



## NEWSLETTER

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### **Dramatizing Technology: Extrapolating a Future from the Writings of Kenneth Burke**

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In February of 1989, Bernard L. Brock asked me to participate on a convention panel at the Speech Communication Association convention in San Francisco. The panel was to be entitled, "Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century." My specific assignment was to anticipate future developments in the nature of Burkeian theory and criticism. I was admittedly hesitant but ultimately agreed.

Since agreeing, I have now become hesitant about describing even the past and present Kenneth Burke sees. My hesitation only escalates—rather dramatically—when faced with the actual task of forecasting the future Kenneth Burke anticipates.

To resolve this anxiety, procedures are required which specify how this particular future is to be constructed. Hence, three notes on methodology are initially appropriate.

#### **Methodological Choices**

First, I have not asked Burke to describe the future he anticipates. I extract Burke's anticipated future from his published writings. I have reasoned that external reliability and verification should remain relevant standards. Hence, I wish to ground my projections in publicly available documents.

Second, I focus upon trends within Burke's writings. Burke's writings now span a 70 year period, and it is possible to identify perspectives which have declined in Burke's writings since 1920 and also to identify trends which have received increasing attention in his writings from 1920 to the present. Specifically, I focus upon the changing emphases regarding technology in Burke's writings.

Third, my objective is to project a view of the evolution of dramatism rather than of the future. I remain convinced that any conception of the future is a sym-

bolic construct, goading us toward the realization of a specific future which can only be viewed as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Accordingly, any number of specific futures can be reasonably articulated and achieved. My interest resides in identifying extensions of dramatism which can be reasonably grounded in the waxing and waning emphases found in Burke's writings.

#### **A Technological Focus**

As we might expect with any critic, Burke's conception of technology has changed over time. Yet, amidst the changing role Burke has attributed to technology, he has also posited some remarkably stable conceptions of technology. Hence, any description of Burke's view of technology must recognize both his enduring and changing conception of technology. Enduring conceptions of technology are an appropriate point of departure.

#### **Enduring Conceptions of Technology**

At least three of the conceptions and assessments Burke posited of technology have endured throughout his writings.

First, technology remains, for Burke, a dominant and independent power. In 1945, Burke cast technology as one of the two greatest "'powers' existing in history" (*Grammar*, p. 116). Some 40 years later, in January of 1983, Burke continued to view technology as one of two dominant "perspectives" of our age (*ATH*, p. 379). Thus, in Burke's symbolic conception of the human condition, technology has continued to persist as a critical and decisive power term.

Second, technology continues, for Burke, to be most appropriately featured under the head of agent rather than agency. In 1945, Burke certainly recognized that any "instruments," such as technology, might be cast as an agency (*Grammar*, p. 275). But, even at this early date, Burke noted that rhetors had cast technology as a willful source of knowledge thereby satisfying the requirements of an agent. Hence, Burke reported that, "Russian Communism was the most

'idealistic'" of the revolutions of its day, expressly because "technology was *willed* there in accordance with Marxist values, rather than being the material ground out of which such values arise" (*Grammar*, p. 116). And, the transformation of technology from agency to agent was also explicitly recognized by Burke in 1945: "technology, as applied science, invites us to put the major stress upon knowledge. And the problem of knowledge is the epistemological problem, a psychologistic emphasis that falls directly under the head of agent" (*Grammar*, p. 176). Today, Burke's sense that technology functions as a willful and independent source of knowledge and policy has been stated and restated with equal explicitness. Indeed, as Burke's discussion of the Strategic Defense Initiative indicates, the advances made in artificial intelligence allow a technical system automatically to initiate a global conflict without human action. Thus, for Burke, technology functions at least as a co-agent or counter-agent in the human drama.

Third, technology remains, for Burke, an extension of and aligned with knowledge by virtue of its link to science. As Burke so succinctly put the case at the end of World War II: "technology, as applied science, invites us to put the major stress upon knowledge" (*Grammar*, p. 176). Today, as the distinction between "fact" and "knowledge" is increasingly blurred, computer systems generate data which human beings treat as knowledge. As Burke has recently put it, "Logological eschatology, my style, would feature the destiny of Technology itself" (*ATH*, p. 424).

### Changing Conceptions of Technology

While some of Burke's conceptions of technology have been persistently advocated for almost half a century, Burke has associated technology with new frames of reasoning. Three of these relatively new redefinitions of technology warrant attention.

First, for Burke, technology has received greater symbolic emphasis in his writings. In 1937, the essential features of an act could, for Burke, be described from any number of perspectives, for an "open-ended" system dominates Burke's thinking. Hence, the "essence" of an "act" may be featured euphemistically in terms of God's will, from the "militaristic" perspective of a debunker, in terms of Bentham's "line" of "self-interest," or comedically (*ATH*, p. 252). But, in 1945, a shift occurs, from a truly open-ended to a narrower set of focal points. Technology continues to be explicitly mentioned and cast as an extension of agency and later agent, but the perspective generated by technology is reduced to one of five to seven major philosophies. Forty years later, the diversity of five to seven major philosophies is reduced again, down to two. In the early 1980s, technology is cast by Burke as

one of the two major perspectives dominating society. Indeed, the technological perspective is cast by Burke as one of "two opposite approaches" (*ATH*, p. 380). Hence, from a symbolic viewpoint, Burke's perception of reality has shifted from one of multiple perspectives, to a systematic accounting of five to seven predominant views, and ultimately down to his most recent conception of reality, a reality dominated by only two forces in opposition—the individual is pitted against technology. This overall symbolic progression and reduction attributes increasing importance to technology.

Second, technology is no longer viewed as an instrument potentially capable of achieving idealistic and humanistic ends. In 1945, Burke viewed technology as an instrument which could be used for either good or evil. As Burke conceived technology then, it was an "objective 'power'" which "we might properly expect" will "manifest" a certain "ambivalence" which "should be capable of acting favorably or unfavorably" (*Grammar*, p. 116). Forty years later, Burke cast technology as inherently pitted against "nature," for technology had become, for Burke, a "departure from a primitive state of nature" (*ATH*, p. 378) and pointedly "Counter-Nature" (*ATH*, p. 379). Indeed, by January 1983, technology had become, for Burke, one of "two perspectives," in which the "instrumental" perspective created by technology is cast in opposition, or "quite at odds," to a "personalistic" democratic, or idealistic perspective (*ATH*, p. 379). Hence, while once he perceived his 1935 volume, *Permanence and Change*, as dealing with variations of orientation, fifty years later, in January of 1983, Burke argued that *Permanence and Change* should be recast and reconceived "as a confrontation of permanent technologic change" (*ATH*, p. 377).

Third, for Burke, technology now requires that a critic maintain a sustained skepticism. Burke's explicit concern for the development of idealistic and humanistic goals and programs has been displaced by a sustained skepticism, a need to debunk and to deconstruct societal constructions featuring technology. Indeed, a desperate note is evident in Burke's writings, as Burke admits that even his own system of analysis may not be adequate for countering the forces of technology. Burke is pointedly clear: "But, the Logological view of this situation is that no political order has yet been envisaged, even on paper, adequate to control the instrumental powers of Technology" (*ATH*, p. 424).

### Conclusion

A new role for the rhetorical critic is embedded in Burke's conception of technology. At one time, in 1937, the "good life" and the implicit ethic for the rhetorical critic required that methods be devised for

"getting along with people" (ATH, p. 256). This ethic required that criticism provide for a "maximum of physicality," a "maximum opportunity for expression of the sentiments," and a "patient study of the 'Documents of Error'" (ATH, pp. 256-258). Hence, for Burke, criticism was decidedly directed toward idealistic and humanistic ends: "Above all," Burke tells us in 1937, "criticism should seek to clarify the ways in which any structure develops self-defeating emphases" (ATH, p. 259).

Today, for Burke, the rhetorical critic is no longer forging an idealistic and humanistic society. Rather the rhetorical critic must adopt a decisively skeptical role in which the symbolic constructions created by technology become the target of the rhetorical critic. Indeed, Burke's current posture may not be unlike the deconstructive mood and tone of Jacques Derrida. Others have also recognized such a shift. Cary Nelson has recently argued: "the Burke I read and privilege is a different Burke from the Burke at least some of those working in communication, rhetoric, and English have read and argued for over the years" (1989, p. 157). Noting that he would "offer a counter-Burke to the humanistic Burke" of many in rhetoric, Nelson maintains that Burke now seeks to "expose" the "structured, predictive, mechanistic, and determining efficacy" of "rhetorical structures" (1989, p. 159).

Given this new role assigned to the rhetorical critic, let me draw five major conclusions regarding the future of technology from a dramatic perspective.

First, technology is emerging as the foremost symbolic construction. Technology is functioning as an ever-increasing symbolic determinant, affecting all forms of human communication, including our psychological orientation and interpersonal relationships as well as our social, legal, economic and political systems (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, pp. 213-234). In the foreseeable future, if Burke's writings are to be our guide, technology and science will be the dramatic critic's central object of study.

Second, the future we can extract from Burke's writings suggests that technology will increasingly function as the central counter-agent of the personal, democratic, and idealistic.

Third, the focus of the critic's future effort must initially be to dismantle the power of technology.

Fourth, the desire to construct the "good life," or the fashioning of idealistic and humanistic programs, must be postponed until dramatists have determined how a symbolic perspective can be used to counter technology, assuming—of course—that dramatic systems are capable of challenging the symbolic power conveyed by technology. No longer is the issue which political doctrine and social program to select. The symbolic power of technology as a perfected social

engineering system has already eclipsed other alternatives.

And, fifth and finally, the future stance of the dramatic critic will mimic postmodern philosophy and the techniques of the deconstructive critic. At a minimum, the future dramatist will explore—in a serious, prolonged, and critical fashion—the relationships between dramatism and postmodernism. More likely, if the transformations revealed in Burke's writings are any indication, technology will blur the distinction between the dramatic and deconstructive critics.

Ultimately, the key question will become: "Can technology be dramatized, given the theories, concepts, and techniques available within a dramatic approach?" Technology, in Burke's own words, challenges the essential and fundamental power of dramatism itself.

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## Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century

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Bernard L. Brock

Throughout Kenneth Burke's over seventy years of critical and theoretical writing, he has commented on almost all important contemporary writers and issues from Karl Marx to Marshall McLuhan and from the constitution to the environment. So it's not surprising to find that his writings provide insight into what we can expect from the 21st Century.

In *Counter-Statement*, *Permanence and Change*, and *Attitudes Toward History*, Kenneth Burke, like Karl Marx, offers both a general critical method that can be applied to literature and human activity and an evolutionary view of society moving through distinct stages. However, Burke's view emphasizes symbols, values, action, and ethics in contrast to Marx's economic determinism. In his later books Burke develops more specialized concepts and methods like substance, identification, the pentad, and dramatic order. Most scholars have focused on these more specialized concepts and methods. But I'd like to explain Burke's general critical method and his theory about the stages or orientations of society so that I can consider the implications of this theory for the 21st Century.

### Inductive-Deductive Method

As a critic, Kenneth Burke utilizes and describes an inductive-deductive method in which people who innately possess a critical impulse establish an orientation for interpreting and responding to the world around them (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 6). Inductively, humans continually take in information from their world and in the process establish a framework for thinking about it. Over a period of time this frame solidifies into an orientation. Deductively this orientation is always being checked for its fit with and ability to account for the world. When it no longer fits, it's modified, and a new orientation is formed.

In *Counter-Statement* Burke doesn't directly explain this method, but it definitely lies beneath his discussion of the poetic process (45-62) and the nature of form (124-37). His approach toward symbol—"the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience" (152)—takes an interpretative perspective, "It can, by its function as name and definition, give simplicity and order to an otherwise unclarified complexity" (154) and "Symbol appeals either as the orienting of a situation, or as the adjustment to a situation or both" (156). Burke then relates the symbol to human experience, "We think in terms of universals, but we feel particulars" (47) and "themes are merely the conversion of one's mood into a relationship, and the consistent observance of a

relationship is the conscious or unconscious observance of a technical form" (56). Throughout this discussion Burke reveals his critical thought process and method.

In *Permanence and Change*, Burke unifies these related ideas into a definite critical method. He opens chapter one on orientation with the first principle of his method, "We may begin by noting the fact that all living organisms interpret many of the signs about them" (5). Then after developing orientation and related concepts Burke summarizes his general method,

- (a) There is a sense of relationships, developed by the contingencies of experiences;
- (b) this sense of relationships is our orientation;
- (c) our orientation largely involves matters of expectancy, and affects our choice of means with reference to the future;
- (d) in the human sphere, the subject of expectancy and the judgment as to what is proper in conduct is largely bound up with the subject of motives, for if we know *why* people do as they do, we feel that we know *what* to expect of them and of ourselves, and we shape our decisions and judgments and policies to take such expectancies into account. (18)

In *Attitudes Toward History* Burke elaborates on his method and then shifts context as he applies it to society rather than the individual. His opening focuses on the human dilemma in responding to the world, "To 'accept the universe' or to 'protest against it'" (3).

Immediately, he enlarges upon this dilemma,

- Be he poet or scientist, one defines the "human situation" as amply as his imagination permits; then, with this ample definition in mind, he singles out certain functions or relationships as either friendly or unfriendly. If they are deemed friendly, he prepares himself to welcome them; if they are deemed unfriendly, he weighs objective resistance against his own resources, to decide how far he can effectively go in combating them. (3-4)

Next, Burke completes his method by tying this process to orientation, "By 'frames of acceptance' we mean the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it" (5). Burke now has a general inductive-deductive method that not only describes how people respond with language to their world but can be used by a critic to explain human symbolic activity.

### Symbolic Evolution of Society

Burke utilizes this general method and establishes a series of symbolic orientations—magic, religion, and science—which he then uses to trace the evolution of individual and societal thought. In *Permanence and Change*, after discussing "occupational psychosis," which is that patterns of thought and culture are established from methods of food-getting or production

(38), Burke asserts "there seem to have been three fairly distinct rationalizations in human history: magic, religion, and science" (44). Burke explains that "magic was the rationalization by which man got control over the primitive forces of nature." He points out that modern thinkers focus on "the errors in the magical theories of causation," but he also indicates "magic did assist tremendously in schematizing man's ways of turning natural forces to his benefit" (44). Next, he states "religion seems to be the rationalization which attempts to control the specifically *human* forces." Burke indicates that "as civilization became more complex, a highly delicate code of human cooperation was needed" and that religious thought fulfilled that societal need (44). Finally, Burke explains that science is "the attempt to control for our purposes the forces of technology, or machinery." He observes that "its genius has been called experimentalism, the laboratory method, creative skepticism, organized doubt" and that "it has an occupational morality all its own" (44). This science-technology rationalization is the one that Burke develops in greatest detail because it is out of this orientation that a new rationalization will evolve. Burke traces the science-technology perspective back to Copernican astronomy, Galilean physics, and the Baconian inductive method and indicates that it reached maturity with the Utilitarian philosophers like Darwin, Marx, and Bentham when the doctrine of use "formally established the *secular* as the point of reference by which to consider questions of valuation" (45).

In discussing the evolution of these three orientations, Burke indicates that each rationalization developed a weakness *from within* its own pattern of thought that grew until it became a *philosophic corrective* resulting in the transcendence of the original pattern of thought into a new rationalization. Magic that stressed the control of natural forces became brutally indifferent to the suffering of victims and required *human cooperation* as a corrective. Gradually it was transformed into the new orientation, religion. In a similar manner, religion's stress on the control of human forces and its "inconsistency in the management of nature" emphasized the "arbitrary factor" and gave rise to the corrective of "philosophy proper" and science as a rationalization (61-62).

Burke then turns his attention to "*what is lacking* in the scientific ideal" and the appropriate corrective philosophy (62). He acknowledges that a psychotic pressure favors science-technology because there is "a definite social need for the completion of the scientific rationalization" (63-64), but he also points to the reduction of people to machines and "the final culmination of man's rationalizing enterprise" as the eventual basis for a corrective because science "may be neglect-

ing an important aspect of human response" (62).

Burke then identifies characteristics of the next orientation,

A corrective rationalization must certainly move in the direction of the anthropomorphic or humanistic or poetic, since this is the aspect of culture which the scientific criteria, with their emphasis upon dominance rather than upon inducement, have tended to eliminate or minimize. (65)

In defending this perspective, he emphasizes that "the devices of poetry are close to the spontaneous genius of man" before he concludes that "the corrective of the scientific rationalization would seem necessarily to be a *rationale of art...an art of living*" (66).

Burke suggests that poetic humanism is the next orientation, so the challenge of the 21st century is the implementation of this perspective. The rest of this paper will identify signs of the breakdown of the scientific-technological orientation and the emergence of the poetic humanistic rationalization. In the "Prologue" to the second edition of *Permanence and Change* Burke presents a reservation to his stages of magic, religion, and science. To avoid being too "historist" by viewing them as "three distinctly successive stages, Burke says he viewed them "as aspects of motivation 'forever born anew'..." (lix) making them more like perspectives. This reservation is compatible with the argument of this paper which is that a single stage will be dominant for a period, but that internal weakness will force another stage or perspective to transcend it and gain domination.

It's definitely possible for previous stages to remain as perspectives in more subdued form within the context of another stage.

### Breakdown of Scientific Rationalization

Even though in the 1930s the scientific-technological orientation was not fully developed in *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke identified many of its characteristics. He did this by transcending individual thought, "Our emphasis is not upon individual strategy, but upon the productive and mental patterns developed by aggregates" (111). He then discussed the orientation in his curve of history under Naive Capitalism and Emergent Collectivism. Burke felt capitalism embodied the scientific-technological rationalization with its emphasis upon efficiency (146) and technology, and collectivism was a corrective as it enters "by the back door" through the "socialization of losses" (160). Yet, his strongest arguments for the breakdown of the scientific-technological orientation are presented in his Dictionary of Pivotal Terms.

One of the weaknesses of the orientation that

Burke develops is that capitalism creates a group of people, mercantilists (149), whose interests are pursued and who received benefits of profits at the expense of the country. Burke compares these people to Samson "who pulled down a temple around himself," Burke argues "technology, as driven by the necessities of capitalism," results in a "dubious kind of 'profit' that exports two-dollar wheat and gets in exchange a Dust Bowl" (150). He further argues that the "economy of this planet cannot be guided by an efficient rationale of exploitation alone" (profit) and that "the laws of ecology have begun avenging themselves against restricted human concepts of profit by countering deforestation and deep plowing with floods, droughts, dust storms, and aggravated soil erosion" (150). These examples foreshadow the corporate takeovers and the environmental and ozone damage of today. Burke sees the primary motive of "self-interest" as potentially destructive.

Another problem related to the scientific orientation is the secularizing and impersonalizing of the economic system as the market replaced "natural law" for determining value and distribution of wealth (154-55). Burke explains how impersonal relationships and the development of financial corporations and holding companies enabled people to alternate between being "free" people and non-persons in a "heads I win, tails you lose" strategy and accumulate large fortunes causing radical inequalities of distribution (155-57).

Burke then borrows from Marx and Hegel the term "alienation," "that state of affairs wherein a man no longer 'owns' his world because, for one reason or another, it seems basically *unreasonable*" and argues that a person is alienated, "if he is deprived of the 'goods' which his society has decreed as 'normal'" (216). Today, alienation and powerlessness permeate society as people feel they have little control over their lives. Burke then explains how "people try to combat alienation by *immediacy*, such as the senses alone provide" (218). If Burke is right, today's two-tiered economy and pre-occupation with sensuality in the form of drinking, drugs, sexuality, and crime, suggest a great deal of alienation as a sign of a breakdown of the scientific-technological rationalization.

However, Burke's analysis of the orientation is dated. More recently, Jacques Ellul in *The Technological System* describes technology as impersonalizing and alienating when he states, "Man can no longer be a subject" because within the technological system "man must always be treated as an object" (12) and "the technological system causes disorders, irrationalities, incoherences in the society and challenges the sociological environment" (18). Ellul extends Burke's initial position as he argues that "the capitalist system has been swallowed by the technological system" (12), and

he quotes F. Hetman's analysis that a technocracy becomes a rigid class system, "at the bottom, the 'unqualified afunctionals'; then the 'functional operators'; and at the top, the 'rulers-researchers-conceivers'; with perhaps a fourth sector for the activities of operational research" (13). Ellul ultimately indicates that technology controls life, "All areas of life are becoming more and more technicized. In proportion, actions are becoming more complex, more intervolved (because of extreme specialization), and more efficient" (57). Ellul describes a world in which specialization and interdependence have transferred control of one's life to others. Today, people are at the mercy of all types of specialists for the solution to their problems—plumbers, electricians, medical doctors, psychiatrists, etc. This lack of control, according to Burke, causes alienation and escape through sensuality.

An example will illustrate both the dominance of the technological orientation and its influence over the political and social aspects of society. A small town on Eastern Long Island wanted to rebuild an aging bridge over a fresh marshland that flows into a large pond. Because the estimated repair was more than half the town's budget, the mayor sought help from the federal government. However, the federal engineers felt the repair would not be cost efficient. Only by widening the bridge and the access road to four lanes, which would require straightening the curved road and eliminating the adjacent parkland, would the government consider helping with the project. Of course, the enlarged project would not only disturb the ecologically fragile marshland but would escalate the cost of the project considerably. Here, a modest project triggered an out-of-scale solution that would change the nature of the community. Citizens against the project were accused of opposing progress, people supporting it argued a little change is a small price to pay for the government's aid with a new bridge. This is a too frequent example of how large scale technology can control the economic, political, and social decision making by being structured into the decision making process (Gratz 15-16).

### Poetic Humanism

Burke and Ellul's analysis suggests that the solution to a number of social problems like crime and drugs lies not in better law enforcement and social services, even though these are essential, but in a shift to a new orientation—Poetic Humanism, and I suggest that this is the challenge of the 21st century. Now, I'll describe Poetic Humanism and examine the signs that it is already being accepted—that significant groups look to the values of poetic humanism as the answer to society's problems.

In *Permanence and Chance* Burke not only discusses the evolution of the orientations of magic, religion, and science, but he also projects the nature of the new poetic, humanistic orientation. Initially, he identified it with "an art of living" (66), but later he enlarges on the "solution,"

*the view of man as "poet," the approach to human motives in terms of action (with poetic or dramatic terminologies being prized as the paradigms of action, a term that leads happily into the realms of both ethical and poetic piety, or into the scientific, too, by reason of the fact that "symbolic" acts are grounded in "necessitous" ones). (168)*

Then, Burke compares poetic and scientific language, "it tends to replace the strictly scientific hopes for a neutral vocabulary by a new weighted vocabulary, which would be moral, or poetic" (178). Next, he relates poetry to the need for action, "Action is fundamentally ethical, since it involves preferences. Poetry is ethical. Occupation and preoccupation are ethical" (250). Finally, Burke discusses the appropriate perspective for poetic humanism, "it involves the selection of a purposive or teleological metaphor (the metaphor of human action or poetry) as distinct from a mechanistic metaphor...." Burke adds that a biological metaphor is superior to a mechanistic one because of what the mechanical metaphors leave out (260-61). Burke concludes, "our thesis is a belief that the ultimate metaphor for discussing the universe and man's relations to it must be the poetic or dramatic metaphor" (263) because it has the advantage of treating humans as "participants in action" rather than stressing competitive aspects (266).

### Accepting Poetic Humanism

This paper argues that implementing Burke's poetic humanism is the challenge of the 21st century, so it's important to look for signs that the process has already begun. Two groups that are already accepting the values of poetic humanism—feminists and self-help medicare—will be discussed.

The scientific-technological rationalization has reflected what women call a rational, dualistic, hierarchical male oriented culture. In consciousness raising sessions women, who traditionally were subordinated to men and were restricted to child rearing in the home, followed their feelings in a "critique of culture" and engaged in a "new naming" of "self and world" (Christ and Plaskow 7). Reflecting Burke's humanism, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues, "Woman must be the spokesmen [sic] for a new humanity arising out of the reconciliation of spirit and body" (51). Women see a more holistic society uniting as equals, "woman and

man, nature and culture, body and spirit, Goddess and God" (21) and transcending a hierarchical male culture. This new orientation is envisioned by Charlene Spretnak in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* when she states, "The global feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm" (xxiii).

Feminists also accept Burke's desire for a more poetic language. Nelle Morton testifies to the importance of metaphorical language,

Speaking organically moves near the metaphorical. Metaphor witnesses to unity between persons and cosmos. Organic reflects unity between body and mind. Organic speech, then, would mean speech before body and the spirit were split. (Christ and Plaskow 161)

Then Bella Debrida ties poetic language directly to women,

Poetry belongs to the mothers. Like an untamed sister, she is a virgin, unmarried. Speech originates in the realm of intuition. Thought is conceived of as light; once formulated, it becomes spoken word, the poem. The same word may mean light or song. In the beginning was Light and Song, and She was powerful. (Spretnak 139)

She then sees poetry as central to a new orientation, "By reclaiming for ourselves the art of poetry, the creation of song, we can spin off from mythological insights and create our own guiding mythological visions for a new age" (148). Feminism definitely suggests a movement toward Burke's poetic humanism orientation.

Another area of society that points toward acceptance of poetic humanism is the medical care self-help movement. This field is especially interesting since medicine is dominated by the scientific-technological orientation. Machines "that generated results in objective formats such as graphs and numbers" were made the foundation of medical care to avoid distortion from subjective human opinion and personal bias (Reiser and Anbar 18). In *Humanizing Health Care* professor Geiger argues a "tyranny of technology" has been established with "the tendency to substitute machines for people" (Howard and Strauss 236). In fact, he goes on to indicate that many people are in hospitals that do not belong there, "that many people can not be cured by modern technology," and "that technology itself can create illness." He then concludes, "our faith in technological medicine actually prevents us from focusing on those other aspects of health that might do far more than medicine to effect our well-being" (296).

Out of this domination by the science-technology orientation and "a 200-year history of nonmeaningful discussion between doctor and patient" (Madara 33)

self-help as a social movement in medical care has been born (Back and Taylor 296). Interestingly, the feminist movement contributed to self-help as women "began to regard themselves with confidence and trust and begin to feel their own power" (Miller 26).

An examination of the self-help literature reveals a strong concern for "humanism" and "holism" which Burke predicted would be reflected in the corrective to science-technology. In the article "Spiritual and Emotional Determinants of Health" Janet Michello states health and illness need to be placed "in the context of a broader view of the quality of life to include the whole person" (64), and she concludes, "an association exists between emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, and satisfaction with health" (68). Humanism is central to self-help groups because the individual is the focus of these groups, self-help groups are composed of individuals with a common problem or set of life experiences, and a common goal of providing help and support to other members to cope with these difficulties (Hinrichsen et. al. 66).

Further, self-help groups transfer democratic values to the level of the individual "releasing enormous energy and reframing self-images and self esteem" (Riessman and Gartner 24). Re-newed concern for the individual is "a constructive attempt to re-personalize services by assuming greater control of both means and ends" (Pancoast et. al. 15). Self-help groups are attempts to counter the alienation and de-personalization that characterize technological medical care.

Burke also suggests that concern for poetic language is an appropriate corrective. Self-help literature doesn't directly discuss a poetic metaphor, but it does stress the importance of "empowerment" language in contrast to traditional medical terminology (Rappaport 15). In an editorial "The Language of the 80s," Frank Riessman indicates that the most prominent words are "empowerment, net working, self-help, advocacy, peer, populism" (Riessman 2). This language supports a shift from science and technology to "poetic humanism." Further, Gartner and Riessman call for the evaluation of self-help groups because they are "serving as the vanguard of the revitalization of human and spiritual values, possibly representing the "emerging 'church' of the 21st Century" (Gartner and Riessman 163).

Signs of acceptance of poetic humanism are not limited to feminism and the self-help medical care movement. Spokespersons in a variety of fields are moving away from the specialized, hierarchical, and authoritarian scientific-technological orientation and are discussing more pluralistic and human empowering approaches to life. One such spokesman is Paul Ekins editor of *The Living Economy: A New Eco-*

*nomics in the Making*. He includes an article by Manfred Max-Neef who argues "Three decades in which a technocratic, mechanistic and top-down development paradigm has been predominant has produced a kind of global crisis that has no precedent in history" (45). He goes on to indicate that "bypassing of centralized power and authority, bureaucratic structures, mechanistic models and other technocratic instrumentalities are corner-stones of an alternative development paradigm" (46).

Supporting this decentralized more personalized way of life are Harry C. Boyle and Frank Riessman in *The New Populism: The Politics of Empowerment*. They observe that "the central irony of the twentieth century is grounded in the discovery that though industrial productivity has increased, the corresponding liberation of human energy that was always presumed to be an inherent by-product of technological innovation has proven to be maddeningly elusive. In terms of their ability to participate effectively in politics, people increasingly feel trapped, not liberated" (20). Throughout the book they discuss a New Populism that resembles Burke's poetic humanism, and they conclude with a vision of the future, "A democratic and egalitarian society will rest, necessarily, upon a rich pluralism of free, nongovernmental association. Through such free spaces we can take initiative on our own terms. And we can reflect, together, what it means to be 'a people,' and many different peoples, dedicated to liberty and justice for all" (314).

These groups and spokespersons see rejecting a scientific-technological orientation and the implementation of a new more humanistic orientation as the challenge we face. Of course, entrenched interests are not going to change perspectives easily, so an ideological confrontation more severe than that of the 1960s is inevitably ahead of us. But just as religion transcended magic, and science replaced religion, the weakness of the current orientation will bring a shift toward Poetic Humanism.

Burke's poetic humanism stresses language, values, and action. So scholars of rhetoric and communication should not only play a central role in implementing this shift, but the poetic humanistic orientation should have a significant impact upon the nature of the future theory and methods within the field.

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## Vision of Critique: Kenneth Burke and Civic Discourse in the 21st Century

James F. Klumpp

For those who study oral discourse in the public political arena, these are not heady times. Politicians look for more control than oral speaking opportunity can give them, and their pollsters are called before their speechwriters. Eloquence, Kathleen Jamieson tells us, is a matter of sound bites in modern political discourse, and the media consultant may even be called before the pollster. These are not the times of fascination with political discourse we experienced just a few years ago.

But then, the problems don't stop there. These are not heady times for those who fashion themselves "democrats" (with a little "D"). Ironically, at the same time democracy is breaking out all over Eastern Europe, cracks are appearing in the institutional democracy in this country. Access to the elected legislators is restricted by security and gained by financial contributions to their constant campaigns. Media campaigns make the raising of money the primary occupation of campaigning political leaders. President Bush delivers a speech on drugs which reaches neither the users nor the large illegal business which supplies the nation's large demand. Of course, the speech was not written to reach them anyway. The situation has grown so bad that we are approaching the point where only about one-half of those eligible to vote bother to participate in this narrow ritual that has become the essence of citizen involvement in the institutions. Even *Time* magazine has pictured a sobbing George Washington asking "Is Government Dead?" Perhaps the most telling sign of the present crisis is that when *Time's* account is read, what they mean by the crisis of leadership is the unwillingness of the institution to spend money.

The political system founded by Jefferson and Madison was a system founded on the power of discourse to form bonds of government among those governed. Jefferson envisioned bonds of community manifesting themselves in political will. Madison designed a government which gave public opportunities for such discourse but limited the power those public opportunities could accumulate. De Tocqueville described a democracy in which citizens were involved in their governance. A political life was much more than the vote, as citizens wove a discourse of civic life. The myth of this civic life continues even as the reality of our politics moves further from it. Because he personifies our myth we celebrate Lech Welesa, a common electrician who created a community, as a symbol of our ideal democracy.

As the 21st century approaches, reminders that we are in a time of transition are all about. Perhaps it is late capitalism as some say, or perhaps we are moving to a post-modern era as others argue. Maybe it is the end of history. Such changes are hardly identifiable when we are in the midst of them. Whatever its scope or its character, the crisis in institutional government demands a renewal of the basis of civic life as we move into the 21st century. A viable democracy must build a civic life that empowers participation through a widely available discourse. The major task of those of us interested in rhetoric in public discourse is not to understand how the institutions work or to describe the rhetorical strategies which characterize those institutions, but to help define the changes that will build a meaningful civic life.

My argument addresses the place of discourse in constructing a civic life. I will mine the works of Kenneth Burke to help with my task. I will argue that Burke's vision of critique in public life provides a framework for rhetorical construction of civic life.

### Past and Future

The alienation of the institutions of government from civic life is rooted in the decade of the 1930s. This was a decade of crisis in American life. The displacements of the economy generated a wide spectrum of potential solutions. The decade was ultimately captured by Franklin Delano Roosevelt whose election rested on a rhetoric which privileged the institutions of government as the response to the tensions of the decade, and whose ascendancy defined the role of the governmental and the private domains for the next six decades. A substantial portion of the American literati of the decade identified with socialist or even communist solutions to the problems of the time. Their work addressed the displacements, the causes, and the promise of radical solutions.

Kenneth Burke was both a part of, and a rebel against, this literati. His sympathies were communist, but he was a free spirited fellow traveler. His involvement is best symbolized by his participation in the 1935 American Writer's Congress. He reports working with painful diligence on his presentation—entitled "Revolutionary Symbolism in America." In it he pleaded with his fellow radicals to abandon the abstraction of their radical ideology by turning toward a rhetorical connection with the people of the nation. Burke reports his rough treatment of that day. As he left, he recalled, two attendees sitting in the back whispered "But, he looked like such a nice young man." Burke was so crushed by the failure that he dreamed of the event for days; dreams of excrement coming from his mouth as he spoke.

That same year—1935—Burke published *Permanence and Change*. The book is his own manifesto for the path of social change. It is a rhetorical path. The book opens with the section title "All Living Things Are Critics." Burke's focus is not the discourse with which political leaders or literati seek to shape events; his is a study of how all humans transform the power of language to orient themselves to the situations which mark their lives. Years before Michel Foucault, Burke identifies structures of discourse toward which lives must be accepting or must choose to resist. Human choice selects an attitude and articulates it to others in the language which the others recognize as the expression of the choice. Thus, the use of discourse in the act of criticism is democratized. Those with platforms which make their voices louder—political and literary leaders—form their rhetorical action within the context of the discourse of their civic life.

*Permanence and Change* concludes with a chapter entitled "The Poetry of Action." There Burke asserts the scope of his vision and discusses the ethical quality of discourse which marks it as "critique":

All our foregoing discussion should serve to pull a great many words together by showing their engagement in one another. Action is fundamentally ethical, since it involves preferences. Poetry is ethical. Occupation and Preoccupation are ethical. The ethical shapes our selection of means. It shapes our structures of orientation, while these in turn shape the perceptions of the individuals born within the orientation. Hence it radically affects our cooperative processes. The ethical is thus with the communicative (particularly when we consider communication in its broadcast sense, not merely as the purveying of information, but also as the sharing of sympathies and purposes, the doing of acts in common, as with the leveling process of communicating vessels)... A man can extract from a poem by reading that he is captain of his soul; he can reinforce this same statement mimetically by walking down the street as vigorously as though he were the captain of his soul; or he can translate the mood into a more complex set of relationships by greeting an acquaintance as one captain-of-his-soul to another; and the two of them can embark upon such a project as two captains-of-their-souls might embark upon. (pp. 250-55)

Thus the choices of rhetoric become choices of perspective with illocutionary power as well as locutionary and perlocutionary power. The ethical in this sense is not merely a judgement on actual or potential behavior. Rather, the ethical is a dimension of choice pronounced in the rhetorical act and with a quality of appeal to others to recognize the validity of the judgement.

If orientation is a structure of discourse, particular instantiations of discourse invoke or resist the power of the orientation. Thus, every human becomes a critic as she generates discourse which critiques language's power over lives, and the use of language by others to adapt to their situations. Such critique has an ethical dimension as well as a dimension of appeal, and since it is about situations it asserts understandings of material and social reality.

As in all of Burke's writings, *Permanence and Change* is filled with references to authors of fiction and philosophy. Thomas Jefferson never appears. Yet, Jefferson's letters often express the Aristotelian obligations of people to make a moral commitment of others through a vivid but accepting critique which transforms the situations of life into a definition of the common good. Jefferson was no relativist. One accepted his fellow citizens but through critique of their actions wove their common situation into a conception of civic life (Bellah, p. 116).

Burke's message in *Permanence and Change* is that a commitment to a civic life requires a fabric of discourse in which all participate to develop common understandings of the situations which mark their lives. This spirit of critique, at the same time ideal and realistic, points to a way to define civic life beyond the pale of institutions.

### The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"

Kenneth Burke, however, is a critic as well as a theorist. In Burke's criticism we will find better indications of his vision of critique than we will find in his theory. Toward that task I want to look at two of Burke's critical essays. They represent two steps away from the institutional toward critique of the power of discourse.

Burke wrote "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" in the late 1930s. My students who read the essay today often say how unsurprising the essay is in its description of the inevitability of the holocaust and the near maniacal control which Hitler wielded over the German people. Then they realize that the essay dates from before World War II. The full depravity of Hitler's power over discourse is not generally known. Public heroes such as Charles Lindbergh are still urging sympathy for the German cause and Franklin Roosevelt is mobilizing slowly and deliberately to avoid activating the resistance. Suddenly the sheer "accuracy" of the essay becomes an eerie voice of the prophet. Understanding the voice of the prophet will reveal some characteristics of Burke's vision of critique.

Like so much of Burke's work, the strength of this discourse emerges from its dialectical quality. Seemingly contradictory stances are driven together through

an essay on discourse in civic life. Dialectic transforms Burke the language expert into Burke the citizen. Even as the essay is the work of an insightful critic of discourse with an expertise in the social power of language, it is written in the language of all students of discourse, academic and otherwise.

Similarly, dialectic transforms an essay on Hitler and his book into an essay on the German nation. The essay is about how a leader "swung a great people into his wake" (p. 164). Dialectic brings through Burke's cold calculating description of Hitler's rhetorical choices the quality of ethical condemnation. Burke overtly declares his distaste. "Hitler's 'Battle' is exasperating, even nauseating" (p. 164).

Finally, Burke's critique leaves the cultural and geographic distance between Hitler and Burke's audience bridged. The distance of one moment—the Aryan experience—becomes the shared experience of another moment. Throughout the essay are the warnings that separate Hitler's rhetorical strategies from the common good and weld the distant threat to the fabric of Burke's community. "Hitler's way of treating the parliamentary babel, I am sorry to say, was at one important point not much different from that of the customary editorial in our own newspapers" (p. 172).

Burke moves back and forth from careful use of his scalpel on Hitler's discourse to sharing the threat to his own community to general principles that define the threat. As he critiques he not only uses discourse, he constructs a discourse to empower the critique by others. "His unification device, we may summarize, had the following important features: (1) Inborn dignity... (2) Projection device... (3) Symbolic rebirth... (4) Commercial use" (pp. 173-74). The language that emerges achieves the character of abstract principle that turns simple description into categories to search other discourse.

Burke's critique is made remarkable by its ability to infiltrate contradiction into a coherent image of material and social reality. For example:

(4) Commercial use. Hitler obviously here had something to sell—and it was but a question of time until he sold it (i.e., got financial backers for his movement). For it provided a *noneconomic interpretation of economic ills*. As such, it served with maximum efficiency in deflecting the attention from the economic factors involved in modern conflict; hence by attacking "Jew finance" instead of *finance*, it could stimulate an enthusiastic movement that left "Aryan" finance in control. (pp. 174-75)

The comment is written with Hitler's choice of rhetorical strategy in the foreground. But just behind that strategy is the Jewish/Aryan division of German society—perhaps alien to his audience—and the crass

need of a political party for financing—certainly not alien to the reader. The clear thrust of the action is toward the familiar human affliction of accumulation of power for social control and the foreboding, but distant, targeting of the Jews. Holding all of it together are metaphors which tie rhetorical strategies to economic motives—he “sells” his program with “efficiency.” Critique thus joins description with warning, materiality with discourse, ethics with factuality.

“The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle’” is a Burkean critique addressed to his fellow citizens and warning them of the strategies of despicable rhetorical deception. Despite this it still has a rarefied quality to it. The ethical stance of Burke, the critic, in this criticism is that of the expert with a measure of abstract terminology that separates the critique from normal discourse. Similarly, the target of this critique, Adolph Hitler, is separated from the community both by being a national leader and being part of a foreign power. A fully empowering civic life cannot be built from this distance. For that reason we turn to a second Burkean essay, “Towards Helhaven.”

### **Towards Helhaven**

Helhaven is Burke’s fictional bubble on the moon where all technology, along with all right thinking humans, have gone to live. This essay, published in 1971, is a satiric treatment of the language of technology. Burke has been interested in what he called “The Technological Psychosis” since the 1930s. He has been preoccupied with it since the 1960s. Burke does to technology what he has done to other concepts such as property and war. He transforms their material reality into a way of talking—a system of discourse—through which the concepts are performed. Once the focus is on discourse Burke is immersed in the community itself and these material systems become subjects for critique.

“Towards Helhaven” is filled with comic irony. Take the following passage:

Among the most deeply-probing facilities on the Culture-Bubble will be the above mentioned Super-Lookout, a kind of Chapel, bare except for some small but powerful telescopes of a special competence. And on the wall, in ecclesiastical lettering, there will be these fundamental words from the *Summa Theological*: “And the blessed in heaven shall look upon the sufferings of the damned, that they may love their blessedness the more.” (p. 22)

The image is of those in Helhaven looking back to earth to those still mired in the mines and pollution-clogged technology that has produced the material goods which make up their bubble. This is an incredibly rich

scenario. Here merge religion and technology. A scene of religious ritual has been created to satisfy the ritualistic need to appreciate the social superiority of their technological society. Here merge the language of history and the discourse needs of exploitation. Aquinas meets “Mad” Avenue. The primordial scientific instrument—the telescope—is the device that permits the celebration of the superiority of Helhaven even as that celebration is based on observation of the hell created by Helhaven. Yet nothing in this account is fanciful except its scene. We look now—at least metamorphically—at Detroit or Wheeling or Cleveland and plan how we will technologize our way out of their pollution.

Thus, the comic irony brings us into touch with our doublespeak that supports technology. Indeed, “Helhaven” is the dialectic merger of heaven and hell which is Burke’s point. This essay, as all the Helhaven essays ends with:

Let there be no turning back of the clock. Or no turning inward. Our Vice-President has rightly cautioned: *No negativism*. We want  
**AFFIRMATION—TOWARDS HELHAVEN.**

**ONWARD, UPWARD, AND UP!** (p.25)

This essay is another level of critique. Here the discourse is not that of a remote Hitler. This language is ours and that of others all around us. Indeed, it is not the language of historical events; it is the language with which we live our lives. It is planning, progress, development; it is the language which we use to place ourselves acceptingly into the warm bubble of technology. The fiction of Helhaven is fiction only in its coherence. The oxymorons of controlled environment, artificially constructed nature; the ironic concept of comfort build on the exploitation of others; these are already a part of our landscape. They exist warmly wrapped in, and continually recreated with, the discourse which articulates our acceptance. Ironic critique places us between the material fact and our unknowing support that challenges us to choose.

### **Conclusion**

If we are to build a civic life in the 21st century Kenneth Burke will not serve as our full guide. There are too many questions that Burke does not answer for us. For example, his vision of critique equips us much more to encounter the material and our discursive support for it than it does to encounter the social facts of racism, sexism, and other isms that drive wedges into civic life. I also think that Burke’s insight from “Revolutionary Symbolism in America”—that critique must be grounded in a historical understanding of discursive form—is too little evident in most of Burke’s criticism.

But the vision of critique that Burke formulated in the 1930s, when the institutions of government that today are beginning to fail us were formed, is a solid starting point for the task at hand. His work that has stood the test of six decades will carry us kicking and screaming with critique into the 21st century.

James F. Klumpp (University of Maryland-College Park) presented an earlier version of this essay at the Speech Communication Association Convention in San Francisco, CA, November 1989. Cite with only proper documentation.

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## Kenneth Burke On Ecology

Jane Blankenship

It seems appropriate to start by recalling two of Kenneth Burke's poems, "He was a Sincere, Etc.," and "My Great-Gramma Brodie." First, "He was a Sincere, Etc.":

He was a sincere but friendly Presbyterian-  
and so

If he was talking to a Presbyterian,  
He was for a Presbyterianism.

If he was talking to a Lutheran,  
He was for Protestantism.

If he was talking to a Catholic,  
He was for Christianity.

If he was talking to a Jew,  
He was for God.

If he was talking to a theosophist,  
He was for religion.

If he was talking to an agnostic,  
He was for scientific caution.

If he was talking to an atheist,  
He was for mankind.

And if he was talking to a socialist,  
communist, labor leader, missiles expert,  
or business man,  
He was for  
PROGRESS. <sup>1</sup>

Now, "My Great-Gramma Brodie":

My Great-Gramma Brodie  
Wouldn't let me say "G"  
'Cause it meant a swear word.

My Great-Gramma Brodie  
Knew about  
Heck, Holy Smokes, and Dam it.  
She helped me clean them up, too.

My Great-Gramma Brodie  
Taught me alot  
About Implications. <sup>2</sup>

In no small way this brief paper is about a term, "progress," and about the *Implications* of that term. More specifically, it focuses on Kenneth Burke, ecologist. I wish that I could claim that this paper reflects the end of a long study; it is, rather, a beginning but by no means a casual undertaking.

To begin let us first recall some of ecologist Burke's "absolute" moments, secondly, point to Burke's sense of place, then examine Burke as "representative anecdote" together with a dictionary of pivotal terms in his most direct ecological writings, and finish with a warning on entelechy, technology, power, mistakes, and the attack on the parliamentary.

We will start with Burke's poetry, not because we intend to approach our topic by looking at the several genres in which Kenneth Burke has written, but because he calls his "lyric" moments his "absolutes." So, why not turn there to glimpse a preview of our subject?

### One's Absolutes—"Lyrical Moments"

In the "Forward to Book of Moments," Burke observes: "Lyrics are 'moments' insofar as they pause to sum up a motive. They are designed to express and evoke a unified attitude towards some situation more or less explicitly implied. In one's moments one is absolute."<sup>3</sup> Among Burke's "moments" are poems about nature, poems "locating" us in nature, and poems locating humans' "counternature" (technology) in nature.

Consider his observations on "California, noble travelogue/Half endless vistas, half unending smog,"<sup>4</sup> or at Yosemite

(The water, falling, stops  
The moveless mountains rise)

(That overhanging chunk, laden with centuries,  
That gouge of the next ice age will bring that  
down.)

Borrowed greatness  
Of feeling puny among heights

All prior to pollution  
Except maybe for Strontium 90 in the snow-water

And it costs several thousand a year  
Together the tin cans scattered along the paths

(Each visitor must leave his *grumus merdae*,  
His signs that King-Kill Kilroy, was here.)<sup>5</sup>

Or perhaps the King-Kills of all Kilroys the Bomb:

### OLD NURSERY JINGLE BROUGHT UP TO DATE

If all the thermo-nuclear warheads  
Were one thermo-nuclear warhead,  
What a great thermo-nuclear warhead that would  
be.

If all the intercontinental ballistic missiles  
Were one intercontinental ballistic missile,  
What a great intercontinental ballistic missile that  
would be.

If all the military men  
Were one military man  
What a great military man he would be.

If all the land-masses  
Were one land-mass  
What a great land-mass that would be.

And if the great military man  
Took the great thermo-nuclear warhead  
And put it into the great intercontinental ballistic  
missile,  
And dropped it on the great land-mass,  
What great PROGRESS that would be.<sup>6</sup>

And another:

### PATTERN FOR A POEM

The drive succeeded  
The quota was filled  
The deal was put over  
He got the job

O let me break down and weep

The greatest nation since the death of Christianity  
Piles a-plenty of bombs and the goods to deliver 'em  
The richest churches  
Rivers polluted with the filth of the world's  
mightiest industries  
And from all quarters of the globe  
The newest facts daily to keep men goaded.

While the dignitaries sit on their dignities  
O let me break down and weep.

(Pattern for a poem:  
Boast of imperial greatness,  
Then end on lamentation)<sup>7</sup>

Other "moments," find Burke asking us: "Do the  
violets, like me, tug at their roots this warm day of late

autumn?"<sup>8</sup> or recalling a "Dawn in Autumn in Vermont"

...in Vermont/The falls splash by weedy factories/  
Run once by water/Then by steam/Then by  
electricity/And now, praise God, often not run at  
all/the Town's dwindle,/And reborn nature/Grows  
rank in sloping cemeteries/Industry dies/That once  
again/The streams may quicken/With the strike of  
decent trout/Life graveyard-lovely/In Greenmount.<sup>9</sup>

Or, confessing to us: "I dig up dandelions/at the height  
of their excesses. (I fight fair. No chemicals. I'm a  
Rachel Carson man.)"<sup>10</sup> Or, confiding to us about his  
mercy killing:

Faithfully  
We had covered the nasturtiums  
Keeping them beyond  
Their season

Until, farewell-minded,  
Thinking of age and ailments,  
And noting their lack of lustre,  
I said:

"They want to die;  
We should let the flowers die."

That night  
With a biting clear full moon  
They lay exposed.

In the morning,  
Still shaded  
While the sun's line  
Crawled towards them from the northwest  
Under a skin of ice  
They were at peace.<sup>11</sup>

Or, rejoicing

The wrens are back!<sup>12</sup>

Their liquid song, pouring across the lawn--  
(Or, if the sunlight pours, the wren's song glitters)  
Up from the porch,  
Into the bedroom, where  
It is the play of light across a pond,  
Sounding as small waves look: new copper coins  
Between the seer and the sun.

Herewith  
Is made a contract binding the brightly waked  
Sleepers and his wren, neither the wren's

Nor his, but differently owned by both.

Behind the giving-forth, wren history;  
Man-history behind the taking-in.

(Mark the city as a place where no  
Wrens sing, as though April were seas of sand,  
With spring not the burial of lilac,  
but heat quaking above stone.)

After magnetic storms  
Had made all men uneasy, but those the most  
That feared the loss of salary or love,

The wrens are back!

But nowhere is one of his "moments" more absolute  
(and more direct) than in a "diaristic fragment"  
written during a cross country trip. This segment is  
written by "a mirror lake in Glacier"

Here, with the memory of so much undoing  
you stand in the sign of Conservation.  
(On a trail, through woods,  
there spread suddenly one of Nature's clearings,  
a pond and meadow, circled by high trees  
behind much higher peaks  
downpointing in the water.  
The mystery maybe  
a reflex counterpart of all the plunder  
that had been flowing  
beneath our wheels)...

Might we not here, my friends,  
confront the makings of a madness,  
an unacknowledged leap  
from *This is mine*  
to *By God, this is ME!...?*<sup>13</sup>

#### **A Sense of Place: Living in "Real" & "Imagined" Communities**

Even casual readers of Burke's work quickly understand that his sense of *place* is profound. "Placement" and "Location" function centrally in Burke's life-work.<sup>14</sup> Burke, the "vagabond scholar," is "rooted" most clearly in Andover, New Jersey. He moved to New Jersey from Pittsburgh with his parents in 1915, well before that state became "routed in traffic, polluted by smoke and toxic waste" and before it was entitled "the Garden State." There, "as ever, future-minded," he later bought a house in Andover, having borrowed \$300 from his father for a down payment for the mortgage, he bought a two room house, and "cleared away the horrendous weed-infested litter" that surrounded it.<sup>15</sup>

Reminiscing about his life in Andover, including his battle with promoters bent on "developing" the land contiguous to his, our self-proclaimed "agro-bohemian" speaks lovingly of his "place": "Even some random spot in the woods is not just that, but has a personal history."<sup>16</sup>

There, in New Jersey, he summons up the new dimensions to "a run-down monarch's saying: 'After me, the deluge.'"<sup>17</sup> Recall Burke writing on the "implications" of Big Technology in his "adopted" and "adoptive" state:

If more and more pollution is to be our state's future, all such polluters can get themselves the best berths on a sinking ship. And they can die rich in ripe old age, and even honored by their fellow citizens. For the ship that is sinking is the ship of state, and indications are, from all over the nation, that such a state will never go under, wholly. It can just go on sinking and sinking as a place to live in while there's always the likelihood that those with funds enough can invest in better berths not yet so polluted, elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

Ever reminding us that we are the "instruments of our instruments," driven by the notions of "perfection," Burke's Helhaven project, aptly called by Rueckert, "a cruel and painful (for him, as for us) parody and burlesque of Walt Whitman," let us glimpse what may happen when humans are reduced to instrumentalities of their own making.<sup>19</sup> In Helhaven, we can "live" completely removed from our "natural condition." In "Towards Helhaven: Three Stages of a Vision," Burke partially sums up his "Anti-Technologic Humanism" this way:

There still remains the problem of how life on earth can manage to survive the burdens of worldwide pollution that plague the ways of industrial progress. When you consider how much such "effluence" is most inevitable in such highly developed technologic enterprises as oil refineries, pulp mills, chemical plants—in sum, the profuse production of power by the mining and processing of minerals, the use of agriculture for industrial purposes, and the consumption of either fossil fuels or atomic energy—it becomes hard to imagine how such trends can be adequately neutralized so long as *hypertechnologism* continues to set the pace for mankind's way of life. And the most violent of Communist or Fascist revolutions are far from the depths of radicalism that would have to be reached before the adventurous ideals of exploitation that are associated with modern, industrial, financial, and political ambitions could be transformed into modes of restraint, plety, gratitude, and fear proper to man's

awareness of his necessary place in the entire scheme of nature. Add also the grim fact that so many government bureaus, in response to pressure of private lobbies, function as representatives of those very interests whose excesses they are nominally designed to control. Frankly, I enroll myself among those who take it for granted that the compulsiveness of man's technological genius, as compulsively implemented by the vast compulsions of our vast technologic grid, makes for a self-perpetuating cycle quite beyond our ability to adopt any major reforms in our ways of doing things. We are happiest when we can plunge on and on. Any thought of turning back, of curbing rather than aggravating our cult of "new needs," seems to us suicidal, even though the situation is actually the reverse and it is our mounting technologic clutter that threatens us.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever happens in the "real" of Andover, New Jersey or the "imagined" of Helhaven we are talking about our "place"; the *eco-* in ecology, after all, comes from the earlier word or house.

#### The Representative Anecdote and a Dictionary of Pivotal Terms

Like his autobiographical hero, Herone Liddell, Burke's "revelations" seem to be "haunted by ecology."<sup>21</sup> Some years ago, in chatting with Don Abbott about his youth in Pittsburgh, Burke recalled that he often looked at his world through the mists of "full-employment"—of factory smoke and grit, sometimes thinking the diffusion of light through that mist quite beautiful. It was, he recalled, only later that he knew the full dimensions of those earlier "Mystical moments."<sup>22</sup> In high school he came to read Emerson's early essay, "On Nature" and to inquire, with Emerson and others on our "uses of nature" and the intimate and fundamental connections between I-Eye-Aye.<sup>23</sup> He, like his "little hero," came to ponder "Gallantry vs. Ecology":

For the world of gallantry (where science has been carried into industry by the applications of politics and commerce) threatens at every point to disrupt the "ecological balance" of the purely physical world. Man's "dominion" over the "lowlier" species that are put here for his "use" threatens at every point to become manifest in a way whereby he destroys what he needs directly or indirectly for his own survival.<sup>24</sup>

And he came to understand how *mighty* our "resources of guilt" and to inquire into master polluters of all sorts (e.g., Hitler) and how they claim frequently to act "in the name of" cleansing<sup>25</sup>—thus, we "purify" our water, "re-move" our toxic wastes, "save" our energy and talk

about "clean" bombs all the while demanding our "freedom to waste, to pollute..." and to seek after new ways of "perfecting" ourselves.

William Bowen, in the February, 1970 issue of *Fortune*, praises Burke "for having in 1937, been the first critic to predict the coming importance among the sciences, of 'one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention'."<sup>26</sup> Although we have already dated Burke's ecological "hankerings" as much earlier, at this point it is worth recalling his 1930 essay, "Waste—or the Future of Prosperity."<sup>27</sup> Looking back on that early essay, Burke comments: "...I then viewed the cult of excessive technologic 'progress' rather as a mere cultural absurdity than as the grave economic problem it now (1971) shows signs of 'progressively' becoming."<sup>28</sup>

Early on, Burke drew the connection between kinds of "conservation movements." In the 1955 introduction to the reprinting of *Attitudes* he speaks of "a truly new situation":

In the twenty some years between the first edition of this book and its present reprinting, a momentous quantitative difference has entered the world; and as the Hegelians and their offshoots might say, this particular change in the quantity has produced a critical change in motivational quality. It is almost as great as the change from No to Yes that struck down the thirteenth apostle, Saul-become-Paul, on the road to Damascus.

We refer to the invention of technical devices it would make the rapid obliteration of all human life an easily available possibility. Up to now, human stupidity could go to fantastic lengths of destructiveness, yet always mankind's hopes of recovery could be born anew. Indeed, had you reduced the world's population to but one surviving adult, in time all the continents could again be teeming with populaces, if that one hypothetical survivor were but fairly young, and pregnant with a male child. But now presumably a truly New Situation is with us, making it all the more imperative that we learn to cherish the mildly charitable ways of the comic discount. For by nothing less than such humanistic allowances can we hope to forestall (if it can be forestalled!) the most idiotic tragedy conceivable: the willful ultimate poisoning of this lovely planet, in conformity with a mistaken heroics of war....<sup>29</sup>

And in following an anecdote recalling the children's game, "I am the King of the Ashpile," in a P.S. dated 1959, Burke comments:

In a final reading, some spots I admit to being content with, others greatly vex me. Despite my complaints against "nineteenth-century antithesis-thinking," I often failed to see the full implications

of my own stress upon the principle known as the "socialization of losses," which cuts across any flat distinction between "capitalism" and "socialism." And the closely analogous ways in which thermo-nuclear power was developed in U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. suggest that Big Technology *cum* accountancy overrides the current political fictions.<sup>30</sup>

From that view of technologic "progress" to Burke's "search for an attitude" to give humankind "an overall purpose,"<sup>31</sup> his thinking on ecology has been clearly laid out for us to follow. But it may be most useful for us, here, to recall that in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy* where he speaks of his search for that "attitude," Burke suggests:

I can offer only one that seems to make wholly rational sense. And to a large extent it has been given to us by the fact that our great prowess with the resources of symbolic action led to the astounding ingenious invention of technology. ...Now owing to technology's side effect, pollution, mankind clearly has one unquestionable purpose; namely to seek for ways and means (with correspondingly global attitudes) of undoing the damage being caused by man's failure to control the powers developed by his own genius....With the great flowering of technology, the problem of self-control takes on a possibly fatal new dimension. Man must so control his invented servants that they cease to control him. Until man solves that problem, he has purpose a plenty.<sup>32</sup>

From the 20s to the 80s Burke has been talking to us very directly about ecology, ecological balance, nature and counter-nature, technological progress, the toxic wastes of all sorts of "medicine men," the "pollution" of war, and the like. The development of his "orientation" and his continuing "search for piety"<sup>33</sup> is quite public.

Of course, whether one talks about ecology as an "orientation," or a "great web," or an "organism metaphor," or as a "less teleological 'ecosystem'" makes a difference.<sup>34</sup> Burke has always taught us that "terms have implications"—but we would like to suggest that Burke, *himself*, an ecologist (in practice and in theory) allows us a rich "representative anecdote" for study. A representative anecdote, Burke tells us, is "something sufficiently demarcated in character to make analysis possible, yet sufficiently complex in character to prevent the use of too few terms in one's description."<sup>35</sup>

A tentative outline of Burke's dictionary of pivotal terms on matters ecological might look like this:

ATTITUDE.  
CAPACITY.  
COUNTER-NATURE.

DETERMINISM.  
 DISSOCIATION.  
 ECOLOGY.  
 ECOLOGICAL BALANCE.  
 ENTELECHY.  
 ENTITLEMENT.  
 FREEDOM.  
 GUILT, THE RESOURCES OF.  
 NATURE.  
 (THE) NEGATIVE.  
 PERFECTION.  
 PLACE, SENSE OF.  
 PIETY.  
 PROGRESS.  
 PURIFICATION.  
 REDEMPTION.  
 STORY.  
 SUPERNATURE.  
 TECHNOLOGY.  
 TECHNOLOGICAL PSYCHOSIS.  
 TECHNOLOGICAL EFFICIENCY.  
 TECHNOLOGISM, ALSO CALLED PERSPECTIVE  
 BY INCONGRUITY.  
 VICTIM.

**Warning: Entelechy, Technology, Power, Mistakes, and Attack on the Parliamentary**

Humankind's entelechy is symbol-guided technology; that is, technology is "an" ultimate direction indigenous to Bodies that Learn Language.<sup>36</sup> Technology is a "coefficient of power."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as Burke observes, "Technology is so great a coefficient of power that when it makes a mistake the results can be fantastically disproportionate to the intention.... True, technology's ability to magnify our disorders may imply equally great abilities to magnify our powers of improvement, and such is indeed the case. But technology...is so highly innovative that we necessarily lag in learning how best for us to live with it, particularly because, in such complicated choices, there are always so many more ways of being wrong than of being right."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, "the possibilities of 'sabotage'...increase proportionately to such technologic coefficient of power. Ours has become the ideal age of either the high jacker or the guerrilla because such roles are the perfect match for our technologic innovators. Quite as any innovator might hit upon a 'breakthrough' that shifts the whole productive-distributive system, so protestors can relate to the fantastically mounting and vulnerable accumulation of technologic resources whereby, if you but cut one wire or punch one hole in a gas tank, inconceivably mighty powers can become weaker than an old nag or one sputtering candle."<sup>39</sup> Whether one "buys" all of Burke's argument at this point or only some of it, there

is a distinctly *anti-parliamentary* dimension to much of our new technology which is developed at such a rate of change that we have little time to "talk about" what to do with it. Without such talk, means are inclined to become ends. Moreover, even if inclination were present, there may not be time to try the "parliamentary." Talk may simply be(come) too "inefficient" and "human story" may end.

*Jane Blankenship (Department of Communication, University of Massachusetts) presented a version of this paper at the 1989 SCA Convention and it is the first part of a longer study "Kenneth Burke On Ecology or What are the Signs of What?" Acknowledgment is due to Eric Metcalf for his significant input on this project. Ideally, the "Dictionary" presented late in this paper would include selected definitions of the terms as used in Burke's work.*

**Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems: 1915-1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 238.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.
- <sup>6</sup> *Poems*, p. 175.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- <sup>11</sup> *Poems*, p. 26.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- <sup>14</sup> For discussion of "placement" see *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 85-91. See also "substance" as a scenic word," pp. 22ff and, indeed the whole of Part One, "Ways of Placement," pp. 3-126. Originally published 1945.
- <sup>15</sup> "In New Jersey, My Adopted and I Hope Adoptive State," *New Jersey Monthly* (November, 1981), p. 98.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> William Rueckert, "Literary Criticism and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," *Iowa Review* (Winter, 1978), pp. 71-86. See also William Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), particularly 273-287.
- <sup>20</sup> *Sewanee Review* (1971), p. 19. See also "Why

Satire, with a Plan for Writing One," *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Winter 1974), pp. 307-335.

- <sup>21</sup> "The Anaesthetic Revelation of Herone Liddell," in *The Complete White Oxen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp., 287-294.
- <sup>22</sup> Taped interview with Don P. Abbott.
- <sup>23</sup> See "I, Eye, Ay—Emerson's Early Essay on 'Nature.' Thoughts on the Machinery of Transcendence," *Sewanee Review* (Fall, 1966), pp., 875-895.
- <sup>24</sup> "The Anaesthetic....," p. 294.
- <sup>25</sup> "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'," in *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 191-220. Originally published 1941.
- <sup>26</sup> William Bowen, "Our New Awareness of the Great Web," *Fortune* (February, 1970), p. 198.
- <sup>27</sup> "Waste—the Future of Prosperity," *New Republic* (July, 1930), pp. 10-14. Another early article on this matter is "Progress: Promise and Problems," *The Nation* (April, 1957), pp. 322-24.
- <sup>28</sup> *Dramatism and Development*, (Barre, Massachusetts: Clark University Press, 1972), p. 17.
- <sup>29</sup> *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd. ed. with New Afterword (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Introduction, p. v. Originally published 1937.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- <sup>31</sup> "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," Don Burks, ed., *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1978), p. 33.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> For fuller discussion of *piety*, see *Permanence and Change*, 3rd. ed. with a New Afterword (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Originally published 1935.
- <sup>34</sup> See for example, "Our New Awareness of the Great Web" and William C. Cronen, *Changes in the Land* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
- <sup>35</sup> *A Grammar of Motives*, p. 324.
- <sup>36</sup> In *Permanence of Change*, Burke states flatly: "Technology /is/...an ultimate direction indigenous to Bodies that Learn Language." (p. 296)
- <sup>37</sup> *Philosophy of Literary Form*. p. 184; "Towards Looking Back," *Journal of General Education* (Fall, 1976), p. 188.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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## Special Sale of Burke Volumes

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The Kenneth Burke Society recently received a letter from Sterling M. Dean, the librarian entrusted with the Watson Archives of the *Dial Magazine* in which he indicated that the library is interested in selling approximately 18 books by Kenneth Burke which were in James Sibley Watson, Jr.'s personal library to "the many admirers and torchbearers of Kenneth Burke." The library will donate 80 percent of the proceeds to the Kenneth Burke Society in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Watson.

Mr. Dean has previously accomplished such an effort with the *Powys Brothers Society*, the *Marianne Moore Society*, and the *E. E. Cummings Society*.

James S. Watson was co-owner of *Dial Magazine* during the time Burke was working there. Some of the books are personally signed and dedicated to him. All are in good condition.

The planning committee believes that this is a fine opportunity both to acquire significant books by Burke and to raise money for the society. Consequently, we have invited Mr. Dean to bring this collection as well as incomplete runs of the *Dial* during the years 1920-29 to the conference for your perusal.

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## Western Chapter Organized

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The organizing meeting of the Western Chapter of the Kenneth Burke Society took place on Feb. 18, 1990 at the 61st annual convention of the Western States Communication Association in Sacramento. The following officers were elected: Dennis Day of San Francisco State University (Chair), Greg Young of Humboldt State University (Program Planning Chair), and Cassandra Shafer of San Francisco State University (Secretary).

The Western Chapter, an organizational affiliate of WSCA, hopes to sponsor two panels at the 1991 WSCA convention at Phoenix. Tentative programs include pedagogy and current research on Burke. Additional program proposals and papers are welcome. Please address inquiries to Dennis Day, 4339 Army Street, San Francisco, CA 94131, (415) 647-7352.

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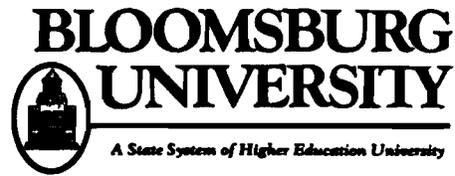
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Dear Colleague:

You are cordially invited to join the Kenneth Burke Society. Formed in 1984, the Kenneth Burke Society now has branches in the Speech Communication Association, Central States Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, Western States Communication Association, and Southern States Communication Association. The Kenneth Burke Society annually sponsors convention programs and seminars at all of these conventions.

In addition, this is a particularly exciting time to join the Kenneth Burke Society. The *Newsletter* has moved to a biannual publication schedule, and the May 4-7, 1990 national meeting of the Kenneth Burke Society is currently being planned.

I look forward to hearing from you.

James W. Chesebro, Chair  
Membership Committee

(Tear off this form and mail it in)

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