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The International Legacy of Kenneth Burke

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Abstract

*This special issue of KB Journal is the second of two issues that offer a compilation of papers presented at the conference *Rhetoric as Equipment for Living. Kenneth Burke, Culture and Education*, which was held in May 2013 at Ghent University, Belgium. In part II of the special issue we will continue with a more theoretical examination of Burke's international legacy, by giving a stage to scholars who confront Burke's ideas with the work of European thinkers such as François Lyotard, Chaim Perelman and Augustine but also non-western thinkers such as the Ehtiopean scholar Maimire Mennsasemay. Other contributions in this issue confront the work of Burke with more contemporary theoretical perspectives.*

The International Legacy of Kenneth Burke

This special issue of *KB Journal* is the second of two issues that offer a compilation of papers presented at the conference *Rhetoric as Equipment for Living. Kenneth Burke, Culture and Education*, which was held in May 2013 at Ghent University, Belgium. As we discussed in the introductory article of Part I of our special issue, the aim of this conference was to introduce rhetoric as a major perspective for synthesizing related turns in the humanities and social sciences—linguistic, cultural, ethnographic, interpretive, semiotic, narrative, etc.—that focus on the importance of signs and symbols in our interpretations of reality, heightening our awareness of the ties between language and culture. The conference focused specifically on 'new rhetoric', a body of work that sets rhetoric free from its confinement within the traditional fields of education, politics and literature, not by abandoning these fields but by refiguring them (for an extended discussion on the *revival of rhetoric*, the *new rhetoric* and the *rhetorical turn*, see Gaonkar, 1990). The conference's focus on new rhetoric was inspired by the work of Kenneth Burke, who together with scholars such as I. A Richards, Wayne Booth, Richard McKeon, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, was a foundational thinker of this new conception of symbolic exchange.

In addition to exploring what it implies to become *symbol-wise* and *if* and *how* (new) rhetoric can still be relevant in a world that is becoming ever more complex, the second aim of the conference was to explore the international legacy and potential of this seminal thinker. By introducing Burke to scholars and fields of research that are as yet less familiar with his ideas, the conference aspired to initiate a lively exchange between people, scholarly domains and geographical regions. The two special issues share the double aim of the conference: introducing Burkean new rhetoric into—and confronting it with—new areas of research and new geographical domains. The first spring 2014 issue was devoted exclusively to non-US scholars, with contributions by authors coming from Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, the UK and South Africa. The issue offered both an overview of the conference set-up, as well as a practical incarnation of its international and explorative spirit. In part II of the special issue we will continue with a more theoretical examination of Burke's international legacy, by giving a stage to scholars who confront Burke's ideas with the work of European thinkers such as François Lyotard, Chaim Perelman and Augustine but also non-western thinkers such as the Ehtiopean scholar Maimire Mennsasemay. Other contributions in this issue confront the work of Burke with more contemporary theoretical perspectives.

In his contribution "Rhetorical Figures in Education: Kenneth Burke and Maimire Mennsasemay," Ivo Strecker (Johannes Gutenberg University, Germany) starts from the growing interest for new rhetoric in educational studies. Strecker argues that Western education has always stressed the need for an intelligent use of literalness, especially in the fields of natural sciences. Plain style, clear expressions, transparent meanings, and methods of disambiguation are held in high esteem while at the same time tropes and figures like metaphor, hyperbole, irony, chiasmus etc. are viewed with suspicion. Strecker turns to the writings of Kenneth Burke, especially his essay "Linguistic Approaches to Problems of Education," and subsequently to other publications such as *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey), and *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion In the Conduct of Inquiry* (Herbert Simons) to argue that rhetoric—and thus figurative language—pertains to all domains of teaching, learning and research. This is the starting point of a paper that explores some of Kenneth Burke's flamboyant contributions to the study of rhetoric, which help to better grasp how figurative forms of expression are indispensable not only in educational practice, but also for thinking and arguing *about* education. Strecker addresses the question whether Western forms of education can claim universal relevance. His search for an answer leads Strecker to Maimire Mennsasemay, an eminent Ethiopian scholar who has tried to figure out what the development of genuine forms of education in his country may involve.

In her contribution "Reading the Negative: Kenneth Burke and Jean-François Lyotard on Augustine's *Confessions*," Hanne Roer (University of Copenhagen, Denmark) offers a reading of Kenneth Burke's chapter on Augustine's confessions in his *Rhetoric of Religion*, confronting it with

Jean-Francois Lyotards posthumous published *La Confession d' Augustin*. Roer argues that Burke's chapter offers new perspectives on his *logology*, and specifically on its gendered character. Roer confronts the interpretations of Burke and Lyotard about the notion of negativity in the Confessions and she argues that Burke explores negativity in order to understand the human object as social actor, whereas Lyotard unfolds the radical non-identity of the writing subject. According to Roer, Burke is more interested in the social-hierarchical implications of the negativity of language than Lyotard. She claims that they are both radical in their insistence upon the emptiness of origins, but whereas Lyotard deconstructs the notion of subject, form, narration, Burke focuses on the sociological implications, the links between subject and society, and his reading is also an ideological critique.

In his contribution, "Burke, Perelman, and the Transmission of Values: The Beautidues as Epideictic Topoi," Stan Lindsay (Florida State University, US) conducts a genre study of the gospels by merging Perelman's rediscovery of the values aspect of epideictic—it "strengthens the disposition towards action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds"—with Burke's entelechy, which claims that humans unconsciously act upon themselves in accordance with the implicit value system of the entelechies with which they identify. In this paper, Lindsay sketches out the steps of his academic journey that brought him to an appreciation of Burke and Perelman and the transmission of values. As an example of how Burke, Perelman, and Classical rhetoric figure in his epideictic perspective, Lindsay considers the New Testament gospels and, more precisely, the Beatitudes of Matthew and Luke as a text.

In his contribution, "Symbolic Action and Dialogic Social Interaction in Burke's and the Bakhtin School's Sociological Approaches to Poetry," Don Bialostosky (University of Pittsburgh, US) explores how both Burke and the Bakhtin school developed sociological approaches to poetry. According to Bialostosky, both perspectives start from an unsituated word for which they construe a situation: for Burke, the poet responds dramatically to the scene of writing; for the Bakhtin school, the poem's speaker responds entymetically to assumed social values and understandings. This implies that Burke's approach focuses on reading the poet's response to the situation in which he writes, while the Bakhtin school follows the unfolding social interactions of the participants in the implied situation represented in the poem.

In his contribution "A McKeonist Understanding of Kenneth Burke's Rhetorical Realism in Particular and Constructivism in General," Robert Wess (Oregon State University, US) confronts the work of Kenneth Burke with that of McKeon. The main inspiration for this essay was the fact that McKeon's name was mentioned alongside other scholars of the new rhetoric tradition in the call for papers for the conference. Wess states that readers of *KB Journal* are indeed familiar with the work of Richard McKeon, mainly through his essays on rhetoric and his relationship to Kenneth Burke. However, Wess argues that McKeon was first of all a philosopher, who only later came to rhetoric. This implies that his work is a philosophical path to and a defence of rhetoric. Furthermore, this path can offer insight into why the *linguistic turn* eventually culminated in the *rhetorical turn* that forms the background to constructivist theorizing. Wess exemplifies this by exploring Burke's "rhetorical realism".

In their contribution "Toward A Dramatistic Ethics," Kevin McClure and Julia Skwar (University of Rhode Island, US) present an extensive exploration of the possibilities for developing a Dramatistic ethics. They reconsider the status of ethics after the poststructuralist and linguistic turns and they explore what potential Kenneth Burke has to offer in the response to the impasse that these turns might have created for ethics. They specifically argue that a Dramatistic ethics primarily begins as a mode of inquiry and they advance pentadic analysis as a holistic framework for the continuous development of ethical scholarship. They end their essay by providing an exemplary pentadic analysis of five ethical theories as possible points of entry and a possible next step in the development of a Dramatistic ethics. McClure and Skar argue that dramatism invites a shift in the contemporary conversation on ethics toward a discussion of ethics as *equipment for living* that transcend both modernity's universalizing impulses and poststructuralism's deconstructive desires.

In his contribution "Attitudes as Equipment for Living," Waldemar Petermann (Lund University, Sweden) explores Burke's concept of attitude through an overview of its use in Burke's writings, connecting it to the concept of literature as equipment for living, the concept of the comic frame and by focusing on the practical impact of attitudes in rhetorical situations. Petermann argues that *attitude* is an important and fascinating part of Burke's theories, and as equipment for living it can become directly usable in innumerable situations. Petermann states that attitudes can be seen as shortcuts to the successful handling of rhetorical situations and, from this perspective, attitudes as equipment for living become powerful tools for handling our everyday rhetorical lives.

In his contribution "Burke's New Body? The Problem of Virtual Material, and Motive, in Object Oriented Philosophy," Steven B. Katz (Clemson University, US) starts from a distinction between Object-Oriented Philosophy (OOP) and Actor-Network Theory and applies Burkean theory to explore whether in OOP objects as Actants can have agency, if not motive. Katz uses a variety of Burkean concepts such as pentadic ratios, entelechy, Spinoza's method, intrinsic/extrinsic, symbolic of the body, and catharsis to rhetorically analyze claims of OOP. Rather than to ask how new materialism might apply to and clarify Burke's work on the relations of bodies/rhetoric to language/objects—which has been explored a number of times before—this paper asks how Burke's work can help to begin to comprehend the implications of new materialisms, in particular OOP, for rhetorics, poetics, and even ethics in the twentieth century.

Works Cited

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