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Contemporary Views of Audience: A Rhetorical Perspective

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This review-essay finds that, in the technical writing field, current pedagogical emphases on audience analysis and adaptation are based largely on classical conceptions of audience and of society. Many rhetoricians are challenging this classical model as inadequate or inappropriate for contemporary rhetorical situations. Citing Chaim Perelman, Kenneth Burke, Wayne C. Booth, and Walter Ong, this paper traces their influence on recent composition scholarship and concludes with the implications for technical communication teachers, classrooms, and practices.

Concern for audience has always been central to rhetorical studies, but the definitions and boundaries of audience have shifted considerably since the classical period. When we speak of audience today, we are no longer just thinking of a group of visible, knowable listeners who are to be persuaded by proofs developed by the rhetor; we are also thinking of a diverse, often unknown collection of readers whom we hope to influence through a form of shared discourse. One reason for this expanded definition of audience is the difference between modern society with its diversity of beliefs and the classical world with its established community of belief. James P. Zappen defines contemporary rhetoric as "collective, cooperative inquiry" with this distinction of audience in mind, and sees this lack of a coherent belief system as "the modern predicament" (1983, 124). Another reason for this more amorphous concept of audience is the distancing between rhetor and audience that occurs when the mode of discourse shifts from an oral to a written one. No longer is there the immediacy of contact that allows for the confident assumptions of a speaker who can intimately know and respond to the actual audience immediately before him. Even when Aristotle wrote his treatise on rhetoric, he was composing within the oral tradition and, thus, thinking of the audience in this immediate, actual sense (Ong 1982, 109-10).

While both classical and contemporary conceptions of audience inform modern rhetorical studies and practice, it is the second view that has been the focus of contemporary rhetoricians and has attracted the attention of composition theorists. The central question that has occupied them is, given this diversity of conditions and attitudes, *how can we think about readers as we write to them*, or, to put it another way, *how can we define our multiple readers to make modern discourse possible?* There is, of course, no single answer or even clear consensus, but there is a convergence of thought I want to trace in

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this essay, for it challenges traditional pedagogical assumptions and practices, particularly those in the field of technical communication. I will first discuss those rhetoricians I see as most influential in contributing to contemporary views of audience and then show how scholars in the fields of rhetoric, composition, and scientific and technical communication have incorporated these ideas into their scholarship and pedagogy.

The Chief Exponents of Contemporary Views of Audience

Chaim Perelman is most closely associated with contemporary views of audience since his major work, *The New Rhetoric*, coauthored by L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, aims to find reasonable, nonformal, and nonantagonistic grounds to gain assent from a wide range of audiences. To achieve that end, a speaker (and here Perelman makes no distinction between the speaking or writing rhetor) must think, "more or less consciously, of those he is seeking to persuade; these people form the audience to whom his speech is addressed." But, Perelman continues, that audience "is always a *more or less systematized construction*. . . . The essential consideration for the speaker who has set himself the task of persuading concrete individuals is that his construction of the audience should be adequate to the occasion" (1969, 19, italics added). This insistence that, even in those rhetorical situations where the audience is immediate and known, a constructed audience is required underlies all of Perelman's work, and leads him to develop the concept "universal audience." Defined as "the whole of mankind, or at least, . . . all normal adult people" (1969, 30), the universal audience is a kind of generalized repository of particular or specialized audiences, including the speaker himself "when he deliberates or gives himself reasons for his actions." The highest point of argumentation "is reached when there is *agreement of the universal audience* . . . not to an experimentally proven fact, but to a universality and unanimity imagined by the speaker (1969, 31, italics his). Perelman extends his theory to include both scientific and ethical argumentation:

> Certain specialized audiences are readily assimilated to the universal audience, such as the audience of the scientist addressing his fellow scientists. The scientist addresses himself to certain particularly qualified men, who accept the data of a well-defined system consisting of the science in which they are specialists. Yet, this very limited audience is generally considered by the scientist to be really the universal audience, and not just a particular audience. He supposes that everyone with the same training, qualifications, and information would reach the same conclusions.
>
> The same hold good when we are dealing with morals. We expect our judgments to be confirmed by the reactions of others. However, the "others" to whom we appeal are not just any "others." We make our appeal solely to those who have duly "reflected" on the conduct we approve or disapprove. (1969, 34)

In other words, this concept of audience allows the speaker to make his meaning known beyond a particular set of listeners or readers, to universalize his audience, thus permitting him to project on a universal screen the basis for assent which he hopes to gain from any particular audience. It provides a meeting ground for rhetor and audience, and thus establishes the basis for a dynamic interchange between the two.

Since mutual agreement is the final aim of Perelman's new rhetoric, the relation between speaker and audience is one of active engagement: each is transformed by the other. On the one hand, Perelman sees the audience conditioned "by the speech itself, which results in the audience no longer being exactly the same at the end of the speech as it was at the beginning" (1969, 23). On the other—and at the same moment—this "form of conditioning can be brought about only if there is a continuous adaptation of the speaker to his audience." Thus the transformations are not only mutual, they are also continually occurring so that each, by a "kind of fiction," will assume a variety of "masks" (1969, 22) during the rhetorical interaction.

These same themes of mutuality and transformation reappear but with less elaboration in Perelman's *The Realm of Rhetoric* (1982). However, here he makes clearer his departure from Aristotle's idea of audience and of the orator's basis for appeal. Whereas Aristotle distinguishes in *The "Art" of Rhetoric* three kinds of rhetorical speeches—deliberative (hortatory or persuasive), forensic (accusatory or defensive), and epideictic (where the speaker praises or blames) (1981, 33)—Perelman sees the epideictic genre as qualitatively more important because its role is to intensify adherence to values, adherence without which discourses that aim at provoking action cannot find the lever to move or to inspire their listeners" (1982, 19). For him, the establishment of consensus around certain values takes precedent over all other rhetorical goals, for only then can the speaker hope to influence action or attitudes. For those interested in analysis of these influential but discursive works, John W. Ray (1978) and Lisa S. Ede (1981) provide more thorough discussions, particularly of the concept of universal audience.

In his wide-ranging essays in *A Rhetoric of Motives* ([1950]1969), Kenneth Burke expresses a goal similar to Perelman's: extending the traditional definition of rhetoric. Burke applies rhetoric to those contemporary situations not usually considered rhetorical—including magic, courtship, sales promotion, social etiquette, education, sermons, and a " 'pure' form that delights in the process of appeal for itself alone, without ulterior purpose" (xiv). While he retains the classical motive of persuasion for his extended definition, he finds two other aspects of rhetoric more relevant to our times: its use of

identification and its nature as "addressed." It is within both of these aspects that Burke develops his conception of audience.

By "identification," Burke means that process by which disparate individuals or groups can achieve communion or become "consubstantial" even though their condition is one of separateness and alienation. Since these are the inherent conditions of human life, made acutely apparent by modern war and its aftermath of dislocation, Burke argues that identification is rhetoric's primary function and writes movingly of its social, moral, even spiritual, value:

> Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence. It would not be an ideal, as it is now . . .; rather, it would be as natural, spontaneous, and total as with those ideal prototypes of communication, the theologian's angels, or "messengers." . . . Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall. ([1950]1969, 22-23)

Yet identification can be a means of perpetuating evil, even when this is not a recognized motive. The rhetor, then, can become a moralist by uncovering perversions of ethical means or ends. For example, Burke points to those university educators, who in their zeal for federal subsidies for their science departments, are acting as "conspirators" with the militarists. Indeed, Burke abhors the modern tendency of science, and its applications in technology, to consider itself autonomous, and thus not responsive to larger social constraints. The whole concept of identification makes the rhetor aware of the need to bring the audience together and makes the rhetor-as-moralist alert to the possibilities for corruption within that audience, which, for Burke, includes the rhetor himself.

This same moral dimension underlies Burke's treatment of rhetoric as addressed and helps him distinguish classical from contemporary rhetoric. For Burke considers rhetoric as not only addressing an external audience (this is how he sees Aristotle dealing with this issue in the Rhetoric) but also as addressing the rhetor himself. Burke uses Freud's theory of the ego with the id confronting the super-ego as an analogue for the internalized and conflicting motives within each individual. As these motives, many of which derive from society itself, are debated within, the speaker is constantly "being born into some new condition . . . his development being dialectical, a series of terms in perpetual transformation." Rhetoric becomes an important ingredient in "all *socialization,* considered as a *moralizing* process" ([1950]1969, 39, italics his): the rhetor becomes changed in the course of changing others. Thus Burke arrives at a conception of audience similar to Perelman's "universal audience" in that he views the audience as having both an internal as well as external dimension, as possessing a dynamic rather

than static nature, and as being ideal as well as real.

While both Perelman and Burke insist on the widest application of their theories of audience, Wayne C. Booth makes his most important contribution to our contemporary view of audience by analyzing only three forms of literary texts: the epic, the novel, and the short story. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* he studies the ways the writer of non-didactic fiction "tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader" (1961, Preface). Yet within this fairly narrow focus, Booth develops insights and terminology which have been influential far beyond the literary context. To begin his argument for the presence of rhetoric in art, Booth shows the concept of the objective or neutral author to be a pose as artfully created as any other authorial persona. He puts the case thus:

> As he writes, [the author] creates not simply an ideal, impersonal "man in general" but an implied version of "himself" that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works . . . . Whether we call this implied author an "official scribe," or adopt the term . . . the author's "second self"—it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work. (1961, 70-71)

Not only will this implied author be different from the implied authors of other authors' texts, it will vary from text to text by the same author. Indeed, this fictional projection of the actual author gives him the flexibility to present different stories and express different values within each story; he is not held to one unalterable self or unchanging set of beliefs. The concept of the implied author accounts for one of the most important creative aspects to fiction: the making and remaking of writers as they write.

And this constant transforming by authors has a counterpart for readers: "The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement" (Booth 1961, 138). Variously called "mock," "postulated," "ideal," this reader differs from the actual audience in that it is a role that must be assumed, a set of values, attitudes, biases, even facts that must be known and accepted if the text is to be read and understood. Through this fictional role, a diverse audience can become unified and enter into a rhetorical relationship with the implied author. In the 18th- and 19th-century novel,

shaped by the device of the "Dear Reader": an overt acknowledgment of the textual characterization to be assumed. In 20th-century fiction, Booth argues, such shaping must occur in a less intrusive manner to satisfy a more objective aesthetic. Yet, it must occur, nevertheless, if any kind of reader empathy, even temporary, is to be achieved. Thus for Booth, *the acts of writing and reading involve dramatic role playing with the text the means of enactment.*

Drawing on many of the same sources as Booth, Walter J. Ong in "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction" takes as his topic "the relationship, of the so-called 'audience' to writing as such, to the situation that inscribed communication establishes and to the roles that readers as readers are consequently called on to play" (1975, 9). He acknowledges Booth's conception of the "mock reader" as being invaluable in understanding the means by which the actual readers take in the meaning of a literary text, but unlike Booth, who is interested in the ways the fictional roles and the moral and ethical assumptions inherent in them relate to the actual readers' beliefs, Ong argues that *these roles are established by earlier roles and often have little or nothing to do with the beliefs of the current actual readers.* Because the potential readers of any text are so unwieldy and ungeneralizable, writers not only make up an audience, they base this fiction on previous fictions. Thus, Ong suggests, "A history of the ways audiences have been called on to fictionalize themselves would be a correlative of the history of literary genres and literary works, and indeed of culture itself" (1975, 12). The subtlety of the process is rivalled only by its inevitability:

> Readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of these projections. They have to know how to play the game of being a member of an audience that "really" does not exist. And they have to adjust when the rules change, even though no rules thus far have ever been published and even though the changes in the unpublished rules are themselves for the most part only implied. (1975, 12)

Like Perelman and Burke, Ong extends his thesis beyond the literary text to all writing, and like Booth, he sees that all writing is essentially rhetorical. Thus reader roles have been subject to the changing fashion in rhetorical style, from a polemical character based on the agonistic structures of classical texts to one more subject to conventions of genre and intentions of individual authors. Shaping readers in contemporary texts requires a great deal of sophistication about the tradition within which the audience has been previously shaped. Justifiably and prophetically, Ong advises that "we should think more about the problems that the need to fictionalize audiences creates for writers" (1975, 16).

Influence on Composition Scholarship and Pedagogy

The most immediate legatees of these contemporary views of audience are the composition scholars and teachers whose fields of discourse include a wide variety of topics, purposes, and readers and whose main concern is teaching writing to a wide variety of students. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., in *The Philosophy of Composition*, draws directly on these rhetorical theories to help him define what he sees as the proper goal for composition research as well as pedagogy: relative readability. " 'Readability,' " Hirsch explains, "refers to the easiness with which a reader understands a text, while 'relative' explicitly concedes that fact that easiness must vary with different semantic intentions" (1977, 9). Because the reader that he is ultimately concerned with is the actual reader, Hirsch's goal leads him to explore psychological bases of reading and cognitive theories of memory. But he sees that the end of such research is not a sufficient guide to writing. It does not address the crucial issue of rhetoric—bringing a heterogeneous group of readers into some kind of authorial focus. For this problem, Hirsch finds the work of Perelman, Booth, and Ong invaluable:

> Perelman's interesting contrast between the one-person audience of oral speech and the universal audience of written, philosophical discourse represents two extremes of oral and written speech. But even more interesting to me than this contrast between audiences is the realization which I gained of the imaginary character of the audience in *all* speech. Every linguistic audience is imaginary insofar as the speaker must predict a probable response and a probable understood meaning *before* he speaks. (Everyone knows how easy it is to miscalculate the meaning that will be understood by even the most intimate interlocutor.) To speak or write is to project meaning as understood meaning, and this requires an implicit imagining of one's audience—a crucial point in composition teaching. (1977, 28)

Like Burke, Hirsch also sees that an imaginative projection of the rhetor is the necessary counterpart to this imaginary audience, since "his projection of that audience must also include an imagined projection of himself as he will be construed by his audience." From these propositions, Hirsch concludes that role-playing is one of the "inherent requirements of a communicative use of language": "That this double projection is often performed unconsciously in oral speech makes its *conscious application to composition all the more important*" (1977, 28, italics added).

Hirsch's "philosophy" of composition is attacked by George Dillon in *Constructing Texts* not because it values these contemporary rhetorical views of audience, but because it doesn't value them enough. Dillon rejects what he sees as Hirsch's overvaluing of the

scientific approach to writing and the wholesale adoption of the "intake-of-content" model for reading. The current models of language processing do not, Dillon argues, "adequately characterize the experience of reading; they are reductionist, and the attempt to base a theory of prose composition on them can only produce significant omissions and distortions" (1981, 162). Goals of efficiency and clarity, supported by empirical science and fostered by traditional pedagogy and texts, underestimate the reader's contribution to the creation of meaning in texts. Dillon concludes his attack:

> The "needy reader" turns out . . . to be a naive fiction. We have replaced this entity with the model (or implied) reader of current literary and semiotic theory and have traced the ways various constructions project or presuppose a reader to whom certain information is familiar, or one who is willing to pretend it is familiar, one who shares a common background and orientation. The process of imagining a reader is accordingly not an attempt to approximate the knowledge and viewpoint of actual persons who might peruse the text but projecting a self that readers will try on and find agreeable. (1981, 164-5)

Instead of pursuing what he calls the " 'cognitive' obsession of current discourse processing," Dillon believes composition teachers should investigate the "process of 'hearing voices,' " concentrate on writing as a "mode of interaction, not as transmission of facts or presentation of material," and teach the student writer to "project the experience of readers so that she or he can judge how much to say and how to say it" (1981, 164). While the center of his concern is the expository essay, Dillon, like the other rhetoricians discussed thus far, extends his arguments to all forms of discourse.

Following this same line of argument that more attention should be paid by writers and teachers of writing to the roles readers play in texts and less to the roles they play in actual life, Russell C. Long, in "Writer-Audience Relationships: Analysis or Invention?" (1980), centers his attack on those contemporary texts that stress analysis of audience as that audience exists before reading. Such texts draw on classical rhetoric's interest in the audience "out there," and thereby make what Long sees as flawed assumptions about the reader:

> that observable physical or occupational characteristics are unvaryingly accurate guides to attitudes and perceptions, and that people sharing certain superficial qualities are alike in all other respects. (1980, 223)

To this "noxious sterotyping," Long adds another important error that derives from an indiscriminate borrowing from classical rhetoric, namely the assumption of *an agonistic relationship* between writer and reader: the assumption of "clear intent—persuasion—on one side and clear attitude—resistance to persuasion—on the other" (1980, 222). Instead, most modern examples of "workable prose" from "cake recipes to AKC classes of dogs" assume *a much more cooperative relationship* between writer and audience. Long's prescription for a more compatible approach to audience derives directly from Ong's: create or invent an audience. Part of this approach involves studying other texts for reader models. It also involves a new set of questions for writers at the pre-writing stage:

> Rather than beginning with the traditional question, "who *is* my audience?", we now begin with, "who do I *want* my audience to be?" Rather than encouraging a superficial, stereotyped view of reader, we are asking the student to begin with a statement about the audience she wants to create. What attitudes, ideas, actions are to be encouraged? This leads directly to questions of methods: what distance between reader and subject should be established? What of diction and the creation of tone? What pieces of information do I want the reader to take for granted: Which do I want to treat in detail and emphasize? *Such questions shift the burden of responsibility upon the writer from that of amateur detective to that of creator, and the role of creator is the most important and most basic the writer must play.* (1980, 225-6, italics added)

The potential of role-playing by writer and reader as a heuristic device is further explored and codified by Fred R. Pfister and Joanne F. Petrick. In "A Heuristic Model for Creating a Writer's Audience" (1980), they develop a series of questions similar to Long's, which relate to a hypothetical or imagined audience. Pfister and Petrick tested their model by having their students write short essays and analyze magazines which posited specific audiences. Such activities gave the students not only a better sense of audience, but also a new ease of composing and a more sophisticated ability to choose and organize details.

Carol Berkenkotter finds the cognitive research methodology of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1980, 1981) and Barry M. Kroll (1978) useful in studying how experienced writers think about their audience. Berkenkotter tested the proposition of Kroll that "the crucial factors in an investigation of audience awareness are not the salient characteristics of audiences, but the constructive processes operative in the mind of the writer" (1978, 279-80). Through thinking-aloud protocols, Berkenkotter's subjects revealed a tendency to internalize their readers in order to consult with them about the many decisions made during the drafting stage. These findings confirm the contemporary rhetorical theories about audience in that these experienced writers constructed imaginary audiences at the outset of the writing process, but also *revised their view of this imagined audience during the writing process*. During this process, the writers put themselves into their imagined readers' minds and thereby became one with them—an echoing of the identification that Burke describes.

Similar findings about the inadequacy of the traditional audience analysis model are reported by Arthur E. Walzer. Questions about the prospective readers' backgrounds, technical knowledge, even needs (for instruction, recommendation, etc.) proved less valuable as a guide to writing for the published writers Walzer studied than the question about the "kind of knowledge the audience expects to gain from the article" (1985, 155). Writers need, Walzer concludes, "a different heuristic for discourse in which rhetorical choice is dictated more by the point of view a community of readers chooses to take on a subject than it is influenced by the immediate needs and particular background of actual readers" (156). A lack of attention to actual audiences is documented by Robert G. Roth in his study of successful student writers (1987). He found that these writers often thought about themselves as audience and that out of that experience of self they projected an ideal reader. As in Walzer's study, the end result of this dynamic transaction between author and author-as-reader was a sense not of a particular audience but of new ideas about the material and its purposes. *In short, thinking about an idealized audience becomes an act of invention.*

Several composition theorists have recently attempted to reconcile the various approaches to audience that they see being taken in current scholarship and classroom texts. What is significant, from the point of view of this essay, is how heavily they draw on the contemporary rhetorical views of audience as a means of mediating the differences. In one of the most influential of these essays, Douglas B. Park asks, "what are the different kinds of meanings 'audience' can have for writers writing in different kinds of rhetorical situations?" (1982, 248). He see the answers tending to diverge in two general directions:

> one toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate; the other toward the text itself and the audience implied there, a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners. (1982, 249)

The first, and most pervasive, concept, is that of concrete readers external to the text. Such an image, while useful in highly structured settings or at particular points in composing can, Park argues, be inhibiting to students as they try to create a rhetorical situation that the actual readers may be unsympathetic to. Part of making the meaning relevant for the actual audience (the audience that finally receives the text) is to create a "context into which readers may enter and to varying degrees become the audience that is implied there" (1982, 249). Park draws on Ong's conception as the *internal* extreme—"an ideal conception shadowed forth in the way the discourse itself defines and creates contexts for the readers" (1982, 250). While Park's taxonomy includes both extremes, he clearly favors the contemporary internal view of audience as one that allows

the writer a much more sophisticated way of understanding and creating the contexts and conventions that operate inside each text. These contexts and conventions, rather than a literal image of audience, are what writers should be paying attention to, for they set the fictional roles that the actual readers must assume.

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford also call attention to these two views. Using "audience addressed" to characterize the view of audience as a concrete reality, Ede and Lunsford see this view being influenced by the "strong tradition of audience analysis in speech communication and by current research in cognitive psychology on the composing process," as well as being a reaction against emphasis on product (1984, 156). They also see this view of audience suiting those teachers encouraging "real-world" writing (1984, 156). They cite Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor's article (1979) as representative of this point of view; their critique of this model follows the lines established by such "new" rhetoricians as Booth and Perelman: Mitchell and Taylor don't recognize the importance of the dynamic inner dialogue that occurs between the writer-as-reader and reader-as-writer; they don't recognize the ethical responsibilities of writers who should seek assent through good reasons rather than simply pander to the crowd. Finally, Ede and Lunsford find that the "audience addressed" model has an oversimplified view of discourse, a view that audience is the main formative influence on language.

The second view Ede and Lunsford call the "audience invoked" position, citing Russell Long's and Walter Ong's articles. Their main complaint with this position is that it doesn't fully recognize the constraints real readers place on writers. Their solution—offered by a model of their own—is to combine both views by recognizing the creative contribution made in the composing process by both the writer and reader. "A fully elaborated view of audience . . . must account for a wide and shifting range of roles for both addressed and invoked audiences" (1984, 169). Such a conclusion places Ede and Lunsford's essay centrally within the contemporary rhetorical position on audience being traced in this essay. In a separate review article, Lisa Ede confirms her bias by using Perelman's view on audience as the final commentary:

> audience is not secondary, a passive entity that merely receives the actions of the speaker or writer. Instead, together writer or speaker and audience create meaning: their contact makes argumentation (and rhetoric) possible. (1984, 152)

Barry Kroll proposes a different taxonomy for viewing audiences, but he arrives at a position similar to Park's and to Ede and Lunsford's. Kroll finds that current theories and their pedagogical applications fall into three broad perspectives—rhetorical, informational, and social (1984). By the rhetorical perspective Kroll means the traditional view of audience that derives from classical precepts and assumptions—an actual, identifiable audience whom

writers have only to analyze in order to persuade. Consequently, his evaluation of the validity of this view echoes many of the same points made by other contemporary critics included in this essay: (1) that too much emphasis is placed on persuasion and an adversarial relationship between rhetor and listener or reader; (2) that, at least for many kinds of discourse, information about the actual audience is difficult to obtain and not very useful anyway; (3) that a "relatively unsophisticated" assumption is made about the psychology of readers and writers. Thinking about the reader as a "target receiver" at which the writer sends "persuasive darts" reduces the complexity of their interaction and the contribution each makes to the rhetorical enactment. The informational perspective involves thinking about the act of reading as informational processing, the perspective Hirsch exploits in his *Philosophy of Composition* (1977). Kroll's response, though more tempered, parallels Dillon's: this view of the "struggling reader" fails "to appreciate the extent to which readers 'construct' the text"; it is also misguided for seeing "the writer's task as one of conveying content which the reader can comprehend with a minimum of effort" (1984, 178). The social perspective draws on the work of Piaget, who argued that egocentrism—self-centeredness—prevents successful communication with another. From this perspective derive exercises to teach novice writers the "satisfactions and conflicts of reader response" (1984, 181). Kroll cites those critics who find such an approach by itself oversimplifies what it means to write to an audience and underestimates the maturity of college students. He resolves these perspectives in language that echoes almost verbatim Ong, Booth, and Park:

> Instead of adapting a text for real readers or for an abstract, generalized audience, the writer's task more centrally involves *creating* an audience within the text, largely by observing conventions which "imply" or "project" an audience with particular knowledge, assumptions, and attitudes toward the writer and subject matter. A text is a kind of drama, with roles created for writer and reader, and the audience is invited to enact the role which the writer has created for the reader. . . . the process of writing for readers depends not so much on social knowledge (nor, for that matter, on rhetorical knowledge) as it does on textual knowledge, especially on an understanding of the ways in which the conventions for particular kinds of texts create a fictional audience. (194, 182)

Views of Audience in Scientific and Technical Communication

In the field of technical communication, as in the composition field, there has been little formalized attempt to incorporate this contemporary view of audience into the major textbooks or into classroom practices. The prevailing view of audience, which has

informed not only the texts and pedagogy but scholarship as well, has been that of potential readers as they exist outside the text—the external view of audience as addressed. The major efforts have, therefore, been directed toward analzying these readers, deciphering their reading habits, their educational backgrounds, their corporate behaviors, work responsibilities, and informational needs. The underlying assumption of these efforts called audience analysis and adaptation is that the more completely technical writers can know their actual readers, the more perfectly they can adapt their documents to them. Dwight W. Stevenson, one of the major contributors to this view, characterizes it thus:

> One basic premise of technical communication has been that awareness of audience is fundamental and that the ability of technical writers to adapt technical discourse to the needs and abilities of different audiences is essential. These are points upon which we apparently have near-unanimous agreement. Even the weakest of technical writing texts give lip-service to the idea, but more to the point, the better texts, a great deal of research, and countless articles have documented the need and have presented various methodologies for identifying different types of readers and for fitting the form of the discourse to their needs, capabilities, limitations. (1983, 319)

Two recent bibliographical surveys on audience in technical communication confirm the continuing primacy of this approach. In a review of 116 articles and six book reviews published in the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, Robert Fry asks what kind of changes over a six-year period contributors to the *Transactions* exhibited in their attitudes toward audience. His conclusions are that the contributors "have demonstrated increasing awareness that purpose and audience in the context of the engineering workplace are complex, not simple, concepts" and that they "have developed a broader definition of the engineering writer's audience as a diversified audience with varied levels of reading ability and technical expertise" (1987, 4). However, an analysis of the individual contributions indicates a definite bias toward looking at the audience as an external entity: concern with readers' purpose, helping "users" get information without much searching, being aware of the difference between readers inside and outside companies, addressing different readers' levels of experience with technical subject matter, meeting the "target audience" by applying the message to the reader's own background and expertise, and analysis of reading levels.

Michael Keene and Marilyn Barnes-Ostrander in their chapter "Audience Analysis and Adaptation" review a wide variety of approaches to audience taken in different fields, including "the literatures of technical communication, rhetoric and composition, literary criticism, psychology, education, linguistics, and human factors engineering" (1985, 163-64). Their findings reveal that, while

the forms of audience analysis and adaptation become more and more complex, the overarching view remains largely the same—that of a given entity to be served by a text, the entity Ede and Lunsford call "audience addressed."

There is emerging, however, a recognition that no matter how well known, defined, or closely analyzed an audience may be, the writer is *still* confronted with the problem of translating that knowledge into the composing process, of creating or "invoking" an audience who can enter into a rhetorical relationship with the writer, of providing roles for that actual audience to enact during the course of reading. A number of scholars and researchers are incorporating this insight, so central to the contemporary view of audience traced in this essay, into their thinking about audience within the context of scientific and technical communication. Drawing directly from the theories of Perelman, Ong, and Booth as well as traditional rhetorical theories, David L. Carson argues that technical writers need to construct a universal audience in order to address particular readers. Each entity gives substance to the other:

> Although teachers of technical writing routinely insist that students write whenever possible to a real audience, no such "real" audience exists. Even when an author knows very intimately the person to whom she or he writes, the image of audience which the writer carries in his or her mind is merely a fictive construction based upon available data. . . . In one degree or another, the writer's image of any particular universal audience of one is always a mere figment of imagination. My criticism aims only at those organizations which fail to supply the writer with the most complete data available upon which to base an imaginary audience construct. (1980, 25)

Similarly, in "The Use of the Reader" (1978), Mary B. Coney states that "knowing the real audience, the one 'out there,' is not enough; a writer must then activate that knowledge and incorporate it into his own process so that it becomes part of the content for his draft" (98). She then shows how the concept of the mock reader can aid the writer in making decisions about the scope and complexity of content, the order and emphasis of the selected content, and the style and tone of a document. Like Carson, she does not deny the value of audience analysis in the traditional sense; she demonstrates that, by itself, it does not initiate or maintain that dramatic interchange necessary for composing *or* reading a document.

This same idea of building a dynamic audience contruct so that it can act as an internal monitor for the writer composing is offered by D. D. Roberts and P. A. Sullivan. In "Beyond the Static Audience Construct: Reading Protocols in the Technical Writing Class" (1984), they find that traditional audience analysis is useful as an initial activity, but a more flexible sense of audience is needed to guide the writer during composing. One way to help produce that sense in

inexperienced writers is to have them analyze "previously written documents for audience and role references"—a solution they attribute to Ong (1984, 147). In "Evolutionary Rhetoric in Technical Writing" (1985), Edward See and Carol Bahruth develop the term "evolutionary rhetoric" to show how audiences are influenced by earlier forms of documentation, how their assumptions and expectations are shaped by previous reading, and how future documents must reflect those new assumptions and expectations. In order to track this influence, See and Bahruth develop a checklist for writers containing such questions as "How was this information [in previous documentation] received by the audience? Did they like it?" Even though they refer to the actual audience, they have had to conceptualize and generalize it to make it a part of the evolutionary process.

Marilyn Schauer Samuels shows how scientists use imaginative constructions of readers to help them develop their logic of presentation. She quotes Martin S. Peterson's advice that "the first job of the scientist as writer [is] to provide the type of information for his readers that a vis-a-vis cross-examination would provide," and then provides the following gloss:

> Put another way, Peterson's statement implies that the writer in conceiving his report imagines a series of interchanges between himself and the audience. In the course of these imagined interchanges, he is able to identify the questions and objections that his explanations might elicit. Anticipating the questions and objections, he can incorporate answers to them into the report structure. (1982, 309)

This same interpretation of science writing as rhetorical interchange is made by Paul Newell Campbell in "The Personae of Scientific Discourse" (1975). He cites such philosophers as Susanne Langer, Thomas Kuhn, Jacob Bronowski, and Kenneth Burke to argue the rhetorical nature of science itself, and then establishes the presence of writers' roles (his *personae*) and their value in scientific discourse. What he shows is that these fictional projections in the text are a way of achieving—or, more accurately, achieving the appearance of—objectivity. Yet, there is still an ethical dimension within personae which can never be disavowed by the scientist; it is inherent in the act of communication:

> All discourse is a multilevel process, and the deepest of those levels is the aesthetic or dramatic presentation of selves—selves chosen from the cluster of more, or less, habitually performed roles called "the self" and enacted for poetic-rhetorical purposes. Such selves are *personae*, they are to be found in every discursive form, including the one we call scientific; and they require ethical appraisal, particularly when they presume to study, to manipulate, to experiment with people. (1975, 405)

Michael A. Overington accepts Campbell's argument for the rhetorical nature of science and posits the thesis that the audience, as well as the writer, contributes to what is accepted as knowledge. In "The Scientific Community as Audience," he explains that "it is the collective agreement of scientists which establishes that a statement is testable or has been tested satisfactorily" and, that, from a "rhetorical point of view one might handle such a communitarian notion of science by the substitution of a conception of "audience" for that of scientific community" (1977, 143-4). Through this conflation, Overington demonstrates—following Perelman and Burke—how the privileged position of scientific knowledge can be made susceptible to rhetorical analysis. By such analysis, we can "restore questions of the purposes of scientific inquiry, or practical action based on scientific knowledge, to rational discourse" (1977, 161).

As we've seen, Campbell studies the significance of the roles played by the writer and Overington the roles played by the reader. Stephen A. Bernhardt combines these conceptions and examines the importance of role playing in scientific writing for *both* writer and reader. He takes as a given that science writing is an "interpersonal transaction" rather than "a simple presentation of cold, facts" and then asks, "First, what rhetorical or communicative *functions* are served when the writer or reader is explicitly present in the text? And second, what are the linguistic *forms* through which the writer and the reader enter the text?" (1985, 163-4). He identifies seven rhetorical acts, including acknowledging assistance and discussing implication for reader behavior, as evidence of writer/reader transactions; and further, finds that writers represent themselves and their readers through "use of pronominals, verbs entailing reasoning, modals expressing possibility or obligation, and adjectives or adverbs which qualify assertions." Bernhardt concludes:

> All discourse, including scientific discourse, makes interpersonal meanings and employs interpersonal constructions. The distinctions among texts are of degree, not type: some texts may be more impersonal than others, but all texts evidence some degree of interpersonal meaning. (1985, 173)

Final Remarks

What becomes clear from this body of scholarship is that conceptions of audience cannot be separated from conceptions about the writing process, invention, language, and knowledge itself. To think of audience only as a recipient or user of information, external to the development of information and the discovery of meaning, is to ignore contemporary definitions of rhetoric and science. If we agree with Zappen (1983) that rhetoric is a collective, cooperative inquiry, then we must place the audience, along with the writer/researcher, at the center of that inquiry. Together they become active participants in the making of knowledge, in the using of language as a means of mutual engagement and change. That imaginative and symbolic interchange is, in Booth's view, the highest purpose of rhetoric. In *Modern Dogma and The Rhetoric of Assent*, Booth connects that purpose with the work of science:

> But if all men make each other in symbolic interchange, then by implication they *should* make each other, and it is an inescapable value in their lives that it is good to do it well . . . and bad to do it badly. If even the most austere, isolated laboratory scientist cannot even claim to exist except as a social self who was made and is still being made in symbolic exchange with others, then his very existence depends on the many values he affirms when he respects the truth. . . . The supreme purpose of persuasion in this view could not be to talk someone else into a preconceived view; rather it must be to engage in mutual inquiry or exploration". (1974, 137)

To think about audience in technical communication with any less complexity does a disservice to ourselves, our students, and our audience.

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