ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Internal Logic: Persuasive Form And Hierarchy In Kenneth Burke

Abstract: According to Kenneth Burke, language contains highly persuasive structures that are not necessarily detectable at the level of arguments. Every author or speaker constructs a unique vocabulary where words are given different nuances of meaning and operate within networks of form and hierarchies of values. These structures form an "internal logic" or a "pattern of experience" which creates both vertical and horizontal convergence. Burke's unique method of analysis, "indexing," reveals these implicit argumentation structures.

1. *Introduction*

In *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse*, Eemeren conducts a brief review of the field of rhetoric and the most cited rhetorical scholars. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Toulmin, Zarefsky, Fahnestock, and Kennedy are most cited and discussed, whereas Kenneth Burke is only given a few passing remarks. The few times Kenneth Burke is mentioned he is credited with expanding the definition of rhetoric from "persuasion" to "identification" (Eemeren, p. 74) and being part of the theoretical foundation for Fahnestock's research on rhetorical devices. I think this is much less attention than Kenneth Burke deserves from students of argumentation. What I hope to do with this presentation is to show how Burke gives us the vocabulary to discuss some central persuasive features of texts, which I will call "persuasive form" and "hierarchy," and also gives us the critical tools we need to analyze these features.

What does a text do and how does it do it? I think we all agree that texts are not simply delivery devices for information, for a text does not simply tell us "what to think," it also tells us "how to think." As Burke writes in *Counter-Statement* (1957): "A text can, by its function as name and definition, give simplicity and order to an otherwise unclarified complexity. It provides a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, attitudes for codifying a pattern of experience" (p.

154). Burke saw two connected mechanisms operating within a text: the psychology of form and the psychology of information. The psychology of information operates by revelation, as in a Whodunit crime novel where information is slowly released to clarify the picture of how the murder was committed and who did it. Suspense is its natural artistic expression. The psychology of form, on the other hand, operates by ritual and initiation, as in a tragedy where the sacrificial victim goes through the inevitable downfall due to his hubris. It is not the ending, but the process, the unfolding of events and thoughts which grips us and keeps us interested. Unlike a crime novel, we may return to this form of literature again and again to enjoy the experience of literary form. A key lesson for argumentation theorists is that all texts use both of these mechanisms, but the "internal logic" of form can be more subtle and therefore avoid detection if it is not critically examined.

What do I mean by literary form? Kenneth Burke (1957) defines form as "the arousal and fulfilling of expectations or desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (p. 124). This principle is in operation even now as I started the text by creating an expectation of what I would provide with this text, and hopefully I am in the process of fulfilling that expectation. It seems pretty obvious and straight-forward. However, this same principle also operates on the level of words and their associated terms. Burke (1973) writes that, "The 'symbolism' of a word consists in the fact that no one quite uses the word in its mere dictionary sense. And the overtones of usage are revealed 'by the company it keeps' in the utterances of a given speaker or writer" (p. 35). When we read a text, we are being initiated into a different vocabulary that has different meanings for words than those we normally use. For example, we are gradually taught by Harriett Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that "lawful" and "constitutional" are dirty words which are opposed to "conscience, truth, and the will of God." In the same way, the concepts of "security" and "risk" are given new meanings in the 2003 State of the Union Address by George W. Bush, where risk is connected to "inaction" and security is connected to "war."

The vocabulary itself and the relationships between key terms set patterns of expectation which the speaker then fulfills, thereby achieving consistency or aesthetic truth. When something is aesthetically true it means that it conforms to the rules which have been set up by the ritual or text. As Burke (1957) comments,

"In so far as the audience, from its acquaintance with the premises, feels the rightness of the conclusion, the work is formal. The arrows of our desires are turned in a certain direction, and the plot follows the direction of the arrows" (p. 124). When a work satisfies the expectations it has aroused in us it is aesthetically true, even though it may be far from scientific truth. In a text it is the author, rather than the laws of science or logical validity, which establishes the boundaries for what can and cannot happen.

We therefore have a structure of "internal logic" which operates by different rules than Aristotelian logic or even the normal structure of argumentation. If we look at a logical argument from Aristotelian logic we have a major premise, minor premise, and conclusion: "All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal." The test of validity here lies in definition. The major premise is like an axiom which does not need to be proven since it can rely on the structures of reality already established by the community. It is not proven that all men are mortal, just commonly accepted. This structure of reality operates almost as an invisible Higgs field which lends its weight to the argument. In contrast, "internal logic" makes the elements of its argument interact with a structure of reality set up by the unique vocabulary of the text. The text functions as an interpretation of life, and the argument simply needs to be consistent with that interpretation. In a sense, this form of argument operates more like a cloth of interwoven connections rather than as a chain. There are many features of internal logic, but I want to briefly discuss two of them: persuasive form and hierarchy.

2. *Persuasive form*
In *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969b), Burke describes the rhetorical effect form can have: "Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter. Formally, you will find yourself swinging along . . . Thus, you are drawn to the form . . . and this attitude of assent may be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form" (p. 58). The form involves identification through participation in a "universal appeal" and then connects that appeal with "a partisan statement" (p. 59). The strongest result or rhetorical effect of form is amplification: "as extension, expatiation, the saying of something in various ways until it increases in persuasiveness by sheer accumulation, amplification can come to name a purely poetic process of development, such systematic exploitation of a theme as we find in lyrics built about a refrain"

(Burke, 1969b, p. 69).

In language, an idea or image is infused and connected with associations and relationships which are not necessarily synonyms or words logically related to it, yet these connections can amplify and enlarge the original idea by accumulation. As Burke (1969b) writes, "You can't *point to* the house that appears in a poem . . . For 'house' will *also stand* for relations alien to the *concept* of house as such. The *conceptual* house is a dwelling of such-and-such structure . . . The *poetic* house built of *identifications.* (Thus it may equal sufferings in childhood, or sense of great security in childhood; a retreat from combat . . . etc.)" (p. 84-5). For example, one politician may mention words such as "house, homes, families, national security, peace, father, children, safety, watchful care, government, homeland, defense, sleep" in grammatical structures that do not specifically connect them all, yet *poetically* and *rhetorically* they may work to amplify an idea of "house" which includes these separate concepts and metaphorically extends the borders of "home" to include national borders, and extends the concept of father to government. These "equations" make up what Kenneth Burke calls "the underlying pattern of experience." It is a substructure of images, terms, concepts, and emotions that are connected together by association.

The restatement of a theme like this through "equations" constructs a kind of rhythm for us as an audience. It invites participation, and soon we feel ourselves swinging along. This is the "magic" of form arousing and fulfilling expectations in us. In *Counter-Statement* (1957), Kenneth Burke writes, "The artist possessed by a certain pattern of experience is an 'expert' in this pattern. He should thus be equipped to make it convincing . . . By thoroughness he should be able to overwhelm his reader, and thus compel the reader to accept his interpretations. For a pattern of experience is an interpretation of life" (p. 176).

So how does this work in a dialectic argumentation? Persuasive form works as a "presentational device" which helps to create identification between the speaker and the audience. Vertical convergence means that "all aspects of a strategic maneuver made by the speaker or writer reinforce each other." One way all the aspects can reinforce each other is by the speaker using language that is unified with a form of interrelated terms

Kenneth Burke recommended a method of close reading which he called "indexing" in order to uncover the implicit equations in a given text. The basic

concept is that one follows a set of what appears as central terms throughout a text and see which other terms they frequently occur with. After a while one then gets clusters of words which center around common themes or motivations, where some will be more central and others will be more peripheral, based on their frequency and intensity (importance for creating meaning) in the text. This will make visible the restatement and amplification that occurs in the text and may show how this persuasive form is connected to different partisan statements. For example, we can study the term "atomic bomb" in the speech given by President Harry Truman (1945) after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. What we find is a cluster of terms that includes "scientists of distinction," "greatest scientific gamble in history," "the race of discovery," "battle of the laboratories," "industrial and financial resources," "manpower," "greatest achievement in the history of science," and "harnessing the basic power of the universe." Already at this level we see some interesting connections, with the atomic bomb connected to metaphors from sports and gambling, and hailed as a great achievement and example of the American will to gamble and risk much in order to get the a handsome pay-out or reward for the trouble. However, it is first by studying the effect of hierarchy that the deeper ideological implications involved become more transparent.

3. *Hierarchy*
Kenneth Burke (1969b) writes that "no expression can be more profoundly appealing than a rhetoric which follows in the direction of a perfect dialectical symmetry" (p. 291). What he means by dialectical symmetry is something like the rhetoric Plato uses in *Phaedrus* where writing is connected to love and love again is connected to the eternal progression of the soul and the gods. Seen in this perspective, the criteria for good writing follow as a natural consequence of the "big picture" or hierarchy which Plato has constructed, and the dialogue therefore has dialectical symmetry. So a hierarchy which is internally consistent is the manifestation of dialectical symmetry.

To give a simple example of hierarchy, humans of all ages, ethnicities, and persuasions can be gathered up, dialectically, in the term "human." Humans again can be classed with dogs, bears, and cows as "mammals." and mammals again can, by a few more steps, be categorized as a form of "life." The movement here is from concrete to more abstract form. I can be touched as a concrete object. However, the principle "human" cannot be felt or experienced in the same

way. It has already become too abstract to really touch. Further, a "mammal" can be touched, but the concept of mammal cannot. Finally, we come to "life," which may be the closest we get to an ultimate term in that vocabulary. This is a hierarchy constructed according to the biological definition of what it means to be "human." This hierarchy tells an implicit story about what and who we are, and it has very different implications than a hierarchy that is based on for example a definition from Christian theology, which would find humans "a little lower than the angels," but still created by and belonging to God. For example, if we look at death penalty from these different perspectives it makes little sense to end biological life to punish the end of other biological life, yet it may make sense to hasten an already expected day of judgment for a killer. One important principle in Burke's (1969b) concept of hierarchy is the concept of movement:

On the way up the steps of the hierarchy there is a distancing from the everyday, for the mystic, "a crossing into a realm that transcends everyday judgments – after which there may be a return: the Upward Way is matched by a Downward Way . . ." whereupon the visionary can once again resume his commerce with the world, which he now sees in a new light, in terms of the vision earned during his stage of exile. (p. 95)

The highest term in such a hierarchy, or God-term, is a self-causing motivational term which works as the explanatory principle for all the other terms in the hierarchy. In Burke's words, the encounter with the "God-term" changes the perspective on the world, just as Plato's discussion of love as divine madness and the myth of the ascending chariots changes our outlook on writing. The world now looks different, and infused more powerfully with a new vocabulary of motivations.

Hierarchy creates the effect of order and symmetry, which creates the illusion of naturalness or unavoidability. The different steps of the hierarchy lead into each other so naturally that they seem to be an integral part of the fabric of the world, much like the real hierarchy of feudalism was at one time seen as unavoidable and established by divine decree.

Burke (1969b) claimed that there is no more persuasive rhetoric than the one that follows the steps of dialectical transcendence. One example of the explicit use of hierarchy is President Ronald Reagan's (1986) remarks at the memorial service for the astronauts who died in the Challenger disaster. The disaster, and the

death of the people in the space shuttle, is transcended by viewing it in terms of "progress," where mankind moves forwards through toil, danger and sacrifice. The people who died as the result of bad engineering, constrained budgets, and what has become a classic example of "group think," are now instead exalted as martyrs of American progress, alongside the pioneers who died on the Oregon Trail and in the end help to pave the ascent of mankind towards the stars. What may have otherwise inspired anger and frustration now inspires admiration and the willingness to sacrifice for the greater good. Reagan's implicit argument in this text goes from the personal to the astronomical and historical, yet the hierarchy of terms he uses to get from the one to the other is "symmetrical" in the sense that one part naturally leads into the next.

To go back to the concrete example of Truman's speech on the atomic bomb, the cluster of terms or equations we have found are hierarchical in relation to one another. In order to find which terms belong on the different rungs of the hierarchy, we can start by asking which terms are most concrete. On that level we can find the "scientists of distinction," the "industrial and financial resources," and the enormous "manpower" that went into this project. To go upwards we can then find titles to describe the different facets of the project; the larger categories that the more concrete terms belong to. The project is described respectively as "the greatest scientific gamble in history," "the race of discovery," and "the battle of the laboratories." This all culminated in "the greatest achievement in the history of science," which was to make the atomic bomb. However, it becomes clear that the atomic bomb is not an end in itself, but that it is itself merely a means to a higher end. Truman states that it "contributes" to the "increasing power" of the armed forces of the United States, and is merely an expression of man's "harnessing the basic power of the universe." Therefore, in the hierarchy of this text, scientific achievement is in service of power and is subordinated to it as a value. Power stands as the God-term. Once we have arrived at this point in our analysis, we, like Burke's mystic, can return for a new look at the text and see it in light of its inherent ideological structure.

4 . *Conclusion*
So what are some lessons we can learn from Burke's "internal logic"? I have a few suggestions to conclude:

1. A text is not a neutral delivery device for information. In fact every text contains an implicit ideology which it teaches us by symbolic initiation.

2. This ideological structure can be persuasive and can be used to give an argument the experience or semblance of validity through aesthetic consistency.

3. The features of persuasive form and hierarchy at the level of terms can be traced and analyzed by Kenneth Burke's method of indexing.

4. If they are not analyzed, these structures remain tacit and implicit and therefore they also remain unquestioned, leading to lack of understanding and criticism.

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