

The Synecdochic Fallacy Revisited

[a work in progress]

Throughout his writings Kenneth Burke implicitly and explicitly invokes the power of the synecdoche and the synecdochic fallacy. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke notes that the more he examines the structure of human relations, the more he becomes convinced the synecdoche "is the 'basic' figure of speech and that it occurs in many more modes besides that of the formal trope." As well, other critics in the drama of human relations implicitly identify this fallacy as part of their social commentary as understood through communicative artifacts.

By definition, the synecdochic fallacy is a deceptive, misleading, erroneous, or false notion, belief, idea, or statement where a part is substituted for a whole, a whole for a part, cause for effect, effect for cause, container for thing contained, and so on. Other Burkean formulations—"Lexicon Rhetoricae," the dramatistic pentad, the hierarchy of motives, terministic screens, trained incapacity, to name a few—serve as tools for understanding how communicative artifacts shape the drama of human relations for the express purpose of balancing social inequalities. Such is the case with the synecdochic fallacy.

This paper is a major revision of "The Synecdochic Fallacy in a Mass/ Technological Society," originally described at the Rhetoric & Public Address Fall Conference in Altoona, PA (1980) and later presented to the Speech Communication Association's national conference in Anaheim, CA (1981) as part of a panel looking at several adaptations of rhetorical theory as applied to a mass and technological society. This panel sparked a later development of two papers: (1) "Sociosuasation and Techno-Ciceronianism" presented to the Speech Communication Association's National Conference in Chicago, IL (1984) as part of a forward-looking panel attempting to anticipate the needs of rhetorical theory in the 21st century and (2) "Diffusion of Responsibility: Ethos and the Technologized Rhetor," presented at the Rhetoric & Public Address Fall Conference in Pittsburgh, PA (1986).

The current paper goes beyond the earlier formulation with (1) an expanded explication based on the writings of Kenneth Burke and others, (2) placement of the synecdochic fallacy in a larger rhetorical context ranging from a microscopic perspective (intrapersonal persuasion) to a macroscopic perspective (cultural and institutional sociosuasation), (3) significant examples addressing (a) a panoply of -isms (sexism, racism, eurocentrism, christocentrism, and the like), (b) the rhetorical characteristics and functioning of major institutions (such as economics, science, medicine, and education, and religion), and (c) hard-core issues (such as domestic violence and the drugging of children), and (4) insights into methodological inquiry.