Charles Bazerman's response

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So, is *Textual Dynamics* revolutionary? No, it is not insofar as it avoids the rhetorical implications of discourse. If anything it works to sustain the status quo. Managers will continue to argue as managers, engineers as engineers, sociologists as sociologists, professional philosophers as professional philosophers, psychiatrists as psychiatrists and on and on. Methodologies become identified with epistemologies and multiplying epistemologies become an excuse for a critically sanctioned, technocratic Babbittry—we only know what we know, and that's good enough for us. *Textual Dynamics* implies that our only choice is to join these discourses or not, never to challenge them. We can be socialized by them, but we can not politicize them. I find such acceptance of discourse paradoxical but not surprising. After all, Donald McCloskey, one of the series editors, once remarked the following about the rhetoric of economics: "One thing is clear, the absorption of rhetorical thinking in economics will not precipitate any revolution in the substance of economics" (174). Perhaps it is not so difficult to have a revolution without changing anything at all—academics do it all the time.

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Charles Bazerman's Response

Reflective Rhetorical Action, not Revolution

Critique, challenge, and change in professional discourse we all agree are important, vitally important. Insularity, stultification, coercion, and exclusivity of professional discourse we all agree are dangers. Professional responsibility, professional accountability, public access, and public participation we all agree are desirable ends. Such concerns provide great challenges for contemporary rhetoricians and contemporary society, embedded as we are in a culture of professionalism and facing the first consequences of the information age. It is not difficult to understand and sympathize with Professor Sebberson's anxiety.

But what is the best way to address these concerns? Is it to deny the social forces around us as well as the structures of cooperation and knowledge, however unsatisfactory, that maintain billions of people on this planet, although many live under the most distressing conditions? Or is it to confront directly the social world we have made together to see how it works and how it doesn't? Is the way to relieve the pain of poverty and crime in our cities to deny economics, sociology, psychology, medicine, and politics in the name of the critical voice? Or is it to understand how we can bring those professional knowledges together with public desire to provide a new configuration for wise public action? To see the social as irremediably tainted, as only fit to be the object of critique, leaves us little choice but to leave the polis and rail from outside the walls, as either god or beast, as Aristotle reminds us. I think it wiser to accept our deeply social nature and recognize that what individuality we have emerges from our participation with those around us, that we construct individuality and individual action upon complex

social fields If Professor Sebberson doubts that, let me ask him through which activities, interactions, discussions, educational opportunities, and professional forums he has developed the critical practice he exercises in his review and desires more widely spread throughout society? Where does he publish his critique and who reads it? And by what means would he have critical practice disseminated? If he were to consider these social questions and act upon what he has learned, he might do more to advance reflective public choice than by attempting to stigmatize research into the communicative workings of the world that exists in front of us, whether we like it or not.

Before I get to the serious substance of my response to Professor Sebberson's review, I want to make some framing comments because Sebberson's critique of *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* is entirely based on a characterization of the studies in the book, and not on any specific critique of the theory, method, findings, or conclusions of any of the contributions to the volume. Rather he objects to the stance that the studies take.

First he creates a monolithic voice from the various essays because they all use a vocabulary of social categories. I am afraid deploying a social vocabulary is a necessary concomitant to studying social processes. Within a general concern for social issues as realized through textual action, the twenty-one contributing authors represent a range of approaches, interests, positions, and methods. The following comments represent only my perspective as co-editor and one of the authors. My co-editor and other authors I assume each would have their own positions, although I have not discussed the review or my response with them.

Second, Professor Sebberson invokes a few related dichotomies, which he incorrectly implies come from the volume. From the beginning he frames his discussion in terms of revolution and its opposite (variously "revolution without changing anything" and Kuhn's normal science). He identifies *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* as part of a revolutionary "rhetorical turn to overthrow modernist doctrine" and then faults the book for not being truly revolutionary. Personally, I find the modernist/post-modernist debate as an interesting discussion among a limited group of theorists each of whom has some wisdom and has had some influence on the self-characterization and behavior of contemporaries, but that debate is not nearly as consequential as the underlying questions about the kind of social, symbolic, and material worlds we live in. More specifically, I have searched the introduction for any language that might have given Professor Sebberson the impression that the co-editors positioned the volume in a revolutionary way.   The most inflammatory language I could find was that the project of the book "rejects some assumptions common in modern criticism"—particularly those assumptions that remove text from its social location. I leave it to the reader to compare that positioning of our text to Sebberson's characterization of it. In a follow-up positioning move Sebberson identifies the book as the normal science after this imputed revolution. I will leave aside the much discussed issue of whether Kuhn's radical dichotomy is either descriptively precise or prescriptively useful as a characterization of the process of knowledge production in the natural sciences, let alone in the social sciences and humanities; I will also leave aside an analysis of how the category *normal science*, which for Kuhn was a descriptive term for the greater part of scientific activity, has been demonized as hegemonic banality by later comers. But even if Kuhn's distinction were applicable here, the diversity of philosophic positions, departments of employment, research methodologies, sites of research and membership in professional societies, and journals for the

placement of the other work of the authors suggest that whatever is represented in the volume hardly has reached the status of a normal science. I am pleased, however, that despite this diversity Sebberson finds an intellectual coherence in the volume—I take that as a compliment to the dialogue that went into the creation of the volume.

The other dichotomy that Sebberson deploys for his critique is between the word *dynamics* as he would use it and as used by my co-editor and myself. The title and introduction of *Textual Dynamics of the Professions* use the word *dynamics* to indicate that texts are active constituents in professional formation and practice, that texts do not lie still upon the table but rather are consequential and moving actors in the drama of the unfolding of professional ways of life. Sebberson, however, uses the word to foreground the *dynamus* that drives individual textual productions, creates novelty, fosters social change, or motivates the development of a critical practice. That *dynamus* is also an important and valuable concern, although not the foregrounded issue in this volume. Nonetheless, as I will document later in this response, many of the articles provide substantial material and insight into originality and critical practice.

Unfortunately, Professor Sebberson works himself into such a passion by the end of his essay that he does not notice how much his critique is based on material provided by the substantive analyses of the articles themselves. He seems to want to kill the messenger by repeating parts of the message. I suppose the only appropriate response is to repeat some other parts of the message which he seems to have missed.

This brings us to the substance of Sebberson's concern: how we can escape the oppressions of society. This is indeed one of the problems that concerned the political radical, educational reformer and scientist Joseph Priestley, whose discursive project I describe as the subject of my contribution to the volume: "How Natural Philosophers can Cooperate." Priestley, as part of his larger project of creating a more egalitarian, participatory social and political order on earth, an order that would call upon the wisdom and experience of each individual and draw each into communal relations with each other, wanted to reform and foster communities of empirical research. He rejected the hierarchical, theory-dominated Newtonian model of scientific inquiry and communication. Among his objections to Newtonian communication of science were that it mystified the process by which one made discoveries and that it elevated the authority of experts in ways that made their work difficult to emulate or criticize. He proposed experiments and findings be communicated in more modest ways that reflected the gradual development of thought and experience, including all the wrong turns and unresolved issues. He also argued that theories, even successful theories, not be fetishized as eternal truth, but only be seen as organizing our current experience and providing heuristic guidance for new investigations. Another of his concerns was the disputatious philosophic atmosphere that granted little mutual respect for the learning, work, or experience of opposing disputants. He saw, indeed, the only hope for the advance of knowledge to be in cooperative expansion of our experience to incorporate all that others had learned. In order to foster democratic access to knowledge he helped develop modern citation and review of the literature practices, that make visible the communal participation of many individuals in the production of scientific knowledge. The case of Priestley provides a strong example of how a social analysis of the language of knowledge production and dissemination can give the

individual critical tools to introduce new practices that reform professional endeavors.

In a contemporary example, Lucille McCarthy's study "A Psychiatrist using DSM III" reveals how the American Psychiatric Association's taxonomy of disorders influences the daily communicative practice of psychiatrists and the treatment of their patients. Her analysis, in revealing the tremendous social power gathered in the creation of a disciplinary charter text, sets the ground for evaluating the process by which such powerful texts are created and which they operate as organizers of disciplinary practice—a work that she has continued. By making visible the processes of creation and use of centralized taxonomies that influence the daily care of millions of patients, McCarthy provides an opening for social accountability and public participation in matters of great importance.

The Carl Herndl et al. account of disasters such as Three Mile Island, which Sebberson finds deplorable, does indeed reveal a deplorable state of affairs, but a state of affairs that cannot be addressed until it is recognized—only then might we be able to foster mediating discourses that can overcome professional insularity. Gail Stygall's study of jury instructions and James Paradis' study of operator's manuals provide suggestive forays into the worlds of mediating discourses that bring the daily life world and professional practices together. Such mediating discourses are filled with distractions, booby-traps, and error, but the more we understand them the better we can make them work. Until we understand how an operator's manual mediates between technical practices of machine-makers and everyday work practices of machine-users, we do not know how to write manuals that avoid unnecessary death. Nor until we have legally and procedurally applicable criteria for such manuals can we hold manufacturers consistently accountable for providing good manuals.

To move from life and death of the body to life and death of the spirit, the studies of academic socialization in the second part of the volume raise precisely the gains and 'losses' in learning to participate in disciplinary discourse. Geisler's observations about how students and professional philosophers frame philosophic problems point not only to how to become a professional philosopher, but also make us aware of the uses non-professionals can put philosophy to. Berkenkotter et al.'s discussion of the developing writing practices of a graduate student highlights precisely the tension between what the student brings with him and the new practices he is introduced to in the program. The tension is never resolved, but neither does the student give up his former life under the weight of a new authoritative community; rather he struggles to give voice to his prior perceptions and concerns within a new language. It is the tension which leads to the framing of novel problems and investigations, new ways of writing, and new things to write.

While disciplines can be temporarily static and oppressive, they must always contend with the multiplicity of experiences and concerns that people keep bringing to them as well as the challenge from neighboring professional discourses—this is one moral of James Zappen's discussion of changing thought about the relationship of scientific, industrial and political rhetoric at the turn of the twentieth century. Recognizing those changes and the tensions emboldens us to participate in them rather than giving in to what we see as an unsatisfactory dominant discourse.

Reflection and reflective action first require looking. The better the looking, the better the reflection and the better the action. Certainly the method of looking influences the kind of reflection and action, and sometimes certain methods of

investigation and representation dominate and ossify, carrying invisible epistemologies that constrain our wisdom, as Sebberson reminds us. But such observations are themselves only made visible to us by careful inspection of the unfolding of discourses within their institutional settings, the kind of investigation undertaken in this volume, and the kind of investigation I and others have undertaken elsewhere. Indeed, Sebberson's comments on methodology reminded me of my own study of the emergence of the official style of the American Psychological Association, institutionalized in their highly influential style manual. We need to look with a cool eye on such things. We need not panic that in admitting we live in a highly organized set of social arrangements we acquiesce to oppression. The oppression is more likely to come when we are moved by forces we do not even see, let alone understand. Although it may be painful, it rarely hurts to look at where you are at.

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