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Public Speech: The DeGarmo Lecture for 1993

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Abstract: The State is constituted by law; the public by public speech. But "What makes public speech public?" Two views are contrasted: the forum view by which speech is public only if it is truth functional, and the idea of umbilical narratives in which speech is public when placed in some community of memory. Offered instead is the auditory principle, namely that speech is public when what is said by A is heard by B as candidate for B's speech. This principle is explored and applied and currently popular fallacies of public speech are exposed.

I. Introduction

In this lecture I aim to explore some features of public speech. I do so, moreover, out of a deep concern for its deterioration in contemporary America. The concern arises from a long delayed realization, that we now have practically a whole generation of students who in their entire lives have heard no major public leader speak to the nation powerfully about our ties to one another much less with conviction about what gratitude we owe our predecessors and what we owe our children. No major public leader who has managed to speak with power to youth about the dignity of public service, none apparently able to say that a life devoted to it might be challenging, might demand the best that anyone can offer, might test our capacities at the highest level. It is an awesome fact, but I believe it to be true. And this silence, I think, has permitted us to engage in a flurry of deeply confused talk on educational reform that also is silent on the role of education in the formation of the public. I ask you to think with me about this concern whether or not you accept this appraisal of the situation.

I offer a simple argument. It goes like this. Public speech is constitutive. Without public speech there is no public, only a babble of lamentations and complaints, pleadings, pronouncements, claims and counter-claims. Without public speech, the public dies, politics turns to polemics, becomes partisan in the worst sense, even

venomous, and we are left with nothing we can reasonably speak of as public education, public service, or public life. That is why it matters that we understand how public speech is formative, how it does its work. So my first aim is simply to remind you of some aspects of speech, especially the power of speech to create the world, and thus to create a public.

We are born and there is a company already there to greet us. With birth, in short, we enter a plurality, but it is not given that we thereby enter a public. We are thrust into the one, must be nurtured to the other. The one is a consequence of birth, the other an achievement of life. It is, moreover, an educational achievement. In saying that the public is created by public speech, I do not mean to offer a claim of causal or temporal precedence, not a statement about which comes first, the one or the other, the public or public speech. I mean rather to be asking an educational question, a question of the sort, "What needs to be done, what skills acquired, what practices entered in order that a public may emerge and be sustained?" The answer, I think, will be found in the skills and practices of public speech. Public speech is formative; it is constitutive. The public is created by speech or not at all. So my first aim is to persuade you that the quality of our public speech matters because that is what educationally forms the public.

My second aim is to explore with you a view of the nature of public speech and its fallacies, those habits of mind by which it is destroyed or its development aborted. And in order to do this, I intend, as my third aim, to persuade you that we speak of the public and of public life in two quite different ways. One view draws upon the notion of a forum a kind of public in which the speech typically required is the speech of inquiry, evidence, demonstration, argument and claims and counter-claims of entitlement. Call this the forum view.

The other view stems from what I call umbilical stories, and its typical mode of speech is not argument, but narrative. In all portrayals in Western painting of the first man and the first woman being evicted from paradise, the figures are represented with anatomical accuracy except for one detail. Whether in the vision of Giotto, or Leonardo, or sweet Raphael, or many others I suppose, Adam and Eve are always pictured with navels. The first man and the first woman had belly-buttons. The thought amuses.(Note 2) I call it to your attention, however, not for its amusement, but in order to render another fact more memorable. We find it as difficult to concieve of any culture, or any public, without its antecedents as to conceive of the first man and the first woman without theirs. And with antecedents, of course, come stories, umbilical stories, stories of attachments. By this view, the public is a public of some memory. Argument, evidence and claims of entitlement are less at issue than are simple reminders of umbilical connections. Identity is the problem, not inquiry. Call this the umbilical view.

What may be the relation between these views? I hope to show you that the first, the forum view, depends for its actual existence upon the latter, the umbilical view, and that the principle of public speech I want to explore, relates the two in just that way.

II. The Power of Speech

The idea that the public is created by public speech is an idea thoroughly known to us. But, like the very end of our nose, we constantly overlook it. Effort is needed to even notice. That is why, I believe, we must detect the oddity of this idea. Only when the ordinary becomes strange do we see it in fresh ways. The constitutive character of public speech is not an idea I have just made up, however. It has its roots in tradition and in familiar experiences. I haven't time to cite all the sources. Nor would we benefit if I did. Neither have I time to fully explicate a single one. I can, however, conduct some forays into memory and tradition and in that way try, as best I can, to make the matter plain. So I urge your patience and invite your attention to some ideas that initially may seem scattered. Trust me. I shall make the connections soon enough.

For the first of these forays, recall the ancient Roman concept of the res publica, by which was meant, and still is meant in the language of law, the "thing," of the public. The res publica is literally the affair of the

public. And this affair is, or ought to be, and in healthy circumstances always is, a "love affair." The "thing" described is both a residence and a courtship, both the arena of our habitation and a project of our affection. The res publica is the Republic, a word familiar to us. Yet here, as every where, familiarity breeds amnesia. We know it so well, we forget its meaning. The Republic is the affair of the people. We should not think of it as our system of government. It would be better were we to think of our system of government as the structure, the machinery, or, in another metaphor, that hardy barrier to barbarism which, standing firm against the constant threat of chaos, gives us time, time to speak. The Government is formed by law, but the public by public speech.

This first foray then, lies on the side of recalling what "public" means. I offer a second to remind us what "speech" is about. Often, speaking is itself a form of acting. We are likely to look past this obvious truth, perhaps because of an "adjacent" vocabulary by which speech is viewed not as action, but as inaction. "She is all talk and no deed." "Cut the gaff and let's get busy." In these expressions, and others like them, speech is opposed to action. By this vocabulary, speech is made to reside with indolence. I admit there is that truth. Speech can be an instrument of evasion, but that is not the truth right now I mean to stress.

We will forget that speech can be action also if we suppose that speech is used primarily to inform. Often it is not. When I say to a dear, dear friend, "I love you; I love you; I truly do," I do not mean merely to give information on my state of mind or on the composition of my affections. Informing is not my aim. My saying "I love you; I love you; I truly do" is already and by itself an act of love. When you step off the curb into the street and someone shouts, "Look out! Look out!" informing you is not their aim. Warning you is, and by uttering those words, they do exactly that. Such speech is an act of warning as surely as if the words had been just that -- "I warn you!." By saying "Greetings!" to friends and strangers, they are greeted. Saying "Greetings!" and greeting our friends are not separate things. They are one and the same. The speech simply is the act.

That is the way things are with warnings and welcomings, but also with promises and pledges. By saying "I promise," I forge a promise. By saying "I pledge..." (my allegiance, say, or my troth), I pledge. The speech and the act are not two things, but one. In this respect, speech is no mere flatus, a simple snorting that happens to agitate the air. Speak and the world is changed. Remain silent and the world remains just as it is. Speak and you alter things. By speech, people are loved and warned and greeted. Promises are made and so the future becomes fixed; pledges are pledged and with them fidelity comes to matter where before it mattered not at all. By speech, obligations are created, assurances offered and received. By speech charity is extended and grace makes its appearance. These are more than merely acts of speech. In the language of philosophy, they are "speech-acts."

This performative function of speech works also for curses. "Be damned!" Except when uttered in the first person, as in "I'll be damned," (and perhaps even then) this expression, originally resident in a theology and cosmology now for the most part vanished, was never meant to assert anything that could be true or false. It did not inform. Here was a speech act by which it was intended, I suppose, that someone actually be made to reside eternally in some nether land, a Sheol or Hades. Like "Bug-out!" and "to hell with you!" such expressions, as William Gass suggests, are "thrown" at people like rice at the bride and groom.(Note 3) Just as rice at a wedding was not originally meant simply to say "Be fruitful," but to actually fructify the pair, so also these curses are meant not simply to say "You are unwelcome here," not simply to announce a fact, but to make unwelcome any there may be on whom these missiles might fall. Note the sweep of these acts, what a vast region they cover. They range over acts of love and banishment, grace and assurance, as well as condemnations and guarantees. If these are things brought forth by speech, then is it so difficult to see that speech, that is, public speech, is what brings forth the public?

A third foray. We are told that in the ancient world it was believed that words, once uttered, go forth into the world with power of their own. Especially was this true of curses, oaths, and blessings. Such words were sent

forth and could not be called back. Think, for example, of Isaac's blessing of Jacob (Gen. 27). Given under false pretenses, undeserved, unintended by Isaac, and evoked by deception, nonetheless, being given, that blessing could not be retrieved and annulled. This, of course, is the basis of one Biblical argument underwriting the gravity of speech or, in other words, the obligation to speak the truth. If words go forth with power to do their work and cannot be returned and swallowed, (Note 4) then we had better be careful what we say. Best get it right the first time.

In Isaiah we read, "so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (55.11). True and false prophets could be distinguished, in the Biblical view of things, because if the prophet spoke the Word of God, then things would happen. The Word would "prosper in the thing" for which it was sent. Proof that false prophets were indeed false lay in the fact that the word they pronounced did not so "prosper." God speaks and it is so.(Note 5) Let there be light! But false prophets speak and it is not so. Jeremiah complained that, though he spoke truly, the power of the Word tarried. It delayed, and that delay, which should not happen, became reason for him to doubt even his own credentials. It is, I suppose, the central claim of the Gospels that proof of God's fleshy visitation is found in the fact that Jesus spoke and things happened. The claim advanced in those texts is that He was the Word, and the proof proffered is plainly that his speech accomplished those things that God's Word always does accomplish, namely, the lame walk, the hungry are fed, the sick are healed and hope is brought to the oppressed.

I do not care what you may think of the argument. I ask you to detect its texture. In these texts the theory of words and of speech is the theory of speech-acts. This ancient belief that words go forth in the world to do their work is often presented as the view of a "primitive people." But this appraisal only reveals our vanity. It shows how much our own modernity pleases us. From the facts, we could as easily conclude that finding this view of speech in the ancient world shows how primitive we moderns are or how modern those primitives were, for we have by no means abandoned this ancient outlook. Consider, for example, what we mean by saying such things as "His words are empty words," and "Those are vain words"? "His is empty talk." What of seriousness is intended when we say, "I give you my word" "Her word is good"? These common ways of speech reveal our conviction that words ought not be empty or vain, but should be full and valid or effectual. They should go forth from our mouths, "prosper" in what we "purpose," "prosper" in the thing for which they are sent. What else could we intend except that the words we speak should have their effect? Speech is formative. It makes the world. That is the Biblical point of view. It is also ours. The fact needs only to be noticed to be granted.

As a fourth foray I appeal to your experience with the reflexive consequences of speech. Speech acts are both performative and educative. They shape not only the world but ourselves. Words publicly spoken form speaker and hearers alike, but perhaps speakers even more than hearers. In Alcoholics Anonymous the initial step in recovery is for the alcoholic to state aloud, publicly, and in the first person "I am an alcoholic." The affirmation itself is therapeutic. But it can have this value only if these words are spoken in public.(Note 6) It is nothing to say these things privately, to one's self, or in silent thought. That kind of speech conducted in the closet of the soul, leads not to recovery but to an even deeper descent into an ever darker night. Such public speech changes not simply the world, but the speaker. Public speech is formative. In this case, it forms the self even as it works to constitute the group within which such speech is offered.

This effect of speech upon the speaker is recognized in other practices. It is the psychological and educational principle involved in the Bar Mitzvah when he affirms, "I am a child of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I was in Egypt." It is the principle underlying the conservative Christian tradition of offering "testimony," describing how things were, what happened, and how things are now; and it is part of what underlies the Catholic practice in the sacrament of confession. Preachers, priests, professors, and politicians, all in their own ways, know that to say what one believes, earnestly and in public strengthens belief. Speech, public speech, forms the speaker.

"Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." This school-yard chant of many generations (which I have slightly modified) is almost certainly false, but even more certain is the fact that its recitation is a useful tool. The repetition as a mantra that "...words will never hurt me," -- such an act of speech is a tool for survival. Hateful words, in fact, do hurt, and perhaps they hurt the speaker even more than those against whom they are hurled. Hateful words are not simply the words of hateful persons; they are words that make persons hate-full, i.e., filled with ugly hate. Speech shapes the speaker. Speech, in all these ways, is formative.

III. A Theory of Public Speech

I offer these forays, as I have called them, not because I think they are completed arguments that stand beyond rebuttal, nor even because I suppose they are altogether clear. Neither do I think they offer proof of anything. Let them be quite plainly what they are, simple pointers to facts about this peculiar human capacity for speech, simple reminders of the ordinary ordinarily overlooked, each offering a small window on the claim that the public is created by public speech. Still, the central question remains. Just what is meant by "public speech"? Or, to be more specific, How does public speech do its public work? What makes public speech public?

The question examined: I shall offer an answer to this question and then try to unpack it. But first, consider the question itself more closely. "What makes public speech public?" To ask is not to ask for a definition, so giving a definition will not help. There is no point in offering an ostensive definition. Nobody would be satisfied. And there is no possibility of getting away with a stipulative one. Nobody would follow it. Conceptual analysis will not help. The answer will not simply drop out of an analysis of how the word "public" is used. Nor will the question be answered by finding some expression identical in meaning to the phrase "public speech." Neither is there any research method likely to yield an answer. Maybe there is a Marxist answer and a capitalist answer, a liberal one and a conservative one, a feminist one and a chauvinist one, a theistic one and an atheistic one, and who knows what others, maybe a quantitative one and a qualitative one, still, I suggest that these too be set aside, at least for the moment, on the grounds that, without exception, in matters such as this, they aid understanding far less than they inhibit it.

Try simplicity! Extreme simplicity. Studied simplicity. I am reminded of a student this past fall who, in a discussion on the logic of knowledge-claims, pronounced the currently popular constructivist thesis. "Of course," she said, "all knowledge is subjective and socially constructed." I asked her whether she was wearing shoes and she allowed the question, said without a moment's hesitation or shred of doubt that she was. I asked whether she thought that knowledge was subjective or socially constructed, and she demurred. The answer doesn't matter anyway. The point does. To tell what it is that makes public speech public, I propose a return to innocence of a sort you have probably been trying for years to overcome. We need the innocence of knowing that right now I'm wearing shoes counts as a genuine case of knowing whereas believing that all knowledge is subjective and socially constructed requires a lack of innocence, a substantial effort, perhaps even a graduate course if anybody is to actually believe it. In contrast, I urge you to make the effort, at least for the remainder of this hour, to recover an uncommon naivete. You have my permission to indulge the luxury of letting yourself, your very own purposefully naive self, to be the judge as to whether what I am about to say fits your experience. Let that be the test rather than whether my remarks fit somebody's research program.

The Auditory Principle.

"What makes public speech public?" My hunch is that public speech occurs when what is said in one person's speech is heard by others as candidates for their own speech. Call this "The Auditory Principle." It states that speech, to be public speech, requires an auditor. Public speech occurs when what A says is heard by B as a possible candidate for B's speech. The principle points to hearing, in a certain way as the font of public speech rather than any array of actions by the speaker. If this principle is correct, that public speech is public

by virtue of the acts of auditors, then it may be tempting to suppose that any speech is public speech, if it occurs in some plurality, some crowd, some forum, or as we say, some "public" setting. But, again, a caution is in order. Don't reduce "public" to "plurality" or confuse "public speech" simply with whatever talk goes on in public places, places where speech, as it were, is disclosed.

That speech is aloud instead of silent and within earshot of others, will make speech public only in the sense that traffic sounds, being inescapably disclosed, are public. Disclosure is at best only contingently related to the sense of "public" invoked when we refer to "public speech." Consider the following fact. In any society there may be persons who mean to speak to others, but no "others" who listen, no auditors, and thus, none who hear. Declining to listen or to hear another is among our more efficient ways of denying that those others even exist. It is one way of killing them. By rendering such persons inaudible, we make them invisible and, in effect, non-existent. That is part of what multi-culturalism in education is about, insisting that voices heretofore muted should be heard and hence allowed entry to the domain of public speech. It is not enough that there be freedom of speech if nobody listens or if nobody listens in a certain way.

That "certain way" I describe as hearing the speech of another as "candidate for one's own." I admit that not much is explicated by the phrase itself. I don't mean, in any case that we have a duty to listen to one another. I don't mean that public speech must be a dialogue. I mean only that public speech cannot occur unless statements about the world, as the speakers know it and announce it, are entertained by others as candidates for the way those others might see the world. Where speech is not heard in that way, then we have something only potentially public, a kind of talk that is public in contrast to private only in the sense of being disclosed, like traffic sounds. This is not public speech; it is simply background noise. Even though aloud and voiced in the midst of some plurality, it is not yet public speech because there is as yet no auditor.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech deserves careful study as an example of public speech. It works partly because it is framed in ways that encourage listeners to entertain every step of that speech as a step that could be uttered as his or her own. It is framed in a homiletic style, familiar in the Black churches, a style that invites the congregation to affirm what is said at each step.(Note 7) In this way, what is said by one is entertained by others as candidate for his or her own speech. "I have a dream" becomes "Here is the dream that we have." What comes forth from the voice of one comes to be "owned" as it were by others, not as doctrine or belief, not as truth claims, but simply as candidate for something that might be framed in his or her own voice.

Thus, speech is public when, as auditor, one thinks things like

"I could say what she has said" or
"I do say what he has said" or
"I might (might not) say what she has said, because...."

Each of these is a kind of interior comment that can enter into the process of hearing the speech of another as "candidate" for one's own. Notice especially, the last of these -- "I might (might not) say what she has said because...." "Because" is the prelude to reasons. How many kinds of reasons are there that can complete this "because"? Not everything will count. Not everything goes. The "because" might call for truth-claims, reasons of the sort that enter into arguments and counter-arguments. But it might call instead for reasons neither truth functional nor even framed in the language of argument. It might call for reasons offered in the language of "umbilical" stories.

IV. Types of Public Speech

The Forum: "Here are my reasons..." These are words that announce an effort to assess the truth or validity of

speech. And even though our question at the moment is not what makes public speech true or valid, but what makes it public, still, it is so that when truth claims are offered as reasons, they can result in making speech public by making it subject to assessment by public standards. If I entertain the speech of another as making truth claims upon me, then I am, in fact, considering that speech as candidate for something I might say. It does not matter to what makes public speech public, that I agree with what is said. Nor does the auditory principle demand agreement. It calls instead for hearing in a certain way, and this certain way of hearing without which public speech is not public is precisely the same condition without which public disagreement cannot be responsible.(Note 8) I can responsibly disagree with or reject the speech of another only if I entertain the claims of that speech as candidates for my own.

So when "because" is followed with truth claims, speech seems to become public by being made subject to public standards of assessment. I believe it is a mistake, however, to say, as some would, that this "subjecting speech to public standards of assessment," is demanded by the need for objectivity. They think that public speech must be objective speech, and, in that respect like scientific speech, subject to standard evidentiary canons.(Note 9) Objectivity, however, is not a standard of what makes public speech public and the auditory principle does not demand that kind of standard.

The importance of truth claims for public speech is neither their objectivity nor their inter-subjectivity, but the fact that in learning to frame truth-claims of public speech we learn to formulate our views in ways that make it possible for them to be entertained as candidates for the speech of others. If I say to you "I don't want to pay higher taxes," I say something about myself that you might also say about yourself. You too could say "I don't want to pay higher taxes."(Note 10) Thus, it may seem that in your reiteration of my speech we have something that falls under the auditory principle, something that counts as "entertaining the speech of another as candidate for one's own." That would be a mistake, however. But why? The heart of the problem lies in the fact that these statements are mere expressions of desire.(Note 11) The "polity of desires" is distinctly egalitarian, almost anarchic. That is to say, desires are inherently equal. There is no natural hierarchy among them, no authority that does not stem from brute strength of numbers, nothing in their nature sufficient to rank them, saying that some are better than others, that some ought to be heeded and others not.(Note 12) So when A says "I want..." and B says "I want..." neither has said anything that bears upon whether what they want would be a good thing or whether they have any claim on the rest of us to grant what they want. Neither has said anything that approaches public speech.

Such separate and discrete statements of desire coming from many people, may add up to a political constituency, but the sum of such statements, even in massive numbers, will not add up to even a fragment of public speech. For public speech, according to the forum view of things, we have to move from statements of personal desire to public claims upon one another, from "I want X" to "we need X" or from "I want X" to "X is a good thing for us."(Note 13) And the disciplines of making this transition from private desire to public affirmation, are the disciplines likely to lead us into public discourse of a sort that makes use of truth claims, canons of evidence and standards of argument. These are the disciplines needed for entry to the forum. We do not enter a public at all, however, if we come to one another simply with our separate bundles of desires and complaints. If that is the best we can do, then we come to public speech not as adults ready to plead a case, but merely as petulant children. Nor is it enough that I can voice your desires also as mine. That is not what is meant by "entertaining the speech of another as candidate for my own." And it does not result in public speech.

Umbilical Stories: In the interior conversation going on as the speech of another campaigns as candidate for my own, some reasons offered may be clothed as arguments, but others arrive simply as umbilical stories. They stem from a narrative of memory, and their recitation does not present arguments and claims. It simply calls forth objects of recollection making them present to some community of memory. Their recitation by some invites their recitation by others. Thus, public speech is not limited to truth claims. This narrative way of entertaining the speech of another as candidate for my own is what I have in mind primarily as "public

speech."(Note 14) When someone like Martin Luther King Jr. says, "I was in Egypt," we do not expect people to say "No you weren't" or "When was that?" or "How were things along the Nile?" This statement, drawn from a Biblical narrative, is uttered, as it were, to announce one's credentials and to tell us within what story we are to entertain what follows. These words announce what genre of speech we are about to enter, just as "once upon a time" and "I have yours of the 26th" announce others. We do not treat the words "I was in Egypt" as a truth claim, and we are invited not to treat the words that follow as truth claims either. Yet they can be and are heard by others as candidates for their own speech. Some among those others can respond with "I too, was in Egypt." This is public speech. I realize that it is successful only if addressed to those who know the story or the litany and those who, better yet, count the story as their own. In short, that this is public speech is dependent upon there being members who hear such speech as their own. This is the speech, in other words, of members and the friends of members who can be gathered by speech into a community of memory around an umbilical story.(Note 15)

This kind of public speech has its own objectivity or inter- subjectivity, but not the kind that belongs to truth claims and investigations of science. This is not the speech of inquiry; it is the speech of membership. It is the speech of some public, not because it pronounces public truth, but because it appeals to an umbilical story of some membership. Consider once again the example I cited earlier of a society in which there are speakers, but no auditors, those who speak, but none who listen to their speech as candidates for their own.

In such a society, even one that prides itself on freedom of speech, there will be no public speech at all and hence no public to speak of. If public speech occurs there at all, it would have to occur in settings that most would view as private, like the family. Yet, what kind of family could it be in which public speech, in this sense, does not occur, a setting where some speak of family affairs, but none entertain what is said as possible candidates for their own speech, no one whose speech enlivens the memory, stories, or convictions of others. If we ponder what that would mean, we may doubt that on such assumptions we imagine a family at all. There would be, for one thing, no parents, or at least none who enact the role, in a family where nobody entertains the speech of others as possible candidates for their own.

V. Fallacies of Public Speech

So the "because..." clause might be completed either by speech appropriate to public claims or by speech suitable to some narrative of antecedents. These ways can succeed in making public speech public. But other strategies will fail. They may be classed as the fallacies of role, position and motivation, as well as the fallacies of explanation and misplaced discourse.

Fallacies of Role and Position

I cannot tell you how many times in recent years I have heard such rebuttals as "You just say what you do because you have tenure" or "...because you are male (or female)" or "...because you are a corporate executive" or "...because you are white" or "...because you are an economist" or "...because you are impetuous" or "...because you are a politician" (That's the kind of thing we expect from politicians) or "...because you are a Christian (or a Jew, or a fundamentalist, whatever that means)." Examples are quite beyond enumeration. Each of these ways of speech constitutes not simply a failure to enter into public speech, but a quite explicit refusal to do so, a declaration that one will not entertain the speech of another as candidate for one's own. Each reveals an explicit technique for rejecting the speech of another in a way that makes it unnecessary even to think about what has been said. Thus, each has the capacity not merely to stop public speech, but to destroy a public. Such speech creates division as surely as public speech creates a public. Such rejoinders are neither prelude to nor any part of public speech. They shape no entry into entertaining the speech of another as candidate for one's own. They add up to the defeat of public speech.

Fallacies of Explanation

To the fallacies of role and position, we may add a kindred set, the fallacies of explanation. Why, we may ask, is it so easy for us to commit the fallacies of role and position, and even commend them as good practice? I believe it is because we confuse the role of auditor with the role of sympathetic listener. We confuse entertaining the speech of another as candidate for one's own with the quite different practice of listening to the speech of another in order to understand the speaker. Thus, we aim to understand the speaker, not the speech, to grasp not what the other is saying, but simply to explain his or her saying it. We seek to explain the speech of others under the false impression that in doing so, in trying to understand why a speaker speaks as he or she does, we are being sympathetic auditors.

This is a misconception and a dangerous one. Public speech is defeated and the public destroyed whenever we accept or reject the speech of another on grounds of some psychological, sociological, or merely preferential explanation as to why the speaker has spoken thus. To grasp such an explanation has almost nothing to do with entertaining the speech of another as candidate for one's own. Allow me please, a general illustration framed as a particular case. Suppose you turn to me, for example, saying "I understand, Green, why you say these things. You talk this way because you are a philosopher (professor, old fashioned, male, of another generation or whatever)." Were you to say that to me, I would know immediately that you had not heard a word I had addressed to you. Moreover, say that to me in an unctuous tone of sympathy and gentle understanding, and you will have deeply insulted me, an insult made all the more painful by coming to me clothed in kindness, by arriving with the moral endorsement of charity. Say that sort of thing to me and I shall look you in the eye and say, "But, my dear, I didn't seek to be understood; I merely wanted to be heard. Don't confuse the two. I don't hanker after understanding; I hanker only for a hearing." A therapist must seek to understand the speech of a client in order to understand the client. But the exchange between the two is not public speech and the listening that goes on there is not the listening demanded by the auditory principle. The therapist does not entertain the speech of the other as candidate for his or her own. Public speech is not counseling, nor is counseling public speech, and being member of some public is not a matter of being in therapy.

Now I am eager not to be misunderstood on this point. It often happens that our public speech, the speech of one to another about our common affairs, is biased, expressing our personal histories and private preferences. No doubt, we speak from our several positions. We could hardly do otherwise. In short, because interest often, perhaps always, governs in the affairs of human beings, and because interests are bound to be parochial, therefore, a hermeneutic of suspicion is a good thing. Often it is more than a good thing. Sometimes it is a necessary thing. But it cannot be viewed as the only thing, because the hearing it engenders, when supplemented by no other, is precisely the kind of listening to another that makes public speech impossible.

What I object to, in short, is not a hermeneutic of suspicion, but an entirely different thing that I believe we have created, namely a culture of suspicion, a culture of public speech in which it is simply assumed that because of role or position, because of the partiality or brokenness of reason, nothing any of us says can be entertained at face value. All must be explained and hence nothing that you say, for example, need be entertained by me as candidate for my own speech. If I adopt that attitude, or if you adopt it, then our joint membership in a public, yours and mine, has come to an end. Make the move from a hermeneutic of suspicion to a culture of suspicion in your relations to your friends, and you will have no friends. Do it with your family, and the family will vanish. Nowadays, apparently, we need not be tutored to hear the other with suspicion. Doing that often seems simply to be doing what comes naturally. Within a culture of suspicion, we need to listen to the other with a hermeneutic of affection. Listen to the loves of the other. Can they be yours? Can they even be candidates for your own?

Fallacies of Misplaced Discourse

To the fallacies of role, position, status and explanation, I add a third group, the fallacies of "misplaced

discourse." Consider an illustration. Justice Holmes, in his famous speech "The Path of the Law," said, in effect, "The law is simply what the courts decide and nothing more."(Note 16) Holmes offered this observation as part of a general resistance to a certain kind of natural law tradition. It was his way of cautioning prospective attorneys to attend more to the court and less to the arguments of philosophy when pleading a case. The aim, after all, is to win the case not to win adherents to a theory. Persuade the judge or the jury, not the American Philosophical Society since they are not assembled in the court in any case. This is good advice for the practicing attorney. It helps to focus thought upon the task at hand. But I submit to you that this is useless counsel to the judge whose problem is not to plead the case, but to decide it, not to convince the jury, but to guide deliberation. When one is the court and must decide, neither guidance nor solace can be drawn from the dictum that the law is whatever the courts decide and nothing more. Useful on that side of the bench where it is framed, the principle is worse than useless when transported to the other side. It sits well at counselor's table, but not in the chair behind the bar.

No genius is needed to find the fault. It is the same as would be noted were we to confuse the book review with the book, the critic's analysis with the poem, the commentary with the text, the analysis of public speech with the speech, the anthropologists report of life among the natives with life among the natives. Public speech is living speech, the speech of members. How do we become members? By public speech, by allowing the speech of the other to candidate as one's own. I shall try now to offer proof as much as the case allows for proof.

In The New York Times dateline August 28, 1963, there is a story by James Reston portions of which ought to be recited.

> Abraham Lincoln, who presided in his stone temple today above the children of the slaves he emancipated, may have used just the right words to sum up the general reaction to the Negro's massive march on Washington. "I think," he wrote to Gov. Andrew B. Curtin of Pennsylvania in 1861, "the necessity of being ready increases. Look to it." Washington may not "look to it" at once, since it is looking to so many things, but it will be a long time before it forgets the melodious voice of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. crying out his dreams to the multitude.
>
> It was Dr. King who, near the end of the day, touched the vast audience ...with a peroration that was an anguished echo from all the old American reformers. Roger Williams calling for religious liberty, Sam Adams calling for political liberty, old man Thoreau denouncing coercion, William Lloyd Garrison demanding emancipation, and Eugene V. Debs crying for economic equality -- Dr. King echoed them all.
>
> "I have a dream," he cried again and again. And each time the dream was a promise out of our ancient articles of faith: phrases from the Constitution, lines from the great anthem of the nation, guarantees from the Bill of Rights, all ending with a vision that they might one day all come true.
>
> Dr. King touched all the themes of the day, only better than anybody else. He was full of the symbolism of Lincoln and Gandhi, and the cadences of the Bible. He was both militant and sad, and he sent the crowd away feeling that the long journey had been worthwhile.

James Reston offers a report of public speech. No argument here. No forum. Better to evoke the vast and rich resources of umbilical stories, allowing others to take possession of these tokens of memory by virtue of which we are a public, an inclusive public, and best to do so within a liturgical setting, Lincoln seated, that is, "presiding from his stone temple" one hundred years more or less from emancipation. But now introduce to this scene and to this speech the academic, acerbic talk of deconstruction and critical hermeneutics, speech that belongs in the Academy and not on the steps of that stone temple, and one detects immediately the fallacy of misplaced discourse. Principles of research and practice may serve well in the context where they are formulated, and serve badly as guides in another place. The rule may sit well in the chair at counsel's table and not at all behind the bar. Trash the critic's comment. I'll take the poem, the music, the memory every time.

Give me the text liturgically situated and alive, not its classroom decomposition which is worthless either as public speech or as instruction in public speech.

But I press the matter to another scene and in turn to still another an added eighty seven years before. I refer, of course, to Lincoln at Gettysburg. Gary Wills, in a recent book, has helped us to re-member.(Note 17) Again recall the liturgical setting, the circumstance, the act, the aim, to consecrate the ground and to remind us of its placement in a larger territory. Lincoln's consistent policy, politically delicate to maintain, had not been so much to free the slaves, as to secure the Union, preserve the Constitution. Yet his first utterance at Gettysburg harkened not to The Constitution, but to the Declaration of Independence. The Constitution says nothing about being created equal. The Declaration does. It was precisely because, by this speech, Lincoln brought the two together that he was criticized. "All men are created equal," indeed. Who says this nation was dedicated to any such proposition? By what right does he alter the Constitution in this way, complained the Chicago papers. But he did bring these two texts together, and did so, morevoer, in a single sentence. And Wills remarks, no doubt with some but not too much exaggeration, that those who heard this speech that day went forth changed. They gained a different ear, would not hear things the same way again. It was the union of these two texts, Constitution and Declaration, and a public changed by speech, that made "I have a dream" something accessible to speaker and hearers alike. Speech offered by one, became not simply candidate, but actually resident, in the speech of others. The public was formed and changed and formed by public speech.

I do not want to leave the impression, however, that public speech is only the speech of heroes and orators, that it occurs only, as it were, on high liturgical occasions. The centrality of liturgy is a topic for another time. Liturgies have to do with seeing, more than with hearing. The educational power of liturgies resides in the peculiar fact that they change nothing in the world, yet they allow us to see everything differently. Liturgy is the true instrument of deconstruction. My point, however, is rather that public speech is living speech. The key I wish to stress is not its liturgical setting at moments of high drama, but that public speech resides in our capacity to entertain the speech of others as candidate for our own. By this auditory act, public speech is permitted and we are joined even in our disagreements. I offer, in conclusion this, from Maya Angelou,

Take Time Out

When you see them
on a freeway hitching rides
wearing beads
with packs by their sides
you ought to ask
What's all the
warring and the jarring
and the
killing and
the thrilling
all about

Take Time Out

When you see him
with a band around his head
and an army surplus bunk
that makes his bed. You'd
better ask What's
all the
beating and

the cheating and
the bleeding and
the needing
all about.

Take Time Out

When you see her walking
Barefoot in the rain
and you know she's tripping
on a one-way train
you need to ask
what's all the
dying and
the running and
the gunning
all about.

Take Time Out

Use a minute
feel some sorrow
for the folks
who think tomorrow
is a place that they
can call up
on the phone.
Take a month
and show some kindness
for the folks
who thought that blindness
was an illness that
affected eyes alone

If you know that youth
is dying on the run
and my daughter trades
dope stories with your son
we'd better see
what all our
fearing and our
jeering and our
crying and
our lying
brought about.

Take Time Out.

I could say that. I *might* say that. Had I the wit, I *would* say that. Would you? If so, then this is public speech as well. The need to attend to the speech of the other increases. The public itself is at risk. *Look to it.*

NOTES

1. This lecture was prepared for The Society of Professors of Education meeting in conjunction with the American Educational Research Association in Atlanta, Georgia, April, 1993. The paper is currently in press in the TEACHERS COLLEGE RECORD. It originated, however, in sessions of the National Faculty Seminar on religious education convened over several years at the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana under the aegis of The Lilly Endowment. The possibility of this lecture could not receive a hearing in that setting, however, partly, I think because of a friendly, but nevertheless strict, adherence to what I now discern to be the fallacies of public speech. I felt thus obliged to confront these difficulties and search for a more transparent formulation of my thought. Suitably recast, this lecture will be situated later as a chapter on public speech in a book called Walls; Education in Communities of Text, Liturgy and Norm, a book inspired by my participation in that seminar.

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2. And the amusement betrays our common ambivalence between myth and literalism. Why are we amused? Because we had not noticed? Does our amusement prove that we insist on taking the story literally?

3. On Being Blue, A Philosophical Inquiry, (Boston, David RxD Godine, 1976), pg. 47.

4. We have a rich vocabulary for "taking one's words back." It includes "eating crow," "eating hat," gagging in the process-- and what else?

5. He had only to say, "Let there be light" and there was.

6. It is vital to note that this therapeutic value is partly a consequence of the fact that these words are said in a company of people who also can, have and will say the same thing.

7. The speech has the structure of a multiple choice question, i.e., a stem and then a series of declarations following from that stem. I say nothing here as to how this style of speech and its content is rooted in the voices of memory and moral imagination. In the case of this speech we have not only public talk, but congregational and prophetic talk.

8. Actually, the auditory principle is not "precisely the same condition without which...." The rational rejection of the arguments of another person, on any other than purely formal grounds, will require that one entertain the speech of the other as "candidate for one's own." Thus, it seems, that to use the 'public' language of the forum requires that the auditory principle be satisfied. But that principle can be satisfied in situations other than those imposed by the argumentative speech of the forum. Thus, what is argued here as the conditions that make public speech public is a much broader principle than the rules of argument in some kind of forum. It should be noted also that "evidentiary canons" are standards of speech, whereas the auditory principle deals with the larger matter of "hearing in a certain way."

9. An aside. My impression, perhaps erroneous, is that the currently popular 'critical thinking movement' in education, presents the practices of public speech as primarily in need of adherence to such evidentiary canons -- drawn either from formal logic or from science. If this is a fair appraisal, then it constitutes the identification of a mistake. Such evidentiary canons have the consequence of making speech public because such canons represent public standards. But this idenfication obscures what it is about such standards that has that effect. This is a view that misrepresents what makes public speech public.

10. Note the indexical reference of the first person pronoun in these statements of desire. These are statements

by different persons about themselves. They are not statements about any joint concern, much less any common good. And if pronomial reference is any part of the meaning of such statements, neither are these statements about the same fact.

11. They are not even about our desires. "I don't want to pay higher taxes" is a statement even more primitive than "I know that I don't want to pay higher taxes." The latter is a statement about my desires, about which the former is a mere expression. "Ouch!" might be the expression of pain. "That hurts" a statement about a pain.

12. I am aware that there is such a thing as a hierarchy of desires. I can have a desire to have other desires than those I have. We might say, "I wish I didn't want that so much." But these "higher order desires" are invariably the consequence of some order in the self other than desire itself. It was this absence of a natural hierarchy of desires that led to Plato's anti-democratic sentiments. He thought of the order of polity always as akin to order in the soul. And when desires alone rule, there is no order. The "natural equality" of desires is akin to anarchy in the self, he thought.

13. See Joseph Tussman, Obligation and the Body Politic, (NEW YORK, 1960, Oxford University Press) pg. 78. Tussman marks a useful distinction between the "assertive mood" and the "claiming mood" suggesting that "'I believe P' is related to 'P is true' as 'I want X' is related to 'I am entitled to X'." This advancement from belief to knowledge (truth) and from blind assertion to grounded entitlement is akin to the transition I am referring to here as moving from the expression of desire to public claims.

14. The illustration and much of the analysis at this point I owe entirely to Emily Robertson.

15. It is worth nothing that this is the point at which Dewey's conception of the public fails. In THE PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS, Dewey's principal treatment of this problem, he defines a public as consisting of those effected by the consequences of actions taken. He distinguishes nascent publics and self-conscious publics, as those whose members are unaware of how they are effected by actions taken and those who are aware of how they are implicated. But the crux of the matter is that, for Dewey, belonging to a public is a purely consequential matter, something entirely contingent upon the nexus of act and consequence. There is, for him, no such thing as a "community of memory," one defined by recitation of an umbilical story.

16. Actually Homes wrote, "The object of our study...is prediction, the prediction of the incidence of the public force through the instrumentalities of the courts." And again, "The primary rights and duties with which jurisprudence busies itself again, are nothing but prophecies.... ...a legal duty so called is nothing but a prediction that if a man does or omits certain things he will be made to suffer in this or that way by judgment of the court...." Cf., "The Path of the Law," in THE MIND AND FAITH OF JUSTICE HOLMES, ed, Max Lerner, (New York, Modern Library, 1943) pg. 72.

17. Gary Wills, LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG, (NEW YORK, SIMON AND Shuster, 1992)

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