

LEADERSHIP AS RHETORICAL ACTION: *THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS* IN
SEARCH OF ITS “PEOPLE”

BY

KRISTYN ESKE-BALLARD

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2013

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By:

Allan D. Loudon, Ph.D., Advisor

Michael J. Hyde, Ph.D., Chair

Holly H. Brower, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was a journey, like all journeys, there should be moments to celebrate the patrons of the journey. Dr. Allan Loudon (and Ming), as my thesis advisor, was continually patient with my fluctuating sentiments, my grammatically-challenged drafts, and my need for reassurance. You assured me I was not “painting the Sistine Chapel,” and that the journey should be my product. I believe you were right. Dr. Michael Hyde, you have given me new language to explore the world. Thank you for “bearing your cross” and not giving up “until the grave.” Dr. Holly Brower, you were vital to focusing my argument and forcing me to make my words coherent.

Thank you to all the people who edited, listened, and encouraged, in particular Dr. Llewellyn, Kaitlin Dunnevant, and Adiel Suarez-Murias. Adiel, I could not imagine walking this MA journey with anyone else. Thank you to my husband, Daniel Ballard, who suffered through “living in different worlds” for two years; you are amazing. To all of my friends and family, who through phone calls, texts, and Facebook gave me the boost I needed to make it happen. Lastly, to Vendula Lensmith for “living in the truth;” if you had not introduced me to Havel, I may have never found this path to travel.

Havel wrote, “The role of the writer is not simply to arrange Being according to his own lights; he must also serve as a medium to Being and remain open to its often unfathomable dictates. This is the only way the work can transcend its creator and radiate its meaning.” This has become my charge, to be a medium of Being, open to its often unfathomable dictates. My prayer is that in this pursuit I bring honor and glory to the One who created Being.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	v
Chapter 1- Introduction and Literature Review: Distinguishing Leadership as Rhetorical Action	1
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	4
Leadership and Language Concepts	6
Application of Major Concepts	10
Critiques of the Major Concepts	12
Summary and Conclusions	17
Chapter 2- Rhetorical Theory: McGee’s Search for “The People” as a Rhetorical Theory of Leadership	21
Introduction	21
The Follower: “The People”	27
The Leader: “The Advocate”	31
The Message: “The Myth”	34
The Context: “The Process”	36
Conclusion	38
Chapter 3- Case Study: <i>The Power of the Powerless</i> as Rhetorical Action and Leadership Emergence	40
Introduction	40
Václav Havel and <i>The Power of the Powerless</i>	41
Rationale for this Case Study	44
Context	49
The Four Stages	50
Gestation	50
Experimentation	51
Fruition	53
Dissolution	57
Havel Acknowledges Context	58
Leader	61
Message	64
Defining and Naming	65
Narratives	68
Competing Myths	72

The Old Myth	74
The New Myth	76
The Minor Myths	77
The Competing Myths	80
Followers	82
Invitation to Co-Construct	82
Co-Constructing	85
Chapter 4- Discussion:	
Rhetoric as a Valuable Lens for Leadership	91
Introduction	91
Study Conclusions	92
Message vs. Leader	93
Leader and Followers	96
Competing Myths and Context	97
The Interaction Effect	100
Limitations and Further Research	103
Implications	104
References	111
Curriculum Vitae	117

ABSTRACT

Leadership studies gravitate toward a leader-centric, behavioral approach. This thesis argues that shifting to a rhetorical perspective of leadership provides a more inclusive look at leadership as a process involving leader, follower, message, and context. When these components align a fuller understanding grounded in rhetorical action results. The four components were derived from McGee's notions about "the people," how audiences come to exist, and applied to Havel's text *The Power of the Powerless*. Havel's text reveals his implicit theory of rhetoric that enhances McGee's original theoretic contribution. The thesis concludes that leadership is an interaction imbedded in rhetoric, and argues that a rhetorical theory of leadership broadens the spectrum in which leadership is studied and practiced.

Key Terms: rhetoric, leadership, *The Power of the Powerless*, Václav Havel, myth, co-creation of meaning, movements, Michael McGee, rhetorical action

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND DISTINGUISHING LEADERSHIP AS
RHETORICAL ACTION

*"One can always find in the behavior of power a reflection of what is going on "below."
No one can govern in a vacuum. The exercise of power is determined by thousands of
interactions between the world of the powerful and that of the powerless, all the more so
because these worlds are never divided by a sharp line: everyone has a small part of
himself in both." – Václav Havel¹*

Introduction

Leadership literature and definitions of leadership have proliferated over the past several decades.² Ford, Harding, and Learmonth argue that leadership is a product that “has been brought into being through the very repetition of the word, that is, the performative effect of the repeated representations of the word in the huge number of texts published on leadership.”³ Their argument is premised on viewing language as an active force in society as opposed to being “neutral,” on the fact that each person will interpret texts differently, and on the notion that what becomes acceptable knowledge can only come through discourse.⁴ In Ford et al.’s book *Leadership as Identity*, they seek to offer a critical, post-structuralist perspective on leadership that describes how the “identity of ‘the leader’ is constructed” in “mainstream” theories that focus on “the

¹ Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvězda*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Knopf, 1990): 182.

² J. Ford, N. Harding, and M. Learmonth. *Leadership as Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 9.; James MacGregor Burns, “The Crisis of Leadership,” in T. Wren. *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*, (New York: The Free Press, 1995): 9.; Cronin, Genovese, Cuilla, Riggio, and Kellerman, “The State of Leadership Studies,” (panel at the annual International Leadership Association Conference, Boston, MA, October 27-30, 2010).

³ Ford, Harding, and Learmonth, *Leadership as Identity*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid*, 5-6.

production of competencies or sets of behaviours [*sic*],” and they give a critique that offers leaders the opportunity to reflect on how this linguistic construction changes them as individual leaders as well as altering the way they relate to their organizations.

One of the major distinctions that Ford et al. are creating is that language and discourse are the source of a phenomenon such as leadership, rather than assuming these types of human experience exist in an innate state. Ford et al. use this knowledge to re-conceptualize how leaders construct their understanding of the role through the demarcations of the concept’s successes and failures. However, their argument has implications beyond those that their book explores. If the way leadership is talked about shapes how the role of leader is materialized, and thus raises the question who is a leader, then conversations that ensue between individuals negotiating for leadership must also shape that interaction, raising the question what is leadership.

From the perspective of a rhetorical critic, the discussion of how language creates leadership is very interesting. A rhetorical perspective assumes that humans are symbol-using creatures, predominately through language, and that these symbols allow humans to define and make sense of their reality while providing the tools to build connections with other human beings; Burke’s describes man as “the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal.”⁵ Burke’s definition of man places symbolic production at the center of human existence, while noting the ambiguity that is inherent in using symbols (i.e., “symbol-misusing”). By these connections a social reality is co-created that not only provides meaning and understanding of the world, but which is also the thread that knits all human beings together. This perspective views language as more than its function to

⁵ Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* ed. Joseph Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 70.

label and define ideas, but as the way in which humans co-exist. Ford et al. argue that language asserts how a role like “leader” comes to be, but a rhetorical perspective adds that communication is the substance that allows humans to act collectively in human processes. In addition, language is predicated on action.⁶ Therefore, when the exchange of symbols, a message, between two or more people works to achieve a common purpose, I believe this to be “rhetorical action,” as opposed to “symbolic action” which can be displayed by a single person. In this thesis, I am seeking to understand this critical, rhetorical perspective as it relates to leadership. My aim is to demonstrate the following concept: leadership occurs when individuals acting in the role of leader or follower co-create a message, resulting in rhetorical action.

There are numerous implications of my aim that require further study, but the centerpiece of my argument is an emphasis on leadership interaction. Looking at interaction shifts the research focus from person-centered to message-centered. This reimagining views leadership⁷ as a communicative process contingent on the cooperation of all parties involved and the context in which the message occurs, rather than seeing it as the behaviors and actions of individuals. Rhetoric becomes a necessary tool for explaining and describing this process. To demonstrate this idea I will apply categories I have drawn from Michael McGee’s article “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative” as a rhetorical tool for re-conceptualizing leadership in Václav Havel’s *The*

⁶ Simon Kelly, “Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?” *Human Relations* 61, no. 6 (2008): 775.

⁷ Note: This is not to propose a definition *per se*; I have not chosen a particular definition of leadership for this research. I felt choosing one definition would be restricting as many of the existing leadership definitions are centered on what the leader is doing. Furthermore, there is an overwhelming amount of definitions. In 1978, Burns counted 130 active definitions (9), there are even more today (Cronin et al.). The lack of adopting a definition favors asking “how leadership occurs.”

Power of the Powerless as a dynamic, rhetorical process among leader, follower, message, and context.

Review of Literature

In addition to the argument presented by Ford et al., there are numerous indicators in the existing literature as to why a rhetorical perspective on leadership could be useful and additive. First, communication in leadership is often “taken for granted” and its purpose reduced to merely an exchange of information.⁸ Ashman and Lawler observe that when poor communication exists, the reaction is often “to communicate more or communicate better, with no sense that perhaps the root cause of the problem is a failure to grasp what communication truly entails.”⁹ Communication is not merely a means to an end, a crude tool, but communication is part of the essence of being human, and therefore an extremely rich phenomenon to study.

Secondly, leaders and followers are often studied as discrete parts, without recognition of the communication that binds their interaction together. The theoretical beginnings of leadership studies are rooted in the Trait Approach or Great Man Theory, an argument that leadership exists because specific individuals are born with innate skills that predispose them to becoming leaders.¹⁰ Throughout the years this perspective has evolved, and the more recent theories advocate that leadership can be learned and has a relational component. Coinciding with this shift is the budding study of “followers.” For example, Kellerman argues that one of the major failings of the leadership industry is that

⁸ Ian Ashman and John Lawler, “Existential Communication and Leadership,” *Leadership* 4, no. 3 (2008): 254.

⁹ *Ibid*, 254.

¹⁰ Peter Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (California: Sage Publications, 2009), 15-24.

it has failed to recognize the role of the follower.¹¹ However, despite any shifts toward a multi-dimensional view of leadership, one trend seems to remain—leadership is predominately viewed through the lens of individual roles, most often through leaders’ behavior, rather than as an overarching process rooted in communication.

Lastly, there are few theories that address context. Ford and Lawler explain, “one of the factors frequently omitted from studies of leadership is a consideration of the potential significance of the context within leadership and management.”¹² Morrell feels even more strongly, “many contemporary accounts of leadership divorce the study of the leader from study of the context.”¹³ Context is not just a literal space; if we believe communication creates realities, then these social realities also provide context for human experience. Therefore, when considering context and its relationship to leadership, we must consider how physical, historical, and social contexts all work to define the phenomenon.

Studying leadership as a synergistic interaction among leader, follower, message, and context imbued with a symbolic, rhetorical nature has the potential to fill the gaps in the literature and in doing so positions rhetorical scholars as ideal candidates for conducting this research. Some scholars have already laid the groundwork for this topic. The existing literature tends to revolve around language, as language is the communicative tool primarily at work in this interaction. This literature is often termed studies in leadership and language. However, I would argue that most of these efforts are

¹¹ Barbara Kellerman, “End of Leadership: At Least as we Know It,” *Leadership Excellence* (July 2012): 8; Barbara Kellerman, “Leader-Centrism,” *Leadership Excellence* 25, no.3 (March 2008): 5.

¹² Ford and Lawler, “Blending Existentialist and Constructionist Approaches in Leadership Studies: An Exploratory Account,” 411.

¹³ Kevin Morrell, “Leadership, Rhetoric, and Formalist Literary Theory.” *Journal of Leadership Studies* 3, no. 4 (2010): 87.

really about *leaders* and language. I am not alone in this critique, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. The purpose of my literature review is to introduce three aspects of the existing conversation: major concepts and scholars seeking to characterize leadership and language, examples of scholars who have practically applied the major concepts discussed in the previous section, and critiques offered by scholars who argue these major concepts have shortcomings. By analyzing the literature on this topic through these three perspectives it becomes clear how this conversation has evolved, and ultimately how it is open to and primed for new, rhetorical perspectives.

Leadership and Language Concepts

In response to a conference, an assemblage of scholars put together a book entitled *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go?*, discussing the state of leadership studies and how that state limited researchers' ability to fully conceptualize leadership. One chapter of this book, contributed by Louis Pondy, introduces leadership as a "language-game."¹⁴ He borrows this term from Wittgenstein to describe language as a metaphor about leadership as well as to explain the complex state in which leadership arises due to the "multiplicity" of meanings created by language.¹⁵ Pondy's work, although surely not the only seminal piece on language and leadership, is foundational in opening up the conversation about the relationship between these two areas of study. Pondy views communication as more than transactional, the exchange of information, but rather as a sophisticated communicative process.

¹⁴ Louis Pondy, "Leadership is a Language Game," in *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go*, eds. Morgan McCall and Michael Lombardo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978): 87-99.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 95.

Weick, who also contributed to *Where Else Can We Go?*, describes the process of how leaders use language as “sensemaking.”¹⁶ Weick, Stuccliff, and Obstfeld explain, “sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing.”¹⁷ Weick et al. present ways to practice sensemaking based on the underlying assumption that using words, texts, language, culminates in forward action and ultimately creates meaning.¹⁸ Weick et al.’s primary goal was to deepen the way organizational experience is understood which sets them apart from the authors that focus on individuals. Weick, Pondy, and others who contributed to this groundbreaking conference in the 1970s were instrumental in moving communication into a more prominent role within the leadership context. Their perspective demonstrates that the employment of language is for creating new meaning while making sense of existing meaning.

Only a few years later, Smircich and Morgan developed their own concept that also explores “meaning” as the essence of leadership action. Their perspective is not just concerned with the creation or deciphering of language like Pondy and Weick et al., but rather with the way individuals organize that language. They state that leaders are those who can “structure experience in meaningful ways.”¹⁹ They place particular emphasis on the action of defining. Their central theme claims that leadership is not just about using the “right” words in a compelling manner, but also that leading is about structuring reality in a way that connects people to intangible ideas and experiences. They call

¹⁶ Karl Weick, “The Spines of Leaders,” in *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go*, eds. Morgan McCall and Michael Lombardo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978): 37.

¹⁷ Karl Weick, Kathleen Sutcliffe, & David Obstfeld, “Organizing and Process of Sensemaking,” *Organization Science* 16, no. 4 (2005): 409.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 409.

¹⁹ Linda Smircich and Gareth Morgan, “Leadership: The Management of Meaning,” *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences* 18, no. 3 (1982): 258.

defining and structuring those realities the “management of meaning,” and they posit that ultimately those who successfully manage meaning become effective leaders.

These three descriptions of leaders’ relationship to language—language-games, sensemaking, and management of meaning—remained the major works on this topic for many years. The next major contributions came from Fairhurst and Sarr and Conger. Similar to Smircich and Morgan, Fairhurst and Sarr seek to explain the leader’s responsibility being the one that defines these realities for others, the factor that distinguishes a leader from other individuals. They argue, “we assume a leadership role, indeed we become leaders, through our ability to decipher and communicate meaning out of complex and confusing situations. Our communications actually do the work of leadership; our talk is the resource we use to get others to act.”²⁰ They cite communication as “do[ing] the work,” while attributing the act of communicating to the leader. This description of the leader’s work is setting the reader up for Fairhurst and Sarr’s major contribution: framing. They define framing by explaining, “to determine the meaning of a subject is to make sense of it, to judge its character and significance. To hold the frame of a subject is to choose one particular meaning (or set of meanings) over another.”²¹ In essence, a leader “frames” realities for others by choosing a specific structure or lens for viewing experiences. Fairhurst and Sarr’s argument seems to integrate the earlier concepts from Pondy, Weick et al., and Smircich and Morgan, but ties the ideas up into one neat package: framing.

Conger also advocates a framing perspective on leaders’ language, but argues that the “language of leadership” is a two-step process that begins with framing, and ends

²⁰ Gail Fairhurst and Robert Sarr, *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996): 2.

²¹ *Ibid*, 3.

with “a process of ‘rhetorical crafting,’” in which a leader uses rhetorical techniques to increase the emotional and psychological investment of the listener.²² Conger’s work is additive to Fairhurst and Sarr, as he recognizes that framing is not sufficient in fully describing how communication in leadership occurs, and that the manner in which ideas are presented has communicative power as well.²³ He explains:

the style of verbal communications is a critical distinguishing factor in whether the message will be remembered or endorsed. This is where the art of rhetoric enters the language of leadership ... A leader’s words often assume their greatest impact as symbols rather than as literal meanings.²⁴

In this approach, Conger’s specific goal is to help business leaders become more effective at leading and to do so he recommends rhetorical techniques such as speaking in metaphors, having linguistic rhythm, and creating identification with the followers.²⁵

These are some of the major authors who were able to describe how language relates to leadership. They demonstrate that communication within leadership is more than practical application for instruction, and that language is infused with multiple meanings that can be shaped for different purposes (hence the need for framing, sensemaking, language-games). The major concepts discussed in this section have been integral in drawing scholars’ attention to communication as a central aspect in leading, and although each concept uses different terminology they all define ways leaders use language. There is no evidence that the concepts have ever been consolidated into a cohesive whole, but they have provided future scholars with ways to define and

²² Jay Conger, “Inspiring Others: The Language of Leadership,” *The Executive* 5, no. 1 (1991): 32.

²³ *Ibid*, 38.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 38-42.

conceptualize the leadership process. The following literature contains two examples of how scholars have applied these specific ideas about language and leadership.

Application of Major Concepts

The exploratory works on leadership and language, such as those by Fairhurst and Sarr, Smircich and Morgan, and others, have become fruitful in the sense that many others have used their ideas to build a specific lens for looking at leader communication. For example, Brower, Fiol, and Emrich begin their research by reviewing Fairhurst and Sarr, but go on to explain that the literature on leadership language is “scattered through multiple disciplines and lacks a unifying framework.”²⁶ They work to clarify the literature and package it into a useful system of knowledge by synthesizing various theories and presenting them into new categories for applied leadership communication. Their approach presupposes that leadership is a “language game,” and that there are appropriate times for language that builds up and language that breaks down.²⁷ For example, they suggest “positive image-based language” is a useful technique for building commitment.²⁸ This type of analysis can be immensely useful, especially for practitioners who are looking for specific ways to digest the complexity of communication. The work of Brower et al. is an example of creating new language to make the existing theory more practical. However, other scholars find ways to apply the theories on language and leadership by reaching into traditional disciplines.

Kathryn Olson is a noteworthy author who uses rhetorical theory from as far back as Aristotle’s proofs to promote the idea of “rhetorical leadership.” Olson draws heavily

²⁶ Holly Brower, C. Marlene Fiol, and Cynthia Emrich, “The Language of Leaders,” *Journal of Leadership Studies* 1, no. 3 (2007): 67.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 72.

on Smircich and Morgan as well as Fairhurst and Sarr in justifying the rhetorical approach to leadership. These two sources provide powerful underpinning for the rhetorical argument because both sets of authors advocate the use of meaning-making and framing as the central components of leading. In essence, these activities are the role of the rhetorician. Olson concludes, “a rhetorical education actively resists dogmatism and ‘coercion through a liberalization of the mind’ that coaches potential leaders to critically and continually entertain and evaluate all sides before settling on one.”²⁹ In the current cultural climate of the U.S., in which formalized leadership is becoming decentralized, allowing for more cases of emergent and persuasive leaders, the “leader” is defined by “framing and defining” the reality of others.³⁰ Olson explains that rhetoric becomes the specific tool for fulfilling the leader’s role.³¹

Olson’s efforts are noteworthy in promoting the overlap of rhetoric and leadership. However, by framing her ideas as “rhetorical leadership” and presenting these ideas as tools for leaders to pick up and put down when they deem it appropriate, she may not be describing leadership fully as process, communication as constituent but not constant. As a result, it would be easy to maneuver “rhetorical leadership” under the umbrella of leaders’ actions and behaviors, rather than focusing on rhetoric as part of the larger context. This view of leadership then becomes a “type” of leadership, and can be

²⁹ Kathryn Olson, “What is Rhetorical Leadership?: My Perspective” (statement, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2011), 2.

³⁰ Kathryn Olson, “Rhetorical Leadership and Transferable Lessons for Successful Social Advocacy in Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 44 (2007): 91. Note: Olson is drawing from Smircich and Morgan’s notion of framing and defining.

³¹ *Ibid*, 92.

classified among the many competing “types” of leadership (i.e., Transformational, Servant, LMX),³² or is reduced to a tool for analyzing leadership.

Both Brower et al. and Olson have expanded the literature on language and leadership by finding different ways to apply the existing concepts as well as by offering new approaches that can be integrated into practical use and research. As in all research, there are limits to what these perspectives can offer. Both of these perspectives, similarly to their theoretical roots, place their emphasis on leader communication. There is an implied presence of followers and context, such as when Olson attempts to empower lay people to become emergent leaders and when she acknowledges that the process “only succeeds when the definition of reality offered by the leader is also ‘sensible to the led’,”³³ but little is offered to fully illuminate how followers and context fit into the process. The literature on this topic does not fully depict communication as co-construction between leaders and followers affected by context.

Critiques of the Major Concepts

The tendency to focus on leader communication instead of leadership process has not gone uncriticized. In particular, leadership scholarship’s elevation of the leader functionally undercuts the role of the follower but also limits the understanding of language and context. Leaders are ultimately limited in what they can accomplish (i.e., limits on their own abilities, organizational restraints), and as such it does not make sense

³² James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulista Press, 1991); George Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level, multi-domain perspective,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no.2 (1995): 219-247.

³³ Smircich & Morgan in Olson, “What is Rhetorical Leadership?,” 3.

to view leadership from only this perspective.³⁴ There are several authors who communicate why the existing approaches are problematic. It is within these critiques that my original thesis begins to take shape.

Gemmill and Oakley believe leadership to be an ideology created by society to subjugate others. At the core of their argument is the belief that leadership is based on implicit authority – essentially an unconscious ideology of hierarchy.³⁵ In their view, leaders become the emotional and intellectual source for followers, and through that dependence, leaders coerce followers to do and think as the leaders instruct.³⁶ Gemmill and Oakley’s purpose is to expose the negative side of leadership, which causes what they call “learned helplessness,” a symptom of the leader continually defining the reality of others.³⁷

Ford and Lawler’s critique of leadership is much softer than Gemmill and Oakley’s; however, they also question the view of the follower perpetuated in popular theories. Specifically, they chide Smircich and Morgan’s treatment of the follower as a “childlike dependency . . . a process whereby followers give up their mindfulness to a leader or to leadership.”³⁸ Regardless of the original authors’ intentions, there is a significant gap in describing the role the follower. Smircich and Morgan’s argument that leaders shape experiences for the led makes sense until put under scrutiny by Ford and

³⁴ Jeffrey Pfeffer, “The Ambiguity of Leadership,” *The Academy of Management Review* 2, no. 1 (1977): 106.

³⁵ Gary Gemmill and Judith Oakley, “Leadership: An Alienating Social Myth,” *Human Relations* 45, no. 2 (1992): 113.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 115. Note: Gemmill and Oakley’s argument is derived from a Marxist perspective which sheds light on why they approach leadership this way.

³⁸ Ford and Lawler, “Blending Existentialist and Constructionist Approaches in Leadership Studies: An Exploratory Account,” *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal* 28, no. 5 (2007): 418.

Lawler. They offer a corrective, showing how adopting certain frameworks about leadership patronizes whole groups of people.

Ian and Lawler make a compelling argument that begins explaining why a paradigm shift concerning followers is necessary:

“Followers” cannot be viewed as homogeneous because every relationship is, like every individual, unique, and therefore, different. While there are some relational models of leadership such as Leader-Member Exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) these still do not account for specific individual relations, or for the unique contexts within which they operate.³⁹

What Ian and Lawler suggest here is that the leadership process is contingent on both a collaborative relationship and the context in which the relationship occurs. Recognizing that the leader is not the sole component to the leadership process is the first piece in exploring the co-constructive aspect of leadership. What Ian and Lawler present as the second component to a paradigm shift, the context, is the next piece necessary for re-conceptualizing the leadership process.

One of the possible inhibitors to considering context is the tendency to root leadership knowledge in typologies. Gibbs, who looks at leadership through an existentialist lens, explains, “the typing of the individual within rationalist leadership” (which he terms scientific and sociological leadership studies) inhibits authenticity. Without characteristics like authenticity, leadership is viewed as a “process of experiences” void of the uniqueness resulting from human choice.⁴⁰ Furthermore he explains how “meaning” is deprived of its richness as “[w]e see in sociological leadership

³⁹Ashman & Lawler, “Existential Communication and Leadership,” 258.

⁴⁰ Stephen Gibbs, “Leadership and Existentialism: Building a Groundwork,” in *University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium* (2010): 5.

studies ... the need for leaders to manage meaning, as if meaning is a commodity that is put on like work clothes.”⁴¹ Limiting leadership to “types” and viewing meaning as a commodity restrict the way in which the leadership phenomenon can be applied and understood.⁴²

Gibbs is not alone in criticizing typologies of leadership. Fairhurst offers an overview of how leadership research is typically categorized when she states, “leadership psychologists essentialize leadership, locating it in the person (e.g. trait theories), the situation (e.g. situational theories), or person and situation combinations (e.g. contingency theories, such as when a strong leader and crisis coincide) [*sic*].”⁴³ These perspectives do not easily account for “variability” and there may be benefits to offering “less about a new take on what leaders do or offering up new methods ... and much more about leadership ontology and epistemology.”⁴⁴ Fairhurst’s suggestion that leadership should be studied from a foundational, philosophical perspective raises questions about what is the root of leadership knowledge and experience. One scholar, Kelly, goes as far as to suggest, “there is no unique content to the construct of leadership that is not subsumed under other, more general modes of behavior.”⁴⁵ Kelly is arguing that leadership should only be studied as a subcomponent of a larger phenomenon.

Perhaps one of the reasons Kelly endorses the notion that leadership is couched in a larger phenomenon is because it is so dependent on human communication, one of the most “general modes of behavior” in human experience. Fairhurst and Grant, in

⁴¹ Ibid, 13.

⁴² Kelly, “Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?” 773-774.

⁴³ Gail Fairhurst, “Considering Context in Discursive Leadership Research,” *Human Relations* 62 (2009): 1608.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1608.

⁴⁵ Bobby Calder as paraphrased by Pfeffer, “The Ambiguity,” 105.

presenting the social constructionist perspective, explains, “leadership is co-constructed, a product of sociohistorical and collective meaning making, and negotiated on an ongoing basis through a complex, interplay among leadership actors, be they designated or emergent leaders, managers, and/or followers.”⁴⁶ The process of “co-construction” situates communication as the “central” component of leadership action.⁴⁷ Additionally, Wittgenstein’s philosophy introduced the idea of language as a game. Kelly expands on Pondy and Wittgenstein’s original concepts by emphasizing leadership as such a game, “a form of life,” and as a result there is a “multiplicity of games in play at any one time.”⁴⁸ This point further emphasizes the danger of rooting leadership research in any singular perspective. Leadership is a complex interchange between multiple people, participating in multiple conversations at one time. Hence, leadership as a co-constructed reality – not a reality induced by one person.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge that this argument is largely described already by Fairhurst and Grant. They establish:

1. their approach rejects the “leader-centric” approach and gives followers credit to “make sense of and evaluate their organizational experiences,”
2. that it is a communication process, resulting from the interactions of “social actors,”
3. and that leadership is so situational that it is up for interpretation, “not issues that can be decided by objective criteria.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gail Fairhurst and David Grant, “The Social Construction of Leadership: A Sailing Guide,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 24 (2010): 172.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 173.

⁴⁸ Kelly, “Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?,” 768.

⁴⁹ Fairhurst and Grant, “The Social Construction,” 175.

However, my argument begins to depart from Fairhurst and Grant's when they conclude that leadership as a concept may not even be necessary. I disagree, because "leadership" may (or may not) only exist as humanity has spoken it into existence,⁵⁰ but it has become at the least a mantra in society.⁵¹ It is a phenomenon that is acted out by humans in daily life, therefore it retains value and is worthy of research. Kelly, who disagrees with Fairhurst and Grant's dismissal of any empirical approach to understanding leadership, states that what is needed is "an interpretative approach that is sensitive to the production of and relationship between language-games."⁵² Instead of dismissing leadership or even dismissing the leader-centric perspectives introduced at the beginning of this review, I believe a rhetorical lens applied to the entire process as a guiding principle can fill the gap in the literature as stated by Kelly and address the problems presented in this section: leader-centric language, restricted view of context, behavior-focused typologies, and the simplification of "meaning." Rhetoric is about the co-constructed, symbolic nature of reality which offers a lens that transcends these problems by its very nature (e.g., rhetoric must acknowledge both speaker and audience, rhetoric offers insight on context as a social reality). Additionally, Fairhurst asserts that "leadership as one or more 'forms of life' must be explored from the perspective of those who would use or assign such a term."⁵³ Who is better equipped to conduct this exploration than those who cherish the use of language most highly: rhetoricians and communication scholars?

⁵⁰ J. Ford, N. Harding, and M. Learmonth. *Leadership as Identity*.

⁵¹ Kellerman, "End of Leadership: At Least As We Know It," 8.

⁵² Kelly, "Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?," 779.

⁵³ Fairhurst, "Considering Context," 1616.

Summary and Conclusions

Communication's relationship to leadership is widely discussed in varying depths. However, the most consistent pattern is the tendency to return to the leader in defining and understanding the context of communication within leadership. As a result of this inclination, communication is limited; it becomes an extension or a behavior of leadership rather than a defining principle. The literature also reveals that defining leadership as a behavior has its limits. In contrast, conceptualizing leadership as a communicative process with multiple components and not as individual action opens up an entirely different way of assigning meaning to leadership activities.

The large majority of scholars who discuss the language of leadership acknowledge the reality-shaping nature of communication, which implies multiple actors creating shared meaning. Furthermore, scholars recognize (however weakly) the participation of "followers" in the leadership process. Communication, therefore, as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, becomes the emulsifier holding the particles of leader and follower together – this lens does not just elevate communication as a tool, but places it as a central entity. Communication, which occurs through the transmission of messages, is a far less limiting way to view leadership. With this said, this argument is not an attempt to undercut the value of discussing how leaders use language, or to imply that leaders are not an important factor in how leadership occurs. What this research is doing is suggesting the bond that holds leadership together is often undervalued, creating a myopic environment. However, defining leadership in terms of the message rather than the individual makes intellectual space for my original thesis: leadership occurs when

individuals acting in the role of leader or follower co-create a message resulting in rhetorical action.

This argument views leaders and followers as individuals who are defined by their rhetorical environment/reality (i.e., background, beliefs, lifestyle) and who engage in a message which creates a new reality through their collective action. My main concern in this thesis is constructing a framework for the components of this argument. In establishing leadership as rhetorical, this research opens up future research about how leadership and communication are fundamentally linked in human nature as well as fulfilling the challenge to explore leadership as the “production of and relationship between language-games.”⁵⁴ To accomplish these goals, the application of established rhetorical theory becomes the ultimate tool of this research. In Chapter 2, I introduce a rhetorical theory by Michael McGee that I think is useful for creating a framework for rhetorical action that will assist in explain the relationship between rhetoric and leadership. I then apply this theory by analyzing a case study of leadership activity in Chapter 3. This study is helpful in understanding how language, in this case a particular text, allows individuals to become leaders and followers, ultimately demonstrating that it is the message that perpetuates the leadership context. Finally, in Chapter 4, I suggest potential implications of this type of application for both rhetoric and leadership.

The purpose of this thesis is one of “distinguishing:”

A language distinction creates a new way of understanding – a new lens, new frame of reference for “seeing” the world we live in. Distinctions are critical because they are the portal to “what we don’t know we don’t know.” In the act of

⁵⁴ Kelly, “Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?,” 779.

distinguishing, we reveal obstacles (e.g., invalid assumptions, outmoded beliefs) we can remove and, in so doing, make space for more effective leadership.⁵⁵

Both the act of distinguishing and the deciphering of messages, in this case messages that create leadership, seem to be activities well suited to rhetorical scholars who understand how language exists and perpetuates itself. Through this rhetorical lens obstacles may be discovered that need removal to make way for better leadership, and rhetoric may find leadership to be an important aspect of its own study.

⁵⁵ Chip Souba, "Perspective: The Language of Leadership," *Academic Medicine* 85, no. 10 (2010): 1613.

CHAPTER 2: MCGEE'S SEARCH FOR 'THE PEOPLE' AS A RHETORICAL THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

Introduction

Why a rhetorical lens? Chapter 1 began answering this question by describing the vital role of communication in creating the social reality of leadership. Chapter 1 also claimed that rhetoricians are best suited to discuss matters of language and persuasion, and for this study to propel the conversation forward, rhetoric must transcend the position of a useful tool to a position as a core component of the leadership interaction. Without this move, a socio-communicative perspective of leadership will never emerge. This chapter will focus on one rhetorical lens, offered by Michael McGee, to situate rhetoric as a core component of leadership interaction.

The only way for human beings to connect with the world is through the use of symbols.⁵⁶ A symbol could be defined as “something that induces you to think about something other than itself – and everything has that potential.”⁵⁷ Therefore, any attempt to decipher how to interact with the world requires an understanding of how meaning is created through symbols. Symbols are the building blocks of language, and therefore also the foundation of rhetoric. In today's culture, rhetoric is often dismissed as superfluous, flowery language.⁵⁸ This is a narrow view of rhetoric. If symbols are the building blocks of society and culture, and if symbols are representations of things, then it becomes a natural function to negotiate the meaning of these symbols. This negotiation is accomplished through rhetoric. Everyday life within human cultures is embedded with symbolic decisions as simple as a choice of clothing or as complex as the act of becoming

⁵⁶ Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 70.

⁵⁷ Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 2006: 8.

⁵⁸ Thomas Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993): 2.

president. Furthermore, these choices are always made in conjunction with the choices of others, resulting in rhetorical action—a symbolic exchange between people. Rhetoric is therefore “always about culture, about the role of discourse in the materiality of human life.”⁵⁹ Leadership is a prominent function of cultures; it is one “materiality of human life,” which means that rhetoric has a place in constituting the discourse of leadership.

Individuals who are interested in engaging leadership benefit from considering the social-communicative reality in which humans live, as language is the proverbial stone being tossed into the pond of human experience and interaction, causing a ripple effect. Leadership as a form of discourse will be consistently shaped by multiple voices at one time. A ripple effect created from the “stone” of communication illustrates the point that leaders cannot act in isolation. When leaders use symbols as a function of leading, that act is always in tandem and overlapping with the ripples of others. They cannot control the full effect of their own ripples any more than the ripples made by others. A leader’s impact is determined by which pond and how large a stone is thrown.

Once rhetoric is acknowledged as an appropriate lens for imagining leadership interaction, we can begin exploring what rhetoric can teach us about leadership. Rhetorical scholar Michael McGee writes, “rhetoricians have long recognized that authority is an attribution, the gift of an audience and not a property of the speaker or the speech.”⁶⁰ Although McGee is not talking about leadership directly, his assessment is valuable in understanding the rhetorical nature of leadership. Regardless of whether a leader seeks to be a servant or a dictator, there is still implicitly a bid for authority in

⁵⁹ Carol Corbin, “Bridging Rhetoric and Cultural Studies: Michael Calvin McGee: 1943-2002,” *Topia* 9 (2003): 97.

⁶⁰ Michael McGee, “Public Knowledge and Ideological Argumentation,” *Communication Monographs* 50 (1983): 50.

moving toward this position. An individual may behave like a leader, but without the investment (the gift) of the listener, these behaviors have no power. Furthermore, a classical view of rhetoric requires rhetorical competence—Farrell explains that this competence requires responsibility from the “advocates and audiences of civic life.”⁶¹ The “gift” is not static, but one of mutual participation. McGee’s “gift of an audience” is one path to a rhetorical lens for leadership.

One of the topics McGee often discusses in his research is social movements. Leadership and social movements have much in common. McGee roughly defines social movements as “collective behavior;” however, he argues that social scientists often misperceive how this behavior occurs.⁶² Collective behavior is similar whether in the context of social movements or leadership. At one point McGee refers to movements as “symbolic transformation” and indicates that this transformation is related to “re-nam[ing]” and “re-defin[ing],”⁶³ much like leadership involves framing, management of meaning, and like concepts. Any movement of people is inextricably linked to how symbols are exchanged and recreated. McGee argues that movements are not phenomena but are meaning.⁶⁴ This shift in perspective changes how rhetoric within movements is studied because the focus moves from “rhetoric of” to “rhetorical theories of”:

We may do some strategic renaming, but by and large I believe that studies emphasizing a “rhetoric of” or “strategies and tactics of” approach to social movement potentially contribute only to the training of revolutionary cadres – a contribution which I applaud politically but must disdain academically. But I

⁶¹ Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 10.

⁶² Michael McGee, “Social Movement; Phenomenon or Meaning?,” *Central States Speech Journal* 31,4 (1980): 237.

⁶³ Michael McGee, “Social Movement as Meaning,” *Central States Speech Journal* 34,1 (1983): 76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

believe that we are more than technicians, that we must be more than technicians if we aspire to create a rhetorical theory of social movements . . . “movement” [is] an ideological state and rhetoric as constitutive or representative of that state. Such an attitude, I suppose, constitutes the “meaning perspective on social movements.”⁶⁵

The most useful aspect of this quotation is the assumed value in exceeding the role of the technician and recognizing the “constitutive” nature of rhetoric. I believe “rhetoric of” versus “rhetorical theories of” changes the emphasis in the conversation. “Rhetorical theories of” removes rhetoric from being merely a side note, it is not just constitutive but the conduit of the entire process. In my review of literature (Chapter 1) it becomes apparent that leadership is often approached similarly to social movements in that scholars see rhetoric/language only as “strategies and tactics.” However, as McGee is suggesting here, to do this is to ignore the fundamental role of rhetoric in creating and sustaining human experience.

McGee’s notion of social movements is helpful in propelling the conversation toward rhetorical theories of leadership rather than rhetoric in leadership or rhetorical leadership. Part of making this distinction is realizing that movements (or leadership) “ought not to be a premise with which we begin research, defining what we want to see and, lo and behold, finding it . . . rather ‘social movement’ ought to be a conclusion.”⁶⁶ Similarly, a rhetorical lens on leadership allows leadership to become the conclusion, forcing the discussion to explore why and how it occurs rather than assuming that it has occurred. For example, this shift would suggest that a discussion about a leader’s

⁶⁵ Ibid, 76-77.

⁶⁶ McGee, “Social Movement: Phenomenon or Meaning?,” 244.

behavior, or even the act of naming someone a leader, would only occur after first evaluating whether leadership is even present. This approach values the exploration of components within the leadership interaction other than the leader.

The argument for a rhetorical lens makes some people uncomfortable, as there is a distrust of rhetoric. This distrust stems from the elevated status of logic in society. However, logic often fails us, and rhetoric steps in to fill the gap when logic wanes (or it may have been a source for “logic” all along).⁶⁷ The perceived problem is that rhetoric “lacks the ‘will to truth,’ conceiving that discourse in praxis is true only as it is powerful and powerful only as it helps make its claims ‘come true’.”⁶⁸ Additionally, rhetoric becomes true through “people’s acquiescence and ratification.”⁶⁹ If we accept the premise that communication creates our social reality, then we have no choice but also to accept the ambiguity of this scenario, the uncertainty of our lives in general. In accepting the ambiguity, McGee’s characterization of people’s belief that rhetoric does not seek truth is less of a concern and merely a consideration when evaluating messages. After all rhetoric presents humans with “new sources of creative reason,”⁷⁰ which constructs bridge to the unknown. These discussions about ambiguity and truth become less esoteric and unnerving when studied through everyday living. It is within the life experience that the search for meaning becomes most relevant.

McGee’s concepts about social movements and rhetoric are meaningful because he is able to apply his ideas to life and society. A former student of McGee explains, “he bridged the distance between rhetorical and cultural studies, showing how the practice of

⁶⁷ McGee, “Public Knowledge...,” 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 55.

⁷⁰

rhetoric is, most important, about the everyday world of culture.”⁷¹ Too often rhetoric is relegated to ancient practices; McGee demonstrates how rhetoric is a consistent aspect of human experience even today. Corbin’s term “everyday world[s] of culture” could be defined as popular culture, which is “those systems or artifacts that most people share and that most people know about.”⁷² Rhetorical scholars are equipped to identify and decipher these “texts of life.” Furthermore, the “struggles over power occur in the creation and reception of texts as much as (or more than) they occur at the ballot box, in the streets, or during revolutions.”⁷³ Texts then, as a source of power, are vital to the perpetuation of society, and as such become important access points to human experience.

This discussion indicates how leadership can be positioned within rhetorical theory. First, people are moved by symbolic exchange; therefore if leadership, which requires movement/action, is to occur, so too must a system of symbols. Second, focusing on developing a rhetorical theory of leadership rather than rhetorical tactics allows leadership to be a “conclusion” of the research rather than an assumption. Lastly, rhetoric is an excellent tool for studying culture or human experience, and texts are often the most revealing artifact of those cultures. Leadership, as an aspect of all cultures can legitimately be studied through a rhetorical lens by using texts. Bass writes, “leadership is one of the world’s oldest preoccupations⁷⁴ . . . all societies have created myths to provide plausible and acceptable explanations for the dominance of their leaders and the

⁷¹ Corbin, “Bridging Rhetoric...,” 97.

⁷² Brummett, *Popular Culture in Rhetoric*, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 93.

⁷⁴ Bass also writes that as far back as the ancient Egyptians, the words “leadership,” “leader,” and “follower” can be traced in hieroglyphic form.

submission of their subordinates.”⁷⁵ This study seeks to understand the myth before it becomes mythical – when it is still merely a “text.”⁷⁶

In the next chapter I will use a specific text to test the rhetorical lens I am constructing in this chapter. I will continue using McGee⁷⁷ as my analytical tool. Specifically, McGee’s article “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative”⁷⁸ is useful in analyzing my argument. There are numerous rhetorical scholars who could offer insight into a rhetorical theory of leadership; however, McGee’s conceptualization of “the people” is an excellent starting point. His discussion in this piece is easily divided into four main components, which ultimately reflect the pieces necessary for envisioning leadership as co-constructed rhetorical action: the follower, the leader, the message, and the context. Although I will focus on describing how McGee defines each of these components in this chapter, the most insightful aspect of this research is in seeking out how McGee’s concepts work in conjunction to actualize the leadership process. I will discuss the synergy of McGee’s concepts in the final chapter.

The Follower: “The People”

McGee begins his article “In Search of the ‘The People’” by elucidating assumptions about “collective groups” that are often perpetuated among social theorists

⁷⁵ Bernard Bass, “Concepts of Leadership” in *Bass and Stogdill’s Handbook of Leadership*, ed. B. Bass. (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 3.

⁷⁶ Note: This is not to say that myths in the “mythical” sense are not vital or interesting texts, but that for my purposes they are not as relevant.

⁷⁷ Note: It is important to note that McGee is primarily known in rhetoric circles for his discussion of ideology and ideographs. These were not the focus of McGee I have chosen for this analysis, so I have chosen to omit them from this research. In a later work, McGee presents “myth” and “ideology” as related especially with ideographs as the link (“The Ideograph,” 4). In this same article he discusses myths as amoral, from a symbolist perspective, in which myth derives from the symbol-using nature of humans to create a reality within a material reality (“The Ideograph,” 3). This description aligns well with the notions discussed in this thesis, and by integrating “ideology” and “ideograph” it would not add clarity to my argument.

⁷⁸ Michael McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61, no. 3 (1975).

and rhetoricians. First, the assumption is often made that “people” are no more than the plural of “person.”⁷⁹ This approach reduces groups of people into statistical, demographic numbers and voids their contributions as unique individuals merging their beliefs and backgrounds. The second and alternative view on the people is when scholars only accept a “one-dimensional” rationalism that separates people into “intellectual elites” and everyone else.⁸⁰ McGee writes, “one might conclude that, with few exceptions, most rhetorical scholarship presupposes a ‘people’ or an ‘audience’ which is either (a) an objective, literal extension of ‘person,’ or (b) a ‘mob’ of individuals whose significance is their gullibility and failure to respond to ‘logical’ argument.”⁸¹ McGee is arguing that limiting “the people” in this way inhibits the relationship between rhetoric and social theory. I believe this view of the audience stems from a speaker-centric understanding of rhetoric and social theory, much like a leader-centric focus within leadership studies. In McGee’s exhortation of the audience, it becomes clear that all audiences hold the potential to become followers. As such, descriptions of the audience reflect characteristics of followers. Followers are no more a collection of unattached individuals than an audience is.

McGee explains that the “only point of agreement” about the audience is that “they are an idea of collective force which transcends both individuality and reason.”⁸² Audiences, or in this context the followers, do not simply exist naturally in the human experience; they must merge into a collective.⁸³ They begin as individuals who come together by finding agreement with the speaker. The result of this transaction is both a

⁷⁹ Ibid, 236.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 237-238.

⁸¹ Ibid, 238.

⁸² Ibid, 238.

⁸³ Ibid, 240.

“social” and “objective” reality.⁸⁴ Individuals enter into the relationship through their personalized experiences (the objective), but then create a shared identity through collective unification (the social). The human relationship to the social and the objective is what distinguishes collective will from the mundane. This relationship establishes the need for the individual to bridge a divide between their individual needs and those of the group. Humans thoughtlessly slip in and out of audiences so often that they are rarely conscious of how they are bridging the gap to the social.

Further, making the distinction between the individual and group experience opens up discussion about how these collective identities come to exist. McGee would argue that each individual has “general propositions” such as beliefs, biases, and experiences that allow for a message formed by a speaker to resonate with that individual.⁸⁵ In fact, there are competing propositions⁸⁶ which force individuals to carefully consider which messages they choose to accept and reject. Essentially, everyone “longs for something,”⁸⁷ something that is yet to be defined. A “people” can exist when a message is presented that fulfills a common longing in a group of individuals. The key factor in this event is the “language” used to materialize the longing, to ignite action toward those propositions.⁸⁸ Therefore, the audience has a rhetorical function⁸⁹ by answering the call put forth by the speaker.

However, because this transaction is only a social reality and therefore only functionally real as long as the narrative exists, continual persuasion is absolutely

⁸⁴ Ibid, 240.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 240.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 246.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 240.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 240.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 238.

necessary to perpetuate the unification of individuals: “‘the people’ are more process than phenomenon. That is, they are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals.”⁹⁰ This quotation is a warning to those who seek to be in the position of the speaker, and is also an acknowledgement of the important role followers play in sustaining any one message. Perhaps, more importantly, McGee alludes to the power of “persons” in the process of creating a social reality. Without the persons forming a “people,” there is nothing left to promote and no action can be taken.

In the most simplified terms, the people (the audience, the followers) are a dynamic part of the rhetorical process because they retain the right to choose. McGee describes the difference between “stable” and “vital” messages. The stable messages are the propositions of the past and the vital messages are the potential messages of the future.⁹¹ With every speaker, people must choose between the stable and the vital. In making a choice, people are then forced to act upon the message one way or another. It is this action that allows the audience to become followers, but to also have significant pull in the actual production of the message:

The advocate [speaker] is a “flag-bearer” for old longings, and by transforming such longings into a new idea, he 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. Once the process is complete, “the people” have an objective existence defined by their collective behavior.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid, 242.

⁹¹ Ibid, 247.

⁹² Ibid, 241.

The idea of the speaker as the flag-bearer who transforms new ideas is the focus in the following section, for this section the important point is that once the audience's "longing" has been "actualized," action is the natural result. Because this action is imbedded in language, it is the manifestation of rhetorical action. Additionally, any non-verbal behavior that results from this "reform" is rhetorical because it is a direct application of the language/the collective will. This action then gives people direct access to power that can be wielded for their collective will. The rhetorical exchange between speaker and audience alludes to the idea that in the end it is the people, the audience, that are the powerbrokers, because without the people's response, the message remains merely an assemblage of words with no force. The speaker may create the environment in which an audience can dwell, but it is the audience's decision to act that creates a new reality – hence the notion of co-construction. The message takes on new life with the audience response.

When substituting speaker for "leader" and audience for "followers," this proposition becomes even more vivid and fully supports the move away from a leader-centric perspective of leadership. McGee's notion gives followers the credit they are due as individuals engaging in a message, and it shifts the emphasis from leaders' action to leaders and followers acting collectively on a message, co-creating. Furthermore, anytime a speaker persuades an audience, catalyzing action, leadership is occurring.

The Leader: "The Advocate"

Despite the important role of the followers, their actions are predicated on an individual producing a message with which they choose to engage. The one who rises to the task of speaking often becomes the leader. McGee also offers some insight into how

the leader emerges through his description of the “advocate.” As already referenced, “the advocate is a ‘flag-bearer’ for old longings, and by transforming such longings into a new idea, he actualizes.”⁹³ By terming the advocate a “flag-bearer,” McGee is acknowledging the forward position of the individual, but clearly not charging the individual with sole authority. The flag-bearer on a battlefield, historically speaking, signals to the soldiers where they should be positioned and whether to keep fighting. The flag-bearer is truly a symbol, which aligns well with the concept of rhetorical functions within leadership.

Advocates become flag-bearers because they “transform,”⁹⁴ “mediate,”⁹⁵ “filter,”⁹⁶ and “redefine.”⁹⁷ McGee explains, “when ‘one [person] stands up as the proclaimer of a general will,’ what he says at the time he originally says it, is a fiction, for it is his personal interpretation of his ‘people’s’ history.”⁹⁸ This statement reinforces the notion that people follow when the message reflects their general propositions and “longing.” In this sense, the advocate is the “proclaimer of the general will” by recognizing what the people want and need to hear.⁹⁹ People then become the audience by accepting the general will as it is interpreted by the advocate. It is important to recognize that the message proclaimed by the advocate will be limited by the advocate’s own general propositions and longings, which is what causes the message to be a “personal interpretation.” The advocate is really no different than the people, and the distinction is only made once the advocate chooses to “redefine” something that has been left ambiguous. Because of the advocate’s personal biases, the message cannot be a

⁹³ Ibid, 241.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 240.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 249.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 249.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 244.

⁹⁸ Hitler as qtd by McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 240.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 241.

“description of reality, but rather a political myth.”¹⁰⁰ I will explore what I believe McGee means by this term in the next section; for the moment, it is most helpful to view the myth as the message first communicated by the advocate that is infused with his or her “personal convictions and opinion.”¹⁰¹

At this point it would be easy to criticize the position of the advocate as one of privilege, since the advocate interprets for the people. However, keep in mind that McGee is suggesting that the advocate “redefines,” which implies that the leader is already subject to preexisting definitions before stepping into the role. The advocate’s own experiences are why he or she can only offer an interpretation, one which followers must choose to accept or reject, to mobilize or discard. Essentially, the advocate exists to ignite the unification of people by establishing “group identity,” but there is a price the advocate must pay to achieve this goal. The advocate can only achieve group identity by transcending “his own individuality,”¹⁰² which is a natural consequence of interpreting the “general” will. The advocate becomes a “mirror of collective forces,” and the final consequence of this action is “the new Leader is himself a kind of fiction, for he wears the magic mask of Kingship, an anonymous face which conceals the powers of the demigod.”¹⁰³ The leader sacrifices his or her own individuality for the sake of the collective, and as result becomes a symbol of the cause, the “flag-bearer.”

Leaders are often described as visionaries, as inspiring, or as having influence.¹⁰⁴ McGee’s description reinforces this conceptualization while supplementing the context in which those characteristics exist. This context contains the role of the “flag-bearer,” and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 241.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 241.

¹⁰² Ibid, 241.

¹⁰³ Frazer as para. by McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 242.

¹⁰⁴ Referencing various definitions or explanations about the leader from Chapter 1.

it acknowledges the sacrifices that must be made. This role calls the leader to continually symbolize, or to remind the people of the myth they are practicing. It also recognizes that without the role of the people, the role of the myth, and the role of the context, the advocate will fail. More importantly, without a myth there is no leader.

The Message: “The Myth”

If the leader is the conduit of the message, then it is the message that holds the most persuasive capacity to form the unified collective. McGee explains that the advocate presents a “new idea,”¹⁰⁵ that results in a “political myth” that is the “heart of the collectivization process.”¹⁰⁶ A myth is defined as “descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act . . . a myth . . . is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions is the language of movement.”¹⁰⁷

Through this quotation, McGee highlights specific aspects about the myth. A myth is a definition, and through its defining process it reflects the general will and general propositions of a potential group of people that have been latent. Because of its ability to describe this will, this reality, the result is action both because language cannot exist without action,¹⁰⁸ but also because the message is a call to action. McGee calls this type of message “a determination to act” or a “language of movement,” both interesting ways of envisioning rhetorical action.

McGee continues by describing the characteristics of myth. First, the myth “gives specific meaning to a society’s ideological commitments,”¹⁰⁹ which means that the once dormant desires of a community are given a shape. He explains that although intellectuals

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 241.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 243.

¹⁰⁷ Sorel as qtd. by McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 244.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, “Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?,” 775.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 243.

try to explain the myth-making process through the science of behavior or through history, it is a “purely rhetorical phenomenon”¹¹⁰ because myths are made of language. It is not a literal process, but instead invites a “false consciousness,” an “alternative reality” to what is “objective.”¹¹¹ This description may appear to embrace deception, but it is simply elucidating the process of language. It is no more dangerous than the idea of sensemaking, the management of meaning, or framing.¹¹² However, the difference is that McGee is giving power to the message itself, rather than just the person conveying it. Furthermore, the myth becomes “functionally real” as people accept it and act upon it.¹¹³ McGee states, “each political myth presupposes a ‘people’ who can legislate reality with their collective belief.”¹¹⁴ Although the myth may originate in the advocate, it is then left to the people to “legislate” it, and through this collective behavior the myth becomes “real.”

McGee describes three choices people have when confronted with a myth. People can choose to accept it, reject it because they disagree with it, or reject it because they have grown tired of it.¹¹⁵ These choices raise an interesting point. So often, it is assumed that a leader is rejected based on his or her individual character and qualities, but how often is that sentiment displaced to the leader when it really should be focused on the message? This line of thinking opens up discussions of why leadership succeeds or fails that are beyond the performance of the leader. McGee states that older myths and new ones often conflict, and that the most successful new myths are the ones that are

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 244.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 244.

¹¹² References to the works of Weick et al., Smircich & Morgan, and Fairhurst & Sarr.

¹¹³ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 245.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 245.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 243.

integrated gradually.¹¹⁶ For example, a well-constructed message overshadowed by an existing prominent message is vulnerable to failure. Myths will overlap and compete; therefore, myths create a “portrait of people” (we can conceptualize the identity of a people by the myths they subscribe to).¹¹⁷ By this, I believe, McGee intends to remind his audience that there is not one single explanation for why some myths are perpetuated and others are squelched, because all groups are composed of multiple myths and all individuals in that group will be participating in multiple myths. As explained earlier, a myth is powerful only as long as it remains relevant to the people, and this relevance is difficult to sustain with so many myths vying for attention.

Through the characteristics of the myth, the role of the audience and the speaker become clear. A speaker is relevant as long as his or her personal interpretation—the myth—resonates with the audience, but once the audience responds to the myth, its survival is completely dependent on the audience fulfilling its call to action, to accept its premises. In this sense, over time the myth grows through rhetorical action, and it becomes just as much the audience’s as it once was the speaker’s. Therefore, a trivium is formed among advocate -myth-people, or leader-message-follower. Each piece is vital for action to occur, but this trivium is subject to rhetorical context—especially in light of competing myths.

The Context: “The Process”

McGee writes, “I would argue that a kind of rhetoric defines ‘the people’ at each stage in a ‘collectivization process’ of coming-to-be, being, and ceasing-to-be an objective real entity. ‘The people’ may be defined rhetorically, therefore, from four

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 245.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 247.

distinct perspectives.”¹¹⁸ McGee recognizes that there is a life cycle to all messages and to all groups of people, and that throughout the stages of the cycle people are going to relate differently to the message. McGee does not give specific names to his four stages, so I have termed them: gestation, experimentation, fruition, and dissolution.

In the gestation stage, a potential myth is embedded in the “popular reasonings.” At this stage, people are not “defined” by these ideas, but “they do represent the parameters of what ‘the people’ of that culture could possibly become.”¹¹⁹ The second stage, experimentation, represents attempts to bring these messages into an active state. There is usually something specific about the climate that gives the myth potential to thrive because the climate gives “visions of the collective life [as it would be through that myth] dangled before individuals in hope of creating a real ‘people.’”¹²⁰ Sometimes the people grasp hold and other times they do not. When they do grasp hold, they enter the fruition stage. This is the stage where an actual “people” begin to exist “because they [exhibit] collective behavior, but also by publicly ratifying the transaction wherein they give up control over their individual destinies for sake of a dream.”¹²¹ Alas, there is a “rhetoric of decay,” which is the fourth stage, dissolution. At this point the “collective life” has dissolved and “exists only in legend.”¹²²

Although not originally correlated with the leadership process, McGee’s description of the myth life-cycle may be helpful in understanding the ebbs and flows of leaders and leadership efforts. All leadership will eventually come to a close, lose its relevance, due to the natural fluctuations of society. These four stages are useful when

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 243.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 243.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 243.

¹²¹ Ibid, 243.

¹²² Ibid, 243.

judging why a bid for leadership may not be successful. For example, people may not enter the fruition stage because they are not ready to give up their “individual destinies” for a particular myth. McGee’s discussion of the collectivization process, although brief, is formative in so far as it cloaks this interaction in stipulation. Context is a crucial component of the leadership interaction because without this perspective it is easy to dismiss the entire process when context is inhibiting its success.

Conclusion

If McGee intended to discuss the leadership process, it was only as a byproduct of discussing collective behavior and social theory. However, he has implicitly created a theory of leadership. In this theory, leader, follower, and message interact within a specific context to generate a leadership process, an interaction. Drawing out each of these elements as vital components of a movement—of a process, and therefore leadership as process and quite possibly as a subunit of movements—provides a rationale for viewing leadership as co-constructed and rhetorical action.

If McGee’s notion of “the people” became a theory of leadership, it could be explained in the following manner: a leader, who creates a message, and followers, who actively respond to that message, collectively engage in a message. Their interaction with this message creates the potential for rhetorical action: the exchange of symbols between two or more people to achieve a common purpose. This action is a symbolic representation of the intent of the original message. However, whether this message is initiated at all and whether it is successful are subject to context.

Furthermore, the entire theory cannot be separated from rhetoric. The leader and follower use symbols to engage each other. The leader becomes symbolic, like a flag-

bearer, through interpreting the general will. The follower must take symbolic action in order to co-construct the message, to move from individual to participant. The message is by definition a set of symbols, and context is determined by the receptiveness of environments to these symbolic exchanges. Therefore, communication is both constitutive of and a conduit for the leadership interaction—rhetoric becomes an appropriate lens for this process because it cannot be separated from the emergence or the vitality of the leadership interaction.

CHAPTER 3: *THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS* AS RHETORICAL ACTION AND LEADERSHIP EMERGENCE

Introduction

McGee's search for "the people" illuminates the leadership interaction as the product rather than the packaging, shifting the focus to how leadership occurs rather than who leads. McGee offers four tools for analysis: context, leader, message, and follower. My case study will use a text to elucidate these four tools within a specific milieu. Brummett describes texts as the "ways in which we experience culture."¹²³ Leadership is certainly an aspect of cultures. Although I am choosing to focus my case study on a specific written text, the "text" of the leadership interaction cannot be divorced from the context (or the culture) that surrounds it. As such, the actual "text" is both the words and the history. The text for this case study is the essay *The Power of the Powerless*, written by Václav Havel and pertinent historical data. *The Power of the Powerless* is about human struggle within the Soviet Bloc in the 1970s, but the way in which Havel shapes his words accomplishes much more than its immediate utility by offering lessons about human nature applicable across cultures and time.¹²⁴ Among its contributions, I think *The Power of the Powerless* is an excellent example of how a message works to bring leaders and followers together and an implicit echo of the principles proposed by McGee about the leadership interaction.

¹²³ Brummett, *Popular Culture*, 35.

¹²⁴ Kristyn Eske, "'Living in Truth' and 'The Power of the Powerless' as an Ethical Treatise," (refereed paper panel at the annual National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, FL: November 2012).

The Power of the Powerless is an essay about “dissident”¹²⁵ leadership in the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia) during the Soviet occupation. Although this is not a case study about dissent, dissent is inextricably tied to what Havel and his fellow citizens accomplished, and as a movement this example aligns well with McGee’s concepts. This is not the only Havel text that accompanied his rise to prominence as a dissident leader, but it is foundational. Havel, through his writings, appears to inhabit the very notion that leadership – or change, a core concept to leadership – requires a co-creation process, and he calls others to recognize and act accordingly. Both the message of the text and the historical context give insight into how the *power* of words results in rhetorical, symbolic action. If this rhetorical interaction was successful in bringing about leadership in a space and place as unwelcoming to this kind of collective behavior as the Soviet Bloc in the 1970s and 80s, then it stands as a significant event worthy of examination with the potential of transferable knowledge to other, less extreme occurrences of leadership interaction.

Václav Havel and *The Power of the Powerless*

In keeping with my claim that the “text” is both the written word and the context—it is valuable first to set the stage of Havel’s life story and *The Power of the Powerless*. His story is not just his own, as his experiences were reflective of many people’s experience under the Soviet Union’s control. Although there were others who managed to live quite normally and well under this system,¹²⁶ Havel eventually became

¹²⁵ I use quotation marks around “dissident” because Havel himself used quotation marks around this term. He was uncomfortable with the term, which becomes clear in the text, and felt that it segregated his audiences. Furthermore, the term was perpetuated more by the Western media than by the individuals who were being called “dissident.” However, it has become a useful term in describing the individuals who showed opposition to the Soviet Communist Party, and so it has continued to be used to refer to this group.

¹²⁶ Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012): 33-36.

the voice for both the average citizen and citizens like himself. I do believe that the message itself is the core of this leadership interaction, but Havel's personal history lays the foundation for the emergence of the message.

Havel came from an educated bourgeois family in Czechoslovakia.¹²⁷ In 1948, the state confiscated all of his family's property.¹²⁸ Although Havel was young at the time, this event was the first seed planted in his young mind as to the threat from an oppressive government. The next seed came when the Communist Party did not allow Havel and his brother to pursue formal education, which was often the practice with young people from well-educated, affluent families.¹²⁹ He held various labor jobs throughout his life, but his passion was writing. From the age of 13 he was writing—poems, serials, and philosophy—¹³⁰ but his gift became most vibrant when writing plays. He managed to find a job as a stagehand at a local theater, and eventually two of his plays were produced on that stage.¹³¹ His plays questioned aspects of the Soviet system, and after the Prague Spring his work was “banned.” It was most likely his gift for writing that advanced his notoriety as a Czech dissident, but it was probably his conviction that initially propelled him into this role. Due to his involvement with the legal trial of the “Plastic People” and his contribution to writing the Charter 77, a reaction to the human rights violations in Czechoslovakia and the document that fully initiated the dissident movement, he became one of the first spokesmen of the Charter.

¹²⁷ Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 22

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 23.

¹³¹ Steven Kreis “Lectures on Twentieth Century Europe: Václav Havel,” *The History Guide*, last modified May 13, 2004, <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/havel.html>.

Havel's position as spokesman for the Charter may be enough to consider him a "leader" of the movement. However, I am placing the focus of this research on his text *The Power of the Powerless*, which I argue is the essay that solidifies his place as a leader. This text was written in 1978, two years after the Charter, and it is viewed as a companion to the Charter.¹³² The piece was originally intended as collaboration between dissidents of Czechoslovakia and Poland. A group of twenty individuals were to write "a volume of essays on the subject of freedom and power."¹³³ However, most of the authors were arrested before the volume was completed, and the Czech side of the partnership decided to publish the Czech pieces without the Polish contribution.¹³⁴ Today, *The Power of the Powerless* is usually viewed as a singular piece, unattached to the corresponding works. This fact suggests the ongoing value of the text. Bolton claims that *The Power of the Powerless* is the "most famous and influential text of European dissent after WWII."¹³⁵

After many hard years, including multiple imprisonments, Havel took his place as a prominent leader of the Velvet Revolution¹³⁶ in 1989, a revolution marked by its peaceful takeover of the government. On December 29, 1989 Havel became president of a free Czechoslovakia. In 1992, against Havel's desires, the Czech Republic and Slovakia split into two nation states. Havel was president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic for a combined thirteen years.

¹³² Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 225.

¹³³ "Václav Havel: Power of the Powerless," *The Official Website of Václav Havel*, Last accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.Vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?sec=2&id=1>, para. 1.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 2.

¹³⁶ The Velvet Revolution was coined by Havel due to it being one of the most peaceful and bloodless revolutions in recent history. It happened in November of 1989 after Moscow began loosening its control on Eastern Europe.

Czechs have mixed feelings about Havel; some hail him as a great and poetic leader, others saw him as “an absolutely unacceptable, criminal, bourgeoisie, provocative and subversive element.”¹³⁷ When he passed away in December 2012, he was mourned across the world. Paul Wilson, who translated Havel’s book-length 1986 interview, writes, “Havel, the writer by choice who became a politician malgré lui [in spite of himself, related to talent], has literally written himself into his country’s history. His power as a writer and his power as a politician come from the same source: his capacity to voice the hopes and fears of people around him.”¹³⁸ Although I am only looking at Havel as a leader during a time of dissent, he has clearly left an impression that extends far beyond his contribution between 1976 and 1989. For this study, it is important to dwell on Wilson’s description of Havel’s “power as a writer,” because the message he was able to communicate and the ways in which that message empowered a nation was vital to the success of the dissident leadership.

Rationale for this Case Study

In 2009 Havel received the Distinguished Leader Award from the International Leadership Association (ILA).¹³⁹ This event is significant because it afforded Havel the opportunity to speak on leadership directly. In his video welcoming the conference attendees, he makes an interesting statement: “You have approached me as a leader,

¹³⁷ Vendula Lensmith, email message to author, 12 December 2011.

¹³⁸ Paul Wilson in Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, xiv.

¹³⁹ “Past ILA Conferences,” International Leadership Association, Last accessed April 24, 2013, www.ila-net.org/conferences/past.

although I don't know whether I am a particularly typical one, and I am somewhat reticent about being labeled one."¹⁴⁰ Havel in many ways is a "reticent" leader.

It would be tempting in this research to focus on Havel the political leader because that is where he became a formalized leader. However, Havel did not come to "leadership" through a place of position; he emerged through rhetorical constructions. I believe this emergence is the ideal setting to focus on questions of "how does leadership occur" or "how does leadership *mean*." Studying his emergence as an informal leader in a natural setting not dictated by an established formula allows questions about leadership to better reflect the intrinsic human experience.

This is not only a case of emergent leaders, but it is leadership that occurred among an immensely diverse group of people, who differed in education, socio-economic status, and proximity. The proximity issue in itself is interesting, because in many cases it was not so much the geographic distance but the social distance created among people due to the secretive nature of their interactions caused by avoiding the secret police. The objective context of repression within the Soviet Bloc would predict failure of dissident leadership yet Havel transcended that context. The chance of dissident leadership successfully forming within this restrictive environment only heightens the significance and richness of this study.

It is challenging from both a historical and cultural distance to establish that leadership did occur, and furthermore, that it was successful. I acknowledge that I cannot be conclusive. We definitively know that *The Power of the Powerless* served as the moral

¹⁴⁰ "Václav Havel Distinguished Leadership Award 2009 ILA Conference," YouTube video, 5:23, from a video presented at the International Leadership Association Conference 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic, posted by ILAOfficial, December 9, 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl-oTKw21xQ

and philosophical soul of the Charter 77 movement.¹⁴¹ We also know that it was Havel who became the voice of the people in the Velvet Revolution, exemplified by the slogan “Havel to the Castle” that was chanted and displayed in graffiti around Prague during the month of the revolution.¹⁴² These historical facts allude to the existence of a movement with some level of effect, and that Havel’s final position in this movement indicates his voice was valued. Havel’s plays and essays resonated with audiences around the world, serving as anti-communist fodder in the Western media, further elevating his status and centrality for the societal transformation.¹⁴³ There is little question as to what Havel’s position is within the dissident movement; he is viewed as a “leader.” The purpose of this analysis is to seek out what made him a leader by acknowledging the other elements necessary for him to take this position as they are revealed in *The Power of the Powerless*.

The Power of Powerless in itself, apart from observable historical relevance, provides a rationale for its study as his subject matter inherently discerns the process outlined by McGee. In particular, Havel’s attitude toward the roles of follower and leader reflects McGee’s notion of these roles. In Havel’s reaction to being awarded by the International Leadership Association, he explains:

people don’t become central persons by their own decision: it is life that lures them and creates them. It doesn’t require any particular leadership habits or style.

¹⁴¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 226.

¹⁴² David Remnick, “Exit Havel,” *The New Yorker*, 17 February 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/02/17/030217fa_fact1, para 5.

¹⁴³ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 225.

A leader isn't someone who shouts or arouses fear in others, but rather someone that people need to have near them and feel that they have at their backs.¹⁴⁴

He is repositioning the leader not as the one taking action, making change, but as a symbolic element. Additionally, he begins describing the time leading up to the Velvet Revolution; he explains that he went away for a few days to prepare for his speeches and the upcoming events. During that time,

I suddenly started to be missed at the Civic Forum, which was then the focus of all the revolutionary events. I was missed not because there was a specific job or task that I had to do without fail or one that I and only I could do. There was nothing that could not be dealt with without me and yet I was missed. I was missed as a special kind of background support . . . Without my having realized it or desired it, it strikes me that in that sense I was able to play the role of a central figure . . . Apart from all other abilities and skills, leaders should also have trust in their co-workers. They should have calm and they should truly be a background support that others can sense, one that is important to them and gives them energy.¹⁴⁵

Havel's reflection embodies an understanding of how the role of the leader and the follower can be shaped. The leader as "support" and "central figure" implies that while the work is carried on by the follower, symbolic frameworks that maintain a leader are also in play. This might sound a lot like Servant Leadership or Transformational Leadership, but Havel clearly does not believe leadership "habits or styles" are vital to the process. This does not mean that leadership styles are unproductive for dissecting

¹⁴⁴ "Václav Havel Distinguished Leadership Award 2009 ILA Conference," www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl-oTKw21xQ

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

leaders' behaviors, but that perhaps leadership as a concept cannot be contained to these kinds of classifications. Additionally, I find Havel's use of the word "missed" interesting. He is indicating that he was a symbolic glue. Havel's attitude toward the role of leaders and followers reflected in the ILA speech began as far back as his text *The Power of the Powerless*. This essay is both example and lesson on rhetorical action, making it an valuable case study.

Furthermore, Havel was once a follower himself in that he followed the Communist Party for a time even if only passively, and understanding this fact frames his text. *The Power of the Powerless* is his written treatise on "how people are brought to participate in their own subjection."¹⁴⁶ Havel realized that he co-constructed the myth of communism even as an inert follower. *The Power of the Powerless* offers theoretical perspectives on power, leadership, and participation while at the same time is the practice of this very process.

The Power of the Powerless has been hailed as sociological, political, philosophical, intellectual, and aesthetic.¹⁴⁷ It has probably obtained these classifications because of the transcendent nature of its message, which surfaces the final reason I argue for this text's utility. The way in which the text reveals, but also understands, the value of language is useful in both practice and theory. In particular, when Havel uses the phrase "*The Power of the Powerless*," in many ways he is talking about the power of language to shape reality and to spur rhetorical action. In *The Power of the Powerless*, Havel

¹⁴⁶ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 220.

¹⁴⁷ Milan Hauner, "The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe, by Václav Havel," *Slavic Review* 46,1 (1987).; Violet Ketels, "Havel to the Castle!" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 548 (1996).; Barbara Kellerman, *Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence* (New York: McGraw-Hill): 2010.

explains how language can be used to disguise rather than reveal and vice versa.¹⁴⁸ The result is “a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality.”¹⁴⁹ Clearly, Havel views language as a sharp tool that can shape cultures and movements, in this case to perpetuate one corrupt system and in the other to bring about rhetorical action from both leaders and followers. This interaction is best illustrated by the text itself with the help of McGee’s categorizations.

Context

McGee does not offer in-depth explanations of context, I will use the classifications extrapolated from his discussion to describe the context surrounding *The Power of the Powerless*. Looking at a single text synchronically to explain the four stages is difficult, as a text is written with a certain veil over the past and present. However, viewing a text diachronically can unravel its layers in a revealing manner the four stages from McGee are useful in unraveling this context. The text not only provides literal context, but mythical/ideological context as well because we can begin piecing together the mindset and not just the actions of the author and audience of the text. Without the context, the element of co-construction cannot be as easily delineated from the text. Context is often the determinant of whether rhetorical action will result from a particular text.

I focus on general historical events as well as specific events from the life of Havel that I believe are relevant to the context of *The Power of the Powerless*. I address

¹⁴⁸ Václav Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” In *Václav Havel Living in Truth: Twenty-two Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, edited by Jan Vladislav, (London, England: Clays Ltd, 1986): 41.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 47.

these events only briefly, organizing them according to the four stages: gestation, experimentation, fruition, and dissolution. These classifications for the historical events are subjective, but I think they serve to conceptualize how Havel's message formed, was disseminated, and climaxed with the fulfillment of his cause. Secondly, in this section I discuss specific aspects of the text itself that reveal Havel's own, however implicit, recognition of McGee's contextualization on the formation of movements.

The Four Stages

Gestation

Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet Bloc since the 1940s, but the period of history that birthed the dissident movement and tied it to Havel occurred after the Prague Spring. At the beginning of 1968, Alexander Dubček, a liberal communist party member came into power, and he implemented reforms that opened Czechoslovakia up to economic, cultural, and political freedoms.¹⁵⁰ During the six months of 1968 that the Prague Spring lasted, creativity in practice and thought blossomed, and fears about expression began to dissipate.¹⁵¹ However, the laws that brought forth these freedoms were not written in a way that could satisfy the Kremlin, and the freedoms were short lived.¹⁵²

On August 20, 1968 Soviet soldiers, planes, and tanks rolled into the country and to the feet of the current administration.¹⁵³ Dubček was quickly replaced by Gustav Husák, who was willing to do whatever the Party asked of him. This began the “normalization” period which characterized the next two decades, the 1970s in

¹⁵⁰ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 4.

¹⁵¹ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 94.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 96.

¹⁵³ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 7-11.

particular.¹⁵⁴ These events created the world that Havel is addressing in *The Power of the Powerless*. It was a world that feared the secret police and where any form of dissent, even unintentional forms, could result in the loss of a job, limited educational opportunities, as well as limited future opportunities for the dissenter's children. It was a "purge" through ongoing "screenings" where "many saw the process from both sides."¹⁵⁵ Writers, artists, and intellectuals often suffered the most as they were removed from their positions as professors, journalists, and other professions,¹⁵⁶ and were forced into silence. One of the most notable effects of the purge is that it "push[ed] thousands of capable thinkers and leaders, on both the national and local scale, out of their professional roles, and cleared the way for a new class of people – those who valued advancement above consistency or principle."¹⁵⁷ This period in Czech history cultivated seeds of unrest in many individuals.

Experimentation

In Havel's 1985 interview, he described the 1970s as "gloomier," "an era of apathy and widespread demoralization," when "independent thinking and creation retreated to the trenches of deep privacy."¹⁵⁸ During this period, Havel became part of a small group of intellectuals who discussed ideas and shared each other's work, but it was not formalized activity.¹⁵⁹ Before the Prague Spring he had begun gaining notoriety for his plays, but by the 1970s he was a "banned writer" who continued to write anyway.¹⁶⁰ By 1975 Havel had grown tired of being restive, and he wrote an open letter (letters

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 62.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 64.

¹⁵⁸ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 119-120.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 121.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 120.

addressing discontentment that were sent to the press or a public, and sometimes to the actual addressee)¹⁶¹ to the first secretary Husák: “I tried to analyze the sad situation in our country; to point to the profound spiritual, moral, and social crisis hidden behind the apparent tranquility of social life. I urged Husák to realize just how much he himself was responsible for this general misery.”¹⁶² This letter, as opposed to other open letters, was particularly significant because Havel chose to sign it with his real name.¹⁶³

There was risk associated with signing his name. Havel was one of many intellectuals and artists who had to adjust to a new way of living in the 70s, one that silenced his natural passions. Many had been forced into low-paying labor jobs and had privileges continually given and taken away with the purpose of demoralization.¹⁶⁴ The result was the formation of the “shadow world,” groups of intellectual and creative thinkers that sprouted up “after hours” and in secret meetings called “salons.” The samizdat, which means “self-publishing” in Russian, also emerged from these ashes.¹⁶⁵ This system of unofficial publishing in the Czech dated back to WWII but played a prominent role in the 1970s-80s.¹⁶⁶ It was an intellectual space to publish poetry, politics, philosophy, plays, and literature that were banned by the government.

At the same time the samizdat began flourishing, the “underground” culture was emerging. The underground consisted mostly of the music scene that “coalesced, from 1972 to 1976, in a kind of dialectic of external police harassment and internal self-articulation.”¹⁶⁷ As opposed to the individuals within the samizdat, the underground was

¹⁶¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 202.

¹⁶² Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 122.

¹⁶³ Paul Wilson in *ibid*, xii.

¹⁶⁴ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 88-89.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 97.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 98.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 124.

a less intellectual crowd who sought freedom of expression not necessarily intellectual endeavors. Havel's first significant interaction with the underground was upon meeting Ivan Jirous, the artistic director for one of the bands, The Plastic People of the Universe. Havel wrote about his first time hearing The Plastic People:

[T]he music was a profoundly authentic expression of the sense of life among these people, battered as they were by the misery of this world. There was disturbing magic in the music, and a kind of inner warning. Here was something serious and genuine, an internally free articulation of an existential experience that everyone who had not become completely obtuse must understand.¹⁶⁸

The Plastic People was not the only significant musical group in the underground, but it became the most famous once Havel became involved in its fate. However, before these tides turned, both the intellectually-charged samizdat and the raw and honest expression of the underground worked separately to forge a two-sided coin. Both efforts began developing and testing anti-party messages in very different circles of society. These events are examples of the experimentation stage because these two groups were yet to be recognized as a unified group and major threat to the system. Anti-party messages were being emitted, but the environment was not quite ready to form a "collective will."

Fruition

The event that ignited the "unified" dissident movement was the arrest of nineteen individuals from the underground. Only two members of The Plastic People were among the arrest, but Havel famously named the entire trial "the case of The Plastic People," and for some reason (or for numerous reasons) that appellation stuck.¹⁶⁹ Before this arrest the

¹⁶⁸ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 126-127.

¹⁶⁹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 116-117.

underground had crossed paths with the police quite regularly, but in 1976 the officials strategically planned these arrests because they believed they would squelch the movement.¹⁷⁰ After the arrests a small group of people decided to protest, calling the police action unjust because the accused were not political but simply arrested “for their relationship with the world.”¹⁷¹ Historians now recognize that what Havel communicated about the “case of the Plastic People” was naïve, perhaps somewhat deceptive, as he portrayed the arrestees as innocent youth. Not all of the nineteen people arrested were young or completely “innocent.”¹⁷² Yet, his rallying and protesting brought together an immensely diverse group of individuals: uniting the underground and the samizdat communities.¹⁷³ Bolton explains that Havel “reinterpreted the underground even as he borrowed inspiration from it in helping to found a new kind of oppositional community.”¹⁷⁴

From these conversations and meetings the Charter 77 began emerging. The Charter 77 was a legal document that outlined how the Communist Party was violating the human rights components of the Helenski Accords. Precan, who wrote an introduction to the Charter in 1978 for the U.S. Government, explains the reasons the Charter came into existence:

In November, 1976, the two International Covenants on Human Rights were published (although quietly) in the Law Code and thus became a formal part of the Czechoslovakian legal system. Not even a superficial reader of the Covenants could fail to see the flagrant discrepancy between their provisions—assumed as

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 124.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 134.

¹⁷² Ibid, 137-138.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 140-141.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 15.

obligations by the Czechoslovakian government—and the daily practice of the state, police, judicial and other agencies. This discrepancy was actually a challenge; to demonstrate the real state of affairs, to spotlight it, and to reveal the discrepancies fully. The challenge consisted not only in offering suggestions for improvement but in continuing the struggle beyond single protests. The challenge, as Charter '77 proclaimed, was not only to make the state accept its own laws, but to require that “everyone share responsibility for the present situation and, accordingly, for the implementation of the enacted Covenants.”¹⁷⁵

Overnight anyone who signed the Charter 77 was made a target of the secret service, but at the same time it became a force to unite diverse groups of people. Along with Havel, one of the three original spokespersons was Jan Patočka, a Czech philosopher who had the privilege of studying under both Husserl and Heidegger before the Soviet invasion.¹⁷⁶ This is significant because Patočka was a major contributor to the Charter but also a powerful influence on Havel. It is likely the influence of Patočka contributed to the existential tone of *The Power of the Powerless*.

Although politically weighty, the Charter was simultaneously sterile.¹⁷⁷ Bolton suspects that it was “missing something . . . a deeper expression of its own inspiring power . . . moral force.”¹⁷⁸ With Patočka’s death shortly after the Charter 77 was written, there came a time where Patočka’s “initial formulations” needed to be expanded both

¹⁷⁵ Vilem Precan, United States. *Documents of Helsinki Dissent From the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: An Introduction to Charter 77*, (Washington: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe): 1978, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 68.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 153-153.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 155.

morally and philosophically.¹⁷⁹ Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* did this very thing by presenting the "humanity" Charter 77 was lacking, and delivering Havel's most prominent moral and philosophical exposition.¹⁸⁰ This text worked as a companion to the Charter 77, opening its power to a wider audience: "the regime's attempt to silence and suppress the Charter left many wondering if it could have any effect at all . . . Havel wanted to return to Patočka's original moral appeal in order to deepen and expand it in a way that would make 'living in truth' seem more widely acceptable and, indeed, necessary."¹⁸¹ I suspect that it is the moral and philosophical working of *The Power of the Powerless* that allows it to continue having meaningful impact on readers today, as opposed to the Charter, which appears to be frozen within its historical context.

The history following the text's publication is less relevant to my discussion of how this text shaped leadership. The history post-text does allude to how the text was used and received by others after it was dispersed. This information is vital in substantiating that followers were indeed formed through the message, which implies that co-construction did occur. By comparing the message of the text to events that occurred after it was written, I can begin extrapolating what this co-construction looked like. In addition to the reactions of others, Havel's personal history reveals the force of his message. For example, Havel was imprisoned three times between the construction of the Charter 77 and the Velvet Revolution in 1989.¹⁸² This fact demonstrates that Havel's message was a threat to the system which reveals that his persuasion was having an effect.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 218.

¹⁸⁰ Havel self-admittedly claims that this text is "the most extensive and most important essay from his 1970 work," in his interview *Disturbing the Peace*.

¹⁸¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 226.

¹⁸² Kreis "Lectures on Twentieth Century Europe: Václav Havel."

I view the fruition stage as extending through the Velvet Revolution, as the revolution marks a transition in the message – a fulfillment of its tenets. As the Soviet Communist Party began disintegrating in Moscow, the Czechs and Slovaks took the moment to claim their own place in history. The revolution began in mid-November, and by the end of December Havel was president of a free nation.¹⁸³ This piece of the story illustrates the rise and fall of the fruition stage, illuminating the fact that a message does not always “die” but sometimes results in a metamorphosis.

Dissolution

The dissolution stage evidences how the metamorphosis occurred—how messages take shape in new contexts. This is a minor section since the focus of this research is on the initiation rather than the future implications of the message. However, I think it is beneficial to understand the lingering impact of the original text because it is instructive in grasping how leadership can dissolve if the context changes.

The transition from dissident to “governing a ruined state” proved difficult.¹⁸⁴ Havel was in many ways an eccentric political leader. He had difficulty reconciling in his mind that his newfound freedoms were not just temporary illusions, and that the opportunity existed to begin creating a world based on the ideal he had been proclaiming for years.¹⁸⁵ There is much that could be discussed about Havel’s presidency, but that world looked vastly different from the dissident life I am discussing in this thesis. One thing is clear: Havel’s message had gone full circle. Apparently as a joke, during one of Havel’s farewell parties, after thirteen years as president, someone read aloud an old newspaper article published in a Communist paper shortly after the dissemination of the

¹⁸³ Meyer, “How They Checkmated...,” 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, para. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Remnick, “Exit Havel,” para. 10.

Charter 77. In the article Husak claimed that Havel and the others would fail miserably and be forgotten.¹⁸⁶ By the time Havel was retiring as president that message seemed ironic, but also served as a reminder of the message that propelled him into the position.

The message of *The Power of the Powerless* lived on, san Havel, in different forms post-revolution. Lensmith, a Czech citizen who was only eight when Havel wrote the essay, first heard about it on the radio program *Voice of America* in the 1980's. She explains that it was almost impossible to find a copy of the text to read unless you had a connection with a member of a dissident group. Her opportunity to examine it personally was post-revolution. She reflects on her first time reading the essay:

Having spent all my pre-revolution life in a world full of political clichés and propaganda that were always conveyed in a very uninventive language and that actually never delivered anything meaningful or new, it was really refreshing to read a text that had a message, that was logically organized, that was worded with precision, and that aptly expressed what I thought and felt myself.¹⁸⁷

This retelling by Lensmith is an interesting portrait of how messages can float into a stage of dissolution. The message still resonated with her, but it is processed in a reflective tone rather than one embracing rhetorical action. This, perhaps, is the defining characteristic of a particular leadership process that has reached the end of its effectiveness—its central ideas no longer spur meaningful, rhetorical action.

Havel Acknowledges Context

In the *Power of the Powerless* there is an inherent recognition of context. In particular, Havel grasps that myths must compete with older myths to be actualized as

¹⁸⁶ Remnick, "Exit Havel," para. 37.

¹⁸⁷ Lensmith, 12 December 2011.

well as with multiple myths working to displace the older myths. Not all myths will survive. Havel explains, “the more complex the mechanisms of power become, the larger and more stratified the society they embrace, and the longer they have operated historically, the more individuals must be connected to them from outside, and the greater the importance attached to the ideological excuse.”¹⁸⁸ Although spoken pessimistically, this quotation acknowledges how ideas gain historical significance, and how people become attached to these ideas as they grow. In this case, Havel is trying to detach people from a particular “ideological excuse” by offering a new philosophy.

However, he keenly recognizes that one of the most significant problems with offering a new idea is that people have often already surrendered their personal identities to an older one.¹⁸⁹ McGee calls this event “publicly ratifying the transaction wherein they give up control over their individual destinies for sake of a dream;” this is also the fruition stage.¹⁹⁰ Arguably, the Soviet Communist Party was forced on the people, but as I will demonstrate later, people perpetuated the system to maintain a peaceful and easy way of life. This text becomes an admonishment of a surrendered way of life, because people were willing to allow the aims of the system to swallow up what Havel calls the “aims of life” because:

individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, are the system . . . by accepting the prescribed ritual, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game. In doing so, however, he has himself

¹⁸⁸ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 43.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 52.

¹⁹⁰ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 243.

become a player in the game, thus making it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place.¹⁹¹

This is an example of how “individual destinies” can be absorbed in the materialized purpose of a myth, and similarly to McGee, Havel recognizes that while people continue to be players the game will continue to exist. McGee says that people within a collective identity “remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force,”¹⁹² while Havel states that the ideology of the system in which he lived has “‘continuity’ that is passed on from person to person, from clique to clique, and from generation to generation in an essentially more regular fashion.”¹⁹³ Both Havel and McGee argue that the myth is ensured as long as there is buy-in from its audience. Because most myths “transition so gradual[ly] that we hardly perceive it” from one generation to another the audience’s attention is much easier to retain.¹⁹⁴ In Havel’s case, Eastern Europe had adjusted to what was familiar, to what had become comfortable, effectively perpetuating the myth.

This may be the reason Havel and the overall dissident message was so revolutionary. It did not transition gradually, but entered the scene as a direct competitor to the dominant myth. The result is that one myth causes the other to implode, forcing it into the dissolution stage, for “when a single person breaks the rules of the game, thus exposing it as a game—everything suddenly appears in another light and the whole crust seems then to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably.”¹⁹⁵ Not all competing myths will dissolve through eruption, but when the values of one myth threaten the values of another the two cannot co-exist. McGee talks

¹⁹¹ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 45-46.

¹⁹² McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 424.

¹⁹³ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 48.

¹⁹⁴ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 425.

¹⁹⁵ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 59.

about the “rhetoric of decay,” and history seems to indicate that the dissident movement proved to be a useful (but perhaps not the sole) tool for eroding the system. Although the dissidents themselves had an expiration date, that fact only further validates the notion of evolving myths.

The discussion of context is absolutely necessary for understanding the environment in which leadership occurs. There is a level of tension among the four stages, and competing myths may work to push myths in and out of the stages. Context sets the stage for leadership, but also helps in describing the readiness for this interaction. Establishing Havel’s role as leader then becomes the next step in conceptualizing this leadership interaction as rhetorical.

Leader

McGee termed the speaker/advocate as a “flag-bearer.” This metaphor is easily transferred to Havel. This vision of Havel is especially lucid when he led his fellow Czechs through the Velvet Revolution, as one journalist wrote about the event, “As Mr. Havel finished, a light snow began to fall, and as if on cue, his listeners took their places. One by one, in single-file, hand in hand, they began to march toward Wenceslas Square.”¹⁹⁶ However, before he reached this point, he had to participate in a leadership interaction in order to bear that metaphorical flag. A careful reading of *The Power of the Powerless* reveals that unlike a political candidate who convinces the audience as to why he or she should lead, Havel becomes a leader by turning the focus away from himself and toward defining the will of the people. Furthermore, he never sought this position. He wrote in a letter, “It is not my intention to be a self-appointed spokesman of the people . .

¹⁹⁶ Michael Meyers, “Power of the Powerless; How They Checkmated Communism in Prague.” *The Washington Times* (29 November 2009): 2.

. but if anything is certain, it is that most Czechs and Slovaks today think as I do.”¹⁹⁷ This quotation demonstrates Havel’s transition into the “proclaimer of the general will” as he does not explicitly state a bid for authority, but instead becomes leader through communicating what he assumes to be the best interest of others.

McGee indicates two major ways an advocate can proclaim the general will. The first is by creating a “fiction,” by giving a “personal interpretation of his people’s history.”¹⁹⁸ Havel attempts this interpretation on numerous occasions in this text. For example, he describes dictatorship historically, with the goal of comparing it to Eastern Europe’s current state.¹⁹⁹ In a later section he delineates the Charter 77 and the “case of the Plastic People.”²⁰⁰ These two events are crucial to understanding how his message emerges, but Havel’s message as a “personal history” becomes salient within historical context. As discussed earlier, Havel’s depiction of the “case of the Plastic People” is a misnomer as only some of the members of the band The Plastic People were arrested, and the other individuals arrested included members from other bands, a minister, a music producer, and others.²⁰¹ Despite the slight inaccuracies within Havel’s narrative of these arrests, Bolton explains that he bridged the gap from his world to the Underground movement, and by doing so he rallied disparate groups together.²⁰² Havel “was the first person who was really able to articulate this experience in a way that spoke to a larger community of opposition intellectuals.”²⁰³ The act of giving a personal history inviting

¹⁹⁷ Havel as qtd in Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 203.

¹⁹⁸ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 240.

¹⁹⁹ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 38.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 63-67.

²⁰¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 115-117.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 134-139.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 136.

the audience to a shift from experimentation to fruition—this certainly reflects the role of a leader.

In addition to interpretation, an advocate shares “personal convictions and opinions.”²⁰⁴ For Havel, this becomes most clear in the construction of his message (discussed in the following section), but is also apparent in his fulfillment of the second characteristic of McGee’s advocate. This is the ability to transform, to mediate, to filter, and to redefine. Havel’s act of defining is prominent in *The Power of the Powerless*, and the ways in which he defines the situation continues to be used in understanding this period of history evidencing the resonance of his terminology. As such, Havel’s legacy largely exists through his definitions, illustrating the power of “naming” to thrust someone into a notable position, particularly the assumed position of leader. I have included what he redefined in the “Message” section because it is most effectively imbibed as a vital component of the message. Without Havel’s definitions, the message cannot be clearly deciphered. However, viewing the definitions as part of the message should not diminish the importance of the actor who is defining, which is a key attribute of the leader as it is mirrored by the authors discussed in the literature review.

Perhaps one of the reasons *The Power of the Powerless* is iconic, is because its persuasive quality does not come from a bid for any personal qualities of the speaker, but as a plea for the audience’s quality of life. Havel’s plea is about exposing how a system degrades individual and societal life, and he uses very little personal experience. He paints a picture of how the audience’s life is being diminished and through the action of the audience (opposed to the speaker) can rescue themselves through personal action from their façade, such as his plea for “greater dignity” and “inner emancipation” which

²⁰⁴ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 241.

leads to the “independent spiritual, social and political life of society.”²⁰⁵ He places the responsibility of both past and future actions on others, clearly indicating that the leader is not the only piece of the leadership equation.²⁰⁶

Message

Although Havel’s rhetorical competence permeates, it is the message that repels or attracts. In this particular message three distinct persuasive techniques at work in the text can be identified: naming or defining “reality,” the use of narrative to punctuate the main ideas, and the juxtaposition of competing myths. These three rhetorical moves are intertwined, and, although presented as distinct entities, these themes work synergistically as a cohesive rhetorical technique.

Remember what McGee explicates about messages, or in his term – myths. Myths come into existence through the process of an advocate presenting a “new idea” through his or her personal interpretation resulting in a “political myth,” but are then interpreted and accepted or rejected by the audience.²⁰⁷ I do not believe McGee uses the term “political” in the most traditional sense, although politics are often at work within these kinds of myths, but for the sake of simplicity I call this a “myth” (sans “political”). Revisiting McGee’s definition of a myth is useful: “descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act . . . a myth . . . is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions is the language of movement.”²⁰⁸ McGee’s use of myth does not solely relate to the myth created by the individual speaking, but also to all of the competing myths that may be present at any

²⁰⁵ Havel, “The Power of Powerless,” 85.

²⁰⁶ See his references to individual responsibility: Ibid, 103.

²⁰⁷ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 241-243.

²⁰⁸ Sorel as qtd. by McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 244.

given time. Individuals must be willing to surrender older myths, or at the least make room, to accept new ones. Once a myth no longer has “force” it will “wilt away.”²⁰⁹

Havel taps into this very notion in materializing his own myth. It begins with defining the current reality.

Defining and Naming

The very first move of this text is to rename the Soviet rule a “post-totalitarian” system.²¹⁰ Perhaps Havel renamed the governmental system to distance his audience from their familiar context. Despite known repressions, historians provide: “many people also built lives around their own projects and values, working both inside the system and outside, both with and against it, depending on their own, often hard-won sense of what was important.”²¹¹ Havel’s rhetoric needed to bring readers to the recognition that the Soviet system inhibited all human life, not just the lives of those labeled as dissidents. Framing the system as post-totalitarian widened the sphere of the oppressed, and posed the system as a threat to all people including those in positions of authority.²¹²

Havel explains that the system is often categorized as a dictatorship, but that this conceptualization cannot be true.²¹³ He justifies his semantic choice by explaining that a dictatorship is often temporary, is characterized by brute force, and is on guard to impending threats. However, this is not the world in which he and his fellow citizens were entrenched. Their system was stable, not emergent, the equivalent of a “low rent home” because “all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxiety,

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 242.

²¹⁰ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 40.

²¹¹ Bolton, “Worlds of Dissent,” 21.

²¹² Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 44.

²¹³ Ibid, 37.

and loneliness vanish,” but the price is “abdication of one’s own reason, conscience, and responsibility.”²¹⁴ It is “post” not because it is beyond a totalitarian state, but because it is a new form²¹⁵ by the marriage of “dictatorship and consumerism.”²¹⁶ He continues by defining it as a self-perpetuating system, everything about it, it does in the service of developing its own aims.²¹⁷ Furthermore, all persons within the system, high or low in authority, are in service to it. This he terms “automatism;” “no matter what position individuals hold in the hierarchy of power, they are not considered by the system to be worth anything in themselves, but only as things intended to fuel and serve this automatism.”²¹⁸ Ultimately, he names the life individuals in this society must practice in order to live in harmony with it as “living within the lie,” and that actions to uphold the system become “ritual.”²¹⁹

The entrapment of the system leaves the people “powerless;”²²⁰ however, everyone is both “victim and supporter” because without the cooperation their system would cease to exist.²²¹ Here, the argument of the text begins to take shape because shared meaning is forged through naming. People can begin forming in their minds what it means to live within the system, while at the same time grappling with their relationship to it. Arguably, before there was language to define the intricacies of this way of living, it may have been more difficult for people to comprehend the true threat. Through naming aspects such as the nature of the system and the role of the people within that system, Havel can then begin terming the alternative.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 39.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 40-41.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 54.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 40.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 44.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 45.

²²⁰ Ibid, 36.

²²¹ Ibid, 53.

The idea Havel most notably coined is “living in truth.” This is how individuals escape being the “victim and the supporter.” Living in truth implies:

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity’s rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie.²²²

This term has force because “living in truth” fundamentally threatens the post-totalitarian system, evoking the counter myth incompatible, riddling the audience with guilt for surrendering those values worth living for.²²³ Therefore, anyone who chooses to live “in truth” creates “opposition” to the system, and the system naturally sees this opposition as an “enemy.”²²⁴ This transaction introduces a choice for individuals, but also a new name for those that make this choice – enemy. Havel explains that the outside world sees these enemies of the state as “dissidents.” He goes into great detail to define the Western idea of “dissidents,”²²⁵ but reframes the existing definition to include anyone who pursues living in truth and seeks out communities of like-minded people. These communities then become an “independent life of society.”²²⁶ These societies are constructed of individuals who have taken action whether in word or deed to separate themselves from anything that diminishes their dignity. The key idea is that people are compelled by their own sense of self to take action. Havel also seeks to define this as an “act of defense,”²²⁷ and as a

²²² Ibid, 54.

²²³ Ibid, 57.

²²⁴ Ibid, 75.

²²⁵ Ibid, 76-77.

²²⁶ Ibid, 86.

²²⁷ Ibid, 88.

byproduct a “second culture” or “parallel polis” is formed.²²⁸ Although this culture lives within the larger culture, it is one of defiance through authenticity.

This section explored the major terminology that surfaced in my analysis. This “new language” is a direct example of how Havel redefined terms and ideas in order to shape his message and open the minds of his audience to his “new idea.” When McGee writes about the “description of things,” this is what he had in mind, the conceptualization of what is once ambiguous and made clear through language. Havel grasps the power of this rhetorical act, as he seeks to convert his audience. More than just Havel’s ability to predict the importance of this act is the importance of these terms in establishing a rationale for the message. However, defining ideas is only the foundation.

Narratives

There is an alternative method of arriving at “the description of things” that is often employed in rhetorical theory. This approach is narratives. Havel was a relatively successful playwright²²⁹, and therefore was familiar with narrative constructions. In *The Power of the Powerless*, narrative descriptions are used throughout the text to make Havel’s conclusions more accessible. These constructions function to give access to or become more relatable with the common citizen. Notable dissidents like Havel were often accused as being “a small, privileged micro-society of professional grumblers.”²³⁰ Innate in Havel’s task was to help all of his fellow citizens, not just the highly educated or the free-spirited artists,²³¹ to recognize their place within “dissent.”

²²⁸ Ibid, 101.

²²⁹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 10,112.

²³⁰ Ibid, 23.

²³¹ This is in reference to the earlier discussion in “Context” about Havel’s connection to the intellectual samizdat and the artistic underground.

By far, one of the most iconic narrations associated with the dissident movement and Havel is the greengrocer.²³² The protagonist of the greengrocer tale is a manager of a grocery, who along with his fruits and vegetables, places the sign “Workers of the world, unite!” in apparent solidarity to the system. “He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life ‘in harmony with society’, as they say.”²³³ Hanging a sign in a window is ritual, displaying loyalty through rhetorical acts that favor harmony over authenticity. It becomes a lie. Havel describes it this way:

We have seen that the real meaning of the greengrocer’s slogan has nothing to do with what the text of the slogan actually says . . . the greengrocer declares his loyalty (and he can do no other if his declaration is to be accepted) in the only way the regime is capable of hearing; that is, by accepting the prescribed ritual, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game. In doing so, however, he has himself become a player in the game, thus making it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place.²³⁴

The greengrocer, therefore, is trapped in a language-game; he can be seen as both victim and supporter. But it is not just the grocer, which becomes clear when Havel introduces a new character, a woman who works in an office. She displays a similar sign in her office. Neither she nor the grocer pays any attention to each other’s signs when they frequent their respective work places.²³⁵ Havel’s emphasis is on how a society can create a sense of indifference, and how ritual can induce a state of self-deception. Although individuals

²³² Aviezer Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 220.

²³³ Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” 41.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 45-46.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

may not find personal agreement with the message of the ritual, they follow it because so does everyone else, but perhaps more importantly it is a reassurance of one's own self-preservation.

What then would it mean to change the narrative? If the greengrocer decided he could no longer express what he did not actually believe, Havel suggests he may take down the sign, not vote "appropriately," or speak out in a union meeting.²³⁶ The result may vary, but in one way or another he risks being stripped of his "autonomy." He jeopardizes his job and common privileges; his children might be denied higher education.²³⁷ The twist in the story, however, is not left with the greengrocer, but with the revelation that the grocer's persecutors are not inflicting him out of a sense of conviction. Instead it is out of the same sense that compelled the grocer to display the sign: "The executors, therefore, behave essentially like everyone else, to a greater or lesser degree: as components of the post-totalitarian system, as agents of its automatism, as petty instruments of the social auto-totality."²³⁸ The greengrocer's action completely disturbs the system because it reveals that the lie he was once perpetuating is applicable to citizens in every realm of society.²³⁹ The reality of a life of lies is complicit; the morality of this life choice is the burden of both citizen and enforcer.

The greengrocer can take one more step to expressing himself. Once he is demoted and his quality of life reduced, he may wish to not take this expression any further. Yet, Havel suggests that greater freedom of spirit could be achieved if he decides to "do something more concrete, something that goes beyond an immediately personal

²³⁶ Ibid, 55.

²³⁷ Ibid, 55.

²³⁸ Ibid, 55.

²³⁹ Ibid, 56.

self-defensive reaction against manipulation.”²⁴⁰ This action may result in his branding as a “dissident,” but the payoff is “where living in the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with a lie and becomes articulate in a particular way, is the point at which something is born that might be called the ‘independent spiritual, social, and political life of society’.”²⁴¹ The greengrocer enters a community where authentic living, the aims of life, is welcomed. He has also taken action to change his circumstances. This narrative offers a scenario that many could imagine. If, perhaps, they can identify with the greengrocers’ fears and hesitations perhaps they could also visualize stepping into action.

Havel presents another story in this text that contributes to the message’s persuasive quality. This narrative is not woven throughout like the greengrocer, but contributes as a real life example of how becoming an enemy of the state is not always about choice. This is one of the few personal experiences Havel shares with his audience. Havel begins by explaining that he once held a job in a brewery. The brewer was “well versed in the art of beer making.”²⁴² His managers, who were not well-versed in beer, but were loyal members of the state. When the brewer expressed concern about the mismanagement of the brewery, suggesting it hurt their profitably, he was quickly removed from his position and transferred to an unskilled job in a remote part of the country.²⁴³ Havel explains, “by speaking the truth, Š [the brewer] had stepped out of line, broken the rules, cast himself out, and he ended up as a sub-citizen, stigmatized as an enemy.”²⁴⁴ The point, “a personal sense of responsibility”²⁴⁵ was enough to threaten the

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 84.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 85.

²⁴² Ibid, 82.

²⁴³ Ibid, 82-83.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 83.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 83.

system. Through this narrative Havel solidifies why the system is so very dangerous as well as the risk all humans are taking by merely being a participant in society. In a sense this text becomes an invitation:

to all of society, not just brave intellectuals . . . Havel is speaking to a world of strangers and asking them to step into the unknown . . . Indeed, this is one way of understanding the brewer's tale: no matter how much people try to make themselves at home in the post-totalitarian world, they will end up being "thrown" into dissent by their innate honesty and creativity.²⁴⁶

The combination of these two narratives (the greengrocer and the brewer) demonstrate the inclusiveness and necessity of the audience's participation, and they begin moving the reader beyond a "description of things" and into the "convictions of a group."²⁴⁷

Competing Myths

Defining concepts and using narratives are useful rhetorical techniques that build a foundation, a framework, for the nucleus of the message. This nucleus takes the form of a myth in the sense that McGee communicates: "a myth... is identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions is the language of movement."²⁴⁸ The purpose of myths is to help humans make sense of their social reality. This may be why McGee calls myths a "false consciousness," because they are an interpretation, a reflection of "objective reality." He explains that "though myths defy empirical or historical treatment, therefore, it is easy to recognize them rhetorically as ontological arguments relying not so much on evidence as on artistic proofs intended to

²⁴⁶ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 228.

²⁴⁷ References to McGee

²⁴⁸ Sorel as qtd. by McGee, "In Search of 'The People'," 244.

answer the question, what is ‘real’?”²⁴⁹ Havel often speaks about “ideology,” which in many ways is exactly this – an explanation of what is “real.” However, explanations of reality do not always align, resulting in competing myths:

The tension existing between competing myths is a product of the contradiction between an individual’s impulse to accept “stable” representations of reality derived from the collective experience of the past, and a contrary impulse to yield to “vital” impressions of reality derived from personal experience with the life condition.²⁵⁰

McGee’s explanation of competing myths is especially relevant to the message in *The Power of the Powerless*.

The most obvious competition is between the Soviet Communist Party and Havel’s idea of living in truth. Havel could have chosen to only present the new myth without first elucidating the older myth, but the power of this message resides in the prudence of choosing the “vital” over the “stable.” Havel is communicating that people must find resonance with a myth to perpetuate it, and the only way for people to choose a different path is to recognize the subversive and threatening nature of the myth they are living under. The persuasiveness of the new myth is further emphasized by addressing other minor myths that could potentially derail or become distractions to the purity of the message. As such, the reader is left with a beautiful example of how myths compete and vie for continued life. In this section of the analysis, I will briefly summarize how he characterizes the old myth, the new myth, minor myths, and the competition between the old and new myths.

²⁴⁹ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 244.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 247.

The Old Myth

In describing the old myth, Havel must break down both the reality of living in the system as well as aspirations of that system driven by its ideology. For example, he calls the governmental system a form of “the consumer and industrial” society,²⁵¹ which in essence denies the central non-consumerist tenant of the communist party. Or the redistribution of labor has created a, “system [that] is made significantly more effective by state ownership and central direction of all the means of production. This gives the power structure an unprecedented and uncontrollable capacity to invest in itself.”²⁵² As such each individual is only worth their contribution to the machine:

Individuals are reduced to little more than tiny cogs in an enormous mechanism and their significance is limited to their function in this mechanism. Their job, housing accommodation, movements, social and cultural expressions, everything, in short must be cossetted together as firmly as possible, predetermined, regulated and controlled.²⁵³

If an individual wishes to have an “independent will” in order to enter any kind of power structure he or she must conceal it, and whether or not they remain in that position is hinged on how well that concealment persists.²⁵⁴ As such, the real threat is the system because everyone from the greengrocer to the prime minister, all are “involved and enslaved.”²⁵⁵

The following statement aptly describes the environment created by this way of life in compelling description:

²⁵¹ Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” 40.

²⁵² Ibid, 40.

²⁵³ Ibid, 94.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 48.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 52-53.

This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing.²⁵⁶

This description is, of course, Havel's personal debunking of the pervading myth – however, as McGee indicates, when the “personal experience with the life condition” of the many fails to align with that myth, dissolution must follow. As such, Havel's message is quite clear, the old myth denies human rights, the fundamental core of the life worth living; this life cannot and should not be sustained.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 45.

The New Myth

Living in truth is an appeal to “life in its real aims.”²⁵⁷ Intrinsically, the difference between the post-totalitarian system and the reality Havel is forming through *The Power of the Powerless* is a moral issue. He says:

living within the truth has more than a mere existential dimension (returning humanity to its inherent nature), or a noetic dimension (revealing reality as it is), or a moral dimension (setting an example for others). It also has an unambiguous political dimension. If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth.²⁵⁸

However, concerning politics a “reawakening” must happen, that precedes political action.²⁵⁹ If political action is not informed by human experience that renders suspect old political habits, no political action can deny human’s state of being. Havel warns:

If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society . . . A better system will not automatically ensure a better life. In fact the opposite is true: only by creating a better life can a better system be developed.²⁶⁰

The pay-off for this kind of life is two-fold, the dignity and “inner emancipation” of the individual, but also the “independent spiritual, social, and political life of society.”²⁶¹

This type of life is achievable when persons first decide to practice “serving truth

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 57.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 56-57.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 60.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 70-71.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 85.

consistently, purposefully, and articulately, and organizing this service,”²⁶² and this life contains both the individual and the collective.

This call to existential action is the “language of movement” or the message turning into “functional reality” as described by McGee. As such, the people are not just asked to listen, but instead are brought into the myth to “legislate” it. Havel seems to recognize the need for the followers to participate in creating this change in the way he crafted the message. He begins by painting a picture of what life could be, how the system could be better, and then asks the audience to be part of that picture. Havel takes it one step further by also recognizing that competing myths do not come only from the dominant myth. There are other minor myths that affect the salience of the message. As such, he also briefly addresses some of these minor myths.

The Minor Myths

Havel seems to recognize people would turn to other “myths” in order to fulfill his call or render it unnecessary, because he made several points to separate his argument from several prevailing myths. I consider these myths “minor” because they are tied into the larger myths, however Havel takes time to delineate these three items apart from the larger discussion. In a sense, these myths are rest stops along the way that allow him to anticipate and debunk potential arguments that would ultimately separate people from his call.

The myth of the law may be an excuse by some to justify the Soviet system. Havel saw the law as a major impediment to freedom, not because it existed but because it existed as a façade.²⁶³ He even states that to an outsider the law, as it is written, would

²⁶² Ibid, 87.

²⁶³ Ibid, 93.

appear fair and reasonable.²⁶⁴ The law violates living in the truth because it uses itself to mechanize the system's activities, by using law as ritualistic language. The "case of the Plastic People," that was such an influential event in Havel's move towards leadership, is a perfect example of this.²⁶⁵ The government was uncomfortable with the art produced by the underground movement, and so they arrested these individuals under false pretenses – for those who went to trial they were convicted for crimes different or weakly related to why they were really arrested.²⁶⁶ This method gives the general public the appearance of legitimacy, while in reality human rights were violated. Havel was working to expose the law as something that hurt rather than protected. Although the law is a subset and defining element of the old myth, I believe Havel takes care to pull out this particular strain of thought to preempt arguments that the law could be used to rescue them from their current state. The law cannot bring order when it is merely a ritual, void of responsibility to its higher purpose.

Havel addressed another myth that could potentially dissuade individuals from actively pursuing "living in truth"—this was conceptions of the dissidents. The dissidents were often viewed as elitist intellectuals,²⁶⁷ and "it is a truly cruel paradox that the more they [dissidents] are labeled with a word that in effect separates them from those 'other citizens'."²⁶⁸ This is probably the reason why Havel felt it was important to redefine who is a 'dissident.'²⁶⁹ This discussion is Havel's recognition that the term was not going to dissipate, so he decided through *The Power of the Powerless* that he would work to

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 95.

²⁶⁵ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 127-129.

²⁶⁶ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 127-129; Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 115-117 and 139.

²⁶⁷ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 23.

²⁶⁸ Havel, "Power of the Powerless," 80.

²⁶⁹ Note: Bolton explains the relationship of people recognized as "dissidents" to the word, and how during the time they were pursuing these types of activities they did not like the term. Havel himself seems to treat it with irony. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 2-4.

demystify, to re-conceptualize it so that others would not associate his call with a select group of people. As such, when he uses the word he only uses it in quotes: ‘dissident.’²⁷⁰ He continues by describing a dissident as anyone who takes part in the “independent life of society” such as writers, philosophers, teachers, who speak or operate in any way not aligned completely with the system.²⁷¹ This description is discussed further in the “Followers” section, but one of his last efforts in the essay is to propose that those labeled as dissidents are only in that position because they were everyday citizens seeking better lives.²⁷² Havel is flattening the dissident concept, giving the audience access should they choose to follow.

Lastly, Havel addresses the myth of democracy and technology. Perhaps, many believed that the answer to the system was to democratize. But Havel’s call is much more foundational than that, and he probably did not want people believing he was only advocating for another system.²⁷³ He has already communicated that all systems are subject to failures, but he also knew the temptation to copycat the Western cultures. This minor myth demonstrates that the governmental systems are “only one variant of the general failure of modern humanity,” and that a consumerist-technology driven culture is a culprit that keeps individuals from living authentic truth-filled lives.²⁷⁴ When it comes to technology specifically, Havel turns towards Heidegger’s argument that it “enslaves” and “tears us away from our natural affiliation.”²⁷⁵ His critique is as much a warning to the West as it is to his own people, in that the “more room...for the genuine aims of life,

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 77.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 86-87.

²⁷² Ibid, 80.?

²⁷³ Ibid, 117.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 115.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 114.

the better the crisis is hidden from people and the more deeply do they become immersed in it.”²⁷⁶ The guise of freedoms does not always free the individual.

This final attempt to tear away any prevailing myths that might deteriorate his argument is sobering, but also revealing. It solidifies Havel’s desire to communicate an ethic of living not just an anti-party sentiment. It also reveals Havel’s innate sense that myths are competing and that in creating a new myth it must challenge other older myths.

The Competing Myths

The description of competing myths in *The Power of the Powerless* make it obvious that revolt is not necessary to change the system. Instead simply living differently, living in truth, was enough. This is an immensely fundamental component of Havel’s argument. One that most likely contributed to the Velvet Revolution, but more importantly outlined a different mode of political and social change – one that acknowledged the power of ethics and communication. There are several instances throughout the text that illustrate the tension between the old myths and the new one.

Havel explains that these two different systems, or cultures, cannot co-exist forever.²⁷⁷ There is too much tension between the two, and at some point one will force the other out. This fact is particularly punctuated by his opening line, “A spectre is haunting Eastern Europe: the spectre of what in the West is called ‘dissent’.”²⁷⁸ This line is important because it is a play on words with the opening line to the *Communist Manifesto*.²⁷⁹ The same line that was first used to expose a once broken system, the world of Marx, is now being turned on its head due to its own brokenness. Clearly, Havel’s

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 116.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 112.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 36.

²⁷⁹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 1.

intent is to juxtapose these competing myths. At the core of the new myth is to “live like a human being,”²⁸⁰ but “between the aims of the post-totalitarian system and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss.”²⁸¹ The reason for this is that the system “demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline,”²⁸² and the struggle must be to “shatter the world of ‘appearances’ and unmask the real nature of power.”²⁸³ This act is difficult because “in everyone there is some longing for humanity’s rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie.”²⁸⁴ Therefore, people must grasp the importance of “responsibility the individual has to and for the world,”²⁸⁵ and as a result:

It is of great importance that the main thing – the everyday, thankless and never ending struggle of human beings to live more freely, truthfully, and in quiet dignity – never imposes any limits on itself, never be half-hearted, inconsistent, never trap itself in political tactics, speculating on the outcome of its actions or entertaining fantasies about the future. The purity of this struggle is the best guarantee of optimum results when it comes to actual interaction with the post-totalitarian structure.²⁸⁶

This last quote is the culmination of Havel’s call. The purity of his new myth is completely dependent on the fortitude of the people to uphold the values that are so vital to the myths existence.

²⁸⁰ Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” 70.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 43.

²⁸² Ibid, 44.

²⁸³ Ibid, 106.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 54.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 103.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 113.

Followers

The message of *The Power of the Powerless* has no force without audience. Although this text is not solely responsible for forming the entire anti-party movement in the 1980s, it is a meaningful piece for *defining* this group. Additionally, as I have mentioned before, the text was important in expanding the definition of a dissident to a more inclusive group. This means that on some level the text is responsible for constructing the followers. It may not be possible to fully know the ways followers “co-constructed” leadership through this text, but Havel’s approach in describing the followers and what their role needed to be to materialize his vision indicates his understanding that they must be co-constructors. Havel once wrote that texts, “[acquire] meaning and substance, only through the response to it. Without any resonance, it would be . . . whistling in the wind, a defeat, and embarrassment.”²⁸⁷ My focus here is not so much on the follower response as a co-construction, but the importance of this co-construction as communicated by the text. I briefly touch on some of the responses to this text, but essentially the mere fact that the Velvet Revolution occurred and Havel was soon after named president reflects that this “conversation” occurred. However, first, I explore how Havel invites potential followers to engage in co-construction.

Invitation to Co-Construct

McGee explains that all people have latent “general propositions” or a “longing for something.”²⁸⁸ There are numerous places, many that have already been discussed, where Havel describes what he believes this “longing” is concerning his cause. One of the best examples may be: “The essential aims of life are present naturally in every

²⁸⁷ Havel as qtd. in Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 207.

²⁸⁸ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’,” 240.

person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence."²⁸⁹ This is the baseline from which Havel builds his follower.

He also accepts that the same people are interwoven into the older myth. He recognizes that it is the people who actually perpetuate the myth as their acceptance of the "ritual...reality...rules of the game" make them complicity "player[s] in the game."²⁹⁰

Havel is reminding people that even passivity makes them co-creators of the old myth, and that in order to deliver themselves from this ritual people must actively work to create an alternative. This is an interesting juxtaposition between silence and noise, and how both are forms of communication that create realities. Yet the point still remains, that this environment (silence or noise) is fueled by the choices of the *people*.

Havel reminds his fellow citizens that they have the ability to make significant change by describing governmental systems where "there is public competition for power" (i.e., democracy).²⁹¹ The difference between the Czech and places like these is that the public retains some control over the "way that power legitimates itself," and as a result there are "correctives" that naturally exist within the system.²⁹² The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate that the "people" indeed have power within their grasp, and they can perpetuate, enslave or free, themselves from certain power structures if they stop handing over that power to their government—to the "leaders." *The Power of the Powerless* is not only working to define its audience, but is challenging them to pull

²⁸⁹ Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 54.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 45-46.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 47.

²⁹² Ibid, 47.

together as active followers, because as McGee explains there is “collective force which transcends both individuality and reason.”²⁹³

In order for this collective force to occur, Havel is continually priming his audience. Once they recognize their lack of freedom, they must understand the difference an individual can make, such as the greengrocer,²⁹⁴ but also the power for change “does not reside in the strength of definable political or social groups, but chiefly in the strength of a potential, which is hidden throughout the whole of society.”²⁹⁵ As an example, he refers to the change agents in the Prague Spring; “they had no access to real power, nor did they aspire to it.”²⁹⁶ I believe his point is that “power” in the traditional sense does not reside in position and does not need to be the aim—that each individual needs to recognize their “responsibility” within their given role. “Responsibility” is an important concept, as each individual choice has some level of “universality,” an effect on others.²⁹⁷

People cannot escape this responsibility:

Patočka used to say that the most interesting thing about responsibility is that we carry it with us everywhere. That means that responsibility is ours, that we must accept it and grasp it here, now, in this place in time and space where the Lord has set us down, and that we cannot lie our way out of it by moving somewhere else, whether it be to an Indian ashram or to a parallel polis.²⁹⁸

Havel is embracing the notion that all people have a type of fate, in that they are placed within a particular place in time and space. This inevitability does not hand out excuses

²⁹³ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 238.

²⁹⁴ Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 55-56.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 58.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 60.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 103.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 104.

for bypassing that fate; all people have responsibility *and* power in their mere existence. Therefore, they should actively choose their relationship to their environment. This is why Havel's title is ironic yet fitting. "The Power of the Powerless" is addressing a mindset of "powerlessness," and indicates the state of those without position or authority—one of power.

Havel makes some practical suggestions as to what this choice to embrace collective power and take responsibility could look like:

People who, using the means available to them, try to express and defend the actual social interests of workers, to put real meaning back into trade unions or to form independent ones; people who are not afraid to call the attention of officials to cases of injustice and who strive to see that the laws are observed; and the different groups of young people who try to extricate themselves from manipulation and live in their own way, in the spirit of their own hierarchy of values. The list could go on.²⁹⁹

This is the call of all people; it does not require special skills or notable positions. Havel is not calling people to himself, but calling them to take his vision and actualize it in their own way within their own sphere of influence. Additionally, the point is it requires a decision to act, and that individuals acting towards one goal create a collective will—this will becomes a co-creation by transforming and transcending the original message through each act. With this collective will, followers exist.

Co-Constructing

The Power of the Powerless represents a shift in Havel's thinking. Years earlier, in his "Letter to Dr. Husak" Havel believed that the government itself could fix the

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 87.

problem. *The Power of the Powerless* is his acceptance that this would never occur, and his turn from “the rulers to the ruled” in creating change.³⁰⁰ Bolton writes, “nearly all dissident writing was, at some level, about the question of its own audience – about its own project, purported, yearned-for connection to those Czechoslovak citizens who weren’t in dissent.”³⁰¹ This statement was written after discussing the peculiar relationship the “dissidents” had with this label. He explains that because it “walled [the dissidents] off from larger society,”³⁰² Havel had to create a new “people”, grasping hold of “citizens” was most definitely an aim of Havel’s. This section looks at a more general discussion about how people answered Havel’s call post-1978. The core concern is whether followers to Havel’s message existed and how they co-created that message. There is no way to concretely prove these connections (and that is not necessarily the goal of this paper), but by discussing these events there is implicit evidence of how this occurred.

In more recent years, historians have sought to paint a more varied picture of life under Communism, one that recognizes the role of individuals outside the dissident circles. One that realizes these people did not simply “[sell] their political souls in exchange for a few consumer goods.”³⁰³ However, even with this being true, in order to live “well” a co-construction process had to occur; Bolton calls it “they cocreate contours of their lives” in order to exist within the system.³⁰⁴ People in this category are often called “ordinary people” because they did not directly engage in dissident activity.

³⁰⁰ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 220.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 16.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 21.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

Václav Klaus explained that even though they did not take outright political action, many:

‘ordinary citizens’ did have a reaction to unfree conditions: resistance, inefficiency, alternate individual activities, the atomization of society, mere passive living against the backdrop of propaganda that no one believed any longer. But it was just these people who, through their behavior, created the precondition for November 17, 1989.³⁰⁵

However, Klaus and Havel never had a very strong relationship, and Klaus may be unwilling to acknowledge Havel’s ability to set the stage for this kind of activity. In Klaus’s description of “ordinary citizens,” the activities described appear very similar to Havel’s earlier quote about what the people’s action could look like.

Bolton explains that “in the final months of 1978, Havel’s theses would be debated even before ‘The Power of the Powerless’ had begun to circulate widely in samizdat – a clear sign that he had articulated questions and dilemmas that faced many others besides himself.”³⁰⁶ This is an interesting statement, because it indicates that Havel’s power to frame these ideas, with or without the whole text, was enough to stir up conversations in people. One of his supporters, after immigrating to Austria, even arranged a public reading of the text.³⁰⁷ One of Havel’s successes prior to writing the text was bringing together disparate groups of people to rally around the individuals put on trial from the underground (the case of the Plastic People), which eventually led to the Charter 77.³⁰⁸ It seems with *The Power of the Powerless* he was working towards the

³⁰⁵ Klaus, qtd. by Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 36.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 231.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 260.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 140-141.

same effect with a new goal: “Havel wanted all his readers to think about their own participation in the system, and hence their own ability to change it.”³⁰⁹ By doing this he was once again drawing together diverse groups of people, but empowering them not just drawing them together.

Whatever positive effect Havel may have had, he was not without critics. Many see the text as “a vague existential hope” that has no practical application.³¹⁰ The problem with this critique is that it is not entirely true. One of the most well recorded reactions to *The Power of the Powerless* happened within the Polish dissident movement. In a moment of defeat, Havel’s text gave the Polish Solidarity the

theoretical underpinnings for our activity. It maintained our spirits; we did not give up . . . We mattered. And the rank and file saw us as leaders of the movement. When I look at the victories of Solidarity, and of Charter 77, I see in them an astonishing fulfillment of the prophecies and knowledge contained in Havel's essay.³¹¹

This response is a sterling example of how a message can inspire or maintain the leadership process. However, this example does not communicate the impact of this text on its immediate audience: the Czech and Slovaks. Poland was the only location where there was a mass movement towards dissent. In other countries, like the Czech, open dissent was only a fraction of people.³¹² These smaller groups made it harder for texts like *The Power of the Powerless* to even be available to the ordinary citizens.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 226.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 230.

³¹¹ “Václav Havel: Power of the Powerless,” para. 2; Barbara Kellerman, *Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence* (New York: McGraw-Hill): 2010, 282-283.

³¹² Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 33.

Jan Urban, a dissident and now professor, explains that “in Czechoslovakia living in truth was understood as advice to personalized passive attitude.”³¹³ The idea of passivity in the Czech culture is still debated. Tucker, who writes about the philosophies of Patočka and Havel, explains that Havel knew “civil society” would not be enough to cause the Communist Party to fall. In the end, Tucker attributes consumerism and internal issues in Moscow as the true cause of the Soviet crumble in Eastern Europe.³¹⁴ Regardless of who or what actually brought down the Communist Party, thousands of people rallied around Havel in 1989 to first demand his release from prison and a few months later rally around him in what he terms the Velvet Revolution.³¹⁵ As I briefly referenced earlier, one American journalist vividly describes the scene from Day 11 of the revolution:

As Mr. Havel finished, a light snow began to fall, and as if on cue, his listeners took their places . . . One by one, in single-file, hand in hand, they began to march toward Wenceslas Square . . . Hand in hand, they bisected the city. Hand in hand, they drew a line. Here, on one side, stood the people; on the other, their oppressors. This was the moment. Everyone had to choose.³¹⁶

Only a short time after this scene Havel became the first president of a free Czechoslovakia. This is a picturesque description of what Havel originally called for in *The Power of the Powerless*: the hand-in-hand collective will that made a decision to live as free citizens. Despite any controversy as to the effect of this text, Havel’s message had been communicated and people rose up as followers. Today Havel is remembered as a

³¹³ Jan Urban, email message to author, March 20, 2013.

³¹⁴ Tucker, *The Philosophy and Politics...*, 167-168.

³¹⁵ Meyer, “Power of the Powerless: How they...,” 1.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

leader, but the leadership that occurred cannot be separated from the call to action and the audience that decided to follow it by living in truth.

CHAPTER 4: RHETORIC AS A VALUABLE LENS ON LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The first time I read Havel's *Power of the Powerless* I immediately thought it was an interesting text regarding the study of leadership. At the same time, I was freshly exposed to rhetorical theories and believed this text could be an excellent example of how leaders engage language for change. I now understand my original hypothesis was in part naïve as language shapes the entire process, not just leader emergence. Leadership unavoidably includes rhetorical context and the co-creation of messages between followers *and* leaders. It is the forward momentum created by the interaction of components that constitutes rhetorical action. My research aspires to validate the merit of this perspective and opens up the following research questions: how does removing a leader (or follower) behavior-centric view of leadership and replacing it with a rhetorical-communicative perspective change the way in which leadership is studied and practiced? What are the rhetorical scholars or the rhetoricians' position within this research?

An abridged response to these questions would advocate for shifting focus to the interaction rather than the individuals, and that because the interaction is constituted through messaging it invites those concerned with language and persuasion to boldly enter the conversation. This project, however, only initiates potential intersections of leadership and rhetorical studies. What this study does is highlight McGee's notion of 'the people' and Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" as tools for understanding this rhetorical lens on leadership. The *conclusions* section of this chapter explains what I have determined to be the most salient points of the analysis in this study. In the *limitations*

and further research section and in the *potential implications* section, I explore ways in which my research could be expanded in hopes of bringing further relevance and clarity to this reconceptualization. Implicitly, this research elevates the relationship between rhetoric and leadership by determining that they are interwoven rather than aligned, warranting a deeper examination of these concepts as consummate.

Study Conclusions

Havel's essay is a blueprint of not just how to resist within an oppressive environment, but he enacts the underlying rhetorical moves soliciting change. In a sense he is direct in revealing what a critic would notice in this scenario, while simultaneously he is the subject material for the critic. That is, his piece is not just a call to action, but a treatise of how communication works to change minds. Also, Havel has an interesting relationship to his text. He largely refrained from infusing his argument with personal experiences (not to be confused with personal interpretation). This is especially interesting as he wrote the text shortly after his release from prison.³¹⁷ The rhetorical choice to exclude this data about his life demonstrates Havel's role as critic—his concern with the relationship between language and action, his recognition of texts as “sites of struggle over meaning,”³¹⁸ and his concern with all things that inhibit the well-lived human experience.

There is no indication that Havel wrote *The Power of Powerless* with creating leadership at the forefront of his mind, but through linguistic engagement he offered himself and others access to leadership. Often we focus on “actions” without interpreting the rhetorical deployment necessary for these actions to occur. This case reveals Havel's

³¹⁷

³¹⁸ Brummett, *Popular Culture in Rhetoric*, 93.

emergent leadership as rhetorically bound, but Havel's message unveils the leader as only one component of the leadership interaction. To fully grasp this interaction, I explore how the four components; leaders, follower, message, and context, relate to each other.

Message vs. Leader

Messages are the conduits, the lifeblood, of the leadership process. As illustrated by my analysis of *The Power of the Powerless*, the text cannot be singularly defined by follower or leader. The followers did not choose the words of the text, and they did not hold the pen to write the text. The follower's contribution appears in their reactions to the text as well as their part in the environment that shaped the speaker's message. Similarly, the leader may have articulated it into existence, but only after interacting with potential followers and shaping his words into a translation of the hope and desires of these people. As such, the message not only becomes a bridge, a typical metaphor for a message, but also becomes the defining essence of the entire interaction – shaping both leader and follower simultaneously. I am not arguing that the message is the only defining aspect of leadership, but that the message is an absolutely vital and central entity in its own right. This research suggests that studying leadership without first acknowledging the independent nature of the message (opposed to viewing it as only a product of the individual) falls short in conceptualizing the entire process.

It was not by design that the largest portion of my analysis focused on the message, but as I began to break apart the text I realized that the ideas presented in the text made more sense categorized as the message than as the leader. To assign the meaning of the text to the leader would be to suggest that the message was the leader's identity— a direct extension of the individual. This did not seem logical because the text

was birthed from specific audiences and events, and therefore was not a “history” of one person but an “interpretation” of something larger than a person. Perhaps this is what McGee intends to communicate with his notion of “collective will.” Some may argue that the mere fact that a person speaks makes it their own; and therefore, an attribute or behavior of the speaker. Yet, the act of speaking does not negate the fact that once the words are spoken they take on a life of their own.

I found that deciphering between leader and message is the most challenging part of this process, perhaps even a shortcoming. For example, when I identified a specific technique being utilized within the text, such as narrative, I had to determine whether to solely attribute the pragmatic skill such as word choice and technique to the leader, or to attribute the actual meaning of the language to the leader. Thus, when Havel uses narrative, I had to decide whether the “greengrocer” was an example of the leader directly or if merely the practice of using narrative format belonged with the leader. I made a decision to only assign the linguistic technique to the leader, for all the reasons I have begun describing. The greengrocer is not the “leader” but instead the message because it is an interpretation of experience that is informed by context, followers, and leaders; and that will continue to take shape as it is read, shared, and discussed. Certainly the leader remains himself regardless of how much the greengrocer takes shape beyond its initial formulation. Yet the narrative is transformative for constituting the public as well, and in a way only accounted for when the message is understood as the co-creator of context, followers, and source. Leader may be changed by his own message, but the message’s import is part and apart from the leader.

Additionally, Havel is not the embodiment of the greengrocer, the greengrocer will forever be a sign of Havel. On some level, when someone meets Havel on the street, he or she will not just see the person, but will also see the greengrocer—meaning that leaders often become the signifier of their causes. Their individual meaning is no longer a sum of their personal life experiences; they become a physical representation of the messages they have championed—which includes meaning added by others. Often, the additive layer is seen first and foremost before the person, much like a flag-bearer is defined by the flag. Presidents of nation states exemplify this concept. When the public sees their president, they rarely first think about the person as a spouse, a parent, or even as a professional; instead the image of their president might first conjure up images of a war, a bill that impacted their lives, or a hope for the future. It is in this way that the message often subsumes the individual identity of the leader. However, this entire discussion is one of semantics; the famous sign, signifier, signified; which is another rhetorical theory that could provide a lively topic for future research. The relevance of discussing the leader as a signifier to my current study is as an example of how a message, once spoken, becomes its own identity. As it may act to define aspects of both leader and follower, it cannot be studied as a direct extension of one or the other.

The challenge of forcing the mind to separate out leader from message into discrete forms is perhaps the reason researchers often focus on the “language of leaders” rather than the “language of leadership.” Additionally, any attempt to separate the message from the leader creates the following question: where does the individual end and the collective will begin? This question can only be answered by doing more than

acknowledging that the message exists as most studies of leadership do, but by creating the habit of exploring how the message “means” in each leadership scenario.

Leader and Followers

This research also introduces the fluid nature of leader and follower. Traditionally (or perhaps culturally), an individual is viewed as a leader according to his or her position of authority. Positions of authority have symbolic meaning, therefore assumptions about authority and leadership are not excluded under a rhetorical theory of leadership, but a rhetorical theory loosens the boundaries of who becomes and how they become leaders. Havel was once a follower of the Soviet system, who became a leader through his rhetorical action. As a “leader,” he called others to join his cause, and many who answered the call became leaders as well. If the leaders blossom through their ability to define, interpret, and connect with potential followers, and if at the same time followers unite by responding to this message they are taking up the gauntlet of co-creation. During the co-creation process, it is very likely that a follower may at some point define, interpret, and connect in a more effective way than the leader, resulting in the follower becoming a leader. Havel’s admonishment about responsibility³¹⁹ and his suggestions of how to act in dissent³²⁰ is in many ways an acknowledgment of how the role of leading is passed from one person to another, and may implicitly suggest that everyone is a leader by taking rhetorical action. Yet, through McGee we see distinct roles for leader and follower, despite their fluidity. Further research may elucidate how leadership is shared between these two groups, but either way the potential for the leader to empower followers to become leaders themselves becomes an important aspect of rhetorical action.

³¹⁹ Havel, “Power of the Powerless,” 103-104.

³²⁰ Ibid, 87.

Havel's allusion to leadership exchange reflects what Millard calls the Circle of Relationship. Millard's theory does not negate formal hierarchy, but argues that in the context of the relationship that hierarchy should be horizontal.³²¹ This type of relationship does not mean that the employee supersedes the manager positionally, but that out of mutual respect the person best suited for the interaction takes the role as the leader. The goal is not to ignore the role of hierarchy in society but to acknowledge that interaction among hierarchical levels does not need to be static. Millard suggests that the chain or ladder analogy in organizational life is a misnomer.³²² Although Millard is not a rhetorical scholar, his critique of the "ladder" metaphor for organizational structure is an act of rhetorical criticism. In this case, hierarchy could be assigned a new metaphor that actualizes a leader-follower interaction more like the one Havel is suggesting, and Millard's circle of relationship demonstrates how this concept may take shape in organizational structures.

Competing Myths and Context

One of the most engaging components presented by McGee is the idea of competing myths. *The Power of the Powerless* demonstrates how new myths must sometimes subsume older myths to succeed, but not all competing myths derive from deep polarities like "living in a lie" vs. "living in truth." Competing myths, as a concept, is not reserved for large social conflicts such as the ones presented in this case study, but this concept has practical application for the entire spectrum of human experiences. McGee explains that most myths are replaced through a gradual process, often through

³²¹ Millard, "Circle of Relationship vs. Chain of Command," clcl.indwes.edu/Lead2

³²² Ibid.

slight generational shifts.³²³ As such, people may not easily recognize dominant myths in their lives on a conscious level. Competing myths within organizational culture and personal relationships are much more difficult to identify because they become habit, perhaps ritual. *The Power of the Powerless* demonstrates how even everyday living, habits, can become a divisive myth, such as Havel describes through the greengrocer. However, consciously delineating the myths we prescribe to is a useful tool for understanding shifts and conflicts within everyday contexts as well as in large social issues. This concept reinforces rhetoric as a vital aspect of dissecting human experience. Rhetoric illuminates moments of transition or resistance, and offers a mode for discovering what may have remained hidden. Through a knowledge of how myths compete and operate will help individuals better understand why some myths succeed and others fail.

Havel is an informative example of this exchange. Havel as a leader in the formalized role of president is different than Havel as the informal dissident leader. This difference does not mean that Havel could not be successful at both, but that context dictates that his myths/message operate differently in various environments. Havel was not considered a successful presidential leader by many. In Remnick's article commemorating Havel's presidency during his exit from the position, he explains that Havel had many distractors,³²⁴ and that he even apologized to the people who "hated" him in his farewell speech.³²⁵ Lensmith explained that some people absolutely despised him, especially those who still believed in the communist party.³²⁶ Kellerman states that

³²³ McGee, "In Search of 'The People'," 245.

³²⁴ Remnick, "Exit Havel," para. 13 and 14.

³²⁵ Ibid, para. 57.

³²⁶ Lensmith, Personal Communication, 12 December 2011.

Havel was “not notably successful” in his presidency, explaining that his mark on history will be the former period of his life as a dissident leader.³²⁷ She describes it as the hero becoming mortal.³²⁸ There are many Czech citizens who might take offense to this characterization. The outpouring of emotion at the time of his death reflects how deeply many felt about him.³²⁹ Yet, Kellerman is not completely wrong. Havel was at a disadvantage because he did not have any positive examples of political leadership to model, as he was “preceded by dictators”³³⁰—in a sense he was limited by his language, in this case a language for ruling a democratic state. Also, Havel embraced the philosopher-leader attitude, which did not align well with the institutional nature of democracy.³³¹ Whether it was the practical conflict between formal and informal leadership, the theoretical differences between dissidence and kingship, or both; Havel was not able to transform his message to work as successfully within his new role and new context. Ironically, Havel even said in *The Power of the Powerless*, “Perhaps all this [the dissident movement] is only the consequence of a common threat. Perhaps the moment the threat ends or eases, the mood it helped create will begin to dissipate as well.”³³² Havel predicted the context would change, and that his message may no longer hold the same relevance at that point. This does not mean that all leaders who go through such a drastic change in leading will struggle to adapt. But for someone like Havel, who held authentic living at such a high standard and lived his life according to the message he deemed most salient until the day he died, this transition in messages from dissident to

³²⁷ Kellerman, “Leadership...,” 281, 276.

³²⁸ Ibid, 283.

³²⁹ Nicholas Kulish and Katerina Santurva, “Mourners in Prague Honor Havel,” *The New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune* (23 December 2011).

³³⁰ Remnick, “Exit Havel,” para. 9.

³³¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 17.

³³² Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 121.

king may not have been possible without changing his message beyond what he was comfortable for him.

Whether Havel was a success or a failure is most likely a personal interpretation based on each individual's accepted myth structure. But when considering leadership as dependent on collective will, Havel's transition to president illustrates how important it is for even leaders to adapt their myths. If they do not adopt the practice of developing new myths, even if it competes with some of their older myths, they may not retain the audience necessary to continue in their role as leader. This inevitability is the beauty and the curse of co-construction, the success of a message is not dependent on one individual.

The Interaction Effect

This study places a significant amount of focus on the message. It would be easy to define leadership through the message. However, I believe it is important to resist the impulse to define leadership so narrowly. Instead, the message should be viewed as a vital and central component of the leadership process. I believe the correct response to my research would be to begin conceptualizing a rhetorical-communicative *lens* for viewing leadership interaction. A lens suggests an over-arching framework rather than an equivalent relationship. Leadership is not the message, but leadership is the interaction between leader, follower, context, and message.

This type of lens offers a unique frame for each of the components I have outlined. Leaders may be determined by their ability to create a message that engages others to participate in their narrative. Followers may be determined by their ability to respond to messages, and through their inhabiting of the message. Context is often a determinant of whether leaders and followers will be ready to engage in a co-construction

process, yet context is also changed through the rhetorical action of leaders and followers. Messages allow individuals to begin engaging in leader and follower roles, and will eventually reflect the collective will of these two groups. Essentially, each component works to construct meaning for each of the other components. This perspective on interaction opens up new ways of deciphering and interpreting how leadership exists.

Havel is an interesting example of this comprehensive process, because of his approach to empowering followers. Bolton explains that

one reason Havel chose a worker, and not an intellectual – a greengrocer, and not a poet or physicist – as his protagonist was to suggest that the independent life of society was open to far more people than just a narrow class of Western-anointed ‘dissidents.’³³³

In a sense, the West thrust upon this group of people a stereotype of dissident leadership. However, Havel knew that the success of this mission was dependent on the non-leaders and the non-political, and interestingly his choice to write *The Power of the Powerless* demonstrates that he knew the only way to gain the allegiance of this group was through shaping language that would resonate with them. Essentially, what this work is allowing Havel to do is activate the role of the follower by shaping a new reality through the greengrocer rather than the intellect. By making this choice, Havel is also rejecting the stereotype of the leader – he is telling his people that their participation in the message is absolutely necessary. He is actively co-creating messages by responding to the Western definition of dissidents and recreating the concept to better fit the context in which he lived and worked.

³³³ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 225.

Additionally, Havel's message is an interpretation tied to his own experiences, which had been impacted by his interactions with "everyday" citizens. The result is that the people's voice is the voice of *The Power of the Powerless*. This is what sets this text apart from the Charter 77; what makes it the "moral and philosophical soul" of the Charter.³³⁴ This transaction is a reflection of how a leader's message derives from his or her own co-construction of a previous message; the message is recreated by the leader to better suit the context, and the follower must choose whether to participate in the co-construction or reject it. These messages continue to evolve and take shape, folding over each other. As such, leadership cannot be viewed as a linear progression. Instead it becomes a construction of meanings that overlap and confront each other, like the ripple effect. In the end, the leaders and followers cannot exist without each other, and even as a collective they cannot continue without the rhetorical bond that holds them together.

In an article about leader-centrism, Kellerman explains that "leadership experts are too narrowly focused. We zero in on one of the actors, the leader, when the drama includes a cast of thousands."³³⁵ "Drama" is an interesting way of illustrating the need for multiple actors in the leadership process. This study has focused on the text of Havel, but Havel would not have been in the position to even communicate without the additional cast members who influenced the process before and after the text. Furthermore, there is a complete drama at work in and around this text. The drama is not a direct product of the actors, but has a stage, a scene, and a script. People do not attend the theater to see people stand on a stage and be themselves, they come to the theater to see the entire drama. Perhaps in a star-struck culture that places so much emphasis on the leading role, we have

³³⁴ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 226.

³³⁵ Kellerman, "Leader-Centrism," 5.

become ignorant to what makes the drama so engaging—the splendid synergy that comes from all the pieces working as a whole. In particular, the narrative that ties all of these pieces of the drama together is rarely highlighted. Leadership activity offers an interesting drama to be studied, but to be successful in interpreting the scene, the observer must be aware of all of its parts. Perhaps, Havel’s background as a playwright contributed to his ability to visualize the leadership process in a holistic manner. A leader-centric approach can wind up as a diversion as it draws attention away from the whole picture, from the components that allow the leader to exist. A rhetorical perspective, on the other hand, engages every aspect of the interaction as it is fully immersed in symbolic assignment and exchange.

Limitations and Further Research

Havel, in many ways, is an “ideal” case. I argued that his text is both theory and practice. His text is “theory” because he is essentially creating communicative theory through his message. This is not the aim of all leaders, and other leadership messages may not present McGee’s four components as explicitly as Havel. In some cases, the leader may even be extremely naive about the different aspects of the leadership interaction, and this unawareness may have a dramatic impact on that leader’s effectiveness. Although the speakers’ awareness of the components in their texts is not a limitation of the current study, it is something to consider if applying this analysis tool to other texts. Future researchers will need to be diligent in extrapolating McGee’s theory of the people.

Where this study is limited is in its ability to fully explore the follower’s co-construction. By restricting the majority of my analysis to a text written by an individual

acting in the role of leader, my understanding of the follower is constrained. This specific study could be significantly expanded by identifying texts by followers that represent the reactions to and reconstruction of the message as individuals responded either by accepting or rejecting this call for collective will. Additionally, analyzing other texts and speeches by Havel himself would illuminate how the myth evolved over time. Observing the evolution of Havel's message may reflect a co-construction process as well as providing insight on how a leader recreates his or her own message to match the desires of the people. Havel was also not the only leader of this movement; expanding the research into leaders, as a plural, may provide an interesting new layer of research - a complexity that could have unique implications. For instance, how do multiple messages being created by multiple speakers vying for leadership overlap, repel, and integrate?

Another limitation is that this is one case study, limited to a specific group of people in a specific period of history. Although I make assumptions about links between this study and other historically documented experiences, such as interpreting the different reports about how Havel reimagined the "case of the Plastic People," these links are ultimately weak because they are interpretation. Extending this research to other case studies will help in expanding and validating my findings. This expansion could include other texts as well as other rhetorical theories. Suggesting a rhetorical lens of leadership interaction, as I do here, is only an opening to the possibilities between leadership and rhetoric.

Implications

The four components present in McGee's theory about the "people" are useful as demarcations of leadership interaction, but as we have described language as more than

its defining quality it becomes important to grapple with what doors of exploration are opened by this type of re-conceptualization about leadership. Initially, potential implications are rooted in the eloquence of *The Power of the Powerless*. As argued before, Havel does not just fulfill the qualities that McGee outlines, but is replete with his own theory of rhetoric. In McGee's article about the "people," he establishes the nature of forming audiences, highlighting the idea that audiences are conscious groups that select and "legislate" the myths in which they choose to become participants. Yet, McGee merely names these behaviors. Through *The Power of the Powerless*, Havel expands McGee's original intent by further defining the audience's responsibility. Followers become part of the "collective identity," they "surrender their personal identities," through responsibility. By taking specific symbolic actions that communicate their agreement with a particular myth, the myth is perpetuated both intellectually and practically. The leader and follower become much more closely aligned in this scenario, because each action may be an act of leading as well as following. As a result, Havel's appeal to become a "follower" requires more commitment out of its audience than McGee fully communicates.

Furthermore, Havel elevates the philosophical importance of language by disclosing its relationship to human values and existence. McGee presents language, in the form of a myth, as an exchange between advocate and audience, but Havel presents this relationship as transformative. First, he describes the complexity of language. For example, when he calls the people both "victim and supporter," he is revealing how people can concurrently dwell within conflicting semantic spaces. This space causes language to exist as a "lie" because only a lie can sustain the dissonance created by the

conflict. By creating “life in truth” he is implying that language exists for nobler purposes; language is the crux of human freedom because it can act as both captor and savior. Therefore, human responsibility is not limited to responding actively to messages, but it is to create language that produces better communities and better individual living. Language is quite possibly a paradox, but one that holds the key to its own bondage. Ultimately, this conversation divulges the relationship between rhetoric and ethics.

The nature of rhetoric raises ethical and philosophical questions. One of the reasons rhetoric is often approached cautiously within leadership studies is because of its potential to be used to harm human life (Hitler, the classic example). From this point of view persuasion is often viewed as an instrument, having no necessary obligation for ethical action; words are moldable. Ethics, however, is always relevant as language use inherently has a pull toward ethics as demonstrated by Havel. As leaders act they seek out myths of adherence, presumably upholding human dignity. At the same time, the audience in their role upholds these myths, thereby endorsing an ethical reality.

All human beings have a relationship with words because words are the substance of our existence. In 1989 Havel gave a speech about “words” upon receiving the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers Association where he acknowledges that “words can be said to be the very source of our being, and in fact the very substance of the cosmic life form we call man.”³³⁶ However, because words are “mysteriously ambiguous” that

No word...comprises only the meaning assigned to it by an etymological dictionary. Every word also reflects the person who utters it, the situation in

³³⁶ “Václav Havel: A Word About Words,” *The Official Website of Václav Havel*, Last accessed April 28, 2013, http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky&val=78_aj_clanky.html.

which it is uttered, and the reason for its utterance. The same word can, at one moment, radiate great hope; at another, it can emit lethal rays.³³⁷

Havel is delineating the complex relationship humans have with words—the power of the words themselves but perhaps more specifically the power *given* to words. We must not forget that even if the message interjects into the context, creating new contexts and allowing for leadership – it is the mouth of the human being that gives the words of that message shape, literally and figuratively. As Havel emphasized, human responsibility is never excused from its role.

The Power of the Powerless is a good example of these ethical considerations, both as a pragmatic example and as instruction. The whole notion of living in a lie exemplifies how rhetorical devices and language can be used to shape unhealthy societies. At the same time Havel demonstrates that the primary way to combat this deceptive use of language is by creating messages populated by language that frees. The bottom line for Havel, “[r]esponsibility for and toward words is intrinsically ethical.”³³⁸ As language is shaped it will reflect the morals and values of human beings, sometimes this must come in the form of a corrective—but either way it is the deployment of language that allows ethics to exist. Havel offered a corrective, but also shaped new realities. Language, inherently, has a compulsion towards ethics because as the “cosmic life form” of humans it must reflect the desires and hopes that compose our existence.

The ethical seed within human nature must at some point intersect with the aspect of human nature that compels us to create leadership. Gellis in his article *Leadership*,

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

Rhetoric, and the Polis, explains that humans function in polis-like communities that require both leadership and rhetoric:

...some kind of leadership is always required by a group, and that the question is not whether the polis will be led, but whether it will be led by a leader or a tyrant...the citizen who speaks within the polis is leading, and leading, truly leading, not tyrannizing, because she is speaking within the polis, as part of the polis, as citizen, to serve the whole instead of her own aims.³³⁹

Gellis points to the fact that individuals will emerge as leaders within every group, but that an individual who is fully integrated into that community, fully invested, a “citizen” in the truest sense cannot help but work for the good of that community. Gellis argues that rhetoric should not be viewed as coercive because persuasion cannot exist without some level of free will.³⁴⁰ This reinforces the notion that rhetoric is participative, and that its persuasive qualities should not be a scapegoat for human responsibility. This conceptualization of ethical responsibility has the potential to slightly change the narrative about good and bad leadership. In this case, “good” and “bad” become imprecise mechanisms for describing the effect of leadership. For example, can good leadership exist with bad intent? And if so, which parties, leader or follower, are to blame? Instead of focusing on good or bad leadership, it may be more useful to explore how leadership and rhetoric work together to create better societies, such as the case of *The Power of the Powerless* demonstrates. We should strive for healthy communities where leadership and rhetoric emerge simultaneously as a fundamental aspect of human nature.

³³⁹Mark Gellis, “Leadership, Rhetoric, and The Polis,” *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 32, no. 3 (2002): 203&205.

³⁴⁰Ibid, 206.

There are certain activities and desires that seem apparent in all human beings. Burke defines man as “the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal... goaded by a spirit of hierarchy (or moved by a sense of order).”³⁴¹ Burke’s definition implies that mankind longs for order and must use symbols to achieve that order. Within order and hierarchy leadership is implicit, even with the acknowledgment that it should not be leader-centric. Revisiting the metaphor of a drama, the theater is a prime example of order, as it requires an outlined script including specific stage directions as well as an entire crew to ensure its success—a success which is dependent on predetermined processes and interactions. Although unlike the theater in that it emerges and evolves, leadership is also a paradigm of “order.” Therefore, somewhere between the human impulse to create symbolic language and to create order, leadership resides.

Furthermore, Thomas writes that “In the case of Burke, Nietzsche, and Lacan, order can be viewed as a basic element of humans’ intersection with language, and these intersections demonstrate that rhetorics of order produce, sustain and maintain rhetoric in society.”³⁴² Thomas is suggesting that order is not a freestanding entity, but is produced by rhetoric and alternatively makes room for other rhetorical spaces. Therefore, rhetoric and leadership do not only influence each other, but they derive from the same human impulse to make sense of the surrounding world. Leadership provides context for rhetoric’s role in building and influencing society, and rhetoric is the force that allows leadership to have a place in society.

The rhetorical nature, both in theory and practice, of *The Power of the Powerless* illustrates this relationship between rhetoric and leadership. This text contains its own

³⁴¹ Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 70.

³⁴² Lincoln. *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

rhetorical qualities, acts as rhetoric, while its rhetorical nature becomes a platform for rhetorical action—for leadership. Havel explained his relationship to the Prague Spring in his 1986 interview: “In those agitated times I still saw my role as that of a writer who is simply a ‘witness of his time’; in other words, I had no ambition to become a politician, in the sense of someone who takes on the practical task of organizing a better world.”³⁴³

What Havel may not have been able to see at the time is that the very materialization of words is sometimes enough to change the world. However, in the same interview, almost twenty years after the Prague Spring, Havel has already enacted leadership and recognizes that “witnessing” is not sufficient action. Further, he appears to “see” how rhetoric and leadership are constitutive:

“[I]t’s not true that you should first think up an idea for a better world and only then ‘put it into practice,’ but rather, through the fact of your existence in the world, you create the idea or manifest it - create it, as it were, from the ‘material of the world,’ articulate it in the ‘language of the world.’”³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace...*, 99.

³⁴⁴ Havel, “Disturbing the Peace,” 12.

REFERENCES

- Ashman, Ian and John Lawler. "Existential Communication and Leadership." *Leadership* 4, no. 3 (2008).
- Brower, Holly, C. Marlene Fiol, and Cynthia Emrich. "The Language of Leaders." *Journal of Leadership Studies* 1, no.3 (2007).
- Brummett, Barry. *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.
- Burke, Kenneth. *On Symbols and Society*. ed. Joseph Gusfield. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Burns, James MacGregor. "The Crisis of Leadership." in T. Wren. *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Burns, James MacGregor. *Leadership*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- Conger, Jay. "Inspiring Others: The Language of Leadership." *The Executive* 5, no. 1 (1991).
- Corbin, Carol. "Bridging Rhetoric and Cultural Studies: Michael Calvin McGee: 1943-2002." *Topia* 9 (2003).
- Cronin, Genovese, Cuilla, Riggio, and Kellerman. "The State of Leadership Studies." (panel at the annual International Leadership Association Conference, Boston, MA, October 27-30, 2010).
- Eske, Kristyn. "'Living in Truth' and 'The Power of the Powerless' as an Ethical

- Treatise.” (refereed paper panel at the annual National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, FL: November 2012).
- Fairhurst, Gail .“Considering Context in Discursive Leadership Research.” *Human Relations* 62 (2009).
- Fairhurst, Gail and David Grant. “The Social Construction of Leadership: A Sailing Guide.” *Management Communication Quarterly* 24 (2010).
- Fairhurst, Gail and Robert Sarr. *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.
- Farrell, Thomas. *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Ford, Jackie and John Lawler. “Blending Existentialist and Constructionist Approaches in Leadership Studies: An Exploratory Account.” *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal* 28, no.5 (2007).
- Ford, Jackie, N. Harding, and M. Learmonth. *Leadership as Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2008.
- Gellis, Mark. “Leadership, Rhetoric, and The Polis.” *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 32, no. 3 (2002).
- Gemmill, Gary and Judith Oakley. “Leadership: An Alienating Social Myth.” *Human Relations* 45, no.2 (1992).
- Gibbs, Stephen. “Leadership and Existentialism: Building a Groundwork.” *University of Cumbria Doctoral Colloquium* (2010).
- Greenleaf, Robert. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York: Paulista Press, 1991.

- Graen, George and Mary Uhl-Bien. "Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level, multi-domain perspective." *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no.2 (1995).
- Hauner, Milan. "The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe, by Václav Havel." *Slavic Review* 46,1 (1987).
- Havel, Václav. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala*. Translated by Paul Wilson. New York: Knopf, 1990.
- Havel, Václav. "Power of the Powerless," In *Václav Havel Living in Truth: Twenty-two Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, edited by Jan Vladislav, 36-122. London, England: Clays Ltd, 1986.
- Kellerman, Barbara. "End of Leadership: At Least as we Know It." *Leadership Excellence* (July 2012).
- Kellerman, Barbara. "Leader-Centrism." *Leadership Excellence* 25, no.3 (March 2008).
- Kellerman, Barbara. *Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.
- Kelly, Simon. "Leadership: A Categorical Mistake?." *Human Relations* 61, no. 6 (2008).
- Ketels, Violet. "Havel to the Castle!" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 548 (1996).
- Kreis, Steven. "The History Guide Lectures on Twentieth Century Europe: Václav

Havel,” *The History Guide*, last revised May 13, 2004,
<http://www.historyguide.org/europe/havel.html>.

Kulish, Nicholas and Katerina Santurva, “Mourners in Prague Honor Havel,” *The New York Times-International Herald Tribune*, December 23, 2011.

Lensmith, Vendula. Email Message to Author. December 12, 2011.

Lincoln, Bruce. *Discourse and the Construction of Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

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

McGee, Michael. “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology.” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980).

McGee, Michael. “Public Knowledge and Ideological Argumentation.” *Communication Monographs* 50 (1983).

McGee, Michael. “Social Movement as Meaning.” *Central States Speech Journal* 34,1 (1983).

McGee, Michael. “Social Movement; Phenomenon or Meaning?.” *Central States Speech Journal* 31,4 (1980).

Meyers, Michael. “Power of the Powerless; How They Checkmated Communism in Prague.” *The Washington Times*, November 29, 2009.

Millard, Bill. “Circle of Relationship vs. Chain of Command.” Center for Life Calling & Leadership ePublications, last modified January 2009, clcl.indwes.edu/Lead2.

Morrell, Kevin. “Leadership, Rhetoric, and Formalist Literary Theory.” *Journal of Leadership Studies* 3, no.4 (2010).

- Northouse, Peter. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. California: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Olson, Kathryn. "Rhetorical Leadership and Transferable Lessons for Successful Social Advocacy in Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 44 (2007).
- Olson, Kathryn. "What is Rhetorical Leadership?: My Perspective." statement, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2011.
- "Past ILA Conferences," International Leadership Association, Last accessed April 24, 2013, www.ila-net.org/conferences/past.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey. "The Ambiguity of Leadership." *The Academy of Management Review* 2, no.1 (1977).
- Pondy, Louis. "Leadership is a Language Game." in *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go?*. eds. Morgan McCall and Michael Lombardo. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978.
- Precan, Vilem. United States. *Documents of Helsinki Dissent From the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: An Introduction to Charter 77*, (Washington: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe): 1978.
- Remnick, David. "Exit Havel," *The New Yorker*, February 17, 2013.
- Smircich, Linda and Gareth Morgan. "Leadership: The Management of Meaning." *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences* 18, no.3 (1982).
- Souba, Chip. "Perspective: The Language of Leadership." *Academic Medicine* 85, no. 10 (2010).
- Urban, Jan. Email Message to Author. March 20, 2013.

“Václav Havel Distinguished Leadership Award 2009 ILA Conference,” YouTube video, 5:23, from a video presented at the International Leadership Association Conference 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic, posted by ILAOfficial, December 9, 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl-oTKw21xQ

“Václav Havel: Power of the Powerless,” *The Official Website of Václav Havel*, Last accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.Vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?sec=2&id=1>

“Václav Havel: A Word About Words,” *The Official Website of Václav Havel*, Last accessed April 28, 2013,

http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=clanky&val=78_aj_clanky.html.

Bolton, Jonathan. *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Weick, Karl. “The Spines of Leaders.” in *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go?*. eds. Morgan McCall and Michael Lombardo. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978.

Weick, Karl, Kathleen Sutcliffe, & David Obstfeld. “Organizing and Process of Sensemaking.” *Organization Science* 16, no.4 (2005).

CURRICULUM VITAE

Kristyn K. Eske-Ballard

Curriculum Vitae

1200 Ford St. – Winston-Salem, NC 27103

765.661.8878 – kristy.eske@gmail.com

Education

Wake Forest University; Winston-Salem, NC

M.A. Communication

Thesis: “Leadership as Rhetorical Action: *The Power of the Powerless* in Search of Its ‘People’”

To be conferred May 2013

Indiana Wesleyan University; Marion, IN

B.S. Communication Arts (emphasis in Public Relations) and Leadership

John Wesley Honors College

April 2008

Employment History

June 2012 –
March 2013

Textbook Editing (Contract)

A Natural Sustainability Lens on Organizational Competiveness by Daniel Fogel, Ph.D.

- Edited all chapters of textbook for grammatical, structural, and content errors in Chicago style
- Organized tables and figures according to publisher standards
- Requested permissions for tables and figures when applicable

July 2011 –
Present

Image Services Specialist (Contract)

Life Discovery, LLC.

- Coordination and set-up for all assessment disbursement
- Manage all client support and services
- Assist with building brand image and services

May 2008 –
June 2011

Coordinator for Client Support and Communication

High School Life Calling Institute, Indiana Wesleyan University; Marion, IN

- *Client Support /Administrative Responsibilities*
 - Assisted with mission, vision, and strategy development for program
 - Served as primary contact for new and potential clients
 - Developed systems for processing applications, use of assessment tools, student examination and more through Microsoft Office tools and online resources
 - Created surveys for multiple publics using Constant Contact and Survey Monkey
 - Utilized social networking tools to develop online community (Blogging, Facebook)

- Developed and sustained meaningful relationships with clients through email, phone and in-person visits that resulted in a 95% client retention
- Applied results of research to curriculum development and creation of new procedures
- Collaborated to create policies, procedures for program growth and efficiency
- *Communication/Marketing*
 - Initiated marketing strategies to gain new client interest
 - Managed creation and distribution of key marketing pieces for program including brochures, packets and other print materials
 - Collaborated with Print Shop in production of marketing materials
 - Directed graphic designers in creation of materials
 - Graphically designed marketing pieces utilizing Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign
 - Photographed events and people for marketing materials
- Responsible for writing and editing all content for marketing or communication pieces
- Worked with CMS pages to develop website content, forms and services
- *Event Planning*
 - Coordinated 5 multi-day training seminars from inception to day of execution
 - Coordinated logistics with catering services, onsite hospitality and lodging and event Developed and implemented all seminar marketing and a web-based application process
 - Managed the production of seminar materials from name tags to binders
 - Presented for seminar sessions
- *Teaching Responsibilities*
 - Edited and revised curriculum for three-credit course
 - Co-taught/Assistant teacher for 4 university leadership and life calling courses including classroom instruction, grading, mentoring, and critiquing papers

September
2007 –
December
2007

Student Communication Specialist

High School Life Calling Initiative, Indiana Wesleyan University; Marion, IN

- Conducted research for marketing/comm. plan including surveys, interviews and online research
- Wrote complete marketing/communication plan used for donor buy-in

June 2007 –
August 2007

Project Facilitator

Adventures in Missions; New Orleans, LA

- Led groups between 20 – 60 people each week in rebuilding activities and
- Managed daily logistics for visiting work teams
- Collaborated with other project facilitators to accomplish large group objectives

September
2005 –
September
2007

Leadership Coordinator Intern (promoted from Student Worker)

Intercultural Student Services, Indiana Wesleyan University; Marion, IN

- Assisted Director with development of departmental mission and daily operations

- Coordinated aspects of campus event attended by 200+ students including logistics for vendors
- Helped create a program for residence diversity coordinators consisting of 12 student leaders
- Developed leadership curriculum used in diversity coordinator training

June 2006 –
August 2006

Public Relations Intern

Celtic, Inc.; Brookfield, WI

- Researched and wrote content for press releases
- Conducted pitch calls to media venues and other PR related activities
- Gathered research for multiple projects, including field research for a pitch to a local newspaper
- Assisted with public relations logistics for large cultural summer festival

Assistantships

August 2011
– May 2013

Teaching Assistantship

Wake Forest University; Winston-Salem, NC

- Responsibilities included teaching lab, grading, and meeting with students
- Taught Public Speaking (two semesters) and Research Methods (two semesters)

Memberships

2012 - 2013 **National Communication Association**
Member

2012 – 2013 **International Leadership Association**
Member

Professional Presentations and Publications

April 11,
2013

Referred Paper Panel Presentation

Title: “Rhetoric’s Role in the Sao Paulo Clean City Acts”
Southern States Communication Association; Louisville, KY

November
15, 2012

Referred Paper Panel Presentation

Title: “Living in the Truth and the Power of the Powerless as an Ethical Treatise”
National Communication Association; Orlando, FL

October 25,
2012

Paper Panel Presentation

Title: “King George VI’s Use of Rhet. Myths to Emerge as a Leader and Unite a Nation”
International Leadership Association; Denver, CO

April 2011

Magazine Publication

Title: “Something’s Brewing at Guidos”
aLife: Alliance Life

October 28, 2010 **Poster Presentation**
Title: “Lost Leadership: Analysis of Leadership Paradigms Portrayed in the TV Series *Lost*”
International Leadership Association; Boston, MA

Skills

- Adobe Creative Suite: InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator
- Microsoft Office Suite: Word, PowerPoint, Excel
- SPSS

Interests

- Management
- Event Planning
- Photography
- Layout Design

Additional Experiences

Summer 2013 **Grader for MGT 2600: Intro to Business**
School of Business, Wake Forest University; Winston-Salem, NC

- Graded student papers for MA in Management course
- Graded student presentations for MA in Management course

January 2010 **IWU Official and Volunteer Coordinator**
– May 2010 NAIA Track & Field National Championship; Marion, IN

- Coordinated training events and recruitment of new officials
- Managed communication and placement of 65 new officials prior to event
- Lead team in preparation and management of registration for all official
- Assisted with care of official needs throughout event