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Dual Contexts, Dual Forms: A World That Stands As One

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“Dual Contexts, Dual Forms”

Paper Title: Dual Contexts, Dual Forms: “A World That Stands As One
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Dual Contexts, Dual Forms: “A World That Stands As One”

Both before and after Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama gave his speech at the Siegessäule in Berlin on July 24, 2008, many questions were raised about the purpose of the speech. While the Obama campaign had announced the speech as, “a major speech on the historic U.S.-German partnership, and the need to strengthen Transatlantic relations to meet 21st century challenges,” (Kulish, ¶ 5) the opposing McCain campaign labeled the speech as a “premature victory lap”(Johnson, ¶ 14). While some pointed to his speech as one “meant to highlight his knowledge of foreign affairs,” (Kulish, ¶ 3) many people, on both sides of the Atlantic, believed that Obama simply meant to use Berlin “as a ‘campaign backdrop’”(Johnson, ¶ 21). Wrote one journalist after the speech was given, “...the speech wasn’t truly aimed at the audience assembled at the Siegessäule” (Schmitz, ¶ 26).

The purpose and context of Obama’s Berlin speech is difficult to ascertain at a glance. Was this speech a campaign speech? Or was it an address on international relations? When looked at closely, it becomes clear that these two purposes do not exclude each other; what I argue in this essay is that, because Barack Obama’s Berlin speech assumes two interdependent contexts and audiences, his speech must respond to the exigencies presented by each. As I will demonstrate in this essay, Obama’s speech is able to simultaneously address both audiences and operate in both contexts by engaging in the narrative form, thereby providing both of his audiences with a common set of values or assumptions, allowing Obama to form two enthymematic arguments based on these assumptions. Also, Obama enhances the efficacy of his enthymematic arguments by contributing to his persuasive appeals, which he does by using style to contribute meaning to the clauses of his arguments as well as by taking advantage of audience memory, using the rhetorical devices of voice and context merging.

The first and most fundamental aspect of Obama’s Berlin speech is its dual contexts and audiences. The two audiences correspond to the two contexts in which Obama’s speech operates and each audience has different key questions for Obama when they are looking at his speech. The first audience is an American audience who is concerned with the 2008 Presidential election. In this context, the audience is concerned about the three following questions, in order of importance: Is he able/ talented, can we trust him, and what is he saying? Although this may be considered the speech’s ‘primary’ audience, this purpose is never directly addressed in the actual content of Obama’s speech. This suggests that the simple *performance* of the speech is more important to this audience than the *content* of the speech. In respect to performance, Obama hopes that, by giving this speech, his American audience will view him, first, as someone with great abilities in the area of foreign policy, second, as someone who they can trust in office and third as someone whose policies reflect their own opinions. If the American audience views him in these three ways, Obama hopes that they will therefore vote for him in the presidential election. This means that the speech, although not a stump speech directed at the American people, can be considered a campaign speech.

The second audience which Obama’s speech addresses is a German, and more broadly European audience. This audience is concerned with the following three questions, in order of importance: What is Obama saying, can we trust him, and does he know us? Although this is may be considered the speech’s “secondary audience” most of the content of the speech is directed at this audience. Obama’s objective in addressing this audience is to appear to them as someone whose policy reflects their own opinions, as someone who they can trust as a potential ally and as someone who understands them and what they stand for. If the European audience views him in these three ways, Obama hopes that they will show their strong support for him

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during his speech, as well as afterward. It is important to recognize that their support for him is crucial to answering the most important of the American audience’s questions, “Is he able/ talented?”

Because Obama’s German and American audiences have different expectations and different political priorities, Obama uses an epideictic, narrative form of discourse in order to provide his audience with a basic set of values or assumptions. This narrative portion of the discourse is best understood when explained using the narrative paradigm. Therefore, to begin an evaluation of this speech, I will discuss how Obama’s speech conforms to the narrative paradigm. The first of the narrative elements of this speech is the narrator of this story, who can be identified as Barack Obama. This is evident simply because Obama is the one who is giving the speech and telling the story. However, Barack Obama is not simply the narrator. This is because he does more than just recount the story he is narrating. Instead, Obama tells his narrative in a first person perspective, and is not just a spectator of the events which he describes. Indeed, instead of limiting his role in the narrative to that of an outside observer, Obama narrates as someone who has a very personal, specific and active role in the events of the narrative.

Obama establishes his role as a character almost immediately in his speech. Says Obama, “I come to Berlin as so many of my countrymen have come before... I know I don’t look like the Americans who have previously spoken in this great city. The journey that lead me here was improbable.”(Obama, ¶ 2-3) This quote conveys a very crucial idea to the audience: Obama’s audience can glean from this quote that Obama’s narrative features him as a key character. This is primarily because Obama’s narrative begins by featuring his journey. Also, Obama should be considered a key character because he addresses his presence in Berlin and acknowledges himself as being among previous American leaders (most notably, former Presidents Kennedy

and Reagan) who had come to Berlin during the Cold War to speak on strengthening the transatlantic partnership. This last fact is very crucial to the definition of Obama’s role in the narrative; since his speech is self-admittedly following in the footsteps of Kennedy and Reagan, Obama’s audience knows that his role should be expected to be very similar to those of the former presidents.

However, it is important not to overemphasize Obama’s role in his narrative. Obama is not the only important character in this narrative, but one of many. After introducing himself as a character in the story, Obama begins his narrative by telling the story of the emigration of his father to America and how, “my [Obama’s] father decided, like so many others in the forgotten corners of the world, that his yearning – his dream – required the freedom and opportunity promised by the West.” (Obama, ¶ 4) In this quote, Obama takes the focus of his narrative off of himself and puts it onto his father. Obama then uses his father’s story to illustrate to his audience that they, too, are characters in this narrative. Accordingly, following this passage, Obama presents himself and his audience as one character, being careful not to use pronouns that would distinguish between himself and his audiences, Instead of using words like ‘America’s’ or ‘Germany’s’ or ‘mine’ or ‘yours’, Obama says, “*Ours* is a partnership that truly began 60 years ago...”(Obama, ¶ 6, emphasis added) and, “The size of *our* forces...”(Obama, ¶ 8, emphasis added). Obama does this so as not to differentiate between himself and his audiences, or between the two audiences themselves. Obviously, even though Obama speaks in these terms, neither he nor his audiences were directly involved in the Berlin Airlift. However, in this narrative, Obama still implicates himself and his audience as characters in the story by portraying himself and his audience as the benefactors of the progress of the transatlantic partnership and as the “heirs to a struggle for freedom.”(Obama, ¶ 42)

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In addition to these characters, who are closely associated enough in the story as to be considered as effectively one character, there are also a few antagonists in this narrative. These antagonists may be considered as anyone or anything that threatens the safety or security of the people of America and Europe or that threatens the safety of the dream of “freedom and opportunity.”(Obama, ¶ 4) According to Obama, these threats include the U.S.S.R., and later in the story, terrorists, and international drug traffickers. However, the exact identities of these antagonistic characters are not of great importance; just as was the case with Barack Obama and the members of his audience, these antagonistic characters operate more or less as a single entity.

Also important to the structure of the narrative is the plot of the story. The plot of Obama’s narrative begins in the third paragraph with Obama’s characterization of his narrative as the story of an “improbable journey.” This improbable journey begins with a brief background story of how Obama’s father emigrated from Kenya to America in search of “a better life.” (Obama, ¶ 4) This story of Obama’s father’s personal ‘improbable journey’ (and therefore that of Obama himself) supports the main plot of the ‘improbable journey’ of the audience. This plot begins with a very vivid description of the American occupation of the western half of Berlin at the end of World War II and the ensuing Berlin Airlift:

“Ours is a partnership that began 60 years ago this summer, on the day when the first American plane touched down at Tempelhof...This is where the two sides met. And on the twenty-fourth of June, 1948, the Communists chose to blockade the western part of the city...And that’s when – that’s when the airlift began, when the largest and most unlikely rescue in the history brought food and hope to the people of this city.” (Obama, ¶ 6-8)

Obama then moves the plot forward to the winter of 1948, when, “a heavy fog filled the sky above and many planes were forced to turn back without dropping off the needed supplies.”(Obama, ¶ 9) Because of these missing supplies, many of the people of Berlin went

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without food or other goods. However, despite all of these adverse circumstances, says Obama, “the people of Berlin kept the flame of hope burning.”(Obama, ¶ 10) Obama then moves the plot forward to the famous speech of the then Berlin mayor, Ernst Reuter, in which Reuter demanded that the world continue to support the people of Berlin by continuing the Berlin Airlift. Obama quotes Reuter’s speech, saying “People of the world — look at Berlin!”(Obama, ¶ 10) He then repeats this phrase, changing its function from a historical reference to Reuter to a chorus-like refrain. Accordingly, this changes its meaning from a plea to a signifier of praise. In doing this, Obama moves the plot forward to the victory of the Airlift and the accomplishments of the transatlantic partnership, which include the formation of NATO and the fall of the Berlin Wall. This victory, says Obama, “proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one.”(Obama, ¶ 15)

This part of the plot serves as the explanation of the “improbable journey” of the people of Berlin. However, the journey does not end with the victory of the transatlantic partnership. Obama fast-forwards sixty years to the present day, saying, “...we are called upon again. History has led us to a new crossroad, with new promise and new peril.”(Obama, ¶ 16) Obama then explains all of the dangers of the new world created by the victory of the transatlantic partnership, which include climate change, terrorism and drug trade. Because of the magnitude and scope of these present circumstances, says Obama, the partnership is still just as necessary as it was during the Cold War:

“In this new world, such dangerous currents have swept along faster than our efforts to contain them. And that is why we cannot afford to be divided. No one nation, no matter how large or powerful, can defeat such challenges alone.” (Obama, ¶ 20)

Explaining that Europe and America must be united, Obama then explains (or rather acknowledges) that in recent years, “it has become easy to forget this truth,” (Obama, ¶ 20) and

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that now, more than ever, the transatlantic partnership is in grave danger of dissolution. The risks of this dissolution are too high, says Obama, because in today’s world, partnership “is the only way...to protect our common security and advance our common humanity.”(Obama, ¶ 22)

The plot that Obama lays out for us stops here at the climax of the story, leaving the plot without a conclusion. In doing this, Obama leaves the resolution of the narrative unresolved, creating an enthymematic structure. Obama takes advantage of the audience’s propensity to strongly desire a resolution to the story by making sure to leave the conclusion of his story feeling empty. To aggravate this feeling in the audience, Obama asks his audience rhetorical questions that emphasize the uncertainty of the future:

“Will we acknowledge that there is no more powerful example than the one each of our nations projects to the world? Will we reject torture and stand for the rule of law? Will we welcome immigrants from different lands, and shun discrimination against those who don’t look like us or worship like we do, and keep the promise of equality and opportunity for all of our people?” (Obama, ¶ 37)

Obama finally concludes his narrative by reminding his audience that, due to their common values and despite their mistakes in the past, they are all one people. As such, says Obama, they are all characters in this story, and each of them has an important and complimentary role to play in its final resolution.

The last and perhaps the most important and most complicated of the elements of this speech is the setting and context of the story. At first glance, the setting of this story seems to be simply Berlin during the Berlin Airlift. However, it is vital to recognize that, although the narrative Obama presents begins with the history of the transatlantic partnership, the narrative quickly shifts its focus to the present (and even future) states of the partnership. Thus, the setting of the narrative is not limited to the setting of the Berlin Airlift or Cold War. In fact, because this

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speech actively participates in the very history it recounts, the context of the speech itself is just as integral to the setting of the narrative. Therefore, in order to thoroughly understand the setting of this narrative, I must discuss both the setting and the context of the speech itself, as well as the setting of the Berlin Airlift, as described by Obama.

First, throughout the course of the plot, the physical setting of Obama’s narrative is (very generally) Berlin. What is vague about the setting of the narrative is the exact date and location of the events Obama describes as taking place in Berlin. This is because Obama describes the events he narrates in scenes. Obama’s first scene begins the narrative with a vivid depiction of Berlin after World War II and at the beginning of the Berlin Airlift:

“On that day much of this continent still lay in ruin. The rubble of this city had yet to be built into a wall. The Soviet shadow had swept across Eastern Europe, while in the West, America, Britain, and France took their stock of their losses, and pondered how the world might be remade.” (Obama, ¶ 6)

The vivid description and imagery found in this passage is central to Obama’s presentation of the setting. Images such as, “the Soviet shadow,” sweeping across the continent, as well as the “rubble of this city” being formed into the Berlin Wall is meant to impress upon Obama’s audience the unstable and seemingly overwhelming circumstances that the people of Berlin faced. The next scene that Obama describes does not lack any of the devices or aims of the previous scene. In this scene, Obama describes the winter, when “a heavy fog filled the sky above” and the streets of Berlin “were filled with hungry families who had no comfort from the cold.” (Obama, ¶ 9) Obama then quickly cuts to another scene in which, “hundreds of thousands of Berliners came here to the Tiergarten, and heard the city’s mayor implore the world not to give up on freedom.”(Obama, ¶ 10) Once again, this scene uses very specific imagery to describe the setting to the audience.

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Obama then fast-forwards to a current setting with a few “snapshots” of the successes of the transatlantic partnership, highlighting West Germany’s adoption of democracy after the fall of the Nazi regime, the successful rebuilding of Europe with the aid of the Marshall Plan, the formation of NATO, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These quick snapshots of the victories of the transatlantic partnership operate in the same way as a movie montage would: they serve to condense this portion of the narrative and skip forward through a long period of time to the climax of the narrative. In the climax of this narrative, Obama describes a modern Berlin in a modern world:

“The fall of the Berlin Wall brought new hope. But that very closeness has given rise to new dangers -- dangers that cannot be contained within the borders of a country or by the distance of an ocean. Think about it: The terrorists of September 11th plotted in Hamburg and trained in Kandahar and Karachi before killing thousands from all over the globe on American soil. As we speak, cars in Boston and factories in Beijing are melting the ice caps in the Arctic, shrinking coastlines in the Atlantic, and bringing drought to farms from Kansas to Kenya.”

(Obama, ¶ 18-19)

This depiction of modern Berlin is decidedly bleaker than the “montage” that preceded it might suggest. In fact, Obama describes the state of the transatlantic partnership as failing. Says Obama, “if we’re honest with each other, we know that sometimes, on both sides of the Atlantic, we have drifted apart, and forgotten our shared destiny.” (Obama, ¶ 20)

The next important narrative element is the setting and context of the speech itself. There are a few things about the context of Obama’s speech which are important to note. Obama gave this speech in the midst of a presidential campaign in which he had only recently been generally accepted as his political party’s likely nominee. Obama had come to Berlin as part of an international tour during which he traveled to Europe and the Middle East to meet foreign

dignitaries, as well as visit American troops serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. This trip had been planned as an opportunity to show Obama’s skills in foreign relations, responding to challenges to his candidacy from his opponents, such as this one from the Des Moines Register: ““With his relative inexperience, it’s hard to feel... confident he could accomplish the daunting agenda that lies ahead.”” (Newton-Small) Such accusations as these meant that in his tour and in his speech, Obama would have to demonstrate his abilities in the area of foreign policy.

It is also important to note the physical setting in which Obama gave the speech. Obama’s speech was given at the Siegessäule, also known as the “Victory Column,” a war monument found in the Teirgarten Park in Berlin. This was the site of another famous speech which was given by the previously mentioned Mayor Ernst Reuter. When Obama gave his speech at the Siegessäule, there were an estimated two hundred thousand people gathered to see him, not to mention the hundreds of thousands more watching on television (Dorning). Among those who came to see him were 40 American reporters who sat in the guest stands that had been built for them next to the stage (Schmitz). Because one audience was present and another was watching via television, we can recognize two audiences for this rhetorical act: the immediate German audience and the universal, American audience.

The successful employment of the narrative elements establishes the narrative rationality of Obama’s speech, “provides a reliable, trustworthy and desirable guide to thought and action in the world,” and resonates with the audience. According to Walter Fischer’s model, the narrative paradigm is composed of two main components, narrative fidelity and narrative rationality. The concept of narrative fidelity “concerns...the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values.” (Stoner, 190) Narrative probability, on the other hand, “is concerned with whether or not a story coheres or ‘hangs together,’ whether or not the story is free of contradictions.” (Stoner,

190) Therefore, in order for a narrative to be considered as effective, it must demonstrate both sound reasoning and a cause and effect structure that is free of contradictions.

In order to evaluate the narrative, I will begin with the narrative fidelity of Obama’s story. It is important to recognize that narrative fidelity is concerned with one main thing: whether or not the values presented in the speech by the rhetor provide a stable basis for the argument presented in the speech. First, it is important to establish that Obama’s narrative does, in fact, “provide a rationale for some course of action,” (Stoner, 189) and isn’t just a story for story’s sake. Obama’s narrative is epideictic in nature, meaning that it is simply a statement of what happened and does not argue for anything in and of itself. However, Obama uses this epideictic portion of his speech to make a deliberative statement about what should happen in the future. If Obama is to be successful in making a deliberative claim, he must get his narrative of the Berlin Airlift to resonate with the current views, goals, ideals and values of his audiences in a way that will motivate them to support Obama’s claim and vision.

Obama’s narrative of the Berlin Airlift encourages his audiences to come to conclusions about how current problems should be solved based on how problems were successfully solved in the past. These conclusions are based on assumptions or ‘values’ which the rhetor hopes the audience will accept. So, in the case of Obama’s speech, the values that Obama tries to get his audience to accept are: 1) the world is a dangerous place, just as it was at the end of the Second World War, and 2) a transatlantic partnership would keep us safer, just as it did in the Berlin Airlift and Cold War. These values being accepted by the audience as important and valid, based on the support of these values given by the narrative, Obama is able to make a deliberative argument that the United States and Europe should mend the growing divide in the transatlantic

partnership in order to protect themselves from the “dangerous currents,” (Obama, ¶ 20) that threaten their “common security and...common humanity.” (Obama, ¶ 22)

Having determined that Obama’s narrative does indeed pass the test of narrative fidelity, the only criterion left by which we can rule out the effectiveness of Obama’s narrative as a “reliable, trustworthy and desirable guide to thought and action in the world,” is the narrative probability of his story. There are three key things that Obama does in his speech to make sure his narrative is probable and ‘hangs together.’ The first of these things is that Obama makes sure to develop his plot in such a way that each individual event in the plot begets the next event. This is an optimal way to create a plot because, according to Fisher, a good story demonstrates a causality of events, where “one thing leads to the next – ‘one thing *because* of another.’” (Stoner, 191) Therefore, Obama portrays the Berlin Airlift as being necessary as a *result* of “the Soviet shadow [that] had swept across Eastern Europe” (Obama, ¶ 6), he is providing his audience with a narrative that is ‘probable’ and that ‘hangs together’ to form a good story.

Obama also enhances the narrative probability of his story by showing his audiences that the characters of the narrative (which include him and both of his audiences) are interdependent. In doing so, Obama must reconcile all of the characters of his narrative, and in his speech, he does so. This is evident in the following passage:

“That is why I am here. And you are here because you, too, know that yearning. This city, of all cities, knows the dream of freedom. And you know that the only reason that we stand here tonight is because men and women from both of our nations came together to work, and struggle, and sacrifice for [a] better life.” (Obama, ¶ 5)

This passage illustrates three important points. First, Obama shows his audience that each one of them is a character who has a role in this story. Second, Obama illustrates that they are all characters because they share 1) the “yearning” and the “dream of freedom and opportunity”,

and 2) that all of their ancestors, “came together to work...and sacrifice,” to realize that dream. Third, this passage shows Obama’s audience that they should consider themselves as one with each other and with Obama due to the fact that they share common dreams and values, and therefore common roles in the narrative.

One very crucial way in which Obama is able to get his characters to cohere can be found in his use of the definition of a “citizen of Berlin.” This definition of what it means to be a citizen of Berlin was borrowed from former President Kennedy’s speech in Berlin in which Kennedy declared, “All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin.”(American Rhetoric, ¶ 18) Obama refers to this in the following passage:

“What has always united us, what has always driven our people, what drew my father to America’s shores -- is a set of ideals that speak to aspirations shared by all people: that we can live free from fear and free from want; that we can speak our minds and assemble with whomever we choose and worship as we please. These are the aspiration[s] that join the fates of all nations in this city. These aspirations are bigger than anything that drives us apart. It is because of these aspirations that the airlift began. It is because of these aspirations that all free people -- everywhere -- became citizens of Berlin.” (Obama, ¶ 40-41)

Once again, Obama reconciles himself with his audiences, and his audiences with each other, by showing them that they are all “citizens of Berlin,” no matter where they live, where they stand on certain political issues or what religious creed to which they subscribe; because they all believe in freedom, democracy, and other “ideals that speak to aspirations shared by all people,” they are all one people with common goals and common values.

The final thing that Obama does to enhance the narrative probability of his story is concerned with the setting of the narrative. In his speech, Obama keeps the general setting of his story consistent throughout. In doing so, Obama provides an unchanging point of perspective

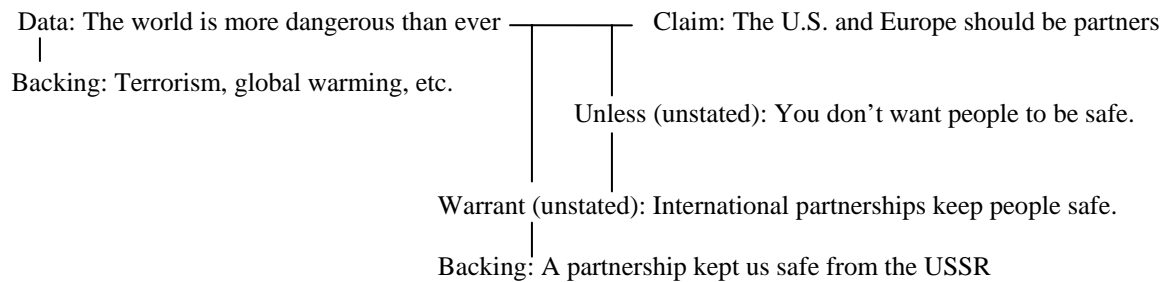
from which his audience may view the changes in circumstances and events that unfold in the plot of his narrative. Additionally, by keeping his general setting fixed, Obama is able to make the story of the Berlin Airlift to cohere with the story of the modern Berlin. In fact, Obama uses the setting of his speech in a very clever way to assist his audience in associating themselves with their past partnership and with their role as characters in the story. Obama gave his speech at the same place that the famed Berlin Mayor Reuter gave his speech deploring the world not to abandon the efforts of the Berlin Airlift. Obama refers to the Mayor’s speech: “And on one fall day, hundreds of thousands of Berliners came here, to the Tiergarten, and heard the city’s mayor implore the world not to give up on freedom.”(Obama, ¶ 10) This image very clearly reflects the immediate scene of Obama giving his speech. Thus, Obama associates himself and his audience with the vivid scene of this historic speech, and in doing so, coheres himself, his audiences and their current struggle to the noble struggle of the Berlin Airlift. Thus, in the mind of the audience, it does not seem too improbable that they might be the “heirs to a struggle for freedom,” whose job is to “remake the world once again.” (Obama, ¶ 42)

With his audiences operating on a common set of assumption provided by the narrative, Obama engages his audiences in a deliberative discourse in which he makes a few key enthymematic arguments, which are structures of argument in which the rhetor provides his audiences with an argument with one or more parts of the argument left unstated. Obama uses this form of argument to invite his audiences to participate in his arguments, rather than just listen to them. Reaching out to two distinct audiences, Barack Obama invents two enthymematic arguments regarding the merits of the policy he proposes and the quality of his character. While the one of these enthymematic arguments operates in the context of transatlantic relations, is presented in the content of the speech and is deliberative in nature, the other enthymematic

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argument operates in the context of the presidential election and is not explicitly stated in the speech. Also, Obama contributes to the efficacy of the enthymemes by using stylistic devices, and by taking advantage of audience memory. In this section, I will discuss the structure and form of each of these arguments using Toulmin’s model of argument.

First, I will present the argument model representing the argument presented in the content of Obama’s speech:



As you can see in the diagram above, Obama’s argument is deliberative because it makes a claim about what we should do in regards to a transatlantic partnership. Obama presents the data for this argument, saying, “History has brought us to a new crossroad, with new promise and new peril.” He then backs up his data by giving examples of how dangerous the world is, saying, “The terrorists of September 11th plotted in Hamburg and trained in Kandahar and Karachi before killing thousands from all over the world on American soil. As we speak, cars in Boston and factories in Beijing are melting the ice caps...shrinking coastlines in the Atlantic and bringing drought to farms from Kansas to Kenya.”(Obama, ¶ 18)

The warrant of Obama’s argument, that a partnership would make the world safer, is not explicitly stated in Obama’s speech. Instead, Obama provides the backing to this warrant, through the narrative of the the partnership between Europe and America formed during the Berlin Airlift. It is this feature of Obama’s argument that makes it enthymematic; by giving backing for the warrant through his narrative rather than explicitly stating a warrant, Obama gets

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the audience to come up with a maxim (Partnerships keep the world safe) by which they may judge his policy decisions. Since he knows that his audience will probably come up with this maxim, Obama can safely move straight to his claim that “Now is the time to join together...”(Obama, ¶ 26) It is in this way that the enthymematic structure of Obama’s narrative forms a deliberative argument.

Adding to the efficacy of this argument are stylistic devices in the narrative which contribute to the meaning of the enthymeme. Specifically, Obama’s use of the schemes of visual imagery and parallelism help his style and augments his persuasive appeals. Although other schemes may be found in Obama’s speech, these two are the most crucial to the function of the enthymeme. First, visual imagery is, at a basic level, descriptive language use by a rhetor to “convey the tone or feeling of a message.” In this speech, Obama uses visual imagery to convey a very important tone. This tone is a tone of danger and urgency, as seen in the following quote:

“Ours is a partnership that truly began 60 years ago this summer, on the day when the first American plane touched down at Tempelhof. On that day -- On that day much of this continent still lay in ruin. The rubble of this city had yet to be built into a wall. The Soviet shadow had swept across Eastern Europe, while in the West, America, Britain, and France took their stock of their losses, and pondered how the world might be remade.” (Obama, ¶ 6)

This passage introduces the visual image of the walls that divide us, which Obama refers to many times in his speech. Also, although the visual image of a shadow sweeping across Europe is not repeated in the speech, it serves the same purpose as much of the visual imagery that follows it, which stresses the dangerousness of the world during the Cold War, as well as the dangerousness of the world today. This augments the data clause of the argument (“the world is more dangerous than ever.”)

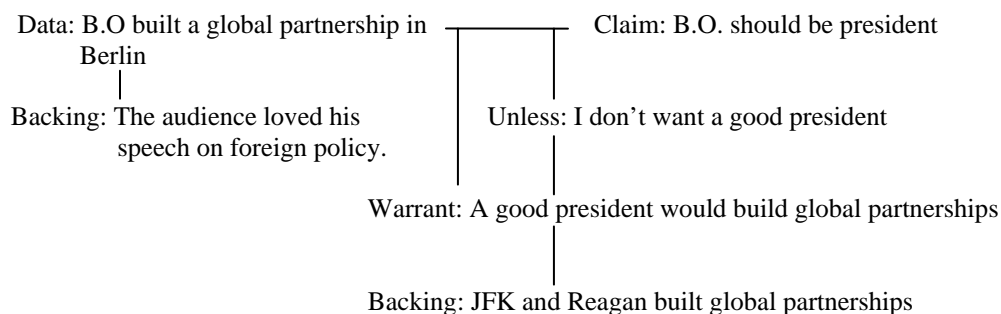
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The other scheme used by Obama is parallelism, which is the “repetition of a phrase or a series of phrases or sentences.” Parallelism is used extensively in Obama’s speech and is used for the very specific purpose of listing the past, present and future accomplishments of Euro-American partnership in a poetic and pleasing way. Parallelism is first used to list the accomplishments of the transatlantic partnership during the Cold War:

Look at Berlin, where Germans and Americans learned to work together and trust each other less than three years after facing each other on the field of battle. Look at Berlin, where the determination of a people met the generosity of the Marshall Plan and created a German miracle; where a -- where a victory over tyranny gave rise to NATO, the greatest alliance ever formed to defend our common security... People of the world -- look at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together, and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one.” (Obama, ¶ 12-15)

Notice that each accomplishment is preceded by the phrase, “Look at Berlin...” This exact same strategy is used when Obama lists his vision for what the future goals of a contemporary Transatlantic partnership should be, when he repeats the phrase, “This is the moment when...” and “Will we...?” These phrases highlight the different points of backing for another part of the enthymematic argument he presents in the content of his speech.

The second enthymematic argument in Obama’s speech is not found in the content of the speech, but rather in its performance:



Although this argument looks deliberative (because it comes to a conclusion about what Barack Obama should be and what the audience should do, namely, vote for him in the election) the performance of Obama’s speech should be considered as epideictic. This is because this entire argument is unstated; Obama never actually makes a deliberative argument in his speech that he should be president. Instead, Obama hopes that, by performing the speech, his audience will create the deliberative argument for him.

This argument model above represents what Obama hoped would be evoked in his audience when they witnessed the performance of his speech in Berlin. Obama started by making the assumption that his speech would be well received by his audience. This assumption was likely to be true for two reasons. First, Obama had been known to give very rousing speeches, and as such, was considered a “political rock-star” (Kirchner, ¶ 3). Second, both Kennedy and Reagan (two other Americans to address the people of Berlin) had given speeches in Berlin calling for international partnership and had been very well received. Therefore, Obama had likely cause to believe that the backing for the data (The audience loved his speech on foreign policy) would be a commonly held belief. This, he hoped, would lead the audience to assume the data portion of his argument: Barack Obama built a global partnership in Berlin. Next, Obama believed that the warrant of his argument was a common maxim: Good presidents build global partnerships. Therefore, as long as Obama’s speech was well enough received to be seen as successful in building a global partnership and as long as his audience believed that good presidents build global partnerships, the probable conclusion of the audience would be that Barack Obama should be President.

Adding to the efficacy of this argument, Obama takes advantage of audience memory by using voice and context merging to appeal to his audience. These concepts of voice and context

merging are closely related to the canon of memory. Although memory has traditionally been used to refer to how speakers memorized their speeches, the modern concept of memory refers to the speaker’s ability to, “use the memory (“the lasting sense in the mind”) of the audience to provide context and meaning in the message.”(MSM, 148) It is this modern concept of memory which can inform most when evaluating the effectiveness of voice and context merging.

As previously outlined in this essay, Obama’s speech is addressing a European and American audience. In order to do this, Obama relies upon the television media to broadcast his speech to his audiences. Given this fact, Obama could have chosen to give this speech from anywhere. However, he chose to speak in Berlin. Obama made this choice for a couple of reasons, but one of these reasons is most relevant to memory: John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, two of the most celebrated American presidents in history, made speeches in Berlin calling for a close partnership between nations. Both of these president’s speeches are historic, and almost anyone in the audience would be able to remember the famous lines from each of these speeches (Kennedy’s proclamation, “Ich bin ein Berliner,” and Reagan’s demand, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”) Just in case anyone in the audience didn’t immediately remember that Reagan and Kennedy had given speeches in Berlin, Obama makes sure to indirectly refer to them, saying, “I know I don’t look like the Americans who’ve previously spoken in this great city.”(Obama, ¶ 3).

Given that Berlin was the site of these two famous presidential speeches, it would be nearly impossible for anyone in the audience not to associate Obama’s speech with Kennedy and Reagan’s speeches as well. This also means that the audience would associate Obama with Kennedy and Reagan, which undoubtedly means that the audience would see Obama as being among the ranks of two of the most celebrated American presidents in history. This is an

incredibly ingenious mechanism by which to build ethos because it means that almost as soon as Obama stepped up to the podium to make his speech, an audience association between Obama and JFK/Reagan gave Obama immediate credibility. This is the concept of context merging, (since it is similar to the concept of voice merging), a concept which is indispensable to Obama’s ethos appeals. Also, this provides backing for Obama’s warrant, “Good presidents build global partnerships,” as previously seen in the Toulmin model of Obama’s performance argument.

As previously discussed, Obama also context and voice merges with the very famous Mayor Ernst Reuter, in order to build his ethos appeal to the German audience. Obama first context merges by giving the speech at the Siegessäule, which was where Mayor Reuter gave his own speech on the need for international cooperation during the Berlin Airlift. Obama voice merges with Mayor Reuter in his speech in the following passage:

And on one fall day, hundreds of thousands of Berliners came here, to the Tiergarten, and heard the city’s mayor implore the world not to give up on freedom. “There is only one possibility,” he said. “For us to stand together united until this battle is won... The people of Berlin have spoken. We have done our duty,” he said, “and we will keep on doing our duty. People of the world, now do your duty. People of the world, look at Berlin.” (Obama, ¶ 10)

In this passage, Obama quotes the late mayor’s speech without mentioning the mayor’s name, knowing that everyone in the German audience will recognize the speech as Reuter’s. Obama also voice merges by repeating the phrase, “Look at Berlin...” (Obama, ¶ 11-15) and by beginning the conclusion of his speech with the phrase, “People of the world – people of the world – this is our moment.” (Obama, ¶ 38) By doing this, Obama makes an extremely important ethos and pathos appeal, attempting to answer two of the main questions of the European audience, “Does he know us?” and “Can we trust him?” (which I discussed in my previous discussion of the dual contexts of this speech.)

Obama also uses memory to augment his logos appeals. In his speech, Obama recounts the story of the Berlin Airlift and the history of Euro-American cooperation and partnership as well as the recent tension in that partnership. In the case of memory, this story is used to remind the audience of how America and Europe have successfully overcome the common challenges that they faced during the Cold War. By gently reminding his audience of this history, Obama provides backing for the warrant “International partnerships keep people safe” as previously seen in the Toulmin model of Obama’s content argument.

With an understanding that Obama is attempting to address the exigencies presented by the two separate but interdependent audiences and contexts, it is clear that what lead Obama to the use of the narrative form was a need for a mode of discourse that was universal enough and all-encompassing enough to be adept at addressing a multitude of exigencies. Obama’s narrative provides Obama with a mode of discourse that will lay down common values and set terms and conditions by which he enters into a discourse about his policy claims, allowing Obama to “merge logic and poetic,”(Stoner, 186) so as to engage his audience in a manner that is both logical as well as inspiring. The arguments contained within this discourse, addressing both his international relations policy as well as his character and the validity of his candidacy for the presidency, are further enhanced through the use of rhetorical and stylistic devices. By recounting to his audiences the story of the successes of the Berlin Airlift and the Cold War-era transatlantic partnership it helped form, Obama offers his audiences his enthymemes, which are meant to be cohesive and ‘probable’ “guide[s] to thought and action in the world.” (Stoner,188) Therefore, these enthymemes are rooted in the common values his audiences share with him and each other. Having accomplished this it is clear that Obama’s narrative is indeed valuable, and therefore, “reliable, trustworthy and desirable.” (Stoner, 188)

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