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## 6.2: (Re)Claiming the Ground

### (Re)Claiming the Ground: Image Events, *Kairos*, and Discourse

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*Enculturation* 6.2 (2009): <http://enculturation.gmu.edu/6.2/stephenson>

Once seen, the images are often hard to forget: A baby seal pup stares up innocently as the man approaches, while the pup's mother, some distance off and unable to stop what her instinct and experience tell her is happening, cries forlornly. The man stops by the pup, which makes no effort to flee, and brandishes a long club with a spike attached at the working end. The man raises the club and with one fell swoop ends the life of the seal pup.

Such images, as well as other, often even more graphic ones, were recorded and disseminated through various media by animal rights and environmental groups in the 1970s and early 1980s. These image events were designed to increase public awareness of various activities and, by doing so, to effect changes in the laws governing such activities. As defined by Kevin DeLuca, image events are action-based (as opposed to word-based) protests specifically designed for dissemination by the media; image events, although they may not create immediate results, are intended to create long-term "change [in] the way people think" about a specific social issue (DeLuca 6). The anti-seal hunting and, more generally, the anti-fur campaigns conducted by animal rights and environmental groups met with some success in the 1980s and early 1990s—certain types of animal traps were banned in some countries, fur "farming" was curtailed or prohibited in some countries, and a number of large corporations quit carrying products (and especially clothes) made wholly or partially from fur.

Image events, as put forth by DeLuca, allow us to better understand those (generally) non-linguistic rhetorical strategies employed by various groups to further their particular positions. Bringing together rhetorical protests (created through action and images), social movements, and the media, DeLuca has provided a useful tool for identifying and conceptualizing how activist groups have impacted debate in the public sphere. Notwithstanding the explanatory potential of the concept, more work needs to be done to determine why certain image events succeed while others fail. For instance, despite the victories noted above, anti-fur groups have suffered some setbacks in recent years, due in part to economic and political realities behind the ability of such groups to change or abolish furring practices. They have also met with less success more recently, I will argue here, because of a shift in their use of image events. That is, as I will demonstrate in a preliminary way below, the anti-fur groups have conducted their image events in locations which, from a rhetorical standpoint, work against them. They have lost ground, in other words, because they have chosen their ground poorly.

The importance of "ground" in rhetorical studies is not new, of course. A number of scholars interested in rhetoric specifically, as well as human communication more generally, have invoked the term as both an explanatory and analytical device, although rarely in connection with a specific physical location. Clark, for example, contends that the concept of "common ground is important to any account of language use that appeals to 'context'" (*Using* 92). The concept is necessary, he continues, because scholars often fail to define the term *context*, relying instead on our intuition or common sense about the particularities of given communicative situations. Common ground, according to Clark, is a "type of shared information" (*Arenas* 3): it is the "sum of [the] mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual suppositions" (*Arenas* 3) shared by two or more interlocutors. Clark's conception of (*common*) *ground* is largely metaphoric, a similarity it shares with Burke's notion of *scene*. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke notes that the concept of *scene* denotes the setting or background in which

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human activity occurs (3). The seeming physicality of this definition belies Burke's later discussions of the term. These later discussions suggest a more expansive—indeed one less physical and more metaphorical—conception of *scene*: “Terms for historical epochs, cultural movements, social institutions . . . are scenic” (12). Such terms do not refer, of course, to physical locations; instead they refer to that “technical sense” of *ground* (i.e., *scene*) that is “positivistically sociological” in nature (*Rhetoric* 207).

The “movement” of scene/ground from the physical to the metaphoric is also evidenced in the work of de Certeau. He suggests in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, for instance, that the physical layout of cities creates a “spatial order [which] organizes an ensemble of possibilities . . . and interdictions” for the city inhabitants (98). Using, changing, and ignoring these ensembles, the city inhabitants give rise to the many practices that forge the totality of life in large urban centers. Although shaped by the “ground” of the city, these practices are ultimately social in nature. For de Certeau, the city's spatial organization, its “ground,” becomes a metaphor for the network of procedures, traditions, and habits that comprise human activity. The impact of spatial organization on human activity has also been studied by Witte and Chin. Witte notes, for example, that the layouts of such common institutions as supermarkets affect an equally common human practice, namely writing. Examining the relationship of context and writing, Chin observes that the physical organization of a university journalism department impacts students' approaches to writing as well as their production of text.

The conceptions of physical context advanced by Witte and Chin are in contradistinction to those of Clark, Burke, and de Certeau, each of whom invokes “ground” as an explanatory or analytic tool although each also ultimately defines *ground* in metaphoric terms. As such—as analytic tools with metaphoric bases—the conceptions of *ground* put forward by Clark, Burke, and de Certeau are largely ill-suited for the task of investigating image events, which seemingly must rely on the physical location of their enactment in order to be effective. Witte and Chin, on the other hand, advance notions of *ground* that remain rooted in physical space. However, in both studies, focus was placed on how pre-existing material contexts affected rhetorical performance. There were, in other words, analytic distinctions drawn between context, on the one hand, and performance, on the other. Thus, these latter conceptions of *ground* are equally unsuited for the investigation of image events, given that image events are rhetorical acts that incorporate their surroundings (i.e., their material contexts) into the act itself. What is needed then, in order to investigate and analyze image events more fully, is a conception of *ground* that is rhetorically based, a conception that does not separate in substantial ways the performance from the place, the discourse from the dais. Such a conception is available I believe in the Greek term *kairos*.

### ***Kairos*: Temporal and Spatial Aspects**

The history of *kairos* has been a rather uneven one. Despite its appearance in various classical Greek rhetorics, *kairos* has only recently seen much attention from contemporary scholars of rhetoric and writing, at least in North America. *Kairos* has, in relative terms, been the subject of a more continuous interest among modern European rhetoricians (Bannerth; Boeckl; Levi; Pohlenz; Rostagni; Untersteiner). Moreover, the construct is addressed frequently in the literature of psychotherapy (Ehrenwald; Goldwert; Hainline; Kelman), historical analysis (J. Smith), and theology (Cullman; Daniélou; Tillich). These circumstances changed, however, following the 1986 publication of Kinneavy's chapter “*Kairos*: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric.” As C. Miller notes, Kinneavy “did more than anyone to revive *kairos* as a term of rhetorical art” (xiii). In the wake of Kinneavy's work, various North American scholars have reexamined the role of *kairos* in both classical and modern rhetorical systems (Carter; Kinneavy and Eskin; B. Miller; Rämö; Sheard; Sullivan) and/or employed *kairos* as tool for the investigation of written texts (Doheny-Farina; Dunmire; C. Miller).

Kinneavy suggests in “Neglected Concept” that his “essay is an attempt to reassert its [*kairos*]’ importance for a contemporary theory of composition” (80). In *kairos*, Kinneavy sees a concept that can connect the student, the student's writing, and the student's world into a cohesive whole that extends across and beyond the student's university experience. Kinneavy's vision is not based, however, on what he suggests is a

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“provisional” definition of the term: namely, that *kairos* is “the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something” (80). Rather, Kinneavy relies on an expansive “definition” of *kairos*, a definition that incorporates not only the concept’s rhetorical aspects but also its ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and civic educational dimensions. This expansion is in keeping with the conceptions of *kairos* put forward by the Sophists, especially Gorgias and, to a lesser extent, Isocrates. In fact, Untersteiner concludes that *kairos* was the foundation upon which Gorgias built his theories of rhetoric, ethics, and epistemology.

Gorgias is often credited with writing the first rhetorical treatise on *kairos* (Kerferd; see also, Consigny). Although this treatise has not survived, Gorgias does use the concept in other extant works. These treatments are reasonably stable and suggest that an understanding of *kairos*—that is, an understanding of “right timing” or “due measure”—can be used to judge the appropriateness of discourse. In *Funeral Oration*, for instance, Gorgias states that “the most divine and most generally applicable law [is] to say or keep silent, do or not do, the necessary thing at the necessary moment” (130). Elsewhere, the Gorgian character Palamedes, on trial for treason, notes that the lengthy passage of self-praise he is about to produce would be “unseemly if I were not accused, but since I am it is fitting” (*Defense* 104). At the conclusion of the passage, Palamedes states again that “it is not my own doing to praise myself; but the present time has forced me, and that when I am being accused, to make my defence (sic) in every way” (105). Influenced then by his “read” of the moment’s *kairos*, Palamedes produces a speech adapted to the particularities of the situation. Although timely at the moment of its production, Palamedes’ speech would, at any other time, be “unseemly” or, in other words, akairotic.

Although much attention has been devoted to the differences between the rhetorical systems of Gorgias and Plato, their discussions of *kairos* are generally similar. [1] In fact, the treatments of *kairos* put forward by Gorgias, Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle are largely consistent, both “internally” (that is, within a single scholar’s corpus) and “externally” (that is, across all their works.) For example, Plato, in a lengthy discussion on rhetoric in *Phaedrus*, suggests that public speakers only become rhetoricians once they have “a knowledge of the times [ *kairos*] for speaking and for keeping silence” (553). Here, Plato sounds strikingly similar to Gorgias, who wrote in the *Funeral Oration* that the “most generally applicable law [is] to say or keep silent . . . at the necessary moment” (130). The connection between an understanding of the moment and the production of discourse is also highlighted in the work of Isocrates, perhaps Gorgias’ best known student. In *Panegyricus*, for example, Isocrates points out that past events are “an inheritance common to us all; but the ability to make proper use of them at the appropriate time . . . is the peculiar gift of the wise” (125). Elsewhere, Isocrates argues that good oratory has three characteristics: “fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment” (*Against* 171). Properly gauging the moment, then, allows rhetor to turn the trite, the commonplace, into an “original treatment” of the subject at hand. The “appropriate time” is also important in the work of Aristotle who maintains, for instance, that an orator can regain the attention of the audience “when the right moment (*kairos*) comes” (*Art* 435) by stressing the importance of the discourse or promising a new and wondrous tale.

Aristotle also notes, in his discussion of honor in Book I of the *Rhetoric*, that “many obtain honour for things that appear trifling, but this depends upon place and time” (53). In this passage, Aristotle explicitly differentiates between the impact that place (as *topoi*) and time (as *kairos*) have on the production of discourse. This distinction is also implicit in Aristotle’s division of rhetoric into three branches: forensic (or legal), deliberative, and epideictic (or ceremonial). This division is based, in part, on the relationship between a specific type of rhetoric and the place at which it should be used. Put another way, the material space (i.e., the environment or the context) helps shape the appropriateness of discourse. This relationship is evidenced also in the work of Gorgias, especially in his *Defense of Palamedes*. On trial for treason and facing death, Palamedes states that the occasion allows him some latitude; in other words, his speech, which might be considered “unseemly” under other circumstances, is acceptable given the current situation. Moreover, the impact of the physical environment on discursive production is implicit across a number of Plato’s dialogues. For example, the dialogue in *Phaedrus* occurs under a plane tree located next to a stream and focuses on love and lovers. Plato situates the inquiry into

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piety or pious conduct found in *Euthyphro* outside the courts. In the two dialogues set within prison cells, where Socrates awaits his execution, Plato turns the discussions to injustice and ethics (in *Crito* which is set in the early days of Socrates' imprisonment) and happiness, knowledge, and the immortality of the soul (in *Phaedo* which is set mere days before Socrates' scheduled demise).

The generally implicit relationship between rhetoric and place in the works of Aristotle, Gorgias, and Plato is, nonetheless, shown in greater relief in their discussions of issues more legal and ethical in nature. This relationship is clearly foregrounded in the legal/rhetorical theory developed by Hermagoras in the second century BCE. Hermagoras developed a set of four questions or levels, commonly referred to as *stasis* theory, that "not only identifies the rhetorical issue but also leads the rhetor to *topoi* appropriate to that issue" (Carter 99). The four questions, or individual stases, are *fact* (Did the act occur?); *definition* (Was the act theft or borrowing?); *quality* (Was this the thief's only robbery or one of many?); and *place* (Is this the proper forum in which to hear the case?). This last *stasis* explicitly suggests a connection between the production of discourse and the location in which such production is envisioned, a relationship similar to those implied in the various works of Aristotle, Gorgias and Plato discussed above.

Carter, based on a detailed examination of the relationship of *kairos* and *stasis*, maintains that the "extraordinary similarity between *kairos* and *stasis* suggests the intriguing possibility that these ancient rhetorical principles may be closely related" (107). On Carter's view, a rhetor's understanding of either *kairos* or *stasis* helps determine the appropriateness of discourse. Carter suggests, in other words, that "*kairos* and *stasis* both are concerned with the rhetorical situation" (107) and, more specifically, with whether or not a particular moment is the "opportune moment" for generating a particular speech given the particular rhetorical context. Such an understanding is based largely on the temporal aspects of a particular set of circumstances. Carter, like Kinneavy, does devote some attention to the "history" of *kairos*, his analysis ultimately rests on the "rhetorical" definition of *kairos* (i.e., *kairos* as "right timing") found in the works of Plato, Gorgias, Isocrates, and Aristotle. In fact, although perhaps not surprisingly, this definition is the one typically used in most recent scholarship on *kairos* (see, e.g., Doheny-Farina; Dunmire; C. Miller).

As discussed above, however, there is a relationship between, on the one hand, the production and evaluation of discourse and, on the other, the physical space at which such production and/or evaluation occur. This relationship suggests that the place of rhetorical production can be as important as its timing; in other words, both space and time may need to be considered to determine the appropriateness of rhetoric in action. What is needed then, I contend, is a more expansive notion of *kairos*, a conception that includes both temporal and spatial aspects. Such a conception would allow rhetors to judge the appropriateness of rhetorical acts on both their "right timing" and their "right placing."

Support for an expanded definition of *kairos* can be found in, among other places, the work of Onians and Liddell and Scott. [2] Onians argues that *kairos* "is supposed to mean 'due measure', 'fitness', 'opportunity', etc. But, if we look to the early evidence we shall find reason to believe it is not a mere abstraction" (343). Onians bases his claim on the etymology of the word *kairos* which, he contends, has two separate roots. The first (or *kairós*) "meant something like 'mark, target'" (343). This root, according to Onians, was initially associated with archery. The term was often used to designate either the opening between two columns of markers through which the archer would shoot (in the case of archery practice) or an opening between armor through which a blow of sufficient force could penetrate with lethal force (in the case of combat). The latter meaning is the one invoked by Homer in the *Iliad*: the *kairos* described "a place in the body where a weapon could easily penetrate to the life within" (344; see also Sipiora 2). Onians traces the second root of *kairos* back to weaving. In this context, *kairos* (or *ka?ros*) referred to the opening in the threads through which the weaver passed the woof (shuttle). As Onians notes, *kairós* and *ka?ros* originally denoted openings that were limited both spatially and temporally. In either case, *kairos* was not a "mere abstraction" but referred to a physical location.

*Kairos* is also widely acknowledged as an important tenet within the philosophy, epistemology, and

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religion espoused by the Pythagoreans. According to Untersteiner, the Pythagoreans believed that *kairos* “was a manifestation of [harmony] which reduces the opposite qualities in the universe to a unity” (82) and “one of the laws of the universe, which were . . . valid in general as well as particular” (110). The association of *kairos* with harmony and balance became even . . . more pronounced during the second revival of Pythagorist thought. The “later Pythagoreans” (Zeller 88) conceived of the universe as composed of opposing elements, which can be brought into harmony through *kairos*. The universe was originally composed of the monad, or form, a single point in the cosmos. The remainder of the universe was composed of the dyad, or matter. These two elements came together, creating the cosmos and everything within. This act of creation was *kairos*; it was the instantiation of balance and harmony. The importance of *kairos* within Pythagorean thought leads Carter to suggest that *kairos* has “profound connotations of generation” (102). *Kairos* is that “critical point in time and space” at which harmony and balance can be generated (102).

In contemporary rhetorical studies, *kairos* is employed most often to analyze the “right timing” of a number of discursive acts, both written and oral. Using *kairos* in such a manner is consistent with the construct’s treatment in classical Greek rhetorical texts. However, as I have discussed above, *kairos* also carries with it denotations of “right placing” or of being “rightly place.” The spatial aspect of *kairos* is explicitly mentioned in numerous Greek texts that predate the rhetorical works of Plato, Gorgias, and their successors and competitors. Moreover, these same Greek thinkers implicitly invoke a *kairos* of space in many of their works. My argument then is for a more expansive notion of *kairos* than that most often used in contemporary rhetorical studies. As an analytic tool, *kairos* would seem to be most useful with both its spatial and temporal aspects firmly in place. To test this hypothesis, I turn to a brief analysis of several related image events staged as part of the anti-fur campaign. This analysis will focus on the physical locations of these events, using the expanded *kairos* construct delineated previously as the key analytic tool.

### **Image Events and *Kairos*: A Preliminary Analysis**

For some thirty-five years, environmental groups have used image events as their primary rhetorical strategy to effect social change. As DeLuca points out, Greenpeace, Earth First!, and other eco-friendly organizations have employed visually-based “acts,” designed for dissemination by the mass media, in order to combat, among other activities, whaling, logging, pollution, and seal hunting. The campaign against seal hunting—and specifically against the hunting of baby harp seals—initially met with some success. This success was brought on, in part, by the use of two image events produced by Greenpeace, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, and allied groups beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing through at least the late 1970s. The first image event, disseminated originally through film/videotape but later through printed media, showed a sealer skinning a live seal pup. The second event, also originally distributed on film, captured a sealer clubbing a seal pup and then tormenting the dead pup’s mother. Such seemingly barbaric acts were made to appear even more horrendous given the location of the acts’ execution: a natural landscape, a landscape of snow and ice, a landscape of white “purity.” Both of these image events relied upon a contraposition for their success: red blood on white snow, man’s barbarity against nature’s purity. Broadcasting such images into the living room and displaying them in magazines and on billboards helped to “change the way people think about and act toward nature” (DeLuca 6).

Although there is some question about the “legitimacy” of the acts captured in the two image events described above, the events did help bring about significant changes: Canada limited the number of harp seals that could be harvested; harp seals could no longer be killed younger than 28 days old (which meant their coats were no longer the highly desired pure white color); and the importation of seal pelts was banned by numerous countries. These successes were brought about, in part, because the associated image events were conducted upon well chosen “ground” (or in this case ice floe). They were, in other words, kairotic in as much as the production of the rhetorical event depended as much upon the location in which it was instantiated as upon the

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images it generated. It seems unlikely that image events designed to protest the harvest of harp seal pups would have been as effective had they been conducted on the steps of the Capital Building in Washington, D.C. or the sidewalk in front of the Canadian Parliament.

In fact, recent changes in Canadian law have severely limited the ability of animal rights groups to witness, monitor, or document various aspects of the seal hunts. These limitations, of course, eliminate the ability of these groups to produce new, and successful, image events chiefly because the “ground” upon which such new image events must be held is no longer kairotic. Such image events would be mis-placed: the images and the location would not work together to present a cohesive rhetorical event. Unable to produce new, viable image events, animal rights groups such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and the International Fund for Animal Welfare have had little impact in recent years on seal hunting. They have been unable to effectively counter the establishment by the Canadian government of a dramatically higher yearly quota of seals that could be killed (although various restrictions do remain in effect). Nor have they been able to reverse a 2004 decision by the Norwegian government to both increase its yearly quota and allow tourists to participate in the hunt. Largely denied access to the ground necessary for their image events, animal rights groups have been forced to adopt more mainstream, and ultimately less successful, forms of protest.

Animal rights groups, and more specifically anti-fur groups, have also met with varied results in their campaign to eliminate the use of mink pelts through the use of image events. For instance, various radical anti-fur groups in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have released live minks from mink farms in order to save the animals from their eventual fate. These releases are intended to function as image events: they are staged acts of protest that are designed to change the social consciousness of the public. However, the acts themselves, although they are often videotaped for later broadcast, are illegal and thus difficult to disseminate on a large scale. The mink releases are, as image events, unkairotic as the acts of release are conducted on private ground; the legal status of the ground thus works against the actions of the protest. What does get disseminated by the media, and what in some ways becomes its own image event, are the results of the mink releases. The mink, often numbering in the hundreds, are often run over or shot by farmers; many others die of exposure, engage in generally fatal combat with other mink, or are trapped and returned to the mink farm. It is these images that become the event, and the images depict an invasion of mink on an otherwise unsuspecting and now newly threatened populace and ecosystem. The “ground” of this image event is certainly public, at least in a broad sense, and so accessible to the media. But here too the act (i.e., the results of the release and, by extension, the release itself) and the ground do not function cohesively: The results of the release, now occurring on public ground, create at best a nuisance and at worst a danger to the same public the image event is designed to persuade. Thus, the mink releases and their results are unkairotic, and ultimately unsuccessful, image events.

Although they have achieved many of their goals, anti-fur groups as well as animal rights and environmental groups more broadly often fail to affect appreciable change in public opinion. In fact, while the details are heavily disputed, by most accounts there has been a recent surge in interest in real fur. Trade groups, largely in the United Kingdom and the United States but also in France, Germany, and Spain, report increased sales over the past several years while the fashion runways in Milan, Paris, New York, and London have seen more and more designers incorporating fur into their clothing lines (Hinds 10S; Peel 9). The *Daily Record* (of Glasgow, Scotland) reported that in 2004 more than 300 designers were using real fur (Booth 20). This upswing in the real fur trade has come despite the efforts of animal rights groups such as Greenpeace, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Respect for Animals, the Animal Liberation Front, and other local, national, and international groups, all of which have relied extensively on the creation and dissemination of image events to create change in the way that humans treat animals. These image events are not, as DeLuca notes, “isolated incidents” (163). They are, instead, “part of a chorus of opposition” (163) which aims to alter fundamentally our approach to the world around us. Image events help us understand

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this “chorus” more fully. And, I suggest, an expanded notion of *kairos*, one which links the act and the ground of an image event, helps us to understand why certain voices in the “chorus” are heard more clearly than others.

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[1] They are, however, distinct in one important way, namely on the ontological status of *kairos*. This distinction is not germane to the discussion that follows.

[2] The etymological work of Onians is supported by the relevant entries found in Liddell and Scott's (1846) *Greek-English Lexicon*. For instance, there are two separate entries for "kairos" in Liddell and Scott. The first, *καῖρος*, indicates "threads, slips or thrums on the beam of the loom" (689), while the second, *καῖρος*, is associated with "a vital part of the body" (689). Given the similarities of the two works, I have not attempted to integrate them but have relied largely on Onians' discussion in an attempt to improve readability.