Electronic discourse, or secondary orality, compels us to reappropriate the writing and speaking careers of Gorgias, Isocrates, and Plato, among others, as new sources for reflection and action in rhetoric and in the humanities in general. One of the writers to recognize this cultural necessity is Walter J. Ong, who writes in *The Presence of the Word* that classical culture in all its aspects must be reconsidered in light of the emergence of secondary orality:

> Our entire understanding of classical culture now has to be revise—and with it our understanding of later cultures up to our own time—in terms of our new awareness of the role of the media in structuring the human psyche and civilization itself. (18)

We can now begin to particularize this agenda by reconceptualizing Gorgias, Isocrates, and Plato, whose writings and "traditions" must be re-created in light of the new technology we all live in, live with, and live through, whether we are aware of that newness or not.

All three writers helped enable writing—or literacy—to form. They wrote and spoke in a world of language fluctuation and so helped to create literacy. Their formations—including abstraction, written dialogue, and prose crafted on a page rather than ordered in the memory—remain very much with us. As Tony M. Lentz argues in *Orality and Literacy in Hellenic Greece*, speaking and writing competed with each other, and their strife led to stunningly original work. The experience of these three writer/rhetorician/innovators resembles in some striking ways the struggle and denial of the new technology consciousness that we have been experiencing for about the last century as secondary orality becomes recognized by some and denied by many.

Since the word *literacy* in particular needs to be problematized, and since many readers find the phrase *secondary orality* opaque, I will sketch an overview of the three-part construction. The primary orality/literacy/secon-
dary orality hypothesis relies on Ong's and Eric A. Havelock's three-part division of the history of consciousness. Primary orality, responsible for the construction of consciousness before the Greek alphabet was invented (between 720 B.C. and 700 B.C.), enabled people to store cultural knowledge and educate young people through spoken performance. This stage is evident to us in the written-down version of the Homeric poems. The second stage, literacy, emerges with the use of a workable Greek alphabet that, as it gradually became interiorized, enabled people to think differently, more abstractly. Literacy became an even more powerful constructor of ways of thinking when movable print type made the writing and reading of the written word even more pervasive. The third stage is secondary orality. Largely electronic, this stage began with the invention of the telegraph in the 1840s and gathered more power as motion pictures, video, computers, and other forms became dominant communication modes. Havelock states that secondary orality represents a "cultural recall" of primary orality because the emphasis on speaking and hearing acquires new significance with electronic forms of communication. Crucially, the three communication-consciousness forms are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are cumulative. Secondary orality could not exist without literacy, and the residue of primary orality remains very much with us, contributing to the empowerment of secondary orality.

One of the changes provoked by our emerging awareness of secondary orality lies in the necessity of reinterpreting classical rhetoricians with a recognition of how secondary orality conditions our own critical sensibilities. At least two immediate complaints arise in recasting writers such as Gorgias, Isocrates, and Plato. The first complaint is a disagreement that secondary orality forms consciousness. The second is an unhappiness that many writers and readers experience when they see Gorgias, Isocrates, and Plato placed on the same plane, as I am doing here for the rhetorical moment. More writers and readers will be unhappier still to see Plato put on the same level as Gorgias and Isocrates. This placement appears to contradict all the known "facts" about Plato, as well as the common sense of many interpreters, who take it as a given that Plato is superior in knowledge, in text, and therefore as a person. For some, it is a heretical act. Nonetheless, while it is easy to grant that Plato exerted more influence over the centuries than did Isocrates or Gorgias, it is helpful in making the sophists' writing and teaching understandable to us to put Plato on the same plane as Gorgias and Isocrates for the interpretive moment or longer. Plato has not been made superior to all his peers because his work was inherently superior; he has been made superior because his work was appropriated in various strands of thought for particular reasons.

Plato railed against the old-fashioned treatment of language as it appeared in the out-of-step Homeric poems—texts which dominated fourth-century Greek thought and educational practice to a degree we tend to forget. Havelock demonstrates in Preface to Plato and elsewhere that Plato's agenda...
consisted partly in transferring the power of the spoken and written-down Homeric poems to a language that was more abstract and less antiquated. The words that appear in a Homeric dictionary differ from those that appear in a dictionary that includes Attic prose. More words, and more abstract words, occur in the fourth century. This difference in vocabulary reflects the linguistic reality that Plato faced (with some sadness): the Greek world had changed as a result of writing. It had changed not only on the outside (communication, or exterior discourse) but on the inside as well (expression to self, or interior discourse). Consciousness itself began to take on the constraints and possibilities presented by the written word. Plato wanted to change what we now call 'the canon.' Like Isocrates, Plato exploited writing fully. Both of them realized that they needed to be writers and that encoding with the new technology presented a force that could not be ignored or relegated to the status of an addition or a decoration.

Rehistoricizing Classical Writers

Lodged as we are one-hundred years into secondary orality, or since the advent of effective motion picture technology, we are in a position to reinterpret these three ancient writers (as well as others) in ways that take into consideration radical changes in communication (including interior discourse, or the part of thinking that is in one’s primary language or languages). When one first studies the intermingling in the orality/literacy/secondary orality hypothesis, a natural resistance can occur because it may seem rather far-fetched, or too neat. This concern is an important one. Sweeping claims can frequently lead to the settling of unsettleable problems and the closure of inquiry and dialectic. The analogy in this context acts as a tentative beginning for the analysis of burgeoning literacy and burgeoning secondary orality. The pressures and possibilities of fourth-century B.C. literacy and for modern electronic discourse systems remain radically different in many ways. People’s perceptions have changed radically. Nonetheless, a peculiar characteristic remains in common: the dominance of oral discourse has become more important since film and video have become dominant symbol systems than at any time since the ancient period. Modern revolutions in ways of thinking have taken place, and they resemble in substantial ways the revolutions in thinking of the fourth century B.C. These revolutions occur with great pain and difficulty and have made a lot of people angry, including Plato to a limited extent in the ancient era, and literacy hounds such as Allan Bloom to a great extent in the present era. The belief persists now that visual texts are inherently inferior to written texts, a belief that has gone through many permutations since the invention of the camera and that has resulted in discussions about the nature of “realism.” The unexamined belief in the inferiority of visual texts continues to permeate the academy in the United States.
Many people now will routinely acknowledge the idea that film and video are "artistic" media. However, their own responses to these media often indicate that these newer symbol systems are not in fact taken as seriously as symbol systems such as print or painting or music. The most compelling evidence for this marginalization of newer discourse technologies lies in their nonintegration in general education requirements. They are regarded as peripheral concerns, unrelated to the study of print texts. When courses do appear in the electronic media, they tend to be segregated or marginalized. Their placement in the curriculum announces their secondary status. The written text of the canon reigns supreme; a remarkable sameness of response exists in the entrenched unawareness of the issues involved. When educational resources become scarce, as they do from time to time and from region to region, the study of electronic media is one of the first kinds of training to be dropped. Its marginality is taken for granted. The conditioning that most people have toward electronic texts leads to statements (either explicit or, more frequently, implicit) that print texts are by nature superior. The situation can be characterized as a class system in texts: Great-Book texts are the aristocrats; some best-seller titles (for example, the books of James Michener) and European art films (the films, for instance, of Ingmar Bergman), contribute to the large middle class of texts; and television and "popular" films comprise the proletarian class. The underclass exists in student writing.

An additional and larger obstruction has occurred in promoting visual literacy. Film and video texts have frequently been taught as if they were print texts. For example, plot issues that might dominate the novel are transferred to the visual realm. "Hollywood Aristotelianism," as it has been called, derives from print culture. The grammar of film and the grammar of video have not been integrated into enough film pedagogy. Consequently, film and video courses frequently (especially in English departments) appear to be pale versions of courses in great print texts and so remain all the more susceptible to marginalization or deletion.

Changing Conceptualizations of Audience

Several alternatives exist for synthesizing literacy and secondary orality in the modern era and for recognizing their silences as well. Recognizing changes in the nature of audiences can lead to a better understanding of discourse technologies and their effects on writerly and readerly consciousness. In the realm of primary orality—when Homeric poets, for example, spoke poems to a community, or when an Acoma tribal leader spoke the Origin Myth of Acoma to one of the Pueblo tribes—the audience consisted of many people. The poet or leader was in charge of the group and spoke for the group as well as to it. In other words, performance was central to primary orality and to its residual existence in modern cultures. Literacy—both in manuscript cultures and in print cultures—required removal from the group, as Ong has pointed out. Writing generally required a certain amount of
isolation, or at least a turning inward that is very much the inverse of the turning outward that performance requires. In the shifts that have occurred with the accretion of primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality, the constitution of audiences has changed. Oratory has always dealt partly with large audiences. Electronic discourse mostly speaks to large audiences. But as Plato's Socrates is made to say in *Phaedrus*, rhetoric "has to do with all audiences, great as well as small"; the private discourse of the household is as much the province of rhetoric as the discourse of the legislative assembly. It appears that Plato understood the constraints of literacy—including its requirement of more isolation from groups—than he is generally given credit for.

Secondary orality has brought about a redefining of a central characteristic of primary orality and a central characteristic of literacy. In the former case, performance has reemerged in a powerful way as people communicate on film or videotape with actual or perceived simultaneity of performance and reception. In the latter case, the isolation brought about by writing and reading has reemerged as people decode the texts of electronic discourse either alone or with a small group. Disembodied communication (literacy) has been re-embodied through visual mechanisms such as video monitors and film screens. This technology has made the fifth canon of delivery (medium) take on the urgency of simultaneous communication. The lag time of print seems to disappear. I write "seems to" because electronic discourse in most of its manifestations appears to be "live" but in fact is stored on film or tape and only appears to be live. The immediacy of this appearance, the attractiveness of the liveness, holds part of the performative power of the symbol systems of secondary orality. In other words, the lag time that modern writers and readers associate with print and regard as "normal" exists in many of the forms of secondary orality as well. Something is lost, but something else is gained.

Deciding on a medium in which to encode, or determining how to use the fifth canon of delivery, or medium, has become a major issue for many encoders in art, business, entertainment, and, to a lesser extent, academics. In addition, the widespread use of telephones provides one obvious example of simultaneous, disembodied communication; it is in fact so familiar that it appears to be nearly a natural part of life. In a less obvious way, the facsimile machine has provided live, simultaneous, disembodied discourse in a way that includes the first demand of literacy: documents exist as part of and as a result of the instantaneous communication. The nature of performance has undergone radical change. Depending on the decision an encoder makes about the fifth canon (that is, which medium or symbol system to use), a different emphasis on a way of knowing will occur. But electronic discourse will contribute to the way of knowing even if one writes. Regardless of which medium is chosen, primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality will exist in each one; they will inform one another, infuse one another, and create one
another. They are not mere additions or accumulations; they are changes in consciousness, that is, in the ways we conceptualize.

We do not have a choice about removing video from our lives and our individual or group consciousnesses. Even if an individual decides to remove all video monitors from his or her environments, that person will remain significantly formed by the small screen. Written discourse and electronic discourse do not compete as much as they change and reinforce each other, even if the encoder appears to be working only in one symbol system.

The implications for pedagogy of these performance issues remain staggering. The institution of the teaching of writing remains in a very tentative phase now, partly because the merging of primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality hovers in a tenuous—and very exciting—place.

Making Discourse Active and Promoting Empowerment

Choosing a medium in which to communicate (and therefore its attendant power) preoccupies Hans M. Enzensberger in "Constituents of a Theory of the Media." His theory of electronic discourse necessarily includes reference to written discourse. Enzensberger writes,

The new media are orientated towards action, not contemplation; towards the present, not tradition . . . The media produce no objects that can be hoarded and auctioned. They do away completely with "intellectual property" and liquidate the "heritage," that is to say, the class-specific handing-on of nonmaterial capital." (106)

The activity that inheres in electronic forms of discourse provides one of its great strengths because it can help to create dialectic, or a productive, interactive clash of legitimate views, in its decoders. The activity that comprises dialectic is one of the promises the electronic forms of discourse offer. Ong makes this point in "McLuhan as Teacher: The Future Is a Thing of the Past":

All a teacher can ever do is get other people to think. Without a teacher, learners may be impoverished, unable to find much to learn. The teacher sets things up, whether by enlivening familiar matter or by providing new things for the learners to think about. But, even with the most brilliant teacher, if the learners are to do any learning, they are the ones who have to do it. The pipeline information-transfer model does not really work for the teacher-learner relationship, for it presents learners as passive recipients. Learners are doers, not recipients. (129)

Activity in the mind must be present for learning to take place. Both these writers recognize the fundamental issue of the power of activity in creating or transferring knowledge, or the enabling of the learner to extend his or her already-present abilities.
Michael C. Flanigan explores the primacy of activity in "Composition Models: Dynamic and Static Imitations." He discusses the way professional writing can be used to promote thinking in student writers to enable them to become more effective writers. He also describes the more familiar role of professional models in writing classes: the static model that students are assigned to read, mysteriously absorb, and then mysteriously imitate.

All these critics realize that in making decoding active (whether as readers or as spectators of visual media) change must occur. In other words, the decoder will undergo an activity that leads to reconceptualization. We can call the change "new encoding." The popular concepts of critical writing and critical thinking appear to be related to the concept of active, new encoding on the part of the decoder.

When students are made aware of the varying constraints imposed by each symbol system (for example, the grammar of film as opposed to the grammar of dominant-culture written English), they are able to engage the symbol system in active ways. Raising an awareness of medium empowers students in at least two ways: (1) it makes them (and us, their teachers) conscious of the technology that will to a large extent determine the result of their decoding (that is, the "meaning"); and (2) knowledge of what a medium consists of and where it came from shows students more of the possibilities of all media and connects students' usually isolated relationships to the media.

Conventionally, expertise in encoding with a video camera remains isolated from the experience of encoding with a pen or a word processor or any other media. When encoders increase their consciousness of medium, it can help them to transcend the frequently antagonistic relationship between language theory and language practice. Knowing that one is choosing a medium for expression empowers a writer who will consider the constraints that each medium imposes as well as the possibilities it offers. Within one medium—for instance, writing—students who study this reasserted canon can think about the kind of text production they want to engage in. Handwriting, typewriting, and word processing offer three possible technologies for writing texts. Each one has particular powers as well as limitations. The recent rehistoricizing of classical rhetoric allows us to see the connections between the fifth canon (in Greek, hypocrisis; in Latin, pronuntiatio, or actio: delivery or medium) as it gathered power in the fourth century B.C. and the fifth canon as it exists differently but also similarly in the twentieth century.

We can extrapolate from Enzensberger's preoccupation with writing, film, video, and so on, that making students active encoders is a dangerous activity. If students achieve adequate consciousness of the ways they have been conditioned to respond, and if they empower themselves through writing and the dialectic of inquiry, then the status quo might be in danger. If we empower too many students, they might want to change substantially the general culture we all partake of and help to create.
The potentially dangerous activity of writing is bypassed by constructing many—perhaps most—writing classes as passive reading classes (as opposed to active reading classes), a point that process compositionists such as Peter Elbow and James Moffett have been making forcefully and persuasively for a generation. Writing textbooks appear in most writing classes partly because they are comforting to teachers and partly because they allow passive reading (as opposed to critical reading) to dominate the class. They reassure the apprentice writing teacher by providing a map of uncharted territory, and they reassure many experienced writing teachers who are overwhelmed by the results of student writing (so unordered, so unlike a book with its neat typeface and margins). Reading a "perfectly" produced textbook can be a tidy, organized, lovely, and passive experience. Looking at writing before it reaches this lovely state requires developing alternative sensibilities. It requires looking at tentativeness, messy lines, and blips of invention that appear to go nowhere. In other words, compelling students and teacher to "write" the course text as the class emerges throughout the semester creates a mess and a mass of disorganized documents that appear to contradict the "rules" of literacy, including order and neatness. Keeping track of drafts and distributing student writing intimidates many writing teachers, both apprentice and experienced.

An even more substantial fear exists in the presence of the activity that comprises dialectic: print culture/print thinking leads us to believe that whatever resides in typeset possesses authority. Moreover, the romantic tradition of English studies makes belletristic writing of the kind reproduced in most textbooks appear to be inherently superior. Both issues—the beauty of the professionally-printed page and the attitude of reverence toward sanctified writers—lead to deemphasizing student activity in the form of writing. It reinforces the class structure of texts discussed above: the underclass of student texts cannot remain the center of attention very long.

Perhaps the largest class of all in the textual class system is the student-writing group of texts. It comprises the underclass, that huge pool of texts produced in huge quantities every year by students working their ways through educational systems. Many people working in the academy prefer not to have contact with this kind of text production or even to be aware of it. This hierarchy dominates the way most readers are trained to interpret written texts as well as texts from other symbol systems. The reintegration of student writing as a center of concern in higher education that the renaissance of rhetoric and composition studies brought has meant that student writing is regarded in some quarters as worthy of attention. Nonetheless, student writing remains the underclass, and many instructors are distressed when they have to come into contact with it for an extended period.

Enzensberger's formulation of "contemplation" versus "action" summarizes one of the major conflicts in both fourth-century B.C. language and twentieth-century A.D. language. In each era, a new form of activity
challenged the contemplativeness of the status quo and the many comforts it invariably offers. Plato’s complaints against writing resemble the complaints of many people in higher education against training students in the electronic media.

People in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries need to be aware of technology and consciousness so that they can participate in the encoding (and so find one way of achieving dialectic) and so that they can understand the modes of persuasion and manipulation that immerse everyone. Becoming aware of one’s place in print culture empowers student writers and writing instructors. Taking print culture for granted enables the still-powerful formalist devaluation of culture and context to remain unexamined.

Classical rhetoric as it has been reappropriated by the writers in the Dialectical School can strengthen student writing ability by revealing the interconnections of print culture and electronic culture. Making language pedagogy active rather than passive can be done in a number of ways. One of them is through a study of technologies.

The New Rhetoric Is the Old Rhetoric

Electronic discourse and the changes in consciousness resulting from it have made classical rhetoric a compelling issue once again. The triviality and boredom associated with much of classical rhetoric (traits it continues to possess for many, and understandably so, given its presentation), can be regarded as pressures resulting from the domination of print literacy. The cultural situation of print domination probably required that two of the primary functions of rhetoric—memory and delivery—move underground to the realm of the trivial, to the realm of tropes-for-tropes’ sake.

A primary characteristic of rhetoric in all historical eras lies in its adaptability. Rhetoric adapts so well that it is alien to virtually nothing. However, this strength easily becomes a problem: its adaptability makes it the chameleon of disciplines. If rhetoric can adapt to any kind of language and symbol system, then what is it? Where is its substance? Since it is partly a faculty, it can be applied to anything.

The adaptability of rhetoric—its power and its danger—leads inevitably to the construction and communication of value systems. Rhetoric as a faculty and a systematic form of study has been throughout its history, beginning with its systematization in the fifth century B.C. and leading to the present moment, appropriated by people for negative purposes. This complaint formed the center of Plato and Aristotle’s long-lasting attack against the sophists. These patriarchs of Western philosophy (who came to appropriate—one could say ‘‘colonize’’—the field of ethics), Plato and Aristotle, disagreed on many issues, but they in a sense collaborated in their rigorous denunciation of the sophists. The totalizing effect of their stance silenced the sophists virtually until the nineteenth century, as various recent
commentators have demonstrated. In the political realm, dictators have always adapted rhetoric to their ends. But then so too have beneficent rulers. So what can be done with a faculty or an ability that can go out of control so readily?

Rhetoric’s adaptability, more than the characteristics of any other field, points to the need for examinations of value systems. It points, in fact, to the need for the analysis of many kinds of value systems. Couched in different terms, it requires us to study ideology, or the interconnecting systems of values and beliefs that inform attitudes and behaviors. Most significantly, rhetoric can teach people to become aware of these systems that are usually tacit and assumed to be factual, or based on “reality,” partly because they feel so “normal,” so “natural.” This enterprise leads to the emphasis on rhetorical consciousness.

Rhetoric, Consciousness, and the “Consciousness Industry”

Print texts possess power that readers tend to take for granted. Print literacy has conditioned us to view published texts as more authoritative than manuscript texts or nonprint texts produced on videotape, film, or other media. Some electronic texts have come to enjoy the same authoritativeness. (This is one reason why live television has become rare: its authoritativeness is jeopardized by mistakes or by unprogrammed material that enters the visual field.) The authoritativeness of printed texts leads to a greater emphasis on the text and, in tum, its life as a finished object. The completed nature of print texts appears to be natural or even inevitable.

If we move the focus from the text and its apparent objectivity and refocus on which institutions control the distribution of the printed or electronic text, then we confront Enzensberger’s point: a consciousness industry possesses enormous control over the population. Enzensberger writes in “The Industrialization of the Mind,”

> While radio, cinema, television, recording, advertising, and public relations, new techniques of manipulation and propaganda, are being keenly discussed, each on its own terms, the mind industry, taken as a whole, is disregarded. Newsprint and publishing, its oldest and in many respects still its most interesting branch, hardly comes up for serious comment any longer, presumably because it lacks the appeal of technological novelty. (6)

These institutions help comprise the fifth canon of rhetoric, delivery (or medium). So great is the distribution power of the mind industry that the fifth canon, it can be maintained, is now the most powerful canon of the five. The fifth canon has become the consciousness industry, and the fifth canon remains the function of rhetoric most frequently (one could say most avidly) ignored by writing instructors and their institutions.
Rhetoric, particularly when the fifth canon is fully considered, helps to create the consciousness industry. Rhetoric as both a faculty and a field of study provides not only the means of analysis for all these symbol systems but the means of producing new kinds of material as well. No other system for the production and reception of texts in all symbol systems possesses the completeness of rhetoric and its definitive connection to systems of education and to cultures.

Rhetoric, including the composition of texts in all media, has the capacity to make people conscious of the unprecedented power of print and electronic texts as systems of communication and of indoctrination. Along with the raising of fifth-canon consciousness, rhetoric provides one means for people to enact their own encoding; it enables writing, filming, taping, and so on. Part of the potential dialectic that inheres in all media occurs when decoders become encoders in a particular medium. For example, when a reader turns to writing, the nature of writing texts changes for him or her. The same situation holds true for filming, taping, and so on.

Because of the power of encoding of all kinds, rhetoric as it applies to the various symbol systems needs to be studied by novices as well as by more experienced encoders. In addition to being studied by critics (a rather small, privileged group) rhetoric in literacy and in secondary orality must become part of the agenda of general education. Studying the technology of literacy and secondary orality has become a necessity for even a minimally educated population. Ink and paper, the word processor and printer, the film camera, the video camera, the frames of big and small screens—all must be studied for an understanding of cultural dynamics. Remaining unconscious of the media of literacy and secondary orality means that cultures will have functionally illiterate populations.

Functional illiteracy in this context means that the power of print and visual texts will remain centered in privileged groups; it also means that the status quo will appear to sustain itself. Appropriate training in print and visual literacy—when students encode as well as decode—would make students less passive. It would promote the interactive thinking that is dialectic. However, the institutionalization of visual literacy is not action enough. Educational institutions themselves must give up their marginality. The passivity of most educational practice (the student as empty vessel waiting to be filled with the knowledge of teacher and print text) is supplemented by an implied moral superiority that frequently accompanies the disciplines ordered under the rubric, "the humanities." An unapparent transaction takes place: the humanities are given tacit moral superiority in exchange for being relatively useless.4

Power in the Ordinariness of Language

The visual illiteracy of modern cultures, along with the sustained unconsciousness of delivery, or medium, means that the ability to understand
systems of communication (including various forms of manipulation and control) remains at an elementary level. Only when the ordinarness of language is recognized—in exterior discourse as well as in the interior discourse that partly constitutes thinking—can extraordinary uses (artistic or literary discourse) be understood. The everyday uses of language exist in constant flux, like Heraclitus's river. Less noticeably, the uses of ordinary language exist in flux as well. While a true rhetoric may exist for some people, that trueness is largely unlocatable. Fluid discourse—rhetoric and the mutual discovery and challenge of dialectic—remains the source of power in classical rhetoric. In this fluidity and dialectic, one may discover (as Plato believed possible at various points in his career as a writer) ultimate realities.

The fact that a primary reception of classical rhetoric has been made utterly definite (that is, static) in positivistic presentations illustrates the moribund state not only of Cartesian dualism but of discourse education that remains maginalized, ghettoized, and useless. Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," explores the idea that electronic media enable oral discourse to gain a kind of power that it did not have in pre-electronic eras: permanence. Films, videos, and computer disks can maintain texts as readily as writing can. In primary orality, the dynamism of the word is powerful but transitory. In secondary orality, the dynamic of the spoken word is not only powerful, it is lasting. We have returned to a much more powerful state of interdependence of oral and written discourse. With the technology of secondary orality, the spoken word and the written word are empowering each other in ways that previously were not possible. Oral discourse is now largely electric. This situation makes classical rhetoric—which accounts for encoders, decoders, and cultures, as well as texts—a newly powerful area. After residing in the nether world of tropes and figures for many centuries, classical rhetoric is newly resuscitated by the interdynamics of literacy and secondary orality. Benjamin writes,

Around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes. For the study of this standard nothing is more revealing than the nature of the repercussions that these two different manifestations—the reproduction of works of art and the art of the film—have had on art in its traditional form. (220)

The fifth canon of delivery as it has come to exist in various electronic forms in the twentieth century influences all forms of art, as Benjamin was one of the first to recognize. Art's reproducibility can empower people who may not have had access to the power of encoding. The means of producing discourse in several symbol systems is available to a large population. In order for people to become persuaded of the empowerment that is possible for them
through encoding, they must see the relationship between their own ordinary language—including interior discourse—and that of artistic discourse. This issue provides a powerful means of persuasion for writing instructors. Connecting a student's interior discourse—something that is lived and felt—to a class essay or to a play by Shakespeare acts as an effective means of empowering students. This connection treats conceptualizations or "how" questions, not "content" or "what" questions. In addition, this connection enables students to comprehend the interconnections of all language use and its existence as a communal activity rather than as the merely private, hermetic possession that many people assume it to be.

Plato and Isocrates appear in their writing to have understood the primary relationship between inner speech (and its relationship to the soul) and outer speech. Plato's rhetoric and dialectic, difficult though they are to define, connect to both kinds of speech in a person engaged in a search, or a process, that is not readily identifiable. Rhetoric and dialectic are communal as well as singular activities; their push and pull require conversation (in any medium) with another person, but, like rhetoric, they require interior change as well. Virginia N. Steinhoff has written about these relational activities:

The Platonic stance toward rhetorical arts and instruction is synthetic and artful, shaped from unexpected material into new forms that are, at best, suggestions of things not seen. The Socratic role requires, in addition, a kind of playfulness and suspension of goal-directed behavior that is unlikely to sit well with responsible institutions of higher learning or teachers anxious about productivity in the classroom, specifically about written products—papers, essays, themes, theses, scholarly articles, and so on. (39)

These outward manifestations, or artifacts of the movement between interior and exterior discourse, have been privileged over the syntheses Steinhoff alludes to. But the signature of Platonic rhetoric as well as of Isocratean rhetoric remains the subjectivity of thinking rather than the objectivity of texts.

Plato obviously and Isocrates less obviously impelled their readers to use their own subjective selves to make contact with versions of reality and therefore to improve perceptive reality. While Isocrates remained more committed to ordinary communication, he nevertheless resembles Plato in his commitment to interior discourse. The impressionism that accompanies rhetoric and encoding in all symbol systems constitutes part of its definition. Positivists of the Heritage School and other groups do not take well to impressionism and subjectivity. It appears to interrupt the definiteness that tends to be reassuring. Writing that is relegated to the status of a mere "skill" partakes of this definiteness. As we have seen, however, writing as a skill-bound activity, as the mastering of the production of definite objects that reflect more or less definite interior realities, quickly becomes boring for encoders and for decoders alike.
Secondary orality and its brief century of life have changed the nature of rhetoric, including that of classical rhetoric. In addition, the ways people perceive have changed radically. The changes brought about in audience as well as in interior discourse resemble (even as they in other ways do not resemble) the changes in epistemology that Plato, Isocrates, Gorgias, and other writers and performers experienced with the spreading of literacy as a dominant form of consciousness in the fourth century B.C. There is no point in worshipping these early writers, as has been done perennially. The hierarchy created by the worshipper and the almost divine means that a huge gap of utter inequality exists. This space may be appropriate in religious practice but hinders discourse practice and pedagogy.

The study of secondary orality as a continuing dynamic will not progress if analogizing to the possibilities and constraints of fourth-century B.C. discourse leads to more of the tired, old fetishizing of classical rhetoric texts and the inevitable and tired, old response of rejecting those texts for being fetishized. Instead, the study of secondary orality can bring about a democracy of texts, in which student texts are produced and studied with the rigor and care that Great-Book texts (of whatever discipline) are studied. In addition, continuing to privilege one medium over the other media that the fifth canon offers us means that the power of delivery will never be realized. Instead, the status quo will remain.

It has remained the sincere task of many language educators to remain unconscious of the fifth canon, of medium, and therefore to act as if only one or two significant systems of delivery exist. This ingrained rhetorical unconsciousness is accompanied by a tacit assumption that good speaking and good writing are somehow innate. In other words, they act as if (that is, their performances as educators state) that good speaking and writing do not at all connect to technology but instead are basically natural traits, the result of good breeding. Those students unfortunate enough (according to these promoters of the rhetorical unconscious) not to have received this language goodness at home (usually the children of the underprivileged) must be trained in it. These spokespeople for the status quo tend to see good writing and speaking as inborn qualities rather than as acquired capabilities. If one is unfortunate enough to be ill-bred, then schools should train the student to acquire the discourse habits of good breeding. In this way, the status quo can go on and on, with its native born and with its recruits reinforcing the power structure that feels familiar.

Literacy hounds such as Allan Bloom and William Bennett have committed themselves to this elitism, and they have taken up the task of rushing toward their valorized past as reinforcement of the way things are rather than reconstituting the past according to modern demands. Embracing the "whatness" of a definite history, with definite categories that feel natural and normal and require no questioning, these new literacy masters are among the first to recoil from the study of visual texts or the study of the revolutions in
symbol systems that have been one of the major sources of intellectual
advancement and liberation in the twentieth century.

Unknown to these guardians of the elitist version of the humanities, the
way people think has changed. The revolutions they insistently deny include
the revolutions of delivery, or medium. The canons of classical rhetoric have
been reconstituted and revivified by secondary orality. If we continue to lapse
into rhetorical unconsciousness, the status quo—the uselessness of not only
rhetoric but of "the humanities"—will continue. The commonplace that the
discipline of classics committed suicide in the United States remains a lesson
that the literacy masters need to consider. It is a lesson that the promoters of
the enfeebled, wholesome, enriched version of "the humanities" need to
consider. Any work in the historicizing of classical rhetoric needs to take
account of this phenomenon. Will other forms of discourse study follow the
path of the classics in the United States? Or will false issues of breeding,
correctness, and unacknowledged elitism lead to the continued appropriation
of print and electronic media by business people and by social scientists who
record "taste" (desire), while academics hoard the diminishing artifacts of
the humanities among themselves?

The unusual adaptability of classical rhetoric and its preoccupation with
producing discourse and not merely analyzing it after someone has produced
it make it one of the most powerful discourse systems we have. The fact that
it has been appropriated by elitists from many centuries and traditions who
invest particular ancient texts and writers with religious properties is no
reason to dispense with it. In fact, its adaptability and usefulness make it an
extraordinarily powerful way of studying texts—written, visual, painted, or
any other kind—and their contexts. Classical rhetoric, like the humanities in
general, is simply too important to be left to the positivists and to the elitists.
Instead, we need to continue the reappropriation begun by dialectical critics
such as Enzensburger and Benjamin and to re-encode and reinterpret classical
rhetoric with the emerging critical sensibilities that have so enlivened and
politicized discourse studies in the last generation.

A new agenda lies before us, and part of that newness is as old as Isocrates,
who figured out what was going on with the burgeoning power of writing (the
exploding power of delivery, the medium of writing). The agenda confront­
ing us now, one-hundred years into secondary orality, is to figure out how
literacy has been transformed and what that elaborate change holds for us.
Electric rhetoric is upon us. If we want to demarginalize discourse education
(and perhaps the moribund state of the humanities as well), if we want the
humanities to give up its profound and self-inflicted uselessness in the general
culture, then we can look to electric rhetoric as one way to make the
humanities something more substantial than the gentrifying of generations of
upwardly mobile or already-arrived students who pass through the assembly
lines of "English" and other disciplines and roll off the line better prepared
to buy and use up not only the usual consumer durables such as cars and
furniture but who are better prepared to use up "the arts" in exactly the same way. We live in a state (in both senses) in which "the arts" and "the humanities" have been enfeebled to the point of becoming just some more consumer durables. It does not have to stay that way.

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Notes

1I address many of the issues that appear here in The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric: Appropriations of Ancient Discourse (forthcoming).
2Vitanza has argued, along with not enough others, that we cannot retrieve any historical era "as it was." We cannot, for instance, read anything without being influenced by thinkers such as Freud and Marx. Returning to some pristine classical rhetoric, in denial of many centuries of interpretation and events, is not possible.
3See Cunliffe, for example.
4Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have traced some of the historical ramifications of this phenomenon in From Humanism to the Humanities.

Works Cited


M.A. and Ph.D. in English with Specialization in Rhetoric and Composition

The University of South Florida offers a specialization in rhetoric and composition at both the M.A. and Ph.D. levels. Students can choose this specialization to prepare themselves to conduct research into rhetorical history, theory, and practice, and to teach composition and literature at the college and secondary levels. This program allows students to study the history and philosophy of rhetoric, the theory of composition, composition research and its design, the teaching of writing and literature, the theory and practice of stylistic analysis, and the administration of writing programs. Students also study traditional British and American literature and critical theory.

Teaching assistantships, tuition waivers, and other kinds of financial aid are available. For further information call or write: Professor Sara M. Deats; Director of Graduate Study; English Department; University of South Florida; Tampa, FL 33620 (813-974-2421).