TRAGIC STYLES IN PUBLIC ADDRESS

Audre Lorde's Discourse as Exemplar

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Of what I move
toward and through
and what I need
to leave behind me
for most of all I am
blessed within my selves
who are come to make our shattered faces
whole.

Audre Lorde, "Outside,"
The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde

This chapter identifies salient features of what I am tentatively characterizing as traumatic styles in American public address. One such feature consists of advocates' remarks concerning shattered illusions of invulnerability after fundamental assumptions about safety, trust, and communal life have disintegrated during an ordeal. Another feature is the rhetorical immediacy in advocates' narrative depictions of past traumatic experiences as abiding timelessly in the present such that their vivid memories are located outside of ordinary narrative time. In addition, certain characteristic emotive dynamics suffice the public discourse, oscillating among numbness, disbelief, fear, anger, and rage. Another recurrent element of the styles is the advocates' calls for vigilance in coping with the hatred of oppressive adversaries and betrayals by similarly situated people seeking to survive. Finally, advocates typically depict a dichotomous and polarizing moral view of the world while seeking the support of onlookers in a dramatic struggle between rival groups, often portrayed as an agonistic struggle between good and evil. Taken together, I will argue, these characteristics constitute the synthetic core of highly variable traumatic styles.
For the purposes of the chapter, rhetorical style will be understood not simply as word choice and sentence structure, but rather as a distinctive way of holding and advocating beliefs in public discourse. By referring to this sense of style, I have in mind Richard Hofstadter’s scholarship on the “paranoid style,” which he claimed was a recurrent, pervasive pattern of advocacy in American political life. Referring to style, he said, “It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself.”

Like Hofstadter, I am not diagnosing an individual’s psychology, but rather identifying a typical mode of advocacy in public discourse. I am less concerned with exploring an individual’s sensibility than I am with examining recurrent public manifestations of traumatic styles in advocates’ attempts to persuade participants in public forums. Traumatic styles recur in speeches, essays, and even poems addressed to audiences to influence beliefs and actions. But unlike Hofstadter, who frankly admitted that he intended his naming of the paranoid style to be pejorative, I would instead call for a critical attitude of compassionate understanding for the human frailties evidenced by public discourses depicting unspeakable experiences.

Since Hofstadter’s widely influential 1968 essay, style has been explored as a sensibility in terms of rhetoric and politics. In 1978, for instance, Edwin Black explored what he called the “sentimental style” employed by Daniel Webster, whose public speeches endeavored to instruct audiences concerning what they should feel about his ideas even as he conveyed them. Black observed, “What I want most to note about this style is the detail with which it shapes one’s response. No scintilla of reaction is left for the auditor’s own creation. Every nuance of his response is suggested by the speech.”

More recently, Robert Hariman’s award-winning 1995 book Political Style: The Artistry of Power has identified and analyzed what he called realist, courtly, republican, and bureaucratic political styles employed by four types of powerful figures, all men who exerted considerable influence extending beyond their lifetimes: Machiavelli, Kupciński, Cicero, and Kafka. Both explorations of style have concentrated on the sensibilities of privileged and powerful men to the exclusion of vulnerable populations of the varieties that Audre Lorde embodied as a black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, and mother. By shifting the critic’s focus to center attention on political advocates who, like Lorde, spoke from relatively vulnerable political positions, this chapter will complement the previous scholarship concerning powerful men’s style, while calling awareness to limitations that may result from generalizing about style from speeches only by the powerful and privileged.

In the process, this chapter’s shift of focus to the styles of relatively vulnerable populations entails attention to a wealth of typically omitted or peripheral concepts in previous explorations of style, concepts that are nonetheless useful for a critic’s analysis of traumatic styles. Such concepts include silence and silencing, discursive amnesia and public memory loss, symbolic matrices and intersectionality,
identification and essentialism, symbolic fragmentation and appropriation, double and multiple consciousness, marginality and centrality, embodiment, performatives, and enactment, complicity or collusion, and double binds, paradoxes, and quandaries. Because these concepts have been neglected or omitted altogether from earlier treatments of style, this essay suggests that studies of rhetoric could be significantly enriched both conceptually and substantively by attention to traumatic styles and, more generally, by meaningful engagement with the speeches of politically vulnerable populations.

This chapter concentrates on identifying the recurring, synthetic features of traumatic styles in the complex rhetorical processes of advocates and listeners. The first section provides a general orientation to traumatic styles. The sections that follow then detail the public advocates’ unspeakable speech, the audiences’ experiences of unlistenable speech, and rhetorical depictions of recovery, reintegration, and communal healing through political actions both for advocates and their audiences. Throughout I will draw on excerpts from several of Lorde’s public speeches, essays, and poems to illustrate salient features of traumatic styles and to suggest how her discourse tides on the whole to evince these styles, though she emphatically placed recovery, empowerment, and political engagement in the foreground. Lorde’s public speeches and essays exemplify what biographer Elaine Maria Upton called “an intense engagement with modern urban traumas, with racism, wars, poverty, and political and social injustice throughout the world.” This chapter contributes to the scholarly literature in rhetoric and public address by identifying features of traumatic styles and by providing a sustained examination of several discourses by an important black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet, and speaker who was reflexive and explicit about the liabilities and possibilities of her rhetorical style.

"Audre Lorde lived two lives," her authorized biographer Alexis De Veaux observed in the opening sentence of the recently released biography, Warrior Poet. Lorde was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1978, shortly after her speech concerning "The Uses of the Erotic." She had a mastectomy, a profoundly life-altering experience for her evidenced throughout her subsequent discourse. Envisioning herself not as a victim suffering, but as a warrior battling her condition, she drew on images of the Amazons of Dahomey, one-breasted women warriors, in her writings. Eventually, however, she was diagnosed with liver cancer, treatments for which she traveled in 1984 to Germany, where she gave poetry readings and interviews. De Veaux claimed, "Lorde’s second life began after she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy in 1978." Only one year before that, shortly after Lorde had been diagnosed at the time with a benign tumor, she began a fifteen-year career as a prominent public speaker. During this period of her second life, she addressed the topics of age, race, sex, sexuality, and economic class in a wide range of forums and publication outlets. Themes in her numerous speeches include silence and
silencing; the habitual complicity of subordinated peoples with dominant groups; being an outsider as a position of both vulnerability and strength; the erotic as distinct from the pornographic in human relationships as well as commercial products; difference and anger as resources for collaboration and social change rather than divisiveness, capricious bias, and hatred; and survival in a hostile society. In general, her speeches, essays, and interviews are difficult for most readers and listeners because she dealt with sensitive and taboo topics ranging from rape, sexual assault, and pornography to harassment, various bias crimes, and other forms of abuse and violence.

Consequently Lorde is well known for her contributions to the women’s movement during the 1970s and 1980s, especially her courageous struggle with breast cancer as recorded in her Cancer Journals, which were published in 1980. Her reputation among feminists and women’s studies scholars continues to grow such that her photographic image has become an icon designating a strand of feminist thought devoted to equity across multiple differences among people. Lesbian, transgender, and queer communities have likewise taken increased interest in Lorde over the years, sometimes coupling her image as a warrior against breast cancer with images of gay men battling the AIDS pandemic, at other times evoking her maxim “Your silence will not protect you” to counter the closeting of same sexuality. Entire organizations have been named for her or her writings, as exemplified by health and community centers bearing her name in San Francisco and New York. Zami, the title of her “biomythography,” is also the name of a center for black lesbians located in Atlanta, Georgia. Even so, Lorde’s socialism, sex, and race have been factors diminishing her appeal to socially and economically conservative gay men and lesbians. Her critical reception has been as diverse as the extraordinary range of audiences she addressed, opinions ranging from heartfelt hostility to deep appreciation and gratitude for her work.

An Orientation to Traumatic Styles

To characterize traumatic styles, I have referred to the plural “styles” rather than the singular “style” for several reasons. First, there are doubtless variations and changes in traumatic styles over time and place, as well as diverse patterns of socialization and histories of specific social groups or communities. In the case of some public advocates, such as rape survivor Andrea Dworkin, Black feminist Angela Davis,* and Jewish Hungarian survivor of the German Holocaust Elie Wiesel,† traumatic styles characterize many public pronouncements. In other cases, such as Oscar Wilde in De Profundis, an exemplar that emerged late in his life, the style marked a fundamental change in the Irish playwright’s public voice after his ordeal during three trials and his imprisonment by the British government. As the examples of Wiesel and Wilde suggest, traumatic styles are not limited only to American public discourse, however much cultural factors may vary it elsewhere. Few, if any, trau-
mas rise to the proportions of the Holocaust, but individuals and groups experience recurrent, significant ordeals nonetheless. In addition, a plural reference to "styles" is warranted in that the discourse may be inflected differently by advocates depicting recovery than for those portraying recent injuries. Beyond this, the naming of a type, even if accurate for several advocates, can easily become a stereotype. This use of a type as a stereotype may be resisted, in part, by pluralizing the styles and differentiating within and across specific social groups.

It would be a serious blunder for rhetoric scholars to consider traumatic styles as merely a personal or psychological sensibility expressed in discourse, because such a characterization would deflect attention from a recurrent pattern of public address in a wide range of public forums and, more important, from the political, social, and economic practices that may discipline the styles into being. If traumatic styles are mistaken as only individual or psychological, attention may be diverted from minority communities' disproportionate experiences of homicide, physical assault, sexual violence, menacing, severe harassment, discrimination in housing, employment and services, and other overt acts literally using the bodies of those who are different to inscribe and to convey messages of contempt, hatred, and oppression. In addition, as others have suggested, psychiatry is an institution that has had a disgraceful history as an individuating, isolating, and silencing mechanism for disciplining and discrediting the voices of sexual minorities. Recognizing traumatic styles as recurrent in public address has ramifications for professional critics' interpretations of such discourses and for other audiences, because listening to such discourse is arduous. Traumatic styles place atypical demands on audiences.

Exemplars of traumatic styles tend on the whole to be reactionary, confrontational, and adversarial, concerned as public advocates tend to be with agonistic conflict among entire categories of social groups across differences in sex, race, sexuality, economic class, religion, and the like. Advocates whose discourses exemplify traumatic styles typically oppose symbolic acts such as sustained and severe harassment, physical violence, and countless homicides disrupting lives within subordinated communities throughout the United States. Examples of such recurring experiences in American history range from chattel slavery, lynching, and racial harassment, to family violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, to the vicious, public displays of openly antigay and antilebian hatred, homicide, and other violence toward queer communities. Consequently, traumatic styles are commonplace among the public discourses by gay men and lesbians, people of color, and women, for instance, simply because members of these social groups routinely cope with violent and dehumanizing ordeals and their legacies. But traumatic styles are certainly neither unique to nor characteristic of discourse by gay men and lesbians, recurring as traumatic styles do with varying content in the discourse of several communities. In certain historical moments traumatic styles have been ubiquitous in American public life.
Traumatic styles are not emblematic of any subordinated community. Instead traumatic styles represent points of fracture, chasms, within and laterally across various subordinated communities. Audiences ordinarily may experience traumatic rhetorical styles as unintelligible speech in part because of complexities that attend understanding experiences which are, at once, both individual and systemic. Audiences of the styles may simply refuse to listen, because they have the power or authority to do so. Or audiences may employ a complex and highly variable range of defensive ways of listening as a means to preserve their own illusions of invulnerability or false beliefs in a fundamentally just world. Examples of such defense mechanisms include caricaturing, infantilizing, or blaming the victims of traumatic experiences through an exaggerated and unrealistic assignment of the victims' responsibility for having had the experience. This cluster of defensive, symbolic practices is deeply rooted in myths of individualism in that they differentiate each targeted person's dubious decision making from those made by the rest of the group rather than recognize disproportionate risks to everyone within the group regardless of decisions made. At stake in refusing to listen or amplifying the victim's responsibilities for the harms that he or she has ostensibly brought onto himself or herself is each listener's heartfelt need for assurance that this ordeal or personal disaster cannot happen to him or her. Consequently, even though it may seem counterintuitive, blaming the victim can be especially pervasive among people similar to the targeted person or group because a commonplace desire for reassurance complicates listening to messages disrupting listeners' sense of safety and security. Additional challenges in listening result from the two commonplace distortions of either excessive identification or nonidentification with the harmed person or people. These patterns of distortion can result alternatively in falsely appropriating the injuries as one's own, or altogether discounting the experiences as too foreign to pertain to one's self.

Advocates exemplifying traumatic styles have made risky decisions in negotiating multiple double binds understood as lose-lose options. For instance, depicting specific acts of victimization risks reproducing invidious stereotypes for entire groups as victims. At the same time, however, complicity in silence entails colluding with concealing the devastating harms, which disproportionately injure members of these groups. Whichever "choice" speakers and their audiences may make in response to unwelcome messages concerning yet another sexual assault, yet another violent act, yet another of the homicides affecting one of "us"—however "us" is understood—the decision entails significant losses. Hostile audience reactions likely come not only from those who dominate but also from those most at risk for similar harms, because of fear, listeners' faith that the right "choices" can reduce the risks of harms, and other factors sustaining the hearers' illusions of their own invulnerability or false faith in a fundamentally just world.

There reside yet additional double binds hidden beneath the first. There are, for instance, practical problems of political inexpediency. The acknowledgment of
victims and victimization may deflect attention from forward-looking agenda setting by members of subordinated communities. In addition, the public discourse may strip people, who need some measure of personal agency, of the belief that they possess the capacity to make any meaningful changes in society, especially if the sources of the harms are deeply rooted in entire systems, as advocates sometimes suggest. This last bind may be buttressed by the quandaries posed in making systemic claims about groups both collectively and as diverse individuals. There is even a double bind in characterizing traumatic styles in this chapter, because attention to its features in discourse may deflect attention from the political, social, and economic pathologies in the acts of extreme hatred that may contribute to some targeted people's use of the styles. Consequently, in the predictable, ensuing acts of silence and silencing, discursive amnesia and public memory loss, denial, dismissal, devaluation of harms, and other seemingly endless varieties of vertical and horizontal hostility, to quote Audre Lorde's remark addressed to members of diverse subordinated communities, "we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other." ¹⁴

Drastically divergent understandings of human fragility rooted in paradoxically impersonal, personal experience may become a crevasse separating speakers of traumatic styles from their audiences and complicating any meaningful communication between them. Traumatic experiences may seem to be profoundly personal, especially when traumatic experiences result from having had an aspect of one's personhood targeted by violent or dehumanizing others. But, on inspection, because the stereotypes and myths actuating the hatred were pervasive in American life even before the targeted individual was born, the experiences are transparently impersonal. For some practitioners of hatred, any member of the targeted group will do. Confronted with this reality, audiences have an immense array of means for not listening, not heeding messages that, if comprehended and accepted, may call into question one's own safety, one's own well being, one's own mortality. For audiences, ordinarily it is easier simply to forego the experience of listening to such discourse. As Carol Gilligan said concerning overt acts of sexism, "If you have power, you can opt not to listen. And you do so with impunity." ¹⁵ Listening with empathy to traumatic styles may be a profoundly transformative activity.¹⁶ Let us turn next, then, to examine synthetic elements, which, taken together, instantiate the styles: shattered illusions of invulnerability, rhetorical immediacy in narrative time, abruptly fragmented selves, emotive dynamics, vigilance, and a dichotomous symbolic world of agonistic struggle.

Unspealable Speech

Traumatic experiences are unspeakable. As one consequence, at the outset, there is a paradox. Some people do speak the unspeakable in public. In her landmark book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman wrote, "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too
terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable.*” She added, "The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma." Conflicts between speech and silence, between declaration and denial, between recognition and invisibility permeate the rhetorical process with quandaries for audiences as well as advocates. As a prominent black, lesbian, feminist, socialist poet, and mother of two, Lorde belonged to several communities that deal routinely with dehumanization and violence.

Despite the distorting myths characterizing traumatic styles as self-indulgent, self-centered, or self-absorbed, advocates speak the unspeakable in public for an immense variety and range of reasons. Often the motivation is to ensure that the trauma does not repeat itself, that there are no additional targets of severe harassment, menacing, violence, or homicide. Other times the speakers’ goals are to transform entire political, social, and economic systems so that they become less supportive of perpetrators, more supportive of the victims, and generally, as Lorde once put it, to sustain “a world of possibility for us all.” Still other times, paradoxically, speakers remember in public precisely to forget, to be able to heal and to recover. The narrative recounting of traumatic experiences may locate them within an historic, narrative moment, an act that may enable survivors to place the events or deeds firmly into the past so as to move into the future. The speakers’ objectives, however, are not always so honorable or oriented toward recovery. Some speakers seek revenge through publicly humiliating their victimizers. Others seek a public apology and acts of atonement from the perpetrators or those who aided and abetted the perpetrators. Still others seek compensation, not necessarily materialistic, for harms that can never adequately be compensated. More often than not, the speakers’ objectives can be multiple and shifting among a conflicted range of outcomes, some of which are improbable, if not impossible, to attain.

Shattered Illusions of Invulnerability

At the heart of traumatic styles is a symbolic world inhabited by victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, a world suffused with first-hand accounts usually as either the target or the witness of violence, terror, or extreme vulnerability and helplessness. These advocates have few, if any, illusions of invulnerability, having had them shattered by lived experience, sometimes a single, overpowering moment; other times, an unending ordeal that day after day consumes the utmost energy. As Lorde observed in a 1977 speech to the Modern Language Association (MLA), “For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive.” Lorde’s poem “A Litany for Survival” can be understood as addressed to “those of us who cannot indulge / the passing dreams of choice.” She concluded that poem with insights concerning false choices among lose-lose options: “When we speak we are afraid / our words
will not be heard / nor welcomed / but when we are silent / we are still afraid. / So it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive.”23 Elaine Upton observed that a “major theme of Lorde’s writing is the theme of survival.”24

Certainly, a great deal of the socialization of lesbians and gay men, like that of other sexual, racial, and religious minorities, has emphasized being extremely vulnerable to harm and dependent on others for support or protection. It is accurate to say that the illusions of invulnerability vary in some measure and, in specific cases, may reflect privilege in economic class, sex, race, sexuality, and the like, as well as confidence in individualism’s myths, even among people who experience serious forms of discrimination. The substance of these illusions varies with the patterns of socialization and diverse histories of specific groups.25

Lorde regularly addressed the obstacles posed by her audience members’ illusions of invulnerability. For instance, in a speech at Amherst College in April 1980, she generalized, “For white women there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools.” Lorde amplified a few mechanisms that, despite the evidence, sustain the illusions: “Today, with the defeat of ERA, the tightening economy, and increased conservatism, it is easier once again for white women to believe the dangerous fantasy that if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right men, then you will be allowed to co-exist with patriarchy in relative peace, at least until a man needs your job or the neighborhood rapist happens along.” Focusing on race, she affirmed, “But Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stained with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest. . . . For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living.”26

Yet, despite the nation’s history of chattled slavery, lynching, and assassinations of black leaders, the illusions surface in most minority communities, including black communities, buttressed as the illusions may be by individuating rhetorical processes such as blaming the victim.27 This rhetorical process may help to preserve such illusions for some members of minority communities, since the harms seem to stem from each individual’s failings, not a systemic situation facing the entire group. To circumvent such responses Lorde queried a predominantly black audience during Malcolm X Weekend at Harvard University in 1982: “Can any one of us here still afford to believe that efforts to reclaim the future can be private or individual?” She later asserted, “Nothing neutralizes creativity quicker than tokenism, that false sense of security fed by a myth of individual solutions.”28 Such comments suggest that Lorde recognized as problematic investments in individualism that sustained illusions of safety among black audiences.

Rhetorical Immediacy in Narrative Time

Survival may have been at stake during the traumatic experiences recollected with crystal clarity years later, perhaps even decades later, as though they had just
happened, here and now, in the present location and the present place. This rhetorical quality of timeless immediacy recurs again and again, season after season, year after year, because traumatic experience is located outside of ordinary narrative time, deeply embedded in the present. "Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present," wrote Herman. She added, "It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep." In some cases, when the memory resulted from a single, highly dramatic event, the anniversary of it may become a time of vivid recollection. Although almost all of Lorde's speeches depicted deplorable deeds, those deeds occurred in her rhetoric without reference to time and place, with few exceptions. Lorde's public speeches are remarkably free of specific dates and locations for hostile actions, which recur timelessly again and again in the present moment.

With respect to public memory and narrative time, advocates whose rhetoric exemplifies traumatic styles may negotiate dilemmas while speaking the unspeakable in public. The act of speaking about ordeals necessarily entails reliving and reexperiencing by remembering the past yet again in the present, however anxious some advocates may be to place the experiences in the past. Yet silence may result in allowing perpetrators to prevail and persist in yet additional cases. Whichever "choice" advocates may make in negotiating the double bind, the decision will be attended by significant losses.

Lorde's decision was evident in the whole of her oeuvre. Elaine Upton remarked, "Along with the reality of cancer survival is the global challenge of survival in an ecologically degenerating world, and in a world of racism, sexism, and homophobia, as well as survival of the poor and of those who are abused in many ways. Lorde's poetry images forth a vast wreck age and wrenching concrete detail of racist, sexist, homophobic, and otherwise inhuman events." Yet the range and complexity of the rhetorical obstacles to speech, exemplified by so many double binds, may place silence in the foreground for other people. Lorde regularly addressed that silence directly. For instance, she commented to the MLA, "I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective."

Abruptly Fragmented Selves

In some cases, trauma results in what psychologists label "dissociation"—that is, the experience of seeming to move outside of one's own body, observing as it is acted on by another; a momentary severing of one's mind from one's own body. Although early research on trauma "viewed the capacity to disconnect mind from body as a
merciful protection," such people are most likely to "relive in their bodies the moments of terror that they can not describe in words." Consequently, characteristic of the traumatic styles are declarations concerning the processes of reintegrating a suddenly fragmented self "to make shattered faces whole," to quote Lorde’s suggestively titled poem "Outside."

These fracturing pressures may come from within communities where advocates may have expected to secure encouragement or support. Lorde remarked at Amherst College in 1980, "As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live."

She emphasized, "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition."

Double or multiple consciousness is a symbolic phenomenon in subordinated communities that may be related to seeing one’s body from the outside as it is acted on by another, though both double and multiple consciousness certainly extend beyond the specifics of psychological dissociation. First articulated by W. E. B. Du Bois in The Souls of Black Folks (1907), the idea of "double consciousness" has been elaborated by many intellectuals from minority communities. “Double consciousness,” as James Darsey noted, "implies a complexity of vision, the necessity for members of subordinate subcultures always to know the rules of the dominant culture as well as of their subculture."

Accordingly, as a black person, Lorde needed to be familiar not only with how members of black communities represented themselves, but also how members of white communities represented them. As Lorde argued in an essay published by the Black Scholar in 1978, "For Black women as well as Black men, it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment." "Multiple consciousness" extends the idea of double consciousness by underscoring that, as a lesbian, Lorde needed to know the rules of dominating heterosexual and subordinated lesbian cultures. Moreover, as a woman, she needed to know the rules of dominating male and subordinated female cultures. In "Who Said It Was Simple," Lorde wrote, "But I who am bound by my mirror / as well as my bed / see causes in colour / as well as sex / and sit here wondering / which me will survive / all these liberations."

Emotive Dynamics

Some exemplars of traumatic styles are the result of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, or floods. Other times, the natural disaster can be located within
an individual, as in a cancer diagnosis. This was in some respects the case for Lorde, whose Cancer Journals chronicled her experiences after an initial biopsy for a benign tumor and a subsequent biopsy for a malignant one. She inquired, "What is there possibly left for us to be afraid of, after we have dealt face to face with death and not embraced it? Once I accept the existence of dying as a life process, who can ever have power over me again?"34 But when traumatic experiences have been the result of other people's deliberate deeds, as with Lorde's childhood and adult experiences,35 speakers of traumatic styles have been forced to confront the human capacity for sadistic cruelty or for evil. Consequently, fundamental assumptions about living in community may have collapsed beneath the speakers' feet. Safety is only one casualty.36 The capacity to feel may be another. Speakers of traumatic styles may oscillate among rage, anger, fear, disbelief, and numbness, "a world of flattened effect," to use Lorde's language.37

As for commonplace emotions of anger and rage that may suffuse manifestations of traumatic styles in public discourse,38 speakers may depict these emotions as appropriate and perhaps even necessary resources, which are sharply distinguished from the hatred practiced by oppressive adversaries. In Lorde's speech to the National Women's Studies Association during 1981, for instance, she devoted the entire speech to "The Uses of Anger." She referred to "the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation." In this speech, Lorde distinguished between the "hatred" of hostile people and women's legitimate "anger," which, she claimed, "are very different." She explained, "Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change... . Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change."39

"Power" likewise concentrated on her experiences of anger and rage while seeking social justice. In a public comment about the poem, she acknowledged rage so intense that she needed to stop driving her car so that she would not run over the next white person she saw. She described her own furious response to an unjust verdict, which had just acquitted a police officer for his deliberate killing of a black youth while uttering the words, "Die you little motherfucker."40 Lorde's poem confronted the insight that people who identify with the victims of hatred can experience hatred in reaction, however momentarily. By doing so, such people may reproduce deplorable ways of relating across human differences. Upton commented, "One of the prominent feelings to which the reader must respond in Lorde's writing is anger and often rage."41

In a later essay initially published in an abbreviated form in Essence in October 1983, Lorde commented on the limitations of anger. Even while she affirmed that
"sometimes it seems that anger alone keeps me alive; it burns with a bright and
undiminished flame," she emphasized that "anger, like guilt, is an incomplete form
of human knowledge." Perhaps this acknowledges that quandaries attend the uses
of anger for audiences and for advocates in the rhetorical processes complicating
traumatic styles. To call awareness to a double bind that confronts advocates who
express authentic emotions, Lorde elsewhere alluded to a white woman who
remarked, "Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you."
Lorde asked, "But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a
message that her life may change?"

In exemplars of traumatic styles, speakers may depict relationships of trust that
have been upended, as when members of vulnerable groups experience revictim-
ization by failures in the criminal justice system. Herman observed, "Traumatic
events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but
also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and commu-
nity. . . . Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the
human and divine systems of care and protection." Abandonment, betrayal,
deceit, lies, and hypocrisy may appear normative to the speakers as a moral drama
between rival groups extends into the larger community, where it may be depicted
as an agonistic conflict between good and evil.

Several of Lorde's poems touched directly on deceit, betrayal, and treachery
from close quarters. Among the most disquieting was "Between Ourselves," in
which she described her experiences of alienation within community: "Once when
I walked into a room / my eyes would seek out the one or two Black faces / for con-
tact or reassurance or a sign / I was not alone / no walking into rooms full of Black
faces / that would destroy me for any difference / where shall my eyes look? / Once
it was easy to know / who were my people."

In another complicated, layered example, Lorde condemned black men's acts of
intimidation toward black women who had considered entering into a feminist
coalition with white women to combat sexism. She argued that, if "threats of label-
ing, vilification, and/or emotional isolation are not enough to bring Black women
doctively into camp as followers, or persuade us to avoid each other politically and
emotionally, then the rule by terror can be expressed physically." She added, "Phone
calls were made to those black women who dared to explore the possibilities of a
feminist connection with non-black women. Some of these women, intimidated by
threats and withdrawals of black male approval, did turn against their sisters."

Fear is one salient emotional legacy of seeking to survive the betrayals by simi-
larly situated members of subordinated communities and the hatred by members
of dominating groups. Lorde's effort to place fear "into a perspective that gave
[her] great strength" was a theme in her public speeches. In her 1977 MLA speech
she observed, "In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear—
fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, or
annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live." In the conclusion, Lorde urged, "We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us."57 The whole speech may be understood as a sustained confrontation with silence, fear, and complicity to transform them.

Vigilance

Under the circumstances of betrayal by similarly situated members of subordinated communities and hatred by members of dominating groups, vigilance is necessary to survive. Lorde affirmed at Amherst in 1980, "For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have had to be watchful, to become familiar with the language and the manners of the oppressor, sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection."58 This vigilance extends to not just the hateful actions of others, but also one's own complicity and even to language insofar as it may perpetuate racism, sexism and the like. In Lorde's MLA speech, for instance, she claimed, "It is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it."59 Lorde elsewhere remarked in 1982, "Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses."60

A Dichotomous Symbolic World

In traumatic styles, the symbolic world may have become dichotomous. All men have oppressed all women. The masculine has disciplined the feminine. Whites have exploited blacks. Heterosexuals have annihilated gays and lesbians. Discernment concerning symbolic others evaporates, if only for a time. Moral subtext disintegrates. Sweeping and hyperbolic generalizations depicting others may recur in a much too tidy depiction of society. If only in myth, the victims are altogether innocent, the perpetrators embody arbitrary and capricious malevolence, and bystanders are either allies or accomplices. There is no neutral ground. In some instances, the generalizations and hyperboles may serve strategic purposes for those who evince traumatic styles in that their claims may emphasize harms that do disproportionately affect entire groups. It may also help advocates to make it difficult for audiences to individualize the traumas inflicted disproportionately on certain groups. But, in another rhetorical double bind attending the complexities of combining systemic and individual analysis, it does so at the cost of failure to individuate and stereotyping.61
Perhaps the most emphatic instance of a bifurcating style in Lorde's public discourse was her 1978 speech "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in which she presented dichotomous relationships between women and men. Lorde's 1977 essay "Poetry Is Not A Luxury" likewise constructed agonistic oppositions between men and women: "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free." In a momentarily tidy symbolic world, there are no feminist men, no antiracist white males, no men accepting and perhaps even fearlessly loving lesbians. All men are patriarchs, if only in fantasy or momentary amnesia.

On the whole, most of Lorde's subsequent public speeches depicted bifurcations so characteristic of traumatic styles; she commented on white women and men's racism toward black women and men, and heterosexual women and men's antigay and antilebian hatred. In Lorde's later rhetoric, the agonistic conflicts among social groups cut across multiple social divisions with invisible hierarchies concealed under simple terms: women, black, lesbian. Lorde asserted in 1980, "There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist." As a black, lesbian, feminist, mother, and socialist, she did not have the luxury of treating the oppositions simply. The complexity of her discourse depicting multiple social divisions is evidenced in her later speeches such as "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redeeming Difference" (1980), and "Learning from the 60s" (1982).

Ultimately, in her subsequent speeches after "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde criticized the symbolic oppositions—between white and black, male and female, capitalist and socialist, heterosexual and homosexual, master and slave—as simplistic and useful to dominant groups for exploiting subordinated communities. In "Learning from the 60s" she claimed, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. . . . Each one of us here is a link in the connection between anti-poor legislation, gay shootings, the burning of synagogues, street harassment, attacks against women, and resurgent violence against Black people." In this respect, there was in a brief period of only a few years an extraordinary development in her rhetorical style representing social groups.

Lorde went one step further in dismantling simplistic binaries, however, by collapsing the victim-perpetrator distinction within herself. In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," she commented, "As Paulo Freire shows so well in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships." In "Learning from the 60s" she remarked, "We must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves."
Later in this speech, she encouraged her audience to ask, "In what way do I contribute to the subjugation of any part of those who I define as my people?" Lorde did not entirely dismiss psychological work by individuals in bringing about social change, because of internalized practices and values, but she put political action in the foreground of her analysis.

In traumatic styles, agonistic conflict between rival groups—sometimes depicted as a conflict between good and evil—may be locked in what usually seems like a mortal combat and, sometimes, actually becomes one. Herman explained, "When the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides." Herman emphasized that in the struggle between perpetrator and victim, "It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering." Inactivity can result as much from bystanders’ feeling helpless to do anything to stop the ordeal, or being overwhelmed and distracted by the sheer range, magnitude, or complexity of the burdens as from any lack of concern about others.

In light of these dynamics of decision making, which are not necessarily conscious, bystanders may align themselves, not with the victims but rather with victimizers. In the general characteristics of traumatic styles, the bystanders’ complicity with perpetrators compounds both moral and dichotomizing dimensions in speakers’ accounts of traumatic experience rather than alleviates them. In general, Herman observed, "The victim’s greatest contempt is often reserved, not for the perpetrator, but for the passive bystander." Lorde’s rhetoric, however, often expressed anger rather than contempt. Thematically she called her audiences to transform silence and other forms of complicity with people who oppress others. In a sense, even the later audiences are witnesses or bystanders. Consequently anger, rage, and contempt evidenced in some manifestations of traumatic styles may contribute to making it unlistenable speech for the audiences who experience these styles. Public advocates who find themselves in moments of unspeakable speech may produce moments of unlistenable speech.

Unlistenable Speech
Speakers seeking to have audiences acknowledge their own vulnerability to harm and the need for active, political engagement find that, as one consequence, there are an immense variety of ways for audiences to respond to their claims. Patterns of audiences’ interactions with traumatic styles are challenging to document, however, not only because the concept of audience has been under-theorized in general in public address scholarship, but also because the evidence is inevitably fragmentary,
which tends to be suggestive rather than conclusive. Some patterns of human response are indicated in scholarship concerning resistance to claims about poverty, racism, sexism, and the like. Other patterns may be inferred, however fallibly, from patterns of response among psychiatrists who have specialized in dealing with trauma survivors.

Audiences of traumatic styles often refuse to listen, simply because they have the power to do so. Audiences may employ varied defense mechanisms to preserve some illusions of their own invulnerability or to sustain their false beliefs in a fundamentally just world. Examples of such defense mechanisms include caricaturing, infantilizing, or blaming the victims of traumatic experiences through an exaggerated and unrealistic assignment of the victims' responsibility rooted in myths of individualism, such as the belief that an individual can minimize the risk of harm by making the right "choices." If in specific cases victims may be in some respect partially responsible for the ordeals, so oftentimes are numerous others, whom audiences are able to ignore by concentrating intently on the victims' flawed performances. Lorde observed in the Black Scholar in 1979, "One tool of the Great American Double-Think is to blame the victims for victimization: Black people are said to invite lynching by not knowing our places, Black women are said to invite rape and murder and abuse by not being submissive enough, or by being too seductive." Given sufficient faults, failings, or examples of bad judgment in the victims' sometimes fatally flawed performances, audience members can remain secure in the certain knowledge: this cannot happen to me.

Beyond the audiences endeavoring to maintain their own illusions of invulnerability, listeners may also seek to sustain their false faith in a fundamentally just world. Such patterns of human response to the styles even seem to recur among psychiatrists who specialize in treating trauma cases. Consequently speakers of the traumatic styles may be subjected by audiences to caricature as malingerers who cannot or will not move on, insufferable people seeking pity, or sympathy, or who are desperate for attention, even if speakers are articulate about systemic roots of their harms in laws, policies, and procedures. All such responses enable audiences to remain at a distance and safely above the speakers, however slightly. Classical considerations of ethos may undergo an inversion insofar as experience is concerned, prudence may be called into question, and decorum may disintegrate under public pressure, confronted by indiscretions and violated taboos. Thus the speakers of traumatic styles may be infantilized. They may be said to have a penchant for wallowing. They may be depicted as too sensitive, too fragile, too delicate to cope with ordinary life experiences. They may be represented as having led sheltered lives. Feeling that, some listeners may infer that surely victims were self-loathing masochists who must, after all, have been seeking suffering. Alternatively, some listeners may experience the advocates as embodiments of smoldering anger, rage or vindictiveness—not, on inspection, all that distinguishable from the perpetrators.
whom they ostensibly deplore. These and other of the audiences' extensive array of defense mechanisms, which have surfaced even among trained psychiatrists, pose extraordinary rhetorical obstacles for speakers who would presume to depict ordeals in public.26

Among people who are compassionate and sympathetic in responding to trauma, there are a range of additional pitfalls, as Elizabeth V. Spelman has underscored. She identified three key paradoxes for people who are genuinely concerned about others' suffering, but who nonetheless appropriate that suffering, becoming ventriloquists of it as their own. By analyzing white women's uses of female slaves' suffering during the nineteenth-century women's movements, Spelman refers to the following paradoxes:

The paradox in appropriation suggests that while a danger in assuming the experiences of others is that they as subjects of such experiences will be erased, a danger in refusing to do so is that one may thereby deny the possibility of a shared humanity. The paradox in identification reminds us that while the formula "women are slaves" tended to subvert white supremacy by denying differences between Black and white women, the formula sustained white supremacy insofar as it obscured white women's roles in supporting slavery. And the paradox in universality cautions that while calling on the experience of a marginalized group to represent "human experience" can be an important way of honoring that group's experience, it also can be a way of trivializing and thus further marginalizing them.77

It is not hard to see how such paradoxes may result in specific double binds for the listeners to traumatic styles, simply by rereading the excerpt replacing each "paradox" with quandary. In this case, because the relationship cut across subordinated communities, each paradox also underscored some difficulties in coalitions across demographic differences.

Ultimately, traumatic styles are not emblematic of any specific subordinated community, but rather constitute chasms within and among various communities. Members of subordinated communities who have been fortunate enough to elude physical harm or protracted ordeals may castigate those who have not been so fortunate. Rugged individualists within the community may fault others in highly variable acts that Lorde called "horizontal hostility." She generalized, "The tactic of encouraging horizontal hostility to cloud more pressing issues of oppression is by no means new, nor limited to relations between women. The same tactic is used to encourage separation between Black women and Black men."78 Elsewhere, Lorde alluded to "those scars of oppression which lead us to war against ourselves in each other rather than against our enemies." Consequently, she claimed, "In the 1960s, the awakened anger of the Black community was often expressed, not vertically
against the corruption of power and true sources of control over our lives, but horizontally toward those closest to us who mirrored our own impotence . . . . We were often far more vicious to each other than to the originators of our common problem.98

Rhetorical complexities attending traumatic styles do not end there, however, because public representations of traumatic experiences ordinarily occur under the surveillance of dominating others, who may seem eager to appropriate the remarks for their own ends. Although much of the dominating mythology of victimization concentrates on what the victims did to bring the trauma on themselves, and although audiences of the traumatic styles may have vested interests in adhering to the delusive myths, the realities of victimization can be much different than what the prevailing myths predispose audiences to believe. In the history of lynching, for instance, the most commonplace way statistically to become the targets of violence was not, as myth would have it, for a black man to make an inappropriate expression of sexual interest in a white woman, though some black men were lynched for that reason.99 Recently, some have suggested that it was especially dangerous for black men to compete successfully against white male counterparts in business, though a difficulty with such claims is that direct competition may have been rare.100 For members of subordinated communities, it can be dangerous—even deadly—to be successful in competition with ostensibly superior others. To maintain a sense of hierarchical place, some supremacists may encircle their targets to put them back in their place, lest there be any trace of living evidence to cast doubt on their superiority. Myth tends to be an ally, not of the targets of violence but of the perpetrators.101

Because of the almost insurmountable rhetorical barricades that audiences erect to protect their own interests of maintaining some illusions of invulnerability or belief in a just world, explicit depictions of trauma in public address may be less commonplace than the indirect and fragmented manifestations of it. Herman wrote, "The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflects attention from it."102 For gay men and lesbians, the direct experience of being the target of severe harassment or violence can become a closet within a closet, precisely because the survivors of violence are often blamed for having had the experience, especially in cases of sexual violence or sexualized aggression.103 But even the illusion of "the closet" is a myth deeply rooted in individualism, because sexuality is social, as can be confirmed by simple reflection on courtship: it is impossible to get a date, much less a mate, without communicating one's sexuality to the person being courted. Indeed some gay men and lesbians' lifelong efforts to be invisible are a fallible sign of a hostile, abusive environment, the byproduct of a silence enforced by violence and the threat of violence.
Recovery Discourse Reintegrating Self and Society through Political Action

Despite the extraordinary odds against being heard and understood, despite the "risk" of having ideas "bruised and misunderstood," the survivors of trauma can and do speak in public with an urgency and a depth of conviction reminiscent of true believers. Survivors bear witness. Advocates testify. Speakers remember in public. More important, speakers refuse to allow others to be silent or to forget. Some targets and witnesses of such violence, knowing that they, too, are worthy people, or, in some instances, felt safe and secure as contributing members of their communities, recount ordeals in public spaces. Having been made to feel extreme helplessness, as though vividly present traces of past ordeals would never end and can never be forgotten, the speakers concentrate on the process of reclaiming agency and public memory. Herman remarked, "Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and re-connection are the core experiences of recovery." Having experienced what psychologists label "dissociation," the speakers may concentrate on reclaiming inner directives, despite externally imposed demands. To some speakers of traumatic styles, it is vital to take pleasure simply in inhabiting one's own body, experiencing embodiment, and restoring a sense of trust and safety in community with others. Herman claimed, "Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends on a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of the group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience." This final section comments on rhetorical depictions of recovery and communal healing for both advocates and their audiences in the aftermath, such as reintegrating self in society through political actions, restoration of appropriate trust in others, and reclaiming embodied pleasure within empowering communities.

As an exemplar, Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" is an eloquent call to recognize a broad range of traumatic experiences in the communal interest of recovery, social transformation, and political action. Lorde's speech enacts an endeavor to reconnect with community, as she affirmed recognition of harms and called for action to transform society. Herman generalized, "The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, on public acknowledgment of the traumatic event and, second, on some form of community action." She further explained, "Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and repair the injury. These two responses—recognition and restitution—are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice." Central to Lorde's call for individual and communal recovery was her endeavor to reclaim "the erotic." Conventional associations of "the erotic" specifically with sex acts complicate appreciating the meanings of Lorde's speech because, to her, "the erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge." Lorde did define
the erotic to encompass sexual pleasure, as in her description of “moving into the sunlight against the body of a woman I love.” But Lorde also defined the erotic as much more encompassing. For example, she asserted, “The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire.” When Lorde identified examples of “erotically satisfying experience,” she mentioned “dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.” To Lorde, reclaiming work, not primarily for profit but rather as a deeply satisfying experience, was another meaning of the erotic. She acknowledged, “It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work,” explaining, “For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.”

“Uses of the Erotic” exemplifies several features of traumatic styles understood as a way of holding and advocating beliefs. She called on her auditors to acknowledge vulnerability in a hostile, symbolic world of men and economic exploitation. She sought to counter numbing, emotional responses to such hostility and, sometimes, physical harms by encouraging her audiences to reclaim the erotic and, in some measure, personal agency despite fear, disapproval, and “external directives” imposed by others and despite systemic obstacles in capitalism and patriarchy. Lorde concentrated on having her audiences reject such externally imposed demands while heeding “internal directives,” or “internal knowledge and needs.” Her concluding lines succinctly summarized this dynamic of symbolic rejection and acceptance: “Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settle for a shift of characters in the same weary drama. For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.”

Despite a climate of hostile men and an imposing economic system, Lorde emphasized feeling embodied pleasure in self and in connection with others. When referring to how “the erotic” functioned for her in personal terms, she affirmed the role of feeling in community with others: “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their differences. . . . That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling.” Her statement, “a reminder of my capacity for feeling,” may be disquieting to audiences familiar with the numbing aftermath of trauma. She said, “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self
effacement, depression, and self-denial." These remarks cataloged commonplace legacies of traumatic experiences. She cautioned, "To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd." Lorde appeared to allude to psychological dissociation during trauma when she commented on disconnections between mind and body while identifying the personal ramifications of sexism and capitalism for women's erotic lives: "When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's." Against the backdrop of such harms, Lorde called for recovery and reintegration in empowering communities by connecting her personal experiences to political actions. She generalized from her own life as a sustained example: "Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy." In "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde situated these calls within a timeless narrative in a dichotomous symbolic world in which men oppress women. Lorde's shifting perspectives within this symbolic world can be illustrated by her comments concerning "the erotic." "As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world." Notice how she shifted between how men and women defined "the erotic" and the "pornographic" in a subsequent passage: "The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling." This passage articulated Lorde's double consciousness of the meanings and uses of the erotic in men's and women's lives. Yet, as is so often the case in traumatic styles, the dichotomizing depictions are reductive and much too tidy, as Lorde's later rhetoric explicitly recognizes; she modified her language in subsequent speeches and essays. Yet there is reason to believe that her generalizations were strategic rhetorically in stressing a systemic rather than individual analysis; the audiotape of her included qualifiers such as "typically and historically" for men's role. Such qualifiers disappeared from the printed texts. Intersectionality may emphasize an interaction among systemic structures informing social identity as they impinge on multiple consciousness.

Yet she called on her hearers to recognize some dichotomies as "false." She affirmed, for instance, that "the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political
is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge.”

Despite this gesture toward reintegration of such dichotomies, Lorde’s rhetoric drew on and perpetuated a series of interconnected, binary oppositions—between men and women, between the dominant and the subordinate, between external and internal directives, between the political and the spiritual, and between the pornographic and the erotic. These oppositions relied on an underlying set of equations in which men were depicted as “the dominant,” “the political,” and “the pornographic.” In contrast, women were portrayed as “the subordinate,” “the spiritual,” and the “erotic.” The reproduction of these binary oppositions is unfortunate, because the binaries were often simplistic in comparison with Lorde’s later speeches, which did emphasize sexism, but also considered intersecting factors of age, race, class, and sexuality. Although the bifurcating oppositions in Lorde’s speech did contribute to its clarity and its rhetorical power, they were intellectually unsatisfying, as she herself seemed later to recognize. Yet, such polarizing dichotomies are commonplace in traumatic styles, perhaps because of a tendency, at least for a time, to overgeneralize in representing others as the sources of trauma or because of a strategic endeavor to stress systemic factors rather than merely individual ones.

In an interview with Adrienne Rich, Lorde acknowledged that feminists had criticized this speech for reproducing stereotypes of women, a criticism that her peers had also leveled at “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” which had been published in Chrysalis the previous year. In addition, both the speech and the essay reproduced invidious stereotypes of men. In the interview Lorde remarked, “After I published ‘Uses of the Erotic,’ a number of women who read it said that this is anti-feminist, that the use of the erotic as a guide is . . . reducing us once again to the unseen, the unuseable. That in writing it I am returning us to a place of total intuition without insight.” Rich interrupted, “And yet, in that essay you’re talking about work and power, about two of the most political things that exist.” Lorde replied,

I try to say that the erotic has been used against us, even the word itself, so often, that we have been taught to suspect what is deepest in ourselves, and that is the way we learn to testify against ourselves, against our feelings. When we talk in terms of our lives and our survival as women, we can use our knowledge of the erotic creatively. The way you get people to testify against themselves is not to have police tactics and oppressive techniques. What you do is build it in so people learn to distrust everything in themselves that has not been sanctioned, to reject what is most creative in themselves to begin with, so you don’t even need to stamp it out . . . This turning away from the erotic on the part of some of our best minds, our most creative and analytic women, is disturbing and destructive. Because we cannot fight old power in old power terms only. The only way we can do it is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting.”
This excerpt suggests that traumatic styles pose ramifications for careful listening. For example, traumatic styles make for arduous listening because of the complexity of listeners' attention to commentary about both individual and collective social conditions and concerns. What listeners may be tempted to dismiss as hyperbolic, sweeping, and simplistic generalizations may signal a need to adjust listening practices to situate the discourse as commentary on systems, not individuals and to recognize the generalizations as having exceptions and complexities. Further, for listeners who feel unable to do much substantive to intervene, listening may embody a transformative practice by raising awareness that subsequently may inform political actions.

Still later in this interview, Lorde situated her speech in her own personal history with breast cancer. Although she had already experienced the diagnosis of a benign tumor and had described that experience at the MLA during 1977, she commented in the interview about the later diagnosis of a malignant tumor: “So much of the work I did, I did before I knew consciously that I had cancer. Questions of death and dying, dealing with power and strength, the sense of ‘What am I paying for?’ that I wrote about in that paper, were crucial to me a year later. ‘Uses of the Erotic’ was written four weeks before I found out I had breast cancer, in 1978.” She added, “The existence of that paper enabled me to pick up and go to Houston and California; it enabled me to start working again. I don’t know when I’d have been able to write again, if I hadn’t had those words.”

In this connection, Lorde’s comments at the outset of the interview situated the speech concerning the erotic well within the whole of her public speaking during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Rich inquired, “What do you mean when you say that two essays, ‘Poetry is Not a Luxury’ and ‘Uses of the Erotic’ are really progressions?” Lorde replied, “They’re part of something that’s not finished yet. I don’t know what the rest of it is, but they’re clear progressions in feeling out something connected with the first piece of prose I ever wrote.” One could infer from the interview that, inclusive in the speech was the beginning of a dramatic series of developments in Lorde’s philosophy, role, and techniques as a public speaker. These developments were a consequence, in part, of frank and difficult dialogues that ensued within the empowering communities that she actively sought to constitute and to re-envision radically. Consequently her later public speaking was much more sophisticated in its rhetorical artistry.

Conclusion

Lorde’s rhetoric in “Uses of the Erotic” most clearly exemplifies traumatic styles, as Lorde sought to transform society by eloquently calling on her audiences to recognize and remember injuries, to experience recovery, and to reclaim embodied pleasure in living in intimate community with others. In general Lorde’s speeches, essays, and poems enacted the integrity of her character in seeking to improve the
lives of women and their children through empowering communities. Herman described such integrity in the wake of ordeals: "Integrity is the capacity to affirm the value of life in the face of death, to be reconciled with the finite limits of one's own life and the tragic limitations of the human condition, and to accept these realities without despair. Integrity is the foundation on which trust in relationships is originally formed, and on which shattered trust may be restored. The interlocking of integrity and trust in caretaking relationships completes the cycle of generations and regenerates the sense of human community which trauma destroys." By endeavoring "to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible," as Lorde put it in her speech concerning the erotic, she enacted these qualities of recovery reintegrating self within community by calling for political actions reclaiming "the erotic."

At the outset of this chapter, I stressed that the identification of traumatic styles was tentative, because, although I believe my critical interpretation to be accurate, I also have misgivings about the potential misuse of such naming to deflect attention from the systemic, institutionalized roots of the hatred and intolerance. Traumatic styles are recurrent precisely because of their underlying systemic sources. It also concerns me that critics could misuse the naming of traumatic styles to interpret discourses or an individual's rhetorical style in public life without recognizing the pathological practices of domineering groups which discipline those discourses into being. There is a risk that the naming of the styles could be easily appropriated to perpetuate stereotypes in an ideology of domination, simply by isolating the discourse from its context. In any event, it would be important to resist using traumatic styles to focus on the individual speaker without attention to the cultural conditions imposing on lives in ways that produce the discourse. It would certainly be misleading to call it "post" traumatic, since racism, sexism and other bias persist through invidious practices even today. They are ongoing, recurrent, practices that cannot accurately be relegated only to the past, even though "post" can mean "in response to" as well as a temporal relationship. Although Lorde acknowledged individual and collective harms, her public discourse emphatically kept politics and social engagement in the foreground: "I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior."

Moreover, the naming of a type can easily become a stereotype. Certainly some survivors of trauma speak in other rhetorical styles. It would be unfortunate if attention to traumatic styles deflected attention from the voices of trauma survivors who do not speak in traumatic styles, because traumatic styles may frame critics' attention in a limiting way. There are also doubtless variations and changes in traumatic styles over time and place—hence the plural, styles. The testimonies of Holocaust survivors would add to an understanding of traumatic styles, though I worry that fixation on ordeals of such horrific scope and magnitude may result in ignoring mundane, daily acts of violence and intimidation. Although it extends beyond the scope of this chapter, it would be useful to examine how specific systemic
factors, such as the legal system, discipline discourses into tidy binary relations in a dichotomous perspective on social relations. An example of this would be the legal system’s procedural insistence on the distinctions between innocent victims and guilty perpetrators rather than the complexity posed typically by victim-perpetrators and mutual combatants. Another instance would be the notion that justice can be meaningfully realized by verdicts, when social transformation is much more fundamental than penal punishments or economic outcomes. It would also be useful to investigate how changes in these systems over time impinge on discursive shifts in the styles.

Some exemplars of traumatic styles can be found among speeches by members of typically dominant groups, such as combat veterans who have experienced the front lines of war or American people generally after traumas such as the Oklahoma City bombing. Although the earliest complete drafts of this chapter were finished before September 11, 2001, public comments on the recent attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon evinced traumatic styles, though in some ways that differ significantly from discourse concerning the routine domestic terrorism disrupting lives in subordinated communities. Nobody in Congress has affirmed, for example, that, however deplorable the hateful deeds, the terrorists are entitled to their views that such killing exemplifies moral virtue. Nor has anybody in Congress held that commitment to freedom of expression, however well established in the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should circumscribe any responses to the terrorists’ deeds or their teachings of hatred toward Americans, because they are deeds that convey meanings and the doers profess to be guided by religious dictates. Affirming such views would appear to be transparently what it is. Leaders in the United States have demonstrated that, if motivated, they can be quite skilled at discerning sham misuses of religion to mask hatred as spiritual virtue and violence as free speech. Yet some of the same prominent leaders display incomprehension in discerning blasphemous misuses of sacred texts to mask domestic terrorism whenever they consider how to curtail the bias crimes that so routinely produce traumatic experiences within some subordinated communities in the United States.

Finally, then, how does this chapter bear on projects to “queer” public address scholarship, which I take to be the activity of explicitly naming, analyzing, and interpreting ramifications of various sexualities in critical studies of authors, texts, critics, audiences, organizations and institutions (such as ACT UP) and ideologies (such as the Radical Fairies). I hope that this chapter suggests my deep ambivalence about the pitfalls and promise of such projects, because they entail significant risks even as they advance exciting possibilities. Some risks in such projects are the usual, familiar problems attending identity politics. Among these are a deflection from the material conditions and social practices impacting queer people’s lives exemplified by acts of hatred and bias, plus an oversimplification of the diversity among queer
people, especially the hidden hierarchies of race, sex, economic class, age, and the like. There are risks of gaps, silences, omissions, and subordinations among queers as harmful consequences.

Along with those factors, there is a high probability that relatively privileged queers will endeavor to represent the rest, by speaking for and about others who inhabit this category with them. Although contributors to this volume have tried with varying degrees of success to be broad and inclusive in our work, it is the case that almost all of us are white, middle-class academics with sufficient age and experience to engage such scholarship without the overt likelihood of losing livelihoods or extensive networks of friends. Lesbian feminists have labored long and hard to engage combined sexist and antqueer biases impacting their lives. So, although ordinarily gender neutrality in language usage is desirable, the gender neutrality of "queer" risks erasure and silencing, appropriation and invisibility with respect to sex as a factor intersecting with sexuality. So too with race, age, economic class, disability, religion, marital or parental status, political commitments, educational backgrounds, and other factors. Moreover it is almost always a mistake to isolate any communities materially or symbolically.

Yet the "queer" public address studies has extraordinary prospects for anyone concerned with accuracy, completeness, and complexity in public address scholarship, not to mention social justice. At the same time that it enacts a symbolic reversal of a pejorative term by reclaiming it in potentially life enhancing ways for queers of all backgrounds, queer is also a useful term for a coalition among diverse sexualities, which terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual are also too simple to adequately name. Oversimplification of diverse queers seems linguistically inevitable and politically necessary to confer visibility on queer aspects of communication and society. Minimally, queer public address scholarship embraces the prospect of centering intellectually on rhetorical practices and concepts that have been undervalued in dominant approaches to rhetoric scholarship. This is exemplified by previous research concerning style wherein key practices and concepts cannot be found or are peripheral, presumably because of a fixation on socially, politically, and economically powerful figures. Examples of practices and concepts that are omitted or peripheral in traditional research on style but that are featured centrally in this chapter include silence and silencing, discursive amnesia and public memory loss; symbolic matrices and intersectionality; identification and essentialism; symbolic fragmentation and appropriation; double and multiple consciousness; marginality and centrality; embodiment, performatics, and enactment; complicity or collusion; and, of course, the usual paradoxes, quandaries, and double birds of varieties that scholars will need to confront directly in projects to "queer" public address by engaging the risks along with the extraordinary potential.

The implications of this stance on queering public address are extensive. Here I want only to share one brief example to illustrate of how it can be creative and
generative to queer public address, for instance, by valuing the First Amendment rights of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, gender-bending, and trans-people. It begins, as all fantasies do, with an implausible premise, a dependable resource for humor such as camp, which sustains the spirit of queers whose laughter rises above oppressive circumstances. In this case, the FBI decides to conduct an undercover operation calculated to apprehend antigay attackers. To capture these violent offenders, the agency assigns teams consisting of pairs of handsome, well-dressed, muscular, fashionable men who endeavor to pass as gay. There is, of course, no need for wiretaps, spy vare, surveillance devices, or the like. There is no need for camouflage gear of the sort that police have sometimes used to apprehend gay couples in remote, secluded woods. All these special agents need to do is walk down the street simply holding hands, or, better yet, to kiss in public. Let me assure you, the violence would come to them (especially if they learn to kiss each other well in secret practice sessions).

I freely admit that the likelihood of men in the FBI learning to passionately kiss each other in practice sessions may strain credulity. But this is, after all, a fairy’s fantasy, one in which the federal government values the safety, the security of person, of gay men, not to mention freedom of expression. So, to get back to this fairy’s tale, two such FBI agents stroll hand in hand past a construction site amid cat calls and the usual sorts of public, verbal harassment. Epithets such as “cock sucker,” “faggot,” and “queer” sound out in tones, which suggest that these are bad things for anyone to be. The special agents fearlessly continue on down the street, hand-in-hand. The number of annoyed onlookers swells to nine or possibly eleven men, who become increasingly vocal, unpleasant, and menacing in their behavior. One or another of the workers picks up a baseball bat, while another grabs a nearby tire iron and blocks the two FBI agents’ way. An appreciative crowd starts to surround them while shouting epithets, cat calls, and such.

Perhaps at this moment one or another of the special agents remembers a statistic: ordinarily, in a gay bashing, there are three attackers against each victim. That figure seems a little low today. Perhaps the other agent reflects, however momentarily, on just who exactly in this scenario enacts the masculine value of “manly courage”—the two special agents passing as queers, or the large gang of publicly heterosexual men whose bravado seems so transparently false as their numbers swell. At this moment, the special agents, being fearless. Of course, as FBI agents are reputed to be, embrace each other in a long, passionate, French kiss. They are confident that the reinforcements are nearby. So, they kiss—one long, slow, erotic kiss. They have been practicing (as in practicing homosexual).

When I have told this fairy’s tale in the past, at this moment in the story, one of my straight male friends interrupted, “Oh, I see, egg them on.” (I pass over in silence any critical observations concerning the alacrity with which straight friends take control or revise a gentle fairy’s tale). “Oh, no, no, no, no,” I replied emphatically. “Refuse to be bullied and intimidated into sacrificing their First Amendment rights.”
Consider, for a moment, the generative insight to be gained from centering on gay men's expressiveness as worthy of public support and government protection, not just insights concerning courage and cowardice, or manliness and masculinity, but also concerning the very nature of bias crimes. It becomes apparent that bias crimes become clearly recognizable as First Amendment offenses, because bias crimes come into existence to suppress, to censor, to annihilate what the targeted individual(s) represent, stand for, symbolize, or express to the attackers. If there is no symbolic representation embodied in a person, there is no bias crime. From this standpoint, bias crimes become actionable as assaults on nothing less than the U.S. Constitution, specifically on the First Amendment, because they undermine freedom of expression, not to mention freedom of association, security of person, and other fundamental human rights specified in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. From this standpoint, the political use of the First Amendment to enable the perpetrator's "expressive" violent deeds becomes transparently a ruse employed ironically to undermine the First Amendment rights of the assaulted queers. At least, that is one fairy's tale.

Notes

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2. Although these elements comport well with the diagnosis for "post-traumatic stress disorder" in the American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV, 4th ed. (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 424-29, it is the appearance of the styles in discourse addressed to audiences that interests rhetoric scholars.


8. For example, Andrea Dworkin, "I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce during which There Is No Rape," in *Transforming a Rape Culture*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth (Minneapolis, Minn.: Milkweed Editions, 1993), 11–22.


20. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 70, 175, 177, 189, 190, 190–91.

21. Ibid., 92.


25. In the case of women, for instance, Angela Davis, "We Do Not Consent," 37, 41, 42. Davis’s speech detailed how specific myths and patterns of human response, such as blaming the individual victim, sustain an individual’s illusions of safety, despite the statistics for the group.


29. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 37.


34. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 239, 43, 238–39.


43. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 7, 51, 154, 162. The struggle between good and evil is thematic in Wiesel's discourse, for example.

45. On anger and rage, Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 138, 143.
51. For example, Mary Cavanaugh, "Statement on Sexual Harassment in the Veterans Administration," 1997, which may be found at http://gos.sbc.edu/c/cavanaugh.htm (January 4, 2001). This entire speech is another exemplar of traumatic styles.
52. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51, 52. Abandonment and isolation are not necessarily individual experiences. For instance, Elie Wiesel, "This Honor Belongs to All the Survivors," in *Representative American Speeches*, ed. Owen Peterson (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1987), 59–73.
53. Examples of such poems include "Learning to Write," "To the Poet Who Happens to Be Black and the Black Poet Who Happens to Be a Woman," and "Conversation in Crisis," in *Audre Lorde, Collected Poems*, 402, 360, and 50, respectively.
60. Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," *Sister Outsider*, 140–41.
61. For instance, Andrea Dworkin’s speech, "I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce," implicated all men in women’s experience of rape. But she did so in a way that stereotyped both men and women. She failed to recognize that most women have not and will not be sexually assaulted, even though, as a group, women do live with disproportionate risk. Further, some men in her audience may have been sexual assault survivors, who, as a consequence of her generalizations, were forced to confront her distorting stereotypes of such assaults.
65. Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," *Sister Outsider*, 138, 139.
66. This development was not unique to her as a public speaker, because a similar development is discernable in Malcolm X’s speeches, especially near the end of his life. Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, ed. Steve Clark (New York: Pathfinder, 1992); *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder, 1989). In "Learning from the 60s," Lorde explicitly distanced herself from Malcolm X’s earliest public discourse, while commending the evolutions in evidence toward the end of his life.
68. Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," *Sister Outsider*, 135, 139.
69. Lorde's partner for nineteen years, Francis Louise Clayton, was a psychologist. Upton, "André Lorde," 316.


71. Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 7–8.

72. For example, Wiesel, "Perils," 4.

73. Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 92.


75. For an alternative view of the breadth of ethos, prudence, and decorum as concepts in public address scholarship, see Robert Hanman, "Afterword: Relocating the Art of Public Address," in Rhetoric and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 163–83, esp. 171. This essay endorses scholarship that has been ongoing for at least two decades now on vernacular discourse and a broad range of media, though without citations here.

76. I base the suggestions in this paragraph on Herman’s chapter concerning psychotherapists’ commonplace responses in therapeutic settings to victims of traumatic experiences (133–54).


83. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.


86. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 197, 197, 155, 214.

87. Ibid., 70; see also 154, 197, 214.


89. Ibid., 58.

90. Ibid., 58.

91. Ibid., 56, 57, 58, 59, 58, 56.

92. Ibid., *Sister Outsider*, 53.

93. Ibid., *Sister Outsider*, 54.

94. The speech has been preserved on an audiotape entitled "Power and Oppression" which is held in drawer A 3 5 at the Lesbian History Archive, Brooklyn, New York. The audiotape differs in noteworthy ways from all printed texts of the speech. On other strategic aspects of Lorde's representations of the erotic in her speech and poetry, Sagri Dhauryav, "Artifacts for Survival: Remapping the Contours of Poetry With Audre Lorde," *Feminist Studies* 18 (summer 1992): 237 and 254, n. 18.


99. Ibid., 81.

100. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 154.


102. For instance, see Hurman's otherwise admirable book, *Political Style*. 