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Political Science 150

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“Language and Politics”

In George Orwell’s article “Language and Politics,” Orwell discusses the importance of direct and concise writing. In much of political writing one will find elaborate sentences in which the point of an essay or article does not reach it point or answer a question proposed until near the end of the written piece. Orwell proposes a theory saying that such writing is not the correct way to compose written pieces concerning politics.

 Orwell is passionate about this because he believes that by addressing the issue of language, grammar, and sentence structure within political writing there will be a change and will help the public and those within the political circles understand the point each writer is attempting to convey and argue. Orwell studies and argues this by reading political articles and giving examples of unnecessarily long and elaborate sentences that could easy be condensed to create a short, and to the point sentences saying the same thing as before. He critiques others writings and give examples, tools, and ideas of different ways to reconstruct sentences to fit his vision.

 After explaining all the issues that he found within political writing, Orwell began to give tactics and advice as to how to avoid the different writing issues. He gave six main rules for his readers to follow in order to be successful. His six points are: “1. to never use a metaphor, simile, or figure of speech of which you are used to seeing in print. 2. Never use a long word where a short one will do. 3. If possible to cut a word out, always cut it out. 4. Never use passive where you can use active 5. Never use a foreign phrase, a science word or a jargon word is you can think of an everyday English equivalent. And finally, 6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.” The moral of these rules seems to make sure one is being straight forward with their writing as well as honest. The last point suggests that to lie, exaggerate, or embellish any sort of information in a false or unnecessary way is far worse than breaking any of the other rules. These changes in writing can also be beneficial to the author. By creating a more concise and to the point essay, it becomes more difficult for opposing opinions and viewpoints to find holes and attack the writer regarding their article or essay.

 I mostly agree with the authors assessment of this subject, whenever I find myself reading any sort of political writing I almost always get lost at some point due to difficult and confusing sentences or phrases I may not understand on top of it being a subject that proves difficult to understand at all. I have never written any sort of political paper and therefore have always been taught to speak more distinguished and use big words when possible, to create long, elaborate sentences to create a more mature paper. Reading this article has begun to change my perspective. I can definitely see the benefits of being more concise and to the point, especially when it comes to political topics. I agree and understand Orwell’s point of view and believe that with his proposed changes, political pieces can become easier to understand.

“Pseudo-Events”

 Daniel Boorstin’s article “Pseudo-Events” discusses the effects and reasons behind certain events and activities and why he calls them pseudo-events. According to his article “pseudo” is a Latin word for false. The government and other companies host parties and events in order to raise publicity and awareness of their organization. Many say they are hosting the event to celebrate the success of the business or organization, but in reality they are hosting it to inform more people in order to become more successful, which in turn will give them more reasons to throw more events and so on and so forth. These parties and events are created solely for publicity and money reasons. Companies want as much publicity as possible in order for more people to become aware of their organization.

 Boorstin gives many examples of different events thrown that are examples of pseudo-events. He explains how and why companies use these to bring more attention to themselves. He gives characteristics of pseudo-events as well as what differentiates them between “spontaneous events.” According to Boorstin, pseudo-events are specified by their drama (i.e. debates), the amount of planning put into them, the money needed in order to pull it off, the level of information given out to the public beforehand, as well as the repercussions of the event (i.e. whether or not other events follow). These, along with many others, are characteristics of many pseudo-events. Boorstin also discusses the “pseudo-qualifications.” In some cases, pseudo-events create a sort of blind over the true views and meanings of certain parties. It can exaggerate and disguise what some participants of the company or organization. For instance, presidential debates; Boorstin writes, “If we test Presidential candidates for their talents on TV, quiz performances, we will, of course, choose presidents for precisely these qualifications. In a democracy, reality tends to confirm the pseudo-event. Nature imitates art.” Boorstin explains that pseudo-events cloud our minds with “fake” representations of people. They are not solely the side we see on TV, but the publicity society shines on those events hides us from some of the real aspects of people.

 I have never understood or thought about being a part of a pseudo-event, but I understand the draw people have towards them. I am sure that at some point in my life I have attended or participated in a pseudo-event without being aware of it. Society runs off of the money and publicity popular companies and organizations receive. We are easily sucked in by the flashy news and constant flow of information coming in to grasp our attention and bring awareness to both good and bad events, but there are times when we cannot tell the difference between the good and bad organizations and motives behind them.

“Political Symbols”

 Murry Edelman’s article “Political Symbols” discusses the effect and meaning of not only certain political symbols, but also some social symbols and the way they impact our daily lives. In the beginning of his article, Edelman states, “Politics is for most of us a passing parade of abstract symbols, yet a parade which our experience teaches us to be a benevolent or malevolent force that can be close to omnipotent.” Edelman voices the understanding that not everything in politics makes sense to that outside world, but most of the time we find ourselves going through the motions either pretending to understand the symbols flooding toward us, or we just let them all pass by.

 Edelman gives an example of a traffic policeman who gets caught up and momentarily distracted by himself. His mind morphs into only focusing on his reflection, he pays attention to only one lines of traffic and is not aware of the rest until he is brought back to reality by the angry horns and long lines of cars all around him. We can become entranced by ourselves or the distractions around us, but we can also become immune and underwhelmed by political news and symbols. Sometimes it takes a big event or ceremony for us to snap out of our minds and be brought back to reality. Edelman talks about controversial topics and how having these be “controversial” makes it easier for us to form opposing opinions which in turn creates tension and more publicity for these symbols. Edelman writes, “Because the meaning of the act in these cases depends only party or not at all upon its objective consequences, which the mass public cannot know, the meaning can only come from the psychological needs of the respondents; and it can only be known from their responses.” The government leaves many things open ended in order to let the public’s minds fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle. By doing this the government quickly creates a tension only possible through the responses of the many conflicting beliefs and scenarios made up by the minds of society.

 Edelman concludes that this world is filled many different symbols which provides many different responses of each mind creating their own specific circumstances. He says that politics and society are run on these symbols and responses. I agree with this theory, from my short time of being somewhat educated in some political issues I’ve been exposed to countless different views and each person believes theirs is the correct and just solutions. There are probably some people that believe if everyone in the world believed the same this would be a much less toxic and hectic environment to live in, but to an extent I disagree. I believe disagreement gives us independence and personality. The world would be boring if everyone was presented with a political or social symbol and no one cared one way or the other what became of it. I appreciate Edelman’s view on political symbols and found it interesting how he tied in social symbols with it to explain how everything can come full circle.