

ATTITUDES TO POWER AND THE LEGITIMATION  
OF ACTIONS-A COMBINED CDA-CT APPROACH  
TO G.W. BUSH'S SPEECHES<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

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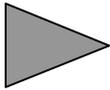
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*In this article I focus on different strategies of legitimation of actions as they are decoded through Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Thinking (CDA-CT). The text selected for analysis is a speech delivered by George W. Bush on occasion of his second election as president of the USA in 2005. In the current article I will focus on the Inaugural address and I will present some of my conclusions following the joined CDA-CT analysis. This is to raise awareness regarding the multiple layers of meaning that political speeches can have.*

**Keywords:** legitimation, discourse, genre, style, argument mapping

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Lucia Grosu's MA dissertation *Attitudes to Power and the Legitimation of Actions – A Combined CDA-Ct Approach to G.W. Bush's Speeches* presented within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Master Programme "English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics", ASE Bucharest, 2008, having Dr. Cristina Neesham as academic supervisor.



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## *Introduction*

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We live in the age of information and connectivity, where “speed”, “action” and “time management” seem to have become our main interests. We also live in a time when communication is highly praised, yet not always perceived in all its complexity. In the current article I will approach one form of communication, namely political communication, and identify implicit messages of the texts chosen by interpreting discursive elements with the help of some of the CDA and CT tools. For the purpose of this article I chose to present only some of my research findings namely those concerning George W. Bush's the Inaugural address of 2005.

My analysis will mainly make use of the theoretical framework offered by critical discourse analysis (CDA), following Norman Fairclough's general method<sup>2</sup>, and critical thinking (CT), concerning the construction of argumentation. I will use the CDA categories of discourse, genre and style, to shift from surface meanings to a deeper linguistic analysis at the level of sentences, phrases and words, and I shall evaluate the key arguments supporting the discourses in the texts using critical thinking skills and methods.

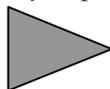
The link between the CDA-CT analysis and legitimation will be made by van Leeuwen's<sup>3</sup> strategies for legitimation: Authorization, Rationalization, Moral Evaluation and Mythopoesis:

*Authorization*: legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and of persons in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested.

*Rationalization*: legitimation by reference to the utility of institutionalized action, and to the knowledges society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity.

*Moral Evaluation*: legitimation by reference to value systems.

*Mythopoesis*: legitimation conveyed through narrative. (Fairclough, 2003)



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## *The president's inaugural address*

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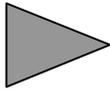
In 2005, on occasion of his second election as president of the United States of America, George W. Bush delivered an official speech after the ceremony of the presidential oath.

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<sup>2</sup> This includes social analysis, interdiscursive analysis of texts and interactions and linguistic analysis of texts and interactions.

<sup>3</sup> Van Leeuwen 1995 cited in Fairclough 2003

I will attempt to analyse this text following CDA and CT guidelines in order to identify the manner in which legitimization of actions occurs. I will focus on the three main CDA categories (discourses, genres, styles) and by a thorough analysis I will extract and interpret the various meanings conveyed by the text which are relevant to the objectives of this analysis. Finally, I will identify the key arguments in the speech and map them to see if the line of reasoning supports the claims of the main discourses.




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## *CDA analysis*

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### *i. Discourses*

My first objective is to discover the different ways of representing social aspects, namely various discourses in the text and the way they relate to strategies of legitimization. There are seven discourses mixed in Bush's speech, and each of them is a way of representing particular aspects of social life.

The predominant discourse in the current text is the "freedom" discourse. This concept is central to the whole construction of the text and its importance is stated right from the beginning:

*There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.*

The other six discourses are all connected to the one on "freedom". These are as follows:

1. the discourse of American history

*Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers.*

*Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that came before - ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

2. the religious discourse

*From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth*

*That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people.*

3. the discourse of America as the guide and leader of the world

*Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way.*

*America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof.*

4. the discourse of unity among Americans

*These questions that judge us also unite us, because Americans of every party and background, Americans by choice and by birth, are bound to one another in the cause of freedom. We have known divisions, which must be healed to move forward in great purposes - and I will strive in good faith to heal them.*

5. the "fight against tyranny" discourse

*We do not accept the existence of permanent tyranny because we do not accept the possibility of permanent slavery.*

*The leaders of governments with long habits of control need to know: To serve your people you must learn to trust them. Start on this journey of progress and justice, and America will walk at your side.*

6. the discourse of the presidential duties and electoral promises

*My most solemn duty is to protect this nation and its people against further attacks and emerging threats. Some have unwisely chosen to test America's resolve, and have found it firm.*

*To give every American a stake in the promise and future of our country, we will bring the highest standards to our schools, and build an ownership society. We will widen the ownership of homes and businesses, retirement savings and health insurance - preparing our people for the challenges of life in a free society. By making every citizen an agent of his or her own destiny, we will give our fellow Americans greater freedom from want and fear, and make our society more prosperous and just and equal.*

Van Leeuwen's strategies of legitimation are represented in the text by the discourses mentioned above. Thus, legitimation by Moral Evaluation is achieved using the "freedom" discourse, the religious discourse and the "fight against tyranny" discourse. These discourses are constructed only by referring to value systems. The main discourse in the text, the "freedom" discourse, asserts the vital importance of having, maintaining and helping to build free nations. Bush proclaims "freedom" as the most precious feature of a people, and its preservation around the world is thought to ensure America's security and prosperity. I have already mentioned the centrality of this discourse, which offers ideological grounds for the other discourses in the text. The religious discourse relies on stating the importance of various beliefs and values and what they stand for, namely tolerance, equality and justice. The "fight against tyranny" discourse opposes the ideal of freedom to the ideologies of hatred and "destructive power". Action against

oppression is central in this discourse and it is perceived as America's most important goal. To justify armed interventions, Bush uses the opposition liberty-slavery, which is the foundation of the "fight against tyranny" discourse.

Legitimation through Authorization is represented only by the discourse on American history. There are numerous historic references in the text<sup>4</sup> and they are all related to the importance of "America's ideal of freedom". This discourse also offers grounds for the discourse on ending tyranny, and Bush even quotes Abraham Lincoln to emphasize his ideas: "The rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: *Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.*" By summoning one of the greatest personalities in American history, Bush makes use of Authorization to legitimize actions against those who do not respect the values of freedom and tolerance.

Rationalization as strategy of legitimation is according to van Leeuwen a method of justification of actions referring to the usefulness of institutionalized action. In our case we deal with the presidential duties discourse. Bush connects his intentions as newly elected president with the predominant discourse on freedom:

*My most solemn duty is to protect this nation and its people against further attacks and emerging threats. [...] We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right". It appears that Bush's electoral promises are strongly attached to the concept of "freedom". Thus, references to the utility of presidential actions are motivated by what these actions will ensure for the American citizens, namely a "society more prosperous and just and equal.*

The final strategy of legitimation employed in Bush's text is Mythopoesis. Van Leeuwen believes this is the strategy that uses narrative in order to legitimize. In the current text this is the case for the discourse of America as guide and leader of the world and the discourse on unity among Americans. These two discourses are constructed by enumerating a series of statements that have no objective evidence to rely on: "America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof" or "These questions that judge us also unite us, because Americans of every party and background, Americans by choice and by birth, are bound to one another in the cause of freedom". Narrative is the means used to support the two discourses mentioned above.

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<sup>4</sup> Historical references in the text: "From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman[...]", "[...]we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it", "This is the broader definition of liberty that motivated the Homestead Act, the Social Security Act, and the G.I. Bill of Rights", "When our Founders declared a new order of the ages; when soldiers died in wave upon wave for a union based on liberty; when citizens marched in peaceful outrage under the banner "Freedom Now" - they were acting on an ancient hope that is meant to be fulfilled. History has an ebb and flow of justice, but history also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty".

### *ii. Genres*

The next step in my article will be concerned with genre analysis. According to Norman Fairclough, genres are various ways of (inter)acting through discourse (Fairclough, 2003). From the viewpoint of the CDA category of genre this text reveals only one genre, namely the public speech. This particular speech is deemed to be more significant than other presidential speeches simply because it is the first presidential address. In his speech Bush uses a series of rhetorical devices not only to inform the audience but also to make appeal to their emotions.

We recognize the format of an official public speech beginning with the manner of address used, by naming the addressees: "Vice President Cheney, Mr. Chief Justice, President Carter, President Bush, President Clinton, reverend clergy, distinguished guests, fellow citizens". Yet at a certain point the president also addresses "the peoples of the world". It becomes clear that the audience of the presidential address is not supposed to be confined to the American people, but it extends globally. The president sends his message (which becomes America's message) both to allies and to enemies around the world. We can conclude that this speech is intended for a large audience and is supposed to impress at a global level.

The speech is not mainly meant to inform but to affect the audience's emotions and we can easily support this assumption by identifying the stylistic tools employed by the author. Bush makes use of many rhetorical devices to emphasize certain ideas or attitudes. Thus, we can identify repetitions, antitheses, metaphors, rhetorical questions and emphatic statements.

### *iii. Style*

The next aspect of the CDA analysis will focus on how the author/speaker's way of being or personality can be tracked down through text analysis. The CDA category of style will be my tool in trying to pinpoint a few main features of Bush's discourse identity as they emerge from his text. According to Norman Fairclough, *modality* and *evaluation* are the two main categories which contribute to the construction of style. They represent ways in which the authors commit themselves to truth and necessity (modality) and to what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable (evaluation) (Fairclough, 2003).

Epistemic modality (concerned with the author's commitment to truth) is best represented in the text by assertions or factual statements: "We have seen our vulnerability - and we have seen its deepest source". As I have already mentioned earlier these statements are representative of the speaker's authority. In terms of style, their presence in the text along the numerous "we-statements" emphasizes the powerful position of the author in front of his audience.

Bush also uses modalized statements which are indicative of the speaker's attempt to maintain a certain degree of objectivity: "[...] the institutions that arise **may**

reflect customs and traditions very different from our own". The small number of modalized statements in the text as compared to the great number of assertions entitles us to consider the speaker an authoritative one, using mostly his powerful stance as grounds for his assertions.

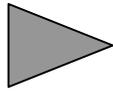
The category of deontic modality (the author's commitment to obligation/necessity) is largely present in the text. Thus, we can notice modalized demands ("Americans, of all people, **should never be surprised** by the power of our ideals"), prescribed demands ("**Make** the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself"), undertakings ("When you stand for your liberty, **we will stand** with you", "[...]- and **I will strive** in good faith to heal them") and refusals ("the United States **will not ignore** your oppression, or excuse your oppressors"). If we take into consideration the purpose of this speech, namely to sustain the presidential oath, it becomes clear why Bush uses deontic modality to such an extent. In his inaugural speech he is supposed to present his commitment to the country and its people, and at the same time to express a few of his own opinions concerning the future of the nation and the necessary course of action.

The second CDA category which can help us determine some features of Bush's discourse style is evaluation. Evaluative statements are statements about desirability and undesirability, about what is good and what is bad. Clear evaluations are made all through the text and some of them have already been mentioned in my discussion of antithesis. The speaker makes clear distinctions between good and bad to serve his rhetorical purposes: "The moral choice between **oppression**, which is always **wrong**, and **freedom**, which is eternally **right**", "And our country **must abandon all the habits of racism**, because we cannot carry the message of freedom and the baggage of bigotry at the same time". We can also identify more subtle evaluations of desirability such as in the following example: "[...] citizens find the dignity and security of economic independence, instead of laboring on the edge of subsistence". Here the evaluation is done through the positive or negative connotation of the words used: positive ("dignity", "security") vs. negative ("laboring", "edge of subsistence").

We can conclude that Bush's discourse style is underlining his authority as newly elected supreme leader of the American people. His discourse efforts are meant to construct his image as a powerful figure able to speak in the name of all Americans and concerned with all their present problems and future choices. From the point of view of my main analytical purpose, legitimation of actions is clearly represented by the author/speaker's authority (van Leeuwen's strategy of Authorization).

In conclusion, the CDA analysis of president Bush's inaugural speech has led us to identify several discourses surfacing from the text which have been proved to be all connected to the main discourse on "freedom". After their examination we have interpreted the discourses using van Leeuwen's strategies of legitimation and found out how Bush builds up his speech relying on Moral Evaluation, Authorization, Rationalization and Mythopoesis. A genre analysis of the text helped us pinpoint

the oratorical qualities of the speech and how they reflect further on the author's discourse style. By analyzing Bush's statements and how they reflect his commitment to truth (modality) and obligation/necessity (evaluation) we have established the speaker's affinity for clear evaluative statements, thus emphasizing the overall authoritative attitude of the speaker.



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### *Mapping arguments*

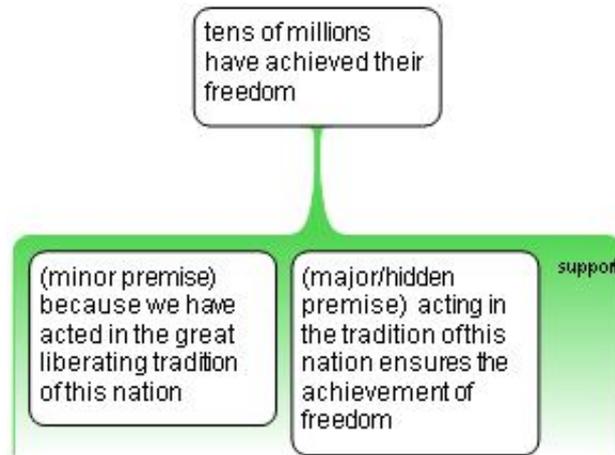
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I will try to identify the arguments (if any) supporting the seven discourses emerging from president Bush's inaugural speech. My purpose is to verify if the claims made by the author/speaker are backed by a sound line of reasoning.

The main discourse of the text is the one on "freedom". Although it is pivotal for the entire construction of the text, this discourse is mainly represented by emphatic statements meant to underline the president's authority. There are only two examples of such arguments in the speech and I will illustrate their construction as follows:

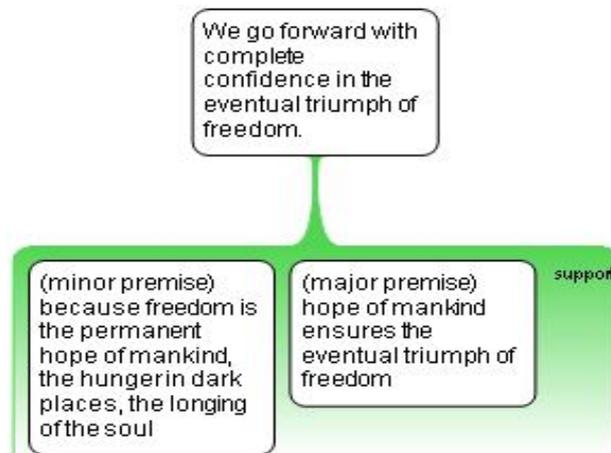
*Yet because we have acted in the great liberating tradition of this nation, tens of millions have achieved their freedom.*



It is a well-constructed argument (both premises supporting the main claim). This argument also supports the discourse of American history emphasizing the discursual connection existing between the main discourse of "freedom" and the one on history and traditional values.

Another argument supporting the “freedom” discourse is the following:

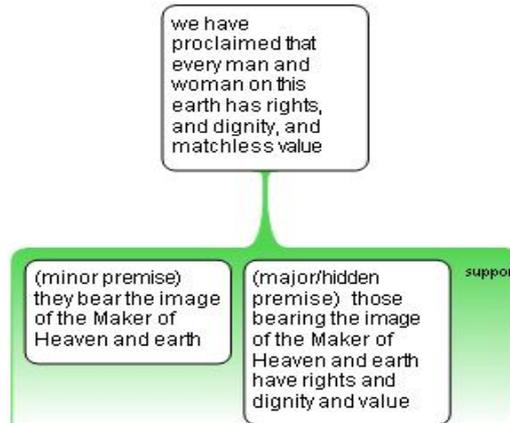
*We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom. Not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability; it is human choices that move events. Not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation; God moves and chooses as He wills. We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul.*



This argument is well-formed, as the two premises support the main claim, but in terms of soundness I believe it can be challenged. The premises could be contested since they do not rely on empirical evidence. There is no proof that “freedom” is actually “the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul”. This is a generalization with abstract references, which does not offer a solid basis for supporting the claim of the argument. In addition, this argument is accompanied by explanatory sentences clarifying which statements can be accepted as premises to the main claim and which premises cannot: “Not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability; it is human choices that move events. Not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation; God moves and chooses as He wills.” While these last statements do not directly contribute to support this argument’s claim, their use here is not entirely futile. By introducing these negated statements Bush suggests that they have been stated by others, and although he apparently rejects them as grounds for his claim, only by mentioning them to the audience he triggers their attention to alternative possibilities of constructing his argument.

The religious discourse is supported in the text only by one argument as follows:

*From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth.*

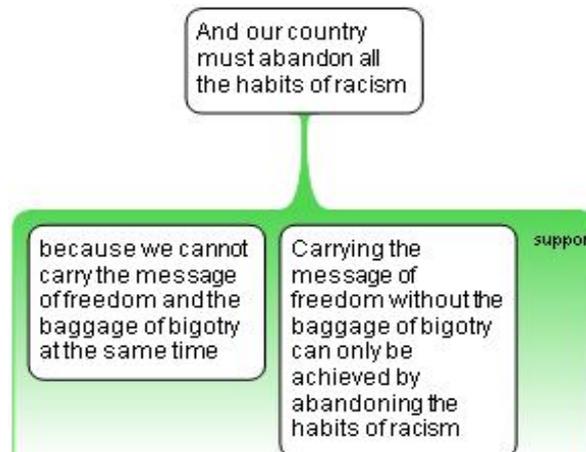


As this is a discourse relying on beliefs, its grounds for reasoning cannot be empirical. The audience is not able to test the truthfulness of the statements supporting the claim (and thus the validity of the argument) unless they share a common religious background. The assumption of the speaker is that his statements are understood and accepted by the audience. The soundness of this argument relies only on this aspect of mutual understanding of religious reference.

The discourse of America as guide and leader of the world is not supported by any argument in the text. It is constructed only by means of assertions, statements backed by the authority of the speaker. As we mentioned earlier, this discourse is constructed through narrative (van Leeuwen's strategy of Mythopoesis) and does not offer clear grounds in the line of reasoning.

The unity among Americans discourse is mainly constructed through modalized demands. We can identify only one argument belonging to this discourse:

*And our country must abandon all the habits of racism, because we cannot carry the message of freedom and the baggage of bigotry at the same time.*



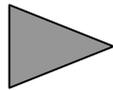
This argument is not very informative. It brings forth an interesting topic but it does not open a debate on ways of achieving the goal stated in the claim (our country must abandon all the habits of racism). Since “racism” *is* a form of “bigotry”, this renders the argument in question tautological. Hence, although from a structural point of view this is a well-constructed argument (a conclusion supported by two premises), it is not to be considered as such because of its redundant character.

The final two discourses, the “fight-against-tyranny” discourse and the presidential duties discourse, are both built without argumentation. The first relies on Moral Evaluation as strategy of legitimation and as I have mentioned earlier in this paper it relies on the opposition liberty-slavery, but is not supported by any argument in the text. The presidential duties discourse is built by using the legitimation strategy of Rationalization referring to the usefulness of institutionalized action. In his speech, Bush makes use of a reduced number of references to his duties and obligations<sup>5</sup>, and he always connects them to the main topic of his speech, namely “freedom”. Thus, we can assume that “freedom” is a pillar in Bush’s perspective regarding his duties towards the country. We noted in the discussion about discourses that the concept of “freedom” is both a goal and a determiner of action. By referencing his duties to “freedom”, Bush emphasises its importance within his vision of his future obligations, a move intended to morally elevate his political platform.

To conclude, we have seen that not all discourses emerging from the text are supported by arguments (only the discourses on “freedom”, “religion” and “unity among Americans” are represented through arguments). After mapping and analysing the key arguments from the Inaugural Address we have noted that most of Bush’s arguments are well-constructed (conclusions backed by minor and major premises), but their soundness can sometimes be challenged. I have also pointed out that in the case of the second argument supporting the “freedom” discourse, we deal with a more complex structure of argumentation, whose purpose is not to offer grounds to support the main claim, but to impress the audience. As newly elected president, Bush searches for the audience’s understanding and approval of his future actions. He does that mostly by employing oratorical devices and not by providing substantial proof through sound argumentation.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of references to presidential duties and obligations: “to fulfill the oath that I have sworn and you have witnessed”; “My most solemn duty is to protect this nation and its people against further attacks and emerging threats” and “We have known divisions, which must be healed to move forward in great purposes - and I will strive in good faith to heal them”.



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### *Conclusions*

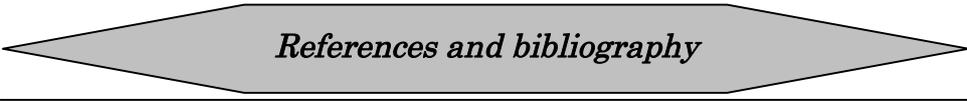
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To conclude, George W. Bush's inaugural address relies mostly on rhetorical devices rather than on reasoning techniques, he speaks on behalf of all Americans, and seems confident in assuming that all his fellow citizens would adhere to his stance. Bush's aims seem to be *to convince* and *to impress* his audience and his arguments rely mostly on his assumption that the audience is familiar with the contexts he presents. From this point of view argumentation seems to be yet another structural-rhetorical means. Finally, Bush could be considered an authoritative speaker with a proclivity to oratory rather than sound reasoning.

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