# To See What's Real and Sell It: The New Rhetoric, Writing in the Disciplines, and Value Judgments

Don J. Kraemer

## Abstract

*The WPA and WID communities share an interest in rhetorical situations: from one situation, context, or activity system to the next, can the similarities and differences that matter be recognized? To address this question, WID has used some of the resources of the New Rhetoric, those of the New Rhetorical approach to genre, which inquire into how skills are transformed to meet the needs of different genres—indeed, of different activity systems. In this paper, however, I wish to entertain the co-existing possibility that activity systems are transformed by skills—understood here as acts of judgment. Most important are value judgments about what is real, about which aspect of reality is to count as more real than other aspects. How are valued aspects of reality justified as similarities that matter, and how are less-valued aspects justifiably excluded as differences that do not matter, especially when the audience might well judge, or has already judged, otherwise? There are motivational advantages in engaging such questions—a claim I engage here by articulating the resources of the New Rhetoric with WID scholarship, an articulation which opens each to further development.*

To keep writing instruction in contact with context, members of the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) community have benefited from studies in the New Rhetoric, which directs attention to how the rhetorical situation differs from one disciplinary context to another. Anyone so attuned can then think more resourcefully about the differences that matter most. The contention this essay will advance is that further resources are available in that form of the New Rhetoric WID has passed over: i.e., the New Rhetoric associated with Chaïm Perelman (and his collaborator, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca) and developed in journals like *Philosophy and Rhetoric* and in col-

lections like 2011's *The Promise of Reason: Studies in "The New Rhetoric."* This version of the New Rhetoric can add—significantly, I believe—to WID's interest in, and growing knowledge of, the *rhetorical* side of rhetorical situations.

The rhetorical side of rhetorical situations is marked by *action*. Writing of the New Rhetoric that is already a key part of WID, David R. Russell and his colleagues note that the approach "sometimes termed 'New Rhetorical'" advocates that genre be taught "explicitly, but in the process of performing a *rhetorical action* in its target context of use—which is the situation in disciplinary classrooms, typically" ("Exploring Notions of Genre" 461; emphasis added). In another study of disciplinary writing, the New Rhetoric is similarly represented:

> A third approach to genre, New Rhetorical or North American, traces its origins to Carolyn R. Miller's (1984) understanding of genre as social action, a typified response to an often-repeated social situation. Scholarship in this area has been largely focused on ethnographic studies of generic contexts and the ways those contexts define and are defined by generic responses. Because of their emphasis on generic contexts, advocates of the New Rhetorical approach tend to be skeptical that genre can be explicitly taught, arguing instead that genre knowledge must be acquired organically through *active participation* in authentic generic contexts. (Carter, Ferzli, and Wiebe 396; emphasis added and internal references deleted)

Thus far, the New Rhetoric is manifest as "active participation" in authentic situations, such as using genres to do what they'd *actually*, repeatedly be used for in disciplinary classrooms. (Appealing to the *actual* is the characteristic move of this form of the New Rhetoric, as the next section will show.)

In her 2011 book *Everyday Genres: Writing Assignments across the Disciplines*, Mary Soliday invokes this version of the New Rhetoric, remarking on both its accuracy as diagnosis and its limitations as pedagogy. The accurate diagnosis that comes out of genre studies is that "students cannot cross easily (or at all) between situations because learners do not learn to write by applying general strategies to specific situations"; rather, learners "must acquire genres by participating in the situations from which these strategies originate. Especially for those influenced by the New Rhetoric, a guiding principle is that if we learn the content and language of a field, we'll acquire its rhetoric, too" (6-7). But a field's rhetoric goes pretty deep, deeper than active participation only. As Soliday puts it, "Ordinary genres like the article and its humble cousin the lab report play powerful roles in

sustaining our disciplines because, as Mikhail Bakhtin argued decades ago, their typical words carry with them significant ethical and social values and ways of being in the world" (1). Genres are not just an epistemological medium, then; they are axiological and ontological, constituting our value-laden disciplinary selves.

It is because of this situational depth that Soliday claims the New Rhetorical "view can be limited if it defines the term *situation* so narrowly it excludes a writer's possible movement between contexts" (7). Interested in other resources of, and agents of, rhetorical depth, she defines "*situation* more broadly to include the expectations of both immediate and more distant social groups" (8). For reasons that shall be elaborated, this definition of "situation" is promising. There is promise in "expectations," implying not just scenic agency but an audience's. There is even more promise, I think, in "more distant social groups," implying a writer's relations not just with academic, professional, and civic stakeholders but also with those the writer has, for purposes peculiar to her, chosen to associate with, however publicly distant from the rhetorical situation. Thus I find congenial Soliday's Bakhtin-influenced conclusion that "students are more likely to achieve this typical authoritative speech when they can participate in the rhetorical situation in some meaningful way" (12). Active participation, then, must be *meaningfully* active—action that addresses what matters, that negotiates the potentially generative tension between our obligations and interests.

For the project underway here, meaningfully active participation denotes action attributed not only to constitutive elements of exigence and invention—such as media and tools, genres and contexts, and network upon intertextual network—but also to the agency of authors (whose interests, whose commitments to their *good* are not entirely scenically subsumed) and audiences (who, as part of the scene, embody the *right*, the obligations, that authors engage). Why emphasize this point when it seems obvious, when the belief that "competing interests must negotiate the good in a very social, very human, very rhetorical process" is already WID lore (Russell, "The Ethics of Teaching Ethics" 171)? One motive for such emphasis is to distinguish one practitioner's good, or one learner's good, from a discipline's. Even the most technical of disciplines is committed to its good, understands itself in terms of, and aims itself toward, the good it must rhetorically negotiate with competing interests. The good of a discipline's rhetorical domain can render mute an individual's good, even in accounts that stress disciplinary writing's *transformative* quality. Consider the recommendation that "we should attempt to account for the ways in which knowledge and skills are *transformed* across contexts; otherwise, we risk overlooking manifestations of skills that have been adapted to meet the needs of a new

activity system" (Wardle 69). Although there is welcome focus here not on recurrent features of a situation but on, rather, a person's active adaptation to, and transformation of, that situation, the transformation is motivated by the new activity system's "needs" only, not by other needs that person may have. If referring to a person's needs seems insufficiently rooted in disciplinary scenes of learning, let me put it another way: in Wardle's account, the activity system's needs are not transformed by acts of judgment regarding how to manifest knowledge and skill, but such acts of interpretation and judgment are transformed by an activity system's needs. To assert the transformative power of a given activity system is a claim well documented and, to my mind, persuasively documented. But if we develop what should also be persuasive—the claim that acts of judgment as well have appropriate transformative power—we will see that the two claims work better in co-existence than in contradiction.

In developing the claim that individual acts of judgment have transformative power, I heed Rebecca Nowacek's caution that we not prematurely "normalize value judgments made about the usefulness and appropriateness of a given act of transfer" (37). Transfer can be an exchange in which students and teachers have voice. But for anyone (let alone students) to get heard in that exchange is unlikely to just happen. Framing "transfer as a rhetorical act," Nowacek recommends that students be encouraged not just "to 'see' connections among previously disparate contexts"; they need to be encouraged "also to 'sell' those connections, to render them appropriate and convincing to their various audiences" (39). That a connection exists and has been seen, that a connection is possible to make—to justify these realities will likely not satisfy the criteria for "appropriate and convincing." Rather, what has to be justified is "the value of the connection" (53).

With respect to these rhetorically useful terms, "seeing" and "selling," I plan two moves. The first move is to show that to see is already to judge. If so, then appeals to the real that we see must be justified. Seeing, then, is selling. In *Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering: Case Studies from MIT*, Mya Poe, Neal Lerner, and Jennifer Craig write suggestively of the relations between seeing and selling. Of students struggling at the beginning of a course in Quantitative Physiology, Poe et al. say students "did not consider methodological choices used in gathering data as a series of rhetorical choices. Persuasion is left to the interpretation of data, not its collection," but by semester's end, students had come "to a deeper understanding about the relationship between audience and reception and the presence of persuasion throughout the scientific process" (121). Argument and persuasion, in other words, do not enter the process after data have been identified and collected but much earlier, in the very process of "col-

lection and analysis. Every methodological choice in data collection and analysis is a decision that allows researchers to foreground certain results and not others" (144). Seeing and selling imply each other. Improving performance in one area should improve performance in the other.

The second move, then, is to consider whether the New Rhetoric being promoted here can help improve performance. It can help, I think, by redeeming questions about judgment that risk getting begged in calls for inquiry into "meta-awareness"—into "how *exactly* individuals *recognize* similarities and differences between contexts" (Nowacek 17; emphasis added). How individual writers do what they do is legitimate inquiry, to be sure, but we must be careful. For it is possible to infer, from the words just cited, the assumption that similarities and differences are self-evident (there is recognition, perhaps exact recognition) and that the similarities and differences that matter are self-evident. From this inference it is reasonable to infer another: that what matters for scholars are not the various ways in which data are constructed as meaningful—in the presence of an audience—but rather the variety in how individuals access these activity-independent data about contexts. Other inferences with pedagogical implications might then be that certain contextual similarities reliably assert themselves, that certain contextual differences can be counted on, and that such knowledge and know-how should be banked for further use.

But such inferences overly minimize judgment. Reading the call for inquiry into meta-awareness differently, we might take it in a problem-posing way: What are the similarities and differences that matter for the writer, that matter for the audience, and that matter in the context that has brought them together? How is the naming of a similarity justified when the audience's sense of the similar is different? How is the exclusion of a potential similarity justified as a difference, especially when the audience believes the difference is a similarity? These are questions of practical reasoning—reasoning which occurs when the demonstration of *certain* knowledge is not available or appropriate, reasoning which occurs when we act on behalf of our good in the company of conflicting goods and value judgments. So understood, practical reasoning, as central to the disciplines as it is to General Education, is the kind of "rhetorical awareness" that Wardle (among many others) claims is "one of FYC's most important contributions" (81):

> Transfer research from other fields, [as] well as the findings of this study, suggest that *meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies* in FYC may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate. We cannot prepare students for every genre, nor can we know every assignment they will be given or the genre

> conventions appropriate to those assignments across the disciplines. That knowledge—and the supports for learning it—must be gained in discipline-specific classrooms. What FYC can do, however, is help students think about writing in the university, the varied conventions of different disciplines, and their own writing strategies in light of various assignments and expectations. (82)

Hear, hear. But the question remains: of all that might come under the heading of "rhetorical strategies," what most warrants cultivating into meta-awareness? I say, rhetorical awareness of the practical written judgment that is the charge of FYC to teach—rhetorical knowledge that has a place in disciplinary writing and beyond. In trying to model such judgment, this project aims to join the work of developing the resources of the New Rhetoric. These are audacious resources, for while they are not "in conflict with disciplinary conceptions of rhetoric," they will, as James Crosswhite puts it, "help to interpret and explain and to some extent even justify and strengthen them" (28). The New Rhetoric, so proposed, exceeds disciplinary rhetoric:

> The discipline of questioning and inquiring is not a natural or social science or a specific field of humanistic study. It is not a method or a logic or a theory of rationality or a calculus of probability or a cognitive science or a decision theory. It is the conversation of reason itself understood as argumentation, something on which every field of study depends, originally and ultimately and pretty much all along the way, too. (214-15)

For the New Rhetoric to exceed disciplinary rhetoric *in this way*, however, it must exist in practitioners—in students and professors, apprentices and professionals, as individual agents who are ever balancing their personal interests with their civic, institutional, and disciplinary obligations.[1] It is a real question whether our colleagues can be open—properly open, on terms they find reasonable—to this proposal, that the continuity between FYC and disciplinary discourse be framed in terms of reasoning with others. But first this proposal must be made reasonable here, which I will begin doing by trying to make it real.

## Appearance and Reality

In "A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing," Carolyn Miller criticizes disciplinary rhetoric for its commitment to "the skill of subduing language so that it most accurately and directly transmits reality" (16). After surveying technical writing textbooks, which "have in common a conviction that content (that is, ideas, information, facts) is wholly separable from

words," Miller concludes that these texts "presuppose what has been called the 'windowpane theory of language': the notion that language provides a view out onto the real world, a view which may be clear or obfuscated" (17). Miller returns to this naïve view, suggesting that "definition in terms of the window itself may be more promising than definitions in terms of what is outside" (19). By no means do I wish to fault this suggestion. What I want, on the contrary, is to pursue its promise a little further. If we do look at the window itself, at what Kenneth Burke called "terministic screens," then to call the screen "clear or obfuscated" is neither an illogical inference nor metaphorically untrue; rather, as a logical extension of the metaphor, it ramifies "windowpane," one of many possible terministic screens, any one of which would be incomplete yet generative: "We *must* use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms," and "any such screen," Burke adds, "necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another" (50). A screen that directs attention to the screen itself as a field of vision may lead to acts such as cleaning the screen: by recursive experimentation and assessment, say, or by a process of copyediting. Are screens that imply clarity/obfuscation somehow less real than screens that imply, say, interesting/boring or useful/useless or elegantly constructed/clumsily constructed?

I think not, yet we value some screens more than others. We want our theories of literacy, for example, to reflect the complex realities that scholars like Bakhtin, Bazerman, Heath, Russell, Soliday, and Swales have taught us to recognize. We strive to make our pedagogies do justice to what it takes to learn. And whether our students are really learning is not something about which we are indifferent. The teachers I know would change their pedagogies if those pedagogies were found to be based on arbitrary fictions rather than on data-based research and on what justifies that research, i.e., the good sense our discipline holds in common.

To say this another way: we do what we do because it seems real to us. But to say this yet another way, the way it *should* be said: What if what seems real to us seems that way because that way is the way we think it should be? To refine this rhetorical question (and to dissociate it from the bias confirmation it seems to endorse), let me use an appeal Soliday makes to reality. She writes that faculty in the disciplines should be urged "to consider the *actual* behavior of genres in the wild" rather than let their students contend with the less-actual behaviors of "the fainter, domesticated shadow of a wilder case-study essay," i.e., the generic college essay (13). Soliday is not actually arguing that the behavior of genres like the generic college essay is not *actual* or *real*. For sure, it is real enough and often enough we don't like it. Her (actual) argument is that our students would be better

served by a helping of the greater variety of acts genres in the wild help constitute and of the greater variety of relationships genres in the wild sustain. If we care about the quality of learning, we should value some ways of experiencing genres more than we value other ways.

This strategic appeal to reality is prominent in the rhetoric of Mikhail Bakhtin, who, as it seems to me, is one of the founders of the New Rhetoric as it is figured in WID. A review of his argument about language will further help me clarify the rhetorical priority of value over reality. Bakhtin's argument is that language is cognitively meaningful only in context, a context that is dialogical:

> No cognitive value whatever adheres to the establishment of a connection between the basis and some isolated fact torn from the unity and integrity of its ideological context. . . . Only on [the condition of contextual analysis] will analysis result, not in a mere outward conjunction of two adventitious facts belonging to different levels of things, but in the process of the *actual* dialectical generation of society. (53; emphasis added)

The term I wish to pull out is "actual." What is actual is process, the process of the dialectic that comes out of, maintains, and transforms the social: "a ceaseless flow of becoming" (32). There is little doubt that Bakhtin sees this process as definitive reality. Consider his question that leads to the answer that reality is "a ceaseless flow of becoming": What "is the *true*-center of linguistic reality: the individual speech act—the utterance—or the system of language? And what is the *real* mode of existence of language: unceasing creative generation or inert immutability of self-identical norms?" (31; emphasis added).

While it is true that the reality in question is *linguistic* reality, the reality of linguistic reality is otherwise unqualified. What is real about linguistic reality is that its meaning comes from, and contributes to the changing meaning of, different spheres of reality. The "expressiveness of individual words," for example, "is not inherent in the words themselves as units of language, nor does it issue from the meaning of these words." Rather, "in reality the situation is considerably more complicated" (85). The complicating reality is that words that communicate are linked "in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere," and because they are so enchained, each "utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere" (85). On this reading of reality, words are already filled with content that comes from others in particular

situations. Linked in communication, we take a word from someone—the other's word, a word that the other has filled—and, for that person and others, fill up the word anew, a process that is situated in time and space. In this co-creation of reality is *actual* thought itself: the "role of the *others* for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great. We have already said that the role of these others, for whom my thought becomes *actual* thought for the first time (and thus also for my own self as well) is not that of passive listeners, but of active participants in speech communication" (87; emphasis added).

Notice that "thought" exists in reality, but it does not become "*actual* thought" until it is for others. There is rhetorical significance in Bakhtin's distinction, and that is the complication added by *evaluation*. Our words, that is, are animated in a process of evaluation, an especially considerable complication because evaluation expresses our "attitude toward others' utterances and not just [our] attitude toward the object of [our] utterance" (86; see also 57). Even the simpler form of relatively monological utterances, such as Bakhtin's example of scientific writing, is "filled with *dialogic overtones*" (86). In words filled with tones writing teachers will recognize, Bakhtin draws attention to "struggle": "After all, our thought itself—philosophical, scientific, and artistic—is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be *reflected* in the forms that verbally express our thought as well" (86; emphasis added). Here is another reality, then: writing *reflects* thought, the linguistic made real by our sweat. Such impassioned, embodied investment accounts for the stakes Bakhtin sees in evaluation: "In point of fact, the linguistic form, which . . . exists for the speaker only in the context of specific utterances, exists, consequently, only in a specific ideological context. In actuality, we never say or hear *words*, we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology*" (33).[2]

In a WID context, the behaviors and ideologies that fill words are discipline specific, community specific, form-of-life specific, activity-network specific—a principled commitment (and therefore a source of recalcitrance) I will have to engage below. Here, however, I would like to more generally comment on the behaviors and ideologies Bakhtin says are inseparable from the meanings reality has for us. On the one hand, Bakhtin's insistent faith in reality seems positivistic: there is actual, factual reality—a process, a struggle—that our linguistic reality reflects. On the other hand, this reality cannot help but be ideological, which means it cannot help but be endorsed as "true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleas-

ant or unpleasant, and so on." Reality, like bad ideology, can be apparent, can be thought that is unearned. Or reality can be actual, can be earned by thought that is actual.

Although WID professes allegiance to the project of distinguishing the actual complexity of discursive reality from unrealistically simple conceptions, the judgment that this project entails has not been sufficiently realized. In Bazerman's "From Cultural Criticism to Disciplinary Participation: Living with Powerful Words," for example, the project is to extend traditional rhetorical critique—to push it beyond its characteristic acts of revelation and evaluation at a distance into its other (under-realized) capacity: participation in socio-cultural reproduction (239-40). If we attend only to traditional critique, we risk "*missing* the detailed processes of rhetorical struggle, may make disciplines *seem* purveyors of hegemonic univocality rather than the locales of heteroglossic contention that they are" (240; emphasis added). We risk missing, in other words, the *reality* of disciplinary discursive struggle—the considerably complicated real situation that is there for all to see. A similarly positivist note is struck in Bazerman's presentation of critical ethnography. Unlike traditional ethnography—"with its authoritative representation of the primitive other, denied direct voice through the suppression of the active role of the native informant in representing the way of life and the elevation of the foreign anthropologist as the objective authority"—critical ethnography is marked both by its disclosure of the dynamic nature of ethnographic texts and by its "rejection of the social/economic relations of dominance thereby *revealed*" (242; emphasis added). The presence of domination can be revealed, objectively, by an act of authoritative reading that is better than the authoritative reading that elevates another kind of "objective authority."

I have no objection to the values that drive this project, only to how far this project has followed what these values imply for ways of talking about disciplinary discourse. Compare Bazerman's appeals to reality with his value-laden account of representation: "People still have multiple needs, both individually and institutionally, to represent their own and each other's lives to each other and for themselves" (242). The qualification "to each other and for themselves" is powerfully suggestive, reminding us not only of Bakhtin's point about collective interdependence but also of each person's distinctive interests. This qualification's suggestiveness for my project grows more powerful when Bazerman applies it to the disciplines:

> One's goals and activities influence one's idiosyncratic placement and interpretation of that intertextual field. When a modern physicist reads physics articles, he or she reads through the goals of advancing his or her own research project within a competitively structured

> argument over what claims are to be considered correct and impor-
> tant and how the literature should be added up and moved forward.
> (243-44)

A physicist must read from an interested perspective, even when she is ful-
filling her obligations to the community of physicists. Even if a physicist
could read everything there is to read in her field, her reading would still
be selective, motivated by her multiple needs, both disciplinary and institu-
tional and individual, to represent her project and those of others in some
way. As with a modern physicist, so with Bazerman, so with you and me.

Why, then, the pattern of distancing ourselves from this commitment,
as when Bazerman writes, "It is as important for an ecology activist or a
community planner to *see into* the complexity of the discourse of biologists,
geologists, and petro-chemical engineers as it is for those professionals to
have command of their own discourses" (244; emphasis added)? Yes, it is
important, and for the reason Bazerman gives: because by "understand-
ing how knowledge is constructed, they in their professional lives can best
judge what knowledge it is they wish to construct" (244). But for Bazerman
to say this understanding can be *seen* and can be seen because it's *real* is to
shortchange the judgment he is calling for. If it is objected that I am mak-
ing too much of "see into," consider Bazerman's elaboration of judgment:

> *Seeing through the appearances of the discourse*, they can always keep
> in mind the fundamental goals of the fields in front of them, asking
> what kind of communication structures, patterns, and rhetorics will
> best enable the fields to achieve those goals, how they can contrib-
> ute to those ends as individuals, and in what way the goals achieved
> through a single disciplinary discourse coordinate (if at all) with
> other social goals from other forms of social discourse. (244; empha-
> sis added)

While I once again appreciate the dialectical commitment here—that
between the rational and the reasonable, that is, between individual goals
(whether those of an individual person or field) and social obligations, any
of which can be in conflict with other goals, other obligations, and/or some
combination of goals and obligations—I must question the familiar appeal
to the real, to the reality underlying discursive appearance, the effect of
which is to figure "the fundamental goals of the fields in front of them" as
something unaffected by discourse.

The rhetorical maneuver Bazerman makes is "dissociation." Recall
Bazerman's presentation of "ethnography," which he dissociates into an
Appearance/Reality pair: "traditional" ethnography and "critical" eth-
nography. Ethnography as traditionally understood and enacted seems to

be real but is not; it is only *apparently* real. Critical ethnography, on the contrary, reveals *reality*. In the following account of dissociation's typical dynamics, think of traditional ethnography as "Term I" and critical ethnography as "Term II":

> Term II provides a criterion, a norm which allows us to distinguish those aspects of term I which are of value from those which are not; it is not simply a datum, it is a *construction* which, during the dissociation of term I, establishes a rule that makes it possible to classify the multiple aspects of term I in a hierarchy. It enables those that do not correspond to the rule which *reality* provides to be termed illusory, erroneous, or apparent (in the depreciatory sense of this word). In relation to term I, term II is both normative and explanatory. (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 416)

The key implication is not that gold is dissociated from dross but that reality itself is made responsible for providing the rules that render gold valuable. Or to point this implication toward us: it is not that the complex reality of discourse is dissociated from its simple appearance; it is that reality has been made responsible for providing the rules that render discourse complex—and hence, for us, valuable. As Perelman says, the very process of dissociation "develops through a series of value judgments" (*Realm of Rhetoric* 129), positing a selective construction of reality's properties that are more highly valued than some rival construction's. In our classification of discursive qualities, for example, we might place, on the plus side, heteroglossia, intertextuality, dialogic relations among self and others, judgment; on the minus side, univocality, representation, monologic meaning, reproduction.

Always such classification is motivated by value judgments: "The fact that the process [of dissociation] can be reduced to a schematic form does not mean that the result is, on that account, purely formal or verbal. The dissociation expresses a vision of the world and establishes hierarchies for which it endeavors to provide the criteria" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 420).[3] Providing criteria serves to justify the dissociation. Dissociation is just one of the techniques the New Rhetoric has developed for "the justification of the possibility of a human community in the sphere of action when this justification cannot be based on a reality or objective truth" (514). Only rarely will justification ever be based on reality or objective truth, yet the communal action it enables is fundamental—insofar, as Michael Carter says, "writing may be understood as a meta-doing: particular kinds of writing are ways of doing that instantiate particular kinds of doing by giving shape to particular ways of knowing in the disciplines" (214-15). Whether

a kind of writing is this or that particular kind of doing, when that doing has to be justified, that justification is an action general to the disciplines.

## Value Judgments and Justification

The "possibility of a human community in the sphere of action when this justification cannot be based on a reality or objective truth" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 514) is based on value judgments, which in turn are based on the Rule of Justice. Before I say a little about how such judgments might apply to disciplinary learning in which students are expected to base their justifications on "a reality or objective truth," thus becoming members of the human communities so based, I need to discuss a particular way in which the communities so based, such as science and engineering, also represent the possibility of the other kind of community. In this, I will begin by following Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's case for adherence to reasons whose certainty and validity, whose goodness, cannot be demonstrated using the logical methods of mathematics or the experimental methods of science:

> But if essential problems involving questions of a moral, social, political, philosophical, or religious order by their very nature elude the methods of the mathematical and natural sciences, it does not seem reasonable to scorn and reject all the techniques of reasoning characteristic of deliberation and discussion—in a word, of argumentation. (512)

If it is not reasonable to diminish argumentation, nor is it reasonable to assume that "questions of a moral, social, political, philosophical, or religious order" that "elude" the methods of certain disciplines are *absent* in the practice of those disciplines, whose methods in turn may have been designed to deemphasize such questions.

Insofar as "deliberation and discussion" in science and engineering involve other people—involve the competing concerns people embody—moral and social issues are implicated. "Values enter, at some stage or other, into every argument. . . . One appeals to values in order to induce the hearer to make certain choices rather than others and, most of all, to justify those choices so that they may be accepted and approved by others" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 75). When demonstration of a truth is not appropriate or possible, we turn to argumentation. Ray Dearin's commentary helps explain a key difference between demonstration and argumentation: "*arguments are not used to justify propositions but behaviors*. Justification, for Perelman, concerns choices, actions, intentions, and decisions. One does not justify statements or individuals but their actions (adherence being a species of

action)" (177). At play in the realm of "behaviors," argumentation is already social. Entangled in questions of how we *should* behave, argumentation is always moral. Even in the most technical and/or impersonal disciplines, then, where there is argument, social and moral issues will be present.

Consider the writing engineers do for other engineers—"test plans, test reports, procedures, design standards, operating instructions, etc." (Ding 298)—writing that tends to be technical and impersonal. In Daniel Ding's study of four engineering documents, the documents were found to be even more impersonal than expected. They were, in fact, object-centered, where *object* "refers to tangible things we can see and touch, the so-called material things such as metals, liquids, tools, machines, parts, and so forth" (297). In Ding's analysis, this tendency helps account for an anomaly in the engineers' writing of operating instructions. Whereas in most instructional writing, we might expect to see instructional steps given "in imperative mood such as 'Remove the rear cover,'" what Ding saw was that "most of these instructions consist of sentences in indicative mood instead of in imperative mood" (303). In the case of an instruction we might expect to read as "'Stabilize the pressure system when the pressure is between 13.5 to 14.5 inches of water,'" we read instead, "'The pressure system should be stabilized when the pressure is between 13.5 and 14.5 inches of water'" (303). This anomaly is perhaps even more noteworthy, inasmuch as "The pressure system should be stabilized" is arguably more ambiguous than "Stabilize the pressure system." Without more context, the former can be taken to describe a condition (i.e., by this point the pressure system will have achieved a stable state) rather than give an instruction to be followed (i.e., when a certain point is reached, you should stabilize the pressure system).

To make additional sense of this anomaly, Ding makes an inference and addresses the question of context. His inference is that the documents he examined use "indicative sentences because these sentences contain grammatical subjects that refer to objects" (303). Context then explains this object-centered preference: when engineers write for other engineers in the same organization, the context is not only spatial; it is ethical. Ding phrases his observation carefully, yet suggestively: "Any individual engineer writer cannot violate the normative features without violating engineering conventions and defeating reader expectations. An engineer who violates the normative features of engineering writing may fail to communicate her meanings effectively" (307). Engineering conventions are "normative," Ding says; they are what an engineer *should* do. Why should an engineer observe these conventions? The reason Ding gives is that if she does not, if she "defeat[s] reader expectations," she risks failing "to communicate her meanings effectively." At the risk of being less careful than Ding, I would

amend his reason as follows: "she risks failing to communicate her mean-ings effectively *even if her audience understands her clear meaning*." If this translation is fair, there are two different issues here: the importance of pre-cise language for engineers and the important need engineers have to be, and to be perceived as being, precise.[4]

These issues are evident, I think, in the special case of the engineering instructions Ding analyzed. I would like to extend these issues more gener-ally, taking as a case in point an interview conducted by some of my stu-dents. Responding to my students' question about what he expected *his* stu-dents' writing to do, a professor of the second physics-specific lab required for Physics majors said this of his students' lab reports:

> Some of them say [in their reports], "We took the laser in the lab and put it on an optical table." [I always think] What laser? What wave-length? If someone wanted to be able to reproduce that, they would not know. Would it be any laser? Lasers come in different colors—which one? Is it a gas laser or a semiconductor laser, a laser pointer? Which one would be the one to use?[5]

The physic's professor's expressed need for precision and accuracy is clear. Anyone wishing to test for himself the results of the lab would need to know which laser was used originally; trying to replicate those results with a different laser would invalidate the effort. Compare this particular need for procedural reproduction with a different "need" expressed in the same interview, the need for social reproduction:

> If a student says, "Seeing the laser light being polarized was amaz-ing," what do you mean? To you it might be amazing; to me it's an ordinary thing. I've been looking at those things for 20 years. It's an ordinary thing, so they should just say what it is and nothing else. . . . That should be all removed. If they can [walk] away from this course with one thing, [I hope it would be], "Oh, I should be very clear in my purpose, very clear about how I did it, and why I did it, my results and my interpretation, and nothing else, just what it is." That will be very useful for them in their following courses and in their jobs. *Nobody wants fluffy things, they just want <u>to the point</u>; what it is*—except maybe in entertainment, in movies, in novels, fiction. There could be a lot of other places, but not in the job we are doing here.

Here there is a specific job that *we* do, the professor says. I don't want to know what some unimportant thing means to you, just what the results mean to you. Even if you have already given me the necessary specifica-tions, I want to know only the results that matter, not immaterial impres-

sions. Forget the fluff and entertainment. Just get us to the point. If you can help us get to the point, *clearly*, maybe you can be one of us.

My colleague's emphasis on clarity stands out for me. When writing up lab work, students need to be clear about everything, my colleague seems to suggest, at least clear about everything related to the point. But can we be more clear about the point? An interview with another colleague, also a professor of physics, suggests that we might. Asked what she expected student writing to do, she said, "There is no emotional tone [in student writing, but] there is certainly opinion, but that opinion needs to be justified. [The main purpose of their report] is to justify [their opinion]."[6] Students' opinion of what their results mean must be "justified"; their opinion must be made into argument; it is the argument for their opinion that must be justified. The justification is made for others; its purpose is to convince those others (and oneself) that, as Dearin says above, one has behaved appropriately—for instance, that how a student treated the results was a good way to proceed, was justifiable action.

It could be that the actions are justified not merely as a good way to proceed but as, better yet, the right way to proceed, and if so, such justification is the point about which to be most clear. What I find most suggestive in the following testimony—taken by Jennifer Craig, Neal Lerner, and Mya Poe at MIT—is its push to go even farther with justification. One of the students they interviewed—a student in a Quantitative Physiology class—said in response to the question whether writing the report had led to the discovery of "any limitations or new possibilities in [the] data" (332): "'One of the things I realized from the peer review especially is that there are many ways to take data and analyze data, so it is important to justify to the reader why you took a specific approach and why you think it's valid—particularly because it might not seem obvious to someone else'" (333). The approach one takes has to be recognized as "valid." The possibility for human community that can be engaged even more fully, however, is not whether the approach was valid for that one person. That approach has to be justified, rather, as valid for anyone. What renders the approach really valid, in other words, is that it would be justifiable for anyone to take. Everyone, no matter who, would justify it—if she can be sold on seeing it the way it should be seen.

How we might increase meta-awareness of this particular sales job—i.e., clearly justifying opinion as universal—is the concluding section's focus.

## Seeing and Selling What Would Be Valid for Everyone

The case to be made here builds on the assumption that it is better to teach something we know well and have good reason to value—artful procedural judgment—than to teach what we know less well (the norms of other disciplines) and what neither we nor our students can know (the odyssey their professional lives may take). The question the case rests on, then, is how the New Rhetoric can help us teach judgment.

Let us consider what the New Rhetoric adds to "seeing" and "selling" (the powerful terms brought into play by Nowacek [39-66]). Rhetorical judgment depends on sight because, when we have to judge whether a reason, an argument, or a norm is relevant or irrelevant, strong or weak, better or worse, we judge "according to the Rule of Justice, which requires that essentially similar situations be treated in the same manner" (Perelman, *Justice* 83). Similarity needs to be seen, to be recognized. The problem is that each particular case is different. Although justice requires "equal treatment for identical beings," identity is particular: "no two identical beings—that is, two beings all of whose properties are the same—exist. . . . If no identical beings exist, the Rule of Justice loses all interest for us unless it can tell us how to treat beings who are not identical. In fact, that is the only question that matters" (21). If the similarities and differences cannot be seen, how do we know what to sell? If recognition occurs, which similarities among two or more beings matter enough to override their differences? Which differences matter enough to warrant unequal treatment?

As for justice for beings (human or otherwise—a common topic in FYC), so also for judgment of situations (a topic bridging FYC and WID): in the view of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca,

> comparison of situations will be the subject of constant study and refinement in each particular discipline. Initiation into a rationally systematized field will not merely furnish knowledge of the facts, truths, and special terminology of the branch of learning involved and of the method of using the available tools, it will also provide instruction in assessing the strength of the arguments used in these connections. (464)

Disciplinary situations will not always be identical; they might be, rather, more or less alike. Which similarities among such situations are to count as essential or immaterial will not always be settled by scientific, mathematical, formally logical, or empirical demonstration. Unless they are to be determined by force, they can be modified by practical reasoning—by evaluative arguments selling the relative strength of what one's methodology and procedures have enabled one to see. Awareness of the need to sell

can be heightened not merely by asking where equal consideration is warranted but more pointedly by asking what merits preferential consideration. What is, so to speak, more equal among equals because its validity would be—because selling shows it should be—justified by everyone?

I would like to show the possibility for such rhetorical action by turning to an assignment in an upper-division course in organic chemistry. An assessment of relative acidity, this particular assignment was crafted by Dr. Laurie S. Starkey (the materials below represent just some of the written guidance she provides her students for calibrated peer-review):

OVERALL SET-UP: The $pK_a$ for meta-cyanophenol (<u>A</u>) is 8.61 and the $pK_a$ for para-cyanophenol (<u>B</u>) is 7.95. Use these data to determine the effects of the cyano group on the acidity of phenol. Resonance effects should be considered.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:
1) What is the relationship between $pK_a$ and acidity?
2) Which is the stronger acid, *A* or *B*?
3) What do the conjugate bases of these phenols look like? (Please refer to them as CB-A and CB-B.)
4) What does the detailed structure of the cyano group look like?
5) Describe the resonance forms of both conjugate bases.
6) Are the cyano groups involved in the resonance? If so, how?
7) What effect does resonance have on the relative acidity of *A* and *B*?

WRITING PROMPT:
Thoroughly explain the difference in the $pK_a$'s of meta-cyanophenol (*A*) and para-cyanophenol (*B*). In other words, which is the stronger acid and WHY? Be sure to clearly address resonance effects. Your response should consider the Guiding Questions but should be written in essay form.

*Be extremely clear* in your written arguments. Avoid using ambiguous nouns such as "it"; instead, refer to species by their proper names (e.g., *A*, CB-A, the cyano group, the oxygen atom, the negative charge, etc.). [emphasis added]

Most of the writing this exercise is designed to elicit can be judged bi-modally—right or wrong, yes or no. The following question excerpted from her scoring rubric is typical:

> 1. Does the essay clearly identify B (para-cyanophenol) as the stronger acid?

| ☑Yes |
| --- |
| ☐ No |

In an e-mail, Dr. Starkey characterized the assignment's aims as oriented toward validation, not original research: "There is very little primary data gathered in undergraduate labs or lectures. Most exercises are really exploring or discovering . . . more experiencing and validating—gaining experience with lab techniques, etc." Such exploration and discovery are not insignificant. As Crosswhite notes, in "application of an existing law or precedent to a new case, something creative or inventional happens. One discovers something new *about the law or precedent*" (93). Newness *can* be discovered, we might prefer to say. That such discovery might happen more often, aided in small part by our enterprise, is what we want.

We want, I further assume, that that discovery be more artful, not only more frequent—something our disciplinary colleagues want as well. Note that the question "Does the essay clearly identify B (para-cyanophenol) as the stronger acid?" guides students less to application of the rules than to *effective* application of the rules. Students are asked, for instance, to do more than identify; they are asked to "clearly" identify.

Let us look at how "clearly" operates. Consider the following question, which like the professor's other guiding questions appears on a rubric (on which appear as well three levels of competence—a low-level paper, a mid-level paper, and a high-level paper—which the professor uses to model calibrated peer-review; see appendix):

| 2. Does the essay clearly describe the relationship between $pK_a$ and acidity (as the acidity increases, the $pK_a$ decreases)? |
| --- |
| ☐Yes<br>☑ No |
| Answer: No |
| Feedback: The $pK_a$ evidence is not presented in the essay at all. |

As the professor's or peer's feedback commentary implies, the circled "no" is not negative enough. The relationship is not merely unclearly described; it cannot be described at all, clearly or otherwise, for the "evidence is not presented at all." But a question is raised: what if the evidence were presented and the relationship described—not unclearly but only fairly clearly (in other words, not *really* clearly)? How would we justify saying that one clear presentation of the relationship in question was clearer than another? A student aware that she has to sell the clarity of the presentation of the rule

she has to apply might discover not only the logic of the rule but also, in thinking about clarity, new resources of effectiveness and agency.

Two different comments in response to the same question tell us more about how "clarity" operates here. Of the middle-quality essay just noted, we read the following:

| 9. Is the argument for why B is the stronger acid clearly laid out and easy to follow? |
| --- |
| ☐Yes<br>☑ No |
| Answer: No |
| Feedback: After discussing resonance, no argument [*sic*] is made for how this explains the difference in stability and acidity. |

Again, the circled "no" does not capture the degree of failure here. It is not the case that the argument was not "clearly laid out and easy to follow"; rather, no argument whatsoever was made. But if there are arguments to be made for why B is the *stronger* acid, and if these arguments are to be judged for clarity and organizational flow, there is rhetorical work to do. It is possible, for instance, for the argument to be present but wrong, as indicated by the feedback response for the low-quality paper:

| 9. Is the argument for why B is the stronger acid clearly laid out and easy to follow? |
| --- |
| ☐Yes<br>☑ No |
| Answer: No |
| Feedback: An argument is presented, but it is faulty. |

The argument in the low-quality is "faulty," whereas in the middle-quality paper the argument is altogether absent. This discrepancy suggests that argumentation is not the most highly prized performance quality of this exercise. If we turn to the high-quality paper, we see what is more highly prized: "A logical, step-by-step progression of argument is presented." Logical, discrete, forward (i.e., not recursive, reflective) *movement*—these presentational qualities of argument are valued. This value judgment grounds the decision to treat this paper's argument "more equally" than the argument that is not present and the argument that is present but not well presented.

If this case is even nearly right, then it is probably "clarity" that fills in what is meant by "better described"—as seen in the overall assessment of the top-quality paper:

| ☑ 10 Highest   ☐ 9   ☐ 8   ☐ 7   ☐ 6   ☐ 5   ☐ 4   ☐ 3   ☐ 2   ☐   1 Lowest |
|---|
| Rating: 10 |
| Feedback: The essay is [*sic*] correctly identifies B (para-cyanophenol) as the stronger acid. However, essay could have better described the structure of the resonance forms. |

Of the three essays, this is the top essay, a "10." (The middle-quality essay received a "5," the low-quality essay a "1.") Yet the "10" essay "could have *better* described the structure of the resonance forms." If the Rule of Justice applies to three papers at three distinct levels, then imagine two or more papers at each of these levels (High, Middle, Low). That is to say, if the Rule of Justice informs the value judgments distinguishing a "10" paper from a "5" paper and a "1" paper, imagine the value judgments needed to justify gradations between two or more "10" papers, with all the gradations of "better" argument and description possible—not to mention the judgments at work in filling out the possible rankings between "10" and "5," between "5" and "1."

It is not up to a WPA rhetorician to adjudicate these rankings. Even had we the know-how, we are not the audience. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca acknowledge, there are times when the speaker's "argument is limited by custom, by law, or by the methods and techniques peculiar to the discipline within which his argument is developed. The discipline often determines also the level at which the argumentation must be presented, laying down what is beyond dispute, and what must be regarded as irrelevant to the debate" (465). (Again, we might say that arguments are "generated by" as well as "limited by" disciplinary culture.) What Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca go on to say about disciplinary culture is important for understanding the limited role we can play: "Naturally, the different philosophies influence any argumentative scheme by their *determination of the structure of reality* and the *justifications* they give of it, by their criteria for valid knowledge and proofs and by the hierarchy in which they place audiences" (465; emphasis added). What I believe projects that develop the resources of the New Rhetoric can add to the conversation, then, is not adjudication of disciplinary differences, nor a call for social justice, nor a reminder like Miller's to attend to the window itself but, rather, arguments that direct the attention of disciplinary colleagues and students to lessons appropriately taught in FYC: that value judgments and justifications help comprise each window, that they comprise whether that window is clear, and that even if the window is clear, it is not thereby self-evidently transparent. Seeing reality must be sold as a valid approach for everyone, if not also as the way everyone should see—as the way that is most real.

This project has tried to make room for the New Rhetoric within the New Rhetorical conversation about disciplinary writing. The case was made that the New Rhetoric can be especially valuable in helping students understand the function and motives of "generic" appeals to reality. The motive behind the New Rhetoric was aligned with the New Rhetorical motive to do greater justice to the complexity of discourse, resulting in a model of discourse devoted to justifying "the possibility of a human community in the sphere of action when this justification cannot be based on a reality or objective truth" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 514). It was furthermore suggested that, if making choices and selling them as valid is good disciplinary rhetoric—that value-laden appeals to reality must be justified to be seen—then directing students' attention to that fact would likely help them participate, within any discipline, more meaningfully and perhaps, for that reason, more effectively.[7]

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline W & P \\ \hline \text{↘} & A \\ \hline \end{array}$$

## Notes

1. Here and throughout, the reference to "the rational" and "the reasonable" owes much to John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. The rational applies to how one's "ends and interests are adopted and affirmed, as well as how they are given priority" (50). The reasonable refers to people who desire "a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept" (50). The rational and reasonable "are complementary ideas": "They work in tandem to specify the idea of fair terms of cooperation, taking into account the kind of social cooperation in question, the nature of the parties and their standing with respect to one another" (52). My 2012 article in the *WPA Journal*, "Just Comp," explored these terms with respect to FYC; this article is something of a sequel. (See also Forst; Kraemer, "The Reasonable and the Sensible.")

2. Compare with Perelman: "If a word already exists, its definition can never be considered arbitrary, for the word is bound up in the language with previous classifications, with value judgments which give it, in advance, an affective, positive or negative coloration" (*Realm of Rhetoric* 61).

3. Perelman and his collaborator Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca do not diminish the power of communal, disciplinary, and activity networks: "All language is the language of a community, be this a community bound by biological ties, or by the practice of a common discipline or technique. The terms used, their meaning, their definition, can only be understood in the context of the habits, ways of thought, methods, external circumstances, and traditions known to the

users of those terms. A deviation from usage requires justification" (513). It is the "deviation from usage" that is of greater import here, if only because for learners in disciplinary discourse—for learners especially, perhaps—it is more reasonable for us to profess that usage, habits, ways of thought, and so on sometimes require justification than for us to assume that either students will not deviate in some way from disciplinary norms or all deviations are to be suppressed.

4. In Joanna Wolfe's study of engineering writing, I see something similar. She writes of strategies of "selecting data visualizations that balance the engineer's need to present an ethos of accuracy and precision against the audience's need to grasp a clear message" and "organizing technical reports so that managers can easily find recommendations, conclusions, and other bottom-line messages while still satisfying fellow engineers' needs for detailed reporting of precise numbers, calculations, and methods" (371). Here we have the Reasonable and the Rational: the Reasonable—honoring one's obligation, as an engineer, to meet the audience's need for clarity and, in the case of managers, their need for bottom-line guidance; the Rational, fulfilling one's interests, as an engineer, to be accurate and precise and to be so recognized by other engineers. For a similar argument made about ethos in science, see Allan Gross (15) and Ding ("The Passive Voice" 146-47).

5. From a personal interview with Dr. Ertan Salik on April 25, 2013—conducted by Evelyn Blanco, Cristina Fucaloro, Sarah Jackson, Dan Staylor, and Terry Steagall. This particular question about writing and doing was inspired by Michael Carter's "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." The project in which the students and professors participated was IRB approved (PROTOCOL #: 12-145).

6. From a personal interview with Dr. Nina Abramzon on April 29, 2013—conducted by Evelyn Blanco, Cristina Fucaloro, Sarah Jackson, Dan Staylor, and Terry Steagall.

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Appendix

PAPERS (presented without correction)

*High-quality paper:*

The lower the $pK_a$ value, the stronger the acid. Since *B* has the lower $pK_a$, it must be the stronger acid. The difference in the $pK_a$ can be explained by looking at the stability of the conjugate bases (CB). After deprotonation, each CB has an $O^-$ where the phenol hydroxyl used to be.

In both CB's, the negative charge on oxygen is benzylic and has resonance involving the benzene ring, in which the negative charge is distributed onto the carbons in the benzene ring that are ortho and para to the oxygen. In addition, the para-substituted cyano in CB-B provides extra resonance stabilization to delocalize the negative charge onto the N. It is impossible for the meta cyano group in CB-A to be involved in resonance which delocalizes the negative charge. The extra resonance involving the para cyano group makes CB-B *more stable, less reactive* and a *weaker base.* If CB-B is the weaker base, it has the *stronger parent acid* (para-cyanophenol, *B*).

*Middle-quality paper:*

Para-cyanophenol (B) is the strongest acid and the explanation can be found by looking at the conjugate bases. Since the cyanide group contains a CN triple bond, it is an electrowithdrawing (EWG) group which is good for the negative charge. Usually, you want the EWG to be closer to the negative charge (the phenol O will have the negative charge), but in this case we will look for resonance since its affect is more important. Both conjugates have resonance, where the ngative charge on oxygen moves to the ortho carbon on the benzene ring. Once it is in the ring, the negative charge can continue to move around the ring because it is allyllic. There will be 3 resonance forms that have a negative charge on a benzene carbon (2 ortho and 1 para). This is true for both conjugate bases. However, in CB-B, when the negative charge is on the same carbon as the CN group, there is more resonance because it will be allyllic to the CN pi bond. In this new resonance form, there is a pi bond between the phenyl C and the cyano C, a double bond between the cyano C and N, and a negative charge on the N of the cyano group. This is an excellent contributor, since the negative charge is on the more electronegative N. In CB-A, the negative charge is never next to the CN carbon so there is only the 3 resonance forms.

*Low-quality paper:*

Para-cyanophenol, *B*, is the stronger acid since it has the lower pKa. We have to consider the conjugate bases to explain the difference in acidity.

Both the conjugate bases have a negative charge that can be moved by resonance into the benzene ring. The charge can move around the benzene ring (ortho and para), but the resonance is not good because carbon is not electronegative so it doesn't handle the negative charge well. Since both conjugate bases have the same resonance, the answer must be because of inductive effects.

The CN group is an electron-withdrawing group (EWG). The closer the CN is to the OH, the more stable it is. When the CN is meta to the OH, the acid is very *stable* so its *unreactive* and *a weak acid* (*A* has the higher pka). When the CN is para, the OH is less stable and more reactive so *B* is the stronger acid.