

The candidates had a similar proportion of policy and character topics: both had one third of character topics and two thirds of policy topics in the classified turns. Halonen had policy topics in 71% of her turns and Niinistö in 68%. Thus, the candidates discussed policy more often than character, and the challenger discussed character more and policy less than the incumbent. These results followed the predictions of functional theory.

The subdivision of the turns into the subcategories of policy and character topics was similar between the candidates; there were only minute differences between them. Of the policy turns, general goals was the largest category. It included 43%, while past deeds included 26 % and future plans 18% of the policy turns. 45% of character topics were coded as personal qualities. 33% of them concerned ideals and 22% were leadership qualities. The greatest difference between the candidates as regards the subcategories concerned policy topics. Halonen seemed to use policy topics, especially general goals, in defenses more often than Niinistö. Instead, Niinistö used policy topics, especially general goals, in his attacks more often than Halonen. Because the differences between the candidates were so small in these categories, it is impossible to conclude how these results followed the functional theory. The small differences were more opposite than similar to the predictions of the theory.

The functional theory also predicts that general goals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. In this debate, Halonen used general goals twice to acclaim, three times to attack, and 24 times to defend. Niinistö used general goals four times to acclaim, nine times to defend, and 12 times to attack. The theory also predicts that ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack. Halonen did not use ideals at all to acclaim, but four times to attack. Niinistö used ideals four times to acclaim and two times to attack. Thirdly, according to the theory general goals will be used more frequently than future plans. This prediction was supported by the results, because the ratio was 43% and 18%.

Next, let's consider the contents of the categories qualitatively. In the attacks it was typical that the candidates talked about what the other candidate had said earlier or said in the debate. The attacks were also often formulated as questions:

#### Extract (1)

Halonen: "Where is the threat then, Sauli Niinistö, coming from in your evaluation, in this evaluation of yours?"

Most of the attacks concerned policy issues. Attacks on character were rare. The next example is Niinistö's attack on Halonen's character. This attack is the most forthright in this debate:

#### Extract (2)

Niinistö: "About the last, I was now left with the picture that you are worried. And you have been worried six years or at least five and now in your New Year speech you paid attention to the matter.



Is it entirely honest toward people that you present yourself as the bearer of all good? But during your time, things have, however, developed in exactly the opposite direction. In that situation you might just take a look in the mirror."

These two examples are clear attacks, but many of the turns coded in this category are not so direct. In these turns, a candidate may express disagreement or criticize something with no specific target.

The defenses were the most common turns in this debate. Some of the defenses were responses to the other candidate's attacks, but many of them were also answers to the moderators' critical questions. Halonen especially had plenty of defenses where she defended current policy. Because of this most of Halonen's defenses related to general goals. Halonen's defending turns were also quite often rather long. In the next example, Halonen answers a moderator's question that the hints in the press about her becoming easily provoked had affected her campaigning:

Extract (3)

Halonen: "Well, I don't know, but on the other hand, if you watch people in international politics, then they all must have a certain edge of course. But it is the sort of side which you of course control yourself and although the whole repertoire of facial expressions is allowed for politicians too..."

Acclaims were quite rare in this Finnish debate. More often than attacks or defenses, the acclaims focused on character topics. In this debate, most of the acclaims related to the fact that in the second election round, the candidates were competing for the votes of people in the rural areas, though they were both considered to be candidates of urban people. Consequently, their acclaims dealt with how well they knew the rural areas and whether they were interested in farmers. Further, Halonen repeatedly emphasized that she had worked as the president of all Finnish people, which was also the main slogan of her campaign.

Extract (4)

Halonen: "But well, now in my opinion, I have been the president of all the people and I stick to that."

Extract (5)

Niinistö: "... That's why I perhaps stress this economic angle quite a bit, but it is however a matter where the president can make a difference. One can also stress for example the issue very important now about getting development funds for the rural areas."

Coding the turns into the categories of acclaims and defenses was fairly easy with the Finnish debate, but the category of attacks must be understood widely. There were only a limited number of direct attacks, but there were various turns including some sort of criticism of or challenge to the other candidate which can be considered attacks rather than turns of other kinds. Applying the topic categories policy and character was easy with the Finnish material.



The debate also included turns which could not be coded as any of the main functions. In these turns, the candidates did not launch any sort of attack against the other candidate, they did not defend their own opinions, speeches or actions, nor did they try to acclaim or tell about themselves or their ideas in a positive way. In most cases, these uncoded turns can be seen as analysis of the prevailing situation in Finnish society, the EU, or other international settings. In many cases these turns are answers to moderators' questions and the candidates do not address them to each other. Halonen especially had long turns in which she analyzed or explained current Finnish society or the development of the EU. In the next example, Niinistö answers a moderator's question about why the Finns' attitudes to the EU are so negative:

Extract (6)

Niinistö: "Yes, I believe however, that perhaps the main reason is however, that this kind of irritation threshold is exceeded too often. The EU goes into areas and matters where people do not understand at all why this is Brussels' business. And at times it is difficult to understand it too."

Sometimes these uncoded turns were also expressions of agreement or ice-breakers. They might also be short facts about an issue addressed.

Further, some turns on the policy topic could not be coded as past deeds, future plans, or general goals, although they were coded as attacks or defenses. These turns do not relate to past or future, nor do they describe general goals; rather, they address the current situation. They can also be seen as analyses of the prevailing political situation. In this debate, there were turns like "the security review is already being renewed little by little" (defense) or "many pensioners are clearly in difficulties" (attack), which were left uncoded into the sub-categories.

### *The Finnish Model Televised Election Discussion*

According to the Finnish model televised election discussion, the main elements of Finnish political discussion are expressions of agreement and disagreement. Both of the candidates had many more disagreements than agreements. About half of the turns (49%) were expressions of disagreement, 14 % were expressions of agreement, and 37% of turns could not be classified to these two categories. The differences between the candidates were not great: of Halonen's expressions 50% expressed disagreement and 16% agreement, the corresponding figures for Niinistö being 47% and 13%. The greatest difference was in the uncoded turns. Niinistö had these in 40 % of his turns, Halonen in 34%. Here is an example of an expression of agreement:

Extract (7)

Halonen: "Well, perhaps we share the opinion about that, you also know as the ex-Minister of Finance, that the president does not actually decide about the budget or legislation."



The other theme analyzed according to the model was the time orientation of the discourse. The most common were the turns related to the present (37%). Halonen had 42% of such turns and Niinistö had 32%. The second group was the turns related to the past (26%) and the third group was the turns related to the future (16%). The differences between the candidates in terms of these groups were small. The turns left uncoded represented 20% of all turns, 15% for Halonen and 25% for Niinistö. Ultimately, Halonen had more present-oriented discourse than Niinistö, and Niinistö had more turns than Halonen which could not be classified into these categories.

Next, these two classifications were considered together. The most typical turns were expressions of disagreement oriented to the present. They represented 41% of all expressions of disagreement. Expressions of disagreement oriented to the past (29%) were also quite typical. The smallest group was expressions of agreement oriented to the future; only 4 turns were coded to this class.

Although uncoded turns were quite typical in both classifications, there were only 10% turns which were left uncoded in both classifications. Typically, these turns were also very short comments, such as *excuse me, what was it or there may not be time left for me*. At the beginning of the program, however, there were short interviews with both candidates with no interaction between them. These interviews included a few longer answers which could not be coded into categories. In these answers, the candidates described themselves or their own thoughts.

#### Extract (8)

Interviewer: "How about church? What does religion mean for you?"

Niinistö: "Religion more than church. Especially in difficult situations, it does indeed come to mind."

#### Discussion

In this article, two different models were applied to analyzing Finnish presidential debate. Both models captured most of the candidates' turns, described interaction in the debate and showed some differences between the candidates. Most of the turns were divided according to the functional theory into attacks, defenses and acclaims and some of predictions of the theory fulfilled, e.g. candidates talked more about policy than character and the incumbent had more defenses than the challenger. The predictions of the functional theory on how the subforms are used (Benoit, 2007) were not realized, because in part, the results from the Finnish debate were opposite to the predictions. For example, in the Finnish debate the candidates used attacks more frequently than acclaims and defenses more frequently than attacks. The frequency of these functions was thus completely opposite to what the theory predicts.



Further, some categories of the functional theory must be defined broadly, because direct attacks, for example, are difficult to find in Finnish material. This has also been noticed in earlier studies on Finnish election discussions (e.g., Isotalus, 2009, Tiittula et al., 2007). Difficulties of this kind were absent when applying the Finnish model televised election discussion, but this is understandable, because the model is developed in Finnish communication culture. The difficulties of applying the functional theory to the Finnish debate reveal that this American theory does not function equally well in all cultures, and therefore its intercultural validity should be considered critically in the future.

Neither of the models could capture all turns of the debate, although the number of excluded turns was not high. The application of the functional theory excluded 21% of the turns and the Finnish model televised election discussion 10% of the turns. The starting point of the models is quite different, because the functional theory is developed for quantitative research and it assumes that all turns should be included under the main categories. Instead, the Finnish model televised election discussion is based on qualitative research and only strives to describe the main categories, rather than attempting to include all turns.

If the turns excluded from the categorizations are considered more carefully, it can be seen that the models actually complement each other. For example, the Finnish model televised election discussion excluded the turns in which the candidates said something about themselves or their own thoughts. This may suggest that such turns need a category of their own, which means an addition to the model. In the analysis that used the functional theory, these turns were classifiable as acclaims, which is one of the three main functions of the theory; however, Isotalus (2009) has observed that in Finnish culture self-praise is often avoided, and it is also rare in this debate. It might be better to speak, for example, of telling about oneself than of self-acclaim. On the other hand, the functional theory could not include turns which consisted of neutral discourse on the present social situation, because they could not be coded as past deeds, future plans, or general goals. Isotalus and Aarnio (2005; 2006) mention three forms of discourse, namely discourses oriented to past, present, or future. The functional analysis seems to cover discourses oriented to past and future, but neutral discourse oriented to the present is missing. This could be taken into account in the future development of the theory.

Isotalus (2009) has observed that agreements are quite typical in televised Finnish election discussions during the run-up to parliamentary elections, continuing that this is emblematic for a multi-party system. Although there were many more expressions of disagreement than expressions of agreement in this presidential debate, 14% of the turns were expressions of agreement. It is natural that there are many disagreements in a political debate, but expressions of agreement seem to be something typical of Finnish culture or perhaps of a multi-



party system in general. Earlier studies on two-party systems have not paid sufficient attention to such utterances.

Functional theory revealed more differences between the candidates' communication than the other model; therefore it seems to be better suited to describing the differences in the debating style of the candidates. For example, the results show that Tarja Halonen used a great number of defenses in this debate. In turn, it was easy for Sauli Niinistö to attack general goals, because Halonen as the incumbent could be seen as responsible for the general goals of Finnish policy. Most of Halonen's defenses also concerned general goals. Benoit (2007) himself has mentioned that one advantage of the functional theory is that it categorizes statements according to more criteria than many other models. The Finnish model televised election discussion did not reveal significant differences between the candidates. The greatest difference was that Halonen had more turns related to the present than Niinistö had, and this difference is probably a consequence of Halonen's position as the incumbent President.

All in all, the analyses show that presidential debates include both features which transcend national borders and cultures and culturally specific features. The cultural characteristics are affected by both the political culture (e.g., a multi-party system) and the communication culture (e.g., the tendency to avoid self-acclaim). It would be reasonable, therefore, to speak of political communication culture as, for example, Gurevitch and Blumer (2004) and Pfetsch (2004) have recommended. The results also stress that the political communication culture should be taken into account in the development of theories and analysis models of interaction in presidential debates. The developers of the two models (Benoit & Henson, 2007; Isotalus, 2009) have also emphasized this point of view.

An interesting observation is that the two models applied complemented each other, which provides ideas for developing both of them. According to these results, attacks and expressions of disagreement represent quite a similar category, the meaning of which is to oppose or resist another candidate. Added to this, defenses could be a category of their own as well as expressions of agreement, the function of which is bridge building. The category of acclaims could be worded more neutrally such as telling about oneself. Further, to the subcategories of the functional theory (past deeds, future plans, or general goals) could be added descriptions of present society. Such categories could give an even more comprehensive picture of debates than the earlier models have done.

According to the results, the functional theory does not seem to be fully applicable to the Finnish culture. More testing, however, is needed, because Finland represents only one small culture. On the other hand, it would be interesting to apply the Finnish model televised election discussion in other countries and test whether it has inter-cultural validity. The testing of these two models also shows that intercultural comparison of political debates is needed to reveal their



cultural characteristics and common international features, because both these would appear to be present.

## REFERENCES

- Benoit, W. L. (2007). *Communication in political campaigns*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Benoit, W. L. & Airne, D. (2005). A functional analysis of American vice presidential debates. *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41: 225–236.
- Benoit, W. L. & Harthcock, A. (1999). Functions of the great debates: Acclaims, attacks, and defenses in the 1960 presidential debates. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 341–357.
- Benoit, W. L. & Henson, J. R. (2007). A functional analysis of the 2006 Canadian and 2007 Australian election debates. *Argumentation & Advocacy* 44: 36–48.
- Benoit, W. L. & Klyukovski, A. A. (2006). A functional analysis of 2004 Ukrainian presidential debates. *Argumentation* 20: 209–225.
- Benoit, W. L., McHale, J. P., Hansen, G. J., Pier, P. M. & McGuire, J. P. (2003). *Campaign 2000. A functional analysis of presidential campaign discourse*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Benoit, W. L. & Sheafer, T. (2006). Functional theory and political discourse: Televised debates in Israel and the United States. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83(2): 281–297.
- Benoit, W. L., Wen, W.-C., & Yu, T.-H. (2007). A functional analysis of 2004 Taiwanese political debates. *Asian Journal of Communication* 17(1), 24–39.
- Blumler, J.G. & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The third age of political communication: Influences and features. *Political Communication*, 16, 209–230.
- Coleman, S. (2000). (ed.) *Televised Election Debates. International Perspectives*. Houndmills: MacMillan Press.
- Gurevitsch, M. & Blumer, J. G. (2004). State of the art of comparative political communication research. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.) *Comparing political communication. Theories, cases, and challenges*, (pp. 325–343). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herkman, J. (2008). Poliitiikan viihteellistymistä vai professionalisoitumista? [Entertainment or professionalization of politics?]. *Politiikka*, 50, 87–99.
- Holtz-Bacha, C., Mancini, P., Negrine, R. & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2007). *The professionalisation of political communication*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Isotalus, P. (2001). Presidential campaigning in Finland. *World Communication*, 30(2), 5–23.
- Isotalus, P. (2007). Presidentinvaalien 2006 juonenkänteet ja kampanjan ominaispiirteet [Plots and characteristics of campaign in presidential election 2006]. In P. Isotalus & S. Borg (Eds.) *Presidentinvaalit 2006 [Presidential election 2006]*, (p.10–31). Helsinki: WSOY.
- Isotalus, P. (2009). Agreement and disagreement in focus: A cultural perspective on televised election debates. In R. Wilkins & P. Isotalus (Eds.), *Speech Culture in Finland*, (pp. 191–208). Lanham, LD: University Press of America.
- Isotalus, P. & Aarnio, E. (2005). Medioidun vaalikeskustelun malli [A model for mediated election discussion]. *Puhe ja kieli*, 25, 155–170.
- Isotalus, P. & Aarnio, E. (2006). A model of televised election discussion: The Finnish multi-party system perspective. *Javnost–The Public*, 13, 61–71.
- Jones, T. J. (2005). *The role of televised debates in the U.S. Presidential election process (1960–2004)*. New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South.
- Lee, C. & Benoit, W.L. (2005). A functional analysis of the 2002 Korea presidential debates. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15, 115–132.
- Mancini, P. & Swanson, D. L. (1996). Politics, media, and modern democracy. In D. L. Swanson & P. Mancini (eds.) *Politics, media, and modern democracy*, (pp. 1–26). Westport: Praeger.



- McKinney, M. S. & Carlin, D. B. (2004). Political campaign debates. In L. L. Kaid (Ed.), *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, (pp. 203–234). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Moring, T. (2008). Media and politics in Finland. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communication politics. Political communication in the Nordic countries*, (pp. 45–62). Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Negrine, R. M. (2008). *The transformation of political communication*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pfetsch, B. (2004). From political culture to political communication culture. In F. Esser & B. Pfetsch (Eds.) *Comparing political communication. Theories, cases, and challenges*, (pp. 344–366). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, B. 2004. The emotional deficit in political communication. *Political Communication*, 21, 339-352.
- Swanson, D.L. & Mancini, P. (1996). Patterns of modern electoral campaigning and their consequences. In D.L. Swanson & P. Mancini (eds.), *Politics, media, and modern democracy* (pp. 247-276). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Tiittula, L., Nuolijärvi, P. & Isotalus, P. (2007). Halosen ja Niinistön esiintymistyyli television vaalikeskusteluissa [Communication styles of Halonen and Niinistö in televised election discussions]. In P. Isotalus & S. Borg (Eds.), *Presidentinvaalit 2006* [Presidential election 2006], (pp. 155–177). Helsinki: WSOY.





# Burke and the End of Days: The Impious Power of Apocalyptic Symbolism as Commentary on Cultural and Social Destabilization

CARLY GIESELER, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

---

**Abstract:** *Abstract: By exploring the underlying attitudes that motivate us through the use of language and meaning, we see how cultural work resonates with shifts between the traditional and revolutionary. Kenneth Burke helps reveal the intricate strategies of persuasion in language and meaning. Burke posits the idea of attitude as an implicit symbolic action that becomes transformed when confronted with impious new motives. This article explores how pious forms of language and meaning become irrevocably altered in the face of impious forms of cultural and political destabilization. Using Burke's notion of incongruity against traditionally accepted attitudes of piety, it is suggested that the increasingly prevalent trend toward apocalyptic language and images emerges in response to this current moment of cultural and political change. This study argues that the apocalyptic trend in cultural productions becomes a symbolic bridge between change and preservation, new and old. Analyzing various examples of cultural images and language in both fictional and non-fictional contexts, This article addresses the possibility of this trend to reconcile this state of expeditious transformation with the pious ideologies of the past. Through a Burkean reading of this symbolic bridge, this study assesses how the incongruous, impious apocalypse genre may provide an opportunity to begin again in a return to piety.*

---

In times of extraordinary political and cultural upheaval, the need to build symbolic bridges from the destabilized present to the idealized past becomes increasingly important. As one of the founding thinkers in critical theory, Kenneth Burke offered analysis regarding the strategies of persuasion. For Burke, our cultural attitudes reflect our philosophies regarding life itself. Burke offers the idea of attitude as an implicit symbolic action transformed by the encounter of impious new motives that challenge our notions of cultural and political stability. This article explores how pious forms of language and meaning become irrevocably altered in the face of impious forms of cultural destabilization. This reveals how attitudes in greater social movements reflect the relationships between traditional normatives and the revolutionary incongruous.

Using Burke's notion of incongruity against traditionally accepted attitudes of piety, it is argued that the increasingly prevalent trend toward apocalyptic language and images emerges in response to this



current moment of cultural and political change. Increased reliance on technology locks us into an existence of constant change weighed against pious dedication to preservation of the environment. Thus the suggestion that the apocalyptic trend in cultural productions becomes a symbolic bridge between change and preservation, new and old is proffered. Analyzing various examples of cultural images and language in both fictional and non-fictional contexts, the possibility of this trend to reconcile this state of expeditious transformation with the pious ideologies of the past is also covered. Ultimately, one may find that apocalyptic language and images offer society the possibility of catharsis. Through a Burkean reading of this particular symbolic bridge, this author assesses how these incongruous, impious messages may in fact point toward an opportunity to begin again in a return to piety.

In popular culture, vivid representations of impending, occurring, and post-apocalyptic existence have become increasingly prevalent over the past few years. It is the particularly carnivalesque portrayal of apocalyptic imagery that has emphasized the potent visual experience of the end of days. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic science fiction gained popularity following the nuclear terror at the close of World War II; significantly, this trend has returned with a vengeance at the current cultural moment. Much like WWII, this is also a moment of social, political, and historical destabilization. With added emphasis on the socio-historical "deadline of the world" posited as December 12, 2012, cultural products have been increasingly reflective of this potential date. As the end of the Mayan calendar approaches, religious, scientific, and prophetic forces reinforce the possible realization of armageddon. Fictional cinema, literature, and television have crafted a compelling catalog of apocalyptic representation. Recent and current representations include: the television series *Dead Set* (2010) and *Jericho* (2006-2008); the cinematic releases *28 Days Later* (2002), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *I Am Legend* (2007), and *The Road* (2009); websites 2012apocalypse.net and empty-world.com; and literature, including *Y the Last Man* by Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra and *World War Z* by Max Brooks. In addition, non-fictional attention has further legitimized our fascination with the apocalypse. As a strategy to analyze the visual and rhetorical impact of these representations, Burke's perspective by incongruity through the frame of the grotesque is applied. This author believes that the apocalypse genre now serves as the contemporary cultural representation of the grotesque, illustrating the incongruous union of destruction and creation, technology and nature. Although these representations do function in tragic and comic frames, a Burkean critical approach illustrates that the apocalypse reaches the zenith of visual power in the sphere of the grotesque.

In a rhetorical analysis of the apocalypse genre, elements of incongruity and the grotesque foster and sustain cultural interest in this representation. In conceptualizing intentional incongruity, Burke offered the grotesque as the fusion of seemingly contradictory meta-



phors or ideas. This intentional incongruity subverts linguistic binaries and confronts scholars with possibilities beyond hierarchical language. The grotesque emerges as a collective moment of mysticism in "periods marked by great confusion of the cultural frame" (Burke, 1959, pp. 57-58). Similarly, apocalyptic imagery serves as a revolutionary force in a socio-historical moment of uncertainty: the apocalypse represents both end of days and symbolic rebirth for the world. The apocalyptic genre thus fuses death to existence as we know it and the promise of a new beginning. As the apocalyptic genre melds metaphors and implodes linguistic signs, we are threatened and tempted with the revelation of the sublime lurking beyond the reaches of normative language.

To analyze the apocalyptic genre as a product of incongruity and the grotesque, this article first establishes the relevance of Burkean ideas to the rhetorical analysis of this representational trend. The significance of Burke's perspective by incongruity, as well as the apocalyptic function in tragic, comic, and grotesque frames is highlighted. Our cultural fixation on the apocalypse is explicated, specifically as a manifestation of desire and rejection oscillating from the haunting horror of the sublime. After expounding on the Burkean vocabulary, this article explores how these apocalyptic representations present stunning moments of incongruity pointing to the sublime beyond a shared linguistic world.

### *Beginning the Conversation*

Critical engagement with culture illustrates how "cultures symbolically nurture and engender their members" (Brummett, 1991, p. xxi). Popular culture generates and sustains meanings within society; thus, cultural texts offer snapshots of specific socio-historical moments. In a critical reading of the apocalyptic genre, these representations serve as part of a cultural phenomena constituted by and constitutive of meaning in this socio-historical moment. To understand these cultural and communicative moments from a dramatistic perspective, Burke's "unending conversation" (1941, p. 111) is called upon, from which drama arises. In rhetorical criticism, critics can analyze cultural developments as pieces of dialogue in this conversation. Resisting traditional methodologies of objectivity, "our aim becomes to continue the conversation about the data" (Foss, 1983, p. 288). In studying the apocalyptic cultural trend, this author adds her voice to the conversation about apocalyptic representations, grotesque frames, and perspectives by incongruity.

Culling from Burke's innovative and extensive vocabulary, the task of this study is to engage these terms in intriguing new ways that speak to the current cultural moment in the unending conversation. Palczewski (2003) suggests that it is necessary to "determine whether the vocabulary used is appropriate to the text" (p. 390). Therefore, prior to using apocalyptic representations as powerful illustrations of Burkean terms, it is necessary to wrangle with complicated Burkean



concepts regarding incongruity, the grotesque, and the sublime. Not only does this author seek to articulate and apply Burkean terms to the best of her abilities, it is also important to address the vocabularies of representation and desire. Much as these explanations welcome new voices to the conversation, the application of vocabularies to these contemporary texts invigorates the discussion for the voices echoing from long ago.

The apocalyptic genre is treated here as a living and evolving piece. These images are not contained within the confines of the screen or page. Once spoken into our cultural dialogue, these representations resonate with social, historical, and political implications. While the creative forces behind each text are considered, the author also stresses how her position and performance as cultural critic shapes the images and texts examined. In addition, although an account for diverse interpretations that differ from her suggestions remains beyond the scope of this study, she does strive to account for desire. This desire culls from the creators' desire for the apocalyptic image or text, the spectators' desire for the apocalyptic representation, and the desire of the apocalyptic other-as-object. Although it is not this author's intention to conduct a traditional audience analysis, while engaging these apocalyptic texts in issues of desire and lack, she must account for subject and object from a creative and interpretive perspectives.

Even as this author intends to stress that the images of the grotesque apocalypse manifest in ways that erode boundaries of space and time, it is important to note that the creative motivations toward such texts possess specific socio-political aspects. The current cultural moment is one of great political and social unrest; as such, this author examines the apocalyptic grotesque as particularly prevalent in moments of great destabilization. It is her contention that the emergence of this apocalyptic representational trend reflects a growing ambiguity regarding technology, nature, and identity. She pushes beyond the current scholarship, looking at how apocalyptic representations function to delight and terrify. These contemporary cultural images that fuse and shatter traditional linguistic binaries beckon and threaten with the horror of the apocalyptic sublime. This is the terrifying abyss beyond the grasp of language's normalizing power. This sublime aspect shadows these apocalyptic representations and demands our recognition of the socio-political implications surrounding our creative choices and interpretations.

### *Cracking the Linguistic Atom*

Burke's perspective by incongruity functions as a metaphor that reveals new possibilities and connections between objects which rational language failed to uncover. Burke (1959) speaks of rational vocabulary as built upon specific philosophical systems which hold productive power in determining our terminology. The perspective by incongruity is radical yet pragmatic as it effectively dissolves linguistic



codes and systems, engendering new ways of speaking and sharing lived experience. Burke encourages us to dismantle these disciplinary codes as a strategic move to disrupt the hierarchical discourse of tradition. Burke describes the motivation toward perspective by incongruity as a vehicle of verbal "atom-cracking" (1959, p. 308). Burke encourages the grotesque, comic corrective, and perspective by incongruity as strategies to illustrate how we can reconstruct pieties dictating our linguistic relationship with the world. In overturning traditional hierarchical systems and linguistic codes, we imbue new value on concepts previously unvalued. "We maintain dynamic textual transaction and thus continue the conversation of socially constructed meaning in a poetic dialogue between art and experience" (Brock, 1999, p. 264). As Burke (1954) posits the perspective by incongruity to highlight that all meaning is metaphorical in nature, he illustrates how social dialogue makes meaning through metaphor available and understood by a collective communicative society.

Burke presents a critical interpretation of the apocalyptic cultural trend because his work illustrates how rhetoric reveals and conceals subjectivity in a socio-cultural context (Mahan-Hays & Aden, 2003). When we internalize a representation, we enter subjectivity. This involves language and narrative, which work to embed us within society. In the utterance of our words, we construct desire by signifying specific objects as desirable. As Mahan-Hays and Aden (2003) suggest, our social narratives further reorient our desires by showing how socialization marks objects as desirable for others. Furthermore, the unifying ability of language and narrative ensures that we never have an experience that is strictly our own. This is why encountering the grotesque shocks the spectator; this moment debunks our collective social myths and reveals our alienated individual existences. This alienation manifests within the moment of the sublime, which is typically shrouded by our collective language.

### *Framing the Apocalypse*

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke states that "art forms like 'tragedy' or 'comedy' or 'satire' would be treated as equipments for living, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (1941, p. 304). The tragic frame depends on a moral code, even as contemporary society loosens moral constraints (O'Connor, 1962). The comic frame insists on rationality as a bulwark against the irrationality of human nature. These frames provide acceptance or rejection, yet the transitory grotesque permits an oscillation between acceptance and rejection. To comprehend the apocalyptic genre as a site of incongruity, it is necessary to address how these representations function in these frames.

The tragic frame cannot function without the concept of the negative. Burke places much weight on this linguistic moment: "The Negative. Perhaps the one great motivational principle that man, in his role as the language-using animal, has added to nature" (1966, p.



469). Through language, the negative spirals into a tragic frame that persists through binaries of good and evil, creator and destroyer. Tragedy casts roles and operates based on these binaries. Language loads the positive with socio-historical value, while the negative marks everything outside of the normative. This binary-built hierarchy reverberates throughout our social, cultural, historical, and political dialogue. Looking at the apocalyptic genre through the tragic frame, the negative emerges as these representations resist and reject our normative existences.

The tragic provides the symbolic purging of guilt and moment of purification. This seems the ideal fusion of death and rebirth within the apocalyptic genre; however, these tragic moments are ultimately fleeting and only reassert hierarchical control. Our linguistic capabilities dictate how we symbolically construct hierarchical perfection. This perpetuates the cycle of a perfect ideal, guilt for failure to attain the ideal, sacrifice to purge said guilt, and temporary redemption. In Burke's (1961) *The Rhetoric of Religion*, he posits the "Iron Law of History." This *Iron Law* is a perpetual cycle built into the symbols of the positive ideal as opposed to a negative that must be mortified, purged, and redeemed. This hinges on the symbolic construction of hierarchical perfection. It cannot be reached and thus makes negatives of us all. When we proceed through these tragic acts of scapegoating, mortification, and purification, it only reinforces the cycle as a mechanism of social control.

In addition, the apocalyptic genre as perspective by incongruity works as a comic corrective. The apocalyptic genre provides representations that are disruptive and new, unsettling our normative binaries and linguistic assumptions. In *Permanence and Change*, Burke looks to perspectives of metaphor, exalting how "the humorists, the satirists, the writers of the grotesque, all contributed...giving us new insights by such deliberate misfits" (1954, p. 91). The apocalyptic genre escapes the Iron Law of the tragic frame by unseating the hierarchical language of social control that constructs binaries.

When operating in the tragic cycle of linguistic binaries, a representation that favors one orientation simultaneously rejects all others. In addition, if society chooses one orientation, this resists any other possible representations. This motivates Burke to advocate the comic frame as the corrective to the curve of history, positioning it as a product of "humane enlightenment" which pictures "people not as vicious, but as mistaken" (1959, pp. 41-42). The incongruous representations of the apocalyptic genre offer ambivalence rather than absolutism. According to Burke, the comic frame possesses "two-way attributes lacking in polemical, one way approaches to social necessity" (1959, p. 166). The comic frame moves away from prescriptive binaries of good and evil, life and death, normal and deviant. "In comedy, the either/or is replaced with the both/and...while tragedy leads to punishment, the comic leads to dialectic" (Goltz, 2007, p. 18). Intentional incongruity traipses across the comic frame, pairing