The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication
This series aims to provide theoretically ambitious but accessible volumes devoted to the major fields and subfields within communication and media studies. Each volume sets out to ground and orientate the student through a broad range of specially commissioned chapters, while also providing the more experienced scholar and teacher with a convenient and comprehensive overview of the latest trends and critical directions.
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While the disciplinary study of rhetoric is alive and well, there has been curiously little recent specific interest in the rhetoric of organizations. “Let us have a one stop shop for scholars and advanced students that want to get the latest and best overview and discussion of how organizations use rhetoric”—with that incentive and goal began the idea for this volume in 2015.

It is a great pleasure to finally see the book come together with contributions from organization centered fields such as organizational communication, public relations, marketing, management, risk, crisis and organization theory. Scholars based in the United States, the UK, Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland, as well as Australia, helped bring the current treatment of organizational rhetoric alive. It is an understatement to say that we learned a lot from our colleagues through putting this volume together.

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Øyvind Ihlen would like to state that it has been an honor to work together with so many prominent scholars, some of whose work he has used and admired for years. Bob Heath and George Cheney deserve special mention for their shepherding of rhetorical and critical perspectives on public relations and organizational communication. In addition, however, he wishes to thank what are arguably the best rhetoricians around, namely his wife and daughters—Hilde, Ina, and Eira.

Bob Heath would like to thank the founders of what evolved into the National Communication Association for believing that rhetoric is essential to human existence, and who later crafted the discipline of Organizational Rhetoric on a solid and enduring foundation. Here Charles Redding’s pioneering work is to be acknowledged. Many writers inspired and guided Heath’s understanding and belief in the fact that rhetoric matters—and never is “mere.” One special tip of his hat goes to Marie Hochmuth Nichols who directed his dissertation and convinced him that he could write a book on Burke’s “theory.” A final wink goes to Burke himself whose work inspired many because he so readily and insightfully found rhetoric—as symbolic action—in all
he read and witnessed. He could craft more provocative thought into a single paragraph than others could get between the covers of a book. Humans truly are the symbol using (and misusing) animals who are inspired by perfection, challenged by the dialectic of the positive and merger and confounded by the negative and division, and separated from reality by our terministic screens, but nevertheless committed to identification and courtship as solutions and stumbling blocks.

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Part 1
Introduction
Organizations need to communicate. As evident as that statement is, studies continue to probe how discourse can be effective and ethical. Present research literature abounds with theoretical advances that provide advice for how organizations can participate in dialogue and engage with their stakeholders (e.g., Johnston & Taylor, 2018). Some sort of discourse, including narrative form and content, is presupposed in this regard, and rhetoric, because of its origins in classical Greece, is arguably the foundation for these concepts. As the first of the communication disciplines, rhetoric has both practical and theoretical applications that have not only stood the test of time but redirected, and corrected, nation states’ relationships with citizens. Furthermore, the rhetorical tradition offers scholars, organizational managers, and communication practitioners a resource to understand organizational discourse, its effects, and its role in society. This volume examines humans, and the organizations they create, as *homo rhetoricus*, the rhetorical animal who uses words to co-create meaning, share ideas, and motivate actions, the building blocks of self-governance (Oesterreich, 2009).

Rhetoric helps explain the ways in which organizations attempt to achieve specific political or economic goals, build identity, and foster relationships with their stakeholders. Rhetorical theory sets itself apart from disciplines such as discourse studies (e.g., van Dijk, 2011) by tracing its tradition back to ancient time and by harboring a normative and practical ambition (Conley, 1994). In addition to offering down-to-earth practical advice, rhetoric also presents epistemological perspectives that temper theoretical tendencies toward naïve realism and platonic notions of absolute truth (Vickers, 1999). Rhetoric helps us to understand how knowledge is generated and socially constructed through communication. People create the world in which they work and live via words. They also contend with one another over values and policies. They seek to demonstrate and critique ideas as ways of enlightening choices. Thus, the topic is both ancient, and as current as some outraged position-taking on Facebook, as is evident by the coverage of the many facets of rhetoric in, for instance, the *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Donsbach (2008) and area specialists. Rhetoric and its companion concepts heritage and current relevance arise from the need for shared meaning to enact societies, and the layers of individual identities, identifications, and interpretations of reality that constitute the pillars of self-governance, the rationale for society.

In the time of ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle (2007), Isocrates (2000), and others, the goal was to understand rational, values-based, and wise policy-formulating discourse for individual
agency, and then society. Today organizations of all types have taken on the individual roles, but as a collective endeavor to achieve societal agency. In recognition of the centrality of discourse, there has been a (re)turn toward rhetoric in many academic disciplines. Scholars of philosophy, management, economics, law, political science, social psychology, history, anthropology, political science, sociology, and literature have all drawn on the rhetorical tradition (e.g., Harmon, Green, and Goodnight, 2015; Heath, 2011; Lucaites, Condit, and Caudill, 1999; Sillince and Suddaby, 2008). However, presently, the rhetorical scholarship that is of relevance for the analysis of organizations is largely confined to its respective disciplinary contexts, be it public relations, organizational communication, marketing, advertising, organizational theory, or management studies. A goal of this handbook is to go beyond the silos and bring this scholarship together to demonstrate its currency and impact on today’s fractured world and complex societies. We seek to extend the scholarship that has used rhetoric to analyze the internal as well as external communication of organizations, and discuss how dialogue, discourse, narrative, and engagement (as key rhetorical forms) have become parallel lines of exploration to investigate the enacted role of discourse in human affairs.

The book presents a research collection on rhetoric and organizations while discussing state-of-the-art insights from disciplines that have and will continue to use rhetoric. With its organizational focus, it examines the advantages and perils of organizations seeking to project their voices to shape society to their benefits. As such, the book contains chapters working in the tradition of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism that asks whether the rhetorical strategies have fulfilled their function, but also chapters that incorporate perspectives with a view of whose interests that are served by particular rhetorical means (Conrad, 2011; Ihlen, 2015). The book discusses the importance of nuanced strategies such as discourse interaction that balances dissensus as formative and consensus as daunting. It explores the potential, risks, and requirements of engagement which presumes that discourse improves ideas, reputations, policies, and relationships as ongoing efforts to draw on the best all parties can offer.

This introductory chapter proceeds to offer a brief overview of the art of rhetoric, anchoring it in the Western tradition from Greece (Aristotle, 2007), but also with a view on new rhetoric à la Kenneth Burke (1969a, 1969b). While the volume includes several chapters that explore the link between and history of rhetoric and organizations, a short preface is given in this introduction chapter as well. Finally, the chapter also includes a presentation of the structure of the volume.

The Ancient Art of Rhetoric

Several excellent introductions to rhetoric point out that the Greek–Roman tradition of rhetoric can be traced back to around 500 BCE (e.g., Golden, Berquist, Coleman, and Sproule, 2011; Herrick, 2011; Kennedy, 1999). At this time, a system for making speeches was developed for ordinary citizens who had to present their own cases in court. The emergent study of rhetoric advised that speeches should include an introduction, presentation of proofs, and a conclusion. Later, more elaborate systems were introduced on the Greek mainland and teachers and sophists offered their services in this regard.

From this period stems the so-called rhetorical canon. Rhetoricians had ideas for the five stages of the preparation of a speech: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The later Roman rhetorician, Cicero, described the phases as follows:

Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style. (Cicero, 1949, I.9)
A well-known dispute developed between philosophers, Plato (1960) in particular, and rhetoricians. Plato positioned philosophy, or more specifically dialectic, as a form of truth-finding superior to rhetoric which could only create the appearance of truth. Rhetoric deals in deception and manipulation, and allows non-experts to outmaneuver the real experts. Thus, rhetoric is actually dangerous, according to Plato. In the dialogue Gorgias he pits Socrates against the discipline and the sophist Gorgias with the following statement: “an ignorant person is more convincing than the expert before an equally ignorant audience” (Plato, 1960, p. 459). Sophists like Gorgias adhered to the idea of competing truths (dissoi logoi) and saw pros and cons for all arguments, and that truth, being a social construction, could change accordingly. Plato, however, only saw rhetoric as legitimate if it supported the truths that philosophy had established. Truth exists outside of language, it is singular and stable, and can be grasped by dialectic approaches.

Plato’s arguments have been recycled throughout history in different versions. Critics have for instance pointed out that rhetoric will utilize all there is, including appeals to emotions, to achieve its goals. For philosophers like Rene Descartes (1956), this was something of an affront since clear logical arguments are what should take precedence.

Aristotle (2007) is recognized as attempting to straddle the two disciplines of rhetoric and dialectics in his treatise on the former. Rather than seeing multiple, equal truths or absolute truths, he preferred to talk about probable truth. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, 2007, 1.2.1; see also chapter 32 on three different Aristotelian conceptions of rhetoric). In addition to Aristotle, however, the ancient tradition also contains the writings of others such as Isocrates that emphasized the epistemic quality of rhetoric, as he stated that “we use the same arguments by which we persuade others in our own deliberations” (Isocrates, 2000, p. 15.256). In other words, it is crucial to use rhetoric for our own thinking and understanding. This point has also been supported by later writers. A prevailing notion is that all language use is rhetorical and that our knowledge of reality is formed by rhetoric. This type of epistemology has been called the rhetorical turn in social science and humanities. It calls for studies of the constituting effect of rhetoric (Charland, 1987). Despite the fact that material structures exist, we do need rhetoric to mediate this knowledge. While rhetoric is epistemic in this sense, the relationship with the ontological might be comprehended more fruitfully when it is perceived as a dialectical relationship (Ihlen, 2010). Rhetoric deals in opinions (doxa), rather than certain knowledge. While Plato held doxa in disregard, as “mere opinion,” Aristotle recognized its usefulness, building on the contrast between what is certain and what is probable (Herrick, 2011). Since we cannot have certain knowledge, rhetoric deals with the contingent, the probable, or in other words, doxa. In essence, the knowledge of today might look different tomorrow. Still, if something is established as a fact, this must necessarily happen through rhetoric.

**New Rhetoric**

In the twentieth century, scholars like Kenneth Burke (1969b) and Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) were the driving force behind a renewed interest in rhetoric. The philosophical orientations of the ancient discipline were brought back to the fore: rediscovered, restored, and also developed further. Rhetoric was seen in all forms of purposive symbolic action by human agents, including mass media use, and not tied to the delivery of a speech to a live audience. Furthermore, material conditions and their consequences can also be analyzed using rhetorical theory. This expansion has led editors and commentators to expand the rhetorical umbrella to include scholars who do not explicitly draw on the work of, say, Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero, or Quintilian. Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric (Foss, Trapp, and Foss, 2002), for instance, included entries on scholars like Jürgen Habermas, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel
Foucault. The list is even longer in *Twentieth-Century Rhetorics and Rhetoricians* (Moran and Ballif, 2000), adding names like Jean-Francois Lyotard. Purposive communication is central in the writings of all these figures.

Besides Aristotle, the one rhetorician quoted most by the authors in the present book is Kenneth Burke. For him, rhetoric was not so much about persuasion as *identification* (see chapter 8). In his “Introduction” to *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969b) he emphasized the types of symbolic action by which humans influence one another: poetry, rhetoric, and dialectic. Symbolic action, the dominating theme in his work, is inseparable from motive, “the process of change” (Burke, 1969b, p. xiii). In his view, rhetoric accomplishes identification. Dialectic is the joining in a progressive form of element of thought to achieve a coherent conclusion. Poetry is the use of language for sheer pleasure (but can influence judgment and behavior).

Eloquence plays to the psychology of the audience; the poet or rhetor creates an “appetite” and tries to satisfy it by using tropes and figures (Burke, 1968, 1969b). Form uses audiences’ appetites and by progressive, emergent resolution prepares the audience for the next part (or step) of each text’s theme. The rhetor hopes to get the audience to agree to each step achieved in form and thereby become engaged in completing (resolving) the progression. Resolution is complete when the audience agrees (identifies) with the perspective advocated by the rhetor. By featuring resolution, Burke’s rhetoric addressed how humans engage in competitive and cooperative (and even courtship) actions. Dialectic, an inherent dimension of language, consists of transformations, tensions, conflicts, paradoxes, guilt, ironies, polarities, interactions based on pitting words and meanings against one another to create and track down conflicts, tensions, transformations, and other resources of cooperation.

Burke’s discussion of thought through symbolic action centered on the nature of vocabulary—the power of words and other symbols to order the world. In the 1930s, he announced: “Man is vocabulary. To manipulate his [sic] vocabulary is to manipulate him. And art, any art, is a major means of manipulating his vocabulary” (Burke, 1968, p. 101). Human choice and action is inherently problematic. Burke (1934) cautioned, “if language is the fundamental instrument of human cooperation, and if there is an ‘organic flaw’ in the nature of language, we may well expect to find this organic flaw revealing itself through the texture of society” (p. 330). By the mid-1930s he had sown the seeds that would grow into a comprehensive theory of the rhetoric of identification (George and Selzer, 2007; Heath, 1986).

This inherent associational flaw that affected the thinking and actions of these “wordy people” motivated Burke (1966) to define humans as “the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-mis-using) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative) separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order) and rotten with perfection” (p. 16, italics in original). Talk about their physical realm inherently separates people from reality, but in doing so, words allow humans “to invent ingenious ways of threatening to destroy ourselves” (p. 5). It allows us to create ideologies which are “like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An ‘ideology’ is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it” (p. 6). Wars, disputes—all of the implications of division—arise from separation. Consequently, competing vocabularies produce different ideologies (as complexes of god-terms and devil-terms) which predict whether German boys and girls become traditional citizens, or “Hitlerite fiends” (p. 6). In these ways, words shape perspectives and perceptions, Consequently, they impose preferences on issues and therefore guide choices which can variously lead to productive or unproductive, as well as moral or immoral, outcomes.

This interplay of language and ideology allows for many mental tricks such as condensation, displacement, transubstantiation, substitution, and abbreviation. For instance, the power of the negative allows “shall not”s of morality to displace positive incentives of “must”s and “should”s.