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Title: Review of *Psychoanalysis and the new rhetoric: Freud, Burke, Lacan, and philosophy's other scenes* by Daniel Adleman and Chris Vanderwees

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Abstract: Review of *Psychoanalysis and the New Rhetoric: Freud, Burke, Lacan, and Philosophy's Other Scenes* by Daniel Adleman and Chris Vanderwees (London and New York: Routledge, 2023).

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Review of *Psychoanalysis and the new rhetoric: Freud, Burke, Lacan, and philosophy's other scenes* by Daniel Adleman and Chris Vanderwees

Daniel Adleman and Chris Vanderwees, *Psychoanalysis and the New Rhetoric: Freud, Burke, Lacan, and Philosophy's Other Scenes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023).

Psychoanalysis and the New Rhetoric is a collaborative work emerging from several years of conversations between Adleman – a rhetorician – and Vanderwees – a psychoanalyst. Their dialogue represents a thoughtful fusion of psychoanalytic practice and theory with new rhetoric, rather effectively combining the work of Freud, Burke, and Lacan as main theoreticians, with many others also included. Rhetoric and psychoanalysis are disciplines that have been, or still are, on the margins of established scientific and institutional domains. Their peripheral status seemingly propels the authors, Adleman and Vanderwees, on an uncertain path to not just refresh and reinvigorate our interest in these two disciplines but also to reframe the relationship between psychoanalysis and rhetoric. This valuable book stands as a successful conclusion to their journey.

The renewal and retelling of the legacy left behind by the great minds of Freud, Lacan, and especially the almost completely forgotten work of Burke on rhetoric, adds a much-needed component to the registers of the symbolic, imaginative, and real. Burke's new rhetoric is based on the premise that rhetoric should be revived by incorporating a set of art forms, cultural practices, and philosophical systems. In turn, this revived rhetoric can augment psychoanalysis by bringing in newfound multidimensionality. The authors of the book follow Burke's theoretical pluralism

with the claim that the tactics of reconciliation between the rival theories of Plato, Aristotle, Freud, Lacan, Dewey, and many others bring to light a wide spectrum of ideas, viewpoints, and positions, making this book suitable for further thought and for developing new ideas of rhetorical and psychoanalytical cooperation and cross-pollination.

In order to best articulate the theoretical stage of this work, the authors revisit the famous prejudice of Plato's philosophy which relegates all art and thinking based on the imaginary and symbolic to the least important place in philosophy. Socrates characterised the sophists and their art of rhetoric as a false imitation of philosophy, based on the contention that their art relied on irrational elements and served to manipulate society. Burke takes exception with Plato's rejection of rhetoric by claiming that philosophy is a *branch* of rhetoric. Further, he negates Aristotle's claim that rhetoric stands in opposition to philosophy. This interesting attempt to allow the penetration of rhetoric and psychoanalysis into philosophy is still debated.

Even though the authors commenced with a symbiosis – or as they would refer to it, osmosis – of rhetoric and psychoanalysis, the question of truth-telling also appears. During these long centuries of Western thought the question of truth was not so radically sharpened by any discipline as it was by psychoanalysis.

“The truth of psychoanalysis is not an institutional or scientific truth, but a subjective truth” (p. 27). Foucault's reading of Freud ties together truth and sex, as sex is considered to go beyond sensation, pleasure, and that it is up to sex to bring us our truth. For Lacan, the “emergence of truth” is always a part of the analysis,

as truth invariably resides in what is unsaid and cannot be said in speech. For Burke, truth and opinion form a dialectical pair within the realm of persuasion, ultimately aimed at prompting action.

In *A rhetoric of motives*, Burke utilises Freud's concept of *symbolic action* to expand upon the notion of persuasion as the persuasion to adopt, or to identify with, an attitude. Burke posits that persuasion is a rhetorical skill entailing "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (p. 45). The authors perceive a parallel between the concept of attitude and Lacan's *objet petit a* regarded as the "hallucinatory motor of desire" (p. 45). In a sense, attitude reflects the subject's involvement in socio-symbolic domains. Through an examination of the capacity of the symbolic to contribute to humans' well-being and its influence on our conscious intentions, Burke arrives at the concepts of *symbolic action*, *attitude*, *identification*, and *orientation* (p. 45)

These rhetorical concepts constitute Burke's new rhetoric as *techné* – a system of techniques – that partakes not only in the subjective psychoanalytic spheres but also in the sociocultural ones by building new ideological principles using the technique of persuasion. When society changes, so too does rhetoric lead to changes in language. One of the defining properties of human languages is that they can be put to new uses, geared to new situations, and even create new uses and situations. Language for Burke has three dimensions: rhetorical, poetical, and ethical. The rhetorical is the dimension in which the act of persuasion is supplanted to identification and social cooperation. The poetical dimension is self-expressive, satisfied with itself, and thrives in art. The ethical dimension is "the portrait of a personality" (p. 37). There is usually something ridiculous in the relationship between rhetorical operations and attempts by *nouveaux régimes* to emphasise their ideological novelty. They try to change the

hierarchies of names and words in order to create a whole new rhetorical cosmos. Their goal is to achieve a – mainly pathological – change in society using the conspiratorial potential of rhetoric. In Burke's close reading of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, in his chapter "The rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" (1939), we can find his seminal work on critical theoretical and psychoanalytic techniques where he explains the social act of identification and disidentification.

Burke considers Hitler as the most prominent far-right conspiracy theorist, and tries to understand him and his rhetoric of conspiracy through the lenses of Freud's concept of *repetition compulsion*, and Aristotle's notion of *entelechy*. The mode of symbolic action shows the link between Freud's *destiny compulsion*, which is based on previous behavioural patterns, and *entelechy's* movement towards perfection. These are the two founding principles of the creation of "magical thinking" but also the creation of the "perfect villain", which are crucial elements for establishing conspiracy theories. It is essential to understand how Burke distinguishes between an old rhetoric based on persuasion and a new rhetoric based on identification, which can include a "partially 'unconscious' factor in appeal" ("Rhetoric old and new" 203).

Conspiratorial plausibility becomes extremely persuasive when the symptoms of a fantasy system align with rhetorical elements. These strategies remain in use today as can be evidenced by Trump's presidential campaigns as well as QAnon's actions. The authors refer to this as a "mega-conspiratorial algorithm" (p. 89) which was activated in the 9/11 conspiracy movement, the pushback against 5G networks, disbelief in the pandemic, etc. The conspiracy movements' plans to save the world correspond closely to Hitler's "Messiah-given role" to save the world from "villainous Jews." This leads to the formation, today, of online rhetorical platforms that produce limited, controlled, and manipulated information – that is,

disinformation – thus creating a “crippled epistemology” (p. 91). In other words, this leads to a situation where truth and knowledge are forever divided. The penetration of conspiracy theories into the being’s psyche through its emotions and passions persuades the being to take action.

For Burke, any verbal act is part of a symbolic action that serves the purpose of identifying the being and manifesting itself outside of itself, thereby underpinning our social, political, and historical environments, and ultimately, the functioning of our society. Action is ordered to represent the essential self (who one is) in the symbolic sphere, wherein the subject (symbolically) represents itself to society, allowing society to function. Expressed in a Nietzschean manner, human existence is a drama that, through its performativity, allows us to analyse and become aware of the state of our personal and societal conditions. Burke’s *dramatistic pentad* seeks to explain “what is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it.” His dramatism can be classified under his concept of *Way of Knowing* – the title of one of his books. “Dramatism as ideological critique” is a “sophisticated dramaturgy that begets and inheres to complex systems of thought then services ideological analysis in a myriad of unexpected ways” (p.53).

The performative character of rhetoric is generally directed towards the audience. “The pivotal role of language’s nature as not only signifying (i.e. meaning things) but also addressing (i.e. calling out to others) is, for Burke, an integral matter of shared concern between rhetoric and psychoanalysis” (p. 46). The necessity for listening cannot be founded on an understanding that is forced. It is precisely by opposing an imposed “proper” understanding that the listener is freed to build their own internal, novel methods of making sense, with their own associations and their own interpretations. In the practice of psychoanalysis, the authors bring forth the most important postu-

lates formulated by Freud and Lacan vis-à-vis listening.

Freud posits that the analyst should practice free-floating attention during the process of listening and should make no effort to remember anything. The analyst must avoid all constructs and reflexes of conscious understanding in the dialogue with the analysand and allow their unconscious to capture the drift of the patient’s unconscious (p. 120). Psychoanalytic listening is a free listening that creates unconscious connections or even free unconscious communication of non-communication. That which Freud terms free-floating listening leads to “afterwardness” which is analogous to Lacan’s *après coup* or deferred action (p. 122).

Amidst the challenge of understanding and confronting the psychoanalytic-narrative discourse, where the vast majority of students at the very beginning of their journey give up on entering the psychoanalytic community, we should find courage in Lacan’s maxim: “the less you understand, the better you listen” (p. 152). What is crucial to understand and to do for the future, not only in the disciplines of rhetoric and psychoanalysis but more generally in our existential being, is to comprehend what it means to listen to someone and what that entails for developing a common ground leading to understanding.

The linguistic order is primordial, not the subject, because subjectivity is born out of the primordial linguistic order that underpins the world. So, what would be the end goal of constituting better links between psychoanalysis and rhetoric? A potential answer might be that it serves to deepen the structure of personal and *social* critique for a more pertinent and salient analysis which can help people to begin to criticise and transform the main signifiers that subjugate them. Together, psychoanalysis and rhetoric can awaken all those who still do not wish to see through the veil of illusion, refuse to confront the symbolic order, and do not want to distrust authority.

This text is highly recommended for a broad range of readers, as it is eminently readable even for those who are unfamiliar with the methods of psychoanalysis and rhetoric. Moreover, it provides a rich historical background for those who gave up on studying psychoanalysis and rhetoric but seek to return to these disciplines, as its meticulous attention to detail allows for filling in gaps that have accumulated over time. Even for knowledgeable readers, the book enables them to deepen their understanding of the link between new rhetoric and psychoanalysis.

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