

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

Freedom, Form, Function: Varieties of Academic Discourse

Let me begin my address by invoking three voices other than my own: First, Langston Hughes, whom I discovered in desperation during my first year of teaching:

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die,
Life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.

And then Adrienne Rich, whom I discovered in more recent years: "We might hypothetically possess ourselves of every recognized technological resource on the North American continent, but as long as our language is inadequate, our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in the old cycles, our process may be 'revolutionary,' but [it will not be] transformative." (247–48).

And finally, Hélène Cixous: "I do not want to tell a story to someone's memory." (qtd. in Conley 1).

In my opinion, the most significant issue facing our profession as we move into the twenty-first century is embodied in these quotations: That our language and our writing should be adequate enough to make our dreams, our visions, our stories, our thinking, and our actions not just revolutionary but transformative. When Rich chooses transformative processes over revolutionary ones, she strikes a chord with me and with many others of my generation. Like Langston Hughes, we were youthful dreamers, but our visions of revolution have given way to practical questions about how we can change our own institutions, our own departments, and

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our own classrooms. And finally, I have invoked H el ene Cixous, who challenges me to try to think in new ways even when I cannot. I want to bring the passions and the dreams of transformation to our classrooms.

In the 1990s, it is not always easy to invite our students to participate in transformation, to write with passion about subjects that are complex, politically charged, politically correct, or even politically incorrect. To do so invites labels such as "tenured radical" and accusations that politics is corrupting higher education, to paraphrase Roger Kimball. To do so invites media attention to our textbooks, as was the case just last week on the Rush Limbaugh Show.¹ To do so invites departmental discord and strife, as past events at the University of Texas have taught us.

And yet, we must continue to make our classrooms vital places where students learn not only the various conventions of academic writing, but also the power of communication to change things, to transform. Academic discourse must help us and our students create community in a world that often seems torn apart by difference. As my title suggests, I want to know how the various forms and functions of academic writing have anything to do with educating ourselves for our whole lives, and by this I mean all of our multiple identities and our multiple dreams for ourselves. To be successful, we need to teach students conventional forms and better analytical skills, but also we need to encourage them to dream, to think in new cycles and to have visions for the future that are hopeful.

Some details from my personal history explain why I care about these issues. One of the things I have learned about rhetoric from feminist theory, especially bell hooks, is how very important it is to position oneself clearly with one's listeners or readers, especially when the subject is complicated.² My experience in this profession will resonate with some of you, particularly those who were in school during the late sixties or early seventies. Others will have had entirely different experiences, and you will agree or disagree with me for your own reasons, but I also hope that we have common professional ground.

I was born in 1947, and promptly nicknamed "Lilly," which was extremely appropriate, given the nature of my middle class, lily-white surroundings in central Florida. Our neighborhood was typical of many built by those seeking to forget what they had experienced during the Great Depression and World War II. Our home was my father's "castle" and my mother was the superwoman who ran it and orchestrated the lives of the children she considered "gifted." Our world was fairly homogenized, as many were in the 1950s. I recall hearing murmurs in the neighborhood when a Cuban doctor bought a house during the first wave of Cuban immigration before Castro's revolution. He was very "light-skinned," they said, and welcome, of course, but no one invited him or his family to

dinner. I had to travel to North Carolina to my grandparents' homes to actually meet any people of color whose names and histories were accessible to me. There, as a small child, I saw my father's hand remain at his side when a friend from his childhood extended his hand in friendship, a hand that happened to be black. This act, which is indelibly recorded in my memory, made no sense to me, coming as I did from that lily-white world where white hands clasped in greeting all the time.

Perhaps, then, you can imagine my surprise when I read Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and learned of another world I had never seen even though it was only a few miles down the road. I am still educating myself about that world down the road. Melissa Fay Greene's *Praying for Sheetrock*, which describes the lives of black and white families in a county intersected by Highway 17, is literally about the road we took every summer on our way back to North Carolina. My world in Florida is gone now, bulldozed and rebuilt as a fantasy world where athletes go when they win medals and diamond rings. It is no longer lily-white, but the people there still attempt to hold on to other kinds of fantasies.

I am a dreamer from that world, but until I went away to college, my dreams were, for the most part, ordinary. As Adrienne Rich suggests, my vision was formless and my thinking ran in the old cycles. The only hint of something else was that my high school counselor complained that I had an exaggerated sense of my personal rights when I refused to take the home economics course required for graduation from a Florida high school. I didn't even know the word "sexist" then; I just knew that I couldn't allow my dreams to be limited to cutting out dress patterns and going on tours of mobile home parks where we were supposed to learn how to finance a home with a kitchen like Betty Crocker's.

The writing that I did in high school was mainly summarization. The only essays that I recall at all were a halting attempt to describe the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, largely plagiarized by stringing together quotes from several books, and a term paper on becoming a psychologist, complete with notecards and an outline written at the last minute. Writing at that time was not a source of discovery or a way of knowing for me. I learned patterns of paragraph development and parts of speech, but I did not learn to write. I did not feel the power of the written word to change anything.

In 1965, I went off to college in yet another lily-white world, though it is now, I am told, a more colorful place. That institution began a radical transformation during the years I was there, as others did across the country, but my courses still reflected old patterns. Nearly all of the important writing that I produced was extracurricular, not a part of my "formal" education, which is one of the reasons why Anne Gere's address

last year was so meaningful to me. My final exams were interrupted by the deaths of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. My real literacy education was about what was happening in the streets. Here, for example, is a poem that I found outside the classroom, a poem that I have carried in my heart for 26 years:

I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
 And laid them away in a box of gold;
 Where long will cling the lips of the moth,
 I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth;
 I hide no hate; I am not even wroth
 Who found earth's breath so keen and cold;
 I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
 And laid them away in a box of gold.

That is Countee Cullen's "Epitaph For A Poet." It might have been the first piece of writing by an African American that I had ever read, for the anthologies of literature in my high school and even in the "southern literature" class that I took at Florida State University in 1970 were still lily-white. I could hardly believe that it could have been written by an African American. I could also not imagine that this African-American man was more educated than my father. Nothing in my childhood world nor in my segregated education had prepared me for this poem. It came to me from an alternative source, from the person who was the most influential teacher I had throughout late adolescence and early adulthood. This was Joan Baez, whose album, *Baptism: A Journey Through Our Time*, introduced me to poetry that mattered and politics that I was supposed to participate in. These things inspired me to write on my own, outside of school.

On the *Baptism* album, Baez read and sang other poems, anti-war poems like Wilfred Owen's parable about Abram and Isaac:

Offer the ram of pride instead of him.
 But the old man would not so,
 but slew his son, and half the seed
 of Europe, one by one.

This was the first time that my old Sunday school lessons had any connection with the world in which I lived. And Norman Rosten's "Guernica," about the little children slain in Guernica, little children just like those in Sarajevo, Palestine, Somalia, or Haiti today:

Do not weep for them, *madre*,
 They are gone forever, the little ones,

Straight to heaven to the saints,
 And laid them away in a box of gold;
 And God will fill the bullet-holes with candy.

And Walt Whitman's "I Saw The Vision Of Armies":

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
 And the white skeletons of young men—I saw them;
 I saw the debris and debris of all dead soldiers;
 But I saw they were not as was thought;
 They themselves were fully at rest—they suffer'd not;
 The living remain'd and suffer'd—the mother suffer'd,
 And the wife and the child, and the musing comrade suffer'd,
 And the armies that remained suffer'd.

These, my most important literacy lessons, were poems I found on a folksinger's record, outside the classroom, away from the places where literature was supposed to be affecting my life. So I left my lily-white world and began to learn about gaps, especially the gaps in my supposedly privileged education. I joined in marches and went off to teach high school English in a predominantly African American community where the average income per family in the county was \$3,000. I began to try to figure out how I would teach these students to read and write, why and how they might or might not want to learn to talk like me. I learned a lot from them about the literatures and cultures of people who did not talk like me. Then and since, writing has also helped me to understand many issues in my personal and professional worlds. It has helped me feel a sense of personal power in my work for social change, and it has helped me with my own personal transformations.

But the main insight I have about my own literacy history is that none of the important or meaningful writing I have ever produced happened as a result of a writing assignment given in a classroom. None of it. And I had some good teachers. And, unlike many of our students, I was one of the ones for whom education supposedly worked, considering that I have a plaque with the word "Valedictorian" on it. In the ninth grade, Warren H. Fugitt gave me A's for my book reports, all of which I have forgotten, but she also wrote on the board one day a line from Robert Browning that I wrote down in a private journal she never saw: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?" In college, I produced more "A" papers in a class taught by James McCrimmon, whose textbook in its multiple editions is legendary, but they were exercises in form, practice-writing that would prepare me for something else, later. So much of my education seemed to be about "later."

Foss, Foss and Trapp, writing about Foucault, observe that he “saw his experience in the French educational system as a continual postponement of the promised secret knowledge. In primary school, he was told that the most important things would be revealed in the lycée. At the lycée he was told he would have to wait until his final year, only to be told at that point that the knowledge he wanted was to be found in the study of philosophy, which would be revealed at the university level” (210). The rest of his life was a search for knowledge, an archeological dig to find the secrets and structures of the knowledge he so desperately sought.

Though I hardly compare the range of my intellect to Foucault’s, I can identify with parts of his quest. Like Foucault, I and many others of my generation needed alternative sources, alternative visions to learn to think in new ways, to find visions and dreams that didn’t run in the same patterns. What I dream about today is that we might *more often* make our classrooms places that connect with the world outside, the here and now; places that show students the power of writing to transform—writing that is not always about later, about jobs and careers, but writing that is about themselves as people, as individuals and as citizens of various communities.

I feel a strong sense of community with colleagues in CCCC who have tried to make education and the teaching of writing “relevant” as we used to say in the 60s and 70s, but finding that sense of solidarity is more complicated than it used to be. Relevant for what? From whose perspective? Our old revolutionary rhetorics are not working. The influence of identity politics has made us cautious, fearful that we would or would not be perceived as “politically correct,” depending upon our politics. Within our own profession, we now have significant differences that make it difficult for us to communicate with each other, let alone, decide on curriculum, textbooks, or pedagogies. I know first-hand from the politics of my own institution that many people have a vision for education very different from mine.

In fact, it may be because we as a profession have already been transformed in so many ways so quickly that we have a whole new set of problems. As a profession, we are conflicted about the roles we and other faculty members should play in literacy development. If we read Bizzell and Herzberg’s *Rhetorical Tradition* from cover to cover, as I just did this quarter in a rhetorical history seminar, we read about rhetoric’s fall from grace in western curricula. At the turn of this century, as English departments in higher education established the study of literature and literary criticism as their primary interests, rhetoric and composition became merely a “service” that these departments provided. The conflicted goals of English and composition were summarized in Maxine Hairston’s CCCC

chair's address in 1985 when she urged us to separate ourselves from departments that put us "at the bottom of the social and political scale" (275). During the 1970s, and especially after Hairston's rallying cry, we sent the message that we were an emerging (now middle-aged) field with a body of professional research and theory that could account for literacy development and generate methods for turning a generation of students into more literate readers and writers. We claimed we had found ways to restore rhetoric to its central and rightful place in the curriculum. Our institutions have, in many cases, believed us and have set up expensive programs, writing centers, and computer labs where our students are supposedly being remediated, educated, and trained for professional writing once they leave us.

More recently, despite Hairston's suspicion about the motive for doing so, we have centered our profession by aligning it with some of the most exciting, formerly "marginal," theoretical developments within the academy: feminist theory, multicultural and postcolonial theory, poststructuralism, and the new rhetorics with their connections to contemporary critical theory. We have learned from the black feminist theorist bell hooks about the interplay between margins and centers. In our roles as rhetoricians, we have found new alliances with those on our campuses who would see writing as a crucial site for intellectual, political, and social debate. We have even found some ways to reunite with those who had seen us as mere technicians as we talk about composition in the broader context of literacy, where reading is not separated from writing. As Hairston put it, prophetically then, "by freeing ourselves . . . And by leaving the house in which we grew up, we may finally create the strong connection between literature and composition that most of us feel is good and natural" (282).

We have accomplished a great deal, but there are problems with our success in professionalizing and theorizing our way back into the academy. Our professional solidarity may mask fundamental disagreements about pedagogical practices. In some places, our rhetorical power to convince administrators has outstripped our ability to deliver students with writing skills acceptable to institutional monitors or to employers beyond the groves of academe. We have not always reconciled our theoretical interests in the philosophical issues of language with the goals that our students and our institutions have for us. Critical theory may be helping us as academics, but is it helping our students? Has all of our transformation been more for us than for our students? Despite the efforts of many CCCC committees, including the leaders of various assessment committees and the drafters of the Wyoming resolution, we have no universally accepted professional standards or standards for writing upon which we all agree. We have not reconciled the issues of politics and power that complicate our ability to

have students write about topics such as racism, cultural misogyny, class differences, abortion, nationalistic chauvinism, and homophobia.

There are, of course, broader social and historical reasons why we have not made more progress in these areas. Our profession is more complicated now than it was earlier in the country's history, or even in the 1940s when CCCC was founded. There was a time when rhetorical education was simpler, and principles and standards were easier to write. This education was predicated on a limited number of professions, a limited number of students, a limited range of types of students, and relative uniformity about the materials and goals of institutions of higher learning. It was simpler because the notion that all people should be allowed access to literacy and to academic literacy in particular did not exist. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., reminds us in his recent book *Loose Canons*, it was illegal in eighteenth century South Carolina for African Americans to be taught to read and write.

Be it enacted that all and every person and persons whatsoever,
Who shall hereafter teach,
Or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write,
Or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of
Writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write;
Every such person or persons shall, for every offense, forfeit the sum of
one hundred pounds current money (59).

Today my university at least proclaims that we do not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, or nationality. We have made tremendous progress in naming discriminatory practices, but we have not yet eliminated them in our classroom practices.

Rhetorical education was also simpler because, among those hired to teach in higher educational institutions, you could assume that there was a fairly homogenous world view. The complexities of language theory were largely limited to two conditions: "Truth" was obvious, waiting to be conveyed by good writing or speaking, or it was probable, waiting to be discovered by the patterns of thinking embodied in rhetorical training. Before the printing press, before the "information explosion" in the twentieth century, "gathering the available means of persuasion," as Aristotle taught us, was intellectually demanding, but not without boundaries. But now, the old familiar canons have given way to Gates' loose canons; we have lost our parameters in this postmodern world. Finally, "we" were all supposedly more alike than we are today. When I first walked into the faculty club on my campus 13 years ago, I recall not seeing another woman or a person of color in a very large room that held over 150 people. Today,

as we celebrate the diversity within our profession, we discover that we cannot always talk about a common "we."

However "we" define ourselves as we move into the twenty-first century, we no longer have, and most of us do not want, these limitations. We are preparing students for professions and lifestyles we can hardly imagine in our wildest dreams. We are teaching more of them than ever before. Our students come from many cultures, and they range in age from early teens to retirement age. We teach them in community colleges, in four-year liberal arts colleges, in research universities, and in alternative programs. No wonder, then, that at the annual meeting of CCCC, we should have to consider our goals for the teaching of writing and communication. For a long time, we have looked for and found common ground, common theories, common pedagogies. As we move toward a new millennium, we, along with our society and the planet, also have to come to grips with difference—among ourselves, among our students, among our institutions, among our nations as we see ourselves as global citizens.

A recent essay in *The Atlantic* entitled "Jihad vs. McWorld" suggests just one kind of tension we live with. Benjamin Barber repeats a common contemporary theme: the dialectical tension between identity politics and the struggle to build a world where we all see things through the same lens, eat the same hamburgers, wear the same brands of athletic shoes, and watch the same movies. As practitioners in the world of composition studies, some of us are confused by the rhetorical problems presented by difference vs. homogenization. This tension affects not only our view of the world, but also our language and our written texts.

If we are blessed, or cursed, with the ability to accommodate what feminist linguist Dale Spender has called a "multidimensional reality," we find ourselves changing perspectives often, really trying to see what "difference" means. Sometimes we see ourselves with a clear identity in a well-defined world. Sometimes we see ourselves as a complex of identities in a complex society. My list of identities includes, but is not limited to: baby-boomer, "white" (but with several Native American ancestors), middle-class, woman, academic with access to international conversations, middle-aged tennis player who might have been great had she started young, life partner to Rick Bowles, mother, stepmother, expatriate southerner, Presbyterian, out-of-fashion liberal, and teacher. Multiple identities, multiple languages, multiple rhetorics.

With regard to the way language works in my multiple worlds, sometimes I think truth is clear and that rhetoric and language should be transparent media for discovering and transmitting it. I remember thinking, for instance, when I sat on a jury: Did this suspect abuse this child? Yes or No? At such times, I require familiar expository forms, clear and

lucid speaking and writing. At other times, the very concept of truth is so cloudy that I can hardly get my bearings or believe in a single truth. For example, what is the “real” situation in El Salvador? Whose perspective, whose version of reality, whose documents, whose language can we believe? How could we possibly write about a place like El Salvador? As Joan Didion did? With her own experience of terror? But then, if we include too much of ourselves in our writing, we might find ourselves being discounted, as Didion was in a review that described *Salvador* as “The Perils Of Joan.” Or like some reporters with the lens of “objectivity” and investigative journalism?³ Or how do we write about Bosnia-Herzegovina? Or Haiti? From what vantage point should a U.S. Citizen try to describe clearly the multiple perspectives that lead to violence in eastern Europe? Or in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories? Or, closer to home, in Los Angeles, or New York, or in my own St. Paul? How can we possibly say all we need to say about the AIDS epidemic in simple expository essays? What else might count as evidence? Journals, fiction, film, photographs, graffiti, posters? Is it better to accept the words of Randy Shilts, author of *And the Band Played On*, before he acknowledged that he had AIDS, or do we believe more of what he wrote and said afterward? How are his words altered by his death? Does his reputation in the Gay community matter as we weigh his words? What could possibly be written in a 5,000 word essay on abortion that would change anyone’s mind? On complex matters such as these, we need a wide variety of forms of writing, produced from multiple perspectives, alongside a variety of other media. If form follows function, and the functions of most written language are multiple, then we need to investigate new forms.

So what does it mean to write or to learn to write from multiple perspectives? From a personal perspective, my life has been directly touched by racism, by war, by AIDS, and by the feminist movement. As I have been touched, I have changed and my language and my rhetoric have changed. Because we are in the profession we are in, many of us self-consciously reflect on these changes. This may be the one great contribution we have to make to our students, to model for them our self-reflexive analysis of our own discourse practices. Our students sometimes have difficulty imagining how radically their own language might need to change until they see how the English language has already had to change in the twentieth-century. They wonder why we still talk about sexist language, but they don’t wonder any more when they read textbooks written 25 years ago. They wonder why we stress the importance of naming particular groups in careful ways, but they don’t wonder any more when they read about racial strife in newspapers written in the 1930s. They also wonder whether they should trust us when we invite them to

write in a variety of forms, some of them even labeled "experimental." They also wonder, sometimes, why we don't just give them the formulas and the rules and be done with it. Although some teachers and textbooks do offer students cookbooks, most of us know that the characteristics of writing in particular fields are cloudier and harder to pin down than the recipes acknowledge. The best I can do is to model for students my own process of trying to connect myself with academic writing. They have learned, just as I did, that "self" and "first person" do not belong in academic writing, so we have much in common.

If we accept multiple perspectives, an ever-changing relationship to the concepts of "truth," rapidly changing language, and complex discourse communities as inevitable characteristics of living and writing in a post-modern world, I believe we have to encourage many different kinds of writing, and not just a variety of styles of academic discourse, but experimental writing as well. In the fall of 1992, I published an essay in *CCC* on "discourse and diversity." I included a number of samples of students' writings produced in response to my invitation to attempt something "experimental." Like many of you, I often encourage students to write in ways that are unfamiliar: problem-solution essays with more than one "right" answer, parodies of academic writing, experiments with textual space, position papers from personas different from their own, and so on. Even though all of the samples came from upper division students and from graduate student seminars, some people who read the essay thought that I was writing a radical manifesto for first-year composition, that I wanted to throw out convention and encourage students to ignore standard forms. One such respondent told me that there was no time for "alternate discourse" in the undergraduate curriculum and that I should focus on rational thought and clear exposition, rather than feminist theories of language and subjectivity. Such responses represented my worst fear: that people would see "rational" discourse as separate from the kinds of experiments I encourage, rational writing as opposed to feminist writing. A growing number of award-winning books from members of our own profession are mixing or blending different types of discourse. One of my favorites is Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self: A Study of Sociolinguistic Competence*, in which he juxtaposes his own personal experience of language difference with the most conventional of linguistic analyses. Many of us don't think we should separate our thinking into categories and enforce strict dichotomies, but there are many who do.

But finding our common pedagogical ground is far more complicated than simple either-or thinking about types of discourse. To assume that we can have a common language of expository rationality in opposition to

what I advocated is to deny a long catalogue of differences that exist within modern (or “postmodern”) postsecondary institutions. Likewise, to assume that we agree that writing in our classrooms should always be about cultural transformation is to ignore a range of differences among us. For example, there are the professional differences. Some of us are tenured, some are employed full-time but have no tenure, some are part-time, and some are students. The obvious differences in our status make us more or less willing to talk about difference. The part-time, untenured lecturer may be less likely to challenge a current-traditional paradigm than someone whose job and future are secure. But security doesn’t always lead to experimentation either; often it is a ticket to complacency. Then, there are the academic aims of our institutions. Those in the most prestigious liberal arts colleges, for example, can sometimes avoid the immediate pressure to train students for jobs. While this might enable them to avoid or at least to defer the instrumental argument for conventional skills, some of the strongest proponents of “liberal arts” curricula argue loudest for conformity. The liberal arts provide, in Allan Bloom’s cynical analysis, the space between an “intellectual wasteland,” and the “dreary professional training” that awaits students after a baccalaureate degree (336). According to Bloom and others who share his views, the liberal arts work best when they promote a “unified view of nature and man’s place in it” (347) by focusing on canonical books and rational, belletristic essays. Those who teach at public universities or in two-year colleges with a strong career orientation, with terminal degrees in majors such as law enforcement and dental hygiene, have little of this kind of luxury. Their job is to get students from point *a* to point *b* as quickly and as economically as possible. Non-professional reading and experimental writing are likely to be less attractive, even though their students, many of them from working-class backgrounds, may be the ones who would benefit most from interrogating the discourse practices of those in powerful positions.

A former member of the faculty at my university, Wlad Godzich, goes even further when he says that “it would not be an exaggeration to state that the effect of the new writing programs [by these he means those that have courses in writing for various fields such as business, technology, and law], given their orientation, is not to solve a ‘crisis of literacy’ but to promote a new culture of illiteracy, in which the student is trained to use language for the reception and conveyance of information in only one sphere of human activity: that of his or her future field of employment” (29). Godzich argues that programs in advanced, specialized composition, in league with the market forces that drive vocationalism, promote linguistic practices that fragment culture, rather than build common under-

standing. While he would not endorse my experimental program, he does imply that students should have instruction in “the general problematic of codes and codification in language” (29).

Within writing programs across the U.S., however, there is more diversity than Godzich suggests. In many writing-across-the-curriculum programs, for example, there are disagreements between practitioners in various fields and writing specialists from our field. For example, some of our colleagues might favor the styles in works such as *The Double Helix* or Lewis Thomas’s *Lives of a Cell* over technical reports and design specifications. They might see “good” scientific writing as philosophical speculation by major scientists, often expressed in genres and on topics fairly far removed from the work that earned them their reputations. We are also familiar with the well-intentioned attempts of our colleagues who try to help students produce “good” social scientific writing, in active voice, with strong verbs and excised prepositional phrases. Such instruction is often criticized when professors in their home departments produce an entirely different style, often what is called “bad” writing in our classes, and wonder why their students’ thinking was so subjective and loose. As many members of our profession have noted, discourse communities are not nearly so uniform as our textbooks sometimes suggest. As Joseph Harris has put it, “I think we dangerously abstract and idealize the workings of ‘academic’ discourse by taking the kinds of rarified talk and writing that go on at conferences and in journals as the norm, and viewing many of the other sorts of talk and writing that occur at the university as deviations from or approximations of that standard” (20).

Nevertheless, there are still some among us who believe that all we really need are uniformity, order, clarity, rules and principles. Allan Bloom argues, for example, that this democracy is really an anarchy, because there are “no recognized rules for citizenship and no legitimate titles to rule” (337). E. D. Hirsch and many others plead for a standard curriculum, standard ways of thinking, shared reading—common ground, in other words. On the other side, there are those who believe that difference is everything, that we should celebrate it in all forms and reject homogenization. Within our own profession, we can name those who represent these political and philosophical poles. In this address, I have argued for diversity because I believe that calls for standardization often mask white, middle-class, male-dominated traditions. Nevertheless, I want to be clear that I do not believe that diversity is an end in itself. As we try to move from “one” right way of thinking and being, let’s not get stuck at the stage of “many” right ways of thinking and being, or what we criticize as “hopeless relativism.” In some ways, the history of rhetoric is the conflict between those who would spell out rules for rhetorical forms vs. those who

would invent new forms to construct new meanings. Surely there are times and places for difference and disagreement and times and places for commonality and community.

Richard Lloyd Jones, in an eloquent vision of our profession, will help me to return to terra firma: "We *can* help students in a democracy understand how language both isolates and builds individuals—all at the same time—and how if we are to live together peaceably we have to learn how we are shaped by discourse as much as we shape discourse" (496). And then he offers some very practical advice: "We need to decide what teaching things we do that are too important to lose, what we can give up with no more than a token fight" (496).

What can we give up with no more than a token fight? I have a long personal list of things I can give up: silly arguments about posture and position, quibbles over the fine points of pedagogical practice, technicalities of writing assessment, narrow conceptions of modes and genres, the need to control my students' writing, and on and on. What things are too important to lose? I put one thing on my list, and after that many other things seem less important: the opportunity to see students grow, not only on the pages of their papers, but also as individuals and as citizens of larger communities. The kind of growth that I'm talking about is the ability to imagine something different, to see things in a new way, to think outside the boundaries of the familiar. That we have to do this is inescapable. Tradition and reform, permanence and change, anarchy and civilization. These pairings are familiar to us because change is inevitable. But my words have been about the freedom to imagine for ourselves what the changes ought to be. I have chosen to speak on the connections between discourse and transformation in the academy because the pressures to conform and to reproduce are so very powerful. I find myself turning again and again to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, especially to this passage:

The central problem is this: how can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? . . . As long as they live in the duality in which *to be* is to *be like*, and to *be like* is to *be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible. (33)

If the one way we know to *be* is to *be like*, our visions will continue to run in the old cycles. If we don't understand history, as the saying goes, we are doomed to repeat it. If we can, as Cixous implied, only write our stories to someone else's memory, we will invent courses, syllabi, writing assignments, genres, organizations, institutions, journals, conventions, panel papers, special interest groups, and occasionally even chair's addresses that are entirely familiar. We will not transform. My dream for all of us is that we cherish what is valuable from tradition and that we continue to find

new ways of thinking, writing, and acting in the world. This is our common ground in the groves of academe.

Jim Berlin, whom we will remember throughout this convention, helped us to see different pedagogical practices built around our understanding of how language works, either as a transparent vehicle for transmitting reality, as a way of constructing reality, as a way of getting at cultural knowledge, or as a way of exploring individual voice. It was important for our profession to see how our own theoretical positions with regard to language, society, and truth influence the pedagogical practices we choose. I have attempted to place these practices within the dialectic of identity politics and society's aims for education.

Let me conclude now with the rest of Langston Hughes' poem from the book I used the first year I taught:

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

I no longer believe that I can change the world, as I did when I sang along with Joan Baez, but I do believe that I can change my own discourse practices, and in so doing, I may inspire some students in my classrooms. Kenneth Burke taught us a long time ago that rhetoric is the use of language to form attitudes and to influence action. I invite you to use writing to dream about transformations for all of us.

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Notes

1. The recent textbook co-authored by Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz, *The Presence of Others*, was the focus of Limbaugh's comments about the politics of instruction on Limbaugh's show in March of 1994.

2. My essay entitled "Discourse and Diversity," published in CCC in 1992, contains a fuller discussion of the connections I try to make between feminist theory and writing.

3. I am indebted to Jane Harred's brilliant work on literary journalism, *Never a Copy: The Conflicting Claims of Narrative Discourse and Its Referent in the Literary Journalism of Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion*. I recommend her discussion of narrative theory to all who are interested in the question of perspective in nonfiction writing.

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