JE on Chapter 8, Rhetorical Situations

Leslie Mock

ENGL 400 - Rhetoric in Civil Life

The rhetor uses different techniques and messages depending on the type of

audience they are trying to persuade. They decide what persona the audience is

and uses what is familiar to their audience in order to motivate them into action.

“Communication occurs when you are in a particular place, at a particular time, as part

of a particular socioeconomic and cultural context, about a particular topic, and to a

particular audience.” (Rhetoric in Civic Life, pg. 225, para. 2). What makes up the

rhetor’s recipe for persuasion, creates the rhetorical situation.

1. Aristotle states: “ there are three situational classifications on the basis of

three distinct audiences to which those speeches are delivered: **deliberative** (addresses broad

audiences and concern merit), **forensic** (designated audience judges events from the past like

a jury), and **epideictic** (speeches of praise or blame).” (Rhetoric in Civic Life, pg. 226, para. 1).

This would be the future, the past and the present.

2. Bitzer states that you need exigence in order to persuade a response from the audience.

Exigence is “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting

to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.” (Rhetoric in Civic Life, pg. 227, para 4).

Bitzer has three situation classifications himself: “**exigence, audience, and constraints**. These

elements are present prior to any rhetorical act and compose the situation which calls the

discourse into existence.” (Rhetoric in Civic Life, pg. 228, para.4). Exigence is the situation

that needs a response, change, or action. The audience are the ones who are persuaded

to bring about change. Constraints are limitations of the actions that the audience can

take depending on the choices given from the rhetor. The rhetor needs to be able to

make its audience believe they can make a difference hopefully for the better.

3. When the situation is in need of a response it must meet the necessary criteria

in order to be a fitting response. When the audience have a repeat response to

certain situations the rhetor can use this in their persuasion. Gives the audience

the sense of the familiar. Example is: “If you have never given or hear a eulogy, you probably

have a general idea of what it should include.” (Rhetoric in Civic Life, pg 234, Para.1).

There are different responses to every situation and they are made up into genres. These can

include the present and also the past. Another response would be **hybrid response** which is,

“ symbolic action that combine elements of two different genres.” ( Rhetoric in Civic

Life, pg. 235, para. 2). Example was Lyndon Baines Johnson’s speech after President

Kennedy’s assassination. Where he had to help a mourning nation before he could state his

objectives as the new President. The rhetor sometimes need to take into account how the

audience is receiving their message and redress the situation. They may need to use

**Contextual reconstruction**, which is: “a response in which a rhetor attempts to redefine the

situation. This will give the audience a fresh look at the situation at hand. (Rhetoric in Civic

Life, pg. 255, para.3).

In Conclusion, as we have learned from Aristotle and Bitzer there are certain elements

needed to create a situation that will require a response from the audience in order

to initiate change. The rhetor depending on the situation and the audience has

options on how to get their audience to respond to their rhetoric. Culture and

past events play a part in the audience response to a situation. “ Rhetors reconstruct

those situations by bringing particular audiences into being and by redefining exigencies.

rhetorical action and the situation of civic life are synergistic.” (Rhetoric in

Civic Life, pg. 257, para. 2). It is the coming together to create a response for the

greater good.