

Debra Hawhee:

Moving Bodies. Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language

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Moving Bodies. Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language is a publication in the Studies in Rhetoric/Communication series. From the author's "Acknowledgments" (pp. ix-x) the reader learns that the book is the result of seven years' work and that previous articles form parts of chapters three and six. The book is divided into the following parts: an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, nineteen pages of endnotes followed by a list of works cited and an index. In a very traditional and modest form – this book on bodies contains only one illustration – Hawhee successfully delivers a new and exciting view on the central concepts used by Kenneth Burke (1897-1993). In addition to the Burkean canon, Hawhee digs into otherwise forgotten or hitherto unknown sources by Burke himself and those who influenced him. Furthermore, she reads Burke's personal life into the works with his perception of the body as her guide. Starting with Burke's work from the 1920s, Hawhee combines biography and genealogy as she chronicles the birth and the development of Burke's view on the human body. Along the way she takes up the contributions of other Burkean scholars.

In the "Introduction" (pp. 1-11) Hawhee makes a very important remark about the body's place in Burke's critical thinking and philosophy building. Whereas, initially, she thought of the body as Burke's counterpart to reason, she now realizes that "[b]odies, for Burke, enable critical reflection on meaning-making from an anti-Cartesian, noncognitive, nonrational perspective – that is, from a perspective that does not begin by privileging reason or conscious thought" (p. 2). As Hawhee points out, only by delving into other academic fields, as Burke did, is it possible to get at such Burkean concepts as 'perspective by incongruity': "By considering in turn bodies stultified through mystical experience, illness, or anaesthesia; animated by adrenaline, or ideas; poked and prodded by psychiatrists and physicians, Burke developed a transdisciplinary perspective on bodies and the fascinating and sometimes peculiar ways that clenching bodies, deformed bodies, recalcitrant bodies, or dancing bodies all sneak up on language" (p. 5). Hawhee is not, of course, ignorant of the problems in contemporary body scholarship, but she hopes to evade its impasses by following Burke's lead. She thereby discovers how seldom Burkean scholars detect the vigor and physical joy of the communications they analyze through his concepts (p. 108).

Chapter 1, "Bodies as Equipment for Moving (from Artist to Audience)" (pp. 12-29), deals with Burke's short fiction and his music criticism of the 1920s. Hawhee here focuses on the health of the fiction's characters; it seems that "healthy bodies are perhaps suspect" (p. 15) and that a "close relation between ill health and artistic capacity" exists (p. 16). Burke's goal is a critique of "an efficient system of citizen production" (p. 16) and a defense of art, which (in Burke's own words) "may

be of value purely through preventing a society from becoming too assertively, too hopelessly, itself” (p. 20). Burke only spent two years writing music criticism, but Hawhee includes this in her analysis because it sheds light on Burke’s understanding of rhetoric – as stated in the title of the chapter. To Burke, the rhetorical effect of music performances includes the audience’s bodies to a higher degree than other art forms. As Hawhee writes, the cluster of music, body, and rhetoric lead Burke to formulate “the theory of form as eloquence [...] of art as rhetorical” (p. 27).

In chapter 2, “Burke’s Mystical Method” (pp. 30-54),¹ Hawhee presents several Russian mystics who were introduced to Burke’s circle in New York in the 1920s. Burke and his poet friends shared a profound interest in rhythm, and their interest found an outlet in the dances performed by pupils from George Ivanovich Gurdjieff’s institute. In his mystic philosophy as well as in his training system and dance performances, Gurdjieff’s aim was to “alter existing habits radically, to revitalize bodies, and to communicate sacred and vital knowledge” in the reader, the performing bodies, and the audience (p. 40). Burke and his friends were especially moved by a dance performance in which the dancers froze their movements at a certain time. When Burke later, in 1935, wrote a review of the American Ballet he found it machinelike compared to Gurdjieff and contemplated the dancing body and language: “Perhaps the dance can illuminatingly bewilder our linguistic habits of mind, and tends ultimately to become mystical, because it is thus always living in the ‘eternal now,’ making its pasts and futures by non-logical leaps into the present tenses of other verbs. As such it is a most vital art” (p. 44).

As documented in *Attitudes toward History* (1937), mysticism inspired Burke to a philosophical position favoring openness and transformation (p. 48). Referring to Burke’s use of William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) as well as Ralph Barton Perry’s biography (1935), Hawhee contends that “the mysticism in *Attitudes toward History* helps show how Burke’s bodily theories so easily evolve into general theories of language and symbolic action” (p. 48). Hawhee lists the cluster of terms Burke acquired from James: language, action, frames of acceptance and rejection, and attitudes (p. 48), and notes that James inspired Burke to continue his work on ‘perspective by incongruity’ (p. 51).

Burke’s aspiration and lifelong philosophical battle is coined in his wish to ‘see around the corner’. As Hawhee argues, it seems that mysticism needed science to make a balanced foundation for his philosophy. The next two chapters, then, account for Burke’s involvement with science – not to forsake mysticism but to combine it with what could be culled from the fields of science.

The title of chapter 3 is ambiguous (as are several of the titles and subtitles): “Burke on Drugs” (pp. 55-74). The chapter chronicles the development of Burke’s terms ‘efficiency’ and ‘piety’, and centers on his occupation as a researcher with the John D. Rockefeller Foundation 1926-27 and from 1928 until the mid 1930s. In the last period Burke worked with drugs at the Bureau of Social Hygiene (BSH). It has often been pointed out that this work helped him understand Coleridge’s opium addiction, but Hawhee contends that it also helped him “formulate more pointedly his concepts of efficiency and piety” (p. 56). Efficiency, for Burke, becomes articulated through his experience with the BSH bureaucracy. Bureaucracy lacks poetic force; bureaucratic efficiency equals artistic inefficiency, or as Hawhee writes: “Efficiency [...] averts commitment, intimacy, and drive, therefore precluding the sort of intense, reflective, protracted involvement with the subject Burke favors in *Counter-Statement*” (p. 60).

¹ Several of the chapters have subtitles and open with quotations from Burke’s texts; only the main titles are cited here.

Burke's resistance to efficiency also helped him formulate the term 'piety', seeing this not only as based on an ethical evaluation, but also as "an act of creating linkages – 'the sense of what properly goes with what' – and from these linkages different ethical models, different 'altars,' emerge" (p. 69). Hawhee's explanation of piety as "a bodily sense of how something is done in a particular context" (p. 72) brings *decorum* to mind.

Burke's interest in the body had begun with writing about music and mysticism. As Hawhee shows, at the BSH his interest in the rhythmic body intensified, but the BSH taught Burke that "muscular imagination" can be influenced by more than music, poetry, and ritual dance – it can also be influenced by drugs (p. 67). In an interview (1980-81) he explained the reciprocity between author and language: "[J]ust as with the cocaine addict and the addict's substance, a writer uses terms and the terms use the writer. The reciprocal movement produces a fusion of the substance and body, producing the 'user' anew" (pp. 73-74).

Chapter 4, "From the Rhetoric of Science to the Science of Rhetoric" (pp. 75-91), accounts for other important insights Burke gained at the BSH. It exposed him, as Hawhee writes, to "the scientific dimensions of rhetoric, language, and meaning-making by taking him, quite literally, deeper into the body" (p. 75). So far, rhetoric-of-science scholars have ignored the BSH years though they use the "conceptual legacies" of that period, that is, terms like 'identification', 'dramatism', 'bureaucratization of the imaginative', and 'terministic screens' (p. 75). What caught Burke's eye at the BSH was a relatively new discipline, endocrinology. According to Hawhee, endocrinology offered him an explanation, alternative to that offered by psychoanalysis, of the relationship between mind and body. Moreover, it helped him formulate "his contributions to the rhetoric of science through the science of rhetoric" (p. 76): "Endocrinology provided a window into the body's internal processes and thus helped Burke to formulate a multidirectional, somatic response to the science of psychoanalysis" (p. 83). When the scientists talked about hormones, they often used communication metaphors for the highly complicated processes. Experiments with insulin injections intensified Burke's awareness of the body as "the mind's mimetic, reciprocal counterpart" (p. 86) and helped him realize that affect and its interpretation can be reversed. In a footnote on p. 322 in *Attitudes toward History* (Hawhee often finds her most persuasive arguments in Burke's sprawling footnotes), Burke says of the body-mind relationship: "The two-way relationship between the mental and the physical [...] can lead from the physical to the mental as well as from the mental to the physical. The mimetics of agitation may lead to a state of agitation, or a state of agitation may lead to the mimetics of agitation. Hence, such a state of mind as guilt or fear may induce its corresponding visceral expression (in glandular and nervous actions), or *v.v.*" (p. 87). Thus, "the somatic line of inquiry" begun in *Permanence and Change* is here "folded into interpretive, critical, and ultimately rhetorical acts" (p. 91).

In *Permanence and Change*, p. 237, Burke asked whether it is not also an occupation to be a hunchback (p. 93). That depends, this reviewer is inclined to think, on the hunchback's capacities or inclinations to shape his perspective. Inclinations can be a gift, a practiced art, resulting from a deformity. Chapter 5, "Seeing 'Deviance' as Inclination" (pp. 92-105), introduces two authors, Emil Ludwig and Ernst Kretschmer, who inspired Burke to take bodily differences seriously when including 'deviance' in his conceptual system. In 1926 or 1927 Burke translated Ludwig's book *Genie und Character* into English (*Genius and Character*). This work on biography builds, among other things, on 'second-wave phrenology' – the renewed interest, at the end of the nineteenth century, in studies of the cranium and in physiognomy – and identifies the body's role in a person's accomplishments; in Hawhee's terminology, this is called 'constitutional analysis'. Ludwig apparently

mixed scientific, nonscientific, and quasi-scientific arguments, and Hawhee's characterization of his method must be taken as an understatement: "Constitutional analysis therefore relied on broad swathes of data, though the question of its validity nevertheless remains an open one" (p. 96). Kretschmer also used constitutional analysis but wanted it to be an exact medical discipline (p. 97). His works, *Physique and Character: An Investigation of the Nature of Constitution and of the Theory of Temperament* (English translation 1925) and *The Psychology of Men of Genius* (English translation 1931), both influenced Burke's bodily concepts. As Hawhee writes, Kretschmer "replaces questions of deviance and inferiority with notions of body-as-inclination" (p. 99). While Dewey was the inspiration for the concept of occupational psychosis, Kretschmer inspired Burke to frame the concept with "a certain kind of psychiatric license to consider psychosis in this more general way, as a matter of emphasis or what Burke elsewhere and more famously calls 'a certain way of thinking that went with a certain way of living'" (p. 100). In Kretschmer, Burke also found a useful definition of the concept of genius: "By emphasizing the motive side of genius, Burke makes room for a version of genius not rarified or magical at all, but simply differently inclined. Kretschmer effectively helped him to blur the distinction between deviance and genius, and in doing so to redistribute and redefine the two categories as propensities" (p. 102).

Surprisingly, in Chapter 6, "Body Language" (pp. 106-124), Hawhee is tempted to end the book: "By now it should be clear that Burke's transdisciplinary quest to theorize language and rhetoric consistently led him to bodily matters and back again, to language's edges" (p. 107). Luckily, she chooses to continue her investigation by introducing another of Burke's transdisciplinary forays, viz. into Richard Paget's *Human Speech: Some Observations, Experiments and Conclusions as to the Nature, Origin, Purpose and Possible Improvement of Human Speech* (1930). To trace Paget's influence, Hawhee finds, is to be given "an alternative, somatic genealogy of Burkean dramatism, symbolic action, identification, and attitude" (p. 108). Paget did not separate the muscular efforts involved in phonation because laryngeal structures mimed bodily postures and gestures (p. 107). Thus, in his physio-philological theory, spoken language was regarded as a physical act involving the whole person – body and feelings – in an unconscious way. In Burke's constant return to the language of dance, Hawhee detects his interest in and respect for Paget's "Darwinian theory of verbal choreography and its status as poetics". She also relates Burke's emphasis on rhetoric's energetic force – as well as his central concepts 'nonsymbolic motion/symbolic action' – to Paget (p. 124).

Chapter 7, "Welcome to the Beauty Clinic" (pp. 125-155), deals with 'purification' and 'purge'. The main inspiration is, of course, Aristotle's idea of catharsis. Yet, Burke associates the two concepts with a political and ecological context by also including the Greek word *katharmata* to denote bodily and other 'waste': "As a term *katharmata* thereby applies as equally to dirty bathwater as it does to dirty words, and dirty bodily processes covered over in what Burke calls the Beauty Clinic" (p. 145). The first sentence of the chapter reads: "In the 1950s Kenneth Burke turned his attention to shit" (p. 125), and Hawhee here takes her point of departure in Burke's own deteriorating health, his fiction, and his writings on erotic, urinary, and excremental secretions. The main part of the latter texts belongs, clearly, to the lesser-known parts of Burke's work. However, he did include philological and etymological explanations of dirty words in his better known books, e.g. in *A Grammar of Motive* in which, as Hawhee notes, "following a Paget-inflected sound association [...] *faces* morphs easily into *faeces*, and the word *towards* found in so many titles (including Burke's own) becomes *turds*" (p. 125). In this chapter, Hawhee also points out how, in his writings from the 1950s, Burke develops what was to become "his preferred shorthand for body-language

relations”, namely the pivotal conceptual pair “nonsymbolic motion/symbolic action”, which should be viewed as an entity, not divided as many scholars tend to do (p. 146). As Hawhee writes, “the idea of a ‘Symbolic of Motives’ isolated from bodies and rhetoric contains its own death sentence: without warm and breathing bodies, words and ideas – the realm of symbolic – become lifeless” (p. 128).

It seems natural that Hawhee’s “Conclusion” (pp. 156-167) includes Burke’s review of the second edition of J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (1975). In the review, Burke compares Austin’s speech-act theory to his own theory of ‘dramatism’ and the key concepts surrounding the nonsymbolic motion/symbolic action pair are presented: contiguity, correlation, and duplication. Here again Hawhee underlines that ‘nonsymbolic motion/symbolic action’ is “an irreducible pair, contiguous but distinct” (p. 158). As to their relationship, nonsymbolic motion not only precedes symbolic action, “its material movements also condition the possibility for symbolic action” (p. 159). Because we can feel and talk about our sensations, body and language not only correspond to but also duplicate our experiences: “Language therefore enables humans to press past the radical immanence of the body, to redouble motion and extend it outward” (p. 166).

Moving Bodies is a remarkable book and an original addition to Burkean scholarship. Hawhee’s contribution is a corporal reading of first and foremost lesser-known texts, which now must find their way into the Burkean corpus. Add to this her thorough research of texts that inspired Burke.

To this reviewer the book represents a fine opportunity to become better acquainted with a thinker whose influence on American letters can hardly be exaggerated. The content is well organized, and in each chapter the author sums up what has been said and gives short previews of what will follow. This helps the reader’s struggle to follow Burke’s search for answers to the question: What makes human act?

Methodologically, Hawhee’s reading successfully evades the ‘intention trap’ liable to traditional biographical criticism (cf. p. 128). Furthermore, she balances narratives and critical discussions in a way that inspires further questions. I agree, for instance, that a term such as ‘attitude’ cannot be fathomed body-less, but does Burke never construct his body discursively? What about the bad health competition that occurs in the correspondence with his friend? From a performance angle, it might be fruitful to study Burke’s interest in dance in combination with his interest in speech-acts: The dancer is the dance, one might argue. Does the reciprocity between mind and body account for this instance of an illocutionary act?

These questions may be seen as evidence of the book’s relevance not only to Burkean scholars, but to body scholars and students of the tradition behind modern rhetoric as well.

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