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A Rhetoric for Literate Society: The Tension between Expanding Practices and Restricted Theories

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Address an abiding social need.
Richard Young

The day is short, the task is long.
Sayings of the Fathers

During Richard Young's career, the teaching of writing made enormous strides in knowledge and practice, in fu ing, and in institutional respect. Richard's vision, scholarsh and institutional leadership have been central to that st Though the task is begun, however, it is hardly finished. We h only begun to sense how truly important writing and literacy to the modern world and how partial and preliminary are tools to speak to the need.

If those of us engaged in composition may have at first thou we just wanted to help some students articulate their thoug and succeed in college, we soon were drawn into the ways students participate in society and the ways literate practices h

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our world together. Writing practices, it now appears, are integral to the complex forms of social organization that maintain what prosperity, amity, and health we have on this crowded planet. This expanded challenge calls for new research and new theoretical perspectives that will help us navigate through the enlarged landscape we are beginning to notice. As we make good on the challenge, we increase our claim on the resources, authority, and professional respect that will allow us to do the job properly.

The Social Space of Literate Activity

Work on academic and professional writing[1] has sensitized us to the way writing is deeply embedded within intertextual networks (see Bakhtin; Selzer, "Intertextuality"; Bazerman, "Intertextual"). How we use our reading in our writing positions us in relation to previous texts, displaying the meaning and value we find in those texts, the relationships we see among them, and their role in the formation of the current moment. Every proposal for a new bridge rests on engineering textbooks, prior proposals, urban planning projections, internal corporate financial statements, contracts and materials catalogs, government policy and project documents, and many other sorts of files, reports, books, and correspondence—only a few of which may be explicitly referred to, but all of which make the proposal what it is.

Interactions mediated by literacy occur in no single physical space and time but in a space of mutual imaginings that we visit every time we pick up a document or begin to fill a blank page (as early as the fifteenth century, this virtual place was nominated the Republic of Letters [Eisenstein 137, n. 287]). Nonetheless, textually mediated relations draw sustenance and motive from our more immediate, embodied relations with the people and things that physically surround us (the problem of how to get us and our neighbors across a particular canyon every morning sets in motion the intertextually complex paperwork of trying to get a bridge built). In turn, the circulation of texts alters the course of immediate events by dint of the altered knowledge, skills, perceptions, affect, thoughts, and commitments brought

about by our reading and writing. We return from our reading and writing altered in ways that change our local behavior—we build far different bridges than we did five thousand years ago. The technologies of literacy and print culture, evolving over the last fifty or so centuries (supplemented in the last two centuries by rapidly changing, but still letter-reliant, electronic communications technologies, beginning with the telegraph) have provided means for our local society to be pervaded by what sociologist Anthony Giddens has called time-space distanciation.

These specialized, highly elaborated forms of social participation abstracted from the immediate moment require literacy skills that extend beyond the text coding and decoding skills we associate with the lower grades of schooling, remediation, or adult literacy programs. In ever more challenging circumstances, people spend their whole careers developing specialized reading and writing skills—such as examining a legal brief for salient legal principles and relevant case details in relation to precedent and prior court rulings, or, on the basis of a few hours of information gathering and a few minutes of actual drafting, writing an engaging, reasonably accurate news story that conforms to current standards of the profession. Because such skills have been developed and passed on within their specialized fields of practice, however, they are often thought of as professional skills rather than literacy skills.

These specialized skills (e.g., reading and writing as judges do); the textual forms through which they are enacted (the opinion, the brief, the law review article); the social and cognitive means of text production (the appeals procedures that bring together documents for review and adjudication); the physical and economic means of text reproduction and distribution (the mixed government, private, and professional association systems of legal publication that distribute the judge's opinion to legal offices, courts, and law schools throughout the country); the social arrangements and roles developed in conjunction with the elaboration of texts (law clerks and law librarians; state bars and bar exams; law companies and legal clients; lawyer-client privilege and obligations of lawyers as officers of the court)—in short, the entire social, material, economic, symbolic apparatus of ou[r]

multiformed textual culture, are historical inventions, becoming ever more pervasive and complex as the number of people, texts, and social organizations has increased.

We know, for example, some of the outlines of the development of the system of scientific publication, which perhaps has been studied more intensively than other literate systems because of recent interest in writing across the curriculum and the rhetoric of science (Bazerman and Russell; Harris). The scientific article was a latecomer—not even a possibility until the invention of the scientific journal in 1665 provided an occasion to develop particular text forms to circulate among specialized readers (Bazerman, *Shaping*; Atkinson). The kinds of arguments engaged in and the kinds of evidence, reasoning, and demonstrations brought to bear evolved over time, as did the social systems of referees and editors. Even the character and role of journal reader evolved over time as readers' interests, professional positions, critical criteria, and uses of the literature in daily practice changed. The social circulation and function of the journal also interacted with the changing character of the sponsoring societies and their relation to economic, political, and class systems within which they resided.

Around the nineteenth century, as literatures, investigative methods, and professionalization of authors and readers developed along with the critical challenge of the argument, articles began to approximate familiarly modern forms. Specialties and journals proliferated, each with its own special character and discursive challenge. Today there are many kinds of journals, articles, and forms of writing in physics, geology, ecology, psychology, anthropology, and every other of the specialized domains. Skilled producers of one kind of text in a specialty are not necessarily skilled producers of other kinds of text in that specialty, let alone in other specialties. The accomplished individual authors, editors, and publishers participate in an extensive system of book, journal, and other format production, circulation, and storage involving libraries, Internet, universities, societies, and for-profit publishers. These specialized forms of knowledge production then intersect with many other discursive systems—corporate and financial, governmental, defense, industrial, legal, psychological practice, education (see, for example, van Nostrand). Each of

these systems has its own complex history of forms, institutioı and practices, and each has its own cadre of skilled and not-ѕ skilled practitioners.

Technology has an even more complex story interpenetrat with relations to other discursive systems, as I have learned the course of examining the emergence of Edison's system of i candescent light and power. While science has tried to remo itself into specialized worlds of inquiry conducted by exper technology is regularly in the business of gathering financial bac ers and clients, keeping stockholders and financial markets hap gaining the cooperation of governments and publics, applyi for and protecting patents and other legal statuses, positioni itself against the representations of competitors, drawing on creasingly sophisticated technical and scientific literatures, co dinating internal organizational work of development a production, managing public relations through the press, a positioning its products in the cultural market (Bazerman, *La guages*).

Though distanced and abstracted from the local mome these textually mediated interactions are deeply embedded in c sociality. Many of the elaborate forms and systems of liter communication grew out of the transparently social forms of l ter writing—emperors' correspondence with generals, governo and emissaries formed the basis for bureaucratic forms of wı ing. Newspapers developed from letters of correspondence. Bu ness memos, reports, orders, and sales documents in the eighteer century were still all simply business correspondence (Yates). Tl is, large, distanced organizations grew from individual peo sending messages at a distance to other individuals. Similaı letter writing remains an important part of children's writi education because teachers need to find comprehensible hum motives and situations beyond the logic of school performar to draw students into this curious practice of inscribing signs

The historically evolved systems of literate activity cre elaborate textual underpinnings to our daily lives and social lations, even when we are engaged in face-to-face events or ex riences of the most material and physical kind. In the courtroo oral arguments made before judges and juries rely on boxes documents, are located within a system of laws and preceden

and produce a court record and a written opinion (Stratman). Similarly, doctors' interactions with patients and medical interventions are informed by medical school textbooks and the current clinical literature, to which practical experience (such as clinical outcomes of surgical procedures) must be reduced if that experience is to be of general use. Politicians' handshaking is embedded within the electoral system established by laws and within a system of politics fed by news and party documents. Our semiotic understanding and organization of events and social order, as produced within special domains of knowledge and practice and as stabilized in texts, pervade all aspects of our life.

The Consequences of Literacy Revisited

The consequences of literacy are manifold. In the seventies and eighties when scholars such as Goody, Havelock, Olson, and Ong started to outline a coherent set of interpersonal and intellectual changes that accompanied the introduction of literacy, they were caught up short by the argument that the consequences of literacy depended on how literacy practices were used within their contexts. This argument was made forcefully by Scribner and Cole through their observations of the varied consequences of the multiple literacies of the Vai in West Africa. Those individuals who used literacy in Western schools to work through puzzles in formal logic increased their abilities in formal logic; those who learned Arabic as part of Koranic scriptural practices increased their ability to repeat verbatim texts; and those who used the local rebus-like written language for letter writing were good at solving rebus puzzles. Literate Vai showed gains in cognitive skills corresponding only to the specific literacy practices they engaged in. Additionally, linguistic research pointed out that the spoken and the written language were connected by a continuity of forms and functions, so that the social and cognitive habits of oral and of literate people would not be distinguished across a sharp divide (Chafe; Tannen).

Yet, that the picture is more complex does not mean there is no picture. Rather, we need to look at the specific social practices and forms that have developed around literacy. This is a direc-

tion that anthropologist Jack Goody was heading in one of last books on the subject: *The Logic of Writing and the Orga zation of Society*. While this text still assumes something c unitary logic of writing, it nonetheless points toward a great riety of social consequences in different spheres, paying close tention to the historical and anthropological evidence fr different societies. With respect to religions, Goody sees histo cal evidence that the concept of distinct religions that are sim and affiliated over substantial geographic regions, as opposec varieties of local beliefs and practices, is tied to the emergence scriptures that are central to religious practices—scriptures t can define a set of beliefs stably and recognizably over time a distances. Textually organized beliefs raise the possibility of u versalism and the global applicability of beliefs. Literate pries classes, having access to texts and control over doctrinal issu may form bureaucracies of geographically dispersed belief pr tices and may aggregate the wealth and political power that ten accompany geographic expansion. Further, attention perceivable religious change (as opposed to the historical evo tion of practice which remains unnoticed by practitioners) i function of recorded beliefs and recorded history—increasing t saliency of doctrinal questions, differences among sects, decre belief changes, changes of allegiance, and the like.

Government likewise faces new possibilities with the int duction of literacy. Goody notes such phenomena as the facili tion of emissaries and clerks over geographically dispersed are kept in communication by both written rule and corresponden Literate government functionaries, engaged in taxation, censı and accounting, extend government control. Treaties can reg larize relations with surrounding states. With centralization power through literate communication, extended geographic eas may become reorganized into center/periphery relations, wi the consequence that national ceremonies, rituals, and forms loyalty come to supplement, if not replace, local loyalties. Goo provides similar accounts of legal and economic systems.

These literacy-facilitated institutional systems may devel in varying relationship with each other. Sometimes they may c incide, as when economic power is centralized in the state church, or the church or the justice system becomes an organ

state policy. On the other hand, complex tensions may arise among the church, state, justice, and economic systems, each affording certain social protections and opportunities based on their separate principles and methods of bringing texts to bear on the local moment.

While Goody attends to only four of the major institutional systems of societies, we may consider similar developments in all aspects of affiliation and activity—for example, numismatic clubs rely on international newsletters, catalogs, reference works, and correspondence; sports leagues, even at the amateur level, have rules and rule-making bodies, league organization and bureaucracies, records and competitive rankings, publicity and news. Consider then the deeply literate practices of such institutions as hospitals and schools. Even the public sphere consists of complex networks of newspapers, magazines, press releases, political consultants, video news and commentary (which themselves are surrounded by paper, scripts, and bureaucracy), and other highly articulated systems which run on the written word. Even the supposed privacy of our bedrooms has been saturated by psychology, social science, and popular self-help publications, not to speak of the technology and economics of mattress making and the communications at a distance that have created the fashion market that influences the patterns on our bedsheets.

Literacy does not require or inexorably lead to any particular development, but it is a powerful tool available for organizing, extending, providing resources for, and transforming all of our social endeavors. Once transformed, these endeavors embed literate practices within their fundamental mechanisms of organization. These practices, as Scribner and Cole (drawing on Vygotsky) point out, are associated with specific forms of cognition. As people use the various tools of literacy, they learn to think with these tools: as discourse about law develops, we think more about the law, and to think, we use precisely those discursive terms of the law—so that if we want to discuss with our friend a court case in which we have been embroiled, we need to draw on the terms and events of the law to explain what is happening and why it is important that the opposing attorney filed a motion to dismiss before the depositions rather than after. If we want to escape the stabilized terms of the literate institution so as

not to be constrained by the institution's own assumptions, we need to develop or draw on a critical vocabulary, most likely to be found in a critical literature, as in critical law studies. That is, even to inspect and query one literate system we may need the resources and strength of another.

Literate practices also embed specifics of the processes of text production, distribution, and use. By pursuing the situated practices within a discursive sphere, we can find new direction for writing process research, which lost some steam with the recognition that processes vary across individuals and circumstances. When viewed as embedded within specialized literacy systems, writing processes can be seen to be shaped and modeled in part by the institutional history and activity; further, atypical processes can inform us about the particularity of specific events and of each individual's form of participation (see Bazerman, *Shaping;* Blakeslee; Prior, *Writing/Disciplinarity;* Swales, *Other Floors*).

Directions for Research

The complex but sketchy picture that is emerging of how literacy works in structuring the modern way of life only points to the need for more research and theory to help fill out, extend, and clarify that picture. Goody points toward one direction for fundamental research into the history of specialized literacy practices and their consequences within the many different societies—starting from less elaborated social forms and observing how literacy enters into their expansion, transformation, and complex organization (see also Besnier). Such chronological investigation can help unpack the complex of current practices and systems. This kind of research complements rhetoric and composition's recent research into writing and literacy across the curriculum, in the disciplines, in the professions, and in the workplace. These inquiries start at the other end, with highly developed literate systems which the student or neophyte must learn in order to participate in. These participations may range from the most routine practices to core decision making or innovation that transforms the nature of the endeavor. The success of one's literacy socialization into specialized practices may be measured

by how much access one has to the most central resources and mechanisms of communication, and how one makes use of that access.

In the historical middle, we have some allies in and resources from scholars engaged in the history of the book and print culture (building on the pioneering work of Eisenstein and of Chartier), as well as historians of specialized domains, such as the history of science and technology (for example, Dear) and the history of journalism and the news (for example, Schudson). Help also may be gained from a few scholars who have entered into parallel studies of other paper-and-ink symbolic practices, such as the history of numeracy (see Cohen; Porter) and the history of drawing as an everyday practice (Bermingham). The thriving profession of the history of literacy (see Kaestle), though it is not yet focused on the rise of literate systems of social organization nor on the advanced skills of specialized literacies, provides much data on the extent of literacy and the circulation of popular texts. We have allies also in current sociological, anthropological, and situated psychological studies of various forms of work and affiliation (see, for example, Engestrom and Middleton); the puzzles presented by the recent introduction of electronic media into a range of activities has brought particular attention to the embedding of symbolic activity within social arrangements.

Using these interdisciplinary resources to frame research projects can help us develop a truly fundamental understanding of the importance, mechanisms, and consequences of writing in society. Such a research program would broaden the basis of our discipline from its current marginal hold on students' writing as they make the transition from high school to the university (a hold which for many reasons we should not give up [Bazerman, "Response"]). First-year writing, or academic writing at all levels of undergraduate and graduate education, is the point at which students' personal literacy development meets the range of specialized literacy practices of contemporary professionalism. However, the tensions between individuals' actual writing skills and the professional demand for specialized writing skills are hard to understand and respond to without having in front of us the larger picture puzzle of literacy and society into which these moments, or pieces, of educational demand fit.

The Limited Domain of Classical Rhetoric

Rhetoric has historically developed as a reflective, practical, stra tegic art of language use. As such it provides a theoretical mode and a theoretical starting point for considering how we can ef fectively operate in this emerging world of increasingly special ized literate interaction. To develop theoretical terms that ar appropriate to literacy, we need to develop new rhetorical cat egories that extend beyond the limited vision of classical rheto ric, which was concerned with a small range of historicall particular oral performances that were embedded in societie which differed substantially from ours. Not of least significance in the ancient world the novel technology of literacy had no entered so deeply into the major institutions of social organiza tion. In the last two millennia, there have been some attempts t address rhetorical challenges created by the growing pervasive ness of literate communication, but no truly coherent set of cat egories has yet emerged that is both literate and rhetorical.

Of all the spontaneous talk that people engage in every da with only limited forethought and reflection in response to im mediately perceived circumstances, only a small and unusual sub set gave rise to the intellectual apparatus of classical rhetoric an a class of professional rhetoricians who provided advice and in struction for successful speech. The special class of speech event that ancient Greeks and Romans worried enough about to sup port the formation of a rhetorical profession was high-stake competitive debate presented to influence public evaluations o decisions. These triadic communications appealed to the third party audience for preference over one's opponent or opponents

If you were accused in public of appropriating your neighbor' land, or if you wanted your neighbors to take up arms against a neighboring state, or if you wanted to advance the leadershi and trust of a political ally, you might spend some time reflectin on the nature of the situation, how you might best speak to tha occasion, and how you might disarm your opponents' position You might well ask for advice from the most skilled of speaker and review people's memories of the most effective such talks i the past. If you anticipated a public future for your citizen child you might even want the child to be educated in the arts of publi

influence. Rhetoric, consequently, was designed to address oral, high-stakes public forums on forensic, deliberative, and epideictic matters.

Without the professional class and its social roles of advice giving and education, the literature on rhetorical theory would not have developed. Consider some contrasting cases. In the classical world, interpersonal conversation was not considered problematic enough or of sufficient stakes, so a reflective art on their conduct never developed; research and pedagogy on personal talk became a substantial industry only with the rise of modern clinical psychology, which gave us reasons to value the quality of communication with intimates. Similarly, in the classical world market negotiation and sales talk may have been learned in the family and in daily practice, but no highly reflective art developed at that time, no schools of marketing were formed, no advertising agencies provided lunch trade to the restaurants of Athens, and the language of commerce had no role in the formation of rhetoric. The reasons of power, class, and social motive that led to the selection of speech types that developed intellectual, social, and economic apparatuses for their refinement are interesting to consider, but here I need only point out the fact of selectivity.

In the classical world, although there was some teaching of writing (Murphy, *Short History*) and written texts did present principles of rhetoric, grammar, and logic, and while accounts and records were kept, laws were written, and legates and embassies were communicated with, no extensive system of reflection and strategy developed around writing, except as a form of scripting oratory, or around reading, except as a means of access to past oratorical performances, to be imitated and learned from (for example, Quintilian, bk. X). Literature, consisting mainly of scripted public performance of dramas and odes, drew the attention of the philosophers but primarily to evaluate the effect of communal performance on the emotional state and moral character of the citizen audience. The art of poetics was a spottier affair, the concern of the small subset of people engaged in creating the literature.

Following the lead of Quintilian, educators up through the nineteenth century continued to teach writing primarily as a means

of scripting oratory. Accordingly, rhetorical teaching remained directed toward public performance concerned with high-stakes, highly visible issues of justice, deliberation, and communal formation. In the medieval period, a rhetoric was also articulated for preaching, another highly public, scripted, high-stakes performance concerned with instilling values and commitments and directing communal behavior.

Ars Dictaminis as a Literate Rhetoric

The narrowness of rhetorical focus prevailed despite the proliferation of forms of writing in increasingly elaborate social systems, as suggested earlier. Within separate faculties of law, medicine, philosophy, and the other arts, students practiced a variety of literacies but considered their practices to be law or medicine or philosophy rather than a form of language use. Few masters of specialized language thought about the communicative nature of their disciplines, and if they did provide support for neophyte writing, it tended to be through untheorized books of forms and models for imitation.

One of the more sophisticated attempts to develop a reflective art of a specialized literacy practice was the *ars dictaminis*.[2] This medieval art of letter writing, as exemplified in one of its most well-developed texts, the anonymous *Principles of Letter Writing*, pays particular attention to issues of class and role (foregrounded in the extensive treatment of the salutation), establishing cooperative relations through a secure bond of sentiment and obligation (considered in the section on "The Securing of Good Will"), establishing the situation (in the adaptation of the Ciceronian narration), and identifying a specific point of cooperation (in the new rhetorical section called "The Petition").[3] Seeking cooperative action in an essentially dyadic relationship, the letter aims to strengthen social bonds, which are attenuated by the distances of place, time, and acquaintanceship that writing mediates. Further, because the occasion of the request is not immediately in front of the correspondent's eyes, the letter must represent the situation so as to orient the reader toward the requested transaction. While the narration in a persuasive speech

may cast a current and visible situation in a particular light, the narration in the letter must itself evoke the situation in the reader's imagination. With the situation evoked—and the reader appropriately respected according to hierarchy, with its obligations and loyalties, and with no opponent present or evoked—there is likely to be little need for persuasion; accordingly, the Ciceronian speech elements of division, proof, and refutation are not present in this form. Thus the art of letter writing begins to reframe the problems of strategic communication away from oral contest toward new social dynamics and difficulties of literate interaction, particularly as they take shape within a hierarchical society.

Audience attention, trust, and goodwill are particularly fragile in written communication. Readers face difficult work in imaginatively and favorably reconstructing the situation, activity, and author's presence from the texts they are reading; as a consequence, ruptures of misunderstanding, mistrust, or just indifference may rapidly lead to inattention, twisted meanings, lack of sympathy, or the framing of objections and accounts of the writer's shortcomings. A reader's alignment with the text is not easily regained once the bond between writer and reader is broken; furthermore, the writer has no way of monitoring the reader to sense a rupture and attempt a repair strategy. Speakers often regain wandering audiences, but writers rarely do. The *ars dictaminis* pays particular attention to the social, personal, and linguistic resources available to ensure such a rupture does not take place, and counsels risking the displeasure of the reader only when the writer's hierarchical authority is adequate to assure compliance and continuing obedience.

The Renaissance Pleasures of the Textualized Word

Although the *ars dictaminis* was a powerful force in the medieval world and eventually provided the foundations for later commercial and government correspondence, it did not have a long-term effect on the rhetorical traditions. Nor did the literate and graphic forms of Ramism influence rhetoric, despite Ramism's displacement of dialectic within philosophy and its offsprings of natural philosophy, social philosophy, political philosophy, and philosophy of the mind—each in turn developing into sciences

with their own peculiar practices.

During the Renaissance, literate composition and the circulation of manuscripts and books may have fostered the concern for style, which extended far beyond the moderate classical concern for figures and tropes intended for oral delivery. Writing facilitates the polishing of individual phrases and sentences as well as the elaboration and amplification of thoughts by insertion, as Quintilian had already recognized. Copiousness and elegance are far more amusing and tempting when one is sitting alone in a study than when one is speaking on the forum steps to a fidgety audience. Style and copiousness also influenced face-to-face manners, but only in the court as an indication of refinement. As such it also was associated with the refined literary practices of the court, where it found perhaps its highest form in the poetry, prose, and verse drama of the period.

At that time, refinement of phrasing was not theorized as a literate practice but instead was seen simply as an extension of style in the scripted oral tradition (soon to extend in eighteenth-century oratory to scripted gesture mapped out in graphic form). In the latter part of the twentieth century, however, such verbal play was specifically associated with the pleasures of the text and the highly textualized imagination of deconstructionist literary criticism, which sees disrupted texts as formed from small stylistic gestures carried out separately from any social or referential contexts they may give the illusion of evoking (Barthes). In any event, the literate inclinations of stylistic rhetoric did not lead to an examination of the basic communicative conditions of textuality or of the social functions being carried out by literacy, except as a marker of the personal refinement and witty amusement of equally refined audiences. In this aspect, rhetoric became a marker of social distinction—a formulation that even its practitioners might have accepted.

New Literate Practices and Literature's Subsumption of Literate Rhetoric

At the same time that rhetoric was attending to courtly display—or rather at the same time that those interested in courtly display had appropriated the rhetorical tradition and the name of rheto-

ric—other forms of literate practice were developing outside the official purview of rhetoric and even overtly distinguishing themselves from the flowers of rhetoric. The systems of bureaucratic, commercial, and scientific literacy that were expanding rapidly during this period of colonial expansion engaged in stylistic eloquence only insofar as they addressed issues of class, court patronage, or policy. While, for example, the early members of the Royal Society did engage in elaborate praise and metaphoric argument, particularly in relation to patronage and policy issues, as well as in efforts to maintain social respect within a still largely gentlemanly endeavor (Shapin; Atkinson), other kinds of language use were being developed to carry out their new communal investigative labor, within which they saw the remnants of eloquence as a hindrance. Accompanying this overt hostility to what was then called rhetoric, these new practices were not theorized in rhetorical terms, nor did they influence the concepts that formed the rhetorical conceptual canon.

Only in the eighteenth century did print communication become a serious topic of rhetorical analysis. Here my story narrows to Great Britain and the United States, the two countries which most directly influenced the tradition of writing instruction in the United States. In Great Britain, outsiders such as the instructors at the dissenting academies, most notably Joseph Priestley, and the Scots rhetoricians, beginning with Edward Aytoun and John Stevenson and continuing with Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, George Campbell, and Hugh Blair, recognized the new print culture of newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and books as the locus of social power. They noted that accomplished writers—people such as Addison, Dryden, Johnson, Mandeville, Pope, and Swift—wielded much influence. The rhetorics of the late eighteenth century, written for aspiring Scots and dissenters, included criticism of contemporary literary models in order to identify the character of effective prose. Further, they began to note that plain style and plain speaking, avoiding extravagant art, were important in maintaining readers' faith. Priestley went so far as to recommend a halting style for speech, to demonstrate contemplativeness and sensibility, which were particularly prized by the literate and educated.

> An audience, indeed that is wholly *illiterate* may have all their passions actuated by means of admiration, or astonishment, and mechanical communication but then there are few English audiences composed wholly of persons of so little reading and reflection as makes that practicable. And it is hardly possible that a person whose reading has lain among modern English books, or has conversed with persons of liberal education, should not have acquired more *delicacy of taste*, than to be taken with that gross and direct address of the passions, which Cicero adopted with applause. (emphasis in original, Priestley 114.)

Some of the same rhetoricians who were noting the soci power of belles lettres also noted other influential written genre that did not rely on classical persuasion. Smith in his rhetor discussed didactic writing, and in other publications he consic ered the psychological sources and consequences of the force c philosophic discourse (Bazerman, "Money Talks"). Similarl Priestley contemplated the nature of historical and scientific wri ing, presenting proposals for the most effective means of partic pating in and organizing such discourses (Bazerman, "Ho Natural"). Even these rhetoricians who reached out to a range c higher-status forms of literacy, however, did not attend to th even then powerful languages of commerce, law, or governmer bureaucracy. The focus of their expanded rhetoric remained o issues of public persuasion in areas of fundamental values, belie and policy associated with the leisured ruling class.

In a further break with prior rhetorics, these new print-or ented works abandoned previous assumptions about natur political order and human nature to begin with minimali Lockean views of human experience and associations. The rhetorics reconceived how humans used symbols to make sen of their own experience, to mediate between each other, and t form social order.

Sympathy, sensibility, and access to the experiences of othe became in this line of thinking important capacities for buildin human bonds. Belles lettres was seen as the key to successf public discourse, both for individual success in touching othe for one's own ends and for communal cooperation rising abo meanness of spirit, narrow self-interest, and the limits of ind

vidual experience. In this newly stabilized literary public realm, power and influence were associated with the new educated classes of sensibility and letters in a nineteenth-century Britain engaged in administering an empire. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States, belles lettres (in alliance with the new research orientation of the university) held sway over secondary and university higher literacy practices, which were no longer called rhetoric. However, in the more protean U.S. society of the period, commercial, corporate, journalistic, technical, scientific, and professional forms of literacy (entirely outside more traditional liberal education) gathered increasing importance and sophistication. A good index of the increasingly complex terrain of literate practices is the variety of magazines and newspapers that flooded the U.S. market in the century following the Civil War.

During this time, however, formal rhetorical teaching in Britain had vanished, and in the United States it had gone into a decline, stabilized under the simplified psychological assumptions of faculty and modes (Mulderig) and a simplified model of expository transmission of knowledge (Connors), both taught only to those who were viewed as not yet having reached adequate competence to take part in the literary literacy of liberal education. The theory that accompanied these pedagogic practices was in a fundamental sense arhetorical, in that it aimed at the development of the individual writer's cognitive faculties rather than at the effective interaction with an audience. Improved communication and persuasion were assumed to come from the increased shared understanding and approbation of those whose faculties were similarly developed. People of reason and refinement would come to a common understanding through intelligent writing. Composition became a mental discipline rather than a strategic art.

Until the revival of composition, new elaborations of rhetorical theory in this century rose primarily out of literary concerns and bear the marks caused by addressing literary problems (as in the work of Burke, Booth, and, by after-the-fact appropriation, Bakhtin). The formation of speech departments preserved a rhetoric aimed at spoken performance, with strong continuing allegiance to classical models. Technical, business, organizational, and journalistic writing developed their own

trainings within the professional schools and separate from Ei glish departments, composition, or rhetoric.

Composition's Rhetoric

In the United States in the post–World War II decades, the ne field of composition, devoted to university writing, attempted t develop new rhetorics out of communication and linguistics, seel ing new grounds for considering the form and interactions (writing.[4] After these impulses faltered, however, classical rhet(ric, reimported from speech departments, became the only alte native to literary models for considering what one would wa to write, to whom, for what purposes, and in what form. Tl investigation of writing processes and the psychology of writir did provide new energy, research, and theory for compositio but it has not provided much guidance as to what kinds of tex those processes might produce and what the consequences of tho: texts might be (see Russell, "Activity Theory and Process Aj proaches").

The issues of what one might write, for whom, for what pu pose, and in what form have, however, been reengaged by wri ing across the curriculum, in the disciplines and professions, an in the workplace, which have opened up the perspective presente here. The descriptive work of located writing practices has opene up new questions calling for new theory to guide people readir and writing in these new domains. Genre theory (drawing c linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, and rhetoric [s(Bazerman, "Life"; Bhatia; Freedman and Medway]) and activi theory (with its roots in psychology [see Russell, "Activity Theo and Its Implications," "Rethinking Genre"]) have started to pr(vide some shape to what we have found. Although orienting u to the social and personal dynamics of writing, however, the: theories have not yet provided a comprehensive practical rhet(ric to help guide people in their literate interactions.

Whether on the basis of these or other theories, a new rhet(ric for literacy needs to be built hand in hand with our growir knowledge of how modern society has come to work throug the written word. And that new rhetoric needs to be flexib

enough to address the transformations of literacy in electronic media—where word, sound, visuals, and calculation are being integrated and moved rapidly and cheaply across great distances in environments structured by the technology. It is a new world, and it needs a new rhetoric. The way to move toward that rhetoric is through continued research into the forces actually at play in the many texts that circulate in the social spaces created by the print and electronic worlds, and into the ways individuals and their activities are influenced by their engagement with mediating texts. By watching what these texts do and what people do with them, without assuming that they are simply reproducing the activities of the agora, we can move toward a rhetoric that will illuminate the great diversity of our communicative world.

Notes

1. For overviews and collections, see Russell, "Writing and Genre"; Bazerman and Paradis; Freedman and Medway; Odell and Goswami; Spilka; Swales, *Genre*.

2. For overviews, see Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,* and Perelman.

3. For a translation of this text, see Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts.*

4. Young, Becker, and Pike's *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* can be well understood as the culminating work of this period.

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Accounting for "Well-Worn Grooves": Composition as a Self-Reinforcing Mechanism

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Toward the end of "'Tracing Round the Frame,'" Richard Young poses a question that serves as an impetus for this chapter, for it is a question that both of us as scholars and teachers of writing have pondered long and hard:

> [W]hy does our profession persist in relegating the study and teaching of writing to an inferior status despite what is by now more than a generation of serious theoretical, historical, and applied work in rhetorical studies in English Departments? One would think that the achievement and the potential it has revealed for valuable work in the future would have had a greater impact on attitudes and practices in the profession. We have swerved from well-worn grooves many times in the past for less reason. (150)

We, too, have wondered why, despite decades of dedicated efforts to unseat it, the compulsory first-year composition system established over a century ago remains impervious to any substantial change.

What makes this situation so puzzling is that since its inception as a response to perceived problems with student writing, college composition has been roundly and consistently criticized as inadequate. "If freshman composition really began in 1874," noted Leonard Greenbaum in "The Tradition of Complaint,"