CONSTRUCTING EXPERIENCE

CHARLES BAZERMAN

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Introduction II: Sketches Toward a Rhetorical Theory of Literacy

This is an alternate introduction from an alternate standpoint, a standpoint somewhere higher up into the clouds. The earlier autobiographical introduction described the following heterogeneous essays cohering through a growing set of concerns and responses that feed on each other, much as an obsessive mental illness inexorably constructs a grand, hermetic universe. These essays, however, are perhaps saved from hallucination by a constant interaction with experience—my own experience, the experience of the students I observe and teach, the experience of the writers and readers who are the subjects of my research, the experience of the fellow teachers and researchers I talk with. While each occasion, each situation, calls forth different comments from me, I draw upon a growing interrelated set of representations about what literacy is, how people engage in literate practices, and how literate activity is a major means of making society and ourselves. This second introduction attempts to sketch out the emerging elements of that set of representations; that is, I here venture into stating a theory.

Theoretical statements generally attempt to remove themselves from the particulars of the occasion of their utterance and the particulars of any problem they are addressing because theories aim to be generally available resources, easily transported from one occasion to another, one problem to another. But when they enter into their own discursive space of theory talk, theoretical statements can lose contact with their localized origins and locales of application; theoretical talk can become a series of abstract accounts and critiques seeking their own textualized perfections rather than active resources for living. My use of theory here has only two excuses, which I hope defend against the uncontained obsessional disease of theory.

First, theory, placed at this point in this volume, serves as an explanation of the more grounded, or down-to-earth, statements gathered in this book and my other publications. By showing how these are part

of a related story, I hope to highlight more of what is in each of them and what they add up to together. In turn, theory is held accountable to the specifics of each of the more down-to-earth statements, both in overt claims and in implicit function within their occasions. The plausibility of the theory depends on the plausibility of its ties to more immediate daily experience.

Second, I am articulating the theory as a potential continuing resource for practical activity for myself and others. The theory will live, will prove interesting, only insofar as it remains useful for our understanding and daily practice of literacy. Moreover, if it does prove recurrently useful for myself and others, it will be elaborated and modified by the specifics of the occasions in which it is applied. Of course, insofar as one approaches situations with a theory in mind and uses that theory to interpret events and frame one's actions, that theory recursively structures those experiences, so the theory becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nonetheless, insofar as the theoretically induced structure seems to coordinate with the unfolding of events and with the participation of others, so that the theory seems to produce successful practical consequences consistent with the structures generated by the theory, the theory will live robustly in the world and will provide the basis for further forays into the life-world. If, however, the theory leads one to unsuccessful actions, actions that do not coordinate with those of others, actions that attempt to structure events in a way that cannot be maintained within the social and material context, then the theory-induced structure will collapse, and the theory will fade into the immaterial world of failed ideas.

In this chapter and book, I present a dynamic, action-oriented view of language that embeds meaning within local circumstances and local uses. Nonetheless, we do endow representations with meaning and carry around those meanings and representations with us from one circumstance to another, even though the meanings and representations may be transformed when used at a new site. The theories we carry around in the organization of our nervous system are realized in practices that determine exactly what happens as we make our way through the day and thus what kind of days we live. So it is of some importance which theories we adopt, either unreflectively by ad hoc practices and habits that get us through the day or through a more considered examination of our experience and conceptual resources. If we find our unreflective practices realize theories and plans that are at odds with our conscious reflections and desires, it is worth inquiring into the disjunctions. If the days we live together are not to our satisfac-

tion, individually or together, it is worth inquiring into how we make our days with each other and how we might make them differently. But the inquiry will be fruitless unless we constantly consider the relationship between the theories and the concrete practices through which our daily lives are made, including the practices of sharing theories with each other and of referring to personally held theories in organizing daily activities.

Because writing is just one of the ways we communicate and because it bears resemblances to and continuities with other communicative processes, the following sketches will at times talk of all communication and at other times focus in on writing specifically. I focus on writing and literacy because that is what I have thought hardest and longest about, but I have found no easy and principled way to consider it apart from general communicative practices. Where a point is most clearly made by referring to speaking or any other communicative practice, I will make it that way; where the point is most easily made about writing specifically, I will make the point that way. And I will always attempt to return to writing and literacy.

Similarly, I play fast and loose with the term *rhetoric,* which has a long and continuous tradition of considering the spoken arts. The term *rhetoric* was applied only after the classical period to the written arts, which have since then been considered only sporadically part of rhetoric's purview. Moreover, the arts of writing have frequently been considered from perspectives that consciously distinguish themselves from the rhetorical tradition. Nonetheless, I will adopt the term *rhetoric* to apply to the study of all the strategic uses of language, in whatever form, and I will then opportunistically hold attention on the strategic uses of written language wherever possible.

Because we act and make meaning from various positions, I currently find it most useful to frame these theoretical sketches on four different levels. This multileveled representation emphasizes how literate and more general communicative interchange looks different from different vantage points, shaped by the different concerns and perspectives. Nonetheless, seeing these four accounts side by side will suggest both how they are parallel and consistent and how they highlight different aspects of literate processes. The first is of the way writing looks to a person engaged in the throes of writing. The second vantage point is that of the intimate observer, such as when we look closely on one friend, one student, or one research subject caught within a communicative literate situation. The third vantage point moves outward to the middle-range observer of systems of communication, such as the

teacher in the role of curriculum designer or the manager of a large organization considering the flow of internal and external communications. The fourth and last perspective is that of the distant observer, such as the general theorist, looking down from some mountaintop to understand how humans use literacy to create a social life that binds one person to another.

Each of these levels has a practical use, and each sheds light on the other. The position most familiar to all of us is the first, for we each have struggled with the act of writing. But in understanding what we are doing as writers, we may find it useful to look on ourselves from the outside to consider the communication dynamics and systems we are participating in through our act of writing. Equally, our concerns as friend, teacher, or theorist are helpfully informed by an empathetic view of what it means for the individual to read and write.

Because the following are sketches only, I draw them with an unsupported and unelaborated confidence. Although I qualify statements for precision, I do not hedge. Nor do I connect the bold claims to specific studies or experiences or theoretical readings that prompted them and provide reasons for believing them. Nor do I make visible the extensive intertextual web upon which these ideas are built. Elsewhere in this volume and in my other writings I cite and discuss materials from the humanities and social sciences that I have relied on, but making those associations would complicate an already too-complicated series of sketches. Here I just want to draw the picture as simply and coherently as I can, so as to make visible what kind of picture it is. Insofar as these sketches turn out to be of interest, I hope to elaborate them in later publications, situating them within research, experience and theory as well as exploring their fuller possibilities.

By drawing the sketches in bold and simple lines at this point, I hope to encourage the kind of criticism and discussion that will help us think through what kinds of theories are most useful to understand writing and what elements ought to be drawn into the synthesis of a theory. That is, by projecting some possible kinds of theory, I probe if these are the kinds of things we would find useful, and if not, why not.

The Writer's Point of View: A Phenomenology of Rhetoric

Whenever we notice ourselves as writers, we find ourselves on a spot, a spot that seems to demand of us that we write. Sometimes the spot is small, local, and temporary. We perceive that circumstances have conspired to force us into writing, whether we are happy with

identifying ourselves as writers or not. For example, a teacher assigns a paper that we must write to pass the course, or our boss expects a report on her desk. Sometimes we take on writing as a more positive action, to move off our spot: a letter will advance a friendship or will gain a refund from a company that has failed to deliver on its services. Sometimes the spot is a place we would like to create for ourselves, as when we write to while away the afternoon, or to emulate an identity we admire or to generate some income.

How we perceive the spot will influence what it is we attempt to write: how we perceive the forces bringing us to this point, what we hope will result from our having written, what we think of those people who will read our text and will have to respond in certain ways for our goals to be met, what resources we can identify as available for our use, and what we think of our own skills and social powers so as to attempt various solutions of different ambition. That is, how we perceive and define our rhetorical situation provides the starting point for our rhetorical action, for our framing of goals, for our construction of a text, for our writing.

However, as we enter into the writing situation more fully and start to think about what we will write, resources we were not aware of come into play. We may respond to an unarticulated sense of the situation, or we may fall into habitual strategies, tactics, and patterns of organization and phrasing. Moreover, personal motives and imaginations may only be activated or come into focus in the course of struggling with the text. The struggle with the text occurs over a period of time in a process that occurs both in our heads and on the paper or computer screen, comprised potentially of both explicitly recognized and dimly perceived activities. We may collect many notes and produce many drafts that we revise in a variety of ways in a varying rhythm and timing, or we may produce all in a single rapid pass. In any instance, the process by which we struggle from early impulses to the completion of a text may be influenced by many variables: education, habit, personality, task, mood and anxieties, perceived stakes in the task, situational constraints such as time and availability of different transcription devices, intertextual resources available or required by the task, current socially available patterns of work, conscious planning, unforeseen difficulties in the process of writing, and others.

The symbolic forms out of which we shape the text (everything from alphabet and vocabulary through genres, tropes, and argumentative appeals) are made available to us out of our history of language use with others. This personal interactional history introduces us to the

forms of language and the occasions on which they are appropriately used and also helps us predict how others will understand our language uses on various occasions. Language forms are social typifications on which we rely to shape our meanings into socially transmittable forms. In using the common language, we realize our thoughts in shared terms. As we strive toward meanings requiring the less commonly used forms or unusual configurations of forms, we put greater strains upon the readers in recognizing and interpreting the unusual.

Within perceived forums of communication, we also become aware that our utterances will be held accountable to various elements and procedures considered relevant by people participating in that forum. Thus, within certain legal forums, our comments, to be effective, need to be framed within an awareness of relevant laws and precedents as well as legally constituted evidence. In certain religious forums, deployment of and consistency with material from sacred texts are major forms of accountability that we must maintain for both credibility and persuasiveness. In certain political forums, we must be accountable to the ethnic sentiments and diversity of the potential audiences, while in others we must be accountable to perceived economic interests; sometimes we have to appear accountable to the national or international good, and at other times we don't. In scientific specialties we must be accountable both to prior theory and results, and if we wish to advance new results, we must both give an account of the production of the results according to currently acceptable standards and must then present the results in the form and according to the standards of such accounts of data.

In perceiving our communicative situation as belonging to a particular kind, whatever typology or set of typifications we are working with, we are likely also to understand our position with our interlocutors structurally in terms of our social relationships, roles, powers and authority, obligations and allowable ranges of freedom, and the other social variables by which we define ourselves and actions in relation to others. Also, we are likely to associate certain ranges and forms of expression as socially appropriate or effective for these situations and our roles within it. Such recognitions have gone by linguistic terms like *register*, *genre*, and *decorum*. As we become sensitized to the expectations others will hold us to in such situations, if they perceive the situation as we do, we recognize the pressures either to adopt the expected forms or pay the price of violation—a price that we might consider worth the cost, depending on the circumstances, the stakes, and the possible repairs. Again, as we put a strain on expectations by violating

them, we put a greater demand on the interpretive charity of the reader and decrease the odds that the reader will reconstruct meaning in ways closely analogous to the way we hope they would. This becomes less of a difficulty if we change our goals away from closely linked intersubjectivity to the excitement of undefined mental and emotional activity by the reader, as in some forms of lyric poetry.

In making a choice between relying on the familiar and formulaic, which will have more foreseeable and simpler effect upon readers who share the formulas, and reaching beyond into the complex, multiple, and novel, which open up less-predictable reader interpretations and responses, we make a trade-off between communicative security and communicative ambition. In so choosing we evaluate the possibilities of the situation and the possibilities of our skills in the light of our goals. Goals of just getting by without troubles or difficulties in situations that are perceived to be highly ritualized and punitive to substantive innovation will lead us to seek out what will satisfy expectations through a formulaic conservative rhetoric. On the other hand, goals of asserting new kinds of thoughts, information, interests, or relationships will lead us to innovative rhetorics, extending the grounds of intersubjectivity by focused novelty at points of perceived flexibility in expectations or by strategic disruptions of discursive expectations.

As we struggle with goals, representations, and bits of formulations to build a formal text out of them, we potentially generate new and unanticipated possibilities of meanings and goals by the interaction of the parts. As we work through how two concepts, for example, can be brought together in a sentence that defines their relationship, we may wind up articulating a new idea at the intersection of the two. In bringing two characters together in a scene and setting them talking to each other, we work through what they have to say to each other and may make some surprising discoveries. In trying to explain away an inconsistency in the data, we may be forced into a new methodological or theoretical realization that recasts the primary concerns of the paper. In pursuing an explanatory metaphor arising out of the reader's world, we find a closer connection between the readers' interests and our own.

Not only do these puzzles of juxtaposition that occur in the course of writing encourage invention of new claims, they may force us back into our resources or perception of the situation as they trigger memories, refer us to texts, return us to the scene of the crime. Moreover, in the course of writing, we may seek out either consciously or spontaneously the help of others. For models, ideas, information, or prods for our own reaction, we may consult books or other texts and data

sources or artifacts prepared by others on other occasions (as when writers go to a topic-appropriate location to soak up the atmosphere). We may discuss our writing problems with a friend, share a draft with a writing circle, float an idea before the professor in a class discussion to see whether she responds favorably, enlist a collaborator. These participations of others both extend the range of resources and skills entering into the construction of the texts and anticipate the outcomes of the presentation of the text.

In integrating these heterogeneous elements, balancing the opportunities, responding to constraints, making discoveries, being excited by possibilities in progress, and solving the various puzzles that arise, we enter into a complex juggling act that absorbs all the focal attention we can muster. Thus, writers often show interest in various techniques and rituals of getting in the mood, concentration, or meditation. Managing complex cognitive processes is also aided by placing work in progress into various forms of external memory, such as notes, outlines, sketches, and drafts; this externalizing allows us to decrease the memory load, to inspect work produced so far, and to focus attention on a limited set of issues at once. The complexity of the mental processing in writing also means that much remains at the periphery, out of sight of conscious attention, but to be drawn on. Thus, writers often show interest in mental disciplines that increase access to elements of perception, memory, and problem solving that are beyond conscious attention.

In the course of entering into the located mental activity of assembling the words we think most appropriate to our situation, role, and task, we become absorbed within the role and situation much as an actor becomes absorbed in a part. We become more responsive to information, ideas, memories that are role and task relevant and less attentive to those other aspects of our cognition and experience that are parts of other roles and activities at a distance from this one. The more challenging the writing task, drawing on more of our time and mental energy, the more this role-playing mode of being overtakes our concerns. This temporary reforming oneself into the role calls forth all the habits and practices we have germane to its pursuit and increases the opportunity for spontaneous invention of novel, role-appropriate behavior. While we write a sociology paper, we start thinking and feeling and reacting like a sociologist, and our relationship with the sociology professor becomes more intense and complicated, even if reflected only in heightened anxiety and a greater difficulty in formulating answers to questions.

In this complex interactive process, text emerges. That text itself

becomes an element in the process as something to be inspected and used, as a framework for continuing action. Although intermediate formulations may be abandoned before the final draft is completed, each intermediate formulation is a significant action on the road to reaching the final formulation and as such has some influence on the final text, even if only as a failed solution that has been meticulously avoided. Again depending on many factors, we let solutions pass as good enough for the occasion, and all the solutions are wielded together, given final textual form for public appearance. In many writing situations, this final preparation incorporates feedback from others in editorial, supervisory, consultative, critical, or gatekeeping roles.

When we make our text public, that is, present it to the audience it was designed for, we may or may not receive any direct response. In either event we have to learn to live with having created the text, having asserted a social presence upon a literate field of social interaction. This entails, in part, coming to terms with ourselves for having made such an utterance. What does it mean to our thinking or commitments or beliefs to have uttered such things? In juggling all the constraints, resources, and opportunities to meet the occasion, we may have said some surprising things. Do we dissociate ourselves from the text as a lie, and how does that change our relation to our discourses? Do we reexamine prior beliefs and commitments? Do we separate this discourse from other kinds of discourse we may engage in? Do we do our best to expunge the utterance from our memory? Or do we feel forced to live by our words? Do we reconfirm the integrity of our beliefs? Do we generate new texts to reconcile inconsistencies? Do we abandon integrity as a principle?

We also have to live with social consequences of the text. How do people understand our text, and how do they then react? How has the text created a social presence that will now enter into all our future social relations with this particular audience and perhaps others as the text or reputation or consequences move from one group to another? A forged check not only sours my business dealings with the corner grocer, but may find its way to the courts, and turn into a prison record that will travel to many new and unanticipated sites of social interaction.

These are some of the things we typically become aware of as we try to understand what we are doing, consider our options, monitor our actions, try to make effective choices within social and psychological processes, and construct a textual artifact. The more we know about

our situations, the social dynamics and psychological processes, textual options and anticipatable consequences of choices, the more intelligently and effectively we can orchestrate our performances, even in the way we make accessible and integrate nonconscious, nonrational elements in both writing and reception processes.

This is all thinking like a writer. It is as well the aim of rhetorical knowledge: to enable us to act reflectively and effectively. Much of the vocabulary of classical rhetoric is precisely to help us identify these sorts of issues, to provide support for the elements of understanding situation, inventional processes, and the form of production—although classical rhetoric was framed for largely oral productions within the political and judicial institutions of Greece and Rome, within the sociocultural worlds of these ancient civilizations.

Rhetorical education is precisely to provide the students with conceptual tools and symbolic resources to make effective utterances within the institutional occasions of importance in their sociocultural worlds. At the next level, we will see how the perspective of the teacher/coach provides a somewhat different view of writing. Moreover, since the systematic occasions for utterance and the social tasks to be accomplished by utterances have changed with both changing sociocultural configurations and changing technologies of communication, rhetoric and rhetorical education need to be reexamined from more distanced sociohistorical perspectives, which here are the third and fourth levels to follow.

The Intimate Observer: A Social Psychology of Rhetoric

This is the perspective of someone looking on the individual writer from the outside—watching the writer engaged with writing in particular social settings; cataloging the skills, resources, and perceptions the writer brings to the task; surveying the writer's struggle with task and text; examining the emerging text; and assessing the text's social consequences. We might think of such an observer as a friend, coach, or teacher of the writer, able to understand sympathetically the struggle of the writer but able to remain outside the struggle so as to offer more distant reflections and cooler guidance.

The individual—having a particular history and a current set of life issues; a set of understandings about writing, society, and the specific subject at hand; and a repertoire of rhetorical perceptions, techniques, and skills—recognizes a situation as one calling for writing. This occasion may be triggered by some explicit request, demand, or invitation

by another person or organization with whom the writer perceives some relation; in such a case, the individual must recognize the rhetorical invitation and evaluate whether to respond, why, and how. Or the rhetorical opening may be uninvited, but the individual senses, more or less consciously, that in the current communicative, social configuration there is an opportunity to advance his or her concerns through writing. This recognition triggers writing-related behaviors or thoughts, whether or not the writer consciously recognizes having entered into a writing episode.

I emphasize the unconscious orientations toward writing situations because often an orientation toward action does not coalesce into an explicit writing task until well into the activity, such as when an individual's discomfort about local political conditions finally coalesces into a letter to the local newspaper. Even more, many factors lead to denial of a writer's intent to write, including the extensive social myths surrounding writing, the sometimes-painful mental work and cognitive difficulties imposed on the writer by the commitment to write, the writer's uncertainties about the ability to complete a task, and the writer's fears about the consequences of public exposure and commitment through a written statement. There may also be further anxieties local to the particular occasion, such as in a most extreme form, the uncertainty (or even all-too-great certainty) about the writer's standing in the community after championing an unpopular cause. For many reasons, the writer may not wish to face directly and unequivocally the commitment to write, to put himself or herself on the line.

Having somehow adopted a writing mood, the writer starts to construct a frame of action, which also becomes a frame of mind that defines the situation and task, and begins a search for available resources. These resources may at first be internal—such as memory, skills, and experiences—but the thought may rapidly suggest other resources beyond the self: such as the data to be generated by an experiment, the results of a library search, or the prompts for thoughts that would occur in a conversation with someone else.

This frame of action and the ensuing resources drawn on may be highly typified, familiar, and therefore unchallenging, as when the Department of Motor Vehicles mails renewal forms to college-educated experienced drivers, who have filled out many such forms already. For new drivers with only an elementary school education and little experience with computerized forms, however, such a task may require some to-them novel problem solving.

Typifications give shape to events: the writer then sees events as

this or that kind, calling for this or that kind of action, compatible with surrounding events and actions, similarly typified. Typifications may reduce the rhetorical activity to a highly structured task, presenting only limited and well-focused rhetorical problems, as when the writer of an experimental report needs to select between five and twenty articles for a preliminary review of literature and to create a coherent research narrative, setting the stage for the current research, or when the automobile insurance examiner in writing a report must select repair items and characterize damage in a way acceptable to both consumer and insurance company. Thus, rhetorical choices may be reduced to fairly focused sets of slot-fillers with well-known criteria, obvious sets of resources to determine what goes into the slot, and well-known procedures for searching out and selecting the slot-filling material. Insofar as the document recipients share congruent typifications with the writer, such writing will be accepted as adequate and appropriate to the task.

Because the final document is what is transmitted between writer and reader, typifications of situations, goals, and tasks can be crystallized in recognizable textual forms deployed in recognizable circumstances—or genres. The textual features of genres serve as well-known solutions to well-known rhetorical problems arising in well-known rhetorical situations and are recognized as such by both writer and reader. Thus, once a writer perceives that the situation calls for the production of a particular genre of text, the situation and task at hand are clarified. Then knowing the kind of text desired, the writer can use well-known procedures that will produce the necessary information and generate the appropriate text to fulfill the genre. Moreover, genres usually carry with them established choices about the organization and parts of the text, the arrangement of the material in the text, the styles appropriate to the text, and even standard phrases that might occur at predictable junctures in the text. Thus, in writing for a refund on a defective product, the most challenging part will likely be to find the original receipts, the guarantee statement, and the address of the company to complain to. The rest falls in place according to type.

Certain typifications of situations and generically appropriate texts may require more complicated and open-ended sets of tasks for the writer to fulfill in creating the text. A city-planning report may require extensive data gathering of multiple sorts, application of a variety of analytic techniques, creation of sophisticated computer-generated graphics, the development of a series of recommendations and arguments, plus a well-tuned political sensitivity to the multiple constituen-

cies likely to be impacted by the plan. Many people would have to be brought in on the process of producing such a text, and although some might have an idea of the kind of text to be produced, the final form and content may not be precisely predictable beforehand.

As well, if the writer perceives the situation as rich and complex, he or she might feel compelled to work from a synthesis of multiple typifications of the situation and then modify these in relation to the details and particular opportunities observed in the situation. Application of too narrow a set of typifications could result in a thinner report, less satisfying to audiences perceiving complexity in the situation.

The typifications of situation, intentions and goals, modes of action, and textual genres that the writer applies to the situation create a kind of habitat for the writer to inhabit both psychologically and socially. That is, typifications give writers symbolic means to make sense of things; in turn, those means of sense-making help set the stage and frame possible action. Applying familiar and unchallenging typifications to a task allows a writer to step into the roles, inhabit the appropriate social forms of response, almost without noticing. The more complexly the writer defines the task, the more the writer has to invest in fulfilling the role. At a store, a person making a small purchase while engaged in a conversation with a friend can enact the role of a paying customer by handing over a credit card and signing a receipt, barely interfering with the conversation. If, however, the purchase is large and complicated and in a store where the customer has had billing problems, the customer may have to break the conversation and inspect the bill carefully before endorsing it with a signature—thereby enacting the role of a suspicious consumer by that set of literate behaviors. A purchasing officer for a large organization will be much more fully engaged in examining catalogs, evaluating goods, corresponding with vendors, comparing bids, and in general acting like a tough-minded businessperson before writing up and signing the purchase order. And the process of requesting bids for a complex piece of equipment like a space shuttle requires a large bureaucracy of people enacting many roles and generating rooms full of paper.

The work of assembling a text may extend far beyond the forming of sentences and paragraphs around a topic and sequencing these statements to address the task at hand. Many elements may have to be integrated into the text. Depending on the genre the writer is writing in, the writer may be held accountable for integrating specific elements appropriately into the text or its production; the writer can be called to account for not including or otherwise taking into consideration

expected elements. Others of these elements may be adventitious choices of the writer.

In either case, integrating multiple elements into the text requires the writer to engage in complex relations with memory, surrounding documents, artifacts, and people. The writer must gather, select, evaluate, analyze, synthesize, and draw conclusions from materials; then the writer must also figure out which of these elements need to be made present and visible in the text, how these elements should be displayed, and how they should be functionally used within the rhetorical structure of the text. We can see, for example, a technical writer examining the terms of requests for proposals, reviewing related technical documents describing the company's prior products and capabilities, consulting materials specification charts, sending out for new tests to be done, speaking to supervisors as well as to personnel in various divisions in the company, calling the legal division to check a point about liability, having some preliminary sketches made, and on and on. All these inputs will influence the final text, but only some will be made visible and functional in the text.

In constructing the text, the writer makes visible for the readers some components that went into it, represented in generically appropriate ways and put in relation to the other visible elements. Tables, charts, descriptions, and references to other documents are more obvious modes of drawing outside artifacts into documents, but more subtle are the passing mention of a government office or piece of legislation, the name of a form, or the list of addressees. Other elements help inform tactical and strategic decisions about how the text ought to be put together but then are given no explicit place in the document. Other elements are specifically left invisible, such as the history of a company's legal troubles, which was used to hedge the implied liabilities in this document.

In addition to explicit encounters with other people and materials while writing, the writer draws on linguistic resources gained over a lifetime of interaction with others. The writer uses words, stances, ideas, moods, forms, and organizational patterns from prior interactions, so that the current text incorporates many voices encountered and responded to previously. This multivocality is harnessed to the perceived dynamics and requirements of the current situation and so takes on a new form under the new coherences of the current situation. Nonetheless, the echoes of earlier occasions may still be recognizable in the utterance and explicitly invoked through quotation or the evocation of moods and attitudes of prior communicative situations familiar

to the readers. On the other hand, the writer's social history of multivocality may be silenced under a coherent-sounding voice that seems to be speaking only for itself and only for the moment; the history can only be recovered by an assiduous linguistic archaeology.

The complex juggling that orders and relates the various elements that go into the text may be done primarily within the mind planning the writing and then interacting with the emerging text or through various preliminary external representations, such as note cards, charts, highlighted documents, or outlines. These externalizations of the information-gathering and thinking processes aid in selecting, ordering, and recasting the materials in task-relevant form.

One's abilities and resources to draw together a text in the particular ways relevant for the task at hand depend on one's history of social communicative experiences. These experiences, in addition to providing socially transmitted writing processes and socially characterized understandings of tasks, also comprise the writer's personal history of communicative challenges. In responding to a lifetime of communicative challenges, an individual develops skills and attitudes in relation to the problems framed and addressed and in relation to the perceived success of those solutions. Accidents of personal history influence how much and what kind of procedures and perceptions an individual brings to bear to any particular task. Moreover, certain individuals, through a greater variety of experiences and/or having access to particular synthetic procedures may have greater flexibility in conceiving of and acting in particular settings. Factors of history may increase the writer's expectations or demands of the situation, forcing the writer to look more deeply into the situation, seek a stronger strategy, or combine multiple considerations. Thus, when confronted with situations that appear similar to an outside observer, two individuals may construe the situations not only in different ways, but one may impose on him- or herself a more serious and creative challenge than another. Moreover, they will likely see different opportunities for how they may act upon that social field.

An individual's history of writing experiences also will influence the writer's general level of confidence and attitude toward literate communicative situations. Most simply, a history of successful writing that has repeatedly projected the writer onto new and wide-ranging communicative fields with rewarding consequences will establish confidence and courage for the writer, who in turn will find writing an attractive form of social participation. A more limited history of moderate successes on limited and well-defined literate fields that are treated

as distinct and tightly structured (as when a student writes competent but dull papers following the explicit instructions of the teacher or as when a salesclerk learns how to file forms and inventory reports correctly as well as write pleasant letters to friends about amusing anecdotes) will breed a more cautious, rule-seeking, less-ambitious attitude to new writing situations. A history of failures, humiliations, and rejections in literate encounters will create aversiveness, anxiety, and defensiveness surrounding literate encounters. These negative emotions and behaviors will only reinforce any lack of skills. Together the aversive reactions and lack of skills make future positive writing experiences less likely, so that the individual will lose the motive to write in any circumstance. Insofar as that failed writer does write, it is likely to be in a highly protected form, defended against the environment rather than actively projecting the writer onto that plane of social activity. Some individuals, because of unavoidable need to write despite repeated aversive experiences, may become highly skilled at forms of writing that achieve personal defense rather than any more interactive social relationship, as when a request for a midlevel manager's opinion on a project produces instead an impenetrable wall of facts, statistics, and explanations.

In addition to a general history of writing development, experience, and attitude, the writer will have more locally relevant writing experiences within certain kinds of social systems and specific groups of people. These more local histories give the writer greater knowledge and experience of particular situations, goals, interactions, and forms enacted within those domains as well as particular relationships with and knowledge of the specific readers. The writer knows the social positions, affiliations, and interests of the audience; the relevant shared documents that create an intertext upon which new utterances establish themselves; and the particular events that have created this particular occasion of writing. The writer will be familiar with the relevant words and phrases, will have seen them applied to situations in practice and perhaps have uttered them in appropriate circumstances, and may have had to respond to similar challenges. Moreover, as a cocreator of the locally unfolding events within a specific collection of people, the writer will share some history, relations, understanding, and formulations with the readers, establishing for them both a highly articulated frame for the current new utterance.

Knowing more about local dynamics not only provides the writer with specific data to use as a resource but also provides a more refined knowledge of the circumstances and their opportunities. This refined

situational knowledge replaces broad-stroke typifications of circumstances with more precise constructions of local events. In some cases these refinements may simply add layers of precision onto the more general typifications, but in other cases the situational knowledge may entirely change the picture. The deeper the writer's history is within the particular communication network, the more the generic relationships and roles can be replaced with specific concrete relationships unfolding over time, and the more any particular document will not be considered simply as a discrete entity but as part of a sequence of interchanges in an unfolding, mutually constructed set of events. Such responsiveness to local conditions is also likely to increase the possibility of creative spontaneous rhetorical invention to meet local circumstances rather than formulaic rehearsal of general procedures.

As the writer projects himself or herself onto the discursive field (which may or may not be integrated with other social networks, as a person shares lunch, stories, and memos with coworkers but usually only exchanges documents with the Internal Revenue Service), he or she will create roles and relationships with others, carry out projects in mutual relation to others, and reproduce (with variation and modification as developed in the process of writing) the perceived structural relations and typifications wherein the writer conceived the situation, goals, and actions. That is, if a person receives a letter from a known other person, perceives it as a friendly letter trying to establish a closer personal connection, perceives that he or she would like to further that friendship by responding in kind, and in fact does so in socially recognizable ways, the writer engages in a mutual structuring of a relationship with the particular other person. This local friendship structure also reproduces a more general structured pattern of relationship available in our society as well as carries forward the genre of friendly letter. Insofar as the relationship and letter are responsive to other typifications and structures or other local conditions, novelty may enter into the received typifications to remake them in new ways.

The produced text, projected onto a social-discursive field, then counts as that person's participation and identity in that social dynamic. The impact the text has on the discursive activity it is part of is dependent on many variables, only some of which can be influenced by what appears in the text (that is, what we call "good writing" but is more usefully thought of as situationally effective writing). The writer's ability to anticipate some of the dynamics of reception and the variables influencing it and to take those into account in features of the text can increase possibilities of consequences the writer might view as favor-

able. Nonetheless, unanticipatable dynamics and accidents can affect how much attention will be paid to the text, under what conditions, how it will be interpreted, what import will be attributed to it, and how it will influence future activities (such influence being a major motive to write). Further, many of the variables of reception and consequence are beyond the control of the writer. In the most stable and typified discursive situations, the possibilities of anticipating the effect of various textual productions are greater, but the more complex or novel or multiple the situation may be perceived to be by any of the participants and the more novel the text is, the greater are the uncertainties surrounding its consequences. Thus, it is easier to know what situationally effective writing is for a state-regulated high school history examination (so much so that its features can be taught in schools as "good writing") than it is for a political broadside during a rapidly changing revolutionary period.

One way to consider the relationship between a text and its consequences is to think of the text as a speech act. For the act to be a success, it must fulfill certain conditions relevant to both the genre the text is understood to be part of and the local situations within which the genre is reenacted. The writer and readers must both agree that the genre is the appropriate one to be invoked in the circumstances; that is, that the writer's utterance is relevant. If judged relevant, the text must then be appropriately responsive to various conditions surrounding its being made public and must carry out various textual work dictated by the genre. Moreover, certain specific conditions must be met by the particular situation in which the text appears, such as the perceived authority of the writer to issue the text. If all conditions of text and situation are met and the readers cooperatively recognize this meeting of conditions, then the text will be recognized as having completed the intended act, and consequent actions of others will respect the completion of that act. However, certain acts or genres must meet rather indeterminate conditions, such as capturing the imaginations of readers through engaging metaphors or overcoming their deeply held convictions through appeals to reason or interest. In such cases it is impossible to determine if a text is likely to fulfill those conditions and succeed until the readers respond. Moreover, as discussed earlier, in complex or changing situations, perceptions as to what typifications (and genres) are appropriate and what conditions need to be met by the text are more variable and unstable. Or in situations where the writer perceives multiple goals or multiple activities to be carried out by unique deployment of combinations of socially available communicative patterns, it becomes problem-

atic whether the readers will recognize and judge appropriately the complex utterance. Thus, the more stably the situation is perceived by all participants and the more the appropriate action has been reduced to a simple, well-regulated, formulaic genre, the clearer are the criteria for success embedded in well-known rules for the genre. The more uncertainty, complexity, or change enter into the social definitions of the situation and the available acts, the less definitively the conditions for success can be predetermined in a set of generic rules and the less certainty there will be in how the readers interpret and respond to the text.

Certain responses or consequent actions resulting from the text may be immediately visible to the writer and serve as a guide in continuing participation in this particular sequence of textual interchanges (as in an exchange of business correspondence negotiating a deal) or in similar situations (as students may glean information from teachers' corrections about how to write for other assignments and courses). But frequently writers receive very little direct feedback, and even if they do, the feedback is general and vague, removed from the specifics of the text, so it is difficult to know exactly how the text was received or interpreted or what consequences ensued. Thus, little specific guidance for future writing may result.

Nevertheless, despite the frequent lack of specific response that would help the writer evaluate the success and consequences of the many complex choices that go into writing any text, a general sense of a text's being read and having some influence on readers is in itself a social reward that helps integrate the person into a discursive social group. The writer feels heard and part of what the group is doing. Such integration lends confidence to future writing and encourages continued participation in that discursive formation. The writer has created an identity upon a social stage and thus builds a stake in that identity. If, however, the writer senses that the text has gone unread or has been rejected in some way, the motive for writing in such a forum may collapse, with consequent alienation. Moreover, the rejection of an attempt to project the self onto a particular exchange and the public exposure of perceived failure may result in some form of anger or embarrassment, with increased aversiveness to this and other sites of written interchange.

The description of writing from the point of view of the intimate observer parallels many of the topics covered earlier from the point of

view of the writer, but by stepping outside the struggle of the writer to see the writer in struggle, we see how we may support, intervene, and provide guidance or comfort to the writer. Thus, this perspective supports our role as confidants, advisers, and teachers of writing. It allows us to see the writer operating within the social environment, so that we can either help the individual writer come to understand that environment, adjust his or her relations to that environment, or, as teachers, simplify or restructure that environment so as to provide the most effective conditions for the growth of confidence and abilities for our particular students. This outsider's view also attunes us to the position of the individual writer, so that we can be respectful of and responsive to individuals' struggles with writing as they entrust us with their concerns and development. Their struggles with writing occur very much in the world of their own perceptions and the social habitat they put themselves into through their understanding of events and practices; if we wish to influence them, in ways that will help them with their writing struggles, we must speak to their conditions. This means first recognizing what those conditions are.

Insofar as we also become observers of ourselves, reflexive monitors of our own behavior, giving advice to ourselves, it helps to see ourselves as others see us—to see our struggles with writing within our attempts to participate with others around us, to step outside of our own interests and position so as to be better able to perceive and advance those positions and interests among the many positions and interests that surround us. Moreover, such an externalized view of ourselves helps us observe and repair negative dynamics of communication as we may become caught up in them. If we are knocking our heads against a brick wall, it is worth noticing that brick wall early on, before we collapse in a terminal headache.

The Middle-Range Observer of Literate Social Systems: A Sociology of Rhetoric

Various social activities, relationships, institutions, and forms of life incorporate literate activity both as part of their enduring legacy of stability, order, and common background to ongoing activities and as part of their current interaction. In literate social networks, activities are carried out with reference to certain existing texts made recurrently visible and present to the participants (as in weekly readings from a sacred text before a congregation or in the legal practice of citing law and precedent, supported by extensive bibliographic apparatus, making the

legal record constantly available as a resource) and are also carried out with an orientation to currently circulated texts and the production of new texts (as in the circulation of sales and negotiation documents resulting in a business contract).

In social configurations incorporating literate activity, the activity is frequently combined and in relation to other communicative activities as well as material activities (such as piloting airplanes). Thus, even such an archetypically literate system as literature is shot through with the talk of book chats, cocktail parties, poetry readings, and literature classes as well as with the daily enactment of roles, attitudes, and thoughts derived from literature, the representation of daily social life within literature, and the psychological projection of the reader's unassimilated residue of daily experience onto the interpretation of the literary text. Further, there are the hidden talk and material production that go into the editing, printing, and distribution of published books and magazines.

In the contemporary world, it is increasingly difficult to find activities that do not have some component of literate activity integrated in essential ways. Even if we consider sports apart from the business of professional sports and the large bureaucracies of organized amateur sports, the crudest sandlot game brings together instruction manuals, statistics, heroic stories, newspaper reports, magazine fantasies, equipment information, and product-design documents. Even our most intimate relations are imbued with wisdom sentences from self-help manuals and more serious psychological studies, with resonances of high and low literature; literate activity often becomes the vehicle of relationships as partners read things to each other, discuss what they have read in the newspaper, sign apartment rental agreements together, make up shopping and guest lists, and engage in other text-related activities that are part of living together in the modern world; finally, through marriage contracts and other explicit and implied covenants, intimate relations become regulated and responsible to the highly textualized world of the law.

On the other hand, contemporary life has a large number of social relationships at a distance that are almost totally dominated by texts (including electronic texts) where a face-to-face interaction really is little more than an interface between two computer terminals. The tax system, except when it leaks out into the political and legislative arena, consists almost entirely of specialized records, with people drawn in only to make confession and payment in textual form (taxpayers), to facilitate the production of the most personally favorable texts (accoun-