CHAPTER 5

CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE: KAIROS, SOCIAL FACTS, AND SPEECH ACTS

Identifying a time and place of communication does not yet, in itself, provide a situation or motive for writing. A motive embodies a desire or need to change the situation—an felt exigency to remedy some shortcoming or imperfection, as well as a belief that language can somehow contribute to the desired change (according to Lloyd Bitzer's definition of rhetorical situation as an exigent situation marked by an imperfection that can be corrected by language (Bitzer, 1968). That is, the speaker or writer sees the need to get something done, the opportunity in the moment to do this and the means to accomplish this through language. At some moment we think "it is time to write a letter to get a mistaken charge off my account" or "I need finally to write that paper tonight in order to get credit for this course and gain my degree" or "This is the moment to offer a critical analysis of Balkan geopolitics."

CREATING AND INFLUENCING THE SITUATION IN THE HERE AND NOW

A situation only comes into consciousness and takes shape from a perception of exigency. An unseen and unperceived threat that kills before being noticed provokes no situation for action, exists outside consciousness and response. As we go through our daily life there are many things around us we do not notice or think about, let alone write about. We are not moved to do so, because we do not see them as relevant to our concerns and lives. It is only things we notice and interpret as consequential for us that prompt us to wonder whether they might be improved through our making of language.

While in our pleasant walk with friends across the field we may talk about the birds above or our shared memories of amusing events, but we probably would not be paying attention to the physical threat of runaway trucks until we see one careening toward us. We worry about writing papers for classes only when schools, courses, and degrees become significant in our lives. There are many people who currently have no thought of educational institutions,

even though they may live around the corner from one; and there are enrolled students who have other things on their mind so that a looming paper deadline presents no exigency.

Conscious awareness and framing of a situation already has the seeds of a motive and action, elevating attention above the level of general monitoring of the environment. The sense of urgency turns the walk into a situation, turns the near automatic monthly payment of bills into a problem to be attended to, the professor's assigned essay into something that consumes our attention and energies. The perception of a situation then brings about the possibility of action and potential moments and means for action. While a perceived danger in which we see no site for resistance, action, or protection, leads us to watch our destruction helplessly, it is the hope of action that leads us to search for the opening and the means. If we perceive no means at hand to relieve a pervasive heat, no shade, no fan, no air-conditioned room, we cannot begin to frame an action, but if we believe that there may be an oasis beyond the horizon, we struggle to move, despite the effort and added threat. If we believe in the possibility of public resistance and democratic removal of an offending government, we look for opportunities to influence the public debate with an eye toward elections, which provide a social system for inscribing public wishes.

Despite the psychological nature of framing of a moment for action, if the rhetor is to be successful in accomplishing his or her ends, the perceptions are accountable to material and social conditions. Otherwise, one would risk being perceived as a foolish henny-penny warning that the sky is falling when listeners do not perceive the danger and cannot be made to see the danger. For them, there is no urgency to the situation and no imperfection, so the words are just untimely foolishness. If people feel no personal, physical or moral cost to a war, nor even perceive events as one of unusual hostility, it is difficult to have them oppose a war they do not notice or care about.

The rhetor has an easier task, of course, if the audience shares material and social experiences that predispose them to see the rhetor's framing of the moment as common sense, even more so if they share relevant sets of social typifications that would lead to congruent understandings of the immediate life world. If in response to a terrible attack witnessed by all and suffered by many, people anticipate that the government leader will speak and propose a call to action, they are ready to listen. The leader may then be able to call on them to engage in efforts that just the previous month would have been unthinkable.

While powerful rhetors may have some effect in reframing the situation and influencing people's judgments about events and appropriate actions, they can do so only by being attentive to the experience, perceptions, and available potentials of the situation. A situation may be transformed by the child

announcing that the emperor has no clothes, but only if available observations or experiences can give credibility to the claim. As the story goes, the child blurts out his transformative truth while the naked king is parading in front of all to see.

CONDITIONS NOT OF OUR OWN MAKING, THAT WE CONSTANTLY REMAKE: SOCIAL FACTS AND SPEECH ACTS.

This role of social belief and experience, and the rhetor's perception of it, constitutes the symbolic side of Marx's (1937) famous comment that we make our lives but not in conditions of our own making. On the material side, a farmer may plow, fertilize, irrigate, and apply pesticides to fields, but that farmer must still be attentive to the initial conditions of soil, climate, and ecosystem, even though his or her actions may be able to transform them to some degree. Influencing humans through language is equally a matter of evaluating, selecting fields for action, and aligning to conditions even in the attempt to transform them. But instead of aligning to material conditions, what we must align with are social facts. Social facts are those things that because people believe are true, are therefore true in their consequences, in the formulation of W. I. Thomas (1923). Social facts are conditioned by and accountable to material conditions and the experiences available to people, but ultimately the symbolic world of communication must speak to the consciousnesses and emotional beings of our audiences. Our statements must become facts to them, part of the symbolic landscape they live in.

Acts of language create social facts that change the way people view their interior and exterior landscapes, the relations with those around them, their material conditions and themselves. This may be as simple, superficial, and emotionally neutral as presenting them an electric bill they will honor and write a check to pay. It can be as complex, profound, and wrenching as having them reconsider the decency and morality of people whose behavior contravenes their personal values. It can be accomplished in as familiar and formulaic a text as a utility bill, or it may take a complex innovative performance drawing on multiple traditions and hybrid textual forms that aggregate emotions and thoughts while disrupting and reorganizing expectations and frames of reference—as perhaps occur in powerful works of art. But each must became an unmistakable act that cannot be ignored or denied, and consequentially change the audience's mental landscape for action. They must become social facts by being successful speech acts.

The theory of speech acts can help us understand how this happens, and what we have to do to make this happen. Although developed only to characterize

short verbal pronouncements (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and presenting some difficulties in applying to extended written texts (see Bazerman, 1994), speech act theory presents the powerful insight that words do things, mediated through the alignment and understanding of others. Further, the theory notes that these acts then change the reality for future utterances through the perlocutionary uptake of the acts by listeners. But speech acts, the theory argues, accomplish these things only if crafted to meet conditions necessary for success, which Austin dubbed felicity conditions. These felicity conditions have to do in part with the external conditions under which an utterance was made: who has the rights to make the utterance, under what conditions and in what venue, with what timing and what attendant cooperation. A baby can be christened only by authorized clergy in a sanctified place and a law declared only by appropriate members of government carrying out the constituted procedures of the country through accepted institutional practices. Felicity conditions, however, also concern the manner and form in which the utterance is realized and with what understandings by both speaker and hearer. Thus in performing a wedding, the clergy or judge must meet some minimum ritual requirements of verbal performance, such as asking each of the participants whether they freely enter a union, to which there must be an affirmative response. But also the presiding official must also be of serious intent in carrying out this performance, as well as believed to be of serious intent by the participants. Similarly the serious intent of the married must be presumed in their acceptance; otherwise we would have a mock marriage, a fraud, a satire, or other act, but a failed marriage.

A further insight of speech act theory is that part of every speech act is a locutionary act—representing a certain state of affairs. In taking vows of marriage people either explicitly or implicitly represent that they are not already married to some other spouse. Again the act fails if the locutionary representation turns out not to be true—or more precisely taken to be true by the relevant parties. The speech act can fail and the marriage be declared invalid if a prior and still valid spouse appears. But if the act is accepted as true, the representations or implied representations are taken to be true. Thus speech acts create both the facts of the accomplished action plus acquiescence to the explicit or implied representations that are asserted as part of the act.

This concept of speech act then provides the mechanism by which our words can influence the world and remedy imperfections in situations. Speech acts change the social world by creating new social facts, which change what we believe, how we interact socially, and how we act in the world. These social facts then may even change our relation to the material world. If we believe the world is flat, with edges one can fall off of, we may lose enthusiasm for long sea journeys to unknown parts, while a conviction of the earth's roundness

extends our adventurousness and knowledge. If common social beliefs hold that there is little you can do about the weather, that a certain number of climate disasters are inevitable and to be expected, and that free markets always respond creatively and successfully to changing conditions, then it is hard to mobilize changes in energy and pollution policy to combat global warming. On the other hand, if scientific argument convinces the public and policy-makers that global warming is occurring and will have catastrophic consequences too large to be absorbed by typical social processes, and further that certain of our actions can ameliorate the situation, then we will look at and act with respect to our environment differently. Of course, changing material experiences (such as rises in aggregate global temperatures, increases in violent weather, rising sea levels, and desertification) may also attune people to attend to different realms of social facts, thereby changing their beliefs and orientations to action.

Let us consider a more ordinary and less extreme example of how this nexus of rhetorical situation, speech act, social fact, and genre can work together to make possible effective action. Consider a person contemplating a lack of opportunities in the local job market and the sterility of his or her current occupation (in an attempt to create his or her own life, but not in a situation of his or her own making or even liking). Clearly the person sees an imperfection in the situation, but how could it be corrected, how could life be made a little more perfect? Noting that in the local economy people with university degree have more opportunities, the unhappy employee might desire to obtain a degree. Of course the person could just add a line to their resume, but that speech act is likely to fail in creating a robust social fact, as any potential employer has the intertextual resource of university records against which to hold the educational claim accountable. In such a case the social fact likely to be created is not the status of a university graduate but of a liar. Other short cuts such as paying a few hundred dollars to a diploma mill to create a record are again likely not to garner the full respect and credentials needed.

So there seems no path but to spend some time in an accredited institution which will entail many documentary speech acts, such as exams, papers, registration forms, and bill payments. Now, let us look in detail at one of the earliest series of written actions that must be carried out to set this in motion. Once having settled on an appropriate school to attend, to gain the status of student, the person must first apply, which means not only locating the application materials from the complex set of intertexts that constitute the university recruitment and application systems, but then filling them out. To complete the application materials the would-be student must write a variety of representations of information in the proper form, asserting many facts about identity, experience, prior educational accomplishment, and similar

topics. The would-be student may also need to write an extended statement, take some exams, and fill out forms to have the scores forwarded from the exam agency. The would-be student must also solicit letters of recommendation and transcripts from previous schools. If the would-be student manages to felicitously collect all these documents and appropriately inscribe them within the university application system, he or she would then have completed the successful speech act of making application, and may receive a written (perhaps electronic) acknowledgment of this fact. The university cannot now deny that the person has applied. The applicant has met all the felicity conditions and a social fact has been created. Of course, if later it is found out that some documents were forged or falsified, the application can be declared invalid and the social fact erased. That possibility aside, that accomplishment is, however, hardly the end of the story, because the person now having achieved the status of applicant desires to be an accepted applicant. This requires that the application meet other felicity conditions arising from the evaluation of the elements inscribed in the application. The admissions evaluators may consider how well the prior academic record, entry exam scores, and quality of the letters and essays match the university's mission, and expectations of the university and compare to the records of other applicants. Even though these considerations involve evaluation by the reader, we can equally say the applicant wishes to meet them felicitously. The obsession of the college-bound is of course to anticipate and meet these somewhat fuzzier felicity conditions, so that the evaluators and they will be made happy. If the applicant is able to meet all these conditions in the application, the evaluators will inscribe another document granting the applicant the status of an accepted student. This then is just the beginning of further sets of inscriptions that accomplish becoming a registered and enrolled student in good standing, and then completing a record over the ensuing years that would establish the social fact and status of being a college graduate. Each of these steps could be analyzed in terms of what must be accomplished against more or less well articulated felicity conditions, that may be rule-governed or more dependent on the judgment of those who read and act on student inscriptions, for example grading student assignments.

From the institutional side, of course, the university would be somewhat imperfect if it lacked students, so it itself must create documents and procedures that would recruit and induce students into the university, accomplishing the enrollment of a select body of people transformed into matriculated students. Similarly the university must go about recruiting and maintaining a faculty, taking a thousand actions and building many systems that constitute the entire system of the university. Thus the social facts of universities and educated students are accomplished through the means of documents by which the

system is organized, activated, and realized—accompanied by all the attendant face-to-face and material actions that are implied and give credibility to the documents, making the degree a meaningful one, by whatever standards of meaningfulness the various participants and surrounding society may invoke.

KAIROS AND EXIGENCY IN EMBODIED FACE-TO-FACE SITUATIONS

The face-to-face situation of spoken language, the physical environment and the visible social relations of co-participants often can lend a concreteness to rhetorical moments that help align participants to common understandings of what is going on and what is needed. The forest is burning around us, and the apparent urgency of the situation will help others understand your cry for help and will lend credibility to your claims and the exigency. Further if you are yelling down from a high point and looking off into the distance, your relationship to your hearers and the physical surroundings will be further defined and again your comments made easier to understand, to be aligned toward, to be credible, and to be influenced by.

Observable social and material conditions can aid the ready production of shared social facts upon which all will act. Team sports players can make their words intelligible to teammates even under the most difficult auditory conditions because there is so much visible co-orientation on the court or field and because of long common training that makes responses habitually anticipatable. Two friends watching a movie together can make comments cryptic to others, but hilarious to each other in the moment. As we say when asked what went on, "You had to be there."

In such real-time, physically embodied rhetorical moments the language helps focus and organize our orientation to the situation. The speech acts are readily interpretable as part of the events. Further, they are immediately and materially effective within the here and now, and participants can often observe the rapidly evolving consequences which mark the effectivity and social meaning of the acts. People start spraying fire retardant, someone passes you the ball, or your friends laugh—or they don't.

Some written communications can also be highly embedded in circumstances—fire teams can send out text alerts, sports coaches can chalkboard messages from the sidelines, friends in a silent auditorium could be texting each other. Typically the conditions of writing, however, are more removed from the immediate surroundings, with the writer and reader not visible to each other and separated by time. Nonetheless, it may be that on each end of the

transaction each is engaged in material real-time activities that are coordinated by the text. The cookbook writer likely starts in the kitchen (no matter how desk-bound the composing and production process might become) and the reader may refer to the grease-stained cookbook open on the countertop while following the recipe. The invoice informs the shipping clerk which items to put in the cartons, the receiving clerk what to confirm, and the bookkeeper how large a check to write. The reporter interviews the political candidate and attends political events to create stories to provide citizens information that may affect how they vote.

KAIROS AND EXIGENCY IN THE INTERTEXT

In these examples, however, the scene of action becomes increasingly mental and cognitive. As discussed in the previous chapter, literacy has facilitated the development of a virtual world of the intertext, and that intertext itself can become the scene of action—the place where the rhetor can perceive an exigency and an imperfection. Voters need information that they get in the newspapers. A candidate has not gone on the record on the issue of school privatization and the reporter perceives the public might be interested in knowing the candidates' views. By interview and other means the writer gathers information for a story to appear in the newspaper, thereby establishing the candidate's position (that is, if the story meets the felicity conditions of a credible news story and is not effectively contested and thereby made dubious as a speech act and social fact). If we remove the temporal and geographical focus of an election, and the special relevancy status of voting citizen in the jurisdiction, we go one step further into the virtual world. The threat of global warming and the ongoing international negotiations on environmental policy may provide some material and social exigency to work in climate science, but more typically work in climate science, as in the other sciences, appears as a more generalized contribution to the scientific literature moving at its own pace. While scientists may know each other, the work is presented as though it were to anyone knowledgeable and committed in the field. The only exigency is that there is something we don't know yet and the scientist through the work offers an increment of knowledge. The imperfection is in the literature which has not yet fully examined some aspect of knowledge (as is highlighted in Swales' model of the scientific article introduction, 1990). The language remedy is the felicitous report of a credible scientific study. Similarly the exigency of a literary critic may appear even more out of time and space—that we do not understand a poem or playwright as deeply as we might, or we have been lacking some knowledge about a novelist's relationship with their

publisher that would shed further light on her famous works. The imperfection in knowledge and interpretive depth is resolved by a work of scholarship. The scene of action is perceived in the text and the text's relation to other texts, only available through interpretation of the inscribed words.

The formation of kairos within the intertextual world has been a gradual historical phenomenon, accelerating in the last few centuries as robust intertextual systems have emerged whose relation to here and now experience is highly mediated through texts. To deal with a land dispute effectively these days, you do not now go out and put up a fence or stand your ground with a weapon. You enter into a complex intertextual world of deeds, registry, real estate law, filings—and maybe a surveyor to inscribe your land according to the directives of documents. To measure your wealth you no longer open your treasure chest to bathe your hands in jewels, but you go into your office to gather documents or examine a spreadsheet. Even to know if you feel healthy, while you still might give some credence to your gut feeling, you need to consult your medical records and results of tests. And to seek wisdom, while you still might seek a personal guru, you are likely to read a few books that define the tradition the guru is embedded in.

The intertextual world presents special difficulties for identifying rhetorical moments, the right times for utterance, in that we are less likely to have events unfolding in front of our eyes to excite, move or frighten us into writing—as the fire racing toward us will induce us to yell help. Similarly we have fewer immediate means to align our readers to an urgent here and now in which they must attend to our texts—let alone in the spirit and orientation and roles we would hope. It is one of the tricks of robust intertextual systems in fact to create exigencies for us to attend to texts, often through some institutional structuring that creates penalties or rewards, framed by deadlines. If we wish to maintain health benefits, we must fill out a form by a certain date and supply specific information. With web forms we cannot even file the document unless all required fields are filled in appropriately—before the page times out. And sometimes the information we provide is immediately checked out against other databases for consistency and accuracy. Further, unless we provide acceptable information we may not be able to proceed to the next page where the information we desire is located. While such devices are so effective we may not even think about them, these urgencies are rhetorical accomplishments. These exigency devices are worth understanding so we can know our options for responsive action better, and so we can mobilize them for our own purposes to assemble virtual kairos.

Understanding kairos within intertextual domains first requires an understanding of why the intertext matters to us. Given modern conditions of

life, for example, institutional records about us (payroll, school, police, credit, health) might affect whether we are hired on a job, get a loan, get insurance coverage or get appropriate medical treatment. Further, we understand typically how a flaw in those records affects us—getting less pay than we are owed, having a mark on the record that would stigmatize us, or not having the records that would grant us preferred status. If we consider these imperfections of the record serious enough to be worth the effort and if we see means to modify or re-inscribe the record, we might then accept the exigency and attempt to have our payroll deductions adjusted, or have a juvenile arrest expunged from our record, or go through the effort of taking additional courses to complete the requirements for a degree. Given the use cycles of institutional records we can often anticipate when they are likely to be used and when might be the best time to modify them. Shortly before we wish to apply for a loan we may feel moved to check our credit rating so we can boost it if necessary. Educational records may become most significant at times of employment or application to further education, but the best time to remedy them is while we are still students. On the other hand, we may have no successful means with an acceptable cost of time, effort, money, or social displacement (such as by going underground and creating a new identity) to change the records.

In each of these cases, we also need to be aware of the effective means of changing the record that forms the intertext for our further actions—that is, what felicity conditions must be met and how. We must determine how we can demonstrate to the payroll office that we were due a raise, how we can prove to the credit bureau there is an inaccuracy, how we can build an academic record. This involves such things as establishing the credibility and authority to act in the circumstances, acting at proper times in proper ways, with proper verifiable supporting materials, doing whatever work is implied in the desired inscription, adopting the appropriate stances and relationships to institutions, and submitting the request in proper form in a timely way with all the relevant information.

We can either attend to the institutional facts residing in our records to protect our interests or we let them slide and live with the consequences, but they are undeniably parts of lives. Our stake in other intertexts may be more matters of our recognition and active pursuit of them. We may not care much about municipal noise pollution regulations until our neighbor adopts a pack of highly excitable hunting hounds. Even then we need to become aware that such regulations exist and are invocable, and then we need to learn the procedures for filing a complaint and presenting evidence. Even then we must decide whether invoking these procedures is worth the social costs of turning a neighborly relationship into a municipal documentary one, with all the consequent legality

that might ensue. Similarly, we calibrate our attention to the news, how much of what sort we attend to, and which we act upon. Do we follow the news to consider the business consequences and modify our portfolio, or to ponder how we will inscribe our votes, or to hold our own in casual conversations? Are we political comedians who must every day write new jokes about current events to earn our living? At what point and why do we feel the need to enter into a blog discussion or write a letter to the editor, or begin to compose our own satires? Where is the stake, what is the imperfection, what are the effective means at hand, what is the timing, who is the audience? And then how can we draw the readers into the same sense of exigency and situation we perceive so that they will find our comments germane and worth attending to, our humor funny?

Such questions add new dimensions to the strategics of rhetoric, which was initially conceived in a world of face-to-face interactions, where social facts took shape in the here and now of mutual alignment in the moment. Indeed many professions, careers and life projects are now devoted to building, maintaining, and transforming the intertext in recognition of its importance for modern lives. The most visible professions have been those who physically produce and maintain the texts that provide the intellectual infrastructure—printers, publishers, librarians, writers. These intertextual workers now include those who build the electronic infrastructure within which information technologies reside, and those who inscribe meaning in digital spaces. This in effect can mean anyone who spends much of the day at the computer or working with documents, from bureaucratic clerks to lawyers to market traders to academics— each of them has the problem of aligning to a communal intertext and refiguring that intertext to incorporate or take account of their work, to create new social facts that will be visible and consequential for those that attend to that textual informational space. Meeting the well-articulated mandatory felicity conditions as well as the more suasive, strategic conditions that invoke readers' selective attention, evaluation, and memory form the basis of successful action.