

CONSTRUCTING EXPERIENCE

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Whose Moment? The *Kairotics* of Intersubjectivity

Every moment embeds and reinvigorates previous moments. That is true also of this moment, of my writing and your reading and the attenuated link between them. To define a moment is to perceive a structure to the then and the now and to act upon that perception, thereby realizing the perception as a social act influencing the future. The momentary act implies intentionality within personal constructs of an evolving historical situation. The writer or speaker presents a dynamic universe for the reader or listener to reconstruct actively within the receiver's dynamic universe. The words are what go between and negotiate the intersection of these moments within the worlds of production and reception. Through language deployed at the moment, we assert the connection of past and future as well as the connection among human beings in creating a shared universe of action.

Thus, the rhetorical concept of *kairos* (loosely translated as rhetorical moment) stands at many intersections: between past and future, between perception and action, between context and agency, between the self and other, between the familiar and the novel, between structure and improvisation, between private and public, between psychology and sociology. Within the meeting point of *kairos* we can locate the concrete boundaries of behavior that have provided the social sciences with their deepest conundrums: how shared knowledge and belief are possible; how substantial social structure is and how it is maintained; how people manage to act together; whether individuals are unthinking puppets of structured social forces or creative, intelligent individuals; how macrosocial forces are related to individual microaction; whether psychology and sociology have any common ground or are unreconcilable competing accounts of human behavior.

The term *kairos* within the thinking and rhetorical action of the classical world came to have a rich and complex meaning embodying interests and ethics, practicality and aesthetics, intentions and contexts, self-assertion

and propriety, citizen and polis, human and divine. Within the conception of the occasion were all the forces and opportunities by which one made life, exhibited life's manifold meanings, and revealed one's own virtues in living up to life.¹ In acting *kairotically*, one became human.

Although in the ancient world *kairos* was an undoubtedly powerful concept, it is a concept that we seem able to approach only indirectly, through the beliefs and uses of that different time, beliefs and uses tinged with the romantic glow of a perceived golden age while obscured by the mists of foreignness. Modern social science, however, can give us another glimpse of *kairos*, for the social sciences also create accounts of how we become human within society, accounts that have become increasingly sensitive to the momentary actions that constitute our relations with each other. This essay will attempt to construct a modern account of *kairos*, drawing on the resources of the social sciences, particularly social theory. Cast in our modern idiom and relying only on familiarly modern assumptions, such an account may make *kairos* more fully comprehensible to the modern imagination, while perhaps revealing resources in the concept that would not shine through as clearly in the classical framework. On the other hand, placing *kairos* in a theoretical web drawn from modern social sciences may reveal how the concept retains vitality for continuing social research and theory. The ultimate aim of this account will be the traditional one of both classical rhetoric and the social sciences, to help us understand our actions so that we may act more precisely and effectively for our own individual ends and for the wider constitution of society.

The voices of this social science commentary on *kairos* will come from all sides of the action/structure, creativity/regularity, micro/macro, individual/social, psychological/sociological divides that have formed the characteristic fissures of social science in recent decades.² But I also hope to show how attention to the *kairotic* moment of social transaction can provide the meeting point for reconciliation of these apparent contraries. At one extreme is the individual microaction orientation of ethnomethodology developed by Garfinkel out of underlying positions of Schutz.³ Schutz, however, suggests pathways for social typification and thus the regularization of social action that ethnomethodology defined as beyond its concern.⁴ Schutz's concept of typification also opens the doorway to cognitive psychological accounts of the formation and functioning of individual action schema, first suggested by Boulding and then developed within reading research.⁵

On the extreme other side is Parson's functional, socially determinative account.⁶ But this position is mediated by Merton's move to locate

structure within the individual's perception of structured alternatives for individual action choices.⁷ In the middle of all these will be Giddens's account of *structuration*; that is, how individual actions constantly reproduce and re-create social structure, even as that social structure constrains and makes possible the individual action—a dialectic that Giddens calls the double hermeneutic of social action.⁸ Giddens, moreover, follows Habermas's (and before him Vygotsky's) move to a critical consciousness that allows us to look upon our symbolic actions and the social worlds we reproduce through those actions and to change both in light of our increased critical understanding of what we are doing.⁹ Bourdieu's analysis of the reproduction of culture is part of this same project of helping us understand the mechanisms by which interests and powers maintain stable holds over politics and economics, so that we may act more reflexively and effectively in rearranging our social relationships.¹⁰

Taking the perspective of these social scientific accounts entails a fundamental shift in the viewpoint from which we observe *kairos*. Classical rhetoric traditionally has viewed *kairos* from the vantage point of the rhetor contemplating when and how to speak. Traditional accounts of *kairos* attempt to provide interest-driven and choice-oriented strategic frameworks for formulating the social situation the rhetor sees around himself or herself, the possibilities of rhetorical action at the moment, the momentary openings that provide the opportunity to speak, and the tides of social dynamic that will support or undermine one's rhetorical intentions. *Kairos* provides a central concept around which to build an analysis of the environment for action—an environment sensitive to time as well as politics, social belief, communal attitudes and goals, personalities, and events.¹¹

Within traditional accounts of *kairos*, basic issues of the organization of society, the roots of individual action, and the formation of intersubjectivity are left implicit, for classical rhetoric takes for granted that the individual rhetor is already fully located within stable and familiar social environments with relatively fixed and approximately shared values, procedures, relationships, and beliefs. Moreover, the rhetor is assumed to have preexisting interests to promote within this stable social environment: defending a client before a court, arguing for particular legislation within an organized deliberative body, gathering support for the actions of a leader. Discovery of these interests and the positions one wished to argue for were largely left to the less public and more exploratory discourse of dialectic.

When one knows one's interests within a stable, known environ-

ment, then one needs to grasp the tides of action and mood, the opportunities, the swellings of forces one hopes to ride or deflect. However, no matter how the rhetor perceives and measures these *kairotic* dynamics to identify the opportune moment, that perception and measurement is inevitably a private judgment from one's peculiar vantage point and through one's personal vision of the world.

Because classical accounts of *kairos* have taken the position of the rhetor, it is not surprising the epistemology of the individual's perception of the moment has fostered serious controversy. When *kairos* is formulated from the point of view of the rhetor, it is crucially important to resolve the extent to which the rhetor's individual perceptions are bound by an actual (and untransformable) state of affairs (if such an actual state of affairs exists independently of the individual's perceptions) or whether the individual can reshape the actual (or socially perceived) state of affairs through a personal redefinition of the moment. This is the issue at stake in the modern Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate, but it also goes back to classical roots, as in Plato's critique of Gorgias.¹²

Viewing *kairos*, on the other hand, from a social-scientific perspective allows us to adopt a more distant standpoint, viewing all participants, their conceptual frameworks, and the relationships and transactions among them from the separate standpoint of an analytical observer. From this standpoint we can consider the ordered social relations that bring individuals together in a coherent social space and make meaningful social actions possible. We can then create a perspective that encompasses the viewpoints of the several participants so as to observe the moment around which individual perceptions and impulses arrange themselves as behavioral history and the unfolding of society.¹³

My reason for taking this social scientific move is not, however, to remove inquiry from the world of action into an objectified world of disengaged inquiry. Rather it is to give deeper guidance to both rhetor and audience, who are all potential rhetors. Indeed, though audiences may be temporarily mute and standing still, they will not be for long. They too will act and speak; moreover, they will act and speak within an environment of the communication they were just audience to. All are users of language, alternately as receivers and producers. The mutual interplay of all their actions creates the evanescent yet compelling atmosphere of society. Within such a complex world of linguistic multiplicity, where each person is a separate nexus of meaning and activity bound with each other person's nexus of language use, the simple vision of the single rhetor acting against a coherent socially ordered

audience lulls us into attributing too great a fixity to the shifting sands of society out of which we construct moments and our perception of them. The epistemological quandary of the Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny interchange, rather than being a philosophic puzzle needing resolution, is an opportunity for us to see beyond the screen of taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. To reformulate the grounds on which we conceive moments and negotiate those moments with others leads us to inquire about the dynamics of social knowledge and action that we constantly realize at every moment of our lives, individually and with each other. Such understanding does not remove us from rhetorical thinking but rather helps us formulate more sensitively what we are doing with others, to know where our opportunities and constraints are, and even more to know how our actions are part of a larger ebb and flow. Marx's formulation often quoted by Giddens and his followers contains a fundamental rhetorical principle that we do well to explore: Human beings make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.¹⁴

Inquiry into the mutual creation of social moments not only deepens our rhetorical understanding but also offers in return to our colleagues in the other social sciences a specific concrete location of human interaction. Rhetoric formulates the daily experience and the actual momentary technology by which we constantly produce and reproduce society. The moment of communication is a site at which society happens. Many of the ambitious projects harbored in the social sciences to evaluate and perhaps reconstruct social order would do well to contemplate the evanescent moments at which society unfolds.

The Individually Perceived Moment

For each individual, life unfolds in an idiosyncratic series of moments in which one participates as best one can and out of which one comes away with perceptions of the world, events, and the consequences of actions.¹⁵ From the sequence of moments, one develops habits, practices, and conceptions that shape future behaviors, and one constructs a sense of the self, an autobiography, and a vision of the life-world. In short, we try to make sense of our lives; that sense is intimately bound up with how we have acted in past moments and will act in future moments.

It has been the project of ethnomethodology to uncover the everyday understanding of the world that is revealed in our everyday actions; equally it has been the project of cognitive psychology to find how

we code that everyday understanding of the world into structures of thought that then guide our continuing daily actions. Both these social scientific projects—ethnomethodology and cognitive psychology—although seeking to establish general patterns of actions or thinking, are fundamentally seated in an analysis of how we bring to bear our sense of the world on our momentary actions.

None of us, as individuals, have godlike access to an objective view of a true and stable world and a universally accurate view of history, against which we may act. We do not know the moments we confront as they might be in some fixed ontological reality. Instead, we understand each moment from our own perspective—from our immediate location at the moment (dynamically interpreted through our ongoing actions and goals) as well as through the life frameworks we have learned to bring to bear. We act as our own gods, creating our own realities out of what we have learned and done and seen and enjoyed to this point and where we perceive ourselves to be heading. To paraphrase Hanson's now famous slogan about the theory ladenness of scientific observations: every action is life-laden.

Even our recognition of moments is life-laden. What we choose to attend to, what evokes our concern, what series of events we feel intersects with our interests and goals, and therefore what intersection of perceived events and intentions that we identify as coming together as discrete moments are all matters of personal sense-making. We devote our energies to and organize our actions around personally identified spots of time that we consider significant. The moment of the fall of Icarus was of moment to the winged boy and his father Daedalus and Brueghel and Auden and many others who participate in the Western mythic tradition, but it was of no moment, it was no particular moment, to the farmer Brueghel depicts. The farmer had no interest, for good life-world reasons; the farmer's perception of temporal consequentiality is organized around the moment of harvest. Indeed, we all organize our moments hierarchically, not only worthy of varying attention but with lesser moments instrumentally related to those we consider of more fundamental import. Before a dinner party, we shop and cook and clean, and after, we mull over words and interactions and consequences as well as wash the dishes.

The traditional notion of *kairos* precisely serves to help us identify those moments that we project as crucial junctures for us and at which we may intervene rhetorically in some significant way to further our own goals and interests. Having identified a moment particularly worthy of our attention, we can then explicitly elaborate our understanding

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of all the forces we believe come to bear on the unfolding of that moment and all the resources we may be able to deploy to make that moment "go our way." Through consideration of *kairos* we not only define moments of opportunity and significance, we also implicitly create moments of planning and preparation. Explicit consideration of *kairos* creates the time and social space for forethought about our actions.

The Personal Ordering of the Moment and All That Went Before

This sense we make of the world and its moments, although idiosyncratic and personal, is nonetheless ordered, both by our conscious and unconscious mental constructs of the world as well as by those habits and regularized practices that create uniformity in our behavior. Over time we learn to attribute certain regularities to personalities, behaviors, motives, dynamics of human relationships, institutions, temporal cycles of the hours and the seasons and the holidays, and numerous other patterns of life that help us find pattern in the local and help us predict the consequences of our possible actions. To make life manageable for us with our finite nervous systems and ignorance of the future, we necessarily must attribute a degree of stable order to life. Cognitive studies identify those ordered visions of segments of the world and activities as schemas, images, scripts, gestalts, cognitive structures, and the like. Numerous studies, in fact, suggest that the ordering influence of such cognitive structures is so pervasive and powerful that individuals have a great deal of difficulty coping with, or even recognizing, events that are not readily reduced to the familiar personal framework. This tendency to normalize events to preconceived frameworks and to ignore the anomalous has been noticed in a wide range of human activities from science to secretarial work to mother-child talk.¹⁶

It is within this individual construction of order within the social world that Merton in fact finds the location of social structure. As Stinchcombe points out, Merton argues that we construct our motivations within what we perceive as social opportunities for satisfaction, and we then pursue these motivations through what we perceive as the socially available alternatives. It is in our own observation and imputation of order within our social environment that permits us to act as if the social world were structured. Thus, we create social structure through our actions. Social structure then is a social fact: it is so because we all come to believe it so.

As we construct our images of how the world is shaped and how our actions affect the future, we learn to take much for granted, and

we learn to typify what we do in repeated patterns. In rhetorical terms, we come to characterize rhetorical moments as of particular kinds, calling for familiar kinds of comments. We recognize when we are chatting over the watercooler or when we are engaged in a seminar; moreover, we recognize what kinds of comments are appropriate to each. Little children (at least those who become recognized as good children within our socially dominant institutions) gradually learn the difference between playful moments and moments when you had better answer simply and obediently. As Carolyn Miller has pointed out in "Genre as Social Action," such typification of moments goes hand in hand with learning genres of responses: this is the time for such-and-such kind of comment. Moreover, this typification helps us develop our set of characteristic social actions. We are learning to recognize not only categories of social moments and what works rhetorically in such moments but also how we can act and respond, ways of being part of society. The range of available genres for us to learn and to integrate into our action repertoire defines to a great extent the characteristic patterns of interaction within a society.

Nonetheless, given the great variety of our biographies, we develop different constructs of moments and appropriate responses. When asked, for example, how they are, some people give a bland pleasantry, others make a wry joke, others complain, and still others attempt to engage you in their latest schemes. Each perceives the moment as a different kind of occasion, calling on a different repertoire of responses. Each individual's characteristic sense-making and action patterns contribute to what we call *personality*.

In realms of discourse more traditionally associated with rhetoric, there are times when some people recognize their interests as being attacked, and therefore it is time to make a defense; or that a communal decision is about to be made and that they can and should intervene in the discussion to influence that decision in ways favorable to themselves; or that there is some other opportunity to advance one's causes. Of course, not everyone feels threatened or hopeful in the same way, nor do they react the same way to perceived threats and opportunities. Some fight, some run, some smile, and some just bide their time. Even a single person might react differently as he or she perceives situations as belonging to different categories. In order to react with the impulses fostered by classical rhetoric, one must take for granted many features and frameworks for considering the life-world and one's role in it. Development of socially labeled occasions, institutionalized forums, and socially recognized roles helps establish some uniformity among

what various individuals learn to take for granted. The formation of the *agora* and its characteristic activities make it more likely that certain classes of individuals recognize moments and impulses for forensic and deliberative rhetoric. But of course, every social formation implies social exclusions, so just as disputes are put into the court, they are taken off the streets (except when the furies are so fierce that they no longer abide domestication); just as deliberative rights are possible to citizens, public decision making is withdrawn from slaves, children, women and noncitizens, who learn other forms of discourse appropriate to their roles of submission, compliance, and perhaps psychic resistance.

The Pleasure of Knowing What to Do and Doing the Right Thing

Despite our seemingly infinite ability to see life as we want to see it and to shut out anomalies or contradictions, yet we are not always sure what is going on or how we should act. We are constantly in the position of having to integrate new sensations into our existing typifications. Perhaps the information we take in does not readily sort into our obvious categories, and we have to shoehorn them in with much tugging and pulling and snipping. Or perhaps we have developed sophisticated ways of combining multiple typifications and complex plans. In either case, our sense of what the moment is and how we are to react is temporarily in suspension. We are confused or unsettled, in some state of cognitive dissonance. The conscious analysis of *kairos* of any particular moment (as a strategic act of rhetorical planning) is precisely to help us sort out unsettling moments or to unsettle our too-easy assumptions about an event so that we delay our knee-jerk reactions until we have brought more subtle, conscious categories to bear. But this unsettled state is by its nature unresolved and uncomfortable; it is in the modern executive parlance "living with uncertainty, coping with chaos." When we satisfactorily find a resolution, establish new categories or reinforce the old with some clever cognitive move, when we finally decide we know what is happening and we know what we ought to do, or even when we discover there is nothing we can do, it is necessarily a great psychic relief, even a pleasure. We have created order where we temporarily were afraid there might be none, and we have created harmony among disparate parts. Resolve is traditionally associated with understanding, and both are associated with a highly valued sense of spiritual peace.¹⁷

Thus, in personal terms, we seem deeply driven to create our personal orders of the world, which then provide the frameworks for our

actions. The deepest-felt disorder is that surrounding our most personal life choices. We find our resolutions and psychic reliefs in the contingent actions we settle on as appropriate to the circumstances. Action, even if it does not directly answer all of our uncertainties about order, makes many of our prior concerns obsolete, for each action changes our action-situation. Those circumstances that we determine no longer relevant to our continuing life plans rarely remain in the forefront of our mind, for they are no longer part of our sorting out our *kairos*.

We Construct the Personal Out of Interaction with the Other, Moment by Moment

Although we each develop our sense of order, our sorting out of memories and perceptions and impulses, in the privacy of our separate nervous systems, that sense of order is deeply influenced by our interactions with others. As Vygotsky and those who followed in his footsteps have pointed out, as we grow up our attention is directed by the people around us, the language we are surrounded with, the interactions others attempt to engage us in. The child, biologically driven to suckle, must still figure out how to coordinate this activity with the particular mother that is a necessary partner to this event.¹⁸ The growing person must shape its own set of perceptions and categories and typified actions to take account of what it perceives of the behavior of the people around it. It must make sense of what other people do and how it can successfully coordinate with those others to meet its needs. It must learn to deal with the patterns and the typifications of behavior and language that others present.

This coordination does not mean the developing person directly adopts the sense-making patterns of others but only that its sense-making must mesh with the sense-making of others, that it must learn to be responsive to the results of the sense-making of others. The people around us will reward or sanction our actions not only overtly through expressions of conscious beliefs, but implicitly by how satisfactorily our actions and senses coordinate with theirs. We must, among other things, come to congruent enough understandings of the language to carry out our mutual business, even though we may be constructing our sentences in different manners and attributing different valences to words. If everyone around us uses paired words in an oppositional pattern (such as observed by Levi-Strauss and Derrida), we must come to terms with those pairs of meaning. If the people around us all treat social distinctions as real, we must also come to terms with those social

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distinctions and frame our behavior in recognition that other people observe these distinctions. Most likely, since very often we find our most satisfactory, rewarding actions by cooperating with those immediately around us, rather than setting ourselves apart, we adopt directly those oppositional pairings and structures of language as significant elements of our sense-making, and we affiliate with the generally preferred pair of the opposite (although in individual circumstances some may prefer to chose the less favored, the evil, the outsider, the wild, the raw). That is, we figure out how to sort ourselves into socially received categories, although we always have the alternative upon reflection to step outside received dualities, in Hindu-like fashion. Similarly, in learning to coordinate with other people's behavior, we learn to adopt the role of partner and to model our behavior on what we experience of others. We develop our own senses of the world and our actions within a complex scaffolding provided by those around us.¹⁹

Recognition of moments is certainly part of this social conditioning of our sense-making. When we are children, there are times when adults demand we answer them and times when they demand silence. There are times when others appear receptive to us and times when our approach only evokes hostility. We are asked questions and given assignments, and only certain ranges of responses are accepted and rewarded as appropriate. And then we learn the more explicitly ordered moments for talk in our society, as in the organized talk of the courts with complaints, summonses, subpoenas, testifying witnesses, spokespeople-lawyers, rule-making judges, and verdict-delivering juries. Moments for spoken language are ordered in institutions such as school, the family dinner, the date, the heart-to-heart, the group therapy session, the business meeting. Moments for written language are also ordered institutionally through schools, monthly bills, accounts, office memos, securities reports, newspapers, literary magazines, scholarly journals, and friendly letters. For each of these socially regularized occasions, we learn the elements of timing and the appropriate responses and the genres of communication; even more, through that learning we discover how we may participate in these forums and sort out how and whether such participation will meet our goals. Indeed, we find that the most highly structured forums provide possibilities for higher degrees of participation, coordinated activity and focused attention, as long as the activity is not so restrictive as to reduce our participation to ritual rehearsals or tediously restrictive narrow ranges of choices. Philosophy gets further and engages minds more deeply as it moves from the 3 A.M. dorm room to the seminar room, except

when the rules of the game get so restrictive as to rule all the interesting questions off the court.

People who have never experienced any particular highly developed forum have a hard time knowing how to first respond when thrust into it; for instance, our students may indeed wonder what we get out of all our reading and writing for arcane journals. Even those people who know how to speak well before a court or a therapy group or how to write well for an academic journal may at some point decide they have received all the benefit they desire from these forums and may then withdraw to pursue other interests on other fronts.

Our learning to participate in each of these forums and continually to re-create these situations by our participation is, as Bourdieu and Giddens have been elucidating, the means by which society is reproduced. It is also the means, as Bourdieu has been particularly interested in pointing out, by which social inequities are reproduced. The person who learns to respond successfully to the moments offered within a society with strong class distinctions reproduces those class distinctions within the minutest actions, by the very way of passing someone on the street or selecting a magazine to read on a train or discussing with a neighbor the latest political events. The more dramatic moments of major speeches by political leaders or of legislative deliberations concerning the homeless or academic jeremiads over the state of culture are built on the pervasive undercurrent of smaller everyday moments. Anyone who has been sensitized to the subtle ways in which racism or sexism is maintained in everyday relations will immediately understand the powerful truth of this reproduction at the microinteractional level, but such social processes of moment-by-moment reproduction are equally at work for desirable aspects of society as well as for those malign patterns we wish to expunge. Helpfulness to others, sharing of thoughts, playing baseball together, or stimulating intellectual interchange are all built on socially conditioned coordination of perceptions and actions on a moment-to-moment basis.

Learning to Read Each Other's Conceptions

We learn to adjust and model our behavior on each other's not only at the overt meeting point of behavior. Assuming that other people are in some ways similar to ourselves, we also start to construct models of what other people must be thinking or feeling or aiming at to do what they do. We attribute thought and intention at first to those closest to us, such as our parents, whose dispositions we early learn to interpret

out of necessity. As our social world expands, we attend to the personality and goals of all those people we need to coordinate with: friends, teachers, intimates, workmates. Although we may have little need to psychoanalyze each other all the time, we do have a need to notice how others are perceiving the moment and their roles and goals within it. As teachers we need to know whether our students are in our classes because they are required to or they are pleasing their parents or they have a deep commitment to our subjects. Whether or not we cross-examine students about what they think they are doing in class, we will readily make judgments from the character of their participation in the class. From their actions we construct a perception of what they believe the moment to be: their *kairotic* construct. Within the dating-courting system, there is almost constant speculation on who is there for lust, who is there for status, who is there to reproduce some early childhood psychodrama, and who is there on a desperate rush to the altar.

We also look up to those people to whom we attribute some deeper or more successful or more harmonious understanding of the moments they are in. People who characterize moments and act in ways we may admire may be labeled quick or percipient or wise or levelheaded or virtuous or shrewd. The terms vary with what we see in their perception. But the point is that we find in their unusual words and behavior some pattern that suggests a kind of mental construct that allows them to perceive the moment in ways we would not but wish we would. Sometimes we may even see their attitude or actions at a moment as beautiful, in that their actions and attitudes imply a deeply ordered and harmonious vision of the situation that we had no concept of until we read it out of their actions and attitudes. Such beauty of the other's *kairotic* conception might cut through our own confusions about a situation or even our own inattention to the moments around us as uninteresting and mundane. In this way a noble character may walk on stage and through a small gesture or a major initiative show us a whole new dimension or harmony in a situation. An Anwar Sadat sees within a generally perceived pattern of hostility carried out to the smallest gesture of life between two peoples, strong underlying economic, social, and political forces that would reward and reinforce a gesture of friendliness. People in Israel and Egypt and around the world respond with awe at the moving beauty of his actions but even more at the understanding of the forces of history and moral sensibility that underlie his understanding of the moment, of his ability (as they say in politics) to seize the initiative.

This beauty to be found in the *kairotic* conception we infer from others' actions has been noted in the literature on *kairos* and bears much similarity to the notion of beauty in science, if we view both in cognitive terms, for both beautiful actions and beautiful theories or discoveries provide mental resting points for a new order of mental construction where we had previously seen only emptiness or chaos. With the beautiful action or concept, pieces in suspension fall into place, and even unanticipated new orders may emerge to create ordered unity in the mind.

Because such beautiful conceptions have such power to reorganize our perceptions into new orders and harmonies, we often say they are powerfully simple, if only we had the wit to see them. They cut through complexity. They even have a moral dimension, for they can reorder our sense of how the social world is ordered and where we find our place within that social order. A Churchill, who finds in wartime the proper moment for his military vision of life, through his stirring words teaches us all to be great patriots at the moment when we need it and are therefore ready for it. A Louis Pasteur, with his vision of microbial struggle and technical medicine, can mobilize all of the world into becoming Pasteurians, even though, as Latour has argued, each is attracted to his vision for different reasons and finds different things in it.

The Mutual Intersubjective Production of Social Order

By these various processes of scaffolding, modeling, and imputation,²⁰ we are able to order our personal typifications of the life-world in ways that are compatible or at least predictably conflictual (for even a conflict must be understood within an intersubjectively ordered framework before it can be joined) for us to meet in mutually recognized moments. Otherwise, we would all be tilting at our private windmills with only the most random social conjunction.

Moreover, the more we find our shared moments and interact with each other, the better we become at recognizing those junctures and construing each other's interpretations of events in ways that seem consistently to predict each other's behaviors. Sometimes this can mean increasing cooperation, mutual satisfaction, and meeting points of agreement. This *kairotic* coordination can lead to the kinds of shared orientations to and shared participations within mutually recognized moments that we identify as intimacy. On the other hand, typifications of the other and our relations to them can also mean hardening of

positions, mutual stereotyping, and reification of differences. Whether or not the outcome is successful, we think we come to understand each other better and we know how to construe other's behavior, locate the times for inaction and action, and act to meet our own interests within mutual situations. We not only learn to time our actions for our own advantage, but we sympathetically construe what timing or what actions at a particular time might be best for another person. For those close to us or for whom we take educational or spiritual responsibility, we time consolations, encouragements, revelations, or insights so as to have most salutary influence on their psyches and development.

This social regularization of moments happens not just between individuals but over time with larger groupings of people who have continuing relationships with each other, even if those relationships are at the distance of institutionalized bureaucratic patterns. We come to share in socially regularized moments that spread over great distances; and we can even recognize the similarity of moments of our lives with moments of long ago and far away.

As individuals perceive structure in the life-world and act according to that structure, and insofar as that structure meshes with others, we find ourselves rewarded with responses we feel are appropriate. We develop an ordered sense of our options given our increasingly reliable sense of what is happening and how others will react to our initiatives in the moment. In this sense Merton finds society structured, by the patterned choice making dependent on individual's perceptions, but in a world where as a result of long interactional processes, perceptions of many individuals have triangulated in on each other to produce similarities and institutions that hold each other stable as self-fulfilling prophecies.²¹

Within the narrow bounds of scientific communities, such coordination of interests, goals, and action frameworks makes possible such social phenomena as recognized disciplinary problems, priority races, and multiple discoveries. These phenomena all rely on people working within sufficiently coordinated frameworks so that disciplinary wide vectors of knowledge production seem to be in force, pointing at shared moments of communal discovery, even though the work of the discipline is carried on by many different individuals.²² Similarly, such history-constructing devices as citation practices, textbook accounts of the growth of knowledge, and awards like the Nobel Prize retrospectively identify and sequence the moments of significance for knowledge-producing fields, thereby reinforcing vectors toward future communally constructed moments.

Similarly, in politics there are many devices that serve to coordinate action and perception around public moments, such as debates, elections, the progress of legislation, or the meeting of leaders. Our political stances and opinions and actions and votes and contributions all tend to array themselves around the options we perceive in these various moments.

Thus, recognition of *kairos* extends beyond identifying our moments of private advantage or sympathetically entering into the evolution of another person's life-world to participating within the communal moments that draw together the larger communities we are part of. Those larger communities in effect gain their strength insofar as their devices of *kairotic* coordination serve to sweep up and organize our various individual *kairotic* impulses. Accountants in the United States, buried beneath seasonal tax work, may barely notice the spring religious holidays but will still mark midnight of April 15 as a significant juncture.

The more reliably regularized our life-world becomes, the more our participation in it is rewarded Skinnerianly. When we say something that *kairotically* coordinates with others, others reply in ways we also feel appropriate to the moment. Our work is followed by predictably satisfactory accomplishments recognized by others and compensated at what we have learned to evaluate as an appropriate rate. When we carry out an experiment or observe a phenomenon, we find that others are able to re-create what we have done and make consonant observations.²³ Even though the social worlds we are part of may not be the best of all possible worlds, they are the worlds we tend to remake because they are the ones we know how to make, how to participate in. Whether we are on the winning or losing team or sit on the sidelines to observe, the games we have grown up on are the games we tend to continue to play.

In this deeply ingrained, highly habituated and patterned reproduction of the moments of society, we see the means by which society may appear in the extremely structured forms noted by Parsons and other functionalist and structuralist sociologists. Having learned the game so well and having shared it with so many around us, we would have to suspend some of the deepest and most pervasive integrations of our lives if we were not to fulfill our roles as we have learned them. The better we have learned, the more our ability to step outside the game diminishes, so that we can indeed appear to be the judgmental dopes that contemporary theorists have rejected Parsonian theory as portraying.²⁴ The structures of society and our participation in them may appear so constraining that we may seem to have no latitude for

individual judgment and freedom of choice. But if we are those dopes, it is because we have devoted our best choices and most skilled energies to become them. Although some people are unreflective about and unresistant to the social structure they learn to participate in, they have had to use all their human abilities to learn and carry forth that participation; as people they are no dopes. As well, many consciously and conservatively commit themselves to traditional social order, values, and institutions while fully and explicitly aware of alternative conceptions of the moments of their lives and alternative potential paths of action; upon reflection they find maintenance of life as we know it to be most rewarding for themselves and others. They too are no dopes although they allow traditional patterns and existing social structures to determine large segments of their macro and micro life choices.

Choice, Creativity, and Social Change

Despite the pervasive scaffolding that enlists each of us into a communally reproduced social structure and gives us all endless occasions to increase our skill in participating in that structure (so much so, that society is often seen as a reified autonomous creature reproducing itself), yet we all meet that apparent juggernaut of society from our own positions and through a unique set of experiences and actions. We each construct our vision of society and our options individually.

Humans, of all the animals, seem to have been able to create from their actions carried out in communal social participation the most complex and varied lives. Each individual constructs a sense of moment out of the great individual variability of his or her experiences. This is hardly the less in the modern world with its great opportunities for movement and interaction among countries, classes, races and ethnicities, occupations, forms of culture, and entertainments. Thus, while we each learn to adjust to one another, the others we learn to adjust to have become legion. We have increasingly many opportunities to choose among kinds of participation available to us and to make analogies between the participations that we have previously enjoyed and those we currently enjoy. To put it succinctly, we are not now a single island tribe narrowly reproducing only a single set of highly ritualized behaviors. We have manifold possibilities available to us to conceive of the moments before us.

Reflection upon these alternatives (that is, formulating our positions, conceptions, and behaviors in explicit symbolic terms and then manipu-

lating those terms to help us plan our choices) makes possible a self-conscious monitoring of our actions, opening up possibilities of novel choices and freedom of action. Through reflection upon our position and actions, we can bring to the surface many of the coordinated misunderstandings and sloppy gatherings of approximate behavior by which we get by together. We can examine explicitly with greater precision the bases for our sharing of any moment. We can examine the *topoi* and *enthymemes* by which we agree to a mutual reality and we can compare them to other bases of agreement and disagreement. Reflection allows us to examine and reorganize the constraining scaffolding we present to others, thereby limiting their participation with us, just as reflection allows us to examine the scaffolding offered to us, to see whether it offers an acceptable template for how we wish to participate with others.

We have the possibility of reflecting upon not only concrete options but the very transience and frailty upon which our communicative system of human coordination is built. Such reflection changes our very attitude toward that system, the respect with which we must treat it, and our possibilities for ordering our lives through it. Such reflection may open the door to a Habermasian world of rational communicative action, stepping back through critical consciousness from the reproduced irrationalities of inherited social structures. Alternatively, such reflection may lead to a fuller commitment to traditional structures that seem to satisfy the manifold irrational needs of individuals and provide the kind of regularity necessary for individuals to provide common ground for mutual living in a complex and indeterminate world. Or less extremely, reflection may simply offer us the means to monitor the world we create as it unfolds before us, so that we may adjust our actions and emerging realities even as we make them, neither totally rejecting or accepting the life-world we are born into. We just become better at living, moment by moment.

By understanding the contingent and frail means by which we intersubjectively establish the moments we share, we grab hold of the basic mechanisms by which we create social life. Recognition of the momentary mechanisms by which events unfold makes possible true social creativity, moving designs for the improvement of humanity out of the vapor of broad abstractions into the concreteness of everyday life.

Reconceiving *kairos* as the means by which we imagine and thereby create social order, we reach beyond the notions of fixed interests and personal standpoints inherent in classical rhetoric as situated in the *agora* and court, where others are only potential dupes or allies to be

enlisted in private causes. We return to a perspective that preceded the institutionalization of many of the forms of classical society, a perspective articulated by some of the Sophists who still perceived the flux and endless possibility of society. When the games are new, it is perhaps easier to see their contingency. When you enter the game late in the day, you need the aid of strong theories to see your way through the many social facts that appear incontrovertibly natural.

But those theories are not the ends in themselves or simply destructive of social order. They are means of reconceptualizing oneself and of providing fundamental frameworks for continuing action. Theory is only praxis in its most reflective mode. Reinterpreting *kairos* through modern social scientific theory still leaves *kairos* as a rhetorical concept, a means of locating oneself in a world of evolving action with others, linked together by the fragile threads of symbols handed back and forth among us.

Notes

1. Insofar as recognition of one's moment of action required recognition of the social web one was part of, *kairos* potentially entailed social obligation and ethical responsibility for fulfilling one's place within the community and perhaps even providing unusual moral and political leadership that met the evolving momentary needs of the society. Thus, *kairos* was the entryway to the most noble notions of propriety as a moral ideal, especially when the condition of society was granted autonomous and transcendent status beyond the accumulation of individual interests. On the other hand, if society were seen only as the playing field for individual interests, propriety could be reduced to only a temporary protective coloration, a fitting-in for the moment to achieve narrow ends, as apparently occurred in Roman rhetoric. For further discussion of the ethical link between *kairos* and propriety, see note 12 below.

2. For discussions of some of these characteristic splits as reflected in sociology see Handel; H. Collins, "Sociology"; and Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel.

3. In the seminal text, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Garfinkel describes the aim of ethnomethodology as analyzing "everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., 'accountable,' as organizations of commonplace everyday activities" (vii). Ethnomethodology seeks to discover "the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, 'from within' actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings" (viii).

4. In *The Structures of the Life-World*, Schutz discusses the process of typification as arising out of the need to respond to unique events, which we come over time to see as similar to previous other events. The salient aspects of similarity become the familiar elements of types, to which we then respond instead of to the unique events. New types arise when previously suppressed elements of events become

interpretively relevant and therefore highlighted within the new type (229–33). See also *The Problem of Social Reality* (15–19).

5. For my interpretation of reading schema theory, see "Physicists Reading Physics," chapter 8 in *Shaping Written Knowledge*.

6. The precise meaning of the term *functionalism* has always been a matter of some dispute among sociologists, but in all its variations, sometimes also labeled "structuralist" or "structuralist-functionalism," it dominated American sociology through the midcentury. Since the sixties it has fallen out of favor but is currently undergoing a revival as neofunctionalism (see Alexander). In its many versions, functionalism attempts to gain an overview of society as an integrated system within which the individual acts. Because of the enormous popularity of Parsonian functionalism, many of the most familiar concepts of sociology are identifiably Parsonian: norms, values, sanctions, roles and statuses, and stratification. Parson's best-known book is his first, *The Structure of Social Action*.

7. Many of Merton's most significant theoretical essays are collected in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, but as a number of his commentators point out, he nowhere explicitly draws his theory together in a single formal account. Coherent overviews of his writings are available in Stinchcombe and Crothers.

8. Giddens presents the most comprehensive overview of his theory in *The Constitution of Society*.

9. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas argues that a reflexive understanding of our actions allows us to constitute "a communicative practice which, against the background of a lifeworld, is oriented to achieving, sustaining, and renewing consensus" (17). Vygotsky in *Thought and Language* discusses the formation of reflective consciousness, which allows us to enter into a new relation of mastery with respect to our mental operations, which are in turn the internalization of our interactions with others (170–72).

10. Bourdieu's analysis of the reproduction of social structure rests on his notion of *habitus* or dispositions of members of different status groups to act in certain ways and express certain tastes that reproduce social structure and divisions. He sees these dispositions arising out of the material conditions of lives and ultimately the distribution of economic and cultural capital of society. See, for example, his monumental ethnography of French taste, *Distinction*. What is most relevant here is the manner in which he analyzes the largest elements of social organization as produced by the actions of individuals, which actions themselves are conditioned by the social-material environment. That is, through each individual's *kairotic* action, larger social regularities of context are reproduced, which in turn help establish each individual's sense of *kairos*.

11. Miller in "Kairos in the Rhetoric of Science" characterizes the heterogeneity of *kairos* by distinguishing the temporal component from the spatial. The temporal locates the opportune moment for action in an evolving world, while the spatial is a synchronic construct of the field upon which the moment is played. Conceiving of the environment for action as a synchronic spatial field helps foreground the rhetor's (and/or the audience's) structured vision of forces and options at play (as will be discussed later in this essay), but it also encourages one to think of the environment as less evanescent than it is, less seated in the passing mental constructs of the separate participants of the rhetorical transactions. In particular, when considering scientific article introductions analyzed according to Swales's four-move struc-

around and accept their goal-oriented reasoning as the sum of our knowledge. Indeed, his perspective is becoming more and more amenable to the vantage point of classical rhetoric, particularly sophistic rhetoric, especially as embodied in his epigrams at the end of *The Pasteurization of France*.

Nonetheless, in light of the position I argue for in this essay, I think we have still much to gain by adopting a more distanced perspective on our actions to allow us a deeper understanding of the environment in which we act. This is not to suggest that we can have an absolute analytical grasp of an actual objective state of social affairs but only that our ultimately action-oriented accounts are made more comprehensive by analytical attempts to embrace greater understandings of others, our relations with them, and our mutual role in creating social realities. Indeed, from Plato onward, thinkers of all philosophic stripes have argued that the growth of the individual has relied on coming to comprehend the other through whatever provisional means we have available as individuals. Recognition that we only come to know others through our own self-interested reconstructions based on our experiences of limited meeting points serves to caution us about the difficulties and limitations of extending our experience, understanding, and breadth of social vision, but it does not render the project of social understanding illegitimate or inadvisable.

14. For example, Giddens, *Constitution of Society* (xxi).

15. One of the great contributions of B. F. Skinner is the recognition of the individuality of each person's developmental biography, which then conditions the person's behavior in any particular circumstance. Even a mouse's learning of a novel maze is dependent on that particular creature's history of contingencies.

16. Perhaps the best-known and most extreme versions of the perceptual restrictions that follow from cognitive categories are the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis and Kuhn's claim that anomalies are suppressed within normal paradigmatic science. In both cases extensive empirical research has produced counterexamples to the extreme form of the claims. Colors, for example, are identified and remembered that are not distinguished by distinct linguistic terms, and many anomalies have been shown to have been observed within normal science. Nonetheless, available vocabulary does influence identification and memory of phenomena, and anomalous findings have at times been dismissed. A striking example of the interaction of language and normal science in suppressing unexpected observations is the case of delay in discovering the sexual reproduction of bacteria because bacteria were originally defined as reproducing asexually and accordingly termed *schizomycetes*; nonetheless, the necessary observations were made and the discovery of sexual reproduction was made, although perhaps long beyond when they might have (Zuckerman 77-79).

17. For Protagoras, an understanding of *kairos* brings with it "a harmony of the conflicting elements" (Untersteiner 72, no. 18).

18. See, for example, Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, chapters 4-6.

19. *Scaffolding* is a term invoked by Bruner to describe the process by which a mother or other skilled speaker collaborates in a child's learning to make recognized and acceptable utterances. That we learn language within the scaffoldings provided by others does not mean that we necessarily learn the most socially powerful or effective uses of language. Scaffoldings may indeed lead us into marginality, passivity, or other recognized but less-desirable roles. Moreover, we may learn to be a

successful linguistic partner within one linguistic subculture but which will leave us stigmatized within another more dominant linguistic culture. Thus, our individual desires to coordinate with those around us may help to reproduce the inequities of roles in which our participation is channeled by those with whom we learn to use language.

20. Scaffolding, as previously discussed, is an enculturation into social participation, such that our behaviors come to fit the mold of those provided around us, as suggested by Vygotsky and elaborated by Bruner. Modeling is a more direct process when we try out the behaviors we observe in others; it is clearly related to learning by imitation as advocated in classical rhetoric. Imputation, as discussed just above, is the process by which we attribute meanings and intentions to other people's behavior and thereby reconstruct our version of their mental conceptions; in social psychology this would be called taking the part of the other, a kind of sympathy (see, for example, Mead's comments on sympathy in *Mind, Self, & Society* 298–303).

21. See, for example, Merton's discussions of the reference group (chap. 10 and 11) and the self-fulfilling prophecy (chap. 13) in *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

22. Cozzens, *Social Control*, chapter 2, presents a comprehensive discussion of the structural implications of multiple discoveries.

23. For a discussion of the relation between social order and replicability of scientific work, see Bazerman, *Shaping Written Knowledge*, chapter 11, on reliable reconstitutability.

24. See for examples, Garfinkel (68) and Giddens, *New Rules* (108–10).