分析散文

ANALYZING PROSE

〔美〕Richard A. Lanham 著

Analyzing Prose

Second edition

Richard A. Lanham
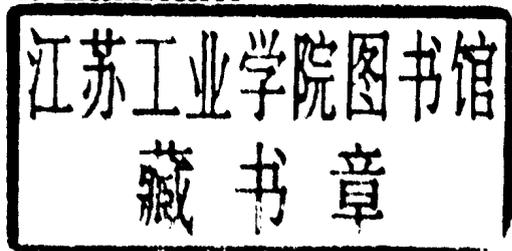
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总　序

胡壮麟

　　"西方语言学原版影印系列丛书"是北京大学出版社外语编辑部建立以来的一个新产品，具有重大意义。随着国内高等教育的发展，这几年来本科生、硕士生和博士生的招生名额都扩大了，教材建设再次提上了日程。除组织国内老师自行编写外，从国外直接引进仍不失为一个有效途径。语言学是一门领先科学，因此本丛书的有些内容对其他专业的老师和学生、研究者，甚至业余学习者也有很高参考价值。例如，像有关语料库、认知语言学的著作除外语老师外，计算科学、统计学、认知科学、词典编辑等专业的研究人员和师生也有一读之必要。

　　北大版"西方语言学原版影印系列丛书"的问世是意料中的事。早在 2002 年 1 月北京大学出版社已出版过"西方语言学丛书"，从剑桥大学出版社引进了六卷本《英语语言史》，Robert D. van Valin 和 Randy J. Lapolla 的《句法：结构、意义与功能》，Andres Radford 的《最简方案：句法理论与英语结构》……共七种，在外语界独树一帜。经过两至三年的摸索，经验更丰富了，视野更扩大了。这表现在选题方面语言学和应用语言学并重，这更符合研究生专业目录中有关"语言学和应用语言学"的基本要求。我们的学生既要有理论知识，也要有如何运用有关理论的知识，只有这样，才能将所学的专业知识更好地为国家建设服务。

　　另一点值得我们考虑的是，全面掌握语言学和应用语言学的专业知识固然是保证教学质量的一个方面，我们还要让高等学校的学生经常站在本学科的前沿，接触本学科的最新成果，掌握本学科的最新动向。这也是保证教材质量，从而保证所培养学生质量的一个重要方面。因此，本丛书既引进有关学科在各时期的经典著作，更注意引进 21世纪的新著。长江后浪推前浪，许多经典著作最初也是以新著的形式问世的，其作者的年龄往往属于新生代。因此，时代意识是本系列丛书的一大特征。

　　为了实现这一目标，本丛书采取灵活的出版发行方式，既可系统成套出版，也可成熟一本，出版一本。这样，只要国外有好的新著出版，北京大学出版社根据该书的质量和国内的需要，及时引进。这在信息爆炸的今天，尤为重要。我们还认为，这套丛书的建设与广大读者的监督和支持是分不开的。我们欢迎读者对本丛书不足之处提出宝贵意见，我们更欢迎读者和业内行家向我们推荐有引进价值的著作！

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　2004 年 5 月
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　北京大学蓝旗营

导　　读

封宗信

　　理查德·阿·拉纳姆的《分析散文》是一本以散文（prose）风格为研究对象的文体学著作。

　　文体学（或风格学）是现代语言学中研究语言变体特征的一个分支，分为普通文体学和文学文体学。普通文体学研究语言内各种非方言变体的总和，而文学文体学研究作为一种语体的文学作品和作家个人风格特有的各种变化（Crystal, 1997）。

　　文学的三大主要体裁——诗歌、小说、戏剧，都有重要的文体学论著出版，它们包括里奇（G. Leech）的《英语诗歌的语言学指南》（1969）、里奇与肖特（M. Short）合著的《小说中的文体》（1981）、肖特等人的《戏剧语言研究》（Culpeper, Short, Verdonk, 1998）等。而散文的文学和非文学特征一直是困扰文体学家的一个体裁。学术界对"散文"一直没有十分明确的、公认的最终定义。广义的散文有两种定义：第一种相对于韵文（verse）而言，指除诗歌以外的所有体裁，如现代戏剧、小说、文学批评、传记、随笔、杂谈、书信、演说、游记、日记等；第二种相对于文学作品而言，指除诗歌、小说、戏剧外的所有体裁。狭义的散文专指论说文（essay）或杂文。其实，广义的第二种定义与狭义的定义之间也不好区分。例如 Harcourt Brace & Company 在 1981 年出版的英国作家 George Orwell 十四篇论说文的集子 *A Collection of Essays*，其实这些文章都可以称作散文。有趣的是，编辑和出版社没有做任何介绍或说明，前言、编者按一个都没有。

　　肖特与里奇合著的《小说中的文体》一书，在副标题"英语虚构散文的语言学导论"中使用了小说的别名——"虚构散文"。肖特在他十多年后的专著《探索诗歌、戏剧和散文的语言》（1996）中继续

使用"散文"和"虚构散文"来指"文学三大主要体裁之一"的小说。
他的题目使用"诗歌、戏剧、散文"还有一个重要的原因：poems，
plays，prose 构成了美妙的音位效果：

poems – plays – prose → 头韵（alliteration）

poems – plays - prose/ → 脚韵（rhyme）

文体学关心的是作家的选择。肖特之所以选择了这三个词而没有
选择文学领域更常用的 poetry/drama/fiction，是因为肖特是个出色的
语言学家和文体学家。

拉纳姆的《分析散文》不完全是肖特"散文"意义上的小说文体
学分析。作者写道，谈论散文风格的书大都涉及文学文本，而且都是
写给从事文学研究的学者的。他也希望本书的读者包括从事文学研究
的人。

在信息已经变成资本和财富的新经济时代，人们生活的各个领域
无时无刻不存在着"散文"。虽然散文是人类生活中如此重要的一种
体裁，但人们似乎并不了解散文的实质，其根源在于散文的特征很难
描述。这一困惑和由此产生的缺憾，并不是一件新鲜事。自从柏拉图
时代起，人们一直把价值性评判与描述性的评判混为一谈，而且总是
喜欢评判性的词语而不喜欢描述性的词语。人们描述散文，习惯于使
用"真挚"、"流畅"、"简洁"、"晦涩"、"生硬"等等普通或流行词语，
而并不喜欢使用真正的描述性术语。人们喜欢用评判性的词语，因为
这些词语谈论的是人自己以及人对语言词汇的感受，而不是语言词汇
本身。因此，描述散文时使用的语言仅仅是价值评判，而可悲的是，
人们还以为在谈论语言而不是谈论人自己。本书作者拉纳姆指出，我
们甚至根本就不知道对书面语言作出不偏不倚的描述会是什么样子，
那也就是说，我们根本不知道自己所做的这些评判到底在说什么。拉
纳姆的这本散文分析指南从"描述"开始。虽然散文囊括的内容五花
八门，风格各异，但是散文的确有自己的范畴、基本类型和模式。从
这个意义上看，本书提供了一个散文分类学蓝图，足以与俄国理论家
普罗普（V. Propp）研究民间故事分类的经典 *Morphology of the Folktale*
相提并论。

对散文进行分类，像所有科学领域的分类学一样，都有一套对类
别进行命名的名称，也势必涉及分类学上的门、纲、目、科、属、种

等。拉纳姆曾是加州大学洛杉矶分校英语教授，他展开这项研究的出发点是，他认为形式主义批评原则与传统的修辞学分析方法，都没有能够揭示出散文的文体结构。随着计算机技术的发展，"书面散文"已经发生了巨大变化，由传统的纸张转移到屏幕上，由静态发展到动态，由作者权威（authorial authority）转移到互动读者，由无声到有声，由黑白到彩色……因此，拉纳姆研究的对象并不局限于传统的散文概念，而是包括传统手段和现代媒体上的两大类散文。他发现了两个重要问题：教育学问题与名称命名问题。首先，我们所说的理想散文是否"透明"？因为对一个人来说属于透明的东西，对另一个人未必透明，所以需要在主观直觉与客观分析之间找到又有可操作性的东西。其次，学术界尚未弄清散文到底有什么模式，而要对散文中的一些机理进行命名，就会使这种"透明"的理想状态变得不伦不类。实际上，拉纳姆发现的这两个问题可以归结为一个解决办法，使用建立在常识基础上的描写术语，建立一个足够大的概念性结构来囊括传统纸张文本和现代多媒体超文本两种类型的散文，并研究它们之间的关系。

　　本书中的描写术语对读者来说可能有些生僻，但是作为一个科学系统的描述分析手段，不可能回避技术性的术语和带有专业色彩的名称。还有一点值得注意的是，作者对散文结构的系统详尽描述，只是手段，而最终目的是从描述走向理解——理解散文的本质。第一至第六章的特征是从局部到整体，每章中的分析都沿着一条线索深入探寻散文的机理。结果发现，每一条线索蕴含的文体特征都指向其所构成的全篇结构。在第七章里，作者掉转车头，由散文的整体入手再到局部，使用古典修辞学描述方法的"柠檬榨汁夹"（艾略特用语）来挤出现代散文的汁液，看看现代散文经过这样操作会得出什么模式。看似随机的描述最终揭示出了散文的内在模式，正是发现了这一模式的人才能有效地使用描述性术语，并用术语来解释文本，而不是把文本作为炫耀术语的陪衬。在这一过程中，自然而然达到了对文本的理解，同时又能进一步阐释描述过程中使用的术语。如作者所说，这种方法其实不是什么新发明，而是最古老的散文分析方法，不论你喜欢不喜欢，它的功效是相当大的。阅读这本书的读者一定会发现，作者把无法回避的艰涩字眼与力求简洁易懂的不懈努力巧妙地结合在一起。他

戴上沉重的镣铐却能自如地跳着优美的圆舞曲，其中的甘苦，读者不妨自己去慢慢品味。

本书虽然是写给以英语为本族语的研究散文风格的初学者，但是对所有关心语言学、修辞学，尤其是文体学和文学理论等的读者都有参考价值。北京大学出版社决定引进此书，至少是功在当代。

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Preface to the Second Edition

I DIDN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND what I was trying to do in the first edition of this book until I came to do the second. To explain, perhaps even defend, this embarrassing confession, let me tell you how the book came to be, first edition and second.

The original *Analyzing Prose* emerged from a single question that I, as a brash young assistant professor of English, set for a doctoral exam. It asked the students to analyze a piece of prose in the same way that they were accustomed to analyze a poem. (Those were the now distant days of 'close analysis,' as we used to call our combination of formalist critical principle and traditional rhetorical analysis.) Catastrophe! The answers were wall-to-wall confusion – boozy generalities and self-satisfied value-judgments, but no idea of how prose styles were put together, and hence no clue about when or where they might have come from.

Puzzling out this failure, I came up with two root problems. First, a pedagogical problem, what we might call the 'ideal transparency' problem. Our ideal prose, like our ideal typography, is transparent: if a reader doesn't notice it, if it provides a transparent window to the meaning, then the prose stylist has succeeded. But if your ideal prose is purely transparent, such transparency will be, by definition, hard to describe. You can't hit what you can't see. And what is transparent to you is often opaque to someone else. Such an ideal makes for a difficult pedagogy. Second, a nomenclature problem. No one knew the basic names for prose patterns. To even suggest that there *were* patterns, and traditional names for them, names perfectly useful still, was to impugn the transparency ideal. The two root problems, it seemed, were linked. They lent themselves to a common solution: a beginner's commonsense descriptive terminology.

In reply and remedy, I created a course in prose analysis, and from it came *Analyzing Prose*. I explain in the original Preface what the book is about – a beginner's guide to describing, and thus understanding, written prose. I aimed to supply, above all, a basic nomenclature for prose style. I could not understand then – nor can I yet – how anyone can teach literature or prose composition

without such a basic vocabulary. I sketched out in the original Introduction how such a nomenclature might fit into the current body of beliefs about prose style. In spite of all that has happened in the intervening two decades, I see no need to alter either original Preface or Introduction. They still need saying.

But a great deal has indeed happened in these two decades. A new expressive space has emerged – the computer screen. When I first wrote, I wrote about printed prose because that's the only kind there was. Now we have text on a screen. I've sketched out in an epilogue, 'What's Next for Text?', the main migratory changes that text undergoes when moving from page to screen: from permanence to volatility; from authorial authority to interactive reader; from dominant word to a new word/image balance; from silence to sound; from black and white to color. *Analyzing Prose*'s purpose remains the same in both domains, however – description leading to understanding. The vital need, now, is a conceptual structure big enough to contain both kinds of prose, and to focus their relationships. The matrix I put forward in *Analyzing Prose* works just fine for this purpose. One might almost think it was made for just this application.

In the original edition of *Analyzing Prose*, I wanted to shift the focus from moralizing about prose to describing it, and that still seems to me the central labor. But the moralizing has been transposed up into a higher key in the current conversation, to become a debate about the very endurance of text itself in the face of the digital image. We may, to personify the threat, quote the actor Bruce Willis, responding to criticisms of his film *The Fifth Element*. The critics found it a mindless, storyless mishmash of costumes and digital special effects. Willis replied: 'The written word is going the way of the dinosaur.' Plenty of evidence confirms his ukase, and plenty of people have built prophetic doom upon it. The evidence is not far to seek: people get their news from television rather than newspapers; the newspapers, to recruit younger readers, use more and more pictures; movies like Mr Willis's have moved from dialogue to flash and filigree, to what Aristotle called *opsis*, setting, the sixth and last part of tragedy; reading scores in the schools plummet; schoolteachers complain that students read only what they are compelled to, and that modicum less and less well. The haste with which the world of computer graphics has fled text and embraced images recalls the project of the Academy of Lagado in Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels*. There, you will remember, 'An expedient was therefore offered, that since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on.' And yet this prophecy of textual doom seems, like the traditional discussion of prose text itself, to contain more moralizing than analysis.

Is printed prose really going out of style? Go to your local news-stand and take a look. A deluge of magazines. Car magazines. Boat magazines. Woodworking magazines. News magazines. Art magazines. Video magazines. Audio magazines. Design magazines. Antique magazines. Gossip magazines. Fan magazines. Ecology magazines. Political magazines. Computer magazines.

Comic magazines for children; comic magazines for grownups. And, at my neighborhood news-stand at least, a good selection of the main ones in Spanish, French, German, Italian and Arabic. This news-stand isn't supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities; people buy these magazines. The level of writing found in this cornucopia is high. I took a miscellaneous armload home the other day (*Electronic Musician, Raygun, Yachting, Billboard, Variety, Playboy, Tatler,* and some less recognized titles) and stacked them with the magazines that come to our house (*The Economist, Wired, Road and Track, Smithsonian,* a gaggle of computer magazines and ecology newsletters). The prose, right through the sample, needs no apologies at all.

The real index of textual health, however, is the book. We find the same cornucopia there. In the decade 1980–90, world book production increased by half, and it keeps on growing. More new titles appear than even the book mega-stores can stock. At least four such superstores have opened within a ten-mile radius of where I live, and they do not lack for customers. The most immediate enemy to the printed word would seem to be not the computer but the printing press, which pours out a flow none of us can cope with. And the computer has enormously enhanced the way that information reaches print. The presses can roll faster than ever just *because* the information comes to them in digital form.

Or we might, as a final instance of thriving prose text, point to the digital artifact *par excellence* – the Internet. Sounds and images are indeed coming on stream, but the center of the Net is still written words, and looks like remaining so for some time. The combination of the written word and live, or almost-live, interaction has proved to be the most attractive technology since the invention of the automobile.

So, we don't have to worry that the printed word will vanish, or that the written word will vanish from the digital screen. The sensible response to this state of affairs by people who love the written word would be, one might think, 'OK, so a new textual space has opened out. Let's figure out how it works. How does the electronic word relate to the printed word? How can we maximize the gains and minimize the losses? Preserve and enhance the power we have treasured since the Greeks domesticated the Phoenician alphabet?' But it hasn't worked out that way. Instead, the traditional curse of discussions about prose style – a maximum of moralizing and a minimum of analysis – has played yet another set of variations.

The popular debate has centered on 'the fate of the book' (the codex book itself, not what it contains). Led by the Library of Congress, we are being scolded on every side to 'Read more books, you screen potatoes!' We are told, endlessly, that you can't take a computer to bed, that there is just something about the shape, the feel, even the smell, of a book that will ever be irreplace-able. Scholars, with Bruce Willis yelling in their faces, yearn for the protected quiet of a library. I feel the pull of this cultural outrage, too, since buying, reading, thinking and teaching about, and sometimes writing, books has been

the joy of my life as well as my livelihood. But surely such sentiments mistake the box for the contents. There were other boxes in Western culture before the codex paper book – parchment codexes, papyrus scrolls, clay tablets, temple walls. What matters is not the box but the contents, the text itself, or, more essentially, *what the text does to and for us*. Boxes take care of themselves, at least if we leave them alone. We'll choose the kind that best fits the contents. What only the printed codex book can communicate, the printed book will continue to communicate. What can be expressed better in an electronic medium will find the medium that suits it. But we will still need to understand *what text does to and for us*. And that returns us to *Analyzing Prose*.

We are living now in a time in which information is the new capital, an information rather than a goods economy. Prose remains our workaday method to communicate and preserve information – that is why it was invented. If we are to understand how written text communicates, then it would seem to follow that we should understand how prose works. The need for a nomenclature for prose style, the need from which the first edition of *Analyzing Prose* departed, seems stronger than ever. And now we must understand electronic text as well as print, and the interface between them. However healthy the world of printed text may remain, more and more prose will appear on a screen because more and more information of all kinds will be recorded in digital form and expressed on a screen. This revolution has already happened. If we are to understand how electronic text works, as surely we must, we still have to begin, as has been the case since writing was invented, with the prose text itself.

Now, back to my opening embarrassment: how preparing the second edition of *Analyzing Prose* taught me to understand what I was after in the first. Even before the personal computer made electronic text commonplace, I had been fascinated by putting words on an electronic screen and making then move. Here, I thought, was the ideal way to teach prose style. Prose styles contain, as *Analyzing Prose* shows, a whole agenda of *motion* which is frozen, rendered static, by continuous print. The electronic screen can unfreeze this motion and thus dramatize it. And so, for two of my textbooks (*Revising Prose* and *Revising Business Prose*) I made, in 1979 and 1981, two half-hour videotapes of text in motion, text being dynamically revised right before your eyes. They worked so well as revision programs that they posed two general questions. First, looking backward, how can computer animation analyze *printed* prose? Second, looking forward, how will prose work when it enters as a full and original player into the electronic expressive space? I puzzled about both these questions until, when preparing the second edition of *Analyzing Prose*, I realized that they were intimately related. They were, in fact, two ways of asking the same question.

In the original *Analyzing Prose*, I tried to find ways to *visualize* prose structures, rather than simply to describe them. I found written descriptions by scholars very hard to follow, and I assumed that students would too. As I worked out these diagrams, simple though they were; as I tried to specify the 'tacit bar-

gaining patterns' discussed in Chapter 6; as I tried to make sense of 'voice' in prose – as I tried to do all these things, I gradually saw that writing, as a consecutive lineated notation (left to right, down a line, left to right) contained a suppressed agenda of expression which to myself I started calling the 'alphabetic counterculture.' To this alphabetic counterculture the computer screen for the first time allowed free expression. In more than a manner of speaking, one could argue that the computer screen had set prose style free. (This freedom, like every other kind, is by no means an unmixed blessing for, as the analysis practiced in this book repeatedly shows, prose derives its power from its constraints.)

And so the effort to understand electronic text made me see clearly for the first time what I was trying to say about fixed, printed prose. It was always working against its limitations. In a silent world, it strove for 'voice' and rhythm. In a world of words, it strove for imagistic clarity. It appealed to the eye by patterns of all sorts. The history of prose style, I began to see, constitutes a long effort to build back into literate culture the powers of oral expression which literacy by its very nature abjures. Whereas speech occurs in the everyday world of behavior, writing and reading occur in a space specially protected to allow for conceptual reasoning. The computer screen puts writing into a space much more like the 3D space of ordinary human life. It allows us to *see* what the 2D space of fixed print leaves out. I had been trying, with the diagrams in *Analyzing Prose*, to point to what the computer screen can embody and dramatize. *Analyzing Prose* was trying, like the Pop artists, to 'paint' information so that we could see it, look AT it. The book is, then, itself a part of the alphabetic counterculture, even as it tries to reinforce the traditional rhetorical culture of the word.

The alphabetic counterculture, we might remind ourselves, has been around for a long time. As early as the fourth century BC, Greek pastoral poets experimented with shape poems. Simias of Rhodes, for example, wrote a poem about a double-headed axe, written in the shape of, and meant to be inscribed on, such an axe. These poems were riddling, virtuoso games of poetical form. Simias also wrote an egg-shaped poem, meant to be inscribed on an egg, which was read in alternating lines, first from top, then bottom, the metrical form altering the while. From such games, called *technopaegnia*, derived the tradition of shape poetry which continues to the present day. Puzzle poems in Greek and Latin based on visual designs reached an extraordinary degree of complexity. (The 'Flowerishes' of Kenneth Burke reproduced in Chapter 4 are modern manifestations of the same impulse.) Much later, the French poet Mallarmé declared war on the conventions of print in his famous *A Throw of the Dice* (1897), which twisted lines of print into representational and symbolic visual designs. A few years later, the Italian Futurists and the Dadaists continued the war on print, reading the alphabet as 26 objects for graphic elaboration, taking the letters as pure shape and sound rather than as sense. It was more than the bourgeoisie which such pranks sought to pique; it was the whole structure of conceptual reason built on alphabetic notation. This revolting enterprise was resumed and

given a philosophic tincture after World War II by French *lettrisme*, which tried to build an expressive philosophy on the shapes, rather than the meanings, of letters.

The mystical ponderation on letter-shapes has, of course, its own long tradition. Letters as graphic design motifs, a practice which started with early Greek vase painting, has been an element of twentieth-century painting from the Cubists to Pop artists like Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenburg. These strands have come to the surface again in the countercultural typography started by designer David Carson and now featured in magazines like *Wired* and increasingly across the journalistic spectrum. The medieval encyclopedist Isidore thought that the primitive shape of a word, if we traced it back far enough, would reflect its meaning. This new typographical style departs from the same premise. Words have, somehow, to *look like* what they mean. The new typography has come to public attention *in print*, but it began on the electronic screen, and it is computers which make it a commercial printing possibility.

I discuss these threads of the prose story in 'What's Next for Text?' because the prose 'counterculture' illuminates the main prose styles at every point. I don't contend that all these various artistic and philosophic expressions share a common ideology. Clearly they do not. But, in terms of the analytical method developed in this book, the distinction between looking *through* a prose surface and looking *at* it, they do share a common method, even a common agenda. They all seek to do the same thing to the conventions of consecutive alphabetic notation. They are, taken as a group, a way of reading which forms a structural opposite and complement to what we think of as conventional prose and conventional reading practices. These two ways of reading, linear *through* and imagistic *at*, taken together constitute the diastole and systole of reading itself. And this system of respiration comes to a common focus on the electronic screen. The computer screen summarizes the history of prose, indeed of alphabetic notation.

Thus the 'futurist' medium turns out to be also an intensely 'pastist' medium at the same time. Rather than repudiating the written word, as Bruce Willis so joyfully proclaims, the new electronic expressive space seems to encapsulate its long history and open out a new chapter at the same time. From its earliest beginnings, alphabetic notation established a separate symbolic space of conceptual thought, one protected from the distractions of ordinary human behavior. But this private space of abstract thought has always been a lonely and unfamiliar place, and people have yearned to relieve its unremitting abstraction by reintroducing the kinds of signals we use in everyday life: shapes, sounds, gestures. Thinking of letters as shapes, ideas as animals, phrases as gestures, makes us feel more at home.

These two impulses, to isolate writing in a special place and to pour it back into ordinary life, have always been present and you cannot understand the power of each without consulting the power of the other. We have always

oscillated between them, but the digital screen alters the frequency and the wavelength of the oscillation, and makes it, in theory and sometimes in practice, controllable by the reader. The expressive matrix which I develop in Chapters 9 and 10 turns out to chart this entire oscillation, not simply certain stages of it. We can, that is, restore the imbalance between value judgments and description in electronic as well as printed text.

The alphabetic counterculture was just that, and so inevitably, at least in modern times, an affair of the *avant garde*. Such efforts aimed to subvert the establishment, puncture the stale balloons of the bourgeoisie, expose the rotten foundations of late capitalism, and so on. Not the least of the ironies surrounding the prose story, however, is that all these brave revolutionary purposes have now been themselves subverted, stood on their heads. We are in the midst of a change from a society built on goods to a society built on information. The change is far from complete but the basic bone structure has emerged. If information has replaced goods as the central economic product, if information is not the way we talk about stuff, but the stuff we are talking about, we have to become self-conscious about it. If we are to understand information flow, that is, we have to look *at* information rather than only *through* it. The *transparency* problem again. What in *Analyzing Prose* I call the Clarity-Brevity-Sincerity or C-B-S theory of style simply will not work in an information society. There, the scarce commodity is not information but the attention we bestow on it. If we are to develop an economics of this attention, which is to say an economics for an information society, then we must develop ways to envisage, imagine, conceptualize the information. We must look *at* it. The long alphabetic counterculture has always aimed to do just this. Thus the digital computer has subverted its 'counterness.' It has made economists out of the *avant garde*. When Oldenburg created his 'soft letters' sculptures or Johns his 'alphabet paintings,' they were, like the long tradition from which they came, trying to *depict information*. So was Andy Warhol, when he chose *attention* as his great subject, and proceeded to 'paint' it via celebrity silk-screenings on the one hand and his own screening of himself as a celebrity party-goer on the other. Outraged as they would be at the domestication of their outrage, the Pop artists were economists.

Prose styles are themselves different economies of attention. They orchestrate human attention in different ways. That is what *Analyzing Prose* is all about. The computer screen, as I point out in 'What's Next for Text?' extends these economies in both space and time. But it does not alter their basic patterns. Nor does it alter the main purpose of prose – to do the alphabetic work of the world. The prose revolution is happening not only in the arts but in the world of work. In an information society, such a revolution can no longer be an affair only of the arts. If *information* will be the *stuff* of the next century, then the prose styles which communicate it will not be a peripheral discipline, a pesky ornament which gets in the way of reality and which real executives leave to their secretaries. In such a world, what has always been called *kunstprosa*, 'art prose,'

may turn out to be very utilitarian prose. It is already beginning to take its place in the emerging discipline of 'information design' – although to be sure not under the literary name *kunstprosa*!

Our customary ideas of 'substance' and 'ornament,' of 'rhetoric' and 'reality,' change places in an information society. Information design, however many names it takes on, becomes a central discipline. In such a society, to understand how prose styles work, and to be able to describe them in a commonly understood nomenclature, would seem to be an affair of some moment. It is in that spirit that I offer the second edition of *Analyzing Prose*.

Hypertextual postscripts

Several students have urged me to change the order of the book, put the last two chapters first. They would have understood the argument of Chapters 1–8 more easily, they said, if they had known where they were going. I've resisted because I wanted to start with analysis, not with generalization. But starting with the general argument might work for you. If, after a chapter or two, you need a larger framework, try it and see.

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