CHAPTER 7
TEXT STRATEGICS

Traditional views of rhetoric have identified the key strategic action to be accomplished as persuasion—that is to bring the audience to agreement with the speaker's view or position. Such a strategic goal is appropriate to the arenas of judicial, parliamentary, and political decision within which rhetoric developed, and even to the arena of spiritual conversion and homiletics (to which rhetoric became extended in the early Christian period). When the goal is persuasion, the main vehicle is argument, to turn other minds in the desired direction.

However, the view presented in this book suggests a range of strategic written actions that may be accomplished in many arenas of activity, unfolding over time rather than in single moments of decision. A broader way of characterizing the goal of rhetoric is influence rather than persuasion. Influence only requires that other people act in some way that recognizes or responds to your utterance. A geologist need not have any degree of disagreement with another person to influence them by providing a detailed report on geologic stresses along a fault so that you can together estimate current risks. Nor does a homeowner need to argue with other neighborhood homeowners in a series of emails coordinating an annual clean-up drive that all are committed to by long-standing practice. The communicative work in either case is not to persuade someone to something they would not already have acceded to. The influence is to create conditions for successful outcomes by providing information or coordinating schedules.

In other cases, it may be that the desired influence is not to create agreement, but to create further divisions and differences with the interlocutor. A businessperson may wish to identify exactly where her concerns and interests differ from a business partner, so that they can renegotiate the terms of the agreement. People may wish to detail the idiosyncratic particulars of their lives, experiences, and emotions so that they may understand each other better or just enjoy sharing unusual events and perspectives. In a contentious situation a statement can be for the benefit of third parties to understand the choice they have in adopting different views or can be to instigate an opponent to an extreme action or statement. Influence is as various as human activities and the ways we have of participating in them so as to somehow affect the outcome. So to think strategically about writing, we need to be considering what outcome we are looking for and how our writing may help bring that about.

Even within the traditional realms of political deliberation sometimes the most effective writing actions are not those aimed overtly at persuasion, as anyone

who has written an agenda for a committee is aware. The most effective action may not be to bring powerful arguments and evidence to a meeting, but to allow or disallow an item coming to a vote or to shape the form of the proposition to be voted on. At times even more powerful is to write the agenda so that before the contentious issue comes to the floor, a committee can report that it is undertaking a study to gather facts on a related issue, such that the contentious vote is tabled pending the report. Then when that report arrives, its facts serve to redefine the nature of the problem the committee is addressing. While there may be specific elements of persuasion and specific arguments given in the course of the process, the overarching goal is influencing the events and outcome.

THE CORE OF STRATEGIC WRITING

The underlying strategic question that brings together all these situations is:

How through a speech act can I change the symbolic land-
scape so as to change the field upon which others will act
in order to assert my concerns, interests, contribution, or
participation into the process or outcome?

This question turns attention from the internal beliefs held by audiences and interlocutors to the unfolding of a social process in which I interact with others. At times the desired influence may require that I change the beliefs or views of those around me, replacing or qualifying some previously held belief they have, but more often it simply means they have to recognize and accept the legitimacy of the speech act I have made. As a consequence of that acceptance, they then need to calculate my act into any further move they make.

Rhetorical strategy, so conceived, examines the unfolding social situation, and the effect of any symbolic intervention in moving the situation forward. Rhetoric then attends as much to who is witnessing and paying attention to what I and others are saying as much as what is specifically said. In looking at what has been said, what I might say, and how others might take it up, as a rhetor I move from reading and anticipating minds as viewing what is visibly in the social field, including the unfolding intertext into which the new text will be inserted. While the strength, size, and effectiveness of some speech acts may depend on how it resonates with the dispositions, beliefs, sentiments, and interests of the relevant audiences, it is as important as to attend to the nature and rules of the game one is engaged in, and the particular forcefulness of moves in that game than to pull out all the operatic stops.

By identifying the act one desires to accomplish, the rhetor turns his or her energies toward what conditions need to be met for the act to be felicitous or successful in the particular situation. Further, the rhetor considers how you can make the act as forceful, well-defined, identifiable, and solid as possible, accomplishing its tasks as strongly as possible and standing for as long as it needs, for all the purposes and auditors it needs to. Again, this directs attention toward the evolving landscape on which influence will be asserted, the unfolding actions of others, and the social rules, expectations and values that define acceptability, compelling force, and evaluation that will influence the fate of the speech act. This further directs attention to the way a successful speech act will then inhibit or support others to do what they wish in its wake.

THE CRUCIAL ORDINARINESS AND LACK OF CONTENTIOUSNESS OF MOST WRITING

Most of the writing we carry out in the world is not in opposition to any particular others, nor to displace any beliefs or commitments people may have. Indeed, displacing someone's existing beliefs or commitments is difficult to accomplish. It is easier to tell someone something new than to get them to change something they already believe, even though for reasons of social harmony they may appear to acquiesce at the moment. Even if they agree with you, you may find it is only on a detail rather than with a deep-seated understanding and acceptance of your view. You may well find old beliefs persist and resurface later. This persistence of beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives, in fact should be expected, for after all, personal experiences, knowledge, and views are often long standing and integrated with an individual's way of looking at life. How often do a few words by someone else significantly change the deeply structured patterns and networks of our thought and perceptions? Such moments are rare enough to be considered remarkable—and even many of those cases involve simply the articulation of existing inchoate impulses ready for crystallization.

Only in highly structured situations like courts, parliaments, or scientific disciplines with regular procedures for coming to communal decisions does effective changing of minds or at least compelling acquiescence to the communal judgment happen with frequency. In such domains there are well known forms of compelling evidence, acceptable lines of reasoning, publicly recognized evaluative criteria, and public accountability for one's ultimate position. Contention to be effective must stay within well-defined rules particular to the domain—the rules of evidence in experimental psychology are different from that in ethnographic sociology, let alone high-energy physics. And those

are all very far from the rules of evidence and testimony in court, so that the knowledge of these fields to be admissible in court requires new procedures and transformation of form, evidence, and authority. Further, even in those domains of structured judgment, individuals whose claims lose and no longer stand with any communal force still may maintain belief that they were right even as they are dragged off to jail or fail to have their grants renewed and works cited. It is the institutional and collective judgment carried out through institutional procedures that has the final judgment, not the state of mind of particular individuals.

More commonly writing is carried out within mutually agreed upon activities that do not depend on agonistic struggle. We write to participate within systems and organizations, establish relations, carry out responsibilities, facilitate conjoint work, build bonds and relations over time, assert identity and establish self-esteem within communities, entertain each other, or share common passions. Within such activities we do not displace any social facts that others have asserted and successfully established; we rather attempt only to create our own new social facts. We make speech acts, and only rarely attempt to undo the speech acts of others. And in making our speech acts we create the occasion and resources for others to act.

Creating a webpage describing our collection of antique phonographs may serve many functions in sharing nostalgia, amusing others with quirky aspects of history we have found in our avocation, displaying our pride in our collection, raising our esteem among aficionados, engaging young people in the history of technology, or in supporting scholarship in industrial history and cultural studies. We may even be trying to create a market in these artifacts and attract people to our antique offerings or catalog of reproductions. Yet none of these displace what anyone else does, except in the sense that others might have to carry out their similar activities in a more crowded landscape, which is not necessarily a bad thing for them, as it increases the overall traffic and adds resources for their own activities.

Writing a newsletter for our community association lets people know who is doing what, builds bonds of joint recognition and action, and provides information to allow people in the community to participate. It brings events, people, activities, and possible cooperations to people's attentions, thereby making their lives a bit richer. Only when the town council entertains a zoning motion that threatens some in the community might there be arguments for and against—and then that rhetorical agonism most likely would be directed toward a council meeting or an election, where a decision will be made. Otherwise, the task is building new things and not opposing anything already on the discursive landscape.

When one applies to a college, or for a grant, or any other competitive situation, one presents the best representation of one's own work and accomplishment in ways that will be credible and stand as an accurate and truthful statement. One tries to make as strong a speech act as possible that will not topple over because one of its fundamental props is found faulty. One typically is not in the business of undermining the attempted speech act of competitors, but only in having one's act standing taller, larger, and more in the correct spot for the purposes and criteria of the judging institution.

Even in filing an application for a building permit that meets all regulations and requires no exceptions, one is creating speech acts that carry forward bureaucratic regulation—populating the city records with information to be evaluated and used by others in monitoring, planning, collecting taxes, and other daily actions. Likewise sending holiday greetings to friends keeps alive social networks as well as shares participation in seasonal rituals. All these quotidian texts expand the intertext within which others operate and thereby create more facts to attend to in making their choices and asserting their actions.

THE PLACES OF INFORMATION AND REASONING

In completing each of these acts there are expected things to be said and information presented, and other things that would appear inappropriate. The information needed for a tax form would be inappropriate for a holiday greeting, even if your friends were tax examiners or your tax accountant. That is for another time and place—and another document.

Each genre and its related social activities call for specific kinds of information, reasoning, and sentiments—which in classical rhetorical terms would be called *topoi* or places. They are places the text might visit in carrying out its work. While a *topus* or topic can be thought of as something mentioned in the text, it also attaches the text to something in the world, audience's emotions, speaker's character, or other texts. It then mobilizes, builds on or transforms our relation to the *topus* brought to mind. Thus in a sense each *topus* the text visits attaches the reader to something outside the text, which is brought to bear on the action of the text. Thus in asking for a personal loan a person may remind the potential lender of long friendship and trust, to recall the borrower's reliability and responsibility and also to invoke a special trust that the borrower would not violate. In visiting these issues the borrower attempts to take the lender mentally to these places and activate them as relevant. On the other hand if the lender holds strongly to the adage that loans spoil friendships and that one should never loan to a friend unless you are ready to lose both money

and friend, taking the communication to the relationship might suggest the opposite reaction. You don't want to go there, as we commonly say.

As each of our words index some reality, they each take the minds of others to places familiar or uncomfortable, known in detail or unknown and filled with specters—whether fearful or entrancing. Most often we just bring each other facts that make visible the world in which our speech act takes place and which fulfills the conditions that need to be met for the action to be successfully complete. Thus for parents to enroll their child in a local school, they must provide basic data, specified on a form with fields we must fill in, such things as names of child and parents, address of residency, emergency contact person and information, age and prior schooling of the child, vaccination and other health history. These establish within the school's documentary system realities relevant for the school's treatment of the application and then the actual child once the child enters the school door. The form requires the parents to visit each of the appropriate places and bring back the relevant token of that reality. Further, there needs to be confirmation of those indexed realities, which is often intertextual, requiring back-up documents, such as a birth certificate, vaccination certificate, and proof of address. While these documents may be accepted on their face in the moment, they of course each link up to other documentary systems, and their validity within those documentary systems could be tested. Even more forcefully, filling out the form directly links this current application with active intertextual links the system may have, such as initiating a request to the child's prior school to send records or linking the address into the city residency and taxpayer base. Parents may even have fears that there will be linkages to documentary systems where they would not want to appear, such as the immigration service, the taxation system, or a justice system with active warrants. Only if they know enough about the system and there are explicit privacy policies that limit uses and linkages, can these specters about the documentary realities invoked be laid to rest.

A second strategic set of questions is that of places—the places you enter and stand on along with the places you bring in as part of your speech act:

a. Where do you want to enter the documentary system and where not?
b. What place within it do you want to inhabit, act, or take a stand?
c. What kind of action in that place do you want to create to reach your ends?
d. What other places do you want to index and invoke at the place you are taking your stand or creating your act?

Let me go through each of these four more carefully.

A. THE PLACES YOU DECIDE TO ENTER OR NOT ENTER

The parents who fear filing information with the school because they don't know where that information is going may or may not be justified in their fears, depending on state and local regulations about the articulation of information between systems and the actions of local officials, but they are correct in understanding that any time you write or have inscribed information within a system you are creating a presence within it and with any other systems that may intersect with it. You are entering the places of that literate, documentary activity system by asserting a presence. As literate systems have spread and become pervasive, some people try to keep their entire presence or some aspect of their lives outside of the encompassing documentary system. As the tax system and its monitoring of transactions has grown, it has produced a grey economy of transactions conducted "off the books" in cash or barter or "off-shore" so as not to be visible to national tax documentation. Companies keep themselves private so as not to be subject to the scrutiny of stockholders and the various agencies that protect the rights of stockholders. Most people do not write letters to the editor or engage in the public sphere of politics, except perhaps when they are asked to be an anonymous respondent in a poll or a voting booth, and even then they may be hesitant. People, as well, know once they announce themselves to a charitable organization by giving a donation or putting themselves on a mailing list, they are opening themselves up to persistent solicitations.

The core of privacy issues as they have emerged on the internet concerns which documentary systems inscribed information will go to and to what extent it will stay within the ambit for which it was initially inscribed, whether as an email to an individual, an order to a commercial seller, a comment in a password protected chat room, or a posting to a publicly accessible blog. Given the extensiveness and publicness of electronic networks, however, it is difficult to identify what the bounds are of the world you are communicating with. In the print world only a small group of self-selected individuals published their work, usually on a limited range of issues through a crafted public voice. In a world as comprehensively documented and inscribed in every aspect as ours, however, it has even become a form of ideological, individualistic commitment of some to "live off the grid."

Most of us choose most of the time not to enter into most documentary systems except those we feel compelled to do so by such strong social forces as schooling, government regulation, community expectations, or employment. Indeed most of them are of no interest to us, unless we ourselves are programmers of a particular computer language, macramé weavers, aficionados of Raymond

Carver mysteries, animal rights activists, or engaged in scriptural interpretation. We are so unaware of most of the literate spheres of activity that go on around us that we would be surprised to find out how many of them there are and how extensive some of them may be

We define our lives, interests, and activities by those social groups we selectively engage with. The immediate compelling relationships of those we engage with daily face-to-face have always been primary in shaping our lives, but increasingly over the centuries these have been supplemented, enriched, and encased within documentary systems that link us up with people at a distance of time and space. While sitting around at night by candlelight and then by electric light, we came to read books, write letters, and now withdraw to separate computer terminals—connecting each individual in the family up with different collective worlds that may affect vocabulary, manner of dress and self-presentation, beliefs, attitudes, commitments, and actions.

While the literate communities we connect up often have to do with the chances of personal acquaintances, community affiliations, and local institutional arrangements of school, church, and government, over the last several centuries communication technologies have opened up increasingly greater opportunities for elective engagement—starting with the circulation of books, creation of periodicals, and the formation of public libraries. Initially our worlds grew mostly as readers, as consumers of the products of a small group of authors, who were perceived as extraordinary. While some limited networks of publications had more of a symmetrical sharing of roles, such as in special interest group newsletters, only with the emergence of the internet and associated forums of digital interaction (e-lists, self-sponsored websites, chatrooms, blogs, tweets and whatever else will be coming along) were fuller ranges of participation available to most people. This proliferation of opportunities makes the issue of choice of where one wishes to become engaged a serious question for more and more people.

B. THE PLACE YOU WANT TO INHABIT, ACT, TAKE A STAND ON, OR BE NOTICED

Even when we have interests in participating in specific networks of communication, we must make a commitment of time and energy to visit the places where people engage in our chosen domain of activity, identify and select relevant texts to read, and start to make sense of that world. It is even a further commitment to think we might have anything to add and then to begin to frame our own contributions. We make a further commitment when we decide to make ourselves visible by sending the letter, by pushing the submit button, by seeking publication of a notice in the local newspaper. In becoming visible

we cause ourselves to wonder what kind of figure we will cut, whether people will pay attention, what they think of what we contribute, whether we will create negative views or even get ourselves in trouble. Thus we need to become strategic about exactly where and when we appear.

A strong statement in the wrong time and place will not be attended to because people's minds and energies are going in different directions and are not primed to attend appropriately to the statement. Within legal systems papers have to be filed in timely ways to the right office, otherwise they are rejected or ignored. Less technically determined, a letter to a newspaper editor about an evolving political issue a month ago will likely not be published, or sending the political comment to the entertainment editor will be equally ineffective. We must identify a time and place when our words have a reasonable possibility of having the hoped-for attention and effect.

c. The kind of action you want to take and the presence you want to establish

In conjunction with deciding the appropriate moment for entry, you need to decide the particular form of action you want to take, which then suggests the genre you choose to write in and thus the way you will make your presence known. Actually these choices are not distinct and sequential, as the available genres suggest the kinds of presences and action, and the kinds of presence carry with them consequences for genre and action. Each moment creates constraints of appropriacy because your readers will be primed to accept, recognize, or be interested in only a range of actions, genres, and presences they perceive as appropriate or germane or meaningful to the moment. No matter how important a student may feel that the professor should understand the deep background of personal ambivalence the student has toward the subject matter of the course, the instructor may quite likely wonder where the answer to the question assigned is. The instructor may also wonder whether he or she really ought to be this student's intellectual therapist, or more properly focus on being a history instructor.

On the other hand you may have a number of different ways of responding or carrying forward an activity that would be considered relevant, meaningful, and useful. Several genres could serve to introduce your fellow board members to a new approach to building membership in your organization. You could describe a future scenario of a vibrant organization with new groups of members, you could analyze current member trends, you could review recent other attempts and why they have failed, or you could narrate the success story of a similar organization. Each approach invokes a genre and defines whether

you present yourself as a visionary, a careful analyst, a strategic thinker, or an inspirational motivator.

Equally with each choice of action, genre, and presence you are making a series of choices about stance toward the ongoing conversation, issues, and activities. Your proposal for increasing membership can express anxiety about the current situation or evoke empathy for an unmet need. You can have contempt, agnosticism, or respect for previous proposals. You can see some facts as needing attention and others as insignificant and not worth mentioning. The stance you take will resonate with or alienate your readers, will create a perspective for your readers or distance you from the perspectives they are committed to, will influence them and strengthen the force of the action or will undermine how much they are willing to accept your act at face value, rather than attributing hidden motives to you.

Thus in engaging in a discussion, you are attempting to stake out some ground on an ongoing landscape of communication and activity that your readers will recognize. You need to be able to define the ground in a way the readers will recognize and place your attempted act so that they will see it fitting, acceptable, appropriate, and meaningful.

d. The resources you want to draw into your space

Too often we think of texts simply as written within their own spaces—as though they were fictions floating apart from other worlds. But even fictions draw on the readers' experiences and emotions in the world to create power within the fictive worlds. Even more, everyday texts draw on and bring together realities outside the text to establish their relevance and force in specific circumstances. Presenting demographic facts about unequal healthcare accessibility is not just a rhetorical trick to make a point; it indexes social realities that need addressing. It says the world demands the kind of attention being given in this text. The text's invocation of these facts then makes the text and author accountable for the accuracy of the representation—that those statistics are well gathered and are germane to the issue at hand. Similarly tying texts to files of information on a patient's case or a long standing discussion of philosophers locates the text in on going exchanges, but also gives the weight of prior discussions to the text at the same time as holding the text accountable to those discussions.

A text representing the world and taking action in it is only as strong as the ground it is anchored to and the strength of the anchors. That is, the claimed representation of conditions in the world must accountably be supportable. An application for a loan identifies the applicant as a person with a credit history— which will be checked against the files of banks and loan institutions. If the name

is false, the claim of employment is inaccurate, there is no history of financial transactions, or the transactions are flawed to indicate lack of creditworthiness, the application will fail.

In some situations the expectations of the genre necessary to take action are so specific that they address all the conditions necessary to complete the act—and also thereby all the resources that need to be brought to bear, indexed, and accountably certified. At the extreme are bureaucratic forms that dictate all the information to be provided, the appropriate form and order in which they need appear, intertexts of data bases and files that confirm and provide expanded details on the reported information, and signed statements making one accountable under legal penalty for the accuracy and truthfulness of the information provided. The bureaucratically determined requirements of the regulated action walk you through all the places you must visit and report on, identify the kinds of details you must use to index the realities and how far you need to go into them—and no further (limited by the size of the space and the specific items requested). Further, the form locates your assertions within institutional and informational resources, activates all necessary supplementary materials, orders them in a way that facilitates their processing by the receiving agency, defines your stance as an applicant or other subaltern to the institutional and organization body, and makes you accountable for your role in the process.

Even in somewhat less compulsory genre situations the expected organizations of texts identify the places you should be taking the discussion, the information and resources you need to represent, and the kind of reasoning you should be doing with these resources. If you are considering for an urban civic blog the impact of new policing procedures, you must first establish the policies you are talking about, when they have been put in place, and some sense of the community situation before and after. Then you might take the discussion to a number of places, but each of those places must be demonstrably related to public impacts, consequences, and responses to the policy. You may take the discussion to crime statistics, a description of main street on a weekend night, the mood of people in one of the more troubled parts of town, the talk in a local gang hangout, the concerns of parents expressed at a community meeting, a press conference held by the local civil liberties organization—or any of a number of places where consequences of and reactions to the policy may be seen. You could take the discussion to state laws and the federal constitution, with scholarly discussion of what is permitted and what violates fundamental law. You may even take the discussion to a scene from a popular television crime show or movie.

Each choice of place you take the discussion carries with it a kind of reasoning. Legal discussion requires you to examine legal material through legal reasoning. Listening to community groups raises issues of public belief, interests,

and reactions which need to be discussed. Reference to entertainment requires you to be aware of the difference between fiction and reality and possibly also the role of media-represented beliefs and images in affecting or contrasting with realities. Not only are you accountable for the reasoning of that location, but the reasoning that ties that location to the issue you are considering. Also typically at the end of such a piece, you would return to the realities of your town.

You may even create hybrid genres that take the discussion to strange places. You could take your consideration of the policing policy to a science fiction fantasy to demonstrate a dystopic or utopic future that would result from the policy and related approaches, or you could create a computer game or cartoon to mock the impulses behind the policy. But still you need to be sure the audience understands the fundamental linkage of this kind of representation to the issue at hand.

The contrast between the closed example of the loan application and the open-ended one of the civic blog also highlights differences in depth the places indexed may be examined. In the loan application it is only important that the representation be good enough—what is asked for, accurate, appropriate, truthful. More would only get in the way. Once you have given what is needed for approval, no one needs or wants to hear any more. In the civic discussion there is no clear ending to how deeply you might want to go, where the discussion would lead. The strength of the act you want to build may be limited by the information you can find out, the amount of concern the community has, and the tolerance and attention span of your audience, but there is nothing predetermined in the genre or basic action to tell you when enough is enough and when more is no longer useful or even welcome. Chapter 9 of this volume provides more details on managing representations of the world and the intertext in your writing

Writing a text is creating a new object on an intertextual landscape and populating that text with representations and meanings and to animate those meanings as the reader engages with the text (see Chapter 11 of this volume). The rhetorical influence of the text is a consequence of readers' engagement with these texts transforming their view of the social, material, and literate worlds of their future actions. The fundamental strategic question is how you can best populate the intertextual landscape with new objects to gain the influence you hope for, to meet your own interests, needs, concerns, or creative visions. Selecting the most effective places to inhabit, building engaging landmarks that call attention to those things you select for others to be aware of, and then creating ways of thinking about the place and objects in the course of text are the strategic means of influencing thought and social processes. The remaining chapters of this volume pursue how one can bring these textual objects into being in their most complete and effective form.