

HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON WRITING

HISTORY, SOCIETY, SCHOOL,
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CHAPTER 36

Persuasion, Audience, and Argument

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A writer writes in order to influence readers, to change their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Readers make judgments about validity and plausibility; they ask questions about importance, relevance, and interest; and they decide whether action is warranted. The authors and readers who interact by way of a written text operate from specific sociohistorical contexts, contexts that may differ in time, location, and culture. Writing is thus a complex, dynamic, and situated mode of communication, and persuasion—the aim to influence—is a dimension of all writing, not a distinct type or genre of discourse that can be separated from “informative” or “expressive” or other supposedly nonpersuasive types. Researchers who seek to understand these dimensions of writing—the interactions of writer, reader, context, and text—enter the province of rhetoric, the classical art of choosing from among the available means of persuasion. As Kennedy (1998) describes it, rhetoric is “a form of mental and emotional energy” (p. 3) aimed at affecting a situation.

Although valuable work on the interactions of readers, writers, and texts has been conducted by educational psychologists (see chap. 27, this volume), much of it has been confined to factors affecting comprehension and recall. In the United States, the rhetorical perspective has been explored mainly by scholars in communication studies, those in English with specializations in composition studies (including rhetoric, technical and professional communication, electronic media), and occasionally in other disciplines, such as history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. Comprehensive introductions to the field of rhetoric are provided by two recent encyclopedias, Enos (1996) and Sloane (2001). Questions raised from the rhetorical perspective have been approached with a variety of historical, speculative, analytical, observational, and experimental methods, and there are several useful guides to methods of analysis and research in the areas we cover. For rhetorical analysis and rhetorical criticism, Barton and Stygall (2001) include a chapter by Fahnestock and Secor, Bazerman and Prior (2004) include a chapter by Selzer, and Jasinski (2001) includes a long entry on criticism in contemporary rhetorical studies. For other modes of textual and verbal data analysis, Barton and Stygall, Bazerman and Prior, and Geisler (2003) provide detailed guidance.

In this chapter, after providing a brief orientation, we synthesize rhetorical research into current questions about the central issues of audience and argument, focusing on studies of three kinds: analysis of textual features, inquiry-based experimentation, and pedagogical application.

ORIENTATION: THE RHETORICAL APPROACH TO WRITING

Historically, rhetoric emerged in response to the communicative demands of governance in ancient Greece and Rome, where citizens and leaders conducted public business in public forums and assemblies. Public discourse was seen as an event or performance, not an artifact or text; as dialogue or deliberation, not as monologue; and as subject to standards of effectiveness or expedience, not of form or correctness. Rhetorical theories were developed and refined over the centuries by pedagogues such as the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, and later Cicero. These theories assumed that a (typically male) speaker was physically present in a large assembly and appealed directly to hearers by drawing on his knowledge of the community and its values and by making skillful use of performative gestures and vocal qualities as well as verbal language and argument (for an accessible history, see Kennedy, 1999). In these societies, persuasion was understood and valued as "an instrument of power," as "a political tool" (Vernant, 1982, p. 49).

Traditionally, then, theories of rhetoric developed under an instrumental and intentional model: Persuasion was assumed to be a purposive function centered in the speaker and under his or her conscious control. This model has undergirded a substantial line of empirical research in communication studies and social psychology that we cannot cover here. The model has also been subject to postmodern critique, pressed particularly by Gaonkar (1997), who characterizes classical rhetoric as an "ideology of human agency" that views the speaker "as the seat of origin rather than a point of articulation." In many ways, Gaonkar's critique was anticipated by Burke (1969). In conceptualizing a "new rhetoric," Burke replaces "persuasion" as the key term with "identification," which takes into account tacit persuasive influences such as social cohesion, courtship, and class relationships in addition to deliberate design.

The presumption that persuasion depends on a proximate audience and an oral modality weakened with the advent of writing as a central force in Western culture (Olson & Torrance, 2001; Ong, 1982). Even in classical Greece, rhetorical theorists recognized that the written modality would affect an author's persuasive options and composing process. The pivotal figure framing the debate was Plato (1998b, 1998a), who paradoxically rejected both persuasion and writing, denouncing rhetoric as a threat to social order. For Plato, persuasion is dangerous because it derives from partial and partisan interests and it seeks advantage rather than truth. Writing is dangerous because it reduces the mental discipline necessary for composing, memorizing, and delivering an address on the one hand, and for comprehending and critiquing a speech on the other. Ironically enough, Plato's own use of the written modality made his critique so durable and influential that it may well have dampened scholarly interest in the role that persuasion plays in writing for centuries.

Writing changes the concept of communication. First, writing transforms the particularity of an oral situation into a decontextualized and universalized space. As Ong (1982) emphasizes, the evanescence of the spoken word is replaced by the fixity and durability of the text, which can be introduced into any situation. Second, writing transforms persuasion into logic. Writing directs the attention beyond what an immediate audience is willing to accept to what any rational hearer *should* accept (see Barker, 2000; Crosswhite, 1996). Scholars even argue that Aristotle's conceptualization of the syllogism, the basis of deductive logic, was fostered by his use of the written modality (Lentz, 1989; Ong, 1982). Third, writing transforms an audience into readers. An audience, as Ong (1975) notes, is a present and participating collectivity, but readers are a distant and fragmented plurality, and readership is a decontextualized abstraction. Ricoeur (1981, 202) calls this transformation the "exemplary" achievement of writing, that it "explodes" the "narrowness of the dialogical relation" into a universality of address. And fourth, writing transforms performance into text. Text fixes meaning in the sense that discourse ceases to be an event and becomes a proposition. Written text dissociates propositional meaning from authorial intention, thus achieving a kind of autonomy (Ricoeur, 1981).

To study the persuasive dimension of writing, therefore, scholars must recapture its qualities as situated, addressed, performative, and ethical—qualities that are obscured by writing. Rhetoric calls for a dynamic recontextualization of a text within a history, discourse tradition, published literature, or set of social conventions. Only then do the elements of situation, timing, audience, action, and ethics become central, allowing us to ask questions about the nature and effects of writing that would not otherwise be possible.

QUESTIONS CONCERNING AUDIENCE

With its roots in orality, rhetoric has a bias for viewing audiences as particular: the jury in *this* trial, the citizens of *this* city-state, the students in *this* classroom. For Kenneth Burke (1969), understanding rhetoric depends on seeing “its nature as *addressed*, since persuasion implies an audience” (p. 38). As Aristotle (1991) put it, “The persuasive is persuasive to someone” (I.ii.11). One sign of the centrality of audience for Aristotle is that his basic taxonomy of speeches grows out of the hearers’ purpose (*telos*): to decide policy (deliberative speeches), conduct an inquiry (forensic speeches), or perform a ceremony (epideictic speeches) (I.iii.1). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that because the function of speech is “to influence men’s souls,” the speaker must have knowledge of the different types of souls and the ways each type can be persuaded of different things (Plato, 1998b, 271d). For recent reviews and guides to the literature on audience within rhetorical studies, see the entries in Sloane (2001), Jasinski (2001), and Enos (1996).

In contrast to rhetoric, writing has a bias for an abstract or generalized conception of audience which is reflected in the literary tradition. Among literary scholars, only historicist and “reader response” critics make a point of focusing on delimited groups of readers. Likewise, few empirical studies have focused on the effects of writing for particular audiences. In many academic writing tasks, the designated audience is a remote and unknowable abstraction: “general” readers, “peers,” “educated” readers, “younger adults,” local leaders. Because writing so easily transcends its moment of composition, the rhetorical study of audience in writing must engage both ways of thinking about audience, the particular and the generalized.

In this section, we connect the available research to rhetorical conceptions of audience. We begin by examining ways of defining audience. Then we consider how audience affects the production of a text and how writers learn to accommodate an audience.

What Counts as an Audience and What Audience Counts?

In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) define audience as “the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation” (p. 19). This seemingly simple definition raises at least three difficulties. First, by invoking the speaker’s “wishes,” it raises a host of questions about intentionality. We alluded to some of these questions in the introduction and return to this issue in the section on argument. Second, this definition puts no limits on the “ensemble” that an author may “wish to influence,” allowing it to range from a list of specific living people (a realist conception of audience) to the widest assemblage a speaker can imagine across time and space (a constructivist conception). Third, the definition leaves open the issue raised by arguing in the written modality, between the particularity of rhetoric and the universalism of writing.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) take on this last problem explicitly by defining the universal audience as “the whole of mankind, or at least, of all normal, adult persons” (p. 30) of which a particular audience is an unrepresentative subset. For this reason, a particular audience can be persuaded, whereas the universal audience must be convinced; particular

audiences can be approached by way of values, whereas the universal audience (which transcends partisan values) must be approached with facts, truths, and presumptions, in other words, with what the society regards as "the real." Thus, writing to the universal audience aims at a higher standard, providing a "norm for objective argumentation" (p. 31); it is in effect a representation of the faculty of reason. Dillon (1991) points out that writing to an academic audience at the postsecondary level is often equated with writing to this kind of timeless universal audience, rather than to the general public of the writer's time.

Convincing the universal audience is commonly portrayed as ethically superior to persuading a particular audience. The appeal of the universal audience derives from its transcendence of time, space, and other limitations and thus, presumably, of the possibilities for manipulation and deception. In contrast, the need to accommodate a particular audience can conflict with a commitment to truth or justice and can promote the very prejudices that give the audience its particularity. This is why Plato condemned rhetoric as flattery. But the "universal" audience can be a projection or idealization by a particular writer or by an academic community that will be understood as particular by audiences who cannot identify with it.

In fact, for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), particular and general audiences do not correspond to "real" and "constructed" audiences respectively. They treat both universal and particular audiences as constructions of the speaker, maintaining that "each individual, each culture, has ... its own conception of the universal audience" and "everyone constitutes the universal audience from what he knows of his fellow men" (p. 33; see also chap. 3 of Gross & Dearin, 2003). Other constructivist conceptions of audience are Black's (1970) "second persona," Booth's (1961) "implied reader" in fiction, Charland's (1995) "constituted" audience, Ede and Lunsford's (1984) "audience invoked," and Ong's (1975) treatment of the audience as a "fiction." The constructed audience can emphasize the writer's point of view, as a part of what the writer has to create and control, or the reader's point of view, as a role that the reader must be willing to assume in order to take on the writer's perspective. Black, for example, refers to the textualized second persona as "a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become" (p. 113).

Acknowledging these difficulties, Crosswhite (1996, p. 151) offers a reading of the universal audience that makes it both "concrete and universal" by being an emergent ideal built specifically in local situations from particular materials.

Discussions of particular audiences often have a realist rather than constructivist conception. But realism involves its own complications. Does it refer to the set of living people to whom the text is literally addressed or to the people who actually sit down and read it? Ede and Lunsford (1984) use the term "audience addressed" to focus on actual living people who can be identified yet who serve as an audience only when rhetorically constituted, such as by receiving the text. As part of his highly influential discussion of the rhetorical situation, Lloyd Bitzer (1968) conceives of audience as specific real persons who are "capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (p. 8). Bitzer explicitly raises the possibility that the argument will fail if it is made at the wrong time or addressed to the wrong people.

A somewhat broader realist conception describes ongoing societies and associations that evolve and change their memberships over time and that continually revisit some sets of issues. Examples of these audiences include academic disciplines or professions, advocacy and interest groups, and loose associations of neighbors. This kind of audience has been described both as discourse community (e.g., Porter, 1992) and as public (e.g., Hauser, 1999). Both concepts differ from particular audiences by representing durable (though evolving) structures of interests and values that are manifested through real people, people who could become audiences (or rhetors) in a given rhetorical situation. Discourse communities and publics constrain and enable rhetorical agents as well as authorizing them and their arguments (Miller, 1993). The discourse community is thus similar to the linguistic concept of a speech community, as explained by Nystrand (1982), who contrasts it with the audience: "Speakers address their audiences...through particular texts but become members of their speech communities by learning the ways-of-speaking of these groups, and especially the *potential for making many texts*" (p. 15; emphasis original).

A final dimension of audience concerns difference, those who oppose the author's argument, those whom the author ignores, and those who are denied a role in the discourse (Lunsford & Ede, 1996). Wander's (1984) concept of the "third persona," for example, "focuses on audiences negated through the 'text'—the language, the speaking situation, the established order shaping both" (p. 216). Roberts-Miller (2004) analyzes the various ways a society can set its communicative purpose and its tolerance of dissent, ranging from societies devoted to free-ranging bull-sessions to tight homogeneous enclaves of true believers who squelch dissent. Roberts-Miller's analysis is especially useful to compositionists because she explicitly relates these possibilities to the different ways in which the writing classroom has been conceptualized.

How Do a Writer's Assumptions About Audience Affect the Production of a Text?

Of all the ideas an adult writer has while composing a text, only a small percentage makes it into the final draft (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). A writer's decisions about the form and content of a text are strongly influenced, for good or for ill, by considerations of audience. Writers decide how much to elaborate on their ideas on the basis of what they think their readers know. Researchers have found that when writing to readers they see as knowledgeable, familiar, and sympathetic, writers omit important details that they assume are shared knowledge. For example, in a study of middle school students, Cohen and Riel (1989) found writers wrote less engagingly and descriptively for their instructor than for a peer cohort overseas who could not be presumed to know about local events, athletes, and customs. Without knowing the intended audience, both the instructors and independent raters gave higher evaluations to the essays for peers.

Writers also tailor the development of their claims according to perceived levels of agreement with the audience. Wolfe (2002) found that when college students wrote on an issue to an audience they perceived as committed to a position, they included more reasons and evidence, whereas when writing to a general audience, they spent more time simply summarizing and describing the issue.

Effects of audience seem to arise only when students take the putative audience seriously. In a study following a set of engineering students over two semesters, Herrington (1985) found that the plausibility of the audience seemed to lead to large differences in their writing. When enrolled in a design class working on projects for hypothetical clients, the students frequently discussed their audience's needs. In contrast, they rarely considered any audience other than the instructor in a traditional laboratory class; they simply followed the strictures for a lab report, even though their syllabus directed them to write with a similar hypothetical client audience in mind. Consistent with these findings, Winsor (1996) found that students gave much less attention to audience considerations in classroom projects than when interning in the workplace.

Students also have difficulty accommodating audiences with whom they cannot identify. Hays and Brandt (1992) observed that college students who were asked to present arguments to audiences opposed to their positions (e.g., appealing to bartenders to support stricter drunk-driving regulations) resorted more often to hectoring their readers, sometimes in pejorative terms.

How Do Writers Approach Indifferent or Resistant Readers?

In any real-world context, writers must assume that readers may question or disagree with any given point, including assumptions that are left implicit in a text. Readers can respond by challenging the validity (or facticity) of a claim, by challenging its value (or quality), and/or by being unwilling to adopt the reader role constructed for them or to accept

unstated assumptions. Considering the audience, therefore, is not simply a matter of selecting the information that readers need to understand the argument. Instead, writers must anticipate objections and questions and develop persuasive appeals, including building on common ground, refuting opposing claims, offering an acceptable reader-writer relationship, and presuming upon appropriate beliefs and values.

In the classical period when rhetorical theory was developed, the citizenry was far more homogeneous than today. For this reason, some classical strategies seem reactive, based on fairly simple inferences about what the audience knows, agrees, expects. But today's academic, civic, and commercial settings are far more complex, particularly because written texts are available to readers who are distant in both time and location from the writer. It is far more difficult for a writer today to accommodate readers' beliefs and attitudes.

Audience resistance is especially common when a writer advances new ideas that are likely to overturn current beliefs or desires. The concept of novelty relates to an historical context, either the one in which the writer makes an argument or the many in which a reader may engage with the written text. Writers who wish to contribute to an ongoing debate over an issue must be able to tell whether their positions are new or old (Kaufert & Geisler, 1989; Ong, 1975). Otherwise, the writer is very likely to come across as naive, uninformed, or boring. Knowing what is new also means knowing what has already been said and how it was received. That is, writers must situate new ideas carefully in the context of older ones, as documented in published articles in journals, newspapers, company records, and so on. Novelty is essentially rhetorical because *new* and *old* can be defined only in relation to a given community at a given time.

Swales (1990) explored how research writers position their work between the old and the new to maximize interest and minimize resistance. After analyzing hundreds of introductions to academic journal articles, Swales found a consistent pattern that scholars use to establish the topic area, review previous work, expose a gap or inconsistency in this work, and introduce their new study as a way to address the gap. His "create a research space" (CARS) model has been used to investigate the expectations that academic readers bring to a text and the evolution of research issues over time (Paul, 2004; Paul & Charney, 1995). Miller (1992) connects the CARS model to the classical Greek concept of *kairos*, which captures the writer's imperative to seize the most opportune moment for a message.

Authors of academic journal articles have been observed putting considerable effort into gaining insider status to aid them in anticipating audience responses and making every aspect of the text as persuasive as possible. In Myers's (1990) study of two senior biologists writing grant proposals, the one with an ongoing research project looked for ways to heighten the novelty and interest of the project, whereas the other, who was attempting to branch into a new area of biology, had to adopt a new set of discourse conventions to persuade researchers in the new area to take him seriously. Similarly, Blakeslee (2001) observed that physicists who wanted to persuade chemists to consider a new statistical modeling technique relied on direct interactions with audience members to learn about audience knowledge and concerns.

In many situations, such as election campaigns, several writers with opposing positions compete to persuade an audience whose members are undecided. In these situations, differences in the way the writers characterize the audience can affect their success. For example, Kaufert and Butler (1996) argue that part of Abraham Lincoln's success in his famous debates with Stephen Douglas derived from his recognition that residents of Illinois were following the speeches by reading transcripts in newspapers. Lincoln took advantage of his audience's growing familiarity with his position to move his arguments along from speech to speech. In contrast, Douglas' addresses repeated points with which the audience was already familiar. However, most audiences are too complex to characterize easily. Kirsch (1990) found vast differences in characterizations when three experienced writers were asked to appeal to the same intended audience. Furthermore, despite their extensive rhetorical efforts to shake up the preconceptions of their audience of evolutionary biologists,

Stephen Jay Gould's and R. C. Lewontin's readers were apparently quite successful in using standard scientific reading strategies (D. H. Charney, 1993; Gragson & Selzer, 1993).

Researchers have also investigated what writers do when addressing readers in differential power relations. Winsor (2003) reports on a careful study of communication within and across levels of a workplace hierarchy. Like others, Winsor found that organizational hierarchies are reflected in many aspects of written communication between supervisors and subordinates. However, she also found that workers at each level enjoyed some agency that shaped their less official communications with others.

How Do Writers Learn to Accommodate an Audience?

The difficulties that undergraduates have in accommodating audiences have been recognized for many years, after Flower (1979) vividly described students producing "writer-based" rather than "reader-based" prose. As the complexity of writing to academic, civic, and professional audiences became apparent in the 1980s, researchers began to focus on students' conceptions of audience and how to enrich them. What kinds of audiences should students be asked to address? What pedagogical practices would help students learn to adapt to a wide variety of audiences? What courses or combinations of courses would be most effective: general composition courses, courses in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or writing in Writing in the Disciplines (WID)?

A series of observational case studies suggests that writers learn to make major adjustments to audience across their college, graduate, and professional careers. First-year college students were observed in several studies having difficulty adopting an authoritative stance without becoming authoritarian or denying the possibility of uncertainty or dissent (Berkenkotter, 1984; Haas, 1994; Penrose & Geisler, 1994; Smagorinsky, 1997). Even within the period of one academic term, Herrington (1992) observed two undergraduates in an anthropology class developing stances more appropriate for their discipline after oscillating between personal narrative and impersonal authoritarianism. As revealed by studies employing think-aloud protocols (Geisler, 1994; Penrose & Geisler, 1994), some student writers mistakenly believe that their own insights and experiences have no place in academic writing, perhaps overapplying strictures intended to promote research.

A similar struggle to create an appropriate relationship to a disciplinary audience seems to take place during graduate school (Belcher, 1994; Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Blakeslee, 2001; Dong, 1996). Blakeslee observed a physics professor taking great pains to convince a postdoctoral student that the audience would not be interested in a long passage of technical background information that the student had spent a long time developing. Belcher (1994) and Dong (1996) both observed graduate students (in this case, non-native English speakers) having difficulty learning which articles deserved citation in their drafts so that readers would perceive them as knowledgeable. Beyond graduate school, Myers (1995) has shown that biological and medical researchers who are experienced in accommodating their disciplinary audiences may have difficulty in addressing the expectations of patent examiners.

Studies such as these have led to calls for writing instruction to focus on addressing actual audiences (Blakeslee, 2001), rather than universal or constructed audiences. Other instructional techniques that increase awareness of audience involve presenting writers with feedback from representative readers (Schraver, 1992; Sitko, 1993).

QUESTIONS CONCERNING ARGUMENT

At different points in its 2,500-year history, rhetoric has been conceptualized as a truth-seeking, power-seeking, or justice-seeking interaction, with each conceptualization in ascendance at different times and each leading to different theories of argument and argumentation. These different conceptualizations are of deep concern to writing instructors

and scholars today. Does the ability to argue empower students (especially those who are traditionally marginalized) to act more effectively in civic, academic, and professional forums? Or does it simply enmesh them within cultural and political systems that are inequitable and immoral? These questions do not have simple answers, but recent theory and research supports the former position. In this section, we describe these alternative conceptualizations of argument and summarize the relevant research.

It is beyond our scope to discuss the elements of argumentation theory in detail. Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Henkemans (1996) provide a comprehensive guide to argumentation theory, Cox and Willard (1982) provide an extensive though dated review, and useful entries appear in Enos (1996), Jasinski (2001), and Sloane (2001). Crosswhite (1996) offers a reconstruction of argument theory that accounts for the philosophical issues, ethical requirements, and the needs of higher education and the writing classroom.

How Is Argument Conceptualized?

Sophists in ancient Greece reportedly offered to teach students to prevail in decision making and to acquire power through rhetoric. Plato disparaged rhetoric precisely because it afforded evil and good people the same access to power and subverted the quest for truth. The quest for a valid method of decision making led literate Western civilization, from Plato through the Enlightenment and into most of the 20th century, to valorize logic over persuasion. In this prescriptive tradition, argument is confined to the rational component of persuasion (in Aristotelian terms, appeals to *logos*), whereas persuasive appeals to emotion and character (Aristotelian *pathos* and *ethos*, respectively) are set aside as the nonrational components. Syllogistic logic is taken as the normative standard for argument, under the assumption that logical validity guarantees the truth of the result. The quest for logical validity has in turn been repudiated as unjust because the truth of the powerful is often imposed on the powerless; in a deliberative democracy, argument can be seen as a quest for justice.

The challenge to this traditional conception of argument is due primarily to the publication in 1958 of two works, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) *The New Rhetoric* (French publication 1958) and Toulmin's (1958) *The Uses of Argument*. At the outset of *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca reject the standard of logical demonstration, "which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries" (p. 1), in favor of studying "the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent" (p. 4). Similarly, Toulmin dismissed the "abstract and formal criteria relied on in mathematical logic" (p. viii) that were characteristic of British philosophy of the time in favor of studying applied logic or practical reasoning to understand and assess argumentation in everyday contexts.

An additional challenge to the standard of logical demonstration came from studies of the course of scientific debates, which were presumed to be based entirely on reason. Thomas Kuhn (1962) observed that scientific change often was not governed by logic but was influenced by technological innovations, social factors, personal values, aesthetics, and dogma, rather than by the steady building of claim upon claim. Theory choice is often a generational conflict, because new theories often do not prevail until the defenders of older dogmas die off and a younger generation can control the debate. Later sociologists of science such as Bruno Latour (1987) investigated the effects of power relationships among individual scientists, research teams, and funding sources, concluding that what comes to be called truth may be whatever claim a group's most powerful members choose. In the strongest versions of critical theory, which Karl Popper (1971) terms radical skepticism, it is impossible for the validity of alternative claims to be evaluated objectively, so argument can only be about power and not truth (Charney, 1996).

Rejecting the goal of certainty through logical demonstration might seem to require embracing the unpredictability of "anything goes" relativism. To avoid both extremes, some theorists retain the quest for an absolute transcendent truth as an ideal that can be

approached only via constructivist or intersubjective truths based on the best evidence that can be obtained. Popper (1971) emphasizes this point:

The fallibility of our knowledge—or the thesis that all knowledge is guesswork, though some consists of guesses which have been most severely tested—must not be cited in support of skepticism or relativism. From the fact that we can err, and that a criterion of truth which might save us from error does not exist, it does not follow that the choice between theories is arbitrary or non-rational: that we cannot learn, or get nearer to the truth: that our knowledge cannot grow. (p. 375)

For Popper, it is crucial that all scientific claims and findings remain open to scrutiny and challenge from the community, a condition he calls “the inter-subjectivity of scientific method.” Hannah Arendt (1990; see also Roberts-Miller, 2002) conceived of political deliberation in a similar way, advocating that each person subject his or her own beliefs to the same rigorous challenges that they raise against others.

This emphasis on the process of argumentation has led to a lively interest in what is called “deliberative democracy,” pursued in studies of political theory and sociology as well as rhetoric, to investigate whether and how argumentation can serve truth, justice, and power at the same time (Benhabib, 1996; Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Pellizzoni, 2001).

Are There Criteria for Valid or Effective Argument?

Truth-seeking theories of argumentation have traditionally had a strong prescriptive bias, indicating what *ought* to be effective, based on criteria for rationality or logical validity. Scholars in philosophy and informal logic work toward articulating such criteria and toward identifying impediments to reasoning, or fallacies (Kahane, 1980; Lumer, 2000). Much of this work is devoted to explaining why a given pattern of reasoning is “fallacious” in some circumstances and valid or acceptable in others. Walton discusses many such patterns in detail, including the slippery-slope argument (1992b), the argument from authority (1997), and the use of emotion (Walton, 1992a), among others. Fulkerson (1996a) includes a discussion of major fallacies adapted to the needs of writing instructors, but Crosswhite (1996) finds the identification of fallacies in writing instruction to be harmful. He characterizes the work of the informal logicians as a futile attempt to apply a “logical model of rationality” to practical human affairs. Similarly, Secor (1987) argues against identifying practical strategies of argumentation as fallacies, claiming that the notion of “fallacy” itself is often a “question-begging epithet.”

Others have sought different kinds of criteria for evaluating arguments, for example, ethical standards relating the rhetor to the audience; such approaches usually focus more on empowerment and justice than on truth. Johnstone (1982) offers the principle of bilaterality, which says that “the arguer must use no device of argument he could not in principle permit his interlocutor to use” (p. 95). Bilateral communication is humanizing and “reflective,” meaning that interlocutors can reflect on the argument and revise it (p. 100). A similar proposal that has been more widely discussed in composition studies is Young, Becker, and Pike’s (1970) “Rogerian” argument, which seeks to reduce audience resistance to alternative ideas by reducing the sense of threat they may pose. Writers using the Rogerian strategy, which is based on principles developed by psychotherapist Carl Rogers for oral discourse, acknowledge the validity of the interlocutor’s position and emphasize mutual understanding and shared values. Brent (1991, 1996) reviews the sources and criticisms of Rogerian rhetoric, concluding that it provides a basis for an ethical pedagogy that emphasizes not “winning” but rather social understanding and cooperation.

Feminists have also been concerned about the criteria for argumentation. Reacting to the agonistic model of argument as a tool of power, some have reached the extreme position that all argument is coercive, an “act of violence” (Gearhart, 1979). Persuasion, as an

attempt to influence others, is viewed as aggressive, competitive, and patriarchal. Foss and Griffin (1995) present an alternate, corrective model they call "invitational rhetoric," designed to promote "equality, immanent value, and self-determination," a model with similarities to Rogerian rhetoric (Young et al., 1970) and bilaterality (Johnstone, 1982). Fulkerson (1996b) reviews the feminist debate about argument with an eye to its pedagogical implications and proposes replacing the conceptual metaphor of argument as war (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) with a view of argument as partnership.

In contrast to these various prescriptive approaches to evaluating argument are a number of descriptive approaches, which focus on how actual audiences evaluate or respond to argumentation. Perhaps the basic feature of these approaches is multiplicity, because different audiences at different times and places with different needs, beliefs, and values will respond to argument in different ways. Crosswhite's (1996) rhetoric of reason bases the evaluation of arguments in the audience, understood as the emergent universal audience (described previously). Although there are prescriptive universalizing tendencies to this conception, it does allow for multiple, transversal forms of rationality grounded in local conditions. Audience-based text evaluation methods (surveys, focus groups, comprehension tests, and other methods of user testing and market research) can be used to obtain descriptive information about the effectiveness of arguments on specific audiences.

Toulmin's (1958) concept of argument fields provides a rationale for these descriptive approaches. Toulmin (1958) proposed that in assessing arguments, we must distinguish between field-invariant and field-dependent criteria, that is, between criteria applicable to any argument and those appropriate for and operative in a court of law, a scientific journal, and Euclidean geometry, to use his initial examples. Loosely, the criteria of evaluation that are field-invariant (or universal) are formal or analytical, and those that are field-dependent are substantive or material, but even the manner of applying field-invariant criteria will vary from field to field. Although arguments in different fields use the same elements (claims, warrants, etc.), fields have different goals for argumentation, degrees of formality and precision, and modes of resolution, with the consequence that evaluative judgments should be made within fields, not between fields (Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1979) and are best made by members or practitioners within the field. Argument fields were the subject of much discussion among scholars of argumentation and forensics in the 1980s, who described them variously as based in disciplines (or subject matters), communities, situations, forums, and audiences (Willard, 1982; see also Jasinski, 2001; Zarefsky, 2001).

How Can Students Learn to Argue Productively?

In the wake of reviving interest in classical rhetoric in the 1950s and 1960s, some undergraduate writing classes began focusing on argument with the goal of empowering students to act more effectively in civic, academic, and professional contexts (Lunsford, Moglen, & Slevin, 1990; Roberts-Miller, 2004; Yeh, 1998). However, those who understand argument primarily as power seeking have opposed teaching argument in the writing classroom altogether. Others have sought alternative models of argument that deemphasize the competitive nature of argument in favor of cooperation, a conceptualization of argument that may be termed justice seeking.

Perry's (1970) well-known model of how undergraduates progress through stages of sociocognitive development suggests a process of how students might learn truth-seeking argument, with the goal of instruction to move them along from unreflective absolutist views of truth, through the stages of multiplicity and relativism, to the final "committed relativist" stage, when they find it possible to evaluate competing claims against a framework of beliefs, methods, and standards of evidence and even to evaluate alternative frameworks (much as Popper, 1971, advocates). But some researchers have argued that a stage model is inappropriate for describing epistemological development. Newman (1993; Charney, Newman, & Palmquist, 1995), for example, developed a more complex model in which three dimensions (which Newman terms absolutism, relativism, and evaluativism) can

co-occur; in his studies of undergraduates, Newman found a low level of absolutism that remained fairly constant for 1st-year and upper-division students, but higher levels of relativism and evaluativism that shifted over time. He also found different mixes of dimensions for students in different disciplines. This research suggests that descriptive pedagogies that teach students to recognize common fallacies and to challenge a claim's validity can be worthwhile. The ability to test conjectures against evidence has been found to improve with more advanced schooling (Crammond, 1998; Felton & Kuhn, 2001; Klein, 2004); studies of descriptive instructional pedagogies have also been shown to increase students' abilities to supply evidence and generate counterarguments (Crowhurst, 1991; Yeh, 1998).

An instructor's conceptualization of argument has strong effects on classroom dynamics, which in turn will shape students' willingness to understand and accept the goals of intersubjective truth and justice for their academic arguments. The effects of these pedagogies deserve more careful study. Roberts-Miller (2004) considers a wide range of college-level writing pedagogies and the elements they incorporate from various social and political discourse models (e.g., liberal political theory, interest-group politics, communitarianism, and public deliberation). She argues that some classroom practices, those that emphasize deliberation and a fair degree of agonism, are likeliest to foster classroom cultures that stimulate the most productive dissent. Lynch, George, and Cooper (1997) describe a classroom approach designed around cooperative approaches to argument with an emphasis on inquiry. They report that students in two 1st-year composition courses were able to engage in argument-based inquiry, rather than hardening their own predetermined positions on an issue, and to produce work that focused on the complexities of the issues involved rather than on seeking power by winning a case.

Some feminist scholars challenge the view that agonistic argument is necessarily masculinist or counter to feminist goals (Dingwaney & Needham, 1992; Fulkerson, 1996b). Researchers who investigate gender differences in argumentation style have also argued against gender-based essentialism. Wolfe (1999, 2002) has studied face-to-face and computer-mediated discussions in several small classrooms investigating whether students typically viewed as marginalized participate more effectively with alternative media. Wolfe (1999) found that male and female college students participated equally in an online argumentative discussion; however, women were more likely to feel that their responses were ignored. An analysis of the conversational turns suggests that women changed the subject after a respondent disagreed, whereas men took more turns to defend their positions. This finding suggests that women may especially benefit from heuristics that help students generate counterarguments (Crowhurst, 1991; Leitão, 2003; Yeh, 1998).

In recent years, a growing number of researchers have investigated argumentation in academic disciplines, some spurred by universities promoting WID programs, and the concept of field-dependent criteria has been supported by many of these. Comparisons of the argument structures in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities have identified differences at many levels, including sentence structure, citation patterns, stases, and *topoi*. Some of these studies are textual analyses (Fahnestock & Secor, 1988, 1991; MacDonald, 1994), including historical studies of the evolution of disciplinary genres (Atkinson, 1999; Bazerman, 1988; Wilder, 2005). In a comparative textual study of differences between the ways students and academics developed arguments, Barton (1993) delineates multiple differences between academic argument and public argument, particularly a marked tendency of students to use generalizations to frame problems, construct their persona, cite sources, and support their claims. Another strand of this work focuses on students learning disciplinary argumentation (Herrington, 1992; Wilder, 2002), including studies of non-native English speakers (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Dong, 1996). In a 4-year study of an undergraduate biology major, Haas (1994) observed progress in the student's recognition that authors of scientific research articles were presenting arguments within a discipline. Noting that most of this research employs observational and text analytic methods, Paul, Charney, and Kendall (2001) call for studies that explore the real-time responses of readers, test the effects of rhetorical strategies on readers, and track the course of acceptance or rejection over time.

Considerable research has also been conducted on argumentation in workplace and public-policy contexts. For example, Stratman (2000) studied voters' perceptions of bias in informational materials for a Colorado ballot referendum; Herndl, Fennell, and Miller (1991) examine the contrasting topoi of managers and engineers in the Three Mile Island and Challenger disasters; Miller (2005) describes the different argumentative topoi and other strategies used by biological and physical scientists conducting electromagnetic field research; Schiappa (1995) provides case studies illustrating epistemic, ethical, and political criteria in public-policy debates; and Ellis and Maoz (2002) compare the argument patterns of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian participants in group dialogues.

CONCLUSION

Persuasion, audience, and argument are all inherent dimensions of writing, and they are all related to each other. That there are different intellectual and research traditions treating each of these concepts is perhaps a necessary sin of analysis. Worse, however, is the danger when a narrow or parochial outlook distorts the dynamic nature of rhetorical practice. In this chapter, we have treated persuasion as a master term, the underlying essence of human communicative language use, and have focused attention on audience and argument as distinct traditions of conceptualization and research. Both are relevant to contemporary writing research, and when they connect, they provide some of our deepest insights into the nature of writing.

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