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Rethinking "Black Power"

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Abstract: Attempts to define rhetoric as material have been criticized for turning back to idealism or reifying the material/ideal binary that sustains the problematic assumptions of idealism. This failure is at least partially due to the paucity of critical terms available within the rhetorical lexicon to broach questions of materiality. This essay examines modern neuroscience theories and assesses their potential for offering alternative ways of conceptualizing the materiality/ideality binary. The essay concludes with a case study of "black power" to illustrate the difference a materialist conception of rhetoric makes for rhetorical criticism.
Key Words: Materialism, Neuroscience, Black Power, Rhetoric

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Introduction: Rhetoric and the Postmodern Condition

The postmodern condition corresponds with the characterization of rhetoric as "postrepresentational," a theoretical shift accompanied by a reconfiguration of the relationship between rhetoric and reality. Instead of viewing language as a system of ideal representations through which objective reality is filtered and communicated, rhetoric is conceived as a mode of action or cultural production. Postrepresentational rhetorical theories generally share a commitment to interrogating the binary operations that sustain representational thought (for instance, subject vs. object, ideal vs. material, culture vs. nature) by articulating rhetoric as a material practice that operates within and is constitutive of objective reality.[1] Attempts to define rhetoric as material, however, have been criticized consistently for falling short of their mission, either by turning back to idealism or by reifying the material/ideal binary that sustains the problematic assumptions of idealism in the first place. In this essay, I suggest that this failure results at least partially from the paucity of critical terms available within the rhetorical lexicon to broach questions of materiality. In a discipline long accustomed to viewing rhetoric as an ideal medium, there is not a developed vocabulary capable of sustaining a rich discussion of material discourse. Even when old terms are redefined and given new meanings through theoretical and critical practices, these terms inevitably retain the traces of former meanings and lend themselves to (mis)understandings and (mis)readings that implicate them in the very forms of theorizing they are attempting to escape or overcome. To enrich this discussion, I suggest that certain scientific vocabularies offer

valuable ways of conceiving of discourse as material, particularly insights from modern

neuroscience and neuropsychiatry. First, I examine existing attempts to formulate

theories of discourse as material and the reactions these attempts have elicited. Second, I

turn to recent neuroscience theories to assess their potential for offering alternative ways

of conceptualizing the materiality/ideality binary. Finally, I offer a case study to suggest

what difference a materialist perspective might make for the practice of rhetorical

criticism. This essay shares the poststructuralist tendency to challenge binary oppositions

and ultimately argues that the opposition between materialism and idealism is an obstacle

to move beyond. While this deconstructive maneuver is by no means new, it has

traditionally been approached from the side of the ideal (taking concepts formulated in an

idealist tradition and reconfiguring them to include their excluded other). My project is to

approach this challenge from the other end of the spectrum, taking concepts formulated in

a materialist tradition and reflecting on their ability to account for the operations of

discourse.

Materialism and Idealism in Rhetorical Theory

Within rhetorical scholarship, there is a persistent tendency to separate the

material and the ideal and define rhetoric as an ideal phenomenon with particular

mediating capabilities. Both materialist and idealist orientations are traditionally defined

in terms suggesting a vertical relationship between matter and ideas. For instance, John

Lyne describes materialist positions as holding that "ideas [are] the *surface gloss* on a

reality determined by other forces," and McGuire similarly writes that materialism "seeks

explanations by looking beneath the *obvious surface* of phenomena."[2] Conversely,

idealists view material reality as a surface affair determined by a deeper ideal order: "An

idealist, on the other hand, is likely to contend that something more is involved—that some powerful continuity has been tapped, running *deeper than the surface features* of words."[3] In both perspectives language is the surface: in the materialist view, language is "gloss," a supplemental dimension that most often distorts the material reality it purports to reflect.[4] In the idealist perspective, language is the surface manifestation of a deeper order that it has *tapped in to*, or in other words, language relates to the ideal order as the tip of an iceberg: it retains an essential connection with the order that it represents. This tendency to separate and hierarchize the material and the ideal informs many understandings of rhetoric.

     As supplemental gloss or surface manifestation, rhetoric is often conceived as a vehicular function, operating between two vertically situated strata, possessing certain capabilities of communicating between the two, a middle ground or delivery system of sorts. As a middle layer, rhetoric is still immaterial in nature and more closely associated with ideality. Materiality is frequently defined as the passive limit of active rhetorical processes. For instance, Condit writes that the forces identified as objective reality "will frequently impinge on a language network to restrain its still impressive creative possibilities".[5] Similarly Biesecker writes that Burke's concept of motion, distinguished from symbolic action, "signifies all those things, biological or otherwise, that constrain and place limits on the free play of the action differential."[6] In these conceptions, the binary relationship between the ideal and the material is replicated in a similar division of active rhetorical forces and passive material entities. As Nathan Stormer summarizes, traditional rhetorical theory has separated materiality (reality and nature) and discursivity (language and culture). Rhetorical scholarship reflects this division in its preoccupation

with understanding the ways in which subjects are able to bridge this gap by means of rhetoric.[7]

The shift to postmodernism and its accompanying postrepresentational perspective has resulted in much reflection on the nature of rhetoric and its relationship to material reality. A number of "materialist theories of discourse" have been proposed with the aim of better accounting for the function of rhetoric in the wake of representation.[8] In these theories, discourse is described as material because (1) no aspect of material reality is accessible without discursive mediation and (2) discourse can directly effect material reality by constituting its meaning. For example, DeLuca argues that Laclau and Mouffe offer a corrective to the material/ideal dichotomy that has plagued rhetorical theory. He writes, "Within a discursive frame, rhetoric is no longer an instrument in the service of reality, but, rather, becomes constitutive of the meaning of the world."[9] For DeLuca, via Laclau and Mouffe, there is no unmediated access to the world—all contact with "objective reality" occurs through discourse. Laclau and Mouffe do not argue that nonlinguistic objects do not have *existence* outside of language or discourse, only that they do not have *being*. DeLuca illustrates this distinction between existence and being with the example of toxic waste sites: their material existence is not disputed, but their meaning is always a site of political struggle and never simply given. McKerrow also follows Laclau and Mouffe in his development of critical rhetoric by rejecting the distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic practices and defining rhetoric as a necessarily material affair.[10]

Michael McGee similarly moves rhetorical theory towards a materialist posture by emphasizing materiality as "the everydayness of practical discourse."[11] Just as Laclau

and Mouffe argue that reality is only accessible through discourse, McGee argues that

human beings are conditioned by "material ideas," vocabularies of concepts that guide

perception and behavior.[12] McGee emphasizes that the significance of these material

ideas, or "ideographs," cannot be revealed through hermeneutic maneuvers that attempt

to pinpoint their meaning, rather their import is "in their concrete history as usages."[13]

Both Condit and Rogers claim to advance McGee's notion of discourse as material by

accounting for the unique function language has within its material milieu. Condit's

project is to analyze how language participates in material reality, and this requires the

addition of a structural theory that justifies a distinction between language and objective

reality. Condit articulates her "Structural-Material" model of rhetorical action by

attempting to determine the ways that materiality places structural limits on the creative

potential of active linguistic processes.

     These theories of discourse as material have precipitated significant, and, I would

argue, productive changes from traditional modes of rhetorical criticism. The shift from

an emphasis on meaning to an emphasis on usages moves rhetorical scholarship from a

focus on speaker (subject, author) and intent to social flows of discourse and their

material effects.[14] Discursive systems and patterns are viewed as more productive loci for

critical interest than single speeches issued by determinate intentional agents. This shift

in critical attention opens up new ways of thinking social change: instead of an ability to

persuade individuals, rhetorical action becomes a method of organizing social resources

in new ways. This shift simultaneously enables a better understanding of postmodern

rhetorical products (e.g. mass media events, visual imagery) that are not amenable to

traditional methods that emphasize individual agency and intentional causality.

Despite the productive insights of these theoretical shifts, existing attempts to formulate materialist conceptions of discourse remain limited. Rogers argues that these materialist theories often fail to purge idealism because they continue the traditional rendering of rhetoric as an active force capable of mobilizing a passive material substrate. Thus, these theories are incomplete because they do not challenge the notion of materiality as a passive limit of active symbolic processes. These theories reinstate an active/passive binary that views matter as inert and insentient. His solution is a transhuman, materialist rhetoric where language and nature are viewed as equally active participants in a dialogic relationship of mutual influence. Jeffery Bineham makes a similar criticism, arguing that constitutive theories still maintain a Cartesian distinction between rhetoric as active subject and reality as passive object.[15] His solution is to reconfigure rhetoric as a "hermeneutic medium" that dissolves the ontological distinction between subject and object, the linguistic and the nonlinguistic. In this ontological culture, no nonlinguistic objects exist because everything is shaped by language.

Bineham and Rogers are acute in their observations of the ways in which materialist theories of discourse maintain the problematic ideal/material binary.[16] Both approach the dissolution of this binary from an essentially idealist perspective. In other words, both want to undermine the binary by enlarging the traditional conception of rhetoric to include its excluded other (objective, material reality). Rogers does this by attributing active, dialogic capabilities to material entities formerly viewed as passive; Bineham cloaks the entirety of existence in an all-encompassing ontological medium that dissolves the distinction between linguistic and nonlinguistic by defining everything as linguistic. While I sympathize with the theoretical thrust of these deconstructive attempts,

I wonder what new insights and productive advances are possible if these strategies are supplemented by projects that approach the ideal/material binary from the other side: the side of the material. Theoretical designs are always limited by their vocabularies and attempts to expand traditional "idealist" vocabularies to account for materialist discourse are likely to continue to confront the charge that they merely dissolve the material into the rhetorical and are better viewed as merely "discursive theories of materiality."[17]

Theoretical insights from the field of cognitive neuroscience offer a productive complement to these existing attempts to articulate discourse as a material entity. Approaching the question of materialist discourse from an orientation grounded in cognitive neuroscience is fruitful for at least two reasons. Initially, it seems that a major problem in formulating genuinely materialist theories of discourse is a dearth of critical terms suitable for discussions of materiality. Because the rhetorical tradition has tended to favor the view that rhetoric is an ideal phenomenon, it is difficult to find terms within this tradition to adequately redefine rhetoric as a material force. Modern neuroscience, coming from a scientific tradition dedicated to a material perspective, offers a rich vocabulary for considering words as material forces rather than ideational constructs. Second, modern neuroscience goes considerably far in understanding matter as an active force rather than a passive entity awaiting rhetorical activation. This perspective is an effective means of destabilizing the active/passive binary that underlies the hierarchy between idealism and materialism. Indeed, modern neuroscience is heavily invested in actively challenging this binary as well as the whole Cartesian legacy from which this distinction derives. In the next section, I examine insights from modern neuroscience and interrogate their significance for rhetorical theory. This section begins by summarizing

some of the common arguments made in publications that are authored by scientists and

written for a mixed audience of lay persons and fellow scientists. These publications are

generally accessible to an educated audience and provide an appropriate place to enter

into a vast and highly sophisticated body of theory. The section then offers a brief

summary of some of the more technical publications, specifically publications devoted to

research in the rising field of functional brain imaging.

Materialism and Idealism in Neuroscience

Modern neuroscience is largely devoted, to borrow a phrase from Dennett, to

"toppling the dictatorial idea of the Cartesian theater."[18] This effort is born of a

materialist orientation that is heavily invested in reconfiguring the dichotomy between

mind and matter by articulating the mind as a derivative of wholly biological processes.

These theories typically claim that the mind/body distinction is both scientifically invalid

and socially retrogressive: the mind is a function of the body (most notably the brain),

and distinctions between mind and body serve to discriminate against those who suffer

from maladies of the former.[19]

This trend of deconstructing the mind/body opposition is succinctly expressed in

the title of Antonio Damasio's well-received 1994 publication, *Descartes Error*.[20] For

Damasio, an ideal subject, or mind, does not generate emotions and rational thought;

rather, they are both "based on neural events within a brain."[21] The self is nothing more

than "a repeatedly constructed biological state."[22] Elkhonon Goldberg, in *The Executive*

Brain, similarly defines the brain, and the frontal lobes in particular, as "your mind, your

core, your self."[23] And Nobel Prize Winner Francis Crick concurs, stating, "*all* aspects of

the brain's behavior are due to the activities of neurons. . . . There is no separate 'I' who

can recognize the defect of independent neural firing."[24] He continues, "'you,' your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules."[25] In this biological perspective, the self or the subject is understood as an artificially unified pastiche of temporally fragmented images generated by successive biological states. The subject is viewed as "one of many states generated by a society of neurons," or a mechanism that binds together "the fractured components of external and internal reality."[26]

These examples are typical of a set of books written for a mixed audience that have been published in recent years.[27] These books articulate the prevalent view in cognitive neuroscience that the ideal categories of mind, self and subject are best understood as effects of biological processes. Thse books share a tendency to explicitly denounce binary distinctions between materiality and ideality, matter and mind, opting instead for a monistic materialism that views human activity in wholly biological terms. These popularizations are part of what is frequently described as a "biological revolution" in psychiatry. The use of the terms "neuropsychiatry" and "cognitive neuroscience" evidence a shift from a psychological perspective that emphasizes mind and language as "ideal" categories to a biological, materialist orientation. In fact, this shift is so significant that traditional psychology has been pronounced "dead" by many committed to a materialist understanding of human thought and behavior.[28]

This biological revolution has substantially altered standard clinical treatment of what were formerly understood as "mental" disorders but are increasingly described as brain disorders (the *DSM-IV* retains the category "mental disorder," but explains that this

is due to a lack of suitable alternative and explicitly denounces the separation between mental and physical disorders).[29] The increasing prominence of psychotropic drugs in clinical psychiatry is directly related to this theoretical move toward a comprehensive materialist theory of human behavior.[30] However, while psychology has been pronounced dead by proponents of this biological turn in the sciences of the "mind," neuroscience itself has not abandoned traditional psychotherapeutic methods such as the "talking cure." Instead of abandoning former methods of treating what were understood as mental, as opposed to physical, disorders, the distinction between language and psychotropic remedies has been challenged. For instance, Nancy Andreason writes, "Psychotherapy, sometimes denigrated as 'just talk,' is in its own way as 'biological' as the use of drugs."[31] In both drug and talk remedies, "the most basic mechanisms are the same. Both affect mind functions by changing brain functions."[32]

This attempt to reconfigure language as an explicitly biological agent is part of a larger theoretical perspective that views the brain as a malleable entity that is affected by many types of stimuli. Andreason defines the concept of brain plasticity as the understanding that "our brains are in a state of constant dynamic change, which occurs as a consequence of the impact of experience on our mental functions and states."[33] Both drugs and words lead to changes in this plastic brain and the distinction between physiological and psychological stimuli is held to be "quite arbitrary."[34] In modern neuroscience, then, language is material in precisely the same way that the chemical compounds composing psychotropic drugs are material: both effect human activity by directly acting on and shaping the biological processes that comprise the dynamic brain function.

This conception of language as a biological agent is not so much a revolutionary discovery as a shift in perspective. The idea that biological events correspond to mental stimuli is familiar, the innovation of modern neuroscience is treating mental stimuli in the same way as chemical compounds: as material objects, with specific effects capable of being precisely identified and localized in the human brain. By mapping the actions of linguistic and chemical stimuli in the human brain, the imaging techniques of modern neuroscience provide a direct way of conceptualizing the action of language as physical and emodied.

Mapping Language: Functional Brain Imaging

The understanding that human activity is grounded in and comprised of the activity of neurons has led to the development of procedures designed to pinpoint, or map, the neural basis of particular activities. One of the most significant trends in current neuroscience research is the development of extremely precise techniques to pinpoint the spatial and temporal locations of specific brain functions. Electroencephalography (EEG) and magnetoencephalography (MEG) techniques measure the neuroelectric and neuromagnetic fields that are generated by brain activity when subjects are exposed to various stimuli. Laboratory studies have examined brain activity response when subjects are exposed to auditory, visual and cognitive stimuli. For instance, an oddball auditory paradigm experiment attempts to determine the neural origins of detection behavior by exposing subjects to a series of auditory stimuli.[35] Infrequent stimuli are embedded in a series of high-probability, repetitive, standard stimuli. EEG equipment is used to measure the brain activity associated with the detection of the infrequent stimuli. By employing sophisticated spatial and temporal localization techniques, researchers attempt to define

the neural correlates of this activity and effectively map the function of this detection

behavior.

These mapping techniques are not isolated to detection of auditory or visual

stimuli, but also include attempts to pinpoint the neural processes associated with

cognitive events such as language processing. For example, Billingsley et al. examine the

different neural activity associated with phonological and semantic processing (loosely,

the processing of sounds and the comprehension of words).[36] Pulvermiller et al. similarly

use MEG techniques to investigate the brain activity associated with the cognitive

processing of spoken words.[37] Functional brain imaging furthers the neuroscientific

understanding of words as material entities. Just as biochemical agents act on certain

parts of the brain to produce different "mental" states, language itself can be viewed as

producing biological effects that generate electric and magnetic fields capable of

detection and spatio-temporal localization. While it is difficult to think of words as

material entities because they are not tangible, viewing them via the magnetic and electric

fields they generate indirectly via their impact on neural activity is helpful: magnetic and

electric fields are material forces, but, like words, they are not tangible in the same way

that we usually ascribe to objective entities.

Therefore, in modern neuroscience theory, human activity is viewed from a

materialist orientation at the level of neural processes. Linguistic and biochemical stimuli

generate neural activity that in turn produces electric and magnetic fields allowing for the

mapping of different brain functions. These stimuli do not merely trigger certain neural

responses, they also have the capability to change the "plastic brain" by rewiring, or

reconfiguring neural pathways, as cortical circuits are capable of experience-dependent

remodeling.[38] This materialist theoretical orientation destabilizes the binary distinctions between mind and matter, words and things, and ultimately the ideal and the material. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical implications of neuroscience for rhetorical theory and then offer a brief case study to illustrate the difference neuroscience might make for rhetoric.

Discourse as Material: Can Neuroscience Contribute to Rhetoric?

The theoretical position of neuroscience offers a useful complement and spur to existing materialist theories of discourse. McGee suggests that we view rhetoric "as an *object*, as material and omnipresent as air and water and specific rhetorical objects must be examined in terms of their material effects rather than stable, determinate meanings."[39] Taking McGee's notion of discourse as material, Condit attempts to examine rhetoric not as the intentional emission of individual subjects but "as an empirical entity operating through multiple voices across the social scale".[40] By describing flows of public discourse rather than the people and events that cause social change, Condit moves from a speaker-centered model concerned with the ideas motivating particular enunciations to a materialist model that attempts to understand rhetoric in terms of its material effects. Condit writes of the method associated with a materialist orientation: "We likewise cannot see the collective effects of discourse directly, but we can read them in the history of the public vocabulary as reliably as a geologist tracing the channels left by a burrowing worm millions of years ago."[41]

The suggestion that rhetorical criticism is a geology provides a way of thinking the implications of neuroscience for rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism has often been approached as a history of sorts, concerned with establishing the causal linkages between

speakers, speeches and events. Viewed as a geology or geography, rhetorical criticism involves mapping the material flows of discourse across social spaces, tracing the effects of linguistic stimuli across a social subject.[42] Just as neuroscience effectively dismantles the "stable subject" associated with the Cartesian perspective by dispersing the subject into a series of discrete neural events and biological locations, viewing discourse as material inevitably requires a social perspective that sees individual rhetors not as authorial, intentional agents but as nodes of articulation for broader flows of discourse, similar to Foucault's emphasis on positions of enunciation rather than individual subjects as authors of their own discourse.[43] A shift in emphasis from rhetoric as history to rhetoric as a geography, or "the cartography of persuasion," results in a simultaneous shift of emphasis from the speaking subject to networks of distributed agency.[44]

As critics map discursive entities circulating through social spaces, the emphasis on material effects does not entirely supplant questions of meaning. The meaning of discursive entities is not, however, seen as a stable entity that can be discovered lurking beneath the surface of words, perhaps in the intentions of the author or even the interpretations of the audience. Meaning is a wholly unstable and indeterminate affair, a dynamic process that "expands and contracts" but does not rigidify.[45] Discursive products can be viewed as material forces that are forever accumulating new associations and casting off old ones, though past associations always leave a trace. Discursive entities are constantly shaping and remodeling the "plastic brain" of society, creating new pathways and relocating the circuits of collective interaction. While meaning is preserved as a category in this materialist perspective, it is only as the assemblage of diverse flows that come to attach themselves to a term as it circulates.

In 1987, E. Hundert published an essay with the title, "Can Neuroscience Contribute to Philosophy?", and indeed it has and continues to do so.[46] While rhetoricians have for the most part ignored neuroscience, philosophers, particularly those in philosophy of the mind, have employed insights from neuroscience and genetics to radically reconfigure conventional understandings of language.[47] One of the most significant breakthroughs in this area was Richard Dawkin's 1976 coinage of the word "meme" to describe linguistic and cultural practices as material entities subject to the same laws as biological and natural entities.[48] A meme is a unit of cultural transmission or imitation that is subject to the laws of natural selection, just like genes. The relationship between genes and memes is not one of analogy but of literal equation: Dennett emphasizes that memes and genes are, in fact, not ontologically distinct but "just different kinds of replicators evolving in different media at different rates."[49] Perhaps the most significant emphasis in "meme" theory is that human consciousness, including human communication, is simply a transmission medium for the self-replication of memes. Dennett describes the human mind as a "meme nest," an artifact created when memes restructure the human brain to make it a more hospitable habitat for memes.[50] Susan Blackmore makes the same point by describing humans as physical hosts subject to the activity of memes, and Ian McFadyen says that human behavior is "the result of ongoing battles between self-replicating systems of thought."[51] Memes are selfish replicators whose existence is largely independent of their value to their hosts. So, the question, for Dennett and like-minded philosophers, becomes, not how to do things with words, but *how words do things with us*.[52]

McGee's notion of the ideograph has much in common with the definition of the "meme" (although memes are generally not taken to be exclusively verbal). Both share an emphasis on rhetoric as a material object that is subject to certain laws that are not entirely, or perhaps even at all, within human control. The perspective of language as a material entity radically displaces the traditional focus on speakers and even audiences and suggests an approach to rhetoric that attempts to map the effects of rhetorical entities across the "social brain" to better determine their functions. While the heavy-handed biologism of neuroscience might initially be off-putting to rhetoricians raised on a diet of idealism, intentionality, and subject-centered agency, insights from neuroscience can propel recent interest in materialist theories of discourse by offering critical methods necessary to complement this theoretical growth.

Materialist Discourse: Mapping "Black Power"

To better illustrate what neuroscience can contribute to rhetoric, I examine the term "black power" as a material entity capable of producing certain "fields" and reconfiguring the synaptic connections of the social. In the 1960s, "black power" comes to circulate not so much through authorial intention but because the words themselves have material force capable of instantiating material effects on the psychic and the social level. Like a psychotropic drug reconstructing the neural pathways of an individual brain, "black power" operates at a social level to solder new connections and rework old ones, rewiring the collective mind. In this perspective, individual rhetors are just nodes for the circulation of discursive flows, synapses that enable and direct the flow of discourse throughout the social circuitry, rather than intentional authors or creators of particular meanings.

To map the flow of "black power," I examine a decade of *The New York Times* and attend to the material effects associated with its circulation. The prominence of the term "black power" is traditionally associated with Stokely Carmichael's June 16, 1966 address during the Meredith March in Mississippi. Thus, I examine *The New York Times* (*NYT* or the *Times* from here on) from 1961 to 1971 to map the shifts in the discursive terrain produced by the emission and social ingestion of "black power." By looking at the *Times* coverage of associated events before the introduction of "black power," it is possible to better understand the differences produced by its entrance into the national vocabulary. In this study, I describe three specific effects or functions of "black power": (1) *Transmission*: "Black power" functioned to call forth seemingly endless interpretive and definitional activity, guaranteeing its own replication via the multiplication and diffusion of "black power" discourses throughout the social body; (2) *Plasticity*: The introduction of "black power" into the collective lexicon increased the permeability of the existing civil rights configuration, dispersing the movement into new arrangements; and (3) *Recombination*: In the resulting network, violence was redefined as an intrinsic component of the movement instead of a peripheral supplement provoked by oppression.

In 1966, "black power" was used as a category in the *Times*' index. It was consistently used throughout the remaining years under consideration (1967-1971). Thus, for these years, the articles selected were included within the "black power" category. "Black power" does not, however, appear before 1966. In the years 1961 to 1965, the articles were chosen from among the many under the category "Negro," with special attention to articles mentioning militancy, violence, and the relationship between the mainstream movement and other factions of the civil rights struggle. The review of the

selected articles revealed many interesting shifts in the national discourse with the advent of "black power." It is, of course, difficult if not impossible to prove a causal link between the introduction of "black power" and the changes in the *Times*' coverage of the civil rights movement. Although the case study sometimes tends to suggest just such a causal linkage, it is possible to bracket the question of causality and consider the case study as a way to show the sequencing of discursive changes with "black power" as a reference point. While the question of causality is interesing, particularly in its potential relationship to neuroscience theory, a full consideration is beyond the scope of this essay. This bracketing does not negate the case study's ability to illustrate, or at least suggest, a type of rhetorical criticism oriented from a materialist perspective.

Defining "Black Power": Definition, Transmission and Replication

Almost immediately after Stokely Carmichael used the term "black power" in his Meredith March address, the term infected national discourse. In the coverage of the Meredith March events published on June 17, a front page article reports the arrest of marchers in Greenwood, Mississippi for defying local authorities' prohibition of camping privileges. Upon his release, Carmichael addressed the crowds, and the *NYT* reports: "Five times Mr. Carmichael shouted, 'We want black power!' And each time the younger members of the audience shouted back, 'Black power!'"[53] This is the extent of the *Times* coverage of the birth of "black power," and there is no reflection or commentary on its potential significance or meaning. Indeed, what is remarkable about "black power" is that it lacked a determinate meaning from its inception—Carmicheal did not introduce the term in a context of definition or explication, he tossed the term out as a potent signifier marked by a semiotic nonspecificity. Although Carmichael would later go to considerable

effort to define the term (including the publication of a book by the same title), "black power" was, at first, vague, open and indeterminate.[54]

"Black power" would not remain so hazy for long. Within days, it made its way into the headlines, beginning a phase of prominent circulation that would last for years.[55] The circulation of "black power" is not, however, immediately due to any controversial definitional content, but its very lack of definition. The enticing ambiguity of "black power" called forth an entire network of discursive activity congealed around the question of its meaning. "Black power" replicates and transmits throughout the social body via its definitional haziness. "Black power" is better described not as an empty or floating signifier, but as a "flickering" signifier.[56] Neurotransmitters in the brain are able to amplify their powers of movement by binding and unbinding from their receptors, just as "black power" attaches and detaches from different definitional constructs and associations of meaning, guaranteeing its infectious spread throughout the social body. "Black power" appears to spread not as a stable entity but by virtue of its essential ambiguity.

When "black power" appears in the *Times*, it is frequently in the context of a discussion of the instability and indeterminability of its meaning. Soon after its first appearance, "black power" is described as an "amorphous" philosophy that "almost defies definition."[57] The fluidity of the term only enhanced its infective possibilities as it came to be defined and used in myriad and often contradictory ways. "Black power" was variously articulated as a philosophy of self-defense, as an alternative to the ideology of nonviolence associated with the civil rights movement, as an emphasis on black community control, as black nationalism, and in a multiplicity of other dimensions.

Entire conferences and conventions were devoted to defining the term.[58] In 1967, the

Times reports on the NBC news special "After Civil Rights . . . Black Power," describing

the program as "a cursory review of the controversy over the meaning of the phrase

'black power'" which included the prominent civil rights leaders who were "heard in an

iteration of the varying Negro interpretations of 'black power.'"[59]

Even outside of the *Times*, publications on "black power" routinely articulated

their purpose as a clarification of definition. For instance, in their 1969 book on black

power, Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenridge bemoan the fact that the "very meaning of

black power has become fragmented" and set out to clarify the term as a coherent and

rational philosophy.[60] C.T. Vivian's 1970 book, *Black Power and the American Myth*,

follows a similar agenda, arguing that the fears associated with the term are due to a

failure to understand its meaning.[61] These examples indicate that "black power" did not

persist simply due to its initial ambiguity and need of definition: the definitional activity

surrounding the term created a feedback loop where each new definition spurred further

discursive activities of refinement, refutation and clarification. In the mainstream

vernacular, "black power" became associated generally with black militancy, anti-white

sentiment, advocacy of self-defense, riots and the anti-social activities of black, urban

youth. However, the meaning of "black power" was persistently destabilized by the

endless definitions presented by its advocates in defense of the term. James Farmer is

quoted in the *Times*, "If I am against black power, I would be against myself. But I am

concerned because the concept of black power has been misinterpreted in the press . . .

We have the responsibility to continually interpret for the public what we are doing and

why we are doing it."[62] Advocates denied that "black power" was anti-white, denied that

"black power" was an advocacy of violence, and frequently attempted to define "black power" in ways palatable to a mainstream, white audience. These defensive attempts to clarify the meaning of "black power" did little to defuse its force as they paradoxically legitimized the associations between "black power" and anti-white militancy by sustaining the term's circulation within conversations of black supremacy and violence.

"Black power" is, like McGee's ideographs, more pregnant with potential meanings than most propositions. However, the disputes over the meaning of "black power" are somewhat different than the types of conflicts that occur over the meaning of ideographs as described by McGee. While ideographs do not possess a single meaning but are characterized instead by a plurality of usages, the changes in meaning are either diachronic (across time) or synchronic. In the latter sense, the disputes are not semantic but are attributed to "the deeper structural dislocation which likely produced multiple usages as a disease produces symptoms."[63] In the case of "black power," the term's very circulation is sustained by a terministic compulsion that is not a structural principle but occurs entirely on the surface. The infectious transmission of "black power" cannot be attributed to its meaning or content, even if this meaning is in some sense polysemic: as Gene Roberts wrote in the *Times*, "there is something intoxicating about the chant 'black power.'"[64] In McGee's example, ideological conflicts issue from definitional disagreements that are structural, or in other words that are the result of relationships with different words: some take equality to be a question of access, others with reference to the goal of being educated.[65] In the case of "black power," the conflict is better described as poststructural: there are no clear boundaries or structural principles that define the conflicts of meaning. Rather, at the very surface "black power" is about the activity of

definition and redefinition, an activity that guarantees the transmission and replication of the term because of the absence of structural determinations that might solidify or stabilize its meaning.

This radical indeterminacy can be seen in the unpredictable and dynamic nature of the "black power" 'camps'. Not only do the advocates and detractors of the term lack any coherent ideological unification—for instance, the term is explicitly defended by Richard Nixon as a type of black capitalism, while Carmichael puts a socialist spin on the term—but the supporters and decriers do not remain stable.[66] For example, Whitney Young of the National Urban League spent years publicly attacking the concept of "black power" before a "sharp reversal" that led him to embrace the concept.[67] The conflicts surrounding "black power" are less a result of ideological or structural differences than the sheer superficiality of "black power."

Plasticity: "Black Power" and the Dispersal of the Civil Rights Movement

The imprecision of "black power" accentuated its character as a potent force with the ability to significantly transform the terrain of the civil rights movement. "Black power" functioned as a stimulus that effectively altered the site of the struggle, transforming the conflict from a relatively unified "black vs. white" problem to a complex tension dispersed into multiple factions. The civil rights movement came to be seen less as a coherent union than a composite of discrete fragments with unstable and tenuous connections. In later years, "black power" came to be articulated as the "post-"of the civil rights movement, and after that follows only the "death" of civil rights. While there were undoubtedly disagreements amongst black activists before the introduction of "black power," these disagreements were more often viewed as occurring at the margin

or periphery of an otherwise "whole" movement. After "black power," the notion of a margin or periphery became less than a stable location as the very "center" of the movement dispersed in multiple directions.

Plasticity refers to the ability of the brain's neural networks to change based on stimuli associated with experience and chemical interventions. "Black power" is associated with a reconfiguration of the topography of the civil rights movement as the network moves from a centralized system to a collective of loosely connected but largely independent organizational elements. In the national lexicon, the introduction of "black power" operates to destabilize existing configurations, dispersing the elements into different arrangements. Before the advent of "black power," the civil rights movement is portrayed as a generally unified front centered around the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. Internal conflicts are situated as peripheral and marginal aberrations that have little ability to substantially influence the movement's core. After "black power," the internal conflicts are moved to the center of the movement and King's leadership is destabilized as competing movement philosophies grow in circulation and perceived influence.

Before "black power," the national discourse tended to view the civil rights movement as a unified entity symbolized by King. A 1961 headlines reads, "Dr. King, Symbol of the Segregation Struggle," and the article describes King as the leader of a monolithic movement with the goal of full integration.[68] The article states that King sees the movement reaching its goal within 15 years. King is frequently referred to as "spokesman and symbol of the movement."[69] In these early years, coverage of internal opposition to King's leadership is articulated as attention to "extremist elements," and it

is common for the articles to explicitly downplay the significance of these elements by offering statistical evidence of their limited influence. In "Negro Extremist Groups Step Up Nationalist Drive," Kihss reports that the best available estimates indicate that the extremist groups in New York City "may involve only 2,000 active members." Kihss attributes to a "qualified observer" the fact that attendees of extremist meetings are likely to be "unemployed and drifters" and "mentally immature."[70] A staff editorial downplays the significance of the extremist elements "which often have very resounding names but very small memberships."[71] The article proceeds to characterize them as "minor movements" that "make a big noise without really interesting the masses of Negroes." And in a 1963 article, black nationalists in particular are singled out as uninfluential extremists who are "emotionally immature."[72]

Before "black power," much of the coverage of conflicts within the civil rights movement focuses on the differences between King and Malcolm X. Frequently, the influence of Malcolm X is slighted with indications that the Black Muslim sect is numerically small and politically impotent. This trend is accompanied by a practice of attributing the limited influence of these "extremist" organizations to frustration and impatience with the slow pace of the civil rights movement. For instance, Roy Wilkins is quoted, "I don't think there's any doubt that Negroes are frustrated, bitter, and impatient" when asked to account for the rising influence of Malcolm X and black nationalism. The same article continues, "The Muslims exist and their influence will remain potent so long as they are able to give the Negro masses something that articulates their pent-up frustrations." The growth of "splinter groups" is seen as the result of a failure of the movement to produce *timely* results.[73] King himself is often quoted as saying that the

perceived failure of civil rights initiatives makes militant positions more attractive.[74] In 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, an article begins, "Civil rights legislation may come far too late" to prevent racial strife, and continues to describe a "hardening of attitudes" among Negroes, "many of whom have become discouraged by the slow pace of their advance" and are becoming increasingly critical of the movement's mainstream leaders.[75]

From 1961 to 1965, there is increasing attention paid to the so-called "splinter groups" that diverge from the mainstream movement led by King. In early years, the significance of these groups is downplayed and they are viewed as irrational and ineffectual disruptions that have little association with the mainstream movement. As the *Times* discourse increasingly acknowledged the growing influence of militant strands of the movement, this influence is often seen as the result of the slow *pace* of the movement. The civil rights movement is still accorded a general unity of structure and purpose, with outlying marginal elements wielding some influence. After June 1966, "black power" became a prominent location for discourses attending to the fragmented and factionalized nature of the civil rights movement.

Almost immediately after the entrance of "black power" into the national discourse, the increasing attention to tensions within the civil rights movement congealed around the phrase, making "black power" the definitive marker of a new topography of the civil rights movement. In a June 28, 1966 article headlined "Rights March Disunity," the emergence of "black power" is described as a new philosophy that "had given rise to a distinct movement within a movement," and "black power" is further described as "potentially the most disruptive force yet in the rights movement."[76] A July 3 article

develops the idea of the split, writing that the civil rights movement had "entered a phase of severe competition" between rival organizations as the authority and direction of the mainstream national organizations were increasingly challenged by "more action-oriented" groups advocating a "harder line" on civil rights.[77] Two days later, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) publicly adopted the "black power" phrase, a resolution that "implied open opposition to other civil rights organizations."[78] Roy Wilkins, then head of the NAACP, responds the following day in a front page article, stating that "the idea of black power opens a more serious division in the civil rights movement."[79] On July 8, a front-page article again features Wilkins response to "black power," stating that cooperation between the NAACP and organizations advocating "black power" had become "virtually impossible."[80] The next day, the headlines of an article on King's reaction to "black power" read, "Dr. King Declares Rights Movement is 'Close' to a Split," and attributes to King the belief that the rights movement faces "a permanent split over the black power issue."[81]

Throughout the following weeks, there is a pattern of increasing news focus on the internal tensions and conflicts of a fragmenting civil rights movement such that the main conflict seems to be displaced from blacks vs. white oppressors to competing black organizations and ideologies. The July 10 edition of the *Times* contains an article on the NAACP's plan to "re-examine the basis of cooperation" with other organizations and attempt to stifle the increasing speculation on the split of the movement.[82] The same issue contains the simply titled "Black Power," the lead paragraph of which dramatically reads:

> The once-solid front of the civil rights movement has crumbled—for the moment at least—and battle lines are being drawn for what could be the start of a long and

bitter struggle for the allegiance of the nation's 22-million Negroes. The unity of

the organizations had been shattered by the rising cry of "black power."[83]

A new spatial configuration of the movement emerges as the battle lines are internalized

within the movement and become definitive of an era of multiple factions rather than a

centralized schema with occasionally divergent outliers. In August, the front page

headlines read, "6 Rights Leaders Clash on Tactics in Equality Drive," and the article

describes that the 6 leaders met for the first time "since the emergence of the "black

power" issue," and despite this coming together they continued to express "sharply

divided opinions" on the Negro question."[84]

The increasing association of "black power" with a fragmented civil rights

movement decenters King as the symbol of a unified movement. As indicated by the "6

Leaders" headline, the movement came to be articulated as a set of independent

organizations (including CORE, SNCC, NAACP, SCLC, National Urban League) with

their own leaders and discrete memberships. An editorial condemns "the incitement of

Negroes by their competing civil rights leaders" and another describes "black power" as a

force that has disintegrated a once-unified movement into a set of "urban blocs".[85] In this

discourse, the tensions of the movement congeal around "black power," and the attention

to black struggle against white resistance is at least partially displaced by a new focus on

internal competition. In later years, "black power" is articulated as the antecedent to the

civil rights movement which is declared "dead."[86]

While tensions between different civil rights organizations predated "black

power," the discourse associated with conflicts prior to "black power" tended to construct

the civil rights movement as a generally unified entity. Militant groups unhappy with the

tactics of mainstream organizations were either marginalized as insignificant aberrations or attributed to the slow pace of progress toward shared goals. In 1966, "black power" became a discursive force employed to articulate the movement as a set of discrete, competing factions with no clear center and thus no discernable margins. The struggle of black people for concessions from the white power structure was partially displaced in national discourse by the struggle of individual black organizations competing for membership and resources. This shift in the geography of the civil rights struggle eventually enabled different constructions of the relationship between protest and violence.

Recombination: Resituating Violence

Before "black power," while the national discourse accorded a general unity of purpose and function to the civil rights movement, violent outbreaks were often perceived either as spontaneous eruptions of a pent-up frustration resulting from the slow pace of the movement or as criminal activity propagated by extremist elements dissociated from the national movement. After "black power" and the discursive fragmentation of the civil rights movement, "violence" came to be soldered to "black power" and militancy, and riots were increasingly seen as the product of irresponsible tactics on the part of the movement itself. "Black power" came to function as a carrier mechanism capable of de-linking violence from isolated extremism and transplanting it into the very heart of the movement. Even when causal links between "black power" and race riots were explicitly denied, the implied necessity of addressing the question of their relationship worked to construct associations between "black power" and violent, riotous activity, a recombination resulting in a sometimes implicit conception of the riots as a

direct consequence of the militant tactics of the civil rights movement rather than a consequence of the frustrations resulting from societal resistance to the movement's demands. The adjacent articulation of "black power" and violence recombines the two constituents in such a way to suggest a certain complicity between the civil rights movement and race riots.

In the years leading up to 1966, the eruption of race riots produced considerable speculation as to their cause. In many cases, the riots are attributed to radical fringe elements outside of the mainstream of the civil rights struggle. When the rights movement and its participants appear to be among the participants, the violence is attributed to some combination of black impatience and white recalcitrance when faced with demands for integration and equality. For instance, a 1964 front-page article suggests that racial violence is the result of Communist Party infiltration of fringe elements.[87] Screvane, then mayor of New York, is quoted in the same article as saying that "rank-and-file" members have not been among the participants, rather the riots "have been agitated by and sponsored by and participated by the fringe groups in the community." The article includes Police Department speculation that a variety of "extremist groups" are looking for ways to capitalize on Negro aspirations by fomenting violence.

The 1965 Los Angeles riots followed a similar pattern. In "Experts Divided on Rioting Cause," sociologists attribute the riots to resentment over white resistance to civil rights progress, and the Los Angeles Chief of Police describes the rioting as "the result of a rebellion of a gang of Negro hoodlums who had no real purpose except rebellion and destruction." The New York Police Commissioner had previously referred to the Harlem

riots in similar terms, as "committed by thugs and hoodlums who had no connection or

interest in civil rights."[88] The Los Angeles riots are described by the *Times* as "a blow to

civil rights leaders," and the responsibility is put on "young hoodlums who have no

respect for the law."[89] While there are some suggestions in the pre-"black power"

coverage that the militant tactics of the civil rights movement encourage violence and

disrespect for the law, the riots are frequently described as purposeless criminal activity

by irrational youth or the byproduct of fringe-group manipulation of the rising

expectations of black Americans. In both cases, the riots and violence are explicitly

divorced from the tactics and ideology of the mainstream civil rights movement.

The emergence of "black power" provided a location for the co-articulation of

violence and the civil rights movement. As a *Times* editorial from 1966 states, "The black

power philosophy gave Negro rage an institutionalized basis".[90] In front-page coverage of

the 1966 Atlanta riots, the article highlights the fact that many participants were members

of SNCC and chanted "black power" as they fought police and destroyed property.[91]

Another front-page article begins by writing that SNCC, "chief advocate of black power,

encountered mounting hostility today as a result of the Negro riot."[92] Even when the

association between "black power" and riots is explicitly denied, the necessity to offer

this defense is evidence of its significant circulation.[93]

The term "black power" became a mechanism of assigning responsibility for the

riots within the black activist community. In President Johnson's 1967 address on the

New York and Detroit riots, he states, "We will not tolerate lawlessness. We will not

endure violence. It matters not by whom it is done, or under what slogan or banner. It will

not be tolerated."[94] Though Johnson does not specifically link the riots to "black power,"

the suggestion that the riots are the deliberate tactics of a "slogan or banner" indicates that militant blacks are the cause of the violence. While the riots were previously associated loosely with the militancy of the civil rights movement, the emergence of "black power" made it much easier to locate the cause of the violence within a specific movement and set of individuals. Carmichael's arrest for encouraging a riot in Atlanta only reinforced the linkage between riots and "black power," a linkage that placed responsibility for the riots squarely within the civil rights movement.

With the co-occurrence of the fragmentation of the civil rights movement, the association of violence with "black power" eventually enabled the infection of the larger movement with connotations of violence. Formerly, the dualistic opposition between King and his mainstream movement and the militant fringe elements such as the Black Muslims operated to ensure the nonviolent reputation of the former as the militant fringe functioned as a foil. With the dissolution of this binary and the emergence of multiple competing factions with no clear boundaries between good and bad, the civil rights movement in general came to be viewed as a potential source of violence and disorder. A 1966 article quotes Attorney General Katzenback as saying that many white people "fail to distinguish between a peaceful march and a riot," attesting to the increasing homogenization of all elements of the movement under a banner of threatening militancy. Even when causal links are not explicitly drawn, the national discourse increasingly associates violence and the movement, and this adjacent articulation subtly reinforces associative links even when they are not overtly constructed. For instance, a 1966 front-page article is decidedly ambiguous about the connections between the civil rights cause and the increasing violence.[95] The article states that a Republican poll found "the race

issue to be of increasing concern to Americans," and the "race issue" is later discussed as "concern over riots and racial disorders, as well as the advance, or lack of it, of the civil rights of Negroes." By combining riots and civil rights under the loose rubric of "the race issue," the article suggests some essential linkage between the two.

Conclusion

By viewing discourse as a material process that circulates throughout society, effectuating new pathways and reinforcing different connections while rendering former geographies obsolete, the critical task shifts from an attempt to pinpoint the meaning of "black power" to determining its effects or the history of its usages. As McGee points out, the task is not to judge discourse or determine its truth value (for instance, to ask whether "black power" is good or bad, true or false) but to map its function across the social terrain. A brief comparison of existing rhetorical studies on black power and the materialist-inspired case study presented here might be of some use in further describing the implications a challenge to the material-ideal binary poses for rhetorical criticism.

Deleuze makes a useful distinction between judgment and experimentation that helps to situate these different approaches to rhetorical criticism.[96] Much existing scholarship devoted to explicating "black power" relies on a politics of judgment, that is, it is concerned with determining both the meaning and the value of "black power." In one of the earliest essays on black power (originally published in 1968), Parke Burgess describes black power as an intentionally devised strategy designed to issue an explicit moral challenge to white America.[97] Burgess acknowledges that black power has been interpreted as militant and violence, but he argues for a different interpretation: "The rhetoric of Black Power may be interpreted in another way, however. Perhaps these

militant Negro advocates utter not a call to arms but a call for justice, a call uttered

outside the law and order because they have no recourse within the institutions that

prescribe what law and order actually mean for many Negro citizens. The rhetoric of

Black Power may be the only *strategic choice* they have. Nevertheless, behind all the

sound and fury of this rhetoric may lie the *intention* merely to force upon the culture a

moral decision."[98] Burgess' thesis is squarely within the idealist tradition. Recalling

Lyne's definition of idealism as the position that words are a surface gloss on underlying

transcendental phenomena, Burgess indicates that the "sound and fury," or the surface of

black power rhetoric, distorts the underlying *intentions* of its authors. Thus, Burgess

attempts to pinpoint a meaning for black power (based on the intentions of its rhetors)

and judge this meaning as preferable to its distorted version that enjoys a more prominent

circulation.

In a similar piece, Robert L. Scott argues that black power is open to a

constructive interpretation "which is absolutely unobjectionable and totally consistent

with democratic ideals."[99] Like Burgess, Scott bases his privileged interpretation on the

intentions of black power rhetors: black power discourses are "intended" to clarify the

term's positive connotations for black audiences and "meant" to illustrate for whites that

black power is not intrinsically associated with violence.[100] Black power is, rather, a

symbolic working-through of violence and a failure on the part of whites to consider its

intended meaning and respond adequately to its demands will inevitably result in actual

violence. For Scott, then, the false interpretation given by the white majority is literally

dangerous and the consequences of real violence can only be averted by grasping its

deeper, intended message and responding appropriately. Scott shares many of Burgess'

idealist tendencies with his emphasis on intentionality, but for Scott, the ultimate truth of "black power" is premised on its association with material reality. The rhetoric represents the true material reality for black Americans: "I believe we must assume that their [Black Power advocates] rhetoric makes clear the world as it is for many, perhaps most, Black Americans."[101] If white America cannot recognize the true material conditions motivating black power rhetoric and change these conditions, black power will fail at the symbolic level and material consequences ("real" violence) will ensue.

Charles Stewart's more recent piece (1997) on Carmichael and black power is more complicated.[102] Stewart describes black power as a mechanism used by Carmichael to construct a new social reality, to bring about a symbolic realignment whereby the civil rights movement was reformed to appeal to a new audience, a new generation of activists. Stewart recognizes, however, that Carmichael himself was the product of historical circumstances, the right person at the right time rather than an agent with the power to recreate the movement out of whole cloth. Carmichael's rhetoric, in combination with the historical circumstances, including already existing conflicts within the movement, operated to evolve the movement from within. For Stewart, Carmichael and black power are not external opposition to the civil rights movement but represent an evolutionary force originating *within* the movement. Stewart is primarily interested in interpreting Carmichael's rhetoric as a strong mechanism for identifying with a younger generation activists.

All of these treatments of "black power" are similarly interested in judging what is viewed as the rhetoric of black power. All three overtly attempt to negate what are perceived as traditional interpretations of black power rhetoric as militant, violent,

irrational and antisocial. Instead, a truer and better interpretation of black power

discourse is revealed and defended as a valuable understanding. A materialist posture

such as I have attempted to outline is not primarily interested in revealing or determining

the true meaning of "black power": rather, the aim is to trace the circulation of "black

power" throughout the social body and attempt to document its effects or, at least, the

sequence of its movements. Although "black power" has had paradoxical effects, it is

quite likely that many will view the effects I have described as largely negative based on

their own political commitments. This does not mean that "black power" should be

denounced, nor does it indicate that "black power" should be redeemed through

interpretive strategies that attempt to salvage, or emphasize, its positive (intended)

effects. Instead of judging "black power," or whatever discursive object happens to be

under our critical lens, the question is: how can "black power" can be put to use in new

ways? A materialist perspective emphasizing function and effects means that discursive

entities have no intrinsic or a priori meaning—they are infectious agents that have powers

of change and mutation though they are simultaneously limited by relational constraints.

Deleuze's notion of experimentation is helpful for formulating a politics

appropriate to a materialist theory of discourse.[103] While discursive objects do not have

intrinsic functions and the effects of discourse cannot be guaranteed by the intentions or

agency of authorial subjects, this does not necessitate that effects must be entirely

unpredictable or uncontrollable. Experimentation implies both repetition and difference.

Experiments are repeated multiple times with slight variations in order to better localize

the substrates of their results. As rhetorical theorists and critics, we can employ

discursive objects and through a variable repetition come to better understand the ways in

which they are capable of functioning. The aim of this project has not been to judge "black power," but rather to trace its history of usage in a particular network of social discourses. It is up to others to decide if "black power" is worth redeploying in new ways or if it has become so embedded in particular associations that it is no longer a useful project.

Can neuroscience contribute to rhetoric? When asked about neuroscience's potential to contribute to philosophy, Humbert responds yes, under one condition—that the two disciplines are viewed as two different perspectives rather than in competition with each other. This view has much in common with Schiappa et al.'s description of different disciplinary vocabularies as different ways for the redescription of similar entities.[104] Sometimes stepping outside of one's familiar disciplinary vocabulary opens up new ways of approaching old problems and provides a productive means of supplementing traditional approaches to familiar questions. By borrowing from the theoretical insights of modern neuroscience, I have attempted to suggest new ways of viewing the relationship between rhetoric and reality, idealism and materialism, that move beyond the current impasse.

[1] In the theories I am concerned with, "objective reality" is typically conflated with material or physical reality. See, for instance Celeste Condit, "Beyond Rhetorical Relativism: A Structural Material Model of Truth and Objective Reality," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983), 140-148.

[2] Emphasis is mine in both quotations. John Lyne, "Idealism as a Rhetorical Stance," *Rhetoric and Philosophy*, ed. Richard A. Cherwitz, (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990), 150. Michael McGuire, "Materialism: Reductionist Dogma or Critical Rhetoric?," in *Rhetoric and Philosophy*, 197.

[3] Lyne, 150-1. Emphasis is mine.

[4] See also Philip Wander's summary of materialism and idealism, where he summarizes materialism as the assumption that "ideas are distorted reflections of an underlying material-economic base" versus what he terms symbolism, "which stresses the transcendent and the potential of the mind." "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984), 201.

[5] Condit, 1983, 356.

[6] Barbara Biesecker, *Addressing Postmodernity: Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric and a Theory of Social Change*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2000), 31.

[7] Nathan Stormer, "Articulation: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Taxis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004).

[8] For instance, Condit 1983; Kevin DeLuca, "Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32 (1999); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London: Verso, 1985); Michael McGee, "The 'Ideograph;' A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*, ed. J.L. Lucaites, C. Condit, and S. Caudill (New York: Guilford, 1999), 425-440.; Raymie McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis, *Communication Monographs* 56, (1989), 91-111; and Richard A. Rogers, "Overcoming the Objectification of Nature in Constitutive Theories: Toward a Transhuman, Materialist Theory of Communication," *Western Journal of Communication*, 62, (1998), 244-272.

[9] DeLuca, 342.

[10] McKerrow, 103.

[11] Michael McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, (1990), 277.

[12] McGee, "The Ideograph," 430.

[13] McGee, "The Ideograph," 431.

[14] For an excellent example see Celeste Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change*, (Urbana: University of Illinois), 1990.

[15] Jeffrey Bineham, "The Hermeneutic Medium," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 28, (1995), 1-16.

[16] Stormer joins Bineham and Rogers in emphasizing the limitations of existing attempts to retheorize language as material practice. Stormer notes that even Butler's theory of performativity with its emphasis on the agency of the body is limited because the body continues to be active only in and through language. See Nathan Stormer, p. 274.

[17] This is Dana Cloud's claim. See "The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Communication*, 58, (1994), 141-163.

[18] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 171.

[19] I describe this toppling of the Cartesian theory as a deconstructive move, although superficially it appears to be a simple reversal of the traditional mind/body hierarchy. This reversal significantly reconfigures the concepts of mind and body. Dennett, Damasio and others advocate a monistic paradigm where traditional understandings of mind and body are no longer functional.

[20] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, (New York: Avon, 1994).

[21] Damasio, xvii.

[22] Damasio, 226-7.

[23] Elkhonnen Goldberg, *The Executive Brain: Frontal Lobes and the Civilized Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

[24] Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, (New York: Scribner's, 1994), 258-9.

[25] Crick, 3.

[26] Rodolfo Llinas, *I of the Vortex: From Neurons to Self*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 121.

[27] These include, in addition to those previously cited: Nancy Andreasen, *Brave New Brain: Conquering Mental Illness in the Era of the Genome*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001); Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2003); and Murray Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[28] The conventional history of psychiatry describes the move from psychoanalysis to a medico-scientific model as a paradigm shift. Edward Shorter locates this "revolution" between the 1950s and the 1990s, writing that psychoanalysis "became, like Marxism, one of the dinosaur ideologies of the nineteenth century." Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), vii. Millon and Klerman date a biological turn in psychiatry in the 1950s, commenting, "psychoanalysis is on the intellectual and scientific defensive." Theodore Millon and Gerald Klerman, in the preface to *Contemporary Directions in Psychopathology: Toward the DSM-IV*, ed. Millon and Klerman, (New York: Guilford, 1986), 9. The historical accuracy of this rendering has been questioned, but it appears to be the dominant narrative among neuroscience theorists and has considerable currency in general and popular histories of psychiatry.

[29] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual—Text Revision, 4th Ed.*, (Washington, D.C.: APA Press, 2000).

[30] This move is certainly not without its critics. For instance, see David Healy's *The Antidepressant Era* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997), or Elliot Valenstein's *Blaming the Brain* (New York: The Free Press, 1998). An common question in these criticisms is of the chicken/egg variety—does the success of antidepressant treatments authorize biological theories or do these biological theories produce biochemical interventions? Most critics of the biological turn hold with the former perspective.

[31] Andreasen, *Brave New Brain*, 31.

[32] Andreasen, *Brave New Brain*, 32.

[33] Andreasen, *Brave New Brain*, 32.

[34] Andreasen, *Brave New Brain*, 47.

[35] Maryam Soltani and Robert T. Knight, "Neural Origins of the P300," *Critical Reviews in Neurobiology*, 14, (2000), 199-224.

[36] R.L. Billingsley, et al., "Functional Brain Imaging of Language: Criteria for Scientific Merit and Supporting Data from Magnetic Source Imaging," *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, 16, (2003), 255-275.

[37] F. Pulvermiller, et al., "Spatiotemporal Dynamics of Neural Language Processing: An MEG Study Using Minimum-Norm Current Estimates," *NeuroImage*, 2003.

[38] See M.P. Meyer, et al., "Brain Imaging: How Stable are Synaptic Connections?," *Current Biology*, 13, (2003), 180-2.

[39] Michael McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," in *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger*, ed. Ray E. McKerrow, (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1982), 26.

[40] Celeste Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 3.

[41] Celeste Condit, "Rhetorical Criticism and Audiences: The Extremes of McGee and Leff," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54, 1990, 341.

[42] Gilles Deleuze specifically contrasts history and geography, suggesting geography or geo-analysis as a better metaphor for postrepresentational critical practices. See, for instance, Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Columbia UP, 1977), 2, 10-11; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 352.

[43] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[44] Nathan Stormer, p. 262, 275.

[45] Michael McGee, "The Ideograph," 341.

[46] Edward Hundert, "Can Neuroscience Contribute to Philosophy?," in *Mindwaves*, ed. Colin Blakemore and Susan Greenfield, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 407-130.

[47] I have come across few publications in the rhetorical discipline that discuss neuroscience. The exception is John Arthos' 2000 piece in *Communication Quarterly*, "Locating the Instability of the Topic Places: Rhetoric, Phronesis and Neurobiology." Arthos uses insights from connectionist theories and cognitive neuroscience to support an understanding of rhetorical concepts and topoi as contingent and evolving rather than static and preformed. While rhetoricians are long accustomed to taking science as an object of critical

inquiry, there are generally fewer essays that take science seriously as a possible contributor to rhetorical theory. Some exceptions include Gregory Desilet, "Physics and Language—Science and Rhetoric: Viewing the Parallel Evolution of Theory on Motion in the Aftermath of the Sokal Hoax," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 85, 1999, 339-360, and Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Quantum Inferential Leaps: The Rhetoric of Physics," *Southern Journal of Communication*, 57, 1992, 178-195, both of which use theoretical insights from physics to augment their perspectives on rhetorical practice.

[48] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976).

[49] Dennett, 202.

[50] Dennett, 206.

[51] Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999). Ian McFayden, *Mind Wars: The Battle for Your Brain*, (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000), v.

[52] Perhaps this perspective is not so foreign to the rhetorical tradition as it might seem. After all, isn't this the very same question that Kenneth Burke raises when he writes, "Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us? An 'ideology' is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An 'ideology' is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in different ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it"? Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1966), 6.

[53] Gene Roberts, "Mississippi Reduces Police Protection for Marchers," *NYT* 17 June 1966, 1.

[54] Of course, Carmichael was not the first to use the term "black power," and genealogies of its origin are varied. However, as Scott and Brockriede point out in their book on black power, no one is more closely associated with the term than is Stokely Carmichael, and it was through Carmichael that the term entered into the national discourse during the civil rights era.

[55] "Dr. King Deplores 'Black Power' Bid," *NYT* 21 June 1966, 30.

[56] Flickering is a recognized property of neurotransmitters. N. Katherine Hayles specifically applies this concept to signification, writing that flickering signifiers are "characterized by their tendency toward unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions." N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 32.

[57] Gene Roberts, "Rights March Disunity," *NYT* 28 June 1966, 23.

[58] For instance: M.S. Handler, "Farmer Dropping Literacy Project," *New York Times*, 4 July 1966, 1; Martin Arnold, "Conference on Black Power Attended by 400," *NYT*, 21 July 1967, 1.

[59] Gould, Jack. "TV: Gore Vidal and Marya Mannes Debate Politics," *NYT* 12 June 1967, 91.

[60] Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenridge, *If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power*, (New York: Delacourte, 1969), 2.

[61] C.T. Vivian, *Black Power and the American Myth*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

[62] Handler, "Farmer Dropping Literacy Project," 1.

[63] McGee, "The Ideograph," 434.

[64] Gene Roberts, "Why the Cry for 'Black Power,'" *NYT*, 13 July 1967, IV, 3.

[65] McGee, "The Ideograph," 434.

[66] See "Nixon Urges 'Black Ownership' to Help Solve Racial Problems," *New York Times,* 26 April 1968, 27. Other conservative causes also embraced "black power" as an ideology of black self-help. See James Sterba, "James Buckley Praises Spirit of Black Militants," *NYT*, 7 October 1968, 32. See also "Goldwater Unit Sees Hope in 'Black Power,'" *NYT*, 14 August 1966. These conservative appropriations of "black power" are ideologically similar to conservative denunciations of "black power": see "Humphrey Urges Negro Self-Help," *NYT*, 15 June 1966, 26.

[67] Earl Caldwell, "Young Embraces Black Power Idea," *NYT*, 7 July 1968, 1.

[68] Claude Sitton, "Dr. King, Symbol of the Segregation Struggle," *NYT*, 22 January 1966, 19.

[69] Claude Sitton, "Sit-In Campaigns Spread in a Year," *NYT*, 29 January 1961.

[70] Peter Kihss, "Negro Extremist Groups Step Up Nationalist Drive," *NYT,* 1 March 1961, 1.

[71] "Harlem Nationalism," *NYT*, 5 March 1961.

[72] "Negroes Are Urged to Shun Africa Tie," *NYT*, 22 May 1963, 44.

[73] Jack Langguth, "A Negro Victory in 5 Years Seen," *NYT*, 29 July 1963, 10.

[74] Ben . Franklin, "Fear of Violence Voiced by Dr. King," *NYT*, 7 November 1963, 30.

[75] Claude Sitton, "Key Year in Civil Rights," *NYT*, 14 March 1964, 10.

[76] Gene Roberts, "Rights March Disunity," *NYT*, 28 June 1966, 23.

[77] M.S. Handler, "Negro Vote Bloc Pressed By CORE," *NYT*, 3 July 1966.

[78] "CORE Will Insist on 'Black Power,'" *NYT*, 5 July 1966, 1.

[79] M.S. Handler, "Wilkins Says Black Power Leads Only to Black Death," *NYT*, 6 July 1966, 1.

[80] M.S. Handler, "Wilkins Assails CORE and SNCC, Hints at Full Break," *NYT*, 8 July 1966, 1.

[81] Gene Roberts, "Dr. King Declares Rights Movement is 'Close' to a Split," *NYT* 9 July 1966, 1.

[82] M.S. Handler, "NAACP to Study Rights Units' Role," *NYT*, 10 July 1966, 53.

[83] "'Black Power,'" *NYT*, 10 July 1966.

[84] John Herbers, "6 Rights Leaders Clash on Tactics in Equality Drive," *NYT*, 22 August 1966, 1.

[85] Arthur Krock, "In The Nation: A Lapse of Memory and Reason," *NYT*, 30 August 1966.

[86] For example, Gould, Jack. "TV: Gore Vidal and Marya Mannes Debate Politics," *NYT* 12 June 1967, 91; Earl Caldwell, "CORE Eliminates 'Multiracial' In Describing Its Membership," *NYT*, 6 July 1967, 1.

[87] Peter Kihss, "Screvane Links Reds to Rioting," *NYT*, 22 July 1964, 1.

[88] Philip Benjamin, "Murphy Scores Talk of More Race Riots," *NYT*, 11 January 1965, 1.

[89] Peter Bart, "New Negro Riots Erupt on Coast; 3 Reported Shot," *NYT*, 13 August 1965, 1.

[90] "Summer Nears End," *NYT*, 11 September 1966, IV, 2.

[91] Gene Roberts, "Atlanta Negroes Riot After Police Wound a Suspect," *NYT*, 7 September 1966, 1.

[92] Roy Reed, "SNCC Assailed on Atlanta Riot," *NYT*, 8 September 1966, 1.

[93] "Riots 'Conspiracy' Is Called Untrue," *NYT*, 1 August 1966.

[94] "Johnson TV Talk on Troop Order," *NYT,* 25 July 1967, 20.

[95] John Herbers, "GOP Will Press Racial Disorders as Election Issue," *NYT*, 4 October 1966, 1.

[96] See Gilles Deleuze, "To Have Done With Judgment," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Trans. Daniel Smith and Michael Greco, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 126-135.

[97] Parke G. Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Black Power: A Moral Demand?," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, ed. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen H. Browne, (State College: Strata, 2001), 180-190.

[98] Burgess, 181, emphasis mine.

[99] Robert L. Scott, "Justifying Violence: The Rhetoric of Militant Black Power," in *The Rhetoric of Black Power*, ed. Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 134.

[100] Scott, 134, 135.

[101] Scott, 143.

[102] Charles J. Stewart, "The Evolution of a Revolution: Stokely Carmichael and the Rhetoric of Black Power," in Morris III and Browne, 428-445.

[103] It is worth noting that Deleuze explicitly links experimentation to geography, in contrast to the judgment of history. The emphasis on spatiality, topography and other geographical terminologies informs much of the theoretical work on materialist alternatives to traditional theories of rhetoric. See, for instance, Nathan Stormer.

[104] Edward Schiappa, et al., "Rhetorical Studies as Reduction or Redescription? A Response to Cherwitz and Hikins," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, (2002), 112-120.