

*Review*

## Theory Building for Writing Studies

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Bazerman, Charles. *A Rhetoric of Literate Action: Literate Action, Volume 1*. Fort Collins: WAC Clearinghouse and Anderson: Parlor Press, 2013. Print. 165 pages.

Bazerman, Charles. *A Theory of Literate Action: Literate Action, Volume 2*. Fort Collins: WAC Clearinghouse and Anderson: Parlor Press, 2013. Print. 225 pages.

Writing programs exist to facilitate the teaching of writing in its various forms. Specific courses emphasize specific writing that is intended to reflect, closely or loosely, writing activity that takes place in other parts of the institution or in other parts of the world. This schooled writing, and the writing that it imitates, is carried out by individuals—students—who are imbricated in a very wide range of constantly shifting contexts: social, cultural, cognitive, affective, emotional, historical, institutional, familial, religious. As writing program administrators, we want writing instructors to know about this imbrication and to teach writing in light of it. We want them to share part of our field's rich understanding of writing with their students on the assumption that the more students know about writing, the better they will be able to write.

As these students' bodies come into contact with the materials, texts, and discourses that comprise and extend our writing programs—syllabi, teachers, classrooms, their own laptops and tablets—we experience their materiality in a particularly immanent way. Even though a writer's materiality is certainly rendered discursive or symbolic when it interacts with a writing program—for example, in the form of grades and other assessments—there is also a sense in which that materiality resists description. The writing bodies that enter into relationships with writing programs are

never fully accounted for in the many and varied texts that emanate from those programs. Because of this, writing programs enjoy a distinct perspective on acts and functions of writing: on the curricular writing produced by a program's students and on the organizational writing produced and received by the program's employees. In turn, this perspective can inform enduring theoretical issues surrounding the study of writing.

For these reasons, the two volumes of Charles Bazerman's *Literate Action* are relevant to the work of writing program administration. In these books, Bazerman sets out to offer a broad view—informed by a selection of social science research—of what writing is, how people use it, and how best to use it. This is a bold undertaking, one manageable only by someone with Bazerman's experience and stature, someone with a long and distinguished career devoted to the study and teaching of writing. In fact, and in a sense, these books accumulate and distill the knowledge Bazerman has gathered and given to us in such major works as *Shaping Written Knowledge*, *Constructing Experience*, and *The Languages of Edison's Light*, as well as the various collections, the many articles and book chapters, and the textbooks that bear his name. Readers familiar with his work will find in these new books a familiar concern: the idea that because literate action (most often writing) is extraordinarily complex and interwoven with other complex activities, it requires a powerful set of concepts to guide its methodical study. These concepts include specific theories of cognition, intertextuality, activity, and, most important, genre. These are theories that others in the field have pursued and developed as well, and readers familiar with that work will no doubt compare Bazerman's perspectives to it, finding points and degrees of divergence and convergence.

Readers (myself included) who come from humanities-oriented traditions of theoretical inquiry in writing studies—for example, those derived from twentieth century rhetorical theory, poststructural theory, postcolonial theory, and the humanistic strands of British and US cultural studies, feminist theory, queer theory—may find themselves in unfamiliar territory or perhaps on terrain they have not surveyed since graduate school. These readers should approach *Literate Action* as a generous invitation to begin a dialogue between modes of inquiry that should complement each other more than they generally do, in order to do what Bazerman sets out to do: describe and theorize writing as fully as possible. Elsewhere, I have discussed the possibility of uniting these modes under a different notion of empiricism (“Outside”). It is in such a spirit that I will try to present *Literate Action's* aims and arguments for the benefit of *WPA: Writing Program Administration's* readers.

Bazerman claims that each volume of *Literate Action* can be read on its own. This is true, as each one tackles a substantially different though obviously related task. The first, *A Rhetoric of Literate Action (RLA)* aims to present “advice . . . for the experienced writer with a substantial repertoire of skills” who “now would find it useful to think in more fundamental strategic terms” (4). It does much more than this, as we will see. The second, *A Theory of Literate Action (TLA)*, points readers to the theoretical and intellectual sources behind this advice. Because Bazerman explicitly sets out to distinguish between practice (or “rhetoric”) and theory, one might be tempted simply to follow his lead, reading *RLA* as something of a how-to guide and *TLA* as its rationale. But this would be a mistake because both books deal with theory. As it happens, *RLA* is the book that actually articulates a theory of writing on the way to offering some advice about how to approach the task of writing. In turn, *TLA* traces the sources of that theory to key figures from a handful of other disciplines. *TLA*, then, is a primer on the texts and traditions of inquiry to which Bazerman and other empirically-oriented writing studies scholars turn as they conduct research on and develop theories of writing. As such, it is very valuable; Bazerman carefully and lucidly explicates some fairly knotty concepts, and in doing so, he invites compositionists unfamiliar with this work to see how it might coincide with, expand upon, or even challenge the theoretical resources to which those compositionists habitually turn for insight into the study of writing.

Published simultaneously by Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse, the books can be purchased as paperbacks through the former, but they are also freely available as .pdf files through the latter (as are Bazerman’s *Shaping Written Knowledge* and other texts, most of which were originally published elsewhere). This makes them especially easy to adopt for graduate seminars, teaching practicums, and other teacher preparation and professionalization efforts. I would likely reserve *TLA* for a graduate seminar, perhaps on the way to sustained analyses of some of its primary texts or as a gateway to Bazerman’s earlier work. But *RLA* should be read widely, especially by those who teach writing as well as by those who study it.

#### VOLUME 1: *A RHETORIC OF LITERATE ACTION*

In *A Rhetoric of Literate Action*, Bazerman admits that it is nearly impossible to generate “general advice or analysis” about writing given its great contemporary variety (3). He notes that we know a great deal about specific kinds of writing for specific situations and that we are able to give and receive useful instruction on how to write well in those situations. But inso-

far as we understand writing to be more than a tool—insofar as it “forms the playing fields of our literate times,” and insofar as “each piece of writing we do claims a place, identity, meaning, and action on those fields of life”—we understand how and why it can be difficult activity to understand and perform (3). Bazerman states what most of us (and most of our students) have felt at various times: that “once we step out of highly directed, highly instructed writing situations we may quickly feel at sea, not knowing which direction to take and without signs to help us gain our bearings and make decisions” (4). He states as well something else we know and hasten to tell our students: that the more we practice a previously unfamiliar kind of writing and reading, the better we may get at it, and thus the less adrift we may feel. But even in these such circumstances, “underlying questions remain” about our writing goals and processes. This is because writing is not—or should not be practiced as—a rote activity: “we cannot reduce our writing just to type, but must create it anew from our interests, resources, thoughts, and perceptions” (4).

Despite the acknowledged difficulties involved in describing writing broadly, Bazerman sets out to “create a rhetoric of wide generality, relevant to all written texts in all their historical and contemporary variety” (16). Toward this end, *RLA* is divided into twelve chapters, which Bazerman’s introduction subdivides informally into three blocks. Chapters one through four offer “a framework for identifying and understanding the situations writing comes out of and is directed toward.” Chapters five through eight explain “how a text works to transform a situation and achieve the writer’s motives as the text begins to take form.” These four chapters, to me, form the heart of this volume—perhaps of both volumes—so I will devote the most space to them. Finally, chapters nine through twelve give “specific advice of the work to be accomplished in bringing the text to final form and how to manage the work and one’s own emotions and energies so as to accomplish the work most effectively” (4).

Early on in the first block, Bazerman explains that in order to understand and perform writing most effectively, “we need to understand it both within the human capacity for language and in the social-cultural-historical conditions which have developed dialectically with our writing practices” (8). We need to understand the issue of context in its fullest complexity. Unfortunately, the study of writing has tended to take an “abstracted” view that focuses on “code concerns,” which Bazerman identifies as “writing systems, spelling, grammar, generalized word meanings, organized patterns” (10). This view has combined with various “linguistic, educational, interpretive, and regulatory practices that have developed around writing” to create “the impression of a contextless code with universal meaning

carried within the text.” And yet, as Bazerman notes and as most in our field would agree, “written language can gain its meanings only as part of meaningful social interactions” (11). These include interactions over long times and great spaces, the kinds of distant interactions that writing itself makes possible. Therefore, attention to the question of distance is crucial to “a rhetoric of writing”—to an explanation of how writing works and how to make it work (13). It is in this context that the remainder of this block addresses familiar issues of genre (chapter two), *kairos* (chapter three), and intertextuality (chapter four).

In the second block, Bazerman addresses questions of exigency, motive, and strategy on the way to a discussion of how these components, as well as those discussed in the previous chapters, manifest in a written text’s form. He presents exigency as a particularly crucial feature of writing, echoing Lloyd Bitzer in noting that “it is only things we notice and interpret as consequential for us that prompt us to wonder whether they might be improved through our making of language” (65). This observation leads him to discuss speech acts and their ability to establish social facts among groups of interested people. According to Bazerman, “speech acts change the social world by creating new social facts, which change what we believe, how we interact socially, and how we act in the world” (68). Bazerman proceeds methodically through these chapters, introducing new ideas carefully and systematically, but also reincorporating ideas from the previous chapters, thereby creating an accretion that eventually represents what it means to write in contemporary contexts. For example, *kairos* and intertextuality resurface at the end of chapter five and elsewhere, and genre is a persistent presence in both volumes.

Chapter six deals with motives, and it is of particular interest for two reasons. First, it treats motives as emergent, as taking place when we “write without the immediate pressure of events unfolding around us at the moment.” In these situations, “our motives may only take shape as we start to contemplate and give mental definition to our situation and then begin to plan and carry out actions” (77). Moreover, “our motivations emerge and take shape in a complex world” (79). Therefore, for Bazerman, the internal and external complexity of writing situations can present particular difficulties unless we “understand a wider repertoire of possible directions and have a wider range of skills to form our emergent motivations into a greater range of potential objects” (80). The better we can understand the contours and details of writing situations, rather than simply react to what we perceive as their immediate demands, the more effective and meaningful our writing interventions are likely to be.

Second, this chapter considers the effects school writing can have on writerly motives, not only in school itself—in writing situations unique to the scenes of formal education—but in the realms beyond school, which of course comprise the much larger part of the actual world. Bazerman notes that for many people “the school experience of writing becomes a general characterization of all writing, and the values and practices of school writing get carried over to non-school situations in ways that are inappropriate” (81–82). Because most writing in school is “framed as assignments” and is “evaluated and corrected in relation to the curriculum,” the motives informing it are often very different than those informing writing activity that is more integrated into one’s personal, professional, social, or cultural life (82). Writing instructors know this phenomenon well and often lament it. But Bazerman suggests that its most serious consequences take place beyond schooling. To those writing situations, people bring the motives they learned from years of school writing, motives that amount to “pursuing correctness, being evaluated, and displaying knowledge and skills” (84). By analyzing school writing’s particularly negative influence on the much wider range of writing situations people encounter throughout their lives, Bazerman makes a larger claim about a writer’s need to understand the profound contingency that surrounds and characterizes any situation that contains, calls for, or is influenced by writing. Without a

reflective understanding of our motives, the unfolding nature of situations, and our changing participation in a dynamic situation, we are at risk of getting locked into a set of motives and stances that are less productive and may not achieve our ends. (86)

Even in the most apparently perfunctory scenes of writing, “it is worth asking ourselves periodically what we really want from a situation, what will meet our needs and carry forward a productive interaction with our audiences and interlocutors” (86).

Such considerations lead into the main topic of chapter seven. Here Bazerman explains that in situations characterized by writing and literacy, it makes more sense to think of rhetoric’s “key strategic action” not as persuasion, but as influence. As Bazerman explains, “when the goal is persuasion, the main vehicle is argument” (87). But the vast majority of writing situations are not overtly argumentative. At best, they are occasions to “change the symbolic landscape so as to change the field upon which others will act” (88). Bazerman notes that “it is easier to tell someone something new than to get them to change something they already believe” (89). At any rate, writing is a cooperative endeavor; it is “carried out within mutually agreed upon activities that do not depend on agonistic struggle.” In these situa-

tions, “the task is building new things and not opposing anything already on the discursive landscape” (90). Toward this end, for Bazerman the “fundamental strategic question is how you can best populate the intertextual landscape with new objects to gain the influence you hope for” (98).

Strategic deliberations manifest in a written text’s form, which is the topic of chapter eight. This chapter also serves as a transition to the final, more didactic chapters of *RLA*, as the advice that dominates that portion of the book begins to emerge here. But first, Bazerman returns to the issue of school writing in order to address the complex question of form in writing. He notes that a regular challenge for students is to learn “to expose and elaborate enough of their thought and experience so that their thought becomes intelligible to the reader” (103). For Bazerman, this question of what to include in a text underscores “paradoxes” that “riddle education as an enterprise,” namely, the fact that we “evaluate external behaviors and products to determine students’ internal development.” Moreover, Bazerman claims that while schooling may draw particular attention to these paradoxes, this “tension between external form and internal thought runs throughout writing.” It is convenient (perhaps necessary) for us to believe, for example, that we extract thoughts from texts, and that these thoughts come from “the mind of the writer.” Yet we know that a text is “an external object made of signs, which can be manipulated and evaluated as a formal construction.” Bazerman notes that while these signs may “index thoughts entertained and projected by the writer and thoughts evoked in readers,” there is no guarantee that these will match (103). As writers, then, the fact that form is the visible thing we can manipulate “tempts us to treat writing on the purely formal level” (104). Yet we use form to make meaning, which is not directly visible or even accessible without some kind of mediation—which is to say, a form.

Bazerman takes up the question of meaning in chapter nine, which he begins by reiterating the categorical, though paradoxical, distinction between meaning and form that he established in the previous chapter. He writes that “a form in itself is a gesture toward a social interaction, but it contains little meaning in itself beyond the gesture” (111). The question of meaning—or, more precisely, of information—brings Bazerman back to genres, each of which “has its appropriate contents of interest and concern to its appropriate audience” at the appropriate time (112). For a writer—for someone wishing to interact or enter into a communicative relationship with others—Bazerman claims that it is important to know not only that genres exist and that they are complex and dynamic, but also specifically that they embody the ontological and epistemological outlooks of those who participate in them. Because the information represented within a

genre “points to objects and events in the world beyond the text” of the genre, what is and what is not pointed to therefore becomes an indication of a given group’s existential relationship to the world (114). This would bear some relation to what Kenneth Burke famously identified as a given terminology’s simultaneous reflection, selection, and deflection of reality (*Language* 45). Furthermore, a group’s methods of gathering, interpreting, and valuing information are more than instrumental. Such methods indicate a fundamental sense of how the world and things in it can be known, as well as what will and will not count as knowledge. As Bazerman points out, training to join a disciplinary or professional group is immersion in that group’s “shared ontologies and epistemologies” (114). It is also, as we know, training in that group’s ways of writing. Because being, knowing, and writing are distinct yet tightly interwoven activities, for Bazerman, questions of ontology and epistemology “are not just philosophic abstractions; they are also practical matters of communication” (116).

On the one hand, we probably already understand the point Bazerman is making, thanks either to our training or our intuition. For that matter, we probably also know that his distinction between form and meaning—as well as the implied and related distinction between writing’s instrumentality and its creativity—is necessarily forced, that it would not stand up to a careful deconstruction. But the point here—for that matter, the point throughout *RLA* and the reason I believe it represents the actual theory of literate action in these two volumes—is that in the study of writing, in the teaching of writing, and in the administering of writing programs, we encounter the seemingly irreducible materiality of people who write. They make writing choices, overdetermined, imbricated, and otherwise bound up though these choices may be.

Part of a writing program administrator’s job is to be alive to the paradoxes of writing that Bazerman details, here and in his prior work. That writing is extraordinarily complex and that it is complex in both the minute and the epic ways Bazerman describes it (as well as in some other ways) stands in obvious contrast to the instrumental approaches to writing that our field has spent decades trying to discredit but that seem to be continuously reborn. How to build that complexity, or at least an appropriate respect for that complexity, into the day-to-day workings of a writing program is, of course, a difficult question. This is mainly due to the fact, as Bazerman has pointed out, that school writing already operates under an unusual set of constraints that set it apart from almost every other kind of writing. School writing formalizes everything, even the paradox between form and meaning. In that sense, perhaps the best a writing program can hope to do is provide the most successful appearance of respect for the

complexity of writing. On the other hand, if Bazerman is right that school writing underscores or aggravates tensions that exist in all writing, then perhaps we should not make too much of the differences between them. Teachers spend a fair amount of time lamenting the supposed artificiality of writing assignments in first year writing courses, technical writing courses, and elsewhere. But these are no more or less contextualized than any other kinds of writing, just differently so.

The book's final chapter contains a shift in focus from a discussion of *how writing works* to one of *how writers work*—or rather, how they don't work. The shift itself is not surprising; such a move makes sense, especially in the advice portion of *RLA*. But its presence is slightly jarring because the centrality of the new subject seems considerably at odds with the peripheral location in which it is placed. Specifically, Bazerman claims that, even though *RLA* to this point has imagined a “fully rational” writer at its conceptual core, in fact “humans aren't built like that” (147). But if humans are not fully rational, why build a theory of writing around an imaginary writer who is? Bazerman does not address this issue. Instead, he offers “to give an overview of some of the many psychological issues that may play out at various moments” in the process of writing (148).

On the one hand, if we see this as a hinge chapter, a transition from the first to the second book, turning to other matters would be warranted. But as we will see below, the second volume does not necessarily or directly take up these ideas; rather, it returns to the *how writing works* emphasis. Of course, it contains extensive discussions of psychology, but these have to do with learning and development rather than with the often extraordinary internal difficulties that can confront people who must write and revise. Ultimately, there are connections to be made between the psychological issues Bazerman raises in this chapter and the socio-cognitive theory and analysis to which most of *Literate Action* is devoted. We as readers, however, must make them ourselves.

## VOLUME 2: THE THEORY

In *A Theory of Literate Action: Literate Action*, Bazerman traces and summarizes the sources that inform *A Rhetoric of Literate Action*'s discussion of writing and writers. Bazerman claims that theories of rhetoric, writing, and literate action drawn from or inspired by the classical tradition—emphasizing the winning of arguments and oral, face-to-face communication—are ill-suited to the forms, modes, and purposes of communication that takes place in contexts created by written literacy. Yet Bazerman does not seek to part ways with rhetoric as such. Rather, he considers his theory to be “within

the rhetorical tradition, but providing a new direction for the way forward.” Furthermore, he notes that this volume is not a comprehensive examination of writing studies research but rather a selection that “aids the exposition of the theory” he is advancing. Finally, while he believes that each volume can stand alone—there is “no one-to-one correspondence of the chapters”—he does note that there are areas of *TLA* offering “fuller expositions” of issues introduced in *RLA* (5). These include issues such as spatial and temporal location, motivated social action, intertextuality, meaning, the temporal experience of texts, writing processes, and, of course, genre.

The first chapter of *TLA* lays groundwork for the chapters to come. Here Bazerman presents writing as a something of a problematic, a complex object of sorts that has a unique history within the history of human development and that presents unique challenges to those who would study and try to understand it. He begins by defining writing as “a skilled, invented, learned, historically emerged social activity,” one that is not “instinctual, not programmed directly into genes and stimuli-released hormones” (7). Writing is also “an invention we are still learning to exploit, learning to carry out new activities with.” For these reasons, “setting about the act of writing requires high focus, intention, and motivation.” We must go out of our way to write. Bazerman notes that in addition to the material challenges writing presents, which of course were far greater in the past than they are for most people today, “cognitive attention must be high to compose messages to those not physically present” (8). For Bazerman this issue of attention and intention is significant. It means that in studying writing, we must understand it as a form of action, or rather, as “a particular form of action” (9).

Ultimately, the goal is to describe writing in its fullest cognitive, social, cultural, historical, temporal, and relational complexity. But specifically, Bazerman wants to “present writing as a form of mediated, learned activity that carries out social activity at a distance.” Moreover, he means to show how writing “works through cognitive means that align writer and reader to common perceived locations of symbolic interchange and then carry out specific interactions within that space.” Bazerman notes that “writing—the making of texts—is a form of work aimed at transforming the thought and behavior of others, and thus coordinating relations in the material world.” Grounding his theory in Marx, he defines work as “all we do to make our lives together as social and material creatures in our social and material circumstances.” The fact that we work to change “the conditions of our life” is itself a product of consciousness, which in turn emerges from “our orientation to our material and social conditions” (9). According to Bazerman, “Marx sees the history of consciousness tied to our changing forms

of labor—that is, to the ways in which we transform nature to make it our own, and make it knowable to humans and part of human life” (10). Consequently, Bazerman sees “rhetoric and writing” as integral to this transforming process because “we form much of consciousness through our participation with others through language, and we learn to make meaning . . . through these culturally developed mediational tools” (10). But each text we create with such tools in turn “comes from a moment in cultural and social history—a history of interactions in pursuit of human life as it is then currently organized, as conceived through the forms of consciousness of writers and readers in their moments” (12). Thus Bazerman establishes that writing mediates between materiality and consciousness, that it is in turn shaped by materiality and consciousness, that it is also shaped by *prior* mediations between materiality and consciousness, and that this process carries into the future.

For Bazerman, genre is the overarching concept with which theorists and researchers can draw adequately complex pictures of the problematic described above. The ensuing chapters of *TLA* work toward rounding out that concept by exploring “the underlying conditions of human cognition, sociality, activity, and communication that pose the need for recognizable and familiar locations for literate interchange” (23). Because genre has been a thoroughly discussed topic and frequently used tool of inquiry in our field for decades, one might reasonably wonder why its story needs to be told one more time. The answer lies in Bazerman’s thoroughness and erudition. He does not present a summary of what genres are or how they work. He is not satisfied merely to bring readers up to speed on the basics of genre as it applies in our field—as some books and articles do—in preparation for an empirical investigation or a theoretical argument to follow. Rather, Bazerman carefully details the sources behind the very concept of genre, sources that combine to give the concept its explanatory force when directed toward writing.

Toward these ends, *TLA*’s second chapter situates the work of Lev Vygotsky at the book’s theoretical and attitudinal (to borrow an adjective from Kenneth Burke) source. Vygotsky serves as an exemplar for Bazerman, not only for his substantial theoretical insights but also for the breadth and depth of his approach to research. Even though Vygotsky directly influences only a handful of the other theorists in *TLA*, Bazerman nonetheless finds his “synthesis of social, psychological, linguistic, and historical concerns” to be a constant source of intellectual inspiration. Because Vygotsky’s thought moves “from the largest issue of society, culture, and history back into the complexity of human selves, thoughts, feeling, and development as we engage with the world,” it happens to mirror

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and thereby provide insight into the paradoxes of writing—the complexes of interactions between interiority and exteriority, occurring in and across space and time, that constitute every act of writing. Furthermore, because Vygotsky’s theory “respects students’ motivated and autonomous selves,” it clears crucial conceptual space for agency even as it “recognizes how deeply those selves are saturated with social interactions” (25). For Bazerman, from Vygotsky’s earliest work onward, “[Vygotsky] finds a way to link consciousness with the material structures of language and the materiality of the cognizing being” without resorting to an idealist form of consciousness. He achieves this, in part, by refusing to see language as the mere representation of consciousness. Rather, for Vygotsky, language is a behavior that works in relation to consciousness, influencing its development. As Bazerman puts it, Vygotsky realizes that “the mind grows in relation to mediating tools and relations” (30). Thus consciousness is raised, or development occurs, and the agent or writer can be understood not as a fixed and isolated point in an otherwise dynamic scene of writing but rather as an integral part of that scene. In fact, in this model, the writer’s agency is endowed precisely by its integration into such a scene, and it is carried out through the mediation of language and other “cognitive tools” (31).

In the third chapter, Bazerman examines “two direct lines of work” that flow from Vygotsky and that develop his concept of activity (43). First, turning to A. N. Leont’ev and then to Yrjo Engeström, Bazerman describes activity’s “relation to larger systems of social organization” (43). Second, he traces A. R. Luria’s attention to the role of spoken language “for the development of higher mental processes and functions” and Luria’s perspective on functional systems, which are the cognitive mechanisms people develop, given “the capacity and tools available,” to live their everyday lives (56). But of particular interest here—and in the fourth chapter, which deals with Alfred Schutz’s concept of typification—is the extended discussion of genre. Bazerman connects acts of writing to activity systems, describing the former as “reflective participation” in the latter. Referring to Carolyn Miller’s often-cited essay, “Genre as Social Action,” Bazerman notes that when we learn to write “in the typified forms available” to us, we learn “the very motives and objects” of our time and place. These typified forms—genres—participate in “larger social activity structures” (52). More to the point, because these structures are “discursively constituted and maintained by the circulation of discourse,” they are driven forward when individuals invoke the attendant genres. Thus, according to Bazerman, “genre-shaped utterances themselves become then vehicles of the production, reproduction, and evolution of the systems within which genres are meaningful” (53).

In the fourth chapter, Bazerman again discusses genre explicitly, this time in the context of Schutz's typification "and its role in constituting individual consciousness and social order" (66). In addition to his own contributions, Schutz's phenomenological approach to sociology made possible a number of subsequent studies in which "social structure can be seen as concretely enacted in micro-events created by individual agents, acting in typified circumstances" (83). From this work, Bazerman concludes that genre—a key component of which is typification—successfully bridges micro- and macro-sociology, the study of individual and collective social actions. In doing so, genre paves the way for structuralist theories such as those of Anthony Giddens, which "suggest that social structure is constantly remade in every interaction which reenacts ordered relations" (84). The idea of a mutually (if unevenly) transformative relationship between the interiority of the individual and the exteriority of the social is precisely the core of the complexity surrounding writing.

Subsequent chapters of *TLA* continue rounding out the concept of genre by exploring its sources in American pragmatism's impact on social science, in structural and structurationist sociology, in Erving Goffman's study of interactional order and that work's implications for written interaction, in notions of order and orderliness in language, in linguistic theories of utterance and the speech act, and in intertextuality. I do not have enough space to cover all eleven of the book's chapters, but I hope that my discussion up to this point—along with a glance at the book's table of contents—will give readers a sense of what remains. More important, I think, is for readers to get a clear sense of Bazerman's purpose and a representative view of how he goes about it. Once that has been achieved, for both volumes of *Literate Action*, then the next task is to situate the work in some recognizable contexts.

## CONCLUSION

Earlier, I noted my own interest in bringing together our field's empirical and humanistic traditions of theoretical inquiry. Such work, I believe, might help us better describe the relations between interiority and exteriority that obtain in, on, and through the body of the writing-subject. But much research in writing studies (or composition studies) has explicitly or implicitly emphasized one or the other. *Literate Action* continues and extends Bazerman's project of arriving at the fullest possible understanding of writing by paying equal attention to interiority and exteriority. Yet important questions remain about the relationship between what Bazerman describes, in his discussion of Leont'ev, as "the inner contents of consciousness" and "the largest social orders of activity" (*TLA* 47). Bazerman

underscores rather than resolves these questions through his meticulous presentation of the extraordinary complexities involved in studying writing. I certainly do not think I can resolve them. But I can call attention to them, and in this instance I can do so in a way that will speak to the work of writing program administration.

In his extraordinary book, *Network*, Clay Spinuzzi places activity theory and actor-network theory (ANT) in “sustained contact” in order to develop the former “in a useful manner” (29). For Spinuzzi, activity theory does a very good job of analyzing change over time, particularly learning and development. But as he sees it, even activity theory’s more recent iterations—which take into account “questions of society and culture” and “issues of power and dominance” by theorizing activity networks—have not yet fully acknowledged the degree of relationality that obtains among human subjects and non-human objects in and across contexts and that, in turn, carries significant implications for our notions of writerly agency (43). For Spinuzzi, this emphasis on relationality, which actor-network theory provides in abundance, is essential to understanding how “knowledge work is strategically and tactically performed in a heavily networked organization” (16).

Spinuzzi’s testing of activity theory reiterates the question of interiority and exteriority that *Literate Action* calls to our attention, and that poses a challenge to any study of writing. On the one hand, we must attend to the irreducible singularity of the writer. On the other hand, we must comprehend the equally irreducible complexity of the contexts (and, therefore, relations) in which writers participate, out of which they emerge, through which they are transformed, and which they transform in turn. But this question poses itself differently if we shift the frame away from the telecommunications company Spinuzzi studies in *Network* or away from any of the non-school examples Bazerman offers in *Literate Action* and on to a writing program. This is because writing programs stand at an intersection of materiality and textuality that calls attention to the thoroughgoing discursiveness—we might even say the metaphoricity—that characterizes reports of even the most hard-nosed empirical studies.

In its varied forms, the writing program is the main mechanism by which our field pays institutionally recognized attention to pedagogy, and thereby, to students’ bodies. At the moment, we do this mainly through courses—traditional, online, or blended—that students take in order to fulfill requirements. We do it through courses that comprise majors focusing on writing as such, and that aim to improve students’ knowledge of and skill at writing, broadly or narrowly defined. This attention is built into our disciplinary identity, for better or worse. Mostly for better.

It's better for the study of writing to have at its disposal an immanent notion of materiality, to complement any of its other useful notions of materiality, and writing programs provide this. The inexorable drive, built into language use itself, to render the writer's materiality as "materiality"—as metaphor—is consistently checked by the student body sitting in an instructor's office, sending her an email, submitting an assignment. The drive is checked by the everyday indexicality of a program's organizational writing, the texts that travel to and issue from it: grades, transcripts, placement exams, outcomes statements, program assessments, funding requests, and many others. One could argue that the writing program exists in the sum of relations and interactions that such texts capture, document, or represent. But such an argument, such a description of a writing program that textualized its bodies, would not have captured the program in its fullest complexity. Something would be missing in the description, something having to do with the learning and development with which Spinuzzi and Bazerman are so concerned.

Of course, something always is missing in the description. It is in the nature of descriptions to be incomplete, perspectival. We are reminded of this—or rather, confronted by this—through a writing program's multi-layered and immanent complexity. Despite the fact that a writing program must account for (i.e., describe) itself frequently and to a range of external entities, every WPA knows that no such description could ever tell the whole story. Yet we have the idea, or perhaps a vague notion, that such a whole story exists or is at least thinkable. In this sense, we rehearse the "tension between external form and internal thought" that Bazerman claims "runs throughout writing" itself (*RLA* 103).

It seems to me that a constitutive feature of writing is precisely the idea that a tension between interiority and exteriority runs through writing. The two volumes of *Literate Action* testify to Bazerman's career-long commitment to explore this idea and its implications, and as such, they make for stimulating, thought-provoking, profound, and often compelling reading. They teach us a great deal about a particularly rich perspective on this constitutive feature of writing. They do not tell us everything about this feature of writing, and of course they cannot tell us everything about writing itself. But we know, from our own administrative encounters with materiality and textuality, that those are unrealistic outcomes. Better to assess *Literate Action* at some point in the future, perhaps with a portfolio of the various conversations it will have provoked, conversations that—I hope—will have brought theorists together from across our field's methodological spectrum to work on the impossible but important task of theorizing writing.

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