

Ceremonial Discourse:  
From Debate to Dialogue

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### From Debate to Dialogue

Public discourse in contemporary American society has been evaluated harshly by many critics. For example, Richard Sennett (1978) has lamented a "fall" from earlier heights of public civility, and has criticized a "modern social life" where "adults must act narcissistically to act in accordance with society's norms" (p. 326; cf. Lasch, 1979). This style of public discourse, he argues, leads the American community to an experience of isolation (pp. 299-300), resulting in an overall decline in public civility (p. 264). The general critique made by Sennett has many voices and includes many related themes such as the over-individualized society (Berger, Berger & Keller, 1974), the "psychoculture" where "the self-fulfillment motif stands out prominently" (Yankelovich, 1981, pp. 55-56), all of which create unsatisfying standards of form for contemporary public discourse (Baskerville, 1980).

On a more local level, at the University of Massachusetts administrators and faculty alike have lamented an apparent inability of persons to engage in civil discussion about important social issues. One needs reflect only a few months to an "incident" where a particularly outspoken person created considerable rage when addressing the public about issues of life style and questions of morality. The "incident," as an enactment of the general trend, gave pause to the community, and helped precipitate local concerns about "civility." In response to this type of concern, and in hopes of a redress, the local chancellor established a

"civility commission." Likewise, a local group initiated "The Kaleidoscope Project" in order to create and evaluate public discourse with the goal of a better civility.<sup>1</sup>

The Kaleidoscope Project convened in part to experiment with public discussion in hopes of "civilizing" its form, especially where "difficult" and so-called "undiscussable" issues were concerned. The main purpose was to provide a scene where representatives of opposing ideological views could civilly present and discuss their positions. According to its organizers, the Project was developed to create a public forum for: (1) the public discussion of 'explosive and intractable' issues; (2) the modeling of ways to discuss such issues; and (3) the (re)creation of a tradition of public discourse on campus (p.1 Year End Report). The goal was to "shift the underlying question from 'which of these two positions is right?' to that of 'how can two reasonable persons come to hold such different opinions'" (p.3, Year End Report).

Several persons worked to design such a forum including the members of the Kaleidoscope project, the Chair of the Civility Commission, some members of the Department of Communication, and representatives from the Student Government Association and the National Council of Christians and Jews. The resulting format appropriated structural techniques from mediation theory and interview techniques from Milan therapy.

The Purpose of the Paper: The explicit goal of the Kaleidoscope project included experimenting with public discourse, and an evaluation of the experiment. This paper functions as a report about the experiment, and our

hope is, like the project organizers, that what follows will "feedforward the results of last year's program" and help describe "to those who might contemplate using our procedure, just what we are about." This paper, therefore, attempts to characterize the experimental discourse created by the Kaleidoscope project in order to understand better how it was done, and what resulted from doing it.

The general questions which organize our report are: How was the discourse put together in acts and sequences (i.e. the form of the discourse)? Given that it was praised generally by participants, what did it accomplish for them?<sup>2</sup>

We responded to these questions by observing five meetings that followed the experimental format. Topics of these discussions were pornography (P), Zionism (Z), the Contras in Nicaragua (C), and SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) research. Data consisted of field observations of the meetings, observations of audio-visual recordings, and readings of transcripts of the meetings. When possible, tandem observations by the research team of the meetings and recordings were made. The data as a whole comprised a corpus of multiple sources which we used subsequently as a means of comparative research and triangulation (Smith 1979, Fielding and Fielding, 1986). Our analyses followed a procedure whereby we each analyzed a corpus of data; then checked our analyses with the other observers. Likewise, we checked our findings from one source of data, with the several types in the overall corpus. When there was convergence between observers and across the multiple sources of data with regard to a claim, we felt the

claim exhibited a high degree of validity and was thus retained. If there was minimal convergence, the claim was modified appropriately or discarded.

Using these data and this type of procedure was most appropriate given our primary concern with the enactment of public discourse during the experimental meetings. Thus we were asking: how is discourse getting done during these meetings? and, what is getting accomplished in the process? These probes led us to a close analysis of our primary concern, the discourse enacted at the meetings. Thus, our approach here is limited. For we are not asking individuals what they intended to do, nor are we asking participants what they thought they had done. In this report we are focusing on the performance of the discourse in its public context and asking what it accomplished there. Our inquiry then is guided by our primary concern, the nature and function of discourse in its public context.

#### A Preview

We will begin by summarizing our general findings as a way of framing our analyses. First, we suggest that the public discourse of the experimental meetings functions as an important ceremony. As such, it provides a public form in which persons can witness the cooperative performance of opposing views. Secondly, we suggest that the form produces a transformation of sorts, since the discourse itself is transformed from debate to dialogue, and the social relations among focal participants are transformed from arch-antagonists to cooperative conversants. Finally, we

comment on what appears to be the singular most prominent accomplishment, the enactment of solidarity among multiple persons and positions.

Our discussion below follows the general form of the discourse and is presented through four major phases that are identifiable in the meetings. Our description also includes an analysis of the acts involved in each phase and a characterization of the discourse along three semantic dimensions, i.e. impersonal/personal, closed/open, monologic/dialogic. By describing the phases along these dimensions, we are able to map change through the course of the meeting and understand better a move within the ceremony from a more traditional to a more contemporary form of civil discourse. In the final section, we will discuss further the discourse as a transformative ceremony of solidarity, and mention some perhaps unintentional consequences hidden in the performance.

Before beginning, let us make one final comment. There are important ways that reports of this sort are always imperfect and incomplete. We know we have not wrapped our words around the whole of these meetings, nor do we give in what follows a flawless "reading" of these "texts." What we do offer to you is our interpretations, from sympathetic aids, as a way of getting the conversation about this form of discourse going. Thus we present our ideas as catalysts for further thought, not as final words. We invite your reactions and look forward to discussions with you.

## Phase I: Introduction

Phase I is characterized by an open and inviting kind of atmosphere that serves to introduce the Kaleidoscope project. This introductory talk functions prominently: (1) to highlight the experimental nature of this forum, (2) to define the roles of the participants, their ways of speaking at the panel as well as with the audience members, and (3) to clarify the sequence of acts to be performed.

Experimental Nature: The meetings are introduced as an experimental process that hopes to develop a new form of public discourse. This form is said to be "an experiment" with the vision of some constructive results, e.g. "...to run them in an extremely self-conscious and constantly experimental way" (P:1). The development and improvement of this form is stated as a shared experience, with joint effort needed from the audience in order to accomplish the goals. The audience is sometimes referred to as "tinkerers," calling attention to the experimental nature of the meetings; since "tinkerers" can be defined as "people who repair, adjust, or work with something in an unskilled or experimental manner" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). The experimental nature of the meeting is publicized even more clearly as the Moderator playfully describes the audience, "They are laboratory animals to us, for us, to a great extent today, and I suspect that by coming into this audience, you've become unwittingly, to a degree, laboratory animals" (S:1).

Participants' Roles: Roles for enacting the meeting are displayed in the introduction, with a proper mode of speaking suggested for each. The participants are introduced as a Moderator, a Chair, a Consultant,

presenters, and audience members (tinkerers).

The Moderator introduces the project by summarizing the need for a better civil discourse and the promise the experimental format holds for discussing important social issues. The Chair is then introduced as a "crucial" person who will coordinate and regulate the following ceremony. The Moderator who summarizes the purposes and potential, and the Chair who coordinates the event, thus provide sources of order for the experimental discourse which the speakers and audience will attempt to enact. Noted with particular importance is the Chair's duty as an interventionist who will directly influence the discussion toward its preferred "civil" goals.

The Consultant to the Chair is introduced as an important but "invisible" part of the intermediary team. His/her role is to privately advise and confer with the Chair from time to time, through whispering in the Chair's ear or passing notes, suggesting questions that would facilitate understanding between the speakers (C:2). While the Chair is more actively involved in discussions with the speakers, the Consultant plays a more removed and detached role, never obligated to pose or respond to questions or to coordinate the traffic during the meetings. This seemingly "invisible," impersonal, and unobtrusive role of the Consultant allows him/her to provide additional perspectives on the issue by having more time and freedom to reflect on the dialogues and to formulate "constructive" questions. Moreover, the Consultant can engage in a metalevel analysis making comments not only about presenters but also about the Chair's perspective.

The presenters' roles are usually introduced here as persons who have



come to present their "positions." The introduction alludes, sometimes implicitly, to the fact that the two individuals hold opposing viewpoints on an important issue, or in Urban's (1986) terms, they represent "maximal distance in social terms." The presenters are introduced as two individuals who have been selected because they are committed to positions of difference, and are willing to speak about the issue.<sup>3</sup>

The audience at this forum is also introduced not as passive listeners, but as active participants. This reflects an effort to improve the experimental format making it more participative in design, e.g. "How did the others feel in the audience, because that, that's an important dimension of this?" (P:48). The audience is supposed to "tinker" with the procedure by contributing both verbal and written feedback (e.g., "...we will involve the audience in asking questions? (Z:3); "You've been given a reaction sheet...you'll let us know how our experiment is going, in your opinion" (S:1). As we mention below, the audience's participation is closely monitored; that is, the audience is asked to follow strict rules as to when and how to participate (e.g., "And we ask that all of the questions from the audience be directed to the Chair..." (S:2); "...and I'm going to ask you please to pose a question and not precede that with a statement" (C:29). In fact, violations of the preferred rules are sanctioned by the Chair (e.g., "would you pose the question to the Chair, please?" (C:32). These comments to the audience help demonstrate the structured nature of the discourse and the expectation that participants will contribute in a proper way.

It would be difficult for us to overemphasize the importance of the

Chair, the interventionist, as coordinator of the meetings. It is through the enactment of this role that the differences between presenters and other participants become "better understood and better analyzed" (Z:2). The experiment thus rests on the assumption that it is more effective to have an interventionist mediate the different ideas instead of having the participants confront each other directly (S:1). Hence the Chair repeatedly asks the audience to pose questions to the Chair instead of to the presenters (S:2; C:2). The Chair can then better monitor the sequencing and tone of subsequent acts, e.g. "From time to time, I may just change the question a little bit or rephrase it before posing it to one of the speakers" (C:2). This type of intervention functions to model for participants a set of acts that motivate "civil" discussion. By directing their questions to the Chair, the audience is shown which ones are most appropriate (i.e. those that go unchanged), which are less appropriate (i.e. the ones that are revised), and are thus educated about ways to translate their language from a less to more appropriate form. One guiding goal of the Chair, in this regard, is to help participants pose questions in ways that invite further disclosure of participants and facilitate reflections (as opposed to those that evaluate positions, critique their merits, thus risking hostility and defensiveness).

These enactments by the Chair help demonstrate the heavy emphasis placed on the third party intervener's role (e.g., "The experiment involves a particular effort to see how third party intervention can serve to make differences better understood; better analyzed" (Z:2); "...one thing we've learned already is how difficult this third party role is" (Z:42). The Chair, with the Consultant's advice, thus assumes a prominent position in order not

only to direct the discussion among participants, but also to coordinate the procedure in a way that achieves productive goals.

These roles ask that each participant share in the goal of experimenting, to promote an alternative format for public civil discourse. The audience is not asked to take sides with or make judgment about either presenter's position, but to help provide a kind of talk that promotes understanding and learning. The roles also function metacommunicatively, to model for the audience some personae in talk that can promote "civil discussion" (e.g. like the Chair). The fact that participants in meetings are given a meeting guide reinforces this didactic aspect of the meetings. By being introduced to the meeting-as-experiment, to the roles of participants, and the way each will be talked, the meeting is introduced, the stage set, for creating a form of discourse deemed civil.

Sequencing of Acts: A second important function of the Introduction Phase is the clarification of the format for discussion. The sequence of acts that constitutes the forum is quickly introduced: "initially, Professors Kryslar and King will present their respective positions...After which, I will ask one of them to have a seat in the audience so our focus can be on the other. And I will pose a series of questions to them one at a time. And following that process they will have an opportunity to pose questions yet unasked...to one another. And then, we would like to invite questions from the audience. And we ask that all of the questions..." (S:2). We will summarize these phases as follows: Phase I: introduction; Phase II: presentations, in which both selected presenters "present their respective

positions"; Phase III: question modelling, "an opportunity to pose questions yet unasked," a phase in which dialogues take place between the Chair and each presenter respectively, while the other sits silently in the audience (with the exception of the "pornography" meeting in which each speaker took turns leaving the room); and Phase IV: civil dialogue: community enactment, initiated by "questions from the audience," and resulting in a kind of dialogue between the two presenters, and between presenters and audience with the Chair as intervener when necessary.

The sequence of acts introduced here creates a sense of the group activity that is highly structured and purposeful. Introducing the sequence helps participants understand how the subsequent discourse will unfold through identifiable phases, and gives them a model for coordinating their public conduct. As shown below, each phase can be described in terms of some unique qualities, and these features, at the same time, define each phase as an integral enactment in this alternative public forum. The goal of educating persons to a public civility are fulfilled through this specific format, and introducing the sequence here helps participants understand the model for the enactment and the objectives of the forum.

#### Phase II: Presentation

Phase II begins as the Chair invites one of the presenters to state their position; as the Chair frames it, "...it's your turn to talk about your position"; "I think I'd rather let the participants talk about the issues as

they perceive it..." (P:3-4), and "Perhaps you can tell us...what your perspective is" (P:4). The presentations, since lacking any formal introductions, are introduced more as a friendly discussion of two opposing views, less as a war of words. Some presenters reaffirm this shared understanding by "...thanking the Kaleidoscope project for ...allowing us to discuss this issue in a calm and peaceful manner" (C:2-3).

A few comments may help clarify the distinctive place of the "presentations" within the meetings, and the demands placed on presenters. From the organizers standpoint, the overall goal of discourse during this phase is to increase understanding about presenters' views. The eventual goal of the meeting is to develop understanding; it is explicitly not to persuade the audience to choose one side of the issue over the other. But this is sometimes not clear to participants, especially presenters, until later when they have had a chance to reflect on what happened. After seeing how their positions are later treated (in phases three and four), they sense that the subsequent discourse has lead others primarily to explore the personal development of the presenter's view, more than discuss its social relevance or merit. The rationale for development in this direction rests on the need to move from the traditional public debate model of persuading the audience, to a more contemporary understanding of diverse viewpoints, but the meetings begin with each presenter asked to state their view - just like in a debate. Presenters consequently tend to rely initially on the debate form that is most familiar to them. Thus this phase reflects residuals from this discourse model of competition and argument.

Since both parties are untutored and asked to develop their own views on the issue, they tend to use the logical standards of debate that establish their moral commitment to their position. Examples of this tendency abound and include: "Well, I guess what I would hope to persuade anyone..." (S:9); and another, "...the major point that I am making in the debate is..." (S:13). In the meeting about "pornography", one speaker appealed to the audience's sense of solidarity by saying "American people have a choice at this point in history...we can either use...or we can maintain" (P:12). The structure of these statements suggests a firm commitment to one position, one's own, and relative lack of receptivity to another or others.

It turns out later on that this enactment of "presentation" proves highly valuable as an implicit point for contrasting discourses of the meeting. But as this phase is enacted, it demonstrates that participants are not familiar with the kind of discourse eventually expected of them. Thus the movement to later phases can be confusing to presenters who eventually may feel "set-up" as they sense their public debate turn into a more personal dialogue (note the comment by the one presenter, after the meeting, whose expectations had been violated).

Here we will turn from a discussion of the acts and consequences of the "presentation" phase, to its characterization along three interrelated semantic dimensions, with the salient poles here being relatively monologic, closed, and impersonal.

Monologic: Monologuing as demonstrated here involves primarily one speaker, the presenter, with the other participants, including the other

presenter, constituting the audience (Urban, 1986). Thus the second phase involves a short, about ten-minute, monologue where each presenter displays his or her views. Others generally do not interrupt as presenters develop their own thoughts through public verbal presentation.

Closed: The presentation phase may also be characterized as relatively closed, a verbal style in which one presents one's own views, does not exchange views with others, tends not to self-disclose, need not display a prominent receptiveness to another's view, nor display much tentativeness about one's own. As presenters make their statements in Phase II, and in order to develop fully their moral commitment to the position they hold, they tend to adopt this rather "closed" discourse style. This monologic presentation of more or less firm and logical arguments, does not allow for explicit statement by other persons of their positions, thus may give impressions of low receptivity to other's views. An illustrative example of this closed discourse occurred during the meeting about "pornography" when a self-proclaimed representative of feminism said, "As feminists..., we thought that we had only to educate men about the harm their abusive power caused us..." (P:10). The clear contrast between "we" and "they" suggests the perceived two non-overlapping social groups, and positions, portrayed through a closed verbal style that is non-sympathetic to others. Such statements embrace only the one point-of-view, through its own logic, and are made with firmness and closure.

Impersonal: The presentation phase can also be characterized as impersonal discourse (Hymes, 1972, pp. 47-48). As such, it displays

arguments more as factual "truth", less as individual beliefs constructed upon personal values, feelings, or experiences. In other words, the impersonal statements create the impression, the reality, that one is making judgment in other than personal terms. In Phase II presenters tend to present their position, by and large, through impersonal appeals, using relevant factual knowledge and reasoning to express their subject (as opposed to using more idiosyncratic personal beliefs or experiences as primary evidence). Many arguments presented in this phase employ the principles of debate such as defining one's terms (P:4; Z:7); appealing to factual statistics and evidence (P:7; S:5); and referring to historical accounts (Z:9-10; C:4,6). As mentioned above, the discourse tends to conform to certain impersonal standards of debate and argument, by appealing to a sense of rationality based on the "factual" information displayed through some relatively more objective source.

In sum, phase II displays maximal social distance on the issue between the two presenters and requires each to present their strong moral commitment to a position. It is accomplished through residuals of the traditional debate model of public discourse. Relative to what follows, it is more monologic, closed, and impersonal. Because this phase displays firm commitments to positions, it becomes an indispensable antecedent, a grounding of sorts, for Phases III and IV. Thus, the discourse qualities of "Presentations" not only provide a contrast to the next two phases, but also construct the moral base for the subsequent enactment of civil dialogue.



### Phase III: Question Modeling

Immediately following the presenters' display of their opposing views, the Chair announces "an opportunity for some focused questions." One presenter is requested to move to the back of the room. At the same time, the Chair confers with the Consultant in low tones. After only a minute or two, the Chair addresses an extended series of questions to the presenter who has remained beside her, with the other presenter remaining at the back of the room with the audience, observing silently.

What is going on here? What function is this talk serving?

The questions asked of each presenter are not merely requests for information, nor are they idle, rambling explorations. In Phase III, the Chair's questions constitute a series of "invitations" to the presenter: invitations for the presenter to examine his/her assumptions (or "self-deconstruct"), invitations to engage with the person/position of the other in a reflective and non-adversarial manner, and invitations to create and explore new frames of reference. Taken as a whole, these invitations create an openness of positions and persons that become more able to engage in the "civil dialogue" which will be required of them in the subsequent phase. Through this type of questioning, the Chair not only "opens" presenters and their positions, but also models a way to motivate that kind of civil dialogue.

Invitations to self-deconstruct. Presenters were invited to display their own personal assumptions by reflecting upon the interrelationships among the following factors: (1) the grounding of facts in experiences that substantiate their position; (2) the telling of the personal development of

the position itself; and (3) disclosing experiences from the past that are relevant to the presentation. For example, one question asked a presenter to ground high-level generalizations in concrete human experiences:

Chair: You speak and you spoke of tragic outcomes, of the moral confusion resulting from the combination of religious fundamentalism in a secular state. Can you give an example of an occasion in which Zionism resulted in treating persons as non-persons...

Consultant: ...or other tragic outcomes?

Presenter: I'm not sure that I can off-hand... I'm not a specialist in this, and I may have only a caricatured sense of, for example... what the conviction of the members of the group... called G.U.S.H. (is)... I suppose I have a general anti-religious bias...

Here the Chair's question invites the presenter to ground a high-level generalization ("tragic outcomes result from the combination of religious fundamentalism in a secular state") in concrete experiences ("give an example"). In his response, the presenter displays his "openness" by willingly reflecting upon his inability to provide an example.

The second and third types of questions invited the speaker to reveal the origin and evolution of his/her position through his/her particular life experiences:

Chair: I'm wondering in what context you first heard Zionism equated with racism, what your reaction was to that then as compared to now, and really that's by way of asking how it is that you came to hold the particular view you now hold.

Presenter: I do remember the situation... ten years ago in the United Nations when this came up, I do remember having similar feelings (to those) I have now...

...nearly 40 years ago, in London when I was in the British Army, on leave in London, I was... selling Labor Israel outside of Finchley Road tube station... I think then, in some sort of instinctive way, I wanted an Israel that was... an immigrant into the Third World... Instead, (Israel has turned its back to) the influx of Asian and African immigrants...

The Chair's question prompts the presenter to look back first 10, then 40 years in an exploration of the ways in which his holding of a highly abstract position ("Zionism is racism") is intertwined with his very particular, very personal life history.

The most complex questions focused on the interrelationship of experiences, position development, and life history.

Chair: Which came first, your support of the Contras or your awareness of the facts about their military effectiveness and human rights emphasis?

Presenter: Probably my, my support for the Contras as group and as an opposition to the Sandinistas... I think the main thing, the main impetus behind my support for the Contras has to be their principles and what they stand for...

In this case, the Chair's question invites the presenter to wrestle with the following problem: did he become aware of facts which led him to the adoption of his position, or did he first choose the position and then find facts to bolster it? The question requires the presenter to reflect upon the process by which he came to his position, the implication being that the process is not a simple inductive one, but a complex personal one (that is, the question invites the presenter to relate the claim of abstract "fact" to his formation of a concrete "opinion"). In his response, the presenter reveals how he arrived at his position rather intuitively before observing the facts that

substantiated his position. What is communicated rather symbolically is the principle that personal "opinion" thus drives impersonal matters of "fact."

To review our characterization of the Chair's questions thus far: at least some of the Chair's questions invite presenters to deconstruct impersonal statements by revealing their connection to the presenters' experiences and life histories.

Invitations to engage with the person/position of the other in a reflective and non-adversarial manner. These questions invited presenters to perform four related types of acts:

- (1) paying attention to the position of the other:  
Chair: Did Mr. --- say anything that surprised you?
- (2) taking the perspective of the other:  
Chair: I wonder what you think has got to be gained by those who hold ---'s position?
- (3) viewing one's position from the perspective of the other: Chair: I'm wondering what it would cost people who disagree with you to change their minds, or agree with you?
- (4) comparing one's own position to the position of the other from a perspective which subsumes them both: Chair: Both of you seemed to agree that a true people's movement should be supported. You disagree about whether the Contras are a people's movement. What's the basis for deciding whether a particular movement is or is not a people's movement?

We should note that all of the above questions carried a similar tone of non-judgment. At no time did the Chair make explicit evaluative comments regarding the adequacy of a presenter's response. That is, while the questions varied widely, they were "reflective" and "non-adversarial,"

initiating a more open and supportive discourse, and eliciting the like from presenters. Consider the following probe, for example:

Chair: Did Mr. --- say anything that surprised you?

Presenter: No offense, not really. We've talked about this together and we, and I think we read each other's written material on it, a fair amount. I'm glad... to know that he could see a circumstance where he might not support the Contras and I don't know if he was saying, I don't mean to put words in his mouth, but about, you know if the Nicaraguans really did, you know, do what they promised, which would be a socialist system. That's moderatley surprising, 'cause that's what they came in and they are socialists. Even if they were Democratic socialists and if he could support that, it pleases me I should say.

Here the Chair requests that the presenter engage with the other by attending to unique or interesting aspects of his position. In his response, the presenter displays a receptiveness ("I'm glad to know that he could see a circumstance where he might not support the Contras") which is all the more remarkable when we consider the degree of their differences:

We spend a lot of time trying to convince each other that the other is wrong...

How, then, do we account for this presenter's sudden receptiveness to a statement made by his counterpart? The simplest and most plausible explanation is that he was led there by the Chair, who in the immediately preceding question-answer sequence had asked his opponent to envision future circumstances under which he would change his position. It was after the "opponent" had outlined such circumstances that the Chair asked our presenter if he was surprised by anything that had been said. Thus both the semantics

(invitations to be open, invitations to reflect) and the sequencing (invitation for presenter one to "open" followed by invitation for presenter two to reflect) of the Chair's questions led the presenters down a new path of supportive and productive discourse. Regarding its productiveness, it is most noteworthy that these probes focus less on the present state of sentiments and affairs, and more on the future possibilities they hold. *nice*

Invitations to create and explore new frames of reference.

Transcending the alternate foci of "self" and "other" stressed by the preceding types of questions, the questions described here encouraged presenters to adopt multiple perspectives. We distinguish these sorts of questions primarily for purposes of analysis, since "historical," "social," and "critical" are not mutually exclusive categories. Furthermore, these dimensions were, of course, sometimes apparent in questions inviting self-deconstruction and engagement.

Questions encouraging a historical perspective ask the presenter to either trace the evolution of his/her position from the past to the present (see examples above), or they asked the presenter to generate future alternatives. Such questions invited the presenter to see his/her position as both developmental and subject to growth or change:

Chair: Can you imagine some set of circumstances in which you would end your support for the Contras? What might they do, or what might you learn that would make you change your mind?

Presenter: About the only way I would end support, my support for the Contras is if the Sandinistas did return to the principles that the Nicaraguan population fought Somoza for, and again, that is the principles of

freedom and pluralism.

Here the chair's question asks the presenter to envision future circumstances in which he might change his presently held position. In his response, the presenter demonstrates his ability to do so. As we have already indicated, this display of openness, of flexibility, on the part of the presenter was an important first step in creating a new and productive arena for discussion.

Questions encouraging a social perspective ask the presenter to identify his/her position, or the position of the other speaker, and ask what those (should) do who are dedicated to similar courses of action:

Chair: What would you expect those who agree with you to do further?

Presenter: You mean what political action?  
(Chair nods.) I mean, I think that no, you can't write too many letters to the editor, you can't write too many letters to... Congressmen. You can even write to the White House. That kind of activity is absolutely...

Chair: Can you bring it back to the University, though?

Presenter: Well, what you're doing here is wonderful. This... kind of thing... is really what we need more of. One of the problems with the University—and I think everyone feels this—is that we're all working on our little isolated projects...

In this case, the Chair's question asks the presenter to identify his position, and to extend it to others, to a social group "who agree with you". The question also asks the presenter to translate an abstract position ("the University should not accept funds for S.D.I. research) into a specific proposal for action. Interestingly, he praises the efforts of the organizers

of the Kaleidoscope Project itself, the implication being that he considers the Project a social group he wishes to identify with, sees its actions as productive, and in part a corrective to "isolated projects" and more individual action.

Questions encouraging a critical perspective ask the speaker to evaluate the "costs" and "benefits" of his/her position, and/or the position of the other:

Chair: I wonder, and let me ask you what you think it would cost people who disagree with you to change their minds...?

Presenter: ...What it does cost, in some sense, is having at the University researchers and fellow faculty members, graduate students, engage in an activity that they find, in some sense, abhorrent. I think that the cost is well worth absorbing the price of, if you will, of keeping free and open research... (etc.)

Here the Chair's question asks the presenter to both take the perspective of the other, and to talk in terms of a cost/benefit analysis. The presenter takes this as an opportunity to both demonstrate his understanding of the position of those who disagree with him, and to present his weighing of the costs and benefits inherent in the opposed position. Note that the question did not ask for his perspective on the relative costs and benefits of the two positions. We stress this incongruity to make the more general point that presenters are sometimes asked to demonstrate a degree of understanding of the other's view, whether they can do so successfully or not.

Before we close our examination of Phase III, we think it important to



refer briefly to the "Pornography" meeting, a Kaleidoscope session not included in our previous remarks since the questions which guided it inquired more directly about the topic of concern, presenter's propositions and the logic of issues. The presenters were thus not moved to engage in the more reflective discourse described here, nor were they enacting a verbal openness and flexibility. It is noteworthy that this alternative line of questioning created a very different agenda, with one presenter in fact choosing to conduct most of her discourse in the form of debate.

Our final remarks concerning Phase III provide a sense of the semantics of the discourse used during this phase.

Monologic/dialogic. We shall characterize this phase as "dialogic" in one sense, that is the Chair is asking questions, and the onstage presenter is answering them. It is important to note, however, that the discourse here also retains a monologic sense, since a major burden for production and performance is upon the Presenter. In this sense the presenters are encouraged to be monologic, to display their ideas publicly, but also to do so through a cooperative dialogue with the Chair. However, the dialogic aspect of this phase does not stop with the interaction of the Chair and the Presenter. Since many questions ask the presenter to engage with either the person or the position of the other, we could consider Phase III "dialogue with the distant other" or "mediated dialogue," which functions to prepare participants for the more direct dialogue to follow.

Open/closed. While the Chair's discourse of this phase initiates and models an opening to dialogue, it does so in a rather preformulated and

highly structured way. Our judgment is informed by the chair's questions which did not constitute "rambling explorations," rather, they were variations of a small set of highly efficient "tools" which required particular types of self-reflection, engagement with the other, and other kinds of perspective-taking. In accordance with this observation, we note that the Chair used a sequence of questions in a way which indicated that the focus was not on following the content propositions of the presenter, but rather on moving the speaker to personalize positions, demonstrate understanding of others, and in other ways open the discourse to multiple persons and perspectives. The function of the Chair's ordered questions was to push presenters toward greater "openness" by inviting presenters to discuss concrete experiences, personal histories, and reflect upon the other.

Personal/impersonal. The Chair asked questions which encouraged presenters to use a great deal of self-reference:

Chair: Does it trouble you to think about the possibility that Mr. --- might be right?

Presenter: Well, I don't, you know, I don't know about that one. I, like you can see, my mind is pretty firmly made up that the means are wrong. And like I said, I think we're both right in what we want for the country and what we'd like to see down there. Do I ever think that we should support these guys? I have to admit, you know, once in, once in a while it passes through my mind, but I usually successfully forget it, frankly.

Thus, presenters are encouraged to such admissions, to explore the links between their views and others, between their personal experiences and

others, to show how their views have developed, to shed some light on their personal histories, and to attempt and penetrate the like human world of the other (e.g. if you were the other, and he is "right," what would that be like?). But all of this is again created through a very important and rather impersonal, albeit formulaic, set of questions. So once again, the discourse of question modeling motivates a more open dialogue of personalities, but does so through a relatively closed and impersonal (in the sense that similar questions could be asked of any presenter) sequence of questions.

The discourse of this phase is, compared to Phase II, relatively dialogic, open, and personal, but includes important features that are more monologic, closed and impersonal. The transformation of the discourse, from debate to dialogue, has begun, but is not yet complete.

#### Civil Dialogue: Community Enactment

Phase IV plays an important role in the production of the ceremony. When it is fully successful, it displays a culminating solidarity where the discourse embraces, and enables the expression of, diverse participants and positions. We will describe a set of communicative acts that are used prominently during this phase, describe their specific functioning within this phase, then turn more generally to their role in the construction of the ceremony.

This phase involves the creation of a public discussion which includes the Chair, the Moderator, the Presenters and the audience; the acts of the phase are various, but include prominently summary remarks, posing questions,

and making statements of response, with the Chair monitoring and intervening where appropriate. These acts function collectively to demonstrate to participants a kind of "civil dialogue." As much is suggested by project organizers: "...this series of experimental discussions, that shares an attempt on the part of the Kaleidoscope Committee to produce some insights, at least in what goes wrong in discussion and what works in a civilized discussion" (emphasis added).

Communicative acts in this phase involve the essential players that have participated in the first three sections, namely the Moderator, the Chair, the Consultant and the two Presenters - plus, during this phase, an important new set of actors, the audience, enters with real force. This new group had been participating through listening; however, in this phase they are invited to participate verbally. But the Chair monitors the discussion, creating a forum where specific types of questions are preferable, like those modeled in Phase III. The performance of course does not always attain this preferred ideal. It is our purpose here to describe the explicit summaries, questions, responses and interventions that occur during this phase.

Summaries: The Creation of Coherence. Summaries provide a common ground for discussion and are generally composed of the differences and similarities between the presenters. The Chair's summaries function to contextualize the talk, restructuring it retroactively to create a description of what happened earlier. In *Contras* (p. 38) the Chair says, "Let me summarize the major agreements and disagreements this afternoon. Both Mr. Dow and Mr.

Spain...oppose human rights violations by both sides. Both believe that people's movements should be supported... They disagree about the means of achieving all of the above... and they disagree about the even handedness of the United States' support of the movement. I thank you for taking part in this program this afternoon." The summary of the speaker's positions orients listeners by organizing the content as to similarities and differences. The fact that the Chair makes absolutely no evaluative comments following her description of the similarities and differences, and simply thanks the speakers, emphasizes the fact that similarities and differences are expected and acceptable. There is no effort to resolve or "blur" them.

Presenters also make summary statements. In Zionism, a Presenter states, "I think ...where it is hard for us to disagree... where it's hard for us to join issue, is in the distinction which I wanted to make, which Dan is reluctant to make because he sees continuities where I see discontinuities." This again is a good example of how a summary statement functions to reframe difference as assumed and even reasonable. There is explicitly not evaluation which portrays one position (person) as good and the other position (person) as bad. So summaries function to provide a description of what happened in terms of relationships where differences are assumed and displayed. The absence of evaluation functions to invoke a context for understanding and embracing difference, as the Chair says, to "develop different positions such that you could understand the assumptions behind them and to give the opportunity for some extended dialogue around a difficult issue" (emphasis added) (Z: 42).

embracing  
difference

Questions/Statements: In Phase IV, after the Chair and others make some summary comments, presenters were invited to pose questions or comments to one another. At this point there is an emergence of a truly interactive performance, with participants engaging in a more spontaneous production of "questions" and "statements." Throughout the performance, there is an implied or explicit reference to personal positions vis a vis the issue. For example during the discussion of Contras, Peter states, "Maybe this isn't in the form of a question, but more of a statement that I'll just reiterate again. The reason why I feel... (p. 22)." Note how this question and statement is a disclosure in personalized terms. Such personalized statements are not limited to one's own position, but may also search the position of an other. In Pornography, one speaker stepped into the role of the Chair by asking questions about the other speaker's position: "What I hear you saying, if I understand it right, is that there are some real problems in terms of, is it in passing laws or is it enforcing the laws that are there, concerning violence to women?" This speaker is seizing the opportunity to demonstrate his understanding of the other. He is in fact taking the other's perspective - as the Chair asked participants to do above - as a way of displaying that he does indeed understand the other person/position. So the enactment of this phase includes questions and statements that help demonstrate to all present that multiple positions and persons can speak, are spoken, and are understood indeed.

Intervention: A Tool for Civil Dialogue. Analysis of the questions and statements made by the audience cannot be addressed without close examination of this third category of speech acts, namely the "intervention." During this

final phase of the meetings, the audience is invited to ask questions of the speakers. However, the Chair claims the right to intervene, to "rephrase" questions to insure that they remain within the "program" or the agenda for the day. This preference was explicitly described by the Chair when she said, "I'd just like to remind folks, for a moment, that our point is to draw out the positions of each of our speakers and I'm going to ask you please to pose a question and not proceed with a statement" (Contra 29). When the audience makes statements, the Chair sometimes intervened by saying, "I'm, I'm just going to stop you for a moment and ask you to pose the question..." The audience member then succinctly formulated a question to the Chair who directed it toward one of the speakers. The power of this prerequisite came clear during the meeting on Zionism when one audience member repeatedly made evaluative statements, rather than asking appropriate questions, and was subsequently overlooked and silenced. The "intervention," as the other speech acts of this phase, provide a coherent structure for the discussion, so (1) to increase information as to the speaker's person/position, (2) to lay a base for the productive use of differences, and together (3) provide a forum for the productive display and cooperative embrace of (personal and positional) differences.

*difference  
bwt - 24  
3 ?*

Dialogic. In Phase IV, the responsibility to talk is shared by all participants; this section is the most dialogic for it is the only section of the meeting where the presenters talk to each other and the audience talks with the presenters. This phase contains signs which acknowledge the presence of the "other" in dialogue: "I agree with Bill", "As I understand his argument", "I appreciate your point", "You may be perfectly right", "What I

hear you saying," etc.

The ultimate testimony that this phase is dialogic occurs in SDI. The Presenter said to the Chair: "You have managed marvelously to diffuse what might have been a heated argument and foster an open exchange." Like references to an "open exchange" reveal the participant's sense of the dialogic and open qualities of Phase IV.

Open. This phase of civil dialogue may also be characterized as "open" for it contains statements by presenters and others that are more tentative, less emphatic, and display receptiveness to others positions and views. This phase contains a high degree of qualifiers and statements that reflect a limited source of information and display receptivity to others. The speakers utilize language that makes their positions more tentative by the use of qualifiers: "I wonder whether it is possible to...be comfortable with the ...participation of global policies of Israel as a nation." In a summary statement this same speaker later said, "So I think it's complex... I want to go back one step and make an admission." Likewise, presenters in Zionism display their positions as tentative: "...my position is quite crude and undiscriminating" (Z 34). These statements create the context for cooperative relations among dissenters, and between the two presenters, such that multiple positions and persons are given a cooperative voice.

*groveling?*

Open statements are variously displayed. In "Contras" a Presenter is asked by an audience member if he had any alternative plans with regard to the perceived problem. He replied, "Not a, not one outlined in detail" (Contra 27). Later he responded to a question, "Maybe we didn't jump in far



enough. I don't know...I don't have the actual solution..." (C 27-28). In Pornography, one of the speakers displayed a high degree of receptivity when he interacted with the other speaker to clarify or "hear" her position. He described an area of agreement between them which again demonstrated his willingness to listen to her argument. After the other Presenter responded, he moved directly into reflective listening techniques: "What I hear you saying, if I understand it right..." In SDI, there is again a high degree of "openness." Statements like "I see your point", preface remarks such as "perhaps" or "it could be", and other qualifiers such as "somewhat" contribute to the open and interactive qualities of this phase.

Personal. The civil dialogue of phase IV could also be characterized as personal. During this phase statements include a kind of reference that translates social issues into more personal and individual experiences. It is important to note that this kind of public speaking favors statements that personalize the issues, and ground the principles in rather unique human experiences. This contrasts with phase II above where presenters tend to impersonalize their statements by reliance on logic and facts. Thus, the talk in these meetings provides, by this phase, a new form for speaking in public, about public issues, that encourages speakers to personalize their own views (displayed in phases III and IV), all the while adhering to a strong moral position (phase II). So, Phase IV functions as a culminating one of the ceremony, where persons summarize and intervene in order to enact a more dialogic, open, and personal form of public discourse. In so doing, the ceremony has ended through a kind of discursive embrace where solidarity between dissenters is displayed, differences are accepted, and disputants

understood.

### Discussion

In this section we will describe more specifically the importance of this discourse as a ceremony, the process of transformation within it, and the social performance of solidarity and metacommunication through it. We will conclude the report by discussing three "hidden" consequences of this ceremonial form.

The form of discourse under investigation here is, as we have seen, more rigidly structured than most routine interpersonal interactions and more formal in tone than other scenes of everyday life. It is this wedding of a relatively high degree of structure with a formal tone that makes of this form a special type. By providing a way for persons to coordinate their public life, and designing a place for the witness and conduct of solidarity, the meetings function importantly as a ceremony. As such, they provide for diverse and disputing participants a formula for conducting one type of social life cooperatively. These are integral features in the ceremonialization of discourse, where "it is necessary to formalize relations... to a fairly high degree" in order to enable the collective performance (Geertz, 1973: p. 399).

It is noteworthy of this form that it was designed as a reaction against "uncivilized" acts, where persons evidently could not conduct themselves civilly and created major tears in the social fabric. In this particular sense, the ceremony provides for movement not only within the

But the part (Phase II) is colored by the whole. I think we overstate our case in identifying Phase II as traditional debate.

ceremony, from debate to dialogue, but also through it, from more uncivil acts, to a more cooperative civil form.

While the discourse provides movement away from the uncivil, it also provides movement within civil traditions. That is, as we have mentioned throughout, the ceremony provides a formulaic means by which traditional expectations for public discourse are created and met (phase II presentations), then violated and transformed (phases III and IV). It is in response to concerns of uncivilness, and as movement within models of civility, that this form of discourse is both distinctive and productive; distinctive as a newer contemporary form that educates participants to its use and accomplishes for them solidarity (see below); and productive as a means for creating discourse about difficult issues that provides movements both away from uncivil acts, and beyond an older debate tradition.

We have attempted throughout to "map" the movement within the discourse as a way of characterizing how the discourse accomplishes this transformation. We can now summarize the movement with figure 1.

	I	II	Phase III	IV
dialogic	0	-	-/+	+
open	0	-	-/+	+
personal	0	-	-/+	+

Semantic Movement within the Ceremony  
Figure 1

The figure helps characterize the distinctive qualities of discourse within

each phase, i.e. the monologic, closed, and impersonal nature of the presentation phase, the transitory phase of question modeling, and the more dialogic, open, and personal nature of civil dialogue. The figure also helps trace the movement within the ceremony from one tradition for civil discourse, a form of competition that stratifies participants (into winners/losers, supporters/antagonists), to another, a form of cooperation that solidifies participants (we all can speak civilly about potentially volatile topics). It is this structured movement between distinctive phases, from one type of discourse to another, from one type of social relation (monologic antagonists) to another (dialogic cooperates), that grounds the transformation, and makes of it a distinctive and productive ceremony of solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

Several features of the discourse lead us to conclude that solidarity is of importance here. The meetings are advertised as presentations about controversial topics, made by participants who are maximally distant in social terms (Urban, 1986). That is, the main participants, the Presenters, are chosen precisely because they hold "opposing views." In situations as these, solidarity is at issue, since discourse involving maximal social distance always holds the ever-present possibility for interpersonal conflict, threats, and hostility. By designing a highly structured discourse that is conducted in a relatively formal tone, organizers have provided a way for potential antagonists to cooperate in a satisfying way. A form is created in which potentially destructive human energy is given a particular shape, and moved in a more unifying direction. A form of discourse is created that is big enough to accommodate opposing voices, accept their

expressions, as well as those from the audience, and thus embrace multiple persons and views. It is this collective and cooperative enactment of diversity that enables the experiencing and display of solidarity.

Similarly, the discourse provides a way to educate participants to its enactment. By displaying this form to participants, they can witness a way two "opponents" can speak through difficult and potentially divisive issues. It is in this sense that the discourse is metacommunicative, it tells of itself, this is a model "of" and "for" achieving solidarity. As such, it brings together a set of verbal resources that any person could use to produce and maintain solidarity, suggesting to all a way social cohesion can get done.

Taken together, these features constitute a transformative ceremony of solidarity which educates participants to its use. But are there features of the performance that warrant further attention? Through our observations, analyses, and writings, we noted at least three that we will mention here in concluding.

First, what happens when important social issues and public policies are stated in relatively personalized terms? Important issues such as pornography, Zionism, political policies in Nicaragua, and SDI research were discussed, but the main voices heard were those of particular individuals, of personal histories and experiences. Persons spoke about important issues by relating unique experiences and personal histories. Thus, we tended to hear more about personalized positions, less about the social issue itself. In other words, speaking this way created a sense of the social issue in

individual terms. Social issues, policies and problems have become translated into a more personalized language, drowning out their broader social articulation. By social articulation we refer to a sense about issues in more impersonal terms, highlighting standards for common action, assessing their merits as guides for human conduct, and discussing their possible consequences in, for example, the neighborhood, community, nation, or world. A personalized forum renders such things difficult to speak. Thus, what is marked for prominent expression is individual sentiment, unique experience. What is less audible are pointed propositions that address the issues, and careful discussion of their consequences. Personal disclosure of experience is heard over reasoned discussion of issues.<sup>5</sup>

A consequent of expressions through the personalized voice, and perhaps at odds with the ceremonial accomplishment of solidarity through a premise of non-evaluation, is an evident lack of explicit development of the issues. In other words, what is foregrounded is a cooperative relation among participants; what gets less developed is the substance of the issues. As much is acknowledged during meetings, in introductions and throughout, by those who say understanding is the goal, not agreement. But, what is getting understood? There is a sense in which the ceremony, by promoting a particular kind of dialogue, develops an understanding of personalities and interpersonal relationships, and makes little progress toward understanding the issues themselves. What is treated prominently and symbolically in the discourse is an acceptance of persons in a supportive relationship.

Looking at the discourse this way makes the topics of concern,

especially after phase II, rather metaphorical. They become metaphors of sorts used to convince the audience that civilized persons can disagree, disagree they do, and they still live cooperatively in a productive relationship. In the process, disagreement is assumed and affirmed, while the important topic is used metaphorically to show 1) that there is a schism in the community, 2) the cause of the schism, the topic, can be talked about civilly, and 3) it is important that we are able to relate in this cooperative way. These accomplishments are important, distinctive and productive. But they stand over the issues, which become rather metaphorical expressions of cohesiveness by persons in public relationships who disagree, agreeably.

These three consequences of the ceremony, a personalized voice, a limited development on the substance of topics, and expressing the topic metaphorically, are part of the ceremonial conduct. It is not of course our purpose to indict the ceremony because of these, for all human forms, as this one, have their limitations. We mention them here only as a way of highlighting the aspects of human life the ceremony helps highlight (the display of cooperative relationships between differing persons), and those which it tends to hide (the display of social propositions and their relative merits).

#### Conclusion

We hope by now to have adequately responded to the questions we

raised. What discourse is enacted during meetings? and, what does it accomplish? We respond by suggesting that the discourse is a transformative ceremony of solidarity. The enactment transforms discourse from debate to dialogue, and relationships from divisive to cohesive. We respond as well by suggesting that the ceremony functions metacommunicatively, by expressing to participants a way of achieving solidarity (Urban, 1986). We hope these findings "feedforward" into the Kaleidoscope Project and make of it an even better public forum. We hope as well to be able to continue assessing the fruits of the project, for one thing is clear to us: the meetings are rich with potential and there is much that could be said, and should be said, about them.

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1. Similar efforts were being made by others. In fact ten such projects had arisen on campuses across the country, but by mid-1986 none had led to a clear forum for creating "civil" public discussion.
2. "Students, faculty and staff alike showed active interest and learning associated with presentations (see tallied Audience Feedback Audience data, Appendix 6). In addition, other university campuses (such as University of Connecticut) indicated interest in learning about the model. A more or less typical response to the debate was heard after the "war in Nicaragua" discussion when a participant said, "It was the most civil debate I've every been in."
3. We should introduce here that the presenter's roles undergo a transformation. Early on, the presenters play different roles, each as representatives of a different point-of-view. Later, the presenters play similar roles, as persons whose experiences have shaped their opinions. The early representative role highlights topical differences, while the later person role highlights human similarities.
4. We might mention that a similar discourse form is used in five South American societies as a way of simultaneously displaying solidarity and suggesting to participants how it can be achieved (Urban, 1986).
5. This trend is not created solely by the ceremony, but is a prominent one in American society as mentioned in introducing this report. Nonetheless, some parts of the ceremony, mainly phase three, seem to guide the discourse



down this well-trodden path.

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