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THE RHETORIC OF IDENTIFICATION AND THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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THIRTY years after Marie Hochmuth Nichols formally introduced the speech communication field to Kenneth Burke,[1] Burke's "rhetoric of identification" occupies a central position in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism.[2] Yet, despite the attempt to explicate, condense, and apply Burke, the rich implications of his grand scheme for viewing human behavior, in particular his theory of identification, remain to be explored. Theorists have variously treated "Burkean identification" in terms of an audience-centered conception of rhetoric,[3] the Meadian notion of the "I" addressing its "me,"[4] the nature of the unconscious,[5] shared "substance" of individuals,[6] phenomenological aspects of coalition formation,[7] and attempts by rhetors to forge conceptual and linguistic associations with persuadees.[8] Still, one finds relatively little attention to the workings of identification as *the* symbolic process underlying basic tendencies in social relations—what Burke terms "congregation" and "segregation."[9] Moreover, the role of identifi-

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[1]Marie Hochmuth, "Kenneth Burke and the 'New Rhetoric,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 38 (1952), 133-44.

[2]James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, "Rhetoric as Motive: Kenneth Burke and Dramatism," in *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 2nd ed., ed. James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1978). Few today would dispute the characterization of Burke as "the foremost rhetorician in the twentieth century" (p. 235).

[3]Hochmuth; Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, "Set Theory: Key to the Understanding of Kenneth Burke's Use of the Term 'Identification,'" *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 33 (1969), 175-83; Wayne N. Thompson, *The Process of Persuasion: Principles and Readings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 418-33; Donald Byker and Loren J. Anderson, *Communication as Identification: An Introductory View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[4]Hugh D. Duncan, *Communication and Social Order* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1962), pp. 165-70.

[5]Roy Ambrester, "Identification within: Kenneth Burke's View of the Unconscious," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7 (1974), 205-33.

[6]Dennis G. Day, "Persuasion and the Concept of Identification," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 46 (1960), 270-73; Barry Brummett, "Presidential Substance: The Address of August 15, 1973," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 39 (1975), 249-59; Gerald D. Baxter and Pat M. Taylor, "Burke's Theory of Consubstantiality and Whitehead's Concept of Concrescence," *Communication Monographs*, 45 (1978), 174-80.

[7]Aaron P. Gresson, III, "Phenomenology and the Rhetoric of Identification—A Neglected Dimension of Coalition Communication Inquiry," *Communication Quarterly*, 26 (1978), 14-23; Craig Allen Smith and Kathey B. Smith, "Trees or Forest?: A Response to Gresson's 'Phenomenology and the Rhetoric of Identification,'" *Communication Quarterly*, 28 (1980), 57-62.

[8]Day; L. Virginia Holland, "Kenneth Burke's Theory of Communication," *Journal of Communication*, 4 (1960), 174-84; Duncan, pp. 154-64; Thompson, pp. 419-33.

[9]Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues*, ed. Lee Thayer (London: Gordon and Breach, 1973), pp. 263-75. The fundamental social role of identification is mentioned in Jane Blankenship, Edward Murphy, and Marie Rosenwasser, "Pivotal Terms in the Early

cation in rhetorical criticism has been unnecessarily limited—confined largely to the isolation of explicit strategies by which public speakers link their interests to those of audience members.[10] But identification and identification strategies are far more pervasive. As Burke declares, "One's participation in a collective, social role cannot be obtained in any other way."[11]

Using wider lenses for the examination of Burke's writings, we can (1) synthesize Burke's numerous statements about identification as "the function of sociality,"[12] (2) logically extend our conceptions of the rhetoric of identification, and (3) broaden the application of identification in rhetorical criticism to include other domains of discourse (in this case, organizational communication). Toward these interrelated aims this essay is directed. First, I offer the individual-organization relationship as an exemplar for understanding and examining the rhetoric of identification. Second, a tentative typology of identification strategies and tactics is developed and applied to one type of organizational communication—corporate house organs. Third, I consider the role of identification strategies and tactics in the larger *process* of identification in organizations.

ORGANIZATION, IDENTIFICATION, PERSUASION

Necessarily, much of our time is spent by communicating with, within, and for organizations. And organizations (usually as represented by managers) attempt to influence members through oral messages from management; with bulletins, handbooks and house organs; in labor negotiations; by offering an array of benefits and services; and through personnel selection, socialization, training and promotion. Further, they communicate persuasively with parties in the "environment" (frequently other organizations) through marketing, public relations, lobbying, testimony, image making, and issue advocacy. In fact, persuasion is inherent in the process of *organizing*, as Kenneth Burke implies in offering the term "Administrative Rhetoric."[13]

The link between organizations and rhetoric is more evident in Burke's discussion of the terms "order," "hierarchy," "mystery," and "identification."[14] Identification is the most significant of

Works of Kenneth Burke," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 7 (1974), 16-17, and is discussed briefly in Baxter and Taylor. Duncan's treatment of identification is the most thorough to date although he focuses primarily on its motivational aspects.

[10]Bernard Brock, "Political Speaking: A Burkeian Approach," in *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke: 1924-1966*, ed. William H. Rueckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), pp. 444-55; Judith S. Trent, "Richard Nixon's Methods of Identification in the Presidential Campaigns of 1960 and 1968: A Content Analysis," *Today's Speech*, 19 (1971), 23-30; Akira Sanbonmatsu, "Darrow and Rorke's Use of Burkeian Indentification Strategies in *New York vs. Gitlow* (1920)," *Speech Monographs*, 38 (1971), 36-48; Brummett; Richard E. Crable, "Ike: Identification, Argumentation, and Paradoxical Appeal," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63 (1977), 188-95; Robert N. Gaines, "Identification and Redemption in Lysias' *Against Eratosthenes*," *Central States Speech Journal*, 30 (1979), 199-210. It should be noted that both Brock and Crable recognize the subtler aspects of identification. Brock, for example, writes: "To the extent that the audience accepts and rejects the same ideas, people, and institutions as does the speaker, identification takes place" (p. 445). And Crable notes the "explicit" and "implicit" levels of identification as a rhetorical strategy (see esp. footnote 9, p. 189).

[11]Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (New York: The New Republic, 1937), II, 144.

[12]Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, II, 144.

[13]Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 158-66; Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 302; Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation."

[14]Phillip K. Tompkins, Jeanne Y. Fisher, Dominic A. Infante and Elaine L. Tompkins, "Kenneth Burke and the Inherent Characteristics of Formal Organizations: A Field Study," *Speech Monographs*, 42 (1975), 135.

PPL
· Rhet Stud
PROF = Institutionalized Rhet
Rhet
People

these for my purposes, as it points to conceptual and methodological tools for the study of organizational rhetoric.[15]

Burke maintains that identification is necessary to compensate for the "mystery" or estrangement in the division of labor and in other ordered domains of human experience.[16] Hierarchical stratification (viewed in the broadest sense) is bound up with the human ability to use language to abstract categories.[17] As our terms are selectively applied within different social scenes, they classify, divide, and separate. With so much emphasis on distinctions and differences (consider social strata, the bureaucratic model and elitism as just a few examples), identification arises as a communicative, cooperative response. Burke expresses the societal role of identification quite succinctly: "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division."[18] Here we have the requisites for Burke's rhetorical situation: segregation and congregation.[19]

As an individual response to the divisions of society, a person *acts* to identify with some target(s), i.e., persons, families, groups, collectivities; and to a lesser extent, values, goals, knowledge, activities, objects. "Thus, a person may think of himself as 'belonging' to some special body more or less clearly defined . . . or to various combinations of these."[20] Through these associations an individual comes to have a variety of "corporate identities" that are sometimes concentric and other times in conflict.[21] "For instance, one may have a job in some large financial corporation, while at the same time being a member of a party opposed to its policies."[22] Our corporate identities are vital because they grant us personal meaning. Burke writes (in terms that antedate similar statements throughout the well-known work of dramaturgist Erving Goffman): "The so-called 'I' is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting 'corporate we's.' "[23]

At the same time, these identities may be manifested by labels or "names" for the individual, i.e., identifications in the narrowest sense.[24] Thus, a person may

[15]Somewhat surprising is the fact that while writers have long recognized the generalized rhetorical applications of Burke's theory, they (with the exception of the researchers cited in footnote 14) have largely failed to explore its relevance to the study of organizations. Well known, of course, is Burke's formulation of the "new rhetoric." In *A Rhetoric of Motives* Burke explains his basic view of identification: "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (p. 20). In summing up the difference between the "old" rhetoric and the "new," Burke writes: "The key term for the 'old' rhetoric was 'persuasion' and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the 'new' rhetoric would be 'identification,' which can include a partially 'unconscious' factor in appeal" (Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric—Old and New," in *New Rhetorics*, ed. Martin Steinmann, Jr. [New York: Scribner's, 1967], p. 63).

[16]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, pp. 22-23, 114-15, 174, 205. See also *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (1935; rpt. from 2nd ed., 1954; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 276.

[17]Burke, *Permance and Change*, pp. 184-85.

[18]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 22.

[19]Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation."

[20]Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," p. 268.

[21]Kenneth Burke, "Twelve Propositions by Kenneth Burke on the Relation between Economics and Psychology," *Science and Society*, 2 (1938), 243-44. Burke uses "corporate" in the broad sense, referring to a group or body of individuals. He emphasizes the individual as a member of a group rather than viewing the group as a collection of individuals. See also *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 226-27.

[22]Burke, "Twelve Propositions," p. 243.

[23]Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, II, 140.

[24]Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p. 27. Interestingly, names also point up a paradoxical aspect of identification; for while the act of naming suggests commonality among those persons included under the same terminological umbrella, it also implies separateness from others who do not or cannot use the same terms of self-description. Thus, we have both "congregation" and "segregation." See Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics and Philosophy," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, ed. Don M. Burks

describe himself or herself by saying: "I'm a New Yorker" or "I work for Exxon." In this way, names, labels, and titles become the foci for larger corporate identities; they carry with them other identifying "baggage" in the form of values, interests and the like.[25] One corporation psychologist expresses interest in the naming function of identification: "I strongly believe that 3M does try to foster an attitude of identification on the part of employees. We stress the concept of 3M people, 3Mers."[26]

Finally, our corporate identities serve to enhance the "self," granting us status and even prestige. "[One] identifies himself with some corporate unit (church, guild, company, lodge, party, team, college, city, nation, etc.)—and by profuse praise of this unit he praises himself. For he 'owns shares' in the corporate unit—and by 'rigging the market' for the value of the stock as a whole, he runs up the value of his personal holdings."[27] In this way, praise (and by implication, criticism) of an organization to which I belong may reflect directly or indirectly upon me, depending on how I perceive my relationship with that unit.

As individuals "work out" their corporate identities, they are inclined to communicate and cooperate with persons and groups who share the same interests; they achieve a degree of what Burke terms "consubstantiality."[28] Consubstantiality represents an area of "overlap"—either real or perceived—between two individuals or between an individual and a group; it is a basis for common motives and for "acting-together."[29] On one level this idea is expressed in the the everyday use of "identification" to symbolize a state. For example, the statement by a television viewer that she or he "identifies" with a character in a daytime serial conveys the notion that the two are, to some extent, "consubstantial." In more specific terms such a comment might suggest that the viewer sees himself or herself as having ideas, attitudes, or intentions similar to those of the appealing character, or as acting in a manner similar to the character. For purposes of this essay "consubstantiality" may be thought of as a *product* or *state* of identification that leads an individual to see things from the "perspective" of a target—in the above case, a persona created through the medium of television.

As others have noted, Burkean identification may appropriately be viewed as the process of either self- or other-inducement, with the stress being on the former.[30] Burke's theory is primarily receiver-oriented: his emphasis is on the individual act of identifying, with or without the help of a rhetor (e.g., a politician, a peer group, or an organization).

Organizations frequently do "help," however, facilitating identification through their myriad means of communication. Thus, while an individual has the ability to identify spontaneously with an organizational target, the "move" is often encouraged by the organization in its dealings with the member. Simply put, an individual who is inclined to identify with an organization (or an organizational subunit) will be open to persuasive efforts from various sources within that unit. The organization "initiates" this inducement process by com-

(West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1978), p. 27. Also see Burke's discussion of the "paradox of substance" in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 21-26.

[25]Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p. 27.

[26]Letter received from Wayne Kirchner, 11 Nov. 1980.

[27]Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, II. 144-45.

[28]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 21.

[29]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 21.

[30]See footnotes, 3, 4, 5, and 10.

municating its values, goals, and information (i.e., the organization's own stated "identifications") in the form of guidelines for individual and collective action; the member may then "complete" the process by adopting or adapting the organization's interests, doing "what's best" for the organization, and perhaps even developing a salient identification with the organization as a target. Burke describes the essence of this process:

> [We may observe] the ingredient of rhetoric in all *socialization,* considered as a *moralizing* process. The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification. To act upon himself persuasively, he must variously resort to images that are formative. Education 'indoctrination' exerts such pressures upon him from without; he completes the process from within. If he does not somehow act to tell himself (as his own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within.[31]

An individual is socialized to some extent through participation in any organization. If she or he "completes" the inducement process by accepting the "outer-voice," the values and goals of the organization, the socialization can be termed "successful" from the organization's standpoint (and to some extent from the individual's point of view as well): the member will "see" his or her "reflection" in the social mirror of the collective;[32] the interests of the individual and the organization will overlap or coincide.

When the "outer-voice" can be traced to a particular social unit (sometimes an "I" addressing its "me"), we can isolate "strategies" of identification: appeals to individuals to accept targets as their own, or perhaps make more salient identifications with already valued targets. The nature and types of identification strategies are discussed below with reference to the organization *qua* rhetor.

Identification Strategies and Tactics in Organizational Messages

Association, Dissociation and Identification

Through reference to Aristotle, Burke illustrates an elementary case of an identification strategy: "When you are with Athenians, it's easy to praise Athenians, but not when you are with Lacedaemonians."[33] "Here," he explains, "is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion."[34] Seen in this context, identification is the way in which a rhetor states *explicitly* to an individual (possibly trying to convince himself or herself), "I am like you" or "I have the same interests as you." Unfortunately, most applications of identification in the literature give disproportionate attention to this view of identification as a form of inducement.[35]

This perspective is important, but it is only part of a much larger picture sketched by Burke. In perhaps his most concise and elucidating comment on identification, Burke advances three interpretations of the term as a rhetorical strategy:

> The first is quite dull. It flowers in such usages as that of a politician who, though rich, tells humble constituents of his humble origins. The second kind of identification involves the workings of antithesis, as when allies who would otherwise dispute among themselves join forces against a common enemy. This application also can serve to deflect criticism, as a politician can call any

[31]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 39.
[32]Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, p. 227.
[33]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 55.
[34]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 55.
[35]See footnote 10.

> criticism of his policies 'unpatriotic,' on the grounds that it reenforces the claims of the nation's enemies. But the major power of identification derives from situations in which it goes unnoticed. My prime example is the word 'we,' as when the statement that 'we' are at war includes under the same head soldiers who are getting killed and speculators who hope to make a killing in war stocks.[36]

In a review of Burke's usages of "identification," Olson explains that the above cases may be understood as lying along a continuum of associational and dissociational symbolic processes.

> The first identification suggests a direct, associative process when one presents oneself as strikingly similar to the extent that one could 'represent' another's interests. The second identification suggests how dissociation indirectly establishes new associations; one implicitly forms other association as one forms the dissociation. . . . The third identification indicates the mingling processes of association and dissociation, when very dissimilar interests are joined under the transcendent 'we.'[37]

Olson's reformulation is quite useful; he articulates a framework for viewing identification strategies in relation to one another. As he outlines, some strategies are more associational in nature; others, essentially dissociational. However, we never find a "pure" form at either extreme because in identification there is implied congregation and segregation; identification always suggests a "we" and a "they."[38] For instance, the statement that two work groups "have something in common" by virtue of their involvement in the same project *necessarily* implies that they are "different" from a third group engaged in another project.

Three types of identification strategies can now be derived from Burke and "operationalized" for the study of formal communication in organizations.[39]

1. *The common ground technique.* This strategy can be seen in Burke's first example above, where the rhetor equates or links himself or herself with others in an overt manner. Evidence of this can be found in communication from management when the employee is told directly that the corporation shares his or her values (e.g., being "American," preserving the physical environment, having a concern for fairness), his or her goals (e.g., desire for economic security, success, cooperation), and offers him or her "identity" (e.g., through personal recognition, company-sponsored clubs, etc.).

2. *Identification through antithesis.* The act of uniting against a common "enemy," described in Burke's second example, may be encouraged by a rhetor. Some corporate documents contain passages that emphasize threats from "outsiders" such as "misguided" environmentalists, "overzealous" government regulators and "unprogressive" community leaders. Through such portrayals, corporations implicitly stress identification with "insiders" (i.e., members of the organization) as an effort toward achieving unity and collective acceptance of organizational values.

3. *The assumed or transcendent "we."* As Burke explains in his third illustration, use of the pronoun "we" (along with surrogate forms) often goes

[36]Kenneth Burke, *Dramatism and Development* (Barre, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1972), p. 28.

[37]Lester C. Olson, "Kenneth Burke's Usage for Identification in His Major Works and the Implications for Rhetorical Critics," unpublished Master's Thesis, The Pennsylvania State University, 1980, p. 44.

[38]Burke, "The Rhetorical Stuation."

[39]The term "strategy" is problematic because is suggests intention, something that is not easily determined. However, the use of "strategies" is appropriate for reference to formal messages from management because they are consciously-conceived "instruments" of the organization. That organizational messages, like many other forms of communication, contain unintended as well as intended persuasive appeals is not relevant to the present discussion.

unnoticed as an appeal to identification between parties who may have little in common. Uses of the assumed "we" and the corresponding "they" (symbolizing outsiders) can be found in corporate discourse when the sharing of interests by the corporation and the employee seems taken for granted. Statements such as "We are against new taxes on profits" would provide evidence of this strategy if the "we" clearly referred to all members of the organization.

In summarizing up to this point, we have synthesized many of Burke's statements on identification and found the immediate relevance of Burke's theory to the study of organizations. Further, we have observed differing associational and dissociational strategies by which a rhetor (for present purposes, an organization) can effectively "tap" into the identification process, thereby catalyzing the persuasion of individual members. Let us now examine these strategies more closely in context by turning to a brief illustrative study of corporate discourse.

Message Analysis

This study is intended to portray the role of identification strategies in one mode of communication by organizations: corporate house organs or periodicals distributed by businesses to their employees. House organs have been recognized as carriers of business policies, viewpoints, and attitudes. Harry Levinson, a prominent organizational consultant/analyst, emphasizes the importance of researching house organs in any thorough investigation of an organization's functioning. In outlining his case study approach to "organizational diagnosis," Levinson explains that house organs are usually "newsy"; but at the same time, they may be blatantly political forums or carefully-conceived disguises for underlying authoritarian attitudes.[40]

But Levinson's most important point for this discussion concerns the way in which employee publications are governed by top management. He writes: "Usually house organs are relegated to editors who are well controlled by several administrative layers above them. Dissent, debate, criticism therefore are rarely found."[41] For this reason, house organs may be viewed appropriately as messages from "the organization"—as represented by top policy and decision makers—to the employee. Corporate house organs are a rich resource for the examination of organizational strategies of identification.

Ten magazine-type corporate house organs from 1979 were selected for this study. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, no attempt was made to find a representative sample of publications from across business and industry. However, the house organs selected were published by ten different corporations[42] from a variety of industries.[43] Also, no

[40] Harry Levinson, *Organizational Diagnosis* (Cambrige, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 223-24.

[41] Levinson, p. 223.

[42] One organization, Arthur Andersen and Co., is a partnership and should therefore be referred to as a "firm." For purposes of facilitating discussion, however, it will be included with the other nine organizations under the heading "corporations."

[43] The house organs selected are single issues of *Ball Line,* 34:5 (1979) of the Ball Corporation; *The Changing Challenge,* 6:3 (1979) of General Motors Corporation; *The Donnelley Printer* (Fall 1979) of the R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co.; *Reflector* (May 1979) of the State Farm Insurance Companies; *DuPont Context* 8:3 (1979) of the E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. (Inc.); *TRW Systems & Energy,* 3:2 (1979) of TRW, Inc.; *BankAmerican* 50:10 (1979) of the Bank of America; *Conoco 79,* 10:3 (1979) of Conoco, Inc.; *The People of Arthur Andersen,* 6:2 (1979) of Arthur Andersen and Co.; and *United System Quarterly,* 19:2 (1979) of United Telecommunications, Inc. Note: The periodicals range in length from 15 to 41 pages, with a mean length of 26.5 pages. All are at or near standard paper size (8½" × 11"). Two are published three times yearly; five

forms of organ strategies

special issues (e.g., anniversary editions) were chosen.

This study isolates "tactics" of identification: specific forms of appeals within the general categories that have been referred to as "strategies." The method used to examine the identification tactics was essentially qualitative because of the relevance of different types of units (e.g., words, titles, expressions of complete thoughts) and the importance of contextual factors such as the topic of an article. All prose contained in the house organ was examined; only photographs were excluded from the analysis.

In some cases it is important to note not only the presence of identification tactics but also their prevalence in the house organs. Hence, quantification will be given (e.g., in terms of a tactic's frequency of appearance, the number of column inches displaying a particular tactic, or the number of pages devoted to an article) when useful to illustrate the significance of tactics in their respective contexts.

The common ground technique. The common ground strategy is the most important technique used in the sample of house organs studied in terms of (1) frequency of appearance, (2) the variety of types of articles (e.g., news, policy statements, job-related information, human interest, etc.) manifesting the strategy, and (3) the diversity of ways in which similarity or commonality is expressed. Thirty-eight articles (of a total of one hundred ten) in six of ten house organs sampled display evidence of common ground appeals. Consider selected examples of the strategy as grouped below into identifiable, although often overlapping, tactic categories.

1. *Expression of concern for the individual.* Five of the ten corporations express concern for the individual as a member or as an integral part of the organization. The most obvious example is the title of the publication of the accounting firm Arthur Andersen and Co., *The People of Arthur Andersen.*[44] The selected issue of that periodical also contains statements describing the individual's role in the organization. Typical of these is the following: "We are highly divisionalized so that our staff people have a home—and partners and managers who are directly responsible for their development."[45]

The issue of *The Donnelley Printer* of the R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co. emphasizes the role of "Donnelley people" in the corporation's success and its spirit of cooperation. One vice president credits "the people" of the company for contributing to his own rise to the top. And he adds, "Our people are the key to what makes this company tick."[46] In a similar manner, the Ball Corporation cites the "people factor" for record production during a plant expansion.[47]

In each of these statements, the role of employees in the organization is featured; the stress is on the people who *belong* to the organization rather than on the organization as a collection of people.

2. *Recognition of individual contributions.* The second common ground tactic is similar to the first but is more focused; it can be seen in articles that recognize individuals for their contributions to the organization. In such cases corporations

are quarterly; one is bi-monthly; and two are monthly. All ten house organs have glossy color covers, and their internal pages include black and white as well as color photographs. Three of the house organs, *TRW Systems and Energy, United System Quarterly* and *The Changing Challenge,* display no *clear* evidence of identification appeals.

[44]See cover of *People.*
[45]"The Windy City Blows its Horn," *People,* p. 4.
[46]"Two Roads to the Top," *Printer,* p. 2.
[47]Shirley Shepherd, "Efficiency Soars Amidst Construction," *Ball Line,* p. 9.

frequently highlight shared values. In commending a company pilot for accident-free flying, *Ball Line* of the Ball Corporation points out that he "is only one of several pilots who has helped maintain the company's 'clean safety record.' "[48] The *Reflector* of the State Farm Insurance Companies features an article on expense-paid travel for employees who, like their employer, are oriented toward "success."[49]

Corporations also recognize individual efforts by creating clubs. The selected issue of the *Reflector* includes a cover story on the "President's Club," into which the "top" 50 agents are admitted each year. President Edward B. Rust explains that the Club "is still a meaningful way to recognize our top agents whose records are reflections of our Companies' success in every line. . . . Members are characterized by a high level of dedication to quality, and loyalty to both their clients and the Companies."[50] The executive expresses his belief that the recognized agents already *identify* strongly with State Farm; the Companies apparently hope that the six-page article will help to foster the same attitude in other readers. Of course, in singling out individuals for praise, there is always the risk of fostering divisiveness (i.e., segregation). Therefore, the organization must take care to present membership in achievement clubs as a realistic goal for most (if not all) employees.

A significant number of house organs display names and photographs of employees who are promoted (four of ten in this sample do). Noteworthy, however, is the *BankAmerican*'s article "On the Way Up" which, in addition to listing official promotions, also cites employees "who have taken on additional responsibilities," many without title changes.[51] In this case employees are offered recognition for simply "doing more" for the organization.

3. *Espousal of shared values.* Another tactic of appeal to the employee *qua* individual is the corporate espousal of *presumably* shared values. In some cases, the organization states explicitly that "we" have the same interests as "you," the employee. For instance, the *BankAmerican* includes an article in its "viewpoint" series that bases the corporation's rejection of political action committees (groups that solicit political contributions from employees) on "informal surveys" of "BankAmericans."[52] An even better example appears in *Ball Line.* In a policy statement the chairman, John W. Fisher, writes: "Each Ball Corporation employee should be an informed, involved citizen. I firmly believe that an awareness of and involvement in public affairs is a responsibility that each of us owes to ourselves, our families, our country and our company."[53] The implications of such a statement are many because it links individual and organization, while equating family, organization, and nation.

4. *Advocacy of benefits and activities.* Advocacy of company-sponsored benefits and activities is a fourth common ground tactic that appears in the sample. *The Donnelley Printer* highlights "the role of training in enabling our people to grow with continued printing advances";[54] the

[48] "Pilot Wins Award," *Ball Line*, p. 3.

[49] "Marco Island—A Paradise for Assurance Co. Millionaires," *Reflector*, pp. 12-13.

[50] "Pacesetters for the Company and the Industry," *Reflector*, p. 4.

[51] "On the Way Up," *BankAmerican*, p. 41.

[52] Ken Howe, "Viewpoint: Political Action Committees and Why We Don't Have One at B of A," *BankAmerican*, p. 14.

[53] John W. Fisher, "A Message from the Chairman," *Ball Line*, p. 2.

[54] "Preparing Today for Tomorrow's Challenges," *Printer*, p. 12.

BankAmerican explains how a sales course helped prepare an employee for a successful appearance on a television game show;[55] and State Farm's *Reflector* urges employees to use its library of prepared speeches for presentations to public groups.[56] The last example is particularly interesting because it quietly assumes the congruence of employees' values with those of the corporation.

Consider a somewhat different example. In an article discussing the Ball Corporation's "corporate runners," an executive is quoted: "This is the spirit of competition that permeates not only our recreational lives but also our business lives."[57] Here the value of a company-sponsored activity is linked with the organization and its function. In all these cases, the corporation does more than simply describe services to employees; it presents membership in the organization as a value in itself.

Each of the common ground tactics discussed thus far represents the organizational "perspective," i.e., the stated position of the employer vis-a-vis employees. Two additional tactics are framed as representing other perspectives—those of "outsiders" and employees. These are discussed below.

5. *Praise by outsiders. Conoco 79* reports that "Conoco has received awards from the Whooping Crane Conservation Association and the Audubon Society for its continuing efforts to safeguard the environment."[58] The same publication emphasizes Conoco's positive image in Japan where the corporation has developed a strong partnership: "the Japanese regard us as a company of ability, dignity, and honor."[59] In a somewhat different vein, *The Donnelley Printer* "sums up" the view of community leaders in Spartanburg, S.C., home of a new Donnelley factory: "investment-wise and quality-wise, Donnelley is just what we want. Spartanburg has received Donnelley with open arms because of that."[60]

These examples show techniques to encourage the employee to identify with the organization by representing the views of others. Implicit in the statements is the idea that employees should hold the same positive view of their employer that actors in the environment do.

6. *"Testimonials" by employees.* Frequently house organs include quotations by employees expressing dedication, commitment, even affection with regard to the organization. Four of the publications in the study have examples of this sixth common ground tactic. Three employee comments about their employers follow:

(1) Dick Tillman, researcher, Conoco: "We are an integral part of every research opportunity you have heard about in Conoco. . . . The better we fulfill our role, the more productive will be the overall research effort."[61]

(2) Jim Landers, Vice President for Personnel, Conoco, on reviewing employees for management positions: "In many ways, this is one of the most satisfying parts of the job. We're talking about the future of the company."[62]

(3) Ron Runck, agent, State Farm: "Being a State Farm agent is the best possible situation for me. . . . The company has proven sales techniques and good products to serve me and my clients. At the

[55] "Bank Course Helps Bring Manager Chuck Leonard a Bundle," *BankAmerican*, p. 13.

[56] "Speak Easy with Prepared Topics," *Reflector*, p. 10.

[57] "Corporate Runners Take 15th in Nationals," *Ball Line*, p. 3.

[58] Vince Robertiello, "Locking Up the Future," *Conoco 79*, p. 7.

[59] Bob Gaines, "Unraveling the Japanese Enigma," *Conoco 79*, p. 21.

[60] "The Crossroads of the New South," *Printer*, p. 17.

[61] Will Cross, "Where Innovation is an Everyday Job," *Conoco 79*, p. 15.

[62] Bob Gaines, "Personnel People: Making a Good Job Better," *Conoco 79*, p. 25.

same time, it allows me to remain a businessman, not just a man in business."[63]

Of the ten corporations represented in the sample, the Bank of America places the greatest emphasis on employee statements through the regular feature "In Good Company" (on the back cover of the *BankAmerican*), where employees talk about their "contributions."[64] Statements such as these highlight individuals and their relationship to the organization (in this way, their thrust is similar to that of the first tactic above). The organization asks readers to listen to what "others like them" have to say about corporate life.

All six categories discussed above represent forms of the common ground strategy. Each tactic involves an associational process whereby the concerns of the employee are directly or indirectly identified with those of the organization. The corporation, in effect, tells the employee, "We are similar; we are of the same substance." Let us now turn to a strategy more dissociative in nature, identification by antithesis.

Identification by antithesis. Identification is evident in house organs when employees are urged to "unite" against a common "enemy," usually some threat from the environment. In this way, as suggested earlier, an explicit dissociation from one target implies association with another. In all, ten articles in three house organs display evidence of this strategy. In the same "Message from the Chairman" cited previously, John W. Fisher of the Ball Corporation writes: "The government regulation and spending which threatens the future of the Ball Corporation threatens the future of everyone. As each of us needs freedom to plan his or her own future and pursue his or her own goals, so our company also needs freedom."[65] Here the federal government is presented as "threatening" the entire organization—including all members. In every example of antithesis isolated in this study, Washington is portrayed as opposing corporate interests.

An article in *Conoco 79*, "Locking up the Future," sharply criticizes Washington's land and resource management policies.[66] Another article in the same publication blames many of the nation's economic ills on Washington and explains the harmful effects on both industry and individuals.[67]

Among those sampled, the house organ with the most evidence of identification by antithesis is DuPont's *Context*. Every issue of this publication is devoted primarily to a single topic. The selected issue features a cover story, "Regulation Tying Down America? Reform is Overdue," as well as four other articles on the same theme. These fill twenty-two of the periodical's twenty-five pages.[68] DuPont cites statistics, opinions of economists, views of its own executives, and statements by those with whom DuPont has business dealings in attacking government regulatory policies. Typical of the remarks cited is this statement by Lee P. Shaffer, President of Kenan Transport (a company which sells supplies to DuPont): "Every business decision our company makes must take into account the many aspects of government regulation. . . . With every beat of the heart of the company, government regulation is involved. This is very scary."[69] In this example, identification with the frightened "victim," business, is implicit.

For the three corporations discussed

[63]"Attitude, Efficiency Essential for Professional Business Operation," *Reflector*, p. 19.
[64]"In Good Company," *BankAmerican*, back cover.

[65]Fisher, p. 2.
[66]Robertiello, pp. 5-7.
[67]"Oil Prices and Stagflation," *Conoco 79*, pp. 26-28.
[68]*Context*, pp. 1-9, 12-23, 25.
[69]"Problems Big and Small for These Businesses," *Context*, p. 12.

above, Washington is an anti-business aggressor. Identification with the collective membership of the organization is suggested not only as desirable (i.e., as the natural product of sharing values and goals) but also as *necessary* to oppose threats from outsiders. We now move to the most subtle of the three identification strategies, the assumed "we," where the processes of association and dissociation are inextricably interwoven.

The assumed "we." The assumed "we" and the corresponding "they" are found in statements where a common bond among members of the organization is taken for granted, but the nature of the relationship is not well defined. Evidence of this strategy includes some uses of the pronouns "we" and "they" (along with their object and possessive forms) and surrogate expressions.

No evidence of the assumed "they" appears in any of the ten house organs studied; references to actors in the environment were more explicit (e.g., as shown in the previous section). Significant usages (determined by frequency and context) of the assumed "we" were isolated in three articles in three house organs. The type of article with the most prevalent use of the assumed "we" is the policy statement by a top executive. Such an article is one or two pages in length and usually appears in the first few pages of a house organ. In his article, "Building Our Futures on Mutual Trust," State Farm's Earle B. Johnson frequently uses "we" to refer to all members of the organization; in fact, the assumed "we" appears 19 times in 30 column inches of text.[70] Throughout the article Johnson stresses the ideas of unity, togetherness, sharing. He writes: "I'm just glad we built our future together, on the same side of the fence, with mutual trust and interdependence. It's a mighty comforting feeling to me—and I believe to you—that regardless of the problems, we'll solve them together. Heaven knows we've had our share over the years."[71]

Harvey Kapnick, Chairman of Arthur Andersen and Co., uses the assumed "we" even more frequently in his policy statement—34 times in 14 column inches of text. Kapnick states: "We all recognize the importance of timely and informative communications and we hope that, no matter what our size, we will be able to retain togetherness so that we can obtain our combined objectives."[72]

The assumed "we" also appears in more focused appeals to shared values and goals. The article "Message from the Chairman" by John W. Fisher of the Ball Corporation has already been cited with respect to the first two identification strategies: common ground and antithesis. Interestingly, Fisher uses the assumed "we" (nineteen times in six column inches of text) to espouse goals presumably shared by organization and employee and to argue for unified opposition to federal policies toward business.[73]

The assumed "we" is both a subtle and powerful identification strategy because it often goes unnoticed. Uses of this strategy allow a corporation to present similarity or commonality among organizational members as a taken-for-granted assumption. To the extent that employees accept this assumption and its corollaries unquestioningly, they identify with their corporate employer.

Unifying Symbols. One example, clearly an identification tactic, does not seem to fit the three-fold Burkean scheme. The State Farm *Reflector*

[70]Earle B. Johnson, "Building Our Futures on Mutual Trust," *Reflector*, pp. 2-3.

[71]Johnson, p. 3.

[72]Harvey Kapnick, "Chairman's Message," *People*, p. 1.

[73]Fisher p. 2.

stresses the significance of its name, logo, and trademark. Guidelines that instruct the employee how to use the trademark cause it to take on tremendous significance; it is portrayed as a revered symbol not unlike a nation's flag:

> What's in a name? If the name is State Farm Insurance Companies, there's a lot—a reputation for stability, competitive prices, quality products, prompt dependable service. . . . It's a name people know—and trust.
>
> The same holds true for the corporate trademark. . . . That's one reason the trademark, like the Companies' name, should be used only in its registered form. . . .
>
> Altering or misusing the registered State Farm trademark—whether it's on a letterhead, a form of advertisement or even a publication intended only for a State Farm audience (such as a manager's bulletin or a regional publication)—may result in the loss of trademark rights. It's also a violation of the reputation the Companies have taken years of hard work to establish and maintain.[74]

Clearly, the State Farm Insurance Companies consider their name and their trademark to be key elements in their corporate identity. The above passage conveys the hope that employees will feel the same way.

While this example dramatizes a bond between individual employees and the corporation, it does not fit neatly into one of the Burkean categories. The case suggests the notion of commonality among organizational members, but only implicitly. Hence, it cannot be typed as a common ground tactic. On the other hand, this statement of the individual-organization relationship is too direct to be considered evidence of the assumed "we." For purposes of this discussion, I label this additional category, "unifying symbols." Such cases would probably be better analyzed with respect to "form" rather than "content." Burke, for example, explains that the sheer appeal of a form may induce an auditor to participate, and "this attitude of assent may then be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form."[75] Thus, an individual may come to accept the identifications that are shaped and suggested by appealing forms such as well-crafted statements of corporated "identity" and their referents (logos, trademarks, etc.)—in whose development corporations make serious investments.[76]

In sum, this analysis illustrates the significance of identification tactics in a sample of corporate house organs. Tactics appear with considerable frequency and in a variety of ideational and topical contexts. Further, a tripartite Burkean scheme proved useful in grouping the tactics into larger strategy categories and in illuminating their underlying associations and dissociations. Finally, it is important to note how the strategies often appear in concert, creating espe-

[74]"Focusing On: The Use of the State Farm Trademark," *Reflector*, p. 10.

[75]Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 58. See also Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (1931; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 124-49. While Burke treats form as an identifiable element of discourse, he insists that it is never totally distinct from content. The State Farm passage displays aspects of discursive form which seem to fit Burke's categories of "qualitative progression" and "repetitive form" (see *Counter-Statement*, pp. 124-25). More important, however, is the visual referent of the passage, the State Farm trademark, which might be analyzed according to a theory of "presentational form" outlined by Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), pp. 78-102. Interestingly, both the passage and its referent could play a role in the identification process. For more on identification and form, cf. Ronald H. Carpenter, "A Stylistic Basis of Burkeian Identification," *Today's Speech*, 20 (1972), 19-23; Richard B. Gregg, "Kenneth Burke's Prolegomena to the Study of the Rhetoric of Form," *Communication Quarterly*, 26 (1978), 3-13; and Robert L. Heath, "Kenneth Burke on Form," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (1979), 392-404.

[76]For example, in the early 1970s a group of companies under a single corporate head invested over $100 million in research on a collective name change to the now familiar "Exxon." See Ben M. Enis, "Exxon Marks the Spot," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 18, No. 6 (1978), 7-12.

cially potent statements about the relationship of the individual to the organization. Let us now assess the role of such strategies in the larger processes at work in the organizational setting.

Influence in Modern Organizations

Identification strategies (and their more focused forms, tactics) take on tremendous importance when viewed in contemporary organizational life; they are intentional and unintentional attempts by the organization to induce identification on the part of the employee members. House organs, as noted earlier, represent just one of many persuasive means that today's large corporation uses in its communication with employees. And these publications, like other organizational messages, should be examined with all the care in which they are produced—if for no other reason than because of their prevalence. The preceding message analysis of a sample of corporate publications is offered as a modest first step in this direction.

Today's large organizations take the task of persuasion and the goal of employee identification very seriously. Again, consider the house organ as an example. Corporations invest significant amounts of time, money and creative energy in the production of internal publications, most of which reach only employees and their families. While we probably cannot know that such messages significantly affect employee attitudes, another conclusion is clear: business believes that they do (or at least that a cost-benefit analysis deems such efforts acceptable).

Moreover, house organs may be seen as one element of a matrix of persuasive messages by which the formal organization presents its interests *as* the interests of the employee member. To a certain extent, this stance is inevitable: any organization must, at least part of the time, subordinate individual needs to those of the collectivity if it is to "act" as an organization. But what is perhaps most interesting about today's large corporations (i.e., the organizations that dominate the advanced capitalist landscape of western society) is their ability to portray *their* priorities not as the products of real choices but as the way things are and the way individuals want them to be.

As we observed in the sample of house organs, corporations often assume the congruence of individual and organizational values, goals and interests. In the process, distinctions between individual and organization and between organization and society become rather fuzzy. Witness this statement by a career development specialist, responding to questions about the employee–employer relationship.

> AT&T has always recognized that it had unique privileges and special responsibilities not common to most American businesses. In order to maintain the company's status and to discharge its reponsibilities, AT&T management has always stressed that it has three major tasks: service to the public, a fair return to the shareholder, and proper treatment of employees. The philosophy developed that "telephone" people were charged with a special trust, and they were expected to diligently serve that trust. Employment at the telephone company was equated to public service; efficiency and quality of operations were heavily emphasized; and equitable compensation, good benefits, and job security became standard.[77]

This single paragraph contains a number of associations (e.g., company with "telephone people" and the latter with "special trust") and an important dissociation (i.e., AT&T's "uniqueness"). Taken as a whole, the statement is an amalgam of values usually distin-

[77]Letter received from Bill Regan, 11 Dec. 1980.

guished as individual, business, and "American." Where there was once "segregation," we now find "congregation." Clearly, statements such as this one reflect as much upon an organization's public position as they do upon policies communicated internally to employees. Nevertheless, our attention is directed toward the individual member, how she or he responds to organizational messages, and how she or he sees his or her organizational role.

Typically, individuals sacrifice a degree of autonomy when they participate in organizational life. They literally decide to accept certain organizational interests and approach work-related decisions from the organization's "perspective"; that is, they assume the "role" of the organization.[78] (To varying degrees, we all do this as we join an organization, whether for employment or for other purposes.) When the relationship is on this level, the "outer-voice" of the organization and the "inner-voice" of the individual are distinct; the employee self-consciously makes the decision to "behave organizationally."

What is desired by large modern corporations, however, is something more: the internal motivation that arises when the two voices speak in unison. This is the idea behind an IBM personnel director's comment that the company's policies are aimed at providing employees with "the opportunity to contribute in their own way to the business objectives."[79] Identification is directed toward the organization, but it must have its "source" within the individual; the employee makes his or her "own" contribution through making decisions in accord with the organization's interests.

Today's top-level managers count on identification with the organization being the rule rather than the exception among employees. As a Raytheon Company policy director explains, "I think it is safe to say that no major, successful company, with a relatively controlled rate of turnover, has achieved this level of success without first having created an attitude of identification with the company."[80] The growth and increasing specialization (a kind of segregation) of corporations make employee identification not only desirable but often necessary for "predictable" organizational functioning.

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith would concur with this observation; he explains that identification has succeeded pecuniary motivation (and compulsion before that) as the most important motivating force in the modern corporation. He sees this trend as one reason for the decline in power of unions; as workers become more accepting of organizational interests, the opposing stance of organized labor becomes less tenable and less practical. (This analysis is particularly interesting to consider in light of the current economic plight of many of our largest industries and the response of some unions in conceding demands, occasionally accepting wage cuts, and generally adopting the organization's point of view.) Further, as we move toward a post-industrial society populated largely by professionals in high-technology and service firms, Galbraith anticipates—and fears—an even greater blending of individual and organiza-

[78]Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), pp. 187-88; Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1976), pp. 202-04.

[79]Letter received from D. T. Piersol, 9 Dec. 1980.

[80]Letter received from Robert H. Sprenger, 11 Dec. 1980.

tional goals, with some individuals identifying most strongly with *particular* employers and others with "industries," professions, or even technology itself.[81]

Conclusion

The fact that contemporary organizations are so concerned about identification—both with respect to specific interests and with regard to their own status as potential targets of employee dedication—demands the attention of the Burkean critic. Organizations are in the business of "congregation." In the past they relied on more direct, even forceful, means of influence (e.g., close supervision, purely monetary rewards, and assembly-line "determinism"). And, of course, such methods are still quite evident. But today we often find managers and administrators less obtrusively encouraging individual involvement, support and loyalty.[82] In short, fostering identification is the "intent" of many corporate policies, for with it comes greater assurance that employees will decide with organizational interests uppermost in mind.[83] If the process of identification were not so compelling and so powerful, we would scarcely find individuals resisting it as is this employee:

> I am concerned about whether the company is solvent and profitable, because that directly affects me. I feel more commitment and identification [toward] the people I directly work with in my department. I probably can't say I feel that way about the company as a whole. I'm not that kind of person. I get very concerned when I see people getting really wrapped up in an organization and identify with it like it's part of them. No one is better than anyone else because of the organization they happen to work for. I know lots of people who work for small organizations, and they're not so-called 'professionals.' They're still fine people.[84]

In considering these remarks, we return to the Burke's dialectical basis for the rhetorical situation: congregation and segregation. My position has been that Burkean criticism and the study of organizational communication should be mutually informed activities. The organizational setting provides an apt case for the illustration of Burke's theory of identification. What Burke wrote in 1937 is even truer today: "In America, it is *natural* for a [person] to identify [himself or herself] with the business corporation [she or he] serves."[85] In examining communication by organizations (i.e., managers and administrators), we can observe the strategies and tactics that help to foster employee identification with the organization. Through such theoretical and critical reflection, we can move toward understanding the process of identification in all its linguistic, psychological, and social complexities and also uncover ways in which individual and organizational interests are linked in contemporary western society.

[81] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, 3rd ed., rev. (Boston: Houghton MIfflin, 1979), pp. 136-166. Galbraith also writes of the rising prevalence of "adaptation," a process by which organizational goals and procedures are sought and improved to make them more consistent with personal aims. This process is highly complementary with identification.

[82] Tompkins and Cheney discuss unobtrusive organizational "control" in more depth. We consider how values and goals are communicated from the large contemporary corporation to the employee and how the overall organizational decision process closely approximates the *enthymeme*, a key concept in Aristotle's explanation of persuasion. See Phillip K. Tompkins and George Cheney, "Unobtrusive Control, Decision Making, and Communication in Contemporary Organizations," Speech Communication Association Annual Meeting, Louisville, Nov. 1982.

[83] Sprenger, cited previously, explains that one "intent" of most of the Raytheon Company's personnel policies is the "generation" of organizational identification to make employee behavior more predictable.

[84] Interview with employee, Cheney, p. 128.

[85] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, II, 140.