

## Introduction



# THE RHETORICAL EXPERIENCE OF LANDSCAPE

It is late March 1967. Recent issues of *Life*—perhaps the most widely read national magazine—lie on side tables and coffee tables in homes and offices throughout America. The February 24 issue has a portrait of Elizabeth Taylor on the cover above the title of its feature article, “Burton Analyzes Liz.” The cover of the next issue, March 3, announces the photographic essay “Lost Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.” The cover photo for the March 10 issue, taken from inside a cargo plane of paratroopers jumping into Vietnam, introduces a feature titled “New Tactics Step Up the War.” For the March 17 issue, it is a photo of Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa smiling over the caption, “Hoffa Goes to Jail.” Immediately inside those covers are *Life*’s short editorials—on rising crime in America, a CIA scandal, abortion conflicts, the need for a more “equitable draft,” Robert Kennedy’s challenges to LBJ’s Vietnam policy. It is springtime in the United States, just beginning to warm toward a long summer during which the streets of the nation’s cities will fill with people protesting the war and rioting in rejection of the racism that still characterizes the national culture.

This is the context in which *Life* inaugurated a new project: a series of spectacular photographic essays to be published under the general celebratory title “To See This Land, To See America.” The first one appeared in the March 3 issue, with this introduction:

The sun burns off the morning mist, the wind rises and the air swells with freshness renewed, and “the varied and ample land,” as Walt Whitman called America, stands forth. Whitman was awed by his subject into uncharacteristic understatement. For America was created on the heroic scale. The mountains are flung up, at once so massive and yet so delicately sculpted that one aches with wonder to behold them. The rivers trace a filigree intricate as the veining of a maple leaf, and hills sprawl flat to make a desert rivaling in unchanging vastness the skies themselves. The beauty of this land is revealed

in an infinity of images. To see this land, to see America, *Life* here begins an exploration that will enlist many photographers, whose discoveries will appear at intervals over the next several years. (50)

Fifteen pages of fine aerial photography follow: carefully composed color images of orderly New England villages, peaceful farms, pristine forests, and sublime seascapes. The next issue, March 10, published the second installment of the series, this one presenting pleasant photographs of American cities, each composed from the closer view afforded by the windows of high-rise buildings. But no further installments of the series appeared in *Life* that spring. Indeed, the first issue in April featured a more urgent photographic essay: a set of “exclusive” photographs of the streets of Hanoi during American air raids titled “North Vietnam under Siege.”

In July of that difficult year, during some of the most intense civil conflict that living Americans had experienced, Kenneth Burke published an essay in the *Nation* with a title that also seems celebratory, “Responsibilities of National Greatness.” But his purpose was admonitory. This was yet another statement of the primary lesson of citizenship he had been trying to teach Americans for a half century: that “we may profit by meditating on our personal modes of identification with the great empire of which we are all citizens” (46). When Burke wrote “Responsibilities of National Greatness,” he emphasized not “our country’s obligation to other countries” nor even “a citizen’s obligations in their totality,” but the pressing need that all citizens “pause occasionally and ponder the puzzlements of ‘identification’ as they affect our sense of citizenship” (47). As people identify themselves with public symbols of a nation, they inevitably fail, in his succinct phrase, “to distinguish clearly enough between things and symbols” (48). This failure to consider critically the complex realities from which they take a simplistic symbolic meaning can lead people to adopt a “corporate” identity that is not in their best interest. Burke’s lesson was that “citizens in a democracy” have a responsibility to attend vigilantly to the “ambiguities of identification” that are always inherent in “that tiny first-person plural pronoun, ‘we’” (50).

To attend critically to these ambiguities of identification—the sort that saturated *Life*’s celebratory photo-essays on a picturesque American landscape at a time when life in that landscape was increasingly turbulent—is the central purpose of the concept of ethical human interaction that constitutes Burke’s understanding of the rhetorical. His *A Rhetoric of Motives*, first published in 1950, describes as rhetorical any encounter that prompts a “persuasion ‘to attitude’” as well as “persuasion to out-and-out action” because persuasion to attitude is, after all, essentially “an incipient act.” This “notion of persuasion to *attitude* would permit the application of rhetorical terms to purely *poetic* structures” (50)—to encounters that we would not readily consider “rhetorical.” Indeed, for Burke the rhetorical may be fundamentally aesthetic, since the “simplest case of persuasion” is, for him, a relational encounter

rather than a rational argument: “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55).

This suggests that the rhetorical symbols we encounter and exchange are not limited to language. It suggests that the full range of symbols that constitute a person’s social and cultural experience have rhetorical functions. As Burke put it, “participants in a common situation” encounter the rhetorical not only in “the words one is using” but also in “the nonverbal circumstances in which one is using them” (“Rhetorical Situation” 263). That is because together these words and circumstances provide those who share them with common “resources of identification” (267). And for Burke, rhetoric is the process of negotiating with others our notions of individual and collective identity. As he put it, “one’s notion of his personal *identity* may involve identification not just with mankind or the world in general, but [with] some kind of congregation that also implies some related norms of differentiation and segregation” (268). The ongoing process of determining those alliances and distinctions is what Burke means by rhetoric. This process provides the foundation for both self-consciousness and social interaction.

Identifications occur in moments of communication, and communication occurs through rhetorical exchanges of collectively meaningful symbols. Consequently, Burke could write that “I never think of ‘communication’ without thinking of its ultimate perfection, named in such words as ‘community’ and ‘communion’” (“Communication and the Human Tradition” 144). For him, it is our encounters with each other’s symbols that enable us to make and to change the identities that act and interact with common purpose. That common purpose is constructed more or less collaboratively from the resources of common rhetorical situations—“the words one is using *and* the nonverbal circumstances in which one is using them” (“Rhetorical Situation” 263, my emphasis). Twenty years before he wrote “Responsibilities of National Greatness” for the *Nation*, he had explained in another magazine article that since in the United States “social status is not fixed or clearly defined,” its citizens must seek in their common surroundings some “objective evidence” of their identity. He then located that evidence in the common experiences of national life that help to “place a person in his own eyes, as he surrounds himself with a scene which, he is assured, attests to his moral quality. For he can feel that he participates in the quality which the scene itself is thought to possess” (“American Way” 5).

For Americans, their nation has always been a “scene” in this dramatic sense of that term as a symbolic setting where they can enact both individual and collective identity. Burke’s project of expanding the concept of rhetoric to encompass the various symbols that constitute a shared culture offers an explanation of how people are prompted by their shared experiences—material as well as verbal—to understand

themselves and their communities in similar ways. Essentially, it explains the covert as well as overt rhetorical ways in which individuals are prompted to recreate themselves in the image of a collective identity. Such experiences of medium intensity have been shared by Americans all along, and their history is punctuated by moments of high intensity in which, despite all their diversity, they have found themselves confronting together a common crisis. One of those, marked by the events of September 11, 2001, has reminded yet another generation of the power that a nation's symbolic landscapes can wield over the attitudes and actions of its people.



This book examines the elements of Burke's rhetoric of identification by exploring the rhetorical power inherent in a particular symbolic experience of their national homeland that Americans tirelessly invite each other to share: tourism. Read as a theoretical study of rhetoric, it presents a set of American tourist experiences from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in terms that trace the rhetorical work they do—*rhetorical* in Burke's broadened sense of that term as the transformative experience of identification. Read as a study of the rhetorical functions of this national culture, it explores some of the ways residents of a vast and diverse nation have been prompted by the symbolic experiences they share as tourists to adopt for themselves a common sense of national identity. My point is that the rhetorical power of a national culture is wielded not only by public discourse, but also by *public experiences*. Both present a collective of people with shared symbols of a common identity and, in doing so, prompt those people to adopt that identity for themselves. Within the context of that new identity they may still respond to the experience as spectators who passively observe a display of the symbols of their community. But that spectatorship is nonetheless shaped by attitudes that are inherent in that shared identity, and those attitudes, sooner or later, are enacted in judgment and practice. In making this point about the rhetorical power of public experiences, I am examining and explaining the constitutive functions of rhetoric—how symbols of all sorts work to constitute in individuals a sense of shared identity that has the power to shape their beliefs and actions in ways that unify them with one community as they divide them from another.

In its design, this book examines some places in the American landscape that, through the first century and a half of national life, offered such public experiences. These places were presented to tourists in ways that would provide individuals with the same symbolic experience of the nation—working rhetorically to transform private individuals into public citizens. And this rhetorical work was done not so much by words as by sights, sounds, smells, feelings—by the experience of actual presence in a place.

The national culture teaches Americans to experience certain places in their homeland rhetorically—to encounter for themselves those places as potent symbols of a concept of national community they are to claim as their own. Rhetoric can explain this encounter if we use Burke's redefinition in which "identification" rather than "persuasion" is the "key" term ("Rhetoric—Old and New" 203). Here the category of rhetoric includes any experience that does the work of "symbolic inducement of social cooperation" (Hauser 14). Anything that prompts social cooperation by presenting to people symbols of collectivity with which they can each identify themselves is rhetorical. Encountering those symbols and aligning oneself, along with others, with them are experiences as rhetorical as hearing a presidential speech. Rhetorical experiences, whether discursive or not, present powerful symbols of shared identity that teach people whom they ought to aspire, individually as well as collectively, to be.

This redefinitional project of locating the rhetorical in the experience of identifying the self with symbols of collectivity unifies the expansive body of work Burke produced as he lived through and tried to understand America's twentieth century. From early to late in his life, he provided his readers with ways to recognize the symbolic assertions of identity that saturate their public experience and to understand how those symbols prompt individuals to transform themselves into particular images of citizen. His key term of *identification* teaches the lesson that rhetorical power operates well beyond the boundaries of conventional public discourse. Exploring that expansive territory is the primary project of this book. It draws upon seventy years of Burke's work to examine the rhetorical functions of a set of American landscapes that were prominent tourist attractions during the first full and formative century of the American national life, a period extending from the early decades of the nineteenth century through the early decades of the twentieth. Its purpose is to explain these landscapes as public experiences that wield rhetorical power—the sort of power that Steven Mailloux describes as productive: "it directs, regulates, normalizes" (137).



Burke himself was a persistent tourist in America. Living in New York in the early 1920s, he was close to many of the people, including his lifelong friend Malcolm Cowley, who were anxious to expatriate themselves to Paris and became the "Lost Generation." But Burke stayed in America, establishing himself first as a literary artist and then later, and more prominently, as a critic and theorist of the processes and projects by which Americans were using the arts in general and language in particular to reconstitute themselves culturally as a nation in a new century. Indeed, Burke was and remains one of the most thoughtful and perceptive of Americans on

the topic of the various ways, for better and worse, that Americans work to make each other American. In his twenties, he settled down on a little wooded farm in Andover, New Jersey, and, to my knowledge, traveled abroad only once in his life. But he traveled far in America. While his friends were living in Europe, Burke was making himself at home up and down the East Coast—summering in upstate New York, or in North Carolina, or all the way up in Maine, or wintering all the way down in Florida. Throughout his long life, his house in Andover was a base for regular travels to the string of temporary teaching jobs in Bennington, or Chicago, or Seattle, or Berkeley that gave him something that barely resembled a stable income.

Most of Burke's travels were by automobile, and automobile travel in America seems always to transform the traveler's state of mind into that of a tourist's. For example, after a winter in Florida in 1941, he offered this description of the trip home in a letter to Cowley: "We traveled from Sunday morning until the middle of the day Wednesday. And throughout the entire trip, not a single burp or wheeze out of the old Blunder Bus (I am here referring to the Cadillac, not to myself). True she consumes four gallons of oil per diem, and that's only two dollars, if you buy the two-gallon tins—and we get but eight miles per gallon of gas. Yet even so, she is a roomy bitch, almost a Pullman, and we carry more luggage than is in many a trailer. I would do a minimum of two hundred miles a day, and Lib a minimum of one hundred, with plenty of snacks and snoozes had by all" (Burke and Cowley 245).

A much later example of that state of mind, written after driving across the country to yet another temporary teaching job, is the poem, "Tossing on Floodtides of Sinkership." "The continent spanned eight times" now, he notes, as he drives across it this time, "Snatches of other trips, remembered piecemeal, keep crowding in." "Snatches" of a tourist's experience of America like these:

Above the canyon at Yellowstone  
after having taken in the sights all day  
chasm-cringingly  
I plunged all night  
(on the edge of the abyss  
clutching frail bushes  
that tore loose at the roots)  
up there, looking down

but at Zion, at the bottom of the canyon, looking up—  
and all night I heard the deep convulsive intake of the desert  
through the gulches.

In the Big Horns  
around many a squirming, wriggling

squiggle-curve  
 after the obvious Presidential colossi at Rushmore  
 we saw, chiseled by nature out of cliffs above us,  
 pagodas, temples, ziggurats, columns, spires, archways,  
 deformed giants, apocalyptic beasts—  
 all of them works in progress  
 and merging profusely  
 into one another (*Collected Poems* 286)

For many who live most if not all of their lives in America, touring America is a significant part of the experience of being at home there. That was still true for Burke when he wrote this late poem that seems to acknowledge his travel in America as something of a ritual of citizenship in which he could enact an identity appropriate to his place in that expansive landscape:

go go going West, the wife and I—  
 I told the Selph I'd say again  
 them resonant words of Horace Greeley,  
 "Go West, elderly couple." (289)

This is a book about the rhetorical power that was experienced by American tourists as they followed public and publicized itineraries through the American landscape during the first century or so after the United States was established as a nation. It attempts to explain how such tourist experiences were part of the process through which diverse peoples inhabiting an expansive landscape were learning to identify themselves individually and collectively as Americans. As such, it is a book about the rhetoric of identification, which I read as the unifying concept in Burke's vast body of work. It explains the tourist's public experience of American landscape as rhetorical in Burke's expanded sense of that term. In doing so, it treats Burke as a self-consciously American social theorist and cultural critic who focused his work on explaining the power of symbols to direct the aspirations and actions of individuals toward common purposes. And it applies that work to an exploration of American landscapes as places where individuals are prompted to identify themselves with a national collective. Burke provides explanatory terms for that rhetorical power.

And what is that sort of rhetorical power? Burke's insight that language functions socially as symbolic action is an expansion of the familiar Aristotelian concept of rhetoric as the use of language to form alliances, a use of language that itself functions as an assertion of influence or power. *A Rhetoric of Motives* begins with a definitional review of Aristotle's concept that pushes its boundaries to the place where Burke can say that Aristotle's key term for rhetoric—*persuasion*—is encompassed by Burke's more expansive key term—*identification*. He then describes his own project as an attempt "to indicate what kinds of subject matter not traditionally labeled

‘rhetoric’ should, in our opinion, also fall under this head”—given that, for him, “there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification . . . and communication” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 46). Sixteen years later he put it another way, describing his project succinctly as “the ‘extending’ of Rhetoric . . . along the lines of such a ‘New Dispensation’ as the modifying of persuasion by identification” (*Language as Symbolic Action* 306).

This “new dispensation” in the notion of what counts as rhetorical influence might follow from the “new dispensation” of collective life that was experienced by people who lived in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the national culture Burke knew when he began to think and write about these things. Aristotle’s concept of rhetoric accounts for relational interactions in a relatively intimate and insular community where knowledge and experience are more or less common and where essential public life could actually be observed within a limited sphere of action. That is not true, and never has been, in the United States where the rhetorical interactions that constitute this community must pervade all sorts of public experience and must vary widely in their forms. In Aristotle’s place and time, it was the office of rhetoric to express as shared value and belief—and to inculcate as common identity—what was immediately observable. But the experience of collective life in the United States has never been so bounded and coherent, nor has the identity of Americans ever been so contained. Rather than a walled city-state that can be encountered firsthand, this is an unimaginably expansive nation-state where innumerable competing models of public identity coexist. In America neither the place nor the culture can be immediately encountered. Only the rhetorical purpose of public interaction—to transform an aggregate of individuals into a cooperating collective—is similar in both Athens and America. The expansiveness of America requires an expanded concept of rhetorical interaction as “a social practice that involves symbolic transactions that affect people’s shared sense of the world” (Hauser 13). In America this rhetorical work has been done through nonverbal as well as verbal encounters that publicize the potent symbols that prompt individuals to recognize themselves in public images of a common identity. Attending critically to that prompt has become an even more urgent matter since the mid-twentieth century—since the simultaneous development of technologies that enable the planet’s masses to communicate with each other and technologies that enable them to destroy each other. The lessons of identification are needed more than ever now, as we confront yet another “new dispensation” of collective life that is even more promising and more dangerous.

This book, then, examines the rhetorical functions of the national landscape using Kenneth Burke’s reconception of rhetoric as what constitutes the experience of identification. My purpose is to use Burke’s work to expand our awareness of the rhetorical resources that prompt the individuals who constitute a community to

adopt a common identity. I will do this by examining both the ways the public discourse of tourism shapes the attitudes of those it addresses regarding the image of the American, and the ways that tourists' immediate encounters with publicly significant landscapes prompt people, as Burke put it, to make themselves over "in the image of the imagery" they encounter there (*Philosophy of Literary Form* 281).

To go further requires some attention to two of the terms I am using: *public discourse* and *landscape*. First, *public discourse*. The first of the two words, *public*, I am using in the sense that John Dewey used it in his slim but important book of 1927, *The Public and Its Problems*. There he defined a "public" as a people bound together by the "extensive and serious" consequences for all that might follow from the actions of one—as people who must interact with their mutual accountability always in mind (67). As Lloyd Bitzer later elaborated, "A public is a community of persons who share conceptions, principles, and values, and who are significantly interdependent." Such an interdependent public sustains itself upon the foundation of what Bitzer called "public knowledge": "a fund of truths, principles, and values" that enables the individuals who share it to recognize their identity in community. *Discourse*, or "rhetoric," Bitzer continued, "is a method of inquiry and communication through which individuals maintain the shared knowledge that enables them to function as a public" (68). The ongoing process of inquiry and exchange that is sustained by the people who constitute the sort of community that Dewey and Bitzer describe is *public discourse*. Conventionally, what counts as public discourse is overtly persuasive in its intent and takes the form of print or speech, but I am trying to show here how that category can be understood—at least in its rhetorical *function*—as much more expansive than that. It can encompass experiences not immediately discursive at all. Like encounters with landscape.

*Landscape* is the second term I need to define. *Landscape* is not the same as *land*. *Land* is material, a particular object, while *landscape* is conceptual. When people act as tourists, they leave the *land* where they make their home to encounter *landscapes*. *Land* becomes *landscape* when it is assigned the role of symbol, and as symbol it functions rhetorically. When landscapes are publicized—when they are shared in public discourse or in the nondiscursive form of what I am calling a public experience—they do the rhetorical work of symbolizing a common home and, thus, a common identity.

Here is an example. In his "Lecture on American Scenery," the great nineteenth-century American landscape painter Thomas Cole attempted to explain the symbolic power of the national landscape: "In gazing on the pure creations of the Almighty" one "feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow-men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate." Then when the gaze shifts from the wilderness to the "cultivated" scene, "its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms,

mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations human hands have wrought and human deeds hallowed all around” (199–200). Whether wild or cultivated, Cole wrote in his “Essay on American Scenery,” this landscape, as encountered by its citizens, is primarily symbolic as it prompts in them shared “associations” of a collective past, present, and future (16).

This is an instance, as Burke described it late in his life, of what we do with all sorts of symbols: our consciousness is shaped by our experience as language-users, and that experience teaches us to “impute the character of language to the non-linguistic” (“In Haste” 339). Indeed, for him, American history was propelled by the rhetorical power of land made symbol, a power that some wielded as others learned to read in the land particular claims about who they collectively were (351–52). Burke even pointed to this place in his own early fiction where he had put that sort of rhetorical power to work:

The lights lined the shores of the river, and thinned away as the river serpented off into the blackness of the hills. To the left he saw the steel mills of Millvale and Etna, with their quick flames licking the sky. Hundreds of feet below him, a cluster of lights was moving regularly with the current. He stood motionless, letting his eyes roam over these miles and miles stretched out beneath him. . . . And of a sudden a feeling of promise came over him, the hope of a boy of sixteen who sees a vision of futurity, of the world before him. He felt an acute interest in what life might have in store yet, trust that there was going to be great change, a faith in the proximity of some new vista. For a few moments he was rich with this unreasoning foretaste of conquest. (*Complete White Oxen* 41)

A critical examination of this sort of rhetorical power, which prompts people to adopt the public identity they read symbolized in the landscapes they share, is the project of this book.

The book begins with an introductory discussion of rhetorical functions of landscape and landscape representation in the national culture of the United States, particularly in relation to tourism as an essentially rhetorical practice that seems to have taught Americans to locate themselves in a symbolic landscape that they can readily identify with an image of national community.

Five historical case studies of the rhetorical function of tourism in the United States follow. These cases move chronologically from the early nineteenth century into the early twentieth and spatially across the continent as American culture did, from east to west. The first is a study of early tourist guides to the city of New York that were written and published for children. The second examines magazine descriptions for late nineteenth-century tourists encouraging them to visit Shaker villages

in New England. The third describes early experiences of tourism in Yellowstone National Park. The fourth examines descriptions of early transcontinental automobile travel. The last focuses on accounts of the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition held in San Francisco in 1915 to celebrate the reach and expanse of the American nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. As each of these cases is explored using an important element of Kenneth Burke's thought that culminates in his concept of rhetoric as identification, each offers variations on his general theme that rhetorical power prompts individuals to identify themselves with symbols of collective experience. The book concludes with a final, and perhaps paradigmatic, variation on this theme, a particular public experience that is provided by monumental architecture at one of America's most monumental public places, the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Together, these cases illustrate the point of my argument: that the separate identities of individuals are constantly reconstituted as people participate in the shared experiences of public life—whether those experiences are intentionally ideological or merely recreational in their apparent form. In that process, communities are reconstituted in the awareness of those individuals, communities that comprise a myriad of individual decisions of unity and of division. In a time when images and symbols can be broadcast instantaneously, enabling a vast collective of individuals who are radically displaced in space to share the common experiences those images provide, we need to be more attentive than we have been to every exertion of rhetorical power.