Metaphor, Catachresis and Equivalence:
The Rhetoric of Freedom to Fly in the Struggle over Aviation Policy in
the United Kingdom

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For various reasons, many governments in liberal democratic societies, even those with large parliamentary majorities enjoying considerable popular support, are often reluctant to pursue public policies they think are desirable and justifiable. This is often the case even if such policies are likely to chime favourably with public opinion and be in the electoral interests of the government. The fear of a media backlash, the threat of intense political protest, the importance of a particular set of constituencies, or just a generalised cautiousness, may conspire to impede the adoption of programmes that from an external perspective seem inevitable. In such circumstances, one possible way to achieve a desired set of policy goals, and thus to circumvent the paradox, is to have a third party or agency that is ostensibly independent of government provide ‘ideological cover’ so that governments can pursue their desired goals. How is such ideological cover provided by actors not directly at the behest of government? And what are the logics of argumentation and persuasion pursued by such actors in their efforts to enable governments to carry out their desired policies and programmes?

This article addresses these problems, especially the latter, by considering the empirical case of aviation policy in the United Kingdom (UK) during the last five years. We argue that the passing of the ‘go-for-growth’ White Paper in December 2003 was in important respects made possible by the political and ideological practices of a coalition of actors named ‘Freedom to Fly’, who were successful in structuring the terrain of public reasoning and debate, thus negating or at least containing those voices that challenged the Labour government’s desire to expand the aviation industry. In order to account for the way in which this campaign was able to displace the existing terrain of argument so as to favour the case for growth, we draw upon recent developments in post-Marxist discourse theory (see Howarth, 2000; Howarth and Torfing, 2005; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Most importantly, we focus on the rhetorical strategies and mechanisms – what we call the logics of rhetorical (and more specifically: metaphorical) redescription, catachresis and equivalence - through which a pro-growth discourse coalition was constituted and operated, and we evaluate the impact of this coalition on the policy outcomes. In advancing our arguments and claims, we focus principally on the ‘official public discourse’ of Freedom to Fly – its media statements, the interviews given by elite actors, the articles written in national newspapers - as well as a series of in-depth interviews with key actors, and an analysis of the consultation process about aviation expansion which took place between December 2000 and December 2003.

Our analysis begins by examining the changing context of the aviation industry, and the governance of airports, during the last twenty or thirty years, focussing attention on the British government’s recent White Paper on airports policy, *The Future of Air Transport*. Arising out of this discussion, we analyse the problems posed for those in favour of airport expansion by pinpointing a series of obstacles to growth, including the discourse of those opposed to expansion, the growing environmental concerns about aviation, the differences of interest amongst those in favour of growth, and the potential reluctance of government to take the lead in supporting growth. In so doing, we problematize the logic of aviation expansion in the UK aviation industry, and then analyse the strategy adopted by those in favour of expansion. This strategy involved the construction of a pro-growth coalition – Freedom to Fly – that sought to provide the government with the requisite ideological protection to articulate a bold policy lead. As our analysis focuses particularly on the rhetorical logics of construction, we
preface our analysis with a brief excursus on rhetoric and its specific role within our conception of discourse theory. We thus concentrate on the techniques of rhetorical redescription, the function of naming, which involves the related trope of catachresis, and examine the production of ‘empty signifiers’ via the logics of equivalence and difference. We conclude by evaluating the logics and mechanisms of the pro-growth alliance, concentrating on the tensions and limits of the pro-growth discourse, and consider its wider environmental and policy impact.

1. The Logic of Aviation Expansion in the UK

In line with other major industrial countries, the last twenty years have brought major changes to the aviation industry and airport policy in the UK. Despite the appearance of ‘rather tight historical regulation’ up until the 1960s and 1970s, market forces have tended to shape both the aviation industry and the policymaking process in the UK (Caves and Gosling, 1997: 308). However, this was accelerated during the 1980s with the growing hegemony of the Thatcher government’s free market philosophy, bringing a period of liberalization, deregulation and global commercialization to the aviation industry as a whole. Along with the privatization of British Airways (BA) in 1987, the Thatcher government developed plans firstly to privatize the British Airports Authority (BAA), which owns the three largest London Airports - Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted - as well as four regional airports in the UK; secondly, to make larger regional airports into Public Limited Companies (even though all the shares would be in the hands of the former local authorities, and hence airports would still be subject to public borrowing limits); and thirdly to raise the issues of how to control airport monopolies. The subsequent 1986 Airports Act gave effect to these measures (ibid, p. 310). Other policy developments alongside these measures, some of which were driven by the European Community, included the reduction of route entry barriers and changing patterns of frequency and fares, both on domestic routes and those international routes where Air Service Agreements had been signed (ibid, p. 310). In short, the entire process of review of airport policy resulted in an abandonment of a national plan for airport policy in favour of market forces, coupled with different forms of public regulation.

This liberating of market forces was married to a new logic of expansion in the aviation industry in the 1980s and 1990s. Firstly, working groups set up in the Airport Policy White Paper of 1978 concluded that more airport capacity would be needed in the Southeast by 1990 (DoT, 1979a). On the basis of these studies, BAA accepted a government invitation to seek permission for a two-runway airport at Stansted (p. 277). In its June 1985 White Paper (HMSO, 1985), having incorporated its own interpretation of the subsequent Public Inquiry into the new project, the government refused permission for the building of a new terminal at Heathrow, but kept the possibility under review. Significantly, however, it gave the go-ahead for Stansted to develop a single runway (capped to 78 000 atm per year with a terminal capacity of 15 mppa), though stipulating that any further expansion required Parliamentary approval (pp. 278-9). Secondly, in July 1991 Manchester Airport announced plans to build a second runway, and in January 1997 the Inspector of the Public Inquiry decided in favour of the new construction. By February 2001 the new runway was in operation. A third important development began in 1995 when a Public Inquiry into the building of Terminal 5 at Heathrow was announced. In late 2001, after an inquiry
lasting four years - the longest ever Public Inquiry in UK history – the Transport Secretary Stephen Byers gave the go-ahead for the new terminal, which is expected to be operational by 2007. One final result of market deregulation and liberalization in the 1990s was the emergence of low cost scheduled airlines in the UK (Humphreys, 2003, p. 24). The growth of budget airlines such as Ryannair, easyJet, Virgin Express, Go and Buzz has introduced low-cost travel at low fares, which had previously been restricted by regulation (ibid), and has resulted in further growth in the aviation industry. Indeed, it has been predicted that ‘budget’ traffic alone will grow at 6.6% per annum between 1998-2015 (DETR, 1998).

In short, at least in the eyes of successive British governments, floundering in a sea of increasingly depressing news-stories about transport and transport policy in the 1980s and 1990s – especially with respect to roads and railways - the aviation industry, and by implication the government, stands out as a beacon of success. Thus, for instance, in one of it its consultation documents on the future development of aviation in 2002, the government could trumpet the view that ‘Aviation is a great British success story, and one of the major strengths of the UK economy, both now and for the future’ (DfT: 2002a). It was in this context that the Government proposed an extensive period of consultation to decide the future of aviation in the UK. It is to this exercise and its policy outcome that we now turn.

The Consultation Process

Between December 2000 and the publication of the White Paper in December 2003, the government consulted widely about the future of aviation in the UK. In its White Paper on Integrated Transport published in July 1998 (DETR: 1998), the Labour Government gave notice of producing a new UK airports policy for the next thirty years. It then undertook a wide-range of consultations, discussions with stakeholders, surveys and independent studies to help contribute to its policy decisions (DfT, 2003a: 4). The first stage in this consultation exercise took place between December 2000 and April 2001, when approximately 550 responses were elicited about the main issues to be addressed in the forthcoming White Paper. A summary of these responses was presented in a report entitled ‘The Future of Aviation’ in November 2001 (DfT, 2001). Subsequent to this initial consultative exercise two programmes of studies were conducted. Firstly, the government conducted an appraisal of the dynamics of regional air services (with studies covering Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, the Midlands, the North of England and the South West were commissioned in parallel), in which the key objectives were to consider how each region might best be served by available airports in the region; to identify strategic enhancements needed to improve surface access to airports; and to appraise the economic, environmental and social costs/benefits of a range of options and policy choices. A second set of studies concentrated on the South East, and the South East and East of England Air Services Study (SERAS) examined a wide range of options ranging from no further development (other than that already permitted or under consideration) to additional runway and terminal capacity to meet demand in full (DfT, 2003a: 4).

The results of the seven regional consultation documents, based on the regional studies, were published collectively as ‘The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: Regional Air Services Co-ordination Study’ in July and August 2002 (DfT: 2002b). The consultation documents reported the key findings of the economic, environmental, social and airspace appraisals, and sought views on a wide range of
issues, ranging from possible options for future development to surface access improvements. In addition, the Government commissioned NOP to publish seven questionnaires canvassing views covered in the consultation documents, in which over 66,000 completed questionnaires were received and analysed, and a series of consultation events and exhibitions were staged across the UK to enable a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties to meet Government officials and to enable consultants to acquire additional information and discuss issues with a range of stakeholders. The government (DfT, 2003b) also published a report entitled ‘Aviation and the Environment: Using Economic Instruments’ in March 2003, which reflected discussions with stakeholders on the most effective instruments for ensuring that the aviation industry factors in environmental costs to its fares and overall business costs, and reduces its contribution to global warming, as well as local and noise pollution. This document was also put out for further discussion. However, in February 2003, following a high court decision taken in November 2002, the Government revised versions of the South East consultative documents to include options for runway development at Gatwick, which had previously been excluded from the consultation process because of local agreements limiting its future expansion, and issued revised NOP questionnaires to reflect this new development. The consultation period was moreover extended until to June 2003 to accommodate these changes.

Eventually, the consultation period closed on the 30 June 2003, after which more than 400,000 responses and representations to the exercise were registered. These included intensive submissions by large stakeholders (such as BA, BAA, ‘Freedom to Fly’ and so on), specific responses to questionnaires, and ‘many thousands of individual letters’ (DfT, 2003a: 6). Some respondents addressed the issue in the round, while others focussed on specific concerns. Respondents were classified into five representative categories: ‘wider stakeholder groups’ (which includes both national and local environmental groups, consultative committees, airport development opposition groups, and so forth), ‘political stakeholders’ (such as country, district and borough councils, MPs, devolved administrations and regional assemblies), ‘surface transport organizations’ (including bus, coach, and rail operators), ‘economic interests’ (including regional development agencies, enterprise agencies, chambers of commerce, trades unions, and so on), and members of the ‘aviation industry’ (which includes airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturers, aircraft maintenance providers and direct suppliers to the aviation industry such as ground handling and aircraft catering (DfT: 2003a: 7). Not surprisingly, in the SERAS study, for instance, ‘there was broad support for additional airport capacity across all respondent categories except ‘wider stakeholders groups’. More specifically, ‘there was virtually unanimous support for new capacity from the Aviation Industry and Economic Interests respondents. ‘Political stakeholders’ supported new capacity by a ratio of almost 2:1. More than half of ‘surface transport organisations’ favoured growth. ‘Wider stakeholders groups opposed new capacity provision by a ratio of 3:1. Within the ‘wider stakeholder groups’, 42 environmental groups were broadly opposed to new capacity with only 3 broadly in favour’ (DfT, 2003a: 471).

The White Paper was finally published by the Government in December 2003. The Future of Air Transport (DfT, 2003c) came down firmly on the side of promoting expansion to meet projected demand, with environmental concerns relegated to a relatively subsidiary role. More specifically, although plans were rejected for any new airports, extra runways were proposed for Stansted, Edinburgh and Birmingham, with
another runway likely at either Heathrow or Gatwick. Expansion plans have also been approved for a large number of regional airports. These include runway extensions at Liverpool John Lennon, Bristol, Newcastle and Leeds Bradford, with possible extensions at Aberdeen, Inverness, and Teesside. New terminals were also recommended at Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff (Dudley, 2003). However, considerable doubt remains about the precise nature of the plans, and the Government depends upon a set of highly unpredictable factors and events (Public Inquiries, international developments, and so forth), along with political actors who may not go along with the plans, in order to implement them. In February 2005, for example, campaigners against further expansion at Stansted airport won a high court ruling that ministers acted illegally in prescribing the location of a new runway at the airport, which ‘is likely to mean that a new runway will undergo scrutiny at a planning inquiry of a length and at a level of detail Mr Darling [the current minister] was keen to avoid’ (The Guardian, 19 February 2005). Yet, overall, it did respond favourably to taking the lead in articulating and reinforcing the logic of expansion.

2. Flying into Turbulence? The Problems of Airport Expansion

At first glance, then, the story of the aviation industry in the UK is a success. However, the extraordinary logic of growth has not all been plain sailing. Indeed, it has thrown up a series of contradictions, tensions and outright antagonisms about the extent, the location, and the very rationale for accelerated expansion. To begin with, the project for expansion came up against a potentially and actually powerful set of interests that were either against the expansion of aviation as such, or were against expansion in their particular neck of the woods, or against both. The extraordinary logic of expansion in the aviation industry has thus been accompanied by a dialectic of protest and resistance. NIMBYs, BANANAs (‘Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anybody) and conservationists joined forces to expose the hidden (and not so hidden) environmental, social, economic and political costs of airport expansion. The most visible and intense instance of protest occurred around the building of Manchester’s second runway. Following in the wake of a wave of anti-roads protests in the 1980s and early 1990s, in which local residents groups forged new alliances with radical environmentalists involved in movements like EarthFirst!, thus contributing significantly to a reversal of the Thatcher government’s ‘Roads for Prosperity’ programme, the Campaign Against Runway 2 (CAR2) mobilized against the building of Manchester’s second runway using a combination of direct action tactics and traditional forms of lobbying and protest (Griggs and Howarth, 2005).

The linking together of the struggle against unfettered airport expansion with anti-roads protest in a context of rapid growth in the aviation industry politicized airport expansion in a new way. Local protest groups at Stansted, Gatwick and Heathrow have all campaigned against further expansion. Indeed, alongside the brief but intense campaign at Manchester, the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (HACAN) vigorously opposed BAA’s proposed new Fifth Terminal at Heathrow. Indeed, in an attempt to broaden its opposition to expansion HACAN amalgamated with ClearSkies in 1999 to become HACAN ClearSkies. ClearSkies was an anti-airport lobby which had been founded in 1998 in the Brixton and Lambeth areas of south London, when continued expansion at Heathrow brought a large increase in the number of planes stacking in wider arcs above the communities of Clapham, Brixton
and Dulwich. Its chair was John Stewart, a surface transport advisor with an established background in community action and anti-roads campaigning, having been chair of the anti-roads pressure groups, Alarm London and Alarm UK (Griggs and Howarth, 2004a: 187).

In addition to contributing to the longest Public Inquiry in UK history, HACAN ClearSkies won a judgement over the regulation of night flights in its favour from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The case was initially brought to the ECHR in 1997 by eight local residents, ‘Ruth Hatton and others’, who argued that the failure to regulate night flights properly breached their rights under Article 8 of the Convention (HACAN ClearSkies News, Summer (2000), pp. 4-5). In October 2001, the ECHR subsequently ruled that the regulation of night flights at Heathrow unfairly infringed the local residents’ rights to respect in their private and family lives. The eight residents were each awarded £4000 compensation to be paid by the British government. Partly fuelled by fears over compensation claims (Financial Times, 07 January 2002), the British government appealed and successfully fought to have the judgement overturned. In early July 2003, the ECHR ruled that ‘the economic interests of the country are more important than the right of people living under the flight path to a decent night’s sleep’ (The Guardian, 09 July 2003).

In sum, then, those opposed to airport expansion have articulated local demands to limit expansion in their particular areas, or to provide better compensation or redress when growth does take place, alongside wider and more global concerns about the environment. They have also sought to highlight what they perceive to be the exclusionary and closed form of policymaking and decision-making in the aviation industry, thus making visible calls for more transparency and democratic participation in the key decision-making forums. Indeed, for some activists and protesters these developments have disclosed a closed policy network captured by dominant producer interests (see Griggs and Howarth, 2004b).

Furthermore, and perhaps paradoxically in the light of our short genealogy of aviation policy in the UK, the logic of airport expansion has also resulted in criticism of the government and the planning systems by powerful interests such as BAA and key airline companies, who demand better central government policy-making and planning of expansion. There has been a persistent demand for greater airport capacity at specific locations both to satisfy a growing economy and in order to keep up with or remain ahead of potential competitors in Europe. It has also been suggested that ‘the development of UK air transport has been a rather classic example of disjointed incrementalism’, highlighted by the ‘piecemeal development of London’s runways’ (which was barely functional given outmoded assumptions that airlines would be regulated and passengers would not have strong preferences between airports), and the development of single runway airports by taking traffic forecasts only 15 years ahead and neglecting the possible need to develop large hubs as mechanisms for enhancing the roles of the additional airports (Caves and Gosling, 1997: 320); all of which has been exacerbated by a belief that market forces, liberalization and privatization will enable individual airport authorities to plan adequately without government help and that their entrepreneurial skills would be blunted by too much government control (ibid, p. 322). Alongside this lack of a strategic overview and the rejection of a national plan for airports, there have been concerns about the Public Inquiry system in the UK, which is viewed by some (such as BAA) as ‘the main
obstacle to the addition of airport capacity because it is adversarial and the loser loses all’ (ibid, p. 315). Others feel that a proper system of compensation for disbenefits would ease and speed the process (Egan, 1990). The most prominent example of these difficulties is, of course, the Heathrow T5 inquiry, which both in time delays and actual costs presented a major headache for BAA. In short, from the perspective of those favouring more expansion, the government has been charged with ‘dithering’ and failing to take the lead with respect to the adequate provision of airport capacity (Dean, 2000).

More extremist criticisms of the government have argued for the complete marketization of the aviation industry. In the colourful words of Michael O’Leary, the controversial Chief Executive of Ryanair, “Any time the politicians get involved in an industry or regulating an industry, they fuck it up. It’s what they do best. If they stay the hell out of it, the industry works much better on its own by letting people compete. We had politicians and regulators running the airline industry for 50 years from 1945 to 1995, and they made a complete dog’s dinner of it in Europe; we had the highest fares and the most restrictive practices. We’ve had 10 years of deregulation and it’s transformed the cost of air travel around Europe’ (O’Leary, 2004).

Ironically, of course, both sets of demands – those set against expansion and those in favour - are to some extent the product of the fact that governments in general (and the UK government in particular) have tended to accept two connected beliefs about aviation. Firstly, that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a national government to intervene in an intrinsically global and internationalized aviation industry and, secondly, because aviation is seen by definition to be good for the economy, any national interference, say by the UK government, would simply result in the relocation of business to more favourable environments, coupled with a shift in pollution from one place (e.g. London Heathrow) to another (e.g. Amsterdam Schiphol) (Whitelegg, 2003: 236). In the British context, this is manifest in a ‘predict and provide’ model of policy making, as in other transport policy such as roads, but it has led to demands for greater government intervention both by environmentalist and NIMBYs, who feel excluded by the existing logic of expansion, and by large corporate interests such as BA and BAA (following in their eyes the T5 debacle) who have implored the government to take a more leading role in arguing the case for, and putting into place, the infrastructure and long-term stability necessary for the industry to compete in a global market.

The upshot of this more thorough analysis of the aviation industry discloses a much more complicated picture than the simple success story tells. Increasing marketization has contributed to increasing fragmentation, bringing new actors into the policy arena, not least BAA and low cost airlines. Local protest groups have exploited new avenues of influence in the European Union to challenge government, contributing to value pluralism and contestation of the dominant ‘predict and provide’ policy paradigm. Indeed, the very definition of airport expansion has become increasingly contested, with disagreement over the solution, appeals to conflicting information, and rival definitions of the ‘problem’ of airports. As such, the traditional operating procedures of government, not least the public inquiry system, have been called into question as government has been called upon to offer leadership in terms of steering and regulation of air transport. In response to such shifting patterns of uncertainty, those
advocating further expansion confronted a serious problem. It is to the development of their solution that we now turn.

3. Providing Ideological Cover: The Strategy of Freedom to Fly

In short, then, pro-growth campaigners and supporters were brought face to face with a number of powerful impediments to their desires and interests, not least of which was a real fear that the Labour Government, though intent on giving a strong ideological and policy lead on aviation expansion, would in the last instance prevaricate and defer the decision. For its part, the government was reluctant to become too closely aligned with the interests of big business, and were committed, at least ideologically, to nationally and internationally stated environmental targets aiming to reduce harmful emissions. Moreover, while they had endeavoured to be democratic and inclusive in the consultation process, or at least strived to appear so, they were also confronted with the possibility of being too closely identified with a top-down strategy of advocating expansion, and of thus losing touch with ordinary votes and stakeholders and their concerns. In a climate of increasing suspicion of government, and a growing question of trust on key policy issues, the government thought it wise to tread carefully.

What strategies were available for those in favour of expansion? How could they solve the dilemma they faced? One important and powerful way to ensure that a policy can be proposed and implemented without adverse publicity and/or conflict is for governments and interested parties actively to prevent protest and opposition arising before such a policy is introduced and discussed in the public arena, or to ensure that only certain aspects are discussed or focussed upon: those that are not fundamental, for example, or those that can easily be conceded and revised (see Lukes, 2004). However, as we have already suggested, the British government faced a well-organised and vocal protest movement when it announced its proposals to expand the industry. In this context, the hegemonic strategy of pre-empting conflict was not, therefore, an available option (see Glynos and Howarth, forthcoming).

Another strategy is to contain and channel protest once it has arisen, robbing such a challenge of its potency, and thus making it less threatening. This strategy of ‘divide and rule’ is attractive, but in a liberal democratic society marked by a relative degree of pluralism and public transparency. How therefore is it to be executed? In this context, a strategy of displacing the existing terrain of argumentation, while simultaneously structuring the space of argumentation in a different way so as to display and advance your arguments in the best possible light, offers the prospect of weakening the opposition, and strengthening one’s own. It is precisely this strategy that emerged to counter the problems facing pro-growth advocates. By chance or design the government was advantaged by the emergence of a powerful and effective organisation – Freedom to Fly – determined to provide it with the necessary ideological cover in the critical period surrounding the consultation process.

‘Freedom to Fly’ drew together airport companies, airlines and trade unions, air users, organised business and sections of the tourist industry around the rhetoric of ‘responsible’ and ‘sustainable growth’. Its overall strategy involved, firstly, the construction of a broad political coalition of all those forces in favour of the project of
expansion and, secondly, the articulation of a viable public discourse that could hold the alliance together. In constructing such an alliance, intellectuals and activists associated with the aviation industry sought to make equivalent a series of diverse particular demands by elaborating a common discourse that could provide a plausible and credible project for growth. More concretely, the purpose of such a discourse was, firstly, to provide a defensible ‘storyline’ about the need and advantages for the growth of the aviation industry, which was built around the ideas of ‘sustainable aviation’ and the ‘freedom to fly’, and secondly to elaborate a persuasive set of counter-arguments designed to negate and disarticulate the political alliance opposed to growth. Finally, they had to devise a set of tactics with which to engage in the consultation process, and a media campaign to deal directly with their opponents. Critically for us, each of these components of Freedom to Fly’s strategy were mediated by a rhetorical dimension. In order to sustain our argument and analysis, we thus need to pause for a moment to consider this dimension in more detail.

4. A Brief Excursus on Rhetoric

We begin by considering the general relationship between discourse theory and rhetoric. As against more mainstream approaches in the social sciences, such as positivism, realism, and certain conceptions of materialism, discourse theorists regard the existence of rhetoric as a constitutive aspect of social reality, and its theoretical and empirical analysis as an essential part of understanding and explaining social phenomena. Hence it is not something to be treated suspiciously, thus being confined to a merely secondary or supplementary analytical status. For instance, in his critical discussion of the literature on ‘policy networks’, Keith Dowding suggests that the notion of a network is a metaphor, rather than a model, implying therefore that explanatory theoretical models can and ought to be rigidly distinguished from metaphors – or strive to be ‘metaphor-free’ so to speak - and that only the former are of use in social science explanation (Dowding, 1995). By contrast, as against these traditions of thought which would make a sharp a priori distinction between a concept and a metaphor, between a realm of rhetorical meaning and an underlying material reality, or indeed between the figurative and the proper/literal, discourse theorists view tropological movements as an essential dimension of all social relations. Indeed, as its name suggests, an important feature of discourse theory is the careful analysis of rhetoric and all forms of ‘textual’ meaning.

However, it is necessary to proceed with the utmost caution in this regard. Discourse theorists need to guard against charges of textual and linguistic reductionism, and they need to deal with rhetorical forms at the appropriate levels of abstraction. At the outset, we need to distinguish between discourse theory and discourse analysis, where the latter consists of a range of techniques to analyse ‘talk and text in context’, while the former provides the underlying assumptions for their appropriate employment (see Howarth, 2005). In Heideggerian terms, discourse theory corresponds to the ontological level, where the concept of discourse specifies the necessary presuppositions of any inquiry into the nature of objects and social relations, while discourse analysis operates at the ontical level, and is concerned to analyse the particular objects specified by one’s ontological presuppositions (see Mulhall 1996: 4). In the first usage, discourse is an ontological category that specifies the interweaving of words and actions into practices, the contingency of all identity, the
primacy of politics, and so forth, whereas in the second usage discourse is understood more narrowly as a set of symbolic representations and practices embodied in a range of texts, speeches and signifying sequences.

The difference between the ontological and the ontical is important for our understanding of rhetoric. Rhetorical categories are at once important for both fleshing out the ontology of discourse theory, and as a means of analysing texts and linguistic practices. For example, with respect to the former, hegemonic practice is essentially a metonymical operation by which a particular group or movement takes up demands articulated by contiguous groups (for example, a student movement begins to organise and address workers’ demands), or extends one set of demands into adjacent spheres (workers’ struggles come to symbolise the demands of an entire nation). By contrast, the stabilization of such practices into a hegemonic form or order, each organised around an empty signifier, is metaphorical in that it involves the creation of new meaningful totalities via the disarticulation and replacement of previously existing formations.

On the other hand, attention to the specific role of metonyms and metaphors in a rhetorical analysis of politicians’ speeches – for example, the use of the terms ‘New Labour’ and ‘Labour’ by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown respectively in their struggle to hegemonize the Labour Party – operates at the ontical level and presumes the basic categories of discourse theory for its analysis (Howarth, 2005). At this level of inquiry, and as long as they are commensurate with its ontological assumptions, discourse theorists can freely draw upon a range of tropes and devices to analyse texts and practices. For instance, Quentin Skinner reactivates Quintilian’s technique of rhetorical redescription (paradiastole), in which he draws upon the latter’s advice of presenting factual narratives (say to persuade a court of law). The technique involves the restating of facts ‘but not all in the same way; you must assign different causes, a different state of mind and a different motive for what was done’ (Quintilian cited in Skinner, 2002, p. 183). Of particular interest for discourse theorists is the substitution of a rival (yet neighbouring) evaluative term ‘that serves to picture an action no less plausibly, but serves at the same time to place it in a contrasting light’ (p. 183). Thus ‘prodigality must be more leniently redescribed as liberality, avarice as carefulness, negligence as simplicity of mind’ (Quintilian cited in Skinner, p. 183).

Our focus in this article is not so much on the ontological dimension per se, but on the employment of rhetorical figures in the ‘ontical’ analysis of the pro-growth coalition. We are thus concerned with the role of tropes such as metaphor and catachresis in constituting Freedom to Fly’s discourse. Nevertheless, as we shall show, the ontological dimension informs the employment of tropes in the analysis of discourse. More precisely, we are interested in the technique of ‘rhetorical redescription’ (mainly through the substitution of metaphors) as a means of understanding the logic by which those organising the Freedom to Fly coalition struggled to secure the requisite ideological cover for New Labour’s aviation policy, and the process of naming that helped bind the coalition together. Nevertheless, we need to make one further, important theoretical detour, before turning to these techniques and their analytical employment. The detour centres on the precise relationship between the figures of catachresis and metaphor in our account, in which we shall endeavour to clarify the relationship between the two tropes and draw out the implications of the relationship for analysis.
In the history of rhetoric it is commonplace to relegate the figure of catachresis to a secondary position vis-à-vis metaphor. Whereas metaphor is generally understood as ‘a transfer or substitution employed when a proper term does already exist and is displaced by a term transferred from another place to a place not its own’ – or, more simply, when one thing is described as being another thing – catachresis ‘is a transfer of terms from one place to another employed when no proper word exists’ (Parker, 1990: 60). Catachresis is in this sense to misapply a word. For example, to say or write that the Labour government’s consultation strategy flew into turbulence is to substitute a particular experience or event of flying in an aeroplane for a specific political practice, thus describing the former in different terms and conveying a new meaning, whereas to speak of ‘the leg of a table’, ‘the foot of a mountain’, or to make reference to somebody’s ‘walkman’, is to apply a term to a thing to which the term does not literally refer, either because our language lacks such a term, or because we come across or invent new objects in need of a name. For many theorists of rhetoric from the classical period to the present the identification of catachresis with an abuse of metaphorical transfers – a misapplication of words – makes the former an ‘unexpected’, ‘violent’, or ‘mixed’ metaphor. In short, and from the point of view of mainstream social science, the figure of catachresis is subject to a double relegation from the proper: not only is it stained by its figurative dimension, as are all tropes, whether they be metaphors, metonyms, synecdoches, and so on, but even within the figurative domain it represents an abhorrent form - an abusio rather than a translatio to use classical terms.

However, following in the wake of theorists such as Derrida, Foucault, and Laclau, the figure of catachresis can be conceded a more fundamental role in our understanding of rhetoric and in our analysis of political logics. Consider, for instance, Derrida’s essay that is entitled ‘White mythology’. In this extended discussion of metaphor in the Western philosophical tradition, he prioritises the figure of catachresis to problematize the metaphysical distinction between the literal and the figurative - between the traditional conceptions of the metaphorical and the non-metaphorical - which continues to haunt current discussions in the human and social sciences (Derrida, 1982). It is important to note that while Derrida contests the valorisation of the concept vis-à-vis metaphor in philosophical discourse, he does not simply invert this tendency by privileging the classical and traditional notion of metaphor. To ground philosophy and its search for pure concepts on the (equally metaphysical) concept of metaphor would be to both exclude and privilege metaphor from the very field of study it seeks to explain. Instead, just as he constructs a generalised ‘arche-writing’ within which to account for signification and the sign, he stresses a ‘generalised metaphoricity’ that is predicated on the figure of catachresis – ‘a not very proper proper meaning’ to use Bennington’s phrase – which weakens any privileging of metaphor or non-metaphoricity (Bennington, 1993: 13).

One significant implication of Derrida’s reading is a mutual interweaving of the literal and the figurative, and thus of the real and its representation. However, while Derrida correctly stresses ‘the radical contingency of naming’, and though he implicitly presupposes a performing subjectivity that names, his general philosophical scepticism about the subject means that he does not thematize this aspect in any theoretical detail. It is here that Slavoj Zizek’s Lacanian-inspired account of naming adds an important twist to the tale. Intervening in the dispute between descriptivists
(e.g. John Searle) and anti-descriptivists (e.g. Saul Kripke) about naming and reference, Zizek criticizes descriptivists like Searle because they circumvent what might be called the social fact of language: the fact that if language qua symbolic order – Lacan’s ‘big Other’ - is ‘a social network in which meaning exists only in so far as it is intersubjectively recognized’, ‘then it must be part of the meaning of each name that it refers to a certain object because this is its name, because others use this name to designate the object in question: every name, in so far as it is part of common language, implies this self-referential, circular moment’ (Zizek, 1989, p. 93).

Moreover, if descriptivists miss the role of the Lacanian ‘big Other’, then the anti-descriptivists miss the Lacanian ‘small other’ (the object petit a), which problematizes the myth that it is possible to trace out an external causal chain back to the ‘primal baptism’ in which an object acquires its name, thus guaranteeing that the name designates the same object in all possible worlds. Instead, contra anti-descriptivism, what guarantees the identity of an object in all possible counterfactual situations ‘is the retroactive effect of naming itself: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object. The “surplus” in the object which stays the same in all possible worlds is “something in it more than itself”, that is to say, the Lacanian object petit a: we search in vain, for it in positive reality because it has no positive consistency – because it is just an objectification of a void, of a discontinuity opened in reality by the emergence of the signifier’ (p. 95). In short, Zizek’s argument about the radical contingency of a naming practice which retroactively constitutes its reference – what we shall the moment of catachresis par excellence - foregrounds the lack in any symbolic order, as well as the importance of the subject, which is compelled to act in the voids opened-up in the gaps and fissures of the big Other.

With this brief detour into the world of rhetoric completed, we return to an analysis of the rhetoric of Freedom to Fly.

5. Analyzing the Rhetoric of ‘Freedom to Fly’

As we have intimated, the airports’ issue pitted two large ‘discourse coalitions’ or hegemonic projects against one another. As we have indicated, ‘Freedom to Fly’ was opposed by a group called AirportWatch which articulated a discourse of ‘demand management’. The latter coalition, which was launched on 19 July 2002 to oppose airport expansion across the United Kingdom, brought together local airport protest groups with national environmental and conservation lobbies such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000, around a policy of ‘demand management’ in aviation, arguing that airport growth across the United Kingdom is unnecessary, and demands the removal of the tax concessions enjoyed by airlines (Griggs and Howarth, 2004).

The formal constitution of these coalitions actually took place during the consultation process, and the struggle for ideological and political ‘hegemony’ in this sector intensified as the consultation exercise unfolded. To begin with, large corporations such as BAA, BA and Virgin, along with air users, business associations, trades unions and elements of the tourist industry used their considerable influence and economic power to put the wider case for airport expansion. In so doing, leaders of Freedom to Fly such as their Director Joe Irvin (now a senior figure in the TGWU), Brenda Dean (a current Labour peer) Stephen Hardwick (the public affairs director of BAA) and Dan Hodges (whose career includes work for his mother, the former
Transport Minister Glenda Jackson MP, the Road Haulage Association, and for the GMB Trade Union opposing privatisation) successfully managed to persuade a large number of power corporations, collective actors and stakeholders to forego their immediate and short terms interests - what Gramsci would have called their corporate interests - to maximise their individual preferences in order to construct a united front in favour of airport expansion *per se*. As the major public vehicle of their campaign they launched the Freedom to Fly Campaign on 14 January 2002 in order to win over the wider public to the idea of airport expansion. Articulating arguments in favour of airport expansion, members of the coalition organised their rhetoric around the benefits of aviation for a range of subjects (passengers, business, workers), thus seeking to confer a particular meaning to the notion of ‘sustainable growth’, which was the object of much ideological contestation.

Now the first task of those wishing to provide ideological space for the government to reach and act upon the ‘correct’ decision, was to forge a coalition of supporters who could speak with a united voice. The organic intellectuals who took up this challenge were confronted with the fact that they sought to represent a series of competing and potentially conflictual interests. There were significant conflicts of interest between competing airlines, who did not necessarily agree on where the expansion should be, and amongst different airports, each backed by competing regional growth coalitions. There were also potential and actual conflicts of interest between the producers and consumers of airline and airport services, as well as between their owners and managers and the workers in these corporations. There was also the issue of constructing a case for expansion that would find favour and be legitimate in the eyes of the public at large.

**Rhetorical redescription: the demand for responsible and sustainable aviation**

In seeking to unify these different interests into a collective will, organic intellectuals were able to make the demand for growth and expansion the single overriding demand (Interview with Joe Irvin). They thus sought to make the lowest common denominator of immediate and decisive support for aviation expansion by the government the point of compromise between the different forces at play. In reaching this agreement, they were able to locate a point of universality between the competing demands and interests to which all could agree to give their support, and they managed to construct an equivalence between interests that both supported growth and strongly opposed all those against expansion. Hence its proponents implored the government to increase runway capacity to meet rising demand, and in their rhetoric they adduced and enumerated several reasons to support their case.

Firstly, Freedom to Fly constructed air travel as an economic success story not only in itself, but also in its capacity to unlock new opportunities both for business and pleasure. As Brenda Dean put it: ‘Air travel has opened up new horizons, both for business and holidaymakers. In 1977 we took 7 million holidays abroad. Now we take 38 million holidays abroad each year.’ (Dean, 2002) *In Flying Responsibly into the Future*, its pamphlet promoting airport expansion, the coalition further associated aviation with ‘growth, prosperity and jobs’, stressing equally its role as a catalyst for growth across all business sectors: ‘Aviation is vital for our country. It supports jobs, investment and tourism’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 1) Or as Dean argued: ‘Time is money. Modern businesses rely on fast, reliable transport both of people and high value, time sensitive goods. The UK's highest growth industries especially, such as
pharmaceuticals, communication services, finance, insurance and consultancy, depend heavily on good international transport links.' (Dean, 2002). Such claims of employment and business opportunities were more importantly presented as ‘FACT’ (see Figure 1). Indeed, seeking to embed the uncontested nature of its claims, Freedom to Fly invoked the Oxford Economic Forecasting study on the positive contribution of aviation to the British economy and even the Government’s own consultation papers which ‘are unequivocal that the UK’s aviation industry is good for the economy and employment’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 2) Thus, reiterating General Motors’ famous advertising slogan, pro-growth supporters asserted that ‘what is good for aviation is good for the United Kingdom’ (cf. Miliband, 1969, p. 69).

**Figure 1: The Rhetoric of Freedom to Fly. ‘Flying Responsibly into the Future’ (2002)**

**FACT:** Aviation adds over £10 billion a year to the UK economy and generates half a million jobs. (2002: 2)

**FACT:** The Government estimates that throughout the UK some 260,000 extra jobs could be created through the proposals for expanding airport capacity by 2030. (2002:3)

Secondly, Freedom to Fly constructed the failure to build new airport capacity as a threat to both the host of employment and investment opportunities unlocked by air travel and to the global competitive position of the UK aviation industry. As Freedom to Fly was keen to point out: ‘the cost to the economy of no growth could be in excess of £15 billion (net present value) and the economy would lose billions of pounds’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 2) Without expansion, the coalition threatened, the price of air travel would increase, up to 260,000 jobs would be put at risk, 73 million passenger movements in the UK prevented, and incoming tourism hit, threatening 4700 jobs (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 12). And, as if to amplify the threat, the failure to build new capacity would also mean losing out to Britain’s competitors in Europe: ‘these benefits cannot be taken for granted however. Today, many of the UK's airports are straining to cope with this rising demand and lots of us have felt the consequences: it is harder to avoid delays, overcrowding and inconvenience. Congestion causes longer flying times, adds to pollution and prevents growth. Meanwhile Charles de Gaulle in Paris now serves more destinations than Heathrow. In fact while we were labouring through the cumbersome inquiry about a fifth terminal for passengers at two-runway Heathrow airport, the French, Germans and Dutch were busy building the fourth or fifth runways at Paris Charles de Gaule, Frankfurt and Schipol (Dean, 2002). In short, this inculcation of an external threat invoked the priority of the collective good over the particular interests of individuals: ‘Air travel gives us tremendous opportunities and is vital to the UK economy. If everyone says “not in my backyard”, it’ll be disastrous for consumers and the British economy.’ (Irvin cited in The Guardian, 22 July 2002). In other words, ‘community interests have to be balanced with national priorities’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 11).

Nevertheless, proponents of the expansion campaign were weary of presenting their case in terms of ‘growth at any cost’. On the contrary, they were of the firm view that the environmental and social costs of expansion had to be fully acknowledged and
addressed. The second task was therefore to ensure that the supporters and forces who joined Freedom to Fly agreed to concessions that would make the industry appear more environmentally friendly, after which they sought to elaborate a public discourse that would allay fears about the negative consequences of growth. It was here that a first usage of the technique of rhetorical redescription came to the fore. In this regard, those articulating the Freedom to Fly discourse sought to redescribe the aviation industry not as a threat to the environment, but as proponents of ‘sustainable aviation’ committed to ‘sustainable growth’. Drawing on radical environmental and development discourses – demands for ‘sustainable development’ in the face of the ‘limits to growth’ - organic intellectuals thus substituted a rival evaluative term based on the qualifier ‘sustainable’ to counter efforts by environmentalists and NIMBY groups intent on presenting the expansion of the aviation industry as ‘unsustainable’, ‘unnecessary’, and ‘subsidised’, thus requiring the demand for air travel to be ‘managed’ and ‘limited’. In short, therefore, the metaphor of sustainable development, widely understood as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, was reiterated in the context of aviation to stave of potential criticism and adverse publicity (World Commission on Economic Development, 1987, p. 43). As such, the proponents of expansion sought to transform the zero-sum game of expansion or environmental protection into a positive-sum game where it was possible to achieve both growth and environmental protection (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The Rhetoric of Sustainable Aviation**

Setting a clear direction for aviation policy will inevitably involve a number of hard choices. The principal issue to address will be how to meet demand for aviation in the most sustainable manner. In our view, policies which limit consumer choice or seek to artificially constrain demand would lead to job losses, damage to the UK economy and undermine the freedom of consumers to travel at a reasonable cost to a broad range of destinations. Our own vision is of an aviation policy promoting a dynamic industry to support the British economy, provide consumer choice and deliver effective measures to protect the environment.

Ed Anderson, Chairman of Airport Operators Association (Airport Operators Association, 2002).

Thus, for example, the Director of Freedom To Fly, Dan Hodges, rejected proposals that emerged during the consultation process for the building of a new airport at Cliffe on the grounds ‘that Cliffe is simply unsustainable on environmental grounds’. And he continued to argue that ‘The aviation industry has a long standing commitment to sustainable expansion’: ‘All that is now required is a firm commitment from those environmental groups who went to court to oppose the exclusion of Gatwick that they will not repeat the exercise and unnecessarily maintain the blight on local residents of North Kent. We are prepared to demonstrate our commitment to sensible aviation growth, and we call on Airport Watch and Friends of the Earth to do the same” (‘No Airport at Cliffe Liaison Group’, Conservation and Communities United, 2004). In a similar vein, Brenda Dean asserted that ‘The challenge for the Government is to maximise the economic and social benefits of air travel while mitigating harmful effects and environmental costs.’ In other words, ‘growth must be responsible and sustainable. All human activity affects the environment. There is general agreement that aviation like all industries should meet the environmental costs it imposes, on a fair and equitable basis. Unfortunately there is a wide and sometimes wild range of
estimates of what these costs amount to. The costs can be dealt with through cutting out problems at source, mitigation (e.g. noise insulation) and compensation. That is why we must encourage the aviation industry to be greener by design. And many believe that a system of tradable permits would be the best way to reduce global emissions for aircraft while permitting people to enjoy the benefits of air travel’ (Dean, 2002).

This rhetorical redescription of ‘sustainable aviation’ was driven by attempts to dispute the alleged environmental costs of air travel. Freedom to Fly (2002: 9-11) thus hastened to establish the progress made by the aviation industry in terms of noise pollution, lauding its commitment to meet new EU standards for NO2 and advocating a system of emissions trading (see above). Equally, it threw doubts for example on the significance of the contribution of air transport to existing global CO2 emissions in the United Kingdom and levels of air pollution surrounding local airports (attributed primarily in this instance on cars not necessarily travelling to airports). As such, any decision to impose further taxation on air travel to offset environmental costs was challenged by the reasoning that: ‘If aviation covers its environmental costs (both by cutting pollution and paying for the remaining external costs) what justification is there for pricing people out of flying?’ (2002:9) Finally, it questioned expansion as ‘some simplistic form of “predict and provide” policy – an accusation previously levelled at roads policy’ (2002:7). Existing levels of demand, it was argued, already justified new infrastructure, and airport expansion, unlike roads, would incur no costs to the taxpayers and would have a marginal charge for using them as ‘runways are built by airports who depend on customers paying to fly’ (2002:7).

_Bringing back the subject? The practice of naming qua catachresis_

Up until now, our analysis draws inspiration from, and in its basic structure conforms to, Ernesto Laclau’s logic of hegemony (Laclau, 1990; 2000). In brief, the construction of a hegemonic project (or discourse coalition to use other terms) involves the construction of an equivalential chain that links together different demands against a ‘common enemy’. In this model, each demand is split between a universal (e.g. the demand for growth) and particular dimension. For instance, an airline might demand an expansion of the aviation industry (the universal dimension) in a particular location such as London Heathrow (the particular dimension). In this theory, then, one of the demands – the desire for growth - comes to play a universal function, thus representing and giving sense to the entire chain of demands. As more and more demands are added to the chain of equivalences, so the universal signifier (e.g. ‘expand the aviation industry in the UK’) is emptied of content, thus becoming a ‘tendentially empty signifier’ to use Laclau’s terms. In the case we are considering, our claim is that the name Freedom to Fly came to signify the universal need for growth, thus functioning to unify the coalition around something that was perceived to be lacking, or at least under threat from those protesting against expansion.

However there are certain reservations and questions that arise from applying Laclau’s model more generally, and to the case of aviation expansion in the UK more particularly. On the one hand, his logic of hegemony is presented as a conceptual necessity, as something which is accorded an almost lawlike status in explaining hegemonic processes. This is especially true with respect to the way in which one demand automatically and necessarily comes to play the role of the empty signifier, thus representing the chain of equivalences as a whole. There seems no reason why
one demand should play this role – why could it not be an amalgam or articulation of different demands? - nor indeed that such a demand is necessarily internal to the series of demands itself: why can’t the universal demand be in some sense heterogeneous to the series? A further problem arises as to whether or not demands are always already split definitively between the universal and the particular, or whether such a splitting is itself a product of ideological construction. In other words, is universality itself a function of ideological construction? In short, Laclau’s model runs the risk of avoiding or bypassing the moment of subjectivity, in which agents invent or construct a more universal discourse through practices of political articulation and acts of naming.

As against Laclau’s purely structural or functional explanation, our account of the pro-growth coalition suggests that the collocation ‘sustainable growth’, which was made to serve as the universal demand of the coalition, was the product of a metaphorical redescription, which was then universalized by organic intellectuals intent on developing what they thought was the most plausible and credible case for expansion. Similarly, the act of naming the coalition – the catachretic moment par excellence – was an inspired creation that successfully tapped into a number of important beliefs, desires and discourses held by people in UK society at large. In this view, naming the coalition Freedom to Fly was a radical and inspired act that brought into being a new object – the coalition demanding sustainable growth - and provides the ideological means of representing a perceived threat or lack (being prevented from flying) that could be overcome by a particular policy (a pro-growth White Paper). In short, Freedom to Fly framed the demand for ‘sustainable aviation’, and the discourse was structured around the fantasy that these two elements do not contradict or cancel each other out, but can be equally desired and achieved.

That Freedom to Fly was an inspired choice for naming, and thus constituting, the coalition, as well as for framing its demands in ideological terms, is evident in the connotations and meanings of the signifiers it employed. Let us begin by breaking the metaphor ‘freedom to fly’ into its two basic parts. On the one hand, the importance of the signifier ‘freedom’ in any political discourse is difficult to underplay. Historically, and in numerous contexts, freedom has connoted an exemption or releasement from bondage, liberation from the bondage of sin, the emancipation from slavery, the breaking free from shackles, the removal of obstacles or impediments to actions, and so forth. In short, just as it is difficult to be against measures that are protective of our natural environment, so it is politically difficult to be ‘against freedom’. The burden of proof seems inevitably stacked on the side of those who wish to interfere with our freedoms, or take away our liberties. In the discourse of political philosophy, and in the analysis of political ideologies, the basic concept of freedom is generally taken to mean an ‘ability to choose without interference by others’, and it has been commonplace, if somewhat misleading, to distinguish between at least two conceptions of freedom: a negative conception - ‘freedom from’ external constraint - and a positive conception - ‘freedom to’ (Berlin, 1969). The beauty of the name Freedom to Fly is that it seamlessly captures both dimensions: the ‘freedom from’ those who would prevent us from flying by ‘managing demand’, for example, or by blocking the expansion of airports, and the ‘freedom to’ fly wherever we wish to at the lowest possible price and in the most convenient fashion.
On the other hand, ‘to fly’, as in ‘flying in an aircraft’ or ‘flying to a destination’, has also acquired powerful and positive connotations in the modern age. In the popular imagination, in novels, films, the world of advertising, and so forth, the image of international airports, jet flight, pilots and stewardesses, as well as the exotic destinations which are put within easy reach, have become quintessential signifiers of the cosmopolitanism, excitement, speed and adventure of our increasingly ‘small world’. As the story of Daedalus and his son Icarus attests, the exhilaration, thrill and danger of flight and flying – connected strongly with ideas of escape and liberation - is deeply inscribed in ancient Greek mythology, and it continues to operate on contemporary popular consciousness as a sign of progress, freedom and pure possibility. The name Freedom to Fly was thus able to tap into these strongly held fantasies and collective imaginaries that structure the mentalities of subjects in the modern world, and was used to try and displace the discourse of ‘demand management’, which it was feared was emerging and beginning to take root as an alternative discourse on aviation.

Tapping into these fantasies and collective imaginaries, Freedom to Fly stressed the articulation between aviation and travel and holidays (see Figure 3). In *Flying Responsibly into the Future*, aviation, it is claimed, ‘has opened up opportunities for ordinary people to fly for a holiday in the sun, visit friends and relatives or experience other cultures. Being able to fly away on holiday is a valued part of people’s quality of life…’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002:4). Alternatively, in the words of Dean: ‘Today ordinary people can contemplate taking the family to the Med, have a romantic weekend in Venice or even visiting grandchildren in Sydney. Flying is no longer the preserve of the wealthy’ (Dean, 2002). Indeed, aviation is persistently portrayed through populist appeals to aviation as a force for social progress. Thus aviation has ‘broadened minds as well as mobility’, with 15% of young people flying to the UK coming here to study (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 5). It has enabled ‘ordinary people to fly’. Additional environmental charges on aviation would add up ‘to £340 for a family of four flying to holiday in Majorca. This would be unjustified, unfair and ineffective’ (Freedom to Fly, 2002: 7). This populist appeal in part enables the redescription of expansion, not as the agenda of profit-maximising companies, but as the social response to rising consumer demand and social progress. And, as Freedom to Fly points out, for the predicted growth in demand to be realised, ‘all that it would mean would be for each of us on average to take one summer holiday and one other return trip by plane each year (for example, a weekend break, a winter holiday, a study visit, a business trip or to stay with friends and relatives)’(2002: 7).

**Figure 3: The Appeal to Collective Imaginaries. ‘Flying Responsibly into the Future’(2002)**

| FACT: In 1977 Britons took 7 million holidays abroad. Now we take 38 million holidays abroad each year. (2002: 4) |

**Rhetorical redescription revisited**

It is here that a second kind of rhetorical redescription can be discerned. Here efforts were made not just to redescribe aviation as sustainable aviation, but to redefine the very terms of argumentation themselves. Richard Rorty, for instance, distinguishes between ‘interesting philosophy’ and philosophy that is simply concerned with examining ‘the pros and cons of a thesis.’ ‘Implicitly or explicitly’, the former approach, amounts ‘to a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become
a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 9). Indeed, as he goes on to argue, the ‘latter method of philosophy is the same as the method of utopian politics or revolutionary science (as opposed to parliamentary politics, or normal science). The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behaviour which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of non-linguistic behaviour, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 9). Endeavouring to redescribe the situation of the aviation industry in this way, those in the Freedom to Fly coalition endeavoured to shift the debate away from concerns about the environment, the control of demand, and issues about equality and social justice, and more to questions about our freedom to fly, and about the threat to jobs and economic competitiveness and our opportunities for pleasure, if such expansion was blocked or threatened.

In this way, Freedom to Fly provided the ideological framing device within which to locate the signifiers of ‘sustainable aviation growth’, ‘sustainable aviation’ and ‘socially responsible development’ more generally. The latter became ‘floating signifiers’ which were the target of the two hegemonic projects, each intent on dominating the field of discursivity. Steering a tertium quid between Leftist demands for state and governmental intervention to lower consumer demand, and demands from the Right to leave the aviation industry in the hands of the market, Freedom to Fly sought to undercut both by articulating the notion of sustainability within the framework of a socially responsible corporate capitalism that was sensitive to environmental and social concerns on the one hand, as well as to the overall economic development of the UK as a whole on the other.

6. Conclusion: Freedom to Fly and ‘The Future of Air Transport’

This article has explored the way in which Freedom to Fly sought and managed to provide ideological cover for the Labour government in the period running up to the passing of the pro-growth White Paper on aviation policy in December 2003. In pinpointing and describing this logic, we focused on the way organic intellectuals welded together a diverse range of pro-expansion interests by securing agreement that the demand for growth ought to be the overriding demand to be defended in the policy and public domains. The analysis stressed the ideological means and mechanisms – especially the devices of rhetorical redescription, catachresis, and the logic of equivalence - through which this discourse was constituted and disseminated, as well as the processes through which Freedom to Fly sought to displace and reshape the argumentative terrain underpinning the debate on aviation.

And finally, although we believe that in doing so this discourse coalition was significant in providing Labour with the requisite room for manoeuvre to take the lead on this policy, we did not adduce direct empirical evidence to demonstrate this case. Rather, to use the language of speech act theory, our focus was on the illocutionary, rather than perlocutionary, dimensions of the language practiced by intellectuals supporting the pro-expansion campaign. That is to say, we have concentrated on what Freedom to Fly was doing in saying they wanted expansion, rather than a thorough analysis of the overall effects and take-up of their speech acts. However, it does not seem overly speculative, especially given the kind of legislation that was proposed by the government, and in the way in which Freedom to Fly became the ideological
target of those campaigns opposing expansions, to claim they partly secured the policy outcomes they desired.

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