Kairotic Rhetoric in
Freire’s Liberatory Pedagogy

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The work of Paulo Freire is often thought of as a theory of pedagogy that focuses on social, historical, and political critique. His concept of “critical consciousness” is generally understood as the “goal” of his concept of problem-posing education. However, there has been no substantial attention given to critical consciousness as a rhetorical concept. In order to begin an exploration of Freire’s work from a rhetorical point of view, I will suggest that kairos is an important, if implicit, component of critical consciousness. The concept of kairos reveals the ways that Freire has a hermeneutic perspective on rhetoric that I will call disclosive. Freire’s rhetoric is based on a particular moment of consciousness, one that is qualitatively different from quotidian consciousness. The difference between these two modes of consciousness occurs as an event that ruptures “normal” consciousness; that is, a critical moment emerges from the rupture when discourse discloses or makes being known. Being is made known through three basic modes of disclosure: moods, which I discuss in section one of this article; understanding, which I discuss in section two; and dialogic discourse, which I discuss in section three. Employing this tripartite framework, I will argue that kairos is a qualitative moment of transformation that gives critical consciousness its dynamic ethical and liberatory dimensions.

Freire’s critical consciousness is a phenomenological and a critical hermeneutic concept designed to describe the analytical moment in which an individual’s concrete situation shows itself as limiting. Critical consciousness has often and justly been associated with Marx’s notion of “false consciousness.” In fact, Marx’s concept has a moment like kairos, an “übergreifendes Moment,” an overriding moment in which “the supersession of alienation in social practice” occurs (Mészáros 114). For Marx, alienation can be overcome and, in fact, it is a goal that can be achieved through the correct method of critically analyzing economic and class structures. However, Freire does not argue that critical conscious-

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ness can overcome or supersede alienation. Rather, the best we can hope to do is disclose, uncover, and understand the specific conditions that make the existential situations alienating. The various modes of disclosure are all acts of knowing that disrupt quotidian consciousness and open the way for decisive acts of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is rhetorical because it depends on a kairotic moment or a qualitative and discursive moment of understanding that leads to decisive actions that reimage and re-structure that which was previously unthought. *Kairos* creates the possibility of new action through its power to disrupt the transparent and antecedent limits, the *stasis*, of each individual's existential situation.  

Freire's rhetoric is based upon a disclosive view of truth; it highlights the making-known processes that are involved in the critical understanding of the local knowledge that constitutes an individual's everyday understandings of his or her life-world. Everyday understanding or *doxa* is a specific realm of public interpretation that affects *Dasein*'s comportment. I use Martin Heidegger's term *Dasein* (or being-there) to refer to the existential situation in which kairotic moments occur. For example, Freire analyzes some of the various "myths" that tend to promote passive and adaptive behaviors in the underclass (*Oppressed* 120-22). To provide another concrete example, I will analyze in section three of this article the myth of the Chinese Kitchen God. This myth contains commonplace knowledge that encourages passive and adaptive behavior by "good" wives. *Doxa* is knowledge that is submerged in *stasis*, in a formulaic set of commonplaces that form a community's knowledge of proper behavior. Freire argues that public interpretations are general anterior structures that exist and order or "in-form" every human situation. Additionally, the anterior structures of knowing one's situation in the world are, for the most part, transparent because *doxa* is essentially a "submersion of consciousness." Each individual has the capacity to articulate the intelligibility of his or her concrete situation. But the articulation of intelligibility only occurs as an "emergence of consciousness" from the transparent and unthought consciousness of the quotidian (*Oppressed* 62; emphasis added).

For Freire, there are two qualities of a daily situation that limit one's potentiality-for-being by making it "strange." On the one hand, limit-situations affect how one experiences temporality; in other words, particular occasions seem to be seamless, continuous, and in *stasis*. On the other hand, limit-situations contribute to estrangement because they seem transparent; the anterior nature of traditions, customs, and ways of life
seem to diminish or limit one’s potential for taking decisive actions. In such situations, an *ec-stasis*, an emersion from *stasis*, ruptures the apparent continuity. For Freire, both aspects of limit-situations contain an uncanny element: as continuity, it makes history appear seamless and determined by fate; as rupture, it is as if one is ungrounded in an abyss of uncertainty and possibility. Heidegger’s description of the kairotic moment can help us to understand how uncanniness or estrangement helps to disclose a new understanding of one’s limit-situation by interpreting the ungrounding as an ethical and ontological “call.”

For Heidegger, there is, as Theodore Kisiel observes, a “close connection between time and truth, which the ‘lighting’ of the clearing implies. . . . Disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*) is . . . specifically attributed to the truth of *Dasein* to bring it into terminological proximity with the kairotic resoluteness (*Ent-schlossenheit*, etymologically an ‘unlocking’) sustaining the moment of decision” (422). A kairotic moment unlocks a decision with disruptive force: it is an uncanny moment that ruptures and disrupts the continuity of time. The uncanny, for Heidegger, discloses the “call of conscience” that delivers “a jolt, of an abrupt arousal” (*Being* 249, 251). The call of conscience contains a kairotic and *Dasein*tic moment that transforms one’s submersion in everyday understanding: “‘It’ calls, against our expectations and even against our will”; yet, the call of conscience leads to decisive action (*Being* 254). According to Heidegger, *Dasein*’s everyday understanding is “lost” or absorbed in its day-to-day involvements. The shock of new understandings breaks *Dasein*’s everyday manner of understanding one’s involvements within the social conditions that constitute what seems to be a stable ground of knowledge. Everyday understanding constitutes the public and shared understanding of one’s environment.

In the kairotic moment, *Dasein* “hears” its uncanny homelessness; *Dasein* begins to recognize what seemed to be a stable “ground” and to recognize it as a false ground. The mode of hearing the estrangement or alienation is an “ecstatic” nihilism that affirms being and the articulation of humanizing inquiry. Passively listening to everyday understanding is a “pure” nihilism, a denial of a humanizing process of inquiry. Or, put another way, in the kairotic moment, one hears the “call of conscience” in the form of an affective self-finding rather than a passive form of listening that loses the self in the anonymous “they” of public interpretations. “Hearing” the uncanniness of its immersion in unauthentic being, its everyday mode of “listening,” is now felt to be an uncanny or strange situation. In the kairotic moment, *Dasein* hears a summoning call of
conscience that “calls the self of Da-sein forth from its lostness in the they” (Being 253). Kairos is a moment of transformation, a moment of affective self-finding; it is also an ethical moment because one chooses to heed the summoning call to a renovated futurity. For Freire and Heidegger, the kairotic moment is a resolute decision that causes ahistorical rupture and opens new paths to understanding one’s way of being-in-the-world.

The importance of kairos in Freire’s concept of critical consciousness has hitherto gone unnoticed. This is not surprising, however, since, as James Kinneavy points out, scholars have neglected the rhetorical concept of kairos. Kinneavy and Eskin note that some scholars have suggested that “kairos adds a dynamism and a value dimension to temporality” (133). Freire’s concept of the limit-situation shows how kairos, as a qualitative moment of affective self-finding, is central to critical consciousness. For Freire, the kairotic moment is dynamic because it opens an individual to new knowledge that discloses one’s limit-situation. The power or force of the moment adds a value to temporality because it is an ec-stasis, a moment when Dasein (the human being that exists in that situation) increases its ontological vocation “to be more human.” Kairos is part of the axiological dimension of rhetorical action because “any situation” in which individuals are prevented from “engaging in the process of inquiry” is a form of alienation: “to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Oppressed 66). The converse is also true: to enable one’s decision making is to become more fully human, more fully free, and to increase one’s being.

The creative and transformative power of critical consciousness that leads to decisive action is, at its most important level, an epistemological process. For Freire, the phenomenological and hermeneutic aspects of a situation are the locus for creating the conditions for new acts of knowing to occur. Freire’s phenomenological and hermeneutic conception of epistemology depends on the “dynamism and a value dimension” of kairotic temporality. Kairos is central to Freire’s work because acts of knowing are always incarnate dialogic disclosures of limit-situations. Critical consciousness is that moment of action when we are free to create alternative possibilities-for-being. Kairos is a moment of decision that leads to an epistemological transformation that ungrounds old knowledge and discloses new knowledge. In order to support the thesis that kairos is implicated in the distinction between hearing and listening, we must turn to Greek conceptions of kairos. Plato’s Phaedrus provides a key definition: kairotic moments are “the right occasions for speaking and for keeping quiet” (272a). Plato’s notion of keeping quiet here is not simple
silence; rather, it becomes a dynamic moment in which "hearing" discloses the value dimension of temporality that is transparent when one merely "listens."

**Moods, Kairos, and Plato's Phaedrus**

The Pythagorean interpretation of *kairos* argues that opposing claims are brought into a harmony and balance (Helsley 371). *Kairos* transforms contentious discourse, a strife-filled situation that is caused by conflicting arguments, into a harmonious situation, one in which consensus and arguments are reduced to a formulaic set of commonplaces, or *stasis*. The Pythagorean interpretation of *kairos* imagines that it reflects the true order of things, the perfect harmony of the cosmos. According to Michael Carter, the sophists transformed the concept of *kairos* from a cosmological principle to one that is pragmatic and social. Because discourse was inherently deceptive, the sophists reasoned, *kairos* is the determination of whichever argument has "the greater probability of [being thought to be] the truth within a community of listeners" (103). The sophists’ use of the term shifts its emphasis from a contentious situation to a situation in which the ethos of a community, its consensus regarding the correctness of a set of assertions, determines what counts as knowledge and truth. The sophistic view is that rhetoric concerns truths that are contingent, contextual, and presume a "community of listeners," an audience of passive listeners, much like, as we will see, Phaedrus.

Another important addition to the definition of *kairos* comes from Aristotle’s view of rhetoric. On the one hand, Aristotle does imagine that rhetoric is a “method” for the “detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter” (*Rhetoric* 70). He implicitly states that rhetoric is investigative and attempts to “furnish explanations” regarding the matters under consideration (*Rhetoric* 66). Aristotle does see a critical and hermeneutic element in rhetoric that occurs when making "judgements . . . of the moment" (*Rhetoric* 67). In addition to noting the temporal dimension of the moment, Aristotle begins the trend of thinking of *kairos* as a moment of correct judgment. Aristotle’s interpretation of truth and being is tied to an “eternal” now. Heidegger puts it this way: “The knowable . . . must necessarily be as it is; it must always be so; it is the being that always is so, that which did not become. . . . It is constantly so; it is being in the most proper sense. . . . [B]eings are determined with regard to their Being by a moment of *time*” (*Plato's* 23). For Aristotle, rhetorical judgments are distinct from that which can never be otherwise than it is, from that which is incapable of “being and not-being” (*Ethics* 152).
Aristotle has a bifurcated view of truth: it is either universal, static knowledge that can be represented syllogistically in correct propositions, or it is probable truth that can also be represented enthymematically in correct propositions. His view has strongly influenced the current-traditional interpretation of \textit{kairos}. For example, William Covino defines rhetoric as the “art” of persuasion; he argues that \textit{kairos} is the “success or failure of persuasion [that] depends upon presenting the right thing at the right time” (105).\textsuperscript{8} At the heart of this definition is the representational concept of truth as “correctness”; implicit in the definition is the assumption that there is a “right” argument to be presented at “the right time.” Covino’s concept of \textit{kairos} reflects Aristotle’s representational interpretation of “valid” arguments based on the imagined ability of propositions or enthymemes to logically demonstrate “both truth and verisimilitude” (\textit{Rhetoric} 68).\textsuperscript{9} His interpretation of \textit{kairos} reduces the philosophical and hermeneutic implications of the term to a pragmatic lesson: “as the audience changes, so must our persuasive appeals” (106).

A representationalist definition of \textit{kairos} does not adequately explain what Dale Sullivan calls “the dynamic situation occasioned by the release of the \textit{logos}” (319). Instead of explaining what Sullivan calls “the irrational power” that makes decision possible, representationalist definitions of \textit{kairos} encourage a rationalist interpretation (320). The rationalist belief in the availability of “correct” argument appearing at the “correct time” covers over the decisive power of the kairotic moment with an anti-dialogic forgetfulness. Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} suggests that deception and forgetfulness are inherent in all discursive situations; however, he also suggests that deception and forgetfulness can be mitigated by the dynamic interactions of dialogic inquiry.\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Kairos}, as a qualitative moment of time, abruptly shocks the listener, releasing him or her from passivity to a new mode of hearing that is active and critical and that increases understanding.

Lysias’ argument impresses Phaedrus because the moral practices that regulate a lover’s behavior are cleverly reversed; however, Lysias’ position is not an inquiry that lets Phaedrus gain new understanding of those moral practices. Socrates demonstrates how \textit{kairos} can release Phaedrus to inquiry.\textsuperscript{11} Plato shows how \textit{kairos} releases one into authentic speaking, “the right occasions for speaking,” as well as releasing one to authentic listening, “the right occasions ... for keeping quiet” (272a). The opportune moment has an affective release—both for speaking and hearing—that is a dynamic disclosure of new unthought knowledge; in other words, \textit{kairos} opens a limit-situation to new moments of critical
consciousness. Just as Freire’s epistemology is based on a disclosive and dialogic rhetoric, so, too, Plato views dialogue, which I will call “incarnate discourse,” as the disclosive process from which truth emerges. In this disclosive process, however, truth concomitantly arrives and withdraws, and I will call that withdrawing mode of discourse “embodied.” Plato clearly develops the distinction between the arrival of truth in “living speech” and the withdrawal of truth in “dead discourse” (276a).

Plato draws the conclusion that rhetoric (discourse that makes being known) is concomitantly true and false (274b). It is this conclusion and Plato’s early discomfort with this understanding of rhetoric (in Gorgias) that may have led to the commonplace, here articulated by Nietzsche, that Plato has “a strong dislike” of rhetoric (Friedrich 7). Heidegger never taught rhetoric but he did teach a course on Plato’s Sophist. In his course notes, there are some interesting observations regarding the evolution of Plato’s view of rhetoric. Heidegger suggests that Plato’s view of rhetoric evolved over three dialogues, Gorgias, Phaedrus, and Sophist, to reach a final position that both rhetoric and philosophy are forms of “legitimate sophistry” (Plato’s 263). Heidegger sees an evolution in Plato’s position; Plato learns from the sophists that all discourse is inherently and unavoidably deceptive. For Heidegger, Plato radicalizes the sophists’ observation regarding the deceptive nature of discourse: “The Greeks had some understanding of the fact that uncoveredness of the world must be wrested, that it is initially and for the most part not available. The world is primarily, if not completely, concealed; disclosive knowledge does not at first thrust itself forward” (Plato’s 11). Not only does truth need to be “wrested” from discourse, but its concealment exerts a pressure on truth to move away from understanding as it “falls” into embodied discourse; truth withdraws from disclosure as it falls into everyday understanding.

One way that Plato understands this withdrawal is that written words “stand before us as though they were alive” (275d). The words are deceptive because they seem to be alive, or to have an existence of their own. Concomitant with the distance between seeming and being, discourse has another deceptive aspect: it leads its audience, its readers, to suppose that it “provide[s] something reliable and permanent” (275c). The supposition that discourse is reliable and permanent effectively maintains “a most majestic silence” around this mode of what Plato calls “dead discourse” because it closes off reasons to doubt its truthfulness or to inquire into its meaning (275d). Furthermore, the withdrawal itself is concealed, causing what Heidegger calls a “double coveredness.” What was “originally disclosed becomes largely covered up again and distorted
by speech. Opinions rigidify themselves in concepts and propositions; they become truisms that are repeated over and over, with the consequence that what was originally disclosed comes to be covered up again" (Plato's 11). Written discourse stands as an example of this mode of dead discourse. Words that are embodied in social situations, that have "fallen" into the everyday mode of understanding, are doubly deceptive. Writing "implant[s] forgetfulness" because it is simply understood as instrumental, as "a recipe not for memory, but for reminder" (Plato 275a). This memorial mode of discourse is what I will call "embodied discourse."

For Plato, the other mode of discourse, which is in a constant conflict and struggle with embodied discourse, is living discourse. Socrates develops the way living discourse discloses "true being" (249d–e). It retrieves one's affective response to the lived experience of being—memory. Few people, Socrates states, are lucky enough to remember the disclosive event of truth; when they remember "they are amazed, and no longer masters of themselves" (250a). The loss of mastery over one's self initiates the Daseintic movement of kairotic ungrounding, "in the moment of final revelation" (250c). It is a moment of bright light that causes a new vision of the concealedness within which Dasein dwells. Socrates says that this vision of the withdrawing arrival of "true being" is physically transformative. He uses the simile of the soul sprouting wings "as a teething child feels an aching and pain in its gums when a tooth has just come through, so does the soul of him who is beginning to grow his wings feel a ferment and painful irritation" (251c). The simile of the disclosure of truth, in which an erupting tooth breaks out of its concealment in the gums, also doubles as a simile for the ferment and pain that comes with the process of unconcealing.

Living or incarnate discourse—which is based on a re-cognition, on a hermeneutic retrieval of memory—transforms one's mind from being passively submerged in the everyday understanding or doxa. Cognitive growth occurs in the disclosure or unconcealment of that which was previously concealed. However transitory the moment may be (the vision always ends with one falling back to the quotidian, back to the anterior understanding), it remains transformative because, in the emersing, two things occur. First, there is an ability to "discern some likeness of the things yonder"; in other words, one can imagine new modes of existence that are beyond what is currently understood (Plato 250a). Second, this ability to imagine new potentialities-for-being is an affective shift from seeing oneself as a master of everyday understanding, to realizing that one
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does not have mastery over the meaning of existential situations. Even though one has a memory of the disclosure of being, one does not know “what is come upon [one] by reason of the perception being dim” (Plato 250a). This means that all incarnate discourse fades and becomes “dim”; incarnate discourse always falls into embodiment and must entail a recognition, a “questioning or exposition” that retrieves the meaning that was “veritably written in the soul of the listener” (278a).

Walter Brogan describes incarnate speech as a “fundamental commitment to a living discourse. It is not so that the person who speaks can be around to answer questions that Socrates insists on dialogue. It is because truth is intrinsically connected to existence” (12). Brogan describes it this way: “Beings are truly revealed only in the context of a lived experience. The question of being cannot be divorced from the question of life. . . . Plato connects dialectic with dialogue, because all disclosure of beings also always involves self-disclosure and the opening of oneself to another” (12). Living discourse leads the listener to an affective self-finding from which truth arrives. A questioning listener is someone who hears affectively. A person who responds to living discourse allows authentic response, one that “originate[s] within the man himself” (Plato 278a). This form of dialogic questioning is “the art of dialectic”; it is a mode of incarnate discourse because words spoken dialectically and dialogically are like “a seed whence new words grow up in new characters” (Plato 277a). Because “living speech” is incarnated in particular situations, the speaking subject “knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing” (Plato 276a).

Keeping quiet or saying nothing becomes a dynamic moment in which hearing discloses a value dimension of temporality. When Socrates meets Phaedrus at the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedrus thinks that he has found “the right occasions . . . for keeping quiet” (Plato 272a). He seeks solitude so that he can memorize a speech by Lysias, a sophist whom Phaedrus considers to be “the ablest writer of our day” (228a). In this early section of the dialogue, Phaedrus precisely demonstrates the mode of embodied discourse that “implants forgetfulness” because it is removed from life experience, removed from a dialogic context in which he can affectively hear its meaning. Phaedrus is estranged because he is in a state of amazement and he is no longer master of the discourse, retrieving a memory of its truth. Rather, he is creating a funeral memorial to the dead discourse of Lysias’ text; he is reminding himself of it. Phaedrus does not question the ethical meaning of Lysias’ speech; rather, he is passive and docile with regard to its ethical import.
Phaedrus' comportment demonstrates the withdrawing pull of embodied discourse, the way it moves as a double concealment. In Phaedrus' care, Lysias' speech becomes *doxa*, or, as Heidegger puts it, "truisms which are repeated over and over" that effectively cover over (again) any understanding that has been previously unconcealed (*Plato's* 11). If we evaluate the ontological meaning of Phaedrus' "frenzied enthusiasm" from this perspective, then Phaedrus' "enthusiasm" is understood as another moment of Socratic irony. Phaedrus did not just listen to the speech "time after time," he "secured the script and began pouring over" it (*Plato* 228b); he submerges himself beneath the words of another. As Freire might say, using Erich Fromm's terms, Phaedrus' behavior is not "biophily" but "necrophily" (*Oppressed* 58). His effort is "frenzied" not just because of his passion to memorize Lysias' speech. Phaedrus identifies with it to the extent that he desires to possess it completely; his desire to have it, to possess it, is so strong that his desire destroys its "life" as discourse, transforming its meaning and its mode into a "dead" embodied memorial. His desire to have the speech transforms its being into nonbeing; it is transformed into an object to be received, controlled, and possessed.

Socrates understands the effects of the sophist's dead discourse on Phaedrus as an alienating rapture. In his last speech to Phaedrus on love, Socrates speaks of rapture as the kind of madness that is "rebuked by the multitude as being out of his wits" rather than as a *Daseintic* "moment" of "full vision" or revelation (249c–250c). Living discourse is based on a disruptive moment of memory, a silent moment of understanding the contextual disclosure of meaning. Phaedrus is "out of his wits" because he has reduced the rhetorical import of the speech to a correct method of reminding himself he has listened to the speech. However, Socrates engages him in a dialogic inquiry that ungrounds Phaedrus from his grounding (holding firmly to a static opinion) regarding the greatness of Lysias' speech. Phaedrus' opinion, or *doxa*, is, as Aristotle states in *Nichomachian Ethics*, an object that "is already fixed and determined." Socrates needs to transform Phaedrus' fixed and static opinion into what Aristotle calls the practical knowledge (*phronesis*) of "deliberation": an investigation in which the meaning of the object under consideration is yet to be determined (162). If the value of Lysias' speech remains undetermined, then Socrates and Phaedrus can authentically investigate its meaning and import. Before such an investigation can occur, Phaedrus' opinion must be ungrounded from his inauthentic listening, the character of which causes an uncanny estrangement from the meaning of Lysias' text.
Socrates defines rhetoric as the function of speech that influences "the various ways in which souls are affected" (Plato 217b). The speaker must be exactly attuned to the mood of the audience. Plato regards "mood," rather than more obvious possibilities such as "reason" or "persuasion," as the essential aspect of kairos. Plato suggests that kairos has to do with being attuned to the "various" moods of an audience. Socrates does not attempt to discover some a priori argument that "fits" Phaedrus' disposition, nor does he directly challenge the morally suspect logic of Lysias' argument. The Phaedrus demonstrates the way that the kairotic moment sets up an interlocutor for innovation and renewal. Socrates analyzes and influences Phaedrus' affective state of mind by changing his "mood." Phaedrus ends both his affective and intellectual enthrallment to Lysias, who focuses on "mere persuasion without any questioning," and begins to explore with Socrates how rhetoric is an inquiry that "show[s] a thing's nature" (277e, 271a). The affective shift in Phaedrus' understanding of the phenomenological "showing" that occurs in the speech demonstrates how Phaedrus opens to the possibility of ec-stasis: in ontological terms, he stands out in an abysmal "dispersion" of what Heidegger calls the They-self.

At the start of the encounter with Socrates, Phaedrus discloses his own uncanny limit-situation through his enthrallment to Lysias. Phaedrus is lost or possessed by what Socrates calls "the busy doings of mankind" (249d). At the end of their dialogic inquiry into rhetoric, Socrates allows Phaedrus to remember that he, like Lysias, needs to turn "toward the love of wisdom" (257b). At this point, Phaedrus, after having reevaluated his previous judgment, finds "Lysias cutting a poor figure" (257c). From this point on in the dialogue, Socrates demonstrates how the practice of rhetoric must be an inquiry into self-knowledge. Socrates has set up the "right occasion" to transform Phaedrus' affective interest in the sophistic concept of rhetoric as persuasion and, concomitantly, to build a case for a disclosive rhetoric in which the dialogue focuses upon actively hearing rather than passively listening. From a phenomenological and hermeneutic point of view, Phaedrus experiences an affective self-finding because of his co-inquiry into the nature of sophistic rhetoric. Retrieving the meaning of Lysias' speech with Socrates entails both a destruction of Phaedrus' passive listening and a painful growth in his self-knowledge.

As Heidegger suggests, "destruction does not mean destroying. . . . Destruction means—to open our ears, to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in tradition" or as the doxa of everyday understanding (What 71–73). As Socrates says at the end of the dialogue, rhetoric that attempts
“mere persuasion without any questioning or exposition” does not “re­mind” the audience of the experience of truth (277e–278a). Plato’s disclosive rhetoric reminds the audience of the withdrawing arrival of truth. The recollection process in general and the concept of kairos in particular do not revolve around a linear concept of time, or the discovery of correct arguments, or the discovery of the “appropriate” moment for making those arguments. Rather, Plato’s concept of kairos suggests that those “disposed to the love of wisdom” are ungrounded by a hearing that opens one to critical inquiry (252e). A safe, secure, and unitary self that is grounded in certainty must experience the disclosive ec-stasis in order to destroy the preconceptions of everyday understanding. Plato demonstrates the role of kairos as the mediating moment between two modes of discourse: incarnate and embodied. However, the destructive force of kairos that, as Heidegger suggests, is liberatory includes the retrospective analysis of tradition, which is concomitantly historical understanding and interpretation.

Understanding, Kairos, and Phenomenological Hermeneutics

Kinneavy argues that there is “a common epistemological thread . . . woven into the meaning of kairos” from the fifth century BCE to “modern extrapolations of the concept made by [Paul] Tillich” in the twentieth century (215). Kinneavy calls Tillich’s interpretation of kairos “a valuable addition” to our understanding of the epistemological nature of the term. Tillich focuses on the “Christohellenic” aspects of the term rather than on its rhetorical aspects. Tillich argues that kairotic time is, in “[i]ts original meaning—the right time, the time in which something can be done”; it must be “contrasted with chronos, measured time or clock time. The former is qualitative, the latter is quantitative” (“Kingdom” 369). Tillich goes on to say that “Paul uses kairos when he speaks in a world-historical view of the moment of time in which God could send his Son, the moment which was selected to become the center of history” (369–70). The world-historical character of kairos, therefore, is neither a “psychological or sociological” one; “it is not a matter of detached observation but of involved experience” (370–71).

Kinneavy agrees with Raymond Bulman that “Tillich’s concept of kairos is at least partially indebted to the Marxist concern for historical consciousness. It certainly is closely allied to Walter Benjamin’s notion of . . . the ‘now-time’” (216). It is accurate to say that Tillich’s conclusions draw on the critical theories of both Marx and the Frankfurt School, which theorize a moment when oppressive socio-economic
conditions will be overcome. Tillich isolates a critical distinction between
the ways that knowledge has been characterized in western thought and
the ways that understanding kairos helps us to see the limited and
hegemonic nature of the representationalist view of knowledge. Tillich’s
conclusions, therefore, should help us to understand the ways that Freire’s
concept of critical consciousness uses kairos to imagine a fulfillment of
temporality that is always open-ended and incomplete. Because tempo­
rality is not imagined in terms of representationalist concepts of stasis,
correctness, and consensus, Daseintic nihilism, which is based not on
“method” but on understanding and interpretation, supercedes scientific
and rationalist foundationalism.19

Tillich, like Freire, argues that there are two basic ways that knowl­
dge has been characterized in western thinking. First, the dominant way
of thinking about knowledge—which can be traced from Aristotle through
the patristic theologians and through the founders of modern representa­
tionalist epistemology, Descartes and Kant—is scientific and rationalist
foundationalism (Tillich, “Kairos” 123–25). It is characterized by imag­
ing that knowledge is static, timeless, ahistorical, and can be repre­
sented or objectified if one uses the “correct” method. Tillich argues that
the “methodical movement” of western thought culminates in the Kantian
attempt to create a correct formalism (“Kairos” 124). He argues that
Kant’s methodical formalism is connected to a tendency in western
thought to privilege the notion of a “timeless Logos” (“Kairos” 129). The
ahistorical characterization of knowledge leads western thinkers to claim
that there is a “rational science” that “empties” the subject so that static,
eternal, and fixed knowledge can be deposited in human minds: “The
subject must be without content in order to receive the eternal forms”
(Tillich, “Kairos” 130). Freire’s critique of the “banking” style of educa­
tion, which conceives of students as empty subjects, is in agreement with
Tillich’s notion of the representational concept of knowledge.

Tillich argues that there is a philosophical counter-tradition that
challenges both the hegemonic “classical-humanistic conception of knowl­
dge” in which knowledge is “rational and static” as well as the “medi­
eval-Catholic conception of knowledge” in which knowledge “is super­
rational and static” (“Kairos” 135). Tillich locates the origin of this
counter-tradition in Nietzsche because he “thinks consistently in terms of
the Kairos,” and he expresses “the decision-character of truth” (“Kairos”
140). Tillich argues that Nietzsche recognizes the interpretative and
historical nature of all understanding, even concerning those topics that
seem “most exact, the most subject to methodical technique, contains
fundamental interpretations rooted neither in formal evidence, nor in material probability, but in original views, in basic decisions” (“Kairos” 143). Because kairos is rooted in “the sphere of decision,” it reaches “into the act of knowledge and make[s] it an historical deed” (“Kairos” 135).

There are two extremely important aspects regarding Tillich’s interpretation of kairos and its relationship to acts of knowing. First, kairos is not dependent on argumentation and good will (“Kingdom” 371). Rather, it is a form of “dia-logos” that has “matured to the point of being able to receive the breakthrough” that ruptures the old understanding and appears “with a new understanding of the meaning of history” (“Kingdom” 369). Second, kairos is a mode of temporality that is connected to a particular type of “dynamic thinking” rather than to static thought: “thinking in the Kairos . . . is opposed to the thinking in the timeless Logos, which belongs to the methodical main line” of western epistemology (“Kairos” 129).

Tillich’s interpretation adequately explains how the hegemony of rational and scientific methodology has been one of the causes, as Kinneavy so aptly pointed out, for the marginal status that the concept of kairos has in modern rhetorical studies. Furthermore, we can summarize three significant areas in which Tillich’s interpretation of kairos is consonant with Freire’s thinking. First, both Tillich and Freire critique traditional epistemology because it makes a false dichotomy between cultural knowledge and a modernist technological methodology, that “extends” static objective knowledge to empty subjects (see Freire, Education 98–102). Second, they both critique the static concept of knowledge as an inadequate epistemology and argue for events or acts of knowing that occur in a dialogic and non-representational form of hermeneutics. And, finally, in response to classical epistemology, they outline ways of knowing that are based on the hermeneutic processes of interpretation and understanding. 20

Tillich outlines a counter-tradition from which he critiques representationalist conceptions of epistemology. Tillich mentions Nietzsche, yet there are many other contemporary philosophers who are also part of this counter-tradition, such as John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Richard Rorty. Rorty, for example, argues that the philosophy of education needs to move from epistemology to hermeneutics (315). He opposes epistemology to hermeneutics because of the “holistic point that words take their meanings from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character” (368). Rorty argues for a “nonepistemological sort of philosophy” that is “partially” exemplified by Dewey (381). Rather than simply rejecting epistemology, Dewey and Freire perform a hermeneutic retrieval of epistemology from its tradi-
ational representationalist framework. They argue for a liberatory epistemology that is based on the premise that knowledge is an event of knowing. Epistemology becomes, for them, a holistic phenomenological analysis that explicates how an individual’s understanding discloses the truth of social limit-situations.

Freire’s philosophical critique of “banking” style pedagogy centers on the dangers and limitations of a representationalist concept of knowledge. Freire’s hermeneutic and existential approach to knowledge is phenomenological and nonrepresentationalist. For Freire, the practice of freedom demands that one participate in an ec-stasis from one’s life-world and its tradition in order to interpret one’s understanding. His dialogic view of knowledge is based in hermeneutics and rhetoric. His dynamic view of time and history as prophetic futurity is not a representation of an ideal society; rather, it is a hopeful projection that is based on the continuing process of humanization. The future remains hopeful, for Freire, exactly because the historical situation is a “point of departure” for humanization. It rests on what he calls prophetic time, those kairotic moments in which people are ungrounded from static foundations of doxa and, while becoming aware of their incompletion, “move forward and look ahead” (Oppressed 65).

As Tillich states, the fulfillment of the moment is not dependent “on argumentation and good will” (“Kingdom” 371). Rather, the kairotic moment is a point of departure, an emersion, and a standing-out from the static conception of knowledge, tradition, and culture. Freire states that the moment of departure “constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. . . . To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting” (Oppressed 66). The emersion from static limit-situations is a kairotic moment of departure that is fundamental to authentic being-in-the-world: the process of becoming more fully human. The kairotic moment is open-ended, dialogic, and allows understanding to be transformed in a continuous transvaluation of values that only seem to be fixed in stasis, in a static historical situation.

A Dialogic and Humanizing Process of Inquiry: Kairos, Decision, and the Transvaluation of Values

Thus far we have seen the way that Plato demonstrates the role of kairos as a mediating moment between two modes of discourse, incarnate and embodied. We have explored how a group of thinkers—Nietzsche, Tillich, Heidegger, and Freire—using the philosophical tools of phenom-
enological hermeneutics, have noted the destructive force of kairos. Kairos releases a mode of discourse, a “dia-logos,” that is a liberatory and retrospective “destruction” of tradition that concomitantly discloses new understandings and interpretations that re-cognize limit-situations. In this final section, we will explore the ways that Freire’s kairotic rhetoric ungrounds internalized values in order to produce new knowledge and to enable transformative decisions to occur. The kairotic moment allows understanding to be transformed into interpretation in a transvaluation of values that decisively affects a historical situation. Employing Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, I will analyze how kairotic moments enable transformative decisions and how those decisions can lead to a transvaluation of values.

The very first sentence of Tan’s novel “throws” the reader into a cycle of cultural oppositions that exist between a Chinese mother, Winnie, who has immigrated to the United States, and her daughter, Pearl, who was born in America. Pearl states that, “Whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument” (3). The conversations between mother and daughter are always strained because each interlocutor understands and interprets the meaning of communicative exchanges from different cultural points of view; each interlocutor understands the everyday world based on her own cultural history. Pearl feels every conversation with her mother is based on intercultural miscommunication and is potentially explosive. Pearl says, “I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines” (9). The largest “land mine” is that Pearl has a medical condition, multiple sclerosis, and has chosen not to tell her mother. In the Pythagorean interpretation of kairos the question might be: how can one maintain a harmonious balance between cultural oppositions? From the phenomenological view of Freire, however, the question would be: how does one transform the values that have created the oppositions?

Pearl lives in a “delicate balance [that] always threatens to go out of kilter” when she sees her mother because she has a “terrible disease” that she has not told her mother about (25–26). The reasons that she has not told her mother are cultural; Pearl cannot understand Winnie’s interpretations of the world. According to Pearl, Winnie interprets the world through a strange mixture of fate, superstition, and cultural values. Pearl explains:

To this day it drives me crazy, listening to her various hypotheses, the way religion, medicine, and superstition all merge with her own beliefs. She
puts no faith in other people’s logic—to her, logic is a sneaky excuse for tragedies, mistakes, and accidents. And according to my mother, *nothing* is an accident. She’s like a Chinese version of Freud, or worse. Everything has a reason. Everything could have been prevented. (27)

It will take a kairotic moment to open up the possibility for cultural action between Pearl and Winnie. It will take new cultural knowledge to break open Pearl’s static and anti-dialogic view of her mother, which she represents here as both complete and unproblematic. John Scenters-Zapico argues that “the goal of *kairos* is to bring the hearer to some new knowledge or understanding. New knowledge or understanding is precisely what allowed Gorgias to sway his hearers from their previous perspective.” Scenters-Zapico argues that *kairos* is “the ‘will’ or ‘decision’ on the part of the speaker to break the cycle of oppositions; . . . he would create something new” (362). Because kairotic rhetoric is not primarily a moment of argumentation, or of reaching consensus between opposing points of view, something is needed before new knowledge can be created. What is needed is a break in the *stasis* created by *doxa* (or opinion) that opens the interlocutors, both mother and daughter, to an *ec-stasis* from passively accepting assumptions and previous judgments about each other. The rupture in everyday understanding that will disclose new cultural knowledge will come from Winnie’s exposition of her life in China, before she emigrated to the United States.

Ironically, Winnie feels exactly as Pearl does—that she is unable to communicate emotionally. They are “always careful to be polite, always trying not to bump into each other, just like strangers” (95). Winnie has also concealed important aspects of her past from her daughter: she has hidden the fact that Pearl’s biological father was her first and abusive husband who raped and impregnated her. Winnie is ashamed of her past and has kept her and her second husband’s (Jimmy Louie, whom Pearl thought was her biological father) history from Pearl. When Winnie reveals her past, this disclosure constitutes an act of knowing that will lead both mother and daughter to an *ec-stasis* from their previous beliefs. It will be an emersion from their consensus about what they already know about each other in order to disclose new truths about each other’s reality; only after the destruction of the supposed consensus can new decisive actions be taken and new understanding emerge.

The first act of destruction, which breaks the cycle of oppositions between mother and daughter, occurs when Winnie finds a box that she had given to her daughter for her tenth birthday. Inside the sealed box
Winnie finds evidence that her daughter had hidden her sadness and sorrow over Jimmy Louie’s death. At her father’s funeral, Pearl had a fight with Winnie that was fueled by intercultural miscommunication. Pearl is shocked when she sees the corpse of her father, who has been transformed from a “charming and lively, strong, kind” man into a “thin and listless” sick person “who moaned and became helpless” (48). The transformation horrified Pearl, and she does “not want to mourn the man in the casket” (48). She wants to remember her father as he was when he was alive. Winnie is upset by Pearl’s reaction to the corpse: “What kind of daughter cannot cry for her own father?” Pearl responds, “That man in there is not my father” (48). Winnie responds immediately by slapping her daughter’s face. This incident occurs because Winnie fears that her daughter chooses to be disrespectful because she knows that Jimmy Louie is not her biological father; in other words, it appears to Winnie that her daughter’s statement is literal. Winnie does not understand Pearl’s sense of her father’s death and imposes her own interpretation on her daughter’s words. Pearl does not understand how her words point to a hidden and shameful historical truth in her mother’s life.

Winnie finds a box that contains Jimmy Louie’s funeral card: “It was covered with black marks, so many angry marks.” In one sudden and transformative moment, Winnie realizes that Pearl was hurt and angry at the death of Jimmy Louie; she realizes that Pearl did mourn him and did not literally doubt that he was her father. Winnie’s discovery ungrounds her whole conception of her daughter: “Right then I realized I was wrong. Right away I wanted to call Pearl and tell her, ‘Now I know. You were sad. You were crying, if not outside, then inside.’” This act of knowing occurs like a musical note that is “already gone the moment you hear it, before you can say, ‘How true, how true this was’” (97; emphasis added). Winnie’s disclosure of truth is an incarnate moment, an affective transformation that opens her to a radical new understanding of her daughter. Furthermore, Winnie decides to find “the right moment” in which to explain her violent reaction to Pearl’s statement at the funeral (215).

Winnie’s kairotic moment is an epistemological disclosure of her new understanding. As Freire might say, it leads to a qualitative moment of transformation that gives a moment of critical consciousness, “an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one’s context” (Education 48). Winnie’s new knowledge highlights the way that Freire’s dialogic epistemology concomitantly releases the creative and destructive power of decision: “Decision making
is rupture . . . But it is not possible to exist without rupturing, no matter how hard it may be" (Teachers 43). It is destructive because it ungrounds or ruptures the view that knowledge is stable either in the sense of fixed and eternal laws or through social consensus. Decisiveness is a “virtue” that is creative because “it signifies breaking free to choose” (Teachers 42). Even though we are “conditioned beings” because we are all, for the most part, thrown into the anterior social discourse that I have called embodied discourse, we are not “determined beings.” As Freire says, “It is impossible to understand history as possibility if we do not recognize human beings as beings who make free decisions” (Heart 37). The intercultural miscommunications between Winnie and Pearl are not determined by fate; they are social practices that can be transformed.

Not only does Winnie want to find the “right moment” to explain her past but she also wants to create a cultural narrative to explain “not what happened, but why it happened, how it could not be any other way” (100). She wants to explain to Pearl why she was in an abusive marriage and how she was taught to accept the abuse as “fate.” In order to explain her cultural background to Pearl, she uses an image from a Chinese myth about the Kitchen God. The Kitchen God was considered a minor deity who, once a year, at the Chinese New Year, reports to the Jade Emperor God on those people “whose fate deserved to be changed, better for worse, or worse for better” (61). At the beginning of the novel, Pearl’s Grand Aunt Du has died, and Pearl has inherited from her “the altar for Grand Auntie’s good luck god, the Chinese crèche.” Pearl has no interest in the altar and gives it to her daughter, who thinks that it is “a Chinese dollhouse” (58). Inside the altar is an image of the Kitchen God.

The traditional meaning of the myth furthers patriarchal ideology: it is about male privilege and it is about a “good wife.” The Kitchen God was an unfaithful husband named Zhang, who shames his wife by allowing a concubine to drive her out of their home. Within two years, the unfaithful husband is reduced to poverty and the concubine leaves him for a rich man. One day, after fainting from weakness because he is on the edge of starvation, he is found by “his good wife, Guo.” She brings him to her new home where her servants revive him. When Zhang comes to his senses and realizes that he has been saved by his “good wife,” he jumps “into the kitchen fireplace” to hide his shame from her; he dies “burning with shame” because his clothing catches fire: “In heaven, the Jade Emperor heard the whole story from his new arrival. ‘For having the courage to admit you were wrong,’ the Emperor declared, ‘I make you Kitchen God, watching over everyone’s behavior’” (60–61).
The myth acts as the central image of the book (as well as its title) because, on the one hand, it seems to justify and value Zhang’s mistreatment of his wife, while, on the other hand, it ignores the act of charity that the “good wife” Guo performs in saving her husband. As the narrative of Winnie’s life in China unfolds, she analyzes and transforms the meaning of the myth. Her critical consciousness of the myth demonstrates how a kairotic moment is a destructive repetition that allows a new understanding of cultural truths to show themselves. Kairos emerges in the dialogic process, implicitly, as an important epistemological strategy and perhaps the most important of Freire’s epistemological strategies. Winnie finds an ethical dimension to her ruptured understanding of her daughter. She is able to liberate herself from the shame of her past only after she has made decisions that project her toward the call of conscience—that is, toward a newly imagined futurity between her and her daughter. In the kairotic moment, she decides to venture forth to create new possibilities-for-being that were previously concealed or unthought. As Freire says, “to study is to uncover…. This implies a requirement of risking taking and venturing on the part of the student, the subject of learning, for without that they do not create or re-create” (Teachers 21). Winnie, as she tells her story to her daughter, studies the myth of the Kitchen God: “I was like that wife of Kitchen God. Nobody worshipped her either. He got all the excuses. He got all the credit. She was forgotten” (322). Winnie begins to critically analyze the patriarchal structure of the myth by understanding that the myth offers “excuses” for a man who abuses his “good wife” and forgets that he has caused her to suffer. Winnie will re-create the knowledge of the myth by transforming it.

After Winnie tells Pearl about her life before she came to America, Pearl says, “And that’s how I knew it was the right moment to tell her. . . . And then I told her about my illness” (514). Pearl’s moment of disclosure is promoted by her new knowledge; she decides to respond in kind to her mother’s decision. As Freire suggests, in a disclosive and dialogic epistemology the process of knowledge production is social, open-ended, and unfolding (Teachers 47). Nonrepresentational acts of knowing are processual events that lead to further disclosures. Yet, the process goes further and deeper than just the intersubjective unfolding of knowledge. It ruptures the cultural and social limit-situations, opening the possibilities for re-creating knowledge—in this particular case, the myth of the Kitchen God and his “good” wife. Winnie’s re-creation of the myth provides an excellent example of how kairotic moments release a transvaluation of values. After she learns about Pearl’s illness, Winnie “was
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the Furies unbound” (514). She throws herself into finding a cure; she goes to traditional Chinese doctors, herbalists, who offer nonwestern alternatives. And when the nonwestern medicine is not available in the United States, she decides to go to China to find “rare things you cannot buy here” (522). Winnie reacts to her daughter’s illness exactly as Pearl feared she would. However, at the beginning of the novel Pearl recoils at the thought of her mother’s behavior while, at the end, after the new understanding she now has of her mother, she interprets her mother’s behavior in a radically new way. Winnie “was tearing [Pearl’s pain] away—my protective shell, my anger, my deepest fears, my despair. She was putting all of this into her own heart, so that I could finally see what was left. Hope” (515).

Winnie decides that the God of Luck that is inside of the altar she has inherited from Grand Auntie Du, the Kitchen God, must be removed and replaced with a goddess who will be more reflective of the hope of women: her granddaughter, daughter, and herself. She says, “Then I saw that picture of the Kitchen God, watching me, smiling, so happy to see me unhappy. I took his picture out of the frame... ‘You go to hell down below’” (529). In the same moment as Winnie utters these words, a smoke detector goes off. At first, the sound terrifies Winnie because she thinks that it is a “sign” that her disrespect of the patriarchal tradition has angered the spirits. Then she reinterprets the “sign” in a new non-patriarchal way: “This was the Kitchen God’s wife, shouting, Yes! Yes! Yes!” (529). Winnie’s reinterprets the “sign” so that it signifies the joy of the Kitchen God’s wife over her divorce from the Kitchen God and the hope that he has been divested of his power over women’s fate. But the question remains who will replace him in Pearl’s altar? Winnie decides that she does not want to replace him with his wife, Guo, because she will become “Mrs. Kitchen God.” She must find a “goddess that nobody knows. Maybe she does not exist yet” (530). Winnie’s moment of decision leads her to moments of authentic critical cognition. She critically analyzes the traditional cultural knowledge that she inherits, and after her kairotic moment she projects a new decision to transvalue her tradition in a way that may not “exist yet.”

Winnie demonstrates the recursive process of hermeneutical reflection. She uses a dia-logic of question and answer to critique her cultural traditions in order to generate authentic inquiry by ungrounding the patriarchal conventions that constitute existing knowledge. Freire describes the humanizing process of inquiry—the “invention and reinvention” of our self-understanding of being-with the world—in terms of a
recursive action that is best understood as the hermeneutic circle of understanding. He says, "The circle of knowledge has but two moments, in permanent relationship with each other: the moment of the cognition of existing, already-produced, knowledge, and the moment of our own production of new knowledge. . . . [B]oth are moments of the same circle" (Hope 192). While the recursive circle of knowledge is made up of two moments, the decisive moment is the ungrounding of the already produced knowledge. The decisive moment is kairotic because it is a moment in which the *stasis* of publicness, the pressure that withholds and withdraws humanizing cultural action, cannot be an object that has a form and a content. Rather, it is a sequence of moments that leads to a re-cognition of existing knowledge. It is a recursive questioning of traditions; it is a critical inquiry into the already said. At the beginning of the novel, when Winnie uncritically passes the inherited Kitchen God's altar on to her daughter and granddaughter, cultural knowledge is a transparent discursive formation. However, at the end of the novel, after the kairotic moment when the altar is disclosed as a patriarchal structure of her limit-situation, there is the decisive moment when she reinvents the cultural meaning of the altar. Winnie is able to see the same altar in a very different way, in a way that opens up new possibilities-of-being, both for herself and for her daughter. To invent and reinvent social habits and traditions is to critically interrogate existing knowledge as it is embodied in a particular social formation of discourse. To reanimate the static traditions that are embodied within the webs of the already said, one needs the interpellant force of *kairos*. New dialogic disclosures, driven by the rupture of the kairotic moment, (re)incarnate the truth. To live or exist truly within a circle of question and answer is a processual reconstruction of tradition. The hermeneutic circle of understanding is a pattern of movement that projectively discloses ever expanding circles of education and knowledge "as processes of inquiry" (Freire, *Oppressed* 53).

Winnie uses her past lived experience to transvalue the values of the patriarchal tradition. She not only reimagines who governs the power of the altar—the god is displaced by a goddess—but she also reevaluates the cultural value of the altar, shifting it from a binary of either good or bad luck to an ontological value of hopeful futurity. Winnie goes to a religious statuary store, and she finds a statue that is a "mistake." The factory had forgotten to mark the name of the goddess on a statue. Winnie buys this unnamed statue; she paints it, writes a name on the bottom, Lady Sorrowfree, to identify it, and she gives it to Pearl, saying,
She is ready to listen. She understands English. You should tell her everything. . . . She will listen. . . . See her name: Lady Sorrowfree, happiness winning over bitterness, no regrets in this world.

Now help me light three sticks of incense. The smoke will take our wishes to heaven. Of course, it's only superstition, just for fun. But see how fast the smoke rises—oh, even faster when we laugh, lifting our hopes, higher and higher. (532)

Winnie names the new goddess after her first stillborn daughter, "Mochou, Sorrowfree, because she had never known even one sorrow" (306). Winnie combines her cultural tradition of ancestor worship with her new cultural context. She creates a goddess who speaks English, for her Chinese-American daughter. She refocuses the use of the altar from the traditional one, the dispensation of good or bad luck, to a new purpose, a goddess who listens and who allows hope to rise up. The Kitchen God's altar has been transformed from the masculine god who judges to a feminine goddess who privileges a hopeful futurity. The re-creation of the myth is what Nietzsche might call a transvaluation of values that emerges only after a critical destruction breaks open new possibilities (Will 544).

The moment of speaking and the moment of listening—or, as Freire puts it, "the moment of the cognition of existing knowledge" and "the moment of the production of new knowledge"—are the "same" qualitative modes of temporality (Hope 192). For Freire, the kairotic process of ungrounding—which provides the power to name and rename, create and recreate our worlds in dialogue with others—creates the potentiality for new disclosures of truth. Dialogue is the way that speakers "achieve significance as human beings"; dialogical relations are indispensable to cognitive action (Oppressed 69). The new dialogic relations that are established between Winnie and Pearl—between Chinese cultural traditions and American traditions—create a new bond and a new focus on hopeful futurity. As Freire observes, "Dialogue is the sealing together . . . in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study. Then, instead of transferring the knowledge statically, as a fixed possession . . . dialogue demands a dynamic approximation towards the object" (Freire and Shor 100). Winnie and Pearl create and re-create in a dynamic appropriation that began in the rupture of a kairotic moment.

The problems of intercultural communication that Winnie and Pearl faced were not "solved" in some objective and representational sense. Rather, we can see how Freire's sense of dialogic epistemology describes an open space, a joyous and abysmal ungrounding that ruptures everyday understanding. As Winnie states, "Of course, it's only superstition, just
for fun”; her goal is an opening of dialogic possibilities, for speaking and listening. As Freire states, giving or getting only answers causes a “rupture between the answer and the question.” Answers, whether or not they contain truth that are independent from “the question that triggers it,” do not open one to the path of inquiry. Cognition starts as a disposition toward inquiry that leads to the transvaluation of values. The possibility of disclosing new truths is a mode of hopeful inquiry that is articulated in incarnate discourse. As we saw in Plato, acts of knowing entail both kairotic moments of listening and speaking. In dialogue, acts of knowing indicate “a state of being,” not an epistemological category: “Knowledge has historicity. It never is, it always is in the process of being” (Freire, Heart 31).

Once knowledge occurs, its being shifts from an incarnate processual act of cognition to an object that is embodied and thrown into the social world; it becomes embodied and implicated within the anonymous web of knowledge that forms the background into which truth withdraws. There is a continual and concomitant conflict at the heart of truth’s disclosure. It is an ontological oscillation between an authentic understanding of incarnate discourse and an inauthentic everyday understanding of embodied discourse. Contrary to the Marxian notion of false consciousness, the transformation to embodiedness is not meant to devalue its meaning as merely “false”; rather, it shifts the ontological status of the everyday to a commemorative one. It is a memorial to the being of a previous event of disclosure. Old knowledge has a commemorative function; it memorializes the work of previous inquiry that, if reanimated by dialogic inquiry through questioning, is (re)incarnated in a current process of inquiry. This “constant succession” of new knowledge only occurs in the event of being: in the ec-stasis from old knowledge, from the embodied discourse of the traditions of everyday understanding to an incarnated discourse in the articulation of projectively disclosive inquiry.

Freire’s phenomenological interpretation of kairotic rhetoric is the opposite of the Pythagorean interpretation of imagined ontological harmony. Such a moment of imagined harmony, when transferred to the social world, is a constraint on one’s ability to reimagine social and existential limit-situations. For Freire, a kairotic moment is a pivotal moment of conflict when truth is disclosed about the limits of the existential situation and decisions are made that re-create the situation. On the one hand, kairos is the opening toward new understandings, the disclosure of new truths; on the other hand, it is, as Freire maintains, a
phenomenological description of “hope, as an ontological need” (Hope 9). The kairotic moment shatters the pulling self-seclusion of public embodied discourse in order to release Dasein (human being) toward the call to be itself; however, as Freire states, “hope is necessary, but it is not enough” (Hope 8). The power that is released in the kairotic moment must be followed by the decision to transvalue one’s values. In this way, the kairotic moment is an abysmal one, a moment when one ventures forth into the open (and, for many, the fearful) region that ungrounds previous knowledge. Yet, the ungrounding is a freedom that grounds the ontological need to hope.

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Notes

1. On the disclosive nature of limit-situations, see Petruzzi, “Between.”

2. I use stasis here in the sense suggested by John Gage: as an invention technique that in “its most frequent applications . . . was reduced to a technical formula for coming up with commonplaces” (158). The idea of commonplaces, as everyday knowledge that circulates in a social context, is the kind of anonymous background of public interpretations from which one “emerses” in the ec-stasis of kairos (see below).

3. Everyday understanding is a ground that provides a transparent structure of self-seclusion within which Dasein is submerged: “The ‘world’ belongs to everyday trade and traffic as the soil from which they grow and the stage where they are displayed. In public being-with-one-another the others are encountered in the activities in which ‘one’ ‘swims-along’ with it ‘oneself’” (Heidegger, Being 354). Dasein “swims-along” with others in inherited and limiting situations that form the “soil” from which Dasein is “displayed.” The limit-situation always contains the possibility of an ec-stasis, of standing out from the situation in a yet-to-be-chosen futurity. In the kairotic moment, Dasein’s submersion in what Heidegger calls the “They-self” (das Man) becomes visible; in the kairotic moment, it is possible for Dasein to emerse in an ecstatic moment, as an authentic-self from the They-self. Kairos is the shattering force that allows a “world” its historicity, that allows a “world” to be disclosed as concealment, from which Dasein emerses in an ecstatic moment. Kairos allows the ec-stasis from its immersion in the “everyday”; it creates the possibility-for-being that ungrounds what Heidegger calls “the everyday trade and traffic” that is imagined to be a foundation for a secure and objective truth.

4. Kisiel suggests that Heidegger’s use of the term “Dasein” is inherently related to the rhetorical term kairos. He argues that in the final draft of Being and Time Heidegger’s interpretation of time is not a “chronology but a kairology”
(421). He goes on to say the even though the word *kairos* is “never used, the idea overtly dominates the entire Second Division” of *Being and Time* (423). Kisiel argues that Heidegger’s concept of time contains a “sense of repetition [that] always involves innovation, a re-view at a more profound, new level. The new level of repetition is what we wish now to characterize as kairology” (422).

5. Hyde offers a fine explication of the concept of the “call of conscience” (see “Call”). However, Hyde’s interpretation of rhetoric shifts from his former understanding of rhetoric as the “making-known” process of *Dasein* to a more “traditional metaphysical” definition (see “Rhetorically”). In this essay, Hyde argues that the practice of rhetoric “has a role to play in the ethical task of guiding us in a right or just manner” (383). He slips into a foundational view that suggests that there is a “correct” or “just” essence that exists prior to the kairotic moment. He also misinterprets Heidegger’s use of the word “poetry,” arguing that rhetoric in Heidegger’s argument is “but a hermeneutic handmaiden to poetry.” Heidegger is not talking about a “genre” that is opposed to rhetoric. As Hyde himself has pointed out, discourse that “makes-known” truth is poetic language; it is discourse that is materially transformed by the disclosive process of truth into commemorative work of art. Heidegger does not propose that the truth of poetry “may help us to ‘better’ our lives” (387). Rather, poetry puts us on a path of inquiry into the “who” that we are.

Wolin argues that the “category of ‘resolve’ or ‘decisiveness’ (*Entschlossenheit*)” should be considered the “gateway” to Heidegger’s political philosophy (35). It is “the ‘call of conscience’ (*Ruf des Gewissens*) that paves the way for authentic decision or *Entschlossenheit*, thereby elevating *Dasein* above the falleness of the They” (40).

6. The distinction I am making between “pure” and “ecstatic” follows in a general way the one that Nietzsche makes between “passive” and “active” nihilism (*Will* 17). Whereas pure or passive nihilism “posit[s] a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events, and a soul that . . . wallow[s] in the idea of some supreme form of domination and administration,” ecstatic or active nihilism is an increase in being because “something is to be achieved through the process—and now one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*” (*Will* 12). Ecstatic nihilism is not “disappointed” that there is no telos, no universalized end point for being or that there is no foundational system that dominates and administers the life-world.

7. “Neo-sophists” such as Sheard argue that from “the ancient sophists Gorgias and Protagoras” to modern sophists such as, according to Sheard, Burke, *kairos* reveals the “relationship between discourse and reality in relativistic, or situational” terms (291). Sheard argues that because *kairos* constitutes the “ground” of human knowledge, “it is *kairos* which, grounded in the traditions and institutions of culture, makes communicative exchange possible and productive” (306). Even though, for Sheard, Burke’s philosophy of rhetoric is grounded and secured as a correct picture of reality, the validation of his view
of rhetoric comes from the definition that he invents for language. That is, because his rhetoric is based on the modernist search for foundations, Burke must develop a system for overcoming the temporal “relativistic, or situational” contingencies, that separate “us from the natural world and one another” (307). Ironically, Burke asserts that temporality is an event structure that is based on the “dramatic” moment; yet, at the same time, he “grounds” the contingent in what Sheard calls an “ultimate reality ... his definition of language as ‘symbolic action’” (307). That is, he must “scientifically” ground his theory of drama in a schematic that has a dualist structure of time. On the one hand, there is a universal structure of knowledge that is a priori, atemporal, and exists outside of the particular relative situation; on the other hand, there is a contingent reality that appears to be a completely open-ended process. Only the correct application of the dramatistic categories reveals the stable, rational underlying structure of reality.

8. Baumlín notes that modern critiques of epistemology often begin with Pre-Socratic rhetoric: “Samuel Ijsseling ... reminds us that part of the epistemological foundation” of modern rhetoric is “the phenomenological theory of Martin Heidegger [that] is inspired by Pre-Socratic philosophy and rhetoric” (179). Baumlín notes that kairos is at the center of “classically-based epistemology” (181). However, although Baumlín and Ijsseling are apt in their appraisal, the reality is that Heidegger’s critique of modernism, as a type of foundationalism that is based upon a representationalist view of truth, has not had much impact on current-traditional rhetoric.

9. Aristotle states that there are two kinds of knowledge: Practical knowledge (phronesis) is “concerned with things that can be other than they are,” while scientific knowledge is concerned with things that can not be other that they are, things are “eternal” and unchanging (Ethics 154, 150). Practical knowledge and rhetoric are both concerned with the same constellation of human comportment: understanding contingency, making choices that are ethical (aimed at attaining the good), and understanding how the realm of decisive action ends in the master science, politics. There is a gap between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge, or theory and practice; however, in Aristotle’s description, both are under the rule of rationality, both are scientific and ultimately reduced to “correct” propositions that reflect the accurate states of things.

10. We must remember that when Socrates is asked his opinion of the truth of the myth of Boreas and Orithyia, he responds, “I should be quite in fashion if I disbelieved it, as the men of science do” (229b–30b). Socrates opposes the rationalist scientific account as “clever” but “crude.” The Delphic inscription, “know thyself” points to lived experience as the proper measure of the truth.

11. The portion of this essay on Plato’s Phaedrus was revised from a paper presented at the World Phenomenology Institute’s Phenomenology and Literature Conference, held at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, MA in May of
2000. I would like to thank Tom Fox, an anonymous reader, and my colleague Ross Wolin for their helpful comments on the first draft of this essay.

12. Plato raises this point in the way that Socrates concomitantly knows and not-knows. For an extended analysis of how the concomitance of knowing and not-knowing is connected with aletheia, or truth, in Plato's rhetoric, see Petruzzi, "Effects" 371–74.

13. Nietzsche taught ancient rhetoric, and some of his course notes are published. In his notes, he makes no direct reference to kairos. However, in "On Truth" Nietzsche develops an important point regarding language and rhetoric. In his lecture course, he suggests that all language is inherently deceptive: "all words are tropes in themselves . . . language never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent" (23). The thesis of the essay is that the "dissimulation" of language reaches its peak in forms of "delusionary consciousness" and "conventions of concealment" (247). The essay concludes that "in moral terms, the obligation to lie according to an established convention, [means that] to lie collectively in a style that is mandatory for everyone" (250). Nietzsche's view of language and rhetoric supports both the sophist view of language and Heidegger's ontological description of Dasein as submerged in anterior and transparent language. The liberated intellect emerges only through the kairotic and ecstatic moment of "smashing" the concealments and putting the pieces "together again" (255). In the hermeneutic tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger, deconstruction always implies reconstruction.

14. Even though practical knowledge of good deliberation also is clearly based upon "correctness of deliberation," Aristotle lists the several senses of correctness: "correctness in assessing what is beneficial, correctness in assessing the goal, the manner and the time" (Ethics 162, 163). The correct assessment of "the time," or moment, is clearly shown in this passage as an epistemological method.

15. I am arguing that Plato's dialogic rhetoric is also, like Freire's concept within the axis of phenomenological hermeneutics. For a more completely developed argument on this thesis and on the ways that the recollection process in Plato is phenomenological, see Petruzzi (1996).

16. Vattimo articulates the way that tradition acts as an "unfounding horizon within which single truths . . . come to be 'founded'" (26). Truth does not emerge in shared conventions by "an organic community" nor is it relativistic. Rather, "the critical function of truth is enhanced here, in the form of a leap into the logoi, an ever renewed passage 'from here to there,' to use the Platonic expression" (27). Hermeneutic truth is recursive, "forever reinterrogated regarding its conditions, forever drawn back into the horizon of the opening that constitutes its permanent unfounding" (27).

17. We should note that Kinneavy "seriously disagree[s]" with some of Tillich's conclusions. I too seriously disagree with aspects of Tillich's interpretation of kairos, in particular his eschatological notion that kairos is a salvific
form of temporality ("Kingdom" 369ff). However, it is important to note that Tillich does not have a representationalist view of God. For Tillich, "traditional theism converts God into an object" (Barrett 623). But Tillich and Fromm both interpret history from a Marxian and eschatological point of view. Fromm states: "Marx's philosophy constitutes a spiritual existentialism in secular language. . . . Marx's aim, socialism, . . . is essentially prophetic Messianism in the language of the nineteenth century" (5). So, although God is not an object that can be represented, or an object of epistemology, both Tillich and Fromm see history as an alienation from God that can be overcome. Their Edenic impulse, which is their hopeful claim that liberatory action will yield a utopian society, is never fully accepted by Freire. Rather than imagining a realizable utopia in which "freedom" exists as an objective state, Freire argues that freedom, like God, can not be objectified. As he states, "Hope is an ontological need" (Hope 8); while, liberation is a processual disclosure that is "born in the labor which brings into the world" a "new being" who is "in the process of achieving freedom" (Oppressed 31). Freedom, for Freire, is always in progress and never fully attainable, as Marx, Tillich, and Fromm seem to believe. Freire, in this sense, is not "just" an existentialist, but an existential phenomenologist.

18. As in Marx's "übergreifendes Moment" [an overriding moment] when alienation is superseded by "social practice" (Mészáros 114). Benjamin develops a critique of time as a "progression through a homogeneous, empty time" (261). "Now time" reconfigures the "homogeneous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method, the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled" (263). The "now time" reconfigures by "shock"; yet, the "blasted" object becomes preserved and its alienating homogeneity is overcome and canceled (262). See Vattimo's "Art" for a comparison of Benjamin's concept of "shock" as the shattering of tradition and Heidegger's concept of Stoss as the "blow" that challenges an observer of a work of art.

19. Freire's work depends on kairotic moments, which Nietzsche calls "ecstatic nihilism." A hermeneutic retrieval of kairos from representationalism should lead us to a new understanding of ecstatic nihilism, which Nietzsche introduces in his outline for the "Eternal Recurrence"; the concept explains the transformative power of ecstatic nihilism to "make way for a new order of life" (Will 544). He proposes a joyous new order of living that thrives on a groundless ground of hope and possibility; Nietzsche proposes that the groundlessness or homelessness of living in uncertainty rather than certainty is essential to the creation of a "continually creative" futurity (Will 545). Nietzsche argues that without the "hammer" of ecstatic nihilism to "break open" the encrusted everyday public interpretations "the revaluation of all values" could not occur.

20. Being and Time presents the most important and succinct position on the interanimation of understanding and interpretation. It is worth quoting at some length:
As understanding, Da-sein projects its being upon possibilities. This being toward possibilities that understands is itself a potentiality for being because of the way these disclosed possibilities come back to Da-sein. . . . We shall call the development of understanding interpretation. In interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood in an understanding way. . . . Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is . . . the development of possibilities projected in understanding. (139)

21. See Petruzzi “Hermeneutic” for a discussion of the nonrepresentationalist nature of epistemology in Dewey and Freire.

Works Cited


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