

***The Triad of Evil and the Bush Incumbency:
Convergence, Competition and Cooperation***

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I analyze discourses circulating during the 2004 re-election campaign of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney as a means to explore the interactions of three tropes of “evil” as identified by James P. McDaniel (2003). In the months between September 11, 2001 and November 2, 2004, the tropes of “Evil-in-itself,” “Evil-for-itself,” and “Evil-for-others” converged, combined, and competed in the culmination of criticism leveled at the Bush-Cheney campaign regarding the screening of entrants into events and rallies. Integral to this interaction is the articulation of American democracy with capitalism, as theorized by Kenneth Burke (1969). Ultimately, I argue that the establishment of “Evil-in-itself” served as grounds allowing a deployment of “Evil-for-others” to trump the attempt to argue for change utilizing “Evil-for-itself.”

On the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush (2006) addressed the nation to “discuss the nature of the threat still before us,” and to assure its citizens that “Since the horror of 9/11, we’ve learned a great deal about the enemy.” The very first thing we’ve learned, as stated in the address, is that “they are evil.” The invocation of “evil” has been a Bush administration refrain from the earliest public comments by the president following the attacks. Within a day of the tragedy, the president was painting the future in these terms: “This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil” (2001). During this same time, however, variations of an accusation of “evil” (Brown, 2002; Summers, 2003; Steinberg, 2004; McCawley, 2006) have been reflected back against the president, from comparisons to Adolf Hitler (Steyn, 2005; “Of Johnson,” 2006; Saunders, 2006; McGovern & Everest, 2006) and characterizations as “fascist” (Donohoe, 2002; Farr, 2004; Herman & Hopgood, 2005), to the strategic reversal of labeling Bush a “terrorist” (Kelley & Cox, 2001; “Marchers in Paris,” 2002; Bonokoski, 2003; “The president in Europe,” 2004; “Bolivia moves left,” 2005; Sommer, 2006). Multiple players in the struggle for political and persuasive force have turned to the power of “evil” and its variations as means to accomplish work in service of constructing their own (opposed) “social good.”

The marked presence of “evil” for coalescing such force, particularly in the broader religious imagery favored by the Bush White House, has been noted by numerous rhetorical critics. Especially fruitful was discussion begun by a panel presentation at the National Communication Association convention in November 2002, published later as a forum in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* in 2003. As part of this interaction, James P. McDaniel offered a perspective that provides a means through which to consider the multiple, nuanced deployments of “evil,” “with which we may begin to characterize, subvert, and reconstitute this theo-political imaginary...” (p. 540). McDaniel maintains that the dominant style of President Bush, “the representative of our state [U.S.A],” is grand, and relies on a very limited Christian vocabulary. This lexicon is stretched to cover an enormous range of judgments which become “‘moralized’ and ‘theologized’” (p. 539) into a single choice between “good” and “evil.” Drawing from Sartre, McDaniel “composes a template for *socio-anagogic* critique,” (p. 540) which joins considerations of strategy to those of idealism. By substituting “evil” for “being” in the existential phenomenology of in-itself, for-itself, and for-others, McDaniel creates “a mode of composing or constituting social relations among things – a trope – shuttling back and forth from the rhetorical figure, the body politic, and the social imaginary” (p. 540). The struggle over who may claim “evil” in the name of what “social good,” and how these tropes both rely on and compete with one another create layers of complexity which McDaniel’s “analytic pivots” (p. 540) help to unpack. In the study of post 9/11 politics these tropes offer a means by which we might re-diversify discussion away from such a singular choice between “good” and “evil,” and reign in the power of the executive (p. 539).

In the following essay, I consider a moment of political conflict where I read these tropes of evil¹ interacting with powerful consequence. McDaniel has already applied his first trope, Evil-in-itself, to discourse as a demonstration of its analytic potential. I build upon this beginning by analyzing the second two tropes, Evil-for-itself and Evil-for-others, within the situated moment. Additionally, I demonstrate how these tropes converge, cooperate, and compete with one another by tracing their interaction in circulating rhetorical deployment. Ultimately, I argue that the deployment of “Evil-in-itself” served as ground for a circulating construction of “Evil-for-others,” allowing it to trump the attempt to deploy an argument for change utilizing “Evil-for-itself.”

Moment of Consequence: Re-Election 2004

During the 2004 election campaign, incumbent President George W. Bush’s team drew criticism from citizens, journalists and media personalities for implementing limitations on entrants into “public” rallies. The most infamous incident occurred at a New Mexico rally featuring Vice President Dick Cheney, where attendees were required to sign a loyalty oath stating that they endorsed Bush for re-election, and “In signing the above endorsement you are consenting to use and release your name by Bush-Cheney as an endorser of President Bush” (Ivins, 2004). At one Florida rally, nearly 2000 attendees were asked to raise their right hands

and recite the “Bush Pledge” (Suellentrop, 2004). At other events, attendees were denied entrance, threatened with arrest, or jailed if they were found to have items with slogans objectionable to staff, or for making critical remarks (Totenberg, 2004). Critics were confounded by a contradiction between the Bush *Administration’s* rhetorical construction of the “War on Terror” as the “spreading of freedom and democracy,” and the Bush *Campaign’s* instrumental curtailing of “freedom” and compromise of “democracy” by way of limiting access to rallies and events. (Ironically, those taking the “Bush Pledge” began by stating, “I care about freedom and liberty.”)

The criticism of this contradiction was regularly available in broadcast and print commentary, and that paragon of political punditry, *The Daily Show*, every Monday through Thursday. In identifying this contradiction in the Bush Administration’s rhetoric and policy, opponents were not offering an especially unique observation. Similar argumentation had been offered in resisting other policies that the administration had implemented under its banner of “compassionate conservatism” (McMahon & Rankin, 2004). Critics from both right and left sought to weaken the administration’s hold over the popular consciousness by pointing out that policies such as “No Child Left Behind” and the “USA PATRIOT Act” contained the same types of contradictions – uncompassionate compassion (pulling funds from schools that demonstrated increased need) and unconservative conservatism (changing structure but not decreasing the size of “big government”). In addition, action taken on the basis of an accusation of “un-American” or “undemocratic” has a forceful precedent in U.S. politics. During the cold war, such accusations flared periodically to threaten civil liberties, as the McCarthy Era attests. While our context has changed, the patriotic fervor in the wake of 9/11 opened the possibility that such accusations would once again be a persuasive force, and other analyses within this time frame have argued as much (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Ostman, 2005).

The moment of consequence was set for opponents of the Bush campaign to mobilize a broad-based protest which could wield the force necessary to correct perceived violations of civil liberties, like the right to public dissent, or to use this issue as a lever which could dislodge the incumbents from office. After all, the argumentation was familiar and understandable, the wave of pro-America sentiment was still cresting, and the evidence was widely available to the public. So the question becomes, in a moment rich with possibilities, how was it that the criticism of contradiction was not able to capitalize on this precedent of the power of “un-American”? It is my contention that an analysis of the claim “un-American” or “undemocratic” as a deployment of a specific *trope of evil* provides telling insight. In the next sections, I will utilize McDaniel’s tropes of “Evil-in-itself,” “Evil-for-itself,” and “Evil-for-others” as a means to understand the failure of this criticism to achieve persuasive and political force.²

Deployment: Evil-for-Itself

I reviewed approximately sixty stories and editorials from mainstream U. S. newspapers and broadcast outlets (between August and December 2004) that addressed the Bush campaign’s

strategies for limiting entry to campaign gatherings. These reports targeted a large, general consumership and not only expressed reactions, but also circulated these reactions to create a “pre-disposition” for those who had yet to make a decision about how to respond in the context of the election. A potential voter need not be escorted from a building or sign his/her own loyalty oath to gather the information upon which to form an attitude, and potentially to take action. In choosing these stories, I hoped to get a fair cross-section of the “average” voices deliberating in one public forum about the “contradiction” of entry limitations. The criticism voiced in these reports attempts to characterize the actions of the Bush campaign as a manifestation of *Evil-for-itself*.

As McDaniel explains, Evil-for-itself is understood as type of selfishness, greed, or “other form of misplaced longing” (p. 544). The motivation of the perpetrator of this variation of evil is understandable to observers, perhaps even “technically reasonable – but not ethically justifiable” (p. 541). This is the evil of the ruthless employer who pursues a “bottom line” (an understandable motivation) at the expense of the lives of his/her employees (unethical outcome). Outrage over military acceptance of “collateral damage” (loss of civilian lives to take strategic targets) recognizes this variation of evil. The very fact that the action can be *reasoned*, that it bears resemblance to decision-making that we might employ for a justifiable social good, is what makes it *sinister*. Such reasoning takes advantage of a familiar mode of thought, the logic of exchange (p. 542), for its operation. This logic suggests that every action must have a reaction, in particular that any gain must be accompanied by a loss.

In deploying the trope of Evil-for-itself, the rhetor(s) seeks to demonstrate the self-serving motivation of an opponent. The actions of the opponent are argued to be in violation of (sacred) principles and as sacrificing too much for the benefit sought. Critics of the Bush campaign described a number of actions that were in violation of the idealized principles of democratic electioneering. In the idealized version of (American) democracy, elections are competitive processes whereby the voters may reach a judgment about how to cast their ballots by means of comparing the performance of the candidates in response to questions, through demonstrations of “character,” etc. Such an ideal expression of the democratic process would require observation of the candidates in competition (debate, etc.), as well as observations of interaction between the candidates and a diverse public. It would also require that voters have equal opportunity *to be in the presence* of each candidate in order to conduct this testing. The reports addressing entry limitations identified numerous actions on the part of the Bush campaign that were noted as a violation of such principles.

Most often cited was the use of some manner of loyalty oath as a guarantee that attendees would not be “disruptive” (Milbank, 2004; Loth, 2004; Shea, 2004; O’Skea, 2004; Dolan, Dolan & Conroy, 2004; Totenburg, 2004; Benke, 2004; Young, 2004; Messina, 2004; “Dodging debate,” 2004; Wenzel & Slaughter, 2004). John Wade’s story of the July 31, 2004 rally³ featuring Dick Cheney was repeated in numerous publications. Quite typical is *The Boston Globe’s* portrayal.

When Vice President Dick Cheney spoke July 31 to a crowd of 2,000 in Rio Rancho, a city of 45,000 near Albuquerque, several people who showed up at the event complained about being asked to sign endorsement forms in order to receive a ticket to hear Cheney. “Whose vice president is he?” said 72-year-old retiree John Wade of Albuquerque, who was asked to sign the form when he picked up his tickets for the rally. “I just wanted to hear what my vice president had to say, and they make me sign a loyalty oath.” (Larese, 2004)

Linked closely with the requirement of some type of signed affidavit was the accusation that non-registered Republicans need not try to get into a Bush rally. Stories told of individuals like Nick Lucy who was turned away from a Dubuque, Iowa rally because he was not registered as a Republican even though he had an official ticket (Larese, 2004).

Getting access to a ticket was portrayed as difficult, however, even for Republicans. In some locations, one had to “apply” for a ticket by “filling out forms stating their home and e-mail address, phone numbers, Social Security numbers, willingness to volunteer and whether they supported the president” (Halbfinger, 2004). Ticketing would become a major node of contention in demanding action, and answering criticism (Crowley, 2004; Milbank, 2004; Loth, 2004; Shea, 2004; O’Skea, 2004; Rowland, Johnson & Niquette, 2004). Of particular concern in some coverage was the recruiting of volunteers for the Bush campaign by requiring hours of work in exchange for a ticket, or a better seat at the rally (Crowley, 2004; Milbank, 2004; Kennedy, 2004). The example of Katrina Waite in *The New York Times* was especially detailed.

At a rally in Bangor, ME, last Thursday, Katrina Waite had driven nearly two hours and then waited seven more under a sweltering sun to see the president. The reward for her early arrival? A spot way in back, atop a flatbed truck, where she downed cups of water fetched by her two children to stave off the heat. Ms. Waite said her mother had earned a spot up front. “She did three hours of phone calling to get it,” she said, peering to try to pick her mother out in the crowd. (Halbfinger, 2004)

Criticism available to the general audience of readers/consumers noted that even if one had a ticket, freedom to participate and peacefully express oneself were not guaranteed at Bush campaign events. The most often repeated story involved Jeff and Nancy Rank who were asked to leave a Bush-Cheney event⁴ because they were wearing T-shirts with anti-Bush slogans. The Ranks had tickets to the event, and Jeff was a registered Republican. The Ranks were charged with trespassing, jailed for several hours, and Nancy was excused from her job at FEMA (Bury, 2004; Herman, 2004). The lawsuit they filed against a White House Advance Staff member and a Secret Service supervisor was documented numerous times. Also repeated in several publications was the story of an Ohio State University professor who conducted an “experiment” to test entry limitations (Herman, 2004; Totenburg, 2004). John Prather wore a Bush shirt to a Kerry rally and a Kerry shirt to a Bush rally to see what types of restrictions he encountered. He was escorted out of the Bush rally, but not stopped at the Kerry rally. Multiple stories were told of individuals who were either asked to leave because of slogans deemed inappropriate by

campaign staff or escorted out after voicing a protest or producing a sign in silence (Totenburg, 2004; Halbfinger, 2004; O'Shea, 2004; Adair, 2004). Often other rally attendees were described as assisting staff in suppressing their fellows. Noted in several stories was the role of the Secret Service and local police in intimidating attendees (Totenburg, 2004; Benke, 2004; Mapes, 2004a).

In particular, critics characterized the limitation of access to the presidential candidate through the requirement of party membership, loyalty oaths, etc. as “undemocratic.” One of the wire services characterized it this way:

Unfortunately, we are seeing campaign trends that don't bode well for democracy – the condition of appealing only to a certain sector or demographic because that's where the votes might be. And unfortunately, such preaching to the choir becomes reflected in public policies, even if it reflects the minority viewpoint of a minority of Americans. (Young, 2004)

The Democratic National Committee Chairman, Terry McAuliffe, did make accusations against the Bush campaign, though it was not widely covered. He told *The Oregonian* that, “The president has stripped his events of anyone who might disagree with him, which is completely un-American” (Mapes, 2004b). The practices of the Bush campaign were widely enough recognized that John Kerry made loyalty oaths and stifled protest into a running joke at his own rallies (Milbank, 2004; Halbfinger, 2004; Gearan, 2004; Herman, 2004; Cerabino, 2004; Benke, 2004). Multiple interviewees described the result of limitations during rallies as the unrealistic presentation of an “adoring crowd” (Loth, 2004; Rowland, Johnson & Niquette, 2004; “Our Turn,” 2004; Davies, 2004; Gearan, 2004; Young, 2004; Larese, 2004). By thus seeking to point out the self-serving element of entry limitations and identifying the principles which this action violates, these critics were employing the trope of Evil-for-itself. With this deployment made by its opponents, the Bush campaign was positioned as the respondent who would need to provide an adequate justification to deny that changes were necessary.

Articulation I: Public/Private/Evil-in-Itself

To understand the ability of the Bush campaign to “brush off” the accusation of Evil-for-itself, we must consider the articulation of numerous factors. In the coverage of election 2004, it first becomes clear that particularly relevant to the Bush camp's success was the blurring of the separation of the public office holder from the private candidate. Central to the operation of this conflation is a reliance on a previous deployment of the trope of *Evil-in-itself* established from the earliest moments after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The election took place against the backdrop of a symbolic overlap between capitalism and democracy, which leads to ambiguity between the public and private spheres as theorized by Kenneth Burke (1969). Burke argues that private business is rhetorically equated to public business in the context of American democracy. As an example, he cites the equivalence drawn by a reporter between the Soviet communist glorification of the public work of the Dnieprostroy

dam (destroyed by retreating troops in WWII), and the Empire State Building for New Yorkers. Key to this comparison is that the dam was produced with state funds as a “public” project. Burke suggests that the same amount of civic pride is attached for Americans to the “private” building project of real estate promotion (p. 395). It is the rhetorical work of constructing the private venture as a matter of civic pride (such as support for the local baseball franchise) that lays the ground work for this conflation. The blurring of the distinction between public and private in “civic pride” paves the way for a similar blurring between the public and the private in “civic functions,” as in the 2004 election. Neither Kenneth Burke nor I contend that there is no public component to the building of private real estate ventures or in creating a baseball team.

Obviously, local, county, state, and even federal permits may be required, tax breaks may be provided, and other interactions with legal requirements and restrictions are always present. However, they differ as to the *consequences of ownership*. Public ownership typically treats a location, item, etc. as held “in trust” for all of the constituent population. For example, National Parks are considered as held in trust for “all Americans.” When the Park Service tried to close the Devil’s Tower Monument to climbers in observance of Native American sacred observances, they became defendants in a lawsuit charging that the land was not open to “all Americans.”⁵ In contrast, shopping malls are often considered “public” locations but are privately owned. Thus, owners can legally reserve the right to exclude patrons, and many lessees post notices that they retain the right to “refuse service to anyone, at any time, for any reason.” In the first case, the consequence of ownership is that the public who have invested their civic pride in the location, item, etc. are held to have a legitimate claim to access. In the second case, the consequence of ownership is that the public may be denied access to the object of their investment of civic pride at almost any time. When the object of the investment is a sitting president, the consequences of ownership are in conflict.

The office of the president (and its current holder) serves (especially after the patriotic rally following 9/11) to bind us together in a “symbolic sociality.” We see in the president an embodiment of our national selfhood. As John Kenneth White (1990) argued in reference to Ronald Reagan, the president has become the secular priest of the gospel of America. The social is symbolically reaffirmed in the person and the message of the president. However, during an election, the access of the American people to that social symbol is limited by a private organization: the political party. As the sitting office-holder, Bush is able to maintain the “*mask* of [a] public institution” while functioning through/by a type of “privately owned business” (Burke, 1969, p. 395).

The Republican National Committee (RNC) could utilize the ambiguity of Bush’s position as an incumbent *public* office-holder to accomplish partisan *private* goals, and in fact *relied* on the contrary positions to justify its conduct. This ambiguity was stated clearly by *The Washington Post’s* White House correspondent Dana Milbank on CNN.

Well, of course, I mean, they're pre-screened in the sense that whoever comes to these events is already a Bush supporter. In some of the cases of the Republican National Committee events, there's actually been something of a loyalty oath that needs to be

signed. We've written about a case in which an Ohio professor came to a Bush event wearing a Kerry t-shirt and was sent out of the event. So of course it's pre-screened. But on the other hand, these are campaign events, and maybe it's a bit unrealistic to expect President Bush to invite in a bunch of hecklers who would ask hostile questions of him. I mean, the campaign's paying for this event. I'm not sure we in the press can really complain. (Kurtz, 2004)

This answer to the accusations of un-American-ness was offered by multiple spokespersons. For example, it was noted that the loyalty oath signed by individuals like John Wade carried a disclaimer that no public funds were used in its production (Larese, 2004). The rallies were described as “not official visits but party events” by several spokespersons for the Republican National Committee (Kurtz, 2004; Larese 2004; Totenburg, 2004). The campaign could claim that they could exclude entry because the event was “funded” by the RNC which could legitimately have rules about entry, while equally claiming (without outright lying) that it had not heard any public dissent about Bush’s policies as he “traveled the nation.” The comments of Yier Shi of the Republican National Committee were echoed by a number of individuals in numerous articles.

“If we feel our event will get disrupted again, we will use the same method [loyalty oath] to make sure it’s a positive event,” Republican National Committee spokesman Yier Shi said Thursday, defining positive as “without interruption, without debate – just [without] disruption, period.” (Totenburg, 2004)

Central to the operation of the blurring between public and private was reliance on the well established trope of Evil-in-itself. As McDaniel (2003) explains, Evil-in-itself is so disturbing that it is nearly incomprehensible. The motivation of perpetrators of this type of evil “slips through the fingers of reason,” and is manifested in acts of “radically ‘senseless’ violence and enjoyment of hatred” (p. 543). This is the evil of the serial killer who attacks random victims. Fear of the hidden threat in horror films recognizes this variation of evil. The acts defy “the reach of reason” (p. 540). We “supply metonymies for it – call it by other names, such as tyrannical or terrible or insane” (p. 540), but it escapes the ability of observers to name it adequately.

In deploying the trope of Evil-in-itself, the rhetor(s) seeks to establish the acts of an opponent as motiveless and without cause. The actions of the opponents are so gross (in quantity or quality) as to shock the system, and importantly, to construct the allies of the rhetor into innocent victims. McDaniel drew on excerpts of Bush’s remarks in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to demonstrate the operation of deploying the trope of Evil-in-itself. In texts such as the “2002 State of the Union Address,” “Anniversary Speech of September 11,” and “Remarks to the Community in Atlanta Georgia,” Bush establishes the boundaries of reason, discursively constructing the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks as operating outside these bounds. “Once set outside Reason’s boundaries, however,” McDaniel writes, “the figure of Evil-in-itself becomes a mirror that allows you to look (back) on yourself in an exalting way. If you can speak for all [as the symbolic sociality of the presidential office holder guarantees], your exaltation will constitute

‘ours’” (p. 546). The ours/us, inside, exalted position is established in opposition to the theirs/them, outside, lawless position. With an incomprehensible enemy established, “an even more encompassing strategy and policy of retribution in which ‘no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them’” (p. 546) is constructed as sensible. Since one cannot reason with the unreasonable, elimination is suggested as the only possible solution.

Even as the legacy of 9/11 continued to be played out, the conversion of the military mobilization against the Taliban in Afghanistan to the War in Iraq provided material for continuing constructions of Evil-in-itself as a generalized threat. The discovery of the remains of the victims of mass murder under the regime of Saddam Hussein, followed by the incomprehensibility of suicide bombers injuring and killing American military and civilian personnel provided ever evolving evidence of the irrational “them” threatening the reasonable “us.” In the election campaign of 2004, this trope of evil was specifically deployed as a means of answering criticism regarding event entry limitations. For example, readers of *Time* were warned, “With the election five weeks away, U.S. counterterrorism officials are obsessed with reports from multiple sources that terrorists hope to disrupt the campaign. ‘Nobody can give you a date, time or place, but everyone is absolutely convinced we’re doing to get hit,’ says a top counterterrorism hand” (Shannon, 2004). The screening to protect the “leader of the free world” from the “forces of evil” also functioned to protect him from the forces of the competitive electoral process. The continuing threat of the monstrous elevates the symbolic representative of the social collective into a position where his/her safety is *equated to our own*. Since s/he/we must protect ourselves, and the monstrous cannot be reasoned with, it must be eliminated (or at least have its sign confiscated and have it sit in a detention cell for a few hours). This action is so crucial that we will accept sacrifices of public monies, liberties, and even the compromise of sacred principles in service to the cause.

Articulation II: Evil-in-Itself/Evil-for-Others

The success of the Bush campaign in answering the critics of contradiction benefits from a second articulation as well. Along with the circulation of the well established discourse which invoked the trope of Evil-in-itself, the Bush campaign could also take advantage of a circulating discourse which invoked the trope of *Evil-for-others*. It is my contention that these two tropes were *articulated to one another* to create a particularly potent trump card.

McDaniel bases the figure of Evil-for-others on a deconstructive urge run amok. He suggests that this invocation of evil points to “the systematic breakdown of ontological-moral difference on which the judgment of Good or Evil depends” (p. 542). The motivation of perpetrators of this type of evil is to quell the “fanatical devotion to some ideological ideal” (p. 543), which may in turn become its own brand of fanaticism. Disdain for the shifting ethical boundaries of “relativism” recognizes this variation of evil. The acts of these perpetrators make good equivalent to evil, and can turn the Christian into the Nazi apologist (p. 543). The paralysis

manifested by a “suspended animation and sustained hesitancy” (p. 544), and a functional inability to tell the good from the bad can transform elastic diplomacy (p. 542) into a threat all its own.

In deploying the trope of Evil-for-others, the rhetor(s) seeks to demonstrate that the opponent has a compromised faculty of judgment. The actions of the opponent are argued to be twisted, and without moral compass. McDaniel’s (2003) description of Evil-for-others is reflected in a particular kind of counter-argument forwarded by supporters of Bush (both inside and outside the White House) to any questioning of the working of his *administration* in the months between September 11, 2001 and November 2, 2004, and by extension, his *campaign*. I read three particularly salient events (though there are many more) spaced throughout this time period in order to demonstrate the operation of this trope, and its availability as a resource for the campaign. While not unique, these three events do demonstrate the point with particular clarity. First, all three had wide coverage in newspapers and broadcasts. Second, each example demonstrates a different context and agent through which the argument of Evil-for-others was implemented. These facts suggest that these examples had exposure to a large general audience, and that the average audience member could track the argument from a number of perspectives, any of which s/he might find persuasive.

The earliest of these events took place as a reaction to a September 24, 2001 contribution to *New Yorker* from Susan Sontag. Sontag was one of the first public intellectuals to offer an objection to the Bush administration’s response to September 11, in oft-quoted statements such as, “If the word ‘cowardly’ is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others.” Sontag “and her ilk” (Pech II, 2001) were characterized as “willfully obtuse,” “perpetuators of moral equivalence,” “promoting obfuscation” and “agonized relativism,” and “woolly thinking” (“Treason of intellectuals?” 2001; Bottum, 2001; Krauthammer, 2001). *The Weekly Standard* introduced a derisive award in her honor – The Susan Sontag Certification – which was given in “recognition of particular inanity by intellectuals and artists in the wake of the terrorist attacks” (Bottum, 2001). An editorial in *The Washington Post* serves as a potent example of the deployment of the trope of Evil-for-others. Charles Krauthammer (2001) wrote, “What Sontag is implying, but does not quite have the courage to say, is that because of these ‘alliances and action,’ such as the bombing of Iraq, we had it coming. The implication is as disgusting as Jerry Falwell’s blaming the attack on sexual deviance and abortion, except that Falwell’s excrescences appear on loony TV, Sontag’s in the *New Yorker*.” The response to criticism demonstrated in these remarks indicates the ease of accessing the resource of this trope of evil.

A second exemplar event arose in March 2003 as the Bush administration was mobilizing the country to war with Iraq. Then Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle made headlines by commenting to reporters that “I’m saddened that the president failed so miserably at diplomacy that we are now forced to war” (Journal Sentinel Wire Reports, 2003). The trope of Evil-for-others was quickly invoked by fellow Senators. They characterized his remarks as “irresponsible

and counterproductive to the pursuit of freedom” (“Speaking out,” 2003), “giving comfort to our adversaries” (“Speaking freely,” 2003), and “emboldening Saddam Hussein” (VandeHei, 2003). Daschle, like Sontag, became associated with the condemning refrain that he was “blaming America first.” Numerous news sources reported the response of Tom Delay. The Editorial Staff (“Speaking freely,” 2003) at *The Boston Globe* wrote with particular verve that, “House majority leader Tom DeLay joined in the attack on Daschle, telling the South Dakota Democrat to ‘fermez la bouche.’ It is lost on no one that in using the French term for ‘shut your mouth,’ DeLay gets to paint Daschle with the same brush used to deride the French – with a white feather and a yellow streak.” The trope of Evil-for-others was not merely functional within lay opinion, but also actively in use among elected leadership.

A third exemplar event forwarded an affirmative (rather than reactive) deployment of the trope of Evil-for-others made by Ann Coulter with the release of her book *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism* in 2003. The title declares boldly that those opposed to the War on Terrorism are suffering from the kind of moral paralysis that produces a variety of evil. Passages in the book that were particularly tropic were quoted in general audience news outlets, exposing even those who did not purchase or read the book to its counter-argument. Average readers/consumers could readily encounter passages from Coulter’s book, like “Liberals have a preternatural gift for striking a position on the side of treason...Whenever the nation is under attack, from within or without, liberals side with the enemy,” and liberals “are either traitors or idiots, and on the matter of America’s self-preservation, the difference is irrelevant” (Sibley, 2003). The book spent 13 weeks on *The New York Times* best-seller list (Guthmann, 2003), and was released in a second reprint in 2004. The affirmative deployment of the trope of Evil-for-others circulated widely, reifying an argument that could now be referenced virtually in short-hand.

Evil-for-others, however, *stands on the back of* the previously established and continually reaffirmed trope of Evil-in-itself. In the case of the Bush re-election campaign, the threat to the symbolic sociality of America as personified in the sitting president is a condition of possibility for Evil-for-others to be sensible. If the threat is severe, it is a *form of evil* to try to complicate our judgment of *that threat*, or to try to *re-prioritize* the evil of selfish motivation and reasoned but ethically questionable logic as being *of greater import* than the evil of the incomprehensible monstrosity of terrorism. As McDaniel (2003) notes, “Those who begin to understand such killers often are depicted as being ‘touched by’ Evil-in-itself, corrupted” (p.541). In essence, the Bush campaign could draw upon the ready resource of the trope of Evil-for-others to suggest that by criticizing the president, opponents were giving quarter to the monstrous and becoming corrupted in the process. The articulation of Evil-in-itself with Evil-for-others, then, is a powerful combination that *functions to silence* the trope of Evil-for-itself. With remarkable impertinence, the chairman of the RNC stated during the campaign, “Senator Kerry crossed a grave line when he dared to suggest the replacement of America’s commander-in-chief at a time when America is at war” (cited in Piven, 2004). At the convergence, competition, and

cooperation between the three tropes of evil, such a statement reveals how imperative it is to “subvert and reconstitute” dominant political attitudes.

Conclusion

While hesitant to make specific recommendations for political intervention, McDaniel (2003) does suggest that the trope of Evil-for-itself offers the “most attractive” means for “re/dis/figuring” evil (p. 550). He writes:

With Sartre, we might see the second strategy (the *for-itself* character of social moral existence) with new eyes after entertaining the excesses accompanying the alternatives: it resists identifying a subject with a substance, a person with Evil, yet allows for assessing the ‘causes’ of Evil in both senses of the term – the political identities for which we perform morally dangerous acts and the variable pressures on us as social as well as psychic beings that collaborate with our choices to bring actions into the world. (p. 550)

The critics of the Bush campaign’s entrance limitations utilized this trope, possibly for the very reasons that McDaniel outlines. However, my analysis has revealed the vulnerabilities of this trope when in complex articulations with other tropes and with the social logic of capitalism. To be clear, while opponents of the Bush/Cheney campaign deployed the trope of Evil-for-itself, the particular circumstances that arose between September 2001 and November 2004 were articulated together in such a way that the strategy could not be effective. The blurred public/private symbolic sociality of the sitting president produced a discourse loaded with the trope of Evil-in-itself which set the stage to support a response with the trope of Evil-for-others. This potent confluence made it possible for McDaniel’s favored trope to be trumped by the more theo-political tropes. However, as McDaniel suggests, the process of re/dis/figuring the American Sublime (the dominant grand, theo-political style) is not wrought through the simple identification of a trope, nor by the work of a single analysis. Seeking out strengths and weaknesses of these and other tropes *in sustained and multiple conjunctive analyses* is the way that the critic might influence the interplay of rhetorical figure, the body politic, and the social imaginary. Were the contingencies to change, the convergence, cooperation, and competition of the triad of evil could be significantly different.

Along with criticism, McDaniel implies that countering the American Sublime requires a productive experimentation. As a practical matter, the critique of contradiction did not appear to shake the administration’s confidence, nor give it pause in its agenda on multiple occasions. Most importantly, such argumentation did not seem to affect the final outcome on November 2, 2004. In particular, given that this administration has demonstrated on multiple occasions that clear and articulate resistance to its policies does *not* provide any assurance of response, nor shake its support with a large portion of the population, opponents of the administration should consider whether “contradiction” is the most fertile ground from which to launch criticism, or they might experiment with strategies other than the focus on inconsistencies. If neither an

administration nor a significant amount of the public are bothered by inconsistencies in rhetoric and/or policy, such a focus becomes a waste of valuable resources. This analysis might also suggest that responding to “evil” with “evil” becomes a cycle that it would be better to avoid than to engage.

In this essay, I analyzed discourses circulating during the 2004 re-election campaign of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney as a means to explore the interactions of three tropes of “evil.” I began from the deployment point of the trope of Evil-for-itself by critics of entry limitations implemented by the campaign. Next, I mapped the articulation between private (capital) logic, public (symbolic sociality) logic, and the reaffirmed trope of Evil-in-itself. Evil-in-itself was further articulated with the developed trope of Evil-for-others. This matrix worked as a means of silencing the trope of Evil-for-itself, allowing the Bush campaign to brush aside criticism and avoid substantive response.

During WWII, the United States was the only one of the allies to hold regular elections. At that time, some questioned the wisdom of threatening the stability of the country by subjecting it to the rigors of the dissent brought about in campaigning. The question left open by election 2004 is whether even a campaign can bring about the type of rigorous dissent that would pose a *much needed* “threat” to this country. Such a threat, as McDaniel makes clear, would seek to de-stabilize the “poverty of its [evil’s] uses by our national leadership” (p. 539). Such a threat would spark an “imaginative reconstitution” of the reigning passion emanating from the State, changing “self-certainty” to “humility” (p. 539). But, when the incumbent president becomes invested with the public’s self-preservation instinct, it seems unlikely that an accusation of selfishness will humble his/her campaign or administration. When Evil-in-itself is the litmus test against which all choices are measured, it seems unlikely that the investment of civic pride can be reanimated to succeed in a demand for civil liberties. It may perhaps be only in the concentrated study of such “failure” that we prompt a new contingency to *disarticulate* these elements.

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Endnotes

¹ From this point forward, for reading ease, I will not place quotation marks around the term “evil.” I continue to see it as set apart and uniquely constructed - to be deserving of the special attention and the inherent question that the marks would connote.

² To clarify: I am tracing the *discursive construction and deployment* of a notion of “evil.” I am not forwarding a judgment that “in reality” a particular group or person is “evil” in whatever notion of the term.

³ While a very few stories in the popular press distinguished between Bush-Cheney “rallies” (as privately funded by the RNC) and “events” (as events paid for with public funds), it would be difficult for an average reader to distinguish between them. As a result, I write of them together, while recognizing that there is a difference in the details.

⁴ In the Rank’s case, they were attending an event that was not privately funded, and thus their example became especially potent since answers regarding the public/private were not applicable.

⁵ The original lawsuit was filed in 1995, and was finally decided on appeal in 1999. The Park Service was ultimately allowed to discourage climbers during the month of June. (“Court rules”, 1999).

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