

# MICROHISTORIES OF COMPOSITION

*Edited by*  
**BRUCE McCOMISKEY**

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
*Logan*

## AGAINST THE RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION GRAIN

### *A Microhistorical View*

Jacob Craig, Matthew Davis, Christine Martorana,  
Josh Mehler, Kendra Mitchell, Antony N. Ricks,  
Bret Zawilski, and Kathleen Blake Yancey

Like other disciplines, rhetoric and composition finds its origin stories located in competing grand narratives, most of them situated in a given philosophy or ideology. But as historians more generally are discovering (e.g., Martyn Lyons 2012), lived experience plays an underappreciated but equally significant role in any field's founding, and so too for rhetoric and composition. Accounts of such lived experience are provided in a set of interviews of leaders in the field—many of whom were participants in the field's founding—conducted by Florida State University graduate students: taken together, these interviews provide a rich corpus of source material for developing several microhistories of rhetoric and composition. Here, we draw on our interview with Charles Bazerman (2011), who in recounting his own experience pursuing a life-long career in rhetoric and composition speaks explicitly to his relationship with, and resistance to, the normative academic structures of the time, among them the structures of literature in English departments; of rhetoric in the forming field of rhetoric and composition; of the early writing across the curriculum's "missionary" efforts to infuse writing studies' nascent knowledge about writing practices and knowledge into disciplinary sites of writing; and, in some interesting ways, of the emerging field, now discipline, of rhetoric and composition itself.

As the work of Giovanni Levi suggests, Bazerman navigated his way through a field he participated in founding through "constant negotiation, manipulation, choices, and decisions in the face of normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms" (Levi 2001, 98–99). The continuing

query for Bazerman (2011), as he explains throughout the interview, focuses on disciplinarity—not so much the disciplinarity of the field identified by some as an end (e.g., Hairston), nor the interdisciplinarity lauded by others (e.g., Bartholomae), but rather the role of disciplinarity in writing itself and the primary significance of research in its formation, both then and now.

Before beginning this analysis, however, it is helpful to highlight some working assumptions of microhistory and provide a rationale for Bazerman as our choice for a human lens into the history of rhetoric and composition. As other chapters in this volume attest, one value of a microhistorical approach is its doubled perspective, its emphasis on both the structures situating individuals and the individuals themselves as actors in the history. Thus, as Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó explain, “Microhistory still seems the best means to point to the fact that structures—at a given moment those unalterable conditions that limit the historical actors’ freedom of action—are to a large extent the product of individual decisions that point to the responsibility of the actor” (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 69). Moreover, as Magnússon and Szijártó point out, individuals do more than make decisions within or contributing to structures: “Structures of history are built, upheld and demolished by the actions of individuals” (75).

If microhistory is committed to locating the effects of both structures and individuals, a key question for us was, which individual’s history might be employed for this purpose? As indicated, we have interviewed several leaders of writing studies contemporaneous with Bazerman—among them Lester Faigley, Amy Devitt, and Shirley Wilson Logan—and several of them, like Bazerman, speak to finding what we might call a *peripheral way into the field*, via linguistics for Devitt, for example, and African American history for Logan, which makes sense given that the field itself wasn’t fully established when they began studying rhetoric and composition; and it is worth noting that these ancillary or peripheral areas of interest providing a way in continue to contribute to the field today. But in reviewing Bazerman’s (2011) interview, we began to understand his specific history as involving more than finding a way in; rather, he was interested in changing the field both before it was fully established—Bazerman being interested in redirecting its course-in-process, as it were, to reflect better his own values and actions—and after. In this sense, we see Bazerman as an “exceptional normal,” as defined by, Magnússon and Szijártó.

How to choose then, the relevant and significant cases? The answer of the microhistorian to this theoretical challenge is the concept of the “exceptional normal” (*eccezionalmente normale*) or “normal exceptions.”

According to this in preindustrial societies, breaking certain rules was in fact the norm. But it also means, and this is its more important meaning, that a really exceptional document, a marginal case can reveal a hidden reality, when the sources are silent about the lower social strata, or when they systematically distort their social reality (Ginzburg and Poni 1991: 7–8, cf. Ginzburg 1993: 21, Grendi 1996: 238). Hans Medick argues that the meaning of this opaque term, opposed to statistical representativity, has broadened to denote the capacity of deep and contextualizing analyses of individual cases to go beneath the surface and reveal what was possible and what was not (Medick 1994: 46). (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 19)

As an exceptional normal, Bazerman speaks eloquently to the structures, both formed and emerging, that he found inhospitable and that thus motivated him to seek other paths, other ways of being. Furthermore, his narrative works more generally to reveal how social structures of the time—in English departments, in the field, and in WAC programs—both have and have not prevailed.

Not least, however, microhistory also represents a way to make abstract narratives of general history more complex and to show what they occlude and thus make invisible. By analyzing the experiences of Bazerman in the spirit of Levi, we seek to add both crosscurrents and complexity to our understanding of composition's established historical narratives. As Levi observes, microhistory arises from a necessity to abandon "schematic and general interpretations in order to properly identify the real origins of forms of behavior, choice and solidarity" (Levi 2012, 123). Microhistory, for Levi, aims at reconstructing particular moments, events, and persons not simply as examples in the absence of any general explanations but instead "as physical correlatives to the complexity of the contexts within which men and women live and move" (125). That's not to say that grand narratives of history are rejected; rather, microhistory shows historical actors' complex experiences in the contexts of historical structures. For Magnússon and Szijártó, microhistory seeks to analyze how actors viewed their past as well as "meanings they attributed to the things that happened to them on one hand and on the other give explanations with references to historical structures, long-lived mentalities and global processes using a retrospective analysis, all of which were absent from the actors' own horizons of interpretation." This complexity can only be presented without oversimplifying it by focusing on "a very narrowly defined object" (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 75). What is also interesting here, however, is that while Bazerman necessarily speaks retrospectively in the interview, his memory is that at the time he is recalling, the late 1960s and early 1970s, he *was* aware



of structures encouraging if not enforcing a given behavior and set of approaches, found those at odds with his own values and experiences, and so deliberately sought out other opportunities and pathways. In this sense, given an individual's awareness not only in retrospect but also *at the time*, our analysis provides more nuance and flexibility to Magnússon and Sziártó's theory; it suggests that individuals may understand the power of structures both during a given period of time and later on and also be motivated by them.

Our analysis is, however, principally interested in the history of rhetoric and composition: by making the experiences of Bazerman the narrowly defined object of our analysis, we aim to deepen our understanding of the uncertainty, inconsistency, and nonlinearity of one scholar's experience within the history of composition as well as to make more complex our understanding of composition's past. As Levi notes, microhistory highlights the inconsistencies of reality and the "necessary partiality" of our knowledge—and it is this acknowledgment that points to "the possibility of further discussion and other possible interpretations" (Levi 2012, 129). It is our hope that this microhistory of composition elicits such continuing discussion of composition's history.

In this context, we next provide background for the Bazerman interview, identifying the circumstances of the interview and outlining our interview process. Then, turning to Bazerman's account of the field in terms of his lived experience, we mark four themes emerging from the interview and important for Bazerman's formation as a scholar, his account of the field, and our own understanding of the field's origins.

#### THE BAZERMAN INTERVIEW

Since 2006, the rhetoric and composition program housed in the English department at Florida State University has played host to an ever-growing list of scholars from across the field. As part of the Visiting Speakers Series, the visiting scholar typically provides a talk to the department about his or her research, meets informally with graduate students and faculty, and participates in an interview conducted by a team of graduate students. These interviews provide a unique and valuable opportunity to explore the personal and professional practices of members of the field and of scholars working at the field's periphery in connected disciplines (such as social semiotics and education). Each interview is conducted by a team of two to six graduate students. The interview team and visiting scholar typically gather in the Rhet/Comp Suite in the Williams Building on FSU's campus or in the FSU Digital Studio, both spaces that

provide an intimate setting for the interview, one that encourages an informal conversation with the visiting scholar and invites students and scholar to interact as mentees/mentor. In other words, the interviews are designed to provide an outlet through which experienced scholars within the field can offer guidance, advice, and reflections to individuals preparing to enter the same field.

A set of seven questions act as a heuristic structuring the interviews.

1. How did you get into the field?
2. Which scholars in the field have most influenced your thinking?
3. How about life experiences: how have they shaped your thinking?
4. What classes do you teach, which are your favorite, and why?
5. What's on your nightstand?
6. What do you think is the most important question that students in R/C should be considering today?
7. And where do you see the field of literacy studies/rhetoric and composition going?

Although these questions guide the general flow of the interviews, as with any conversation, there are often follow-up questions and comments combined with tangential stories and anecdotes that emerge as the interview progresses. Once the interview session is completed, we distribute the audio recordings among the interview participants who then set about transcribing the occasion, and in this case, we invited Charles Bazerman to review the interview; he has edited it for factual errors.

#### THEME ONE: A SOCIAL SELF FORMED THROUGH WRITING

In reviewing the transcript of Bazerman's interview (2011), we were struck by the parallel chronology of Bazerman and the field. Our first theme, then, begins where Bazerman did, as a graduate student and teacher in the late 1960s at the beginning of his shift from literature to writing, a shift motivated by the profound influence of three experiences—alienation from literature, teaching in an elementary school, and psychotherapy—through which Bazerman began to understand himself as a social self formed through writing. It's also worth noting that this shift occurred at a certain larger moment in the United States, what we might call its *Zeitgeist*. The early 1960s, a time then and now referred to as *Camelot*, had first been replaced by Lyndon Johnson's era of civil-rights legislation, then later by increasing escalation in Vietnam, by urban riots, and by antiwar demonstrations, all these setting the

stage for a turn to the right. As Rick Perlstein explains, "In 1964, the Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon B. Johnson won practically the biggest landslide in American history, with 61.05 percent of the popular vote and 486 of 538 electoral college votes. In 1972, the Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon won a strikingly similar landslide—60.67 percent and 520 electoral college votes. In the eight years in between, the lines that define our culture and politics were forged in blood and fire" (Perlstein 2008, xi). During this time, particularly in the context of the Vietnam War, the enthusiasm of the Camelot young had given way to cynicism, as suggested in Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's "Ohio" memorializing both the students murdered at Kent State University and the larger generation of college-aged students: "Tin soldiers and Nixon coming/We're finally on our own." And in the midst of this tectonic shift in national politics and identity, there was attention to college composition and, ironically, to the attention it was not receiving: "Too many college instructors, their graduate study devoted almost entirely to literature, have made no advanced study of composition, display little more than average competence in their own writing, and see their professional advancement associated with literary or linguistic scholarship. It is no wonder that study and research in the deeper aspects of composing have not traditionally received the sustained attention of our best minds" (Conference on College Composition and Communication 1968, 81).

Sociologically, the decade of the 1960s in the United States, for the country and the field, celebrated the individual, at least in contrast to the conformity of the 1950s. Students especially located their individuality in various causes, some serious and some less so, from civil rights and protests of the Vietnam War to the celebration of LSD's power to raise consciousness. This focus on the individual was echoed by the field, which located its early studies of writing process within the individual writer. Donald Murray (1982), for example, conceptualized writers even as their own first readers; likewise, our studies of writing process are memorable precisely because of their focus on individual writers like Sondra Perl's (1979) Tony. Charles Bazerman, who found himself working against this grain in conceptualizing the self, saw the self not as individual node apart but rather as a connected node on a highly structured and interactive network; moreover, he accounts in his oral interview for his developing sense of the self as culminating through three seemingly unrelated concurrent events: his "re-orientation" away from literature; his teaching in an elementary school; and his experience with psychotherapy. As Bazerman puts it, "That's probably the most

important series of events, cluster of events that really re-oriented me and gave me direction." Together, these events exercised foundational influences on his view of writing as a human-affirming practice located in structured social systems, a view at odds with the more popular view of English and literature as hospitable sites for writing and of writing as an individual process. In other words, even before he entered the field of rhetoric and composition, Bazerman was an exceptional normal. In this sense, of course, in recounting his recollections, Bazerman isn't responding to the histories we read now since they didn't exist at the time; he is responding to what he perceived as the historical trajectories of the day. Other narratives of the time give emphasis to other themes—New Criticism for literature, for example, and a kind of nonconformist's conformity of the 1960s. But for Bazerman as an exceptional normal, what stand out are his reactions to what he saw as an overemphasis on individualism and an absence of methodology, reactions that became foundational for his way of seeing composition.

Bazerman's first step in this direction is what he calls a "re-orientation" pivoting him away from literature and toward literacy and writing in particular. Pursuing a graduate degree in literature in the late 1960s, Bazerman, by his own account a student with many interests, didn't view a prospective career in literature with enthusiasm: "In '67 and '68 I wasn't particularly happy with being a lit[erature] grad student; I was doing some Renaissance drama and poetry. I had tried a lot of undergraduate majors and had wound up doing literature, and although there were certain aspects of literature I liked, I wasn't happy with where it was leading me for a career." In fact, after a brief stint teaching in an elementary school, described below, Bazerman returned to complete his PhD in literature, not because of a passion for or commitment to literature but principally because he could not think of other viable options: "I went back and finished up Literature, because of my own limitations and lack of imagination of alternatives. I finished up very quickly, and when I got my first real job after that, it was to teach composition." This experience, however, contributed to Bazerman's relationship to literature and to English departments more generally. He cites Maxine Hairston, for example, in talking about how the field should define itself. When reflecting on how he planned his CCCC Chair's Address, he notes that he thought in terms of Hairston's (1985) admonition that the field "break" with literature: "I also had messages of, kind of a next step after Maxine Hairston, in her call to break from literary studies, is that we needed to keep on defining ourselves in our own lights and not by the lights of the field we happen to come out of."



Likewise, as opposed to many who claim their relationship to English departments with pride and see literature as sibling or parent to composition—David Bartholomae is perhaps the preeminent example—Bazerman sees literature as only one among many disciplines, and as important, one not defined, as most disciplines are, by its methods. Instead, literature is without methodological definition: “We [compositionists] come out of the US, out of literary studies and humanities that, in fact, almost consider themselves anti-methodological. And I have had the experience—and maybe you have—of asking literary scholars, so, what’s our methodology? [And] they often say we don’t have methodology. It’s individual.” In other words, Bazerman understands that compared to other disciplines, literature is methodologically anomalous; implied in his response is that Bazerman views this as a problem. As important, linking himself to Hairston—whose CCCC Chair’s observation about literature colleagues’ neglect of composition, “THEY’RE NOT LISTENING,” still resonates—Bazerman casts literature institutionally as a site that, if we let it, will cast its shadow over and define composition. Put in terms of sponsorship, Bazerman rejects English departments as sponsors of composition, seeing composition instead as a self-sponsored field with multiple disciplinary relations. Not least, Bazerman rejects what he perceives as the individualism characterizing literary studies, in which a scholar’s individually distinctive account of a text or its composer substitutes for a shared methodology that could locate and bring together a social field and its researchers, which is the kind of field Bazerman seeks.

Like others during this time, Bazerman sought a way to avoid fighting in Vietnam; in his case, between beginning and completing his doctorate, Bazerman began teaching elementary school, a second factor in his foundational cluster. He began this teaching opportunistically: “They took the graduate deferment away and the only way I could not go kill people was to—the last job they were going to give a deferment for was inner city teaching, which I did.” He found himself teaching first and third grades in conditions that were “tough,” a task for which he was neither prepared nor trained. Still, what struck him was twofold: how important the job was and how important literacy is. “Teaching literacy really seemed to transform lives, and you could see the effect of literacy or the effect on the child of not taking to literacy. The trajectories of these kids were taking shape, even by third grade. So, that teaching was the transformative event.” Bazerman’s use of the word *transformative* twice in this brief passage underscores how important this teaching was for him and how purposeful, how in contrast to his anemic interest in literature.



Interestingly and ironically, unlike others in our field for whom teaching composition is the centerpiece (a point made well in Joseph Harris's [1996] *A Teaching Subject*), Bazerman finds his interest in literacy less in teaching and more in the power and wonder of writing itself.

Finally, during this period, Bazerman engaged in psychotherapy, the final factor within this foundational cluster of lived experiences. The therapy, conducted by "somebody who was highly influenced by Sullivan," provided Bazerman with his "first introduction to that intellectual world. I came to reframe myself in a much more social sense, and to understand the power of social science and the pragmatist orientation." Someone with a self-labeled "very troubled family life," Bazerman found in therapy an intellectual home allowing him to bring separate elements—school and the rest of social life—together into a coherent philosophy, one keyed to structures and relationships. "I didn't have much of a social place and not much of a social support system, except for school . . . I didn't like my family—I liked school." School, as it turns out, provided a powerful framework for Bazerman—to see himself "in relations to others," to see how school provides a context and structure for human relationships, to see the relationship of practice to theory, and to see writing itself as social interaction.

I liked school. Then I started to develop an understanding which gave me relations to others, and my place in them, which gave me also a way to sort of monitor my behavior and see who I was in social circumstances. This perspective gave me the practical consequences of theories, and then, that then also provided some of my orientation to writing, as I started to see writing as social interaction, and as creating identity and social positioning, writing as engaged within social systems rather than as the product of the individual. That all really came out of my psychotherapy.

School provided a context for living and understanding the social and relationships, while psychotherapy provided the space and intellectual material to articulate observations based on this experience, observations directly connected to what Bazerman recognizes as literacy's power in social settings: how it impacts the children and their lives—both present and future—in material ways. Bazerman, as an exceptional normal, remembers "start[ing] to see writing as social interaction," a very different way of conceptualizing writing, one almost canonical now but very much at odds with a then-current Murraysque, Elbowian notion of the individual writer making meaning not so much with others but rather with the self and on the page. And here, too, we see a hint of another theme to come: Bazerman's interest in learning to write as an activity with a future, as a lifelong activity.

In sum, in this foundational moment, Bazerman's approach to life, writing, and research spun away from an understanding of the self as individual, one reified in literature study, and toward seeing the self in "relations"—engaging in composing as a social interaction and participating in society.

#### THEME TWO: TEACHING AT CUNY AND A NEW EXIGENCE

Although the United States, with the election in 1968 of Richard Nixon, had turned to the right, a new social experiment was taking place under the leadership of Mayor John Lindsay in New York City. More specifically, in 1970, the "giant City University of New York" became even bigger and more diverse as it moved to open admissions in the service of students whose discourses were very different than those faculty typically encountered: "With its 16 campuses and over-all enrollment of 190,000, [CUNY] last week became the first municipal institution to open its doors to all high school graduates in the most extensive urban test of open admission. It embraced a freshman class of 35,035, compared with 19,559 last year and 26,000 who would have entered this month in the normal pre-open enrollment course" (*New York Times*, September 20, 1970). Moreover, what was happening at CUNY was happening elsewhere as more community colleges opened their doors and as basic writing became a new college subject, all of which meant that teachers needed to find new ways to help students learn. "As college entrance requirements are being lowered or completely disregarded in favor of a neglected segment of our population, college teachers find that they cannot rely on traditional methods of teaching. In particular, freshman composition teachers cannot depend on the time-worn method: assign the reading material, discuss and analyze it, assign the composition, then hand back the composition with corrections" (Griffin 1969, 360). For many in composition, as for Bazerman, it was a watershed moment in higher education; these new students, attending college as composition's process movement began to take center stage in the profession, prompted considerable research-based pedagogical work, some of which occurred at CUNY. Based on her work with these new CUNY students, for example, Mina Shaughnessy began the theorizing about student language that would be published in her award-winning *Errors and Expectations* just as the new field of basic writing began forming. Also teaching basic writing at CUNY during this time, Charles Bazerman became convinced that what we needed was independent research on writing informed by a

research agenda that doesn't necessarily attend to pedagogy; in conducting such research, he argued, we would become the experts of our own field. At the same time, again as an exceptional normal, what he labels an "outlier," Bazerman saw his passion for and definition of research composition as peripheral to the larger field, which focused on teaching—then and now.

According to Bazerman's account, he was one of several teaching at CUNY during this period, what he calls "the Mina Shaughnessy period": "There was a large group of people who were committed to writing, which became called Basic Writing." His interest in writing, however, was different than that of his colleagues; they, like teachers in the field nationally, focused on the incoming students and what they needed during that first year, while Bazerman attended to the larger social scene these students were entering and the kinds of writing they would do *after* FYC as they progressed into college and even after they left—as Bazerman put it, "writing all the way up": "To me it wasn't just the beginning points—Basic Writing kind of orients the students at the beginning points—But what does it take to succeed in higher education and beyond, into writing in the professional world, writing all the way up? That leads to another type of question. For many years I was an outlier, or at least I think of myself as an outlier because of the interest in the higher end of writing, writing outside the freshman classroom." Given this interest, this other "type of question," Bazerman began learning about that "higher ed of writing . . . outside the freshman classroom": "So I started to investigate what academic writing was. I didn't phrase it quite that same way, but what kind of writing would they need to do at the university? I started to collect information about writing in other disciplines. First, I started to think about what we now call intertextuality, that the writing was heavily in the context of their readings." This experience, teaching basic writing in a community of colleagues to diverse students at CUNY, provided a new purpose for Bazerman, one located in the idea that learning to write within a social context is a life-long process, making writing not "knowable" in one classroom or in a single semester: instead, one needs to learn about writing elsewhere and everywhere.

Linked to this experience is another fundamental observation for Bazerman, that practitioners and researchers play important but different roles in advancing writing, that the field requires both, and that the field should support both—and ultimately, that teaching well is built on a foundation of research about writing. We need, he says,

to take our research much more seriously. We view ourselves as practitioners. Even assuming we knew what writing was and kind of—let me find the right way to say this, it's not flowing so easily—but well there is this thing we kind of know what it is and we'll just teach people how to do it. Some people have a hard time getting it but not that we have a really—we also assume that to some degree we all know what it is to write. And that we have the sense of what the full competence is, whereas at the same time everyone still feels insecure about their writing. But we don't have the courage to go and find out what's the full extent and variety of writing, how complex it is. We are very much at the surface of understanding what writing is, so we have a responsibility to investigate it deeply.

The gaps in our knowledge about writing, echoing what Bazerman didn't know when he began teaching basic writing, motivate his view of what we need to do: although we “view ourselves as practitioners,” and even though “we also assume that to some degree we all know what it is to write,” we don't yet know “the full extent and variety of writing.” To investigate writing more deeply is our responsibility, but one that also requires courage—to learn about writing elsewhere, to understand writing on a deeper, more encompassing level than is possible by remaining within the safety of the writing classroom.

This problem—that we haven't learned enough about writing—has been exacerbated, according to Bazerman, by the leading professional and scholarly organization in the field, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, or Cs), the organization that he himself chaired in 2009. Bazerman “and other people have had . . . a kind of frustration with the C's . . . C's is very much a practice-based organization.” Bazerman understands why: “Most of the people spend most of their time teaching in the class as I did for many years. And they don't have the time, the perspective, the reward system to pursue other lines of work. But, as a result of that, the convention has had a great weighting towards classroom presentations. And there has been no real venue to present hardcore research papers.” Without the “hardcore research papers,” we don't know what we need to know, a point Bazerman makes by referring to his experience teaching third grade: “So how can writing instruction in third grade and the goals of writing be the same as high school or higher ed? It just, it does not make sense. So we need a really fundamental research field to start to understand many, many things. And we can't do our work well if we don't understand these things.”

Perhaps to help us understand that other fields have experienced the same issue, Bazerman points to medicine as a field analogous to writing studies in the ways both fields have developed.<sup>1</sup>



So in a way we are like clinical doctors. I am not here suggesting teaching of writing as repairing the wounded and curing pathology. Think of a health-oriented medical system. Here I am just talking about the knowledge needed to provide effective guidance. If you have doctors who are simply treating patients and have no pharmacological knowledge, no biological knowledge, no knowledge of people's lives and the relationship of nature and nurture, they won't be very good doctors, right? And that was the position of doctors up until the beginning of the 20th Century. Ok, that is the position we are mostly in. When I say we have a shallow view of the field, we see our students and we respond on a kind of surface level. Of course, there are better choices and worse choices to be made at that level. But until we get a much deeper understanding of what writing is, what writing development is, what it is that we want and they want to accomplish, how you go about doing those things, then our capacities will be very limited.

To meet this need, Bazerman suggests that a research group should be formed, but as important is that the researchers need to be in dialogue with practitioners. "I would say research—there needs to be some group, whether it's us—whoever that is—or some other group, who takes writing seriously as—who tries to understand writing. There is also a need of people who will teach it—or support the development of individuals and communities at various parts of their writing development." According to Bazerman, neither practice nor research can or should stand alone; it is to the benefit of the field if we engage the two in a reciprocal relationship, to its detriment if we do not. Teaching at CUNY, then, Bazerman saw students entering the university and wanted to know about writing beyond FYC and "all the way up"; in taking up this query, "collect[ing] information about writing in other disciplines," he sees the need to learn more about the practices we are fostering, and not surprisingly given his understanding of structures, also sees the need for a research group to organize this research.

### THEME THREE: THE IDENTIFICATION OF AN ANTECEDENT AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

As the field formed, it looked for intellectual antecedents, most prominent among them rhetoric. The strongest claims about our intellectual heritage position rhetoric as the ur-discipline; for example, Robert Connors has argued that "we need at the beginning to understand that 'history of composition' is not a *sui generis* subfield of composition studies. Like composition studies itself, history of composition is a branch of the larger field of rhetorical studies, which has existed for over 2000 years" (Connors 1991, 50). Others like Jason Thompson and



Theresa Enos recall a deliberate linking of rhetoric and composition, again with rhetoric acting as frame and substance for the composition course: "In the heady revolutionary days of the 1970s and throughout most of the 1980s, rhetoric in its vigorous revival not only marched hand in hand with the process movement but also ensconced itself as the very core of the college writing course" (Thompson and Enos 2012, 162). And it is not surprising that many in the field remember it this way; after all, the flagship journal of the field, *College Composition and Communication*, offered as its third special issue the October 1965 issue "Further toward a New Rhetoric" following issues dedicated to composition as art and polemics, with articles like Francis Christensen's (1965) "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," which employs rhetoric as an inventional device for discourse, and Richard Hughes's (1965) "The Contemporaneity of Classical Rhetoric," which seeks to establish classical rhetoric as the heart of composition. Interestingly, at least some of this scholarship, like Edward Corbett's (1969) edited *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* and Wayne Booth's (1961) *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, was keyed to literature rather than to writing, probably because the authors were situated in English departments and had literary backgrounds themselves. In sum, as Gerald Mulderig points out, "One can readily understand how . . . the 2,500-year history of rhetorical theory and practice seemed to promise an intellectual foundation upon which a new conception of writing instruction might be built" (Mulderig 1999, 164).

It is thus a truism that in the modern iteration of composition studies, the early scholars and teachers looked for intellectual antecedents and found them in Greece; ancient rhetoric provided a distinguished history for the field as well as intellectual materials for members of a field and for college writers (e.g., Corbett's [1971] *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*) to think with. When Charles Bazerman looked for intellectual antecedents for the field, however, he rejected classical rhetoric in favor of figures like Adam Smith, whom we might think of as a rhetor working in the world; theorists like Lev Vygotsky, who is known for his emphasis on the relationship between social interactions, thought, and language; and American pragmatists such as John Dewey. Central to all of these figures is what we might call their *world relationship* and the way writing enacts their theories and structures our relationships.

In thinking about the role of classical rhetoric in providing a background and possible intellectual ballast for writing studies, Bazerman finds it too constrained by its own origins to be very helpful to *writers*: "I found a couple of concepts from classical rhetoric very useful, but classical rhetoric as a whole I found too constrained by the socio-historical

circumstances in which it was created and the purpose it was created for. It wasn't created for literacy, for writing—it was created for high-stakes oral presentation within the social structure of Greece and Rome, and the replications of that, after that." At the same time, he is interested in what we might call *the rhetoric of*, that is, the ways we come to a set of questions, the structures we use, and the enactments writing makes possible: "In terms of sociologists, when I got interested in rhetoric of science I was directed to Robert Merton—who's like the founder of the sociology of science. . . . Merton was very influential, and I think you can see that in my work in that I try to understand how larger structures arise, and people orient towards larger structures in their writing, and how they orient to activity systems, for example." Moreover, Bazerman is interested in rhetoricians—or given their role in the world, what we might call *rhetors*—but as he concedes, they are not the ones we in the field typically reference.

In terms of rhetoricians, I would say the ones that influenced me most deeply, and I've written on them, are Adam Smith and Joseph Priestly. They represent eighteenth century attempts to remake rhetoric. They're not even viewed as the major eighteenth century rhetoricians, but in my mind, I think they were much more interesting in what they were attempting to do than the ones that are more commonly cited. I think Adam Smith in particular was very, very deep . . . in his rhetoric. . . . What was he doing rhetorically in *The Wealth of Nations*—and you have to reconstruct how he came to conceive of language and the role of communication—it then becomes evident that the early work is interesting. It's interesting; it opens a couple of issues, and you can see him trying to cope with writing, and you can see him trying to cope with a more complex and more modern psychology and with social and political problems that were outside of the assumptions of Greek and Roman politics.

What interests Bazerman in Adam Smith is, in part, that he, much like Bazerman himself, is more learner than teacher: for example, Smith, as described by Bazerman, tries "to cope with writing," modeling for us the kind of "attempting" we also engage in today. What also interests Bazerman is that Smith is taking up the issues of his own time, "social and political problems . . . outside of the assumptions of Greek and Roman politics," which again speaks to his sense that to be valuable, writing and rhetoric must engage with the issues of the time in a framework also of the time.

Bazerman cites another set of intellectual antecedents as influential, these focused on cognition and the individual, especially "within the social situation."

I also was very influenced by the Russian psychologists, Vygotsky, and all those that came after, in the way they understood cognition, and

cognitive development in relationship to, not just social situation, but the individual's activities within the social situation—and how they came to understand that. That, and also, the third pole of influence was American pragmatists: Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Harry Stack Sullivan—and actually he's not as often thought of in that group—but he clearly grew out of that group. He was a psychiatrist, but with a very social-biographical orientation towards how people come to learn to live in their world and solve problems about living in their world.

For Bazerman, theorists such as Vygotsky and Dewey highlight “how people come to learn to live in their world and solve problems about living in their world.”

It is worth noting, of course, that Bazerman is not the only scholar of his time looking to Vygotsky and Dewey as intellectual forbears: in that sense, he is not alone in being an exceptional normal. But he is exceptional in the combination of (1) citing Vygotsky and (2) moving beyond literature and reifying the individual, as a quick comparison with the scholar Janet Emig demonstrates. Emig, author of the 1971 groundbreaking study of writing process, *The Composing Processes of 12th graders*, also looked beyond rhetoric to Vygotsky as a helpful theorist, but she did so, perhaps unintentionally, in the context of literature and the individual. Emig's (1971) case, in other words, is instructive in terms of how normalized and naturalized literature and the genius individual were as a default context at this time, even for someone intentionally looking to Vygotsky. As Steven Schreiner explains,

At the root of Emig's study is an author whose composing process has less to do with students' composing practices than with a notion of literary authorship based on a modernist aesthetic prevalent in an academy shaped by new critical methods. Valéry, Eliot, Yeats, Hardy, Rilke, and Woolf figure prominently in Emig's bibliography, which includes over ninety items on artistic composition by authors and their critics. Her conviction that the processes of established writers—principally poets—reveal how good writing works in general underlies her observations of the composing processes of twelfth graders. Stephen North has noted that, as a clinician, Emig used a case-study model to find traits in the individual that would hold true for the larger population: Just as her case-studies of eight students helped her construct a typical twelfth-grade writer, her investigation of literary authors helped her construct a model of good composing practices. In all fairness, Emig looked to literature because the most readily available data on the writing process came from discussions by and about literary authors, most notably in *The Paris Review Interviews*. But even though she dismisses such data as idiosyncratic, it clearly informs her idea of a model writer and writing process. Emig's case-study of well-trained subjects, and particularly of her chief subject, Lynn, paved the way for investigations of the writing process of diversely skilled and prepared

students. But despite the liberating potential of Emig's work, it was nevertheless modeled on a type of composition that required a privileged level of preparedness and instruction in English. (Schreiner 1997, 88)

In this sense, then, Bazerman, in moving beyond the trifecta of literature, the individual, and rhetoric, is an exceptional normal of a most pronounced variety.

Nor does he identify with the "language people." In closing this section of the interview, Bazerman (2011) again refers to his antecedents as a way of explaining his own stance—"You'll notice none of them are language people"—again drawing attention to the idea that we have much to learn from disciplines not our own. For Bazerman, one of the main benefits of looking to theorists beyond our field is that they allow us to attend to the choices we make as writers and the social structures that result from and inform these choices: "I think you can see that in my work in that I try to understand how larger structures arise, and people orient towards larger structures in their writing, and how they orient to activity systems." Not least, he brings this point home by invoking the interview itself as such a structured situation: "You're treating me very nicely here and with a lot of respect as a senior professor, that makes this an event between senior professor and graduate students. We're making it that way. If we'd come with a different orientation to each other—with beers, right, and there was a television screen up here and we were watching the game, it would be a different event and our set of relations would be different and the social structures that would be engaged would be different. That's structural." That's structural.

#### THEME FOUR: THE FUNCTION AND FORM OF WAC

Several master narratives account for the beginning of the WAC movement, with at least three schools contending for the honor of originating WAC—Carleton College, Beaver College, and Michigan Technological University. Central to the narrative for all the WAC pioneers is the leading role of English faculty: helping their (benighted) colleagues learn how to teach writing in their classes, typically through writing-to-learn activities like journaling. Barbara Walvoord, for example, identifying WAC as a kind of movement, claims that "like any movement, [it] was influenced by societal factors. It may be seen in part as a move by writing faculty to extend their power and influence, helped by wide-spread perception that student writing was inadequate" (Walvoord 1996, 61). Chris Anson takes this argument even further: "So important [for WAC leaders] was the need to sell the idea that writing is . . . 'a powerful tool for



learning,' and so focused was the call to support it in all subject areas, that proponents theorized little about possible differences in emphasis, programmatic orientation, or intellectual activity in diverse settings" (Anson 2006, 101). Because of several motivations—chief among them an interest in being helpful—faculty in composition studies working in WAC did not attend to the differences across diverse writing contexts. And in the case of Carleton College specifically, we see the continuation of an earlier theme. At Carleton, there was neither sufficient faculty in English nor sufficient interest on the part of faculty in working with WAC colleagues, so another approach was implemented, but it too was grounded in classical rhetoric: put simply, the administration brought together faculty from across the curriculum to read in rhetoric. In this small institutional narrative, we're reminded again of the identity of rhetoric as the intellectual foundation for writing efforts led by English and writing faculty—here, even outside of English departments as well.

In contrast to this rhetoric/composition-dominated approach to WAC, Charles Bazerman saw the emergence of writing across the curriculum as exigence: not to teach others about how to write based on his expertise as a compositionist but rather to *learn*, in this case about writing across the curriculum in its multiple contexts and disciplines so as to develop expertise in writing defined capaciously. As he noted, "The WAC [writing across the curriculum] movement sort of started . . . —and my first reaction is that we're trying to go across the curriculum but we don't know what kind of writing they do. We need to go out and find out."

When Bazerman taught elementary school, he was impressed by the dramatic change just two years, here between first and third grades, makes in our development as writers; when he taught at CUNY, he looked to the places his students would write in the future as both locus of activity and site of research. Bazerman's response to early WAC approaches, consistent with this trajectory, was that we needed to learn *before* we could share, much less lead. He understood that "first generation WAC was sort of the exporting process models and journaling across the curriculum," but, he said, "I had this different view—that we needed to go out and actually find out what was out there and what the needs were." For Bazerman, the origin narrative of WAC is a reversal of the one typically circulated; rather than a narrative that presents composition instructors as experts reaching out to share their invaluable expertise, writing faculty, in Bazerman's account, should research the multiple practices of writing located in WAC.

In fact, Bazerman's teaching at CUNY motivated his interest in WAC, which provided a starting point for his research into sites of writing



other than FYC. He saw that to help students succeed as college writers, he had to "get [them] interested in writing" because "this is what I could get them interested in writing for": "I understood that the reason why students were required to take our courses was so they could succeed at the university, and it wasn't any of the other wonderful uses of writing that was important, or the other aspects—to help the students succeed in the university was why we were being paid. So, if I could get students interested in writing, this is what I could get them interested in writing for. So I started to investigate what academic writing was." Bazerman's exploration began with the role of reading in writing. Driven by two questions—"How do you write after you've read something? How do you write after you've read *two* things?"—this research led to *The Informed Writer*, a textbook helping students write their own research. In addition, that research led to "follow-up research on the history of the scientific paper. How did it get that way? And how did it work within the society of scientists?" This, in a nutshell, is "how [his] trajectory started."

When Bazerman was teaching at CUNY and writing *The Informed Writer*, some few compositionists were also tapping the insights of other disciplines in our explorations into composing processes; perhaps the most celebrated researchers, Linda Flower from composition and John Hayes from cognitive psychology, modeled for Bazerman what was possible, a kind of interdisciplinary approach to the disciplinary questions of writing. But that approach was subjected to considerable critique (e.g., Bizzell 1982), and by the time Bazerman began to publish on his research into scientific writing, such interdisciplinary efforts were fading: "There were engagements with certain branches of psychology around Flower and Hayes but that vanished. We were phobic about that. I think there were real limits with the way they were approaching it. But there is something beyond that response, that critique—there was a real phobic reaction against that." Bazerman didn't lose his enthusiasm for the role of interdisciplinary research into writing, however. He noted, for example, that psychology wasn't the only discipline that could inform writing: what Bazerman saw, instead, was that each discipline would have something to contribute to what ultimately is an uber study of writing limited only to "writing's role in society, and the forms that writing took": "I was saying well, it's good we have psychology, we also need a sociology. Also, writing—from sociology then I got to a history, which is different from the history of writing instruction, or the history of rhetorics. There's the history of writing practices, and the emergence of writing practices, and writing's role in society, and the forms that writing took." Today, of course, some of the leading WAC programs in the

country do exactly what he advocated, and they do so programmatically, working with faculty to articulate how writing works, specifically in terms of the kinds of problems a discipline poses, the kinds of evidence that count, and the genres in which they are shared (Flash, forthcoming). In this example, if twenty-five years later, we see Bazerman's approach and the field's beginning to align.

## CONCLUSION

More generally, in this interview with Charles Bazerman and thus through the eyes of what we have identified as an exceptional normal, we see a different kind of founding narrative of rhetoric and composition take shape. A founding narrative suggests that people come together and agree upon goals/aims/purposes they then seek to achieve. In the case of rhetoric and composition, two founding narratives have held center stage: (1) a devotion to teaching, and the teaching of first-year composition especially (e.g., Harris 1996); and (2) a grounding of composition in rhetoric (e.g., Berlin 1987). As the discussion above demonstrates, however, through this interview with Charles Bazerman we see a different founding narrative of rhetoric and composition emerge, one testifying to a richer history of the discipline than has previously been acknowledged. This microhistory—highlighting Bazerman's attention to writing as a researchable disciplinary social practice—shows us how other factors played a role in the founding of the field, in his case beginning with teaching elementary school, shifting out of literature as focus of study and default context, and undergoing psychotherapy. Likewise, in these threefold processes, he became committed to a notion of the self that is social, that is supported and constrained by activities and structures; this construct of the self then systematically informs his research activity, an activity Bazerman understands as central to the discipline.

As a researcher, Bazerman reverses the commonplace dynamic of the field: rather than focusing on teaching students, Bazerman focuses on teachers learning. In addition, beginning to conduct research in the 1980s, he focused on what this moment in history—given the field's interest *in* writing but our little knowledge *about* writing—can mean: he sees a different future than his contemporaries, one untethered from the classroom, one oriented to a writing that is lifewide and lifelong.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, he rejects the conventional intellectual rhetorical heritage so valued by early scholars in the field (and of course still valued), finding other intellectual antecedents whose approach to writing in

the world and cognition seem to him more congruent with his definition of writing and his aspirations for the discipline. So too his interest in disciplines that have their own writing practices and knowledge: in learning from them, Bazerman claims, we contribute to a writing studies unbound from rhetoric. Not least, he sees the field's need for an organized research effort; even now, he says, current influential structures like the CCCC annual conference privilege practice at the cost of theory. He thus argues for a writing studies organization that will focus on research, and it is likely no coincidence that he is the founder of the Writing Research across Borders conferences and the related International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research. Bazerman's interdisciplinary approach to writing, then, differed considerably from the more common approach in the field, which was to see writing as a rhetorically influenced individual activity anchored in FYC and more field than discipline. Interested in a writing that goes "all the way up," Bazerman sees interdisciplinary research as a critical means of developing writing studies as its own discipline.

At the same time, this narrative we have woven could be seen as seamless as the one Bazerman disrupts, but within it are both seams and incongruities. Put more specifically, Bazerman is at odds with the field in some ways, as we see in his interest in the social, in systems, and in structures, and in his founding of an international forum focused on writing research. Even as Bazerman chronicles this microhistory, however, he points to what we might think of as overlaps within narratives, points of important intersections. In recounting his resistance to English departmental institutional sponsorship of composition, for example, Bazerman makes it clear that he is not alone in his view: Bazerman cites Hairston's (1985) similar aversion to such sponsorship, and it's worth noting that Hairston, as Chair of the CCCC in the early 1980s, wasn't an outlier. Likewise, Bazerman points to Mina Shaughnessy as perhaps inadvertently providing a "license" for the work he wanted to undertake: "In some ways, just because of her influence in sponsorship, Mina Shaughnessy was important, and in taking student writing seriously—I think there were one or two sentences she made in passing in *Errors and Expectations* which I saw as providing a kind of license for what I was doing, even though I was going in a different direction." These overlaps, of course, attest to ways narratives intersect and speak to each other as well as to the complexity of the field's founding.

As Bazerman himself says, he "was an outlier," and in very specific ways. But as this volume demonstrates, none of our master narratives

is seamless; and microhistories, like this one located in an interview, help us see how variegated the experience of any field's founding necessarily is.

Including ours.

## Notes

1. It is worth noting that in this comparison, Bazerman is arguing as well that medicine and composition are serving different but equally significant human needs.
2. The expression *lifewide and lifelong* is frequently applied to electronic portfolios, but here it seems an apt descriptor for Bazerman's approach.

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