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THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS
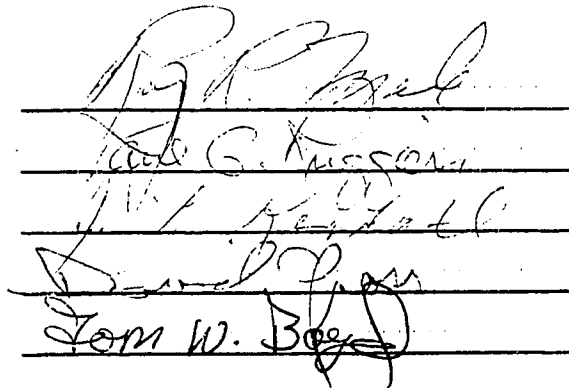
OF KENNETH BURKE

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF KENNETH BURKE

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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I want to thank Kenneth Burke and William Rueckert for their timely correspondence and their suggestions.

I want to thank my committee chairman Roy Male for giving me just the right degree of guidance and for doing the best thing a chairman can do, namely, for suggesting a dissertation topic that matched a subject needing treatment with a student's natural interests. I can still see him in his office in Gittinger Hall in the autumn of 1976, pulling a book off the shelf and saying over his shoulder, "You might want to write on Kenneth Burke."

I want to thank Paul Ruggiers, who taught the first post-survey English course I ever had; who, along with James Sims, was one of two reasons I decided to major in English; and who suggested one day in the autumn of 1972, when I was on leave and visiting in his office overlooking the South Oval, that I not rule out returning to Norman for graduate school.

I want to thank the other members of my committee: Jack Kendall, David Gross, and Tom Boyd. I can picture each of them in the act of teaching, in various rooms, on various subjects—all of which moments I fondly recall in the terms of my own personal, intellectual "transformations."

I want to thank Eric Eaton and Joanna Rapf, both of whom agreed at one time to serve on my committee; Victor Elconin and Alan Velie, department chairmen who offered me more than the usual amount of encouragement;

all those instructors, both within and without the English Department, whose courses I took or audited; and the many friends with whom I associated during these graduate school years, most of whom have now been scattered to different regions of the country.

I want to say I am grateful that there was a major public university in my homestate and that in its less than a hundred years it had developed as far as it had, for the University of Oklahoma was thus able to be for me, in the best sense of a liberal education, a source of liberation. Had it been less a university than it was, it could not have pulled me across as much ground.

And I want to thank my wife Sharon and my son Chad. The happiness we all shared enabled me to concentrate on this work.

Abstract

My starting point is Kenneth Burke's starting point. We humans are word-using or symbol-using animals; more specifically, and more certainly, we are the only creatures who use words about words or symbols about symbols. Burke has labeled this impulse "logological." Now Burke himself is part of a veritable "logologism"; that is, Burke is one of a number of twentieth-century proponents of the doctrine that places the study of the language faculty at the center of the sciences of the human and that develops various critical languages for speaking and writing about human speech and writing.

My second point is that the key to Burke's own logological system is his "logological definition of humankind," and my third point is that the five clauses of his definition can be expanded into brief introductions to the world of human language. I conclude the first movement of this dissertation by posting five principles of language, namely, the principles of logocentric symbolics, of negation, of alienation, of hierarchy, and of entelechy.

My fourth point is that the key to this definition is its clause on negation. I believe that Burke, in developing a theory of human language built around "the negative," joins another widespread trend of twentieth-century thought. A number of writers—some philosophic, some literary, some both—have offered what might be called various "negationisms," that is, have offered various doctrines that at the center of human existence is some kind of negation or void or gap or cipher or absence—whatever

one chooses to call it.

My fifth point is that of these surprisingly common negationist doctrines, none is more prevalent than the structuralist version concerning the diacritical nature of all human meaning. Thus, if Burke, not always granted to be the important figure that I think he ought to be, is to be reseated at the roundtable of intellectual debate in our time, we might do so by allowing him to interrupt today's structuralist dialogue. Both the structuralist theory of the diacritic and the Burkean theory of the negative center human meaning in a faculty of differentiation, but the structuralist diacritic is primarily a faculty of the intellect while the Burkean negative is a faculty with ethical, rhetorical, and practical, as well as intellectual, dimensions. In short, I use the structuralists as a foil to introduce Burke's superior theory.

My sixth point is that neither a theory of intellectual differentiation nor a theory of ethical differentiation seems the most obvious place to begin a discussion of human meaning. This slight obstacle can be overcome by taking an evolutionist approach to the subject. For this reason, I preface both the chapter on structuralism and the chapter on "Burkeanism" with a chapter on the evolutionism of Ernest Becker and others who have theorized about the emergence of human meaning.

My seventh point is that Burke's own theory of linguistic negation generates, as does his definition, a series of phrases for describing the use of language. By the time I have shown how Burke's theory of the negative emerges from his various works, I will have posted another list of language principles, namely, principles concerning the diacritical

dialectical, poetical, ethical, rhetorical, and practical dimensions of word-use. My eighth point is that the best way to organize Burke's sprawling word-production is to gather all these linguistic principles into a whole cluster and then to reflect on the interrelationships among the various principles that constitute its parts. With this I conclude the second movement of the dissertation.

My ninth point is that this cluster of linguistic principles can be taken and turned into an analysis of human society, the social order being largely a linguistic construction and its dynamics being largely the dynamics of words or symbols. Kenneth Burke's theory of language is hereby discovered to be a very relevant theory of sociolinguistics, one which helps us understand what kind of a mess we are in and what, if anything, we can do to ease the tensions which today threaten to culminate in our own self-inflicted destruction.

My tenth point is that my consideration of Burke's logology, to this point extended through nine chapters, along with some of Burke's own recent statements, force slight modifications of his logological definition of humankind, modifications which I tentatively suggest.

My eleventh point is a kind of coda to all the above. I intend to show that before Burke came to reveal philosophically (or perhaps I should say "logologically") the workings of the play of language, the language system itself, in some of our culture's major narratives, had gone a long way toward telling its own sad, dark, yet still strangely upbeat tale.

Except when first referenced in a given chapter, these critical works by Kenneth Burke will be abbreviated as follows:

CS   Counter-Statement (1931)

PC   Permanence and Change (1935)

ATH   Attitudes Toward History (1937)

PLF   The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941)

GM   A Grammar of Motives (1945)

RM   A Rhetoric of Motives (1950)

RR   The Rhetoric of Religion (1961)

LSA   Language as Symbolic Action (1966)

"KL"   "King Lear: Its Form and Psychosis" (1969)

"DTE"   "Dancing with Tears in My Eyes" (1974)

"RPP"   "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy" (1978)

"M/A"   "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action (1978)

"TL"   "Theology and Logology" (1979)

Creation Myth

In the beginning there was universal Nothing.
Then Nothing said No to itself and thereby begat Something,
Which called itself Yes.

Then No and Yes, cohabiting, begat Maybe.
Next all three, in a menage a trois, begat Guilt.

And Guilt was of many names:
Mine, Thine, Yours, Ours, His, Hers, Its, Theirs—and
    Order.

In time things so came to pass
That two of its names, Guilt and Order,
Honoring their great progenitors, Yes, No, and Maybe,
Begat History.

Finally, History fell a-dreaming
And dreamed about Language—

(And that brings us to critics-who-write-critiques-of-
    critical-criticism.)[1]

In a critical age, if not in any age—and the question may be moot

because for a century writers from Matthew Arnold to Robert Scholes and

Robert Kellogg have been telling us ours is such an age—reading criti-

cism is essential to reading.[2] It may indeed be that criticism is a

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[1] Kenneth Burke, Collected Poems, 1915-1967 (1968), p. 5.

[2] Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,"
in Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. W. J. Bate (New York: Harcourt
Brace Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 452-66. I know I should probably cite
Arnold's collected works, but I prefer to plug this already-out-of-
print Bate anthology. I like the overview of the history of criticism
this volume supplies in its introductions. Its most serious flaw is
its omission of Kenneth Burke from its section on modern criticism. And
also Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (Oxford:
Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 3-4.

ubiquitous feature of any era. In his essay "To Criticize the Critics,"

T. S. Eliot paraphrases F. H. Bradley to the effect that "criticism may

be . . . 'the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct,

but to find these reasons is no less an instinct.'"[3] Later in his

essay Eliot shortens this to "literary criticism . . . is an instinc-

tive activity of the civilized mind."[4] So perhaps we should say that

criticism is an omnipresent feature of any era of any civilization

that has reached the stage of rationalizing (in both the favorable

and unfavorable connotations of this word) its motives. For Kenneth

Burke, the inspiration for and eventual focus of this dissertation,

criticism is both essential and inevitable, although most likely to

achieve prominence in those eras of cultural transition that deny poets

the use of a widely-accepted symbolic. Thus we return to Arnold, who

also thought that there are those eras, and that ours is one of them,

in which the cultural synthesis is lost, and that in such times critics

can help effect a new synthesis and help pave the way for a new poetry.

But whether necessary or instinctive or periodic, criticism is for

some of us still more a pleasure than a duty. We enjoy reading first-

rate criticism almost as much as reading first-rate poetry and certainly

more than reading second-rate drama. For us criticism is a genre all

its own. We ride the ebb and flow of this "sublunar activity"[5] with

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[3] T. S. Eliot, _To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings_ (New York:
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), p. 11.

[4] T. S. Eliot, _To Criticize the Critic_, p. 19.

[5] The phrase is Geoffrey Hartman's. See his _The Fate of Reading_
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 267.

the same excitement with which others follow the fashions of the novel or the theater. Some of us can even laugh at ourselves as we catch the wave of a new critical "ism," knowing that along a modern coastline where the breakers come faster and faster another wave roars just behind us. There are dangers of a sort. One can seem to dive too wholeheartedly into each new academic trend, or one can drown in intellectual currents too strong. Yet despite the effort and the danger, we feel it is all worth it. We do it for the ludic pleasure and for the utilic gain: that wider, sometimes panoramic perspective from atop a foaming, everchanging crest.

Again, it is the opinion of our featured critic that some of those who ride these waves of critical thought will eventually call into question the activity of criticism itself. Kenneth Burke considers this "metacritical" impulse a mark of the human. He would say that, whereas all organisms in some way "critique" or "analyze" or "interpret" their environment, only humans interpret their interpretations. Many years ago, in the mid-Thirties, Burke wrote,

> Though all organisms are critics in the sense that they interpret the signs about them, the experimental technique made available by speech would seem to single out the human species as the only one possessing an equipment for going beyond the criticism of experience to the criticism of criticism.[6]

Only humans are guilty of meta-interpretation.

Forty years later, in the mid-Seventies, Burke is still thinking along the same lines. In a lecture at Purdue University, he reaffirms his view of our species:

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[6] Burke, Permanence and Change (1935, 1954), p. 6.

> . . . a human person could be defined as the kind of animal
> organism . . . endowed by mutation with a trait differing
> from all other known animals, namely, the ability and the
> need to communicate with the aid of an arbitrary, conven-
> tional symbol-system (such as a tribal language) of such a
> nature that it can comment on itself . . . . It is this
> "second-level" dimension (the possibility of words-about-
> words, symbols-about-symbols) that makes possible the develop-
> ment of human personality as we know it . . . .[7]

If it ever sufficed to say that humans are the creatures who exchange

conventional signs about their situation, it does no longer. Research

on bees dancing pollen locations, on chimpanzees gesturing food pre-

ferences, and on whales singing sonar pictures has blurred such boun-

daries. Burke's emphasis on "second-order" symbolics now seems a safer

distinction. A last pair of quotations on this Burkean theme will

suggest several related pre-texts and post-texts:

> Symbol systems [of the human sort] . . . differ from
> intuitive signal systems [of the infrahuman sort] in
> that they have a second-level (or "reflexive") aspect.
> That is to say: they can talk about themselves. Cicero
> could both orate and write a treatise on oratory. A dog
> can bark, but it cannot bark a tract on barking.[8]
>
> Whereas many other animals seem sensitive in a rudimentary
> way to the motivating force of symbols, they seem to lack the
> "second-level" aspect of symbolicity that is characteristically
> human, the "reflexive" capacity to develop highly complex
> symbol systems about symbol systems, the pattern of which is
> indicated in Aristotle's definition of God as "thought of
> thought," or in Hegel's dialectics of "self-consciousness."[9]

Since so much of Burke's own work is a kind of "second-level" reflection,

and since that work is certainly classifiable as a "highly complex

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[7] Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," in Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978), p. 29.

[8] Burke "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action," Critical Inquiry (Summer 1978), 810.

[9] Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (1966), p. 24.

symbol system about symbol systems," Burke could promote his meta-
critical endeavors as the work of the Aristotelian divine or of the
play of the Hegelian dialectic--or merely as the expression of the
quintessentially human!

Burke has not, however, chosen to label his critical practice
with the term "metacriticism"; instead, he has chosen his own term.
Lately, he has begun writing under the heading "Logology," as with
his The Rhetoric of Religion, subtitled "Studies in Logology." In
the broad sense in which he usually defines this term, "logology"
means simply "words about words."[10] Now it may strike one that a
great many words fall into this category. Morse Peckham has spoken
of a division between exemplary statements (words about things) and
explanatory statements (words about words) and has noted the proli-
feration these days of explanatory statements.[11] Perhaps then I
should draw a distinction between logology in the broad sense and
logology in the narrow sense. By "logology" in the narrow sense, we
would mean "words used systematically to chart the general principles
of word-use." The term would of course apply to Burke's later studies,
but it would also cover much of his earlier work: -A Grammar of Motives,
in which he schematizes the underlying dynamics of terms in general,
especially terminologies for human motives; A Rhetoric of Motives, in
which he analyzes the procedures by which words are used persuasively;
Permanence and Change and Attitudes Toward History, in which pair of

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[10] For example, see The Rhetoric of Religion (1961, 1970), p. vi.

[11] Morse Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia: Univ. of
South Carolina Press, 1970), pp. 300-301.

volumes he explains the permanent principles governing changes in ideological attitudes over the course of history; and such a chapter as "The Poetic Process" in Counter-Statement, in which he deals with the dynamics of poetry in general. Burke once described himself to his friend Matthew Josephson as a "word man."[12] In light of his concerns in the works just listed, we might better describe Burke as a "words-about-words man."

Josephson portrays the Burke of their Greenwich-Village-in-the-Twenties days as a person preoccupied with philosophies of literary form:

> Even then the question of how we were to use language interested Burke above all things; in the end the theoretical critic and psychologist of language outweighed the poet and storyteller in him. He fairly bubbled with ideas for renovating the technique and form of literature. Often and again he would come to my room, throw his hat into a corner, and exclaim: "I've got a new theory, by God!"[13]

I must admit that there are times when Burke does leave the impression that ours is a universe consisting of nothing more than linguistic theories in action, one eventually replacing another, various discourses playing their discontinuous-yet-still-continuous games, "each mode of saying [needing] correction by each other mode."[14] Like the struc-

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[12] Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 35. This book, despite its treatment of a larger subject, is still one of the best introductions to Burke and offers a number of endearing vignettes of Burke's early years.

[13] Josephson, p. 64.

[14] The phrase is Charles Morris's. See his "The Strategy of Kenneth Burke" in Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke, ed. William Rueckert (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 164.

turalists, Burke can write as if only codes exist, cycling through various permutations: words, only words, interacting, interlocking, coming into contact, breaking apart, always combining and recombining. Of course, those who have read Burke know that he can also deal with the most "down to earth" aspects of our lives. His work is filled with trenchant, knowledgeable, politically-progressive observations on matters of economics, society, and politics. But in his final analysis even these activities are treated as the siblings of language. They are "real" enough, but they are all conditioned by their recipro-cal development with words. Though Burke flirts with some of these sister subjects, and even seems at times wedded to one or another of them, his first love eventually turns out to be the dynamics of words themselves. His logologism is best approached as neither a philosophi-cal idealism trafficking exclusively in the abstractions of language and thought nor a philosophical materialism acknowledging the primacy of economic power and class struggle but as something in-between.[15]

Burke sees logology as the central science, the one from which the other sciences ought to radiate.[16] He believes that logology has a tautological advantage over other "ologies" because it both treats a basically human subject matter, namely, words, and uses a method cha-racteristic of the "second-level" word-user, namely, words about words. However, by such a move to a "higher" level, logology participates in

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[15] On the search for a somewhat similar compromise, see the first part of Mark Poster's _Existential Marxism in Postwar France_ (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 3-105. The unit is entitled "Nei-ther Idealism Nor Materialism."

[16] _RR_, p. 26.

a natural proclivity of the language system, perhaps of any hier-
archical system, to transcend itself. His logological project thus
risks contributing to an unchecked system building, always a danger
in human symbolics but intensified in our time of sophisticated,
high-technology communications. I am speaking of the kind of disorien-
ting climb that worries a number of contemporary novelists,[17] but that
much earlier wearied such practical souls as Francis Bacon and Jonathan
Swift. Fascinatingly, neither Bacon, so distraught over the chiro-
graphic ramblings of medieval scholastics, nor Swift, so perturbed by
the typographic gyrations of Renaissance speculators, was able to
resist the temptation to spin a complex system of his own.[18] Their
dilemma is also Burke's dilemma—and our dilemma as well. Aware of the
irony of building a system to take other systems apart, Burke accepts
the risk anyway. It is a risk that his reader must also choose to take,
for it is a risk that the universe seems determined to take through us.

I confess a touch of vertigo myself, for I suppose this disser-
tation is an exercise in "logologology": my words about Burke's words
about everybody's words. I am quite conscious that I will be engaged
in a critique, not of literature, but of another critique. The author
of the first full-length book on Burke is rather defensive about this.

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[17] I have in mind Tony Tanner's comments on John Barth's _Giles Goat-
boy_ in _City of Words_ (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 247-8, 253.

[18] I have in mind Kathleen Williams's comments in her _Jonathan Swift
and the Age of Compromise_ (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1958), as
when she compares passages from Burton's _The Anatomy of Melancholy_ and
Swift's _The Tale of a Tub_ to reveal both Swift's revulsion over "uncon-
trolled speculation" or over the "spider-like spinning of systems and
theories from our own entrails" and his delight in such spinning, pp.
15-17.

George Knox justifies his efforts on the grounds that he can widen the appreciation of Burke by helping readers overcome Burke's obscure and fragmented style.[19] I would hope to make a defense of my own criticism of Burke's criticism more flattering to my subject, especially since there is thematic unity to Burke's work as well as some obscurity and fragmentation. It is the unity of interlace which Eugene Vinaver finds in medieval romance, wherein the seemingly patternless forest is discovered to be alive with interrelated characters and events.[20] There is method to Burke's madness, though perhaps not so much as to support the claim of Virginia Holland, author of the second full-length book on Burke: "Revealing and imaginative Burke certainly is, but obscure and unsystematic, never!"[21]

Here though is a good example of our predicament. I am already making a critique of critics of the critic Burke, himself a critic of, among others, Ransom, Empson, and Poe, themselves critics of critics. How quickly these days the object of our analysis is complicated! We seem to be worse off than the poets in Plato's Republic, always copying things at several removes from the ideal, read "the truly real," forms. We partially sympathize with those who are downright critical, to employ

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[19] George Knox, Critical Moments (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1957), pp. xvi-xvii.

[20] Eugene Vinaver, The Rise of Romance (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 68-98.

[21] Virginia Holland, Counterpoint (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. ix. For a more recent treatment of the issue of system or lack of system in Burke, see Richard Kostelanetz, "A Mind That Cannot Stop Exploding," New York Times Book Review (1981 March 15), pp. 24-5.

that other meaning of the word, of criticism of criticism and par-
tially share their desire to ban us from the community. Jonathan
Culler, in his critique of critics, mentions this situation in which
"the number of interpretive studies increases to the point where reading
what has been written on any major author becomes an unmanageable labor"
and in which "few of the many who write about literature much less
about literary criticism have the desire or arguments to defend their
activity."[22] William Rueckert, the leading champion of Burke and
author of the third full-length book on him, writes of "the incredible
storehouse of existing theories and methods" that constitutes our
"somewhat curious critical environment," in which "so many resourceful
and energetic minds . . . exhaust very quickly . . . even the merest
suggestion of a new position."[23] In short, we seem lost in a Borgean
Library of Babel, surrounded by a printed, xeroxed, and microfilmed
embarrassment of riches.[24]

This predicament is, in my opinion, the result of an accelerating
semiotic evolution, that is, of the evolution of systems of signs and
the technologies for transmitting, storing, and retrieving them. This
is a large topic, one with a voracious appetite for lesser topics,
nowadays seasoned with spice of Hegel, Heidegger, Teilhard, or Ong.

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[22] Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. vii.

[23] William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology," Iowa Review (Winter 1978), 72. This is also the place at which Paul de Man opens his chapter "Criticism and Crisis" in Blindness and Insight (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 3-4.

[24] I have in mind Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths, trans. James E. Irby (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1962), pp. 51-58.

Here I do not have room to pull down and browse through even one of
these four vocabularies, all of which, so similar and yet so different,
outline "stages," be these an evolution or a devolution, of something--
of consciousness, of Being, of Christ, or of communication. Nor do I
have the space to explain how such discourses have provoked the ire of
Foucault, who seems to feel that any such "developmentalism" harbors
a horrible orthodoxy and who substitutes for the notion of a staged pro-
gression the notion of a series of discontinuous, directionless trans-
formations.[25] At this time it must suffice to say that by the beginning
of the twentieth century, the compilation of the documents of centuries,
yea, of millenia, finally creates a crisis in the European and American
arts and sciences. The ubiquity of paper finally forces the Occident
to a conscious reconsideration of its relationship with its texts.

The way that our reams of critical prose have begun to fold
back on themselves has become too obvious to go unnoticed. To name
just two, George Steiner has recently written of our "current linguis-
tic self-consciousness or 'reflexivity,'"[26] and Fredric Jameson has
recently called attention to a kind of watershed:

> What has today for better or worse come to be known as
> literary theory may be distinguished from an older "philo-
> sophical" criticism by its emphasis on the primacy of
> language; and it has come to be widely, if loosely, felt
> that it is the discovery of the Symbolic in the most
> general sense which marks the great divide between thinkers
> and writers who belong to our world and those who speak

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[25] Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M.
Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 3-17.

[26] George Steiner, Martin Heidegger (New York: Penguin, 1975),
p. 5.

an historical language we have first to learn.[27]

To pay homage to all those who guided us up and across this "Great Divide," we would have to backtrack all the way to the Greeks via the trail of those famous footnotes to Plato or, more dialectically speaking, footnotes to the debate between Plato and Aristotle. An abridged list of the twentieth-century pioneers along this way would include a number of names: Charles Sanders Peirce and other practitioners of pragmatist semiology, Husserl and his independent-minded protégé Heidegger, Wittgenstein and his coterie, Cassirer and his protégée Langer, and Saussure and his structuralist progeny. The reflexive acts of all these persons take the form of words about words, and hence might be called "logological" reflections. More specifically, they constitute a series of attempts to overthrow the analysis of particular language events and to establish the general linguistic principles underlying those events.

Kenneth Burke must be classed as one of the agent provocateurs of this intellectual revolution. His service to the widespread movement ranks among his most important contributions and assures him, I hope, a long reputation. He is one of the great logologers, a metacritic by temperament, a participant in these collective reflections on human symbolics. He is right in the middle of this century's fascination, yea, obsession, with language itself. Certainly Jameson would so class Burke. In fact, the article from which I have already quoted

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[27] Fredric Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference: or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis," Critical Inquiry (Spring 1978), 507.

speaks of "Burke's pioneering work" which "marks him as the precursor

of literary theory in this new, linguistics-oriented sense."[28]

I am not finished borrowing from Jameson. His introductory pages

on Burke contain several other ideas of great importance for this study.

He claims that Burke can serve as a standard against which to measure

other linguistics-oriented critics:

> . . . it is not enough to say that Burke's notion of the sym-
> bolic is an anticipation, indeed a privileged expression of
> current notions of the primacy of language; seen from a dif-
> ferent angle, it allows us to probe the insufficiencies of
> the latter, which is in so much of today's critical practice
> little more than a received idea or unexamined presupposition.
> Indeed Burke's conception of the symbolic as act or praxis
> may equally well be said to constitute a critique of the more
> mindless forms of the fetishism of language.[29]

Here already is another key notion held by Burke, the notion that "lan-

guage is itself theory in action."[30] Finally, Jameson realizes that

Burke

> foresaw the analysis of literary texts and monuments as a
> unique means of access to the understanding of social
> relations.[31]

That Burke is among those theorists who grant language primacy, that

his theories amount to more than just another structuralism, that he

knows words are a form of praxis, and that he approaches the dynamics

of society through the dynamics of language—such concepts provide an

agenda for much of what follows.

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[28] Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference," 507.

[29] Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference," 508.

[30] Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference," 507.

[31] Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference," 509.

The last of these concepts is of special importance to this dissertation. It is one of my main contentions, and this is something else that is obvious to those who have read much Burke, that Burke's logology is sociology. At every point in his career, his observations about human language have a way of turning into observations about human society. When, in the mid-Forties, Burke projected a masterwork on the basic dimensions of language, he envisioned a four-volume set with the overall title On Human Relations. When, in the mid-Sixties, William Rueckert offered us the first real summary of Burke's still unfinished magnum opus, he did so under the title Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations."[32] So I do not plan to finish until I have taken those principles of language which appear and reappear throughout Burke's writings and turned them on "the drama of human relations."

To release these recurring motifs of Burke's logology, I plan to start with what Burke calls his "logological definition of humankind."[33] Burke is a test-case for hermeneutic analysis: one must understand the whole in order to understand the parts. His definition of humankind, though not formally rounded out until the early pages of one of his later volumes, is the best place at which to join his circle. As A. P. Frank has pointed out, in the fourth book on Burke, this definition attempts to encompass a field broader than that surveyed by the traditional definition of man as a rational animal by including those "irra-

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[32] William Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1963).

[33] For example, see Burke, "Theology and Logology," Kenyon Review (Winter 1979), 155.

tional" or "subconscious" or "preconscious" motivations of language

which influence human behavior, without scientistically reducing the

human to a mechanism capable of no rational choice.[34] For approaching

Burke via this sweeping, carefully qualified definition I have, not

so coincidentally, the author's own authorization. Speaking of himself

in the third person, Burke recently said,

> One might conceivably begin an essay on Burke by taking
> as point of departure his theory of form as first presented
> in Counter-Statement, or his "Definition of Man" in Lan-
> guage as Symbolic Action, or his summing-up of what, in
> The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, he
> calls "Dramatism."[35]

Without ignoring either Burke's theory of form or his doctrine of

dramatism, I will accept the middle option of this challenge and will

use Burke's definition as point of departure for the next couple of

chapters.

However, I did not want to deal with the logological definition

until I had dealt with the term "logology." As this word has begun to

surface more and more frequently in Burke's prose, I felt that we should

be familiar with it and with a number of its forms. We will come back

to logology again. I would argue that it is one of the more useful

terms in Burke's vocabulary because it assumes a basic principle of

Burkean criticism, namely, the principle that words are goaded to turn

on themselves. This principle of logologics is only the first of a

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[34] Armin Paul Frank, Kenneth Burke (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969),
p. 141.

[35] Burke, "Dancing with Tears in My Eyes," Critical Inquiry (September
1974), 23.

a number of such principles to be extracted from Burke's pages. I

would also argue that "logology," as its very shape suggests, is one

of the more playful terms in Burke's vocabulary. Such word-play

exemplifies another principle of Burkean theory, namely, the prin-

ciple of poetics that any system of language provides the enjoyment

of its transformational forms, that is, offers the excitement of

the creative extensions and violations of its rules. Burke is not

above (beneath?) having fun with new combinations of letters, words,

and phrases. In the course of working out my arguments, I too will

play, but play in all seriousness, with words. I know that the lan-

guage codes that I must use are going to "drift"; for the love of

these codes I want to give their changes as constructive a direction

as possible. I am also aware that, ironically, such a purpose involves

building my own system to take Burke's apart. Still, I judge this

to be a risk that to some degree we naturally logological, hierarchy-

haunted, system-building symbolicians cannot avoid.

> . . . all definitions are essentially _ad hoc_. They are
> relevant to some purpose or situation, and consequently
> are applicable only over a restricted field or "universe
> of discourse." For some definitions, . . . this universe
> is very wide.[1]

We begin, or rather we begin again, with the issue of human speci-

ficity. It is from this point that Kenneth Burke launches one of his

own important works, casting his definitional net, collecting a school

of ideas, and displaying these in the opening chapter of a volume entitled

Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method.[2]

Beginning with a "definition of man," he vows, using a hunting rather

than a fishing metaphor, to trackdown the implications of the terms in

the book's name. I quote his definition in full:

> Man is
> the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal
> inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)
> separated from his natural condition by instruments of his
>   own making
> goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense
>   of order)
> and rotten with perfection.[3]

With these five clauses Burke believes he has **logologically** netted, or

bagged, a being most powerful and dangerous: the human being.

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[1] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, _The Meaning of Meaning_ (1923; rpt. Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 111.

[2] Kenneth Burke, _Language as Symbolic Action_ (1966).

[3] _LSA_, p. 16.

Burke is not, of course, the first to fish these waters. With
this attempt to define the human, he sails alongside a large fleet of
ancients, medievals, and moderns--all dropping their lines in quest of
our essence. But such is the logocentric nature of their industry, all
pull from the deep only more words, dumping on the docks a pile of
lifeless Latinate labels: homo sapiens, homo faber, homo pyrans, homo
domicilius, homo economicus, homo pietas, homo bellicosus, homo ludens,
homo laborans, homo poetica, homo memorans, and homo providens. These
marine hunters are no more successful at capturing their prey than
was Ahab, in a story that has much to say about the enigma of names
and the problems of definition, at harpooning the Great White Whale.[4]
In short, much, especially the mystery of the Other, slips through the
meshing.

But eventually, as I mentioned in the last chapter, several of the
more reflexive participants in this chase, persons like Peirce, Husserl,
Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Saussure, and Burke, seize upon the tactic of
pulling back, ovserving themselves, and proclaiming the human as the
one who chases. They use their words to define the human as the word-
using definitionician. Burke is aware of a certain tautological per-
fection to letting the form of the act of definition reinforce the
content:

> Inasmuch as definition is a symbolic act, it must begin
> by explicitly recognizing its formal grounding in the
> principle of definition as an act. In choosing any defi-
> nition at all, one implicitly represents man as the kind

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[4] For a fuller development of this theme, see Tony Tanner, City of
Words (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 21-3.

of animal that is capable of definition (that is to say,
capable of symbolic action).[5]

This is a case of verbal action itself speaking louder than words.
And, in effect, these reflexolates give us homo symbolicus, or homo
loquax as Burke half-teasingly labels him,[6] a creature for whom
symbol-using (and, after Chapter One, we might ought to say "symbols-
about-symbols-using") precedes knowledge-gathering, tool-making, fire-
stoking, house-building, commodity-bartering, idol-worshipping, war-
waging, game-playing, work-doing, poem-singing, past-remembering, and
future-planning respectively.

So there are those twentieth-century thinkers who begin defining
the human as the language-user. What are Burke's special contributions
to this movement? First, Burke is notable, even among radicals, for
the radicalness of his logocentrism, for the lengths to which he pushes
these doctrines, for his use of these ideas to achieve what the jackets
of his books advertise as "a total vision." As applied to Burke, the
phrase actually belongs to William Rueckert, who, in the first and still
the best effort to explore the range of this vision, comments: "Like
Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal, Burke's definition
of him as a symbol-using animal is simplistic, but with enormously
complex ramifications."[7] Malcolm Cowley, longtime friend of Burke,
states that Burke's "system starts with the definition that man is a

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[5] LSA, p. 14.

[6] Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941, 1973), p. 112.

[7] William Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations
(Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1963), pp. 129-30.

symbol-using animal and from this . . . exfoliates in all directions."[8]

This expansion is due to the way Burke follows human symbolics down

all the thoroughfares and backalleys of life. As Burke would say,

the human is the being who endows _everything_ in his world with the

spirit of his symbol systems. As Rueckert explains, Burke's "language-

oriented system . . . is a self-contained and internally consistent

way of viewing man, the various scenes in which he lives, and the

drama of human relations."[9] As I said in the last chapter, the goal

toward which this dissertation moves is a Burke-inspired, Rueckert-

inspired analysis of the sociolinguistic motives of groups of people.

Second, Burke has many serious reservations about this language

faculty. The name "Symbol-user," as he is fond of saying, is both

"honorific and ironic."[10] The same words that free us also enslave us.

Whereas some thinkers tend toward the pure celebration of this new

human power, a la Helen Keller bursting into a dawn of names from the

prenomian darkness of her sensory handicaps via the cold water from the

pump and the warm concern of her nurse,[11] or even a la Fredrich Nietzsche

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[8] Malcolm Cowley, "Prolegomena to Kenneth Burke," in _Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke_, ed. William Rueckert (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 249.

[9] Rueckert, _Drama_, p. 129.

[10] _LSA_, p. 9. This is a recurring note in the Burkean chord. For example, see also Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," in _Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature_, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978), p. 29.

[11] Helen Keller, _The Story of My Life_ (1902; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), pp. 34-7.

rejoicing in the play of language in a twilight of meaninglessness,[12] Burke sees this new power as a decidedly mixed blessing. Rising or setting the sun of symbolics casts its light upon some pretty horrible sights. Whatever else we may say about the word-creature, we can say that he has many more opportunities for mischief. Language makes possible new divisions, hatreds, guilts, instabilities, and destructions. This same short opening chapter of Language as Symbolic Action, in which Burke presents his definition, contains no less than half a dozen references to nuclear warfare, the most ominous recent spinoff within the whirl of human symbolics. This is something else we must eventually reconsider.

Third, Burke postulates his own unique cluster of propensities at work in the play of words. Each clause of his definition captures one or more of these propensities, and each merits a name of its own: the clause on symbolics or on logocentrism, the clause on negation, the clause on alienation, the clause on hierarchy, and the clause on entelechy. A way of organizing the otherwise seemingly disparate sections of Burke's texts is to take a sheet of paper and list these five clauses as headings across the top. As one reads Burke and notes his references to these ideas, the columns begin to lengthen. One soon sees that these clauses are a veritable index to Burke's chief concerns, concerns to which he repeatedly returns. By the way he mentions one clause while assuming his reader's familiarity with other of the clauses, one quickly

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[12] I am borrowing from Gerald Graff borrowing from Derrida borrowing from Nietzsche. See Graff's Literature Against Itself (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 61-2.

realizes that these clauses are closely interrelated. One gradually discovers, by the growing number of Burke's various volumes detailed on such a list, that Burke has long been preoccupied with the way that humans are encircled in a system of symbols (logocentric symbolics), with the distinguishing trait of this system (negation), with the consequences of such encirclement (alienation), with an important aspect of the form of this symbol system (hierarchy), and with the force that goads it to perfection (entelechy). Around these centers gather the interlocking movements that organize Burke's ideas in particular and the world of language in general--his ideas being a sensitive register of that world.

Now I would be surprised if at this juncture these clauses and their interconnections are very clear. Needless to say, Burke's brief definitional chapter is helpful, but it presents problems of its own. It only begins to touch on the profundities of symbolics. It prepares a reader to think in terms of "the negative" without really tracing out the implications of negation. Under "separation" or "alienation" it lumps what would not fit under any of the other clauses and leaves the reader to puzzle over the groupings. It only introduces the vast subjects of hierarchy and entelechy. Of course, it is not intended to be a full-scale examination of its subjects; it means to start us thinking. As Burke says, "The aim is to get as essential a set of clauses as possible, and to meditate on each of them."[13]

What follows is meant as a further meditation on these clauses.

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[13] _LSA_, p. 3.

I want us to survey the human landscape or, as we should perhaps be calling it by this time, the human "symbol-scape." Forewarned of some of the dangers, I want us to follow Burke through, to borrow Tony Tanner's title, "the City of Words."

> . . . in contrast with the immediacies of the body, we
> confront for our overall "reality" an indeterminately
> interwoven complexity of symbols . . . .[1]

1. The Clause on Symbolics

If by a "mosaic" we mean the picture formed by a pattern of bits

of colored stone or glass or the process of making same, by a "symbolic"

we would mean a mosaic of bits of symbolic meaning. Any culture is an

interwoven pattern of such bits, and our personalities are among its

details. Furthermore, if the creation of a mosaic requires many indi-

vidual acts of composition by which the pieces are fitted and glued,

a symbolic likewise is formed by "symbolics," that is, by the sum total

of countless individual acts, often undertaken in series, by which is

gradually built a picture of human value and purpose. The principle of

symbolics is the principle that human beings are the creatures who "see"

such a "picture" or who compose their lives by such "symbolicity," to

use one of Burke's favorite words. And the important corollary to this

is the principle of logocentrics, namely, the principle that we encircle

ourselves in the symbolic structures that we build. These principles

are Kenneth Burke's point of departure: we humans, be we individuals,

groups, or whole civilizations, are something constructed from symbolic

action, and it is our fate to be caged in the resulting "complexity."

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[1] Kenneth Burke, "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action," Critical
Inquiry (Summer 1978), 814.

Let us look at the text I am using to launch this discussion. In the first chapter of <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u>, after a couple of anecdotes about the disadvantages (and advantages) of infrahuman levels of consciousness, Burke begins with a classic statement of the logocentric predicament of human beings. It is a rather lengthy passage, and I quote only that part of it essential for introducing Burke's linguistics:

> . . . can we bring ourselves to realize . . . just how over-whelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, bio-graphy, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, news-papers, and the like about the present? In school, as they go from class to class, students turn from one idiom to another. The various courses in the curriculum are in effect but so many terminologies [after Foucault, we would probably say "discourses"]. And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall "picture" is but a construct of our symbol systems.[2]

In Burke's view, we are "but a construct of our symbol systems." We are "symbolical constructs."

But the phrase "symbolical constructs" conveys too static an impression. To be true to the Burkean view, I must say that we are something more than this: we are symbols or words or language in action. Since any species is a mode of action (and I would suggest that any species is as well a mode of being or intention or purpose or courage or perseverance or hope), we might think of the human as a new "species of action," namely, as "language as symbolic action."[3] Both terms in the phrase are

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[2] Burke, <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u> (1966), p. 5.

[3] Burke, <u>The Rhetoric of Religion</u> (1961, 1970), p. 38.

crucial. In so far as this world of symbols is a realm of intention or purpose, it is a realm of "symbolic _action_" (note position of the underline). It is a new kind of motivation, a new mode of engagement with the surround. And in so far as this region of language is a place of comparatively great freedom of choice, this realm is a realm of "_symbolic_ action." For the fact of human choice makes possible a new level of expression. The act of human selection is an indication of comparatively great "interiority." These are ideas that I will try to clarify in my fifth and seventh chapters. For now, we must simply note that our logocentric world is a world of "deep inwardness,"[4] and this inwardness receives symbolic expression in the selections we make and in the signals we choose to send.

Burke closes this section of his definitional chapter with mention of such things as "substitution," "abbreviation," and "transcendence."[5] As these terms are all employed to describe the method by which language orders our world, I prefer to deal with them under the third clause, the clause which treats language as an instrument. So for the purposes of what follows, I need only restate the masterclause of Burke's linguistic philosophy: _we are systems of words, and what is true of words is true of those word-constructs that our identities and our societies; we make, use, and misuse amazing new counters of meaning; we inhabit the city of words._ When William Rueckert introduces Burke's theory of symbo-

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[4] The phrase is William Rueckert's. See his "Kenneth Burke and Structuralism," _Shenandoah_ (Autumn 1969), 23.

[5] _LSA_, pp. 7-8.

lic action, he gives us two sentences which can serve as a summation

of this principle of logocentric symbolics:

> Because of this unremitting tendency on the part of man
> to make the world and himself over in the image of his
> distinctive trait, man has a <u>language-ridden</u> [my under-
> line] view of himself, his products, and the universe;
> and language acts as a key motive or scene for all of
> man's acts. Every aspect of non-verbal, socio-political,
> and extra-verbal reality is viewed by man <u>through a fog</u>
> <u>of symbols</u> [my underline again], and human relations are
> at every point complicated by the linguistic factor that
> is intrinsic to the human mind.[6]

2. <u>The Clause on Negation</u>

With respect to the last section, we might begin something like

this: <u>the city of words is built with the negative</u>. All cultures are

fabricated with basic building blocks I shall call, in keeping with

the fashion for such terms, "negemes." Burke's later works, especially

<u>The Rhetoric of Religion</u> and <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u>, resound with

his hammerblows on the theme of the negative as the quintessence of

language. The second clause reads this way: "Man is the . . . inventor

of the negative." Here at the start of his section on the negative,

Burke wrestles with the term "inventor":

> . . . we could not properly say that man "invented" the
> negative unless we can also say that man is the "inventor"
> of language itself. So far as sheerly empirical develop-
> ment is concerned, it might be more accurate to say that
> language and the negative "invented" man.[7]

In a later chapter, Burke makes the same point in a different manner:

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[6] William Rueckert, <u>Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations</u>
(Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 130. See also Burke,
<u>RM</u>, p. 136.

[7] <u>LSA</u>, p. 9.

"The essential distinction between the verbal and the nonverbal is the
fact that language adds the peculiar genius of the Negative."[8] In both
chapters, Burke credits Bergson with opening his eyes to the fact that
"there are no negatives in nature, every natural condition begin posi-
tively what it is," and that "the negative is a peculiarly linguistic
resource."[9] This ingenious, and originally ingenuous, addition of a
new dimension to the universe is "solely a product of human symbol sys-
tems."[10] All these quotations pound out the same message: language is
the peculiar genius of the human, and the negative is the peculiar
genius of language; the human is the place where the negative blossoms
into the universe.

In exploring further Burke's principle of lingual negation, there
are at least three routes we can take. First, let me call attention to
a twist Burke puts on the negative as he introduces it, a twist, I might
add, that he does not turn as many times as he could. Again borrowing
from Bergson, he writes that the negative plays one of its prime roles
"with regard to unfulfilled expectations":

> If I am expecting a certain situation, and a different
> situation occurs, I can say that the expected situation
> did not [my underline] occur. But as far as the actual
> state of affairs is concerned, some situation positively
> prevails, and that's that.[11]

I will rephrase this: if the human is the place where the negative enters
the world, the negative enters through a sense of unfulfilled expectations.
In a sense, the negative is born in a breach--is a breach--between expec-

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[8] LSA, p. 420.   [9] LSA, pp. 9 and 419.

[10] LSA, p. 9.   [11] LSA, pp. 9-10.

tation and fulfillment. I mention this because one of my goals in this work is to draw the parallels between Burke and the structuralists, and under structuralist influence others have begun to speak of the distinctively human as a "breach" or a "gap" or a "rupture."[12] Furthermore, Ernest Becker describes the birth of human meaning as a birth that occurs in a kind of gap--as something that _is_ a gap--and this too I plan to link to Burke's ideas.[13] The common denominator in all of this is the concept that, whatever else is the human·being that language and the negative invent, he is a construct covering a new distance between shaped expectations and subsequent perceptions.

If, in my opinion, Burke does not fully develop this concept of the human as a new gap in intellection, it is probably because he has what seems to him an even more important concept to convey. Burke wants us to consider, and this is what separates him from the structuralists and from Becker, a different kind of breach. In The Rhetoric of Religion, he speaks of the human as the temporal breach between the issuance of commandments and the decision to accept or reject them. To obey or not to obey, that is the human question. The human is built from the negative all right, but in Burke's theory this turns out to be a moral negative:

> It [the human lifeworld] will all center in . . . the nega-
> tive. With [infrahuman modes of being], there is only the
> distinction between _is_ and _is not_. But with [the human],

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the first negative will be of a different sort: it will
involve the distinction between shall and shall not.[14]

And Burke remains perennially fascinated by the human ability for a kind

of "double negative":

> . . . implicit in the legal negative, the "thou shalt not"
> of the Law (which, the story of Beginnings tells us, was
> born with the creation of wordly order), is the possibi-
> lity that its negativity can be extended to the negating
> of negativity. There is thus the "responsibility" of being
> able to say no to a thou-shalt-not.[15]

This is a turning point in Burke's system. The hortatory negative

is assumed to be prior to the propositional negative. "The negative

begins, not as a resource of definition or information, but as a com-

mand, as a 'Don't.'"[16] The gap that is the human is more than just

an intellectual pause; it is a locale filled with the need to conform

to the Law and with the inevitable guilt of failing to do so; it is an

intrusion of moral feeling. We both make differentiations and judge

them; we deliberate between keeping and breaking the laws. Before I am

finished, I hope to have shown how basic is this ethical point to Burke's

whole system, how much he does with it, and how effectively he uses it

to distinguish his doctrines from other doctrines of the negative.

My third introductory comment on negation concerns this Burkean

extension of the doctrine: "One builds one's character . . . out of re-

sponses . . . to the thou-shalt-not's of morality."[17] At the opening of

this chapter, I said that our personalities are a part of a larger symbo-

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[14] RR, p. 278.

[15] Burke, "Theology and Logology," Kenyon Review (Winter 1979), 167.

[16] LSA, p. 10.   [17] LSA, p. 11.

lic. If we now consider that system of symbols as a systems of laws,
then we must think of our personalities, as "details" or "patches" of
the larger ethical system, as being morally charged. If we are ingrained
patterns of response to the negativities of a set of moral commandments,
and if our responses are our own way of interacting with the environment,
then the "negativity" of our personalities will reach into all corners
of our experience. Burke sums this up in a sentence in which one can
hear the principle of logocentric symbolics still echoing: "The posi-
tive events of nature come to be seen through the eyes of moral negati-
vity."[18] Again, William Rueckert's own summary suggests some of the
implications with which we must deal when handling this aspect of Burke's
negationism:

> The negative is the very essence of language and the ability
> to use it is one of the distinguishing characteristics of man.
> To a positive, amoral, and fundamentally innocent nature, man,
> with language . . . adds the negative and all of its products--
> such things as property rights, moral and social proscriptions
> of all kinds, law, justice, and conscience.[19]

We not only add these products of the moral negative to nature, we also
infuse their spirit into all nonverbal realms--so much so that it is diffi-
cult to talk about the negative without using it, as my use of the pre-
fix "non" in "nonverbal" indicates.

For the purposes of what follows, I must close in terms that capture
both the sense of negation of this section and the sense of action of the
previous section. Thus I act to coin a phrase which is not to be confused
with any other. I propose a _principle of negatics_ (with, say, the same
long vowel in "negatics" as is found in the verb "negate"): _the play of_

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[18] _RR_, p. 195.   [19] Rueckert, _Drama_, p. 130.

forces which shape the world of words is largely the work of explosions

of negation--intellectual and ethical negation.

3. The Clause on Alienation

The third clause of the defintion reads as follows: "Man is . . .

separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making."

Let me follow the trail of this key term "separation." Earlier in the

definitional chapter, Burke says,

> In being a link between us and the nonverbal, words are
> by the same token a screen separating us from the nonver-
> bal--though the statement gets tangled in its own traces, .
> since so much of the "we" that is separated from the non-
> verbal by the verbal would not even exist were it not for
> the verbal.[20]

Burke has an entire later chapter in which he speaks of the language

system as a "terministic screen" separating us from the world.[21] Else-

where, he writes of "separation":

> I literally say that . . . symbolicity is a medium between
> man and the nonverbal, but by the same token, in being a
> medium, it separates him from the nonverbal realm (as pre-
> sumably, say, a worm is not separated from its "reality").[22]

Burke is unwilling to view this "separation" as a total separation. In

Attitudes Toward History, he gives this description of the paradoxical

relationship between the word-creature and his environment: "Words

are a mediatory realm that joins us with wordless nature, while at the

same time standing between us and wordless nature."[23]

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[20] LSA, p. 5.   [21] LSA, pp. 44-62.

[22] Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," in Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978), p. 27.

[23] Burke, Attitudes Toward History (1937, 1959), p. 373.

At other times Burke searches for some less definitive term for

this process of mediation than the term "separation." He may argue

that the typical resource of language is "abbreviation" or "abstrac-

tion" or "generalization" or "classification" or "displacement."[24]

However, for the purposes of what follows, I am most intrigued by still

another of his terms for the negotiations between the verbal and the

extraverbal. In the definitional chapter, mention of "separation" is

soon followed by mention of "substitution": A fundamental resource

'natural' to symbolism is substitution."[25] But "substitution" carries

connotations of one-to-one correspondence, as when a coach "substitutes"

one player for another. Even if language is a substitution, it is not

that kind of substitution. Of course, Burke does not imply that it is.

In fact, in Burke's view, "substitution sets the conditions for trans-

cendence."[26] In A Rhetoric of Motives, he observes that

> when we use symbols for things, such symbols are not merely
> reflections of the things symbolized, or signs for them;
> they are to a degree a transcending of the things symbo-
> lized. So, to say that man is a symbol-using animal is . . .
> to say that he is a "transcending animal."[27]

This transcendence, I must next say, is a transcendence by "synecdoche."

We "transcending animals" achieve our humanity by lifting the old "parts"

and "wholes" of infrahuman experience into new human "parts" and "wholes."

In his Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke says the synecdoche is the

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[24] For example, see Permanence and Change (1935, 1954), p. 185, on
abstraction or Language as Symbolic Action (1966), pp. 7-8, on abbreviation.

[25] LSA, p. 7.   [26] LSA, p. 8.

[27] Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 192.

basic figure of language, but all of his work is characterized by the assumption that our world of language grows out of a reciprocation between "parts" of sensory data and "wholes" of symbolic interpretation.[28] We displace the raw data of our senses with abstract categories of extraordinary scope, and then let these interpretive classifications "color" or organize future experience. So we must include in any definition of the human a principle of hermeneutics which I will call the principle of synecdochics: language is a series of acts of compulsive substitution.

At the end of this section of the definitional chapter, Burke gives us some idea of the scale of this synecdochical action. The instruments which "separate the human from his natural condition" include the entire "complex network of material operations and the varying relationships of the structure of public and private property."[29] These are the kinds of human concerns we substitute for infrahuman needs. Thus the human being, locus of comparatively great freedom, is soon enchained in the most elaborate collective structures, structures that are the result of previous human interpretations and choices. Although in this dissertation I will make use mainly of the notion of synecdochical substitution and will de-emphasize other aspects of this third definitional clause, I cannot finish this section without stating another of Burke's constant assumptions: "Substitution" leads to "reification" leads to something else— the city of words is the capital of Alienation.

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[28] Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941, 1973), pp. 25-9, 60, 77-8, 102, 122, 139, 178, 280, 288, and 450.

[29] I am paraphrasing LSA, p. 15.

4. The Clause on Hierarchy

After the difficulty of the previous clause, this one is compara-
tively simple: the city of words is a tower with many hierarchical
levels. The section on this clause in the definitional chapter is
brief. Burke restates the clause, "Man is . . . goaded by the spirit
of hierarchy," and then he suddenly begins speaking of the mysterious
pride of social classes.[30] For the reader not familiar with Burke's
other pronouncements on hierarchy, I will fill in some of the missing
steps of the argument as we have it here in Language as Symbolic Action.

There is in language an unremitting tendency toward hierarchy.
This tendency is closely related to some of the language tendencies
just mentioned, such as "abstraction," "generalization," and "classi-
fication." We might have added "hierarchicalization" to that list of
descriptions of the process of linguistic ordering. Burke devotes a
whole clause to this one aspect of human order because the consequences
of hierarchy are so far-reaching. Because word-systems form hierarchies
and because the human is a word-system, the human will think in hier-
archical terms. Because he thinks in hierarchies, his organizations, his
institutions, and his social structures will take hierarchical form.
Actually, there is another factor at work here, and Burke hints at it in
such phrases as "modes of livelihood" and "division of labor." It would
seem that hierarchies of knowledge and skill are required by any living
system in order that it wrest the necessities of life from its environ-

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[30] LSA, p. 15.

ment. It is probable that these hierarchies of knowledge and skill
are themselves grounded in the multi-tiered arrangment of any pattern
of information. The human is thus not really unique in organizing its
perceptions and interpretations and actions hierarchically, but the
human is unique in coloring its hierarchics with ethics. Burke brings
the concepts of hierarchy and negation together in this fashion: "Here
man's skill with symbols combines with his negativity and with the ten-
dencies towards different modes of livelihood implicit in the inventions
that make for division of labor, the result being definitions and dif-
ferentiations and allocations of property protected by the negativities
of the law."[31]

A Rhetoric of Motives is one long meditation on the problems of
communication within these inevitable hierarchies of economic, social,
and political organization. In Burke's view, the structured exchanges
of language are inescapably hierarchical, and all messages involve levels
of information passed among morally-charged social levels. We always
find ourselves within social arrangements that will create, as these
arrangements become increasingly differentiated, with privileges granted
to some but denied to others, new challenges for those who wish to avert
a complete breakdown of communication.[32] The different classes will
tend to become "mysteries" to each other. "Those 'Up' will be guilty
of not being 'Down'; those 'Down' will certainly be guilty of not being
'Up.'"[33] The inherent vanities and insecurities of hierarchy will pro-

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[31] LSA, p. 15. [32] LSA, p. 15.

[33] Again, I am paraphrasing LSA, p. 15.

mote the abuse of hierarchical power. So basic are these ideas to Burke

that, as I condense the argument of a number of his works, I feel I am

skipping a great deal. For the moment just remember this principle of

hierarchics: language is a series of acts of hierarchical classifica-

tion. The city of words is peopled with hierarchy-haunted creatures.

5. The Clause on Entelechy

Burke closes his definition with the line: "Man is . . . rotten

with perfection."[34] As he says elsewhere, this a perhaps a "perversely

figurative" way of saying, "Man is . . . given to excess."[35] The prin-

ciple of perfection referred to here is actually a principle of entelechy.

As hackneyed an approach as this is, let me turn to the dictionary, in

which "entelechy" is defined as

> the realization of form-giving cause as contrasted with
> potential existence; a hypothetical agency that in some
> vitalist doctrines is considered inherent in living sub-
> stances and regulates or directs the vital processes of
> an organism but is not discoverable by scientific inves-
> tigation.[36]

The latter part of this definition is the mark of debates in modern

Europe and America; the former of debates in classical Greece. The

nineteenth-century vitalists argued that there was at work in any organism

a "vital lifeforce" which defies empirical measurement but which governs

the development of the organism. Their argument was a throwback to a

principle of fifth-century Greek metaphysics. Plato had spoken of the

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[34] LSA, p. 16. [35] "RPP," 25.

[36] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 8th ed., p. 380.

ideal form which the Demiurge bestows upon the prototype of each crea-
ture. Aristotle had taken these forms out of the realm of the eternal
and planted them in the things themselves. Existing things were now
to be seen as obeying a god within, not as being molded by a god without.
Life was to be conceptualized as conforming to an inner "telos," as
being a manifestation of an "en-telos" or of a process of "entelechy."
However, although Aristotle brought "the process of form" down from the
clouds or forward from the primal past, he hardly lessened the mystery
of the events through which "things" or "beings" or "modes of being"
fulfill their form in governed stages. The same mystery filled the
worldview of those later vitalists, who, theorizing in a scientistic
age from which the Christian God seemed to be disappearing, ressurrected
the entelechial gods within.

Burke's use of entelechy may also be seen as a modern revitalization
of an ancient doctrine. He frankly presents his ideas on entelechy as
an adaptation "for sheerly logological purposes" of "the Aristotelian
notion . . . that each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind
(or, etymologically, is marked by 'possession of telos within')."[37]
However, Burke wants to center the discussion of entelechy in the arena
of language: "Whereas Aristotle seems to have thought of all beings in
terms of entelechy, we are confining our use of the principle to the
realm of symbolic action."[38] The originality of Burke here is his modi-
fication of a cosmological or ontological principle into a principle of
linguistics. We can state this as the principle of entelechics: every-

[37] LSA, pp. 16-7.   [38] LSA, pp. 16-7.

where there are words, there too will be a series of acts aiming at some kind of fulfillment. The city of words is subject at all points to the pressures of formal perfection. What the Lord tells Satan in Burke's seriously comic epilogue to The Rhetoric of Religion must apply to any current explication of Burke's theory of language: "You shall hear a lot more about 'perfection' before this inquiry is ended!"[39]

I have tried to keep these sections fairly short, so much so that I have come to feel they still require a specialist's knowledge in Burke to make all the connections. But even a non-specialist ought now to have a better outline of the basic relationships among Burke's linguistic principles: the principle of logocentric symbolics that our human city is walled in words; the principle of negatics that our city is one of law and order, its streets ruled by moral admonishments; the principle of synecdochics that all the parts of our experience are forced into these new censorious human wholes which we have substituted for the comparatively innocent and spontaneous orientations that presumably operated before our evolution; the principle of hierarchics that our mediatory systems take hierarchical form; and the principle of entelechics that all these forms—the moral negatives, the synecdochical hermeneutics, the hierarchical structures—are subject to an impulse toward perfection. These clauses are truly a cluster. The first clause on symbolics subsumes the next four. Notions of separation and perfection are woven into the

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[39] RR, p. 281.

notion of the negative. Notions of hierarchy and transcendence are woven into the notion of entelechial perfection. Try to life a single one of these clauses and, as Fredric Jameson says somewhere of a Hegelian cluster, the whole tangled mess comes dripping to the surface.

But I will try anyway. Having set in front of us at least a chapter's worth of linguistic principles, I now want, perhaps unexpectedly, to zero in on just one of these principles. As Burke says,

> When working with a set of terms [and here read principles] that mutually or cicularly imply one another, we must necessarily pick one of them to begin with, though we might as well have begun with any of the others. But whichever one we do start with becomes in effect "foremost among equals."[40]

I believe we will be in accord with Burke's priorities if we pick the clause on negation as the "foremost among equal clauses." However, I must admit that we might as well have begun with any of the others. In fact, when I wrote William Rueckert of my intention to deal with Burke's theory of negation, he wrote back that perhaps I should deal with Burke's theory of entelechy.[41] A case can certainly be made that the concept of entelechy becomes increasingly important in Burke's later works, until it dominates all other concepts. But a case can also be made that the clause on negation provides, to use Rueckert's own phrase, "the central coordinates of [Burke's] system."[42] If the logological defini-

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[40] LSA, p. 365.

[41] In his letter to this author dated 1981 March 24, Rueckert says, "Burke, of course, has really not committed himself to just one of the principles; or, if he has, it is entelechy (at least in all of his work after Language as Symbolic Action and in many essays therein).

[42] Rueckert, Drama, p. 130.

tion is the key to Burke, the clause on negation is the key to the definition. If I can explain this clause satisfactorily, I think I can make the rest of the clauses fall into place. In addition, and this is one of my main motives, writing on negation will make it easier for me to link Burke to other contemporary critics. To use the vernacular, negationism "is in." If we focus on negation, we can join the structuralist and poststructuralist fun.

So, we are poised to approach the world of linguistic action through Burke's principle of negation, with other Burkean principles at our disposal should we need them. Unfortunately, the few times I have foolishly ventured to mention to someone Burke's theory that the negative is at the heart of the human condition or that the negative is our contribution to evolution, I have received a funny look. It does seem an odd, awfully abstract place to begin an analysis of something as phenomenologically concrete as the human lifeworld. Thus at the risk of postponing too long a deeper plunge into Burke, I am going to insert three chapters. The next chapter (Chapter Four) will show how common are doctrines of negation. If Burke is odd, then so are many others. The chapter after that (Chapter Five) will use an evolutionist perspective to show that negationism is not only a currently fashionable place to begin, but that there is a powerful logic behind such a beginning. Then as a way of returning to Burke, I want to outline certain key structuralist notions of the negative (Chapter Six). These three chapters, combined with a thorough exposition of Burke's own theory (Chapter Seven) will form a sort of critical mass that I can accelerate toward the finish of this dissertation.

> . . . implicit in polar terms, there is a timeless principle
> of negativity. . . . DUPLICATION, POLARITY, NEGATION (and
> countless variations of such) [are] the very soul of logo-
> logical inquiry.[1]

By "negationism" I mean the doctrine that at the center of human
experience is an "absence" or a "cipher" or an "emptiness" or a "loss"
or a "void." All these terms imply some kind of "negativity" in that
all suggest the canceling of something more "positive," something such
as a "gain" or a "fullness" or a "presence." One might be inclined at
this point to counter that at the center of human experience is rather
some kind of "positivity," and that it is only these binary oppositions
of language that trick us into thinking otherwise. We are basically
desire, one might assert, and the last thing desire is is an absence.
We only introduce negativity, this opposition might continue, with the
language in which we try to think about and talk about our desires. Un-
fortunately, this argument is like one of those Civil War bombardments
that ends up strengthening the fort under its seige. For according to
the principle of logocentric symbolics, we are largely those terms in
which we think and speak, and, if they operate by negativity, so do we.
The self-deceivers would then be those who urge us to "think positive."
For a number of years now, intellectuals who would have us stress the

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[1] Kenneth Burke, "Theology and Logology," Kenyon Review (Winter 1979),
172, 175.

negative and bestselling authors who would have us "accentuate the positive" have been recoiling in horror from one another. I am going to dismiss the latter as hopelessly deluded but still understandable and even somewhat sympathetic figures and, with an eye on eventually placing the work of Kenneth Burke, to concentrate on two of the former: Robert M. Adams and Paul de Man.

The thesis of Robert Adams's Nil is that "in art, in literature, in science, in our culture as a whole, we are a void-haunted, void-fascinated age."[2] He opens his study with brief mention of some of the great modern negationists, including Sartre, Burke, Freud, Hegel, Beckett, Antonioni, Stevens, Gide, and Hemingway.[3] He lists other places in our world, ranging from nicknames to music to comic strips, where the pervasive-to-the-point-of-being-almost-commonplace negative has left its mark.[4] Adams's purpose is not, however, to locate the negative in either philosophical works or popular culture. His goal is to chart the "conquest of void" in nineteenth-century literature.

Adams finds that different modern writers fight different voids.[5] Some seem to be reacting to the "death or disappearance of a cosmic Something, probably God"; others grapple with the "hollows and vacancies"

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[2] Robert Martin Adams, Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void during the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 6.

[3] Adams, pp. 3-6.   [4] Adams, p. 3.

[5] For one list, see Adams, p. 14.

that develop in "human, all-too-human circumstances."[6] There is the

grand metaphysical negative of Melville,[7] as well as the less spectacu-

lar ennui of Baudeliare.[8] There are moral voids in the works by Byron,

Barbey d'Aurevilley, and Villers de l'Isle-Adam,[9] as well as voids of

inner personality in the heroes of Stendhal.[10]

Adams discovers different tactics being used against these dif-

ferent foes. Some writers try to tame the void with intellectual

disdain; others try to fill it with the products of their imagination;

still others plunge into what they perceive are its voluptuous folds.

There is the dry scrutiny of Senancour, as well as the busy fantasy of

DeQuincey, as well as the exalted deathwish of Novalis.[11] Furthermore,

Adams charts the "domestication" of the void during this period.[12] The

erstwhile enemy becomes the constant companion. From a time before the

romantics to a time after the French symbolists, Adams traces the com-

promises made with average, everyday nothingness. The evolution of

this accomodation is not a steady one; it is a "progress" more like the

course of counterguerilla warfare, with the same ground being won and

lost and won again and lost again. As Paul de Man says of a similar

movement, "The process does not necessarily move in one single direc-

tion, . . . there can be an intricate play of relapses and momentary

recoveries."[13]

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[6] Adams, pp. 239-40.

[7] Adams, pp. 138-48.

[8] Adams, pp. 109-12.

[9] Adams, pp. 195-201.

[10] Adams, pp. 134-38.

[11] Adams, pp. 19-38.

[12] Adams, p. 7.

[13] Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 14.

Adams also finds different sources for different negatives. Some
writers echo Rousseau, who associated the negative with desire and ima-
gination and their discontents:

> If all my dreams had turned into reality, I would still
> have remained unsatisfied: I would have kept on dreaming,
> imagining, desiring. In myself, I found an unexplainable
> void that nothing could have filled; a longing of the heart
> towards another kind of fulfillment of which I could not
> conceive but of which I nevertheless felt the attraction.[14]

But for other nineteenth-century literary artists it is the operations
of the intellect not the dynamics of the emotions which add up to nil.
Among the causes which Senancour lists for our sense of the void is the
fact that "we perceive relations, not essences."[15] In Poe, there is a
void, usually a deathly void, between the "glib and self-assured" clicks
of ratiocination, a void that eventually defeats the intellect, indeed,
eventually annihilates the entire cosmos.[16] Gogol's Dead Souls reveals
"a deep suspicion and hatred of thought."[17] Flaubert's Salammbo is
interpreted as a call "to abandon the life of the mind," or at least as
a statement that, "as a matter of social adjustment, there is nothing
to be said against" such an abandonment.[18] For a number of these
writers the villain is the rational mind, and they believe that, when
all is added and subtracted, the sum of its persistent calculations
is simply zero.

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[14] Quoted by De Man in Blindness and Insight, p. 18.

[15] Adams, p. 25.   [16] Adams, pp. 41-50.

[17] Adams, p. 56.   [18] Adams, pp. 83-4.

[19] The number zero could serve as one of the basic symbols of nega-
tionism, notwithstanding that others might see in the circular figure a
symbol for "wholeness" or "fulfilledness" rather than a symbol of
emptiness.

There are still other nineteenth-century intellectuals who do not

find the void specifically within the head or the heart but find it

instead without and throughout. Mallarme is perhaps the classic exam-

ple, and Adams's discussion of him is important for our understanding

of modern negationism. Mallarme is said to be

> an author for whom void provides a—perhaps the—central
> experience; from its emplacement at the heart of his work,
> it rays out in a spectrum of directions through modern
> poetry, modern prose, and modern critical theory.[20]

His negative is "neither cosmic nor comic, neither religious nor social,

but intimate and ontological."[21] The Mallarmean void is best captured

by "a quiet room, a single object isolated on a bare table, and Mallarme

looking at it." Adams describes this as "a peculiarly active transaction

which no perfunctory phrases will adequately define," and summarizes it

by saying, "the object, like the viewer, is either empty within or sur-

rounded by emptiness without, or both . . . ." From what, asks Adams,

did Mallarme's sense of void grow?

> His earliest poems . . . show no trace of a void . . . . But—
> perhaps as a result of two untimely deaths in his intimate
> family, perhaps because of some sexual guilt, perhaps from
> a loss of religious faith, the depth of which is particularly
> hard to sound—for whatever reason, void settled upon his world
> and invested it completely, before the poet reached his
> majority.[22]

It would seem that Mallarme's void is all-encompassing, a nothingness

born of frustrated expectations (especially projections invalidated

by the intrusion of death), moral guilt, and the loss of a sense of

divine presence—all of which reasons repeatedly come into play as his

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[20] Adams, p. 155. [21] Adams, p. 155. [22] Adams, p. 155.

age proceeds.

One ray of Mallarme was said to shine into modern critical theory.
Perhaps nowhere does it burn with a harder gemlike flame than in Paul
de Man's Blindness and Insight.[23] This is an extraordinarily "negative"
book. Harold Bloom has labeled its doctrine a "serene linguistic
nihilism."[24] I am tempted to call its doctrine a serene nihilistic
metacriticism. What makes it metacriticism is of course that it is an
extraction of general laws of literary and critical language from the
rhetoric of particular contemporary critics, the titular law being
that critics are often blind to their own most valuable insights. What
makes it nihilism are its basically negativistic assumptions. What
makes it serene is its manner of presenting these assumptions as if
they were unquestioned axioms. As Gerald Graff has complained, the
deconstructionist (and we could easily include De Man in this category)
too often does not interrogate the tradition in a way that invites
"counter-interrogation."[25] Too often he "does not argue; he asserts,"[26]

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[23] Once again, Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the
Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971).

[24] Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of the Circle," in Deconstruction
and Criticism, contributors Bloom, De Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey
Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 4.

[25] Gerald Graff, "Deconstruction as Dogma; or, 'Come Back to the
Raft Ag'in, Strether Honey!'" Georgia Review (Summer 1980), 404-21.
With this article and his earlier book, Literature Against Itself
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), Graff seems to have emerged
as the champion of the anti-deconstructionist position.

[26] I am paraphrasing Graff, "Deconstruction," 409.

and he casually presents his bleak postulates as if only a hopeless

Neanderthal would dare to grumble. Nevertheless, one can find oneself

captivated by, and even taking a sort of perverse pleasure in, the

"peremptory assumptions" of De Manian deconstuctionism.[27] Let me just

cycle through some of these in a manner as oblivious to plausible

counter-arguments as a tape-recorded speech playing in an empty room.

The use of language, including the poetic use of language, is never

free from "duplicity, confusion, and untruth."[28] A sender of a message

must express his subjective desires in words, but he must borrow these

words from an intersubjective code. This code is a "social language"

which amounts to "an intricate system of rhetorical devices designed

to escape from the direct expression of desires that are, in the fullest

sense of the term, unnameable--not because they are ethically shameful

but because there is no such thing as unmediated expression."[29] The

sender of a message must use for expression a vehicle designed to filter

expression. Furthermore, the fact of mediation makes receiving a message

as difficult as sending one. Not only can the sender never do justice

to his own message, the receiver of the same message can never com-

pletely interpret it: "In the act of . . . interpretation, a funda-

mental discrepancy always prevents the observer from coinciding fully

with the consciousness he is observing."[30] Sender and receiver remain

trapped in their partial perspectives. The best they can achieve, by a

kind of "mutual oscillation," is an ongoing exchange that moves them

[27] Graff, "Deconstruction," 411.

[28] De Man, p. 9.   [29] De Man, p. 9.   [30] De Man, p. 11.

closer together but that changes both of them in the process, and that

can never exactly unify them. Hence, sending and receiving messages

are both—here comes a favorite deconstructionist word—"problematic."

De Man writes of "the impossibility [at both ends of the communicative

act] of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be

expressed, of making the actual sign coincide with what it signifies."[31]

As if this were not enough, the deconstructionist adds that it is

mistaken to speak of a sender or a receiver as a "self," or as a "self"

that is somehow "privileged." On the contrary, both sender and receiver

are products of the language system. Individual identity is problematic,

even illusory. And since there are no selves, there are none of the

motives usually associated with selves. The "[language] system, and

the expressions within it, are 'unmotivated.'"[32] Radically logocentric,

human acts of communication refer to no world outside of the language

system; nor do they express individual intentions. As Graff explains,

deconstructionism

> challenges not only the determinacy of textual meanings,
> but also their referentiality, their "motivation" by an
> anterior authorial self or an exterior world of objects
> and relations.[33]

The impersonal sign-system "subverts" any "humanly intended utterance."[34]

The code provides the motives for the message. As formulated in the

doctrines of deconstructionism, these motives are strangely limited, for

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[31] De Man, p. 11.

[32] Graff, "Deconstruction," 406.   [33] Graff, "Deconstruction," 405.

[34] I am borrowing from Graff borrowing from Hartman. See Graff,
"Deconstruction," 405.

the code seems to be busy playing with, and in the process destroying, its own conventions. So when the sender passes his indeterminate message to a receiver, it is as if one part of the language system coyly misleads another part.

For all these reasons, the deconstructionist and his ilk are wont to speak of language, not merely as a series of discrepancies, but as a system of lies. Moreover, these rather cynical logologers do not stop here. They go further and speak of language as a duplicity that, even when it tries to leak the secrets of its own deceit, lies again. The language system is blind to its own insights. Despite efforts to reveal what it hides, it still hides as much as it reveals. Like a phonograph needle skipping down an endless scratch, it is condemned to its broken, flawed recital. Like the universe at the instant of the big-bang, it erases its origins in a moment of discontinuity—and it does this over and over. Finally, it succumbs to its own discrepancies and prevarications, playing to an empty space, moving from "information" to "noise" in accordance with the law of entropy, again like the universe itself, toward its own systemic demise.

Such is the incredibly, almost humorously, dark cluster of doctrines which De Man presents so calmly. But he is not exactly an isolated figure in the world of contemporary ideas. His negationism is derived from Saussure via Derrida, specifically from their doctrine of "the diacritical nature of all signification,"[35] a doctrine which we will re-examine in the chapter after next. Nor are the structuralists

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[35] The phrase his Gerald Graff's. See his "Deconstruction," 406.

and deconstructionists the only ones who link the negative to the

traumas of human identity. The most direct statement may be Sartre's:

"Man is the being who is not what he is, and is what he is not."[36]

Closely related to this pronouncement is the Heideggerian notion of

Dasein as a process born in the encounter with and incorporation of

"annihilating nothingness."[37] Dasein, it seems, is a project that

does not positively get underway until it finds at the end of the

way that ubiquitous negation, namely, death. This is certainly some-

thing to which we must return later.[38]

I suspect that behind both Sartre and Heidegger hangs the Hegelian

portrait of the human as "the being who poses as other than himself in

order to become himself."[39] With the adoption of this role, the human

casts himself, usually uncunningly, in the drama of an evolving Spirit,

a Spirit who allows, always cunningly, the rise of Its own contradic-

tion or negation only to "negate the negation" into a creative synthesis

that drives the Dialectic to the next level. But, for all I know of

such sequences of intellectual displacement, these somewhat enigmatic

formulations, formulations which have culminated recently in De Man's

negationism, formulations existentialist, structuralist, or deconstruc-

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[36] See Mark Poster, _Existential Marxism in Postwar France_ (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 33.

[37] I am borrowing from Tillich borrowing from Heidegger. See Paul Tillich, _Systematic Theology_, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 189.

[38] See below, the final pages of Chapter Nine.

[39] I am borrowing from Poster borrowing from Hyppolite borrowing from Hegel. See Poster, pp. 23-4.

tionist--these may all be expansions of hints left in the worn groves

of Zeno and Parmenides.

What are we to make of this pair of "metanegationists," much

less of this whole pack of philosophers, critics, and literary artists

obsessed with a nothingness they have come to believe is the most real

feature of our existence? Kenneth Burke would caution us not to "simply

dismiss [them] as sheer nonsense."[40] Instead, he would recommend we

take the De Manian comedy seriously. As he says of Heidegger's doctrine

of Nonbeing, "Whether or not it refers to anything, it is a 'reasonable'

operation linguistically."[41] He continues,

> Logology would admonish us to take Heidegger's comedy
> seriously. For there is always the possibility that, if
> language does lead ultimately to this generalized use of
> the negative [Heidegger's concept of Nonbeing], the impli-
> cations of such an end are present in even our ordinary
> thoughts, though in themselves these thoughts possess no
> such thoroughness. . . . For if man is the symbol-using
> animal, and if the ultimate test of symbolicity is an in-
> tuitive feeling for the principle of the negative, then such
> "transcendental" operations as the Heideggerian idea of
> "Nothing" may reveal in their purity a kind of Weltanschauung
> that is imperfectly but inescapably operating in all of us.[42]

We could also make a Burkean defense of Heidegger's theory by noting

that it enjoys a previously mentioned tautological force. Directly or

indirectly, he defines the human in terms of the negative as something

negative. Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Burke and many others--all symbol-

users using symbols with "an intuitive feel for the negative" to define

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[40] Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion (1961, 1970), p. 21.

[41] RR, p. 21.   [42] RR, p. 21.

the human as the symbol-user inspirited with the genius of the negative.
It is irrefutable, but what does it mean? We might say that the exis-
tentialist question, "Why is there something rather than nothing," is
being replaced by the metanegationist question, "Why do so many cham-
pion nothing rather than something?" Why do so many theories about
the human intersect at this junction of negation?

For one thing, it means that, and this whole chapter has been
designed to say that, we have stumbled upon an important crossroads.
The next three chapters are really three ways of answering the above
rhetorical questions. The first deals with several theories of the
evolution of human consciousness, centered around Ernest Becker's
The Birth and Death of Meaning. I am convinced that the evolutionist
viewpoint makes contemporary negationism seem less like a mere curiosity
and more like a respectable analysis of what a few years ago was being
called "the human condition."

Next I will deal with what is currently the most widely circu-
lated negationism, namely, structuralism. The structuralists are deli-
berately anti-evolutionist. Following their intellectual progenitor
Ferdinand de Saussure, they insist on downplaying any diachronic develop-
ment and focusing instead on synchronic structures. But that theirs is
a version of negationism is evidenced by, among other things, the
quizzing Jacques Lacan receives after delivering a paper at the struc-
turalist colloquium at John Hopkins University in 1966. His inter-
rogators are interested in how his theory of nothingness compares to
Sartre's.[43] My argument will be that the structuralist theory of the

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[43] See The Structuralist Controversy, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio
Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 196-7.

negative is grounded in valid intuitions about human intelligence, especially human intelligence as it operates _in_ and _through_ and _as_ language. The structuralist theory of diacritical meaning will be treated as a vast elaboration of Senancour's negationist insight that "we perceive relations, not essences."[44]

I save the best for last. Burke himself places his negationism in the line of Boehme, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Bergson.[45] Like the structuralists, Burke is not a particularly evolutionist thinker. Despite occasional references to evolution, he usually treats the human as a dramatically qualitative leap from the infrahuman (which of course it is, though the evolutionist might counter that evolution proceeds by dramatically qualitative, quantitative leaps!). Burke's approach in effect says, "In a way it does not matter how we got here; here we are, users of language; and we must analyze the special powers and problems associated with the use of language." Nevertheless, if we take a brief look at certain evolutionisms, including Becker's, then, when we reach Burke, his determination to begin with the negative will no longer seem so capricious. Nor has Burke written in detail on the structuralists, though he is said to be presently studying Lacan when he is not editing his own manuscripts.[46] Nevertheless, if we review certain structuralisms, including Derrida's, then, when we reach Burke, his negationism will seem less an eccentricity and more a maincurrent of twentieth-century

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[45] Burke, _Language as Symbolic Action_ (1966), pp. 419-20.

[46] See Ben Yagoda, "Kenneth Burke," _Horizon_ (June 1980), 69.

[44] Once again, Adams, p. 25.

critical inquiry. My argument is that he can be brought into a fruit-
ful dialogue with both evolutionists and structuralists. And I think
it will emerge from such a roundtable conversation that his, Burke's,
negationism is a fuller, richer, in some ways more somber, in other
ways more uplifting brand of negationism than that of his rivals.

> From the beginning man has been a contradiction. . . . The
> evolution of self consciousness has been filled with para-
> dox and dilemma . . . . fear and disorientation are unavoida-
> ble, since the power of consciousness lies in the tension
> between the disparate subsystems it holds together.[1]

By "evolutionism" I mean the doctrine that forms of life evolve

according to a process of natural selection. I have adopted the evolu-

tionist perspective in this chapter because it will help us see why

the negatives of cognition, emotion, imagination, and will are so pre-

valent in modern theory. I contend that, after a long development,

certain "natural" negativities have surfaced and have achieved their

fullest expression so far in the voids we semiotically sophisticated

modern humans find when we reflect on our perceptions and our desires.

Modern theory participates in a naturally logological turn of events.

No wonder negationists, such as those treated in the last chapter, have

been able to hold their own, and even expand their influence, the past

several centuries.

Here is the way I think it happened. The poor frightened creature

capable of making sharp distinctions had an evolutionary advantage

because it could perceive more dangers more quickly; the creature that

resisted being locked into a single system of knowledge or that refused

to be gratified by a single set of pleasures had an advantage because

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[1] Eric Eaton, "The Promise of a Dangerous Paradox," _Western Humani-
ties Review_ (Winter 1978), 1, 19-20.

it could adapt more successfully to a changing environment. Those
other beings with duller senses, narrower minds, or more fixed sen-
sibilities survived best, and perhaps even flourished, only in stable
evolutionary niches. Under rapidly altering conditions, nature tends
to produce a creature given to skeptical suspension of its interpre-
tive schemes and to dissatisfaction with its various satiations. That
hypersensitive deer standing in the forest clearing, head raised, nose
sniffing the wind, marvelously alert but unable to relax and enjoy a
choice brunch of tufted moss, is a product of the evolutionary process.
In short, certain kinds of anxiety, skepticism, and even unhappiness
are favored by natural selection. We humans are the culmination of
an increase in alertness or restlessness, depending on the connotations
one prefers.

But this is not all. The creature who can imagine that which is
not also has an advantage. If I can look at my humble abode in the
opening of a cave and, remembering the last harsh winter, make plans to
improve its shelter, I may well increase my chances and my people's
chances of surviving the cold. But that same faculty for the hypothe-
tical that enables me to perfect my situation also dooms me to a cycle
of disappointments. As Rousseau understood, we bring everything under
the sway of an idealizing imagination, contrasting unfavorably the
what-is with the what-might-be:

> . . . nothing embellishes the actual object in the eyes
> of its possessor; one never images forth what is already
> beneath one's eyes; imagination makes no play with what
> one actually possesses; illusion ceases where enjoyment
> begins. In this world, the land of chimeras is the only

> one worth inhabiting; and such is the nullity of human
> affairs that, outside the one self-existing Being, the
> only beautiful thing is that which has no existence at all.[2]

Since I myself have known beautiful existent things, I might accuse

Rousseau of a slight rhetorical flourish in this passage. But I think

we might agree on this much: that which gilds the ideal comparatively

tarnishes the real. As Robert M. Adams explains, the testimony of a

number of modern writers is that "anticipation, imagination, and memory

(any relation as long as it is distant) are richer experiences than

experience itself."[3] For such moderns "the world of things, practical

objects, here-and-now arrangements can," in the light of the idealizing

imagination, "yield only a meager experience . . . ."[4] And my point is

that such an apprehension of our state of affairs, such a feeling that

ours is an accursed predicament, is one of the blessings of evolution.

Here is a sample of the kind of evolutionist passage we can use as

a point of departure. In his The Intelligent Eye, R. L. Gregory is spe-

culating that human intelligence arose out of a new level of vision. In

his view, the first senses in the evolution of life "must have been those

which monitor physical conditions which are immediately important for

survival," such as the senses of touch, taste, and temperature.[5] He

thinks that the "primitive touch nervous system was taken over to serve

the first eyes."[6] He hypothesizes an evolution of vision from a skin

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[2] From La Nouvelle Heloise. Quoted by Robert M. Adams in his Nil (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 131-2.

[3] Adams, p. 132.   [4] Adams, p. 132.

[5] R. L. Gregory, The Intelligent Eye (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 12.

[6] Gregory, pp. 12-3.

sensitive to light. Clearly, there are benefits to be derived from

such a development:

> Touch is . . . limited to objects in physical contact.
> This means that when a foe is identified by touch, it is
> too late to devise and carry out a strategy. Immediate action
> is demanded, and this cannot be subtle or planned. Eyes
> give warning of the future, by signalling distant objects.
> It seems very likely that brains as we know them could not
> have developed without senses--particularly eyes--capable
> of providing advance information, by signalling the pre-
> sence of distant objects. . . . Eyes require intelligence
> to identify and locate objects in space, but intelligent
> brains could hardly have developed without eyes. It is not
> too much to say that eyes freed the nervous system from the
> tyranny of reflexes, leading to strategic planned behavior
> and ultimately to abstract thinking.[7]

Consider all the abilities this passage implies evolved together or, as

I would say, "covolved": sight, intelligence, planning, abstraction,

memory (to store the information from the eyes), imagination (to turn over

the various possibilities among these stores), and even the sense of time.

We had best think of the emerging human as just such a nexus of inter-

related, covolving faculties.

However, as every gain is also a loss, a number of negatives are

born along with these positives of memory, imagination, and time-sense.

In his The Birth and Death of Meaning, Ernest Becker addresses these

contradictory developments.[8] He molds various twentieth-century disco-

veries in psychology, sociology, and anthropology about the rise of the

human into a "general theory of human nature."[9] I want to resort to his

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[7] Gregory, p. 13.

[8] Ernest Becker, The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary
Perspective on the Problem of Man, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1971).

[9] Becker, Meaning, p. vii.

chapter entitled "The Distinctively Human: The Ego, Language, and the Self."[10] I will explicate Becker's evolutionism by tracing the implications of the three terms of this subtitle, a key phrase which Burke would say serves as a titular abbreviation of the ideas which follow.

Becker presents the ego as a late development of "mind." "Mind" he defines as "the style of reaction of an organism to its environment."[11] Drawing on the terminology of anthropologist Leslie White, Becker writes:

> The simplest organism takes note of its world, steers a course through it, and gets what it needs from it; it is "minding" its world, . . . deriving "reactivity meaning" from it. In other words, the world of meaning of any animal is created for it out of the range and subtlety of its reactivity.[12]

Still borrowing from White, Becker postulates an evolution of "style" from direct reflex to conditioned reflex to the early stages of "autonomous" problem-solving among primates. "Mind culminates in the organism's ability to _choose_ what it will react to."[13]

This ability for a more carefully considered interaction with the environment is made possible by the evolution of a sophisticated central nervous system and cerebral cortex. Becker describes the highly evolved human brain as a kind of "internal gyroscope" that "keeps the organism in hand and keeps the environment at a distance and well sorted out."[14]

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[10] Becker, _Meaning_, pp. 13-26.

[11] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 5. For a whole book on just this topic, see Kenneth Boulding, _The Image_ (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1956).

[12] Becker, _Meaning_, pp. 5-6.   [13] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 7.

[14] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 15.

This faculty, for which Becker uses the term "ego," is an evolutionary

plus for its possessor, for it permits the organism to wait, to delay its

response, and to make "wiser" decisions:

> With the ego the organism can hold constant in awareness
> several conceptual processes and stimuli at one and the
> same time. This allows the organism to imagine diverse
> outcomes without immediately acting; it makes reasoned
> choice possible; it allows the organism a freedom unknown
> in nature.[15]

Or, assuming that the evolution of the human being is as natural as

anything else, we might modify this to read, "The ego . . . allows the

organism a freedom previously unknown in nature."

Here again the human appears as a new nexus. Note the overlap

between Becker's description of the ego and Gregory's speculation on

"the intelligent eye." In Becker's theory, the human ego is a gap

wherein the imperfect match between expectations and subsequent percep-

tions is considered with unusual deliberation and wherein new orientations,

theoretically more successful orientations, can be hopefully adopted.

The human ego is a "roomier timespace" wherein new distinctions are made

and new courses of action chosen. I find myself coining other oxymorons

to describe the "longer, wider moment" or the "lengthier locale" wherein

emerge, to include just those powers suggested in the Becker quotation

above, human awareness, imagination, reason, choice, and freedom. As

we will see more clearly as we go, other aspects of the human, such as

human feeling and human anxiety, must also be added to this list.

The human is thus a new level of "range and subtlety" characterized

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[15] Becker, *Meaning*, p. 15.

by unusually delayed responses to stimuli. Furthermore, this mechanism, the ego, which lifts the new species out of the comparatively timeless stream of fleeting sensations that comprise the world of the animal into the comparatively time-drenched mentations that comprise the world of the human, is a verbal mechanism. It is words that stretch the networks of response to new plateaus and that widen the gap wherein more data can be processed and more alternatives pondered. The human is a new complex "symbolic style," one which uses words to "designate objects, and then responds to those arbitrary designations."[16] Mind culminates in the organism's ability to name what it will react to.

One of Becker's strengths is the stress he places on the linguistic (and we could say logocentric) nature of this new human style. Drawing on the terminology of psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, Becker writes that the ego is "a verbal edifice." In addition, this edifice is not described as if it were built on an island. Its main purpose is that "of conciliating the environment in order to avoid anxiety."[17] Using words, "the ego . . . builds up a world in which it can act with equanimity."[18] Using verbal discriminations, the ego designates objects in the environment as, roughly speaking, "good, bad, or neutral."[19] Without such a network of biased terms, there could be no ego. It is language then that provides the controllable signs, the manipulatable counters, which enable the animal, the animal-now-human, "to put some distance between himself and immediate internal and external experience."[20] A central idea in

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[16] I am paraphrasing Becker, Meaning, p. 6.

[17] Becker, Meaning, pp. 19-20.   [18] Becker, Meaning, p. 20

[19] Becker, Meaning, p. 20.   [20] Becker, Meaning, p. 20.

in Becker, and one which resonates through these pages as the principle
of logocentric symbolics, is that we humans are quintessentially word-
systems.

Now it is this new system of words that allows the beginnings of
a human sense of self. Like the growing spaces between the disentangling
filaments of deoxyribonucleic acid during cell division, a new self-
consciousness swells during self-division. It is as if the ego, hesita-
ting among alternatives, slowly begins to wonder who is doing the hesi-
tating. As a person left at the curb might drift into reflections on
matters suppressed in the rush to catch a bus, a self-consciousness
gradually fills the pauses of the ego. And the same language which
colonizes this new reflexive territory also grants it a provisional
capital: "The personal pronoun is the rallying point for [this new level
of] self-consciousness, the center of awareness upon which converge all
the events in the outside world."[21] The "I" is merely a word, but it
annexes a number of complex sensations and reflections, and it enables
these to be administered efficaciously. However, it takes us awhile,
as it takes Robin Molineaux, to find our way in this new city of words.
The mastery of the first person pronoun comes only gradually in the course
of the development of the human species and, as child development studies
confirm, of the human individual.

The ego, language, and the self--I am these inextricable networks

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[21] Becker, Meaning, p. 20.

of distancing and deliberating. And I believe it is the gaps and pauses

in these common yet not-so-common processes that lead so many reflexo-

lates on the human condition to the intuition that at their core is a

negativistic center. These theorists define the human as the negative

because the human is the process that negates the comparatively unified

and immediate world of the infrahuman and displaces it with more elongated,

more "vacant" loops of human response. The human is a more complex

hermeneutic, that is, a more complex system of interpretation, one charac-

terized by the greater number of possibilities it can cycle through

between "openure" and "closure." Actually, even at infrahuman levels,

"closure" is probably an illusion, but it is at the fully human level

that its illusory nature finally becomes obvious. There the true open-

endedness of these rhythms of meaning asserts itself in such a way as

to give, to those who look inward, the impression of great emptiness.

We have now effected a minor closure of our own, for we have

finished treating the three terms from Becker's subtitle. However,

before we leave The Birth and Death of Meaning, there are two other

concepts we should note. First, Becker presents the new distances and

delays of human intelligence as the result of a complicated social world.

In the course of evolution, the intelligent primates were forced to

become more sensitive to their social "roles." Drawing on the termi-

nology of Earl Count and M. R. A. Chance, Becker writes of the primates:

> The picture that emerges is truly unique in the animal
> kingdom: a great variety of animals in various stages
> of development, possessing rather keen sensitivity to the
> aggressive and erotic barometers of one another, are thrown
> together in one group. The result . . . is an extremely

complex jumble of statuses to which the members must
adjust.[22]

Even the primates, it seems, were forced to define themselves against

each other by a series of acts which in this dissertation I will end up

calling "the dialectical diacritics of identity."[23] In this hodgepodge

of roles and statuses, a premium was placed on unusually flexible

social behavior on the part of the primate. At each stage in the life

of the animal, the animal-now-well-on-the-way-to-becoming-the-human,

"he" or "she" had to adjust to others: young to young, male to female,

female to male, male to young, female to young, young to both male and

female adult, and so on.[24] It is these kinds of social pressures that

Becker and his sources believe produced the larger human brain and the

more "spacious" human ego. From the beginning, we find a social dimension

residing in the human word-system.

Second, we also find a practical dimension to this sophisticated new

level of social sign-reading. Human intelligence does not rise in a

theoretical vacuum but in a survival situation. We quoted Ernest Becker

and Harry Stack Sullivan to the effect that the ego is a "verbal edifice"

the purpose of which is to "conciliate the environment" and to build a

world in which one "can act with equanimity."[25] We have just seen that

that environment is intensely social and that the ego is a social con-

struction. The individual ego is a social vocabulary within which

one enjoys some continuity of experience, and that ego borrows from a

social vocabulary within which the group may act with some confidence

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[22] Becker, Meaning, p. 11.   [23] See below, pp. 210-12.

[24] I am paraphrasing Becker, Meaning, p. 11.   [25] See above, p. 62.

in a less-than-Edenic setting. Behind that little word "equanimity" lurk existential fears of individual disorientation and even terrors of group extinction.

The writing on this subject of evolution is massive and getting more massive all the time. It is not difficult to find other texts to support Becker's thesis about the linguistic, social, and practical nature of the human. In The Evolution of Intelligence,[26] David Stenhouse argues that human intelligence evolved from infrahuman instincts. These instincts, he says, "must form, collectively, an integrated and dynamic system."[27] They amount to a "behavioral repertoire" consisting

> of a number of inbuilt responses to the stock situations likely to be encountered in the course of the normal way of life in the typical habitat of the species. These responses occur because they are biologically useful to the species; or, more accurately, because they have in the past been useful to the ancestors of the present populations . . . .[28]

These "instinctual sequences and learned habits" of animals are "relatively fixed"; they are marked by their "conservatism."[29] Although it would seem that "any intrusion of intelligence into the delicately-balanced instinctive system would be likely to lead to deleterious effects,"[30] a number of factors encourage the rise of an embryonic intelligence "within, and supported by, [the] instinctive framework."[31]

The first and most important factor is

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[26] David Stenhouse, The Evolution of Intelligence (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973).

[27] Stenhouse, p. 55.   [28] Stenhouse, p. 55.   [29] Stenhouse, pp. 54-5.

[30] Stenhouse, p. 56.   [31] Stenhouse, p. 56.

> that which gives the individual animal the power <u>not to</u>
> <u>respond</u> in the usual way to the stimulus situation which
> previously initiated an instinctive sequence . . . . This
> power not to respond may be absolute, or may be merely the
> ability to delay the response--withhold it provisionally,
> as it were--but its absence would negate the very possi-
> bility of adaptive variability in behavior.[32]

One should recognize a factor important to Becker's theory; one should

note the emphasis here on the negative, and the way by which a complex

human ability "not to respond" is substituted for a simpler infrahuman

spontaneity. At least some of the risks incurred on this new level of

negatics pay off:

> Once intelligence has been developed to the stage that it can
> "take over" from the instinct system at least some of the
> normal everyday activities of an animal a net gain has been
> achieved: for the unusual can be dealt with.[33]

This variability of response is made possible, Stenhouse believes, by

longer periods of "sensitivity training," themselves made possible by

longer periods of association between parents and offspring. On this

score also Stenhouse is in agreement with Becker, though I did not mention

this aspect of Becker's views in the above discussion.

The emergence of a creature who can wait till the last moment and

who can "change its mind" to meet emergencies involves, according to

Stenhouse, a second factor:

> If a new adaptive response is to be achieved with anything
> other than the merest trial-and-error, some latent and/or
> insight learning must have occurred, and that presupposes . . .
> some sort of "memory stores."[34]

In this quotation, one should note another factor important to Becker's

theory, namely, memory; one should be reminded that we are talking about

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[32] Stenhouse, p. 67.   [33] Stenhouse, p. 56.   [34] Stenhouse, p. 67.

a creature who lives inside new "stores" of data. (I am tempted to
say that we are talking about a creature who lives inside new "stories,"
for these expanding memory-banks assume the form of a narrative; however,
I cannot pursue this idea without getting too far ahead of the story
I am telling here.)

Then Stenhouse adds a third factor. He says that the ability to
use a "memory store" presupposes

> abstraction and generalization. This is necessary, both
> at what might be termed the "factual" level (the abstrac-
> tion of common qualities in objects, e.g., "hard," "heavy,"
> "red," etc.) and at the level of "evaluation," where the
> common qualities are obviously relational, e.g., "dangerous,"
> "useful."[35]

In this quotation, one should recognize a factor important in almost
everybody's definition of the human, namely, abstraction; one should
realize that we are talking about diacritics, that is, about a series of acts
of the recognition of identity and difference:

> There must . . . be involved, in principle at least, [some]
> power of abstraction, of "seeing the common quality," of
> generalizing. It must be recognized that this situation
> is effectively similar to that past situation in which action
> X was performed with non-adaptive results, if the animal
> is to avoid or modify X this time . . . .[36]

Stenhouse believes that it was a rapidly changing environment
that stimulated the development of this power of abstraction:

> If the home range is relatively stable in configuration,
> the knowledge of it may be particular, the "items" in the
> memory store may be of this rock, this fallen branch, and
> so on. Generalization and abstraction are necessary insofar
> as the relationships between items must be known. Generaliza-
> tion and abstraction must play an increasing part, however,
> in proportion as the home range itself is variable. "This,"

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[35] Stenhouse, p. 67.　　　　[36] Stenhouse, p. 61.

"that" become functionally inadequate; it is necessary to progress to "this sort," "that sort," It is a commonplace that the variable arboreal environment gave rise to the increased intelligence of the high primates.[37]

Finally, according to Stenhouse, these developing patterns of retained abstraction constitute what I would call, in the language of this complete dissertation, "dialectical axiosics," that is, a series of necessarily selective acts of the attribution of value:

> . . . it is important not to overlook or understress one of the most significant features of [this process of mapping]: the "map" in some sense incorporates "evaluative judgments" relevant to the welfare of the individual or the species of animal concerned. . . . An animal cannot memorize everything: it will notice and store items of information roughly in proportion to their usefulness to it.[38]

We can summarize Stenhouse's argument by saying that in his view the evolution of human intelligence involves the development of systems of deliberation, memory, and abstraction out of, and still laden with the values of, systems of survival instincts.

In his bestseller, The Dragons of Eden, Carl Sagan likewise speculates on the evolution of human intelligence.[39] Sagan sees in the human the emergence for the first time of an organism "with more information in its brains than in its genes."[40] But there is more to this development than just better "information-processing." New emotions arise with the new intellections, both dependent on the development of the brain itself. Borrowing from Paul McLean, Sagan

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[37] Stenhouse, p. 64.   [38] Stenhouse, pp. 64-5.

[39] Carl Sagan, The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence (New York: Random House, 1977).

[40] Sagan, p. 47.

describes this development:

> One of the most engaging views of the . . . evolution of
> the brain is a story of the successive accretion and spe-
> cialization of three further layers surmounting the spinal
> cord, hindbrain, and midbrain. After each evolutionary step,
> the older portions of the brain still exist and must still
> be accomodated. But a new layer with new functions [intel-
> lectual and emotional] has been added.[41]

More specifically, the layers are added in this order: to an "uncon-

scious" R-complex, which plays an important role in aggressive behavior,

territoriality, ritual, and the establishment of social hierarchies,"[42]

is added a "pre-conscious" limbic cortex which generates powerful and

contradictory passions ranging from rage and fear to altruism[43]; then

to both is added the more or less "conscious" neocortex, seat of language,

abstract thought, deliberation, and the regulation of action.[44] Each

layer of consciousness sublating those that went before, the human comes

into being within a complex of territorial boundaries and social hier-

archies, a creature remembering enough to fear more things and to bear

a grudge longer, and also to cherish favors longer and to return

affection; in short, a being possessed of greater powers of interpre-

tation and greater freedom of action.

Sagan, too, sees the rise of the human as the rise of an inter-

related group of functions, and sees that all these new functions are

based on the ability to use symbolical languages. Like Stenhouse, he

believes our linguistic intelligence is indebted to the millions of years

our ancestors spent aloft. The arboreal apes, already members of a

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[41] Sagan, p. 52. [42] Sagan, p. 60.

[43] Sagan, pp. 62-9. [44] Sagan, pp. 69-76.

society defining itself by its external boundaries with its neighbors and by its internal rituals of social and sexual mounting, had to learn to abstract more general categories in order to map the key features of a world of swaying limbs and quivering leaves. As Sagan somewhat humorously puts it, "Every leap was an opportunity for evolution."[45]

Sagan goes on to speak of the "first true humans" as those who left the African forests for the grasslands, "an extremely challenging environment filled with an enormous variety of predators and prey."[46] The field apes had to develop some means of coordinating their pursuit of big game. As Sagan says,

> Stalking large animals, either solitary beasts or herds, is dangerous; some gestural communication among the hunters is necessary. . . . Adam's first act was linguistic . . . : he named the animals of Eden.[47]

And I do not think it is going too far to say that a premium was placed on beings who could both participate in these dangerous cooperative ventures and, at certain critical moments, also "think for themselves." Sagan mentions this new agent's growing "sense of self," his "sense, real or illusory, of individuality and free will, which is so characteristically human," and even his sense of death.[48] The networks of abstraction and gesture become fully human networks of language, tools, and culture—all developing "roughly simultaneously"[49] for the very practical purpose of perpetuating themselves in less-than-Edenic surroundings, i.e., for coping with "the dragons of Eden."

But perhaps the most carefully argued book on this subject is

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[45] Sagan, p. 83.   [46] Sagan, p. 89.   [47] Sagan, p. 99.

[48] Sagan, pp. 94-5, 98.   [49] Sagan, p. 102.

Harry Jerison's <u>Evolution of the Brain and Intelligence</u>.[50] As in R. L.

Gregory's version of the story, Jerison presents the rise of human intel-

ligence as the result of improving sense perception, particularly the

sense of sight:

> From an [evolutionist] point of view one may . . . think of
> language and speech in association with the development of
> perception and imagery rather than with the development of
> communication and social controls, although both sets of
> factors undoubtedly contributed to the utility of language
> as a behavior mechanism in the evolving hominids.[51]

At first this statement seems to exclude some of the factors in human

evolution that Sagan stresses, but its last clause permits the reintro-

duction of same. In fact, Jerison's final chapter narrates many of the

incidents we just discussed. As in Sagan's version of the story, an

early primate is forced by evolutionary pressures into "an adaptive

zone of diurnal, tree-dwelling animals . . . [and evolves] a more adequate

visual system as [its] major distance sense."[52] Like Gregory, Jerison

links the rise of intelligence to the rise of sight, and, like Stenhouse

and Sagan, he believes that it was a rapidly changing arboreal setting

that forced the evolutionary advances of the intelligent eye. As he

describes it,

> . . . life in trees based on visual information would have
> that information in the form of mottled figures against a
> mottled background, with natural camouflage inhibiting one's
> capacity to form an accurate picture of events at any
> distance.[53]

As I might describe it, our tree-swinging ancestor was forced to develop

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[50] Harry Jerison, <u>Evolution of the Brain and Intelligence</u> (New York: Academic Press, 1973).

[51] Jerison, p. 410. [52] Jerison, p. 413. [53] Jerison, p. 413.

better eyesight, including a sense of color, in order to distinguish such things as, say, a pattern of sun and leaf-shadow from the skin of the ancestor of the boa constrictor. Furthermore, the exact position of leaves and limbs would tend to vary, and the tree-dweller would find it useful to build imaginary or hypothetical models of the general position of things. Jerison explains this in terms of the "construction of 'real' space" or the "configuration of 'objects' with particular positions in space and durations in time."[54] Again, we might choose to speak, as we did with Becker's theory, in terms of new "timespaces."

As in the account of Sagan, these new creatures of maturing vision and abstraction are, over a span of ages, forced down from the trees and out onto the savannahs in search of game, where the new setting stimulates communication skills needed to coordinate the hunt. But here Jerison takes the story a chapter further. He writes of how, again over a long stretch of time, these new creatrues of sophisticated gesture encounter the advancing glaciers of the last Ice Age. Used to roaming the wide open plain, they must now live in the close quarters of a cave or group of caves. The cave apes are forced to make the kinds of social distinctions that Becker, Chance, Count, and others stress as the stimulus to human intelligence. The cramped habitat necessitates extensive differentiation of acceptable versus unacceptable acts, and the scarcity of game on the shrinking hunting grounds provokes verbal taboos designed to parcel out, whether evenly or unevenly, the dwindling supplies. Like Rene Girard, Jerison adopts the theory that human order is born out of the need for

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[54] Jerison, pp. 414-5.

controls on mimetic behavior (specifically, controls on everyone copying everyone else's consumption) as a way of preventing the depletion of limited resources.[55] The burst into recognizably human signification is a gain that resulted from major losses.

In his article "Culture and the Direction of Human Evolution," Stanley M. Garn theorizes that human order is a matter of social differentiation.[56] Like Sagan, and like Jerison in his last chapter, Garn sees the direction of human evolution as a response to an increase in social and even inter-cultural interactions. This new intensity of interaction brings with it

> heightened interpersonal relations, with exponentially increa-
> sing possibilities for interpersonal conflict. With the
> increasing chances for conflict, there obviously arose rules
> for minimizing conflict and hence the need for a personality
> structure that could withstand both conflict and rules.[57]

Then Garn gives this a cyberneticist twist:

> With increasing social (as against technological) complexity,
> it was inevitable that information input increased, and with
> it that kind of information that is effectively noise. . . .
> Our vaunted intelligence is merely an indirect product of
> the kind of brain that can discern meaningful signals in a
> complex social context generating a heavy static of informa-
> tion or, rather, misinformational noise.[58]

"Inevitable" is not the best adjective to describe the chancey, openended episodes of evolution, and the adverb "merely" used to characterize the rise of the human is scientistically cavalier: even from the standpoint of "data processing," the human brain is an astonishing development. But

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[55] Rene Girard, "To double business bound" (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 201.

[56] Stanley M. Garn, "Culture and the Direction of Human Evolution," in Human Evolution, ed. Noel Korn and Fred W. Thompson, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 100-12.

[57] Garn, p. 109.   [58] Garn, pp. 109-10.

Garn's vocabulary enables us to think of the emerging human language-user as a true "system," as W. Ross Ashby has defined such cybernetic systems.[59] In Ashby's view, all systems, and this includes all species, and this includes homo symbolicus, are patterned transformations with an environment. The linguistic, social, and practical human ego is actually a system which "regulates and controls" the interactions among its various internal parts and an external world. The human language system governs the relationships among individuals as well as the interactions between the entire language group and the natural world in which it operates. The differentiative ego is a pattern of exchanges that borrows from a larger language system, a system that, like all systems, has evolved in such a way as to try to ensure that its codes (and at this level we mean both the biological or genetic codes and the supra-biological or behavioral codes) are passed to the next generation. To paraphrase Ashby, "When we study words, we are studying a means to survival."[60]

This chapter, like this dissertation, like our culture, is an exercise in the accumulation of documents. Stenhouse argues that the system of human intelligence evolved from a very practical system of instincts. Sagan describes the symbolic abilities of the human brain as a transforma-

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[59] W. Ross Ashby, An Introduction to Cybernetics (1956; rpt. London: Chapman Hall, 1964). See Part Three, "Regulation and Control," especially the section entitled simply "Survival," pp. 197-201.

[60] Ashby, p. 196.

tion of baser abilities. Jerison supports the view that the human is the result of advanced skills in vision and abstraction being employed in social distinctions. Garn offers just the cyberneticist or systemist perspective needed to place the others. Of course, the progress that all these writers describe was not as one-directional as these brief sketches make it seem. There was no doubt "an intricate play of relapses and momentary recoveries."[61] Gains were no doubt sometimes squandered into losses, but at least at certain critical moments it seems that losses were occasionally converted into gains.

I have told a composite tale that moves from forests to savannahs to caves. If this imaginary or hypothetical model is not exactly correct or if the actual sequence of events was much messier, it does not really matter. What does matter is the growing consensus about the emergence of human discrimination, social order, and ethics as a cluster of language functions. To add some terms that will become useful in later pages, we might say that the human abilities to make distinctions (diacritics) in a changing environment (hence dialectical diacritics) and to promulgate these as constraints on behavior (ethico-rhetorics) are inseparable if distinguishable abilities. It is important to remember that these remarkable multi-dimensional networks operate both as a collective scheme for classifying objects in the world as "good, bad, or neutral"[62] and as a traditional set of taboos for governing the relationships between

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[61] Again, the phrase is Paul de Man's. See his Blindness and Insight (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 14.

[62] Again, the phrase is Ernest Becker's. See his The Birth and Death of Meaning, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1971), p. 20.

humans and these objects, as well as for governing the relatively free
interactions among humans themselves. In either case, the differentiative
order sets the stage for new internal and external conflicts: people
versus their surroundings and people versus other people. The order is
more than a passive hermeneutic; it is a system of interpretation charged
with the most practical of tasks in the drama of survival.

Becker would be gratified at the way these other texts document
his doctrine of the human as a group of linguistic systems, but he would
remind us of the paradox by which these new systems, though systems of
"socialization," create new individual "inner worlds."[63] I went out of
my way earlier to include Becker's reference to the interiors of human
personality, interiors filled with the tension of choice. Because lan-
guage opens new timespaces of decision, it spawns all sorts of new doubts,
hesitations, and regrets. The new responsibilities of choice are found
to be a burden. I went out of my way earlier to include Sagan's mention
of the characteristically human sense of self and awareness of death.
Because language stores a fuller record of the past, it offers richer
analyses of the present and longer projections into the future; however,
much of what is discovered looming on the horizon of the new "ego-scape"
is frightening. The new clairvoyence is found to be a burden. Evolution
gains creatures of greater autonomy, creatures who can think for themselves,
but these creatures pay an enormous price for the advance.

I have tried to work myself into a position from which I can state

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[63] See "The Inner World" and "Socialization: the Creation of the Inner
World," Chapters Four and Five respectively in Becker, Meaning, pp. 27-53.

all this in another linguistic principle, namely, the principle of dramatics: the human is the being who achieves a heightened awareness of the forms of his or her existence, and, furthermore, who tends to cast such reflections in the terms of a drama. Finding ourselves in the middle of conflict, agencies at our disposal, obstacles in our way, caught in a play of crosspurposes, attitudes already at work within us, we have the sense, "real or illusory, of acting freely."[64] We most naturally think of ourselves as players cast in roles, moving through scenes, gesturing and posturing, tangled in dialogue, delivering soliloquys, joining cabals to counter opposing alliances, trying to convert our losses to gains, and often succeeding only in erasing our advances. The primordial attraction of the staged drama lies in its phenomenological truth, in its intuitively accurate mimesis of the forms of our human lifeworld. In the evolutionist view, the art of dramatics   represents humans reaching that stage on which they can construct a model, a logological model or "meta-model" if you will, of their own dramatic, linguistic actions.

Thus we are ending this chapter where we began it. We humans enjoy new powers but also must cope with new anxieties and, largely as a consequence of these fears, new abuses of power. In our insecurity we seek to reassure ourselves by mounting campaigns (ethico-rhetorical crusades) to persuade others to think and act as we do and to convince ourselves and others that we are   innocent of the faults we feel we are hiding. Enabled by new linguistic units to hypothesize or imagine models of what other "inners" are like, we can guess what will appeal to them. Thus

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[64] Again, the phrase is Carl Sagan's. See his Dragons of Eden, pp. 94-5.

we fashion the most sophisticated systems of expression, designing them
to draw others into our own schemes of self-justification. Such efforts
may result in, among other works, dissertations hundreds of pages long.
Indeed, so desperate becomes this new world of the human and so filled
with conflict and terror its many dimensions, that one has to wonder
whether the development of the human is an example of evolution or
devolution. For this reason, I have tried to duck the connotations of
either by describing the human as a nexus of "covolving" faculties,
the concept of "covolution" suggesting merely that, whichever way we are
headed at the moment, a whole cluster of things, and a whole lot of us,
are going there together. Perhaps it would be simpler just to say, as
does Eric Eaton, "From the beginning the human has been a contradiction,"
or to place beneath this chapter's picture of the emerging human the
phrase, "The blossoming of a dangerous paradox."[65]

There are, of course, a number of angles from which to further explore
this dangerous bundle of human contradictions. Modern existentialism is
basically, it seems to me, an analysis of this dramatic spot on which the
evolutionary process has placed us. (Becker himself might be classed as
a somewhat Darwinian, Kierkegaardian neo-Freudian!) But I am committed in
this work to a different approach. As a formal system of highly arbitrary
differentiations, as diacritics, the human language system invites the

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[65] I am borrowing from Eaton borrowing from a whole tradition of writers.
See "The Promise of a Dangerous Paradox," Western Humanities Review (Winter
1978), 1-21. Eaton discusses a number of cultural stages which increase
both human power and human instability, but his key phrases apply, as he
suggests, to the very beginnings of the human.

structuralist approach. As a series of acts controlling behavior, bonding individuals, and establishing customs to perpetuate itself, that is, as ethics, rhetorics, and pragmatics respectively, the system invites the approach of Kenneth Burke. The evolutionist ideas in this chapter are meant to clarify the comparison between structuralism and "Burkeanism" which follows. The evolutionist concepts presented above serve to legitimize the decision by both the structuralists and Burke to begin their theorizing about humans and human culture with the topic of linguistic differentiation. Such evolutionisms as we have briefly examined should help us to see that structuralism, while strong on the point that language is a social system of formal categories which functions, largely unconsciously, through the members of a culture, tends to overlook a number of its other dimensions. A concentrated look at just one feature of structuralism, namely, its emphasis on the principle of diacritical differentiation, will reveal both its strengths and its weaknesses. Then we can return to Burke to consider this as well as other twists of the world of human language. And if the way ahead seems to darken somewhat, we will do well to remember these lighter lines from one of Burke's poems:

> May we think of ourselves
> as having come together
>
> to help us all help one another
> by reminding ourselves to be grateful
>
> for that ancestral evolutionary twist
> whereby we can now name ourselves . . .[66]

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[66] Kenneth Burke, "Invocation for a Convocation," _Kenyon Review_ (Winter 1979), 3.

Thanks to the genetic code, Levi-Strauss can now put a name, he says, on that principle of discontinuity that governs the works of nature as well as of culture; this principle moves the entire universe and finally becomes conscious of itself, first in a crude mythological form, later in the works of science.

This association between genetics and mythology has an unexpected result; it permits a reappropriation by Levi-Strauss of none other than the good old _elan vital_, which needs only a slight adaptation before it can reappear as an _elan differenciateur_, perhaps, or _codificateur_ . . . .[1]

A diacritic is, to quote Webster's, "a modifying mark near or through an orthographic or phonetic character or combination of characters indicating a phonetic value different from that given the unmarked or otherwise marked element."[2] The marked letter has no value considered in isolation. An "n" sporting a tilde or a "c" dragging a cedilla or an "o" raising a macron only has significance compared to a letter less dressy or less encumbered or less energetic respectively. For the structuralists, this movement of mind which compares and contrasts two things that are partly similar, in this case two "n's" or two "c's" or two "o's," and yet that are partly different, in this case one marked and one unmarked, is the basis of all signification.

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[1] Rene Girard, "To _double_ _business_ _bound_" (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 158-9.

[2] _Webster's_ _New_ _Collegiate_ _Dictionary_, 8th ed., includes a helpful diagram, p. 313, that makes this series of visual marks easily visualizable.

The letter not marked by a diacritic is of course still marked
by its shape. A sloppy handwriting, one that breeds unintelligible
hybrids from the standard shapes of, say, certain vowels, presents
an insurmountable problem to its reader. A page of type pinned on a
distant bulletin board is silent until one walks close enough to make
the necessary distinctions between the letters, at which moment, by
a kind of magic to which we have become desensitized, the white rec-
tangle with horizontal black lines finds its voice. Then, as Hawthorne
recognized, those small, dark curves or straight stretches of ink
come to life.[3] The diacritical differentiations are critical, and
slightest difference can make all the difference.

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[3] I have in mind such proto-structuralist hints as the following,
found in Hawthorne's American Notebooks, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Colum-
bus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1972):

> It is a singular thing, that at the distance, say, of
> five feet, the work of the greatest dunce looks just as
> well as that of the greatest genius,--that little space
> being all the distance between genius and stupidity. (p. 16)

> Letters in the shape of figures of men, &c. At a dis-
> tance, the words composed by the letters are alone dis-
> tinguishable. Close at hand, the figures alone are seen, and
> not distinguished as letters. Thus things may have a posi-
> tive, a relative, and a composite meaning, according to
> the point of view. (p. 183)

Browsing in these notebooks, one gets the feeling that Hawthorne read
signs everywhere: in water, in sunshine, in the buzzing of insects,
in clouds, and in the wind. He understood the way language patterns
the human lifeworld, and at various places in his journals ruminates
on the possibility of bringing to life the "verbalness" of our
experience by personifying individual words ("Polly Syllable"), con-
junctions ("If--But--And--Though--&c"), and cliches ("he burst into
tears") and on the possibility of giving more purely linguistic
expression to the passage of time or the process of ruin. See pages
236, 242, 254, 255, and 30 respectively. Of course, Hawthorne's
diacritical vision is part of what is behind his choice of title for
his major novel, the story of a letter, a scarlet letter, brought to
life. For an article that initiates an analysis of Hawthorne's theory
of meaning with such considerations, see Roy R. Male, "Hawthorne's
Literal Figures," in The Ruined Eden of the Present, ed. G. R. Thompson
(West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 71-92.

This then is the principle of diacritics: significance does
not reside in the isolated letter or sound or word or event but in
a field of differentiative relationships.[4] A number of examples are
usually offered in introductory structuralist texts. The signifi-
cance of the phrase "the cat pawed the bat on the mat" depends on
phonetic differentiations, especially those among initial consonants.[5]
A particular color signifies in relation to the entire color spectrum.
A particular dish signifies in terms of a whole code of culinary possi-
bilities. A particular garment signifies in contrast to last year's
and next year's fashions. A particular stream is classed in relation
to smaller creeks and larger rivers.[6] The middle integer of a three-
digit number gains its significance from its companions on either side
and from the whole scale of possible integers "understood." And usually,
at about this point in any structuralist explication of the diacritic,
the Geneva-to-Paris Flyer roars through, a few minutes late but still
possessing its significance as the 8:25 express because of its rela-
tionship to earlier and later trains.[7]

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[4] For example, see Jonathan Culler, Ferdinand de Saussure (New
York: Penguin, 1976), pp. xv, 15-29; Terence Hawkes, Structuralism
and Semiotics (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), pp. 19-28;
Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language (Princeton: Princeton
Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 13-5; and Robert Scholes, who comes close to
this subject in his discussion of paradigmatic meaning in Structuralism
in Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 19.

[5] See Culler, Saussure, pp. 21 and 25 on "bed" versus "pet" and
Hawkes, pp. 22-3 on "kin" versus "tin."

[6] For a sample of this kind of argument, see Culler, Saussure,
pp. 15-6.

[7] Again, Culler, Saussure, pp. 19-20, is one of many examples.

A grasp of the principle of diacritics and its emphasis on webs
of relationships normally requires a reorientation of one's conscious
thought, which seems to fall more naturally into a sense of isola-
table entities. Perhaps because we develop our notions of physical
objects by putting our hands around them, we come to assume they
are complete units in themselves. Perhaps because physical objects
present to us seemingly sharp visual outlines, we come to think they
are separate things. But even our perception of the single, graspable
object is a strategy for combining clusters of sense data, a process
requiring a "feel" for what goes with what, requiring, in other words,
a number of differentiations. Even our perception of a visual edge
is a strategy for dealing with light and dark or light and lighter
or dark and darker, a process requiring the separation of figure
from field, requiring, in other words, multiple differentiations.
Moreover, as I present this principle of diacritics, I can only do so
by bringing it up against less relational, more substantialist princi-
ples of meaning.

I am not sure where I first ran across this concept of differ-
entiation. It may have been that frequently quoted excerpt from
William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience on "the blooming,
buzzing confusion" that is our experience until we give it shape, or
it may have been one of those free-floating quotations from Alfred
North Whitehead about the interconnected diversity of the world before
we impose on it some kind of order.[8]   E. H. Gombrich, who sees Kant

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[8] I found the Jamesian excerpt in Robert E. Ornstein's The Psycho-
logy of Consciousness (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1972), p. 43.
I did not even try to find the Whiteheadian excerpt.

behind all such formulations, uses this fact that we, as individuals

and as cultures, interpret the world according to varying schemes of

differentiation as his point of departure for solving "the riddle of

style."[9] Behind Gombrich himself are a number of theorists, including

Piaget, Popper, J. J. Gibson, L. von Bertalanffy, Hayek, and Bruner

and Postman--all of whom have given "sorting and categorizing" a

leading role in their psychologies of perception.[10] This is a tradi-

tion old enough to have manifested itself in textbook summaries, such

as Berger and Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality and Burkart

Holzner's Reality Construction in Society.[11]

Most of these writers take a developmental view of perceptual and

cognitive differentiation. Nevertheless, we will be following both

the letter and the spirit of the primary structuralist law if we acknow-

ledge this intellectual tradition with a fairly static maxim: All

perception, however fundamental, is based on the diacritical differen-

tiations by which we order an amorphous, if potentially interrelatable,

flux of data. However useful it may be for us to consider, say, a bare

table supporting a vase of flowers or a man making threatening gestures

with a knife as a separate thing or being, this does not change the

fact that we ourselves supply the exact diacritical forms for the

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[9] See the first chapter, "The Riddle of Style," in E. H. Gombrich,
Art and Illusion (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 3-30.

[10] Gombrich, pp. 28-9.

[11] For an introduction to and summary of theories of developmental
perception, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construc-
tion of Reality (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) and Burkart Holzner,
Reality Construction in Society, revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.:
Schenkman, 1972). R. L. Gregory, The Intelligent Eye (New York: McGraw-
Hill, 1970) is also helpful.

pressures that weigh on us, lightly or heavily, from "out there."
An explicit statement of the principle of diacritics is important for
the way it undermines a naive realism. Although there is much to be
said for a pragmatic epistemological realism, and when I drive the
highway I do not doubt that the other vehicles, the fences, the barns,
and the winter fields are positioned "pretty much" as I see them, I
know that I am selecting and ordering what my perceptual equipment,
and later that perceptual equipment as extended by my language, has
been trained to select and order. Human diacritics are logocentrics,
that is, human acts of differentiation are acts of interpretation from
within the circle of language. So we need occasionally return, at
the level of reflection, to thinking of "things" as relational patterns
not as substantial entities. Of course, at the most basic level, we
never quit thinking diacritically.

Allow me a more elaborate illustration of the operation of the
diacritical faculty. Suppose I sit in a living room talking with
friends, listening to a stereo, and sharing refreshments. As I per-
ceive the situation, I distinguish a table from a chair, a wall from a
ceiling, this houseplant from that houseplant, this face from that,
this voice from that, this phoneme from that, this guitar solo from
that, this Grateful Dead album from the last, this beverage from the
one before it. Suppose furthermore that outside it is early summer,
and, in Oklahoma, already fairly hot. Even though I catch a mere
glimpse of the outdoors through a window over the shoulder of someone
to whom I am speaking, I can almost predict the temperature. For I
have in my memory recorded experiences with various permutations among

colors of lawn, formations of cloud, intensities of sunlight—all

associated with certain periods of certain months. I use these to

estimate the heat outside and to contrast that with the coolness of

the air-conditioned inside. My whole sense of my situation within

a temperature-controlled structure and among certain people and

certain unfolding events is based on clusters of diacritical dis-

tinctions. And I am not alone. All the others in the room are also

unconscious diacriticians.

But who is the "I" who makes these distinctions? Is it the space

between the "this" and the "that"? Is it the gap in which these dis-

tinctions are made? Yes, I am the what or who that is in the midst

and looks both ways. I am the locale wherein operate the noetic

interpretations that I have developed, or that have developed me. I

am a particular function of the universal calculus of the Diacritic.

I am a child of what Rene Girard, following Levi-Strauss, calls the

elan differenciateur.[12]

Now there is considerably more to it than this. In the light of

my earlier chapter on Ernest Becker, it should be clear that I view

human diacritics as a development out of infrahuman diacritics. In

the light of later chapters on Kenneth Burke, it should become clear

that I believe that at the human level the operations of the Diacritic

carve out new ethical depths. But here I need only say that we owe

our sense of the importance of this principle of diacritics to the

posthumous publications of the university lectures of Ferdinand de

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[12] See the quotation with which this chapter opens. Again, Girard,
"To double business bound", p. 159.

Saussure, the Swiss linguist who taught a course in general linguistics at the University of Geneva in the years before his death in 1911. Although other thinkers, such as Einstein, Heisenberg, and Whitehead, have also been instrumental in shifting the focus of modern thought from entities to processes, Saussure is responsible for our granting the principle of relational meaning a prominent place in the study of language and, after the extension of this Saussurean principle by his followers, in other sciences of the human.

1. Saussure

In his Course in General Linguistics, Saussure says that language is a "domain of articulations" which involve relational fields of "identity and difference." According to him, "the linguistic mechanism is geared to differences and identities, the former being only the counterpart of the latter."[13] His view is negationist, the meaning of all spoken sounds and written letters, i.e., of all basic linguistic elements, being described as "negative and differential."[14] His summary of this position in his chapter on "Linguistic Value" is classic:

> Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms.[15]

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[13] Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 108.

[14] Saussure, p. 119. [15] Saussure, p. 120.

Actually, Saussure views language as being doubly diacritical. He theorizes that a lingual sign is a combination of signifier and signified. In perhaps the best introduction to these issues, Jonathan Culler says, "the sign is the union of a form which signifies, which Saussure calls the _signifiant_ (signifier), and an idea signified, the _signifie_ (signified)."[16] The forms are defined against other forms; the ideas against other ideas. Both "signifier and signified are purely relational or differential entities."[17] Soon I will take issue with Culler's choice of the adjective "purely," but for the moment we want to accept Saussure's and Culler's statements that both of the basic components of the human sign are diacritical.

In his following section on the nature of the linguistic sign, Culler goes further. Both components of the sign are also arbitrary. Language is not a mere Adamic nomenclature assigned to determinate beings as they pass one by one. Language

> does not simply assign arbitrary names to a set of inde-
> pendently existing concepts. It sets up an arbitrary [again
> Culler's choice of adjective is a little troubling] relation
> between signifiers of its own choosing on the one hand, and
> signifieds of its own choosing on the other.[18]

Culler illustrates this principle of arbitrariness using English and French terms for "flowing bodies of water." He notes that the English opposes "river" to "stream" according to size, while the French opposes "fleuve" to "riviere" according to whether the water flows into the sea. Each language thus expresses "a different articulation of the

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[16] Culler, _Saussure_, p. 9.   [17] Culler, _Saussure_, p. 15.

[18] Culler, _Saussure_, p. 15.

conceptual plane."[19] He concludes with this revealing paragraph:

> The fact that these two languages operate perfectly well
> with different conceptual articulations or distinctions
> indicates that these divisions are not natural, inevitable,
> or necessary, but, in an important sense, arbitrary.
> Obviously it is important that a language have ways of
> talking about flowing bodies of water, but it can make its
> conceptual distinctions in this area in any of a wide
> variety of ways (size, swiftness of flow, straightness
> or sinuosity, direction of flow, depth, navigability, et
> cetera). Not only can a language arbitrarily choose its
> signifiers; it can divide up a spectrum of conceptual possi-
> bilities in any way it likes.[20]

Yes, but that last sentence is such a fascinating overstatement

of the case, especially since just above is the admission that there

will of course be words for flowing bodies of water. This is to

admit that there is something that is not quite arbitrary. I will

put it crudely: a language can divide a spectrum of conceptual possi-

bilities in any way it likes, but if it divides the world in certain

ways, ways that ignore crucial features of the extralingual scene, it

will cease to exist because the people who speak it will be wiped out.

There is no one way, but there are some wrong ways.

I would concede that the arbitrariness of the components of the

sign is close to what Culler says it is, but I would ask for the above

qualification to his absolute argument. My hunch is that onomatopoeia

is more widespread, more important, and more subtle than he gives it

credit for being.[21] My guess is that there are less than completely

arbitrary relationships between, say, the positions of the mouth for

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[19] Culler, Saussure, p. 16.   [20] Culler, Saussure, p. 16.

[21] I do not find adequate Culler's single paragraph dismissal of the
anticipated counterargument for the significance of onomatopoeia. See
Culler, Saussure, p. 11.

spitting and sounds for repulsive things. At least Burke toys with such a theory at one point in his Philosophy of Literary Form. Interestingly, Burke concludes his meditation on this one small issue with the suggestion that a sense of connection between the bodily and the symbolical may have been lost and that this loss may have been due to a shift from "the spoken to the documentary."[22] Perhaps Culler's failure to appreciate such a connection, and perhaps the tendency of structuralism in general toward a disembodied idealism, are the result of the rise of print. I say this is interesting because structuralists or poststructuralists, such as Derrida, accuse their opponents of being blinded by assumptions about the spoken word. We have here in Burke the seed of a pre-McLuhan, pre-Ong, McLuhanesque-Ongian counterargument that the structuralist theory of the total arbitrariness of language is the symptom of an ultratypographic sensibility! This tilt between the champions of the voice and those of the letter might well hinge on the work of Roland Barthes, whole sections of which turn, as Fredric Jameson has shown so well, on the mysterious way that relatively free-floating words are still somehow "grounded in the wordless and the physical itself."[23]

However, these issues are tough, and almost scholastic in their intricacy, so I will not quibble over them, at least not here where they threaten to take us so far afield. More importantly, we now have

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[22] Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941, 1973), pp. 12-16.

[23] Jameson, Prison-House, p. 152. See the section on Barthes, pp. 146-161, especially pp. 146-155.

before us Culler's important principle that the language system is
incredibly autonomous. This much we do not really challenge. Using
partly a structuralist vocabulary and partly the vocabulary emerging
in this dissertation, we can agree that in the diacritical gap created
by the evolution of the human, symbolic style, there is great room
for the most remarkably flexible and arbitrary mediations between the
language-creatures and their environment. It is only Culler's, and
structuralism's, occasional insistence upon the total arbitrariness of
the sign that provokes my, and Burke's, resistance. But we will have
more to resist if we first see how Saussure's proteges use and abuse
this principle of diacritics.

2. Levi-Strauss

As many have remarked, and as he himself has proclaimed, Levi-
Strauss applies the model of Saussurean linguistics to the data of
anthropology.[24] He presents primitive culture as a "science of the
concrete" which endows the world with human meaning. The superstruc-
ture of any culture is a classificatory scheme which allows "the
natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole."[25]

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[24] Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jakob-
son and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, Vol. 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1963).
Levi-Strauss gives Saussure credit for the advent of structural linguis-
tics (p. 20), though Roman Jakobson is also acknowledged as important
(p. 233), and devotes the first part of his first volume to the rela-
tionship between structural linguistics and anthropology. Levi-Strauss
also mentions his debt to Marx. See Tristes Tropics, trans. John and
Doreen Weightman (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 57-8, as well as The
Savage Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 130 and
246.

[25] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 135.

Levi-Strauss's point of departure is the principle of diacritics:

". . . the practico-theoretical logics governing the life and thought

of so-called primitive societies are shaped by the insistence on dif-

ferentiation."[26] Levi-Strauss speaks of this system of differentiation

as a "grid" which makes the originally unintelligible intelligible:

"The grid make it possible to introduce divisions and contrasts, in

other words the formal conditions necessary for a significant message

to be conveyed."[27]

The emphasis in Levi-Strauss is not on how "the natural and social

universe" is used or survived or feared or worshipped but on how it is

intellectually organized. Objects in the world do not shine with their

own meaning once they are caught in the differentiative grid. Instead

they begin to catch the refracted light of an overall structural pattern,

a light that makes them visible in the mind of the primitive. The

"bits and pieces" of the world

> can no longer be considered as entities in their own right . . .
> they must be considered from a different point of view . . . :
> one consisting of patterns in which, through the play of
> mirrors, reflections are equivalent to real objects, that is,
> in which signs assume the status of things signified.[28]

The culture is thus a diacritical discourse, and the objects of the

world become manifestations of its grammar. Once again, the diacritics

·amount to an ongoing logocentrics. Levi-Strauss is aware that this dis-

course is also a system of taboos, and that such a system amounts to

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[26] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 75.

[27] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 75.

[28] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 36.

a massive effort to influence the primitives who share it, but he does not pause to consider the implications of these ethics. On this point, as we will soon see, he provides a revealing contrast to Kenneth Burke.

Since, as in Saussure, the diacritic of any language is also a binaric, that is, a system of differentiations based not merely on relational fields but, even more fundamentally, on paired oppositions, Levi-Strauss finds the savage mind operating in terms of binary oppositions. As everyone by now knows, he extends the structural study of culture to the structural study of myth. He analyzes the ancient myths as a language revealing the binary character of the human mind, and he dissects a linguistic artifact such as Oedipus Rex looking for those binarily paired mythemes that unite the work.[29] That particular Greek tragedy is found to contain contradictions concerning blood relations and autochthonous origins.[30] Levi-Strauss displays great ingenuity in uncovering these binary oppositions, and even those of us troubled by such a radical de-emphasis of the mythic message as traditionally interpreted must admit that he has told us something we need to know about the structure of the mythic code.

However, although Levi-Strauss believes that these coupled mythemes yoke great contradictions of human experience, such as the haunting question of origins, and hence harnass the terror of such dilemmas, he does not picture the primitive as one caught in the throes of life's

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[29] Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, pp. 206-31. This chapter is entitled "The Structural Study of Myth" and is one of the more frequently reprinted structuralist documents.

[30] Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, pp. 25-6.

terrible ambiguities. The manner of this happy savage is cool, even Cartesian. His classificatory system does not vibrate with existential tension as much as with the simple mathematical beauty of, say, a symmetrical chart of positive and negative numbers, and he stands at the diacritical zero looking back and forth along the scale, holding in his vision the bipolar sequences of the graph. Fredric Jameson has written of the way that myth, after Levi-Strauss's "wholly disengaged and dispassionate . . . inventory," dissolves into "essentially an epistemological, rather than an existential, affair."[31] Rene Girard has also observed that "Levi-Strauss regards with great contempt . . . all the moral, existential, or psychoanalytical values or intuitions that many people attach to mythology."[32]

I would stress the word "Mind" in Levi-Strauss's title "The Savage Mind," for under his analysis myths become a matter of mind or of purely formal intelligence. And not necessarily a human intelligence as we are accustomed to assume. According to Levi-Strauss, "men do not think the myths"; the myths "operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."[33] It might be more in keeping with the tone of the French anthropologist to say that the myths use us humans as equipment on which to run their computer programs. I am not the only person to receive this impression from Levi-Strauss's presentation. Edmund Leach complains

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[31] Jameson, _Prison-House_, pp. 119 and 144.

[32] Girard, "_To double business bound_", p. 181.

[33] Levi-Strauss, _The Raw and the Cooked_, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (1969; rpt. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 12.

that Levi-Strauss "leaves obscure . . . the nature of the 'human mind' . . . which functions as a kind of randomising computer."[34] C. R. Badcock accuses Levi-Strauss of "a tendency to treat the mind as if it were a computer or logic machine."[35] And Levi-Strauss himself once wistfully hoped that someday the cultures of various Australian tribes might be clarified by "punch-card and computer."[36] There is admittedly some debate as to just how far Levi-Strauss carries this notion of the mind as a cybernetic machine or as an autonomous system of logic, but there is no disagreement that, in his treatment of myth and culture, the chief formal characteristics of these language systems is their binary and diacritical "deep structure."

Now there are points at which the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss can be brought into an interesting conjunction with those of Kenneth Burke. As I already mentioned, Levi-Strauss, unlike Burke, does not much stress the ethical dimension of language. We can now add that Levi-Strauss portrays these binary, diacritical patterns of culture as basically static patterns. Jameson calls Levi-Strauss's diacritic an "arrested dialectic," and he sees it as the inevitable outcome of the original structuralist choice of a synchronic perspective.[37] Burke takes a different approach, for, and I will give this considerable space in the

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[34] Edmund Leach, Claude Levi-Strauss (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 54.

[35] C. R. Badcock, Levi-Strauss: Structuralism and Sociological Theory (New York: Homes and Meier, 1975), p. 112.

[36] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 89.

[37] Jameson, Prison-House, p. 119.

next chapter, he views differentiative patterns as subject to dialectical pressures.

But the most arresting difference between Burke and Levi-Strauss concerns the practical dimension of language. If one rereads the first chapter of The Savage Mind, one will find that it is written against the spirit of Bronislaw Malinowski. That is, Malinowski stands in the background of that chapter as the father of the anthropological tradition from which Levi-Strauss wishes to break. Malinowski views language technologically, that is, views language as a tool that helps a human group work its corner of the world. In his opinion, language is anything but autonomous. On the other hand, Levi-Strauss wants us to understand that language has its own formal dynamics. Of the complex classification systems of various primitive societies, Levi-Strauss says, "Knowledge as systematically developed as this clearly cannot relate just to practical purposes."[38] Under the analysis of structuralist anthropology, the universe becomes "an object of thought at least as much as it is a means of satisfying needs."[39] If we ignore this fact, Levi-Strauss continues, we make "a mistake of the same kind that Malinowski made when he claimed that primitive peoples' interest in totemic plants and animals was inspired by nothing but the rumbling of their stomachs."[40]

To this point, one has little trouble agreeing with Levi-Strauss;

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[38] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 8.

[39] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 3.

[40] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 3.

not so when he pushes his conclusions further:

> . . . one may readily conclude that animals and plants are
> not known as a result of their usefulness; they are deemed
> to be useful or interesting because they are first of all
> known. . . . It may be objected that science of this kind
> [meaning "the science of the concrete," Levi-Strauss's label
> for the primitive classification system] can scarcely be of
> much practical effect. The answer to this is that its <u>main</u>
> <u>purpose</u> [my underline] is not a practical one. It meets
> intellectual requirements rather than or instead of satis-
> fying needs.[41]

Later it becomes clear that these "intellectual requirements" are

basically esthetic requirements. Levi-Strauss speaks of the "estheti-

cally satisfying equivalence"[42] between thought and objective reality

and of a kind of knowledge "which gratifies the intelligence and gives

rise to a sense of pleasure which can . . . be called esthetic."[43]

Surely it is one thing to argue for the presence of an esthetic dimen-

sion but quite another to claim that any practical dimension is entirely

subordinate to it. It would seem that Levi-Strauss, setting out to

correct Malinowski, has overcorrected. Indeed, there are four allusions

to Malinowski in The Savage Mind, none of them favorable, and, unkindest

scholarly cut of all, Malinowski's writings are omitted from Levi-Strauss's

bibliography.

I delve into all of this in order to facilitate the eventual com-

parison to Burke, a number of whose books include the proud announcement

of their debt to Malinowski. Actually, Burke takes a stance between the

extreme positions of Malinowski and Levi-Strauss, able to stress the

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[41] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 9.

[42] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, pp. 15-16.

[43] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 24.

practical value of language but also able to appreciate its formal

perfections. Yet despite the differences between Burke and Levi-Strauss,

there are also similarities. First, both stress language as a series

of acts of differentiation or as a diacritics. Second, both feel the

esthetic inflation at work in any word pattern. For example, Levi-

Strauss writes of the way that the intricate taxonomies of various Aus-

tralian tribes were bent by the invasion of English culture and dis-

torted by forced resettlement in close proximity to other tribes.[44]

Levi-Strauss is struck by the fact that the formal, "theoretical,"

cultural effort toward systematization "continues to flourish,"[45] to

absorb foreign elements, and to "harmonize" them in a new amalgam of

classifications:

> The natives' first response to the regrouping was . . .
> the adoption of a common terminology and of rules of cor-
> respondence for harmonizing the tribal structures . . . .[46]

A few pages later, he summarizes what he calls "the constant struggle

between history and system"[47] endured by the Australian languages:

> When it is no longer possible to retain the traditional
> interpretations, others are worked out which, like the
> first, are inspired by motivations (in Saussure's sense)
> and by schemes. . . . If the process of deterioration
> were halted [i.e., if the British and their descendants
> withdrew], there is no doubt that this syncretism could
> serve as the starting point of a new society, for working
> out an entire system with all its aspects adjusted.[48]

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[44] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, pp. 156-7.

[45] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 158.

[46] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 157.

[47] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, p. 157.

[48] Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, pp. 158-9.

With this doctrine of a "logical dynamism" toward expansive inte-

gration, Levi-Strauss wanders onto the domain of Burke's doctrine of

entelechial poetics. Third and finally, Levi-Strauss's doctrine that

the highest message of any myth is its commentary (its "metacommentary")

on its own patterns overlaps with Burke's logologism. Again Rene

Girard has encapsulized my point: ". . . to Levi-Strauss, the mythical

drama really boils down to an allegorical dramatization of the thinking

process itself."[49] Before we are finished we will see how compulsively

certain great myths dramatize their own linguistic processes, but by

the time this presentation takes shape it will owe more to Burke drama-

tistic theory of language than to Levi-Strauss's cyberneticist

vision.

3. Lacan

Jacques Lacan applies to psychoanalysis a mixture of the vocabula-

ries of Freud and Saussure. In a paper he read to the 1966 John Hopkins

meeting, he treats the unconscious as a structured language.[50] He finds

at work on the most fundamental psychological levels the principles of

language. Like any language, the unconscious is "a collection of dif-

ferential traits."[51] Since this system of differentiation, i.e., this

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[49] Girard, "To double business bound", p. 180.

[50] Jacques Lacan, "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Pre-
requisite to Any Subject Whatever," in The Structuralist Controversy, ed.
Richard Macksay and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press,
1972), pp. 187-8.

[51] Lacan, "Inmixing of an Otherness," p. 193.

diacritic, precedes one initiated into it, as English preceded my adoption of it, Lacan titularly summarizes the unconscious as "an in-mixing of an Otherness prerequisite to any subject whatever." The social diacritic thus precedes the self.

One's first glimpse of this truth is said to be one's first moment in front of a mirror. Even so notable an authority as Richard Wollheim says that "the precise significance of this "stade du miroir" is not "all that clear."[52] Wollheim himself interprets the Lacanian doctrine to mean that "it is the infant's first sight of its own reflection which cuts short the inaugural phase of its life and precipitates it toward language."[53] Anthony Wilden, Lacan's "unhappy translator,"[54] explains that "Lacan views the 'stade du miroir' as the primary identification allowing the possibility of secondary identifications."[55] In other words, the child, having developed the strategy of identifying with his or her own image, can move to all sorts of other necessary identifications. Though these identifications are required for the child's induction into full social discourse and hence into the social life of his culture, the moment is not described as a happy one. The gain it seems is also a loss, a loss of innocence if nothing else. The moment before the mirror is given by Lacan the place held in other versions of psychoanalysis by the trauma of birth or the first peep

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[52] Richard Wollheim, "The Cabinet of Dr. Lacan," New York Review of Books (1979 January 25), 37.

[53] Wollheim, "The Cabinet of Dr. Lacan," 37.

[54] Wilden's own phrase, and addressed to Lacan. See The Structuralist Controversy, p. 196.

[55] Jacques Lacan, The Language of the Self, trans. with notes and commentary Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1968), p. 172.

at parental coitus. The moment before the mirror is the inauguration
of alienation.

But here we want to place the stress, not on alienation, but on
negation. Since, as Wilden says, "identification is itself dependent
upon the discovery of difference,"[56] there is a diacritical moment
within this moment before the mirror, and I suspect that it is this
discovery of the "empty" process of identification itself and of this
gap of difference itself that may be blamed for the alienating impact
of the experience. What is certain about Lacan's theory is that the
moment before the mirror invokes basic questions of identity, that it
involves a discovery of presence and absence, and that it produces
feelings of primordial alienation, perhaps even paranoia.

In the absence of any full consensus about Lacan's doctrines,
let me engage in some Lacan-inspired speculation, dropping the protec-
tive third-person. Early in childhood we develop a sense of ourselves
as opposed to the rest of the world. It is a distinction necessary for
functioning in the world, and so I will call this our "working sense of
self." Now what we realize the first time we step in front of a mirror
is not that we can think of ourselves as a separate entity nor that we
can isolate ourselves as a body that stands out from a background. These
things we had already figured out and made the basis of our working
sense of self. In the presence of our own self-image, be it in a mirror
or water or smooth surface or the eye of another, we realize something
else. We begin to suspect that our working sense of self is not primary

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[56] Lacan, The Language of the Self, p. 174.

but secondary. It begins to dawn on us that our working sense of self

is itself the result of a prior distinction. We begin to wonder, with-

out of course putting this into words, for we do not yet know words and

will not know them until we have worked our way through this experience

or its equivalent, "If my sense of myself was preceded by an act of

differentiation, what agent made that differentiation? Is my most

basic self, my 'real' or 'true' self, this faculty of differentiation?"

You also begin to suffer from the uneasiness that accompanies the budding

awareness of an essence so insubstantial. You are a mere formal princi-

ple that operates on the data of experience. You are a mere form that

drifts onto a content it cannot choose.[57] At least, as Lacan presents

it, this is the problem that must be tentatively, if intuitively, resolved

before you can go on to learn the language of the self. Furthermore,

much of that content onto which you drift does not offer itself totally

unformed. It has already been shaped by the acts of others. The "you"

does not last long; it becomes a "we." As Lacan metaphorically sum-

marizes all this, our "real" selves are related to out "working" selves

as the early morning light is related to a trans-Atlantic traveler who,

awakening dizzy with jetlag after a flight from Paris, uses that light

to view a Baltimore built by other people through his own reflection in

the highrise hotel window.[58]

I have included these ideas in this dissertation because I think

they supplement, and deepen, a premise of Kenneth Burke's own nega-

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[57] For Lacan on the "drift" of life, see The Structuralist Contro-
versy, p. 190.

[58] The Structuralist Controversy, p. 189. I confess I have taken a
few liberties with the metaphor.

tionism. Burke has often said that the use of language requires an intuitive talent for the negative, a sense that a given category is <u>not</u> to be confused with what it is <u>not</u> and a sense that the word is <u>not</u> the thing (though this knowledge is almost always suppressed at more conscious levels).[59] I read Lacan, with his mirror episode, as translating Burke's proposition into narrative. In the moment before the mirror we incorporate a negativity that carves out within us the spaces for all the future structures of our lifeworld. But why a moment before a mirror or a glass or a polished surface? Why not some other kind of experience? Perhaps because of our increasing dependence on the sense of sight and because of our habit of failing to pay attention to something until it confronts us as a serious, unavoidable threat. One difference between the theories of Lacan and Burke is that in Lacan the "you" disappears after a fleeting appearance, lost, often forever, in the social codes of language, while in Burke the collective language structures are anchored in a biological fact of individuation: "you" remain a separate central nervous system, albeit a nexus at which social structures have gathered.

I have tried to show that Lacan's theory of the self is largely the product of his point of departure. Such Lacanian enigmas as "I think where I am not, for I am where I do not think"[60] are the result of his application of a principle of diacritics inherited with Saussurean linguistics. Jean-Marie Benoist calls this "Lacan's joke about

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[59] Burke, <u>Language as Symbolic Action</u> (1966), pp. 5 and 12.

[60] Quoted in Jean-Marie Benoist, <u>The Structural Revolution</u> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 17.

a new _cogito_, which splits the subject," and he summarizes the doctrine
as follows: "Man, in other words, is the great absence."[61] I am
arguing that the sense of the self as an absence is born in that dia-
critical moment before our self-image, when, as children raised by
developing language structures to new heights of abstraction and reflec-
tion, we begin to appreciate the gap between the mirror and our body as
a symbol of the gap between our self and the Other. We begin to realize
that we are what stands in the middle and looks both ways. But I
should stress that our appreciation of this symbolism remains faint,
and, according to Lacan, is soon lost in the secondary identifications
made available by the further adoption of language structures, especially
pronoun structures, and remains lost--unless perchance at some later
date we drift before the murky mirror of Lacan's own prose and are
raised into the fuller appreciation of the diacriticality of our
problematic selves.

4. Derrida

Despite extensive use of the principle of diacritics by Claude
Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida is its real champion.
It is Derrida who wields this seemingly innocuous observation of Saus-
sure's as a metaphysical or, more appropriately, an anti-metaphysical
weapon. Derrida's central notion, the notion of "differance," is
itself centered around the principle of diacritics. If Lacan has his

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[61] Jean-Marie Benoist, _The Structural Revolution_ (New York: St.
Martin's Press, 1978), pp. 17-8.

great joke, Derrida has this great pun. The neologism is meant to

capture two meanings: "Differance . . . indicates difference as dis-

tinction, inequality, or discernibility," but it also "expresses the

interposition of delay."[62] As translator David Allison explains,

"'differance,' or difference with an a, incorporates two significa-

tions: "to differ" and "to defer."[63] In addition, the term "has the

desired advantage of refering to differing both as spacing/temporalizing

and as the movement that structures every dissociation."[64] "Differance"

is thus not so much a notion as a motion. It is, for lack of a better

phrase, the basic movement of mind. And in this movement of differing

and defering, one should recognize the distancing and deliberating

motions of the differentiative ego as presented in the preceding chapter.

By now we may suspect that the movement of the diacritic is the basis

of all language and thought. Show me meaning, says Derrida, and I will

show you where the diacritic has already been. Toujours deja—always

human signification assumes its shape within a diacritical play of pre-

sences and absences already at work.

Armed with this new word "differance" and the ideas inside it,

Derrida goes after those who defend a principle of unmediated presence.

As others have noted, he is out to "deconstruct" the whole Western meta-

physical tradition, which he sees as hopelessly mired in doctrines of

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[62] Jacques Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, trans. David Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), p. 129.

[63] Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, p. 129n.

[64] Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, p. 130.

presence.[65] His tactic is to reveal the hidden assumptions of this

venerable (and now vulnerable) tradition by contrasting them with his

own insights about the diacritical absence that precedes all else. He

finds the old assumptions still strong as late as Husserl, stronger in

fact for being more concentrated. He is upset with Husserl's retention,

despite all of Husserl's talk of supposed presuppositionlessness, of

presuppositions about presence. He accuses Husserl of smuggling into

philosophical discourse old theories of presence by hiding them in a

theory of the spoken word as the privileged expression of unmediated

presence.

Using as our text a chapter from Speech and Phenomena, let us con-

sider Derrida's impressively systematic critique of Husserl. In "Meaning

as Soliloquy," Derrida notes the Husserlian claim that we cannot know

another's own phenomenological experience, for that inner experience

never receives full expression in the indicative signs the other person

sends our way.[66] The only expressions we can know fully, according to

Husserl, are those which never leave our own interior monologue. During

our soliloquies, we seem to be united with "pure expression," with "real

meaning," with the voice we are; at such moments we seem to be present

to ourselves. Now Derrida's counterargument is that even the meaning

of our own interior monologues, "meaning as soliloquy," requires differen-

tiations inherent in the interpretation of signs. The diacritic thus

precedes our solitary musings. Our knowledge of ourselves is not an

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[65] For example, see Gayatri Spivak's "Translator's Preface," in Jacques
Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974),
pp. 3-5.

[66] Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, pp. 32-47, especially pp. 38-9.

immediate, unmediated unity with self-presence, for such an immediacy

is denied the sign-interpreting creature. As Gayatri Spivak explains,

". . . according to Derrida, Husserl's text is tortured by a suppressed

insight that the Living Present is always already inhabited by diffe-

rence."[67] Toujours deja—always our sense of "our self" as present to

itself assumes its shape within a diacritical play of absences already

at work.

With the authority of such counter-insights, Derrida discovers

Husserl to be spending from "a common fund of metaphysical implications,"[68]

namely, the metaphysics of the voice and of presence, and, as far as

this auditor is concerned, that account has long since been overdrawn.

But Husserl is not the only modern intellectual spendthrift. The accu-

sation made against Husserl by Derrida's Speech and Phenomena is made

against Rousseau and Saussure by the Grammatology.[69] All, so the charge

reads, fail to break from the phonocentric circle; all privilege the

spoken word over the written mark; all assume "the voice" and its "pre-

sence" to be virtually synonymous. None characterize human meaning as

a process of "openure" rather than "closure," of discontinuity rather

than continuity, of absence rather than presence—at least not as

radically as Derrida believes is necessary.

We are not used to thinking of Rousseau, Husserl, and Saussure as

such deluded souls, for all made honest contributions to our self-

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[67] "Translator's Preface," Grammatology, p. lxviii.

[68] Derrida, Grammatology, p. 34.

[69] For Derrida on Saussure, see Grammatology, p. 44ff. For Derrida
on Rousseau, see the last half of Grammatology, which even most Derridians
find extremely difficult.

knowledge. To show that even these great demystifiers still fall prey
to a mystification is Derrida's way of emphasizing the strength of the
illusion and hence his way of dramatizing his attempts to dispel it.
To bury one tradition while announcing that its successor, not yet visi-
ble in any clear form, is looming on the horizon is Derrida's strategy
for placing himself and his reader at a pivotal moment in the history
of ideas, and hence of dramatizing the importance of his arguments.
(Perhaps because it accords so powerfully with the liminal nature of
our experience, this strategy has been effectively employed by almost
every teacher from John the Baptist to Karl Marx.) And to shock us with
outrageous phrasing is Derrida's method for forcing us to rethink assump-
tions so long taken for granted. In trying to reverse the Western tra-
dition and to usher in a new era, Derrida has gone so far as to make
superficially absurd statements, such as his claim that "writing precedes
speech." He cannot possibly mean this to be taken at face value, for,
as we all know, in the development of both the culture and the indi-
vidual, the spoken words must be mastered before the written words can
be learned. But as Spivak points out, Derrida's choice of the term
"writing" in this phrase is polemical, that is, is part of a diction aimed
"against the manifest phonocentrism of structuralism."[70] He is reminding
us that all interpretation and communication is structured as combinations
of straight and curved marks structure the various letters. In other
words, the diacritical function, become so obvious with the appearance
of the menagerie of a written alphabet, was always already at work in

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[70] "Translator's Preface," Grammatology, p. lxix.

the play of differentiations that distinguish spoken phonemes. We were marking sounds when we began marking marks. Long before we started to write, we stood in those diacritical gaps and looked both ways, comparing and contrasting, playing the "this" against the "that" or the "that" against the "not this."

With his Grammatology, Derrida elevates the Saussurean principle of differentiative meaning to a position of eminence. Unfortunately, this apotheosis leaves us with a very vacant god. The experience of reading Derrida has an affinity with the experience of viewing those popular science fiction movies: we are confronted by much silent, pitch-black void between the stars and the double moons of distant planets. The emphasis is very much on absence over presence, on the voiceless page over the uttered syllable. In short, to the traditional ontology of presence so prevalent for so long, Derrida opposes his own ontology, an anti-ontology of absence gathered around the principle of diacritics.

I have tried to show that the principle of diacritics is central to structuralism. Levi-Strauss uses this principle to analyze cultural myths, Lacan to psychoanalyze the human ego, and Derrida to promote his counter-ontology. We should not snipe at Levi-Strauss's hyper-formalism, Lacan's obscurity, and Derrida's "vacuity," for these structuralists have made a major contribution to the theory of meaning. There is an inescapably diacritical factor in our experience of the world and of ourselves. Our intelligence is a diacritical function, and even

our desires seem condemned to choose their objects from diacritical

lists of alternatives. It is impossible to say which comes first: the

desire that motivates the diacritic or the diacritic that shapes desire.

If the evolutionists are correct, we could follow this vicious spiral

back down the life-chain to simpler organisms, which seem to know their

environment through diacritical "images" of the harmful versus the

beneficial. We might even descend to the level of the inorganic, where

atoms and molecules can be thought of as "knowing" the world around

them through a diacritical language of valencies.

But it is at the human level, especially at that level where humans

reflect on themselves, that the diacritic threatens to expand until it

hegemonizes all else. So that when the structuralists, participating

in the impulse toward self-knowledge, peer inward, they find only a

diacritical center that disappears as they try to fix on it, like those

faint reflections in a dark room at which one must not stare if one

wants to see them. If the structuralists expected to find a specifi-

cally human substance, they are disappointed. Under their observation,

the once seemingly solid self dissolves into a gigantic impersonal,

linguistic network, into bundles of syntactical patterns, into conver-

sations of the Other. To use Spivak's term, the picture faces into

"no-picture."[71] So diacritical consciousness faces a difficult task

when it tries to focus on itself because even that act of focusing

requires a diacritical separation of figure from field. It is tempting

to simply postulate this faculty of separation as the ground or sub-

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[71] "Translator's Preface," Grammatology, p. xiii.

structure of all human intelligence.

Because of their willingness to deny the reality of a fixed self and their tendency to stress the relativity of thought and desire, the structuralists make valuable allies if one is engaged in the luxury of debating ultimate questions. The structuralists will aid one in an argument with absolutists. But with respect to more practical questions, the structuralists can be like those Civil War reinforcements that arrive the evening of the day the battle has been lost. Considering some of the probabilities of the coming decades--regional, if not global, nuclear war, environmental pollution on an unprecedented scale, mass starvation in undeveloped nations, severe economic dislocation in all nations, and the genuine suffering and political bitterness that will accompany the efforts to head-off any of these disasters--we may need something besides new formulations of the total relativity and essential emptiness of life.

Even if one were to argue that the structuralists are as effective at bolstering morale as weakening it, a difficult but perhaps not impossible position to defend, even if one were to prove that, despite a nihilistic strain, the structuralists celebrate the play of signs, the fact remains that the structuralist vocabulary discriminates against certain important ideas. For example, though I may not be a "substantail" self and though I may possess no fixed essence, the impression lingers that I am still "a self of sorts": a locus of action, a nexus of memories and plans, a point of choices however limited the options. To use a Burkean vocabulary, I am an agent and I use language as an agency, whatever the degree to which it also uses me. Furthermore,

we all naturally dramatize our plight by thinking of ourselves as pur-
posive agents opposed by counter-agents and their agencies. The things
we need do not always drop into our hands; to obtain them we must muster
our energies and overcome obstacles. We may not know any unmediated
presences, including our own, but we feel ourselves to be a presence
in a looser sense of the word: we put pressure on others, and they
put pressure on us. Our sense of ourselves and others as centers of
power is one of our least mediated intuitions.

Take a simple example. If I am hopping in agony after having
stepped on a nail, to tell me that my sense of pain is diacritical in
that pain must be contrasted with the lack of pain or that my notion
of the nail borrows from my notions of a "tack" and a "spike"--well,
such observations, even if they are correct, are not especially helpful
at such a moment. To call attention to the fact (that is, if one could
get my attention) that my physical pain will immediately be sublated
into mental structures, into feelings of helplessness, of self-pity
and guilt, into feelings with unavoidable social and historical dimen-
sions, dimensions made possible by collective networks of language--well,
such advice is in danger of missing the main point: No other self is at
that moment feeling the pain I am feeling.

The problem with structuralism is that it often misses precisely
this point. While it directs our attention to the diacriticality of
meaning, the insubstantiality of the self, and the impossibility of any
unity with an unmediated presence, it deflects our attention from other
crucial areas. In its use of the term "value" to refer merely to the
diacritical distinctions of intelligence, it debases this key word. In

its denial of any link between the voice and presence, it obscures those ways in which the voice is an indication of a power-center. Before we accept uncritically the accusation that "phonocentrism" is the great enemy because of its extrapolation from intuitions about the voice to an ontology of presence, we ought to consider the ways in which its accusers, in extrapolating from the diacritical spaces between the letters to an ontology of absence, are guilty of what we might call "typocentrism." I personally doubt whether a debate between two such schools would be settled any sooner than the debate over "fate versus free will." So, as growing piles of documents strengthen both sides of such arguments, the question about the nature of ultimate reality yields to this question: with which doctrine can one do the most?

Let us return to an earlier anecdote. Near the opening of this chapter, I described a scene with me and my acquaintances in a living room making diacritical discriminations as we conversed and relaxed. Suppose that suddenly there is a knock on the door, and, before we can open it, federal narcotics agents barge into the house. Carrying guns and shouting instructions, they line us up against a wall and search us rather roughly. They find chemicals, of course, but no illegal ones. Then they realize that they have broken in at the wrong address. Embarrassed and worried about possible press attacks and lawsuits, they leave quickly. After they are gone, I and the others find ourselves still making diacritical differentiations. But now these concern relaxation versus exertion, security versus insecurity, privacy versus invasion of privacy, stupidity versus reasonableness, power versus

powerlessness. Our outrage is a clue that our diacritics are not simply a matter of purely disembodied, intellectual distinctions, but instead are soaked in value judgments about what is fair and what is unfair, judgments which themselves have arisen from the most basic intuitions about what is harmful and what is beneficial. In other words, the diacritic is also what we might call an "axiosic," that is, a system of acts of attributing value by a creature who knows pleasure and pain.

I would argue that humans cannot live by a diacritic alone. Nor can criticism rest with an analysis of the diacritic alone. We need a critical vocabulary that allows us, even encourages us, to talk about such aspects of life as will, attitude, purpose, and ethical choice. We need a theoretical system that accommodates more fully our primal intuitions about ourselves and our motives. We must have a doctrine of negationism that leaves us more to affirm. The dramatistic theory of language and society developed by Kenneth Burke provides just such a set of terms. As we move from the structuralist world of cybernetic differentiation to the Burkean world of human drama, the gray linguistic networks come to life again, fired by scarlet flames of value and desire. Burke's theory of differentiation presents language as a diacritical system that radically transforms infrahuman needs, but Burke does not deny the priority of the nonsymbolic. Even if his theory gives us a less serene, less charming picture of us users of language and uncovers unsightly problems slighted by the structuralists, it is still more humanistic. It saves a place for the unique human agent. And it is a doctrine we can do more with.

> In ordinary everyday speech each phrase has not one
> but a number of functions.[1]

These chapters on the evolutionist theories of the differentia-

tive ego and the structuralist theories of the diacritic were not meant

as separate entities. In the context of this work, they are intended

to throw light on the Burkean theory of the negative. We can now view

the diacritical negative diacritically, so to speak. Burke's nega-

tionism, like structuralist negationism, presents language as a clas-

sificatory scheme and the negative as its differentiative faculty, by

which the "this" is distinguished from the "not this." Yet there are

also a number of differences. I will state my argument in advance.

Burke's concept of the negative will be found to incorporate dimensions

dialectical, ethical, rhetorical, and practical lacking in most struc-

turalist concepts of the diacritic. As Gregory Polletta explains,

> Like the French structuralist critics Burke has been
> constructing a unified theory of verbal and social beha-
> vior . . . . But Burke's aim is a global theory of "sym-
> bolic action," all the forms by which human beings act on
> and communicate with each other; his effort . . . has gone
> into categorizing the rhetorical strategies and symbolic modes
> (rather than structures) of "human relations in general"
> as well as in literature.[2]

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[1] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (1923; rpt.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 149.

[2] Gregory T. Polletta, Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism
(Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 477.

Burke's differentiative faculty is a faculty of body, mind, and spirit, not just of purely formal intelligence. And Burke's negative will fit more neatly the empirically-based speculations of the kind of social science synthesized by Ernest Becker.

But before we look at the differences, let us for the sake of transition look at the main area of overlap between Burke and the structuralists. To use a favorite term of Burke's, let us start where the two are "consubstantial." Both put great faith in the notion of language as diacritics, i.e., as acts of differentiation. As we will see, there is more to differentiation than mere differentiation. Any system of categories is actually at the service of some locus of values, some mode of being desperately trying to hold its own and, for an added measure of safety, to expand its influence. Underlying all diacritics are pragmatics (and entelechial pragmatics at that!). Ah, but I am giving you too many possibly confusing hints as to where this chapter will end. For the moment our job is to begin, and these structuralist days a good place to begin is with "differentiation."

1. Diacritics Plus

At one point pretty far along in Counter-Statement, Burke is discussing the way forms of art borrow from forms of life.[3] He lists some of these forms, such as contrast, comparison, metaphor, series, bathos, and chiasmus, and then he adds parenthetically that all of these may be

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[3] Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (1931, 1968), p. 142.

rooted in that most basic movement of mind, namely, that movement by which "'something' [is distinguished] in relation to 'something else.'" One coming off a structuralist binge immediately recognizes in this a statement of the principle of diacritics, and a fairly early one at that, Counter-Statement having been written in the Twenties and early Thirties. What it means that Burke occasionally puts very important observations in either parentheses or footnotes, I do not know. But I do know that this principle of relational meaning is a key Burkean idea, if often just an assumed one. There are, however, moments, like that just quoted, when Burke brings this principle into sharp relief. Another such moment is the presentation of his theory of terms in A Rhetoric of Motives. As such a theory offers an excellent place to open a discussion of Burke's theory of linguistic negation, we will look at it in some detail.

In a section entitled "Positive, Dialectical, and Ultimate Terms," Burke presents what amounts to a miniature of his theory of language.[4] He isolates for analysis three different kinds of terms. First, there are the "positive" terms. These terms are "most unambiguously themselves when they name a visible and tangible thing that can be located in space and time."[5] These terms "name par excellence the things of experience, the hic and nunc, and they are defined per genus et differentiam, as with the vocabulary of biological classification."[6] The word "tree" is given as an example of a positive term.

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[4] Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (1950, 1969), pp. 183-9.

[5] RM, p. 183.   [6] RM, p. 183.

Sound simple enough? Burke also notes that in Kant's scheme "the thing named by a positive term would be a manifold of sensations unified by a concept."[7] Burke is aware that such perceptual and conceptual operations are problematic. He notes that a skeptic might question just how simplistically "positive" our labeling of "separate entities" is. As Burke says, "Particularly one might ask himself whether the terms for relationships among things are as _positive_ as are the names for the things themselves."[8] This is the kind of qualification that encourages me to give Burke the benefit of the doubt. I think he realizes that even these terms are diacritical, but he chooses to emphasize in this context their _comparatively_ _positive_ character in contrast to other kinds of terms. I think he could be persuaded that Saussure was correct when he said that "in language there are only differences _without_ _positive_ _terms_."[9]

Second, there are what Burke calls "dialectical" terms. This is a slightly misleading choice of label for reasons I will explain later. The objects that these dialectical terms name have "no such strict location as can be assigned to the objects named in words of the first order."[10] To paraphrase Burke, "Though you may locate the positive referent for the expression 'tree,' you will have a hard time trying to locate a similarly positive referent for the expression 'negationism' or 'logologism' or 'positivism.'"[11] These more abstract terms name "principles" and

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[7] _RM_, p. 183.   [8] _RM_, p. 184.

[9] See above, page 88. More directly, see Ferdinand de Saussure, _Course_ _in_ _General_ _Linguistics_, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 120.

[10] _RM_, p. 184.   [11] _RM_, p. 184.

"essences." These terms might also be thought of as unusually "titular":

> Titles like "Elizabethanism" or "capitalism" can have no
> positive referent . . . . And though they sum up a vast
> complexity of conditions which might conceivably be reduced
> to a near-infinity of positive details, if you succeeded in
> such a description you would find that your recipe contained
> many ingredients not peculiar to "Elizabethanism" or "capi-
> talism" at all. In fact, you would find that "Elizabethanism"
> itself looked different, if matched against, say, "medie-
> valism," than if matched against "Victorianism." And "capi-
> talism" would look different if compared and contrasted
> with "feudalism" than if dialectically paired with "socialism."
> Hence terms of this sort are often called "polar."[12]

Hence terms of this sort are downright binary. We could not ask for a

much clearer statement of the principle of relational meaning by which

words are defined against each other. Burke here uses the term "dialec-

tical" where I might use the term "diacritical." (In the next section

I will explain where I might retain the term "dialectical.")

According to Burke, these dialectical terms transform even the

more positive terms. The relational patterns among these relatively

abstract, dialectical, second-order terms affect the relationships among

the more immediately referential, more positive, first-order terms. The

dynamics of the dialectical realm of ideas permeate "the positive realm

of concepts."[13] For example, Burke fashions a forceful paragraph on how

the ideology of capitalism transforms, as it manifests itself in material

arrangements, such positives as stone and concrete, cathedral and sky-

scraper.[14] Burke is fascinated by the way that "nonverbal things, in

their capacity as 'meanings,' also take on the nature of words," and

thus extend human dialectics (or human diacritics) "into the realm of

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[12] RM, p. 184.   [13] RM, p. 186.   [14] RM, p. 186.

the physical."[15] Again one catches the logocentric note in the Burkean

chord: in the human lifeworld, the nonverbal must be experienced through

the swirl of language. We humans view reality "through a fog of symbolical

relationships."[16]

In an essay entitled "What Are the Signs of What?" Burke develops

more radically this theory that a system of language colors the world

for those who see that world in its terms.[17] I read the first several

pages of this essay as a statement of the principle of diacritics.

Burke proposes that we reverse our commonsense notion of words as attach-

ments to things which have previously been "singled out"[18] and think

instead of words as "entitlements of complex nonverbal situations."[19]

In this view, things become "derivations . . . from the forms of lan-

guage."[20] Burke asks,

> . . . might words be found to possess a "spirit" peculiar
> to their nature as words? And might the things of experi-
> ence then become in effect the materialization of such spirit,
> the manifestation of this spirit in visible, tangible bodies?[21]

These rhetorical questions are in the same vein as Culler's challenge to

the commonsense intuition behind the myth of Adam naming the animals one

by one. Burke's suggestion that things are elements in those situations

for which we have names (or "entitlements") parallels Becker's suggestion

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[15] RM, p. 186.

[16] I am paraphrasing a line I quoted in Chapter Three. See William
Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis:
Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 130.

[17] Originally published as "What Are the Signs of What: A Theory of
'Entitlement,'" Anthropological Linguistics (June 1962), 1-23, this essay
was collected into Language as Symbolic Action (1966), pp. 359-79.

[18] LSA, p. 360. [19] LSA, p. 361. [20] LSA, p. 361. [21] LSA, p. 361.

that things are subjects about which decisions are made by the language

systems that are our egos and Levi-Strauss's suggestion that things are

signs that catch the refracted light from the language pattern that is

our culture. For all these writers, the logocentric human world is one

in which words are not so much the signs of things as one in which things

bear the trace of verbal templates. As Burke concludes this essay, "In

a sense things would be the signs of words."[22]

We have returned to the principle of logocentric symbolics, and

the discussion of this principle in Chapter Three enriches the presen-

tation here. Also, the discussion in that same chapter of the principle

of hierarchy prepares us for our next step. Third, there are what Burke

calls "ultimate" terms. In his view, the terms of a language are not

content to unendingly jostle each other for position in some relational

pattern. It is the nature of language to promote some terms to the top.

Gradually established as "foremost among equals" (Burke's phrase) and

then eventually as "highest among not-so-equals" (my phrase), a given

term will infuse its spirit back down the developing tower of language.

This hierarchical spirit of language is symbolized on the cover of the

paperback edition of The Rhetoric of Religion by a pyramid with an eye

at the apex, over which is the motto, "Annue Coeptis." Translating the

Latin, we discover this half-plea half-command: "Approve our undertaking."

Burke's point is that the hierarchically lower terms tend to seek appro-

val for their undertakings from some hierarchically supreme term, as

ancient Roman religionists once sought the blessing of Jove, hierarchi-

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[22] LSA, p. 379.

cally supreme among the gods. Of this third order of terms, Burke

says, "The 'ultimate' order of terms would differ essentially from the

'dialectical' (as we use the term in this particular context) in that

there is a 'guiding term' or 'unitary principle' behind the diver-

sity . . . ."[23] The hierarchic is still a diacritic because it depends

on distinctions, distinctions between high and low, but the diacritic,

and this is Burke's important insight, tends inevitably to become a

hierarchic.

This section of Burke's on positive, dialectical, and ultimate

terms portrays language as radically transformative. It would seem that

once words are more or less freed from the necessity of immediate refer-

ence they "come into their own." At higher levels of abstraction, they

exhibit more clearly their diacritical, dialectical, and hierarchical

dynamics. To use a Burkean phrase, as words transcend a narrow context,

they "dance" their own peculiarly linguistic "attitudes" with fewer and

fewer inhibitions—and thus more completely transform the world of their

users while they are at it. As the first-order positive terms are sub-

lated by the second-order dialectical terms, both are sublated into this

third order. Here is Burke's summary of the process:

> In an ultimate dialectic, the terms so lead into one
> another that the completion of each order leads to the next.
> Thus, a body of positive terms represents the principle or
> idea behind the positive terminology as a whole. This sum-
> marizing term is in a different order of vocabulary. And
> if such titles, having been brought into dialectical com-
> merce with one another, are given an order among themselves,
> there must be a principle of principles involved in such a
> design—and the step from principles to a principle of

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[23] RM, p. 187.

principles is likewise both the fulfillment of the pre-
vious order and the transcending of it.[24]

This then is a basic movement of language: from things, to words for

things, to words for words, to words about words for words—each stage

negating or transforming or transcending or sublating a previous order

into a higher system.[25]

I am not sure that Burke's terminology for this terminological

process is the best. We have "positive" terms that are themselves the

result of the negative. Burke approaches this problem in analyzing

Spinoza on negation. The passage indicates one of the primary sources

for Burke's theory of diacritics and helps clarify the sense in which

all diacritics involve the negative in action:

> Spinoza explicitly held that all definition is "negation,"
> which is another way of saying that, to define a thing in
> terms of its context, we must define it in terms of what it
> is not. And with scholastic succinctness, he formulated
> the paradox of contextual definition in four words: "All
> determination is negation . . . ." Since determined things
> are "positive," we might point up the paradox as harshly as
> possible by translating it, "Every positive is negative."[26]

We also have "ultimate" terms that are less than ultimate because less

than permanent. The terms that are "on top" are always in danger of

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[24] RM, p. 189.

[25] See also Rueckert, Drama, p. 136. Here is the way he summarizes
this same hierarchical process of linguistic abstraction: "In this
process man moves first from thing to word, from positive to negative,
from image to idea; then he regards the thing in terms of words, the
positive in terms of the negative, and the image in terms of the
idea." Incidentally, Rueckert follows Burke in treating this process
of abstraction as a process which separates humans from their "natu-
ral condition." Paradoxically, the principle of transcendence is
found to embrace a principle of alienation.

[26] Burke, A Grammar of Motives (1945, 1969), p. 25.

being subverted by the jostling terms beneath them. As for the "dia-
lectical" terms, I have already taken issue with the choice of label.
Burke himself hints by his underlining the phrase "in this particular
connection" in a quotation included a couple of pages back that in other
connections he might use the label "dialectical" differently. I must
say that in reading throughout Burke's work one is left with the impres-
sion that all terms, not just the middle order of his three-tiered
scheme, are "dialectical" (and, again, we could substitute the term
"relational" or the term "diacritical"). But apart from this wobbli-
ness of terminology, a measure of which, as we will soon see, is a
problem for any terminology, Burke has given us a fairly rich theory
of terms and a valuable summary of some of his ideas about language.

My purpose in this section, however, is not to assess Burke's overall
theory but to prove that he, too, understands the diacritical nature of
language. We began with a parenthetical note from Burke's first book.
We saw how a sense of diacritics was revealed in A Rhetoric of Motives
and in one of the later essays in Language as Symbolic Action. In one
of the works from the middle years of his career, A Grammar of Motives,
Burke says, "To define . . . a thing is to mark its boundaries."[27]
Drawing a boundary is drawing a line, which of course means relating
diacritically what is inside the line to what is outside the line. And
Burke virtually begins his theorizing about language systems with the
diacritical principle, although he does not call it that. In the first
chapter of Permanence and Change, he remarks that the distinguishing

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[27] GM, p. 24.

characteristic of a sign "is not an absolute, but a relationship to other characteristics, quite as one may recognize the North Star, not in itself, but by the pointers of Ursa Major."[28] The middle section of _Permanence_ _and_ _Change_ is built around the titular concept of "perspective by incongruity." We could properly transform this phrase into "perspective by comparison and contrast" or even into "perspective by diacriticality." Perhaps then we end where we could have begun, for some Burke-readers might have said right off, "Of course Burke understands the diacriticality of meaning; he calls it 'perspective by incongruity,' and claims that it is the way we view and define anything." Over and over there appears in Burke's work an awareness that terms are defined by their "companion terms,"[29] quite as one may know people by the friends they keep and the enemies they oppose.

With this simple point behind us, we can move to several tougher ones. I have only to say why I entitled this section "Diacritics Plus." I did so because for Burke there is more to differentiation than mere differentiation. We have already seen for example, that the differentiations of language have a tendency to form some kind of hierarchy. Linguistic meaning obeys other principles as well, and we can now expand this discussion to another of these. As for our precise direction from this point, we can be guided by a clue planted by Burke, namely, his unfortunate label for his second order of terms. We can now isolate this "dialecticality" of language and give it the concentrated atten-

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[28] Burke, _Permanence_ _and_ _Change_ (1935, 1954), p. 12.

[29] The phrase is Burke's. See an appendix to the 1954 edition. _Permanence_ _and_ _Change_, p. 281.

tion it requires.

2. Dialectics Plus

The very etymology of the main titular term for this section is a
nightmare from which I am not sure any of us can awaken. Both Robert
Fulford and David Fractenberg, dissertationists who have placed Burke
in the tradition of dialectical philosophy, spend whole chapters tracing
the changing meaning of the term "dialectics."[30] Burke himself pauses
in his Grammar of Motives to include a long paragraph listing the varied
disguises this word has assumed.[31] Here is Burke's own definition: "By
dialectics in the most general sense we mean the employment of the pos-
sibilities of linguistic transformation."[32] Burke adds that we may also
mean "the study of such possibilities." In accordance with the terms
and ideas being developed in this dissertation, I might separate off
that second part of the definition under a new label, "metadialectics,"
and then proceed to modify the first part: By dialectics we mean the
possibilities, yea the necessities, of linguistic transformation sub-
ject to the forces of conflict and change. In short, the dialectic is
the diacritic under pressure.

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[30] See Robert Lewis Fulford, "Kenneth Burke's Dialectic: Platonism
and Dramatism," Diss. Univ. of Illinois, 1976, and David Fractenberg,
"Kenneth Burke and the Dialectical Tradition," Diss. Univ. of Kansas,
1976. These two dissertations seem to be a case of two people, each
unaware of the other, catching at the same time something "in the air."
Both have merit, and both are convincing in their claim that Burke is
a dialectical thinker. But neither brings the dialectical principle
into conjunction with the diacritical principle as I am trying to do
in these sections.

[31] GM, p. 403.

[32] GM, p. 402.

As we saw, Burke concurs with other metadiacriticians that the terms of a language are defined against each other. But for him there is more to it than that. These divisions are not serene divisions. In the second chapter of his first book on language, following that first chapter which touches on the relational character of meaning and from which I quoted a moment ago, Burke says that human meanings arise under pressure: "Now there is general agreement, whatever the so-called phenomenon of consciousness may be, it occurs in situations marked by conflict."[33] Our "consciousness" or our "diacritic" or, as Burke is calling it here near the start of Permanence and Change, our "orientation" must grapple with a world of movement and countermovement, forces without and forces within. The stimuli it must label often represent conflicting claims. Since the impulses that arise within us are partially, perhaps largely, the products of natural, external forces, they too pose trick questions and elicit answers riddled with contra-diction. Burke speaks of our orientation as, in part, a language for these jostling tendencies: ". . . our introspective words for motives are rough, shorthand descriptions for certain typical patterns of discrepant and conflicting stimuli . . . ."[34] But because conflict means change, our orientation is always in danger of becoming obsolete with respect to both the outer and the inner.[35] The turbulence of a world of ubiquitous change makes the divisions of any orientation or any diacritic or any consciousness inherently unstable.[36]

The fun begins in the fact that any language system is necessarily

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[33] PC, p. 30.   [34] PC, pp. 29-30.   [35] PC, p. 21.

[36] I cannot resist adding the obvious postscript that the faster the world changes the sooner one's diacritic will become obsolete and cannot

selective. The same early chapters of Permanence and Change which treat

human meanings as relational and unstable also treat them as unavoidably

perspectival. What Burke says is true of all systems of communication

is of course true of all systems of differentiation:

> A [diacritic] is never an absolute, but varies with con-
> ditions of time and place. Any given mode of [differen-
> tiation] can be expected to have the defects of its qua-
> lities (with the apologists stressing only its qualities,
> and its opponents stressing only its defects).[37]

Or as he says a paragraph or two later:

> . . . there is not a simple one-to-one correspondence [be-
> tween the system of differentiations and that which these
> differentiate]. For in this world, communication is never
> an absolute (only angels communicate absolutely) [a sample
> of Burke's humor]; and a deficiency at one point in a given
> [diacritical] sytem may show as a proficiency at some other
> point (somewhat as persons deprived of sight may become more
> acute in hearing or touch).[38]

This is the basic Burkean notion I am trying to extract from these quo-

tations: the strength of a given system of interpretation is also its

weakness, much as Othello's military skills prepare him for the forth-

right battle of the open field but leave him at the mercy of the intrigues

of dark, narrow, civilian streets.

Our interpretive systems are a kind of "shorthand" because there

is too much reality to record in a "longhand." "Our minds, as linguis-

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(continued) resist selecting a passage from John Cheever on the desperate
dialectics of the contemporary world: "Fiction is art and art is the
triumph over chaos (no less) and we can accomplish this only by the
most vigilant exercise of choice, but in a world that changes more
swiftly than we can perceive there is always the danger that our powers
of selection will be mistaken and that the vision we serve will come to
nothing." From "The Death of Justina," in The Stories of John Cheever
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 294.

[37] PC, p. xv.   [38] PC, p. xv-xvi.

tic products, are composed of concepts (verbally molded) which must select certain relationships as meaningful."[39] Our interpretive schemes are finite, and such "finite schemes differ . . . in their ways of dividing up" experience.[40] Moreover, in a world of change, such differences will spark disagreement (for some schemes will "lag" more than others) and, as these disagreements work themselves out, will produce "shifts in interpretation."[41] As Hegel understood, at any given moment the Truth is an Interconnected Whole, but we can only talk about part of it at once—and we may at times be talked out of one interpretation into another. Only "if we [all] knew everything"[42] could we escape this logomachia of selection, disagreement, and shifting viewpoint.

Once again the middle section of Permanence and Change is pertinent to our inquiry, for it is devoted to this process of shifting interpretation among partial, conflicting perspectives.[43] Burke approaches the problem in summarizing Bergson on selectivity. The passage indicates one of the primary sources for Burke's theory of dialectics and also helps clarify the sense in which all diacritics involve limited perspectives in action:

> The events of actual life are continuous, any isolated aspect of reality really merging into all the rest. As a practical convenience, we do make distinctions between various parts of reality, and by such processes of abstraction, we can even treat certain events as though they recurred, simply because there are other events more or less like them. . . . We find our way through this everchanging universe by certain blunt schemes of generalization, conceptualization, and verbalization—but words have a limited validity.[44]

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[39] PC, p. 35.   [40] PC, p. 36.   [41] PC, p. 36.

[42] PC, p. 36.   [43] PC, pp. 67-163.   [44] PC, p. 92.

Burke admires Bergson's acceptance of the inevitable mismatch between orientation and reality. Better to acknowledge the incongruity, appreciate its heuristic value, and plan for it than to pretend it is not there. Moreover, in a world of change, better to accept the fact that the clash of finite viewpoints means constant re-interpretation and to give this strife as constructive a direction as possible than to pretend that stability is our fate. Again, as Burke says in his Philosophy of Literary Form, "A completely adequate chart" or orientation or "gauging of [the] situation as it actually is . . . would, of course, be possible only to an infinite, omniscient mind,"[45] and only such a total perspective would be spared the constant testing of dialectics.

Meanwhile, we mere mortals must choose an incomplete orientation and let its particular sets of linkages serve as our temporary model.[46] In the phrase of Burke's Grammar of Motives, we must "carve" reality along certain "joints" and not along others.[47] We must spotlight certain things while throwing others into darkness. In the phrases of Burke's Language as Symbolic Action, we must use a "terministic screen" to "direct our attention" toward certain features of the world while "deflecting our attention" away from certain other features.[48] But that which has been shoved into the dim background does not vanish; it may, over the course of time, clamor for consideration. Then the whole system of differentiation will have to be realigned to take into account

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[45] PLF, p. 7.   [46] PC, pp. 9-10.

[47] GM, p. 403. I borrow the phrase Burke borrows from Plato's Phaedrus.

[48] See the third chapter of LSA, entitled "Terministic Screens," pp. 44-62, especially page 45.

these temporarily neglected, or perhaps heretofore ignored, areas of experience.

My excuse for these last five paragraphs, admittedly patchworks of Burke's ideas, is my intention to show that a concern with dialectics has been a repeated theme in all his work. He is reported to have told a seminar at the University of Illinois, when asked why his A Grammar of Motives had not been entitled A Dialectic of Motives, "I could have named all my stuff 'dialectic.'"[49] This comment is recorded in an unpublished dissertation by one Robert Heath, who also includes an entire chapter on the principle of dialectics as Burke believes it operates in language.[50] Although Heath is more interested in some of the details of Burke's metadialectical theories, his chapter confirms my general point that the dialectic is the diacritic under pressure. Heath puts it this way: "In Burke's notion of dialectic, conflict and difference [my underline] provide the possibility of linguistic trans-formation."[51] Heath supports my argument that the conflicts are both internal and external. He says that "terms are transformed on the basis of tensions which exist among them,"[52] and later he notes, "Linguistic

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[49] Quoted in Robert Heath, "Kenneth Burke's Theory of Language," Diss. Univ. of Illinois, 1971, p. 131.

[50] Heath, pp. 131-161. This chapter treats such Burkean concepts as "contextual substance," "familial substance," and "paradox of substance," but it does not—and there is no reason why it should—line things up the way I want them lined up. Heath, along with Fulford and Fractenberg, who were mentioned in an earlier footnote, stress the instability Burke finds characteristic of language. Heath and Fulford, as well as L. Virginia Holland, are proteges of Marie Hochmuth Nichols of the University of Illinois Speech Department, a center of "Burkology."

[51] Heath, p. 141.   [52] Heath, p. 142.

substance is inherently unstable; it is prone to change as the tensions
and strains of use press upon it."[53] He sees that the principle of dia-
lectics applies to language in so far as language is "dynamic,"[54] and
that "dialectical transformation is a creative process."[55] So central,
he says, is the dialectical principle to the world of human meaning
that we may follow Burke in speaking of the human as homo dialecticus.[56]

I suppose I use the term "dialectics" in my own way. Actually, I
do not think my use of the word differs radically from traditional con-
cepts of the dialectic which picture a conflict between "thesis" and
"antithesis" producing some "synthesis." For I am talking about the
"conflict" between an interpretive, diacritical scheme and the shifting
data which it must organize. In so far as such data violate the expec-
tations of the scheme, they force into being new interpretations and
new purposes. These can be thought of as "syntheses" of old expecta-
tions and new facts. Nor is this concept of dialectics a difficult one.
We might even speak of ubiquitous dialectics. Consider William James
on the dialectics of perception:

> We see that the mind is at every stage a theater of simul-
> taneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the com-
> parison of these with each other [note the sense here of
> diacritics], the selection of some, and the suppression of
> others, of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency
> of attention.[57]

Or consider E. H. Gombrich on the dialectics of culture and art:

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[53] Heath, p. 145. [54] Heath, p. 135.

[55] Heath, p. 140. [56] Heath, p. 131.

[57] William James, The Principles of Psychology (1890; rpt. New York:
Dover, 1956), pp. 288-9.

> . . . the art historian's trade rests on the conviction
> once formulated by Wolfflin that "not everything is pos-
> sible in every period."[58]

And finally consider Fredric Jameson's classic statement on the dialec-

tics of all knowledge, especially of all critical models:

> When new discoveries are made, they result, I think, from
> the way in which the new model enlarges or refocuses corners
> of reality which the older terminology had left obscured, or
> had taken for granted.[59]

Let me restate these two main principles because they are so basic.

In Burke's view, the language patterns that form our perceptions, our

conceptions, and our communications are both diacritical and dialectical.

They are diacritical in that we must lump this with this and exclude

that from this as we categorize, by a process of differentiative negation,

what is _not_ different and what is _not_ the same. They are dialectical

in that they are inevitably partial or temporary or perspectival. We

must _somewhat_ _arbitrarily_ "divide" that which in another scheme could

be "merged." But the interconnections are never fully erased, making

for what Burke calls the "paradox of substance."[60] By this concept he

means that there are no two things, however different the classifica-

tions into which they have been placed, that cannot, from yet another

perspective, be seen as standing on some common, underlying ground, as

sharing some "sub-stance." We noted in the last section Burke's state-

ment that definition was a matter of marking boundaries.[61] Now we must

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[58] E. H. Gombrich, _Art_ _and_ _Illusion_ (Princeton: Princeton Univ.
Press, 1960), p. 4.

[59] Fredric Jameson, _The_ _Prison-House_ _of_ _Language_ (Princeton:
Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 132.

[60] _GM_, pp. 21-3.   [61] Again, _GM_, p. 24.

add that those boundaries can and will shift.

All of this has been very abstract, so let me give some examples. Ponder one of those prints by M. A. Escher, such as the one entitled "Mosaic II."[62] One can choose to view the picture as a collection of dark figures or as a collection of light figures, but not really both. The closest one can come to viewing both sets of figures simultaneously is to see one set through the fading images of the other or to try to alternate rapidly between them. But one cannot, it seems, see both sets sharply at the same time. The Escher print calls us to an awareness of the dynamics of perceptual selection. Burke's argument is that the dynamics of language extend and intensify these dynamics of perception. For any linguistic act is an act of diacritical, dialectical focusing whereby one system of linkages is thrown into sharp relief at the expense of other systems—until such time as change forces the act to be revoked. Then some of what had been backgrounded will have to be foregrounded.

Treaties between warring nations often offer great opportunities for metadialectics. The goal of the negotiators is a language that each nation can interpret, by emphasizing certain phrases and de-emphasizing others, to its own population as an "honorable victory." By the time, say, the United States, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam finished interpreting the document they all signed at Paris in 1973, the boundaries of meaning had been shifted so many times one wondered if the

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[62] One still occasionally encounters this and similar Escher prints on once-slightly-modish walls of rooms and offices. Or see Douglas Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 61.

words themselves had been erased. Or closer to home, a candidate of
the Presidential primaries might vehemently stress his differences with
a frontrunner; the same politician, once that frontrunner had defeated
him for the party's nomination yet had chosen him to complete the ticket,
might well decide to carve things differently, stressing instead the
broad areas of agreement he and his new runningmate had always shared.
I draft this paragraph the day after the 1980 Republican Convention in
Detroit, at which Ronald Reagan picked George Bush as his runningmate,
giving Bush the chance to prove himself such an adept practitioner of
an unusually obscurantist brand of dialectics, namely, the dialectics of
traditional American politics.

I myself recently had occasion to shift some linguistic boundaries.
I had written a resume and gone for a job interview with a university
office closely tied to big business. On the resume I had condensed my
military experience and elaborated on my days as a graduate student and
teacher. Now, after reading my credentials, the interviewer might have
said, "You mean you dedicated seven years of your life to learning for
its own sake? You are just the kind of truth-seeker we are looking for!
But wait, what is this? You served in the United States military during
that great crime of American foreign policy, the Vietnam War? Don't
you have a conscience? Why weren't you in Canada or in jail?" Of
course, that is not exactly how the interview went. There was an embar-
rassing silence about my years in graduate school, but the interviewer
did seem impressed by some of the duties I had performed in the service.
These seemed to be all I had in my favor. I did not get the job, so
I went home and redrafted my resume, downplaying the academic record

and expanding the section on my time in the Air Force to make it
sound like I had, war or no war, virtually supervised, organized,
edited, counseled, and budgeted an entire military base for four
years. Before my eyes the typed paragraphs which represented me
shifted their boundaries. I was being initiated into a world of lies
and inverted values, but the dialectics of this "rite de passage" were
so intriguing.

With these examples of changes in rhetoric which accompany changes
in diplomatic, political, and personal fortunes, we confront the pro-
blem of limits which haunts any synchronic perspective. But the pro-
blem is just as acute when we take a diachronic view. As before, we
must merge and divide, only this time into "stages." In a section
entitled "Merger and Division," Burke treats the dialectical resources
of such linguistic operations.[63] He uses the example of a birth. We
can talk about an infant as being apart from its mother, as having
"burst the bonds" of a "benign circle of protection" that "had threatened
to become a malign circle of confinement," as being "a new bundle of
motivations peculiar to itself."[64] What was inside the womb is now
outside the womb, and such obvious changes in the states of nature invite
a terministic distinction between "prenatal" and "postnatal." (The fact
that nature seems to encourage certain divisions and not others is the
reason I describe our carving of reality as "somewhat arbitrary" and
not as "completely arbitrary," and this qualification is meant as still
another correction to the structuralist doctrine of the total autonomy

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[63] GM, pp. 403-6.   [64] GM, pp. 405-6.

of language.) On the other hand, the birth does not change everything. We can talk about the child as being a part of the family, as being "consubstantial with the familial source from which it was derived."[65] Customs of naming usually beg this issue by suggesting with certain names, say a first name, the discontinuity of the new individual, and by suggesting with other names, say a last name, the continuity of the ancestral tradition. Furthermore, since many of the processes that begin before birth continue after birth--heartbeat, brainwaves, acquistion of language--we can choose for different purposes to divide the birth of the individual into different stages. The current battle over abortion rights is a particularly acrimonious instance of the problem of drawing the defining line in a diachronic analysis. The discontinuities of nature may be sharp breaks but never clean breaks, so the paradox of linguistic substance remains unresolved.

Because the verbal is always perspectival and because both the verbal and the nonverbal are always changing, Burke believes that no orientation is ever final. Its inevitable contradictions are never completely quieted. As Morse Peckham puts it, "It is not merely that language slips and slithers over the surface of the world, but . . . the world slips and slithers underneath it."[66] As an earlier dissertationist was quoted as saying, "Linguistic substance is inherently unstable."[67] I am afraid that our predicament might be symbolized by

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[65] GM, pp. 405-6.

[66] Morse Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 295.

[67] Again, Heath, p. 145.

the history of a patch of the Earth's surface where a great river, presently named the Mississippi River, is eroding its banks, presently named Arkansas and Tennessee, and where human beings, for various purposes, under various pressures, have attempted to fix the flux by planting successively the flags of England, France, Spain, France again, the United States, the Confederacy, and the United States again. These are the kinds of natural and historical drift that undermine any human order, be it the linguistic creations that are our nations or our identities or the terministic towers that are (1) our philosophic systems, (2) our works of verbal art, (3) our poetic genres, and even (4) our cultures themselves.

(1) Burke's Grammar is one long meditation on the dialectics of interacting systems of terms. Although no claim is made that word-systems operate completely removed from more material concerns, the emphasis is on these systems as they jockey with each other for position in a gigantic logomachia. I can explain this best if I half-paraphrase, half-quote the section entitled "The Featuring of Terms."[68] Each word-system is comprised of a whole cluster of terms, but each will feature a few key terms. In fact, a single term can usually be isolated as the cynosure around which the others gather. The system will develop "a vocabulary designed to allow this one term full expression (as regards its resources and temptations) with the other terms being comparatively

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[68] GM, pp. 127-31.

slighted or being placed in the perspective of the featured term."[69]

The system will set up "coordinates particularly suited to treat of

substance and motive" from this chosen terministic perspective. However,

inevitably, a rival philosophic terminology will "propose to abandon

this particular system of terms" and to feature instead a different

set of terms. The rival system will be necessary for the earlier terms

will have become "unwieldy" or "irrelevant." However, "principles of

internal consistency" will tempt the new terminology, once it has

established its place and is holding its own, "to undertake imperialis-

tic expansions" of its own. Let me just quote Burke as to what happens

to the new system and its key terms:

> . . . as soon as a philosopher has begun to investigate
> the possibilities in whatever term he has selected as his
> Ausgangspunkt, he finds that the term does not merely create
> other terms in its image. Also, it generates a particular
> set of problems—and the attempt to solve these problems
> may lead the philosopher far from his beginnings.[70]

The new system, "quite simple in its original conception," may become

"fantastically complex."[71] By the time it becomes unwieldy and irrele-

vant, the stage will have been set for the entrance of still another

antagonistic terministic to challenge the reigning word-system. Thus

we get a series of displacements by which "one mode of saying" corrects

another.[72]

As does his sense of diacritics, Burke's sense of dialectics, usually

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[69] GM, pp. 127-8.   [70] GM, p. 130.   [71] GM, p. 130.

[72] The phrase is Charles Morris's, and I quoted it in my first chap-
ter. See his "The Strategy of Kenneth Burke," in Critical Responses to
Kenneth Burke, ed. Willaim Rueckert (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota
Press, 1969), p. 164.

implicit, at times becomes explicit. Burke devotes the middle section

of his Grammar to an analysis of the rise and fall of various philosophic

terminologies or "schools." It is almost as if he is describing the

ascents and descents during a competition among butane-powered balloons,

in which the successive entries push their way into a crowded sky, hold

their own or even dominate the horizon for awhile, and then are brought

low. Of course, Burke has his own metaphor for this "machia." In

the introduction to the Grammar, he presents it as a kind of alchemy

whereby terminologies are mixed and remixed in a great crucible. The

terminologies are fused at high temperatures; then they erupt onto the

surface and cover a given area until, like continental plates, they

are crushed back toward the molten core:

> Distinctions . . . arise out of a great central moltenness,
> where all is merged. They have been thrown from a liquid
> center to the surface, where they have congealed. Let one
> of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in
> this alchemic center it may be remade, again becoming molten
> liquid, and may enter into new combinations, whereat it may
> be again thrown forth as a new crust, a different distinc-
> tion. So that A may become non-A.[73]

I know of no other paragraph in Burke that so well captures his sense of

both the diacritical and dialectical aspects of negation. So that when

Fredric Jameson summarizes the project of this major text by saying that

into it Burke pours the systems of other writers and melts them down, he

alludes to Burke's own metaphor for the dialectical conflicts among

partial, limited, fallible terminologies.[74]

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[73] GM, p. xix.

[74] Fredric Jameson, "The Symbolic Inference," Critical Inquiry (Spring 1978), 507-8. The implicit allusion to Burke comes as part of an explicit allusion to the Buttonmoulder in Ibsen's Peer Gynt.

(2) But what holds true for philosophic schools also holds for individual poems. In the title essay of his Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke treats poems as word-patterns which feature key terms.[75] To analyze a poem, Burke locates these key terms and notes the compannions they keep and the enemies they oppose. His search for "equations" or "terministic clusters" is a search for "what goes with what" or for "what is versus what."[76] He wants to know a poem's repeated alignments in order to map the poem's maps. In short, he is after the poem's diacritic. But, as we have seen, the divisions of a diacritic are not serene divisions. At points in an important poem the diacritic will flow dialectically across some watershed. Its terms will be realigned. Now the analyst's interest will shift from "what goes with what" to what flows "through what from what to what."[77] Or as Burke puts it in Language as Symbolic Action, the analyst's goal is to first determine a poet's "nomenclature" from a "concordance" of his or her poetry and then to recognize the "convertibility" of key terms under pressure in significant passages.[78]

Burke is fond of using examples from Coleridge, and we will do likewise. Based on the terministic interrelationships he has tracked down in "Coleridgese," he reads "The Eolian Harp" as a movement from the celebration of a panentheistic divine to an apology for such unorthodoxy.[79] Using the same Coleridgean cluster of noon and punishment

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[75] See "On Methodology," in PLF, pp. 66-89, as well as the opening pages of "'Kubla Khan': Proto-Surrealist Poem," in LSA, pp. 201-4.

[76] PLF, pp. 38, 69.   [77] PLF, pp. 38, 71.   [78] LSA, p. 203.

[79] PLF, pp. 72, 93ff.

and marriage, he treats "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as a not much bolder and similarly guilt-ridden bid for a secular faith. For example, when the mariner's ship sails from sunlight to moonlight, the poet is seen as moving from one set of motivations to another.[80] In this case, the transition is one from a sense of desolation to a sense of blessedness and later on to a sense of the ambivalence of both. Finally, in "Kubla Khan," Burke finds a similar movement from beatitude back down to a sense of the sinister and on to ambivalent feelings about the "dreadful holiness" of this dream-vision by using the associations within Coleridge's private nomenclature, especially the associations among such terms as "stately," "green," "moon," "fountain," "mazy," "ice," and "midway."[81]

None of these capsulizations is fair either to Coleridge's three poems or to Burke's analysis of them. My point is that Burke's method is to pay attention to the dialectical shifts among the relationships of terms that comprise the poet's own special diacritic in action. We should note that Burke sees no reason to abstain from viewing such linguistic transformations as indicative of the shifting personal concerns of the poet, especially if the same transformations are repeated in the poet's essays, letters, and diaries, as well as in the poet's poems. Nor is Burke beyond using such shifts in a poet's private vision as indicators of dialectical shifts in the worldview of the poet's age. Years before Leo Spitzer was finding in the stylistics of Rabelais, Cervantes, Racine, Diderot, and others   the hinges on which the worldview of an emerging Europe turned, Burke was presenting the modern poet as one

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[80] PLF, pp. 75, 95.   [81] LSA, pp. 201-14.

whose search for a new set of key terms is designed to bring forward

from a dim background those facets of human experience relegated to

obscurity in the rise of industrial capitalism.[82] Years before Morse

Peckham was writing of romantic poets as seekers after a new orienta-

tion at the edge of the social construction of European reality, Burke

was writing of the modern artist as one who tries to forge a new inter-

pretive vocabulary in the face of a dialectically changing world.[83]

Burke's first four volumes of criticism are all meant in part to explain,

and to encourage, those artists who wish to provide a more adequate

terministic with which to replace the overly rationalisitic, mechanistic,

and scientistic vocabulary of the industrial age, a vocabulary grown

"unwieldy" and in many ways "irrelevant" to basic human needs.

(3) Burke also views poetic genres as examples of diacritics under

pressure. In the second chapter of Attitudes Toward History, entitled

"Acceptance and Rejection," he analyzes a series of "poetic categories":

the epic, tragedy, comedy, the elegy, satire, burlesque, the grotesque,

and the didactic. Each is presented as a different mode for "handling

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[82] I have in mind Leo Spitzer, Linguistics and Literary History
(Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948). For example, see the opening
chapter, in which he talks about "the evolution of the French soul" using
the work of Charles-Louis Philippe (pp. 11-4) or "the history of ideas"
using Rabelais (pp. 15-8). Where Spitzer speaks of a writer's "inward
form," we might speak of his identity or his own special diacritic. Most
interesting is his full-page endnote on Burke (p. 32), in which he admits
that his method and Burke's are closely allied and yet takes issue with
Burke in such a way that one is left wondering why Spitzer cannot see the
obvious parallels between his own work and Burke's.

[83] I have in mind Morse Peckham's thesis on romanticism as consistently
presented in such works as The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia: Univ. of
South Carolina Press, 1970), Victorian Revolutionaries (New York: George
Braziller, 1970), and Romanticism and Behavior (Columbia: Univ. of South
Carolina Press, 1976).

the significant factors" of a given age.[84] Some are ways of accepting

the conditions of the time, and Burke calls these "frames of acceptance."

Others are ways of rejecting those conditions, and Burke labels these

"frames of rejection." So far we are still talking diacritics. But

we start talking dialectics when we note that none of these categories

or genres can cover the full range of possible human attitudes toward

history. The factors

> incorporated within any given frame are never broad enough
> to encompass all the necessary attitudes. Not all the sig-
> nificant cultural factors are given the importance that a
> total vision of reality would require.[85]

The frame must be selective, and there are forces which will encourage

it to be even more selective than it has to be. At the risk of intro-

ducing a whole new topic, Burke offers this Marxist example:

> Class interests . . . distort the interpretive frame, making
> its apparent totality function as an actual partiality. From
> the organization of class interest inevitably follow over-
> emphases and underemphases.[86]

Eventually, "another class of people" will arise who find the dominant

genres inadequate, unwieldy, or irrelevant and who will initiate the transi-

tion to new genres. (One should hear running beneath this the principles

of both diacritics and hierarchics, in that social classes define them-

selves against each other and in that they tend to take hierarchical form,

as well as the principle of dialectics, in that the social hierarchy is

never serene.) We thus end up with a setting in which the poet must

strive, for economic and social and political reasons in addition to

more purely linguistic reasons, to dialectically overcome the tyranny

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[84] Burke, _Attitudes Toward History_ (1937, 1959), p. 34.

[85] _ATH_, p. 40.   [86] _ATH_, p. 40.

of language categories. Here Burke joins others, such as Shelley and

Sartre and more recently Harold Bloom, in believing that writers must win

freedom for themselves and their allies by fighting the forms of language.

To use Bloom's phrasing,

> . . . the poets make themselves free, by their stances
> towards earlier poets, and make others free only by teaching
> them those stances or positions of freedom. . . . Such free-
> dom is wholly illusory unless it is achieved against a prior
> plentitude of meaning, which is tradition, and so also against
> language.[87]

Because we have moved so rapidly, in typical Burkean fashion, from

poetic genres to social institutions to a kind of existential poet battling

the interrelated forms of both, I fear my main point may be lost if I do

not repeat it. A poetic genre is a diacritic in so far as it is a pattern

of relational linguistic conventions. Woven into the texture of this

poetic pattern is an attitude toward a given historical setting. Now

this setting is itself, in Burke's view, largely a product of language.

Later in this dissertation I will clarify Burke's theory with respect to

the connections between language and society. For the moment we want to

note simply that Burke sees society as a pattern of linguistically-

created classifications. And both the genres of art and the conventions

of society are, under various pressures, for various reasons, subject to

changes which will necessitate a selection of different factors as the

important factors.

(4) As with the basically denotative networks of philosophy and

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[87] Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," in Deconstruction and Criticism, contributors Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 3-4.

the richly connotative networks of poetry, so with the whole pattern of

a culture. For Burke, a culture is primarily a terminology. Like Merleau-

Ponty, he recognizes the facts of syntax and grammar but continues to

stress the importance of vocabulary in organizing a given cultural per-

spective.[88] A culture is a network of words, and it is dialectical in

that it is selective. As the culture extends further and further its

particular pattern (and here one should hear the principle of entelechics),

and as a changing world slides out from under this pattern, the culture

will be in danger of becoming obsolete. Thus the stage is set for the

challenge of an antagonistic system. What Burke does for philosophic

schools in the middle of A Grammar of Motives he does for periods of

Western culture in the middle of Attitudes Toward History. He treats

the history of our culture from the rise of Christianity to the present

as a series of stages—"Christian Evangelism," "Medieval Synthesis,"

"Protestant Transition," "Naive Capitalism," and "Emergent Collectivism"—

in each of which stages a diacritic composed of certain key terms and

featuring certain key attitudes temporarily establishes itself until

displaced by a new pattern of terms and attitudes.[89]

I may have belabored the principle of dialectics in this section or

at least belabored some of its obvious features. But if I have succeeded

in demonstrating that Burke, often explicitly but more often implicitly,

treats philosopies, poems, poetic genres, and cultural patterns as examples

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[88] See James Edie, Speaking and Meaning (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), p. 82.

[89] ATH, pp. 111-75.

of a dialectical process, then I will not have belabored in vain. One

way to consolidate the Burkean view is to review Morse Peckham on the

Hegelian view:

> . . . if the historical situation changes sufficiently,
> what traditionally appeared to be a coherence becomes in
> fact an incoherence. At that point, according to Hegel,
> the task of the artist, the man of religion, and above all
> the philosopher is to transcend the incoherence and inno-
> vate a new proposition which on the one hand will maintain
> the valid features of the incoherent beliefs and on the
> other will introduce genuinely novel features. . . . The
> history of man is, Hegel maintained, the history of Geist,
> the history of how concrete historical situations are con-
> stantly revealing cultural incoherence and how philosophy
> as well as art and religion . . . are constantly trying to
> innovate an integration.[90]

If for "incoherent" one reads "inadequate," "unwieldy," or "irrelevant"

and if for "new proposition" one reads "new terminology," one will have

a pretty good summary of Kenneth Burke's theory of the dialectical

process.

I have only to explain why I entitled this section "Dialectics

Plus." In this discussion of the operations of dialectical diacritics, a

certain additional dimension of language has been intruding. It is

present when Burke talks of how philosophic schools tend to give fuller

and fuller expression to a set of key terms. It rears its head when

Burke speaks of how a poem tends to "carry to the end of the line" a

poet's unique terminological equations. It is lurking in the idea that

poetic genres fill out the attitudes of a given mood of a given social

class. It permeates any discussion of how a cultural pattern tends to

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[90] Morse Peckham, Romanticism and Behavior (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1976), pp. 198-9.

complete itself or to extend its style to all facets of human life. It colors Burke's statement, not discussed in this section, that scientific systems are often the embellishment of a single metaphor.[91] It is even hiding in Peckham's use of the word "integration." The "It" is the poetic dimension of language, a dimension which makes the dialectics of language change a "Dialectics Plus."

3. Poetics Plus

One of the marks of Burke's half-century of language analysis is his passionate concern for art. Burke begins his career as a man of letters writing his own poetry and short stories. By the early Thirties he has turned from literature to literary criticism, but his criticism draws brilliantly on his experience as a working artist. From Counter-Statement in 1931 to the new prefaces he is still adding to old works, he exhibits a keen appreciation for the process of poetic creation. Years before Northrop Frye, Burke was expanding our sense of this process until it encompasses all else. A recently mailed catalogue listing new editions of a pair of key Burke volumes says this of Permanence and Change:

> It is here that Burke establishes in path-breaking fashion
> that form penetrates society through and through as it does
> poetry and the arts. Hence, his master idea that the forms
> of art are not exclusively esthetic.[92]

Of the companion volume, Attitudes Toward History, the same promotional brochure says that Burke is able "to coordinate his social and esthetic

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[91] PC, p. 95.

[92] "Literature: New 1981 Titles (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 34.

criticism" because he "sees religions, philosophies of life, and whole cultures as collective poems." Again the master insight seems to be the ubiquity of form or of formal process. If these advertisements are correct, and I think they are, then Burke believes that an esthetic dimension pervades all forms of life.

I want to use several systemist concepts to approach this difficult and mysterious dimension. In the previous section, we saw the diacritic as a system of differentiations under dialectical pressures. The linguistic diacritic is like any other system: it is caught between internal and external pressures. Obviously, any system must take a stance in the face of its environment. But it must also take a stance, so to speak, in the face of those subsystems which constitute it. Its predicament is not unlike that of the president of a Midwestern public university, who must pacify, for the sake of harmony in academe, certain liberal departments, but who must also represent the whole university before a conservative state legislature. Its mode of operation is not unlike that of the musculature of the human body, which plays members of muscle-pairs against each other in order to move itself toward an outer goal. We might even define a "system" as a pattern of internal arrangements as these turn outward. Or, more precisely, if more jargonishly, we might define a "system" as a pattern of transformations between the internal and the external, i.e., as an interface between the internal and the external.

Now an amazing aspect of this process—and any system is of course a process and not a thing—is that a system seems to enjoy its patterning in and of itself. If we say that a system is the action on the interface and

that the pattern or shape of this action is a system's "style," we may
then say that any system enjoys the "flair" of its own style. If we
accept that style is "the striking of a stance," we can state that any
system appreciates its own stylistic gestures. Systems enjoy their own
"expression" and seek to "complete" the sweep of its arc. With respect
to the previous section, we might conclude that poems, genres, philoso-
phical terminologies, and cultural patterns can all be enjoyed as, qua,
patterns and can all be, as Burke would phrase it, "rounded out" in
search of greater fulfillments. Marvelously, style assumes a life of
its own. I intend to duck the issue as to whether what is being "enjoyed"
or "appreciated" or "completed" by the system is the sheer power of
action or the expression of life or the excitement of tension or the
novelty of order in a world of chaos or the novelty of disorder in a
world of routines. Whatever is the rage--power, growth, life, order,
disorder--it is also the rage for "patterning" for its own sake.

So that in addition to the pressures from within and without,
"purely" formal pressures govern the region of the interface. "Purely"
is perhaps the worst possible word, for clearly there is nothing "pure"
about this, these styles or patterns or interfaces originating as a
result of the interaction of extraformal forces of all kinds. The formal
must be viewed as inextricably interwoven with the extraformal, unless it be
said that the formal is all that exists. Such statements are subject
to frequent misinterpretation. However, it does seem as if it is the
beauty of form, as Kant postulates, that holds the universe together,
for esthetics guide the patterned transformations that are all systems.
Furthermore, at the level of more reflexive systems, such as systems of

human language, the system can pause to enjoy the "purely" formal plea-

sures of its own operations to such an extent that it feels itself lifted,

as Schopenhauer postulates, from the extraformal demands of living which

gave rise to its systemic forms in the first place.

Kenneth Burke has long known that systems of human language qua

systems are not immune from the wiles of ubiquitous esthetics. If we

use the term "poetics" to denote the esthetics that guide the inter-

actions of word-systems, we can say that Burke has long felt the omni-

presence of the poetic dimension. Consider the following pair of

statements:

> As for poetics pure and simple: I would take this moti-
> vational dimension to involve the sheer exercise of "sym-
> bolicity" (or "symbolic action") for its own sake, purely
> for love of the art. If man is characteristically the symbol-
> using animal, then he should take pleasure in the use of
> his powers as a symbolizer, just as a bird presumably likes
> to fly or a fish to swim.[93]

> The poetic motive is viewed as symbolic action undertaken
> in and for itself. Just as, in being an animal that lives
> by locomotion, man moves not merely for purposes of acqui-
> sition or avoidance but also through the sheer delight in
> being free to move, so in being the typically symbol-using
> animal he takes a natural delight in the exercising of his
> powers with symbols.[94]

These quotations indicate Burke's understanding that the human is the

place where the diacritical patterns of language can be enjoyed, more

or less self-consciously, for their own sake. And it is clear from the

comparisons he uses--flying and swimming and "locomoting" with symbol-

using--that Burke views the poetic dimension as one that emerges on the

interface, that is, among the interactions between the language-organism

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[93] LSA, p. 29. [94] LSA, p. 295.

and its environment.

Furthermore, when Burke talks about poetics, he does so in terms of processes not in terms of things. He could agree with Paul de Man's statement that poetic form "is never anything but a process on the way to its completion."[95] In a chapter of his early Counter-Statement, Burke explains that what are completed in the process of poetic form are various expectations of the person who is experiencing the work of art. Form "involves desires and their appeasements."[96] Years before E. H. Gombrich, Burke was saying that form requires the

> creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor and the adequate satisfying of that appetite. This satisfaction—— so complicated is the human mechanism——at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end these frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction, and furthermore serve to make the satisfaction of fulfillment more intense.[97]

One should note here the assumption that art plays with a "mechanism" already at work in our experience of life. Art manipulates rhythms of "frustration" and "satisfaction" characteristic of the human lifeworld. For its effects, art draws upon, and often so concentratedly as to call our attention to, processes that were already running their course. Recently, Harold Bloom has paid homage to Burke's process-oriented definition of poetic form, calling it "still the best description we have": "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."[98]

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[95] Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 31.

[96] CS, p. 31.   [97] CS, p. 31.

[98] CS, p. 124. Quoted by Bloom in his "The Breaking of Form," p. 4.

Burke never repudiates this early theory of form. Though he

writes about much else over the years, he consistently maintains that

a poetic dimension is always present and always a matter of formal

processes which arise from, and which borrow their power from, the

forms of life itself. Let us glance quickly at several of the examples

of this doctrine to be found in Burke's work.

In Counter-Statement, Burke speaks of the way art "parallels" cer-

tain "psychic and physical processes which are at the roots of our

experience."[99] He writes of the way art utilizes "innate forms of the

mind."[100] The list of types of form in his "Lexicon Rhetoricae"--

syllogistic form, qualitative form, repetitive form, conventional form,

and incidental form--is really a list of some of the basic movements

of experience which can be exploited by art.[101] All are based on "our

modes of understanding anything."[102] For its raw forms, as well as for

its raw materials, art must take over "patterns of experience" which

"arise out of the relationship between the organism and its environment."[103]

Moreover, in Counter-Statement, Burke goes beyond this doctrine that

the forms of art arise from the problems of life. The chapter entitled

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[99] CS, p. 45.   [100] CS, p. 46.   [101] CS, pp. 124-8.

[102] CS, p. 142. Once again, in listing these innate forms, Burke
mentions that they may all be grounded in our most basic interpretive
form, namely, the diacritical consideration of "'something' in relation
to 'something else.'"

[103] CS, p. 150.

"Thomas Mann and Andre Gide" makes the case that the artist is "an

adventurer of the emotions."[104] Mann's fictitious character Aschenbach,

in Death in Venice, submits to a dissolution that the "real" haute

bourgeoisie of late nineteenth-century Europe, once so thirty and so

disciplined but now grown weary of the tedious accumulation of capital,

was beginning to find tempting.[105] Gide's protagonists take moral options

left unexplored by the more sober middle-class conventions of the time.[106]

So not only does the artist play with the forms that arise from the

problems of life; he is one who "by profession faces new alternatives."[107]

We might say that his endeavors are both ludic and utilic, for he

invites the enjoyment of form for its own sake while testing, almost

in the manner of a scientific experiment, possibilities of the most

pragmatic sort. In a sense we have returned to the Hegelianism with

which we ended the previous section: finding a cultural incoherence,

the artist works (and plays) at transcending the incoherence and initia-

ting new interpretive and behavioral forms.

These ideas from Counter-Statement are not the only ones in Burke

which justify my systemist approach to his theory of poetics. His The

Philosophy of Literary Form begins with the proposition that the formal

dimension of literature borrows from the extraformal requirements of

living. The book opens with the suggestion that "we think of poetry . . .

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[104] I am borrowing from Burke borrowing from Mann. See CS, pp. 92-106, especially page 95.

[105] CS, p. 94.

[106] CS, pp. 95-9.

[107] I am paraphrasing Burke's CS, p. 95.

as the adopting of various strategies for the encompassing of situations."[108] As Burke puts it, poems are answers to questions posed by situations, and however imaginative the poetic responses, "the situations are real." He adds that poems are answers that are both strategic and stylized.[109] The problems of living shape an artist's concerns, and these concerns shape his art. Then on the region of this interface, the problems assume a kind of formal life of their own. There the artist may move these problems toward the kind of formally "perfect" solution usually denied in life. To use the phrasing of The Philosophy of Literary Form, the artist may "round out" his problems or carry them "to the end of the line."[110] As readers of the artist's work, we may be captivated to the extent that we share its extraformal problems, or we may be drawn by the work's powerful form into problems that are somewhat new to us. As critics of the work, we can "psychoanalyze" its forms for clues to the primary concerns (or psychoses!) of the artist. However, I would emphasize here, not the way the artist reaches us on our own ground and pulls us across to his, but the way that the processes of living provide the basis for the processes of art.

Some of the best examples of this aspect of Burke's theory are his analyses of Shakespearean drama. In Language as Symbolic Action, Burke says of the theater in general:

The expectations and desires of the audience will be shaped

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[108] Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941, 1973), p. 1.

[109] PLF, p. 1. [110] PLF, pp. 3, 38n., 70, 83, 84, 86, and 88.

by conditions within the play. But the topics exploited
for persuasive purposes <u>within</u> the play will also have
strategic relevance to kinds of "values" and "tensions"
<u>outside</u> the play.[111]

Of <u>Coriolanus</u> in particular, Burke says, "The . . . social tension . . .

here to be exploited for the production of 'tragic pleasure' is . . . a

kind of discord intrinsic to the distinction between upper classes and

lower classes."[112] Burke goes on to show how the playwright intensifies

the same malaise "a hostess, a diplomat, an ingratiating politician, or

a public relations counsel" would try to mollify. Start with a prota-

gonist whose blunt speech sharpens the conflict between the privileged

and the underprivileged. Shape his attitudes and actions with the appro-

priate supporting characters. Then bring the whole development to a cul-

mination in the sacrifice of this cantankerous fellow, a sacrifice for

which the audience ought to be fully prepared. By such means can the

playwright allow social tensions very familiar to the audience to assume

a life of their own, and by such devices can the dramatist carry them

"to the end of the line."

In a subsequent article, entitled "King Lear: Its Form and Psycho-

sis," Burke reiterates this theory of form beginning with the notion

that "practical social tensions or distresses outside the play can be

used as a source of tension within the play":

> . . . whatever may be the virtues of a work considered
> internally (purely as an artistic structure enjoyed for
> itself alone), it must ultimately contain reference (ex-
> plicitly or implicitly) to some profound area of motiva-
> tion affecting us in our practical or ethical world out-
> side the realm of art.[113]

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[111] <u>LSA</u>, p. 81.   [112] <u>LSA</u>, p. 81.

[113] Burke, "King Lear: Its Form and Psychosis," <u>Shenandoah</u> (Autumn
1969), 4.

Burke finds that <u>Lear</u>, like <u>Coriolanus</u>, draws upon the extrapoetic for its power. It exploits "a basic cluster or cycle of motives related to any relinquishing of authority" or any surrender of power.[114] It borrows from feelings we all have about "<u>retirement</u> of any sort."[115] It taps one feature of "the psychosis of <u>authority pure and simple</u>."[116] Burke would admit that in some ways an older viewer can identify more closely with the aging protagonist, but he would still argue that even the young understand the dynamics of power relationships well enough to be moved by the problems of self-esteem inherent in any "relinquishing of authority." Burke goes further to suggest that a part of the appeal of <u>Lear</u> at the time he is writing this article (1969) is related to one particularly thorny "relinquishing of authority," namely, the painful efforts of the United States to "retire" from Southeast Asia:

> Might not the appeal of <u>King Lear</u>, so far as an extra-
> literary "psychosis" is concerned, begin in such feelings
> as many people have at the thought, far afield, that our
> nation must not give, like a weak old man, but should go
> on expending its treasure until, still young and vigorously
> assertive, we shall have torn apart any enemy if it be but
> a distant victim of our own choosing?[117]

This is the kind of Burkean passage that tempts us to jump ahead, for I have only just begun to suggest the importance of this topic of authority in the writings of our subject. At the moment we must hold the stress on the idea that in the extrapoetic are the origins of poetic patterns. I confess I am fond of the way that Burke, having adopted a

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[114] "KL," 11.   [115] "KL," 11.   [116] "KL," 11.   [117] "KL," 11.

philosophy of literary form, chooses to illustrate it with beautiful

Shakespearean examples of class struggle and imperialist aggression;

however, I am more concerned with making the general point that through-

out his career Burke writes of the forms of life as material for the

forms of art.

Burke's approach predates a similar one by certain structuralists,

including Jonathan Culler. Using Flaubert's Madame Bovary as his example,

Culler argues that social realities serve as "myths which are necessary

if the novel is to come into being" or as "formal devices which generate

the novel . . . ."[118] Burke would quickly argee; then he would just as

quickly add that the worthy critic will not dwell solely on the poetics

of an important document. Burke is never so foolish as to legislate

that criticism must eschew such topics as revolution and war. While

Burke might agree that poetics produce an unusually "disinterested satis-

faction,"[119] and might agree that the poetical dimension may for analyti-

cal purposes be distinguished from ethical, rhetorical, or practical

dimensions, he would never deny the fluid interrelationships among these

dimensions. Therefore, Burke is able to slide, without fear of theore-

tical contradiction, from the "purely poetic" to.the extrapoetic, from

Shakespeare's Lear to the arrogance of American power in Vietnam.

Furthermore, Burke demonstrates how difficult it is for his for-

malist opponents to keep from so sliding. In a chapter on the New Cri-

ticism, he shows how Cleanth Brooks does not deal solely with poetics

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[118] Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 146.

[119] See Gerald Graff on Kant in Literature Against Itself (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 45.

but eventually slips, as would any good Faulkner critic, into the history
of race relations in the Deep South.[120] Burke's attack on Brooks predates
Graff's attack on Culler, whereby Graff shows that Culler himself cannot
keep from interpreting Madame Bovary as a commentary on the very real
world in which Flaubert lived and wrote.[121] Graff argues that any work
may be taken, should the reader so choose, as a comment on the world in
which it was composed. It is virtually impossible to enjoy the patterns
exclusively as esthetic patterns—even if it is possible to do so for a
short time and tempting to try to do so for a long time.

It should thus be clear why I label this section "Poetics Plus."
So to finish it I need only bring a few loose ends together. I must
pick up a thread dropped near the start of the section, interweave several
phrases encountered in extracts from Burke, and dye the whole thing in
a principle we squeezed from Burke's definition chapters ago. For it
seems that this process of form, which we earlier saw Burke describe as
a process of completion or appeasement of desire, is in effect a staged
development. In Chapter Three, we took, as the principle of entelechy,
the principle that all systems develop through stages toward a "mature"
or "ideal" or "perfect" form. That a similar striving toward perfection
characterizes the process of art is suggested by various Burkean phrases
from Counter-Statement, The Philosophy of Literary Form, and the pieces
on Coriolanus and King Lear, phrases such as "round off" and "carry to
the end of the line," phrases used throughout this section. Also, we

[120] See the chapter entitled "Formalist Criticism: Its Principle and
Limits," in LSA, pp. 480-506.

[121] Graff, Literature Against Itself, p. 47.

must reiterate Burke's belief that the esthetic process uses the sensi-
bility of the art perceiver as the instrument on which to play its
melody of frustration and fulfillment. Art is an ongoing entelechial
process that must complete or perfect the expectations of a perceiver
in such a way that he or she is moved into unknown territory, but not
so far that he or she balks. A poetics is thus, not only an extrapoetics,
but also an entelechics, that is, a series of acts that stretch the
experience of the perceiver as well as a series of invitations to
enjoy this expansion for its own sake. And if it is in language that
the human patterns come into their own, it is in the literary process
that the linguistic patterns most dramatically negate or transcend
their extralinguistic origins. More or less released from extraformal
pressures, they achieve a new arbitrariness and a new capacity for care-
free recreation. On the region of the interface, these forms assume,
like the forms of other systems but more freely and more self-consciously,
an entelechial life of their own.

I have now covered my first three sections on Burke's theory of
linguistic differentiation. Actually we have not moved far from struc-
turalist territory and have only just begun to do justice to Burke's
broader and richer theory of language. As we saw in Chapter Six, the
structuralists have a keen appreciation of diacritics, and a structuralist
like Levi-Strauss reveals his awareness of both poetic and extrapoetic
pressures when he speaks of the way that certain aboriginal cultures
have been shattered in their collision with English-speaking Australians
and yet still show the capacity for absorbing foreign elements and

harmonizing both native and foreign in a revised and once again expanding system of differentiation.[122] However, it is right about here, as we leave the topic of entelechial, poetical diacritics, that the Burkean theory begins to move away and to assume a recognizably unique life of its own.

4. Ethics Plus

For Burke, language is more than a formal system of differentiations imposed on a sea of change to make that flux graspable by the human intellect or elevated above practical realities to invite the enjoyment of its own structure. For Burke, language is first and foremost a set of commands. This principle of linguistic ethics, so central to Burke's theory of language, seems at first almost anachronistic. So pervasive these days is the opposite tendency, namely, the tendency to talk of the diacritic as an act of pure intelligence, that one's expectations are violated by Burke's seemingly archaic insistence on the moral dimension of language. The chapters through which one must approach this aspect of Burke's metalinguistics are heavy with references to moral commandments and allusions to the Bible. It takes awhile for the modern sensibility to adjust. The next to the last essay in Language as Symbolic Action, entitled "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language," seems initially something of an idiosyncrasy on Burke's part.[123] "If he worked hard on this piece," one finds oneself thinking, "and if

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[122] See above, pp. 99ff. More directly, see Claude Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, pp. 156-8.

[123] LSA, pp. 419-79.

he wants to include it to complete this collection of essays, I will
not object; but must I take it seriously?" The answer is, "Yes." Once
one overcomes one's prejudices, one can begin to appreciate the impor-
tance of these ideas to Burke and the importance of Burke as a correc-
tive to certain structuralist tendencies.

In his chapter on the origins of language, Burke argues that lan-
guage evolves as a system of thou-shalt-not's.[124] He states his case
succinctly: "We would say that the negative must have begun as a rhe-
torical or hortatory function, as with the negatives of the Ten Command-
ments."[125] Burke acknowledges that language and its negatives may have
evolved from infralingual gestures such as indications of positive
repugnance or from infralingual sounds such as demonstratives calling
attention to some positive feature of the environment.[126] However, Burke
believes that in the drama of life and death even these gestures and
sounds were absorbed into a developing structure of moral commands,
such that they came to be translated, "Avoid this" or "Look at this,
so that you may know what to shun." As language matures, its marvel,
the negative—and remember for Burke this negative is a hortatory
negative—infuses all its other dimensions. The negatives overtake the
positives. Gradually these budding connotations of repugnance and
deterence become outright admonitions; the implied negatives become

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[124] See the section entitled "The Perfect Dramatistic Starting Point,"
in LSA, pp. 421-2.

[125] LSA, p. 421.

[126] See the section entitled "The Positive Pre-Negatives," in LSA,
pp. 422-4. Burke here is of course anticipating possible arguments against
his own developing position.

out-and-out negative commands.[127] Only after the moral negatives have

come into their own can there arise the fully indicative and proposi-

tional negatives of mature language, i.e., the negatives nowadays so

often mistaken for negation in its entirety.

Here Burke himself has opened the evolutionist door, and he should

not blame us if we enter carrying several of the theories we collected

in Chapter Five. As we saw, Ernest Becker views the rise of the human

as the rise to a new level of decision-making.[128] Becker calls this new

level of discrimination "the ego," and he portrays the human ego as a

mechanism enabling the human person to delay response to stimuli, to

consider more alternatives, and to make more complicated choices. Becker

pictures such a creature of greater choice as a creature of greater

freedom. We might also suspect that this creature would be in greater

danger of "going astray" and thus be in greater need, from the stand-

point of the preservation of behavioral patterns, of restraints on his

or her actions. We should not then be surprised if the same language

which permits a wider range of action develops, paradoxically, as a

strong set of social controls, tying this new person in a network of

verbal bonds. As we saw, some cyberneticists, such as Stanley Garn, por-

tray the development of the human as an advance to a new level of

"information processing," where more sophisticated differentiations

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[127] LSA, p. 424. Here is the sentence I am paraphrasing: "Gradually
the implied negative in connotations of deterence would become the
explicit negative of command."

[128] See above, pages 60ff. More directly, see Ernest Becker, The
Birth and Death of Meaning, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1971),
pp. 13-26.

between "signals" and "noise" can be made.[129] In Garn's view, this advance was provoked by a social environment in which organisms, more specifically, intelligent primates, were required to play more demanding social roles and to catch more subtle behavioral cues. Such a social setting admits the possibility of just the kind of budding confusion that a system of negative commands would arise to quell. Again, as we saw earlier, even Harry Jerison, more interested in presenting the evolution of the human as an evolution in perception and intelligence, accepts a role for moralistic language once the emerging human is both "free" enough and "cramped" enough to necessitate a tighter moral order.[130] Finally, if we follow Carl Sagan in taking the view that the human is a creature who, unlike lower lifeforms, stores information crucial to survival in cultural as well as genetic networks, we must now add that these networks blaze with an ethical fire.

We could accommodate all these theories to Burke's theory if we told the story a certain way. We might have to use some of the most sophisticated techniques of modern fiction, including shifting points of view, a narrator of "limited omniscience," discontinuous timeframes, and all sorts of interrelated foreshadowings and fulfillments. We would narrate a tale of the most intriguing reciprocations: new perceptual differentiations stimulating new behavioral constraints stimulating more highly differentiated perceptions. In a way the exact sequence

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[129] See above, pages 74-5. More directly, see Stanely M. Garn, "Culture and the Direction of Human Evolution," in Human Evolution, ed. Noel Korn and Fred W. Thompson, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 109-10.

[130] See above, pages 73-4. More directly, see Harry Jerison, Evolution of the Brain and Intelligence (New York: Academic Press, 1973), pp. 423-4.

of the plot would not matter as long as we made it clear that <u>at some point the ethical negative assumes a crucial role in the creation of the human</u>. The climax of our story would be the birth of human language in the perfection of warnings, admonitions, and moral judgments.

But of course all this is speculation, factual or fictional, about the origins of something the origins of which will never be finally known. Considering the impossibility of verifying these guesses, and considering Burke's own admission that the origins of language are as mysterious as the origins of the universe itself,[131] what is the purpose of such pseudo-history? Well, Burke is aware that our histories are often meant to serve as reinforcement for our choice of first principles. In other words, he understands that myths often translate existential postulates into narrative form for rhetorical purposes. He believes that his theory that language evolved primarily as a moral system is at least as valid as competing theories and thus should not be forced to debate at the disadvantage of having no etiological myth. It is as if he is saying, "I, too, can play this game of speculating about origins, and, now that I have entered, give me one good reason why I should not be the top-seed!"

I would support Burke's mock-historical defense with an experiential one. One evening in the summer of 1980, I was in my backyard, stooping down in the shade of a stockade fence, picking the few tomatoes in my garden that had survived the record heatwave. From the other side of the fence came my neighbor's voice. Unaware of my presence, he was rather

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[131] <u>LSA</u>, p. 44.

authoritatively laying down the rules of his own turf to a visiting child: what to touch, what not to touch, where to go, where not to go, and so on. A few minutes later I caught myself telling my son not to kick his soccer ball onto bermuda grass I had just watered. As I walked around the house, I heard my wife tell other children not to throw sand on the sidewalk she had just swept. Standing on my driveway, I was reached by a breeze-carried voice that said, "If I catch you doing that one more time, I'll . . . ." Fortunately, a shift in the wind transported the rest of this dire threat in another direction. But at that moment an adult cyclist rode by, peddling but also turning to a child strapped in a seat on the bicycle's backfender and saying, "Now that you know what will happen if you do that, what are you going to do?" It certainly seemed to me that the air that night was full of moral lessons. The case was cinched when, riding my own bicycle to campus in the blistering heat the next afternoon, I heard a single adult exclamation--the word "No!"--explode from inside a house at a small child holding open the frontdoor and letting the valuable cool air escape. Burke is correct: when we are initiated into language, we are initiated into a system of commandments. Assuming that phylogeny is somewhat analogous to ontogeny or that the experience of humans as a group is somewhat analogous to the experience of the human individual, might we not also plausibly assume that the developing human species encountered language originally as an ethical network?

This aspect of Burke's negationism is more than faintly Freudian. Our first breaths, Burke postulates, are taken in an atmosphere full of floating "No's" and seemingly disembodied demands that we repress our

natural desires. We are urged by a linguistic network to shape our actions to fit the social norms. Our character, moreover, is our particular pattern of internalized commandments, largely adopted from the culture but also determined by our own peculiar set of interactions with parents, siblings, peers, and others. These interpersonal exchanges drill the moral grammar into our beings as the Harrow inscribes the legal code into the bodies of the condemned prisoners of Kafka's "Penal Colony." This ethical system we adopt and develop goes deep, as deep as those first parental admonitions, which resonate within our pristine spirits, carving new interiors about as delicately as dynamite blasts new branch-mines far below the surface. Admittedly, to say that we are the cavity left by exploding negatives is to take a rather negationist view, but such is the view taken by both Freud and Burke in postulating an all-important ethical dimension in language and personality.

My reasons for stubbornly insisting in Chapter Five that we humans are "wider moments" or "lengthier intervals" should now be more obvious, for it is these growing interiors that are transformed by the ethical negative. It is the fact of moral choice that largely gives our lives their depth. We feel in ourselves the exercise of new powers of moral decision. We find ourselves adopting, and sometimes violating, a system of values no less precious for being so relatively arbitrary. And in the look of others we detect, because the same language that created us makes possible this image or hypothesis, a similar existential depth. My own view is that it is for these new human interiors that "signs" become "symbols." Infrahuman consciousness was and is able to interpret phenomena as signs of various causal forces; only humans must take into

account, in their interpretation of their own and others' behavior,
this fact of moral choice. Human acts are symbols of ethical selection;
they drip with choice; they could have been different but for some
reason are not. Each act means something; each is significant; each
represents some act of the attributing of value. And because we must
move through this world of symbolic gestures, sensing ourselves as one
protagonist among others, I also insisted in Chapter Five on a principle
of dramatics. Again, as Burke would put it, the most literal term
for describing the new human lifeworld is the term "drama."

We are now in a position to clarify a couple of final points about
this linguistic dimension. Burke often speaks of the ethical dimension
as the symbolic or expressive dimension. He says, "By the ethical dimen-
sion, I have in mind the ways in which, through language, we express our
character . . . ."[132] Then he adds:

> . . . language reflects the "personal equations" by which
> each person is different from any one else, a unique com-
> bination of experiences and judgments. Thus there is a
> sense in which each poet speaks his own dialect.[133]

There are a number of other names for what Burke here calls a "dialect."
Norman Holland speaks of a poet's "identity theme."[134] Roland Barthes
writes of a writer's "style."[135] Kenneth Boulding theorizes about each
person's "image" of himself or herself in relation to the world.[136] We

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[132] LSA, p. 28.   [133] LSA, p. 28.

[134] Norman Holland, Poems in Persons (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 49-50.

[135] Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin
Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 10.

[136] Kenneth Boulding, The Image (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press,
1956), pp. 3-18, 47-63.

might also choose to talk of a poet's unique signature or hermeneutic or diacritic. But whatever terminology we select, we would stress here the negativity—the ethical negativity—of the given orientation. Our neo-Freudian, Burkean perspective describes a process by which an ethical pattern is impressed into the medium of the developing person, is modified by that person's unique experiences, and is reincarnated in a new linguistic body, a body symbolic or expressive of the deepest concerns. The process is a less mechanical version, a more heavily mediated version, of the process of the first telephone. As explained in a recent book by James Burke,[137] Alexander Graham Bell's invention receives an impression from sound waves at one end, translates these into a pattern of electro-magnetic waves, and at the other end returns these to sound vibrations which can be heard by a listener. Nor, to borrow a more poetic metaphor, one employed at least as early as the Christian prophetes of the second century and at least as late as the romantic visionaries of the nineteenth century, is this process completely unlike that by which a windharp receives the rhythms of a breeze and, in accordance with a timbre unique to its own forging, converts these rhythms into patterns of sound.[138]

Burke's defense of the concept of an expressive, symbolic, existentially-deep self may be contrasted with the structuralist determination

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[137] James Burke, Connections (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 78-9.

[138] For one early example of the employment of this image, see E. R. Dodds, Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety (1965; rpt. New York: Norton, 1970), p. 64. For one of the better known romantic examples, see Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp."

to "decenter" any such concept. Burke would ask that we preserve a

sense of the self as an everchanging nexus at which is manifested the

"deep inwardness" of the ethical dimension.[139] As William Rueckert

has summarized this point, Burke understands that language is "a

phenomenon of the self," that the self is "a structural presence in

all verbal discourse," that a work of language art is "a symbolic and

functional verbal action of the self":

> Like Bachelard, Burke believes that the self polarizes words
> in accordance with its own interior space to create a poetics
> of the self. Language is a coercive agency which the self
> uses to control and transform both the self and the Other.
> All verbal structures derive from the self.[140]

We must be careful to note that Burke's concept of the self is not that

of a static construction, but that of a pattern in constant transforma-

tion, as the Rueckert excerpt suggests. Thus, we can synthesize the

structuralist and Burkean positions by scrapping the notion of a "sub-

stantial self" or of an "essential self," as the structuralists would

wish, while retaining a notion of a personal self, unique in experiences,

memories, and orientation, as I believe Burke would wish. Burke is

willing to discard the concept of a fixed self, but, unlike the struc-

turalists, he insists that we continue using a vocabulary for some kind

of "self." As he would put it in his dramatistic terminology, we are

going to keep talking about ourselves, like it or not, as some kind of

"agent." Harold Bloom is correct in his assessment that a part of Burke's

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[139] The phrase is William Rueckert's. See his "Kenneth Burke and
Structuralism," Shenandoah (Autumn 1969), 23.

[140] I borrow from Rueckert borrowing from Bachelard, Barthes, Blanchot,
Norman O. Brown, and J. Hillis Miller. See Rueckert's "Kenneth Burke
and Structuralism," 21-2, including footnotes.

value, in the face of the current onslaught of Continental criticism,

is his "humanistic expressionism" with its retention of a concept of

the symbolic self:

> Burke, as opposed to the French theoreticians, shows that
> a deep concern with language, as a contending force in the
> deciding of meaning, need not exclude a belief in the cen-
> trality of the psyche, of the will, in the agon that is
> literature.[141]

In sum, the negatives add up to an ethos. What an individual shuns

expresses much about his or her personality, so much so that we are some-

times given to typing persons by their phobias. What a society bans

tells us much about its priorities. When we deal with such an ethic,

we deal with what I call an "axiosic," that is, with a system of values.

A set of "do's" and "don't's" is a set of choices about right and wrong,

good and bad, beneficial and harmful. All ethics are "Ethics Plus"

because beneath any series of acts of moral judgment is a series of

assumptions about matters of value. And an ethic is something else:

since individuals naturally try to convert others to their values, there

being self-justification and self-esteem as well as strength in numbers,

and since cultures naturally seek to pass their values from the past

through the present and on to future generations, any ethic or axiosic

is also a rhetoric, that is, a system of persuasion.

5. Rhetorics Plus

If the language system is an ethical system, it is a system designed

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[141] Harold Bloom, "A Tribute to Kenneth Burke," Washington Post Book
World (1981 May 31), 4.

to influence its users. It aims to affect their attitudes and thus their actions, as Burke would say.[142] Any system of language is therefore a system of persuasion or a system of rhetoric. Indeed, I could not make it through the last section on ethics without employing the adjectives "hortatory" and "rhetorical." We have reached the principle of rhetorics in Burke's theory: there is a ubiquitous rhetorical dimension in the realm of symbolic action. As he puts it in A Rhetoric of Motives, "there is, implicit in language itself, the act of persuasion."[143] Rhetoric is

> . . . rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.[144]

So closely is this rhetorical dimension allied with the ethical that we might speak of language as an ethico-rhetorical system. Here Burke overlaps with other of my favorite theorists. As Morse Peckham has emphasized, language is first and foremost a system of cues for behavior.[145] As Merleau-Ponty has written, language is a structure of values, a structure which the child begins to learn as soon as he or she is exposed to the very rhythms and intonations of words.[146] In short, language is not only a value-laden expression of ethical choice, but also an inducement to the adoption of these same values.

One of my goals is to use Burke's doctrines to revitalize structuralist

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[142] RM, p. 50.   [143] RM, p. 274.

[144] RM, p. 43. This entire passage is underlined in Burke's text.

[145] Morse Peckham, Romanticism and Behavior (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1976), p. 18.

[146] See James Edie, Speaking and Meaning (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 82-9.

doctrines, but I cannot do this with the principle of ethics alone. In

stressing the moral negative, as I did in the previous section, one is

in danger of leaving too negative an impression about the functions of

language. For this reason I was struck by a Biblical passage that was

recently brought to my attention, namely, the opening of Second Corin-

thians. The apostle Paul is trying to spread a new religion, and he is

quite aware of the nature of this expansion. The growth involves the

formation of new verbal bonds. Elsewhere he states this succinctly:

"Faith comes from hearing."[147] Here, in the act of sending a letter to

his Greek followers, he reflects on the ties that bind them all together:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
> the Father of mercies and God of all comfort;
> who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able
> to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort
> with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
> For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abudance, so
> also our comfort is abundant through Christ.
> But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;
> or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effec-
> tive in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also
> suffer;
> and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you
> are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our
> comfort.[148]

Following this synopsis of the process of Christian communication, Paul

requests the prayers of the new church at Corinth. Then he begins to

worry that in stressing so heavily the suffering and denial demanded

by a new faith in its hostile surroundings, he may be leaving too

negative an impression of the religion's purposes. He tries to explain

that Christianity is still more "yes, yes" than "no, no."[149] I read

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[147] New American Standard Bible, Romans 10:17.

[148] New American Standard Bible, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

[149] New American Standard Bible, 2 Corinthians 1:17.

these enigmatic verses on the sharing of comfort and affliction as support for the contention that Christianity is basically a "yes" in the face of life's many "noes":

> . . . our word to you is not yes and no.
> For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us . . . was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.
> For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes . . . .[150]

I, too, would like to negate the negative and to say of the language network what Paul says here of Christian ties. <u>Language, though quintessentially a set of negatives, offers a promise that is basically positive</u>. The word and its denials blossom in response to the necessity for a new order in an often hostile environment. Since we have a religious example before us, we might see this new order as a new covenant, one meant to comfort those who share affliction, to provide stability, security, and hope for its privileged members, and possibly to serve as a homeground for further proselytizing. For this new language system, like any system, desires to maintain and perpetuate itself and even, for an added measure of safety, to expand its influence. Like any system, it needs to control its constituents in such a way as to increase the likelihood that its own patterns will survive. <u>The ethico-rhetorical negations turn out to be wrapped in an affirmation of life</u>. The linguistic commandments, though they induce collective guilt and even try to spread this guilt to new areas, also join us in the process of human meaning itself. The moral order, though it separates some of us from others by dividing the more or less lawabiding from the more or less

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[150] <u>New American Standard Bible</u>, 2 Corinthians 1:18a-20b.

lawbreaking and separates all of us from ourselves by dividing us from

our spontaneous desires, also connects us as _sharers_ in a new order.

The covenant, though it binds us, also bonds us. And words, though

certainly used to lay down the "noes," are also used to call, "Yes, let

us cooperate to beat the odds stacked against us."

So despite the fact that he views language as centered around the

negative, Burke builds his theory of rhetoric around a positive: _the_

principle _of_ _phatics_ _that_ _language,_ _by_ _its_ _very_ _rhetorical_ _nature,_ _reaches_

out _to_ _make_ _contact._ Actually, it is I who, following the lead of Roman

Jakobson, furnishes the label for this "phatic" dimension of words.[151]

Burke himself calls this first stage of the phatico-rhetorical process

"identification," and he sees it as a basic aspect of all communication.

He features the concept of identification in his _Rhetoric_ _of_ _Motives._ In

one of two sections of that book, a section entitled "Identification,"

he says,

> You persuade [listeners] only insofar as you can talk
> [their] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image
> attitude, idea, identifying your ways with [theirs]. Per-
> suasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in
> general. But flattery can safely serve as our paradigm if
> we systematically widen its meaning, to see behind it the
> conditions of identification or consubstantiality in general.[152]

As we saw when dealing with the principle of dialectics, _everything_ is

in some way consubstantial, though things can be divided in many different

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[151] See Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in _Style_ _in_ _Lan-_
guage, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350-77.
In this article, Jaokobson divides the speech act into a number of
dimensions, including a phatic dimension which involves the making of
contact.

[152] _RM,_ p. 55.

ways. One of the first moves of any effective rhetoric is to so divide

things that you and your audience are left standing on common ground;

then you can try to move them closer to you. Of course, the initial move

of any rhetoric is one's decision to address a given audience in the

first place, a "reaching-out-to-make-contact" that immediately joins

both sender and receiver on the common ground of language itself.

So we talk about both positives and negatives when we talk about

language. My section on ethics stressed the "negativity" of the moral

commandments; this section tries to counter by stressing the "positivity"

of links that break a precommunicative isolation. To spread the proper

appreciation of Burke, I must reiterate his own basic ambivalence

toward the role of language. He believes that "killing, personal enmity,

factional strige, invective, polemic, eristic, and logomachy" are "pro-

nounced aspects"of the rhetoric that we are "repeatedly and drastically

encountering."[153] He urges a realistic view:

> We need never deny the presence of strife, enmity, faction
> as a characteristic motive of rhetorical expression. We need
> not close our eyes to their almost tyrannous ubiquity in human
> relations; we can be on the alert always to see how such
> temptations to strife are implicit in the [linguistically
> conditioned] institutions that condition human relationships;
> yet we can at the same time always look beyond this order to
> the principle of identification in general, a terministic
> choice justified by the fact that the identifications in
> love are also characteristic of rhetorical expression.[154]

What makes the ethico-rhetorical strife so interesting is that, although

one of our motives is always this honorable phatic motive of identifying

or joining with another in some collective endeavor, often our endeavors

are driven by other motives far less noble. Though there are "yeses"

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[153] RM, pp. 19-20.   [154] RM, p. 20.

behind the "noes," there are drawbacks to the "yeses." The principle of rhetorics might be rephrased: <u>we</u> <u>draw</u> <u>others</u> <u>into</u> <u>our</u> <u>own</u> <u>evil</u> <u>verbal</u> <u>schemes</u>.

From innumerable possibilities, let me just select a literary and cinematic example. In D. H. Lawrence's <u>Sons</u> <u>and</u> <u>Lovers</u>, and in a more concentrated way in Jerry Wald's 1960 film of the novel, is a character whose efforts to reach out and make contact harbor ulterior motives. Mrs. Leivers is troubled when her daughter Miriam begins seeing Paul Morel, the sensitive and sensual young artist from a family of coal-miners. Miriam is unusually close to her mother, and the mother is threatened by the prospect of her daughter's affections being transfered to Paul. She ruins the budding affair of the two youngsters by drilling into Miriam certain guilt-inducing notions about sex that have their origin in passages from Mr. Calvin, Mr. Augustine, and not so coinciden-tally our own apostle (at least in this section) Mr. Paul. It works. The daughter's healthy sexual development is stunted and her chances of a satisfactory engagement to Paul Morel destroyed.[155] The mother is not, however, a totally unsympathetic character. Like any system, she is trying to perpetuate a given orientation. Like any rhetorician, she is trying to forge connections that provide a sense of security. She would like to continue to live the same way and enjoy the same affection, and she would like her daughter to continue these patterns. And even the kind of bond between mother and daughter she forms with Miriam is better than no bond at all--though I sometimes wonder if Lawrence might

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[155] D. H. Lawrence, <u>Sons</u> <u>and</u> <u>Lovers</u> (1913; rpt. New York: Viking, 1968), p. 171 ff. Once again, this theme is somewhat diffuse in the novel but sharpened considerably in the British film version.

be reluctant to agree with this, his dislike of this puritanical type
of religion being unusually strong. What the mother does to the daughter
in this story is just an intense variation of the typical series of
rhetorical acts, any of which involves the parties concerned in a mixture
of comfort and affliction.

On this note we can return to the writings of Paul the Apostle. I
chose the Pauline scriptures quoted at the start of this section because
they illustrate both implicitly and explicitly the Burkean principles of
rhetorics and phatics. Paul, like Lawrence's Mrs. Leivers, induces a
measure of guilt in his followers. I interpret certain verses as saying,
at least in part, "Hey, you guys in Corinth cannot let Timothy and me
down because we nearly got ourselves killed in Asia for your sakes!"[156]
In all sorts of other ways Paul is identifying with his audience and
asking them to identify with him. His plea amounts to this: "We can
understand each other because we suffer for the same cause. Since you
have been across some of the same painful ground, we have hopes of
bringing you further down our way (directions to follow in succeeding
verses!). Just remember that the Divine Logos, whose word we spread,
travels this road with us, shares our agonies, empathizes with our
predicament, and provides us with the strength to continue." Whatever
mysteries reside among these final identifications, Paul gets good
mileage out of them in a rhetoric that spreads guilt as well as hope.

For the purposes of this dissertation this is about as far as I

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[156] New American Standard Bible, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

want to go with Burke's theory of rhetoric. It is enough that we have
in front of us the notion that rhetoric not only shatters the "isolation"
of developing humans but also coopts their commitments into questionable
endeavors. Much more could be said, and has been, about the Burkean
theory of rhetoric.[157] This is in fact the most discussed aspect of
Burke's theory of language, and his A Rhetoric of Motives has been
adopted by communication theorists as a leading text in their field.[158]
In some ways this is the most accessible approach to Burke. As I have
presented it here, his theory of phatico-rhetorics is downright conven-
tional compared to his theories of expressive ethics and entelechial
poetics. Nor does this section on rhetorics pull us across as much
rough ground as the sections on diacritics and dialectics. I want
merely to stress that Burke's theory of rhetorical acts is that such
acts involve both identification and separation for both positive and
not-so-positive motives.

I have only to solve the riddle of this section's title. Actually,
I have been dropping clues all along, but the key lies in a linguistic
dimension upon which we have not yet focused, a dimension perhaps most
exaggerated in primitive magic. Burke considers the practice of such
magic extremely revealing, and he mentions it in a number of his books.
In Language as Symbolic Action, he says that magic is best viewed as "an

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[157] This line begins with Marie Nichols Hochmuth's "Kenneth Burke and the
'New Rhetoric,'" Quarterly Journal of Speech, (1952 April), 133-44.

[158] See for example Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Critiques of Contemporary
Rhetoric (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1972). Kohrs sees three main cate-
gories of metarhetoric: Aristotle's traditional theories, post-Freudian
psychological theories, and Burke's own "dramatistic" criticism.

effective structure of persuasion,"[159] i.e., as an effective structure

of rhetoric. One of the theses of The Rhetoric of Religion is that

systems of religious words, primitive or sophisticated, are "excep-

tionally thoroughgoing modes of persuasion": "To persuade [people]

towards certain acts, religions would form the kinds of attitudes which

prepare [them] for such acts."[160] But primitive magic in particular went

further. It tried to employ appeals developed to "induce action in

people" to instead "induce motion in things."[161] Radically rhetorical,

radically persuasive, magic aimed to bring into line with its users'

wishes, not only other people's behavior, but also the events of Nature

Itself. Even if word-magic thus got things turned around, it still

exhibited what Burke calls "the realistic function of rhetoric."[162] In

Permanence and Change, Burke speaks of magic as "a schema which stressed

mainly control of natural forces," and says playfully of its success:

> The magician's ability to bring about the orderly progres-
> sion of the seasons, assure the fertility of seeds, and
> promote the conception of children was on the whole astoun-
> dingly successful.[163]

Whatever the weaknesses of this magic as a scientific explanation of

cause and effect, it could be efficacious in such "realistic" efforts as

the growing of crops. The best magic charted, with at least minimal

accuracy, the environment of its practitioners; more importantly, it

coordinated their efforts and bolstered their moral in the struggle to

subsist. Here was a rhetoric with a very pragmatic purpose--a "Rhetorics

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[159] LSA, p. 294.   [160] RR, p. v.   [161] RM, p. 42.

[162] RM, pp. 43-6.   [163] PC, pp. 59-61.

Plus."

6. Pragmatics Plus

The preceding section has left us where we need to be to explore

a final dimension of language. Let us cross from rhetorics to pragmatics

on the bridge built by Burke in his Rhetoric of Motives. I opened the

last section quoting Burke on "an essential function of language itself,

a function . . . wholly realistic, . . . the use of language as a sym-

bolic means of inducing cooperation . . . ."[164] I closed the last

section refering to Burke's view of primitive magic as "an effective

structure of persuasion" rooted in this essentially "realistic" function

of language. Burke notes that

> anthropology does clearly recognize the rhetorical function
> in magic; and far from dismissing the rhetorical aspect of
> magic merely as bad science, anthropology recognizes in it
> a pragmatic device [my underline] that greatly assisted the
> survival of cultures by promoting social cohesion. (Mali-
> nowski did much work along these lines . . . .)[165]

What is true of magic in particular is true of language in general. As

Burke puts it near the start of Permanence and Change, ". . . communica-

tion is grounded in material cooperation."[166] The positives of common

purpose lie behind the positives of rhetorical identification, as the

positives of identification lie behind the negatives of social mores.

The ethical edicts and the rhetorical enticements serve a practical aim.

We have at last reached the principle of linguistic pragmatics: lan-

guage is a mode of survival.

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[164] Again, RM, p. 43.   [165] RM, p. 43.   [166] PC, p. xv.

As our key quotation from the last page suggests, Burke is indebted

to Bronislaw Malinowski for this approach to language. Indeed, the best

pre-text to this aspect of Burke's theory of linguistic differentiation

is Malinowski's supplement to Ogden and Richard's The Meaning of Meaning.[167]

In this supplement, entitled "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Lan-

guages," Malinowski develops his theory that the meaning of primitive

language is a function of "the context of situation." The famous British

anthropologist discovered that he could not break the language code of

the Trobriand Islanders without understanding how their messages func-

tioned in their efforts to extract a living from their own beautiful

corner of the Earth. He realized that

> language is essentially rooted in the reality of the cul-
> ture, the tribal life and customs of the people, and that
> it cannot be explained without constant reference to these
> broader contexts of verbal utterance.[168]

Malinowski found that he was "helpless . . . in attempting to open up

the meaning of [the Islanders' statements] by mere linguistic means . . . ."[169]

The sentences "became intelligible only when they were placed in their

context of situation."[170] He argues that the conception of this context

> must be substantially widened, if it is to furnish us with
> its full utility. In fact, it must burst the bonds of mere
> linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the
> general conditions under which a language is spoken.[171]

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[167] See C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, 8th ed.
(New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1946; originally published in 1923),
pp. 296-336.

[168] Ogden and Richards, p. 305. [169] Ogden and Richards, p. 300.

[170] I am paraphrasing Malinowski. See Ogden and Richards, p. 306.

[171] Ogden and Richards, p. 306.

When this is done, it can be seen that language is a system designed "to serve the purposes of common action."[172] According to Malinowski, "Speech is . . . the one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible."[173] Language is more than a reflection or a mirror or a handmaiden or a countersign or a translation of thought; language is "a mode of action."[174]

At this point Malinowski gives us his classic example of language as "a mode of action."[175] He describes the launch of a party of Trobriand fishermen out toward a coral lagoon where they will spy for a shoal of fish, trap them in large nets, and finally drive them into smaller net-bags:

> The canoes glide slowly and noiselessly, punted by men especially good at this task and always used for it. Other experts who know the bottom of the lagoon, with its plant and animal life, are on the look-out for fish. One of them sights the quarry. Customary signs or sounds or words are uttered.[176]

Malinowski pictures the natives as they encircle their prey, sometimes whispering directions, sometimes nodding acceptance of same:

> . . . the men, as they act, utter now and then a sound expressing keenness in the pursuit or impatience at some technical difficulty, joy of achievement or disappointment at failure. Again, a word of command is passed here and there, a technical expression or explanation which serves to harmonize their behavior towards other men. The whole group act in a concerted manner, determined by old tribal tradition [, one] perfectly familiar to the actors through life-long experience.

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[172] Ogden and Richards, p. 307. [173] Ogden and Richards, p. 310.

[174] Ogden and Richards, pp. 311, 315, and 326.

[175] Ogden and Richards, p. 311.

[176] I am paraphrasing Malinowski. See Ogden and Richards, p. 311.

Then the final push is made; "an animated scene, full of movement follows"; and, "now that the fish are in their power, the fishermen . . . give vent to their feelings." Malinowski gathers in his own conclusions:

> Each utterance is essentially bound up with the context
> of situation and with the aim of the pursuit, whether it
> be the short indications about the movements of the quarry,
> or references to statements about the surroundings, or the
> expression of feeling and passion inexorably bound up with
> behavior, or words of command, or correlation of action.
> The structure of all this linguistic material in inextri-
> cably mixed up with, and dependent upon, the course of the
> activity in which the utterances are embedded.

By this point in the dissertation, one should be struck by Mali-nowski's summary. Note first that the basis of the symbolic action in this example is pragmatic, namely, the efforts by the fishermen to feed their people. Note that the tribal diacritic changes dialectically with the progress of the action--different things being looked for at different moments--and no doubt varies with the time of day, the time of year, and the mood of the gods. Note finally the interplay of various linguistic dimensions. The joy of sport, the expression of feeling, the issuance of commands, the rhetoric of an energetic communion subject to both comfort and affliction--all mingle in the winged words and the splashing foam of a Polynesian bay. Here indeed is a "Pragmatics Plus."

There is another way to state this Malinowskian principle of lan-guage as practical action: any act of speech acknowledges extralingual environs. Language emerges in part as a map of a world that was there before it was; language serves as a chart that guides its users through this world, and, however freely it eventually expands beyond this duty, it never fully shakes the trace of this original purpose. As information

is stored in genes to help ensure the survival and propagation of a species, information at the human level is stored in a social language to help ensure the survival and propagation of the human species. Just as any act of language can be dealt with as an act of selection expressing the ethos of its user in a given situation (diacritics, ethics, dialectics) or as an act of persuasion harboring a plan for some audience (rhetorics) or as a statement of its own structure (logologics) or as a formal pattern to be enjoyed for its own sake (poetics)—any act of language can also be utilized as a referential statement about the "context of situation" (pragmatics). This referential dimension of language is irrepressible. Hence the ease with which Gerald Graff proves that even the most "non-referential," absurdist modern fiction can be interpreted as a "realistic" comment on the state of a nation or the state of our culture.[177]

No one understood better the implicatons of Malinowski's theory of the multi-dimensional-but-essentially-pragmatic lingual act than Kenneth Burke.[178] Burke extends this theory of the meaning of primitive languages to all speech acts, including such "post-primitive" symbolic acts as modern poems. Consider some of the Burkean notions attributable to Malinowski's influence: (1) that poems are "strategies for encompassing situations"[179]; (2) that a language is "a network of biases" that provides

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[177] Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 179-80 and 207-39.

[178] See Ross Dean Altman, "Kenneth Burke's Relation to Modern Thought and Literature," Diss. State University of New York at Binghampton, 1977, p. 53.

[179] PLF, p. 1.

spontaneous cues for behavior[180]; (3) that effective speech acts are

rooted in a factor of interest or that such acts appeal to a system of

survival values[181]; (4) that this system of values or this axiosic that

constitutes the language is the result of a myriad of "tests of service

and disservice,"[182] the result of a long evolution of learning the hard

way; and (5) that such a system is "embedded" in practices beneficial

to the stabilization of the production and exchange of social goods.[183]

Allusions to Malinowski are scattered through almost all of Burke's major

works, and Language as Symbolic Action pays titular homage to the

Malinowskian theory of language as a mode of practical action.

As Burke follows Malinowski in stressing the active side of language,

I follow both. My method is, and has been, terminological. All through

this dissertation I have been employing terms that end in "ics." Each

is meant to suggest the way words explode into the world with essen-

tially pragmatic, purposive force. My justification for such a series

of linguistic acts is that both Malinowski and Burke treat language as

a system of social customs the real foundation of which is the effort to

survive in an environment of scarcity or of at least potential scarcity.

That is, both treat language as a pragmatic, social tradition. Both view

language as a form of social praxis.

Now this word "praxis" fascinates me. I have seen it used to mean

the way an idea is given visible, tangible, material form or the way a

theory is put into practice. Thus "praxis" would be the process by which

the hands of the potter give the clay a shape heretofore existing only

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[180] PC, p. 177. [181] PC, p. 37. [182] PC, p. 102. [183] PC, p. 28.

in the potter's imagination, the process by which, say, some sixth-
century Athenian, tired of black figures on a red background, inverted
the formula and brought into being the new style of red-figure vase.
"Praxis" would thus be the method by which the violinist gives to
potential movements of fingers, strings, air, and the eardrums of an
audience patterns existing heretofore only in the violinist's (or per-
haps a composer's) mind. "Praxis" is thus the mysterious exchange by
which any art is advanced through the "outering" of a new, or at least
a somewhat new, "inner."

However, these images of individual artists are partially misleading,
for the associations of the term "praxis," as I have often encountered
them, imply a social element. By some definitions the phrase "social
praxis" is a pleonasm. So perhaps a more powerful example of praxis
might be the way a group of urban architects, planners, and contractors,
assigned to lay out a brand new capital city deep in the hinterland of
a developing nation, would draft abstract plans on a series of sheets of
paper, then translate these plans through much labor and many laborers
into the moving of hills, the carving of roadbeds, and the building of
modernist structures on what before had been an uninhabited plateau.
And, in a sense, an entire society is a process of such praxis, by which
an abstract, social pattern, albeit a pattern internalized by individuals,
is manifested in concrete (sometimes literally concrete) structures. A
culture is an ongoing endeavor by which the world is transformed in accor-
dance with a collective interpretation, for unless that collective ideal
or, if one prefers, that collective mental picture of how things ought
to be receives material expression and, for an added measure of safety,

embellishment, it will not survive.

Actually, I did not have to move to examples of urban planning and cultural organization to make my point. I could have stuck with the potter and the violinist, for even the individual artist works with others. He or she borrows from a great tradition of previous artists. Interestingly, sometimes the word "praxis" is used to refer, not to the action of the skilled individual who puts the tradition into practice or who keeps it in practice, but to the tradition itself. The dictionary definition of the word "praxis" spans both meanings:

> praxis: exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill; customary practice or conduct.[184]

The denotations of few words ring with such contradictory (or complementary) connotations. In some ways these meanings are as different as life and death. The second clause contains overtones of prescribed customs, of constrictive genres, of confining habits passed from generation to generation. The first clause has overtones of the liberating, creative exercise of a trained skill. Thus Webster's definition skirts one of the long-debated issues of all process, namely, the mystery of continuity and discontinuity. How is change possible, or, given the ubiquity of change, how is any repetition possible?

I am going to recommend, in the face of the habits of my own language, that we retain the word "praxis" to refer to "customary practice or conduct" and that, to refer to the series of life-giving acts by which these practices are revitalized in each new age, we use the word "praxics." My own feeling is that our living acts become a part of the fixed tradi-

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[184] _Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary_, 8th ed., p. 903.

tion with incredible rapidity. The forces of reification are surprisingly strong. We must not acquiesce to a vocabulary that confuses the living with the dead. We must not let the forces of rigidification take over the very word that was revitalized by Marx to suggest that human beings could act together to change the exploitative traditions in their world. I use the word "praxics" to mean any series of acts by which life is, over and over again, breathed into the always-dying, often near-dead collective structures, structures themselves the deposit of earlier instances of life-choices. I use the word "praxics" as a reminder that at the locus that is the individual a relatively formless and relatively free energy can burst into the world—if only for the briefest moment. Every time I type the word "praxics" I do so with the thought that another blow has been struck for the doctrine that language is symbolic action free enough and vital enough to keep our logocentric universe from completely ossifying.

Unfortunately, the language theory of Malinowski skirts this ambiguity between tradition and change. In effect, his view is that language, though he never uses these exact terms, is both a praxis and a praxics. Language is basically a craft or skilled technique, one inextricably embedded in what we might call "the craft of living." His view of language as a practical system is amenable to incorporation in W. Ross Ashby's theory that all systems are patterned exchanges between internal elements and an external environment, exchanges designed to ensure the perpetuation and, for an added measure of safety, the expansion of their own patterns. Language is "a pragmatic device," yes, and one that "greatly assists in the survival of the culture." Language is a

praxis "rooted in the reality . . . of tribal life," yes, and one that is allied to the community's desire for immortality. However, and fortunately Kenneth Burke never forgot this, the linguistic praxis is also a series of acts—is a praxics—that keeps alive the cultural symbolic. Language has to be constantly put to practical "tests of service and disservice" at the pleasure-pain nerve-ends of individuals. Language is a series of messages that continually revitalize the code in a perfectly divine, humanly imperfect struggle to advance rather than fall back. (One should hear the principle of entelechics still echoing long after this section has ceased.)

As Burke occasionally says of his own digressive productions, "All told, where are we?" Well, let me do some summarizing. Human language evolves from an infrahuman hermeneutic or system of interpretation with the pragmatic purpose of differentiating or "sorting" the environment. Like all systems, it is subject to dialectical pressures of change (internal systemic pressures as well as external environmental pressures) and entelechial pressures toward perfection. But at some crucial point this shifting, expanding language system adds ethical and rhetorical dimensions. It takes on the role of moral arbiter. The human diacritic becomes a bible of deeply-held pieties and a creed intended to contact and convert. The infrahuman pragmatic becomes a fully human social tradition governing the life of the language-user in an ever-changing material setting.

-Thus we have managed to generate a whole theory of language starting from the concept that language is a system of differentiative

negations. For Burke these negations are quintessentially a response, in the form of proscriptions on behavior, to a changing world. In so far as this ethic reaches out to bond the group, it is a rhetoric. In so far as this ethico-rhetoric is designed to ensure the survival of its users, it is also a pragmatic. And in so far as the entire ethico-rhetorico-pragmatic can be enjoyed for its own sake, it amounts to a poetic. As I have repeatedly toyed with these Burkean ideas in this long chapter, I have decided that the best way to summarize them is as follows: Kenneth Burke believes that the language system possesses diacritical, dialectical, ethical, rhetorical, practical, and poetical dimensions.

I have been determined to prove that all these principles can indeed be found interwoven throughout Burke's writings. I have tried to induce these one by one from selections taken from all periods of Burke's work, to listen for and record the recurring motifs of that work. I have tried to transmit these motifs by form as well as by content. In accordance with the principle of hierarchics, I have adopted a hierarchically supreme term which approves the undertakings of its lessers, namely, the term "praxics." In accordance with the principle of entelechics, I have fulfilled or rounded out the potential parallelism of a developing vocabulary. In accordance with the principle of poetics, I have invited enjoyment of this expanding network for its own sake. In accordance with the principle of rhetorics, I have tried to reach my readers on the ground where they might likely be standing these structuralist days and to draw them across new terrain into my own scheme. In accordance with the principle of pragmatics, I have used language as if it in some way charts

the world around us, and I hope to show before I am finished that I am dealing with features of our world that are absolutely crucial to our survival. Finally, in so doing, I have expressed, in accordance with the principle of ethics, something about my own unique pattern of deeply-held pieties, something about my own assessment of what is right or wrong, good or bad, harmful or beneficial.

I have also tried to dramatize the fact that the structuralist boundaries cannot contain Kenneth Burke. We have at last reached a space wherein we can stand and look both ways. On the one hand, we see a structuralism so fascinated by the diacriticality of all human meaning that it tends at times to neglect other linguistic dimensions. It may be true that some structuralists deal well with the way language turns itself inside out (the logological or metalingual dimension) and with the way language seems to enjoy this play—and playful deconstruction— of its own forms (the poetic dimension). It may be true that a structuralist like Levi-Strauss only seems to overemphasize the diacritics and the poetics of language or that structuralists like Jacque Lacan and Jacques Derrida only seem to follow the principle of diacritics into vacancies that exclude any ethical dimension. But from our new vantage point at the end of this chapter, they appear to have comparatively little to say about the ethical, rhetorical, and practical dimensions of the world as we have to live in it on a day-to-day basis.

On the other hand, we see a Burke who grants to language from the outset its ethical, rhetorical, and practical dimensions. Burke may be open to the charge that his theory has room for a little bit of everything, but at least he does not prematurely constrict his doctrines before they

touch the crux of our lives.

On the one hand, we see a structuralism so afraid it may be accused of reintroducing an anachronistic metaphysics of presence that it timidly avoids talking about power relationships.

On the other hand, we see a Burke who, with his strong initial stress on language as ethico-rhetorical command, sets out in a direction that cannot miss the subject of the use of language as an instrument to enforce one's will on others or to impose the collective will on all.

On the one hand, we see a structuralism so worried that it might accidentally resurrect a discredited notion of the fixed self that it ends up in empty spaces where no selves exist at all.

On the other hand, we see a Burke who, because he is willing to talk of a unique self if not a substantial self, ends up smack dab in the middle of the drama of self-justification, the agon of wills, that is the drama of human relations.

In short, we can do more with Burke's doctrines than with those of his rivals. By bringing together all the Burkean principles of language extracted in previous chapters of this dissertation, we can begin anew. We can move toward what I think is a rich and relevant sociolinguistics.

Language is indeed straining here . . . : "Man does not only
stand _in_ the critical zone . . . . He _is_ this zone . . . ."[1]

We have finally reached a place at which we can take stock of
accumulating concepts. We are ready to inventory observations about
the world of language which we humans have come to inhabit, observations
encountered repeatedly, both in explicit and implicit formulations, in
the work of Kenneth Burke. Gathering together these linguistic princi-
ples extracted in preceding chapters, we end up with a list something
like the following. Brace yourself because what is coming condenses
the developing vocabulary of this dissertation.

First, the principle of symbolic logocentrics: the language system
draws a circle. We are the creatures ringed in words. Our societies,
whether a tradition of primitive tribal customs or a body of advanced
technological knowledge, and our personalities, in so far as these borrow
from such social systems, are formed from ongoing transformations of
words. We are each a neighborhood or a borough in a larger city of
words.

Second, the principle of diacritical negatics: the language system
is a network of identities and differences. Its patterns of differentia-
tion are comprised of interlocking clusters of binary oppositions (the

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[1] I am borrowing from Gayatri Spivak borrowing from Heidegger. See
her "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida, _Of Grammatology_ (Baltimore:
John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), pp. xiv-xv.

principle of binarics being a subprinciple of this principle of diacri-

tics), although these clusters are organized into spectrums of possibi-

lities that transcend the merely polar dichotomy. The language system

"follows in its operation the Hegelian law that determination is nega-

tion."[2] At the basis of its binary differentiations operate acts of

negation to distinguish the "this" which is "not that." The city of

words arises on fields of relational meaning, paved with units of the

negative.

Third, the principle of dialectics: the language system is not

omniscient but rather limited in its perspective. No network of differ-

entiations can endure indefinitely, for any such system selects, under

the pressures of the moment, to accent some things and not to accent

others. In the face of inevitable change, the differentiative system

will have to be transformed. Over time, whole districts of the city

of words will have to be razed and rebuilt to meet new needs.

Fourth, the principle of hierarchics: the language system assumes

hierarchical form. When the city of words arises, it does so in or as

"levels." Relatively "concrete" terms will be sublated by more and more

"abstract" terms, relatively "particular" terms by more and more "general"

terms. The high will be differentiated from the low.

Fifth, the principle of synecdochical hermeneutics: the language

system works by substitution. Once developed, the hierarchical negations

serve as a complex series of mediations. Surrogation turns out to be as

fundamental a linguistic resource as differentiation. If the principle

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[2] I am borrowing from Fredric Jameson borrowing from Hegel. See his
The Prison-House of Language (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 34.

of dialectics stresses the way language must focus its attention on only a part of the whole, this principle of synecdochics stresses the way language makes this part a working whole and infuses its spirit into new suburbs. By manipulating his symbols for the world, the language-user develops new interpretations and re-interpretations, new hypotheses and memories, new hopes and fears, new choices and responsibilities. The human leaves forever the narrow immediacy of infrahuman countrylanes to wander the wider, longer boulevards of the capital, more sophisticated but more alienated.

Sixth, the principle of ethical negatics: this new interpretive scheme is "morally colored." The language system is a network of commandments. The diacritical and hierarchical negations work to influence behavior. To reign in the new freespirit it has itself sponsored, the city of words adopts statutes. Its streets become streets of law as well as of order. The human can no longer lounge in the cafe or stroll under the arcade without being stalked by the pinkertons sent out by the authorities. This is the turning point in the Burkean account of the origins of language. All that has gone before is transformed into ethics. Intellectual negatics become ethical negatics; the "'this' versus 'not that'" become "'do this' versus 'do not do that.'" Winds of judgment blow through the city, and its atmosphere pulsates with the vibrations from acts of the attribution of value (the principle of axiosics being a close cousin to the principle of ethics).

Seventh, the principle of rhetorics: this ethical system is a web of persuasion. The language system works to bond human groups. Words reach out to make contact (the principle of phatics being a sub-

principle of this principle of rhetorics) and to goad to action (rhetorics proper). The city of words annexes all who will listen and many who will not into its own scheme.

Eighth, the principle of dramatics: the language system, having created the new choice-maker and then having clamped ethico-rhetorical constraints on this person, sets the stage for a battle of conflicting wills within this new agent and among agents. The language-users find themselves as agents acting in a given setting, moved by various purposes and beset by different attitudes, choosing from among alternate agencies, allied with other agents, and confronting many obstacles, including counteragents. The new city-of-words-dwellers picture themselves as citizens (or perhaps as "anti-citizens"); i.e., they cast themselves as players in a social drama.

Ninth, the principle of pragmatics: the language system is a mode of survival. The real foundation of the language drama, as with other modes of being, is the struggle to eke out a living in less-than-Edenic environs. The diacritical, dialectical, hierarchical negations always acknowledge the extra-linguistic. The system of ethically condoned behaviors and rhetorically cemented bonds must take into account all the crucial factors of the environment. It is not completely arbitrary. It must chart or map its surroundings with great accuracy. It must guarantee, as must any living system, the survival of significant numbers of its members to their age of reproduction in order to ensure their propagation of the species and, of course, its own self-perpetuation.

Tenth, the principle of logologics: the language system is goaded to turn on itself. Words tend not only to chart the environment but also

to chart themselves. Since critical thought offers an evolutionary advantage, the hierarchical negations will build until they begin to bend back on their own structures, as Burke and a whole movement of twentieth-century writers have helped them so bend, as we are presently helping them so bend.

Eleventh, the principle of entelechial poetics: the language system will perfect its forms. Words will not just try to hold their own; they will try, for an added measure of safety, to expand their control. The way that the system logologically turns on itself is just one rather belated and rather reflexive version of the ways it teleologically fulfills its structures. Language will "round out" or "carry to the end of the line" its patterns, whether these patterns be benevolent or malevolent. However, as it does so, it will invite the enjoyment of this whole expansive process for its own sake.

I told you to brace yourself. Please do not worry about the overlap between some of the principles, such as between diacritical and ethical negatics or between logologics and entelechics or between entelechial poetics and all the others. Please do not chuckle too loudly at my extravagant play with words and phrases, for I am actually serious about all this. This play is meant to exemplify a number of the principles of this very list. And this cluster of principles gives this dissertation is _raison d'etre_. No one else has collected all these Burkean principles and subprinciples of language into as tight a cluster. Various commentators have sampled this one or that, but none has brewed the whole bittersweet concoction. And with this group of principles

in hand we can now attempt what might otherwise seem a glib mishmash of linguistics and current events. We can apply these dynamics of language to the dynamics of society. We can analyze the rather tense sociolinguistic negativities of the human situation.

> The book . . . operates on the miso-philanthropic assump-
> tion that getting along with people is one devil of a dif-
> ficult task, but that, in the last analysis, we should all
> want to get along with people (and do want to).[1]
>
> . . . the author would propose to replace the present poli-
> tical stress upon men in rival international situations by
> a "logological" reaffirmation of the foibles and quandaries
> that all men (in their role as "symbol-using animals") have
> in common.[2]

We begin with a basic Burkean idea: human language, in so many

ways so beneficial, has a number of "unintended by-products." It is

one thing to celebrate the evolution of the human as a new level of

thought or expression or piety. It is another thing to live entangled

in the distortions and disputations that human language effects.

Obviously, any gain in complexity is also a loss, a loss of simplicity

if nothing else. Likewise, any gain in power is also a loss, a loss

of freedom from responsibility if nothing else. New powers pose new

problems, as our human-all-too-human situation makes clear. But the

problems associated with language are particularly bedeviling. Nor

are these problems much alleviated by the requirement that we approach

them using the same instruments, namely, words, that created them. (One

should hear in this a restatement of the principle of logocentric sym-

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[1] Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (1937, 1959), p. xi.

[2] Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961, 1970), p. 5.

bolics.) As we saw in the seventh chapter, human language amounts to a new system of negatives; in the new negations are new affirmations, but in the new affirmations are serious drawbacks.

These problems are not neat and are not to be neatly explained. I will try to explain them by using my own scheme of Kenneth Burke's principles of language as I have developed it to this point in the dissertation and by resorting to a number of my own examples, as well as to Burke's examples. Nevertheless, all will be set forth in the spirit of Burke's unique doctrine of negationism, especially in the spirit of his main documents on this aspect of the subject, namely, the first and third chapters of The Rhetoric of Religion and selected key chapters of Language as Symbolic Action.[3] Other pre-texts for this chapter include the work of certain literary and non-literary theorists themselves indebted to Burke, most notably the work of William Rueckert and Hugh Dalziel Duncan. In such volumes as Language and Literature in Society and Communication and Social Order, Duncan expands basic Burkean doctrines on symbolic action, hierarchy, and phatico-rhetorical identification into a full-scale sociological system.[4] Where Duncan is especially good on hierarchy, Rueckert is good on ethical

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[3] See RR, particularly the following: Chapter One, "On Words and The Word," pp. 7-42 and Chapter Three, "The First Three Chapters of Genesis," pp. 172-272. In Language as Symbolic Action (1966), see particularly the following: Part One, Chapter One, "Definition of Man," pp. 3-24 and Chapter Five, "Coriolanus--and the Delights of Faction," pp. 81-97; Part Two, Chapter Eight, "Social and Cosmic Mystery: A Passage to India," pp. 223-9; and Part Three, Chapter Seven, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language," pp. 419-79.

[4] Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Language and Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953; retitled and republished New York: Bedminster Press, 1961) and Communication and Social Order (New York: Bedminster Press, 1962).

negation. We will see shortly the importance of both topics. In

his book <u>Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations</u>, Rueckert

introduces Burke's overall system in a fine chapter entitled "Drama-

tism: Language as the Ultimate Reduction," from which I lift and

slightly alter a quotation to serve as our starting point:

> . . . the central generating principle of Burke's over-
> all system . . . is the proposition that humans are the
> specifically language-using or symbol-using animals, and
> that somehow the essences of the human and human relations . . .
> are to be derived from the dramatistic study of language
> and the various functions it performs for men and women.[5]

1. The Ethical Negative, Guilt, and Victimage

At one point in my seventh chapter, I left the human in a patch-

work of moral commandments.[6] This ethico-rhetorical network, like all

networks, like all things, is not static. The network evolves; it

devolves; it does a little of both. Depending on which tendency seems

to be the dominant tendency at a given moment, we can say that the

network is subject to the forces of entropy or to the forces of ente-

lechy.[7] It is caught between the tendency to breakdown structurally

and the countertendency to grow, to complicate its structures, to

"perfect" itself. As a system, the linguistic commandments will tend

both to become simpler and to become more complicated. <u>In various</u>

<u>ways the moral code will tend to be "perfected."</u>

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[5] William Rueckert, <u>Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations</u>
Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 129.

[6] See above, Chapter Seven, pp. 166-8.

[7] Instead of speaking of "entropy versus entelechy," we could speak
of "entropy versus syntropy" or "entropy versus negentropy," depending
on which systemist vocabulary we want to employ. I have chosen the
binary opposition closest to Burke's own terminology.

A couple of examples might help to clarify these processes. I
believe that no language can rest content with a commandment such as,
"Most of the time, do not eat the green berries." Admittedly, a given
language may carry such an admonition, but not contentedly. It may
well be that a directive will persist that draws fine distinctions
to the point of encouraging or forbidding the consumption of a certain
fruit only at certain stages of its ripening. It may be that an order
to avoid a vegetable with small red dots while harvesting a vegetable
with large red dots will continue in effect for centuries. Nevertheless,
my argument, and I am actually combining Burkean principles of entele-
chics and negatics as he himself never quite has, is that such command-
ments persevere in the face of a linguistic proclivity toward dramatic
simplicity, an impulse which urges that they be perfected into something
like, "Never eat the green berries!" or "Eat no vegetables with red
dots period!"

Such hard and fast distinctions (cannot one hear the principle of
diacritics somewhere nearby?) are indeed easier to grasp, remember,
and communicate. Thus I would stress here their sheer dramatic per-
fection, which gives them an evolutionary advantage vis-a-vis more
carefully qualified, more "wishy-washy" versions. Consider the rhe-
torical advantage possessed by the political candidate who argues that
there is one simple cause for inflation, namely, government spending,
and one simple cure, namely, a balanced budget, vis-a-vis the candidate
who argues that there are dozens of interconnected causes of inflation,
all of them systemic to a Western industrial world reacting to the

economic dislocations of an earlier stage of capitalism.[8] Is there

any doubt which candidate of the two will appear, especially to those

uninformed, the stronger, the more confident, the more able to force

a dramatic reversal of our situation? And, similarly, is there any

doubt that forcefully simple proscriptions have a better chance of,

so to speak, garnering the votes of time?

Yielding to various mnemonic, didactic, and dramatic pressures,

the commandments will admit fewer and fewer exceptions. Even if a

social hierarchy is established that exempts certain groups or certain

individuals from certain rules, it will do so because in its case the

principle of hierarchics overrides this principle of dramatic succinct-

ness. A commandment specifying that "Some may do such-and-such, while

others may not" will tend to become simply "No one may do such-and-such!"

Again, many languages, probably all languages, violate this tendency,

but not because we do not try to "dramatize" their commandments in the

starkest images or do not strive for the rhetorical force of the most

terse, the most combative phrasing.

At the risk of dissipating my momentum just when it is beginning

to build, I want to pause to consider a possible weakness in the argu-

ment to this point. I can already hear the skeptic asking, "Wait, would

not language, by your own principle of entelechial esthetics, qualify

its taboos in all sorts of ways, expanding these qualifications into

the most delicious complications, rather than reducing them to the

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[8] In other words, a candidate who had been listening to Arthur
Laffer or one who had been reading Robert Heilbroner.

starkest simplifications?" Yes, one side of the mind does love exceptions, and my own scheme does postulate the presence of tendencies toward both complexity and simplicity in the code of commandments. It is probable that as soon as sets of ethical commands are simplified, for whatever reason, they begin to grow complicated again. But the opposite is also probably true. For if the mind loves exceptions, the spirit loves drama, and there is a certain drama in the simple moral commandment. At the heart of this is another of our principles, the principle of dramatics. Remember, if Ernest Becker is correct, the emergence of the human represents the emergence of an agent capable of a new range of choice. Might not this new agent enjoy the intensification of his situation as choice-maker, a situation dramatized by any ban on his alternatives of behavior. Might not the new human enjoy the drama of his predicament as choice-maker for its own sake? (One should note here the assumption of a principle of esthetics.) I believe this is a lure of surprisingly strong appeal. My hunch is that the deathrow murderer who refuses a last-minute defense by civil libertarians is motivated, at least in part, by his sense of dramatic perfection. Think of the beautiful simplicity of such state-sanctioned suicide: the killer, probably always a rebel, facing the whole hierarchical apparatus of authority, from the lowly prison-guard all the way up to the governor, over an issue of life and death, with the whole scene played out in the burning limelight of television cameras! And in the absolute rule that brooks no quarter, I see the work of synecdochics and even of terminological hierarchics, in that the absolute command requires such terms as "No one" or "Everyone," general terms which substitute for the names

of particular persons, higher terms which subsume lower terms.

The issue at stake here is a difficult one, for obviously we are dealing with several of our linguistic principles at once and obviously we are wrestling with perfections of various kinds, perfections which work at cross-purposes. I stubbornly maintain that an absolutist urge works on any ethical system and that this urge is related to the lure of the dramatically intense. We are tempted by our powers of generalization and our love of drama toward an absolutism that highlights our struggle. All of us lump ourselves in the general category of "a subject" to authority, and all of us hold a picture of ourselves pitted against the forces of law and order. Even those fortunate enough to squeeze through some loophole in the law feel deep down that their luck was unjustified. Without ceasing to self-righteously defend the loophole beneficial to them, they harbor suspicions that they do not deserve a break. At some level they know they use the same language as everyone else and know its rules apply to them. But, of course, this appreciation of their common plight may only goad them to demand that much more vehemently their right to special treatment.

Whatever, this paradoxical proposition is not as crucial as the next one. Whether or not the moral code covers everyone in the same way, it does tend to cover everything. By a process of entelechial expansion, the commandments will be extended to more and more areas of life. Anyone who has enjoyed the privilege of basic military training has encountered a system in which linguistic commands pervade the smallest corners of everyday experience. When I was at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas some years ago, I could not rearrange

undershirts in a chest of drawers without violating a printed regula-
tion. These regulations were carefully numbered and published, complete
with photographs, in a manual given free of charge to each lucky
draftee. Nor did these regulations make any exceptions. All trainees
were subjected to the same regimen. Everybody's drawers and closets
and beds and venetian blinds looked exactly alike—or somebody was in
trouble! There was, I admit, a certain perfection to the system.
There was as well a certain rottenness which forced some of us to
bitter jokes, as a way of maintaining our sense of proportion, about
the Kafkaesque headquarters where dimwitted sergeants typed furiously
around the clock to so pointlessly constrict our lives and which drove
us to sobering truths about the tendency toward collective insanity
inherent in structures of human evil. Here where the abuse of power
was the rule and not the exception, a tendency always at work in lan-
guage was unleased and allowed to run amok. But, unfortunately, the
rhetoric of basic military training is only an intensification of the
rhetoric of any system of social power.

In short, the linguistic network will incline toward rather stark
taboos that extend to everyone and to virtually everything. In order
to ensure the material cooperation of the tribe (pragmatics), a system
of commandments will develop (ethico-rhetorics); then this system will
assume a life of its own (esthetics) and will expand to cover more and
more areas of experience (entelechics). The system of rules will become
such that no one will be able to keep all the rules, at least not all
the time. The result will be ubiquitous guilt. All will feel that
they have sinned and fallen short of the gloriously perfect commandments.

All will feel that the air is full of hostile forces, and indeed it is:
the rhetorical force of repeated law and threats of punishment. All
will be drawn into the evil scheme of the social system itself. And
if these negatives are rooted in the positives of interpersonal coopera-
tion, such that they partake of the joys of brotherhood and sisterhood,
these negatives are also grounded in the effort to wrest a living from
less-than-Edenic environs, such that they also partake of the despera-
tion of survival.

As I did in my seventh chapter, I would point out the Freudian
coloring of any scheme that casts social norms as the culprits which
stricken individuals with anxiety. In so far as Burke's theory is a
linguistically-oriented brand of neo-Freudianism with strong emphasis
on the social aspects of negation and the impact of the Other, it
reminds one of the theory of Jacques Lacan. Yet what differences! How
much more effectively can Burke's theory of the _ethical_ negative deal
with the fact that some of the earliest known religions seem to have
consisted chiefly of the worship and propitiation of an "intangible,
invisible, impersonal power" or "mana,"[9] that one of the near-universals
of religion is the desire to escape the avenging furies of the air by
establishing sanctuaries such as hallow grounds, sacred groves, or
temples, and that it has been tragically common for guilt-laden groups
suffering hard times, especially suffering from some nonverbal calamity

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[9] For a brief summary of this anthropological position, see Anthony
F. C. Wallace's mention of Maret's theory of the origins of religion in
Religion: An Anthropological View (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 7.
For a longer treatment of this and related issues, see F. M. Cornford,
From Religion to Philosophy (1912; rpt. New York: Harper Torchbooks,
1957), a volume more neo-Durkheimian than neo-Freudian.

such as a heat-wave or a drought, to blame an innocent scapegoat for their own infernal verbal state of affairs. (One should catch in this a most desperate pragmatics.)

This brings us to the subject of the scapegoat, a recurring Burkean concern. To explain this all-too-prevalent feature of human affairs, I must employ a number of Burke's linguistic principles, beginning with the principle of diacritics as it functions in the process of identity. As we have seen, the meaning of words is relational, and the meaning of those word-edifices that are our identities is also relational. We define ourselves against each other and the groups to which we belong against other groups. We are constantly placing ourselves with this and separating ourselves from that. In the play of children these demonstrative pronouns come to life. How often have I noticed "kids" running around a house, hiding behind cars on a driveway, and teasing some newcomer before I realized that they were partially motivated by that human tendency to define themselves against another, especially against one who arrives too late to be incorporated in the first group of "us." We adults, too, participate in unsettling divisions among neighbors, coworkers, countrymen, foreigners, and so on. Any group, be it an age group, a sex, a race, a religion, a nationality, an economic class, as we experience it, is the product of a diacritic. Young versus old, old versus young; heterosexual men versus heterosexual women, both versus homosexuals; Oklahomans versus Texans, Texans versus Oklahomans, both versus New Yorkers; Chinese versus Americans, Americans versus Chinese, both versus Russians; Protestants versus Catholics, Catholics versus Protestants, both versus Moslems, all three

versus Buddhists, all four versus atheists--the diacritics of identity

are constantly at work locating us at some nexus on such a linguistic

grid.

But we must remember, especially when adopting the viewpoint of

Kenneth Burke, that words carry the weight of taboo. Since the diacri-

tical distinctions are made with an instrument inescapably ethical and

rhetorical, we will not simply say, "I am this, and you are that."

Around the edges of such an identification, we will tend to say, "All

ought to be this, and those that are not are in some way unfortunate or

misguided or wrong or bad." Since, as a result of the moral negative,

these categories will be drawn by beings laden with guilt, these cate-

gories will take on a character of self-justification. We will want to

make our party the party of Good and our opposition the party of Evil.

The appeal of melodrama is the appeal of a literary code that so accu-

rately mimics the baser instincts of the general language code, asking

the audience to identify with Good in its fight against Evil in a world

of violent passion and translating the justification of the Good into

narrative terms, namely, into the assurance of a final victory.

But in accordance with the dialectical principle, these mergers

and divisions are neither serene nor final. Under varying pressures

we will shift our alliances and define ourselves against different

persons and groups. In a smalltown bar among oilfield roughnecks, a

smart intellectual will redefine himself as somewhat less highbrow

and more macho; at a reception for a visiting scholar, surrounded by

his professors, that same intellectual had best not talk like a hard-

hat dropout. One month we may define ourselves as Kennedy-supporters

against Carter; the next month, in more dire political straits, we may

admit to being Carter-supporters against Reagan; we may yet have to

someday define ourselves as democrats versus totalitarians. One night

we may class ourselves as disciples of a given prophet; by dawn the

next we may deny that connection altogether. The classic example of

such a denial, Peter's denial of Jesus, is an act involving the dialec-

tical diacritics of identity.

However, the dialectical diacritics of the scapegoat involve fur-

ther complications. The scapegoat occupies an ambiguous position between

the parties of right and wrong. It is a fulcrum around which the pro-

cesses of self-justifying identification and separation swing. To

explain this correctly, we must introduce another principle of language,

namely, the principle of synecdochical representation. The scapegoat

is a part that assumes the burdens of a whole. At one moment it is

a part of the sacrificers, representing their evil; a moment later it

represents something apart from them. In his section entitled "Dialectic

of the Scapegoat,"[10] Burke observes that we first identify with the

scapegoat; then, the scapegoat having assumed our sins, we deny the

connection by ritualistically driving it from the community or killing

it. Burke notes that the scapegoat must be "profoundly consubstantial

with those who, looking upon it as a chosen vessel, would ritualis-

tically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own iniqui-

ties upon it."[11] Yet the scapegoat must also be different from the

sacrificers in order to allow the group to "alienate from themselves

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[10] Burke, A Grammar of Motives (1945, 1969), pp. 406-8.

[11] GM, p. 406.

to it their own uncleanlinesses."[12] Burke outlines the "scapegoat

mechanism" as follows:

> (1) an original state of merger, in that the iniquities
> are shared by both the iniquitous and their chosen vessel;
> (2) a principle of division, in that the elements shared in
> common are ritualistically alienated; (3) a new principle
> of merger, this time in the unification of those whose
> purified identity is defined in dialectical [and we could say
> diacritical] opposition to the sacrificial offering.[13]

It is this kinship, this "consubstantiality," this "paradox of sub-

stance" between sacrificers and sacrificed that makes the dynamics

of the scapegoat so complex a symbolic process and that allows for

such interesting "re-identifications." Who would not in some ways

secretly long to be the one whose sacrifice saves the group? Who would

not in some ways secretly admire the one who behaves heroically in the

face of punishment or death at the hands of authorities? And in those

cases where the sacrificers know deep inside that their party of Good

is in reality a party to Evil, this knowledge increases their guilt

and strengthens their determination to rid themselves of the scapegoat.

Surely one of the factors behind the viciousness of the Ku Klux Klan,

avowedly a Christian organization, was their intuition that, in lynching

a Negro, they were transforming him into the kind of Christ-figure

they professed to love.

At this point we must reintroduce the principle of entelechy, for

our theory includes the twist that there will be a need to "perfect"

the victim. Burke lists various methods by which the sacrifice may be

made more dramatically powerful by making the chosen vessel more

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[12] GM, p. 406.   [13] GM, p. 406.

legalistically, narratively, and poetically appropriate:

> This vessel, delegated to the role of sacrifice, must obviously be "worthy" or sacrifice . . .
> (1) He may be made worthy legalistically (i.e., by making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he "deserves" what he gets).
> (2) We may make him worthy by leading towards sacrifice fatalistically (as when we so point the arrows of the plot that the audience comes to think of him as a marked man, and so prepares itself to relinquish him). . . .
> (3) We may make him worthy by a subtle kind of poetic justice, in making the sacrificial vessel "too good for this world," hence of the highest value, hence the most perfect sacrifice (as with the Christ theme, and its secular variants . . .)[14]

The logic (not perhaps the best word for this) of the process seems to argue: the more dramatic the event, the deeper the catharsis. One can almost hear one of the tribe's elders making the proposal, "Would not the gods be more satisfied with the sacrifice of a young, virginal victim than with that of an elderly surrogate past his or her prime?" Marvin Harris may be correct in his speculation that the sacrifice of healthy victims helped the Aztecs to meet their recommended daily requirements of protein,[15] but we would take the Burkean position that the sheer formal artistry of the grisly business was a factor of at least equal importance. To the biological need for meat, the linguistic dynamics of the scapegoat process add the symbolical need for "perfect" cleansing.

As a fairly clear example of the scapegoat process, Burke usually

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[14] Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (1941, 1973), p. 40.

[15] Marvin Harris, Cannibals and Kings (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 147-166. I refer to Harris's memorable chapter on "The Cannibal Kingdom" of the Aztecs.

offers the Hitlerite cult of anti-Semitism. I will take more recent

examples. The period of the drafting of this dissertation coincided

with the holding of American hostages in Iran. At one point in this

crisis the news from Tehran was dominated by images of streetmobs

flagellating themselves with chains, burning the American flag, and

shouting, "Death to Carter." A week later, after the Russian invasion

of Iran's neighbor has posed a new threat to the Iranian revolution,

the same mobs were heard chanting, "Death to Breshnev." It did not

seem to matter exactly who filled the blank in the phrase "Death to ____,"

as long as the guilt-ridden masses had some scapegoat on whom to heap

their own sense of sin. The fact that the Iranians have at least two-

and-a-half centuries of good historical reasons to be inimical toward

Russia and at least two-and-a-half decades of good historical reasons

to hate the United States only intensified and "perfected" the dynamics

by which the Allah-fearing Islamic fundamentalists aligned themselves

against their Satanic foes. Meanwhile, back at the American ranch,

many of those most appalled by the torching of the Red-White-and-Blue

(can one hear the principles of synecdochics and dialectics flowing

beneath this, in that the flag is a part that stands for a whole and

in that the part will be subject to shifting interpretations depending

on whether it flies over the atrocities of the Shah or over the

heroics of the Normandy landing?) were the same Christian fundamentalists

who for so many years have themselves practiced a similar melodramatics

toward the Soviet Union, accusing its atheistic communism of being the

source of all the moral pollution threatening the God-fearing "Free

World." And the Soviets? At this time, they are still justifying

their invasion of Afghanistan on the grounds that they acted on behalf

of truth, justice, and the Soviet way to prevent that omnipresent evil,

the American C.I.A., from interfering in the internal politics of ano-

ther nation. The situation would be more humorous did not the countries

involved command three of the planet's five largest military machines.

I am not interested, however, in parceling out the blame for this

recent debacle. More important for us here is the fact that, although

we frequently witness the recurring forms of such folly, we are not in

the habit of stepping back and saying, "There is language at work!"

But the only world in which such a mess can occur is the world of

human symbolics. Lest one think I am forcing this point, I would

observe that Burke explicitly mentions the linguistic basis of the

scapegoat process. Speaking of the ubiquitous human need for "unifica-

tion against a common foe," he says, "On a purely Grammatical level,

this is reducible to the <u>antithetical</u> <u>nature</u> of 'dialectical' terms

[dialectical <u>and</u> diacritical terms] . . . that derive their signifi-

cance from their relation to opposite terms."[16] We can thus say that

these tragic situations are the result of a complex tangle of linguis-

tic principles in action: pragmatics, ethics, rhetorics, dramatics,

diacritics, dialectics, synecdochics, hierarchics, entelechics, and

poetics.

In his introduction to <u>The Rhetoric of Religion</u>, Burke includes

a little poem which summarizes the "sacrifical principle . . . intrinsic

to the idea of Order":

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[16] <u>GM</u>, p. 408.

Here are the steps
In the Iron Law of History
That welds Order and Sacrifice:

Order leads to Guilt
(for who can keep commandments!)
Guilt needs Redemption

(for who would not be cleansed!)
Redemption needs Redeemer
(which is to say, a Victim!)

Order
Through Guilt
To Victimage
(hence: Cult of the Kill). . . .[17]

In the wake of this chapter's first dozen and a half pages on the ubi-

quitous mischief made possible by human symbolics, this poem's consider-

able significance should be clear. But we must add a coda to the "Iron

Law." At the close of his section on the dialectics of the scapegoat,

Burke notes that the "cult of the kill," if frustrated in its search

for a victim, may victimize itself, thus becoming a "cult of suicide."[18]

As Burke says, ". . . insofar as ritual transference of guilt feelings

to the scapegoat is frustrated, motives of self-destruction must come

to the fore." He uses the example of Nazi Germany in its last days, but

we could update this with the Jonestown mass-suicide as the now-classic

example of "motives of self-destruction coming to the fore." Order

through guilt to victimage and possibly on to self-victimage or morti-

fication--here are the stages in the patterned transformations of

linguistic action that may hasten the end of our history.

Now we can see what is really worrying Burke: the symbol-fostered

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[17] RR, pp. 4-5.   [18] GM, p. 408.

human tendencies toward destruction and self-destruction in a world

of high-technology armaments: "The contemporary world must doubly

fear the cyclical compulsions [of human symbolics] . . . as two mighty

world orders, each homicidally armed to the point of suicide, confront

each other."[19] Burke notes that each of the superpowers is "much

beset with anxiety," the anxiety to which the language creature is

prone, and that

> in keeping with the "curative" role of victimage each is
> apparently in acute need of blaming all its many troubles
> on the other, wanting to feel certain that, if the other
> and its tendencies were but eliminated, all governmental
> discord (all the Disorder that goes with Order) would be
> eliminated.[20]

We have seen in recent months how easily the rhetoric of this Cold

War can be revived. So "natural" are its melodramatics that, though

I was born at the dawn of the atomic age, never in my thirty-odd

years has any real reversal been made in the stockpiling of nuclear

weapons, and today a new arms-race seems all but unstoppable.

This would be an unremittingly gloomy assessment of our predica-

ment did not Burke simply refuse to take the position that things are

hopeless. He is determined, as he says, to theorize "under the sign

of comedy," not of tragedy.[21] In fact, _his goal is to call our atten-

tion to these language-spawned dangers in order that we may avert them._

He "would propose to replace the present political stress upon men in

rival international situations," the stress typical of the Cold War,

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[19] _RR_, p. 4.   [20] _RR_, p. 4.

[21] Burke, "Dancing with Tears in My Eyes," _Critical Inquiry_ (1974
September), 27.

"by a 'logological' reaffirmation of the foibles and quandaries that
all [people] (in their roles as 'symbol-using animals') have in common."[22]
Burke would introduce a "new level of motivation."[23] Using words to
overcome the troubles of words, he would foster new mergers and divi-
sions. He would encourage us to dialectically redefine ourselves in
our new situation, namely, in the age of the hydrogen bomb. Since we
must diaciritcally align ourselves, he would ask us to join, not with
a national group, but with those who are aware of the dangerous dynamics
of language and who are no longer under the illusion that "surely the
human race could never behave so insanely as to destroy itself." Because
he suspects that that is exactly what may happen, Burke's rhetoric is
designed to move us to the awareness that all our particular acts of
self-destruction could add up to a very general annihilation.

One of the reasons I respect Burke is that he has shown an instinct
for talking about what matters. For example, in the late Thirties, he
took time to analyze the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler. Early in his career,
and years before the advent of thermonuclear devices and intercontinental
ballistic missiles, he was stating his fear that the symbol-produced
instruments of warfare were outracing the symbol-assembled machinery of
critical awareness. He feared then and he fears now that the scales
are being tipped against those metacritical or logological resources
that might bring us to our senses. He signaled his chief purpose when,
beginning the series of books that was to cap his achievement, he
affixed to the first of these a Latin epigraph meaning "Toward a puri-

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[22] RR, p. 5.   [23] The phrase is Burke's. See his RM, p. 200.

fication of war."[24] One can thus make the case that Burke's "ultimate

concern," to use a phrase of Paul Tillich's, has been and still is a

concern over the potential destruction of this beautiful and bountiful

globe on which we live.[25] Several have indeed made this case. Stanley

Edgar Hyman wrote in the Forties that Burke's "ultimate object, expressed

in the epigraph, "Ad bellum purificandum," is to eliminate the whole

world of conflict that can be eliminated through understanding."[26] In

the Sixties, William Rueckert labels Burke's work as a whole "a huma-

nist's counter-statement offered to the public at large as a reaffirma-

tion of human purpose and as a means of 'purifying war' (man's greatest

rational lunacy)."[27] Rueckert calls it "a new 'scientific' religion . . .

designed to save man in this world."[28] In the Seventies, Wayne Booth

comments that Burke has sought to build a critical system "that would

save himself and the world by reducing . . . destructive symbolic

encounters":

> The further one goes in Burke, the clearer it becomes
> that every consideration is subordinated to this master
> program. . . . The world is threatened with kinds of con-

[24] GM, pre-titlepage. Note also Burke's statement on page xvii that
he began this work "feeling that competitive ambition is a drastically
over-developed motive in the modern world," and thinking "this motive
might be transcended if men devoted themselves . . . to 'appreciating'
their linguistic foibles and antics . . . ."

[25] See Rueckert's quotation from an unpublished manuscript of Burke's
in his Drama, p. 162. See also the closing of Burke's article "Rhetoric,
Poetics, and Philosophy," in Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature, ed.
Don M. Burks (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978), p. 33.

[26] Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York: Knopf, 1948),
p. 353.

[27] Rueckert, Drama, p. 161.   [28] Rueckert, Drama, pp. 133-4.

flict, symbolic and literal, that may destroy us. Can
we, by taking thought about conflict, diminish the chances
of . . . destruction . . . ?[29]

It should be clear that commentators besides myself have listed

as Burke's top priority his concern with the consequences of the ethical

negative. It should also be clear that Burke hopes we can check

certain trends by using language to pass "through language beyond

language," or at least to defuse, by logological analysis, some of the

explosive tendencies of symbolic action and to avoid some of its

terrible results.[30] I just could not stand to continue linking the

chain of linguistic problems all the way "to the end of the line." To

do so, I felt, would be to give a slightly too "doomsdayish" impression

of Burke's doggedly comic tone. However, the inclusion of these

expressions of hope was a bit premature, for I had hardly begun to

exhaust Burke's theory of language as it applies to the tragedy of

human power struggles. These other students of Burke would have been

among the first to notice that I had omitted something. As Rueckert

demonstrates, there are two main guilt-inducing principles in the

Burkean psychosociolinguistics: the principle of the ethical negative

and the principle of hierarchy.[31] We have treated only a first chain

of trouble, a sequence which moves from the ethical negative to guilt

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[29] Wayne Booth, "Kenneth Burke's Way of Knowing," _Critical Inquiry_ (September 1974), 8-9.

[30] Rueckert, _Drama_, pp. 137 and 162.

[31] Rueckert, _Drama_, p. 131.

to victimage. We must now treat a second sequence, one which moves from the fact of hierarchy to guilt to victimage. I realize that such phrases may annoy a reader not familiar with them. As we go forward to the next section, just remember that once again we are dealing with aspects of language-induced guilt and the possibility of its resolution through symbolic behavior.

2. Hierarchy, Insecurity, and Victimage

As we saw when examining Burke's theory of terms at the start of the seventh chapter, word-systems tend to form hierarchies. Burke thinks that our individual identities and our societies, being word-systems, also take hierarchical form. As terms jostle one another for supremacy, we jostle one another. As some words will be promoted to the top, so will some people. Furthermore, by the operation of the principle of entelechy, these hierarchies will tend to be perfected. These ladders of symbolic rank will be extended to greater heights and depths. Everyone will feel that there are both lower and higher rungs available. Few will rank so low that they do not fear slipping another notch; even a "King of Kings" will be able to imagine himself outclassed by, if nothing else, a legendary or mythological figure. Hence no one will feel completely secure about his or her status, and no one will be unable to idealize a level of achievement of which he or she has fallen short. A new sense of inadequacy will be added to that caused by the failure to fulfill all the commandments: the sense of inadequacy that accompanies a sense of inferiority, real or potential or imagined.

After language has created a social hierarchy and populated it

with guilt-laden individuals anxious to consolidate their seemingly

insecure positions by asserting themselves over those beneath them,

abuse of power will be endemic. Power will corrupt and absolute power

will corrupt absolutely those individuals goaded by hierarchical order.

Burke believes that many individual anxieties, and subsequent acts of

injustice, are "a reflex of the need for a pyramidal or ladder-like

order in human 'offices.'"[32] He goes so far as to speak of a "hier-

archical psychosis":

> Call this design "hierarchy" when you are feeling friendly
> towards it. When you are feeling unfriendly, call it the
> "hierarchal psychosis"--or, more simply, The Scramble; or
> still more simply, the Rat Race, which is what the condi-
> tions of empire add up to, in their drearier manifestations.[33]

The problem is that these inferiority psychoses which result from

the hierarchical order are as inevitable as the guilt which results from

the proscriptions of the moral order. Both would seem to be inescapable

facts of human life. I would explain this systemistically. For any

system to interact with its environs, it must make decisions. As I

said when I introduced the clause on hierarchy in Chapter Three, a part

of any system will specialize, in the name of efficiency, in processing

information and initiating responses. Living systems ranging from the

smallest cell to the largest human society develop centers of authority.

Burke puts it this way: " . . . unless, in practice, authority is

[first centralized, then] delegated, organized behavior as we know it

becomes impossible."[34] I know of no human society without an organized

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[32] Burke, Attitudes Toward History (1937, 1959), p. 375.

[33] ATH, p. 374.

[34] Burke, Permanence and Change (1935, 1954), p. 282.

decision-making mechanism, and I have read of many infrahuman societies characterized by a rigid "pecking order." In short, "Order is impossible without hierarchy."[35]

So, like the ethical negative, hierarchy is an unavoidable feature of life, but, unlike the ethical negative, it does not serve to mark the human. The demands of survival give rise in any organism to hierarchies of knowledge and skill, a skill being itself a form of hierarchical knowledge. As Rueckert explains, "The hierarchy . . . is a general principle of ordering which begins with nature and the preverbal, and runs upward to man and language."[36] But what is important is what happens to hierarchy when it is raised into the human realm of the ethical negative and guilt. New feelings of hierarchical inferiority intensify the feelings of ethical guilt. The higher seeks to control and manipulate the lower for reasons other than those of efficiency. The ethical commandments become a part of a system's hegemony, a control designed to maintain and to extend power. The "do's" and "don't's" take on class significance; one must do this and not do that in order to prove oneself a worthy member of a given social strata. Acts within the class hierarchy become acts of self-justification. Of those who are low on the social scale it will be said, "They are unfortunate or misguided or wrong or bad." And a characteristic feature of human life becomes that act by which an insecure person raises his own sense of self-esteem by symbolically lowering the status of someone else. In much human behavior those who

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[35] __ATH__, p. 374.

[36] William Rueckert, "Kenneth Burke and Structuralism," __Shenandoah__ (Autumn 1969), 22.

listen will be able to hear the diacritical, hierarchical exultation: "If you are down, then I am up!" All in all, the pyramidal magic becomes, in the union of ethics and hierarchics, a blacker magic.

The stages of this sequence are easy to trace in Burke's appendix to the revised edition of _Permanence and Change_. First there is hierarchy; the order of human affairs "involves a distribution of authority," and this structure of "rule and service . . . takes roughly a pyramidal or hierarchal form (or, at least, it is like a ladder with 'up' and 'down')."[37] Once this structure of "offices" is in place, those who occupy its rungs or slots or boxes can assume the trappings of status: "We take it for granted that the pyramidal magic is inevitable in social relations, whereby _individuals_, whether rightly or wrongly, become endowed with the attributes of their _office_."[38] Classes form, and "owing to their different modes of living and livelihood . . . become 'mysteries' to one another."[39] Thus we can say that "the purely operational motives, i.e., the motives of efficiency binding a society, become inspirited by a corresponding condition of _Mystery_."[40] Different classes find this mystery useful for different reasons. The upper classes use it to awe and intimidate classes further down the scale and hence to consolidate their enviable position. But the lower classes use mystery for their own revengeful purposes. I still remember my first day as a carpenter the summer after my freshman year. The workers at the site had a number of methods, some humorous, some a little meaner than humorous, of reminding me that I was a middle-class college kid trespassing on their turf. They had their own hierarchies of knowledge

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[37] _PC_, p. 276.   [38] _PC_, p. 279.   [39] _PC_, p. 276.   [40] _PC_, p. 276.

and skill. In their terms I was a lowly beginner, and it took me several weeks to win their respect.

Examples of how we seek our own level in this fluid, guilt-laden, mystery-filled hierarchical madness are, as we saw with the ethical negative, depressingly numerous. Sometimes the whole course of one's life can seem like a series of graduations from the top rung of one hierarchy to the bottom rung of another. From low-school (though of course we do not call it that) to middle-school, from middle-school to high school, from high school to college, from college to the military or to a civilian job, from one job to another--one is repeatedly being promoted back to the bottom. And, consequently, one is repeatedly beset by new inferiority complexes and new inferiority anxieties. I am told that in the terms of the Pentagon, where rank-heavy staff soak up the tax dollars, even one-star generals are made to feel like lowly beginners.

As I work on this chapter, the nation is in its autumnal obsession with hierarchy. This process is usually called "the college football polls," but we could label it "self-justification through identification with the team that is Number One.'" Would that these psychosociolinguistic dynamics were limited to such a harmless pastime. Unfortunately, we often hear assessments of the relative military strength among nations as if this too were merely a pyramidal scramble for the top ranking. An American Presidential election without a distorted debate as to whether the United States is still "on top" seems too much to ask. We might call this "self-justification through identification with the arsenal that is 'Number One.'" Obviously, this is a dangerous

dynamic in a world of such "isms" as nationalism, imperialism, and

advanced industrial militarism. Some of us have not forgotten what

happened earlier in this century when Japan said to China and Italy

said to Ethiopia and Germany said to Poland, "If you are down, then I

am up." Iran and Iraq are just the latest in a long list of word-creations

to jostle each other for a dominant position.

Occasionally, the psychological and sociological and linguistic

features of this ugliness bloom like a cancer in a single speech. When

Henry Kissinger addressed the 1980 Republican Convention in Detroit, he

wooed the extreme right-wing with his analysis of the weakness of the

United States in the face of the Soviet challenge. To describe this

alledged weakness, he used at least three times the noun "impotence," a

particularly graphic term for the hierarchical inferiority felt by one

who is down while another is up. Of course, it was Kissinger and his

boss Nixon who used to argue that a great nation like the United States

of America must not retreat from its responsibilities to its allies in

Southeast Asia, an argument that said in effect, "If we pull out of

Vietnam, we will drop in the polls." In the neocoldwarwarrioristic

rhetoric of such criminals, every Third World country became merely a

fulcrum around which pivoted the hierarchical diacritic that is the rela-

tionship between American and Soviet spheres of influence. This was all

very simplistic and a naked example of the identifications and separations

involved in individual and collective self-justification, but, alas, as

we have seen with the resurgence of similar rhetoric less than a decade

later, as well as with the return to power of some of the same rhetoricians,

such words can easily hold their own, and even expand their influence,

against more historically accurate counterstatements. Such bad talk

drives out good talk because such bad talk so naturally fills our basic

psychosociolinguistic needs. Thanks to the dynamics of our hierarchical

psychoses, oneupsmanship has once again become nuclear brinksmanship.

Admittedly, much more is involved in these domestic and inter-

national conflicts than words, but _it is words that make the disasters_

possible. Once again, what we are looking at in the play of these forces

is the work of language. And once again, according to Burke, only lan-

guage can break the spell cast by its own black magic. Burke's classic

contribution to these subjects is a book that he wrote, with a sharp

sense of timing, as our country simultaneously entered the ages of

nuclear weapons, television, and cold war hysteria. In the introduction

to _A Rhetoric of Motives_, he presents his volume as an act of contempla-

tion upon the "torrents of ill will into which so many [of his post-war

audience] have so avidly and sanctimoniously plunged."[41] Then, as now,

the rhetoric of hawks was driving out the rhetoric of doves.

However, much of _A Rhetoric of Motives_ deals with the way these

timely arguments are shaped by the relatively timeless problems of com-

munication within a social hierarchy and with the rhetorical strategies

which will be employed in most any such situation. Granted, the prin-

ciple that hierarchies of decision-making and prestige are unavoidable

can be misapplied. Burke does not use this principle to urge that we

capitulate to the still-developing hierarchy of corporate wealth and

power in this country or that we acquiesce to the still-intensifying

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[41] _RM_, p. xv.

inequities between rich and poor nations. On the contrary, he makes
the necessary qualification: "To say that hierarchy is inevitable is
not to say that any particular hierarchy is inevitable; the crumbling
of hierarchies is as true a fact about them as their formation."[42]
Indeed, throughout Burke's work there are plenty of hints that he favors
relatively egalitarian (relatively "non-hierarchic") economic arrange-
ments and considerable equality of opportunity. He is constantly lobbying
for the kinds of checks which will block the full expansion of the
technological empire of multinational corporations and for the kinds of
balances which will hinder the full use and abuse of its hierarchical
tendencies.

But Burke also warns against the utopian view that hierarchy can
be eliminated altogether. The problems of hierarchy must be faced,
and faced repeatedly. Only by logology can we rise to an analysis of
the hierarchical forces that operate through us. Using words to over-
come the troubles of words, Burke would foster new hierarchies of know-
ledge. He would, as he might say, "introduce a new level of motivation."[43]
He would encourage us to realign ourselves with those willing to par-
tially transcend our own verbal madness long enough to grasp our common
plight and to forge new rhetorical bonds of love instead of hate. As
with the dangers of the ethical negative, he would raise us to an aware-
ness of the dangers of hierarchy. Burke's logology is meant to serve
the aims of liberation. And because this liberation or transcendence
is partial and temporary, he would caution us not to overstate his motto

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[42] RM, p. 141.   [43] Again, RM, p. 200.

of redemption, "Through words beyond words." I believe that Burke would

want us to place him in a category with Freud, that is, to place him

among those whose plan of salvation falls into "Here-is-the-bad-news-Can-

you-dig-it?" mode.[44]

A much fuller treatment of hierarchy would take us deep into the

clause on hierarchy (I have reference to Burke's logological definition

of humankind, my original point of departure) and far from our present

exploration of the clause on negation. We now have enough concepts

before us to conclude by saying that the ethical negative and the fact

of hierarchy which the ethical negative intensifies largely create the

human lifeworld. These are what Burke and Rueckert call the two "critical

moments" of language and society. They are part of a chain of interlocking

events which we might summarize as follows: the need for systemic order

gives rise to lingual commandments, but everywhere such commandments go

they induce guilt; the need for systemic decision-making gives rise to

hierarchy, but everywhere such hierarchy builds it produces a sense of

inferiority; guilt and the sense of inferiority intensified by guilt

combine to create strong feelings of imperfection, insistent desires for

purification, and widespread longings for a scapegoat. The sociolinguistic

negations form much of the basis for civilization and its discontents.

The linguistic negatives, both ethical and hierarchical, set the stage

for the drama of human relations.

I was reluctant, earlier in this chapter, to move from Burke's

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[44] I have in mind the picture of Freud that develops in a pair of books
by Philip Rieff: Freud: The Mind of a Moralist (Garden City, N.Y.: Dou-
bleday, 1961) and The Triumph of the Therapeutic (New York: Harper & Row,
1966).

theory of ethical negation to his theory of hierarchical negation. The former topic seemed grim enough without going into the troubles of the latter. With a similar reluctance, I must move this discussion one step further, and this time I cannot use the excuse that I must do so to complete the presentation of Burke's ideas. Unfortunately, what Burke says of an approach he wants to deepen is applicable to his own:: "Frankly, it [is not] morbid enough."[45] To "round out" this chapter we must add a section that owes as much to Ernest Becker as to Kenneth Burke, though the two complement each other powerfully.

3. Memory, Death-Terror, and Victimage

Once again, let us adopt an evolutionist perspective. We have at our disposal, thanks mainly to Chapter Five and the section on "Ethics Plus" in Chapter Seven, a picture of the human as a new region of choice. On several occasions I have described the human as a new node or nexus in expanding networks of language. We are an interplay of various language-based functions including memory, planning, and decision-making. More than once I have said that we are the "roomier timespaces" wherein a new sense of past, present, and future takes shape. Now, thanks to the ideas developed here in Chapter Nine, we can see that these new "time-spaces" are haunted by ethical guilt and hierarchical insecurity. But they are also haunted by something else. The problem is that these expanding timespaces which the creature-now-almost-human comes to occupy "widen" and "lengthen" until they encompass an awareness of the creature's

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[45] RR, p. 181.

own demise. Humans are the first beings to construct a framework of past, present, and future that includes the prediction of their own personal death. In effect, the infrahuman becomes the human when this last chapter is added to the story inside which it lives. In terms of the dominant metaphor of this dissertation, we might say that in the streets of the new city of words is seen a dark figure, a figure never before seen. The human being is the first being to encounter this mysterious stranger, so frightening but so intriguing. We are unable to halt our pursuit of this intruder—he is too obviously related to us in some way—yet we instinctively distrust his presence. Like Poe's Prince Prospero, we might want to flee him to some refuge outside the city's gates, but, once we found him again inside our dwelling, we would compulsively stalk him until, at the back of the most secluded chamber, we cornered him and learned who he was and what he meant to us.

This discovery of death is the event which gives rise to the human lifeworld. If we agreed earlier that the moral negatives invent the human, we must now add that this fearful revelation concerning our own inevitable end issues the patent. If we concluded earlier that social taboos carve out our psychic interiors, we must now add that death-terror furnishes the tools. The discovery of death is an episode which transforms all interpretation. In the light of death, all the indicators cast shadows of another dimension. To come to an awareness of death is to multiply a great negative through the human equation, thereby changing all the signs. In the foreknowledge of death, infrahuman semiotics become human symbolics. And, if we decided earlier that human signs are symbols because they represent a process of comparatively free choice and hence

express deeper concerns, we must now add that human signs are symbols because they are reminders that these choices are made with the deepest concern, namely, are made by a creature that knows at some level he or she is not going to be making choices forever.

We are approaching the territory of Heidegger, but I want to stay with the Heidegger-influenced writer some of whose ideas we have already explored. In Chapter Five, we saw that Ernest Becker's The Birth and Death of Meaning offers a theory about the linguistic, social, and practical nature of human identity. The seventh chapter of that book, entitled "Self-Esteem: The Dominant Motive of Man,"[46] emphasizes that this symbolical creation that we are, this linguistic structure spreading into new timespaces, largely functions to protect our self-esteem. I spoke above about patterns of interaction with the environment within which we can act with equanimity. Becker borrows from the Burke-influenced Erving Goffman to discuss how we put our self-esteem on the line every time we make a "presentation of the self" and how we depend on others to face us with a "solid" symbolic self, to "play the game" of symbolics with great gusto.[47] But as Becker proceeds in The Birth and Death of Meaning, he suggests there is something else that threatens our identity as surely as the failure of those around us to respect and to reciprocate our performances. In his chapter "What Is Normal?" Becker comes close to saying that the real purpose of symbolics is the denial of our finitude

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[46] Again, Ernest Becker, The Birth and Death of Meaning, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 65-74.

[47] See the ninth chapter of Becker's Meaning, entitled "Social Encounters: The Staging of Self-Esteem," pp. 87-111.

and that the social game we play is a frenetic distraction from this

fact of mortality. The game is especially intense in mass-consumer,

advertising-saturated, advanced technology capitalism, but it is a very

old game nonetheless:

> Modern man is denying his finitude with the same dedication
> as the ancient Egyptian pharaohs, but now whole masses are
> playing the game, and with a far richer armamentarium of
> techniques. The skyscraper buildings, the cloverleaf free-
> ways, the houses with their imposing facades and immaculate
> lawns—what are these if not the modern equivalent of pyra-
> mids: a face to the world that announces, "I am not ephemeral,
> look what went into me, what represents me, what justifies
> me." The hushed hope is that someone who can do this will
> not die.[48]

In all this human-all-too-human activity, one ought to be able to

detect the operation of synecdochics, expressive ethics, and self-

justifying rhetorics; however, it is the denial of death that has priority.

On a page that is one of my favorites in all social science, Becker

goes on to list some of the everyday things we do to "deny untidyness,

hence lack of order, hence lack of control, hence [our] death."[49] In

Becker's view, all of our social actions add up to one vast "cultural

neurosis." Speaking of the noisy bustle of our world, Becker says, "This

is truly obsessive-compulsiveness on the level of the visible and audible,

so overpowering in its total effect that it seems to make of psycho-

analysis a complete theory of reality."[50] In the terms of this disser-

tation, we could say that all praxics is neurotics. In Becker's own

terms, we could say, "Life in contemporary society is like an open-air

lunatic asylum."[51]

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[48] Becker, _Meaning_, pp. 149-50.   [49] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 150.

[50] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 150.   [51] Becker, _Meaning_, p. 150.

By the end of The Birth and Death of Meaning, Becker has realized
that the dominant motive of humankind is the denial of death not the pro-
motion of self-esteem, closely related though these may be. His last
book, written in the face of death in more ways than one, is built around
his analysis of the "impossible" human predicament. I am going to put
the argument of The Denial of Death into my own words.[52] The human is
the result of millions, actually billions, of years of evolution. The
evolutionary process develops all kinds of survival tactics and mating
habits to help its creatures hold their own and, for an added measure
of safety, to expand their power. Consider some of the more fearsome
defenses and some of the more colorful courtship practices of various
lifeforms, and then consider the strength of the force of life itself.
Picture the eyes of a healthy animal in mortal combat. Now, one of the
traits selected for perpetuation and development is a self-conscious
intelligence, for such intelligence makes for very flexible action and,
in a rapidly changing environment, for longer life. So what evolution
eventually produces is that amazing creature in whom the life force flows
as strongly as ever but who can see far enough ahead to understand that
there is something that cannot be defended against no matter how urgent
the force of life. The human comes to know that, regardless of how many
dangers he or she avoids, he or she is still doomed. The human learns
that decay and death are stages of development as certainly as birth and
growth. But this datum does not really compute; this contradiction is
too basic to be resolved. Becker believes that we cannot balance the

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[52] Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973).

the human equation because death figures so largely in our calculations and that the resulting anxieties are so fundamental to our lives that all our institutions serve mainly to hide from ourselves the truth of our situation.

Unlike Becker, Burke does not make the foreknowledge of death the centerpiece of his theory. From stories I had heard, stories of all-day discussions with visiting professor Burke or of all-night ramblings in the woods around Andover, New Jersey with native-settler Burke, I had formed the idea of a man full of life, one to whom the thought of death would be unusually painful. Recent articles by Ben Yagoda and Richard Kostelanetz confirmed this image,[53] and I was intrigued by Yagoda's quoting a poem written by the eighty-one-year-old Burke during a recent harsh winter:

> Age in the grip of ice
> Pronounces his name Kenneth
> The word thus honored nice
> Quite simply rhymes with *****

Yagoda then comments: "Burke could not bring himself to write "death."[54]

But, of course, Burke has linked his name to "death" just by writing the above poem and, by leaving the last line unfinished, has more effectively forced his reader to discover the word. We must thus be careful about a theory of Burke's personal denial of death. All we can safely say is that the notion of death is not as central to Burke's

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[53] See Ben Yagoda, "Kenneth Burke," *Horizon*, (1980 June), 66-69 and Richard Kostelanetz, "About Kenneth Burke," *New York Times Book Review* (1981 March 15), 11, 24-6.

[54] Yagoda, 69.

published writings as to Becker's, for there are times when Burke introduces this notion quite directly. Perhaps the most important is in The Rhetoric of Religion, when he develops the idea that the biological fact of death is transformed in the radically ethical human lifeworld. To a creature being wrapped in a developing web of commandments and coming increasingly to think in terms of obedience and disobedience, the natural end of life will begin to seem a retribution. By a strange twist of newly-human logic, death will provoke the question: What did we do to deserve this? Unfortunately but inevitably, we will assume ourselves guilty until proven innocent. We will think of our very emergence in terms of crime and punishment, in terms of a sin against the universe. Like the protagonist in a Greek tragedy, blessed with a crown but still cursed for having been born into some infamous royal line, we may consider ourselves blessed with the crown of creation but still cursed for having been born into the human family. As Burke puts it, "When death is viewed in moralistic terms . . . , it is conceived not just as a natural process, but as a kind of 'capital punishment.'"[55]

Burke's argument at this point is both simple and complex. If we restore the omitted phrases from the above quotation, we have this:

> When death is viewed "personally," in moralistic terms
> colored by conditions of governance (the moral order),
> it is conceived not just as a natural process, but as a
> kind of "capital punishment."[56]

This fuller context reveals that Burke is here involving the critical moments treated in this chapter's two previous sections. If hierarchy was complicated by being raised into the world of human ethics, the

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[55] RR, p. 209.   [56] RR, p. 209.

intuitive fear of death is complicated by being raised into the world

of both human ethics and hierarchics. Because "the natural order is . . .

seen through the eyes of the sociopolitical order," death comes to

represent (by the principle of synecdochics), all the mortification

felt by the low in their "toil and subjection" to the high, that is, all

the pain felt by everyone in their submission to the "conditions of

governance."[57]   Death is now seen by us guilt-ridden as the fitting

summary of all we deserve, as the dramatically perfect last chapter

to our imperfect lives:

> . . . "mortification" is a weak term, as compared with
> "death." And thus, in the essentializing ways proper to
> the narrative style [or, we could say, in the essentializing
> ways of entelechial poetics], this stronger, more dramatic
> term replaces the weaker, more "philosophic" one. "Death"
> would be the proper narrative-dramatic way of saying "Mor-
> tification."[58]

So Burke concludes:

> Accordingly death in the natural order becomes conceived as
> the fulfillment or completion of mortification in the socio-
> political order, but with the difference that, as with capi-
> tal punishment in the sentencing of transgression against
> sovereignty, it is not in itself deemed wholly "redemptive,"
> since it needs further modifications, along the lines of
> placement in an undying Heavenly Kingdom after death. And this
> completes the pattern of Order: the symmetry of the socio-
> political (cum verbal), the natural, and the supernatural.[59]

And this completes the sequence of events I planned to chart. Our

sense of death is indeed transformed in the networks of commandments and

hierarchical social arrangements, but, by some dangerous reciprocations,

ethical guilt and hierarchical insecurity are intensified by the fear of

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[57] I am paraphrasing Burke's RR, pp. 206-7.

[58] RR, p. 206.   [59] RR, p. 207.

death. If foreknowledge of death, then fear of death; if fear of death, then greater uncertainty; if greater uncertainty, then intensified ethical and hierarchical insecurities; if greater insecurity, then greater abuse of power to shore up the sagging self-esteem; if greater abuse of power, then more victims. Yes, the guilt caused by the ethical negatives and the insecurity caused by social hierarchy set the stage for victimage. But the real playwright of the tragedy that is human relations turns out to be the death-terror made possible by linguistic memory and a growing sense of time.

> Definitions are . . . the writer's equivalent of the lyric
> (though a poet might not think so!) in that the writer usually
> "hits upon them." They are "breakthroughs," and thus are
> somewhat hard to come by . . . . In actual development, the
> definition may be the last thing a writer hits upon. Or it
> may be formulated somewhere along the line. But logically
> it is prior to the observations that it summarizes.[1]

In the course of putting this dissertation together—choosing to

write on Burke's definition, swinging out into chapters on negationism,

evolutionism, and structuralism to gain added perspectives, and then

hurtling back through the basic ideas of Burke's sociolinguistics—I

gradually came to the opinion that Burke's definition needed a few

slight modifications. Interestingly, I learned that Burke himself had

been moving toward a similar opinion over the last several years. I had

obtained Burke's address from William Rueckert and had written Burke about

my plan to write a dissertation on his somewhat structuralist doctrines

of negation, beginning with his logological definition of humankind. His

reply opened with his confession that he was "a slovenly correspondent

at best," and, indeed, his letter was full of typographical errors and

corrections. But it was a beautiful letter nonetheless, the kind meant

to encourage a young follower. And lo and behold, he suggested a change

to his definition:

> I would insert a clause: "Acquiring foreknowledge of death."
> No nonverbalizing organism can have such an idea, for "death"

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[1] Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (1966), p. 3.

is but a word. If there are those who go on having known
close up, they ain't telling. But the <u>Book</u> <u>of</u> <u>Genesis</u>
tells us that capital punishment is a primary aspect of
motives in human government . . . after the Fall.[2]

If we incorporate Burke's suggested addition, along with others

suggested by what has gone before in these pages, a revised definition

might read,

> The human is the
> Maker, user, and misuser 'of symbols, diacritician and
> dialectician supreme,
> Inventor of the negative (or moralized by order),
> Occupant of hierarchies maintained by the commandments,
> Acquirer of a foreknowledge of death,
> Alien separated from his natural condition by all these
> instruments of his own making which he has substituted
> for spontaneous infrahuman immediacy,
> Participant in a great reflexive turn, the logologer deluxe,
> And, like all other systems—only perhaps more so—a system
> rotten with entelechial perfection.

Such are the ideas I have been stacking throughout this long work.

Actually, I have been stacking the deck. Taken together these seven

clauses of Chapter Ten or the three critical moments of Chapter Nine or

the eleven principles of Chapter Eight constitute an explanation as to

why our situation is so damn near hopeless, that is, if what is hoped for

is anything resembling a predominantly just and peaceful world. Given

the basic characteristics of the world of human symbolics, there will

only occasionally be pockets of relative equity and harmony, though, as

far as I am concerned, our calling will always be to enlarge these (and

to try to have a good time doing so). Pressed between diacritically

opposed groups, we ought to hasten disarmament, foster empathy, and

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[2] Personal letter dated 1981 March 4 from Burke, who was at the time
a visiting professor at Emory University in Atlanta, to this writer.

facilitate negotiation. Enrolled in structures of order, we ought to
stop the worst abuses of power, soften cruelty, replace malign rule
with more benign rule, and institute checks and balances to better
contain the next tyranny. With the motto, "The humane left is usually
right," we ought to work (and play) toward progressive change.

But because of inescapable sociolinguistic shadows, I cannot see
a light at the end of our tunnel. My pessimism may be the result of
having lived through a kind of golden age (at least compared to most
periods of human history)--and of having seen what was done with it. We
should have formed at home a much fairer union and adopted abroad a much
wiser diplomacy, to say the least. Now most efforts at mass education
are being swallowed in a junk culture unique in its hideous stupidity.
Reactionary ideologies, which one might have predicted, in more optimis-
tic days, would soon disappear, are raising millions to add to already
impressive financial warchests, are employing the most sophisticated
communications media, and are thus defining the issues in the arenas of
public rhetoric. At the highest levels of business, government, and
the church, where one might have expected, in more naive days, real
leadership, one finds instead a failure of vision, even a lack of aware-
ness of the danger. Insecure in our positions, crippled by guilt,
frightened of death, we seem to lack the courage to defend the progress
of the past, much less to imagine a better future. Unless we revolu-
tionaries, revolutionaries of consciousness if nothing else these days,
find some elixir to suspend aging and to stave off death, we all face
an uphill task of truly Sisyphean proportions.

But let us not, for the sake of those heavenly kingdoms we project,

end here. Let us add a coda because in the world of information exchange, where there are no real endings, a coda can be as important as that which precedes it, i.e., can be a whole new beginning. Even if we are nearing the finish, we have got to go on as if we were just barely starting out. If not probable, anything is possible.

> Whatever may be the embarrassments as regards theological
> attempts to square this wonderful story literally with modern
> theories of evolution, it is just about _perfect_ for the pur-
> poses of the "logologer."[1]

Suppose I were the genius of a primitive tribe, and suppose I had

intuited the logological truths about myself and others and the mischief

we inflict on each other that were set forth in the preceding chapters.

That is, suppose I had figured out from my observations of myself, my

people, and our natural environment that it is language that sets us

apart from the rest of nature's creatures. Granted, I would have merely

grasped the obvious, but the discovery would be all the more remarkable

for one who had been taught to worship the totemistic link between himself

and the leopard or the owl or the alligator. And suppose that as a result

of my fortunate contact with other tribes I had broadened my concept of

what we users of words were up to. Suppose that, rather than focus on

the differences of costume and custom among neighboring tribes and my own,

I pondered instead the curious similarities.

To begin with, all those I had lived among or talked with or heard

about sensed the haunting presence of Ubiquitous Forces. All felt the

pressure of the Forces of Rhetorical Control (though none of us would have

called Them that). All acknowledged that the Forces possessed powers

greater than our own. Witchdoctors, rulers, messengers, planters,

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[1] Kenneth Burke, The _Rhetoric_ of _Religion_ (1961, 1970), p. 3.

neighbors, family members—all tried to placate these omnipotent "spirits of the wind" by putting the right words into the air around them. All were extremely careful to say the proper things in prayers and ceremonies and to say these things in the proper, the sacred, sequence.[2] In short, we tried to do as we had been told.

All of us seemed to know the commandments laid down by the Forces at the beginning of time; in fact, that was how some peoples dated the beginning of time. Few of us dared call attention to the apparently whimsical nature of some of Their rules. Indeed, the more arbitrary the rule, the more in awe we were of the disproportion between Their Divine Wisdom and our puny human rationale. And we had to admit that, pragmatically speaking, It was working. After all, here we were! So all of us desired to conform to the wishes of these Forces and to persuade others to do the same, all the while dreading that we might fail in our rhetorical campaign and thus allow someone to violate the sacred taboos and to bring the wrath of the Forces down upon us all.

Moreover, on some occasions, we had been convinced that it was already too late, and we had begun to demand the punishment of those evil-doers who had incurred the displeasure of the Forces and had brought a curse upon the land. In such times of alledged decline, even those of us who classed ourselves among the moral majority had wondered if it was not we who had broken the rules in some way. However, we had usually been too frightened to voice our doubts; instead, we had called that much more loudly for the sacrifice of a scapegoat to propitiate the

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[2] I have in mind some of my favorite anthropological texts. See, for example, Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934: rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), especially her chapter on the Dobu, pp. 130-172.

Forces and hence to restore the land to its rumored former greatness.

If all had gone as we Force-fearing wished, the necessary culprits had

been driven from their huts and offices by the practice of the proper

word-magic. We may not have had the advantages of computerized mailing

lists and voter identification techniques, but we used a voodoo every

bit as effective. Then we had made the required sacrificial offerings

to seal our renewed committment to the Forces and to inaugurate a new

era of law and order and prestige. We had felt we were on top once again.

And since all these events had involved various verbal operations, I and

all I had ever interviewed were of the opinion that, to the extent we

reflected on such matters, we were ringed in words, words that coerced

and cursed and uncursed and pleaded for mercy and gave thanks.

Suppose, in sum, that I came to realize that this kind of sequence

was at the core of human experience and gathers about itself the deepest

human emotions: a moral order or set of commandments is shattered by

disorder or disobedience, and those inflicted with guilt over the changes

seek by victimage to win redemption. Naturally, I will want to share

this truth, for, as we have seen, everyone desires, in keeping with the

principles of rhetorics and entelechics, to spread the insights they

think they have attained; everyone wants, not just to hold onto their

ideas, but, for an added measure of safety, to expand their influence.

As the poet of an oral culture, I am not going to be able to wait until

the local equivalent of Scientific American publishes a September issue

devoted exclusively to the sociolinguistics of human communities, for of

course at my semiotic level there is no such equivalent. I am going to

have to embody my insights in an oral art form, and then sing them to all

who will listen. I will chant my summaries (my intuitively logological analyses) of the linguistic essence of our social world in great epic poems while my fellow tribespersons beat an ancient rhythm on sticks and drums.

Or I might rework the ritual drama of my people. Assume that, following our budding sense of the principle of dramatics, we had begun to stage a mimesis of our acts as agents employing certain agencies to overcome counteragencies (especially counteragents) in an effort to achieve certain purposes in a certain setting. Assume that we had developed a full-scale tradition of religious theater which initiated young hunters into their new role as providers of the tribe in a ceremonial histrionics which both involved them in a hypothetical recreation of the dangers of the hunt and, by confronting them with a manageable sample of those dangers, bolstered their morale with respect to the possibility of over-coming their fears during the real thing. As the dramatist of an oral culture, I could give these pragmatic and esthetic rituals an added logological or metalingual dimension to both involve my audience in a manageable sample of the sociolinguistics of life and, by staging these sociolinguistics within the controlled arena of art, bolster our morale with respect to the possibility of our containing such future events. And, if I were truly successful, this mimesis would become a catharsis, and the growing tensions of our linguistic, social, and practical realm would, by reaching their completion within artificial, esthetic boun-daries, be temporarily eased.

But as a literary artist at an oral stage of culture, I will have to translate my ideas, whether as myth or as ritual drama, into the form

of a dramatic story that can be more easily remembered.[3] That story may

very likely include some of the following features. To convey my belief

that it is language that sets us humans apart, I will tell the story of

how our world was generated by words. To honor those Forces that we

worship and to communicate my sense that it was Their commandments that

created our social order, I will attribute the creative verbal fiat to

Them. Since to make Them capable of speaking words is to make Them

possessors of "person-ality," I will sing of Their creative deeds as the

deeds of "persons" or, better still, of "Superpersons." (I would need

little encouragement in this direction because it would violate my

notions of perfection to sing the praise of beings that lacked personality

and hence that were less "complete" than we humans.)

To capture my experience of the world of words as one that blossoms

in a natural setting, a setting which yields to the proper incantations

(remember I am the poet of a group that practices oral magic), I will

place my story in a garden which is itself the result of the creative

verbal energies of those Ubiquitous Forces and which is responsive to

Their commands. But to cover my opposite sense that not everything is

words, the world of airy words being somehow grounded in a more solid

reality, I will have the first human formed from the earth itself.[4] And

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[3] Here I will pass blissfully the question as to which came first,
myth or ritual, as blissfully as does Francis Fergusson in his analysis
of the tragic rhythm of ritual drama in his Burke-influenced The Idea of
a Theater (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), pp. 26-7.

[4] On these "unnatural obstetrics" and their implications, see RR,
pp. 206 and 214. Actually, this footnote is not sufficient, for, not
only the last point, but many of the preceding points are attributable
to Burke. Though I have taken some liberties with his ideas, this whole
chapter is inspired by his chapter "The First Three Chapters of Genesis,"
in RR, pp. 172-272.

to share my hunch that this linguistic world evolved in time (and pro-
bably to recall my own gradual entrance into it over a period of child-
hood years), I will shroud the earthly garden setting in a mist which
only slowly burns away.[5]

One of the oddities of this translation of my insights into some
sort of story is that there are points at which the imperatives of story-
telling itself will put pressure on the shape of the tale. In accordance
with one of the subprinciples of dramatics, I will limit my cast to a few
key personages. To achieve a dramatic simplicity, I will let a single
Force-Over-All-Forces represent the supernatural powers, and over against
the Force, as a symbol for ourselves, I will set one man and one woman.
(If my culture is a male-dominated one, I may even express this dominance
narratively by having the creation of the man precede that of the woman.)
I will substitute, in accordance with the principle of synecdochics, a
single law for the myriad of commands laid down by the Forces, and, to
symbolize that these commandments are at the core of our experience, I
will have this single law pertain to an object at the very center of the
garden. To stress the arbitrariness of the commandments, I will have
this law ban consumption of what is obviously the most nourishing and
most tasteful of the garden's fruit. Thus, I would offer the narrative
equivalent of a dramatic tableau that captures the essence of our
sociolinguistic situation: a man and a woman over against the Force and
Its Arbitrary Law.

Then to reveal my experiences and observations concerning the pos-

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[5] On this point, see _RR_, pp. 213-4.

sibility of the commandments being followed, I will dramatize the breaking of the Law. As an image for the guilt that follows in the wake of the Sin, I can stricken my male and female protagonists with embarrassment over their natural nakedness. In addition, I might personify those rebellious desires that led to the first transgression into a single forceful antagonist and, for the sake of heightened drama, develop this new character into a worthy opponent of the Force. (One should hear the principles of diacritics and entelechics in this growing opposition between Force and Counter-Force.) Finally, to show the extent to which the human rebellion brings down the wrath of the Force upon all below (and of course one should feel in this the presence of the principle of hierarchics), I will have the Force curse the Counter-Force, the humans, and the very ground of the garden itself--for, remember, it was postulated from the beginning that everything was generated from and remains subject to the power of words.

As for the curse, I will choose the curse of death, not only because I and all who talked honestly with me have found death the most intriguing and frightening subject, but also becuase death is the most dramatic punishment and thus makes the best story. This is also a great stroke of storytelling because now the earlier creation from the dust becomes, with this penal return to dust, an "openure" which from the start began moving toward its fitting "closure." So the tale to this point becomes a kind of narrative loop, one which extends into narrative timespace a variation of that dramatic tableau which portrays the crux of my and my people's world: a man and a woman driven forth from the garden of innocence under the arbitrary sentence of the Force, namely, the sen-

tence "You must surely die!"

Suppose that I tell and retell this story over many years, not only adding other valid insights about the human situation, but also trying out different effects on my audience to see which make the best story. Then suppose this creation of mine and my followers, for other poets will come after me, becomes a part of the oral tradition of my culture and is passed on through new generations, who also perfect the tale by including their own observations and by improving such features as the way early incidents foreshadow later incidents, the way episodes build to a climax, the way images and symbols reinforce themes emerging from the action, and the way the personalities of the characters are developed and their motives complicated. In short, suppose that my successors take my poem or my play and, in accordance with the poetics of narratives, make it a more perfect work of art.

By this time a number of people will be telling the stories, but the stories will also be telling them. Suppose further that, with the rise of a written alphabet, this continually developing story is made to absorb a heavier trace of history, probably a more detailed version of the self-justifying accounts of dynastic achievements and military conquest. Gradually the oral myth will be loaded with historical facts, legends wrapped in year-by-year chronology, the faint beginnings of biography, new kinds of political propaganda, more subtle rationalizations of class privilege, and the like. Now we must be careful on this point because the mythology has always been a mixture of fact and fiction, some myths more so than others. So the argument here has got to be that

this semiotic transformation from oral culture to chirographic culture is a sharp break but not a clean break. This is one of those quantitative changes that, while truly quantitative, adds up to a qualitative change. The growing use of handwriting means a growing sense of the importance of the less-than-legendary. Though the myth has always included some human characters among its divine dramatis personae, now there will be more humans and fewer gods and goddesses. Though the myth has always been designed to preserve cultural events for posterity, now that preservation will be less concerned with the poetry of primal beginnings and apocalyptic endings and more concerned with the prosaic details of everyday life. Though the myth has always placed "more or less real" happenings in a timespace network, now that network will take shape more as a dated, linear progression and less as an eternal recurrence. The sacred stories will become increasingly but not totally secular.

The rise of chirographics will mean other things as well. The ongoing cultural narratives will begin to grow unwieldy. Young writers, used to dealing with parts, i.e., with separate cantos or even separate pages, will begin to lose a sense of the old whole. Their memories in some ways stretched but in other ways atrophied by dependence on manuscripts, they will satisfy themselves with the production of noble fragments. Furthermore, the introduction of inscribed parchments will hasten the introduction of science as the modern knows it, for science relies on a written record of experiments and, even more importantly, on a detached objectivity released in the weakening of the oral tradition and of the kinds of personalities that tradition fosters.[6] The rise of empirical

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[6] On this crucial point, see Eric Havelock, Preface to Plato (1963; rpt. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1967), pp. 197-210.

science means the rise of a scientific skepticism unwelcome at the chanting sessions of the oral poet.[7] Taken together, the change in the "technology of the word"[8] and the corresponding change in worldview leave the most progressive artists saying to themselves something like this: "I do not think I can tell the whole vast story of my people, and perhaps this is just as well because I have begun to feel rather skeptical about certain traditional parts of it." But these poets will be unwilling to abandon the field to the scientists, for they know that there are important dimensions of the story that the scientists will leave untold. Logically, the poets' new tactic will be the creation of works of verbal art which eschew the overarching mythic plan of a macrocosmos and substutute instead some microcosm of human life, say, the rise and fall of a single ruling family. Their linguistic artifacts still treat fully the sociolinguistics of life but on a smaller scale, say, the scale of tragedy.[9]

Suppose, for example, I were the genius of a tribe passing from a sophisticated level of oral culture to the lowly beginnings of chirographic culture. Suppose I decided to focus on a particular unit of the rapidly fragmenting mythic tradition. I could tell a story of pride and error and guilt and victimage and punishment as these operate in and on

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[7] Again, Eric Havelock, but the next chapter, pp. 229-30.

[8] The phrase is Walter J. Ong's. See his *Interfaces of the Word* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977). In addition, the outline of this chapter into considerations concerning oral, chirographic, and typographic cultural stages is fully attributable to Ong's work.

[9] On this point that tragedy is a kind of fallback position for the literary artist in a rapidly modernizing world, I have in mind a somewhat related passage in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 82-89.

a single household. For dramatic purposes I could make the head of

this household the head of the city state, even the king. I could have

him create his own world, as great rulers often do; the extension of

his power being more or less coterminus with the range of his commands,

I could have him come to power by his utterances; better yet, the assump-

tion of power being the assumption in large part of the problems of a

group's survival, I could have my protagonist rise to the throne by

uttering the correct words to solve the riddle of a community's life

and death. To represent the serious problems that inevitably haunt the

creation of a city of words, I could inflict this fictitious city with

a terrible fictitious plague. Then I could have my hero launch an

investigation into the cause of the plague, only to learn that it is

he himself, the utterer of words, who is the guilty party. I could

bring him face to face with the truth that it is he, the user of language,

who, in the very act of assuming linguistic powers offended the universe;

that is, it is he who, by violating the "innocent" infralingual order,

committed the great sin that brought evil into the world.

This evil has proven to be extraordinarily virile. It could hardly

have begotten itself more busily if it had been commanded to be fruitful

and multiply. The problem is that, and again this was a main point of

the preceding chapters, linguistics are sociolinguistics. The dynamics

of linguistic division are translated into very real human divisions;

the workings of linguistic scapegoats become so easily the plottings of

very real murders. These cycles of victim and scapegoat, scapegoat and

victim are something with which the developing chirographic culture must

deal. A burgeoning urban civilization based on written documents must

try to substitute courts of justice for the old warrior ethic of revenge.

As a poet attuned to such changes, I might choose to deal with a related unit of the fragmenting cultural myth. I could tell the story of another regal household caught in the grip of guilt, murder, and revenge. I could embellish the story of a king who sacrifices his daughter for questionable military motives; I could have the mother and wife avenge her daughter's death by killing her husband the king upon his return from the campaign; I could then have his son and daughter avenge his death by killing their mother. Then in the final play of a trilogy I could portray the instituting of formal judicial procedures meant to break the cycle of otherwise endless violence. I could even give the establishment of these legal structures divine sanction by having a goddess open the chambers and hold the first session of the new court, for, if the gods ever did us a favor, it was helping us move from a dialectics of feuding knife and spear to a more irenic dialectics of legal paper.

The sociolinguistic revelations have come this far, but they must be pushed further. Once again, suppose I am the genius operating on a given level of culture, this time a maturing chirographic culture that takes the semiotic transformations in a different direction. Instead of amplifying small parts of the shattered oral tradition into tragedies, as do Aeschylus and Sophocles, suppose that I and other artists string a series of more or less historical accounts onto the original myths, as do the authors of the Old Testament. These extensions will be subject to several different imperatives. They will need to preserve the actual

historical occurrences with some accuracy, but they will also need to conform to the earlier myths which everyone is still expecting to hear. That is, there will be certain developing conventions of narrative or "generic imperatives" which will help shape the telling of our historical narrative. The impulses of the poetic genre are powerful. For one thing, the original myths partly control our expectations and hence partly determine what historical facts we notice and then choose to relate; for another thing, those original myths are themselves a mimesis of the sociolinguistics of human life. For both reasons, the new stories will repeat the patterns of the old. The new written record of the days of our lives will repeat the old mythic rhythms of exodus and return, bondage and freedom. They, too, will tell of orders disordered, covenants broken, sins confessed and forgiven, and new covenants sealed—until these likewise are breached at a later date in some future age of decline and weakness. In other words, our subsequent additions to the ongoing cultural story will be a complex combination of art that copies art and art that copies life.

Over the centuries a chain of such chirographic chapters will be added to the earlier oral myths. Then something happens, something that cannot happen until the handwritten record is old enough and long enough to make certain trends obvious. Some of those who ride these seemingly endless waves of separation from and reconciliation with a Divine Order will eventually call into question these recurring actions: "Looking at the pages of the sacred record, one is made to wonder if ever so many have done so much to deserve so little. Will we never break this cycle of sin and repentance? We now have centuries of documentary evidence

that we perfectly untrustworthy creatures will undoubtedly abrogate any covenant if we are just given enough time. Could we not just be redeemed once and for all? And would not such a perfect redemption require the sacrifice of the perfectly worthy victim?"

By this time many people are writing the myths, but the myths are also writing them. For, according to the principle of dramatics, the most worthy victim will be the victim whose sacrifice makes the best story. Now, dramatically speaking, the most moving sacrifice is the sacrifice of that which is most dear. The death of a person should be more moving than that of an animal; in a male-dominated society, the sacrifice of a son would be more powerfully histrionic than that of a daughter, and, the better the son, the better the drama. One can almost hear one of the tribe's elders recommending, "Would not our God be most satisfied with the sacrifice of that which He considers most precious, namely, with the sacrifice of an absolutely sinless Son?"

Hence we poets of such a society would project our desires to break the cycle of covenants made and broken into a narrative in which the Force redeems us by sacrificing his own Firstborn. We might even have the tale of a similar sacrifice (it is such a great story surely some dramatist would have thought of it!) stored in our cultural tradition. We could use an episode like that of Abraham and Issac to foreshadow the new chapter in which we embody our wish for a final solution to our society's problems in an account of a Sacrifice-to-End-All-Sacrifices. To bring the ongoing tradition to its perfect fulfillment, according to the principles of entelechial poetics, we must make another narrative loop: the story of how the Force will send his only begotten Son to a

sacrificial death in this world in order that this world, through Him, might be saved.

As our expectations were shaped by earlier narratives, our new narrative will color the vision of those who follow us. We will not be surprised if later writers look for--and think they find--that final solution for which we hoped. Inevitably, some will hypostatize the figments of our imagination into what they claim are actual, historical events, but, since the workings of our imaginations are so real, not all will be lost. Writers in a later typographic age, used to the stable configurations of the printed page, will be especially prone to mistake our insubstantial fictions for substantial facts. By this time many people will be typing the myths, but the myths will also be typing them. Even if these later witnesses, and all they draw into their ethico-rhetorical scheme, spread false teachings about a Final Redeemer who has come and gone and whose exploits while here on Earth were caught, virtually photographically, in printed scriptures, their search will in some ways be our search. Their announcements will be still another closure of that which keeps opening up, of that which first begin to open up a long time ago. For in the beginning of language was the possibility of this entire unfolding of the sociolinguistic drama, and this entire unfolding was with language, and this entire unfolding was language. And whatever the mistakes of the scriptural literalism and the "print fetishism" of the typographic age, it can at least spread the good news, by means of new world-wide communication systems, that partial redemption is available, not just to a single

tribe or society, but to all humans the world over.

Eventually there will come those who will enter, as do the proponents of the "Higher Criticism (an interesting example of hierarchics) in the nineteenth century and as does Kenneth Burke in our own time, into a dialectical exchange with the more literal-minded in an attempt to make them see that the essence of their sacred stories and the sum of their faith is the expression of the need for at least partial deliverance from the problems that we users of words, in the very act of assuming linguistic powers, have created, as well as the expression of courageous hope that such a deliverance is possible. These more critically-inclined will have at their disposal new print-fostered resources: new stores of data, the excitement of discovery, a prestigious and confident scientific skepticism. They will need all these advantages to counter the more literal-minded, who will begin to spread, paradoxically, their reactionary fear of learning through revolutionary new techniques of electronic communication. Of course, the more critically-inclined will be in danger of losing a sense of the sacred in their preoccupation with objective knowledge and secular studies, while the more literal-minded remain closer, at least in their guilt and fear, to primal feelings. But the literal-minded, too, will increasingly aid the process by which the holy depth of Being and Becoming is flattened out onto the shiny surfaces of technological objects and bled off into the sparkling distractions of high-speed laser communications, and they will be the ones whose dangerous superstitions, wherever they go, pose a threat to the human spirit and its joy in spiritual growth. On the ensuing struggle between these groups will depend the future of language and those who use it, for in a world of typographics-

fostered, electronics-fostered modern weapons the more critically-inclined will have to find a way to defuse the absolutisms of the more literal-minded of various cultures--while retaining a sense of the numinous quality of Being and Becoming.

Of course, you readers of this dissertation realized pages ago what I was up to in these wild speculations. It is the same thing that Kenneth Burke is up to in some of his later writings. What I have done is to momentarily reweave the Greek and Hebrew myths that his logological analysis unweaves and to place these along the stages of semiotic evolution outlined in the later writings of Walter Ong. Burke believes, I think it should be said, that these myths are "true." Or, rather, he believes that they dramatize with amazing faithfulness the interlocking moments at the core of human experience and that they capture with their images, their episodes, their characters, and their narrative sequences, the relatively timeless principles of our world. As he puts it, "Even if . . . one does not literally believe . . . , the Biblical narrative's way . . . would be the correct way of telling this story."[10] In Burke's view, these ancient stories are the beginnings of a logology deluxe, for they mime so grandly the general principles of word-use. The legends of the Houses of Laius and Atreus individuate or "imagize" the general dynamics of our world of logocentric symbolics. The Old Testament, and especially its extension into a New Testament, is a remarkably full exposition of our sociolinguistic plight.

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[10] I am paraphrasing Burke's RR, p. 210.

We are approaching the territory of Hegel, but I want to stay with

the Hegel-influenced Burke. Burke's epilogue to The Rhetoric of Religion,

entitled "Prologue in Heaven," is a conversation between two voices,

one "The Lord" and the other "Satan." At one point the more authorita-

tive of the two urges that we not deny anyone "the right to conceive

of God in terms of a perfection which is identical with an underlying

principle of language," for even if such "ideas of divine perfection

were reducible to little more than a language-using animal's ultimate

perception of its own linguistic forms," such ideas might still reach

"a true inkling of the divine insofar as language itself happened to

be made in the image of divinity."[11] Thereupon this exchange continues:

> Satan: If, that is, implicit in the principle of words
> qua words there really is The Word?
> The Lord: Yes; if it were shining there all the time,
> like a light hid under a bushel.[12]

And in the ending to this epilogue which he purposefully labels a pro-

logue, an ending that could have served (and, inspirationally speaking,

did serve) as my beginning to this chapter, Burke gives us his "quick

summation" of the sociolinguistics that are taking millenia to shine

into self-consciousness:

> In their societies, [humans] will seek to keep order. If
> order, then a need to repress the tendencies to disorder.
> If repression, then responsibility for imposing, accepting,
> or resisting the repression. If responsibility,
> then guilt. If guilt, then the need for redemption, which
> involves sacrifice, which in turn allows for substitution.
> At this point, the logic of perfection enters. Man can be

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[11] I am manipulating Burke's RR, pp. 298-9.

[12] RR, p. 299.

viewed as perfectly depraved by a formative "first" offense against the foremost authority, an offense in which one man sinned for all. The cycle of life and death intrinsic to the nature of time can now be seen in terms that treat natural death as the result of this "original" sin. And the principle of perfection can be matched on the hopeful side by the idea of a perfect victim. The symmetry can be logologically rounded out by the idea of this victim as also the creative Word by which time was caused to be, the intermediary Word binding time with eternity, and the end towards which all words of the true doctrine are directed. As one of their saints will put it: "The way to heaven must be heaven, for He said: I am the way."[13]

These very modern words of Burke's are the product of a mature typographic society. Such a paragraph amounts to a less "narratively" or "temporally" organized presentation of the plots and a more strictly critical version of the ideas embodied in the basic Western myths. We have reached that level of semiotics where the wisdom of our culture comes to be reformulated in more abstract, more philosophical, more "self-conscious" patterns. If we are not too weighed down by linguistic guilt, we can rise to the contemplation of Burke's "higher criticism," a criticism that is trying to pull us to a place where we can believe without believing fundamentalistically. Even one who does not take the old stories as history can still agree with Burke's assessment that the Biblical narrative's way of telling the basic human story is one very powerful way.[14] Even one who no longer believes the miracles in the sacred lore can still admit that the lore itself is a miracle.[15] And

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[13] RR, pp. 314-5.

[14] I am paraphrasing Burke's RR, p. 210.

[15] I am paraphrasing Burke's description of the religious beliefs of the protagonist of his only novel. See Towards a Better Life (1932, 1966), p. 4.

that miracle is the process by which the cultural lore unfolds over a number of ages, through various semiotic levels and using evolving semiotic technologies, "inspiriting" a number of literary artists until--almost as if by trial and error, almost as if through an intricate play of relapses and momentary recoveries--it begins to clarify its own workings. Slowly it is goaded to turn on itself. Slowly it seems to articulate its own dynamics. Slowly, but with gathering momentum, it bends back upon its own principles. The genius spoken of once or twice in this chapter is not of course my genius, nor even the genius of some ancient myth-maker, legend-fabulator, or ritual dramatist, but the genius of language. The greatest logologer has been gradually revealed to be Language Itself.

axiosic, a: a system of values.

axiosics: acts, often in series, of the attribution of value.

binaric, a: a system of binary oppositions.

binarics: acts, often in series, of the grasping of meaning by means
of categories of contrasting pairs.

closure: the limiting of debate in a legislative body, especially by
means of taking a vote (often termed "cloture"); in mathematical
set theory, the closing of an operation; in "computer-ese," the
closing of a program loop or the ending of an information
sequence.

openure: the initiating of a program loop or of an information
sequence; the complement of "closure."

coldwarwarrior: one who sees the diacritic between the Soviet Union
and the United States in the starkest, most melodramatic terms.

neocoldwarwarrior: one who, after a brief period of detente, returns
to viewing relations between the Soviet Union and the United
States in cold war terms, with perhaps a little greater appre-
ciation of China as a third independent superpower.

coldwarwarriorism: the doctrines held by the coldwarwarrior, doctrines
which exhibit clearly the Burkean principles of sociolinguistics.

coldwarwarrioristic: pertaining to coldwarwarriorism.

consubstantial: sharing the same substance or standing upon the same
ground.

criticism, literary: that branch of logology specializing in the art
of analyzing or evaluating the general principles at work in the
play of particular acts of literature.

criticism, structuralist: a branch of contemporary literary cri-
ticism that tends to focus on the principles of language set
forth in the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure as these prin-
ciples manifest themselves in acts of literature, especially
on the principle that meaning is based on relational fields
of binary oppositions.

criticism, deconstructionist: a poststructuralist branch of contemporary literary criticism that tries to dismantle or "deconstruct" those binary oppositions on which the meaning of a text is based.

metacriticism: that branch of logology that attempts to extract the general principles at work in the play of particular acts of literary criticism.

critic: one who practices literary criticism.

metacritic: one who practices metacriticism.

critical: pertaining to literary criticism, at least for our purposes.

metacritical: pertaining to metacriticism, at least for our purposes.

cybernetics: acts, often in series, on the part of an automatic control system, such as a mechanical-electrical or mechanical-electronic communication system, interacting with its environment and organizing its own parts according to the programs of its "brain" and the information obtained through its feedback loops; the science of such machines and the principles which govern them (which might otherwise be termed "metacybernetics").

cybernetic: pertaining to cybernetics.

cyberneticism: the doctrine that cybernetic machines offer the best model for understanding the workings of any intelligence, including the workings of the human nervous system and human brain.

cyberneticist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of cyberneticism.

cyberneticist (adjective): pertaining to cyberneticism.

deconstructionism: a poststructuralist branch of philosophy and literary criticism holding that the key to the analysis of a text is the revelation of hidden insights to which the text itself is blind, an analysis made by means of shattering or "deconstructing" the arbitrary, diacritical, binary clusters assumed by the text. Deconstructionism also holds that, prior to the formal deconstructionist analysis, there is always already at work in the play of the text a tendency toward "self-deconstruction"--a tendency which the deconstructionist is happy to encourage.

deconstructionist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of deconstructionism.

deconstructionist (adjective): pertaining to deconstructionism.

definitionician or definician: one who linguistically defines,
    marking one term in relation to other terms; i.e., each of us.

developmentalism: the doctrine that things develop, as with Piaget
    on intelligence, Erikson on personality, Kohlberg on ethics,
    Spengler on culture, Ong on word-technology, or Teilhard on
    spirit.

diachronic: pertaining to a linear, even a narratival, development.

  synchronic: pertaining to a simultaneous arrangement or a holistic
      pattern; the complement of "diachronic."

diacritic, a: a system of differentiations.

diacritics: acts, often in series, of the grasping or the conveying
    of meaning by means of differentiations.

diacritical: pertaining to diacritics.

diacritician: one who practices diacritics; i.e., each of us.

  metadiacritician: one who reflects on and seeks to extract from
      particular diacritical acts the general laws of such processes
      of meaning.

diacritic, the: a short form of the phrase "the diacritical process."

Diacritic, the: the diacritical process, once demythologized, now
    remythologized.

dialectic, a: a system of dialectical exchanges.

dialectics: acts, often in series, by which relational fields emerge
    under the pressures of conflict and change, stress given relation-
    ships or interpretations, and then, still under the pressures
    of rival interpretations, are realigned into new interpretive
    syntheses.

dialectical: pertaining to dialectics.

dialectician: one who practices dialectics; i.e., each of us.

  metadialectician: one who reflects on and seeks to extract from
      particular dialectical exchanges the general laws governing
      all such exchanges.

dialectic, the: a short form of the phrase "the dialectical process."

Dialectic, the: the dialectical process, once demythologized, now
    remythologized.

dialectical diacritics: acts, often in series, of differentiation
     under the pressures of conflict and change.

dialectical diacritics of identity, the: the ongoing differentiation
     of oneself from others (or the ongoing formation of an identity)
     under the pressures of conflict and change by means of temporary
     alignments with and against, and temporary exchanges with and
     against, other individuals and other groups.

differential: pertaining to differentiation but with connotations
     of that differential gear of a vehicle which connects wheels
     turning at different speeds.

differentiative: pertaining to differentiation but with connotations
     less mechanical, less greasy, and more appropriate to the light
     play of intelligence.

drama: a portrayal of life or character usually involving a story of
     conflict and emotion complete with action and dialogue and
     typically designed for theatrical performance; a mimesis of the
     human predicament of choice.

dramatism: the doctrine holding that the best model for understanding
     the human is the model of the stage play and that the best
     vocabulary for identifying the important elements of human
     action and for placing the important motives for human choices
     is to be borrowed from the language of literary criticism that
     has grown up around the drama; the term given by Burke to his
     brand of sociolinguistics.

dramatistic: pertaining to dramatism.

dramatics: acts, often in series, of the casting of events in the terms
     of a drama.

dramatician or dramatist: one who practices dramatics; i.e., each of us.

elan differenciateur: the phrase used by Rene Girard to mean "the
     spirit of differentiation"; one of the possible complements to
     elan vital, a phrase popularized by Henri Bergson. (If Burke
     coined a phrase in this genre, he might well choose the phrase
     elan entelechial!)

entelechy: the term used by Aristotle to name the process by which
     beings or systems fulfill their form through stages of develop-
     ment.

  entropy: the process by which systems break down toward greater
       simplicity or "undo" earlier stages of development; one of
       the possible complements to the term "entelechy."

entelechial: pertaining to entelechy.

entelechics: acts, often in series, of the fulfilling of formal
    tendencies through developmental stages.

esthetic, an: a system of esthetic conventions.

esthetics: acts, often in series, of the enjoyment of formal processes
    of stages of development for their own sake; the science of such
    enjoyment (which might otherwise be termed "meta-esthetics").

ethic, an: a system of moral values (sometimes termed an "ethos").

ethics: acts, often in series, of the judging of one's own or others'
    conduct good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable; the science of
    such acts (which might otherwise be termed "meta-ethics").

evolution: the process by which organisms or systems gradually
    change into significantly different, especially into higher
    or more complex, forms.

  devolution: the process by which organisms or systems degenerate
      into lower or simpler forms; retrograde evolution; a complement
      of the term "evolution."

  covolution: the process by which clusters of systems evolve or
      devolve in concert.

evolutionary: pertaining to evolution.

evolutionism: the doctrine that the best model for understanding life
    is the Darwinian model of organisms struggling for survival and
    striving for advantage within a process of natural selection.

evolutionist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of evolutionism.

evolutionist (adjective): pertaining to evolutionism.

hermeneutic, a: a system of interpretation.

hermeneutics: acts, often in series, from within a given circle of
    interpretation.

hierarchics: acts, often in series, of the ordering of things in terms
    of high and low or of the setting up of a hierarchy of offices.

homo bellicosus: the human the warrior.

homo dialecticus: the human the dialectician supreme.

homo domicilius: the human the house-builder.

homo econimicus: the human the barterer.

homo faber: the human the maker.

homo laborans: the human the worker.

homo loquax: the human the talker.

homo ludens: the human the player.

homo memorans: the human the rememberer.

homo pietas: the human the worshipper.

homo poetica: the human the singer.

homo providens: the human the planner.

homo pyrans: the human the fire-starter.

homo sapiens: the human the knower.

homo symbolicus: the human the symbolician.

human specificity, the question of: the question as to what is the
     specifically human characteristic. (Burke's logological definition
     of humankind is one attempt to offer a cluster of answers to this
     question.)

infrahuman: in hierarchic terms, the lower-than-human; in narratival
     terms, the prior-to-the-human.

infralingual: in hierarhic terms, the lower-than-lingual; in narratival
     terms, the prior-to-language.

lifeworld: the world as it impinges on and is organized by a given
     level of consciousness or a given hermeneutic; a way of saying
     "the world" with the kind of phenomenological accent that stresses
     the "inside" of things rather than the "outside" of things.

lifeworld, the human: the more elongated, more vacant experience of
     those creatures who have evolved to the level of language.

lifeworld, the infrahuman: the more immediate, more spontaneous exper-
     ience of those creatures who have yet to evolve to the level of
     language.

linguistics: most properly, acts, often in series, of the interpreting
     and the manipulating of the world through words, but traditionally
     used as a term meaning the science of such acts (which might
     otherwise be termed "metalinguistics").

sociolinguistics: acts, often in series, of interpreting and then
manipulating the world in accordance with the structures of
one's language and one's society; the logological science of
such acts (which might otherwise be termed "metasociolinguistics").

psychosociolinguistics: acts, often in series, of interpreting and
then manipulating the world in accordance with the structures
of one's psyche, one's society, and one's language; a way of
saying "sociolinguistics" but with stress on the psychological
in addition to the sociological.

metalinguistics: that branch of logology that attempts to extract
the general principles at work in the play of particular lin-
guistic acts.

logocentric: trapped within the circle of words.

logocentrics: acts, often in series, of interpreting and manipulating
the world from within the circle of language.

logocentrism: the doctrine that human meaning is radically and ines-
capably logocentric.

phonocentrism: the doctrine that the basic model of logocentric
human meaning should be the aural identification of differing
phonemes. (The poststructuralist Derrida accuses structuralism
of clinging to a phonocentrism.)

typocentrism: the doctrine that the basic model of logocentric
human meaning should be the visual identification of differing
marks. (The poststructuralists might be accused of clinging to
a kind of typocentrism.)

logology: in the broad sense, words about words; in the narrow sense,
words used systematically to chart the general principles at
work in the play of particular verbal acts; the quintessential
human science.

logologics: acts, often in series of turning words on themselves.

logological: pertaining to logology.

logologer or logologician: one who practices logologics; i.e., each
of us.

logologism: the doctrine that logologics dominate the realm of
human symbolic action and hence serve to mark that realm from
other realms of purpose.

logomachia: a struggle with or in or through words.

ludic: pertaining to play or to acts that are an end in themselves.

  utilic: pertaining to work or to acts that are a means to some end;
    the complement of the term "ludic."

narrative: a story organized by a storyteller, usually into
    sequences that assume causality and that unfold the choices
    of agents as these move through a given setting or as a given
    setting moves through them.

narratival: pertaining to narrative.

negatics: acts, often in series, of negation.

negatic: pertaining to negatics.

negation: a differing or a delaying or a canceling.

negationism: the doctrine that at the core of human experience is some
    kind of negation.

  structuralist negationism: a doctrine arguing that linguistic meaning
    is organized by the negatics of relational or diacritical fields
    of differentiation.

  deconstructionist negationism: a poststructuralist doctrine arguing
    that not only is human meaning based on diacritical differen-
    tiation but that the emergy of such meaning is most powerfully
    released by negating these negatics, i.e., by splitting apart
    these differentiations.

  Burkean negationism: a doctrine arguing that human meaning is
    grounded indeed in a movement of negatics but that the spaces
    in which these negatics operate are spaces filled with
    ethical, rhetorical, and practical, as well as intellectual,
    values.

  metanegationism: that branch of logology that attempts to extract
    the general principles at work in the play of particular acts
    of negationism.

negationist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of negationism.

negationist (adjective): pertaining to negationism.

  metanegationist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of metanega-
    tionism.

  metanegationist (adjective): pertaining to metanegationism.

negeme: the basic unit or method of negation.

neurotics: acts, often in series, of the repression of unresolvable psychological tensions.

nexus: a connection or a cluster of connections; for our purposes, the gap wherein a bundle of negatic transformations occur.

nihilism: an extreme negationist doctrine holding that all traditional values and beliefs are highly arbitrary at best -or completely unfounded at worst and hence that existence is senseless or useless or, put another way, basically "good for nothing."

noetic: pertaining to the intellect, especially as used by Walter Ong when he speaks of a ".noetic economy" (which might otherwise be termed a "symbolic").

poetics: acts, often in series, of the enjoyment of word-patterns as an end in themselves.

  extrapoetics: acts, often in series, of the use of word-patterns as a means to some practical end.

pragmatics: acts, often in series, aiming at survival in less-than-Edenic environs.

pragmatism: the doctrine, largely attributable to such American philosophers as William James and C. S. Peirce, that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is preeminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief; also the doctrine that the best model of intelligence is the "problem-solving" model.

pragmatist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of pragmatism.

pragmatist (adjective): pertaining to pragmatism.

praxics: acts, often in series, by which a tradition of conduct or art is embodied in matter and hence kept alive.

praxis: a customary practice or tradition.

pre-text: a text the writing or reading of which precedes another.

  post-text: a text the writing or reading of which follows another.

principle of axiosics, the: all acts involve the integration of impinging factors of experience into both esthetic and extra-estheic value-systems.

  principle of dialectical axiosics, the: a way of restating the principle of axiosics to stress that all acts of the attribution

of value are necessarily selective.

principle of binarics, the: we grasp meaning by means of binary oppo-
sitions or by means of categories of contrasting pairs.

principle of diacritics, the: significance does not reside in the
isolated letter or sound or word or event but in a field of
differentiative relationships.

principle of dialectics, the: the differentiations are made under
the pressures of conflict and change and hence are not perma-
nent nor total but instead perspectival and temporary.

principle of dramatics, the: we word-users naturally tend to cast
ourselves in terms of agents confronted by conflict, caught
in powerful, fluctuating emotions, and choosing from among
alternatives with very real consequences as we try to survive or,
for an added measure of safety, extend our will.

principle of entelechics, the: all systems tend to perfect themselves
through stages of development.

principle of linguistic entelechics: the language system, like all
other systems, tends to develop toward perfection.

principle of esthetics, the: all systems, but especially highly
reflexive human systems, can enjoy the transformations of
their patterns for their own sake.

principle of entelechial esthetics, the: a way of restating the
principle of esthetics to stress that what is often enjoyed
in the esthetic experience is the expansion of form through
stages of development.

principle of hermeneutics, the: all systems precede and follow their
acts with a process of interpretation and, at the level of highly
reflexive human systems, this process comes to reflect on
itself.

principle of synecdochical hermeneutics, the: a way of restating
the principle of hermeneutics to stress that these interpre-
tive systems involve "wholes" derived from "parts" and "parts"
seen in the light of the derived "wholes."

principle of ethics, the: the language system is a structure of
do's and don't's.

principle of hierarchics, the: all systems tend to move information and
to organize decision-making in a hierarchy.

principle of linguistic hierarchics, the: the language system takes
hierarchical form.

principle of entelechial hierarchics, the: a way of restating the
principle of hierarchics to stress that hierarchies, and cer-
tainly linguistic hierarchies, tend to perfect themselves,
adding new tiers, multiplying offices, and embellishing
titles.

principle of logologics, the: words are goaded to turn on themselves.

principle of negatics, the: language is a series of acts of
negation; the play of forces which shape the world of words
is largely the work of explosions of the negative.

principle of diacritical negatics, the: a way of restating the
principle of negatics to stress that these acts of negation
involve intellectual differentiation.

principle of ethical negatics, the: a way of restating the prin-
ciple of negatics to stress that these acts of negation involve
moral judgment.

principle of phatics, the: the language system reaches out to make
contact.

principle of poetics, the: the language system offers the enjoyment
of its own transformational forms.

principle of entelechial poetics, the: a way of restating the
principle of poetics to stress the growth of language through
developmental stages (within a given work, within a given
author's body of work, within a given genre, and so on) can
be enjoyed for its own sake.

principle of pragmatics, the: any system is a mode of survival.

principle of linguistic pragmatics, the: the language system is
a mode of survival.

principle of entelechial pragmatics, the: a way of restating the
principle of linguistic pragmatics to stress that the language
system tries to hold its own and, for an added measure of
safety, to expand its influence in less-than-Edenic environs.

principle of rhetorics, the: the language system is a structure of
persuasion.

principle of symbolics, the: we are all symbolicians; we are
created by, as individuals and as collectives, the symbols
we exchange.

principle of logocentric symbolics, the: a way of restating the
        principle of symbolics to stress that we are ringed in the
        symbolic exchanges that create us and that we are forced
        to use further symbolic exchanges to understand our plight
        as symbol-creatures.

principle of synecdochics, the: language is a series of acts of
        compulsive substitution; this substitution involves abstract
        classifications which develop new "wholes" from "parts" and
        then interpret new parts in terms of these wholes; and the
        rhythm of this process of interpretation of particular data
        by general categories is the rhythm of hermeneutics as it
        has been traditionally described.

reflexive: pertaining to reflection, especially self-reflection.
        (Some critics, notably Walter Ong, prefer the term "reflective,"
        but, since Burke uses the term "reflexive," I will follow suite.)

reflexolates: those given to self-reflection; i.e., each of us
        humans to some degree.

rhetoric, a: a system of persuasion.

rhetorics: acts, often in series, of the use of language to persuade;
        more traditionally, the science of such acts.

  metarhetorics: for our purposes here, that branch of logology
        attempting to go beyond the analysis of rhetorical acts to
        the general principles assumed by such analysis.

rhetorical: pertaining to rhetoric.

rhetorician: one who practices rhetoric; i.e., each of us.

  metarhetorician: one who practices metarhetoric.

science: a method of empirical observation and probable knowledge
        derived therefrom.

scientism: the doctrine holding that science can explain everything
        worth explaining or that science can give us certain rather than
        probable knowledge.

scientistic: pertaining to scientism.

semiotic, a: a system of signs.

semiotics: acts, often in series, of the exchange of signs.

semiotic: pertaining to the exchange of signs.

semiotic evolution: the gradual development of systems of signs and the means of transmitting, storing, and retrieving them.

semiotician: one who practices semiotics; one who interprets and conveys signs; i.e., each of us.

sign: something that represents something else.

symbol: signs that yield human depth, specifically that yield ethical guilt, hierarchical insecurity, and the foreknowledge of death.

structuralism: the doctrine that language is a structured system of meaning. In the broad sense, this term means something close to "systemism"; in the narrow sense, this term means the doctrines of Saussurean linguistics, especially the doctrine that language is a structured system of differences, as well as the application of these Saussurean principles to other disciplines.

structuralist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of structuralism.

structuralist (adjective): pertaining to structuralism.

sublation: as used by Gayatri Spivak, that process of meaning by which something is lifted into a larger context where it is retained, canceled or negated, and transformed all at the same time; a process of meaning involving, it seems to me, both hierarchics and negatics.

substantialism: the doctrine, the virulently anti-structuralist doctrine, that there are substances in existence to which words can refer in roughly the manner of a one-to-one correspondence.

substantialist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of substantialism.

substantialist (adjective): pertaining to substantialism.

symbolic, a: a system of symbols.

symbolics: acts, often in series, of the exchange of symbolic meanings.

symbolic: the quality of representing something in such a way that more is conveyed than a mere intellectual grasp of difference and that some appreciation of human depth is communicated as well.

symbolical: pertaining to the use of symbols.

symbolician: one who engages in symbolic acts and who receives and sends symbolic messages; i.e., each of us.

system: a bundle of transformations, according to Piaget; a pattern of interaction between an organized whole and its environment; a series of less-than-random exchanges.

systemic: pertaining to a system.

systemism: the doctrine that the universe is composed of interacting systems, all exchanging energy in accordance with the invariances of all systemic action.

systemist (noun): one who spreads the doctrines of systemism.

systemist (adjective): pertaining to systemism.

systemistically: in the manner of systemism.

tautological: the quality of bending back or returning back upon oneself. (Logology is a tautological development in the evolution of what Hegel might call the Universal Spirit or Geist or of what I might call the Divine Bodymindspirit.

terministic, a: a system of terms.

terministics: acts, often in series, of the defining and applying of a given vocabulary.

timespace: a term given to the kinds of delays and differences carved out by human language.

timespace network: the kind of "lengthier locale," the kind of "longer, wider moment" which we users of language occupy.

ubiquitous: all around us--like language and its problems.

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