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## KENNETH BURKE'S COUNTER-SPECTACLE AND THE PROBLEM OF UNITY IN POLITICAL CULTURE

**Abstract:** The spectacle was prominent in public displays and mass meetings in mid-twentieth-century Russia and Germany as a quest for unity in political culture. In Russia, it was countered by Mikhail M. Bakhtin's novelistic dialogue, polyphony, heteroglossia, and carnival. In Germany, it appeared in its most grotesque form in Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which proclaims Hitler's quest for German national unity and celebrates his National Socialist mass meetings, which created the appearance of a false unity imposed by force of arms. In the United States, Hitler's spectacle was critiqued in Kenneth Burke's review of *Mein Kampf* and continually challenged throughout his life's work. Burke's review critiques Hitler's strategy of attempting to unite Germany by dividing it from those who opposed him, in particular non-German ethnic groups. Burke was engaged in sociopolitical issues throughout his lifetime, and his work offers theories and principles aimed at diversity in unity in political culture and offered as a counterforce to Hitler's spectacle of a false unity—a *counter-spectacle* in the form of identification, dramatism, dialectical and aesthetic transcendence, and a satiric mock portrait of a false unity.

**Keywords:** Kenneth Burke, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Guy Debord, Adolf Hitler, Spectacle, Counter-Spectacle, Political Culture, Identification, Dramatism, Dialectical Transcendence.

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## АНТИСПЕКТАКЛЬ КЕННЕТА БЕРКА И ПРОБЛЕМА ЕДИНСТВА В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ

**Аннотация:** Спектакль играл важную роль в публичных представлениях и массовых собраниях в России и Германии середины XX века как средство формирования однородной политической культуры. В России ему противостояли понятия романного диалога, полифонии, гетероглоссии и карнавала, введенные М.М. Бахтиным. В Германии наиболее гротескным воплощением спектакля стала «Моя борьба» Адольфа Гитлера, в которой Гитлер провозглашает свое стремление к национальному единству Германии и восхваляет массовые собрания национал-социалистов, создававшие иллюзию сплоченности, навязанной силой оружия. Кеннет Берк в рецензии на «Мою борьбу» критиковал организованный Гитлером спектакль и последовательно оспаривал эту установку на протяжении всей своей жизни. В своей рецензии Берк подвергает критике стратегию Гитлера, который пытается объединить Германию, противопоставив ее тем, кто с ним не согласен, особенно негерманским этническим группам. Берка всю жизнь интересовали общественно-политические вопросы, и в своих работах он сформулировал теории и принципы, направленные на сочетание в политической культуре разнообразия и единства, противопоставляя разыгранному Гитлером спектаклю мнимого единения антиспектакль – идентификацию, драматизм, преодоление диалектических и эстетических границ и язвительный сатирический портрет ложного единства.

**Ключевые слова:** Кеннет Берк, М.М. Бахтин, Ги Дебор, Адольф Гитлер, спектакль, антиспектакль, политическая культура, идентификация, драматизм, диалектическое преодоление.

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Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle has recently experienced a resurgence of interest [Bunyard 2018; Penner 2019], concurrent with the rise of political cultures that celebrate spectacles of apparent unity even as they marginalize populations that seem to threaten their hegemony [Blow 2019; In the Hall 2018; Karni Haberman 2019; Kellner 2017; Reeve 2018; Zaretsky 2017]. But the spectacle has deep roots and an ugly place in twentieth-century history as a political strategy for promoting a false unity. As such, it has been challenged in both Russia and the United States, most notably in the works of Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Kenneth Burke, whose lessons are worth recalling in our own time.<sup>1</sup> Writing under the shadow of Stalinist Russia, the spectacle of the Show Trials, and the univocality of the Soviet propaganda machine, Bakhtin was circumspect and politically disengaged, but his portraits of multivocality as dialogue, polyphony, heteroglossia, and carnival are well known as counterpoints to the Soviet monologue, and his portrait of the carnivalesque spectacle, in particular,

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<sup>1</sup> Burke scholars have noted similarities in Bakhtin's and Burke's ideas but note as well the differences in their discursive styles [Adams 2017; Henderson 2017; Lucke 2017]. Henderson observes that both writers offer similar perspectives on history and society, as captured in Bakhtin's various metaphors for the novel's "multiple voices" and Burke's metaphor of the parlor's "unending conversation" [Henderson 2017]. But, according to Henderson, their writing styles differ, Bakhtin's being more "propositional," Burke's more "performative." Bakhtin is a "traditional intellectual," whose writing is "professional, scholarly, and conservative." Burke is an "organic intellectual," whose writing responds to "the exigencies of his historical moment."

These stylistic differences are grounded in part in Bakhtin's and Burke's very different life histories. Bakhtin lived in Stalinist Russia; had an academic education through the doctorate but due to political tensions was denied the degree [Clark Holquist 1984: 27-30, 322-25]; had a limited circle of intellectual friends and acquaintances [Ibid.: 35-62, 95-119, 253-74]; suffered imprisonment and exile in his own country [Ibid.: 120-45]; eventually taught in various universities but under close political scrutiny [Ibid.: 253-74, 321-45]; and suffered from lifelong illnesses, which required amputation of his right leg [Ibid.: 51-53, 142-44, 261, 336-37]. Referencing his works from the 1930s and early 1940s, Clark and Holquist write: "The major contemporary implicitly addressed in these writings was not one of his peers among the intelligentsia but Stalinist culture itself. Bakhtin used his ostensible subject matter as a medium to convey his critique of Stalinist ideology" [Ibid.: 266, 268]. Burke lived alternately in New York City and Andover, New Jersey; had a non-traditional, largely self-education [Selzer 1996: 20-21, 60-63]; had a large circle of intellectual friends and acquaintances, including many of the major literary figures of his time [Ibid.: 3-60]; and throughout his life was thoroughly engaged in sociopolitical issues [George Selzer 2007; Weiser 2008: 58-145]. Referencing "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" in particular, Weiser observes: "Burke seized the opportunity to demonstrate more strongly than ever before that his exposition/exhortation 'type of criticism' could have ramifications beyond the aesthetic and into the sociopolitical world. It could both expose the truths of language and provide the attitude necessary to take action" [Weiser 2008: 64].

stands in direct opposition to the Show Trials and the relentless Stalinist monologue. Burke, in contrast, was thoroughly engaged in sociopolitical issues throughout his life. Writing under the shadow of Nazi Germany but from a greater physical distance, he was direct and explicit in his opposition to the Nazis' strategies for promoting a false unity and the spectacle of their mass meetings, and the entire body of his work not only repudiates their false unity but offers alternatives that embrace a true unity of multiple and diverse perspectives.

Burke expresses his opposition to the Nazi spectacle in his review of the 1939 English translation of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'," but he also observes the persuasive force of the work and offers his assessment as a cautionary note against other works of this kind [Hitler 1939; Burke 1973: 191-220]. Hitler scorns the shameful spectacle of the bourgeois open meetings, with multiple and conflicting voices; admires the grand spectacle of the Marxist mass meetings, which illustrate their unity of purpose; and boasts about his own National Socialist mass meetings, with a false unity imposed by force of arms [Hitler 1939: 715-31, 739-49]. In "Hitler's 'Battle,'" Burke assesses Hitler's unification strategies, not least his ability to identify with the German people by dividing them from the others that he so despises [Burke 1973: 202-7]. But Burke's opposition to the spectacle extends far beyond his rejection of Hitler's false strategies of unification and encompasses his fundamental concept of a unity that embraces diversity and respects the multiplicity of different and potentially competing perspectives. Indeed the entire body of his work may be read as a counterpoint to the spectacle of a false and enforced unity—a *counter-spectacle* in the form of identification, dramatism, symbolic bridging, dialectical and aesthetic transcendence, and perhaps even satire as a mock image of a false unity [Burke 1969a; Burke 1969b; Burke 1971; Burke 1984; Clark 2014; Crable 2014; Weiser 2008; Wolin 2001; Zappen 2009].

### **The Society of the Spectacle**

Debord's commentaries on the spectacle emphasize the inescapable presence of the mass communication of his time, especially television, and its negative consequences for individuals [Bunyard 2018; Debord 1998; Debord 1995; Penner 2019]. Bunyard observes that Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* is not so much about the spectacle itself as it is about history: "it is a book that describes a society that has become detached from its capacity to consciously shape and determine its own future" [Bunyard

2018: 4]. Penner notes in particular the consequences of the spectacle for the social separation and passivity of individuals and its increasing threat as an all-controlling and totalizing force [Penner 2019: 22-33]. Penner therefore proposes a re-envisioning of the spectacle as a radically democratic practice in digital spaces and cites Bakhtin's work as a theoretical basis for such a revision [Ibid.: 9-14, 45-46, 104-35]. Writing from a Marxist perspective, Debord asserts that modern industrial society has generated "an ever-growing mass of image-objects," with the spectacle as its chief product [Debord 1995: 15]. As a consequence, individuals have become isolated and separated since "all contact between people now depends on the intervention of . . . 'instant' communication," which is "essentially *one-way*" [Ibid.: 24]. As they have become separated from each other, they have also become mere passive recipients of the spectacle as "the ruling order discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise" and spectators assume an attitude of "passive acceptance" of the spectacle's "monopolization of the realm of appearances" [Ibid.: 12, 24]. Debord's later *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* observes the increasingly controlling and seemingly inescapable reach of "the integrated spectacle," which is "simultaneously concentrated and diffuse," so that individuals can no longer "lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse and of the various forces organized to relay it," mostly notably industry and government [Debord 1998: 4, 7]. The consequence of these various forces is a seeming "unification" of society via a spectacle that "unites what is separate, but it unites it only *in its separateness*" [Debord 1995: 3, 29]. Penner cites Debord's insistence on "real communication" and "real dialogue" as a corrective to the spectacle and finds in Bakhtin's works a theoretical grounding for his re-envisioning of the spectacle as a radically democratic practice [Debord 1998: 187; Penner 2019: 71]. Bakhtin's theories thus should be read as dialogic practices that not only oppose the authoritarian and monological discourses that convey a false unity but also promote a true unity that embraces multiple perspectives and multiple voices.

### **Novelistic Multivocality**

The relentless print and visual propaganda of the Stalinist political regime has been extensively documented [Bonnell 1997; Brooks 2000; Groys 2003; Haskins Zappen 2010]. Groys explains this propaganda machine as a whole when he asserts that the goal of Stalinist painting and architecture was "the creation of societal homogeneity and the exclusion of

the other” on the principle of the “law of unity and the battle of opposites’,” which proclaims a single official ideology and situates political enemies in a struggle against each other [Groys 2003: 96]. Bakhtin describes this relentless propaganda as “monologism” and envisions various forms of opposition in his portrayals of novelistic “multi-voicedness” as dialogic, polyphonic, heteroglossic, and carnivalesque [Bakhtin 1984a: 8, 16, 20, 285-86, 292-93; Morson Emerson 1990: 49-54, 130-33, 139-49, 231-68, 309-17, 433-70]. Bakhtin’s multivocality is not only a mode of discourse, however, but also a concept of the world as a unity that preserves and respects the multiple perspectives and multiple voices within it. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin captures this unity of multiple perspectives in his distinction between monologue as the unified truth of a “single and unified consciousness” and dialogue as a unified truth “that requires a plurality of consciousnesses” [Bakhtin 1984a: 81]. He provides an illustration of this dialogic unity in his characterization of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel as “*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices . . . , with equal rights and each with its own world,*” which “combine but are not merged in the unity of the event” [Ibid.: 6]. Referencing Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, Bakhtin compares this polyphony to “the complex unity of an Einsteinian universe” but adds parenthetically that “the juxtaposition of Dostoevsky’s world with Einstein’s world is, of course, only an artistic comparison and not a scientific analogy” [Ibid.: 16].

Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and carnival provide similar portraits of such a multiplicity of perspectives and discourses within a unified world. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin explains heteroglossia as the co-existence within any language of “socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth” [Bakhtin 1981: 291]. This heteroglot language is dialogized when any one language is viewed from the perspective of another and thereby enters into “a critical interanimation of languages” [Bakhtin 1981: 296; Morson Emerson 1990: 143]. As in the polyphonic novel, heteroglot language is captured in literary language (and especially novelistic rather than poetic language) as a complex unity, which “is not a unity of a single, closed language system, but is rather a highly specific unity of several ‘languages’ that have established contact and mutual recognition with each other” [Bakhtin 1981: 295]. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin develops a portrait of the carnival as a reversal of

the traditional medieval spectacle and as such not a spectacle of observers but of participants: “Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” [Bakhtin 1984b: 7]. The carnival too is a complex unity, a community of diverse participants formed in opposition to traditional social structures: “In the framework of class and feudal political structure this specific character could be realized without distortion only in the carnival and in similar marketplace festivals. They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” [Ibid.: 9].

### **The Quest for Political Unity**

Burke’s work provides a similar counterpoint to authoritarian and hegemonic discourses—a counter-spectacle to oppose the official discourses that promulgate and perpetuate a sense of false unity that marginalizes and silences diverse perspectives and potentially conflicting voices. Burke was well aware of both the threat and the persuasive force of these official discourses, most horrifically and graphically illustrated in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which asserts a false unity defined as German racial superiority and uniformity; marked by contempt and even hatred for other ethnic and political groups; sustained by the State as guardian of the community so defined; and most prominently displayed in the spectacle of mass meetings, with unity imposed by force of arms [Hitler 1939]. Hitler deplores the lack of unity of the German people and imagines what a unified Germany might have become: “If, in its historical development, the German people had possessed this group unity as it was enjoyed by other peoples, then the German Reich would today probably be the mistress of this globe” [Ibid.: 598]. He believes that such a unity must be pure, however, and uncontaminated by other racial groups: “Every race-crossing leads necessarily sooner or later to the decline of the mixed product, as long as the higher part of this crossing still exists in some racially pure unity” [Ibid.: 604-5]. This drive toward German unity is motivated by his contempt for other ethnic and racial groups, especially Jews, and it motivates also his hostility toward his political opponents, including the bourgeoisie, the Social Democratic Party, the Austrian Parliament, and Marxist sympathizers. Hitler directs his most bitter contempt toward other ethnic and racial groups, especially as represented by Austria and its Jewish population: “I detested the conglomerate of races that the realm’s capital manifested; all this racial mixture of

Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Serbs, and Croats, etc., and among them all, like the eternal fission-fungus . . . of mankind—Jews and more Jews” [Ibid.: 160]. And the Jews, he asserts, are a race, not a nation: “The Jews were always a people with definite racial qualities and never a religion, only their progress made them probably look very early for a means which could divert disagreeable attention from their person” [Ibid.: 421].

But Hitler is also contemptuous of his political opponents for their opposition to German national unity. The bourgeoisie, including Hitler’s own father, arose from the working classes, but the political parties that represented them resisted attempts to improve their working conditions and remedy their social abuses [Ibid.: 30-32, 59-60]. As a consequence, the bourgeois parties drove workers toward the Social Democratic Party, which Hitler despises for its “very fear of the actual raising of the workers from the depths of their present cultural and social misery” and for “its hostile attitude towards the fight for the preservation of the German nationality” [Ibid.: 51, 64]. The Austrian Parliament was both contentious and also hostile toward German nationalism, as represented by the Pan-German movement. It was “a gesticulating mass, shrieking in all keys, wildly stirred, presided over by a good-natured old uncle who, by the sweat of his brow, tried to re-establish the dignity of the House by violently ringing a bell and by alternately kind and earnest remonstrances” [Ibid.: 98]. It opposed the Pan-German movement, which did not have the support of either the masses or the Catholic Church, had to rely on Parliament for support, and thus lost its future: “As soon as the Pan-German movement, because of its parliamentary position, began to place the weight of its activity upon parliament instead of upon the people, it lost its future and won cheap successes of the moment” [Ibid.: 137]. Marxism had a broad international agenda and so, too, was aligned against German nationalism: “Therefore Marxism itself is nothing but the transmission, carried out by the Jew Karl Marx, of a long existing attitude and conception, conditioned by a view of life, to the form of a definite political creed: international Marxism” [Ibid.: 578-79]. Its Jewish sympathizers were proponents of the “Marxist doctrine of irrationality,” practitioners of a twisted form of the Marxist dialectic, and masters of “international capital” [Ibid.: 81, 331]. As such, they were not only racially inferior but also politically abhorrent.

To promote his agenda of German national unity in the face of the forces that he perceived to be aligned against him, Hitler enlisted the State as his greatest ally and mass meetings as his most powerful weapon. The State he considered “not an assembly of commercial parties in a certain

prescribed space for the fulfillment of economic tasks, but the organization of a community of physically and mentally equal human beings for the better possibility of the furtherance of their species as well as for the fulfillment of the goal of their existence assigned to them by Providence” [Ibid.: 195]. And the mass meeting he considered more powerful than the contentiousness and incessant wrangling of the bourgeoisie—both spectacles but of a very different sort. The mass meeting, he claims, “*is necessary if only for the reason that in it the individual, who in becoming an adherent of a new movement feels lonely and is easily seized with the fear of being alone, receives for the first time the pictures of a greater community, something that has a strengthening and encouraging effect on most people*” [Ibid.: 715]. The bourgeois meetings maintained a pretense of “mutual discussion” as a bridge to “mutual understanding,” lest the world be offended by “the shameful spectacle of the internal German fratricidal quarrel . . . ough!” [Ibid.: 727]. The Marxist mass meetings, in contrast, projected “a powerful appearance at least outwardly” and thus illustrated “how easily a man of the people succumbs to the suggestive charm of such a grand and impressive spectacle” [Ibid.: 731].

Inspired by the Marxist mass meetings, Hitler boasts about his own National Socialist meetings, with a unity of purpose imposed by force. The conduct of the meetings was authoritarian: “We did not ask anyone graciously to tolerate our lecture, and, from the beginning, no one was guaranteed an endless discussion, but it was simply stated that we were the masters of the meeting, that consequently we had the authority, and that everyone who would dare to make only so much as one interrupting shout, would mercilessly be thrown out” [Ibid.: 728]. It was also ruthless and brutal, as Hitler openly boasts: “The dance had not yet started when my Storm Troopers, that was their name from that day on, attacked. Like wolves, in groups of eight or ten, again and again they pounced upon their opponents and actually began to beat them out of the hall. Hardly five minutes had passed that I did not see one of them that was not covered with blood” [Ibid.: 748]. Such, as Hitler proudly proclaims, is the ugly spectacle of an intolerant, enforced, and false unity.

### **The Problem of a False Unity**

Burke recognizes Hitler’s quest for unity via German nationalism as his life’s ambition and the central theme of *Mein Kampf*. Scholars have noted Burke’s early formulations of concepts such as identification and scapegoating in his review of *Mein Kampf* and his opposition to the false

unity asserted in times of war in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* [Burke 1973: 202-7, 448-50; George Selzer 2007: 201-2; Weiser 2008: 60-67; Wolin 2001: 126]. But the review may serve as well as a preface to the entire body of Burke's work—an exploration of the strategies for the imposition of a false unity for which his own quest for a unity that respects and encompasses diversity serves as a response—a counter-spectacle and antidote to Hitler's toxic life and work.<sup>2</sup> Burke begins his review of *Mein Kampf* with a cautionary note and then states the central theme of the book and maps the strategies that, as he cautions, can be so effective, even if driven by malice and prejudice. The cautionary note is an advisory to guard against the medicine man's poison: "Here is the testament of a man who swung a great people into his wake. Let us watch it carefully . . . to discover what kind of 'medicine' this medicine-man has concocted, that we may know, with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against" [Burke 1973: 191]. The central theme is the sinister pursuit of a false unity: "Hitler found a panacea, a 'cure for what ails you,' a 'snakeoil,' that made such sinister unifying possible within his own nation" [Ibid.: 192]. And such a unifying panacea is so darkly and deeply sinister because it is not just a unity of like-minded people but also and especially a division from those who are different: "Men who can unite on nothing else can unite on the basis of a foe shared by all" [Ibid.: 193]. But for maximum effectiveness such an enemy must be one, not many, and Hitler selects "an 'international' devil, the 'international Jew'" as his unified enemy and the primary target of his vilification: "So, we have, as unifying step No. 1, the international devil materialized, in the visible, point-to-able form of people with a certain kind of 'blood,' a burlesque of contemporary neo-positivism's ideal of meaning, which insists upon a *material* reference" [Ibid.: 194]. And the Jews are vilified, especially, for their mastery of "Jew finance" and their twisted version of the Marxist "dialectics" [Ibid.: 197, 204].

The unifying enemy thus identified, the unifying strategies inevitably follow as *both* divisive and unifying. Hitler's divisive strategies Burke characterizes as "inborn dignity," "projection," "symbolic rebirth," and "commercial use" [Ibid.: 202-4]. Inborn dignity is the natural superiority of the "Aryan" race and, consistent with Hitler's strategy of divisiveness,

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<sup>2</sup> Garth Pauley provides a detailed account of the publication history of Burke's review, including its relationship to other reviews and essays on Hitler's book, Burke's presentation at the Third American Writers' Congress, and the subsequent publication of the review in *The Southern Review*—all further evidence of Burke's engagement with other intellectuals in the sociopolitical issues of their time [Pauley 2009].

a presumption of the natural inferiority of other races, especially Jews [Ibid.: 202]. Projection is, in essence, scapegoating, the “purification by disassociation” from others and the loading of evils on the backs of those others [Ibid.: 202]. Symbolic rebirth is an aspect of the “projective device of the scapegoat” and the “doctrine of inborn racial superiority” [Ibid.: 203]. It is a “rebirth” in the sense that it provides “a ‘positive’ view of life” and a feeling of “*moving forward, towards a goal*” [Ibid.: 203]. Commercial use is “a *noneconomic interpretation of economic ills*” with the Jews, as the masters of international finance, as the chief villain and scapegoat [Ibid.: 204]. These divisive strategies intersect in Hitler’s own twisted version of the Marxist Jews’ alleged dialectics: “A people in collapse, suffering under economic frustration and the defeat of nationalistic aspirations, . . . have little other than some ‘spiritual’ basis to which they could refer their nationalistic dignity . . . of superior race” [Ibid.: 205].

Hitler’s primary unifying strategy is the spectacle of his speeches at mass meetings with deliberate provocations and harsh retributions. Again, Hitler’s strategy of divisiveness helps to explain and (at least in his own mind) justify his strategy of unification. The problem is the “‘babel’ of voices,” best exemplified by the Viennese parliamentary “wrangle” [Ibid.: 200]. It is “the many conflicting voices of the spokesmen of the many political blocs” that had arisen “from the fact that various separatist movements of a nationalistic sort had arisen within a Catholic imperial structure formed prior to the nationalistic emphasis and slowly breaking apart” [Burke 1973: 200]. In contrast to this parliamentary wrangle, Hitler celebrates his own speeches of unification at his mass meetings. Against the wrangle, “we get a contrary purifying set; the wrangle of the parliamentary is to be stilled by the giving of *one* voice to the whole people” [Ibid.: 207]. That one voice is the key to the identification of the leader and the people: “Hitler’s inner voice, equals leader-people identification, equals unity” [Ibid.: 207]. And that one voice produces the spectacle of the mass meetings, as Hitler boasts that he “would . . . fill his speech with *provocative* remarks, whereat his bouncers would promptly swoop down in flying formation, with swinging fists, upon anyone whom these provocative remarks provoked to answer” [Ibid.: 212-13]. Such was “the power of spectacle” of the mass meetings as “the fundamental way of giving the individual the sense of being protectively surrounded by a movement, the sense of ‘community’” [Ibid.: 217]. Against such a false spectacle, Burke develops strategies for a unity that respects and embraces difference and diversity.

## The Counter-Spectacle of Diversity in Unity

Burke's strategies for diversity in unity offer a counterpoint and a counterforce against the spectacle of a false unity. Burke dismisses Aristotelian spectacle as mere costuming and Machiavellian spectacle as a strategy of a manipulative "'administrative' rhetoric" [Burke 1969a: 231; Burke 1969b: 158]. Instead, recognizing Hitler's strategy of identification with his people via a division from other peoples, he offers his counter-spectacle—a complex array of theories and principles that accept the reality of divisions and seek not to exclude but to embrace them in an overarching unity. Like Bakhtin's concepts of multivocality, these theories have various names and develop over time throughout the body of this work. They are broadly conceptual but also readily applicable to both political culture and everyday life. Burke scholarship has long recognized identification as a key concept in his work [Crusius 1999: 120-21; George Selzer 2007: 156-57, 201-2; Wolin 2001: 177-201], but Burke was well aware of the problem of identifying with others by aligning them with our own interests [Burke 1969b: 19-23, 35-39, 43-46]. He therefore turned increasingly to transcendence as a key concept, and more recent Burke scholarship has tracked this concept in its several variations as it developed throughout the course of his work [Clark 2014; Crable 2014: 5-25; Weiser 2008: 106-8, 130-34; Zappen 2009].

As explained in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, identification can unite people by promoting their common interests, but it can also divide them by promoting an individual's or a group's own interests—though the distinction between one's own and others' interests and the degree of conscious deliberation are not always clear. Identification assumes division and an ambiguous line between the one and the other. It is thus an invitation to rhetoric—the art of persuasion—and as such it is also an invitation to manipulation, which can be either partially or wholly conscious and deceitful. Identification is a joining of one's interests with those of another: "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B" [Burke 1969b: 20]. The identification of one with another does not, however, negate the other: "In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" [Ibid.: 21]. Such a conjoining of interests thus assumes a division: "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division" [Ibid.: 22]. As such, it is an

invitation to rhetoric: "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" [Ibid.: 22].

But identification and division have a complex and ambiguous relationship and thus invite rhetoric but so also manipulation, whether or not deliberate and deceitful. The ambiguous relationship invites rhetoric: "Put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric" [Ibid.: 25]. Rhetoric invites cooperation: it is "*the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*" [Ibid.: 43]. But it also invites manipulation, which might or might not be deliberate. It might be a manipulation that "we impose upon ourselves, in varying degrees of deliberateness and unawareness, through motives indeterminately self-protective and/or suicidal" [Ibid.: 35]. Or it can hover at "the edge of cunning": "A misanthropic politician who dealt in mankind-loving imagery could still think of himself as rhetorically honest, if he meant to do well by his constituents yet thought that he could get their votes only by such display" [Ibid.: 36]. Or it can be deliberately deceitful: "For if an identification favorable to the speaker or his cause is made to seem favorable to the audience, there enters the possibility of such 'heightened consciousness' as goes with deliberate cunning" [Ibid.: 45]. Thus the "wavering line between identification and division" is "forever bringing rhetoric against the possibility of malice and the lie" [Ibid.: 45].

Given the tension inherent in the relationship between identification and division, Burke increasingly turns to transcendence to address the problem of diversity in unity. But identification nonetheless serves as an initial step on the path to transcendence. As Burke observes retrospectively, "if identification includes the realm of transcendence, it has, by the same token, brought us into the realm of transformation, or dialectic" [Burke 1951: 203]. Like identification, transcendence is compensatory to division, or difference, but, unlike identification, transcendence seeks to escape manipulation and deceit by fully engaging, and respecting, multiple and potentially conflicting perspectives. Bryan Crable captures this difference in the phrase "transcendence by perspective" [Crable 2014: 4], which suggests that the perspectives are as much a counterpart to transcendence as division is to identification.

In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke offers an elaborate framework for the analysis of these multiple perspectives, which he calls "dramatism" [Burke 1969a: xxii]. Like Bakhtin, Burke was aware of the multiple per-

spectives of relativity theory [Burke 1984: 310], and, like Bakhtin also, he seeks to bring these multiple perspectives and their interrelationships together in a complex unity that he calls transcendence [Burke 1969a: xv-xxiii, 3-20, 125-320, 420-30, 503-5; Burke 1969b: 53-54, 181-333]. Dramatism tracks human motives “in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action” [Burke 1969a: xxii]. Its key terms are act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose:

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. [Ibid.: xv]

A single, simple act can illustrate this complex of motives: “The hero (agent) with the help of a friend (co-agent) outwits the villain (counter-agent) by using a file (agency) that enables him to break his bonds (act) in order to escape (purpose) from the room where he has been confined (scene)” [Ibid.: xx]. But the individual motives that constitute the act are also complexly interrelated as, for example, scene-act, scene-agent, etc. [Ibid.: 3-20].

This complex mix of motives is evident in Burke’s analysis of “the philosophic schools” and most notably in his appraisal of contemporary sociopolitical issues [Ibid.: 125-320]. Like Bakhtin’s explanation of dialogized heteroglossia, Burke’s analysis shows how one person’s perspective on these issues can be viewed from another’s: “And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A” [Ibid.: 504]. The Marxists’ “*dialectical materialism*,” for example, is a mix of scene-act motives. On the one hand, it is primarily historical and material, hence scenic, since Karl Marx derived “the character of human consciousness in different historical periods from the character of the material conditions prevailing at the time” [Ibid.: 200]. On the other hand, *The Communist Manifesto*’s insistence on revolution is clearly a motive to act: The Communists “openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions,” and the *Manifesto*’s “entire logic is centered about an act, a social or political act, the act of revolution, an act so critical and momentous as to produce a ‘rupture’

of cultural traditions” [Ibid.: 207, 209]. Hitler’s promotion of the State as guardian of the community shows a similar mix of agency-purpose motives. On the one hand, its agency (pragmatism) can be read as a devious strategy of inducement to join the cause of German nationalism; on the other hand, its purpose (a crude form of mysticism) can be read as the pursuit of the ultimate goal of a quality social life: “Was it crass pragmatism (in using the philosophy of the State purely as a rhetoric for inducing the people to acquiesce in the designs of an elite) or crude mysticism (in genuinely looking upon the power and domination of the State as the ultimate end of social life)?” [Ibid.: 290]. Analyses of these “mutually related or interacting perspectives” will produce a “perspective of perspectives” and will pose a problem since any one person can see another only “from his particular position, or point of view, or in his particular perspective (necessarily a restricted perspective, since it represents but one voice in the dialogue, and not the perspective-of-perspectives that arises from the coöperative competition of *all* the voices as they modify one another’s assertions, so that the whole transcends the partiality of its parts)” [Ibid.: 89, 503]. Burke addresses this problem via “the Socratic transcendence” of the early Platonic dialogues [Ibid.: 420-30], which provide a model for his own version of dialectical transcendence.

As Crable observes, however, Burke’s concept of transcendence also has other meanings [Crable 2014: 6-10, 18-25]. In his early formulation in *Attitudes Toward History*, transcendence is an individual’s resolution of differences of perspective within him/herself, such as differences in values, differences between the self and the community, or differences between the sleeping and the waking self [Ibid.: 8-9].<sup>3</sup> Such a resolution is both natural and curative, as a way of “creating unity from the divisive materials of human experience” [Ibid.: 9]. It is effected via a conceptual process of symbolic bridging: “When objects are not in a line, and you would have them in a line without moving them, you may put them into a line by shifting your angle of vision” [Burke 1984: 224]. This conceptual shifting permits an individual to reconcile differences in perspective via transcendence, the adoption of a new perspective that resolves the differences: “When approached from a certain point of view, A and B are ‘opposites.’ We mean by ‘transcendence’ the adoption of another point of view from which they

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<sup>3</sup> As Burke notes, Hitler himself experienced such an internal conflict: “Hitler is said to have confronted a constant wrangle in his private deliberations, after having imposed upon his people a flat choice between conformity and silence” [Burke 1969b: 23].

cease to be opposite” [Ibid.: 336]. In Burke’s late formulation in an essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Language as Symbolic Action*, transcendence is fundamental to the human condition and is “an ever-present feature of human symbol-use” [Crabbe 2014: 21]. It is a dialectical process whereby symbol use is always reaching for something beyond itself: “Whether there is or is not an ultimate shore towards which we, the unburied, would cross, transcendence involves dialectical processes whereby something HERE is interpreted *in terms of* something THERE, something *beyond* itself” [Burke 1966: 200]. As such, transcendence as symbol-use is always open-ended and, as Bakhtin might say, “unfinalized” [Bakhtin 1984a: 12].

Given these limitations, Burke’s solution to the problem of diversity in unity lies in neither of these early or late formulations but in his concept of dialectical transcendence as previewed in *A Grammar of Motives* and developed more fully in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. [Burke 1969a: 420-30, 503-5; Burke 1969b: 53-54, 181-333; Crabbe 2014: 10-18; Crusius 199: 179-82; Weiser 2008: 106-8, 130-34; Zappen 2009]. Dialectical transcendence is “dialectical” because it derives a complex unity from the interplay of multiple, potentially competing perspectives. As Crabbe explains, “the twin movements of the ‘Upward Way’ and the ‘Downward Way’ . . . trace the movement from a plurality of competing voices, through increasing levels of abstraction, to the arrival at a new, unifying principle” [Crabbe 2014: 14]. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, as in the earlier *Grammar*, these competing voices are not only individual but also broadly sociopolitical and ideological. They are the voices of “the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the Wars of Nerves, the War” [Burke 1969b: 23]. And they are resolved via a dialectical process that leads, or can lead, to transcendence, as envisioned originally by Plato and proceeding thus:

First, the setting up of several voices, each representing a different ‘ideology,’ and each aiming rhetorically to unmask the opponents; next, Socrates’ dialectical attempt to build a set of generalizations that transcended the bias of the competing rhetorical partisans; next, his vision of the ideal end in such a project; and finally, his rounding out the purely intellectual abstractions by a myth, in this case the chiliastic vision. The myth would be a reduction of the ‘pure idea’ to terms of image and fable. By the nature of the case, it would be very limited in its range and above all, if judged literally, it would be ‘scientifically’ questionable. [Ibid.: 200]

This scientifically questionable myth would not necessarily represent a point of closure, however, since it “might then be said to represent a forward-looking partisanship, in contrast with the backward-looking partisanship of the ‘ideologies’” and thus might serve as a point of departure that seeks “a new dialectic by a method that transcended the partiality of both the ideologies and the myth” [Ibid.: 200].

This forward/backward-looking partisanship is significant because it illustrates the transformative quality of the dialectical process of transcendence, a process that is both upward and downward. On the one hand, the upward journey produces, or can produce, a momentary unity of the competing ideologies; on the other hand, the downward journey shows how those competing ideologies have been transformed by the upward journey:

Here are the resources of the Upward Way, by the *via negativa*, with the possible reversal of direction, a returning to the flatlands in a Downward Way. (On the return the system will contain a principle of transcendent unity which was reached at the culmination of the way up, and henceforth pervades all the world's disparate particulars, causing them to partake of a common universal substance.) [Ibid.: 311]

The competing ideologies themselves may thus be transformed by the dialectical process of transcendence, and the individual perspectives may be revisited from the broader point of view of the “perspective-of-perspectives” [Burke 1969a: 89]. Thus is achieved an “ultimate identification” that avoids the potential for manipulation and deceit in identification conceived as merely a joining of interests via persuasion [Burke 1969b: 328, 333].

But dialectical transcendence as an ultimate identification is an ideal. The reality is that dialectic is a recursive and iterative process that may but does not necessarily always lead to a transcendent unity of diverse perspectives, a diversity in unity. In the *Rhetoric*, Burke explains how dialectic may build an attitude of openness toward a transcendent unity even if not always an immediate and positive outcome. In the context of the parliamentary wrangle, a “‘dialectical’ order” may lead to mere concession and compromise and so may “leave the competing voices in a jangling relation with one another” [Ibid.: 187-88]. But an “‘ultimate’ order” might place these competing voices “in a *hierarchy*, or *sequence*, or *evaluative series*” so that the voices might be motivated by a “guiding idea” or “unitary principle,” and thus the “somewhat formless parliamentary wrangle” might

be “creatively endowed with design” [Ibid.: 187-88]. The voices might not accept this design, but it might nonetheless have the “contemplative effect” of reorienting the voices toward the struggles of politics and more open to the possibility of compromise [Ibid.: 188]. In a similar vein, in the later “Linguistic Approach to Problems of Education,” Burke proposes “an educational ladder” whereby students might be led from indoctrination to exposure to others’ views for the purpose of combatting them to genuine appreciation for those views to engagement with those views as voices in a dialogue [Burke 1955: 283]. At this fourth stage in the process, all voices deemed to be relevant to discussion of an issue would need to be represented as ably as possible, not merely for the purpose of “fair play” but so that “the various voices, in mutually correcting one another, will lead toward a position better than any one singly” [Ibid.: 283-84]. At the least, at this stage, the voices in the dialogue would be affected by the other voices, would learn from them, and might thereby correct or enrich their own beliefs.

Beyond these ongoing and thus incomplete dialectical processes, transcendence as an aesthetic experience may also be possible but may be only momentary and fleeting. Gregory Clark provides an instance of “aesthetic transcendence” that succeeds, if only momentarily, where dialogue fails [Clark 2014: 180]. This instance is a conflict that he observed in workshop with a jazz sextet wherein a saxophonist and a trumpeter were at odds in their approach to jazz music. The saxophonist was a jazz historian, the trumpeter a proponent of innovation and experimentation. The two were at odds throughout the workshop until a public performance, the two successively improvising and then accompanying each other, with a momentarily satisfying result that nonetheless left them as much as ever at odds with each other. Such a process of aesthetic transcendence, Clark argues, might not be as permanent as a transcendence achieved dialogically, but it might succeed, at least momentarily, where dialogue fails.

Transcendence as diversity in unity is also merely illusory when it is the product of a forced and false unity, as Burke illustrates in “Towards Helhaven: Three Stages of a Vision,” a mock, satiric portrait of an Earth colony on the moon [Burke 1971]. Burke remained committed and engaged in sociopolitical issues throughout his life and, not least, in his later years, in problems of technology and the natural environment.<sup>4</sup> Burke perceived

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Hill explores Burke’s philosophy of technology and argues that his concern with Big Technology persisted throughout his lifetime: “Kenneth Burke spent copious

technology and nature as almost entirely, though not inescapably, at odds with each other since technology is both *in* nature and *at odds* with it: “The various toxic waste dumps are *in* nature; all Counter-Nature (much of it advantageous) is *in* nature. It is ‘unnatural’ only in the sense that, thanks to the symbol-guided ‘labors’ of Technology, we have altered the nature of our environment as no other animal’s mere ‘presence’ in the world has been remotely able to do” [Burke 1984: 426-27]. But technology per se is not the villain. The problem is rather “Technologism” and the mutual entanglements between technology and social, political, and economic structures [Burke 1972: 53]. Technologism is the use of technology to solve the problems created by technology: “As distinct from mere technology, ‘Technologism’ would be built upon the assumption that the remedy for the problems arising from technology is to be sought in the development of ever more and more technology” [Ibid.: 53]. And technology, moreover, is situated within a complex sociopolitical environment, “as all of us in the United States today share, however variously, the situation characterized by the present conditions of technology, finance, and sociopolitical unrest” [Burke 2016: 263].

Burke responds to this technology-nature split with satire, by engaging “the entelechial principle” but doing so “perversely, by tracking down the possibilities or implications to the point where the result is a kind of Utopia-in-reverse” [Burke 1974: 315]. In “Towards Helhaven,” he envisions this Utopia-in-reverse in the form of an imaginary community that brings technology and nature together in a false unity—false because it is merely asserted and not developed via the dialectical process that leads both upward and downward to a true transcendence and a diversity in unity. “Towards Helhaven” portrays an Earth that is consumed with “*Hypertech-nologism*,” industrial progress, massive energy consumption, depletion of natural resources, and global pollution to the point that a radical revolution would be required before “the adventurous ideals of exploitation that are associated with modern industrial, financial, and political ambitions could be transformed into modes of restraint, piety, gratitude, and fear proper to man’s awareness of his necessary place in the entire scheme of nature”

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time grappling with the meanings and ramifications of technological behavior. He recognized the waste and destruction that technologies entailed, and these problems constituted one of the central themes that Burke confronted throughout his writings: ‘Big Technology’” [Hill 2009]. According to Hill, Burke’s self-assigned role “in response to Big Technology was that of world-transforming critic aiming to counter the problems derived from ‘Counter-Nature.’”

[Burke 1971: 19]. As an escape from this ravaged Earth, Helhaven offers a visionary lunar community that unites technology and nature in an idyllic paradise:

HELHAVEN, the Mighty Paradisal Culture-Bubble on the Moon. Safer than any Sea Meadows venture (even under the Arctic ice). More nearly attainable than a Martian project, HELHAVEN, the Ultimate Colony, merging in one enterprise, both Edenic Garden and Babylonian, Technologic Tower. And paradox of paradoxes: This Final Flight will have been made possible by the very conditions which made it necessary. [Ibid.: 21].

But this technology-nature unity is the product of Burke's satiric imagination and mere assertion and thus provides only a mock image of a true transcendence. Moreover, this imagined unity is evidently also a satiric mock imitation of the dialectic's Upward and Downward Ways—a mockery because it leads ever outward and upward and thus forecloses the downward way that revisits diverse perspectives from the perspective-of-perspectives of a transcendent unity:

But in any case, let there be no turning back of the clock. Or no turning inward. Our Vice-President has rightly cautioned: *No negativism*. We want AFFIRMATION—TOWARDS HELHAVEN.  
ONWARD, OUTWARD, and UP! [Ibid.: 25]

This satiric portrait of a Utopia-in-reverse nonetheless suggests a path to a true transcendence: a dialectical process that engages and respects multiple perspectives with hope that the competition among conflicting perspectives might lead to a broader perspective-of-perspectives and thereby a true diversity in unity.

Dialectical transcendence is not a simple solution to the problem of unity in political culture. It is a process that sometimes yields only limited positive outcomes, is sometimes momentary and fleeting, and may also be a false image of a true unity. These limitations notwithstanding, dialectical and perhaps also aesthetic transcendence offer promise of a true diversity in unity—a counter-spectacle to challenge the spectacle of false unities imposed by force or effected by partially or wholly deliberate deceit and manipulation. Political *unity* born of nationalism and partisanship is a false unity that promotes marginalization, stokes the flames of hatred of ethnic and gendered minorities, and produces spectacles as appearances of unity

that veil an underlying refusal to respect difference and diversity and engage others in meaningful political discourse and mutual accommodation. Bakhtin's portraits of multivocality are fundamental dialogic principles disguised as literary criticism, and Burke's counter-spectacle is an aggregation of principles and procedures that may seem remote and abstract but nonetheless provides some basic and essential lessons for a political discourse that embraces differences in the interest of a more genuine and lasting unity that preserves and respects but transcends individual and partisan interests.

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