

The Rhetorical Act
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CHAPTER 1

A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Through its title, *The Rhetorical Act*, this book boldly announces that it is about rhetoric. Since the mass media often use *rhetoric* to mean "hot air" or "lies," you may well ask why you should study rhetoric in a class or read a book about rhetorical action. One way to answer this question is to define *rhetoric* properly and to show the possible value of a rhetorical perspective on human action.

A "perspective," literally, is a way of looking through (*per* = through; *specere* = to look), an angle of vision, a way of seeing. All perspectives are partial and, in that sense, distorted or biased: each looks at *this* rather than *that*; each has its particular emphasis. Because someone is always doing the looking and seeing, it is impossible to avoid taking some point of view.

Just what is a "rhetorical" (as opposed to a philosophical or scientific) perspective? Whereas the scientist would say the most important thing is the discovery and testing of truth, the rhetorician (one who studies rhetoric and takes a rhetorical perspective) would say, "Truth cannot walk on its own legs. It must be carried by people to other people. It must be made effective through language, through argument and appeal." Philosophers and scientists respond, rightly, that truths must be discovered and tested, through logic and experiment. In fact, they would argue that you and I should pay more attention to how truths are discovered and tested. The rhetorician would answer that unacknowledged and unaccepted truths are of no use at all. Thus, the "bias" of a rhetorical perspective is its emphasis on and its concern with the resources available in language and in people to make ideas clear and cogent, to bring concepts to life. A

retorical perspective is interested in what influences, in what *per-*
rades people.

As a result, a rhetorical perspective focuses on *social truths*, that is, on the kinds of truths that are created and tested by people in groups, truths that influence social and political decisions. Among the important social truths a rhetorical perspective might teach you to examine are the processes by which taxpayers, parents, congressional committees, school boards, and citizens treat issues that cannot be resolved solely through logical analysis and experimental testing. For example, should nuclear breeder reactors be built to provide more energy? What should be done about the rising number of pregnancies among teen-agers? What crimes, if any, deserve the death penalty? For social questions such as these, philosophers can point out contradictions in our thinking and spell out the implications of a given position. Scientists can give us the best available data about the storage of nuclear wastes, the ages at which women become pregnant, the rates of commission of capital crimes. When we have looked at the data and examined the logic of the conclusions drawn from them, we still must make decisions that go beyond the facts and make commitments that go beyond logic.

From its beginnings, this emphasis on social truths has been the distinctive quality of a rhetorical perspective. History seems to indicate that rhetoric was first studied and taught by Corax and his pupils in the Greek city-state of Syracuse in Sicily. A despot had come to power and seized much of the privately owned land. When he was overthrown, former landowners went to court to recover their holdings by pleading their cases. It soon became apparent that those more skilled in arguing were the more successful, and Corax and Tisias began to teach rhetoric—or how to be more skillful in pleading one's case in court.

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

The first major treatise on the art of rhetoric that still exists was written by Aristotle in fourth-century-B.C.E. Athens. Both in the *Rhetoric* and in his other works, Aristotle distinguished among kinds of truth. He recognized that there were certain immutable truths of nature, and these he designated as the province of science (*theoria*). He recognized a different sort of wisdom or knowledge (*phronesis*) as needed to make decisions about social matters. These truths, not discoverable through science or analytic logic, he described as continuing

gent, that is, as dependent on cultural values, the situation, and the nature of the issue. They were the special concerns of the area of study he called "rhetoric." The contingent character of social truths can best be illustrated by looking at what it means to say that something is "a problem."

Put most simply, a problem is the gap that exists between what you think ought to be and what is; it is the discrepancy between the ideal and the real, between goals and achievements. By this definition, a problem for one person may not be a problem for another person. For example, some students are satisfied with C's in most courses. Their goal is to get the "ticket" represented by a college degree with a minimum of inconvenience. They plan to exert their energies after they get into the occupation or position of their choice. Other students are miserable with anything less than an A. Their goal is graduate school or highly specialized study and work. They need very high averages and the best possible preparation and achievement now. For these different students, the same fact—a grade of C—can be a serious problem or no problem at all.

For you as students and for society as a whole, problems depend on the goals desired and the values held. It is in this same sense that social truths—and thus rhetoric—are "subjective" and "evaluative"; rhetoric is grounded in issues that arise because of people's values.

Rhetoric is, of course, also concerned with data that establish what exists and with logical processes for drawing conclusions from facts and implications from principles and assumptions. Indeed, Aristotle considered rhetoric an offshoot of logic, and a rhetorical perspective is characterized not only by an emphasis on social truths but by an emphasis on *reason-giving* or *justification*. Of course, not all of the reasons used by rhetors (those who initiate symbolic acts seeking to influence others) will make sense to logicians and scientists. Some rhetorical reasons will be grounded in facts and logic, but many others will be grounded in religious beliefs, history, or cultural values, in associations and metaphors, in hunger, resentments, or dreams. A rhetorical perspective is eclectic and inclusive in its search for what is influential and why. In fact, rhetoric's concern with justification grows out of its focus on social truths, tested by people in their roles as voters, property owners, and the like. In other words, reasons are presented to those decision makers and evaluators to whom the rhetoric is *addressed*, the audience.

Obviously, in some situations you can say, "Do this and don't ask any questions—just trust me," but these situations are rare. Reasons can be ignored only where your relationship to the audience is so

close and strong that the relationship itself is the reason for action or belief.

In most cases, then, even those involving your nearest and dearest, you must give reasons, justify your views, explain your position. And you must do so in terms that will *make sense to others*. Rhetors must “socialize” their reasons. For example, one of my students, a long-distance runner, told me that he ran for the joy of it, for the sheer physical pleasure it gave him. But when others asked him why he ran and endured what they saw as considerable pain, he spoke of developing his body and protecting his health. Those were the “socialized” reasons, reasons accepted by society. United States culture is strongly pragmatic; “good” reasons show that an act is useful. Other societies or subcultures in the United States emphasize the sensual and aesthetic; for them, “good” reasons affirm the pleasure and expressiveness of behavior.

Because rhetoric is *addressed* to others, it is *reason-giving*; and because it is social and public, it uses as reasons the *values accepted and affirmed* by a subculture or culture. In this way, rhetoric is tied to *social values*, and rhetors’ statements will reflect the social norms of particular times and places.

Because it is addressed to people, providing justifications that others will understand and feel, rhetoric is a *humanistic* study, and, as such, it examines all kinds of human symbol-using, even the bizarre and perverse. From the beginnings of rhetoric in classical antiquity, rhetoricians have known that persuasion occurs through both argument and association, through the cold light of logic and the white heat of passion, through explicit values and subconscious needs. As a result, rhetoric is a field of study that examines *all* the available means by which we are influenced and by which we can influence others.

In summary, rhetoric is the study of what is *persuasive*. The issues it examines are *social truths*, *addressed* to others, *justified* by reasons that reflect *cultural values*. It is a *humanistic* study that examines all the symbolic means by which influence occurs.

RHETORICAL ACTS

As I have described it, a rhetorical perspective takes note of the rhetorical or persuasive dimension in all human behavior. Although all human actions can be considered implicitly persuasive, I do not wish to define “the rhetorical act” so broadly. The lines separating rhetorical acts from other acts are difficult to draw, however, and in

this book I shall treat the concept of rhetoric in both its broad and its narrow sense. An example will illustrate why this should be.

During the student protests of the 1960s, a group of black students occupied a building on the campus of Cornell University. The incident was widely publicized, and several newspapers and magazines published a photograph showing the blacks leaving the building carrying weapons that included guns. They looked threatening, militant, extreme. But one of the departing blacks also took a photograph. Taken from the opposite direction, it showed what the outgoing blacks faced: a crowd of whites, bunched behind a ring of police wearing helmets and masks and weighed down with weapons. Both police and crowd look angry and dangerous. One picture shows the event as most whites saw it; the other shows the event as the demonstrators and many blacks saw it. Editors who published the first picture probably did not make a consciously racist decision. They published what they saw (and what other whites wished to see, perhaps), and by doing, they influenced others to see the event as they did, to believe that that was the way it was. The rhetoric of each photograph emerges most clearly when one sees them both.

What the example illustrates is that many acts are rhetorical when you consider the potential of the act to influence others, whatever the actual intentions of its author may have been. Of course, many acts are intentionally rhetorical—advertisements, editorials, book and movie reviews, and essays, sermons and speeches that declare a position and seek to defend it and make it attractive to others. When address you as speakers or writers, I talk about rhetorical acts intentional and deliberate attempts to influence others. However, when I function as a critic or analyst and address you as critics and analysts, I comment on all possible persuasive effects, both intentional and unintentional. I do this because, to understand rhetorical acts, you must understand all the processes of influence and because, as rhetor, you must come to terms with unintended and accidental effects—especially since some of them may tend to defeat your purpose.

In other words, defined most broadly, *rhetoric* is the study of all the processes by which people influence each other through symbols, regardless of the intent of the source. A *rhetorical act*, however, is intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end. A rhetorical act creates a message whose shape and form, beginning and end, are stamped on it by a human author with a goal for an audience. If you study all forms of influence, you will become aware of all the available resources for persuasion. Similar

when you analyze your rhetoric and that of others, you must consider persuasive effects that may not have been fully under the control of the speaker or writer.

RHETORICAL PURPOSES

Because intention and effects are so important in a rhetorical perspective, I wish to consider the range of purposes contained in the words *persuasion* and *influence*.

Creating Virtual Experience

First, rhetors intend to communicate. If I write, "The sun shines against a pale blue sky, the snow has melted into dirty slush, blades of grass poke up here and there, and crimson birds chirp in the still-bare trees," you can draw on past sights and sounds and sensations to re-create your own mental picture. Although each reader's picture will be different, and each will reflect the reader's unique past, most will concern spring in the northern hemisphere. To communicate, to act rhetorically, means that you initiate an act that someone else can translate into virtual experience. When something is virtual, it does not exist in fact; it is *as if* it existed. There is no sun, no blue sky, no dirty slush, or crimson bird on this page. But if I write about them vividly enough, you can imagine them; it is as if you saw and heard and felt them here and now. That re-creation in your mind is virtual experience. In response to my words, you imagine a scene, create a mental picture, and what you experience is virtual experience, experience called forth and shaped by your response to the symbols produced by someone else. To communicate effectively means that the image or idea created in your mind approximates the image or idea that the speaker or author wished to convey.

In other words, the fundamental rhetorical purpose, the most basic kind of influence—communicating—requires you to initiate a rhetorical act that can be translated into virtual experience by others. The most basic question in rhetoric is how to do that.

One kind of rhetorical action is intended primarily to produce virtual experience. Most works of literature, for example, are written to expand and shape our experience. In them, one sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches vividly and concretely, and these sensations are shaped and formed into a satisfying and complete experience. In Tolstoy's *The Death of Iván Ilych*, for example, the reader sees and

touches the stuffed furniture and damask draperies; smells Iván's fo' breath; hears the crushing of a down cushion; tenses muscles w' Iván's struggles. These sensations re-create Iván's fear of death an' the horrors of his dying.

Altering Perception

Literary works can also have political effects, however. Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* re-created the experiences of orphans in English poorhouses so movingly that readers demanded reform. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicted scenes of slavery so vividly that it became a major force for abolition. The same sensorily aesthetic stimuli that enliven good literature are a major means of persuasion. In other words, by creating virtual experience—the vivid the better—literature can contribute to the second rhetorical purpose I want to discuss: *altering perception*.

George Washington wrote, "The truth is the people must *feel* before they will *see*." Whether or not you must experience before you understand or comprehend, it is surely true that vivid experience improves the capacity to understand. Indeed, Washington's statement names the two processes by which persuasion occurs: feeling and understanding.

For a striking example of how an author can change the meaning of a concept for an audience—that is, alter perception—adding to their experiences that are associated with it in the minds of the audience—consider what Tolstoy does to the deductive syllogism that begins: "men are mortal":

Iván Ilych saw that he was dying, and he was in continual despair.

In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.

The syllogism he had learnt from Kiezwetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius—man in the abstract—was mortal was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate from others. He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman and a nurse, afterwards with Katerka and with all the

joys, griefs, and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Had Caius kissed his mother's hand like that, and did the silk of her dress rustle so for Caius? Had he rioted like that at school when the pastry was bad? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at a session as he did? "Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me, little Vanya, Iván Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it's altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible."⁶

Until I read that novel, no one had ever died in a syllogism. Since reading the novel, I cannot hear the syllogism without thinking of my own death.

To recapitulate, the most minimal rhetorical purpose, the smallest effect produced, is to add to the sum of your audience's experience. If you succeed, you start a process that may alter perceptions.

Explaining

If we measured the effects of rhetorical acts by how much they altered belief, nearly all of them would be failures. Normal, healthy human beings whose physical environments are not controlled by someone else do not change their beliefs in response to a single message—whether the message lasts five minutes or five hours. If people do alter their beliefs, they do so over weeks, months, or even years, and in response to many different messages.

Let us suppose that you have read Tolstoy's *The Death of Iván Ilych* and now feel very intensely your own fears about death. But you are puzzled and unsatisfied. You want to understand the processes by which humans avoid thinking about and dealing with death. At this point, you are an ideal audience for the third rhetorical purpose: *explaining* or creating understanding. Such rhetorical acts attempt to order and account for a whole mass of information and experience. For example, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's *On Death and Dying* explains the psychology of death and helps the reader understand why Ilych's fear of death torments him and why his torment is increased by his family and friends' refusal to acknowledge to him that he is dying.

The need to explain often appears when an intense, irritating experience occurs. For example, when a German industrialist, Dr. Martin Schleyer, was kidnapped and murdered by a group of educated young Germans whose middle-class backgrounds provided no obvious reasons for their terrorist behavior, another young man, responding to his need (and ours), wrote an open letter trying to explain such actions. He spoke of the shame that he and other young Germans felt for the Nazi past, especially when postwar allies seemed to be an obscene reward for the obscene practices of the Children of his age learned not to trust parents who pretended not to have known of the death camps and could not trust teachers reshaped history to emphasize the benefits of the Third Reich building highways and curbing inflation. He described the effort of his generation to invent an ersatz (a term borrowed from German referring to an artificial substitute) country and family—by adopting Korean and Vietnamese children, by embracing pentecostal Christianity, by supporting all left-wing causes, by going to work for United Nations, as he did, or even by joining an international terrorist group. What the author makes us feel and see is the desperate need to belong to something dedicated to good and the intense desire to destroy lies and to act against those who had deceived them about the past. If his letter speaks to us, it helps us share the experience of bitter young Germans and understand how some, the bitterest of them, might see terrorism as a solution.⁷

Susan Brownmiller wrote a book called *Against Our Will: Women, and Rape*.⁸ Much of the book provides information about crime of rape—its magnitude and nature—and gives us the vivid experience to recognize it as a crime that real people experience. How Brownmiller goes beyond the data to explain—to argue that rape is the logical and necessary outcome of sexism in our society. Her explanation will find a large and ready audience, for women, particularly the millions of rape victims, have usually found rape an unfathomable horror. Most people, in fact, wish they could make sense of this paradoxical crime—committed by "normal" males who commit their acts before finding an available victim, often committing it in groups, the fastest growing violent crime in the United States.

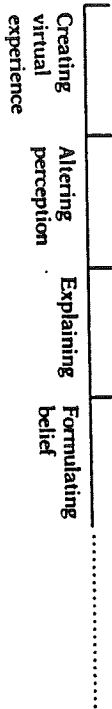
⁶ Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Iván Ilych," translated by Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude in *The Death of Iván Ilych and Other Stories* (England: Oxford University Press). Reprinted by permission.

⁷ Frederick Weibgen, "Compensating for a Childhood in Germany," *New York Times*, January 1978, p. A33.
⁸ New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

one that is no respecter of persons: neither age, respectability, ugliness, nor staying at home will protect you, your sister, your mother, your friend, your wife, or your daughter. Brownmiller's book provides many data that alter perception and need explaining; then it presents a persuasive, intellectually satisfying explanation.

Formulating Belief

By this time you should begin to see that rhetorical action is not a one-shot event, but a process, and that there is an orderly progression of rhetorical purposes, depending on where a rhetorical act fits into that process. Often when our perceptions are changed by virtual experience, we demand explanations, or the rhetor who has created the virtual experience is moved to explain why these processes occur. Similarly, the next rhetorical purpose emerges out of these: *formulating belief*.



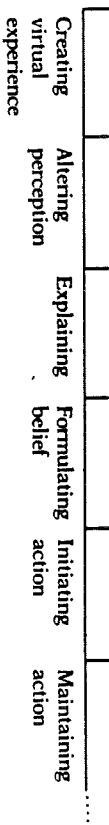
To return to Brownmiller, most people who read this book are probably already concerned about rape or interested in feminism generally. Such readers will, at least, entertain her explanation as possible even if they postpone any further move until they have more data. These readers are now a prime audience for other rhetorical action. They might read a feature story about a rape squad formed on a police force and its effects on the arrest and conviction of rapists and on the protection of persons unjustly accused. Or they might read a San Francisco reporter's story of being raped in her home, or plan to listen to a late-night talk show on which she tells her story.* Such people are testing Brownmiller's explanation. They may now talk to a rape victim. If these experiences and messages confirm Brownmiller's view, they will reach a point at which a new belief will emerge. Many rhetorical acts aim to produce that "precipitating moment" in which everything falls together and the reader or listener says, "That's it."

* Marilyn Chase, "Nightmare in California: A Reporter's Story of Her Rape," *New York Times*, 21 January 1978, p. C 25.

That's the way it is." Few rhetorical acts succeed, however, in transforming people's attitudes. Most serve, at best, to confirm a position being considered or to present an explanation the audience is ready to ponder. Indeed, those who achieve such goals have been resounding successes as persuaders!

Initiating Action

Let us suppose, however, that you are present at a rhetorical event that formulates the beliefs of a group of people about rape. The pleased speaker now urges action—but finds that most of the audience is not ready to form a rape squad with some female officers or, in fact, to do anything very concrete. You might doubt that the rhetor has really changed people's belief, and your doubts would have merit because belief and action are related. But a survey of rhetorical purposes may show that a normal process is occurring. The speaker may merely have tried to move too fast, skipping one or two steps in the sequence of rhetorical goals and purposes. Even when belief is formulated, it will not result in action unless the general belief is reinforced and then channeled so that action seems appropriate and necessary.



Once again, messages must be supported by other events. If a series of rapes occurs on your campus and they are publicized, generalized belief will be reinforced, and concerned groups and individuals will seek to protect potential victims and create procedures that will increase the chances that the rapist(s) will be caught. Under such circumstances, reinforcement may happen almost instantly for friends and families of the victims, but can happen fairly soon even for those not directly involved. In the face of such events, people discuss alternatives, argue their merits, consider what is feasible, decide the extent of their commitment, and choose what actions, if any, they will take.

Rhetorical acts aimed at initiating action will appear. An editorial will urge a special rape squad; a women's group will press the school administration to provide facilities for a crisis line for rape victims; and hold a rally at which speakers urge this; the police chief will promise anonymity to witnesses; a local student organization may

urge formation of a special student police group to protect women students, and so on.

Maintaining Action

And then, when the furor dies, rhetorical acts will be needed to keep the crisis line and the special police rape squad in operation. Rhetorical acts will appear to sustain the commitment to continued action (maintaining action, the sixth and last of our rhetorical purposes). Such rhetorical action perpetuates institutions: the Sunday sermon to the regular churchgoer, which urges continued support and attendance; the regular report on the activities of the Rotary Club, which reaffirms the club's successes and values; the weekly ritual at Eastern Star, which reinforces Masonic principles; the daily repetition of the national anthem at baseball games in summer, which proclaims the patriotism of sport.

This progression reflects the rhetorical dimension in all human behavior and indicates the processes involved in the most ordinary sorts of rhetorical acts. It should suggest to you as a prospective rhetor that your choice of a rhetorical purpose should reflect the prior experiences of your audience and should be attuned to the events taking place in your environment. Your potential purposes will depend on the issue, the audience, and the context, as well as on you. (Your role in a rhetorical act is considered in Chapters 3 and 6.)

THE DISCIPLINE OF RHETORIC

A discipline is a field of study, an area of expertise, a branch of knowledge. A discipline provides *theory*, *application*, and *experimentation*, and *criticism* to test them all. Theories are explanations that seek to account for processes and data. Rhetorical theories seek to account for the processes in language and people that influence belief and action. Applications are rules for action that are developed from theory. Rhetorical applications suggest how you can use rhetorical principles to be an effective moral agent and to protect yourself as you participate in rhetorical action initiated by others. Experimentation seeks to isolate variables or elements in the persuasive process and to test theoretical explanations as carefully as possible. Critical analysis examines rhetorical acts in order to describe processes of influence and explain how they occur. Both experimentation and

rhetorical action) contribute to the modification and application of theory.*

In the chapters that follow, I develop theory about the nature and application of rhetorical processes, which is supported by experimental research and by critical analysis that qualifies, refines, and illustrates these theoretical concepts.

In its theory, the discipline of rhetoric examines the symbolic dimensions of human behavior in order to provide the most complete explanations of human influence. This broad view is tested by critical analysis. Rhetorical application focuses more narrowly on rhetorical acts—written and spoken messages designed to achieve predetermined effects in an audience. Experimental studies of persuasion focus more narrowly on rhetorical acts and test the adequacy of explanations of them and the appropriateness of rules for application.

As a discipline, *rhetoric is the study of the art of using symbols*.† It provides theory, application, experimentation, and critical analysis. It studies the *social use* of words by people in groups, the *political use* of words to decide who shall make what kinds of decisions, and the *ethical use* of words to justify belief and action through cultural values. It is related to logic and empirical validation because it uses these materials. It is different from philosophy and science because it studies all the available processes for influencing people, and it defines influence broadly. As a result, it considers how people use language to alter perception, to explain, to change, reinforce, and channel belief, to initiate and maintain actions. Put more traditionally, it studies all the ways in which symbols can be used to teach, to delight and to move.

This book is based on the ancient idea of the relationship between art and practice—the belief that you cannot develop a skill such as speaking or writing unless you understand the theory, the concepts, and the ideas on which it is based. Conversely, you cannot understand the theory unless you use it and test it in practice. In my view, the ancient relationship demands that those who would learn about rhetoric must take the posture of a rhetor—critic. The rhetor is an

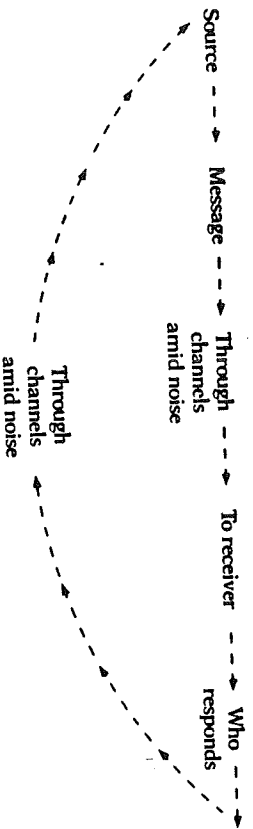
* Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Nature of Criticism in Rhetorical and Communicative Studies," *Central States Speech Journal* 30 (1979): 4–13.

† This conception is reflected in many well-known definitions of rhetoric: "The art or talent by which discourse is adapted to its end" (George Campbell); "The use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Kenneth Burke); "The faculty of observing, in any given case, the available

initiator of rhetorical action who tries to make the choices that will make her or him the most effective moral agent. As a rhetor, you come to understand all the forces at work in persuasion, some of which are outside your control. The critic analyzes, describes, interprets, and evaluates rhetorical acts to understand what they are, and how and for whom they work. As a critic, you learn to criticize your own rhetoric to improve it, and you learn to analyze the rhetoric of others in order to make decisions as intelligently as possible.

CRITICISM IS FEEDBACK

Every book addressed to students of communication begins with a model of the process that looks something like this:



Most of you already know that the name for the receiver's response is "feedback," the kind of information used in missile guidance systems to keep projectiles on the correct path. When you speak, the immediate audience gives you useful but limited feedback. They look at you intently, smile in amusement, frown in puzzlement, look away in annoyance or boredom, take a note to check out a statistic, and the like. If you are in a class and your instructor has the other students write comments and discuss your speech, you will discover that most of their reactions were not evident from their faces and bodies. You will also discover that the messages you could not read are very important—perhaps the most important. Similarly, when your instructor comments orally and in writing, you will discover that the written comments are different—less superficial, more helpful, tied to ideas you have studied. Such feedback is criticism—the careful analysis and evaluation by an experienced student of rhetoric who has heard and read many rhetorical acts, read many critical analyses, studied available theories, and read many experimental studies. Ideally, you should aspire to be such a critic. If you understand rhetori-

cal processes, you have the best chance of consistent success in rhetorical action. You will be able to help yourself improve, and you will be able to consider the rhetoric of others most carefully.

The perspective of this book is a critical one. In each case, theory and application are related to critical analysis of rhetorical acts, with the goal of making you an effective critic of rhetoric, your own and others'. Then, the process of learning that begins in class can continue outside the classroom and throughout your life.

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EXERCISE

The history of rhetoric and of communication is embedded in and revealed by the meanings, usage, and origins of these terms. Both the history and the varied meanings of these words can be discovered this way: ask each student or assign groups of students to look up *rhetoric* and *communication* or *communications* in one of the following:

The Oxford English Dictionary

Rogel's *Thesaurus* or any dictionary of synonyms and antonyms
Encyclopaedia Britannica (Compare the essay in the eleventh edition with that in the fourteenth; then look at the *Macropedia* and the *Micropedia* of the latest edition.)

Bartlett's Familiar Quotations or *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*

*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage**A Dictionary of Word Origins**The Oxford Classical Dictionary**The Dictionary of the Social Sciences**Black's Law Dictionary**M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms*

And any other dictionary, encyclopedia, or other reference work.

In class, share all the definitions, meanings, and information about word origins that were found. How old is the study of rhetoric? How old is the study of communication? How do their word origins reflect their meaning? What differences are there in these two terms?

CHAPTER 2

THE RHETORICAL ACT

In the first chapter, I discussed rhetoric, the rhetorical dimensions of all human action, and rhetorical acts in general. In this chapter I examine a particular rhetorical act in some detail, and in Chapter 3 I discuss *your* rhetorical act, the special relationship between you and specific individual and the choices to be made when you speak to achieve the range of rhetorical purposes I have described in this chapter. I play the role of critic, analyzing and interpreting rhetorical acts. As the analysis proceeds, I develop a lexicon of terms that can be used to talk about the elements or parts of a rhetorical act.

The act I examine was printed on the Op-Ed (opposite the editorial) page (p. 21C) of the *New York Times* on September 24, 1971, was written, not by a journalist or member of the *Times's* editorial staff, but by Melvin J. Konner, an associate professor of biological anthropology at Harvard University.* I have chosen the act because as you will see, it works well to illustrate the various elements of rhetorical action and because it treats a typical rhetorical question of public policy that rests on cultural values and reveals the creation of social truths. The broad issue is what public policy should be about providing contraceptive information and abortion to teen-agers.

* This information about the author appeared in a note at the end of the essay.