

What West Virginia? Conflict over West Virginia's State Identity
A Constitutive Approach to Activism and Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

This rhetorical analysis of a coal advocacy and a coal-critical environmentalist organization examines how each group constitutes different West Virginian identities that accord with their organizational mission. Based on the constitutive concepts advanced by Edwin Black, Maurice Charland, and Michael McGee, this study has analyzed the ideological narratives, which underlie each argument, and which call into existence two antagonistic West Virginian identities. Whereas the coal industry conceives of a dutiful West Virginian people, who take pride in providing energy to the nation and fueling its economy, the environmentalists interpellate a primitive people who live at the mercy of their environment. In a father-child relationship, the groups take oppositional roles in a mutually constructed drama. Hence, this constitutive analysis of two public opponents strongly suggests that public activist groups derive their identities from conflict and are thus disinterested in resolving their disagreement.

To

Robert Daniel Erps

and

Steven Wilder Davis

*Two wild and wonderful people that have shared with me the worryless and the worrisome worlds
of their home, West Virginia*

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Chapter One

Introduction

Coal, the state icon and primary revenue resource of West Virginia, triggers in its people a contradictory mix of pride and misgivings. West Virginia is the second-largest coal producing state in the United States and contains the largest coal reserve in North America. From its 540 mines, the state produced over 165 million short tons of coal in 2009.¹ Although many West Virginian coal miners strongly identify with their profession and their state's coal heritage, labeling their cars with stickers of coal miners and wearing "Friends of Coal" labels, violent protests and revolts are as old as the 100-year history of the coal industry itself. In the early 20th century, violent mine wars broke out, fueled by the coal miners' squalid and impoverished living conditions. Coal miners lived completely off the coal company's property, inhabited company-owned shacks, and shopped in company-owned stores. Their miserable dependency on the coal companies created a rising desire for empowerment and unionization, which had been declared illegal by the coal companies, triggering the famous Matewan Massacre in 1920 and the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921, an insurrection larger than the Battle of Trenton during the American Revolution.²

Although the state's dependency on the coal industry is still a matter of dispute, today numerous activist organizations criticize the coal companies for their inadequate safety standards, environmental pollution from the fossil fuel, and the destruction of the

¹ The West Virginia Coal Association, "Coal Facts," The West Virginia Coal Association, <http://www.wvcoal.com/attachments/article/2463/Coal%20Facts%202010.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

² Willard Mounts, *The Rugged Southern Appalachia*. Denver (Ginwill Publishing Company, 1996), 64.

landscape through the strip mining method of mountain top removal. The oldest and most prominent environmental coalition in the state is the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. Started in 1965, this grassroots organization claims leadership in coal mining issues and has made its mission to protect air, water, forests, mountains, and the health of the people in West Virginia.³ The West Virginia conceived by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has a history that is older than the foundation of the state itself and is rooted in the self-sufficient lifestyles of the Native Americans and the early European settlers of the Appalachian mountain region. By directing its rhetoric to an Appalachian audience whose lives are closely interwoven with nature and defined by Bluegrass music, moonshine liquor, and fishing, the environmentalists call forth a West Virginian identity that remains unrelated to coal, thereby challenging the state's ingrained connection to this fossil fuel.

Nostalgia for pre-industrial societies has become increasingly common among environmentalists. Whereas the origins of the environmental movement in the 1960s had focused on the advances in science and technology as solutions to industrial pollution, many current environmentalists harken back to native cultures in their idealization of a more subsistent lifestyle. In his book *Transnational Identity Politics and the Environment*, Gabriel Ignatow explains that the current environmentalists are increasingly fostering associations with cultural, ethnic, and religious identities, moving from "universal scientific knowledge to local knowledge and custom."⁴ Ignatow illustrates by examples that the environmental movement in our globalized world is in the

³ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, "About Us," The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, <http://www.wvhighlands.org/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

⁴ Gabriel Ignatow, *Transnational Identity Politics and the Environment* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 12.

process of eroding state sovereignty and fomenting cultural fragmentation and transnational hybrid cultures.

In direct contest to these environmental efforts we see the coal industry aligned with the West Virginia Coal Association, a trade association representing 90 percent of the state's coal production. According to its website www.wvcoal.com, the West Virginia Coal Association aims to be the leading voice regarding matters of coal, an advocate of clean coal and mining safety, and educator to West Virginians about the benefits of coal. Announcing that 70,000 West Virginian jobs are created in the coal sector, the coal advocates stress the state's close relationship with coal. The website's Coal Fact Sheet 2009 refers to West Virginia as the "State of Coal."⁵

Environmentalists and Coal advocates conceive of strikingly dissimilar West Virginian identities. Moreover, the two groups hardly respond to each other's arguments but strictly hold on to their own points of view, with each organization seemingly addressing a different audience of West Virginians. Each party's preoccupation with the West Virginian public and neglect in acknowledgement of each other's viewpoints suggests that the conflict revolves around a contest in who defines West Virginia as either a state of coal or a state of the mountains. What's more, this contest implies a disinterest in dialogue, compromise, and collaboration, and indicates that solution-oriented discourse is hampered by the competition of defining West Virginia's state identity.

In Chapter Two I will review existing literature on the limits of collaborative public discourse. Consequently, Chapter Three will revisit the concept of interpellation and Black's second persona, and delineate how these theories facilitate our understanding of how the West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Highlands

⁵ The West Virginia Coal Association, "Coal Facts."

Conservancy compete for their rhetorical construction of an audience. As I expect to unveil in the subsequent analysis, the environmentalists and the coal representatives constitute two West Virginian people that stand in ideological antithesis to each other. As both parties derive organizational identity and meaning from the conflict, resolution is not aspired and constructive dialogue not pursued.

Chapter Two

The Limits of Collaborative Discourse

The Rhetorical Co-Creation of Meaning

A shared worldview underlies identification, which, in turn, generates a sense of community. Dialogue is the active attempt to overcome difference and to produce a shared meaning in order for identification to occur. Dialogue, or, relationship building, is therefore the most important tool for public relations practitioners. For example Robert Heath's rhetorical enactment rationale of public relations postulates that parties with divergent interests have different worldviews and will confront each other in dialogue. In the process of advocating their ideas and listening and responding to each other's points of view, the parties negotiate a shared, cohesive understanding, and the disputants co-create zones of meaning. Robert Heath goes a step further in referring to "public relations as the co-management of meaning and, by extrapolation, as the co-management of cultures."¹ By adapting organizations to people and people to organizations, individuals connect within a common system of symbols through which they come to share a worldview, culture, and a collective identity.²

Heath conceives public relations as a symmetrical process of statement and counterstatement through which publics negotiate that which is true and best for society. By reacting to each other's messages, the correspondents negotiate their different roles within one narrative and come to share a worldview. The process by which a co-created meaning is negotiated is rhetorical. The rhetorical process of statement and counterstatement serves society because the best reasoned and most ethical statements withstand all challenging

¹ Robert L. Heath, "A Rhetorical Enactment Rationale for Public Relations: The Good Organization Communicating Well," in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 34.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

counterstatements and become accepted by the majority. Rhetoric is thus both epistemic and invitational, as it invites groups and individuals to take part in the quest for knowledge by offering their voice in an open marketplace of ideas and by considering alternative viewpoints before making a final enlightened choice. Heath reasons, “Each person targeted with the information is invited to consider the information and opinion as steps toward making a choice that is better than its alternatives.”³ Rhetoric sustains democracy by resolving issues and disagreements in the dialectical process of argumentation in an open marketplace of ideas. As Heath writes, “Rhetoric instantiates the democratic process because it presumes that any position voiced in public must be sufficiently compelling to withstand vigorous critiques by other rhetors who believe their competing ideas have merit.”⁴

Robert Heath’s rhetorical approach to public relations grew out of the Aristotelian idea that we seek truth through the process of advocacy and argumentation. Through public exchange and a challenging of ideas, a community develops notions of truth and virtue: “Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view of some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think is good.”⁵ In dialogue, superior ideas will resist challenges and persevere as the accepted truth to the benefit of a more fully functioning society. Dialogue is the cornerstone of democratic decision making, the building of community, and “a means for seeking truth, knowledge, good reasons, sound choices, and wise policies.”⁶

Based on Heath’s rhetorical enactment rationale, public relations is the process of building relationships that are based upon identification. Moreover, individuals identify with one

³ Heath, “A Rhetorical Enactment Rationale for Public Relations,” 43.

⁴ Heath, “The Rhetorical Tradition,” 21.

⁵ Aristotle, “Politics,” in *Great Books* (Vol.2) ed. R. M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952b): 445.

⁶ Heath, “A Rhetorical Enactment Rationale for Public Relations,” 32.

another if they come to look at the world through a shared narrative that brings about a sense of community. “Co-created meaning leads to a sense of community through shared narratives, which supply people with knowable and collective ways to act toward organizations and one another.”⁷ In open dialogue, public knowledge is constantly subject to change, as alternative narratives modify established ones in a dialectic fashion, and as organizations and their publics adjust mutually to one another.

The act of speech is thus inherently coupled with the creation of community. Kenneth Starck and Dean Kruckeberg defined public relations as “the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community.”⁸ Lamenting current anomie and social fragmentation, the authors challenge public relations practitioners to inspire shared meaning and a reconstruction of shared values by maintaining an open mind toward the interests of different stakeholders while advocating their own claims. As facilitators of community, public relations practitioners should concentrate on building relationships with various environmental constituencies and seek mutually beneficial outcomes for the parties involved. Roy Leeper argued for communitarianism as a unifying paradigm underlying public relations theory. Its premise of maintaining an open dialogue to build trust and community is proposed to overcome the complexities of our pluralistic society.⁹ Different from liberalism, whose ethics are based on the rationality of deontological rules; communitarian ethics are rooted in trust, shared meaning, and shared experience as evolved in dialogue. Consistent with Aristotelian theory, communitarianism stresses individual responsibility toward the common good, as opposed to individual rights, and assumes a constructivist and story-telling approach to truth.

⁷ Robert Heath, “The Rhetorical Tradition,” 40.

⁸ Kenneth Starck and Dean Kruckeberg, “Public Relations and Community: A Reconstructed Theory Revisited,” in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 51.

⁹ Roy Leeper, “In Search of a Metatheory for Public Relations: An Argument for Communitarianism,” in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001)

Discursive co-creation of meaning has been applauded as the aspirational norm by public relations theorists Robert Heath, Kenneth Starck, and Dean Kruckeberg. Its emphasis on constructive dialogue and cooperative competition¹⁰ makes Heath's rhetorical enactment rationale an inclusive, symmetrical, and ethical approach to public relations. Yet, a number of scholars have studied the reasons why this kind of symmetrical dialogue is seldom implemented in practice. To these concerns I will now turn.

Limitations to Dialogue-Based Public Relations

One of the assumptions that the rhetorical perspective on public relations is based upon is that all dialogue revolves around the attainment of knowledge pertaining to public issues, whereas dialogue can equally serve to act out and delineate the different roles in a narrative, and thereby advance the self-knowledge of each party involved. Besides epistemic, the rhetorical enactment rationale of public relations is ontological because it unravels and negotiates different roles and identities that are positioned in relation to one another in a narrative, as well as the social reality that is constructed as a scene in which the discourse takes place. Narratives can give light to antagonistic relationships between an organization and its publics, which may keep parties from seeking constructive dialogue because a resolution would constitute a change in their self-definition. Thus, organizations may benefit from conflict and division, as it provides them with a defined role within a public drama.

Public groups that are dramatically opposed to each other interpret reality through opposite narrative lenses, with different heroes and villains. These opposite narratives or worldviews are still interdependent because they rely both on the same conflict with different groups taking the role of the hero and the villain. The conflict thus constitutes a narrative with

¹⁰ Heath, "The Rhetorical Tradition," 24.

antagonistic characters, whose differences dialogue may not be intended to resolve.

Disagreement may thus serve organizations to define their identity in public discourse, which may be more expedient than seeking agreement with another group. In such circumstance, public argumentation may not be able to, or even intended to overcome the divisive identities of the publics in dispute.

Heath acknowledges that public identities are a byproduct of discourse. “Through dialogue, publics and the views they espouse are constructed and reconstructed through an ongoing process of discursive struggle.”¹¹ He moreover argues that discourse invents a reality through which publics and organizations know their identities and prerogatives.¹² Identification can, however, equally be the source of division. Identification is unattainable without division because it highlights the limits of an identity. The component of division as a prerequisite for identification reflects what Burke meant when he wrote: “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division.”¹³ People derive personal meaning from dramatic conflict, i.e., from identifying with a group that is defined by its relation with oppositional groups, and therefore strive to maintain oppositional relationships. In “Language As Symbolic Action,” Burke reasoned: “A character cannot be himself unless many others among the dramatic personae contribute to the end, so that the very essence of a character’s nature is in a large measure defined or determined, by the other characters who variously assist or oppose him.”¹⁴ What is more, antagonistic groups in public discourse often add legitimacy to the existence of another group because the presence of one group triggers the formation of a reactionary group. Although Heath’s observation that public

¹¹ Ibid., 38.

¹² Heath, “A Rhetorical Approach to Zones of Meaning and Organizational Prerogatives,” 142.

¹³ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 208.

¹⁴ Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 84.

disputants strive for resolution is valid, the publics' gravitation toward division is equally and often more significant to each group.

Impracticalities of Dialogue-Based Discourse

The practical shortcomings of dialogue-based public relations have been pointed out by a number of public relations critics. The underlying critique concerning most reactions has been well formulated by Gabriel Vasquez, describing symmetrical dialogue as idealistic and lacking in breadth and depth of explanation.¹⁵ Vasquez points to the invalid assumption of a shared mission, such as assuming that both parties intend to work toward shared understanding. As is most often the case in reality, "parties in a negotiation are perceived to hold different interests or goals."¹⁶ Vasquez thus conceives of public relations as negotiation with a scale ranging from cooperation to competition.

Solution-oriented dialogue is often infeasible because an organization's dominant coalition may not possess the skills or funding to carry out a collaborative approach, and that negotiation with one public undermines negotiation with another, as "the interests of these publics may be interrelated and be somewhat antagonistic."¹⁷ Greg Leichty observes that an organization cannot build long-term relationships with all publics, as some activists operate from completely removed cultural dynamics. An example of this type is Josh Boyd's outlaw discourse, a form that purposefully contradicts all societal norms and assumptions.¹⁸ Thus, some activists are not interested in engaging in an argument-counterargument-style debate, and intend to evoke scandalous attention-getting appeals. These groups often operate from a postmodernist

¹⁵ Gabriel M. Vasquez, "Public Relations as Negotiation: An Issue Development Perspective," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8, no. 1 (1996): 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 60.

¹⁷ Leichty, G. "The Limits of Collaboration." *Public Relations Review* 23, no. 1 (1997): 49.

¹⁸ Joshua Boyd, "Outlaw Discourse," in *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II*, ed. Robert L. Heath, Elizabeth L. Toth, and Damion Waymer (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 333.

mindset and reject consensus as a worthy goal because they are wary of reinforcing the dominant ideology of the organization under attack.¹⁹ That is, by the very act of discursive cooperation, the activist group would be legitimizing the organization they are contesting. Boyd explains, outlaw discourse uses “tactics that reflect different ways of thinking; they espouse what might be seen as a third option in a controversy – not a compromise, but an alternative logic or way of approaching the problem that might seem simply disruptive.”²⁰ As an example, Boyd examined the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s intentional association of Procter & Gamble’s fat substitute olestra with “anal leakage” and “fecal urgency.”²¹ Although these claims were rejected by the FDA, the CSPI had successfully combined these two concepts in the minds of the consumer and olestra never became the market hit to which Procter & Gamble had aspired.

Leichty describes this interest in dissent as “antagonistic interdependence,” explaining that parties derive symbolic gratification from “dramaturgical conflict.”²² By boosting the dramatic qualities of a conflict situation, many activist groups draw attention to their mission, confirm their legitimacy in the public eye, and recruit new members.²³ Leichty’s observation of conflict as dramaturgical has been illustrated in Jonathan Lange’s rhetorical analysis of the conflict between the logging industry in Washington and the environmentalist call to protect old growth forests. Lange refers to the discourse between the two parties as an “environmental drama” that socially constructs the environmental conflict through environmental and counter-environmental advocacy. In his descriptive, qualitative case study, Lange found that both parties

¹⁹ Derina R Holtzhausen, “Postmodern Values in Public Relations” *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12, no. 1 (2000): 93-114.

Juliet Roper, “Symmetrical Communication: Excellent Relations or a Strategy for Hegemony?” *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17, no. 1 (2005): 69-86.

²⁰ Boyd, “Outlaw Discourse,” 332.

²¹ Josh Boyd, “Public and Technical Interdependence: Regulatory Controversy, Out-Law Discourse, and the Messy Case of Olestra,” *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 39 (2002). 91-109.

²² Greg Leichty, “The Limits of Collaboration.” *Public Relations Review* 23, no. 1 (1997): 51.

²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

mirror and match one another in a “synchronous, spiral-like logic of interaction”²⁴ Lange elaborates that when interlocutors address each other, “their utterances evoke - almost force - specific types of responses, while delegitimizing and disallowing others.”²⁵ Rather than confronting each other in direct dispute, each party mirrors and matches the other’s tactic by learning about it in the media. For example, whereas logging advocates frame the issue around job losses and blame environmentalists for destroying communities traditionally characterized by the logging industry, environmentalists reframe the context, pointing to the logging industry that is destroying the community by taking down the forests. Further, while logging advocates vilify the environmentalists as radicals and “eco-terrorists,” environmentalists vilify the logging industry as “timber beasts who, like the coal barons from Appalachia, will ruin the landscape and long-term economy after depleting the natural resources.”²⁶ Finally, each party dramatizes the issue by simplifying it. As one cries, “Save a logger, eat an owl,” the other counters, “Save an owl, educate a logger.”²⁷ Lange’s findings of mirroring and matching reveal the often insurmountable rivalry between the interlocutors to assert their position to the defeat of the competitor. Giving in to compromise would be interpreted as a sign of surrender and have devastating consequences on organizational legitimacy and interests.

The unending battles of dramatized arguments and counterarguments may have their origin in what Robert Heath and Damion Waymer termed the “paradox of the positive.”²⁸ The authors describe that advocacy statements, such as advertisements, usually present positive

²⁴ Jonathan I. Lange, “The Logic of Competing Information Campaigns: Conflict Over Old Growth and the Spotted Owl,” *Communication Monographs* 60, no. 9 (1993): 241.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 249.

²⁷ Ibid., 251.

²⁸ Robert L. Heath and Damion Waymer, “Activist Public Relations and the Paradox of the Positive,” in *Rhetorical and critical Approaches to public relations II*, ed. Robert L. Heath, Elizabeth L. Toth, and Damion Waymer (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 195-215.

qualities in an overly favorable light that masks any negative attributes. Such exaggerated statements can incite emotional reactions on part of a skeptic. The authors note, “One of the inherent flaws of the efforts to make appropriate corrections is that the non-profit activist may be overly negative or overly positive in an attempt to balance the discussion of the issue.”²⁹ As an overly positive statement triggers an overly negative one, the public is left to identify with one of two extreme positions, a process that the authors explain through the work of Kenneth Burke: “Identification is an essential element of the positioning of activism that seeks to employ what Burke called the dialectic of division and merger.”³⁰ In a dialectic fashion, the public has a choice to identify with overly positive and overly negative sides of an issue.

Leichty additionally notes that a public conflict is not a dyadic matter between organization and public, but involves the media and other interested publics.³¹ Sometimes, activists even bypass the opponent by appealing to the general public through the media. In their analysis of the battle between Philip Morris and the grassroots anti-smoking advocacy group (GASP), Ashli Q. Stokes and Donald Rubin describe how each group concentrates on building identification with the Colorado public based on common values, such as the right to free choice as opposed to the right to clean air.³² Philip Morris’s beginning approach to foster a less negative attitude toward smoking by accommodation was unsuccessful mainly because the GASP was unwilling to seek agreement with them. The authors observe that the assumption of accommodation “does not explain the oppositional public relations activities of some activists.”³³ Instead, the authors suggest that advocacy groups build relationships with strategic publics to

²⁹ Ibid, 201.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Leichty, “The Limits of Collaboration.” 49.

³² Ashli Q. Stokes and Donald Rubin, “Activism and the Limits of Symmetry: The Public Relations Battle Between Colorado GASP and Philip Morris,” *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22, no. 1 (2010): 35-36.

³³ Ibid, 30.

affect legislation, publicity, and regulation, “virtually ignoring the monolithic corporate elephant in the room.”³⁴

Stokes and Rubin point to an interesting phenomenon in current activism: Advocacy campaigns do not direct their rhetoric toward the organization under attack. Instead of aiming for compromise, activists compete with organizations for the public’s approval, making public relations an all-or-nothing battle. Provided that environmentalists had asserted their demands with the logging industry, and the anti-smoking advocates asserted their interests successfully against Philip Morris, these groups would lose their ground of legitimacy and, thus, their *raison d’être*. Although not explicitly pronounced by any of these scholars, the public relations conflicts between organization and activists center on their power to construct a collective identity. The two parties compete for the support of a public majority identifying with one group over another. These all-or-nothing conflicts do not revolve around specific issues as much as the validity of their overall organizational identity.

³⁴ Ibid, 32.

Summary

In his theory, the rhetorical enactment rationale, Robert Heath proposes that in the dialogic process of expressing divergent viewpoints, public advocates eventually blend interests and co-create a shared understanding. This rhetorical approach to public relations is invitational and epistemic because every party is invited to voice an argument and participants build their knowledge and extend their understanding to incorporate novel viewpoints. Knowledge is gained after careful evaluation of all ideas and in consideration of the circumstance at hand. In the end, a balanced rhetorical dialogue will yield insight and support those ideas that have resisted all challenges.

According to Kenneth Burke, cohesive meaning is only possible when ambiguous symbols are interpreted in the same manner, which he also calls a sharing of substance. Heath argues that public disputants share substance through open dialogue and form a common worldview, or, terministic screen, that allows them to identify with each other and build community. Hence, organizations should strive to maintain open dialogue with their publics. By listening to them and expressing the corporate voice, organizations can share mutual understanding, foster agreement, and be an essential element in the wider community.

Leichty, Vasquez, Boyd, Lange, and Stokes and Rubin, have demonstrated that organizations often don't aspire symmetrical dialogue with activists, and put them second to other publics, such as the media. For example, Stokes and Rubin's analysis demonstrates that both the tobacco as well as the GASP groups bypassed each other to address the general Colorado public. Boyd and Lange reveal that activists often don't aim for collaboration because it would undermine their legitimacy as a group. Old growth activists copied and matched the organization's tactics in the fashion of an interlocking spiral, deriving organizational meaning

and legitimacy from their attacks against the logging industry. Taking it even further, outlaw discourse has as its goal to create scandal and conflict to effect awe and surprise. Identities rooted in antithetical relation to corporations call activist organizations into existence that are centered on conflict and disagreement, and whose *raison d'être* would be threatened by conflict resolution.

In the conflict between organizational and activist interests, the conflicted parties often engage in competition about the support of a third public. This suggests that activist public relations is often far removed from collaboration and the goal of building cohesive understanding and is more proximate to the competitive rather than the cooperative end on Vasquez's scale. Constitutive rhetoric and the second persona may yield insight to why public relations discourse sometimes operates to further fragment, rather than integrate, different publics. Maurice Charland's original study of the Quebecois, as well as Ashli Q. Stokes and Rachel Holloway's analysis of the anti-Wal-Mart documentary demonstrates that constitutive rhetoric is an apt rhetorical lens through which to study the construction of a collective identity. Nevertheless, no critic has yet examined how the construction of a public identity, such as the state identity of West Virginia, is subject to inter-organizational conflict. In the third chapter, I will outline the fundamental concepts underlying Edwin Black's second persona, Charland's constitutive rhetoric, and Michael McGee's concept of 'The people' to explicate how these theories may be used to analyze the competitive relationship between coal proponents and environmentalists in their struggle over defining West Virginia and positioning themselves as the integral representatives of the state.

Chapter Three

Constitutive Rhetoric and the Second Persona

Rhetorical criticism is a method well-suited for, yet, in my opinion, insufficiently applied to the study of public relations. Defined by Aristotle as the counterpart of the dialectic and by Marie Hochmuth Nichols as “an act of adapting discourse to an end outside itself,”¹ rhetoric reflects the strategic effort of a rhetor to imbue an audience with his or her intended meaning. Analyzing organizational discourse through rhetorical criticism yields understanding and appreciation of the organizational goals and assumptions that underlie its communication, and can further unveil the underlying points of congruence and conflict between the organization and its publics. What is more, the constitutive approach to rhetoric is concerned with the impression a rhetorical text has on the self-concept of its audience and is therefore particularly well suited for uncovering the rhetorical effects that organizations have on their publics. In the following paragraphs, I am going to discuss the literature relevant to constitutive rhetoric. Edwin Black, Maurice Charland, and Michael McGee are concerned with the rhetorical audience, address the distinction of constitutive rhetoric from more instrumental approaches to discourse, the interpellation of a collective identity, antithesis and the negative, and ontology. In this order the chapter shall proceed.

The Audience: The Second Persona

Based on Edwin Black’s second persona, the notion of constitutive rhetoric helps us to better understand how audiences are called into collective identities through the use of symbols

¹ Jim A. Kuypers and Andrew King, “What is Rhetoric?” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in action*, ed. Jim A. Kuypers (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 5.

that are directed toward and understood by a particular people. According to Black, “rhetorical discourses, either singly or cumulatively in a persuasive movement, will imply an auditor.”² By its symbolic nature, every rhetorical discourse is intended to be reached and understood by a particular audience, who Black refers to as the second persona. Constitutive perspectives on rhetoric therefore focus on the rhetorical text exclusively in order to extract from it the auditor therein implied. This concept contributes to public relations theory by shifting attention from the act of strategic dialogue to the pre-rhetorical effect of addressing an audience.

Black underscores that by implying an author, a rhetorical text carries ideological significance. Ideology – “the network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world”³ - binds individuals into one commonality that is reflected in an idiom pertaining to a particular worldview. Just like Robert Heath observes about organizational culture,⁴ Black believes that a particular idiom, e.g. a metaphor, is understood only by individuals that adhere to the same ideology. Black writes: “The expectation that a verbal token of ideology can be taken as implying an auditor who shares that ideology is something more than a hypothesis about a relationship. It rather should be viewed as expressing a vector of influence.”⁵ People attend a discourse not only in order to gain information but to find out more about who they are and how they are to understand the world. By addressing an audience as a people, the rhetor positions them in a narrative, a moral judgment of history and a way of shaping and bringing order to their past, and defining them as a people.⁶

² Edwin Black, “The second persona,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (April 1970): 112.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert L. Heath, *Management of Corporate Communication* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 5-6.

⁵ Black, “The second persona,” 113.

⁶ Ibid, 109.

The second persona does not embody an actual person but constitutes a potential character that is provided with a worldview, i.e. a moral judgment of the world. Hence, the second persona is like a role figure that individuals can adopt and adjust to their distinctive personalities. By internalizing this role figure, or, an ideology, we gain understanding of our selves. Black writes, “Each one of us, after all, defines himself by what he believes and does.”⁷ Moreover, he observes that the contradicting and diverse worldviews that characterize modern life have called into question the predetermined identities of, for example, womanhood, into which people used to be born, and brought about a quest for identity. In discourse, a rhetor addresses an audience as the second persona, a process by which we construct our identities. Black notes, “The quest for identity is the modern pilgrimage. And we look for one another for hints as to whom we should become.”⁸ Questions of identity and ideology are increasingly relevant to public relations theory because practitioners need to be aware that groups and individuals can generate personal meaning from the quality of their relationship with an organization.

Instrumental vs. constitutive approaches to public relations

In one of the few published public relations cases studied through the lens of constitutive rhetoric, Ashli Q. Stokes points to the overemphasis on instrumental, tactical, and outcome-driven approaches to public relations. Stokes analyzed Metabolife’s quick web response to a news coverage that misrepresented the diet pill on the 20/20 news show to uncover how the speed of a response can overpower its content due to its potential to “define the terms of the

⁷ Ibid, 113.

⁸ Ibid, 113.

controversy.”⁹ The speed of a message is a significant element of public relations theory because it leads to the advantage of defining the public’s interpretation of a controversy by constituting the narrative. Stokes argues that “the discipline needs to employ a constitutive lens that reveals how public relations discourse shapes, reflects, and is constrained by the larger public sphere.”¹⁰ She observes that the study of public relations has moved beyond investigating strategies to influence public opinion on a specific issue onto addressing how the discipline shapes culture and redefines rhetorical norms.¹¹ Constitutive approaches to public relations thus unveil the ideological effects of the practice on the culture in which it operates.

Stokes’s argument to study the larger cultural forces of rhetoric reflects Michael McGee’s argument that the concept of ‘the people’ is a philosophical, rather than scientific, phenomenon. McGee criticizes the discipline’s over-emphasis on technique and attitude research, which treats the rhetorical audience as an objective entity:¹² “The analysis of rhetorical documents should not turn inward, to an appreciation of persuasive, manipulative techniques, but outward to functions of rhetoric.”¹³ Contesting that ‘the people’ are merely the plural form of an individual, McGee argues that the people is a wishful idea of collectivism dangled in front of a group of individuals by a leader who interprets and redefines sociality by means of the available ideological parameters, i.e. aphorisms, maxims, and commonplaces.¹⁴ Just like Stokes, McGee appeals to rhetoricians to “contribute positively to understanding the social process and the human condition,” instead of understanding the “persuasive, manipulative techniques of rhetoric.”¹⁵

⁹ Ashli Q. Stokes, “Metabolife’s Meaning: A Call for the Constitutive Study of Public Relations,” *Public Relations Review* 31 (2005): 559.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 556.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 557.

¹² Michael McGee, “In search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61, no. 3 (October 1975), 236.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁴ McGee, “In search of ‘The People,’” 242-243.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

Essentially, McGee favors social theory and philosophy as more appropriate than science to study ‘the people.’ Similar to Black’s audience by implication, McGee conceives of ‘the people’ as an argument which he describes as an “irrational form of persuasion”¹⁶ that transcends reason, behavior, and individuality.¹⁷ A people, according to McGee, cannot be measured or examined through empirical observation or logical deduction. Its existence depends “neither on the observed behavior of individuals nor on Platonic prejudices about the role of reason in human affairs.” Rather, ‘the people’ is an argumentative fallacy that exists as a collective phantasy in the minds of its adherents, and which is induced and legitimized by a linguistic form.¹⁸

Similarly, James Jasinski makes a clear distinction between what he calls an instrumentalist and a constitutive framework. Whereas the rhetorical theory has favored an instrumentalist framework, which focuses on a rhetor’s attempt to solve a specified problem within the immediate historical context and audience, Jasinski observes a trend toward “operating in the dimension of conceptual (re)constitution [which] explores the ways specific discursive strategies and textual dynamics shape and reshape the contours of political concepts and ideas.”¹⁹ Jasinski describes the constitutive turn in rhetoric as concerned with a constructivist or structurational approach to the modalities of social reality. As opposed to an instrumentalist focus on intention, argumentation, and representation, a constitutive framework studies the extensional effect of rhetoric, i.e. the enabling and constraining effects of textual forms on political culture.²⁰ The instrumentalist framework is concerned with persuasive intention and

¹⁶ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹⁸ Ibid., 239.

¹⁹ James Jasinski, “A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)Constitution of “Constitution” in The Federalist Papers,” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 74.

²⁰ Ibid.

discursive influence, as when a political campaign urges its audience to vote for the endorsed candidate through rational argumentation, emotional appeals, and speaker credibility. By contrast, the constructivist framework studies the changes of conceptual meaning which legitimizes the vote for the endorsed candidate, as when the American concept of equality expanded to include women and minorities, and legitimized the vote for such candidates. Thus, the instrumental approach tests the strategic options within a given conceptual framework, whereas the constitutive approach pushes the limits of a given conceptual framework by challenging and reconstructing the conventional meaning of common symbols.

Interpellating a people

What McGee calls an irrational form of persuasion is referred to by Maurice Charland as an “extra-rhetorical” existence of an audience that, nevertheless, is fundamentally rhetorical.²¹ Charland, who coined the concept of “constitutive rhetoric,”²² remarks that rhetorical theory fails to account for the existence of an audience as a rhetorical effect even though it can be the primary influence of choice and action in form of an ideology. In other words, a people, their ideology, and their identity are constructed rhetorically through interpellation.²³

Charland’s idea of “interpellation” is a process by which audiences are invited to identify with and participate in a rhetorical narrative. Charland studied the pursuit for Quebec sovereignty from Canada based on interpellating the *peuple quebecois*, which “would legitimate the constitution of a sovereign Quebec state.”²⁴ Different from other Canadians, the people quebecois are situated within a distinct interpretation of history, according to which the

²¹ Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 137.

²² Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 133-150.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

Quebecois had established their own society by 1760 with traditions and customs inherently distinct from the English. Through interpellation, which “occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation,”²⁵ the people assume an identity within a fictive discourse that is based on a narrative representation of history. From McGee’s viewpoint, advocates proffer to their audience a “dramatic vision,” which the audience is enticed to participate in.²⁶ A rhetor who discovers and understands his or her audience’s dormant wishes and their penchant toward collectivity is successful in persuading them to perceive themselves as a people. Although the people is a dreamed fiction, it is nonetheless a reality to each individual in a rhetorical sense because it offers individuals a group identity. McGee writes, “It is easy to recognize them [political myths] rhetorically as ontological arguments relying not so much on evidence as on artistic proofs intended to answer the question, What’s real?”²⁷ “The people’ are both real and fiction simultaneously.”²⁸ The reality of rhetorically constructed people lies in the action of the subject position that the narrative motivates. As Charland puts it, the narrative “inscribes real social actors within its textualized structure of motives, and then inserts them into the world of practice.”²⁹

McGee’s dramatic vision, or fictional dream, and Charland’s interpellation are strongly related to Edwin Black’s second persona, except that McGee stresses the persuasive intent of the rhetor to urge his audience to accept a dramatic vision, whereas Black and Charland perceive the construction of a collective as a tacit, “extra-rhetorical” process³⁰ that occurs by implication.³¹ According to McGee, “An advocate brings to the confrontation with his audience a battery of

²⁵ Ibid., 138.

²⁶ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” 240.

²⁷ Ibid., 243.

²⁸ Ibid., 240.

²⁹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois,” 142.

³⁰ Ibid., 140.

³¹ Black, “The Second Persona,” 111-112.

entirely personal convictions and opinions; he then adapts them to his vision of what a ‘people,’ when created, will want to hear.”³² The fictional dream of a people is projected by a leader before he or she passes it on as an argument to a number of individuals, who accept or reject the fiction of a united people and the rhetor as their leader and as a “focal point for collective identity.”³³

Collective identity

Identification occurs based on a narrative representation of history. Black tells us that it is through rhetoric that we make moral judgments of our past, which helps us to bring order to a long string of events and make a connection “between the dead and the living.”³⁴ This relates back to what Kenneth Burke referred to as familial definition, which is “the definition of substance in terms of ancestral cause.”³⁵ Familial definition assumes a genitive, or, derivative, construction of identity. In explaining consubstantiality in “A Rhetoric of Motives,” Burke further explains that an offspring shares substance with its parents while still being its own entity apart from them.³⁶ In Charland’s case of the Quebecois, for example, the ancestry is what binds the people in a collective identity and provides for the freedom to express their independence. As Black would argue, the ancestral substance is based on common moral judgments about our history through which we create new possibilities: “It is through moral judgments that we sort out our past, that we coax the networks and the continuities out of what has come before, that we disclose the precursive patterns that may in turn present themselves to us as potentialities, and

³² McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 241.

³³ *Ibid.*, 242.

³⁴ Black, “The Second Persona,” 219.

³⁵ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 219.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

thus extend our very freedom.”³⁷ Jasinski argues that the discursive constitution enables and constrains thought and establishes the conditions of possibility similar to the rules in a game.³⁸ Thus, through a narrative interpretation of history, we build our collective identity based on a perceived common ancestry as a common ground, as well as shared notions of possibility, action, and goals.

Therefore, a narrative has the potential potential to create identification by origin or common ancestry and prelude a common end or purpose. Charland argues, “To be constituted as a subject in a narrative is to be constituted with a history, motives, and a telos.”³⁹ Constitutive rhetoric is a two-step process that entails the interpellation of an audience first and the necessity of action second.⁴⁰ This action can also be a reaction to a competing people with a divergent narrative representation of history. For example, the narrative of the Quebecois coexists and competes with the narrative about the “French Canadians,” or, “Canadiens francais” and calls for action to separate the Quebecois from the Canadians. According to Charland, “the distinction is crucial, for only the former [Quebecois] type of ‘people’ can claim the right to a sovereign state.”⁴¹ Thus, only the narrative of the Quebecois beckons action to change life conditions and challenge the existing narrative of the “Canadiens francais.”

According to McGee, action is called forth by the constant exchange of political myths, which are in conflict with objective reality and with old and new myths. A leader invokes a political myth that “actualizes his audience’s predisposition to act, thus creating a united ‘people’ whose collective power will warrant any reform against any other power on earth.”⁴² The leader, an individual or organization, unites the masses in an ideology by addressing their underlying

³⁷ Black, “The Second Persona,” 111.

³⁸ Jasinski, 75.

³⁹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 141.

⁴¹ Ibid, 136.

⁴² McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 241.

wishes and convincing individuals to abandon their individuality for sociality. McGee's political myth is an expression of a determination to act, the basis of a collective identity, and "the metamorphosis of persons into 'people.'"⁴³ While pertinent to a particular generation or audience at a time, the new myth is a reaction to a previously existing myth in a dialectic relation. McGee explains, "because life conditions are always changing, there is a constant choice between a 'stable' impulse to see objective reality as tending to confirm traditional judgments of life (old myths) and a contrary "vital" impulse to perceive objective reality as tending to refute traditional judgments (a condition calling for new myths)."⁴⁴ In this dialectic rhythm, one myth is exchanged by a new myth that is better fit for the new life conditions. A people are thus called into existence based on accepting a political myth, which is characterized by its opposition to previous myths. McGee writes, "'The people' exist, not in a single myth, but in the competitive relationship which develops between a myth and objective reality, and between a myth and antithetical visions of the collective life."⁴⁵

Identification through antithesis

The dialectic collectivization process of the political myth from "coming-to-be, being, and ceasing-to be" is not unrelated to Kenneth Burke's concept of the negative, as it constitutes a negative reaction to a positive condition. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke explains that the concept of the negative refers to the discrepancy between our desires and our material reality. It exists only within the symbolic, but not in the scientific, tangible environment.⁴⁶ The symbolic, such as the concept of the negative, is a source both of division and identification, as language

⁴³ Ibid., 244-247.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 246.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 295-296.

consubstantiates individuals with common symbols and divides those with divergent interpretations and courses of action. Burke also stresses that the act of identifying with each other is possible only through the act of segregating from another, for “one need not scrutinize the concept of ‘identification’ very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its ironic counterpart: division.”⁴⁷ In a similar vein, James Jasinski raises the “strategies of ‘othering’ that secure a privileged identity for an individual or group at the expense of specified others.”⁴⁸ Thus, the presence of an ‘other’ preconditions the rhetorical transformation from individuals into a unified people by marking their limitations. Jasinski moreover argues that groups constantly engage in a reconstituting project of self-maintenance, a discursive practice wherein communities renegotiate power, affiliation, meaning, and values.⁴⁹

In reference to Charland’s article, “The People Quebecois,” *Quebecois* is a symbol that expresses the desire to form a separate state from Canada. The symbol exists in reaction to the symbol “Canadiens francais,” which connotes the reality of being a part of Canada. Burke’s concept of the negative also serves to define a collective identity, as identification is inherently linked to division. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes, “identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division.”⁵⁰ The negative is thus a rhetorical argument to mark the limits of a particular identity. The symbol “Quebecois” implies that they, as an audience, are *not* Canadians, which gives the people a motive for action and, by extrapolation, for their existence.

However, as McGee and Charland both observe, the real boundaries of a people remain unclear and exist only symbolically as rhetorical constructions because the ambiguous nature of

⁴⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁸ Jasinski, 76.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 77.

⁵⁰ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 22.

symbols allows for sufficient agreement for a people to exist. According to McGee, a people's "only concrete significance is their existence, for not even their identity is agreed upon by those who appeal to them."⁵¹ A group's opposition to another group may be the only common factor that binds the individuals into a rhetorically constructed collective identity. James Mackin referred to this phenomenon as "schizmogogenesis," the "process of progressive differentiation that results in polarization."⁵² As Mackin explains, the rhetorical strategy of antithesis allows a people to reinvent or reinforce their community at the expense of alienating from an antagonistic group.

Charland explains that various different subject positions exist within a culture and can place a strain on identification: "Successful new constitutive rhetorics offer new subject positions that resolve, or at least contain, experienced contradictions."⁵³ Typically, contradictions are resolved by unifying against a common enemy. In the realm of symbols, the definition of a collective people is thus ambiguous with only its negative relationship to an outside entity marking its boundaries clearly. In attempting to define the word "substance," Kenneth Burke explains: "To tell what a thing is, you place it in terms of something else. This idea of locating, or placing, is implicit in our very word for definition itself: to define, or determine a thing, is to mark its boundaries, hence to use terms that possess, implicitly at least, contextual reference."⁵⁴ Therefore, he concludes, "To designate something *within* the thing, *intrinsic* to it, the word etymologically refers to something *outside* the thing, *extrinsic* to it."⁵⁵ Hence, a group can be defined only by its relation to a different group, which often is the purpose of its existence. For

⁵¹ McGee, 238.

⁵² James A. Mackin, "Schizmogogenesis and Community," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 251.

⁵³ Charland, 142.

⁵⁴ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

example, in Charland's analysis, "Canada is an antagonist in this life-drama of a *peuple*. As such, Canada must be overcome."⁵⁶

The ontology of narrative discourse: Is it a matter of choice?

Narratives thus have an ontological function because they offer different subject positions for individuals to step into. As Charland writes, "Narratives 'make real' a coherent subject. They constitute subjects as they present a particular textual position, such as the noun-term 'people quebecois' as the locus for action and experience."⁵⁷ It is only through narrative that different personas are called into existence. What's more, the narrative represents not only good but also antagonistic subject positions that are assigned to those who represent the problem that the subject is to overcome. Antagonists in turn give a group a reason to exist and to act. Therefore, a collective identity, which is derived from a subject position within a narrative, may inhibit productive dialogue between antagonistic groups because they depend on each other for their own symbolic existence. Furthermore, their antagonism also calls opponent groups into existence by addressing them as such. Their narrative addresses the subject as the second persona and implies the existence of an antagonistic third persona. What's more, if addressing each other directly, they each construct each other as antagonistic second personae, which are reluctant to engage in collaborative dialogue. As Charland writes, "One must already be a subject in order to be addressed or to speak."⁵⁸

Charland further maintains that constitutive rhetoric is extra-rhetorical because interpellation occurs at a subconscious level that does not involve rational or free choice. By being addressed as a group, the interpellated subjects lose significant freedoms because "they are

⁵⁶ Charland, 145.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁵⁸ Charland, 141.

positioned and so constrained.”⁵⁹ Although constitutive rhetoric does not interpellate all individuals into uniform subjects, it does call them to assume a particular subject position within a narrative that, if successful, becomes part of one’s self-concept and limits one’s disposition to contemplate opposing viewpoints. Similarly, opponent groups in the public sphere are often unable to find zones of agreements because they have been interpellated into a worldview that constrains the perspectives available to them. Even though many social movements have countered more traditional lifestyles, their arguments, as McGee would argue, are often based on a different political myth, which can make both camps subjects to insurmountable conflict with each other. Further, Charland avers that interpellation occurs at a state of unawareness because it usually does not give the audience a chance to question their name. The rhetorical trick of constitutive rhetoric is that something inherently rhetorical such as a collective identity is presented as something unquestionable and indubitable because it occurs prior to argumentation.

In contrast to Charland’s deterministic view, Black argues that identification seems to increasingly become a matter of choice. Black contrasts the “febrile combat of ideologies” that increasingly characterizes our age since the 1970s with the old age, when men were born into a firm identity that interpreted the world for them and remained beyond their awareness or choice.⁶⁰ For instance, rather than taking national identity for granted, Charland’s case of the Quebecois illustrates that it is no longer an unquestionable symbol. French Canadians are offered a choice whether to define themselves as Canadians or Quebecois. Similarly, Kenneth Zagacki’s application of constitutive rhetoric to President G. W. Bush’s speeches demonstrates that the president’s attempt to constitute an Iraqi identity by appealing to one democratic Iraq turned out a failure because Bush did not take into account the various groups of Sunni, Shia, and Kurds,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁰ Black, 112.

whose violent conflict was unleashed with the removal of Saddam Hussein.⁶¹ So, while some countries, such as the United States, operate on the E Pluribus Unum principle, in which all cultural subgroups have an American umbrella-concept, groups in many other countries, such as the Basques in Spain, violently revolt against their nationality, questioning the legitimacy of institutionalized boundaries of peoples. Thus, cultural territories may define us more strongly than institutional borders. Released from the set borders of nation and state, identities are more freely constructed through rhetoric. The choice of identity makes identity a matter of persuasion, which in turn makes it germane to rhetoric.⁶²

As Charland's concept of interpellation unveils, not all rhetoric prompts a choice. Unlike Heath's rhetorical enactment rationale, in which people make enlightened choices after contemplating all expressed sides of an argument, constitutive rhetoric gives its audience little room for deliberate decision-making. Charland explains, "Much of what we as rhetorical critics consider to be a product or consequence of discourse, including social identity, religious faith, sexuality, and ideology is beyond the realm of rational or even free choice, beyond the realm of persuasion."⁶³ Freedom, according to Charland, is a mere illusion because groups are constrained to act in line with their subject position in the narrative. However, as McGee reminds us, the rhetorical construction of a people, goaded by the political myth, is an ideological challenge against a previous myth. The choice thus lies in what political myth, i.e. narrative, individuals accept for themselves. Nevertheless, it remains a questionable assertion whether these myths or narratives eventually co-create one unified worldview. Political myths create divisions between individuals who identify with different myths. If collective identities are becoming more a matter

⁶¹ Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered: Constitutive Paradoxes in G. W. Bush's Iraq War Speeches," *Western Journal of Communication* 71, no. 4 (October 2007): 272-293.

⁶² Black, 113.

⁶³ Charland, 133.

of choice, as Black argues, more narrative versions coexist in competition without meshing into one co-created meaning. Whether Charland's deterministic or Black's more deliberate outlook is granted I intend to answer in my analysis of the competing constitutive discourses between the coal advocates and the environmentalists. As hypothesized, the competing concepts of West Virginia, supplied by each camp, coexist in oppositional relationship and provide a choice of endorsement to the citizens of the state.

Methodology

Through effective interpellation, organizations can call an audience into existence and assign it a collective identity that acts toward a common goal. Normally, activist identities are constituted in reaction to existing identities and provide an opportunity for redefinition and new unions. The present study is designed to understand the relation between two contradicting West Virginian identities, as constituted by the coal industry, represented by the West Virginia Coal Association, and the environmentalists, represented by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. An analysis informed by constitutive rhetoric and Black's second persona can unveil how conflict between two organizations (i.e., activists and corporations) can emerge from a competition over defining a community consistent with the each group's values and beliefs. Organizations and public groups may thus use interpellation in order to promulgate a community's identity that fits their own organizational mission and advocate their own legitimacy.

Constitutive rhetoric is a method well suited for understanding the underlying ideological differences between the two public opponents. Concentrating my analysis on how each party constitutes an opposing West Virginian identity will yield insight to how each group positions itself as the representative defenders of the state's citizens. However, rather than "extra-rhetorical,"⁶⁴ the constitutive arguments by the coal industry and the environmentalists become explicit in the conflict over the defining the West Virginian people. As McGee observes, "There are several myths and several political generations at any one time, each with a modicum of influence in the society."

Moreover, political myths are also meaningful to those who do not adhere to them. They define the antithetical "because they are hostile to the myth itself or because they have tired of

⁶⁴ Charland, 137.

the myth and are not inclined to defend it.”⁶⁵ Consequently, this analysis intends to unveil how public conflict mutually informs both competing narratives by casting oppositional heroes and villains, and to underscore the central role of conflict and opposition to forming a strong collective identity.

In the present case, the environmentalists constitute a West Virginian identity characterized by wilderness and civil isolation, which challenges the state’s widely accepted identity as a state of coal and economic interconnectedness. In consequence, the coal companies are resisting by reaffirming coal as the characterizing icon of West Virginia. Contradicting West Virginian identities may, as Jasinski would argue, “emerge in the fault lines between two belief systems that are competing for the allegiance of those who struggle to hold them simultaneously.”⁶⁶ Thus, West Virginians may be torn and in disagreement about the two West Virginian concepts, or they may aspire to integrate both concepts into a coherent identity. A constitutive approach to both discourses shall unveil the ideological implications of each side and uncover whether a mutual integration of both identities is possible.

Most importantly, through a constitutive lens, I expect to gain understanding of how the West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy interpellate oppositional West Virginian audiences with favorable effects on their own institutional legitimacies. By understanding the differently constituted West Virginias, I intend to answer if, and if so, why productive dialogue is impossible in this case. In order to underscore the differences between the two theories, I am analyzing the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and its blog Highland’s Voice, as well as the website and publications of the West Virginia Coal Association through a constitutive lens. Based on the sample case of environmentalists against

⁶⁵ McGee, 243.

⁶⁶ Jasinski, 81.

coal companies in West Virginia, I hope to demonstrate the increasing importance of constitutive rhetoric to the field of activist public relations.

Chapter Four

Two Differently Constituted West Virginian Identities

From Edwin Black, Maurice Charland, and Michael McGee we know that by implying an auditor, a rhetorical text also implies a defining ideology in whose narrative the constituted persona is situated as a role figure. In order to gain insight into why the two parties appear to have insurmountable disagreements, I conducted a constitutive analysis of the West Virginia Coal Association (WVCA) and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) to unveil the two ideologically incompatible West Virginian identities that are called into existence in each text. In this chapter, I will explicate how the two interpellations of West Virginian identities by the coal advocates and the environmentalists differ based on fundamentally oppositional ideologies. While the coal proponents interpellate a West Virginia based on duty, service, and workmanship, the coal critics interpellate a West Virginia based on play, leisure, and adventure.

Specifically, the WVCA's West Virginia is characterized by its interconnectedness due to its energy supply for the rest of the country, a sense of duty like that resembles a working father who strives to support his family, and stewardship over nature. By contrast, the WVHC's West Virginia is wild due to its isolation from civilization, fun and playful with an exploratory mindset of a child, and nurtured, as West Virginians are sustained by their natural environment. In this order, this chapter will explicate the specific differences of interconnectedness vs. isolation, duty vs. play, and stewardship vs. nurture, between the two West Virginian personae, as constituted by the WVCA and the WVHC, in order to understand the dynamic between the two identities that are called into existence.¹

¹ Robert L. Heath, "Onward Into More Fog: Thoughts on Public Relations' Research Directions," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18, no. 2 (2006): 94.

Interconnectedness versus Isolation

The West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy interpellate two separate West Virginian audiences with polar opposite ideologies. The coal industry, with its specific goals of revenue and productivity, is oriented toward the future, values efficiency, and sees its role as an engine of linear progress toward human perfection. Thus, the interpellated West Virginian is a dutiful coal miner, who serves as an energy provider and steward over the environment. West Virginia, with its large coal reserve, is the origin of progress, strength, and the reason the United States enjoys an advanced comfort of living, and the hard-working West Virginian makes this lifestyle possible. By contrast, the West Virginia constituted by the environmentalists is characterized by alienation from the rest of the nation, vulnerable beauty, and a lifestyle that is not to be advanced but to be maintained and protected. The audiences constituted in each campaign diverge based on the overarching themes of interconnectedness and duty, as illustrated by the industry's metaphor of a servile soldier or father, as opposed to the isolated and recreational status conceived by the environmentalists and that is illustrated in the metaphor of a playful child and a virgin. These overarching themes imply the more specific assumptions of realism in contrast with idealism, father role versus child role, and imperfection, as opposed to perfection, of nature. In the following pages, I will explicate and illustrate these themes in the order previously mentioned.

Robert L Heath, "A Rhetorical Enactment Rationale for Public Relations: The Good Organization Communicating Well," in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 34.
Robert Heath, "The Rhetorical Tradition: Wrangle in the Marketplace," in *Rhetorical and critical Approaches to public relations II*, ed. Robert L. Heath, Elizabeth L. Toth, and Damion Waymer (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 19.

Coal: Interconnectedness

Duty implies a one-way relationship, in which, according to the coal industry, West Virginia coal represents the cause. Coal is the foundation of West Virginia's economy, and West Virginians, whether coal miners or not, depend on the industry for their living. Thus, coal is the representative icon that characterizes West Virginia as a coal mining state, which is explicitly stated in a newspaper excerpt published in the WVCA news archive, as "This is a coal state,"² and in the Coal Fact Sheet as "We are West Virginia. We are West Virginia Coal."³ The WVCA thus connects coal and West Virginia as an inseparable unit in the minds of its audience so that every West Virginian identifies him-/herself with coal. In reference to the coal miners, the Cedar educational website states, "Our people have also worked hard to preserve and protect our past and our heritage," indicating beyond an economic venue, coal is a way of life for West Virginians. In the same vein, the testimonials published on the Friends of Coal website similarly refer to coal as their cultural heritage.⁴ Visually, the marriage between coal and West Virginia is expressed in the WVCA's logo - a half circle in the geographical shape of the state surrounding the words "WV," (short for West Virginia) and "Coal."

The dependency theme of the coal advocates represents coal as the cornerstone of West Virginia and the United States. In metaphorical terms, coal is the fuel or engine that drives the state's and the country's economies. The WVCA makes this comparison explicit in: "Coal is like an engine for development in the poorest WV County."⁵ Since coal, like an engine, is construed as the starting point of any progress, the question of what comes before it, what sacrifices must

² The West Virginia Coal Association. "News." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/Latest/Page-14.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

³ The West Virginia Coal Association. "Coal Facts." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/attachments/article/2463/Coal%20Facts%202010.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

⁴ The Friends of Coal. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

⁵ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News."

be paid for the resource, or how much coal reserve is left, is omitted. Just like a car motor, the U.S. economy resembles machinery that runs on coal produced in West Virginia. As a source of energy, West Virginia is the source of all progress in the United States and part of the larger economic system that binds it as a synecdoche to the nation.

The WVCA depicts West Virginia as dependent on the coal industry for employment and for the preservation of West Virginia's cultural heritage and lifestyle. In the context of the EPA's veto of the Spruce #1 coal mining permit, the WVCA has blamed the governmental agency for actively eradicating West Virginian jobs.⁶ Employment is herein presented as a scarce and precious opportunity that the West Virginian pursues. The idea that a West Virginian is looking for a professional occupation that is being withdrawn by the EPA is expressed in: "West Virginia needs these jobs. The people of West Virginia want these jobs and they support this project. Having a good job is perhaps the best prescription for good health available."⁷ By portraying West Virginians as needing jobs, the coal association is able to present the industry as the essential supplier of this desperate demand and position the coal industry as the chief provider of prosperity for West Virginians. This positioning also shows that in the image of the WVCA, West Virginians want to be coal miners. What's more, coal has represented West Virginians since their ancestors from Europe looked for economic opportunity in the coal fields of West Virginia⁸, framing coal as the reason why West Virginian ancestors ventured into the New World and why West Virginians live here today. According to the WVCA, coal is therefore the fundament of existence to the West Virginian people due to their need of economic opportunity that coal satisfies.

⁶ The Friends of Coal. "News." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/latest-news/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The West Virginia Coal Association. "Coal Facts." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/attachments/article/2463/Coal%20Facts%202010.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

Coal, and, by extrapolation, West Virginia, is also the fundament of the U.S. economy. The WVCA characterizes the state as the origin of economic progress in the United States due to the coal that fuels homes and factories nationwide. In a radio spot sponsored by the coal association, the announcer declares, “Coal is the backbone of our economy and our nation,”⁹ or, “It is the lifeblood of the American economy,” and, “It is America’s best friend,”¹⁰ published on the annually published Coal Fact Sheet. Thus, West Virginia is the engine and the heart of the United States and is associated with patriotic pride. The factsheet explicitly mentions, “America is the center of the world, the greatest world power, and coal is its engine.”¹¹ According to the WVCA, coal is the energy source that transformed the United States into a superpower, and West Virginia is therefore credited with the fundamental role of American progress. However, as the WVCA’s website makes clear, West Virginia has been unappreciated in the role of a provider by the rest of the United States, despite its sacrifice of mountains and coal miners. As commented on the association’s video clip, *The Coal Seam*, the moderator Chris Hamilton says: “They are jealous, they make us think they don’t want our coal,”¹² and in defense of coal against the rising criticism, a news commentary on the WVCA website reads, “Americans will be better off if they start asking hard questions about where - if not from coal - the nation's policymakers intend to get the dependable energy supply of the future.”¹³ According to the WVCA, West Virginians do not receive the recognition they deserve for working in the coal mines. They are called to stand up and take pride in their profession. Just like soldiers fighting on the battle fields for their country, so do coal miners risk their lives in the mines to benefit their country’s

⁹ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Media.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/coal-is-west-virginia-ringtones.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

¹⁰ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Coal Facts.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The West Virginia Coal Association. “Coal Seam # 2.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/the-coal-seam.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

¹³ The West Virginia Coal Association. “News.”

economic advancement and the comfortable standard of living for Americans. For example, a radio spot by the WVCA refers to coal miners as “answering our nation’s call” and “help win our wars.”¹⁴ Despite supplying the fuel to build and power military arms and advance American values throughout the world, the coal miner has been unappreciated. This service for the nation is also expressed by coal-supporting Senator Joe Manchin’s words, as published in the WVCA’s website: “The people of WV are the greatest Americans because they work hard and fuel the country, they make the American dream possible.”¹⁵

As evident from these quotes, West Virginia is a synecdoche of the entire United States because everything that the U.S. stands for, i.e. its ideals of freedom and material comfort, its industry, and its military power, is made possible through the production of coal in West Virginia. Moreover, West Virginian values, according to one of the radio spots on the Friends of Coal website, are reflecting the American values of family, work, and good faith,¹⁶ immediately linking West Virginia with the United States, as it says: “These are the values of West Virginia, and these are the values that made America.”¹⁷ In these depictions, West Virginia still harbors the best of what the United States has to offer, and preserves the founding values (e.g. work) upon which this nation was built.

Environmentalists: Isolation

The coal industry’s West Virginia is conceptualized in terms of the federal union, and it is inherently connected as a heroic provider of energy to power the nation. However, not all West Virginians perceive this economic tie as the defining characteristic of their state. The

¹⁴ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Media.”

¹⁵ The Friends of Coal. “News.”

¹⁶ Friends of Coal. “Media.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/radio-spots.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

¹⁷ Ibid.

environmentalists, who have made it their mission to defend the Appalachian Mountains from the mining method of mountain top removal, have a decidedly discrepant view of West Virginia as isolated and different from the rest of the nation. Most obvious is this image in one of the WVHC's blog entry on a report by the Associated Press, according to which Illinois is the most and West Virginia the least "average" state of the entire union. The WVHC comments this finding with, "We're often called 'below average,' but this is something else. 'Exceptional,' say. Something worth preserving."¹⁸ As a state that is culturally at the opposite end of Illinois, an industrial state often associated with the large city of Chicago, West Virginia must be quiet, slow, and undeveloped. Thus, the West Virginia conceived by the WVHC is not defined by any industry but by its wilderness, its bucolic character, and its isolation from America. What's more, the WVHC calls upon its audience to be proud of what industrialists would describe as "backwardness." This is even reflected in the implication of developmental resistance in the word "preserve."

Furthermore, the WVHC interpellates an isolated West Virginia by means of the themes of purity, as in purity from the industry. West Virginia is associated with paradise, and an old age that is reminiscent of grandparents. Rather than implicating bitterness and cynicism from years of worldly experience, the theme "old age" connotes purity because it preserves a lifestyle that existed prior to the industrial undertaking. The "old age" theme is largely expressed through grandparent figures that are recurrently used in the WVHC text. Grandparents, in the WVHC text, imply a sense of nostalgia to a pre-industrial, more primitive living. West Virginia, in the view of the environmentalists, is featured by wilderness, "a place where the land is pretty much

¹⁸ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "The West Virginia Highlands Voice." The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. http://wvhighlands.org/wv_voice/?paged=6 (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

like it has been since the days of the Lewis and Clark expedition.”¹⁹ Thus, West Virginia, as echoed in its slogan “wild and wonderful,” is conceived to still be as pure and untouched as in the pre-industrial days of discovery. Just like West Virginians, grandparents are backwards, set in their old ways, and dogged to defend their lifestyle from any invading progress. For example, activist Judy Bonds, whose life is described on the WVHC’s blog “Highlands Voice,” was living with her grandchild near a wild stream when her grandson discovers dead fish in the water which had been poisoned by chemicals from a nearby mine. Since that day, Bonds has been struggling against this form of industrial invasion and destruction to defend her and all other West Virginians’ homes and lifestyle.²⁰ Similarly, the author of an entry blog reminisces about the days when he lived on his grandmother’s farm in Emmons, who made a living by selling organic tomatoes. These harmonious days were over when “the ridge from Ashford to Emmons [was] being destroyed by mountaintop removal strip mining.”²¹ The roots of West Virginia, personified by the grandparent theme, are threatened by coal mining just like an animal being at risk of extinction from human invasion. In this conceptualization, the real West Virginia is shut off from the rest of the progress-oriented, profit-driven world and is struggling to maintain its old ways and protect its culture from becoming something that it is not, i.e. an industrialized state.

The isolationist theme implies resistance to progress and alludes to the environmentalist idea that purity is beauty. West Virginia, according to the WVHC, is a paradise that is threatened to be lost. In the About Us section on its website, mountain top removal is said to “seriously damage the ecology and aesthetics of the West Virginia Highlands,” and that the WVHC “works to protect our native flora and fauna while encouraging a fight against harmful invasive exotic

¹⁹ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “Wilderness.” The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. <http://www.wvhighlands.org/store/pages/donate.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

²⁰ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “The West Virginia Highlands Voice.”

²¹ Ibid.

species.”²² Besides other species, the WVHC is primarily concerned with human intrusion, especially in the form of machinery and other man-made utensils. The serene and pure world of our grandparents and the days of Lewis and Clark, which characterizes West Virginia, is thus contrasted with the “concern about human intrusions that bring into the wilderness the mechanical Twentieth Century world.”²³ Anything man-made, even bicycles, is shunned as besmirching the pure wilderness of the Appalachian region. From the environmentalists’ viewpoint, human beings overstep their boundaries when they dominate the earth and are instead conceived as assuming an equal place as part of a larger ecosystem. The ideal state of wilderness is being contrasted “with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape,” and with “increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization.”²⁴ Coal mining, from this point of view, exemplifies nothing but destruction in the name of selfish profit-making interests from abroad.

West Virginia is a good and beautiful place because it has largely remained isolated from the destructing economic and industrial advances and the intrusion of human projects. Hence, the WVHC understands West Virginia as an island. West Virginians are special because they are isolated from the rest of the country, and because they have a unique connection with nature. Just like a native species, West Virginians seek solitude and protection from civilization in the mountains, which offer an “escape from the exhaust of motors.”²⁵ Even manmade bridges to cross over streams are seen as undermining the pure experience in the mountains that is supposed

²² The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “About Us.” The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. <http://www.wvhighlands.org/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

²³ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “The West Virginia Highlands Voice.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “A Vision for a Wild Mon.” The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. <http://www.wvhighlands.org/Pages/VisionWildMon.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

to stay untarnished from any human footprint.²⁶ Reporting on his hiking experience in a West Virginia national park, a blogger comments: “Add to it a greater amount of solitude I consider it even better.”²⁷

Attached to the ideas of isolation and purity are the ideas of beauty and vulnerability. Nature is precious and beautiful, but threatened to be destroyed by the human hand. This is expressed on the About Us page by referring to the construction of a highway that “sliced a gaping wound from north to south through the heart of the highlands,”²⁸ or in their discussion about whether mountain bikes should be allowed in designated wilderness areas: “Wilderness will not survive where there is mechanical transportation.”²⁹ Interestingly, in both phrases, the environment is personified in terms of being “hurt” or “wounded.” So, as West Virginians are conceived to be one with nature, nature is also personified as a West Virginian.

The personification of West Virginians is underscored in the poem “Blindsighted,” in which West Virginia is represented by an abused woman who is losing her beauty and purity to a coal miner. The young woman is losing her vivid, “sun-burned” look because she is tied to the bed, suffering the pain of giving birth and risking “a sweat-soaked death to delivery gone wrong.”³⁰ This picture not only alludes to the pain of growing up into adulthood, it also reminds of earlier times in which women gave birth in private shelters remote from any hospital, which is still the situation in many isolated parts of West Virginia today. The poem goes on to describe the husband as violent and with seductive wages that remind of a coal miner. The phrases, “Your man can beat or rape you without breaking a single law” and “Lest your bride seduce with winsome wages,” bring forth associations of the coal mining industry and its destructive

²⁶ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. *The West Virginia Highlands Voice*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “About Us.”

²⁹ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. *The West Virginia Highlands Voice*.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*

exploitation of the West Virginian landscape driven by an attractive profit. The description of the young woman, as being “flecked with mercury” and “scented with sulfur,”³¹ clarifies the image of the mountains being personified by a pregnant woman who is being harmed and whose jovial radiance stultified by her coal mining husband. The poem not only associates the purity and beauty of nature with the purity and beauty of an innocent virgin, it contrasts these ideas of youth with the vulnerability of life and the finiteness of death, with coal mining symbolizing death by sin and destruction, and nature symbolizing life and vitality.

Different from the industry’s West Virginia as a synecdoche of the United States, with West Virginians being interpellated as coal miners that supply America with energy, the environmentalists’ West Virginia is marked by protection and isolation from the rest of the country as “our last remaining wild places.” Whereas the coal industry’s West Virginians are a dutiful army of coal miners who serve power to the nation, the environmentalists’ West Virginians recede from any progress and prefer solitude and pure wilderness. Whereas the industry’s West Virginians take pride in serving the nation, the environmentalists’ West Virginians take pride in their state’s uniqueness as backwards and wild.

Duty vs. Play

Tied to the themes of duty, represented by the serving coal miner, and isolation, represented by the purity of the Appalachian wilderness areas, are the philosophies of realism and idealism. The coal mining industry, represented by the WVCA, constitutes a West Virginian audience by the necessities of every-day life: making ends meet and supporting a family. By contrast, the environmentalists constitute a West Virginian audience by its lifestyle closely bound with nature, and by its recreational experience in the mountains. Therefore, the West

³¹ Ibid.

Virginian constituted by the coal advocates is a providing father figure, who risks his life in the mines to support his family, whereas the West Virginian constituted by the WVHC is a playful grandparent or a child – two generations that are remote from the drudgery of duty and service associated with adulthood and, instead, eccentric and preoccupied with the individual self. For example, in the poem “Two Moons,” published on the WVHC’s blog, a Native American child impatiently asks her mother when spring will arrive so that she can go out and play. The mother, who is braiding her long black hair, which alludes to constraint and discipline, answers that spring is two more moons away. The poem ends on the mother smiling at the impatience and the joy in her child. By contrast with the playful image of the WVHC’s West Virginia, the coal industry conceives West Virginia a place for adults because it offers work. According to the WVCA, the industry offers a “bright career right here at home.”³²

Coal: Dutiful father

The realism of the WVCA, and the associated West Virginian father figure reiterates the theme of duty and service and characterizes the West Virginian as an obedient and hard worker who is facing hardship and is sacrificing his leisure and health for his family. In a poll, reported in one of the WVCA’s news articles, West Virginians are mostly concerned with the economy and jobs, from which the authors conclude that “West Virginians choose paychecks.”³³ Besides hard-working, this statement further highlights the employee lifestyle from paycheck to paycheck, rather than making a fortune. Thus, money itself is not as important as making a living and support a family. The goal of making a living to get by, which characterizes the West Virginian here, implies humility, practicality, and common sense. In fact, the WVCA refers a lot

³² The Friends of Coal. “About Foc.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/2007081612/latest-news/about.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

³³ The West Virginia Coal Association. “News.”

to coal as providing common sense solutions for people with material problems, i.e. earning revenue. Since West Virginians opt for coal and jobs, they have common sense, as expressed in their call to Washington “to listen to a healthy dose of good, old-fashioned West Virginia common sense,”³⁴ or Senator Joe Manchin referring to West Virginia’s “common sense solutions.”³⁵ Moreover, the WVCA’s West Virginians demand “common sense answers”³⁶ to the problem of unemployment, as in, “We don’t want a bailout, we want to work!”³⁷ Thus, the constituted West Virginian is ready to work an “honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.”³⁸ This emphasis on the quotidian matters such as work and earning a paycheck implies realism and is especially pictured in the physical work of coal mining or construction, which is contrasted with mental work and the detachment from the realities of the American people in the offices of the federal government.

The WVCA’s West Virginian further has common sense because he/she is frugal and knows to get by with little. Senator Joe Manchin holds West Virginian as an example to the nation: “We must confront our fiscal situation and be willing to make the right investments and the difficult choices. Doing so, for West Virginians, is just common sense. West Virginians don’t go out and spend more money when they face tough financial problems.”³⁹ In this view, West Virginians are not poor but frugal and humble. They have experienced the harsh realities that come as a consequence of a smaller working man’s budget and can serve as an example to other Americans during economic recession. Their experience of hardship has made West

³⁴ The Friends of Coal.

³⁵ The West Virginia Coal Association. “News.”

³⁶ The Friends of Coal.

³⁷ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Media.”

³⁸ Friends of Coal. “Media.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/radio-spots.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

³⁹ The West Virginia Coal Association. “News.”

Virginians more realistic about life, and characterizes them as father figures who must teach their children how to handle money and live a responsible lifestyle.

Just like fathers in traditional families, who sacrifice their free time to provide for their families, West Virginians work for the reward to come home to their wives and children. As hard-working family man, the West Virginian gives up his individuality and self-expression to become one of many coal miners who are busy living up to their duties. This is especially apparent in the graphic on the WVCA's website, which shows a coal miner turned with his back toward the camera. The anthracite hair color not only reminds of coal but also hints at his advanced age and experience in the mines. More importantly, the man is too busy working to look at us and show us his mood or facial expression, which would imply his individuality. In other words, the man has given up his fun time and self-centeredness to make a living for his family. The idea of sacrifice for the family is further expressed in a radio announcement stated in a male voice by the Friends of Coal: "There is nothing like that moment when you get home in the evenings, standing outside, seeing your family safe and warm."⁴⁰ The "you" in this message is the coal miner who sacrifices his time and health to provide an income for his family and warm homes for American families across the nation. Again, the West Virginian is conceived as a dutiful father-figure and provider for the country. However, as the WVCA follows, the EPA's regulations have strained the coal business and threatened the father's work. Therefore, West Virginians, according to the WVCA, are worried about losing their occupations. An article by the Friends of Coal describes this concern: "Our families have been subjected to months of worry and fear – fear for their jobs, fear that they might lose their homes and their way of life."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Friends of Coal, "Media,"

⁴¹ The Friends of Coal. "News."

Hence, the WVCA constitutes and celebrates an identity of West Virginians whose lifestyle is inherently related to the realities of work, duty, and the selflessness of a father.

Environmentalists: Playful child and grandparent

Different from the hard-working and dutiful man personified in the WVCA's West Virginian, the environmentalists conceive of a much more playful, recreational, and outspoken West Virginia embodied by the boldness of a grandmother or the playfulness of a child. An example is Judy Bonds's grandson who is playing in a creek when he is disrupted and alarmed by the harmful chemicals from a nearby coal mine, which incites Judy Bonds to become the outspoken activist against coal.

Children personify the wilderness that constitutes the WVHC's West Virginia. For instance, the documentary, "Bringing Down the Mountain," about the destruction of the mountains by the coal industry, is an unprofessional clip that highlights the fact that it is made by high school students. At the same time, children stand for purity and innocence, as they have not been exposed to the stultifying realities of workplace competition and making a living, and hence represent an idealism that stands in sharp contrast with the realism implied in the WVCA's coal miner. Children, conceived as playful, are not yet familiar with the practical mentality of having a purpose for their actions. Similarly, West Virginia, as constituted by the WVHC, does not have a purpose of economic progress. Rather than future-oriented, it exists in the leisurely and playful presence, and is conceived as a paradise where young and old can "escape the sounds of civilization."⁴² Moreover, wilderness and children are also conceptually related by their vulnerability to society. Just like children are subject to adult influences of maturity and

⁴²The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "National Wilderness Preservation System." The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. http://www.wvhighlands.org/PDFs/Wild_Mon_Act.pdf (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

socialization, wilderness is subject to the destructive threats from civilization and industrialization. Thus, West Virginia is like an unrestrained child that is alienated from worldly matters and full with the joy and vitality of the presence. The association between children and wilderness is depicted on the National Wilderness Preservation System page: “Wild places. Where the deer and the antelope play.”⁴³ This idealistic image describes West Virginia as bereft of competition, full of harmony and fun, and evokes nostalgia in simpler times that, just like a child’s age, are bound to pass. Moreover, the river water that is endangered by the coal mines is not only for drinking but also for swimming,⁴⁴ an activity that connotes fun and childlike playfulness. In response of the threats from civilization, a blog comment reads: “Where will we go to canoe, camp and hike, fish and hunt?”⁴⁵

The joyfulness evoked by the WVHC is constituted as the kind of willful innocence and blissful ignorance that only children experience. Children are far detached from the duties and responsibilities of an adult lifestyle and unaware of the stressors and complications that it entails. The environmental rhetoric invokes a willful negation to and evasion from the modern adult’s worries by retreating from civilization into a more self-sufficient living in the mountains. For example, in the Two Moons poem published on the WVHC blog, the Native American girl is eager to escape the restraining walls of her winter home, where house chores are waiting, to play outside like the squirrels. Bereft of any worries or responsibilities, children can experience what the poem describes as “unstoppable, unspeakable,” and what the mother experiences as “unbearable joy,”⁴⁶ because she “misses” being in a *tabula rasa* state of ignorant bliss that an adult cannot return to. Just like the adult mother, the civilized society yearns for the carefree,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “The West Virginia Highlands Voice.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

joyous lifestyle enjoyed by West Virginians. Moreover, the interpellation of West Virginians as playful and blissful, yet ignorant, simultaneously positions the EPA as a strong protector who watches over West Virginia in a parent-child relationship.

Not only children, also grandparents are depicted as playful and joyous. For example, Bob Handley, a WVHC member who passed away in January, is remembered for his sanguine sense of adventure during hikes and his naked runs in the caves at an old age.⁴⁷ Nakedness implies innocence and purity, and the aberrant activity of running naked through caves further underscores the playfulness and silliness that is typical of children. Just like children, retired grandparents usually do not have any more duties or responsibilities and stay outside the flurries of civilized, working lifestyles.

Different from the service of the father to his family, as constituted by the coal advocates, the child and the grandparent do not serve anybody and live the present moment to its fullest glory. West Virginia is therefore idealized as one of the few idyllic places where people can escape from the drudgery of everyday duties and enjoy life. This intense living is expressed through the WVHC's centrality of water, which stands for good health, purity, and life. For example, one of the board highlight reports talks about a potential campaign called "Water is life,"⁴⁸ a point that is also made in a report directed at Joe Manchin, calling for the senator to "stop standing in the way of clean water."⁴⁹ Again, clean water, and an associated pure lifestyle, is threatened by coal mining practices.

Most of the time, the word "water" occurs in the context of "toxic chemicals," the destruction from coal mining, and the stream burial from valley fills. Thus, the life-giving qualities of water are contrasted with the deathly image of black coal and the destruction from

⁴⁷ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "The West Virginia Highlands Voice."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

coal mining, as discussed in the poem “Blindsighted.” Furthermore, the depiction of coal companies as murderers of the mountains additionally contrasts the life and death qualities attached to water and coal. This is especially apparent in the commemorative blog entry for Judy Bonds, whose death is compared to the disappearance of the mountains. The mountains, that “reach to heaven” and that “still exist in the image of God” have reached eternity, and “where those mountains are now, where Judy is, no coal company can reach.”⁵⁰ The lives of Judy Bonds and the mountains were ended by the coal industry, which is hence depicted as murderers. By taking away their mountains, the coal industry deprives West Virginians like Judy Bonds of their natural habitat and their lifestyle. Rhetorically, this depiction of the coal industry as the violent enemy, and Bonds and the mountains as an inseparable unit, serves to further constitute West Virginians as a people closely attuned with their environment. In other words, the grandparent is a metaphor for the mountain, which is old, close to death, and symbolizes West Virginia’s heritage. By portraying the coal industry as a clear evil, West Virginians and the mountains are characterized by the innocent qualities of victims, thereby highlighting the vulnerability of a paradise that is threatened to become extinct.

So, the two organizations constitute West Virginian in polar opposite terms. Whereas the West Virginian of the WVCA is a hard-working, dutiful family man, the West Virginian of the WVHC is a playful, eccentric child or grandparent. The harsh living of a coal miner is praised for its self-sacrifice and its experience with the realities of a civilized lifestyle, which illustrates the coal industry’s value of realism, practicality, and common sense. By depicting West Virginia as a provider of energy for the rest of the world, especially for the United States, the coal advocates position the state as the origin of civilization for America, reinforcing the connection between West Virginia and America. In sharp contrast, the leisurely living of the mountain

⁵⁰ Ibid.

people, constituted by the WVHC, is honored for its celebration of life and thrives in the nostalgia of a pre-industrial past that is bound to be forever lost. In their nostalgia for past times, and in their physical isolation from American civilization, the environmentalists have detached themselves from the monotone realities of the presence and the American working lifestyle, and are thus able to paint a more pleasurable life in close harmony with nature. This image, which draws a close parallel with the pre-civic paradise in the Garden of Eden, is bemoaned for its vulnerability from the destruction of human greed and exploitation.

Stewardship vs. Nurture

The way West Virginians are constituted by the coal advocates as working for and serving as common sense role models to the rest of Americans, stands in sharp contrast with the West Virginians who escape the monotony of working lifestyles and retreat from civilized America to the wilderness of the Appalachian Mountains. The less nature is inhabited by human beings and tarnished by civilization, the more desirable it becomes to the WVHC's environmentalist. Wilderness is perfection. In isolation from human projects, mother nature is strong enough to nurture the people of West Virginia, who are intrinsic to and dependent of their natural environment.

Coal: Stewardship

West Virginians, in the image of the WVHC, take on a passive role with regards to nature, whereas the coal industry takes on an active role. In the image of the coal advocates, the working man has to sacrifice his leisure time to provide for his family, just like West Virginia as

a state, which has to sacrifice its mountains to provide for America. In order to achieve a better way of life, the environment has to be modified to ignite the American economy with energy and boost West Virginia's economy with employment opportunities. Wilderness is a sign of backwardness and calls for the cultivation of a more civilized lifestyle. The more civilized West Virginia, the more progress can be made, and the higher the quality of life in the future. With this future-orientation, the natural landscape at present is imperfect and demands people to take action as stewards of their environment.

According to the WVCA, the mountainous landscape in West Virginia inhibits economic progress. As stated on their educational website, Cedar WV, and on their coal fact sheet "development is naturally limited by the landscape."⁵¹ The people in West Virginia don't choose to live in the hills, but they lack the financial resources to move away or adjust the landscape. As the following commentary on the Cedar WV website illustrates, the mountainous landscape is not ideal for a living: "In West Virginia, the little hollows along which most people live often flood, wiping away lives and life's work in just minutes. Like industrial and commercial development, the people of West Virginia build their homes along these little hollows because there are no other good options."⁵² The wilderness is hostile and unsuitable for the human need of leading a comfortable lifestyle. Therefore, the environment must be altered to improve the quality of life for West Virginians, such as provide better housing, and more flat ground for economic development. As the WVCA repeatedly proclaims, the flattened post- mining surface

⁵¹ The Friends of Coal. "Cedar West Virginia." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.cedarswv.com/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

The West Virginia Coal Association. "Coal Facts."

⁵² The Friends of Coal. "Cedar West Virginia."

offers new ground for the constructions of malls, soccer fields, airports, and housing communities.⁵³

Nature, as seen from the WVCA's point of view, is inadequate and must be modified to suit human needs. Flat land, of which West Virginia possesses little, is a valuable rarity ("Flat land is a rare bird."⁵⁴) because it yields more opportunity for progress and an elevated lifestyle. Communities, from this point of view, must actively be fostered and built through the process of construction. For example, in a letter to the editor published on the WVCA news, the writer defends the coal industry for its restoration of the land and thereby converting it into a better place: "During the restoration process, in some cases, trees are planted and grass is sowed, and in others, hospitals and businesses are built."⁵⁵ The writer moreover notes that due to the post-mining renovation process, his community now has a park. So, work, housing, and even recreational activities are unattainable without construction and the earthmoving influence of the coal industry. Any community improvement must actively be aided and produced. A community does not evolve – it is constructed by means of the coal industry. This sentiment is pronounced by WVCA Vice President Chris Hamilton: "I actually see these sites, with a properly developed mechanism to identify and market them, as one of our most important resources for building this new West Virginia"⁵⁶ What the WVCA constitutes as West Virginia is a community of people that are tied by their determination to develop from their backwards situation into an economically advanced state, which can only be realized by actively modifying the land, removing the hurdles (the mountains), and constructing businesses and communities. The final product is the "new West Virginia" – a land marked by development and civilization.

⁵³ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News."

⁵⁴ The West Virginia Coal Association. "Media."

⁵⁵ The Friends of Coal. "News."

⁵⁶ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News."

Their intention to actively modify the landscape characterizes the West Virginian as a steward and manager of his environment. For example, commenting on the 2010 environmental award winning companies, WVCA President Bill Raney refers to the coal companies as “environmental stewards,” and says: “The men and women who mine, manage and support these award-winning operations truly set the standard for environmental achievement and practical stewardship.”⁵⁷ The individuals who run and work for the coal companies are the ones who take charge of their environment: They manage the land to provide jobs for West Virginians, produce electricity for their country, and, in addition, watch out over the natural environment. Hence, not only people but nature depends on the coal companies for stewardship and improvement.

Environmentalists: Nurture

In opposition to the concept of nature in need of stewardship, the environmentalists see nature as perfectly self-sustained and in no need of any outside help. The fewer humans intrude into nature, the purer, wilder and more flourishing and stable is its ecology. Although the natural West Virginian landscape is inadequate for the progress envisioned by the coal industry, the environmentalists idealize wilderness for its strength and vivaciousness and for its ability to sustain a people who depend on it for their survival. West Virginians, as conceived by the WVHC, are interwoven with their natural environment, and they are nurtured by their mother earth.

Although wilderness is glorified for its strength, it is still subject to destruction and vulnerability. The WVHC prizes wilderness and an isolated lifestyle in the mountains as pristine, invigorating, and as an invaluable retreat that is worthwhile defending. For example, the About Us section on their website states as one of their missions to “Protect native WV,” or, what they

⁵⁷ Ibid.

call in Native American terms “Mon” for the Monongahela Mountains.⁵⁸ The mountains define the lifestyle of these people and therefore constitute the central element of their communities. Since West Virginians are constituted as mountain people who die when bereft of their environment (i.e. Judy Bonds), West Virginia, including its mountains and the nature-bound lifestyle of its people, is threatened from extinction by the coal industry and its plan to civilize the land. As stated in the video, *A Vision For a Wild Mon*, “Wilderness is a key element to our heritage and an essential part of our way of life.”⁵⁹ However, the coal industry is “driving entire communities to extinction.”⁶⁰

When the environmentalist talks about communities, he or she refers to an age-long process of natural evolution that is not exclusive to human beings (i.e. “Red Spruce Communities”⁶¹). Since the West Virginian people are interwoven with their natural environment, the old rivers and mountains are included in their definition of “natural community.” For instance, in the video, *A Vision For a Wild Mon*, West Virginia is described as the “home to our state’s highest mountains, free-flowing crystal-clear trout streams, and thriving fish and wildlife.”⁶² Not surprisingly, the WVHC’s concept of community is not contingent on the prospective economic progress and employment opportunities, but on a retrospective focus on heritage and tradition. From their point of view, the coal mines are an intrusion and destruction of an age-long heritage of communities that preexist the arrival of the coal-mining industry. Thus, when the environmentalist refers to the destruction by the coal mines, she or he hints at the communities that existed before they were subject to destruction. An example of a reference to a pre-coal-mining community is found in their fact sheet: “Just as significant as the

⁵⁸ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “About Us.”

⁵⁹ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “A Vision For a Wild Mon.”

⁶⁰ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “The West Virginia Highlands Voice.”

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “A Vision For a Wild Mon.”

harm done to the land, however, is the effect on the surrounding communities when the promise of profits leads big coal companies to increasingly disregard the neighborhoods affected by their mining techniques.”⁶³ Nature and, by extension, its communities, is harmonious and West Virginians live happy and fulfilled lives until the coal companies came and destroyed their environment and their culture.

So, whereas the coal advocates’ West Virginia is based on the modification of nature, the environmentalists’ West Virginia is tightly connected with the unscathed wilderness. Wilderness is an imperfect, backward state in the need of civilized from the perspective of the coal industry, and it is a perfect and harmonious way of life from the perspective of the environmentalists. Dissimilar from nature as relying on the mountain steward constituted by the WVCA, according to the WVHC this relationship is turned around in that the West Virginian relies on nature. The opposition between the active West Virginian of the coal industry and the passive West Virginian of the highland conservancy echoes the conceptual contrast between the dutiful father figure and the carefree child figure.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained the ideological differences between the coal advocates and the environmentalists by analyzing each party’s constitution of a different West Virginia. This constitutive analysis has yielded one main point of diversion with two related sub-points: Overall, the coal industry sees West Virginia as interconnected with the rest of the nation and the environmentalists see West Virginia as isolated.

⁶³ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. “MTR Fact Sheet.” The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. <http://www.wvhighlands.org/MTR/MTRFlier.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

The coal mining industry addresses a West Virginia that is interconnected with the United States as its provider of fossil energy. West Virginia is a synecdoche of the United States because its people live by the American ideal of hard work, discipline, and service. However, the West Virginia constituted by the Highlands Conservancy is marked by its isolation from civilization and American progress. Their West Virginia preserves a primitive lifestyle in harmony with nature that has long been lost in other parts of the country. First, closely related to this theme of interconnectedness versus isolation, is the personification of West Virginia as a father figure by the coal advocates as opposed to a child or a grandparent constituted by the environmentalists. West Virginian coal miners are characterized by their dutiful service to the country and sacrifice for the family, whereas West Virginians from the environmentalist point of view are characterized by playfulness, adventure, and leisure. This contrast additionally projects the contrast between the strength of the coal industry embodied as a father figure, and the vulnerability of nature, embodied as children and grandparents. Second, related to the interconnectedness versus isolation theme also is each party's conceptualization of nature as either in need of modification for more ideal living conditions, or as perfectly self-sustained and in need of preservation.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The foregoing chapter has shown a dramatic contrast in the conceptualization of West Virginia between the coal association and the highlands conservancy. Based on the interpellations of two fundamentally different West Virginian people, it appears impossible for the environmentalists and the coal industry to find common ground in dialogue. In understanding their contrasting conceptions of West Virginia, it becomes clear that the groups are arguing from polar ideologies that are unable to merge. Whereas the coal industry's West Virginia is interconnected with the United States, progressive, and characterized by dutiful and disciplined citizens, the environmentalist West Virginia is isolated, eccentric, and wild. In this chapter, I discuss my findings from the constitutive analysis and the implications of the ideological differences between the two opponents. Hence, I will outline some of the attributes that characterize activist public relations, such as their failure to engage in constructive dialogue, the polar opposite identities between the publics, the antagonistic interdependence and compatibility between their narratives, and the emotional attachment to an argument that interpellates a cultural identity.

Failure to engage in constructive dialogue

This analysis has revealed that public opponents are disinterested in constructive dialogue and prefer to tout their contradicting claims that stand in competition, rather than collaboration, to each other. The two public interest groups offer contradicting claims and evidence because they base their arguments on different warrants. The Coal Association's argument by statistic,

that coal companies are environmentally responsible because restoration occurs in 90 to 95 percent of former mine sites,¹ does not resonate with the environmentalists because it is based on a warrant of stewardship. The environmentalists do not support active stewardship as a method to responsibly engage with nature. Rather, they propose a *laissez-faire* approach toward nature by keeping it wild and self-sustained. The WVHC rejects all human intrusion into wilderness, and therefore the coal companies' argument of restoration because it does not make up for the foregoing, irreparable intrusion into vulnerable ecosystems. Hence, both groups base their arguments on different warrants, with the coal industry advocating active stewardship and the environmentalists proposing conservation and complete seclusion from civilization. This difference in warrants additionally explains why the two public interest groups have neither achieved nor intended to find a resolution to their conflict.

The argument between the coal advocates and the environmentalists resembles what Jonathan Lange called interlocking spiral in his analysis of the conflict between the logging industry and the environmental protectors of old growth forests. Lange observes that antagonistic groups can respond to each other's argumentative tactics and strategies without responding to each other's messages. He writes, "Both environmentalists and industry representatives choose strategies that are dependent on and responsive to their antagonist. This analysis reveals how disputants' interactive logic – mirroring and matching of each other's strategies – is achieved with little or no direct communication between the parties."² Via the mass media, the adversarial interest groups learn about each other's vilifying and simplifying tactics that are then copied and contradicted. The opponents either mirror or match their tactics, wherein mirroring implies doing the exact opposite of the antagonist, and matching means copying the same action.

¹ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News."

² Jonathan I. Lange, "The Logic of Competing Information Campaigns: Conflict over Old Growth and the Spotted Owl," *Communication Monographs* 60, no. 9 (1993): 241.

Throughout both campaigns, the environmentalists and the coal representatives mirror each other when they offer contradicting statements and figures, and they match each other's tactics by vilifying one another, directing their speech to Congress, and by claiming to represent the origin and prerequisite for living, whether referring to jobs or water. Lange's interlocking spiral illustrates that the discourse between coal and the environmentalists is a game that sets up the two parties in competition, rather than collaboration, and that prevents them from co-creating meaning. However, it does not uncover the underlying reasons for this ongoing competition. Through a constitutive lens, I was able to gauge why constructive dialogue was nonexistent between the Coal Association and the Highlands Conservancy.

Polar opposite identities

The constitutive analysis of the discourse between the coal advocates and the environmentalists has unearthed the ideological differences between the two disputants. The WVCA's narrative that constitutes West Virginia as a dutiful provider figure for the nation implies qualities that stand in opposition to the WVHC's narrative of West Virginia as a care-free, eccentric mountain people. In this section I will outline some of the ideological differences between publics.

The constitutive analysis has unveiled the dynamics between two advocacy groups with entirely different ideologies, and how they fail to engage in constructive dialogue. As reasoned by Edwin Black and Maurice Charland, an audience is constituted with a history that serves to unify individuals into a common people. Edwin Black explains that the sequence of historical events demands moral judgment in order to make sense of it.³ In the present case, we have two differently interpreted accounts of West Virginian history that underlie the constitution of two

³ Edwin Black, "The second persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (April 1970): 109.

oppositional West Virginian people who are unable to come to an agreement. The coal industry tells of a hard-working coal-mining people, who were making a living and serving the country until the EPA imposed its “anti-coal, anti-growth, anti-corporate agendas.”⁴ The environmentalists narrate the story of a distinct West Virginian people that had lived in a peaceful seclusion from the rest of the world until the coal industry destroyed their habitat.

Whichever narrative West Virginians accept and internalize, it will not only shape their identity, it will also motivate action to defend the people’s constituted self. Therefore, besides constituting a people as a subject character, a narrative also functions to funnel emotions into action against those who threaten the constituted identity. As Charland argues, characters constituted with a history “move inexorably toward their telos.”⁵ A narrative thus constitutes characters that invoke real social actors “within its textualized structures of motives.”⁶ If West Virginians conceive themselves as mountain people, they will protest against the invading coal industry; if West Virginians conceive themselves as “friends of coal,” they will protest against the environmentalist interests in regulating their coal industry. As a result, each party constitutes the other as the antagonist against whom to take action.

The narratives constitute two West Virginian people that are as polarized as life and death. This is symbolized in the central icons of each argument. According to the coal association, coal is the state icon of West Virginia, as petitioned by a “coal miner’s daughter” from Gilbert High School, who has led the effort to have coal named the official state rock.⁷ Coal gives West Virginians work and a living; it is the source of economic progress in both West

⁴ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Mountain View.” The West Virginia Coal Association. http://www.wvcoal.com/attachments/909_WALKER%20MMV%20LOW%20RES.pdf (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011)

⁵ Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 140.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Press Releases.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/Press-Releases/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

Virginia and the United States, and it has shaped the lifestyle of those who were “born and raised in the coal fields of Southern West Virginia.”⁸ Hence, coal calls forth a West Virginian people as they have been constituted by the WVCA. However, what coal is to the WVCA that is water and mountains to the environmentalists. Stream water is polluted by the coal mining sites and endangers the lives of the surrounding vicinities and ecosystems that depend on water for a living. Thus, while coal is the source of life for the WVCA’s West Virginians, water is the source of life for the WVHC’s West Virginians. More importantly, if “water is life,”⁹ and if the coal industry pollutes the waters, coal, according to the environmentalists, is associated with the opposite of life - death, which has also been conveyed in the WVHC’s story about Judy Bonds and the dead mountains, as well as in the violent description of the mountain top removal process as a “destructive” coal mining method that is “permanently burying natural streams.”¹⁰ So, the two representative icons of each narrative, coal and water, are constituted in polar opposite terms by the environmentalists, which dramatizes the divide between the two interest groups.

Mutual antagonism

Each party bounces its identity off the opponent to reinforce their own version of what it means to be West Virginian and underline their own worldview. Hence, the two groups derive their identity from the mutual antagonism ingrained in the conflict. As both narratives are constructed as a product of the conflict, two constituted narratives are interrelated and interdependent. Who is the hero in one narrative is the villain in the other, and vice versa. This antagonistic interdependence undermines the likelihood that the two parties are willing to engage

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. The West Virginia Highlands Voice.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in constructive dialogue because a resolution would dissolve their narratives and, by extension, their identities and organizational legitimacy.

The mutual antagonism is especially apparent considering the cast of opposite heroes and villains in the two present narratives. In essence, both parties tell different versions of the same story. From the coal association's viewpoint, the environmentalists, especially the out-of-state Environmental Protection Agency, inhibit the state from progressing economically while the coal companies are trying to help the state move forward. By providing economic progress, the coal companies are the heroes, and by "standing in the way" of economic progress, the environmentalists are the villains. From the environmentalist perspective, the coal companies intrude into a secluded West Virginian world of harmony, wilderness, and wonder. As intruders and destroyers, the coal companies are conceived as the enemy and the environmentalists as the resistant heroes who stand up for the vulnerable communities and ecosystems. Moreover, both parties fight for a system that they both claim is robust and powerful, yet vulnerable to the opponent's invasion. The WVCA upraises the coal industry as essential to the functioning of the U.S. economy, yet the regulations by the EPA are destructive and unjustified. In a similar vein, the environmentalists prize wilderness as a robust ecosystem that should be left alone to sustain itself. Nevertheless, this ecosystem is vulnerable to unassociated trespassers, such as industry and civilization.

Interestingly, although each narrative casts opposing heroes and villains, the two narratives conceive of the same victims: the people of West Virginia. Again, in the coal association's narrative version, the people of West Virginia are victims of the EPA because the federal agency cuts their jobs and their hopes of a stable income. In the Highland's Conservancy's version, West Virginians are the victims because the coal companies destroy the

natural habitat from which West Virginians live. This representation of two different versions of West Virginia underscores that each party is in the process of constituting a West Virginian people that yield legitimacy to their cause and corroborate their organizational identity.

Thus, both narratives include each other as enemies, present themselves as heroes, and the people of West Virginia as victims. Their representation of and struggle for the people of West Virginia shapes their heroic role in the narrative, which is further highlighted through their antithesis with the enemy. Conceived as victims, the people of West Virginia underscore the narrator's stellar figure because their victimization calls for a saving hero. Most importantly, both parties claim to fight for the people of West Virginia and, hence, be the true representatives of that state, and both parties assert that the opponent is an unassociated outsider. The coal industry calls the environmentalists "outside wackos"¹¹ and predominantly refers to the EPA in the federal government as their detached representative from Washington. Similarly, Bob Handley from the WVHC describes the coal industry as representing out-of-state interests.¹²

So, both groups tell the same story with polar opposite casts except for the victim role, which constitutes two divergent West Virginian people that fit each narrative. By rhetorically positioning each other as enemies in their narratives, both groups highlight their morality in contrast with the immoral opposition. This polarization is necessary to constitute and delineate their group identity and their version of what it means to be West Virginian. Therefore, the antagonistic relationship serves both groups to affirm their reason to exist, as defenders of a people that are constituted in accord with their own organizational identities. The identity-affirming effect of the dramatized conflict undermines the chances that a resolution in the form of constructive dialogue is a pursued goal.

¹¹ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News."

¹² The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "The West Virginia Highlands Voice."

The two parallel narratives thus reveal the interdependency between the opposing parties for their own organizational identity and legitimacy. In what Kenneth Burke terms “identification by antithesis,” each narrative’s emphasis on the opponent as the evil enemy highlights their own organizational identity by what they are not and by what they are struggling against. Under this consideration, the two groups use each other to strengthen their own prominence in the public sphere. Without the coal industry, environmentalists would not have an enemy to attack. Likewise, the coal industry without the environmentalists would not have a scapegoat to blame for suspending employees, and they would not have a contrasting group that makes their case stand out. Most importantly, without each other, the two groups’ narratives would be incomplete. In this finger-pointing game, each party pushes the opponent into an extreme position that is then easily attacked. The coal industry characterizes the environmentalists as lazy and emotional extremists, while the environmentalists characterize the coal industry as violent, profit-driven destroyers.

Possibilities of compatibility

Besides constituting interdependent narratives, the two groups constitute interdependent personality figures. Inviting West Virginians to see themselves as dutiful coal-miners who provide for energy-dependent nations interpellates the state into a providing parent figure. This personality stands in stark contrast to the playful, blissful child that is unaware of any responsibilities and, if anything, is a responsibility to others.

Although the two narratives are contradictory, they are interdependent in that they exist as a father-child relationship. Just like a hero’s existence is contingent upon an enemy, a provider’s existence is contingent upon a care-receiver, and a care-receiver’s role implicates a

care-taker. Thus, the conflict between the coal representatives and the environmentalists lies in the revelry of a child that does not want to obey the rules of civilized society, take on responsibilities, and live an adult lifestyle. Consequently, the environmentalists are conceived by the coal industry as “extremists that have no jobs and live off of our hard-working tax dollars,”¹³ and from the environmentalist point of view, this “revelry” constitutes a protest against a society that is callous and monotone. This protest move proposes the pursuit of a more idealistic lifestyle that is free from stress, competition, and greed, and marked by humility of a subsistent life in the nurture of nature, and by the existential fulfillment of living in a natural environment.

This conflicted parent-child relationship between the coal and the environmentalist camp hints at the existence of a more general, all-encompassing narrative that underlies this public dispute and that has been co-created in the conflict between the coal industry and the environmentalists. Yet, although the parent-child relationship brings both narratives into compatibility, it still positions the two parties as foes, whose resolution is impossible to realize within the framework of this narrative because a West Virginia, constituted as a dutiful father-figure, who provides for the energy-dependent nation, is irresolvable with a West Virginia constituted as a playful, carefree child-figure that exists in blissful ignorance of energy problems, duty, and service. Rather, the two personifications of father and child take polar opposite perspectives on the same narrative. Hence, it could be argued that both groups are co-creating the same narrative with interdependent personality figures. Moreover, this underlying agreement of taking compatible roles of parent and child points to the artifice embedded in the conflict. The conflict is less a consequence of issue disagreement than of a staged role enactment.

¹³ The Friends of Coal. “News.” The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/latest-news/> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

Even though the two public advocates are telling different versions of the same narrative and mutually relate to each other in a conflicted parent-child relationship, each group ultimately defends a differently constituted West Virginia that accords with their own organizational mission and reinforces their organizational legitimacy. By means of interpellation, both organizations adjust the concept of the West Virginian public to fit their organizational needs, and constitute a people that legitimizes their own cause. Their mutual antagonism allows the two groups to construct an interdependent relationship in which both parties need each other to underscore their own existence. This is especially apparent in the contrasting father-against-child narrative constituted by the two groups.

Theoretical implications

This rhetorical analysis has extended Greg Leichty's concept of antagonistic interdependence by analyzing a current conflict between two antagonistic interest groups - coal advocates and environmentalists - through the rhetorical method of constitutive rhetoric. Instead of engaging in deliberate argumentation, the environmentalists and the coal representatives interpellate audiences with polar opposite, yet interdependent ideologies. This analysis underscores Charland's and McGee's claim that a newly constituted narrative is interpellated in dialectic response to a previous narrative that ceases to correspond with society's demands and sentiments. In line with McGee's observation that a myth exists as a response "not only to discomfort the environment, but also to the failure of previous myths,"¹⁴ my analysis echoes McGee's dialectic myth in that the environmentalist and coal association challenge each other's narratives by constituting polar opposite West Virginian identities. As this analysis reveals, such dialectic can occur simultaneously in an argument between both groups, rather than in

¹⁴ McGee, "In Search of 'The People,'" 241.

chronological replacement of myths in the sequence of generations. It is therefore not intended to suggest that the coal's narrative is a failed myth bound to be replaced by the environmentalists. However, it has failed in the eyes of a large fraction of society who stand critically toward our fast-paced, energy-dependent lifestyle. Consequently, our fragmented society consists of multiple competing myths at a time, which can exist in antagonistic interdependence. Hence, my analysis has highlighted the interdependence between challenging myths.

Ultimately, this analysis has echoed Edwin Black's observation that an identity is the "modern pilgrimage."¹⁵ Mutually challenging narratives exist simultaneously and vie to define a people, who have a choice in accepting one identity over another. Beyond Black's observation, this analysis has also demonstrated that competing ideologies in a single modern society do not exist in a vacuum but are interrelated as opposite reactions to each other. So, individuals do not only choose one identity over another, they choose one by defying another. Environmentalists define themselves by who they struggle against – polluters. Similarly, the coal industry has extended its function beyond its practical purpose of energy supply onto the symbolic as an interpellator of a people. Taking symbolic significance demands a rhetorical delineation what coal is not, which occurs when coal engages in defense against coal critics. Under such antagonistic yet mutually beneficial relations, resolution is not aspired.

In this regard, this analysis serves to clarify Charland's notion of freedom being an illusion.¹⁶ With public discourse revolving more around ideological questions and ever more fragmented interest groups challenging each other, the interpellation into an identity is increasingly a matter of active choice on part of the audience. The notion of agency begins with the definition of the self among multiple narrative invitations, and the freedom lies in the choice

¹⁵ Black, 109.

¹⁶ Charland, 140.

of narrative. However, once successfully interpellated, the freedom is limited by the action prescribed in the narrative. The coal association's narrative implies action against the EPA ("We must stand up and show federal regulators that we will not retreat from their unfair actions. We will continue the fight not just for the Spruce Number One mine but for every coal miner, coal company and for our way of life."¹⁷), and the environmentalist narrative implies action against the coal industry ("Victory for the communities nearby, and for all Americans across the country who are fighting to protect our precious natural resources from industrial pollution."¹⁸). Although Charland and McGee's argument holds true, that "myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act,"¹⁹ they ignore the increasing freedom and agency involved with choosing a narrative. The process of interpellation is not extra-rhetorical, as Charland maintains; but involves an active consent by the audience.

Final comment

As the present study reveals, argumentation can drive the two parties further apart by denigrating and constituting each other as public opponents and as enemies in their narratives. However, it is dubitable whether the argument between the environmentalists and the coal advocates can actually be classified as dialogue, or even conflict, since the two groups did not listened to each other's arguments with the intension to find a mutually beneficial resolution but enacted their staged role characters in a drama. If the coal industry and the environmentalists attempted to resolve their disagreement about coal mining, they would have to modify their own arguments in order to accurately respond, rather than contradict each other. To what extent

¹⁷ The West Virginia Coal Association. "News." The West Virginia Coal Association. <http://www.wvcoal.com/Latest/Page-14.html> (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

¹⁸ The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "The West Virginia Highlands Voice." The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. http://wvhighlands.org/wv_voice/?paged=5 (accessed October 11, 2010-February 28, 2011).

¹⁹ Michael McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61, no. 3 (October 1975), 244.

would this modification of their argumentation alter their narrative, their self-image, and their significance to the West Virginian public?

The antagonism between the coal industry and the environmentalists is too emotional and too tied to people's personal self-concepts to allow for a reasoned debate to take place. As a detached outsider, it is indeed difficult to decide whose narrative would be more reasonable. Considering the many international attempts to reduce carbon dioxide emission, the environmentalist demands do not seem unreasonable. However, comparing their inclination toward complete wilderness with the coal industry's attempted environmental stewardship, the environmentalists do indeed appear to have a less realistic argument. On the one hand, working West Virginians might realistically identify more with the Coal Association's claims; on the other hand, they might yearn for a West Virginia described by the Highlands Conservancy. Although the coal industry offers a more realistic narrative of the West Virginian people, the fact that far less West Virginians today than fifty years ago work for the coal companies,²⁰ and the additional rise in value of nature as a place to break away from quotidian flurries, makes the environmentalist narrative very attractive to many so as to pose a real challenge to the coal industry's narrative.

Leaving aside the organizations' similar roles as representatives of the original people of West Virginia, the direct conflict between the environmentalists and the coal advocates can be characterized as the former being the attacker and the latter the defender, for coal has preceded and likely triggered the environmentalist mission to highlight the damaging effects of coal mining on the rivers and the mountains. Nevertheless, the constitutive analysis has shown that both organizations vie for constituting their West Virginia as the original one, and each other as the subsequent disturbers. According to the coal association, West Virginians have worked in the

²⁰ The West Virginia Coal Association. "Coal Facts."

coal mines since it was first discovered in the nineteenth century, and environmentalism is a more recent protest movement that has led to the federal empowerment of the EPA. On the other hand, the WVHC constitutes a West Virginia rooted in a pre-industrialized lifestyle of the first European settlers and the Native Americans, whose lives are closely interconnected with the natural cycles. This primitive West Virginia is especially apparent in the poem, “Two Moons,” in which a Native American mother derives the season from the moon calendar and by the density of the soil. So, even though the environmental movement is a reaction to and thus succeeds the coal industry, their constituted West Virginia alludes to a culture that precedes coal mining. Similarly, even though companies have mined coal in West Virginia since the nineteenth century, promotional campaigns such as the “Friends of Coal” were founded as recently as 2002 in response to the environmentalists and other coal critics.²¹ So, just like each group denounces the other as an outsider, they also denounce each other as a newcomer and attribute representation of the original West Virginia to themselves.

The implications of invoking public identities

Although attributing different causes, both groups’ narratives depict West Virginians as the victims who the organizations intend to protect. In essence, both groups value West Virginia and lead efforts to maintain, protect, and support its people and its culture. Effective public interest groups, such as the WVCA and the WVHC, claim to represent the public by constituting them according to their own organizational interest and appealing to their sense of self. Arguing that West Virginians are primitive mountain people, the environmentalists attempt to arouse the emotions of individual West Virginians by relating their argument to the people’s personal self-concepts. Once the people see coal as a threat to their self-image, they are more willing to

²¹ The West Virginia Coal Association. “Coal Facts.”

support the Highlands Conservancy's cause. Similarly, messages inviting West Virginians to see themselves as dutiful, hard-working coal miners are intended to reach people on a personal level that gets them emotionally involved and inspires loyal support for the coal companies. Putting at stake an entire culture of coal miners or mountain people lowers the disposition to compromise and co-create common zones of meaning because of the personal identity at stake. However, considering that each party constructs the issue around the personal identity of West Virginians, detachment, objectivity, reason, and compromise appear infeasible.

The increasing concentration of public discourse on personal identity and individual rights is therefore inhibitive to rational argumentation that is envisioned by Heath and many other proponents of deliberative discourse, which Lynn Sanders defines as “a commitment to finding a way to address concerns, resolve disagreements, and overcome conflict by offering arguments supported by reason to our fellow citizens.”²² For example, Robert Denton decries the “divorce between speech and thought, character and ideas” because, as he argues, “narrative and drama are more important than reason and evidence”²³ in today's public sphere.

Deliberation, according to Sanders, requires selflessness, commitment to the community, civic virtue, and rational decision-making.²⁴ However, if two advocates are already conflicted about who *is* the community in the first place, this civic virtue as a motive to restore disagreement does not have a mutually shared community as a target. Moreover, civic commitment becomes utterly lop-sided by favoring either the community interpellated by one advocate, or the other. Civic virtue to the community becomes not a much matter of virtue but a matter of who is the community. As both the WVCA and the WVHC are constituting their own

²² Lynn M Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (June 1997): 347.

²³ Robert Denton, “Forum on the Future of the Presidency: Rhetorical Challenges to the Presidency,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2000): 447.

²⁴ Sanders, “Against Deliberation.”

community of West Virginians, civic virtue is resolved to serve only their partisan ends.

Diverting attention from mutually resolvable questions, i.e. how to reduce (as opposed to stop) coal mining waste and pollution, the discourse falls short of deliberation because it triggers a conflict that revolves around personal rights and offenses against a culture.

Ultimately, then, the conflict between the coal association and the environmentalists is driven by a quest for power. In constituting a West Virginian people that aligns with their organizational mission, the two advocates move their cause to the center of a community. Public argument becomes thus not a matter of adjusting organizations and their claims to the demands of the community but adjusting the community to claims of the organization. Hence, although the issue of the effects of coal mining on the environment stands open to a deliberate debate about the least destructive coal mining methods, the competition between coal and the environmentalists is an all-or-nothing game without any hope of compromise. In this light, it is necessary to remark that this analysis has studied only the rhetoric of the leading opponents, the Coal Association and the Highlands Conservancy, without taking into account the West Virginian people's actual self-concept. Thus, while the WVCA and the WVHC constitute polar opposite West Virginian identities, it remains unknown how well they resonate with the state's citizens, i.e., whether these two polar concepts divide them, or whether West Virginians are able to integrate both narratives into one coherent West Virginian identity.

The conflicting interests between industry and environmentalists are a dominant consideration in today's public debate. The analysis of the West Virginia Coal Association and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy was intended to unearth the reason why both sides fail to negotiate an agreement and to understand the challenges that the industry faces in responding to the pressures from environmentalist groups. As this analysis has shown, the conflict is a

symptom of more deeply rooted ideological opposition that hampers the process toward resolution in dialogue. If deliberate discourse is based on a common concern for the community, both arguers must at least perceive themselves to be a component of the same community in order to give in to compromise for the broader good. However, environmentalists ignore that many West Virginians are linked to the coal mining industry, just like the coal industry ignores that many other West Virginians are unrelated from coal and hold the state's ecological diversity and national parks in high regard. As this analysis shows, activist public discourse is heavily constitutive, as it interpellates new communities and revises history.

In order to achieve deliberative discourse, the two arguers must have a baseline common ground. Today, this common ground is made of thin ice, as our society is increasingly marked by social fragmentation, and its various audiences “have become too numerous, too diverse, and too political.”²⁵ Certainly, a diversity of ideas comes with the freedom of expression and is an essential fundament of any democracy; however, mere expression of a viewpoint is not enough. The argument must be tailored for and reach its opposing audience, who will then attend to the message, reason, and respond. The question remains, on behalf of what community are we to resolve our disagreements? In light of the increasingly constitutive power of public argument it becomes more unclear to answer the question of who are the people. Finding this common ground requires ever more abstract rhetoric, for which negative discourse is an example.

²⁵ Denton, 446.

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