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Reflections on the First European Kenneth Burke Conference

Rhetoric as Equipment for Living: Kenneth Burke, Culture and Education

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Introduction

This special issue of *KB Journal* is the first of two issues that offer a compilation of papers that were presented at the conference *Rhetoric as Equipment for Living: Kenneth Burke, Culture and Education,* which was held in May 2013 at Ghent University, Belgium. The aim of this conference was to introduce rhetoric as a major perspective for synthesizing the 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. (On this, see Dilip Gaonkar.)

The conference's focus on this "new" kind of rhetoric was inspired by Kenneth Burke, who together with scholars such as Wayne Booth and Chaim Perelman, was a foundational thinker of this new conception of symbolic exchange. As a rhetorician and literary critic interested in how we use symbols, Burke described human beings as the symbol-*making,* symbol-*using* and symbol-*misusing* animal. Our interpretations, perceptions, judgments and attitudes are all influenced and "deflected" by the symbols that we make, use and misuse, and we are at the same time *used by* these symbols. This implies that we can approach the world either *symbol-wise* or *symbol-foolish*. The conference aimed to explore how rhetorical concepts (specifically those developed by Kenneth Burke) can be deployed as tools—equipment—to make students, teachers, scholars and citizens symbol-wise: to understand the way linguistic, cultural, narrative . . . symbols work, and to develop effective means of critical engagement with, as well as on behalf of, those symbols. The conference furthermore aimed to explore if and how (new) rhetoric can still be relevant in a world that is becoming ever more complex and paradoxical by political, economic and cultural differences on a global scale.

In what was the first major event devoted to Kenneth Burke outside the United States, 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. Under the banner of "Rhetoric as Equipment for living," the broad call for papers resulted in a highly varied program that explored Burkean conceptions of rhetoric in pedagogy, social work, psychology, cultural studies, management, and communication, and from the perspective of education, citizenship, literature, literacy, technology, games, (new) media . . . And with over a 100 attendees from 20 different countries, this mix of topics and perspectives also resulted in a true crossover between national and intellectual traditions.

Thanks to what we believe was a successful conference that realized its double aim—introducing Burkean new rhetoric into new areas of research and new geographical domains—and the generous response to the ensuing call for papers, we are very happy to change roles from being satisfied conference organizers to becoming excited guest editors of two special issues of *KB Journal*. This first Summer 2014 issue is devoted exclusively to non-US scholars, with contributions by authors coming from Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and South Africa. This issue will offer both an overview of the conference set-up, as well as a practical incarnation of its international and explorative spirit. In the second issue (to be published in the fall of 2014), 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, Augustine, and others. Before introducing the contributions to this first special issue, however, we would like to take some time to look back (with both the satisfactions and benefits of hindsight) to the May 2013 conference. For those unable to attend, we will first give an overview of the set-up of the conference and the different topics that have been dealt with.

Keynote Speakers

Driven by our aspiration to explore the international legacy of Burke, we invited two speakers from Europe and two speakers from the US, selecting speakers who would address the theme of the conference "rhetoric as equipment for living" from a broad range of different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds (philosophy, communication, rhetoric and literature).

The first keynote speaker was Michel Meyer, Professor of Rhetoric and Philosophy at the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium) and former student of Chaim Perelman. In his opening keynote, he confronted the work of Burke with that of Perelman. In his lecture on *Burke, Perelman and Problematology: Three Different Views of Rhetoric?* Meyer argued that Perelman deeply respected Burke's vision of rhetoric and that he resorted several times to the notion of a Burkean ethos. In addressing the question of what it is in Burke's work that was so relevant for the rhetorical conception of Perelman, Meyer focused on the conception of the interacting person playing with identification at all levels. However, whereas Burke offers a vision of man and his dramatic expressions *through* rhetoric, Perelman provides a vision *of* rhetoric, and for Meyer this difference is specifically clear in their respective views on tropes. In his lecture, Meyer integrated both Burke's and Perelman's views into a single vision of rhetoric, more specifically the question-view or *problematological* approach that Meyer himself has developed in recent years.

The second keynote lecture was given by Barry Brummett, Charles Sapp Centennial Professor in Communication at the University of Texas at Austin, who introduced *A Burkean Framework for Rhetoric in the Digital Age.* Starting from Burke's observation that new rhetoric today creates an existing audience rather than appealing to a preexising one, the paper developed a general perspective on the development of rhetoric in our current digital age. Working on a metaphorical level, the paper claimed that people today can be understood as *terminals.* Our consciousness is made up of the images grounded in the material pixels of the screen, yet the images are not physically real. These images must be cognitively integrated and assembled following culturally shared forms. The paper addressed the question as to where the individual stands in connection to cultural discourses if the individual is conceptualized as a terminal.

The third keynote lecture was given by Steven Mailloux, President's Professor of Rhetoric at Loyola Marymount University, who gave a lecture on *Under the Sign of Theology: Kenneth Burke on Language and the Supernatural Order.* The paper examined Burke's rhetorical paths of theological thought in the 1960s. In his lecture, Mailloux explored "Theotropic Logology" as a way of characterizing Burke's approach in a series of publications and conference papers during that period. Mailloux argued that through theotropic logology, or words about words about God, Burke developed a distinctive rhetorical hermeneutics in addressing questions at the intersection of what he called (in "What Are the Signs of What?") the linguistic and supernatural orders.

The final keynote lecture was given by Jennifer Richards, Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture in the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics at Newcastle University, who gave a lecture on *Kenneth Burke: Literary-Rhetorical Thinker.* In this lecture, she explored how a literary-rhetorical frame of mind equips us not only to live, but also to live well with each other. She explored what Burke meant by describing 'literature' as 'equipment for living' and how this might also work for rhetoric. Initially, Richards argued, it is hard to see how Burke's major contribution to rhetoric, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), equips us for living, because its mode of argument is so difficult. Richards unfolded what is difficult and, apparently, impractical about *A Rhetoric of Motives* by comparing it with a recent attempt to revive rhetorical analysis, Sam Leith's *You Talkin' to Me* (2011), which does set out self-consciously to 'equip' readers with a method of rhetorical and political analysis. She compared these two works not to show up Burke but to try to understand what was different about the use of rhetoric he had in mind. Despite the difficulty of *A Rhetoric of Motives*, its mode of argument does aim to equip to live well. To help explain how, Richards turned to Burke's short essay on "Literature as Equipment for Living," focusing on his conception of literary writing in terms of proverbial wisdom: strategies or attitudes for different situations. Burke's comparison of literary genres to proverbs provided Richards with a starting point for re-thinking rhetoric, and the rhetoric of literary experience, that might clarify Burke's own style of thinking. What Burke can give us is equipment for thinking, Richards argues, because he furnishes us with a different style of thinking in *utramque partem* (i.e. on different sides).

Plenary Sessions
Next to the keynote lectures, we also organized a series of plenary sessions that offered detailed explorations of specific aspects that are of importance for the theme of the conference. To set the *scene* for the conference, we started with a panel on *The Rhetorical Turn in the Human and Social Sciences,* which explored Burke's importance for anticipating (and influencing) the (re)turn to rhetoric of the past century. In *Kenneth Burke and the Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* Herbert Simons (Temple University) focused on the way Burke anticipated what has come to be called the *Rhetorical Turn* in the human sciences. The rhetorical turn has been an intellectual movement that refashioned the human sciences in rhetorical terms by criticizing commitments to objectivism and to foundationalist presuppositions. Simons argued that when used disparagingly, the term "rhetoric" can be something of an ironic entitlement, summoning images of scholars as flatterers and deceivers, con artists and propagandists and raising questions about relationships between science and ideology, scholarship and political practice. Simons claimed that while traditionalists might be pleased to learn that the project to re-conceive the human sciences has a reconstructive aspect—that it is not all criticism and deconstruction—they might still legitimately conclude that while the news from the rhetoric front is somewhat mixed, it is generally bad for them. Simons addressed the question how there can be progress in the human sciences absent foundations and with objectivity called into question.

From an anthropological perspective, Ivo Strecker (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany) honored Kenneth Burke, who pioneered the *rhetorical turn in the study of culture,* and who demonstrated that symbolization and figuration play a crucial role in art, science and everyday-life. Strecker argued that Burke hardly ever used the term "culture" but preferred to speak of "human relations," the "human condition" or simply "ourselves and others." Strecker's contribution first reflected on the metaphor of "rhetoric as equipment for living" and then presented two new approaches to the study of rhetoric, which are greatly indebted to Kenneth Burke. Firstly, the *homo rhetoricus* project which is based at the University of Tuebingen and which derives its innovative power from a new alliance between philosophical anthropology and rhetoric. Secondly, the *rhetoric culture* project—a project that originated at the Johannes Gutenberg University (Mainz) and Rice University (Houston) but has now become thoroughly international and nomadic—and that derives its innovative thrust from a new alliance between anthropology and rhetoric. In his paper, Strecker explored the many different ways in which rhetoric molds culture and culture molds rhetoric.

One of the aims of the conference was to explore what it implies to become symbol-wise and this inevitably also implied a focus on new developments, such as digitization. Therefore, in collaboration with DiGRA Flanders we organized a plenary session on *Videogames as Equipment for Living* which was chaired by Jeroen Bourgonjon. Christopher Paul presented a paper on *Identification in Play: People, Processes, and Paratexts* in which he focused on the concept of identification as the core of Burkean notions of rhetoric. According to Paul, identification works to build a sense of 'we' among individuals and, through consubstantiality, can demonstrate representations of what can bring a group together. In moving from an approach to rhetoric predicated on persuasion, a Burkean focus on identification rather facilitates a focus on connections and interactions. Christopher Paul argued that this kind of approach is particularly suited for the analysis of video games and their

multifaceted platforms for interaction. Applying Burke's ideas about identification to the study of video games indeed enables a richer understanding of games.

In his presentation *Burke, Bogost, and Foucault in Colloquy on the Rhetoric of Games* Gerald Voorhees (Oregon State University) aimed to put Kenneth Burke's notion of literature as equipment for living in conversation with Ian Bogost's conception of procedural rhetoric and Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, knowledge, and power. Burke's explanation of literature's capacity to identify both recurrent situations and strategies for negotiating them has been applied to study a diverse range of mediated communication, including games. Games not only teach players which ways of interaction "make sense," according to Voorhees, they also assess player input and provide feedback evaluating the effectiveness of the player's action. This paper explored how games offer a more responsive equipment for living that communicates knowledge about recurring situations. Voorhees argued that games advocate the effectivity of specific responses by dynamically modeling the outcomes afforded by different possibilities for action.

Seeing that the conference theme also specifically explored the educational dimensions of Burke's corpus, we organized a panel on *Rhetoric as Equipment for Education.* In this session, Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert focused on the question: How can rhetoric and narrative function as equipment for living? They discussed how Burke argues for the importance of literature by focusing on his major concepts as: "equipment for living," "everything is medecine" and "proverbs writ large." They discussed some "representative anecdotes" from recent literature, films, and TV to illustrate how these concepts are thematized and problematized in recent fiction. By presenting a set of case studies they discussed how rhetoric and narrative can serve as equipment *for* education.

The final panel of the conference was an informal one that explored the current status and the possible future of the *international legacy of Kenneth Burke.* Noting suitable points of exchange between Burke and European scholars, the panel also discussed potential obstacles to the integration of Burke into different national traditions of scholarship. The main obstacle, the panel agreed, is the lack of suitable translations of Burke's work. Burke himself, it was noted, earned a living in part as a translator: this meant he was very susceptible to the different shades of culture and meaning that are present in language. Transposing Burke's idiosyncratic vocabulary into different tongues might make us more aware of these different shades in Burke's conceptual metaphors, exposing prospective common ground between Burkean ideas and those of other thinkers. Such common ground, it was argued, might provide a basis for more comparative scholarship on Burke and contemporary European thought. Also, it was hoped, such scholarship might be flanked by studies that tackle the European (Freud, Marx) and classical (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine) sources from which Burke's scholarship draws.

Reflection

It is obviously beyond the scope of this introductory essay to describe how the many and diverse paper sessions of the conference interacted with, and deviated from, the topics discussed in the keynote lectures and panels. For a full overview of the presented papers and panels we are happy to redirect you to the **conference program (http://www.cultureeducation.ugent.be/kennethburke/ProgrammeBook.pdf)** . Still, before introducing the conference papers that made it to this first special issue, we would like to point out some general tendencies, developments and hiatuses that struck us as the conference unfolded.

Despite the specific focus in the Call for Papers on the implication of Burke's work for (and in) education, only a minority of the presented papers explicitly explored the relationship between Burke and education. As we stated before (in "Narrative and rhetorical approaches to problems of education"), Burke has only written one essay explicitly about education—"Linguistic Approach to Problems of Education"—which was published in *Modern Philosophies and Education: The Fifty-Fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education.* In *KBJournal* 7.2 William Cahill already extensively discussed the specific volume that this essay was published in and he argued that "[t]hough Dramatism could be called a philosophy, and there were people who regarded it as such in the period, it was still a stretch to call it a "general philosophy" in the sense implied by the Yearbook's editorial committee, which brought together in the volume the main philosophies studied in academic departments of the day—Thomism, Pragmatism, Realism, etc. Burke's philosophy was not studied in this way at that time" (¶2). His exploration of the context of this publication specifically raised the question: "How did Burke come to appear in this book whose other writers, with one exception, were professors of philosophy in universities and one a professor of education?" (¶2). Probably, as we argued ("Narrative and rhetorical approaches to education"), it is even today still more or less exceptional to give Kenneth Burke a major role in educational studies. However, our (continuing) aim is to re-visit the work of Burke for educational studies by exploring if and how Burke's ideas are still relevant for contemporary discussions in education. We concur with Peter Smudde, that 'to take Burke seriously calls for an examination not only of the substance of his corpus, but also of the implications of that substance for how we function as educators,' which does not imply to 'develop or advance any *singular* view on education, except to have Burke as the nexus for *thinking about* and *acting on* education' (xii, our emphasis).

A second notable (near) absence was that of papers that tried to strike a bridge between classical rhetoric and Burke's new breed of identificatory symbol usage. Does this suggest a radical break between the 'old' and the 'new' rhetoric on which our Ghent Conference focused? Or have Burke studies as yet to convince those scholars of Aristotle, Aquinas and Ramus that Burke also speaks to them—and do we new rhetoricians, in turn, need to get in touch with our classical roots? Whatever the case, it seems that there is still a lot of scholarly ground that needs covering before we can establish more accurately the novelty of Burke's thinking, and ours in its wake. Related to this is a third notable (near) absence: that of papers that explore Burke's relation to those great European thinkers—Marx and Freud—that shaped his thought. Here, too, European scholars still have their part to play.

Contributions

In his paper "In Pursuit of Persuasion: Burke's Rhetoric of Motives and the Artistic Practices of the Painter Frank Auerbach,"Derek Pigrum (University of Bath, United Kingdom) starts from Jean-Luc Nancy's claim that 'there is an incapacity, an infinity, an impossibility inherent in writing about, to writing in the face of painting, for which every text on painting must account' (341). He starts his paper with this claim and, accordingly, has chosen to view Frank Auerbach's painting in terms of his practices and what he terms his 'quest.' Pigrum argues that this quest has vital links to key notions in Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* that, although it deals primarily with works of literature, has, according to Pigrum, a relation to the painting practices of Auerbach and perhaps other painters too. Thus, this paper is experimental and exploratory in

terms of the relation between Burke's rhetoric and the visual arts. In the paper Pigrum characterizes Auerbach's endless practice, that Weiss terms "erasure and restitution," as part and parcel of the "self-address" of the artist in pursuit of "pure persuasion," which according to Burke, is "the furthest point of rhetoric."

In her paper "The Vox Populi in Poems: Ramsey Nasr as Poet Laureate and Public Intellectual," Odile Heynders (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) puts the spotlight on the work of Dutch Poet Laureate Ramsey Nasr. In the four years of his official appointment, he wrote poems and essays articulating a critical perspective on the current political conjuncture in the Netherlands. The Poet Laureate can be considered a public intellectual in that he shows engagement in regard to concrete societal issues and translates this into poetry. Using ideas and rhetorical tools from the work of Kenneth Burke, Heynders shows how Nasr's poetry prompts readers to identify with his perspective while illuminating how such identification leads to division from a perspective that frames nationalism in terms that would exclude multiethnic citizenship.

In his paper "Urban Motives. Rhetorical Approaches to Spatial Orientation, Burke on Lynch's 'The Image of the City,'" Pierre Smolarski (University of Bielefeld, Germany) argues that whoever raises questions about the legibility of the city must notice that the metaphor of legibility involves the ideas of interpreting signs and symbols under different motivational axes, which leads to the creation of different scopes of reading, understanding and acting. Thus, the legibility of the city involves the idea of a rhetoric of the city. Smolarski examines Kevin Lynch's inquiry, *The Image of the City*, in terms of the rhetorical theory developed by Kenneth Burke. The aim of this confrontation is to see what happens when Lynch's central terms are discussed rhetorically, and to show that Lynch's categories can be understood as rhetorical motives. In conclusion, he argues that *The Image of the City* can be interpreted rhetorically, and in a more fundamental way the paper aims to demonstrate that problems of orientation in the metropolis have an essential rhetorical dimension. Finally, Smolarski interrogates the results of the rhetorical impact on urban environmental design.

In their paper, "Expanding the Terministic Screen: A Burkean Critique of Information Visualization in the Context of Design Education," Anneli Bowie and Duncan Reyburn (University of Pretoria, South Africa), start from what information design theorist Richard Wurman has dubbed "information anxiety" to argue that information visualization has become a widely accepted tool to assist with the navigation of the symbolic world. Information visualizations, or infographics, are essentially external cognitive aids such as graphs, diagrams, maps and other interactive and innovative graphic applications. It is often argued by design theorists that information visualizations are rhetorical texts in that they have the ability to persuade. From this perspective, Bowie and Reyburn assert that information visualization may be understood as one expression of Kenneth Burke's notion of the "terministic screen." This paper aims to interrogate the rhetoric of information visualization within the domain of design education in South Africa by analyzing two student visualization projects. Moreover, it explores the selective and deflective nature of visualization alongside issues regarding the interplay between ideology and Robin Kinross's idea of a visual "rhetoric of neutrality." Burke's explanation of synecdoche is shown as a useful approach to understanding how visualizations function rhetorically. Furthermore, Burke's concept of perspective by incongruity, which is echoed in the notion of "Critical Design" is shown as an alternative method with the potential to ameliorate the problems with traditional infographics. Bowie and Duncan present Burke's rhetorical theory as a critical tool for developing more ethical communication design education and praxis.

In her paper, "'You're Not Going to Try and Change My Mind?': The Dynamics of Identification in Aronofsky's *Black Swan*," Yakut Oktay (Bogazici University, Turkey) focuses on the movie *Black Swan*, directed by Darren Aronofsky, to analyse how the rhetoric of ballet is used as a tool for shaping, and interrupting, the journey of the hero. The movie follows its main character Nina, who is dangerously obsessed with becoming the perfect swan for the new production of *Swan Lake*, which requires the principal dancer to embody both the White and the Black swans. By focusing on her struggle with identification, this article aims to pinpoint these instances by utilizing the theory of the monomyth, propounded by Joseph Campbell.

In her paper, "Who are you working for? How *24* Served as Post-9/11 Equipment for Living," Laura Herrmann (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Germany), focuses on the groundbreaking television series *24*. Portraying a post-9/11 society, *24* has been an interesting show to watch and analyze, Herrmann argues. Not only did it tie viewers all over the world to their screens, it also attracted fierce criticism in regards to its depiction of society, its war on terror, and the means by which it was fought. *Times* author James Poniewozik put an interesting point to these discussions, asking: "Is *24* just a TV show or right-wing propaganda? Or, to turn Jack Bauer's frequent refrain on him: Who are you working for?" ("The Evolution of Jack Bauer"). This paper argues that *24* worked for us; as equipment for living to a post-9/11 society. As *24* "sized up" (Burke, *Literature* 298) a status of exception of a post-9/11 era, it offered us attitudes and strategies to symbolically (Literature, 299) overcome our fear. Employing a pentadic analysis, it examines the portrayal of a post-9/11 status of exception, its promoted strategies and attitudes. The idea is that these attitudes bear different notions of self: they offer facets of identity to a post-9/11 society, which had to deliberate on how our actions morally define us, how they not only determine our identity, but also create it anew.

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