



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
ASSOCIATION FOR RHETORIC, WRITING,  
AND THE TRANSCENDENT

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Greetings Associates,

I hope to see many of you at the 4C's in San Francisco, especially at this year's Special Interest Group session. We are slated as session TSI.05, "Rhetoric, Writing, and the Transcendent," and scheduled for Thursday night, March 17, at 6:30-7:30.

This year we have two presenters. But we have significant corrections to make to the CCCC online program. Bradley Siebert of Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, and Hayes Hampton of the University of South Carolina – Sumter *will* present. But neither will be speaking on Burke's pacifist project, as worthy as that would be. Siebert will present a paper called "Bio-Historicity as Kaufman's Postmodern Theological Ground: A Burkean Analysis." Hampton will present his paper, "Terministic Screams: Forbidden Texts and the Figur-ation of Chaos."

Below you will find Ben McCorkle's article, "*Ars Rhetorica, Ars Bellum: More Fragments and Meditations on Peacemaking Potentials in Postmodern Discourse Theory*," an extension and complication of my hopeful article "Peacemaking Potentials in Postmodern Discourse Theory: Fragments and Meditations," from last year's newsletter. McCorkle reminds us that Postmodern discourse theory won't necessarily orient us more toward peace than toward conflict. I discussed my hope that postmodernism could inspire humility by orienting people to the limits of human knowledge, making us uncertain of the righteousness of any cause that up until now may have inspired us to level guns at each other. McCorkle, on the other hand, despite knowing that there's no going back, speculates on a "postmodern return" to *playing* by the rules of open-handed discourse even though we know they are only rules.

Sincerely,  
Bradley G. Siebert, Editor

***Ars Rhetorica, Ars Bellum:***  
**More Fragments and Meditations on**  
**Peacemaking Potentials**  
**in Postmodern Discourse Theory**

Ben McCorkle  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

No amount of neon jazz  
Could hide the oozing vibes of death.  
– Dead Kennedys, *Frankenchrist*

When I arrived in San Antonio for the 2004 CCCC, I happened upon Bradley Siebert's article in the ARWT Newsletter. I suppose it was not mere coincidence that at essentially the same time I took notice of the featured session for that morning: "Rhetoric and War," chaired by Andrea Lunsford and featuring Jackie Royster, Joyce Irene Middleton, Hilton Obenzinger, and—the beau of the ball—Wayne Booth. The occasion for the panel, of course, was the anniversary of the war in Iraq, and the topics raised therein involved the role of rhetoric *vis a vis* war: distinctions between war and propaganda, sustaining dissent during wartime, the various influences of

mass media and pop culture, the (ir)relevance of the university in the face of war. Not surprisingly, my own thoughts began churning, roiling, smashing together like so many troubled atoms.... Why are we (read: the body politic) persuaded to warfare, and how can we be dissuaded from it?

Siebert's article rings hopeful, and I want to embrace that hope save for a few niggling doubts. Although postmodern philosophy offers us promise in the form of Gadamer's hermeneutic or Levinas' care-laden stare into the face of the Other, too often that promise goes unrealized, trumped by the Burkean scapegoat principle. Perhaps we have, as Siebert suggests, the potential to realize a rhetoric that will "shape our *selves* toward peace and justice, leaving fewer of us misshapen by rage to enrage each other," but in my less hopeful moments, I feel as if we're almost predisposed to armed conflict (4). Perhaps a better understanding of what moves us to warfare is in order.

*A Rhetoric of Motives* gives us perhaps the most resonant definition of warfare from within the disciplinary confines of rhetoric:

And so, in the end, men are brought to that most tragically ironic of all divisions, or conflicts, wherein millions of cooperative acts go into the preparation for the one single destructive act. We refer to that ultimate *disease of cooperation: war*. (Burke 22, emphasis added)

Of course, Kenneth Burke wasn't alone in his preoccupation with the connections between rhetoric and war, especially during the mid-twentieth century. The Burkean-influenced, yet far more conservative voice of Richard Weaver from *Ideas Have Consequences*:

The terrible brutalities of democratic war have demonstrated how little the mass mind is capable of seeing the virtue of selection and restraint. The refusal to see distinction between babe and adult, between the sexes, between combatant and noncombatant—disti-

nctions which lay at the core of chivalry—the determination to weld all into a form-less unit of mass and weight—this is the destruction of society through brutality. (XXX)

And then there's the aforementioned Wayne Booth:

All religious warfare is a result of a failure of reconciliation—and all academic and political warfare, all family disputes, personal quarrels. (Booth, "...Targets")

I see in this tendency to see war as failed rhetoric a lacuna or oversight, brought on by the assumption that rhetorical persuasion ends at the doorstep of warfare. Warfare is not the end of rhetoric, the space where rhetoric dares not or can no longer tread. Rather, warfare is the **ends** of a **particular** rhetoric. As such, the question becomes not a matter of what caused rhetoric to fail to stem the march to battle, but what caused **one** rhetoric to win over **another**. The rhetoric of warfare is one that, historically and now, has often employed religiosity as its most powerful ally in the bid to establish consubstantiality in the citizenry. Perhaps the key to unsettling successful war rhetorics lies in the **strategic** reclamation of religiosity into a rhetoric of peace that not only strives to consubstantiate divided factions within the nation-state, but between us and Other.

The sad state of contemporary political discourse is that it has become all too easy to win the day. Through ceaseless repetitions of countless mantras broadcast over a tireless network of mass media (Consider the media monotone: "bad guys and evil-doers," "Bush-bashing," "another Vietnam quagmire," "Emboldens the enemy," "WMDs," . . .), politicians drive the polis into their galvanized mentalités. Absent the threat of conscription, and serenaded by the hypnotic lull of a real-time, embedded video feed of the action as it happens in some remote corner of the world most of us will never have occasion to visit, we are many of us rocked into a complacency to simply let this stand, never mind our political proclivities. Warfare of today, as well as the attractive remediations of the wars of yesterday (recent cinematic events like *Pearl Harbor* or *Saving Private Ryan*, for instance), has become aestheticized and

hence removed from our embodied, lived experience. This state of the hypermediated postmodern condition realizes the promise that closes Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Though commenting on the Fascist/Futurist context of WWII, Benjamin's Epilogue eerily prophesies what we have come to witness firsthand today—that

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. [...] [Humanity's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. (241)

Could it be that one way out of the morass is a return **from** poststructuralism? Mindful of the

old adage "You can't go home again," such a return inevitably carries with it the knowing, ironic wink of poststructuralist thought, the recognition of systems **as** systems, and with that recognition, the ability to maneuver through the system with a newfound latitude (call it "strategic structuralism," a distant cousin of Spivak's poorly understood "strategic essentialism"). Edward P.J. Corbett offered us the glimpse of such a model back in 1969 when he drew a distinction between a rhetoric of the open hand and a rhetoric of the closed fist. Corbett saw in the politically turbulent 1960s a growing reluctance on the part of youth culture to engage the establishment in nonviolent dialogue. And although he acknowledged that reluctance to adopt a rhetoric of the open hand, allowing that the youth "may see the civility, decorum, and orderliness of the older mode of discourse as a facade behind which the establishment in all ages has perpetrated injustices on the have-nots," these

## Call for Papers

If you have an idea for a presentation for **next year's SIG session** or know of someone who might, please let the editor know as soon as possible. Next year's deadline for CCCC program proposals is, no doubt, immanent.

Also, if you would like to submit an article for **the next issue of the newsletter**, we'd be glad to consider it. (There is usually space for an article of 1500-2000 words, plus a modest bibliography.)

In both cases, we are looking for papers that discuss topics having to do, broadly, with how spiritually oriented and other transcendental worldviews influence rhetorical practice and composition pedagogy.

We can correspond by e-mail. The editor's address is <bradley.siebert@washburn.edu>.

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### *Membership and Change of Address Form*

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faults were more “the result of human frailty, not of an inherent weakness” in civic discourse itself (296). For Corbett, actively participating within a power dynamic, even when one is situated at the bottom of it, still allows for the contingency of persuasion; delivered with an open hand, that contingency grows all the more likely. I read Corbett’s lesson as something of a poststructuralist return: respect the rules, play by the rules (and here, emphasis on “play,” a central tenet of postmodernism), but above all else, know that they are only rules.

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Department of English  
Washburn University  
Topeka, KS 66621