Reviews


Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Flynn, Michigan Technological University

In the first of two essays by Gary Olson in *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*, Olson helps to clarify the contexts that gave rise to this very important collection. His essay, "The Death of Composition as an Intellectual Discipline," was originally presented as a plenary speech to the Research Network Forum at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention in Minneapolis in 2000 and then revised and published in *Composition Studies*. As Olson explains it, the need for a defense of rhetoric and composition as an intellectual discipline began in the 1980s when the past chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Maxine Hairston, and others were concerned about the theoretical orientation of much of the emerging scholarship in the field and the move away from expressivism. Work in composition studies was beginning to draw on theoretically sophisticated work in other fields with the result that individuals such as Hairston, whose contributions to the field had been primarily in the areas of administration and pedagogy, felt threatened and disenfranchised. A more recent manifestation of Hairston's complaint, according to Olson, is an essay by yet another chair of CCCC: Wendy Bishop's *College Composition and Communication* essay, "Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition" (1999, 9–31). According to Olson, Bishop laments the marginalization of expressivists such as herself within the field, the domination of the field by "careerists," and a devaluation of attention to teaching. Olson makes clear that he does not begrudge Bishop's attempt to move the discipline in the direction of creative writing and feels that she should not begrudge his attempt to move it in the direction of emphasizing composition studies as an intellectual discipline.

*jac* 22.4 (2002)
Many of the essays in the book examine this conflict between scholarship/theory and teaching practice. For example in “Rhetoric and Composition as a Coherent Intellectual Discipline: A Meditation,” Jan Swearingen worries that as institutions and as institutional practices, rhetoric and composition “seem poised for segregation or divorce.” She speaks of strained relations between rhetorical theory and composition practice. At the same time, the book provides ample evidence that borrowing theory and research techniques from fields with greater theoretical and methodological sophistication has enhanced it and moved it in the direction of a mature intellectual discipline. One indicator of the maturity of a field, claims Jasper Neel in his essay “Reclaiming Our Theoretical Heritage: A Big Fish Tale,” is a tendency to constantly scrutinize its theoretical underpinnings. The contributors to the volume do so with regularity in addition to examining methodological underpinnings and relationships between theory and practice. In their respective essays, “The Case for Writing Studies as a Major Discipline” and “Writing Studies as a Mode of Inquiry,” Charles Bazerman and Susan Miller call this more self-reflective and mature field “writing studies” in an effort to distinguish it from the more practically-oriented “composition studies.”

Contributors borrow from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, including rhetoric (Swearingen, Mailloux, Miller, Jarratt, Covino, Bazerman); cultural studies (Fox, Trimbur, Selfe and Selfe); history (Wells); reading theory (Neel); critical linguistics (Gilyard); feminist theory (Worsham, Crowley); philosophy (Kent, Couture, Vitanza); and critical pedagogy (Olson). Several attend specifically to the research method of examining archival materials (Miller, Wells, Mailloux, Couture). The essays in the collection are well-developed and engaging demonstrations that other fields can bring our own field along and provide us with new and productive ways of examining our situation within the university and the larger culture.

Contributions to the book might be called “post process,” a term like “writing studies” that is sometimes used to describe work that moves beyond an outmoded process movement. In his preface to the volume, for instance, Olson refers to Thomas Kent’s paralogic rhetoric as having become a foundation of the post-process movement in composition. In “Paralogic Rhetoric: An Overview,” Kent speaks of paralogic rhetoric, a rhetoric that emphasizes communicative interaction, as one of numerous approaches that have come to be called “post-process theory.” In “Delivering the Message: Typography and the Materiality of Writing,” John
Trimbur suggests that the post-process movement is not only a repudiation of the process movement but also an attempt to read into composition the material conditions of the composer and the material pressures and limits of the composing process. Later in his essay, Trimbur speaks of a conception of author-as-producer as a post-process representation of authorship that replaces the process movement's composer as the maker of meaning.

The post-process rubric, however, implies that the process movement was unified and coherent, but this was hardly the case. Rather, it consisted of numerous often contradictory strands. Both expressivism and cognitivism, for instance, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as process-oriented alternatives to formalist and text-oriented current-traditional rhetorics that were committed to examinations of written products. Expressivism and cognitivism, however, differed considerably in their representations of process and in their pedagogical approaches. Expressivists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow emphasized the importance of encouraging student writers to write freely, unconstrained by conventions, and to develop their own voices in their writing. Cognitivists such as John Hayes and Linda Flower, in contrast, emphasized writing as rule-governed and conventional and the importance of having students attend to the needs of audiences. Expressivists were philosophically opposed to formalism and derived their energy from the Romantic rebellion against convention and celebration of individual creativity. Cognitivists, in contrast, developed a new kind of formalism that emphasized processes of the brain rather than the formal properties of texts. Expressivists encouraged students to find their unique voices and assumed that the writing styles and writing processes of each individual differed from those of others. Cognivists, in contrast, attempted to identify an ideal writing process, usually that of the professional writer and of academic writing, that should be emulated by nonprofessional students. To the extent that the process movement was anti-intellectual, it was the expressivist branch with its Romantic wariness of systematized science and philosophy that absented outside reading from classrooms and made student writing the subject of writing courses. Cognivists, in contrast, saw writing as a mental process and drew heavily on work from other fields, most obviously cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence. In emphasizing ideal processes, however, cognivists ignored the ways in which gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and other factors influenced writing and teaching.

*Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*, then, is post-process
in the sense that it resists both the anti-intellectualism of expressivism and the universalism and academicism of cognitivism. Most of the essays, despite their diverse orientations and intellectual derivations, are rooted in post-structuralist or postmodern critiques of Romanticism or expressivism as well as the formalist tendencies of cognitivism. As such, they are critical of academic work as it is usually undertaken within universities.

Lynn Worsham's "Coming to Terms: Theory, Writing, Politics" is a good example of this postmodern or post-structuralist tendency. Worsham begins her essay by making a distinction between intellectual work and academic work. She finds that academic work is inherently conservative in that it seeks to fulfill narrow and policed disciplinary goals and interests and fulfills the increasingly corporatized mission of higher education. Intellectual work, in contrast, is relentlessly critical and self-critical and potentially revolutionary. It seeks to change institutions, disciplines, and professions that engage in exploitation, inequality, and injustice. She calls, then, for making the academic work of composition studies more vigorously and resolutely intellectual. This necessitates making it more theoretical, though theory is always used self-reflectively with an awareness of its inherent rhetoricity and with an understanding that it always emerges out of and responds to the world. Worsham criticizes traditional rhetoric with its emphasis on rationality and insists, instead, on the importance of pathos or emotion. She departs from an expressivist conception of emotion, however, in that she insists that personal life and emotional life always take shape in social and cultural terms. For Worsham, emotion is a dialectic of "self" and "world"; she "seeks to return emotion to the field of political theory and political action." Worsham sees emotion as an important resource for political resistance and social change.

Other contributors also emphasize similar themes. Jasper Neel speaks of theory as making students aware that changing their positions changes what they see and how they see it. Charles Bazerman calls for historical, theoretical, and practical syntheses and finds that theory is "an attempt to understand how we live our lives at the unfolding edge of history." In "Working Against the State: Composition's Intellectual Work for Change," Tom Fox is appreciative of the move toward self-criticism within rhetoric and composition. In "Holdin It Down: Students' Right and the Struggle over Language Diversity," Keith Gilyard finds that it is important to link pedagogy to a positive view of language variation. In "From Segregated Schools to Dimpled Chads: Rhetorical Hermeneutics and the Suasive
Work of Theory," Steven Mailloux sees that rhetoric and interpretation involve politics. In “Writing and Truth: Philosophy’s Role in Rhetorical Practice,” Barbara Couture says that phenomenological epistemology, philosophies of rhetoric, and moral theories of truth combine an abstract concept of “truth” with the human application or realization of that concept. In “Seeing in Third Sophistic Ways,” Victor Vitanza calls himself a theorist/writer of ways of seeing that he refers to as “misrepresentative antidotes,” “Dissoi-paralogoi,” and “theatricks.” In “Body Studies in Rhetoric and Composition,” Sharon Crowley finds that body studies contributes to rhetorical theory “because of its habit of pointing up the interestedness of boundary drawing and distinction making.” In “The Intellectual Work of Computers and Composition Studies,” Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe argue that technology, power, and literacy practices are linked in fundamental ways.

To insist on the importance of rhetoric and composition as intellectual work, then, is to insist on the continued development of the field as a political agent for change. This process necessitates acknowledgment that an uncritical embrace of perspectives worked out by other academic fields does not necessarily lead to the development of intellectual perspectives; it could instead result in academicism and a conservative political agenda. The essays in Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work themselves offer strong models of intellectual work and, taken together, work as a political agent for change.


Reviewed by Diane Davis, University of Texas at Austin

Avital Ronell has an amazing gift for de-familiarizing the most familiar concepts, for shattering any sense of complacency or certainty, for setting thinking back in motion. Her works have sprung from conceptual confinement the telephone, the television, the drug addict, and the writer, for example, reintroducing them to us in their infinite strangeness, their radical singularity. And in the latest addition to her remarkable oeuvre, she continues this bold (counter)tradition, prompting the release of another “hostage of the concept”: stupidity. However, as Ronell demon-