CHAPTER 1

Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy

MAGIC

Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe, in his compendious and uniquely comprehensive social theory of magic, defines magic as the "audacious individual use of existing powerful symbols" (73) in which "there is always a curious tension between the traditional and the surreptitious, and hence between syllogism, implications from accepted truth, and an enthymeme that bends consensus to private ends" (85). Such tensions define a social context in which magic "works because people agree it works"(96).[1] O'Keefe's theory complements the core propositions of this study: Magic is not the instant and arhetorical product of an otherworldly incantation; it is the *process* of inducing belief and creating community, with reference to the dynamics of a rhetorical situation. Magic is a social act whose medium is persuasive discourse, and so it must entail the complexities of social interaction, invention, communication, and composition. Thus magic becomes a term through which we can address the ways in which words make real things happen.

Initially, O'Keefe divides the universe into magic "in the strict sense" and magic "in the weak sense." The former includes medical magic (e.g., the curative spells of the "medicine man"); black magic (malevolent witchcraft and sorcery); ceremonial magic (rainmaking); religious magic (exorcism); occultism (fortune telling); and the paranormal (ESP, flying saucers). Such institutions constitute magic in the strict sense largely because they are explicitly "designated as magical in many societies" (14).

O'Keefe is much more interested, however, in "magic in the weak sense," a category that becomes a misnomer during the course of his book, finally designating a broad range of symbolic actions that are *really* magical, exerting *strong* effects on society; but whose magical transformative powers are not fully and pub-

licly acknowledged as such, because to do so would deny our rational, mechanistic epistemology:

> Newer magics of pseudo-science, mental technology and mass manipulation are invented almost daily. Occasionally, an "occult revival" like the present one becomes so blatant that we notice this persistence of magic; but usually we dismiss it as an exception and go on believing magic belongs to the past. As a result, the difference between modern and primitive societies is not that they had magic and we do not. The difference is that they accepted the magic around them, whereas we deny it. (xv)

What is this "magic" that exists despite our disbeliefs?

> Magic is real action. Something really happens, often something violent, usually something of consequence. People are shaken, influenced, healed, destroyed, transformed. The social situation is altered. . . . In fact, magic is more often than not *collective* social action. Solitary-seeming magics such as yoga and mysticism and the study of occult arts also have social objectives: in practice they translate into . . . the pursuit of power, prestige and authority over others. (25–34)

Put another way, magic is and always has been symbolic action (that is to say, magic never occurs apart from language), in the service of individual or social transformation.

Magic takes place, for the exorcist and the orator, the witchdoctor and the psychiatrist, when the parties involved agree to agree, when they enact what E. Fuller Torrey calls "a shared worldview." Torrey compares witchdoctors and psychiatrists, and finds little difference:

> The psychiatrist looked thoughtfully at his client. "You look angry when you talk about him. I wonder if something happened to you once that made you very angry at him." At this point the client broke down sobbing, blurting out a forgotten history of neglect and deceit by a thoughtless father toward a little girl. Afterward the client felt better. After several more sessions in which she was able to explore her feelings of anger, she began to get better.
>
> The witchdoctor stared solemnly at the small shells. They had landed in a pattern resembling the shape of a large animal. He picked up one shell and examined it minutely. "You have broken a taboo of your family. It has offended the sacred bear that protects your ancestors. That is why you are sick." The

client and her family breathed a sigh of relief. It was as they had suspected. Now that they knew for certain what was wrong, they could proceed with the necessary sacrifices. After these had been made, the client began to get better. (17–18)

For both the psychiatrist and the witchdoctor, therapeutic transformation occurs through "operations on traditional collective ideas" that become "synthetic a prioris" (O'Keefe 110). These operations are often, O'Keefe reminds us, syllogistic; the psychiatrist and patient above come to share a syllogism: Expressing anger makes people feel better; I am expressing anger; therefore, I am feeling better. For the witchdoctor and his clients, the operative syllogism—with the major premise that offending the sacred bear is a cause of sickness—is nearly explicit in the witchdoctor's explanation.

In a nonmagical society, our classification systems are presumed to be scientific and logical, so that their origins in social rituals within a magical epistemology are forgotten. Time and space are concepts that govern the laws of modern science and society, which we abbreviate unreflectively in the memorization of common schoolroom formulas such as d(istance) = r(ate) x t(ime). As tokens of mechanism, they are entirely removed from ancient origins in ritual consensus, where time and space were "played out" in drama that attempted to establish our place in a universe driven by a cosmology of deities (O'Keefe 70–75). Jacqueline de Romilly traces, for instance, the orphic tendency to "present time as a first principle, and, through an identification of names, [turn] it into a divine being" (*Time* 34–35); Chronos eventually becomes established as a character in Greek tragedy. Ernst Cassirer surveys the ancient association of mental concepts with the correct utterance of an appropriate deity's name, and he concludes that ritualized word magic is the ground of "theoretical, practical and aesthetic consciousness, the world of language and of morality, the basic forms of community and the state" (44).

The belief in magic necessarily entails a sympathetic universe, in which master ideas emerge from the interaction of analogous spiritual and physical forces. In the exchange between the witchdoctor and his clients, the small shells are both natural and supernatural signifiers, in cooperative transaction with like signifiers: the shells "speak of" the great bear, and the clients are charged with reentering the cosmology of sympathies by offering sacrifices.

Distinctions between the natural and the social, corporeal and incorporeal, signifiers and signified, subjects and objects, do not operate here. The magical universe comprises a plurality of forces and powers that are all related, both metaphorically and really. The powers in this universe abrogate rules of binary logic, of contradiction and negation. O'Keefe extends the observations in Lévi-Strauss's *Primitives and the Supernatural*—that unresolved contradiction is a main element in primitive epistemology—to propose that binary Western logic is unable to *elaborate the possible* because it rules out the apposition of unlike categories, because it is locked in an "either-or" framework (87–91).

The elaboration of sympathies is not exclusive to primitive societies; it is central to the magic worldview that continues through the Renaissance. Even in sixteenth-century Europe, resemblances denominate consciousness:

> The world was seen as a vast assemblage of correspondences. All things have relationships with all other things, and these relations are ones of sympathy and antipathy. Men attract women, lodestones attract iron, oil repels water, and dogs repel cats. Things mingle and touch in an endless chain, or rope, vibrated (wrote Della Porta in *Natural Magic*) by the first cause, God. Things are also analogous to man in the famous alchemical concept of the microcosm and the macrocosm: the rocks of the earth are its bones, the rivers its veins, the forests its hair and the cicadas its dandruff. The world duplicates and reflects itself in an endless network of similarity and dissimilarity. (Berman 74; see also Foucault 17–45)

In a fourth-century C.E. memory spell that directs us to actually drink our writing, elements of the natural, the human, the celestial, and the supernatural worlds must be set into precise cooperation:

> Take hieratic papyrus and write the prescribed names with Hermaic myrrh ink. And once you have written them as they are prescribed, wash them off into spring water from 7 springs and drink the water on an empty stomach for seven days while the moon is in the east. But drink a sufficient amount.
>   This is the writing on the strip of papyrus: "KAMBRĒ CHAMBRE SIXIŌPHI HARPON CHNOUPHI BRINTATĒN-ŌPHRIBRISKYLMA ARAQUAZAR BAMESEN KRUPHI NIPTOUMI CHMOUMAŌPH AKTIŌPHI ARTŌSE BIBIOU BIBIOU SPHĒ SPHĒ NOUSI NOUSI SIEGŌ SIEGŌ NOUCHA NOUCHA LINOUCHA LINOUCHA CHYCHBA CHYCHBA

KAXIO CHYCHBA DĒTOPHOTH II AA OO YY ĒĒEE ŌŌ."
After doing these things wash the writing off and drink as pre-
scribed.

   This is also the composition of the ink: myrrh troglitis, 4
drams, 3 karian figs, 7 pits of Nikolaus dates, 7 dried pinecones,
7 piths of the single-stemmed worm-wood, 7 wings of the Her-
maic ibis, spring water. When you have burned the ingredients,
prepare them and write. (Betz 9)

A typical indicator of sympathetic magic, this spell also
enforces the identification of magical action with symbolic action
that O'Keefe stresses in two of his postulates:

   Magical Social Action Consists of Symbolic Performances—
   And Linguistic Symbolism Is Central To Magic.

   Magical Symbolic Action Is Rigidly Scripted. (21)

O'Keefe's distinction between magic and rhetoric turns on these
postulates; a look at that distinction will lead us to consider the
definition of rhetoric that follows from the acknowledgment of
magic as social action. For O'Keefe, magic in the strict sense "must
be said just right" (65); he agrees with Hugh Duncan, who writes
in *Communication and Social Order*, "Magic spells must be
handed down, without change. The slightest alteration from the
original pattern would be fatal" (318, quoted in O'Keefe 65). For
O'Keefe, such rigidity includes "speeches [that] are not extempora-
neous or composed, but entirely traditional," for which "audience
response is preordained." Further, real magic "does not try to 'per-
suade' [as does rhetoric], but to compel." But O'Keefe does admit,
with reference to Plato and Aristotle, that the function of rhetoric
(as persuasion) may be "wrenching the consensus and foreclosing
it," and that "there is some resemblance to magic in this opera-
tion—in the attempt to suspend communal dialogue, in the first
person singular speaking as the first person plural ['we believe'], in
the partialism of the viewpoint." However, "magic itself" is rigidly
scripted, while rhetoric is "much freer and more plastic." Strictly
speaking, rhetoric "reminds us of magic" (81–84)

   It is true that magic formulas are, in an important sense, for-
mulaic. But at the same time, every particular effect that the
magus seeks requires a particular formula; that is, there would
seem to be a lack of "all-purpose" formulas. For example, *The
Greek Magical Papyri* (just over 500 spells surviving from antiq-

uity) contains 65 different love spells. There is a love spell to be "performed with the help of heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death" (Betz 64), a love spell to be recited "over myrrh which is offered," a love spell to be uttered "in conversation, while kissing passionately" (137), and so forth. The importance of making one's magic agree with circumstances continues through Marsilio Ficino's *Three Books on Life (Liber De Vita in Tres Libros Divisus)*, one of the most influential and popular statements of Renaissance magic. Ficino warns that even the slightest change in heavenly constellations affects both human behavior and the powers that magical discourse can invoke:

> Observe the daily positions and aspects of the stars and discover to what principal speeches, songs, motions, dances, moral behavior, and actions most people are usually incited by these, so that you may imitate such things as far as possible in your song, which aims to please the particular part of heaven that resembles them and to catch an influence that resembles them. (3.21; 359)

Ficino is calling, in a way, for a "rigid script." However, such rigidity is defined not by the invariableness of the symbolic act, but by the precise match that must be made between language and context. While it is perhaps true that magic as such can be identified with unalterable utterances and preordained responses, mainly in ritual ceremonial contexts, magic that performs social action and presupposes a sympathetic universe is essentially plastic.

Stopping short of concluding that magic *is* rhetoric, O'Keefe defines magic with rhetorical terms, and concludes that a complex of social/rhetorical contingencies accounts for its effects. Understanding magic as a social and discursive process allows us to analyze and critique the powers at work in the "plain rhetoric" that mesmerizes audiences with its seeming clarity and simplicity. Further, such a conception of magic may lead us to prefer a "magic rhetoric," if this means preferring a fertile, dynamic and fluctuant imagination to its opposite.

RHETORIC

In his commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, the same Ficino who advises the magus to adjust his discourse to constant, myriad

changes, defines the perfect orator with like emphasis on the multiplicity and changeableness of the auditor's soul:

> The perfect orator must know that any human soul is intrinsically and naturally multiple (for it has reason, imagination, sense, and the powers of wrath and desire); and, likewise, that various souls use their various powers as much as possible and differently among themselves and are differently affected; and, again, that some of their differences are derived from the differences of their bodies. Moreover, he ought to know what kind of mental disposition is moved by what kind of discourse and accommodate his discourse to each one, just as a musician must bring various harmonies to various things. (Allen 204)

The call for systematic alertness to changing circumstances defines rhetoric from Antiquity through the Renaissance. In the sections of the *Phaedrus* to which Ficino refers above, Plato's Socrates insists that any true art of rhetoric must appeal to the multiform nature of the soul, through a repertory of changing speeches whose exact expressions cannot be predetermined (270c–72b; 549–55). Aristotle's *Rhetoric* emphasizes the complexity and diversity of proofs that will affect different auditors in differing contexts, and issues his famous sweeping definition of rhetoric, as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (1355b; 35). Cicero's Crassus associates rhetorical power with broad learning and alertness to change: "The real power of eloquence is such that it embraces the origin, the influence, the changes of all things in the world, all virtues, duties, and all nature, so far as it affects the manners, minds, and lives of mankind" (*De Oratore* 3.20; 213). In 1708, Giambattista Vico—professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples—reasserts the importance of the broad exploration central to classical rhetoric, as he attempts to counter Cartesian educational philosophy, with its insistence on an unambiguous language of clear and distinct ideas:

> For how can a clear and distinct idea in our mind be a criterion of the true unless we perceive everything in, or related to, the thing itself? And how can anyone be certain that he has perceived everything, unless he has pursued every question pertaining to the matter under consideration? First [he should raise] the question whether it exists, lest he should be talking about nothing. Then the question what it is, lest his efforts be expended

upon a name. Then how great it is, under which heading come color, taste, softness, hardness and the other tactile sensations. Then he must ask when it was created, how long it lasts, and into what it changes as it decays. And proceeding thus through the remaining categories, he must connect it to all the things which are in any way related to it, whether they be its causes or effects, or those effects it has when combined with objects which are similar, dissimilar or contrary, or when combined with those which are bigger, smaller, or equal. . . . On the other hand, anyone who is confident of perceiving something in a clear and distinct idea of the mind is easily deceived, and he will often think that he knows a thing distinctly when he still has only a confused consciousness of it, for he has not learned all the elements which belong to the object and which distinguish it from everything else. ("On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians" 72–73)

In this century, the classical scope and dynamism of rhetoric reemerges in Paolo Valesio's ambitious proposition, "Rhetoric is *all* of language, in its realization as discourse" (7). Broadly inclusive formulations of the elements of rhetoric are presented by a diversity of scholars, including Kenneth Burke, I.A. Richards, Roman Jakobson, Ernesto Grassi, James Kinneavy, Ann Berthoff, and Terry Eagleton; all acknowledge that the *meaning* of any utterance varies with its *context*, and reinforce Valesio's conclusion that "the house of human discourse cannot be built on solid rock, that (*pace* Descartes) its only possible foundation is ever-shifting sand" (83).[2] Very recently, George Kennedy has proposed a definitive metaphor that recognizes the art of rhetoric as both the "coming into being" of discourse that accounts for interactive variables (see Kennedy in Aristotle 36, n. 34), and as a quasi-corporeal phenomenon that resists definition in material scientific terms:

> Rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the *energy* inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message. ("Hoot" 2, emphasis added).

We need not go very far from defining rhetoric as the interaction of different kinds of energy, and suggesting as Kennedy does that rhetoric is the *natural* practice of both animals and humans acting

under the aegis of a common communicative urgency, to calling rhetoric the invocation of invisible powers within a sympathetic universe of widely shared signifiers; that is, magic.

Indeed, the magician and the rhetor are similar figures, and often the same figure, throughout Western intellectual history. Mythic and literary origins of rhetoric and literacy occur at the juncture of magic and writing, in the person of the ibis-headed god or divine man who was variously named Thoth, or Theuth, or Hermes. He is the inventor of writing, and as Frances Yates has shown, this originary writer was also the originary magus:

> The Egyptian God, Thoth, the scribe of the gods and the divinity of wisdom, was identified by the Greeks with their Hermes and sometimes given the epithet of "Thrice Great." The Latins took over this identification of Hermes or Mercurius with Thoth, and Cicero in his *De natura deorum* explains that there were really five Mercuries, the fifth being he who killed Argus and consequently fled in exile to Egypt where he "gave the Egyptians their laws and letters" and took the Egyptian name of Theuth or Thoth. A large literature in Greek developed under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, concerned with astrology and the occult sciences, with the secret virtues of plants and stones and the sympathetic magic based on knowledge of such virtues, with the making of talismans for drawing down the powers of the stars, and so on. (*Giordano Bruno* 2)

One of the many identities of Theuth/Thoth/Mercury/Hermes is "the Egyptian Prometheus" (Burger 90). Like Prometheus, Theuth would bestow knowledge and skills on humankind that— as his superior Thamus warns—can only be employed truly by gods. Recounting the story of Theuth and Thamus in the *Phaedrus*, Plato's Socrates describes Thamus's worry that those who can read and write "will read many things without instruction, and will therefore seem to know many things," thus exercising "a power the opposite of that which they really possess" (274e–75a; 563). The preemption of godliness is forbidden.

The dialogue between Thamus and Theuth, between the supreme god and the emissary of occult knowledge to humankind, represents the central worry that trails both writing and magic through their histories, namely, that they will get into the wrong hands. Outside the control of an originary authority, writing and magic might be made to do the work of illusion, as rhetoric. Jacqueline de Romilly, in *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient*

Greece, has emphasized their common goal as illusion, holding the Sophists responsible for illusions of truth achieved via the incantatory spell of language, and reminding us that Plato's Socrates often charged his opponents with bad magic, while also weaving his own spells (see especially 26–27, 36).[3]

Although reactions against the Sophists contributed to the establishment of rhetoric as *techne* without magic, associated with political and institutional control and stability, the link between magic and rhetoric persisted. In Greco-Roman antiquity, the magician "served as a power and communications expert, crisis manager, miracle healer and inflicter of damages, and all-purpose therapist and agent of worried, troubled, and troublesome souls" (Betz xlvii). Through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, many of the prominent humanists are also occultists (Thorndike's *History* presents repeated instances); teachers such as Isidore of Seville wrote textbooks on both rhetoric and magic, and a typical government advisor in the Middle Ages was a "practicioner of magic and rhetoric, a supplier of skills to ruler and crown—administrative, ideological, rhetorical, historical, liturgical, and architectural skills" (Ward 101).[4] While there is a continuing post-classical emphasis on technical rhetoric, there is also "a revival of the Greek sophistic notion of rhetoric as magic" (Ward 107–9).

The need for magic, which Susanne Langer (after Cassirer) posits as part of the "inventory of human needs" (38), seems to coincide with the need for technical rhetoric; as John Ward points out, "high points in the history of rhetoric are also high points in devotion to the occult" (87). The proliferation of new facts—which marks the beginning of each of the traditional epochs of progress in Western history—provokes doubt about what's "really" true, and drives those who would manage a newly more complex world to magic, and to magic rhetoric. Thus the overtly magical Sophistry of early Antiquity, the renewed reliance on both magic and technical rhetoric in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Ward 107–9), the appropriation of magic to empirical methodology in the Enlightenment (see below, chapter 3), and the growth of both New Age occultism and data management systems in our own "information age," may all be instances of the appeal of both magic and rhetoric, or of magic as rhetoric, at times when the influx of new knowledge and patterns of life puts us in search of a spell to control the demons of change. Bestseller lists in recent years include both Shirley MacLaine's *Out On A*

Limb, which offers a reactionary mysticism that has us looking backward for selfhood, constructing our identity by invoking our past lives; and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, a reactionary pedagogy that has us looking backward for a common language of established facts, constructing our identity by means of a *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, a list of the terms that we must memorize and speak to transmigrate into the mainstream, a virtual lexicon of incantations.

Insofar as they provide schema for public discourse, programs such as Hirsch's constitute a technical rhetoric. The congeniality of magic and technical rhetoric results from the real power of the latter to design and alter reality: the mastery of institutional discourse makes one an insider who can, in turn, invoke and impose facts and formulae. As Kenneth Burke writes, this power exists because "the magical decree is implicit in all language; for the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something-other." Magic is a "coercive command," the "establishment or management by decree," and insofar as it is intrinsic to language, is unavoidable. Further, all magic is a *strategy* calculated to address a *situation* "in the name of" a certain *power* (*Philosophy* 3–5).[5] Strategy, situation, and power are the elements of magic, and (I would add) the elements of rhetoric, when embodied in discourse.

I have proposed that magic can be generative or arresting, a mode of creating novel possibilities for action or a mode of constraint. Just so, rhetoric can be identified with a play of ambiguities, or with the absolute determination of meaning, by decree. The recognition that discourse is made of shifting sands, or energies, enfranchises rhetoric as *invention*, and encourages the generation of multiple solutions, perspectives, formulations, in behavior variously associated with imagination and creativity. But alertness to ambiguity also makes possible its restraint, in the interest of clarity, certainty, authority, and power. Manifest in slogans, maxims, and laws, the restraint of ambiguity is an arresting rhetoric.

Herbert Marcuse emphasizes the force of an arresting magic rhetoric operating on mass culture:

> At the nodal points of the universe of public discourse, self-validating, analytical propositions appear which function like magic-ritual formulas. Hammered and re-hammered into the recipient's mind, they produce the effect of enclosing it within

the circle of the conditions prescribed by the formula. (*One Dimensional Man* 88)

For Marcuse, "the closing of the universe of discourse" is effected by "magical, authoritarian and ritual elements [that] permeate speech and language": "It is the word that orders and organizes, that induces people to do, to buy, and to accept" (84–86). Abbreviated thought and thoughtless behavior are the consequences of the tendency in media and government institutions to prefer the abridgment of information: "In its immediacy and directness, [media language] impedes conceptual thinking; thus, it impedes thinking" (95).

Typically, magic rhetoric *arrests* ambiguity. The "arresting" magician issues a "coercive command"; because such commands are intrinsic to language, and really do make and re-make reality, we "do magic" when we "do rhetoric," and vice-versa. Such magic/rhetoric transforms the *phenomenal* world through *noumenal* enchantment. For the Greek orator, the Renaissance magus, the Romantic poet, and the variety of present-day institutional authorities who invoke a cosmology of sanctioned forces in every act of official discourse, language alters the social situation. Consider, for instance, the especially potent force of the speech acts J. L. Austin has called *performatives*, and which Daniel O'Keefe renames "magical power prescriptives" (54). When George Bush issued a performative declaration of war against Iraq in 1991, we were reminded that all such declarations, from the cleric's "I pronounce you husband and wife" to the professor's "Your final grade is an A" to the boss's "You're fired," are instances in which saying makes it so. In such cases, the rhetor performs magic by effecting real action; in the event that any of us employ powerful words to change a situation, or are ourselves changed by what we read or hear, we participate in a magical transactive transformation.[6]

Pierre Bourdieu gives repeated attention to the magic of performative utterances in *Language And Symbolic Power*:

> The mystery of performative magic is . . . resolved in the mystery of ministry . . . , i.e., in the alchemy of *representation* (in the different senses of the term) through which the representative creates the group which creates him: the spokesperson endowed with the full power to speak and act on behalf of the group, and first of all to act on the group through the magic of

his slogan, is the substitute for the group, which exists solely through this *procuration*. Group made man, he personifies a fictitious person, which he lifts out of the state of a simple aggregate of separate individuals, enabling them to act and speak, through him, "like a single person." Conversely, he receives the right to speak and act in the name of the group, to "take himself for" the group he incarnates, to identify with the function to which "he gives his body and soul," thus giving a biological body to a constituted body. *Status est magistratus*; "l'Etat, c'est moi." Or what amounts to the same thing, the world is my representation. (106)

While magic may be intrinsic to language, the power of an utterance resides in the social designation of a speaking symbol, enacting a phenomenon common to both magic and rhetoric: "the first person singular speaking as the first person plural" (O'Keefe 83). Thus, "Stop in the name of the law" is only effectual when uttered by the law incarnate, the police officer who represents the codification—by some consensus—of right behaviors.

What is at issue then is not *whether* rhetoric is magic, but what sorts of magi/rhetors, under what sorts of conditions, produce what kinds of effects. Still enclosed in the Enlightenment privileging of plain, unambiguous maxims, and often presuming their speakers' authority, we are too often the victims of a repressive magic that *limits* the possibilities for action. The most obvious examples of such magic come from advertising, which Raymond Williams has called "a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology" (*Problems* 185). In a popular Nike commercial, all of the reasons to avoid exercise (and the Nike apparel that goes with it) disappear with the injunction, "Just Do It." This is the magic of authoritarian, simplistic incantations passed from salesperson to consumer, from teacher to student, incantations that identify preferred public discourse as instantaneous, formulaic, and absolute. Arresting magic operates more subtly in "info-tainment," in popular combinations of information and entertainment represented by "prole weeklies" (Paul Fussell's term) such as the *National Enquirer*, by digests for the astute such as *Harper's* magazine, and in television talk shows; in these cases, as we will see in chapter 5, inculcation can masquerade as the interanimation of perspectives.

Ioan Couliano associates an arresting magic with the hypnosis induced in a "police State," in contrast to the flexible but inefficient "magician State":

> But the essential difference between the two, the one which works altogether in favor of the [magician State], is that magic is a science of metamorphoses with the capacity to change, to adapt to all circumstances, to improve, whereas the police always remains just what it is: in this case, the defender to the death of out-of-date values, of a political oligarchy useless and pernicious to the life of nations. The system of restraints is bound to perish, for what it defends is merely an accumulation of slogans without any vitality. The magician State, on the other hand, only expects to develop new possibilities and new tactics, and it is precisely excess of vitality which impedes its good running order. (105-6)

Within a paradigm that privileges machine virtues such as "good running order," and values stability and efficiency, the discourse of slogans and the authority of sloganizers are prevailing sorceries inimical to social vitality. The prospect of *generative* magic rhetoric begins with the recognition of this fact.

LITERACY

Arresting literacy upholds determinate correspondences between signs, meanings, and behaviors; this is the literacy celebrated in "liberal and right wing discourse . . . tied to narrowly conceived economic interests or to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged, and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition" (Giroux, "Literacy" 2–3). It is the literacy we need to be "functional," which Ira Shor summarizes as

> The ability to interact with political, legal, commercial, occupational and social demands in daily life, such as voting, filing tax returns, applying for work, signing leases and contracts, following printed instructions, passing a driver's written exam, balancing a checkbook, comprehending instructions in a phone book or in an employee benefit plan, etc. (*Culture Wars* 189)

This conception of functional literacy becomes, in Linda Brodkey's view, a trope that a nation or culture can use to justify social inequity (161). Brian Street adds that "what governments and companies want from literacy is primarily technological compe-

tence and improvement. The relationship between this and 'intellectual competence' is problematic. . . . literacy programmes will still be justified on the grounds of 'productivity.'" (185). Jonathan Kozol, with his insistence that literacy is more than the incorporation of "adult nonreaders into the accepted mainstream of noncritical America" (182), has identified "fundamental humane literacy" with capacities that disrupt routine functionalism:

1. Informed Irreverence
2. Tolerating Indecision
3. Political Sophistication
4. Respect for History
5. Counteraction of Violence
6. Wise Anger
7. Taste ("the willingness to state that some things count a lot, others much less, and some things not at all")
8. Global literacy (as against "geographical myopia")
9. Ability to Decode Doublespeak (174ff)[7]

Defining the literate individual as broadly informed, critical, participatory, and skeptical, Kozol realizes that this individual "portends some danger for the social system as a whole" (133), through the counteraction of public emphasis on literacy as unreflective and obedient behavior.

The elements of Kozol's fundamental literacy are associated by others with *critical* literacy, that is, the ability to interrogate, challenge, complicate, transform, redefine, and elaborate ostensibly neutral social and institutional facts.[8] This literacy requires the capacity for dialectical thinking, by positing knowledge-in-language as an ongoing critique, in which conclusions lead to further questions, oppositions, and relationships. The dialectician is interested in how meaning can change in light of new connections and contradictions. Her practice exhibits critical inquiry that is necessarily ideological, because it embodies a belief in the value of change. Herbert Marcuse reminds us that dialectical thought can be the weapon of revolution against a formalist establishment:

> Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfree-

dom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs. (qtd. in Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 19)

Stepping back from explosion and catastrophe, I want to associate *generative* literacy with a dialectical habit of mind: the mind in motion rather than the mind foreclosed. Michael Basseches, whose presuppositions about learning in the 1980s recall Vygotsky's emphasis on the dialectical interaction of mind and society, investigates what may be called the society of ideas in the mind, that is, the dialectical interaction of contradictory propositions and perspectives that he associates with adult development. Basseches would extend Piagetian cognitive theory to account for post-adolescent development. He concludes that "Piaget has never described particular methods of transcending the stability provided by the closed-system structure of formal operational thought so that continuing dialectical progress in the construction of knowledge can occur" (54). Basseches interviewed thirty-six students and faculty members (nine freshmen, nine seniors, nine professors) at Swarthmore College about "the nature of education." From transcriptions of these interviews, he abstracted "moves-in-thought . . . which seemed clearly related to dialectical outlooks and analyses" drawn from "the work of many writers within the dialectical tradition" (68, 72; e.g., Hegel, Marx, Engels, Ollman, Unger, Kosok, Gould, Von Bertalanffy, Piaget). These moves-in-thought, which occurred most frequently in the older students and the professors, are represented as twenty-four dialectical schemata:

1. Thesis-antithesis-synthesis movement in thought.
2. Affirmation of the primacy of motion.
3. Recognition and description of thesis-antithesis-synthesis movement.
4. Recognition of correlativity of a thing and its other.
5. Recognition of ongoing interaction as a source of movement.
6. Affirmation of the practical or active character of knowledge.
7. Avoidance or exposure of objectification, hypostatization, and reification.

8. Understanding events or situations as moments (of development) of a process.

9. Location of an element or phenomenon within the whole(s) of which it is a part.

10. Description of a whole (system, form) in structural, functional, or equilibrational terms.

11. Assumption of contextual relativism.

12. Assertion of the existence of relations, the limits of separation or the value of relatedness.

13. Criticism of multiplicity, subjectivism, and pluralism.

14. Description of a two-way reciprocal relationship.

15. Assertion of internal relations.

16. Location . . . of contradictions or sources of disequilibrium [within and among systems and structures].

17. Understanding the resolution of disequilibrium or contradiction in terms of . . . transformation. . . .

18. Relating value to [movement].

19. Evaluative comparison of forms (systems).

20. Attention to problems of coordinating systems (forms) in relation.

21. Description of open self-transforming systems.

22. Description of qualititative change as a result of quantitative change within a form.

23. Criticism of formalism based on the interdependence of form and content.

24. Multiplication of perspectives as a concreteness-preserving approach to inclusiveness. (74)

One of Basseches's interviewees serves to sum up the process of dialectical thinking: "I test my schema all the time because it tells me how to react to the world" (139). Such "metaformalist" thought, and dialectical thought in general, conceives the world, and the ideas and institutions that populate it, as transforming and transformative systems.

By arraying in lists the characteristics that Kozol and Basseches associate with mature intellection, I want to support a definition of generative literacy as the capacity to create and

entertain a number of intellectual, social, and political positions with reference to any piece of "data." More pointedly, I call generative literacy *alertness to ambiguity in spoken or written discourse*. This literacy becomes a foundation for generative magic rhetoric: alertness to ambiguity is a "competence" that makes possible its own "performance," as transformative rhetoric.

Generative literacy can be understood as a "philosophical condition" that continues the sympathetic polytheism central to magic. We perform literate alchemy by presuming that a plurality of relationships and articulations may affect the transmutation of any "pure" substance, fact, idea, condition. David Miller, James Hillman, and Margot Adler value the polycentric/polytheistic "belief" in plural meanings and shifting definitions (Hillman 35, Adler 28–34):

> Socially understood, polytheism is eternally in unresolvable conflict with social monotheism, which in its worst form is fascism and in its less destructive forms is imperialism, capitalism, feudalism and monarchy.... Polytheism is not only a social reality; it is also a philosophical condition. It is that reality experienced by men and women when Truth with a capital "T" cannot be articulated reflectively according to a single grammar, a single logic, or a single symbol system" (Miller 4, qtd. in Adler 29).

James Hillman connects dialogic literacy with both polytheistic magic and psychic health when he proposes that

> Even should unity of personality be an aim, "only separated things can unite" [Jung], as we learn from the old alchemical psychologists. Separation comes first. It is a way of gaining distance. This *separatio* (in the language of alchemy) offers internal detachment, as if there were now more interior space for movement and for placing events, where before there was a conglomerate adhesion of parts or a monolithic identification with each and all, a sense of being stuck in one's problem. (31)

The *separatio* that informs generative magic, rhetoric, and literacy is essentially patho-logical, a term whose Greek roots denote "suffering discourse." Dialectical transformation, the rearrangement of parts into new but temporary wholes, aims at disorder and de-formation, at the dis-ease of the original conceptual or institutional "organism." Imagining and arraying alternatives to a presumably healthy body of official knowledge: these

are the traditional practices of the *magus*, and are always potentially wicked.[9]

TRICK OR TREAT?

I must admit, preliminary to a more patient investigation of our title terms, that equating magic and the language of social action is something of a trick; one might argue that they merely have a "family resemblance," insofar as both "make things happen." In that case, what this study accomplishes by replacing "rhetoric" and "literacy" with "magic" is an extended lexical shift. This both is and is not so. Allying rhetoric and literacy with magic because all three entail generation, production, and transformation, in order to assert that they are common identities as well as conceptual analogies, is a sleight-of-definition. But perhaps it seems so only because we have forgotten their real commonality. Recalling that commonality affords us the new stressing of an essentially forgotten epistemological framework, and re-presents the powers that we enforce in every instance of theoretical and applied rhetoric, theoretical and applied literacy.