PERSPECTIVES ON

RHETORICAL INVENTION

Edited by

Janet M. Atwill
and
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TENNESSEE STUDIES IN LITERATURE

In loving memory of

David

Foreword

JANICE M. LAUER

In the mid-twentieth century, discussions of invention were inextricably woven with attempts to revive an interest in rhetoric within the academy, particularly in English studies. Elbert Harrington articulated this connection in his 1962 essay, "A Modern Approach to Invention," in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* contending that "most teachers know that rhetoric has always lost life and respect to the degree that invention has not had a significant and meaningful role" (373). Through complex historical circumstances, rhetorical invention had been either folded into logic (Ramus), limited to finding the known (Bacon), banished altogether from rhetoric (Blair), or devoted to "proving the truth" (Hope). The dormant if not dead state of rhetoric could be seen in the power structures of the academy in which literature eclipsed rhetoric and philosophy controlled invention. With rhetoric's loss of life and respect came the loss of power. In the early twentieth century, philosophy held sway over the study of reasoning of all kinds, restricting it to formal logic, even symbolic logic. English studies held sovereignty over written discourse, focusing only on literary discourse, abandoning rhetoric as a discipline and keeping only its application—the teaching of composition. Within composition teaching, invention was neglected, contributing to the loss of prestige and power of composition instructors.

Remarkably, within the next three decades, a plethora of inventional studies emerged within different fields in the academy, intertwined with other connected movements. In the sixties, the revival of interdisciplinary interest in rhetoric (e.g., The Rhetoric Society of America) contributed to the development of the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition and to this surge of research on invention in English studies. In 1964, I began investigating the state of invention in both contemporary theory and composition

pedagogy. By the time the study was completed, I had found new and diverse work on invention, including studies by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca and Toulmin on informal argument, adaptations of Burke's Pentad, Scott's writing on rhetoric as epistemic, Corbett's discussions on classical invention, Young, Becker, and Pike's tagmemic rhetoric as a process of inquiry, and Gordon and Wlecke's prewriting research. Entailed in these studies was a challenge to the domination of formal reasoning and an examination of the nature of inventional thinking. I argued for the relevance of studies on heuristic thinking as descriptive of the open-ended yet guided nature of inventional acts in composing written discourse. Janet Emig's study of composing processes theorized a frame for inventional acts. This work on invention in the sixties was followed in the seventies by other theories such as D'Angelo's conceptual theory of discourse, and Flower and Hayes's cognitive process model. In the eighties, Karen LeFevre argued for invention as a social act, prompting meta-theoretical discussions of prior theories, and Flower constructed a socio-cognitive theory of writing, describing collaborative planning. Throughout these decades, classrooms and textbooks continued to advocate inventional practices.

During the nineties, however, interest in invention appeared to wane in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. The purpose of this collection of essays, therefore, is to offer a forum for continued work on invention within the framework of recent developments in postmodernism, revisionist historiography, cultural studies, writing in the disciplines, technology, and other areas. If inventional research is to continue to flourish, it must remain sensitive to shifts in epistemology, ethics, and politics. The essays in this volume undertake this effort.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

FINDING A HOME OR MAKING A PATH

JANET M. ATWILL

The idea for this collection grew out of formal and informal discussions on the status of research in rhetorical invention at the beginning of the millennium. Janice Lauer and I had both expressed frustration over what we perceived as a neglect of the rhetorical canon of invention, the canon that was most responsible for the renaissance of rhetorical studies in the last half of the twentieth century. She did her own research, leading to the first essay in this collection, "Rhetorical Invention: The Diaspora." Her survey of the field brought her to two tentative conclusions. First, research in invention was being conducted, but it had, in her words, "migrated, entered, settled, and shaped" other research areas in rhetoric and composition, such as writing across the disciplines and cultural studies. Second, her investigation suggested that this research tended to be more focused on theory than practice. In other words, while researchers theorized about the concept of inquiry, they were less likely to craft the kind of heuristics generally considered to be the fullest expression of the canon.

The essays in this collection both confirm and challenge these conclusions. But the conclusions themselves raised a number of questions. Why does this research tend to privilege theory over practice? Why does the metaphor of migration seem such an apt description of invention? Is there something in the character of invention that makes it prone to migrate? Or is there something in the institution that makes invention ill at ease?

When Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of observing the available means of persuasion, he placed the art in a peculiar place between theory and practice, subjectivism and empiricism, the aesthetic and the utilitarian. These binary oppositions have never served invention very well. Indeed,

the status of the art would seem to be fairly described by Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* as "a place that is neither theoretical nor practical or else both theoretical and practical" (38). While this indeterminacy has productive potential, Derrida also points to the risk of inhabiting such an ill-defined space: "But this here, this place is announced as a place deprived of place. It runs the risk, in taking place, of not having its own proper domain" (38).

We might agree with Derrida that art's productive capacity lies in its potential to subvert rather than secure binary oppositions. However, the history of research in invention in the last half of the twentieth century— at least in American higher education—suggests that institutions are ill designed to accommodate this indeterminacy. When confronted with these oppositions, the institution has shown a propensity to choose theory over practice and to accommodate the subjective and aesthetic over the empirical and utilitarian. To be sure, the complex character of rhetorical invention is responsible in part for its ambiguous status. Invention is concerned with practice, but it aims at creating arts that can inform practice across situations. Moreover, while the art aims at enabling practice, throughout its history it has been defended as being more than an instrumental means to an end. Still, while historical research in invention has continued relatively uninterrupted in classical studies and speech communication, other forms of research in invention have faced a number of challenges, especially research in English studies.

Early studies in invention were conceived as "useful" responses to the needs of composition, but this research provoked controversy as it touched on a number of closely related oppositions: humanities set against technology; creativity set against problem solving; the individual set against society. Research in the sixties and seventies was interdisciplinary, frequently drawing on linguistics, but some of that research also drew on empirical studies and methodologies from the social sciences. Most early researchers were careful to link their work to literary studies or the humanistic tradition—as if anticipating that exploring this canon that was so concerned with practical activity would be met with questions. For example, Richard Young and Alton Becker opened their 1965 article, "Toward a Modern Theory of Rhetoric: A Tagmemic Contribution," with the statement that "the heart of a liberal education was the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric"; and "modern linguistics," they asserted, had "come to encompass more and more of this trivium" (135). Ross Winterowd similarly allied his research with linguistics, drawing in

particular on Roman Jakobson's schema analysis. However, in the introduction to his *Contemporary Rhetoric,* he used this linguistic method to analyze the poetry of Allen Ginsberg. Janet Emig unabashedly advocated empirical methodologies for studying writing. Still, in situating *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders,* she compared and contrasted her case study method to the first-person accounts of writing by such authors as James Joyce, Thomas Mann, and William Wordsworth.

Janice Lauer's well-known debate with Ann Berthoff foregrounded perceptions of what was at stake in transgressing the boundary between the humanities and the social sciences. Less apologetic than her colleagues, Lauer insisted in her 1970 *College Composition and Communication* article, "Heuristics and Composition," that it was time for writing teachers to "break out of the ghetto" and "investigate beyond the field of English, beyond even the area of rhetorical studies" (396). She proposed that compositionists explore research on heuristics in creative problem solving being conducted in psychology, and her article included an extensive bibliography to encourage exploration.

In "The Problem of Problem Solving," published in *College Composition and Communication* in 1971, Berthoff attacked Lauer's proposal on several fronts. She argued that Lauer set problem solving in opposition to creativity, despite the fact that Lauer had consistently used the term "creative problem solving." Most of Berthoff's critique, however, was mounted on disciplinary, institutional, and political grounds. Lauer was faulted for using the research of psychologists, whom Berthoff referred to as "technologists of learning" whose approaches were "politically not above suspicion" (237). She accused Lauer of failing to consider the "crucial interdependency of psychological and political factors" (237). Berthoff insisted that a "psychology of learning, no matter how carefully researched or how liberal its assumptions, can be politically dangerous unless it is conceived in the context of a sound sociology of knowledge" (239). For Berthoff, a "sound sociology of knowledge" required defining "the common ground of all school work, of all disciplines" (240). Moreover, this undertaking was, according to Berthoff, "philosophical precisely because it is concerned with that juncture of the public and personal, the social and individual, the political and the psychological" (240). Berthoff concluded that the questions raised by Lauer (and presumably other composition researchers like her) could be adequately answered without stepping outside the humanities building.

What was missing from Berthoff's critique was a sense of what classical philosophers called the domain of probable knowledge. It was in this domain that Aristotle placed not only rhetoric but also the political and ethical knowledge that informed public, civic discourse. In the institution depicted by Berthoff, there seemed to be only two types of knowledge: the humanistic exploration of value, on the one hand, and hard, instrumental, scientific knowledge, on the other. Lauer touched on this distinction in her response to Berthoff's article, pointing out that Berthoff was collapsing science and technology. Lauer argued that though researchers used empirical, "scientific" methodologies, they did not view creative problem solving as a closed, rule-bound process ("Response to Berthoff" 209).

Berthoff's second response, "Counterstatement," seemed to confirm that what was finally at stake were disciplinary boundaries and the character and status of the humanities. Berthoff insisted that the questions to which Lauer turned to cognitive psychologists for answers were questions that "we can ask pretty much on our own" (415). The answers could be found "by looking again at those writers we happen to admire; by reading the notebooks and journals of artists and thinkers . . . and by talking with present-day artists and artisans" (415). Thus Berthoff concluded: "If we make use of the knowledge we have as teachers of English, we can pursue such speculation fruitfully, without the guidance of psychologists who are studying the 'area' of 'creativity.' For creativity is not an area; it is the heart of the matter and the matter is using the mind to create images and models by means of language" (415).

It would be unfair to separate the Lauer-Berthoff exchange from its historical context. Berthoff was quite accurate in her assessment of the encroaching influence on the university of science and technology, an influence funded in large part by defense research contracts. The dehumanized uses of scientific and technological research had been critiqued in the work of the Frankfurt School and C. Wright Mills. Thus, early research in invention was conducted in a time of institutional change and political turmoil. Moreover, it is not surprising that traditional humanists might have been uncomfortable with the research methodologies of other fields. But, for Berthoff, the question of research methodology became a question of politics. It is difficult not to believe that such reactions had a chilling effect on research in invention.

The issue of methodology and politics in research in invention was raised again in the late eighties in James Berlin's critiques of cognitive rhetoric. Berlin's critique was explicitly leftist, and his postmodern

orientation raised some elements of the debate to a higher power. In "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," Berlin challenged the work of Linda Flower and John Hayes for its empirical orientation. According to Berlin, this orientation was based on a naive epistemological foundationalism, which, Berlin argued, betrayed its compatibility—if not complicity—with the "new American university system," whose primarily mission was to rationalize and enable competitive capitalism (480). As Berlin used them, the terms "science" and "empirical" were so charged as to function themselves as indictments. Berlin observed that "there is no question that Flower considers her work to fall within the domain of science"; indeed, "her statements about the composing process of writing . . . are based on empirical findings, on 'data-based' study, specifically the analysis of protocols recording the writing of choices of both experienced and inexperienced writers" (481). Berlin argued that the cognitive paradigm's view of language suggests that there is "a beneficent correspondence between the structures of the mind, the structures of the world, the structures of the minds of the audience, and the structures of language"(483). Flower's use of the terms "problem solving" and "goal directed" were cited as evidence that "the rationalization of the writing process is specifically designated an extension of the rationalization of economic activity" (483). The cognitive paradigm was further suspect because it focused on the writer as an individual: "problem solving is finally the act of an individual performing in isolation, solitary and alone" (482). Thus Berlin concluded that cognitive rhetoric was "eminently suited to appropriation by the proponents of a particular ideological stance, a stance consistent with the modern college's commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism" (482).

Like Lauer, Flower argued that Berlin's critique misconstrued the character of her research. In her response to Berlin, Flower defended the probabilistic nature of such inquiry, explaining: "We build theories and models in order to test our perceptions against experience, even though such 'tests' must still rely on a theoretical perspective and probabilistic claims, whether they are based on rhetoric or statistics" (766). However, once more research methodology was tied to politics, and this version of invention research was characterized as epistemologically and politically suspect.

History would moderate both sets of exchanges. Both Berthoff and Lauer elaborated on issues raised in shorthand in their discussion in *College Composition and Communication*. Berlin offered a more nuanced

understanding of institutional culture in his last book, *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures*. Flower applied the problem-solving model to groups and community issues, as her article with Julia Deems in this collection details. Still, it is difficult not to believe that the intensity of these critiques did not shape the direction of research in invention, inhibiting the kind of cumulative research that helps a field of study develop and mature.

As postmodern theory gained influence in humanistic studies, one might have expected its deconstruction of binary oppositions to have made the canon of invention more comprehensible. More often, however, postmodernism has been deployed to challenge invention. For example, in "Antifoundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition," Stanley Fish argued that the knowledge associated with practice is so situation-bound that theories can never cross situations to shape and inform practice. Indeed, since theory-making, itself, is its own discrete practice, theory can have "no consequences." Fish's conception of postmodernism would seem to offer little to inform research in invention since the very purpose of inventional strategies is to enable practice across rhetorical situations. Other versions of postmodernism have significantly more to offer to our understanding of invention. Pierre Bourdieu's theory/practice critiques, for example, hold potential for elucidating both commonsense, probable knowledge and the kind of knowledge called "art." For the most part, however, invention has been put on the defensive by postmodernism.

The essays in this collection may then be viewed as both legacies and interventions into the institutional values and state of research in invention. They are legacies in that they continue to grapple with the opposition between theory and practice. Moreover, while these essays are interdisciplinary, only a few invoke methodologies outside the humanities. They are interventions on several points. Several of these essays confront the relationship between invention and postmodernism—some by refiguring invention, others by challenging postmodernism. Others examine invention in light of rhetoric's civic function, seeking to redefine that function for our own postmodern polis. Scholars also offer cultural and historical perspectives that enlarge our conception of invention.

Debra Hawhee's "Kairotic Encounters" uses concepts from classical rhetoric and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to outline a postmodern theory of invention. She argues that modernism has constrained our understanding of invention by two binary conceptions of invention: invention as

the discovery of a pre-existent object or the creative production of a unified subject. According to Hawhee, both conceptions of invention depend on a traditional notion of subjectivity. Hawhee offers in its place a conception of subjectivity and invention that she describes as "invention-in-the-middle." She draws on several sources to outline this notion of invention: the middle voice in Greek; the concepts of *kairos, intermezzo,* and *dunamis;* and Gorgias' style in the *Helen.* According to this conception of invention, the subject is the outcome rather than the source of the rhetorical situation, fluidly acting in the moment to effect change.

In "Rhetoric and Hermeneutics: Division Through the Concept of Invention," Arabella Lyon addresses the institutional values that have suppressed rhetoric's public function by privileging interpretation over invention—hermeneutics over heuristics. Lyon holds postmodernism's concern with textuality partly to blame, maintaining that this turn "toward interpretation and away from production and 'making'" has effaced rhetoric's public function—or, as she puts it, rhetoric's identification with "action in the world." Lyon examines the hermeneutic/heuristic opposition as it appears in Michael Leff's debates with Dilip Gaonkar and in the work of Steven Mailloux. She concludes that an adequate understanding of the hermeneutic/heuristic distinction allows each to function without eclipsing the other.

Like Hawhee, Yameng Liu also focuses on postmodernism's challenge to the discovery/creation binary. In "Invention and Inventiveness," Liu deals more specifically with the institutionalization of modernist values that have secured this opposition, locating the source of invention as discovery in the thought of Francis Bacon and invention as creation in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's romantic conception of discourse production. Liu explores the dependence of both views of invention on a stable, sovereign subject and examines Derrida's deconstruction of the discovery/creation binary. In place of this binary, Liu offers the notion of "inventiveness," which he describes as a "strike for the new without attempting a clear severance with the old." Liu maintains that the deconstruction of the discovery/creation binary holds specific implications for rhetorical pedagogy. It forces us to reexamine the notions of originality and creativity we convey to students and to rethink not only our conceptions of the speaker/writer but also the audience.

In "Institutional Invention: (How) Is It Possible?" Louise Wetherbee Phelps argues that rhetorical invention provides a useful paradigm for understanding constraints on institutional change in academic contexts. She

observes that rhetoric plays several roles in institutional development: as a means of change, as a language for explaining invention, and as a feature of its organization as a system. Phelps draws on a number of sources in addition to rhetorical theory: the history of education, theories of institutional and organizational behavior, and her own experiences in educational administration. She maintains that invention by institutions, especially academic ones, can be developed as a practical art, one that not only enables academic institutions to be environments that foster creativity but also allows institutions to reinvent themselves in creative and productive ways.

In "Conflict in Community Collaboration," Linda Flower and Julia Deems bring invention to bear on rhetoric's civic function by examining the use of heuristics in community problem solving. They offer the most explicit discussion of practical heuristics as they explore a series of discussions between tenants and low-income landlords at the Community Literacy Center in Pittsburgh's Northside. Their article records participants' own inventive processes and goes on to examine how heuristics based on the group's deliberative processes helped them to create a discursive space between antagonism and forced consensus. In particular, Flower and Deems discuss the heuristic use of "scenarios," which they describe as "what if" narratives that help participants expand the range of options for community problem solving. As Flower and Deems describe it, invention in this context calls for a generative, openly deliberative, and non-adversarial rhetoric. Such a rhetoric must be capable of not only articulating differences but also engaging in collaborative planning, constructing multivocal meanings, and gaining consensus about actions, if not ideas.

In a different context, Donald Lazere also seeks to restore rhetoric's civic function to the teaching of writing. In "Invention, Critical Thinking, and the Analysis of Political Rhetoric," he argues that effective engagement in public rhetoric requires the ability not only to create but also to analyze public discourse. Lazere maintains that backlash from the academic culture wars has put pressure on writing teachers to take politics out of the classroom, but he insists that participating in rhetoric's public function requires understanding the terms and strategies of contemporary political argument. Lazere contends that engaging students in analyzing political rhetoric fosters critical thinking, as it requires such skills as distinguishing fact from opinion, identifying assumptions, predicting probable consequences, and recognizing different value orientations and ideologies. Building on his work in teaching the political conflicts, he offers specific strategies for interpreting political arguments. Lazere concludes his essay with a discussion of inventional strategies for creating

public arguments. Thus Lazere points to a contemporary rhetoric of political discourse, one that is responsible at the same time that it enables dissent and the expression of strong convictions.

Another perspective on rhetoric's civic function is offered by Jay Satterfield and Frederick Antczak in "American Pragmatism and the Public Intellectual: Poetry, Prophecy, and the Process of Invention in Democracy." Both scholars acknowledge that postmodern critiques of foundationalism have so focused on the cultural and institutional constraints on knowledge as to problematize the very notion of invention. In the wake of "collapsed foundations," they offer pragmatism as an ethical and epistemological paradigm that can underwrite a post-foundationalist theory of invention. In this paradigm, they define invention broadly as "the creation of new thought that is workable, but also sharable." More specifically, they describe inventional theory in the pragmatic tradition as politically effective knowledge created in an historically contingent public space. They find the most complete expression of this paradigm in the thought of Cornel West. According to Satterfield and Antczak, West's pragmatism resists foundationalism's naive conceptions of subjectivity, while still allowing for meaningful knowledge and public action. In this paradigm, invention consists in public dialogues directed toward collective action within politically minded institutions.

Haixia Wang uses the work of a Classical Chinese thinker to examine the ways culture shapes conceptions of invention, subjectivity, social hierarchy, and political possibility. In "Inventing Chinese Rhetorical Culture: Zhuang Zi's Teaching," Wang explains that the philosopher viewed invention in an analogical and dynamic relation to context. For Zhuang Zi, invention is characterized by the acts of analyzing, sorting, and assessing— all of which are contingent upon specific circumstances. Understanding this sense of contingency, according to Wang, is key to understanding the probable nature of the Tao. Wang examines, in particular, Zhuang Zi's conception of *ziran*, which she says can be translated as "spontaneity" and "movements of choice," guided not by rules or wild impulses but by a clear vision of things. Wang maintains that for Zhuang Zi this vision could be possessed by everyone. Thus Zhuang Zi's teachings were in tension with the hierarchical character of China's system of imperial examinations. Wang brings these notions to bear not only on Chinese conceptions of invention but also on the Tiananmen Square tragedy.

The last two articles offer historical perspectives on invention. In "Literacy in Athens During the Archaic Period: A Prolegomenon to Rhetorical Invention," Richard Enos describes how the cultural and economic

constraints on literacy in Archaic Greece shaped conceptions of invention in the Classical Period. Enos argues that in Archaic Greece writing was viewed as a labor skill—or craft trade—"used by non-experts for facilitating everyday activities," particularly various forms of record keeping. As Enos explains it, these literate record keepers were not aristocrats; indeed, up to the Classical Period, they were generally members of the lowest census class. Enos describes a division of labor between reading and writing that fell along class lines. In this context, the rhetorical curricula of such rhetoricians as Isocrates were revolutionary because they defined writing as a heuristic that facilitated creativity and encouraged intellectual complexity. Enos's discussion is important for providing a more complete context for understanding both the development of rhetoric's public function and the debates between Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle concerning writing and rhetoric.

"Vico's Triangular Invention," by Mark Williams and Theresa Enos, explores the eighteenth-century rhetorician's theories of knowledge, rhetoric, and invention for insights to inform the teaching of invention. They discuss Vico's conception of invention in the context of his debates with Descartes concerning reason and imagination and pay special attention to the ways in which Vico's conceptions of topical invention, common sense, and memory are contingent on both context and history. Williams and Enos illustrate how Vico's unique integration of these disparate elements undermines the opposition of individual imagination and collective consciousness, providing a basis for rhetoric's public function.

These essays reveal scholars' confrontations with the constraints and possibilities that attend contemporary research in invention. Will they help to create a more protected space for the art? That may still be an open question. Early Greek conceptions of invention depicted the art as a process and act of "making a path." To make a path is to enable new perspectives, new points of contact—even new destinations. Perhaps this is a more productive way of envisioning the art—creating spaces, rather than securing them.

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