

Implications on the Practice and Study of Kenneth Burke's Idea of a "Public Relations Counsel with a Heart"

Peter M. Smudde

Kenneth Burke presents his idea of "a public relations counsel with a heart" in Attitudes Toward History. This idea is a springboard to applying Burke's system to the symbolic action of public relations in practical ways. This paper takes a look at the philosophy behind Burke's idea and translates that philosophy into a practical methodology for public relations practitioners that relies on identification, terms for order and the pentad. This paper extends Burke's system by describing how to directly apply this philosophy and methodology explicitly to the practice (and teaching) – the symbolic action – of public relations.

KEY CONCEPTS Kenneth Burke, public relations, dramatism, logology

Peter M. Smudde (Ph.D., Wayne State University, 2000) is an Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, Whitewater, WI 53190-1790. An earlier version of this paper, which was drawn in part from the author's doctoral dissertation (Bernard L. Brock, advisor) completed at Wayne State University was presented at the 2002 National Communication Association held in New Orleans, Louisiana, November 21-24, 2002.

How often do professionals have the time or opportunity to bridge theory and practice in their work? Chances are they don't do this activity often or often enough to take advantage of its importance. Certainly higher-education institutions, conferences and articles in public relations-related publications, for example, provide opportunities to formally build these bridges, but once those experiences are completed, the likelihood that the bridges are maintained may be quite slim. As one bridges both sides of the intellectual chasm, practice can inform theory and theory can inform practice, resulting in a more informed and insightful perspective about things.

The field of public relations, like other fields, has a research base that supports the extant knowledge about public relations' many dimensions. In the corporate world of public relations, the realm of message effectiveness is key, where measuring this phenomenon is largely a quantitative endeavor of opinion-gathering; whereas, qualitative approaches, if employed, are frequently used to support quantitative findings through such techniques as analyses of verbatim comments on questionnaires or focus groups.

A formal theoretical framework based on a theory of rhetoric that is useful to and used by practitioners can illuminate the qualitative effectiveness of and the planning for public relations action, but such a framework is scarcely (if ever) used.

Building a useable bridge between rhetorical theory and public-relations practice, then, is an essential and needed approach for planning, understanding and evaluating public relations action. Kenneth Burke gives us a framework for theory-practice bridge building about effective public relations—to become a “public relations counsel with a heart.” That framework both humanistic and dramatistic, is a valuable one to explain how it can apply to the practical work of public relations professionals.

Burke’s system is open to others’ views and other applications (cf. Chesebro, 1992), including analyses of public relations. Indeed, the author has found Burke’s ideas to be useful in his career as a public relations professional, consultant and educator, and these experiences provided the inspiration for the ideas in this article. For example, Burke’s view of rhetoric is sufficiently broad that it would illuminate public relations activity like special events, crisis and issue communication, corporate speakers, news releases, and press conferences as symbolic acts. Burke’s system is also useful as a way to think about and enact campaigns and strategic plans, for example, as the foundation for broad-based symbolic action.

The first and only time that Kenneth Burke formally addresses public relations is in his work, *Attitudes Toward History*. He says in that book that an alternative title for it would be, “Manual of Terms for a Public Relations Counsel with a Heart” (Burke, 1937/1984, p. i). This idea smacks of a specialized pragmatic dimension to not only the book itself, but also to Burke’s larger system. To this end, *Attitudes Toward History* serves as a springboard to a practical application of his work to public relations or even other areas of communication practiced in industry.

So, what would be the nature of a “public relations counsel with a heart?” And from a practical perspective, how could such a counsel apply Burke’s system to the symbolic action of public relations—especially in a way that helps public relations officials do their work? This paper will answer these questions first, by examining ideas behind Burke’s humanist orientation of a “public relations counsel with a heart”; second, by describing how public relations practitioners can apply Burke’s “tools” for dramatistic analysis of situations and their work; and third, by concluding with an holistic, Burkean view of public relations symbolic action that suggests some of the things we learn about public relations and the application of Burke’s ideas from this paper’s approach.

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND A “PUBLIC RELATIONS COUNSEL WITH A HEART”

We know much about the historical evolution of the practice of public relations over the past century and even beyond (cf. Cheney & Vibbert, 1987; Cutlip, 1994, 1995, 1997; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994; Ewen, 1996). Prior to Burke’s writing *Attitudes Toward History*, the practice of public relations was still in its infancy, at least as a formal organizational function and certainly as a unique business line. The formal practice of “public relations” does not emerge until 1889, as Westinghouse competed with Edison General Electric over the establishment of alternating electrical current over direct current, and Westinghouse created the first, formal public relations position (Cutlip, 1995, p. 202; Cutlip, et al., 1994, p. 98). Until this point, the responsibilities that eventually came to be associated with public relations were referred to under terms

like "publicity," "promotional activity" and "press agent," all of which were closely associated with coverage of corporate activity in the press. The term and function of "public relations" then was still fairly new but not without a heavy load of semantic baggage, as it "became institutionalized in the large public agencies that arose to meet several environmental challenges [of social order (labor unions), political order (Roosevelt's New Deal), economic order (the Great Depression), and technological order (radio and 'mass culture')]" (Cheney and Vibbert, 1987, p. 169).

During the time that Burke wrote his earliest material, public relations already had a bad name. In Burkean terms, public relations and those who practiced it were (and are) seen through a negative terministic screen. That screen seems based on negative first impressions. As Grunig and Hunt (1984) put it, "in its early development, public relations was equated with persuasion and/or propaganda [i.e., a secular approach to 'propagating the faith' about an organization]. Most people still have that concept of public relations today, explaining the common suspicion, mistrust, and even fear of it" (p. 21). For example, growing out from the labor movements in the early 1900s, primarily in the steel, oil, meat-packing and railroad industries, and fertilized by muckraking journalistic practices about what was going on, both business and government alike adopted aggressive practices of public communication and defense (Cutlip, 1997, p. 23). So in the eyes of business and government leaders, public relations was seen as an essential means to combat hostility and court public favor, but in the eyes of the public it was seen as a way to manipulate people's thinking about issues. Even more recently, as Cutlip (1995) tells us, contemporary social critics claim that the ideal of "free and robust debate" that is at the heart of our culture is in grave danger of being "seriously imbalanced by the large, money-stuffed war chests and armies of skilled communicators that the powerful special interests can put into the field of debate" (pp. 280-281).

From William Henry Vanderbilt's 1882 statement, "the public be damned," (Cutlip, 1995, p. 188) to today's sense and reference from terms like "spin" and "spinmeisters," negative terministic screens have long guided people's thinking about public relations and public relations professionals. In this light, public relations might be seen as heartless, as Burke seems to have thought. At worst, public relations may have been seen (then as now) as an unscrupulous endeavor of wordsmithing or shameless image-mongering. Cases like the Exxon Valdez support such a negative terministic screen, or frame of rejection. But cases like the Tylenol poisonings show that a more positive terministic screen, or frame of acceptance, can apply. It's the latter that Burke may have wanted to establish, if only because he saw that a comic corrective about public relations practitioners of his time was needed to help them be more heartfelt in their work.

Given this context, Burke provides terms in *Attitudes Toward History* that help define a frame of acceptance with a literal screen of terms in that book for people, including "publicists" (his term for public relations practitioners), to use. More specifically, Burke's analysis assists in setting up a frame of acceptance about the work of publicists; that they observe a didactic strategy "by coaching the imagination [of people] in obedience to critical postulates" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 75). That is, publicists try to inspire people to analyze their situations critically, spark creative ways to address situations symbolically, and achieve consubstantiality with what is going on in human situations. If one observes various possibilities in a situation, the carrying-out, the "bureaucratizing" of one of them stems from the historic texture surrounding it. Publicists would likely place themselves in a position where they can empower people with humanistic attitudes, motives, and symbols of authority to act for the good of society. In

other words, publicists' "natural tendency of [their] symbolic enterprise is towards [an] integration of symbolic superstructures" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 184).

Publicists, accordingly, have a significant role in history. Their work moderates the shifts of superstructural symbols for new ones, a perspective that predates and is congruent with Kuhn's (1972) concept of paradigm shifts. As Burke (1937/1984) says,

Obedience to reigning symbols of authority is in itself natural and wholesome. The need to reject them is painful and bewildering . . . [T]hose in possession of the authoritative symbols tend to drive the opposition into a corner, by owning the priests (publicists, educators) who will rebuke the opposition for its disobedience to the reigning symbols. The opposition abandons some of the symbolic ingredients and makes itself "ready to take over" other symbolic ingredients. (p. 226)

Although publicists attempt to maintain something of the status quo through appropriate frames of acceptance or rejection (perhaps doing so by employing some strategic ambiguity), they also provide some impetus into what ways the reigning symbols may not be completely discarded but somehow revised or "bridged" into newer symbolisms. Again, publicists integrate symbolic superstructures, which also include revisions to them. In Burke's terms, "[O]ne must not adopt the polemic, pamphleteering attitude so quickly, unless he [sic] is more interested in winning an argument than in understanding a process" (1937/1984, p. 327).

Within the context of *Attitudes Toward History*, a publicist is not a positivist who merely reports on social situations, but a humanist whose focus is on inducing cooperation between an organization and its publics. In Burke's view, a publicist's chief interest is to tend to the integrity of and educate people about symbols and symbolic superstructures within the historical context of a society, which would include organizations. In this capacity, a publicist, as a coach of attitudes (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 322) or even as a writer of "secular prayers" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 323), "would be a perfectly balanced sub-whole in a perfectly balanced super-whole. He [sic] would be the microcosm that matched the macrocosm. He [sic] would define his identity by membership in one single all-inclusive corporation" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 253).

From Burke's perspective, the role of a "public relations counsel with a heart" would be to cultivate a "charitable attitude toward people that is required for purposes of persuasion and co-operation, but at the same time maintain our shrewdness concerning the simplicities of 'cashing in'" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 166). This humanistic role requires this counsel to "give attention to superstructural adjustments" (Burke, 1937/1984, p. 184) in the symbolisms of a society—i.e., enact events from the flow of experience and make sense of them intersubjectively, as Weick (1979) would say. Put in another way, public relations officials make sense of the symbolic action of present, past and anticipated future enacted environments, which reflect an order of things, to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics.

A METHODOLOGY FOR A "PUBLIC RELATIONS COUNSEL WITH A HEART"

With this understanding of something of the humanist philosophy behind a "public relations counsel with a heart," what can be said of a methodology for such a counsel? That is, how can Burke's system of rhetoric and criticism help a public relations practitioner? Here it becomes apparent that Burke's later dramatic work is needed to

augment the humanistic principles in *Attitudes Toward History*. The answer to this question, then, mainly lies in using Burke's tools for critical analysis— terms for order, identification, and the dramatistic pentad— individually and, especially, as a system. Separately and together these tools reveal important dimensions at both the micro- and the macro-levels about the symbolic action of public relations.

In a nutshell, a methodology for a public relations counsel with a heart would be a dramatistic one. For example, an issue's evolution can work for an organization in a proactive way to establish a new order that is at least as close as possible to what it wants. Issues that matter to an organization and its publics are literal dramas that have scenes, acts, agents, agencies and purposes. The dramatistic quest for an organization is to inspire cooperation between itself and its publics by enacting an issue's drama that is one with which audiences will identify. The public relations discourse that is used enacts that drama and an issue's dramatic dimensions, which also invites the involvement of publics with the organization. Let's look at how public relations professionals can apply Burke's tools to their work at the micro- and macro-levels for a more heartfelt public relations counsel.

Applying Terms for Order to Public Relations

Burke's cycle of terms for order (Burke, 1961/1970) is his tool for tracing out history terministically, and it can help us understand the context, even the drama, of the symbolic action of public relations. A logological approach can help us understand the dynamics of such symbolic action through order, pollution, guilt, purification through either mortification or victimage, and redemption (Burke, 1961/1970; Brock, 1995, 1999). Describing issues logologically chronicles the rhetorical context and the evolution of an issue to restore order for an organization. Figure 1 shows and briefly describes the general logological progression of issues across four phases, all of which echo Burke's terms for order.

FIGURE 1
Four-phase logological progression of issues.

PHASE 1: ORDER	PHASE 2: POLLUTION & ASSIGNMENT OF GUILT	PHASE 3: PURIFICATION	PHASE 4: REDEMPTION
The state of things about and for an organization what it stands for, and what it offers is stable.	Something from within, without or both upsets or significantly changes the stability of things and blame or responsibility must be assigned for it on the public stage.	Efforts to make things right gradually secure the public's approval, where the success of one side over the other becomes increasingly apparent, especially as an organization accepts responsibility of its own accord or is saddled with responsibility by others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For an organization that secures the public's favor, final vindication of it is given & a new order is created, which would bolster its image and credibility. • For an organization that does not secure the public's favor, it must cope with the new order, which (adversely) affects the organization's reputation and credibility.

Intuitively, to properly understand an issue, action, event, or the like requires us to know about the things going on around it that are (and maybe are not) related to it. With symbolic action as the basis for public relations, this firmament of properties from social situations are "systematically (that is, not incidentally) *relevant* for discourse" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 11) and make up context. Minimally, participants, their acts, their agencies, their purposes, the scene, and other discourses all make up something's context. The rhetorical (i.e. logological and dramatistic) and the organizational natures of a situation must be enacted and documented, especially in the form of a strategic public relations plan that supports an overall business plan and has specific measurable objectives that link to the business plan's objectives.

In terms of the organizing process for public relations, it is from an equivocal environment that people select certain features and make sense of them intersubjectively for social situations. For public relations organizing, the uncertainty within an environment poses rhetorical opportunities. While reducing this uncertainty about what is going on, public relations officials also identify areas for possible symbolic action. In this way, practitioners define context together (perhaps with others in an organization, like management, attorneys, engineers, etc.) by reducing rhetorical equivocality. In a very real way, as public relations officials reduce the rhetorical equivocality to define context, they enact Weick's (1979) recipe, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say" (p. 133). Practitioners' enactments for rhetorical opportunities comprise samples from the flow of experience, first, taken by each person individually for closer inspection and, next, selected in a group process of "sensemaking" (Weick, 1979, 1995) sorting out which enactments (including previously retained ones) make the most sense to share publicly in ways that would induce cooperation between a company and its publics (Smudde, 2003).

In rhetorical terms, that environment, or context, frames a social drama enacted in public relations discourse. Context subsumes the logological progression of social moments that creates what Duncan (1968/1989) calls a "social bond" that is attained "through identification which occurs in the enactment of guilt redeemed through victimage" (p. 436). These social moments can be thought of as texts—the symbolic action of individuals either individually or collectively. Within the scope of public relations (as depicted in Figure 1), the context concerns the logological progression of things, beginning with a stable order just before something changes it. From there, context addresses who or what may have caused the problem (whether internal, external or a mix of both), their level of responsibility for it, and how order can be restored for the organization and its publics. In this way, context is as much retrospective as it is prospective about the drama of a particular event, issue, situation, or other enacted environments. That is, public relations officials can not only make sense of how the order of things changed, but they can also plan to ethically pollute the order of things to achieve certain objectives, like those related to the launch of a unique product into a market or the introduction of a new public policy to remedy a social situation.

Achieving Identification in Public Relations

Symbol systems place humans in the realm of action—symbolic action—and beyond mere biological motion. For Burke, rhetoric is a function of language "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Burke, 1950/1969). This definition expands the traditional notion of rhetoric as persuasion—that rhetoric is an element of symbolic action, which includes persuasion and

identification. Identification entails simultaneous unity and division—it is rooted in the inherent division among people because of their physical separateness, and language helps them bridge that condition to become “consubstantial,” to find common ground or “substance” (Burke, 1950/1969). Indeed, identification is perhaps the most-often used concept of Burke’s when applied to the study of organizational communication and, specifically, public relations.

Public relations officials work hard to make sense of the environment that an organization faces to find common ground, or inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics. A big part of achieving this goal is to figure out how to make selected events in an environment resonate with other people inside and outside the company; whereas, they craft key messages about it with which target publics will identify and develop a strategic plan to guide the application of those messages and other aspects of public relations efforts. Based on what’s understood about an organization’s internal and external environments, key messages reflect different but related aspects of any event’s or issue’s drama. Key messages are not the final public relations texts; they make up the most important points of an issue that corporate officials want to emphasize with target publics in the texts (e.g. press releases, speeches, backgrounders, press conferences, etc.) they do prepare. The key messages must also reflect areas of common ground, striking a favorable balance between the organization’s point of view and the audiences’ concerns and needs. Key messages serve as a kind of outline or list of the dominant features in the issue’s drama that are enacted textually, based on the context and in any combination of public relations discourse genres.

To be useful during the planning and execution of public relations symbolic action, key messages are documented simply, shared, and retained with corporate leaders and public relations officials managing an issue. The main reason for this approach is to maintain message consistency and mutual understanding among corporate people involved in the issue. To capture the key messages that organizational officials want publics to understand, buy into, and act on is to help ensure consistency. And having a central team that orchestrates and is the authority for communication to all audiences also keeps consistency intact.

In general terms, a public relations official must also do his or her homework on the organization’s principal audiences, which ones must be targeted, and what their demographics are. The key is to enact dramas about something (e.g. issues, product, service, event) that are consistent with or complementary to target publics’ dramas about those things. Research into audiences can be both quantitative and qualitative, using methods like surveys, focus groups, and secondary research from other sources (e.g. other department analyses, periodicals and published articles, and government reports) about target audiences. Stakeholder analysis, too, can be a valuable approach, as it “demands the ability to determine where parties agree and disagree in terms of what they believe to be facts regarding an issue and the evaluation of it” (Heath, 1997, p. 29). How to go about such research will not be addressed here, since it is outside the scope of this paper and is covered well in other sources, like Bivins (1999, P. 13-24), Sinickas (1997), sTACKS (2002), and Wilcox, et al. (1995, p. 157-179). The important point is that the target publics are the focus of the key messages, which guide practitioners in their symbolic action—to make sure the salient points about the enacted drama are emphasized with publics effectively, ethically, and strategically. Public relations professionals can measure and nurture identification with publics through audience analyses, ensuring that the right messages are in the right discourse at the right time.

Public relations officials enact an issue's drama in specific kinds of public relations texts that present that drama in the best ways for publics and emphasize key messages about it. The genre set for public relations includes at least the 30 kinds of discourse listed in Figure 2. Although the logological context has been defined and key messages have been developed, the actual discourse that weaves the two together to enact the drama must be prepared, focusing on appropriate pendantic aspects in the entire drama. The subsequent discourse about an issue enacts the drama public relations officials defined logologically. As Eggin's and Martin (1997) put it, "an interactant setting out to achieve a particular cultural goal is most likely to initiate a text of a particular genre, and that text is most likely to unfold in a particular way – but the potential for alternatives is inherent in the dialogic relationship between language and context" (p. 236).

During the preparation of individual public relations texts, an audience-centered approach may result in some refinement of key messages, as public relations officials pragmatically apply their knowledge of the context and effective, ethical communication to the task at hand. Furthermore, a text can only be effective if the writing works well for the audience in the right genre. Whatever the purpose of public relations discourse may be (e.g. to persuade, inform, debunk, or motivate), that purpose guides practitioners in how they use language in selected genres to help structure people's thinking about an issue.

FIGURE 2
Genre set for public relations discourse.

Prepared statements	Biographical statements	Video news programs
Press releases	Press conferences or briefings	Corporate reports (annual reports and public-interest reports)
Video news releases (VNR)	Press kits (sometimes called "communication packages")	Corporate image pieces (brochures, Web sites, advertisements)
Photo news releases (PNR)	Interviews	
Audio news releases (ANR)	Backgrounders	Pitch letters Pitch calls
Matt releases	Articles	Written correspondence (printed or electronic)
Public service announcements (PSA) Fact sheets	White papers	Conversations (tele phone, face-to-face, or real-time video confer- ence calls)
Tip sheets of experts' credentials, availability & comments on specific matters	Case studies	
FAQs (frequently asked questions)	Speeches	
	Advertorials	
	Newsletters	

To meet someone's needs on their terms – to achieve consubstantiality – increases the probability that the message will be accepted and understood, then subsequently embraced and acted upon. At a textual level, certain attributes of messages are instrumental in inducing cooperation with an audience: "proximity or immediacy, concreteness, the vital, suspense, repetition, familiarity, simplicity, novelty, conflict, activity, repetition, visual and vivid, content, elite personalities, messages with affective content, and humor" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 149). These attributes reflect various ways people may come to identify with messages. At a basic level, the more a message affects people

personally and projects a sense of urgency, the more likely they are to pay attention to it and, potentially, act on it.

As issues evolve logologically (see Figure 1), changing contexts may require practitioners to enact more or fewer key messages for publics than those in the original plan. Such adaptability is necessary to make sure the issue is managed as effectively as possible. The main point here is an intertextual one: practitioners must make sure that, across all texts that will be used, certain messages will be given in particular ways that are best-suited for chosen discourse forms, meet audiences' needs, and ethically advance communication objectives. This intertextual dimension means "the line separating internal and external communications becomes more suspect and corporate messages become more interrelated," from newsletters to television (Cheney & Dionsopolous, 1989, p. 145). This interrelationship among texts does not mean every person gets each message identically in any genre; it means that members of each audience receive the same message in the appropriate language and form that suits them collectively. The goal is to establish common ground between an organization and its publics. The result, generally speaking, is that audiences are more apt to identify with the messages and cooperate with an organization's cause.

Applying the Dramatistic Pentad to Public Relations

To Burke, because language is "the dancing of an attitude" (Burke, 1941/1973) and shapes our views of reality, guides our behavior, and generates our motives for our actions, human action could be understood through drama. He developed dramatism as a method to derive a "literal statement about human motivation" (Burke, 1968). Dramatistic analysis proceeds through the pentad (Burke, 1950/1969), a cluster analysis of the terms that name the act (what was done), scene (where it was done), agent (who did it), agency (how that person did it) and purpose (for what reason the person did it). Ratios of these five terms show relationships between them and in which term the greatest attention is placed to discover motivation for the act.

Public relations texts grow out of organizing behavior among public relations practitioners and the people with whom they work. The logological context practitioners define is part and parcel to their investigation of the motives behind a situation and planning for specific symbolic action by naming the act (the corporate message), the scene (the environment or context to which the message refers), the agent (the person[s] who will act as the corporate representative to which the message will be ascribed), the agency (the chosen public relations discourse genre), and the purpose (to inform, persuade, inspire, inform, debunk, etc.). This sensemaking activity reduces rhetorical equivocality and results in an enacted environment—"an orderly, material, social construction that is subject to multiple interpretations" (Weick, 1988, p. 307)—on which practitioners act symbolically.

Using pentadic analysis, we discover finer detail about how language is used to structure people's thinking about an issue and particular aspects of it. Each text functions as an individual symbolic act that is tied to a particular event in an issue's history, as suggested in Figure 1. Even when separate texts—like a backgrounder, press release, and pitch letter—are used for the same episode in an issue's drama, they are simultaneously separate in their specific generic qualities and united in their appeal for people to identify with the drama enacted by those texts. Thus, the effectiveness for all public relations discourse on the issue derives from both the discourse form and the language about the scenes, actions, agents, agencies, and purposes. Two simple ex-

amples are shown in Figure 3. (Note that in the case of an organization being the agent, the agency may be a spokesperson or the particular kind of public relations discourse that is enacted.)

Inherent in the practice of public relations is the effective management of information for multiple audiences simultaneously. This managing of multiple or diverse audiences means the role of the pentad can be especially powerful, because it give practitioners a way to systematically break down and analyze the dynamics among the constituent dramatic parts of an organizational situation (e.g., issue, crisis, or other matter). In effect, public relations practitioners are working with various publics' ideas—multiple dramas—about what is going on. In this way, having multiple publics means there will be multiple dramas about any given issue, crisis or other matter. So the symbolic action that public relations practitioners enact dramatically about something should help target audiences to identify with the drama that's articulated in public relations discourse. In practice, public relations practitioners can employ diverse strategies to target any given audience or set of target audiences. Practitioners, then, can be working with multiple genres of public relations discourse in systematic efforts to enact a particular drama in symbolic terms. Further, depending on the complexity of an organization's environment, a public relations practitioner can coordinate multiple dramas and concomitant symbolic actions about different matters simultaneously, and each probably would have its own release date. In the end, this dramatic approach should lead, ideally, to establishing identification between diverse publics and an organization as the drama an organization enacts about some matter in its discourse is closely aligned with the dramas that its publics enact about the same matter.

Examining public relations texts dramatically reveals public relations officials' use of language to structure publics' thinking about issues and inspire cooperation. Practitioners can strategically and ethically emphasize one or more key messages over others, especially through the individual dramatic features of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (and attitude, if using Burke's hexad) to craft texts for target audiences. Elements of the pentad can be used to order one's perception of reality, where people select one of the five elements to emphasize over the others. This approach reflects how one's worldview orders the rhetorical aspects of a text.

FIGURE 3
The pentad and public relations discourse examples

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>Press Conference</i>
<i>Scene</i>	Specific Situation	Actual Place of Event
<i>Act</i>	What was done or needs doing	Addressing news media and public
<i>Agent</i>	Quoted official(s)	Corporate official(s) & selected dignitaries
<i>Agency</i>	Press release	Oral comments & supplemental texts
<i>Purpose</i>	Announce news	Personally address issue

This approach also calls attention to ethical principles, since people can view the same situation differently and possibly mask truth in a situation to serve one's own

ends. For example, by focusing on the scene, someone subordinates the agent, act, agency, and purpose as functions of the scene; or by emphasizing the agent, the other elements are subordinated to that agent. Ling (1970) shows, regarding Senator Edward Kennedy's televised statement about the death of Mary Jo Kopechne on Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts, in 1969, that the pentad can be applied for unethical purposes. Kennedy's focus on the scene of the incident subordinated him as a victim of it, and the scene was one over which he had no control, thereby absolving him of the responsibility for Ms. Kopechne's death. Conversely, public relations professionals can – and must – use the pentad in ethical ways, which Burke would expect from these writers of “secular prayers” (1937/1984, p. 323). By emphasizing a pentadic element from which all others would radiate, a public relations professional can truthfully, accurately, and appropriately frame an issue and enact its drama in texts to establish identification with target publics.

PUBLIC RELATIONS PROS AS HUMANISTS AND DRAMATISTS

The philosophy and methodology of Burke's idea of a “public relations counsel with a heart” gives us a basis for the practice – the symbolic action – of public relations. The philosophy is based on Burke's humanist ideology and dramatic methodology. His humanist perspective gives us a way to view public relations more holistically as practitioners pay attention to social dynamics and help people make sense of them through public relations symbolic action. The humanist perspective also works the other way, as practitioners engage in symbolic action and are aware of the social implications of their work.

In terms of dramatism, Burke's tools for analysis can be used individually to allow critics to see deeply into the motives behind symbolic acts and do so in specific ways. This is the realm of micro-level insights. When taken together, those same tools can augment each other's strengths to form a rounded, holistic approach to analyze the broader symbolic action of public relations. This is the realm of macro-level insights. Human symbolic action is the focus of and, thus, the link among the terms for order, identification, and pentad. As Brock (1995, 1999) explains, these tools build upon one another and can work together as a system for rhetorical criticism. As levels of order and abstraction increase in symbolic action, “the pentad can be used to establish identification(s) for the terms for order within the nature of pollution, guilt, purification, and redemption” (Brock, 1995, pp. 18-19).

By employing Burke's system, a public relations professional becomes more of a dramatist, who is tempered by a humanist perspective like that presented in *Attitudes Toward History*. This result effectively bridges the rhetorical dimensions with social consciousness, thereby opening the door to an ethical perspective that seems to be lacking in the traditionally negative terministic screen about public relations. This combination is at the heart of a contemporary view and application of Burke's theory to the practice of public relations in a more positive light.

On an holistic level, Smudde (2001) explains that public relations “is the measured and ethical use of language and symbols to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics” (p. 36). Indeed, this Burkean orientation means issues, crises or what have you “are literal dramas, with a definitive scene, specific action, particular people playing certain roles, special means for the people to do their action, and real purposes behind the management of things. That means communications professionals do more than retell the story of an issue or crisis [given its logistical context]: they

create discourse that emphasizes the dramatic dimensions inherent in it and invite the involvement of the publics with the organization in communication about it. That involvement is cooperative and ethical, actually fostering constructive dialog about the good and the bad – all of which should ultimately help target publics to identify with the organization and its messages” (Smudde, 2001, p. 36).

Communications professionals “are in the business of producing symbols. They, much more than others in the organization, tell various publics ‘what the organization is.’ They share identity, manage issues, and powerfully ‘locate’ the organization in the world of public discourse” (Cheney & Dionsopolous, 1989, p. 139). Because organizations function within a larger context of social, political, economic, technological, and cultural environment, they communicate symbolically with internal and external publics in many ways. Yet, “despite all other measures of what a company is or should be, what really counts is the meaning internal and external people enact on behalf of or in response to it” (Heath, 1994, p. 118). It is indeed the case that public relations professionals “attempt – admittedly with varying degrees of success – to control the ways internal and external environments discuss such key concepts as values, issues, images, and identities” (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987, p. 173). Such discussion is possible through the structuring of people’s thinking (through symbolic action characterized by the ethical use of terministic screens and the use of frames of acceptance, rejection and comic correction) about the dramas enacted in public relations discourse.

This notion of “control” really reflects back on public relations professionals’ quest to establish identification with their organizations’ publics. In other words, their quest is to ethically inspire or “induce” cooperation between an organization and its publics. Practical (and even academic) application of Burke’s system to public relations, through the concept of the terms for order, identification, and the dramatistic pentad, can yield both micro- and macro-level insights about the symbolic action of public relations. At the micro-level, we can see important dimensions to individual public relations texts. At the macro-level, we can see the dynamic interplay of texts within the simultaneously logological and dramatistic dimensions of public relations. At both levels, a public relations counsel with a heart has the necessary humanistic and dramatistic elements for effective symbolic action that benefit both an organization and its publics.

REFERENCES

- Bivins, T. H. (1999). *Handbook for Public Relations Writings: The Essentials of Style and Format*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.
- Brock, B. L. (1995). Evolution of Kenneth Burke’s criticism and philosophy of language. In B. L. Brock (Ed.), *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought: Rhetoric in Transition* (pp. 1-33). Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Brock, B. L. (1999). *Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century*. Albany, NY, State University of New York Press.
- Burke, K. (1968). Dramatism. In D. L. Sills (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Vol. 7, pp. 445-452). New York: Macmillan.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published in 1950)
- Burke, K. (1970). *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published in 1961)
- Burke, K. (1973). *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published in 1941)

- Burke, K. (1984). *Attitudes Toward History* (3rd ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published in 1937)
- Cheney, G., & Dionisopoulos, G. N. (1989). Public relations? No, relations with publics: A rhetorical-organizational approach to contemporary corporate communication. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton Jr., *Public Relations Theory* (pp. 135-157). Hillsdale, NJ: Earlbaum.
- Cheney, G., & Vibbert, S. L. (1987). Corporate discourse: Public relations and issue management. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Communications: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp. 165-194). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Chesebro, J. W. (1992). Extensions of the Burkean system. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 78, 356-368.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1994). *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History*. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1995) *Public Relations History: From the 17th to the 20th Century, the Antecedents*. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1997). The unseen power: A brief history of public relations. In C. L. Caywood (ed.), *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Communications* (p. 15-33). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (1994). *Effective Public Relations* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Duncan, H. D. (1989). *Communication and Social Order*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Eggins, S. & Martin, J. R. (1997). Genres and registers of discourse. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process* (pp. 230-256). London, UK: Sage.
- Ewen, S. (1996). Visiting with Edward Bernays. In S. Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (p. 3-18). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ferguson, S. D. (1999). *Communication Planning: An Integrated Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Heath, R. L. (1994). *Management of Corporate Communication: From Interpersonal Contacts to External Affairs*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Heath, R. L. (1997). *Strategic Issues Management: Organizations and Public Policy Challenges*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ling, D. A. (1970). A pentadic analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy's address to the people of Massachusetts, July 25, 1969. *Central States Speech Journal*, 21, 81-86.
- Sinickas, A. D. (1997). *How to Measure Your Communication Programs*. (2nd ed). San Francisco, CA: Sinickas Communications Publishing.
- Smudde, P. (2001). Issue or crisis: A rose by any other name.... *Public Relations Quarterly*, 46, 34-36.
- Smudde, P. M. (2003, April). *The "Dramatistic Organizing" of Corporate Discourse: Text Analysis Through a Synthesis of Burke's and Weick's Theories*. Paper presented at Central States Communication Association Convention, Omaha, Nebraska.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). Discourse as interaction in society. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction* (pp. 1-37). London, UK: Sage.
- Weick, K. E. (1979). *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25, 305-317.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wilcox, D. L., Nolte, L. W., & Jackson, P. (1996) *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques* (3rd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Copyright of *Communication Quarterly* is the property of Eastern Communication Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.