

***Ethos* at the Crossroads of Disciplines: Rhetoric, Pragmatics, Sociology**

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Abstract Examining the rhetorical notion of *ethos* at the crossroads of disciplines, this article builds up an integrated model attempting to reconcile Bourdieu's theory of language and power with pragmatic views of illocutionary force. For the sociologist, the authority of the orator depends on his institutional position; for Ducrot or Maingueneau, drawing on Aristotle, the image of the orator is built by the discourse itself. Analyzing political as well as literary texts, this essay takes into account the institutional position of the speaker; his "prior *ethos*" (the image his audience has of him before he takes the floor); the distribution of roles inherent in the selected genre and the stereotypes attached to these roles; and the verbal strategies through which the speaker builds an image of self in his discourse. "Argumentative analysis" thus explores a dynamic process in which social, institutional, and linguistic elements are closely connected.

What is *Ethos*?

In Aristotle's art of persuasion, the term *ethos* (in Greek, character) designates the image of self built by the orator in his speech in order to exert an influence on his audience.¹ It is one of three means of proof, the two others being *logos*, referring to both discourse and reason, and *pathos*, meaning the

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1. For an extensive presentation of this notion in ancient rhetoric, see Wisse 1989 as well as Kennedy 1963. An excellent discussion of Aristotle's use of *ethos* can be found in Eggs 1999.

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emotion aroused in the audience. Today, the theory linking the efficacy of speech to the authority and credibility of the orator traverses disciplines: it is to be found at the crossroads of rhetoric, pragmatics, and sociology. It is thus no wonder that the notion of ethos borrowed from a somewhat forgotten tradition makes a spectacular comeback under various guises in contemporary theories.²

It does, nevertheless, give rise to sharp polemic. The idea that a discursive image of self can be influential implies that it is possible “to do things with words.” Pierre Bourdieu’s well-known attack on Austin in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu 1991) denounces this stand along with any belief in the intrinsic power of speech. To the notion of an illocutionary force deriving from performatives or more generally from speech acts, the sociologist opposed a power external to the verb, anchored in institutional frameworks and social rituals. According to Bourdieu, the power of language and its ability to “act” are not rooted in its inherent possibilities; instead, they are determined by social circumstances and power relations. In terms of rhetoric rather than of analytical philosophy, one could say that the force of discourse is not dependent on the image of self the orator produces in speech, but on his or her social position and “the access he [or she] can have to the language of the institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech” (Bourdieu 1991: 109). This proposal clearly goes against all approaches seeking the secret of verbal efficacy in the usage of discourse.

Is the power of speech, bound up with the authority and credibility of the orator, an integral dimension of verbal exchange? Should ethos be considered as a purely language-related construction or as an institutional position? A reexamination of the contemporary notion of ethos can address these questions by reintegrating sociological and pragmatic insights into a rhetorical perspective inherited from Aristotle and based on Chaim Perelman’s new rhetoric.³

2. The notion of *ethos*, which appears in the pragmatico-semantics of Oswald Ducrot 1984 and in the discourse analysis of Dominique Maingueneau 1984, 1993, 1999, is also included in Jean-Michel Adam 1999b and in many contemporary theories of argumentation (see, e.g., van Eemeren et al. 1996). It recently has given birth to two collections of essays devoted entirely to the subject, Baumlin and Baumlin 1994 and Amossy 1999.

3. See my chapter on ethos in Amossy 2000a for a discussion of this specific issue in the framework of classical rhetoric. There, a pre-Aristotelian tradition founded by Isocrates and mainly followed by the Romans defines ethos as the previous reputation and social status of the speaker, thus going against the predominance conferred by Aristotle on the discursive construction of a self-image.

Theoretical Frameworks

Pierre Bourdieu (1991: 107) provides a reminder of the sociologist's viewpoint, according to which "the illocutionary force of expressions cannot be found in the very words, such as 'performatives.'" For Bourdieu (*ibid.*), the principle of the efficacy of speech is not found in the "specifically linguistic substance of speech"; the artificial character of examples taken out of their concrete situation can alone lend credence to the claim that "symbolic exchanges [may be] reduced to relations of pure communication." In reality, the power of words derives from the connection between the social function of the speaker and his or her discourse. According to Bourdieu, a discourse cannot be authoritative unless it is pronounced by the person legitimated to pronounce it in a legitimate situation, hence before legitimate receivers. The same applies to the sermon, to the press conference, to the poem, to all forms of discourse which circulate in any given society.

Within this framework *ethos* occupies a determinate place, but it no longer qualifies as a discursive construction. It merges with the *skeptron* held out in Homer to the one who is to speak next. In other words, *ethos* is composed of the exterior authority enjoyed by the speaker. The latter appears as an "authorized spokesman." He can "act on other agents . . . because his speech concentrates within it the accumulated symbolic capital of the group which has delegated him and of which he is the *authorized representative*" (Bourdieu 1991: 111). The university professor, the priest, the political leader, and the writer all proffer a type of discourse which draws its efficacy from the fact that, in the eyes of their public, they are qualified to produce it. "The symbolic efficacy of words," Bourdieu (*ibid.*: 116) notes, "is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognizes the person who exercises it as authorized to do so." In short, the efficacy of speech does not depend on what it utters but on who is uttering it and on the power with which he or she is endowed by the public.

Observe that Bourdieu operates, in relation to the philosophy of language, some major shifts. For him, the saying can be a doing only within the logic of social interaction—a shift from speech acts to symbolic exchanges between participants who are social agents. An interactional perspective is thus adopted. An institutional perspective is adopted as well: the verbal exchange cannot be dissociated from the positions occupied by the participants in the field (religious, political, intellectual, literary) within which they act.

Contemporary pragmatics diverges from the sociologist's perspective insofar as it researches the efficacy of speech *inside* verbal exchange. Its various trends are concerned not with social rituals outside of language practice but with enunciation frameworks. Oswald Ducrot thus defines *ethos* as a discursive

sive phenomenon not to be confused with the social status of the empirical subject. His theory of polyphony illustrates quite clearly the difference between the speaker, to whom is imputed the responsibility for the utterance, and the empirical author, who has produced it (1984: 193–94), respectively designated as being of discourse and being in the world (ibid.: 199). It is in this sense that Ducrot (201) takes up the notion of ethos, with reference to Aristotle: “In my terminology, I shall say that ethos is attached to L, the speaker [*locuteur*] as such: it is insofar as he is the source of the utterance that he sees himself as decked out with certain qualities which consequently render this utterance acceptable or repellent. On the other hand, what the orator can say of him, as the object of the utterance, concerns . . . the being in the world, and it is not the latter who is involved in that part of rhetoric of which I speak” (our translation).

Thus understood, the notion of ethos as a discursive entity has been developed in France mainly in the work of Dominique Maingueneau. His pragmatic analysis proposes a close examination of the elements constituting the verbal interaction as such. Maingueneau focuses on the speaker, analyzing the way in which he or she enters into the interlocution as an appropriate self-image is constructed. In this perspective, Maingueneau (1999) shows that any verbal presentation of self is conditioned by what he calls “la scène d’énonciation” [the scene of the utterance or enunciation scene], which includes three complementary dimensions. The *global scene* corresponds to the type of discourse chosen by the speaker and gives the utterance its pragmatic status (literary, religious, philosophical, and so forth). Each field has its own choice and hierarchy of genres. Political discourse includes, among others, the electoral speech, the parliamentary debate, and the press conference. In other fields there are well-known genres such as the sermon or the war novel and less recognized genres such as the medical visit and the commercial negotiation. The *generic scene*, always depending on the “contract” attached to a genre as discursive institution, is subordinated to the global scene. Finally, Maingueneau uses the term *scenography* in a peculiar sense, designating a preexisting scenario the speaker freely selects for the text. Thus a sermon, as a genre pertaining to religious discourse, can be uttered through different scenographies: it can be pedagogic, prophetic, and so forth. Even if the speaker is not aware of it, the image of self he or she builds in discourse is to a large extent determined by the three levels of the enunciation scene.

Through these multileveled discursive frameworks, Maingueneau connects ethos to the rules and constraints of verbal interaction in its institutional dimension. Moreover, he does not limit ethos to the roles assigned to the speaker by the genre and the selected scenography. He also relates it to

a “voice” and a “body” in the metaphorical, if not in the physical, sense of these two terms. In the particular exchange in which the speaker is engaged in given sociohistorical conditions, he or she is endowed with a series of physical and psychological features corresponding to the character knowingly or unknowingly being played. In the case of many populist speeches, the scenography is that of a man contemptuous of ordinary rules and futile politeness, using a rude and direct language that sharply contrasts with the hypocritical sophistication of his fellow politicians.

Thus the pragmatists’ ethos, descended from Aristotle, is constructed within verbal interaction and is purely internal to discourse; the sociologists’ ethos, on the other hand, is inscribed in a symbolic exchange governed by social mechanisms and external institutional positions. In a perspective opened up by rhetoric, however, these two approaches can be complementary rather than conflictual.

The “New Rhetoric”: Orator, Audience, and the Question of Shared Beliefs

Located within a framework of communication, the “new rhetoric” of Chaim Perelman views argumentation as the verbal means by which an orator “aims at obtaining or reinforcing the adherence of the audience to some thesis” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 11). In other words, speakers wish to exert an influence on their addressees within the framework of a verbal exchange. This is true of actual dialogues as well as of situations in which the addressee is absent or unable to voice an answer. If to Perelman the study of argumentation seems fertile in its sociological applications, that is because, above all, as he says in a 1959 article entitled “The Social Frameworks of Argumentation” (Perelman 1989), the discourse of the orator is oriented toward the public. According to Perelman, it is “an essential fact for the sociologist” that “all argumentation develops in function with the audience to whom it is addressed and to whom the orator is obliged to adapt himself” (ibid.: 360). Thus an orator “speaking a language understood by his audience, can only develop his argumentation by hanging it onto theses accepted by his hearers, failing which he risks committing *petitio principii*. The result is that all argumentation depends, for its premises, as indeed for all its unfolding, on what is accepted, on what is recognised as true, as normal, as believable, as valid: through that it becomes anchored in what is social, the characterization of which will depend on the nature of the audience” (ibid.: 362; our translation).

The importance accorded to the audience naturally entails an emphasis on the values and norms outside of which any dialogue proves to be impossible. It is by drawing on common knowledge and beliefs that the ora-

tor attempts to make an interlocutor share his or her views. For Perelman, argumentation must in effect lead the audience to bring to bear on the conclusions the agreement given to the premises, and it does so by dwelling on the topoi or commonplaces shared by the participants (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Amossy, 2000a).

It needs to be realized, however, that for Perelman the audience is always a construction of the orator. Clearly, at either end of the chain of communication are to be found real people, on whom ultimately the proper functioning or the failure of the operation depends. However, the interaction between the orator and his audience is necessarily effected through the image they form of each other. It is not the addressee's concrete person which molds the undertaking to persuade; rather, it is the representation that the utterer forms of the addressee, of the ideas and reactions ascribed to him or her. It is in this sense that Perelman can speak of the audience as a "construction of the orator" while at the same time underscoring the importance of the fit between this "fiction" and reality: the discourse will have no effect if the audience is misconstrued and bears no resemblance to the empirical addressees.

The proper functioning of the exchange demands that to the image of the audience, there corresponds an image of the orator. In point of fact, the efficacy of the discourse is subject to the authority enjoyed by the speaker, that is, on the idea that the addressees form of his or her person. Just as an orator rests arguments on the opinions and norms ascribed to the public, so he or she builds an ethos on collective representations endowed with positive value. An orator adopts the models which are likely to produce in the addressees an impression befitting the circumstances. Developing Perelman's thought, and drawing on Jean-Blaize Grize's (1990, 1996) rhetorical models,⁴ it may be said that the discursive construction of ethos is realized through a series of mirror reflections. The orator builds his or her own image as a function of the image he or she forms of the audience, that is to say, of the representations of what a trustworthy and competent orator is in the eyes of the public as the orator imagines it. He or she has to guess how the audience conceives of a trustworthy politician, a reliable administrator, a genuine artist, or an intellectual. An orator also has to choose a presentation of self as fulfilling the expectations of the audience if he or she wants

4. For Grize, founder of the Neuchâtel School, well acquainted with Perelman's work but also inspired by Michel Pecheux's discourse analysis, speaker A "has no direct access to the representations of B (i.e., the addressee). It follows that what will actually be of importance is the representations that A holds of the representation of B" (Grize 1990: 35; our translation). To construct an appropriate representation in his or her discourse, A thus has to imagine B's knowledge, values, and level of speech (Grize 1996: 64).

to be elected president, selected for a good job, or trusted when expressing ideas about literature or politics.

If the speaker has to adopt a self-presentation that suits his or her purpose, he or she also must determine the image the audience holds of the speaker. Sometimes this is a private image limited to the circle of the family, friends, and colleagues; sometimes it is a public image widely circulated in the media. The public image of the orator intervenes above all when a well-known personality is involved; such might include political figures such as de Gaulle, Le Pen, or Clinton; movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Bette Davis (Amossy 1986); or writers such as Hugo, Hemingway, and Barbusse. The public knows them through what the press and rumor have to say about them, what the media show of them, or by the image associated with the group or party of which they are the spokespersons. This *prior ethos* (Haddad 1999; Amossy 2000a) precedes the construction of the image in the discourse (or what Maingueneau [1999] prefers to call “prediscursive ethos”). When they take the floor, orators evaluate the impact of the prior ethos on the current subject matter and operate to confirm their images, to rework or transform them so as to produce an impression which is in keeping with the demands of the projected argumentation.

Stereotyping and Construction of an Image of Self

At this point, it is important to discuss the notion of stereotype (Amossy 1991; Amossy and Herschberg Pierrot 1997), which plays a crucial role in the modeling of ethos. In point of fact, the prior idea which one forms of the speaker and the image of self which the speaker constructs in discourse cannot be totally singular. To be recognized by the audience, both have to be bound up with a *doxa*, or linked to shared representations. These images must be referred back to cogent, albeit controversial, cultural models.

Stereotyping consists of perceiving and understanding the real through a preexistent cultural representation, a fixed collective schema. A concrete individual is thus perceived and evaluated as a function of the preconstructed model diffused by the community of the category in which they place that individual. If the man or the woman is a well-known personality, he or she will be perceived through the public image created by the media. Sociological and semiological practices generally define the stereotype in terms of attribution: one attaches to a category—the Scotsman, the bourgeois, the housewife—a set of ready-made predicates.⁵

5. On the notion of stereotype in the social sciences, see Bar-Tal et al. 1989 and Leyens et al. 1994.

In a cognitive perspective, the stereotype allows for generalization and categorization, thus helping the individual to make sense of the environment as well as to make provisions concerning the future. In argumentation perspective, the stereotype allows the speaker to make hypotheses about the modes of reasoning and the sets of values and beliefs characteristic of a group. Speakers cannot picture their interlocutors unless they attach them to a category which is social, ethnic, political, or the like. The conception that a speaker forms of the audience, whether correct or erroneous, regulates his or her endeavor to adapt to them. An orator would be unlikely to make the same speech in front of Communist Party militants or wealthy executives, of chador-wearing Muslim women or American feminists. He or she would try to reach the Socialists or the Communists by basing him- or herself on the ethical and political premises to which such groups are likely to adhere in the first place. The construction of the audience necessarily passes through a process of stereotyping.

The same applies to the construction of the image of self which confers on the discourse a considerable part of its authority. The orator adapts his or her self-presentation to collective schemas which he or she believes are ratified and valued by the target public. This is accomplished not only by what the orator says about his or her own person (it is often not good to talk about oneself) but through the way he or she says it; through the style of speaking. In other words, *ethos* is built on the level of the enunciation process as well as on that of the utterance. It is then incumbent upon the receiver to form an impression of the orator by connecting him or her with a known category. The discourse offers the receiver all the elements needed to compose a portrait of the speaker, but it presents these elements in an indirect form, dispersed, and often incomplete or implicit (Amossy and Herschberg Pierrot 1997: 267–69). Thus a style punctuated with exclamations allows one to deduce the temperamental or excitable character of the speaker, while a concise and blunt manner of speaking which shows no concern for conventional politeness may indicate a person of integrity who does not deviate from the truth. A person who extols the qualities of adversaries presents him- or herself as someone who is honest and impartial; one who inundates discourse with learned allusions and with quotations appears to be erudite. It is from all of the characteristics relating to the orator's person and the situation in which these traits manifest themselves that the orator's image is constructed. Even if the latter remains ultimately singular, the reconstruction is effected with the aid of cultural models which facilitate the integration of data into a preexistent schema.

Taking into account the prior *ethos* of the speaker as a representation anchored in familiar stereotypes allows for a better understanding of the

strategies deployed in the discourse to consolidate or improve the orator's image of self. It demonstrates that as a verbal construction ethos has an intrinsic social dimension. Its power partly depends on the prestige of the social representation it succeeds in exemplifying. Thus Marschal Pétain, announcing France's surrender on the June 18, 1940, could make this announcement acceptable, thanks to what he embodied in the eyes of the nation, namely, the "hero of Verdun," the brave and experienced soldier who helped win World War I (Adam 1999a). This is not to say that his status as chief of state did not have a decisive effect on his audience. It is thus important to see how the prior ethos, and the discursive ethos that integrates and reworks it, are related to the authority derived from an exterior institutional status.

The Example of Jean-Marie Le Pen

A construction of the image of self was demonstrated by Jean-Marie Le Pen at a press conference reported by the daily paper *Présent* (24 August 1990). On the occasion of this construction (22 August 1990), Le Pen was issuing a series of proposals intended to prevent the Gulf War. The leader of the Front National (National Front) is addressing a double public, the members and supporters of the party but also the public at large. He has, therefore, to take into account, in order to correct it, the image of his person then circulating within a vast part of public opinion. For those who do not support the Front National (FN), Le Pen's "prediscursive" or "prior" ethos consists of the stereotype of the extreme right-wing leader who is hostile to the values of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of nations, pro-force, pugnacious, xenophobic, demagogic, and untrustworthy. The text of the press conference operates to modify this stereotype in several ways.

As a spokesman for the FN, Le Pen tries to erase the image of a leader stigmatized for his opposition to democratic values and his xenophobic stands. He presents himself as the president of a minority party that has the advantage of not being in any way compromised by engaging in dubious political strategies. He thus attempts to turn a position of weakness, that of a group then playing no part in the political chess game, into an advantage. He portrays himself as "*free*": "The Front National, and myself as its president, speak on this occasion, as indeed we always do, as free men, free of any attachment and of any compromise."⁶ The president of the FN consequently is able to weigh matters with total impartiality, unhindered by any vested interests. He is detached from considerations of power, as he re-

6. All translations of Le Pen are mine.

mains outside the parliamentary game: “And I am about to tell you what, out of office, in opposition, and out of parliamentary opposition, the Front National proposes in order to try to open a door which will allow both sides to back down without losing face. . . .” He is a man of *integrity*, attached to the truth: “And at this stage I say that alliance is not servitude and that elementary loyalty toward the allies means precisely to tell them the truth. I think that France’s duty was to tell Europe and to tell her British and American allies that involvement in the Arabian-Persian Gulf carries with it terrible risks. . . .” Thus the stereotype develops of the upright politician who does not get mixed up in the “wheeling and dealing” (“*magouilles*”) of the parties in power, denounced in the same declaration: “In fact, are not the military gesticulations of our government aimed at distracting the attention of the French people from its scandals, from its wheeling and dealing. . . .” Through this presentation of self, Le Pen attempts to show that he can act as an ideal mediator in the Gulf conflict. At the same time he gives himself the right to reveal to the French everything that others have been trying to hide from them. He embodies the figure of the righteous denunciator.

A second dimension of the presentation of self comes to inflect the stereotype of the FN figure, to produce a favorable image by stressing the values ratified by common conviction. To improve his brand image, to mold an image of a potential president, Le Pen presents himself on the political level in terms of ethical values. To the stereotyped image of an extreme right winger, driven by xenophobic fervor and eager for a bit of “Arab bashing,” a supporter of military power, he opposes a self-representation as a supporter of negotiated solutions and as a moderate, circumspect, responsible leader who brings peoples and their rulers to their senses: “I can hear some people, like Monsieur Juppé, raising a hue and cry” (*jouer du clairon et du tambour*). “What does this crusade for international law [in which] we are called upon to participate, whatever the outcome, mean? Our feeble and useless military gesticulations can only endanger our compatriots.”

Oddly enough, Le Pen’s discourse thus harks back, without mentioning it, to the old stereotype of the left-wing humanist, the advocate of peace. He is attached to the values of *peace* and *opposed to violence*: “we proclaim our attachment to the defense of peace and to negotiation as a means of solving conflicts”; “believing that peace is the primary imperative, the National Front was the first to make a move to keep our fellow citizens away from the conflict”; “we feel we are doing our duty in the service of our country, but also in the service of world peace by providing a constructive proposal which could in any event enable a dialogue to be resumed. . . .” He upholds *humanitarian values*, denouncing the threats of “starving the civilian population” and of “bombing the towns.” Like all pacifist militants, he believes

in humankind's capacity to prevent wars, he is a *voluntarist*: "This peace plan . . . constitutes a contribution of which the governments of France and of Europe have shown themselves to be incapable, each of them in effect letting himself be drawn in by fate, by destiny. We are voluntarists, that is to say, we think that men can take a hand in their destiny." In short, the president of the FN is gifted with a *sense of responsibility* and *of duty* (a recurring term), which is lacking in the other leaders, named and attacked one by one in this same text. These values, borrowed from a *humanist credo*, stress the duties and the dignity of all people. As part of a common worldview, they are intended to make a favorable impression on the audience.

One can see just how the discourse attempts to exploit the potential of ready-made images, which it reuses in new contexts to respond to particular needs. This reworking of representations of self and stereotypes is effected in the framework of a discourse that has its generic constraints and its role assignment. The construction of an image of self indeed takes into account the requirements of the political discourse (Maingueneau's "global scene") and, more particularly, those of the press conference (Maingueneau's "generic scene"). The contract attached to the latter assumes an interaction, through the intermediacy of the journalists, between an important political figure and the public at large; the politician has to make a declaration regarding the current state of affairs in a thorny international situation in which he or she has a part to play.

On this occasion, the choice of the press conference and the assignment of roles it involves demonstrate a strategic move. Le Pen himself announced the press conference; the daily *Présent*, faithful to the FN, insisted on publishing the text because the press conference had been ignored by the French media. In the political field, Le Pen did not have the necessary public recognition to indulge in the ritual of an international press conference. Nor, institutionally, was Le Pen in a position to intervene on the stage of an international conflict. Lacking a *skeptron*, which as it happens no one was holding out to him, the president of the National Front was mandating himself. The efficacy of speech therefore can derive only from an *ethos* entirely constructed by the discourse, which is what, in effect, the speaker puts into practice when he presents himself in the Gulf crisis as the man of the moment.

How effective can a discursive *ethos* be when it is not supported by the corresponding institutional status? It is obvious that, even if Le Pen's initiatives were reported at the time and discussed in the press and the media, they did not have any real impact on the international arena. Still, there is no denying that the image constructed by the discourse of August 1990 is not devoid of effect. It reworks the prior *ethos* precisely to grant the leader of the

FN a better position in the political field. Starting off with the public image of an outcast politician, his objective in taking the floor is to reverse the disadvantages of a less-than-flattering collective representation. The discourse attempts to modify Le Pen's position in the French political field by developing an image that eventually may influence the way in which he is perceived. Moreover, it seems that Le Pen is exploiting the circumstances of the Gulf crisis to improve his public image, not only in order to gain more voices for his party, but also to prepare his personal candidacy for the forthcoming presidential elections. He wishes to appear in the eyes of his fellow citizens as a dignified political figure, a man able to ensure the security of the nation and fulfill an important role in the international arena.

The Example of Henri Barbusse

The question of whether it is the institutional authority or the discursive construction that defines ethos is thus to be understood in terms of reciprocity and complementarity. This issue can be examined through a brief analysis of an excerpt from a literary text, Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* [*Journal d'une escouade*] *Le Feu*. (1917), chapter 13: "The Big Words" (in French: "Les gros mots," meaning vulgar language).

Barque notices that I am writing. He comes towards me on all fours through the straw and lifts his intelligent face to me, with his reddish forelock and the little quick eyes over which circumflex accents fold and unfold themselves. His mouth is twisting in all directions, by reason of a tablet of chocolate that he crunches and chews, while he holds the moist stump of it in his fist.

With his mouth full, and wafting me the odor of a sweetshop, he stammers—"Tell me, you writing chappie, you'll be writing later about soldiers, you'll be speaking of us, eh?"

"Why yes, sonny, I shall talk about you, and about the boys, and about our life."

"Tell me, then"—he indicates with a nod the papers on which I have been making notes. With hovering pencil I watch and listen to him. He has a question to put to me—"Tell me, then, though you needn't if you don't want to, there's something I want to ask you. This is it; if you make the common soldiers talk in your book, are you going to make them talk like they *do* talk, or shall you put it all straight—into pretty talk? It's about the big words that we use. For after all, now, besides falling out sometimes and blackguarding each other, you'll never hear two poilus open their heads for a minute without saying and repeating things that the printers wouldn't much like to print. Then what? If you *don't* say 'em, your portrait won't be a lifelike one; it's as if you were going to paint them and then left out one of the gaudiest colors wherever you found it. All the same, it isn't usually done."

“I shall put the big words in their place, dadda, for they’re the truth.”

“But tell me, if you put ’em in, won’t the people of your sort say you’re a swine, without worrying about the truth?”

“Very likely, but I shall do it all the same, without worrying about those people.”

“Do you want my opinion? Although I know nothing about books, it’s brave to do that, because it isn’t usually done, and it’ll be spicy, if you dare do it—but you’ll find it hard when it comes to it, you’re too polite. That’s just one of the faults I’ve found in you since we’ve known each other; that, and also that dirty habit you’ve got, when you’re serving brandy out to us, you pretend it’ll do you harm, and instead of giving your share to a pal, you go and pour it on your head to wash your scalp.” (Barbusse 1917: 174–75)

When *Under Fire* was published, in the midst of the Great War, it was an immediate and unprecedented success, winning the Goncourt Prize as soon as the novel appeared in book form (December 15, 1916; it had first been published as a *feuilleton* [serial] in *L’Oeuvre*). It was also praised in the heaps of letters the author received from all over the country. Following are some examples of the enthusiastic reactions that came from the battlefield as well as from the rear: “*Vous avez lancé un cri de vérité. . . . C’est le tableau de notre vie infernale, de tout ce que nous endurons, de tout ce que nous pensons,*” wrote a soldier to Barbusse. And a civilian, thanking the author, said: “*C’est la vie et la mort de nos petits que vous nous avez fait comprendre. . . . Vous avez éclairé l’enseignement terrible de la guerre. . . . C’est un livre de pitié et de justice et d’espoir. . . . Vous êtes le porte-parole de ceux qui souffrent*” (Vidal 1953: 64).⁷ In the middle of the war, the readers thus saw in *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* a work of truth, giving a faithful account of the horrors of the battle in a language that neither embellished those horrors nor hid them under some kind of conventional patriotic rhetoric. The *poilus* (the name given to the Great War French soldiers) and their families spontaneously granted Barbusse the title of spokesman. Barbusse, though, was not the first or the only person to write about the trenches; a war novel by René Benjamin, *Gaspard*, also won a Goncourt in 1915. In addition, the author did not yet have the reputation he earned in later years: he was not yet the militant pacifist, the leading political figure he was to become after the war when he joined the Communist Party and founded the movement *Clarté*.

Most of the readings of *Under Fire* from the thirties to the present day interpret it as the protest of a well-known soldier of peace. They tend to ex-

7. “Your cry is a cry of truth. . . . It is the picture of our infernal life, of all we suffer, of all we think. . . .” “It’s the life and death of our dear ones that you made us understand. . . . You threw light on the terrible lesson of the war. . . . It’s a book of pity and of justice and of hope. . . . You are the spokesman of all those who suffer” (*my translations*).

amine the text in the light of a fame Barbusse had not yet acquired when he was first acclaimed for it. In our perspective, it is interesting to see how an image of self was built by the first-person narrator in the text before Barbusse was hailed as a great literary and political figure, enjoying the authority of pacifist and Communist leader. What kind of ethos did the “I” build in the text in order to appear trustworthy? To what extent did the discursive presentation of self contribute to the global effect of the narrative? These questions can be examined using the chapter mentioned above. This text is meaningful because it presented one of the major themes of the book at the time: its attempt to portray the life of the poilus through the use of military slang (the so-called *argot des tranchées*).

Barbusse’s work builds a complex ethos in the framework of a multi-leveled interaction ruled by the logic of a specific genre, that of the testimonial first-person novel. In the Great War narrative, the autobiographic dimension inherent in testimony is understood in a very broad sense. The equation traditionally defining autobiography (author = narrator = protagonist, as in Rousseau’s *Confessions*) here proves too constraining. What the audience of the Great War stories wanted to know was whether the author had actually fought the war and was entitled to speak as a witness, even if his narrator bore a fictional name.⁸ Thus the fact that *Under Fire* is told by a character called Caporal Bertrand does not break the tacit “contract” of the testimonial novel. Henri Barbusse himself was known as a 1914 volunteer, he was forty-one when he chose to share the hardships of the poilus, and he did so as long as his health allowed him to bear life in the trenches (the book was partly written in a hospital and appeared in *L’Oeuvre* while Barbusse was still enlisted in the army).

In its first-person version, the war novel exemplified by *Under Fire* offers a triple presentation of self. The name of the author on the cover, sustained by prior knowledge of his real life, evokes the image of a poilu entitled to provide valid testimony. This is the prior ethos of the author as witness, based on the reputation of the man Henri Barbusse and on the stereotype he embodies. On the second level, the I-narrator builds his image of self in the text, through what he says about himself (his self-portrait on the utterance level) and through the way he says it (his style on the enunciation level). On a third plane the I-protagonist, presented through the narrator and entirely dependent on his vision and purposes, builds his ethos in the framework of his interactions with the other characters (more specifically in the dialogue). This threefold ethos corresponds to a threefold interaction: with the poten-

8. This perspective is still at the core of Norton Cru’s monumental work, *Witnesses [Témoins]*, (1929), which gathered all the testimonial writings concerning the Great War on the basis of the authors’ actual participation in the life of the trenches and the fighting.

tial reader, with the narratee, with the fictional character. Although each interaction has its own aims and strategies, they are ultimately integrated into a coherent whole (Amossy 2000a, 2000b).

The chapter under examination shows, on the level of the I-protagonist living in the trenches, a verbal interaction taking place between two soldiers, the “I” himself and his mate, a simple fellow called Barque. It is presented in direct speech in the form of a full-fledged dialogue where everyone in turn becomes an “I” presenting himself. On the level of the narration, a verbal interaction is taking place between the narrator and his narratee:

Narrator (I) \longleftrightarrow Narratee (You)
I-Protagonist \longleftrightarrow You-Character (the poilu Barque)

In the face to face encounter of the dialogue, participants can react directly to each other’s arguments and adjust their own speech to the situation so that the two partners build their images of self in a reciprocal interaction. In the written narrative, there is no actual exchange taking place between the two interlocutors: the text presents a *dialogic* dimension, meaning it takes into account a reader that is neither active nor present. The addressee of the narrator, also called the narratee, is virtual. Since he or she is not explicitly addressed, this narratee can only be inferred from the presence of an I, necessarily calling for a you since any first person discourse implies an addressee. In the absence of explicit marks, the narratee is characterized by encyclopedic knowledge and the values and norms which seem to be taken for granted in the text, for it is obvious that they define his own views and build the common ground on which the two partners can meet. In terms of argumentation, the discourse on the Great War has to conform to the supposed beliefs and views of its audience in order to influence it.

In regard to the reported discourse at the center of the chapter, how does the I-protagonist present himself through his speech? A striking feature is the secondary role he plays in a verbal exchange in which his comrade is given the lead. The I only utters three short lines, which are merely answers to questions raised by the poilu. The other soldier is the one to initiate the dialogue, choose the theme, and put forward the principal arguments. Through his questions and comments, Barque presents himself not only as a simple, unsophisticated man who speaks an argotic and incorrect French, but also as a smart fellow, imbued with popular wisdom. He proves to be quite capable of understanding the principal issues of the literary genre (the “war novel”) growing out of the events he is actually experiencing: “Tell me, you writing chappie, you’ll be writing later about soldiers, you’ll be talking about us, eh?” He aptly reflects on reported speech and on army slang as a means of ensuring a true-to-life picture, violating all institutional

taboos: “You’ll never hear two poilus open their heads for a minute” [*Tu n’entendras jamais deux poilus l’ouvrir pendant une minute*] “without saying and repeating things that the printers wouldn’t much like to print. Then what? If you don’t say ’em, your portrait won’t be lifelike. . . . All the same, it isn’t usually done.” Far from presenting his past self as versed in the theory of the novel, the narrator thus unexpectedly leaves this role to his uneducated companion. Moreover, the I-protagonist accepts the somewhat critical portrait Barque draws of him as a fellow who is much “too polite,” a writer who will not find it easy to shock his sophisticated readers by reproducing vulgar language. This portrait of a man beset by good manners and, moreover, averse to alcohol (which he uses for cleaning purposes!) meets with no opposition. The I-protagonist thus consolidates his ethos of witness as an open-minded person willingly accepting the other’s worldview, respecting popular ways of thinking without attempting to discuss or correct them, and refraining from any critical comment when reproducing them.

Thus the passivity of the protagonist in the interaction plays an important role in the construction of his reliability as a witness-narrator. His speech, however, also actively contributes to the projection of a positive ethos. Concerning his future mission as a writer on the Great War, the I-protagonist makes a series of clear-cut promises: to write about his poilu friends and their common experiences, to use vulgar language in order to remain true-to-life, and not to allow bourgeois and institutional criticism prevent him from doing these things. This faithful observer, respectful of the poilus’ feelings, is also the one who will implement their wishes. In this context, the witness becomes an authorized spokesman. As a result, the style of the novel appears not as an individual choice, but as a dutiful endeavor to reproduce reality as it then was. The protagonist’s presentation of self gives the war novel its credibility and its force: not only have the events been witnessed in real life, but they are all reported as they happened in accordance with the explicit request of the poilus.

That the I-narrator’s argotic language is a constraint necessitated by his commitment to truth is made even more conspicuous by the contrast between Barque’s reported discourse and the opening description. The portrait of the poilu is written in literary metaphoric prose: “his intelligent face . . . with his reddish forelock and the little quick eyes over which circumflex accents fold and unfold themselves. His mouth is twisting in all directions, by reason of a tablet of chocolate that he crunches and chews, while he holds the moist stump of it in his fist.” It is the style of an educated man, a master in the art of literary description, addressing a reader equally familiar with literary conventions. The ethos of the narrator develops an aspect which is also present in the dialogue, though not fully exploited:

the I-soldier is no ordinary poilu — he is an educated fellow who speaks correct French, in sharp contrast with the picturesque slang of Barque. Even his peculiar use of military language is meaningful: “Why yes, sonny,” “I shall put the big words in their place, dadda, for they’re the truth.” The expressions used to designate Barque cannot but sound a little paternalistic, subtly asserting the superiority of the cultivated man over the regular poilu. Clearly, a sophisticated narrator faithfully reporting on war calls for the participation of a well-read narratee not to be confused with Barque. The reader in the text is someone capable of appreciating the picturesque description, the intended mimesis on the level of dialogue, and the artful passage between different registers of style. The narrator in the first person thereby builds the artistic dimension of his ethos while underscoring its moral dimension, that of a man who keeps his promises and fulfills his duty. As a result, the speaker can appear in the eyes of his audience as a trustworthy narrator on the artistic as well as the ethical level.

To summarize the analysis of the discursive ethos in its relationship with the prior image of the author, we can see that (1) the prior ethos of the war witness at the level of the authorial image foreshadows the ethos of the narrator, conferring on it due authority; (2) the narrator builds an image of himself as the poilus’ faithful spokesman, which entitles him to write about the war and gives him his reliability; (3) the image of the narrator is enhanced by the ethos of the protagonist in the dialogue as respectful of the simple poilu (although intellectually superior to him) and close to his companion: he appears as an ideal witness. The images produced at all levels reinforce each other with the aim of justifying the style of the novel and offering it as a reliable representation of the war, as opposed to previous attempts that did not respect the truth of the poilus’ language and worldview.

In this perspective, one can wonder whether the institutional position and the external authority of the author in the literary field—which, according to Bourdieu, constitute the only reality of ethos—play any role as far as the novel’s impact is concerned. Let us leave aside for the moment the notion of the speaker as a discursive construct and turn back to the role of the empirical author in order to see to what extent the authority of the written word derives not only from the force of the argument but also from the position of the writer in the literary field.

Under Fire is far from being Barbusse’s first work: he had authored a book of poetry published in 1895 (*Les pleureuses*), wrote numerous tales for newspapers (from 1908 to 1914, he published short stories in *Le Matin* on a regular basis), and he published a novel entitled *L’enfer* in 1908. He obtained various editorial jobs, one in particular being at the Pierre Lafitte publishing house in which he was chief editor of *Je sais tout*, a very successful popular science

review. He was well received in literary circles and wrote various influential theater chronicles. This is why, in 1915, a number of French papers asked him to publish his impressions of the battlefield. It was only in January 1916, when he took up the post of secretary at General Headquarters after being seriously ill, that he considered writing about his war experiences, first—as we have seen—for *L'Oeuvre*, and then as a book published by the influential Flammarion. It is not clear whether Barbusse could have gained such a large audience had the Great War soldier not been a writer courted by well-known journals and publishers. (Flammarion, for example, made sure to have the book out a short time before the awarding of the Goncourt Prize.)

However, Barbusse's prior (and relative) celebrity as a story writer, the help he received from the literary institution wherein he could already claim a position, not even the prestige bestowed by the Goncourt Prize are sufficient to explain the tremendous impact of his work. If Barbusse could appear to his readers as a reliable witness and a recognized spokesman, it is not because he was an acknowledged novelist. It is mainly because the professional writer was willing to forget his skill and reputation in order to present himself as one of the simple *poilus* (even though he stays a "writing chappie"). By depicting himself as a mere witness of the soldiers' life in the trenches, the I-narrator succeeds in reconciling in his image the ethos of the educated novelist, competent to use an appropriate literary style, with the ethos of the witness directly reporting what he has actually seen and heard.

Insofar as the author can here be identified with the I-narrator, *Under Fire* allowed Barbusse to occupy a new position in the literary field, a position which responded to the requirements of the period. Unlike the previous works on which his fame was built, he produced so-called testimonial writing subsequently canonized as literature, thus contributing to the success and recognition of a new kind of war novel that drew on naturalist aesthetics. It is the Great War narrative of which *Under Fire* was to become a canonical model in the Western world (it was immediately translated into numerous languages). This specific genre can be viewed as a development of the trend illustrated by Maupassant and Zola, in particular the latter's *The Debacle*, which deals with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. *Under Fire* exploits Zola's model in that it remains faithful to his realistic-symbolist prose and his picturesque mimesis of popular language. However, it uses the *poilus*' specific slang, the so-called *argot des tranchées* in pages that bravely defy the scissors of censorship (*L'Oeuvre* made linguistic corrections over the author's protests). Moreover, the new war story blends this slang with the rules and constraints of testimony, which were by no means a condition of the naturalists' war narratives—Zola, for example, did not fight the 1870

war he depicts, nor was he ever attacked on this ground. With the “realistic” pictures of the poilus’ suffering told “in their own words” and drawn by a man who shared their lives, Barbusse seems to offer the precise mixture of writer and witness which could give him the right to speak of and for the poilus. By taking up the figure of the novelist, he gives the novelist his reliability by deliberately subordinating it to that of the faithful witness and reporter (Relinger 1994: 74).

Thus we see in *Under Fire* how the institutional status of the writer as “being in the world” and the verbal construction of the speaker as “discursive being,” far from being incompatible, overlap and strengthen one another. It would seem, then, that the efficacy of speech is neither purely external (institutional) nor purely internal (pertaining solely to discourse). In the literary as in the political field, it is played out simultaneously on different levels.

Discursive Ethos and Institutional Authority

The results of the preceding analyses might be recapitulated as follows: the institutional position of the orator and the degree of authority which this confers upon him contribute to the eliciting of a prior ethos. This prior ethos, as part of the audience’s encyclopedic knowledge, is mobilized by the oral or written speech in a specific situation of utterance. Thus the official status of Le Pen as the leader of a minority extreme-right party with (at the time) no parliamentary representation determines the (low) degree of his authority when he gives a press conference on the Gulf crisis. The position of Henri Barbusse as a fairly well-known writer and review editor confers upon him a (limited) authority when he publishes a novel on World War I.

- (1) A name and a signature are sometimes sufficient to evoke a stereotyped representation which is taken into account in the specular game of verbal exchange. The prior image of Le Pen or of Barbusse is built not only on the collective representation attached to their official function and status (a political leader, an influential writer); it is also created by the manner in which they are perceived as individuals. The audience holds a schematic representation of public figures. No doubt in 1990 the French nourished a widespread and fairly negative stereotype of Le Pen. The same does not go for Barbusse, who was acknowledged only in well-read circles and whose reputation could not influence the masses. It is, however, important to emphasize that whether or not the reader was aware of Barbusse’s prior ethos in 1916, the prewar reputation of the man of letters could in no way compete

with that of the Communist peace leader that was to emerge in later years, endowing *Under Fire* with an *a posteriori* authority.

- (2) The prior ethos is only the background against which ethos is built in the discourse through verbal means. In the framework of a given generic scene, the speaker proceeds to set in place an image of self which corresponds to a preexistent assignment of roles. The image born of the genre constraints is complemented by the choice of a “scenography” or familiar scenario selected by the speaker. Thus Le Pen tries to build an image answering the needs of a press conference while choosing the scenography of the honest and responsible fellow situated outside the dirty games of professional politicians. In his war novel, Barbusse portrays himself as a narrator entitled to tell the life of the poilus because he is a “writing chappie” who has taken part in their hardship. He chooses the scenography of the faithful witness who takes upon himself the moral duty of speaking for his comrades.
- (3) The discursive ethos is built at the level of uttering. The image of self Le Pen or Barbusse project in the act of enunciation, through their respective styles, as well as at the level of the utterance, through what each explicitly mentions about himself, is the self-portrait they draw.
- (4) The construction of an ethos in the discourse often aims to displace or modify the prior image of the speaker. In some cases, the speaker can heavily rely on the prior ethos; the speaker only has to confirm a preexisting image he or she sees as appropriate to persuasion goals. In other cases, the speaker has to erase aspects of his or her public image that might prove harmful or exhibit dimensions of his or her person that are not altogether clear to the public. Le Pen has to alter his reputation as a supporter of military force known for his hatred toward Arabs if he wants to appear as a responsible politician fit to play the mediator in the Gulf crisis. Barbusse has to leave aside whatever he represented in the Parisian literary world before the war in order to promote the image of a simple soldier who can be a true witness and a faithful spokesman. The image of self thus constructed within the discourse through a reworking of the prior ethos is a constituent part of the verbal interaction and largely determines the capacity of the speaker to act upon his or her addressees.

Within this framework, a rhetorical analysis that examines the ethos as a discursive, interactional construction hinges on both pragmatics and sociology. Pragmatics allows the analysis to work within discourse and to analyze the construction of ethos in terms of enunciation, of genre, and of verbal strategies. Sociology allows the analysis to underscore not only the

social dimension of the discursive ethos (the collective representation), but also its relation to external institutional positions. A continuum is established, with the inevitable breaks in level, between the speaker inside the discourse and the prior image of the speaker linked with his name and his position in a particular field. The discursive construction, the social imaginary, and the institutional authority contribute, then, to construct a suitable ethos.

In this linkage, the influences between the institutional ethos and the discursive ethos are mutual. A reciprocity is established, a dynamic functions in both directions. It is not in fact, as on occasion the sociologist would have it, a matter of considering the position in the field as foremost and limiting the verbal discourse to the representation of an external authority (“This authority is, at most, represented by the language. It manifests it, it symbolises it” [Bourdieu 1991: 105]). To be sure, the status enjoyed by orators, together with their public images, delimit their authority at the moment they take the floor. Yet the construction of the image of self within the discourse has, in turn, the capacity to modify the prior representations and to confer credibility and authority upon the speaker. For the leader of the Front National as well as for the Great War novelist, it contributes to the production of new images and helps to transform positions in the field while participating in the field’s dynamic.

One might add that, while not immediate, the effects on the state of the field are no less perceptible. Thus, the ethos constructed by Le Pen’s discourse is clearly not intended to produce an instant revolution in the way the public conceives of him. One could even foresee that the image of the extreme right-wing nationalist as a peace loving humanist would, by some, be violently rejected. The fact remains, however, that the discursive ethos thus produced seeks to procure for the speaker a long-term benefit which could well make a difference. In the literary field, the construction of the storyteller as a faithful witness helped pave the way for a new genre with a great future, the (First World) war story. It is the promotion of a literary form and not his previous authority, upon which he did not wish to rely, that endowed Barbusse with a central position in the field. By constructing an ethos deliberately disconnected from his recognized authority as a writer, Henri Barbusse occupied a new position, soon to be translated into terms of institutional and political power. The discursive ethos built in chapters like “Les gros mots” laid the ground for the later image of Great War veteran, pacifist militant, and Communist intellectual that accounted for Henri Barbusse’s reputation when he published his later books.

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