BOOK REVIEWS

Nicholas F. Burnett, Editor

Myerson, George and Yvonne Rydin. *The Language of Environment: A New Rhetoric*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997; pp. 264, $24.95 paper. ISBN 1857283317.

Arguments concerning environmental problems, their causes, and their appropriate solutions occupy a central position in contemporary political debate. The authors of *The Language of Environment* find in environmental argument a metaphor for a form of dialogic democracy they term the "argument culture." The book's recurring theme is that different perspectives on such environmental issues as overpopulation, the loss of biodiversity, and global warming are fundamentally incommensurable and dialectically unresolvable. But instead of a failing of environmental argument, this incommensurability is suggested to be representative of a move beyond the dominant "answer culture," roughly the paradigm of modernity.

Myerson and Rydin generate an empirically based catalogue of contemporary "environment words" that collectively comprise a discursive field they term the "environet." Their methodology involves scanning full-text articles of major periodicals and academic journals in both the United States and Britain for recurring words and phrases associated with environmental discussion. These are then boiled down to approximately 30 key terms. The authors explore the deployment of these environment words from the standpoint of discourse, ethos, and figures of argument, and the book is organized around these three tasks.

According to Myerson and Rydin, an environment word or phrase can represent a new concept discourse, a new information discourse and/or a new practice discourse. For example, in arguments concerning resources, "create resource value" may represent a new concept discourse, while "study the availability of resources" may represent a new information discourse. Similarly, "indigenous peoples are living in balance" is classified as a new practice discourse in deforestation debates, as is "set aside as a national park." This classification scheme is less explanatory than heuristic. Heavily influenced by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens and his theory of structuration, the authors seem content to trace how culturally available concepts and information structure social practices, and how those practices similarly structure human agency. Nevertheless, the work could benefit from a clearer discussion of how new concepts interact with new information and new practices at the level of rhetoric.

The authors also classify the types of ethos informing contemporary environmental arguments. Discussions of sustainable development are characterized by the ethos of "essential vision," while arguments about energy policy tend to issue from the ethos of "technical vision." While resource debates unfold within the ethos of "systematic far-sightedness," arguments concerning overpopulation are informed by the ethos of "emotive objectivity." These and other classifications of environmental argument by ethos are perhaps determined too much by topic area; for example, debates concerning resources may be informed by numerous types of ethos, depending upon the eco-political ideology of the advocates. However, the rigid typology serves the authors well in developing their major theme, the incommensurable and agonistic nature of environmental rhetoric.

Myerson and Rydin turn to metaphor, irony, and association to explore the environet from the standpoint of figures of argument. The point of this discussion is to establish that environmental arguments are infinitely creative. Metaphors like Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, in which the earth is conceived as a living organism, help structure perception about the environment. Environmental irony functions to address possible future worlds and their desirability, while association functions to legitimize or delegitimize environmental rhetoric by linking it to other discursive fields. According to the authors, even the three dominant figures of conflict resolution in environmental argument – the dialectic of catastrophe, the feasible possibility, and overcoming the polarity – are important primarily for their heuristic value rather than their ability to solve environmental problems, for they are fundamentally incompatible.

As implied in the subtitle, the authors find in environmental argument a "new" rhetoric, one that reflects an emerging and widespread cultural change toward dialogic democracy. The authors suggest that the "environet could be an early prototype of the agendas of a culture of argument" (220). This vision has clear affinities with many postmodern conceptions of a free society. But it is in establishing this vision and linking it to environmental rhetoric that the work falls short.

The authors' basic strategy is to demonstrate the existence of multiple forms of discourse in areas of environmental discussion, classify them, discuss them, and finally conclude that they are incommensurable: "As we have stressed throughout this book, environmental arguments are deeply irresolvable" (181). This is a case of the method creating the object, rather than the object guiding the method. The method has created the object in that the authors fail to provide any theoretical framework for understanding a dialectical resolution of argument. Similarly, the failure to compare the diversity in environmental rhetoric to diversity in other discursive fields makes the case less than compelling. Simply noting the existence of multiple voices on environmental issues tells the

reader nothing about the relative weight of certain dominant voices in the distribution of rhetorical power. The thesis of incommensurability serves to rescue the status quo by default. As noted by Benhabib, "insisting upon the incommensurability of language games, in the name of polytheism, may generate moral and political indifference . . . and the activation of differences may not amount to a democratic respect of the right of the 'other' to be, but to a conservative plea to place the other, because of her otherness, outside the pale of our common humanity and mutual responsibility."[1] The relativism endorsed by Myerson and Rydin in regard to environmental debates is especially troubling given the seriousness of the issues at stake. A convincing antidote to this linguistic relativism can be found in Soule and Lease (eds.), *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction.*[2]

Further, while the authors hope to find in environmental rhetoric a harbinger of a new, emerging "argument culture," they would perhaps be better served to note, in any apparent incommensurability, a return to pre-modern rhetorical forms. The "spiritual dimension" and "reverent objectivity" noted by the authors in the discussion of environmental ethos both represent attitudes toward externalized nature that, according to Habermas, typify pre-modern social formations.[3] This is not to suggest that a deeper environmental ethic is inappropriate in modernity; rather, it is to note that such ethics bear closer affinities with long established worldviews than they to do a "new" rhetoric.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Language of Environment* offers a rewarding sample of the range of discourse in contemporary environmental debate, as well as a catalogue of the dominant rhetorical forms. The work would prove helpful to any student of discursive fields, so may be appropriate for an upper-division course in persuasion or propaganda. It would be less useful for an introductory argumentation course.

Notes

[1] Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-Francois Lyotard," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 122-23.

[2] Michael E. Soule and Gary Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995).

[3] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) 43-74. See also Stephan Elkins, "The Politics of Mystical Ecology," Telos 82 (1989) 52-70.

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Lunsford, Andrea A. and John J. Ruszkiewicz. *Everything's An Argument.* Boston/New York: Beford/St. Martins, 1998; pp. 338, $15.00 paper. ISBN 0312170882.

Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz attempt to position argument as any persuasive text, "whether written, spoken, or visual . . . "(3). This is an important move because many argumentation courses are beginning to cover "non-traditional" argument, or require student to craft written arguments, but few traditional argument textbooks actually help students to analyze symbols or author textual arguments. In undertaking this challenge, we must examine this textbook and ensure that the authors follow through on their promise to instruct the argument speaker in new ways. Unfortunately, the long-running traditions of argumentation work against the authors by pushing them to reinstate previously traveled paths of thought.

The authors make an honest attempt to make good on their promise – the text contains a number of innovative sections and chapters that can supplement an argumentation course. Chapter three examines the importance of audience when writing arguments and analyzing argument texts. The authors provide two potent sections examining the power of humor to persuade, a topic that is important and seldom covered. There is also an entire chapter on making proposals, possibly replacing Monroe's Motivated Sequence as a persuasive path to action. There is an inspirational chapter on "visual argument" that provides students with an introduction to analyzing advertisements and symbolic images. An often wished for glossary and section on how to cite works used make important contributions to an argumentation classroom. A laudable strategy is the inclusion of a chapter on electronic communication. (Unfortunately, the discussion in this chapter focuses almost exclusively on "net-iquette," or how the reader should make arguments in cyberspace.)

On the other hand, many of the chapters are classic selections from argumentation courses. Most of the textbook follows a traditional path and works in the legacy of other argument textbooks. This is unfortunate, because the authors' stated purpose presents real potential to rework argument and reposition the student as critic. As the book travels through various chapters examining the lines of argument and methods for constructing arguments, the weight of years of staid argument classes begins to take its toll upon a reader looking for a truly innovative approach. What is needed is for this book to either blaze new ground with fresh analysis or to concede that they are offering a traditional argument

textbook. The authors choose to walk the middle ground and fail to achieve one of their primary goals: "to broaden the context of argument. . ." (iv).

A strong point of this book is that it is light on specialized terminology and heavy on explanation. Critical terms of art, like ethos, evidence, and tropes are introduced at the beginning of chapters and given a brief definition. But the authors stress what these ideas mean by exploring their use and effect. When asking if most arguments fit neatly into Toulmin's model, the authors explain: "The honest answer is no, if you expect most writers to express themselves in perfectly formulated enthymemes or warrants. . . " (94). The frank approach of the book reinforces the reader's natural argumentative capacity and reminds the student that argument is a part of life rather than simply being a classroom exercise.

The format of the writing both contributes to and detracts from the message of the authors. Much of the textbook is constructed as a running commentary supported by examples and quotations. The authors use pieces of text to support arguments and illustrate the techniques of persuasion that they describe. This process has both advantages and pitfalls. The quotations provide a potent way to support the analysis of the authors, and the reader will experience multiple quotations from a single text, clarifying the concepts from the primary text. On the other hand, the myriad quotations often blur the context of the primary texts quoted. With the text offering an array of quotations displaying ideologies ranging from deep ecologists to Newt Gingrich, readers may find themselves wishing for more background and analysis and fewer quotations.

Everything's An Argument is not the easiest instructional manual for introductory argumentation courses because it focuses on exploring ideas rather than walking the reader through the steps of argument construction. There are exceptions, like the careful step-by-step examination of creating arguments by definition, evaluation, and causality. But the more difficult sections where the authors tackle humor or argument through symbol contain almost no guide for students to construct these kinds of arguments. This is where the commitment that this text makes begins to feel like an unfulfilled promise. The reader wants to be able to analyze the potent power of the AIDS ribbon, or reproduce the acrid wit of Molly Ivins, but the book leaves the reader with little concrete direction in these cases.

Argumentation instructors (and students) will find this book useful in a few key areas. What the book does well is introduce new subjects to argumentation textbooks while approaching the study of argument as an unfinished project. The sometimes-chaotic

presentation, and traditional subject areas make this book a wonderful supplemental reader for an argument class, but perhaps not the primary textbook. The book contains a powerful potential to break from traditional argumentation textbooks and teach students to make arguments that are innovative and meaningful. The philosophy behind the book is sound and important, what is lacking is implementation of that philosophy in the text. This book can provide inspiration for argument teachers who want to move beyond the traditional artifacts of argument, but unfortunately, it does not provide the complete blueprint for changing the argument classroom.

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James F. Klumpp, ed., *Argument in a Time of Change: Definitions, Frameworks, and Critiques (Proceedings of the Tenth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation, 1997).* Annandale, Va: National Communication Association, 1998; pp. 445, $22.50 paper. NCA Publication 460.

The proceedings of the Tenth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation were jointly sponsored by the National Communication Association, the American Forensic Association, and the University of Utah. Begun in 1979, the biennial conference's tenth iteration in August of 1997 continued the tradition of bringing together theorists, critics, historians, and debate coaches to try to push the envelope in forging connections across traditional boundaries in rhetorical scholarship. Sadly, the late summer date of the conference bedevils attendance by many in the forensic community because of the growth in intercollegiate workshops that now tend to meet around the same time in early August. When the series began in 1979 that was less of a problem.

Structurally, the publication of the proceedings represents seventy-four of the competitively selected papers presented at the conference. It also includes the keynote essay delivered at the opening of the conference by David Zarefsky, and the closing address by Bruce Gronbeck. The content is organized within four broad categories roughly characterized as argument process, argument and civil society, argument and public issues,

and education in argumentation. Each category is further sub-divided to represent the major themes addressed by the panels of presenters in each category.

Before creating a broadly-sketched impression of each category of interest, it is worth noting that Gronbeck's concluding summary, which seeks to embrace the past ten Alta conferences, serves as an excellent guide to the overall value of this iteration of the proceedings. Gronbeck notes that the biennial conference series has been marked by community building, innovation, internationalization, dialogic bridging of intellectual schisms, and expansiveness. That all of these observations are as true of the tenth Alta as of all ten Alta conferences is a powerful endorsement of the importance of the 1998 publication of the proceedings.

Attempting to critically encompass so much varied material in one review is not wise, so I hope I will be forgiven if I simply try to describe the structure of the material in such a way as to illustrate the validity of Gronbeck's summary.

David Zarefsky's keynote on "Definitions" openly sidestepped the contentiousness surrounding the definition of argument itself, and in so doing he illustrated Gronbeck's theme of expansiveness. Instead, calling for more attention to the concept of "framing" argument, Zarefsky nicely offered a way to integrate scholarly pursuit of theories encompassing both visual and discursive perspectives on argument. The possibility that "framing" is an argument phenomenon at both the "macro" theoretic level and the "micro" case-analytic level means, to Zarefsky, that its elucidation could generate greater coherence in argument studies without sacrificing a diversity of approaches.

Certainly diversity is a hallmark of the Alta proceedings. The first section on *Argument Processes* covered the most extensively sub-divided material with six identifiable themes: seven articles appear on the "nature of argument," four on "processes," three on "frameworks for theorizing," three on "interpersonal dimensions," two on "argument in scholarship," and three on "argument in the new electronic world." The twenty-two papers in the section probably illustrate all of Gronbeck's themes, but dialogic bridging and internationalization are certainly at the forefront. Included are essays from political scientists and philosophers as well as German, Dutch, and Slovenian scholars. Postmodernist and interpersonal perspectives mingle with, and occasionally elbow, dialectical, narrative, and propositional treatments of argument.

A brief sampling of the papers in this section reveals treatment of argument in sound by Boynton and Nelson, and an array of orientations toward or divergences from logic-based

perspectives that progress from the "informal" to the "antilogical." From pragma-dialectical reconstruction to the interrelationship between patterns of deliberation and conceptions of character, the conditions in which argument leads to decisions are explored. Papers on narrative and polyphony explore the predilection of language to facilitate argument and epistemics are employed to explore how to reach across the boundaries created by discursive communities. The discourse of argument among scholars is contrasted to argument in the interpersonal realm. Electronic media are studied as both a tool for broadened discourse and a potential constrictor of access to argument.

Creating Civil Society featured three sub-themes: six articles on "characteristics of civil society," five on "power and difference," and two offered as "case studies." Here, meta-issues of the public sphere variety illustrate both expansiveness and community building. This is the place where practical concerns in public decision-making and the traditional perspective of public address joins with the theoretical dimensions birthed by argumentation studies, critical studies, and the conceptualizing of the public sphere itself. This work expands the laboratory of public argument and seeks to create a larger community of interests between those who consider themselves critics and those who see themselves as theorists.

Virtue, society, citizenship, public deliberation are key terms deserving attention in this section. The tensions of the contemporary global political environment are featured in some essays as a challenge to those key terms. So too, issues of fantasy, identity, and power underline the struggle to understand the framework within which minority voices maneuver for strategic rhetorical advantage. Additional studies explore the backlash of counter-strategies and the milieu in which competing parties seek voice.

Argument in Public Issues was divided into five sub-themes: seven articles under "strategies in public arenas," eight articles on "pursuit of the humane society," four articles on "war and peace," and six papers on "legal argument." With twenty-five papers in all, this was the single most compendious section. Of course, this seems the venue for classic work in public address, bringing together both historical and critical perspectives. But here innovation has also become a powerful theme. Visual argument has attracted growing attention within this domain, and while this volume largely puts aside any definitional debate as to whether visual persuasion is argument, the case studies of the use of public space promise to expand heuristic dialogue on the nature of argument itself. This section also brought forward strong international perspectives in the sub-category of "war and

peace" in which Finnish and Japanese scholars brought much needed outside perspective to conventional rhetorical typologies invoked in both metaphors and in reality construction regarding war.

Concrete examples of the analytical power of theoretical perspectives are manifest in an astonishingly broad array of papers extending from visual analysis in documentary photography, the use of public space in public buildings, to quantitative analysis of question-asking in the interrogation of presidential candidates and the use of the body as argument. Creative analysis of conventional topics was also in evidence, including explorations of the Oklahoma City bombing, death penalty legal argumentation, Oliver North, the bomb, feminism, race, and many other apt subjects for argumentative analysis.

Goals and Strategies for Educators in Argumentation contained three sub-themes: five essays on "reconsidering the argumentation classroom," seven papers "preparing debate for the 21st century," and three works on "Kritiking." In this section community-building and innovation were especially apparent. Concern with challenges to both the material well-being of competitive debate activities and the pedagogical value of classroom instruction brought together individuals with a diverse range of perspectives. Peering into the future in anticipation of new challenges leavened some of the intensity with which the many old controversies and conflicts are pursued.

Treated last, and next to last in number of papers, argumentation pedagogy still retains resilience, even if its profile at Alta has shrunk somewhat from that seen in earlier years. The current infatuation with critical thinking is explored by practitioners and theorists who have thoughtful reactions to the rhetorical presence of argument instruction in the class-room. Specific constituencies in legal and business settings are explored as well as the elasticity of debate as a classroom model. There is a tension and concern for the realm of intercollegiate debate in a series of papers that seek to get beyond old sticking points and reach out for new ground exploring transformational leadership, participative decision-making, and finally, the reality of debate arguments as an alternative pedagogy in themselves.

Giving advice as to how to use this volume may be as futile as trying to critically encompass its tremendous diversity in any meaningful way. For those familiar with and committed to the field of argument, none is necessary. In any given two-year span no other publication can equal the sheer vigor with which the *Proceedings* propels the intellectual borders of argumentation studies. On the other hand, one cannot look to it for historical

perspective or context. One cannot necessarily glean a coherence or core to the field by looking at these essays alone. They represent a turbulent boil of interests and varying levels of completeness of thought. There are typically more incipient threads of research than there are completed or definitive settlements of longstanding disputes. It is a work of an upward trajectory, rather than a *denouement*. Students of argument will cherry-pick amongst the offerings and seek opportunities to step into the on-going dialogue that is Alta.

Alta has always been a significant event for those interested in an expansive view of the scholarship of argumentation. As Gronbeck noted: "So long as reconciling dialogue – even outright dialectic – can occur across epistemological fissures, this event will be a premiere source of new ideas for the study of argumentation" (443).

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