

tants), or to make decisions concerning the validity of texts (tax examiners). Face-to-face meetings between clients and accountants or between tax examiners and payers are only limited, highly constrained, and secondary activities within the exchange of documents. Scholarly life is similarly punctuated by conferences and chats with colleagues and queries with librarians, but much of the activity in many disciplines is textual; even the face-to-face collaboration of laboratory work almost always gets textualized in the research literature.

Within these literate social systems, individuals receiving texts perceive them as of one type or another, associating those texts with structured features of the social system and particular actions within it. When I find that my new baseball glove is emblazoned with the comment, "Does not need oiling," I take that as a message of advice from the manufacturer concerning care of the glove. Since I am the owner, I have responsibility for care of the product, but the manufacturer wants me to be satisfied with the durability and performance of the product over time, so I take it as appropriate that the company offer me advice. I also understand that oiling is one of the rituals of baseball life, but I am glad to be relieved of that responsibility.

In daily experience individuals become aware of these typified activities (including the specialized activities of organized training frequently located in schools). Individuals observe that others take certain typifications for granted, explicitly point out these typifications, or enforce use of these typifications in various ways, such as through reward and punishment in schools. In all these instances, to interact with others the individual needs to become aware of these typifications and use them as resources. Thus, typifications become fundamental elements of an intersubjective social world. For example, in many cultures children very early become aware of the lexical distinction between work and play. This lexical distinction helps create distinctions between realms of activity, such as might distinguish between the child's activities with blocks and the parent's fiddling with the contents of a briefcase. Different social etiquettes apply concerning what can be said in work and play circumstances, different artifacts become associated with the two realms (such as two different realms of software—games and business—to be run on the same computer), and so on. Not only does the child learn that people use such words and act in ways consistent with the distinction, their parents hold them accountable to the distinction, such as by asking whether they would like to play now or whether it isn't time to do homework. These distinctions are enforced by various means of social coercion that the student must respect, especially when

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parents ship students off to school, where students are rewarded and punished in relation to their work habits and work productions and where students are required to engage in elaborated literate activities that construct complicated environments for work and play. Students are asked to produce two different kinds of letters (friendly letters and business letters) and assigned to read two kinds of books (novels and textbooks) about which they write two kinds of responses (an imaginative set of genres aimed at responsiveness and creativity versus an educational set of genres aimed at reproduction and application). Nonetheless, although elaborated typifications exist at all levels, both adults and children understand in practice that the categories of work and play are variable resources, as when teachers design schoolwork tasks to appear as play or when students try to insert playfulness into their schoolwork.

No matter what the biological, psychological, and social proclivities of people of different ages in different circumstances that might enter into the creation of the work/play lexical distinction, that distinction once it appears helps organize and orient people toward large realms of socially typified behavior and forms. Forms of literate participation are associated with these and other distinctions that one learns by participating in our culture and communicating with others. Learning of social typifications is not only a matter of vocabulary distinctions and other more elaborate communicative forms learned in abstraction. Rather social typifications have force for each individual because they are part of complex forms of activity and practice toward which the individual orients as part of living with other people. The words, registers, phrases, genres, forms and other sociolinguistic types provide the basis of symbolic interaction and become the grounds of intersubjective orientation as they are deployed in the course of interaction. Each individual must learn to cope with these typifications, as the individual is socialized into different groups of people; that is, socialization is not indoctrination so much as learning the orientations and resources and practices that allow one to interact within a group.

Because each individual has a different complex history of relationships and activities in becoming socialized into the typifications of a society, and because each individual on each occasion deploys those typifications out of the dynamics of a local situation, these social types do not have fixed, grounded, and inflexible meanings, shared absolutely and univocally by all participants. Rather the typifications serve well enough to coordinate for the tasks at hand the separate actions and meanings of multiple individuals. Each person constructs individual

meaning and purpose, in adjustment to the meanings and purposes of others. If difficulties arise, if the typifications are not shared closely enough to coordinate the activities of the participants, there is some sort of trouble that will lead either to some further negotiation of typifications and attunement of meanings (as when scholars argue over the appropriateness of a definition or the validity of an experiment to prove a particular claim) or to some breakdown in the shared activities (as when a marble game breaks down when children can't agree as to whether to follow Brooklyn rules or Jersey City rules or the rules "my big cousin taught me" or as when international trade negotiations break down because neither side could give more and still be able to explain their concessions effectively in the political discourse of their own countries).

The attempt to systematically introduce and enforce more standardized ranges of typifications and their interpretations, and thereby create tighter social order, is usually associated with some form of authority or social dominance. Sometimes the standardization is fostered by benign intention, such as the adults' judgment that children will need familiarity with particular ranges of linguistic activity to negotiate the grown-up world successfully and productively. Similarly, the top management of a corporation may judge the information flow in the organization is chaotic and requires a more systematic set of procedures for providing information, documenting decisions, and disseminating policies. However, motives and consequences of the enforcement of typifications from positions of authority are not universally benign, depending on what contrary positions are lost, with what degree of suasion and coercion, to whose benefit, and with what residual resistance.

In contemporary society such as exists in the United States, most people participate within many different kinds of social configurations, each of which has its own set of literate practices. The literate networks, however, are organized differently within different realms. Legal texts not only look different than high school reading and writing, but the texts circulate within different kinds of social structures and serve different social functions. Indeed, the presence of certain kinds of texts define social roles and functions: National high school tests exist only within a matrix of social structure built around the tests. Test takers, test makers, test graders, and test result users are all arrayed around the reading-writing instrument of the test. This configuration has very different dynamics from the distribution of court opinions among plaintiff, defendant, attorneys, and judges. In participating in any literate social system, one takes on one role or another depending on interests,

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training, status within that system, or other variables that locate one in the transactional network. Most of us at one time or another have had to pass through the high school testing systems as students seeking favorable evaluation; all of us may complain about the test, but only a few are in the position to make critiques that will be attended to; some of us through a variety of factors (not all of which are rational) get into a position to design the tests.

Because these powerful discursive systems in our society are so complex, for any individual to attain a central powerful role in any discourse usually requires a large investment of energy, training, and social activity. As a result, only relatively few individuals move to the center of discursive systems. Those that move to a discursively powerful position in any one system are unlikely to have as central a role in any other (although there are significant transfer effects among related systems). It is much more typical that we have subordinate roles (of client, consumer, passive victim, or the like) within a great variety of systems, often with the help of a professional intermediary to act as our spokesperson or guide (such as a lawyer, accountant, doctor, legislative representative, or book reviewer) to orient us to each particular system, to obtain the help we need from the system, or to advance our interests within the system. Even the president of the United States needs doctors, lawyers, media consultants, movie reviewers, and fishing guides.

Our differential roles within each system are not just a matter of different training or social power. They are also matters of our different interests. A lawyer, cast in the role of a plaintiff, is usually well-advised to hire a colleague to act as lawyer in the case. All college students do not seek to become members of the professor's discipline; many simply want to learn some aspect of that discipline to be used in support of some other activity, as when an architect learns materials science. In communicating with a town council, a citizen usually wants to assert private interests rather than to have a responsibility for the welfare of the entire community, which ought to be the role of council members (although, unfortunately, sometimes the roles and values are reversed). Thus, the literate activities we may carry out in these roles are influenced not only by the social hierarchy of that domain but also by what we appropriately hope to accomplish from our position.

Participation in these complex systems allows the intersection and cooperation of many individuals of different interests and backgrounds over common projects. Within these complex systems, certain forms of language emerge as appropriate and functional to enact recognizably the various roles and activities. These decorums include the kinds of

things we identify as registers and genres. Whereas registers identify sets of social relations within certain kinds of social space (e.g., the registers of doctor talk and patient talk define the relationship within the setting of the consultation room), genres add to that a kind of dynamic interaction, as kinds of statements are recognizable as speech acts, doing various kinds of work (as the doctor can recognizably offer a diagnosis or a prognosis or prescribe a therapy). Thus, in schools certain genres presented by teachers deliver information to be learned by students and other genres enacted by students exhibit the students' command of the material. Genres may be related systematically as one kind of utterance follows from another with certain structural relationships between the material that comprises each. Frequently, oral and written genres are systematically intermixed, as in college classrooms, where teachers typically distribute assignment sheets identifying textbook selections to be read by students; teachers then lecture on material related to the textbooks; perhaps discussion between students and teachers about the material or interrogation of the students by the teachers follows. Questions are then written by teachers and distributed to students as either examinations or at-home essay questions. Students must respond according to formats implied in the questions and occasions. Genres of feedback from the teacher then follow, ultimately reduced to a single letter-grade sent to the registrar for compilation with other one-letter evaluative communications for distribution to students, also thereby creating a record that certifies completion of requirements for graduation and provides information for evaluation by employers or graduate schools.

Being familiar with the genres and registers of the systems individuals participate in allows the individual to make a kind of sense of complex interactions and to locate his or her actions in relation to the communicative actions of multiple others. Complex systems of social cooperation and participation can then be carried forward through these typified behaviors. Individuals thereby identify the kinds of actions available to them and the appropriate forms for carrying out the actions.

These discursive systems comprised of interactive genres in recognizable social settings facilitate some interactions and make others more difficult, thus structuring interaction. Also, the expectations of genres make it more likely that some aspects of life will be made visible and others remain hidden. For example, until a recent change in the style of literary studies encouraged autobiographical accounts about the critic's position and project, evidence from the text being interpreted would be made prominently visible in literary exegesis, but the goals and

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actions of the interpreter would be largely invisible. In courtrooms the question of what can be made reportable and visible to the jury is a matter of explicit rules of admissibility and private argument among lawyers and judge (which discussions are kept away from the hearing of the jury). Thus, the typified linguistic or representational forms that are recognized as appropriate and according to the decorum of the situation can define not only the social roles, relations, and activities but also the relevant realities to be considered within the forum and the form in which those realities are to be considered (such as through statistical charts, medical test results, or anecdotes).

Insofar as each discursive system identifies certain discursive activities to be carried out in a particular form, employing various materials to be displayed and intellectually acted upon in various expected forms, that discursive system develops a characteristic thought or representational style, consisting of the genres, registers, and other sociolinguistic typifications held to be appropriate and part of the decorum. The thought style influences not only the shared public deliberations but also the individual thought of the participants insofar as their thought is aimed at preparing comments for the public discursive field and insofar as individuals employ the public discursive symbols in their private thinking (for example, thinking through a problem in physics by puzzling over the kind of graph that is likely to appear in a physics article).

Moreover, insofar as a discursive field settles on certain formulations as satisfying the varied interests and needs of the participants or as resolving issues in ways that are too difficult to challenge, these formulations become accepted as knowledge or fact. They become irrefutable and immovable in a system and so must be respected in all future communications upon this field, until someone mobilizes the resources necessary to upset this received knowledge. Thus, court cases in a written opinion settle contentious matters (or at least make it more difficult to keep contending) and are respected as fact and precedent until sufficient changes occur in law, conditions, and court membership to establish a new contrary precedent. Similarly, a political term takes hold to define an issue because it encapsulates issues in ways that are most socially powerful and acceptable—such as the way the term *diversity* took hold on ethnic issues or such as the way the abortion debate settled into the peculiar oppositions of *pro-choice* and *pro-life*. Agreed-upon formulations become resting points for public deliberations or meeting points for contention.

The typification of communicative forms also means that utterances

can be judged inadequate for failure to meet expected contextual conditions or formal requirements within the speech act; for example, an application may fail for being past a deadline, being sent to the wrong address, being filed by an inappropriate person, or for leaving out one of the required elements, such as an educational history. Thus, communications within various genres and systems are held minimally accountable for the representations within texts and how those representations are responsive to actions, experiences, relations, and objects that exist outside the text. However, minimal success or failure does not determine the full social power or lack thereof of the would-be textual action, as that frequently depends on how well the text meets multiple variables within the full complexity of the situation and, consequently, how it is taken up by the various relevant audiences who have their own perceptions of the situation, related social and material experiences, separate knowledges, interpretations of the texts, and interests to pursue, all within the general framework of the social typifications. These multiple factors controlling reception and consequences thereby influence how texts will be rewarded or sanctioned or ignored, thus influencing the future configuration of the network, how participants view the advisability of various forms of texts (what works in writing), and how confident individuals feel about knowing how to write within that forum.

Even though some literate systems may become relatively stabilized, innovation and change are fostered by the differing locations and interests of participants, the complexity of situations, the varying results achieved by different forms, the changing relationship with other discursive systems, and other factors leading to constant redefinitions of situations and the strategic deployment of rhetorical forms. Nonetheless, insofar as recognizable social configurations built on recognizable discursive forms emerge with some social presence, they become potentially visible and attractive (if not intrusive and mandatory) for nonparticipants to orient toward, as a young person sees the work of journalists, admires it, and becomes recruited to the profession or as another young person hostile to the economic communication system built on money still must come to terms with that symbolic interchange so as to be able to eat and not be victimized.

These varying systems, in becoming potential sites of social participation, present challenges to individuals. To become successful the individual must develop the cognitive machinery for coping with the kinds of symbolic interchange, the kinds of reading and writing that go on within personally relevant discursive fields. Even more than learning

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the general discursive forms, individuals must learn how to solve the puzzles of strategic local action using the available discursive forms. Thus, individuals' minds develop in relation to the symbolic systems and the social interchange they want or need to participate in, even if only as rebels, defining an oppositional discursive practice.

How individuals wind up participating in the various social systems that intersect with their lives is influenced by their perception of situations and goals and the particular sets of skills and practices through which they respond. This participation then creates a presence visible to others and thereby available for interpretation and evaluation. Insofar as individuals' significant social participations are in literate forms, we associate the people with their texts. Supreme Court justices are publicly known largely through their written opinions and novelists through their novels. Even our secondary knowledge of such literate personalities through biographies is not only textually transmitted but framed most often as expansions or explanations of their primary literate productions. We typically learn how Justice Frankfurter became so wise as to write so many brilliant opinions or how Henry James came to have such a complex imagination and literary talent. Even in our relations with people we see every day, much of their identities is built around textual relations, as in work organizations where management is defined through memos, statements, and evaluative documents and white-collar workers are largely defined by the kinds of reports they prepare and the kinds of papers they shuffle. In research disciplines we associate colleagues with the research and ideas they have published. In schools students are identified by what they have read and internalized as well as by what papers they submit to the teachers.

Individuals thereby gain social presence as they move onto social fields and participate. Insofar as many social fields in the modern world are permeated with literacy (and, increasingly, the new forms of literacy that are electronically mediated), social participation is deeply influenced by individuals' range of literate abilities. These actual social participations and visible identities are then reflexively perceived by the individual, influencing future life choices—forming what we sometimes call *self-concept*. Awareness of the potential importance and satisfactions of different discursive fields for the individual can attract the individual to want to become part of those forms of social interchange. But insofar as the individual cannot find realistic and personally satisfying pathways for socialization, or insofar as the individual perceives that personal skills or other characteristics do not enable participation, the individual may not pursue those social integrations and even feel ac-

tively hostile to those literate systems. Success and satisfactory identification within the various social fields require not only a general literacy but a literacy appropriate to each kind of endeavor and one's actual and desired social position within it.

Because in differentiated contemporary society individuals develop upon multiple socioliterate fields, each person participates through multiple identities and interests. To some degree these identities may be kept apart, thereby simplifying the individual's roles within each. That is, a clerk in a bureaucracy can file formulaic reports according to regulation with no reference to after-hours participation in a creative writing group, which favors poems of social rebellion written in disrupted meters and syntax, juxtaposing media images with references to biblical apocalyptic literature. Nor does the creative writing group need to be concerned with how the after-hours poet earns a living.

But often enough participation in one socioliterate system is related in clearly defined ways to participation in another. Experience in the school system, in part reduced to a school record that influences employment, is even more kept alive in the educated person's competences, perceptions, and behaviors, which influence both work and private life. Experience and public presence as a news reporter changes a person's role in community politics. Being implicated in legal documents can determine many aspects of life, from finances to institutional residence. In these cases people cannot keep discourses apart and are forced to make one accountable to the other. Even people who have been continually humiliated in school may return for further degrees as one or another aspect of life seems to require the pain of writing further school papers; reciprocally, schools, to be responsive to student needs, may pose assignments relevant to the students' extramural lives.

Also, individuals may see in one of their discursive identities the opportunity or even obligation to carry identities across social boundaries. A person dedicated to advancing civil rights or the cause of a particular group may enter the law or journalism to carry out the cause effectively on those social fronts. Or a lawyer or journalist, with no committed professional agenda, may nonetheless find some matter crossing his or her desk that outrages a sensibility or commitment from another sphere of life; he or she may feel the personal necessity to take that other aspect of identity into account in carrying out the legal or journalistic task. And many areas of life are enriched by the recognition of a person's intersection of identities; for example, many significant questions for academic and scientific research are driven by motiva-

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Thus, who individuals want to become, who they indeed do become, how they become those people, and what they perceive they have become are dependent on participations in social fields and deeply implicated in the kinds of literacies they have learned to negotiate.

Again at this level of social description, we see reverberations of issues visible at the more immediate levels of writer viewed from the inside and outside, but here we can see those issues as part of larger social systems. Such a systemic view would be of interest to anyone involved in ordering, constructing, fostering, or regulating any discursive social system, whether as manager of an organization, editor of a journal, or government regulator of the accounting profession. As well, teachers of writing, indeed all teachers, are concerned with socializing students into discursive systems and facilitating students' moves from one discursive system to another. Understanding the systemic nature of discourse can help these supervisors and facilitators of communication perceive the relations of separate communicative acts, make adjustments, or organize educational paths into the discursive fields. This is the teacher's work of curriculum design, as opposed to the teacher's work of individual instruction and student support.

A systemic understanding of how writing works both in school and other social settings may make us wonder how anyone learns to write at all. Since learning to write requires so much work of such a complex kind, sensitive to the local dynamics of so many varied situations, it requires strong, motivated desire of individuals to integrate into the various scenes of literate communication. Each individual must really want to do it. Yet each scene of writing is fraught with obstacles, inappropriate tasks, unspoken expectations, exclusions, insults, punishments, and humiliations. It is not surprising, therefore, that a large part of the population feels alienated from any except the most familiar literate activities, within which they rely on the safest formulas. Even among those who make it into postgraduate education and the professional world, almost none escapes insecurities and anxieties about those literate activities they do engage in. Nor then should we be surprised at the exaggerated cultural regard (with its dialectical distrust) granted to those who make it through this social and discursive maze to be categorized as good writers. While such categorization provides special

support and different social treatment for those identified as having talent and provides a motivating target for those who see such an identity as a possibility, it also points to the exclusion of all the rest of society that must communicate under the cloud of not being a Shakespeare or a Hemingway or even a Jacqueline Susann. That people manage to write well enough to carry out the tasks they do is testimony to the inescapable importance of written communication in our society despite the large aura of aversiveness that surrounds it for most people.

As individual actors, we too have a stake in recognizing the various discursive fields open to us and how we can participate in them. Such recognition helps us to understand our possibilities, provides targets of our desires and ambitions, and points to paths of successful involvement. Moreover, the more we understand how our individual utterances enter into and work within discursive systems, the more effectively we can design those utterances to serve those ends; that is, the better we can write. We can understand more of the dynamics we can be responsive to, more of the fundamental communicative processes we want to intervene in, more of the creative options for meeting our needs, and more of the possibilities for readjusting the discursive systems to negotiate new kinds of meanings and practices. Also, when things go wrong, when our communications fail, we are not caught speechless, left only with a perception of failure. We can begin to understand what went wrong systemically, why our text was the wrong one at the wrong time. Then we are on the path to finding out what might be the right text for this time and place.

The Distant View: A Sociocultural History of Rhetoric

Human history is acted out in changing social groupings, communicating through changing cultural forms, and bringing unfolding events into being through their material and communicative relations. The introduction of new communicative media presents opportunities for new kinds of communications and changing social relations. Literacy has developed and continues to develop within specific historical circumstances in response to particular needs, opportunities, dynamics, and potential media. The evolution of literacy goes hand in hand with the evolution of the social interactions and participations it carries out. Moreover, human cognition has developed in dialectic with tasks made possible or necessary through this literate-social evolution.

The history of literate forms is a history of inventions, not just of the literate forms themselves, but of their use in social circumstances

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and of the development of social circumstances through the incorporation of literate forms. The history of journalism and the public taste for news includes material inventions, such as printing presses, steam presses, Linotype machines, radio, television, and satellites. But it also obviously includes the invention of kinds of periodicals, from the seventeenth-century intelligencers through the twentieth-century national newspapers, tabloids, and special-interest magazines. Further, within those periodical types are embedded the inventions of thousands of changing genres, such as the sports story, the front-page analysis, the op-ed article, the advice to the lovelorn, and the gossip column. These literate forms appear within changing social structures created around the texts, such as changing distribution networks for the periodicals; the emergence of the profession of journalism with its attendant institutions, values, rituals, recruitment, and training; the creation of a consumer advertising culture; and the idea of public opinion, which is both a response to reportage as well as a social fact to be reported on. And of course the rise of journalism is in dialectic with such social inventions as public education, white-collar work, middle-class culture, political systems, nationally organized societies and economies, marketplace economics, public transportation, and the morning commute.

Thus, history is made within the forms of life made available by practices, themselves created in the course of unfolding events. In the last four thousand years, available forms of life have been increasingly implicated with literacy and other symbolic communication that followed in its wake. Contemporary electronic audio-visual media were created within the literate networks of science and technology, rely on many texts for their technological maintenance and substantive production, convey alphabetic and numeric communications in conjunction with graphic and audio information, and symbolize audio and visual messages in ways that for the time being are dependent upon modes of thought most developed within literate systems. These literate and postliterate forms of life provide the habitat for both individual and social development and evolve in response to the creativity expressed in that social and individual development.

Literacy has led to social communication that travels through time and space, thereby spreading messages, rules, typifications, and other systemizations that have both a wider range and greater stability than communications based on face-to-face interactions. Cultural histories embodied in sacred texts can be copied and held in multiple locales rather than being carried about in the memory and flexibly re-creative performance practices of oral storytellers. Rules for a society inscribed

in stone can be carried across deserts for generations and provide consistent reference points for individual behavior. Financial and legal records can be kept, and trade can be carried out in increasingly abstracted forms of value. With the advent of printing, exactly similar texts can travel to more people and increasingly across social boundaries. Many other consequences of the development of literate practices and methods of text reproduction and dissemination have been explicated in recent research on the history and consequences of literacy and printing (such as the inspectability and criticizability of utterances both for the individual thinker and for multiple widespread readers as texts become reproduced and widely available; the extension of utterances at great length; the ability to contemplate utterances for longer periods of time before they are made public; the development of coherence over extensive discourses; and the graphic display of systematized thought).

As texts have spread through time and space, they have had not only an organizing tendency on the social and intellectual systems that they become part of and extend, but they have also facilitated the differentiation of social systems, as communication can develop among individuals at great distances sharing specialized tasks and relations. Law is no longer a local matter to be enacted within each tribe but is now a highly elaborated system of communication among legal professionals separated in time and space. Socially influential knowledge is created by members of research specialties having their own international publications, each communicating among just a few hundred of the many billion people on earth. Large corporations with multiple levels of bureaucracies and multiple divisions for different products and functions are held together by complexes of highly regularized but differentiated systems of texts flowing in well-structured communication channels.

Further, each of these systems develop accountability procedures that define what the texts must attend to internally and in relation to the surrounding environment to be judged successful. The accountability procedures incorporate standard practices for evaluating the success of texts by various participants in the communicative process. These accountabilities help define the special character of the communicative system and drive the development of the system to closer and closer ties to those things to which the texts are held most accountable. Thus, a knowledge-producing system that includes many representations of empirical experience, many procedures for comparing those representations with continuing experiences, and critical procedures for questioning the production of those empirical experiences will drive the

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development of an increasingly data-oriented and data-gathering set of communications. Another system that makes texts accountable to and evaluated through the imaginative excitement of the audience will drive the development of communications that seek both novelty and the unexpressed states of mind and mood of the relevant audiences. These differences in accountabilities and accountability procedures can lead communicative systems to become increasingly elaborated within themselves and differentiated from each other.

Moreover, commitments to different texts and communication through different textual networks can keep people apart, as families in neighboring apartments may read different sacred texts in the company of different congregations, may subscribe to different magazines, and may receive mailings from different political parties. Even more divisively, nations—each monolithically organized around its own constitution and governmental system, engaged in its own political discourse, and perhaps even committed to ideologically contrasting defining texts of political economy—can create walls along borders.

Thus, the major distinctions of contemporary social systems can at least in part be understood as developing with relation to textual circulation systems, with their own set of inventions of textual forms and functions, interpretive practices, structured social relations, and cooperative tasks. Moreover, relations among these various systems can also be understood in part by what documents are shared by the different groups or are specifically designed to travel between them; relations are also defined by the communicative barriers of prohibition, inconvenience, irrelevance, or differing communicative practice.

Similarly, the historical evolution of societies and the events they experience can be understood in relation to the evolving communicative fields upon which their fates have been played out. Historians have traced how the introduction, distribution, and special uses of texts have changed institutions of religion, law, government, politics, science, high art, public knowledge, and popular culture. But it would be instructive to see overall the evolution of international culture in relation to the evolving literate networks that increasingly created unfolding communicative frameworks for each of these areas of human activity and their interrelation.

Such a history would also be a history of human consciousness, insofar as human thought is directed at coming to terms with the social, cultural, and material world one is born into and using those terms to live most satisfactorily. That study of consciousness, however, would not reduce the world to a textualized history of ideas but would rather

reveal the kinds of resources and communicative structures available to each individual for making a life upon a particular historical conjunction of fields of social participation. Thus, while we can gain a sense of the changing possibilities of life participations as increasingly influenced by literacy, the available social forms only establish the playing fields upon which we see individual lives being played out creatively in relation to the lives surrounding. Each discursive field and each symbolic form that can be played upon that field will be useful or attractive to individuals each for his or her own reasons. Everybody in a small, seventeenth-century Puritan village may have read copies of the same printing of the Bible, but they may have done so for different reasons, in different frames of mind, with different interpretations, with different consequences for thought, feelings, and behavior, and for later redeployment in different situations for different utterances. Social institutions for reading, sharing interpretations, and enforcing behavior may have created some commonality of experience and appearance of uniformity in how the text was used (more perhaps than in a contemporary American city), but still the individuality of life and the personalized use of literacy remain.

Lives enacted with others, within socially recognized forums and forms of communication, have certain structured possibilities. As well, the texts produced at the locations of literate interchange realize certain structured possibilities even while they extend the possibilities into an unfolding future. These structured possibilities of life and communicative action contingently create tensions within individual lives and with others. The conflicts individuals feel in enacting social roles, the conflicts they work out with others as role partners in discursive systems, and the conflicts that groups of individuals in one discursive network confront in their relations with members of other discursive systems can also be understood in terms of the relations between discursive systems. Competition for recognition is built into the discursive practices of modern science where novelty, priority, and correctness (according to disciplinary criteria) are rewarded; the conflicts played out in professional journals and conferences and the mechanisms by which the conflicts are mediated and contained are all built into the discursive practices of the disciplines. During the cold war, the internally structured public discourses of the United States and USSR, in engaging the separate populations of the two countries in the political economies of each of them and in attempting to enlist the citizens of the many countries that stood between, assured an international discourse of propaganda, name-calling, and mutual fear. Remarkably,

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a change in the internal organizing discourses and foundational texts of one of the countries has entirely restructured international political discourse.

This macroview of evolving discursive systems provides us with a view of how the largest structures of society have developed and maintained themselves, as well as how these largest structures create local places for individual participation by establishing extended frameworks for action and social order. Also, in understanding the literate frameworks that structure much of our social life, we can see better the consequences of various literate practices in relation to the full complexity of social life. We can examine where the creation and circulation of documents work well for the lives of many and where other practices create misery. We can see when political leaders create forums for discussion of difficulties among different constituencies, structured in ways likely to lead to positive action; and we can see when leaders try to rally electoral support of individual constituencies by reinforcing negative representations of other constituencies that are not deemed politically essential to the leaders, thereby making cooperative communication among these populations more difficult. The news media's continuing self-examination of its role in the electoral process, considering how various forms of communication can influence the unfolding of political events, is an example of the way reflective understanding of communicative processes can influence the wisdom of national choices.

Such a macroview helps us see the cultural underpinnings of rhetorical activity and helps us see how our rhetorical interventions can transform large historical processes. A new kind of publishing house or a new kind of magazine is a major intervention in the life of a community, and a broad view of the communicative structure can help the strategic design of such a forum; conversely, understanding difficulties within the communicative structure might suggest the need for new communicative forms to rearrange the dynamics. Understanding of the evolution of cultural systems of literate communication can help in the writing of even a single, novel text that cuts across traditional systems or tries to foster a newly emergent community, as perhaps early work in the ecological movement attempted to do. Understanding the role of communicative literate systems and their interactions in the unfolding of our social-cultural history can also help us make wise choices about the evaluation and fostering of communications system, as both Adam Smith and Karl Marx worried over the translation of social and economic

relations into the symbolic communication of money within capitalist economies. Certainly one ongoing and unresolved issue of this century has been the relationship between the development of scientific knowledge within its specialized communicative systems and the other communicative systems of contemporary life.

But perhaps the most important payoff for a large-scale understanding of the way literate systems create possibilities of life is to motivate us to attend to writing in its many forms as a major priority at all levels of education and social organization, for the stakes in writing are extremely large, larger than we have perhaps previously understood. Understanding the multiplicity of writing as it has evolved within different conditions and systems of human history may perhaps decrease our attachment to any particular form or standard of writing. We may come to see that good writing is not a single timeless thing. But neither is it a purely ad hoc accomplishment. It is a great diverse and evolving range of accomplishments, integrated into many complex forms of life. To understand that diversity in its many social locations and its many active forms is to understand what we do, who we are, and what we make of ourselves in our constructed lives.

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