DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 394   CS 206 931

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TITLE   What Does It Mean to be Able to Write?: The Question
                 of Writing in the Discourses of Literature and
                 Composition.
PUB DATE   Dec 81
NOTE   38p.; Paper presented at the International Conference
                 on Language Problems and Public Policy (Cancun,
                 Mexico, December 16-19, 1981).

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Discourse Analysis; Higher Education; Interaction;
                 *Literary Criticism; Literature; *Models; *Reading
                 Processes; Rhetoric; *Writing (Composition); *Writing
                 Processes
IDENTIFIERS   *Reading Writing Relationship; *Textual Analysis

ABSTRACT
        Competing views of written texts, of the process of
writing, and of the purposes of the scholarly investigation of
written discourse appear inherently at odds. Today composition theory
is often demeaned as being only pedagogical while literary study is
granted the status of a self-fulfilling academic pursuit. What is
needed is a model or matrix that could establish scholarly
interaction between the two fields. Such a model would have to
address (1) the nature of a written text--its capacity for analysis
as both a product of a prior activity and the reflection of a human
process; (2) the nature of a writing event, whether defined as an act
of recording meaning or as a unique, individual, indeterminate event;
(3) the relation of both individual texts and discrete writing events
to intertextuality--the history of texts and their conventions; (4)
the relation of the individual writer to a particular text, to a
particular writing event, and to the history and conventions at a
particular moment of writing; (5) the relation of the public impact
of writing to the individual writer; and (6) the propriety of
research questions, evidence, or methods within the study of the
foregoing issues. (HOD)

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What Does It Mean To Be Able To Write?:

The Question of Writing in the Discourses of Literature and Composition

In a recent essay, "The Common Aims that Divide Us," Wayne Booth made

a good case for the intellectual, professional, and pedagogical unification

of the fields of composition and literary study within the discipline of

English. I imitate this purpose by proposing a new account of writing in

light of current positions in both of these fields. But I make this case

because Booth's premise, that "what separates them is not any inherent

intellectual distinction,"[1] has not yet been adequately supported. While

the two fields are professionally housed together and separately or mutually

claimed by people who might agree that advanced literacy is the ability to

read, write, and think--critically, pleasurably, and individually--their

intellectual domains nonetheless diverge. Important research or speculation

in one field does not often appear important in the other. They neither

discuss their shared nor debate their differing visions of advanced

literacy. And they probably will not, so long as they have no common frame-

work within which they might think about the nature of "writing."

Some would argue, reasonably, that no two fields are now intellec-

tually united. It could be said that trying to establish a structure

that would comprehend "writing" for the discipline of English is unnecessary

and beside the point of contemporary pluralism. Thus separate but equally

exciting theoretical explanations of the phenomenon of written discourse
merely mirror post-modern fragmentation, which is enormously productive.
In this view, composition and literature no more need mutual intellectual
ground than linguistics and literature do. That is, one may from time to
time inform the other, but each respects the other's integrity and appreciates
the meaningful difference between studying language systems and studying
literature. It might therefore be argued that cases for the greater mutuality
or unification of literature and composition, made from either field, are
not   intellectual, but perhaps political or professionally exploitative,
and should be rejected. Some of the most apparent differences between
composition and literary scholarship do, after all, represent common
enough intellectual differences within many humanistic disciplines, as I
hope to explain.

The trouble with resting on this argument is that while fields like
linguistics and literary study can agree about their differences, the
rapidly expanding field of composition is now at once too embryonic and,
paradoxically, too ancient to assume this or any clear relation to literary
study. What composition has to offer, especially now that literary theory
is itself pluralistic and contains more than only New Critical methods and
programs, is lost to other students of discourse because composition is still
working out its own understanding of "writing." Composition produces
articles and books "as much <u>about</u> the nature of interpretation itself as...
<u>about</u> the subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration."[2]
On the other hand, even as composition attempts to reassert its antecedents
in rhetoric,[3] which once dominated literary study precisely as literary

study now dominates it, rhetoric's re-emergence appears to emphasize rather
than mitigate composition's distinctness. Because literature's latest recognitions of
"rhetoric" often reduce a definition of rhetoric to only the study of the
single domain of style--schemes, tropes, and figurative language[4]--com-
position students are unwilling to equate their own relation to rhetorical
history as they understand it with literature's perception of it. Con-
sequently, even in the face of articles and conference programs that suggest
that the two fields are already mutually informative, their relations,
pleasant and strained, occur in social rather than mental spaces.

No one would expect to resolve this dilemma easily, and many would
wish that time and established professional power structures would resolve
it without recourse to another intellectual program. But because pro-
fessional structures now only rarely provide interaction between the two
fields, _laissez faire_ offers little hope. For those who would like to
understand and profess both fields, or to understand and profess one in
light of an informed view of the other, a description of "writing" that
can comprehend both research interests is urgently needed. This would be
a view that would identify common interests as well as separable concerns
so that debate, discussion, and mutual understanding could take
place on intellectual ground.

History and Difference

To those who read current scholarship in both composition and literature,
the distinction between the two fields, if not their sources, may appear too
fundamental to be reconciled. Competing views of written texts, of the

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process of writing, and of the purposes of the scholarly investigation of written discourse appear inherently at odds.

To study texts is of course not necessarily to study literature. All writing is available to analyses of its semantic, syntactic, and propositional structures; it may be described with the tools of discourse analysis or text linguistics, stylistics, or textual history. All writing may be seen through the philosophical lens of pragmatics and speech act theory. And it may, by those who accept the atemporal, structuralist analyses of semiotics, be viewed as one of many equally interesting systems of signification.

Such approaches are common enough in studies of narrative literary discourse and poetry as well as in research in composition, and might appear to unite rather than distinguish scholars in both fields. But the texts to which such approaches are applied in literature are assumed to be aesthetically interesting. This aesthetic quality may be referred to the texts' assumed coherence, unity, and completeness, to their assumed universality or perduring spiritual relevance, or to any of a complex set of assumed relations to other literature. For a particular text, this aesthetic status may depend on its place in the received canon of literary works (e.g., any play be Shakespeare). Or, the aesthetic definition of the text may derive from a relation to this established canon (e.g., Milton's prolusions or Virginia Woolf's letters). A text's aesthetic interest may also depend on its perceived status as a formal, generic, or political commentary on texts that have already been canonized (e.g., "found" poetry, some literary autobiographies, or popular but "unrecognized" novels by nineteenth-century women).

The text studied in composition, on the contrary, has no such implicit or assumed status. It is usually valued and analyzed in relation to conventions, whether generic, formal, intentional, or stylistic, rather than studied for its own sake. It is generally presupposed to be a "presentation," or an example from a set of successful executions of one or more of these conventional categories. It is a model, whether well- or ill-executed. A textual analysis in the field of composition might reveal the same features revealed by the same approach to a literary text, but the same prior assumption about the text's autonomously interesting nature would not have been made. In composition, the methods of text linguistics or stylistics generally discover models or schemes or forms that are said to represent a normal--and by extention usually a normative-- pattern.

This is not to say, as I will emphasize later, that composition only teaches students to write while literature teaches (for want of a better word) literature. It is instead to point out that whatever text the rhetorically-oriented composition theorist analyzes, whether by a student or by a belle lettristic essayist like Arnold, Johnson, Mary Macarthy, or Auden, that text is assumed to be a realized possibility, one of many possibilities, not a privileged or "special" work of art whose authority is a given conditon of its analysis. For composition, alternatives to this text are always in question, not automatically beyond speculation.

These distinct views of the text are implicit, not explicit, in each field. But their strength is revealed by considering the attention accorded Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations. Her premises--that even the most unskilled basic writing will repay the assumption that the text is made up of coherent patterns, sustain a properly informed reader's attention, and will in its own sense repay close reading--[5] radically reversed the usual interpretive definition of the text in composition. Wide recognition of her reversal suggests that new assumptions in composition about the text, especially the student text, could be a bridge between all who study written discourse.

Certainly simple separations of artistic from technical creativity or of the products of those two modes inadequately propose a text to scholars in either composition or literature. To say that one field has staked out art while the other treats "practical writing" belies the strong positive response to Shaughnessy's presuppositions about student texts, as well as the impact of current reader-response criticism, semiotics, and deconstructionism. As the examples of parody, pop art, street theater, or Marxist and feminist criticism show, pitting the poetic against the vernacular generates rather than settles questions about an object's evocation of interest.[6] Many in literature now find the acts of writing and of reading the texts of non-fictive discourse,[7] or the tools of "rhetoric" (however limited) appropriate interests because many no longer categorically separate art from craft.

Nonetheless, many studies of writing activities, almost exclusively defined now in composition as "the composing process" distinguish the two fields. The assumption implicit in

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referring to the composing process--that an identifiable, repeatable, and virtually context-free series of activities occurs when people write--underlies many empirical studies of writers that are conducted without reference to the texts written.[8] Many of the most important such studies do consider texts, but only to note the relatively self-expressive (as opposed to public) kind of writing that students produce if on their own rather than fulfilling a school assignment.[9] Similar studies of readers' patterns of agreement in evaluating writing are designed without reference to the interaction that produced the writing. They also exclude qualitative descriptions of the texts read.[10]

In this regard, composition research often imitates the social sciences by using its systematic procedures of observation and its empirical methods to present quantifiable results. Composition researchers have adopted such tools as case studies, protocol analyses that narrate a writer's activities and thoughts, interviews, and elaborate experimental research designs for comparing the texts of "controlled" groups of writers. They may videotape a writer's actions, follow the eye movements of a person in the process of thinking and writing, and use texts as "samples" for the purpose of comparing rates of reading, rates of error, or rates of improvement from one time to another. They generalize from groups or individuals about the normal development of a writer or, more often, of the structure of any one writing event. They borrow readily and emphatically from cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, artificial intelligence, and neurophysiology to study the mode and moment of a text's production.

Explaining how it is that such studies are conducted in the humanities, by humanists, requires more than a definition of composition research as

"pedagogical" (even if always accurate) would allow. Most of this work
by university English faculty has been done in the relatively short time
between the publication of Richard Braddock and Richard Lloyd-Jones'
thorough but embarrassingly slender survey of Research in Written Composition
(NCTE, 1963) and Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations (1977). During
this period, the genteel alliance of rhetoric and belles lettres, which
sustained the relation of literature to composition throughout the nineteenth
and early twentieth centuries, taught students by assigning reading and
having them imitate (largely by osmosis) "great" essays. This alliance,
occurring during a largely pretheoretical time in both fields in the new
discipline of English, is described now in composition as the "current-
traditional paradigm," an approach devoted only to analyzing texts and
assuming that good students will imitate them. This implicitly
elitist view, thought to echo Romantic, or "vitalistic" understandings
of writing, has largely been replaced by a "process model." Empirical
research that describes human processes apart from the contexts in which
they occur or the products that result from them has quickly come to
dominate the field. In literature, the biography and writing habits of
an author are still usually excluded from almost all interpretive activity,
but in composition the biography and actions of whatever kind of writer--
as well as writers/comments on these matters--have become a primary focus
of attention.

This emphasis, more than the distinct ways various programs for analyzing
texts are used, now intellectually divides composition from literature. This method's new
foothold
in Departments of English owes as much to a general movement through-
out the humanities as to a sudden, inexplicable extension of educational

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research into what were once only departments of literature. That is, the insufficiency of the unexamined "current-traditional" view became apparent at the same time that scholars in all of the humanities were looking toward social scientific research questions and methods. Composition teaching that depended (if distantly) on Latin grammar, canonical unifications of rhetorical and belle-lettristic discourse, and positivistic or New Critical assumptions about the static, decipherable meanings of texts produced little research of any kind. When these agenda for teaching became insupportable, they were questioned and supplemented with a program similar to the social scientific incursion into other humanistic disciplines.

This movement is most visible in political science, for its statistical and predictive behaviorism dominates every media election "analysis" we hear. The decay of political philosophy and of political theory in favor of political science is so well known that its implications often escape notice. The rise of "new history" is less generally known but equally important. This approach relies on quantification, structural analyses, and studies of groups rather than of great figures and events. It avoids chronological narrative accounts of symbolic events and the actions of elites and "important" figures.[12] Both disciplines--as well as anthropology and ambivalent sociology--have participated in the most recent version of what has become, by virtue of its repetition in every century since the Renaissance, a traditional "new" study of human sciences.

This movement in the humanities not only appropriates methods and models from social scientific study. It also radically questions the doctrine of "presence," or of the origination of events and works in human (or in

transcendant) consciousness. It therefore rejects elitism, the necessary
or the possible significance of individual actions or of "great" events
and the existence of a conventional, sanctioned cultural hierarchy. Its
quantitative and experimental methods are motivated not only by a desire
to imitate science, but also by wanting to use data from ordinary life,
from the masses, and from behaviors or "signs." It uses such data in the
service of answers to new questions about significance, which are perceived
to correct establishment values. It tests the new answers against social
scientific criteria--validity, reliability, replicability, applicability--
which may neutralize other criteria--class, power, money, established
dominance. By taking these research positions, this movement in the
humanities provides implicit and explicit social, political, cultural,
and historical critiques.

The study of literature has by no means remained aloof from this
essentially post-modern turn toward fragmented egalitarianism. In its
current manifestation, this direction is the one taken by those who profess
to have given up "interpretation" in favor of The Pursuit of Signs, or
semiotics.[13] Marxist and feminist literary criticism /have reread the
traditional literary canon to expose its relation to those it now appears
to have blithely excluded from power. Reader-response, psychoanalytic,
and linguistic literary theories all admit evidence that was previously
excluded from academic interpretations of literary texts. New Criticism's
positivistic views of texts and philology's devotion to chronological
"coverage" no longer dominate the study of English literature. "Literature"
is no longer the study of how great men read great texts by great men. Its

lessons no longer appear to take place in an aesthetic world whose borders are impermeable, but instead in a rhetorical arena, where gates on lived experience open on all sides.

Composition theory is also opening formerly closed doors by using the new social scientism to ask and answer research questions about student writers. It entertains the possibility that practice and instruction as well as fortunate birth and inspiration can make a writer. Moved by the obvious needs of newly admitted students and the equally obvious irrelevance to them of traditional assumptions about the relation of literacy to the literary--and moved by both at a time when the country's absorption in questioning traditional power bases was absolute--many who had been only teaching composition while studying literature took up this premise. They wanted to understand and change groups and communities. If only implicitly aware of their relation to such a theory, people in composition nonetheless became-Marxist students of the means of production.

However similar composition and literature are in relation to a broad academic context, the two fields' perceived purposes remain distinct. The more venerable belief--that literature promotes individual sensitivity and individual analytic or interpretive abilities while composition aims to produce "skilled" writers--holds sway in both fields. This perceived difference has ancient roots in the histories of prescriptive rhetoric and descriptive poetics, but its current professional manifestations owe the most to the Romantic and post-Romantic vision of the individual opposed to the collective, bourgeois culture. Since the Romantic emphasis on "insight" and "inspiration," an emphasis characteristic of what Richard Sennet has called The Fall of Public Man,[14] it has been more

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congenial to promote reading literature as a transforming humanistic study than to focus on public writing or speaking as a prerequisite for full participation in Western culture.[15] Literary study perhaps was able to replace rhetoric in the humanities curriculum because an implicit conviction that enriching individual sensibilities and especially personal interpretive powers gained higher value than fostering active, potentially influential abilities to create public discourse. Consequently, those within English who refuse to define "reading" only as decoding messages may nonetheless see "writing" only as communicating a specific message to an absent reader. Composition theory is therefore often demeaned as only "pedagogical," while literary study is granted the status of a self-fulfilling academic pursuit.[16]

This division according to perceived purposes is reinforced not only by misapprehensions about the passive nature of reading,[17] but also by traditional but currently questioned views of texts that place their "meaning" in the text itself rather than in their authors or in community consensus, however provisional. The traditional views have lately been opposed in much criticism and research, but they still shape our vision of reading as an act whose implications and validity are private, subjective and individual rather than part of a community's rhetorical stance toward a text in its textual history.[18] Saying that texts themselves contain meaning almost necessitates defining "writing" as recording a meaning already in mind, rather than as a way of coming to know or of being knowledgeable about and able to play within the framework of discourse conventions. Thus even when the field of literature momentarily overcomes its reluctance to express its usefulness in a community, its conclusions about texts' interpretable meanings have (until recently) necessarily distorted and limited definitons of the nature of

writing. The purposes of the two fields remain opposed, and these oppositions verge always on promoting "the growth of a division between those who study individual texts (historians, editors, critics--who like to call themselves humanists) and those who study the activity of creating texts in general (...who like to call themselves scientists.)"[19]

It is at least clear from these distinctions that understanding "writing" in a context broad enough to allow for them will require a frame-work that corrects a number of received opinions about the two fields., within and Outdated perceptions of their shared projects as well as their divided goals will not serve to bring them together intellectually. We might welcome, for instance, a unified view of writing and reading that acknow-ledged each to be active expressions of the individual in the world as well as enriching, developmental contributions to personal powers. But such a view would have to modify both literary scholars' continued distaste for fostering "public man" and composition research's willingness to smooth out variables to describe groups of writers, While achieving even such changes is hardly to be hoped for, debating their appropriateness would require asking ourselves how well we now understand "writing."

What Does It Mean To Be Able To Write?

Defining "being able to write" addresses both literary and composition theories; it is what both fields are "about." But as this survey shows, the two fields address a number of crucial issues from different, if not opposed, perspectives. Any model that could establish scholarly interaction between the two fields would have to address:

1. The nature of a written text--its capacity for analysis as both a product of a prior activity that may or may not fix a stable "meaning," and as the reflection of a human process;

2. The nature of a writing event, or act of writing, whether defined as an act of recording meaning, as an instance of "the composing process," or as a unique, individual, indeterminate event. The nature of the "ideal" or "typical" writer described by research;

3. The relation of both individual texts and discrete writing events to "intertextuality," the deconstructionist name for the complex, highly textured series of writings into which any new act of writing enters--the history of texts and their conventions;

4. The relation of the individual writer to a particular text, to a particular writing event, and to the history and conventions he or she is aware of at a particular moment of writing. The possibility or appropriateness of individual writers' tran-
inter-
scending, modifying, or ignoring textuality, the history of texts, and conventions of written discourse;

5. The relation of the public impact of writing to the individual writer; the "uses" of writing in the service of expression, of individual development, and of forming cultures and communities;

6. The propriety of research questions, evidence, or methods within a humanist's study of the foregoing issues.

I am raising rather than resolving issues in this list, in an attempt to
occupy students of "writing."
state questions that   . What is at stake here is a matrix, or meta-discourse, within which both students of composition and literature could

recognize their relation to each other.

While I of course am responsible for what follows, my proposal
reiterates and combines a number of similar discussions. It is most
heavily indebted to Dell Hymes' "The Ethnography of Speaking," which in
turn acknowledges debts to Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory and Kenneth
Pike's tagmemic linguistics.[20] James Kinneavy's important and too
frequently overlooked hermeneutic approach in "The Relation of the Whole
to the Part in Interpretation Theory and in the Composing Process" mirrors
Hymes' description in many ways, but it is more directly localized in
writing than Hymes' essay.[21] Lloyd Bitzer's description of "The Rhetorical
Situation," although focused primarily on defining the conditions that
necessitate persuasive discourse, relevantly emphasizes the "circumstances"
of the historical context" in which such discourse occurs.[22] Michel
Foucault's analysis of "discursive relations" in The Archaology of Know-
ledge, although it pointedly dismissed "the speaking subject," offers a
similar description of the relation of texts to their textual contexts.[23]

I highlight these sources and analogues because by writing yet another
discourse "as much about the nature of interpretation itself as...about the
subject matter," I am attempting a renovative synthesis, not claiming to
have found a Rosetta stone hitherto lost to those who study writing.
Insofar as intellectual interaction is possible, it depends on translating
among contributions from theories of language, composition, rhetoric, and
literature.

This proposal consists of an interpretation of four figures, or pictures,
of writing events. These schemes are not intended as models like those used
in science to simulate processes; they are not Venn diagrams. They are
progressively specified representations of a field--the considerations

necessitated both by an act of writing and an act of textual analysis. The final figure restates this representation to suggest how writers develop: it is blatantly pedagogical, but firmly dependent on a theoretical picture of writing.

When analyzing any discourse event, we commonly identify particular contexts, intentions, situations, and manifestations in signs. Particular cultural contexts and intentions, or desired outcomes, within them as well as discourse situations and their results are the idealized elements that students of discourse explain. Some describe the relationship of these elements teleologically (Figure 1), showing that each determines the limits within which the next may occur, or determines the possibilities that follow from its particularization.[24] However, strictly hierarchical views are incomplete. A discourse situation, for instance, may occur without a prior intention to speak, even though the manifestation, or speech, that results will depend on the cultural context of which the speakers share. Consequently, these elements of discourse typically identified in or implicitly interesting in analyses are capable of both hierarchical and interactive description. For the purposes of studying discourse, they may be seen as always in relation to each other and provisionally deterministic. They are at least interrelated.
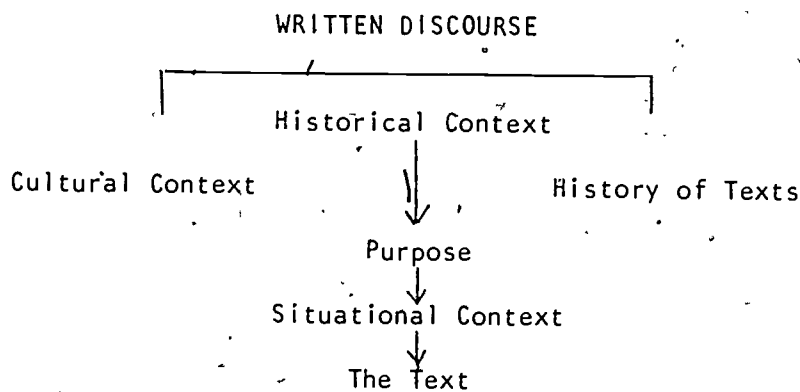
FIGURE 1

DISCOURSE EVENTS

Context

↓

Intention

↓

Situation

↓

Manifestation
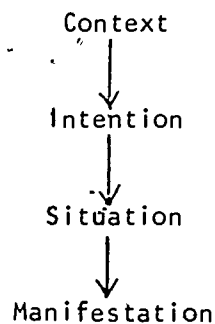
The elements of analysis are further specified in Figure 2, which names both cultural context and textual context[25] as the particular nature of "context" for writing. Both the act and the text of writing distinctly require separate self-consciousness, either by virtue of minimally intrusive breaks in the flow of events that make the fluent look for paper and pen, or laborious and burdensomely slow hiatuses that define the hesitation of the semi-literate who must occasionally write. Writing requires an active consciousness that divorces it from the temporal flow of living culture; it stops time, setting itself apart from the communal murmur of discourse, if only by virtue of its relatively recent silent, visualized nature. Writing evokes its own context, or frame of reference. It explains and excuses itself not only in relation to the immediate, but also in relation to the textual context created by other writing. As Geoffrey Hartman has put it, writing is "qualified by being framed."[26] While this is sometimes true of speech, it is always true of writing, which even in its most casual forms depends on formal schooling. Whether one has learned only to make letters or has a Ph.D. in humanities, writing transforms or adds to the consciousness of those who write, as they may not speak, always as aware participants in a separate mode. Writing depends on both the broad cultural setting and the textual setting in which it occurs. To say this is to say that writing is equally related to culture and to the textual frame of reference, or intertextuality. Its' technological, formal, schooled origins have created a series of manifestations that make it less able than speech to escape the artifact, or genre, of "history."

FIGURE 2

WRITTEN DISCOURSE

Historical Context

Cultural Context   History of Texts

Purpose

Situational Context

The Text

Scholars more often distinguish writing from other systems of signifcation by focusing on the situational level of such a picture. They assume that the same discourse purposes may be accomplished by both speech and writing, depending on the relatively primitive/oral and sophisticated/literate developmental level of the person or culture.[27] Exchanged gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, timing, rules of dialogue, and distance from audience are some of the elements brought into play in studies of the implications of their differences.[28] David Olson, for instance, emphasizes that writing represents what is said, while speech expresses what is meant.[29] To speak "what time is it?," may mean "it is late," for instance. To write "what time is it?" will usually evoke anxiety about the exact time. Writing is text-bound, not situationally interpretable.

But to use only situational analyses implies that the two modes are both only modes of communication, transmitters or, in writing, archives for messages. Viewed this way, speaking and writing distinctly interest scholars who will study the "text" of either in relation to the presence of an auditor or the absent, fictionalized, evoked, perhaps dead, certainly distant, intended reader. This reasoning implies that the pen or the mouth

convey according to situational appropriateness. If you are here, I say it; if not (and if I am one of the relatively few who can), I write.

Such a situational distinction surely provokes important and justifiable research, but to differentiate speaking and writing primarily at this level is to limit both to techniques in the service of extending the voice. Situational distinction prevents our questioning both modes as creators of messages; as different ways of thinking, and as independent cultural gestalts. A limited (in the model, lowered) view of their difference might accurately predict whether a person would speak or write, but it would not account for cultural and individual situations that specifically result from writing nor address how the act of writing has become a way of thinking concomitant to, but different from, both "making" (formal) speeches" and recording thought...

At the same time, a situational distinction of writing from speaking also allows "literacy" to be defined only as functional literacy, a cultural tool or skill. When textual context as well as cultural context is essential to describe writing, literacy also is necessarily a textual tool, the ability to act within the world of texts. Writing in this view is not only a way to act as a citizen, professional, worker, or socially-adjusted person, but is also a way of acting in the re-lived, reflective, interior space of textual interactions.

The prospect that this stable, historical textual ambiance can modify as well as be contained by culture is, of course, the humanist's per-spective on both composition and literacy studies. By theoretically distinguishing speaking and writing at the level of context rather than situation, we are required to remember that the meaning or implication of writing--both the act and the text--is always larger than the

boundaries of its originating purpose and situation. Written texts
have and create their own worlds in which their writers as well as their
readers may enlarge and interpret cultural contexts. The writer-in-process,
as well as the reader, depend on cultural and textual histories. They are
the broadest possible relevant considerations that provide motives to
either writer or reader.

The third figure specifies the elements that stimulate and control
written discourse. This configuration may be used to describe writing
events from the viewpoint of the writer. It may also provide a way to
analyze a written text. Being able to write means being able to act
within this matrix; being a student of writing is to elucidate, at any
particular level of education, these textual elements. A complex
understanding of literacy requires attention to the matters represented here.

FIGURE 3

THE WRITING EVENT

History

Cultural Context
(Specific era, language
community, attitudes, rules,
values)

History of Texts
(Literacy, "history,"
"literature," cultural
documentation in law,
science, belles lettres)

Purpose
(The desired outcome or best imagined result)

Situational Context

Setting

Participants   Subject

Personae   Scene   Topic
          (Imaginatively transformed   (The particular aspect
          locale)   of the subject)

The Text

Genre
(E.g., letter, drama, prayer)

Form
(Blocks of discourse, propositional
structure)

Order of Semantic Constituents

Lexical Choices
(Vocabulary; register)

Grammatical Structure

Graphic Representation
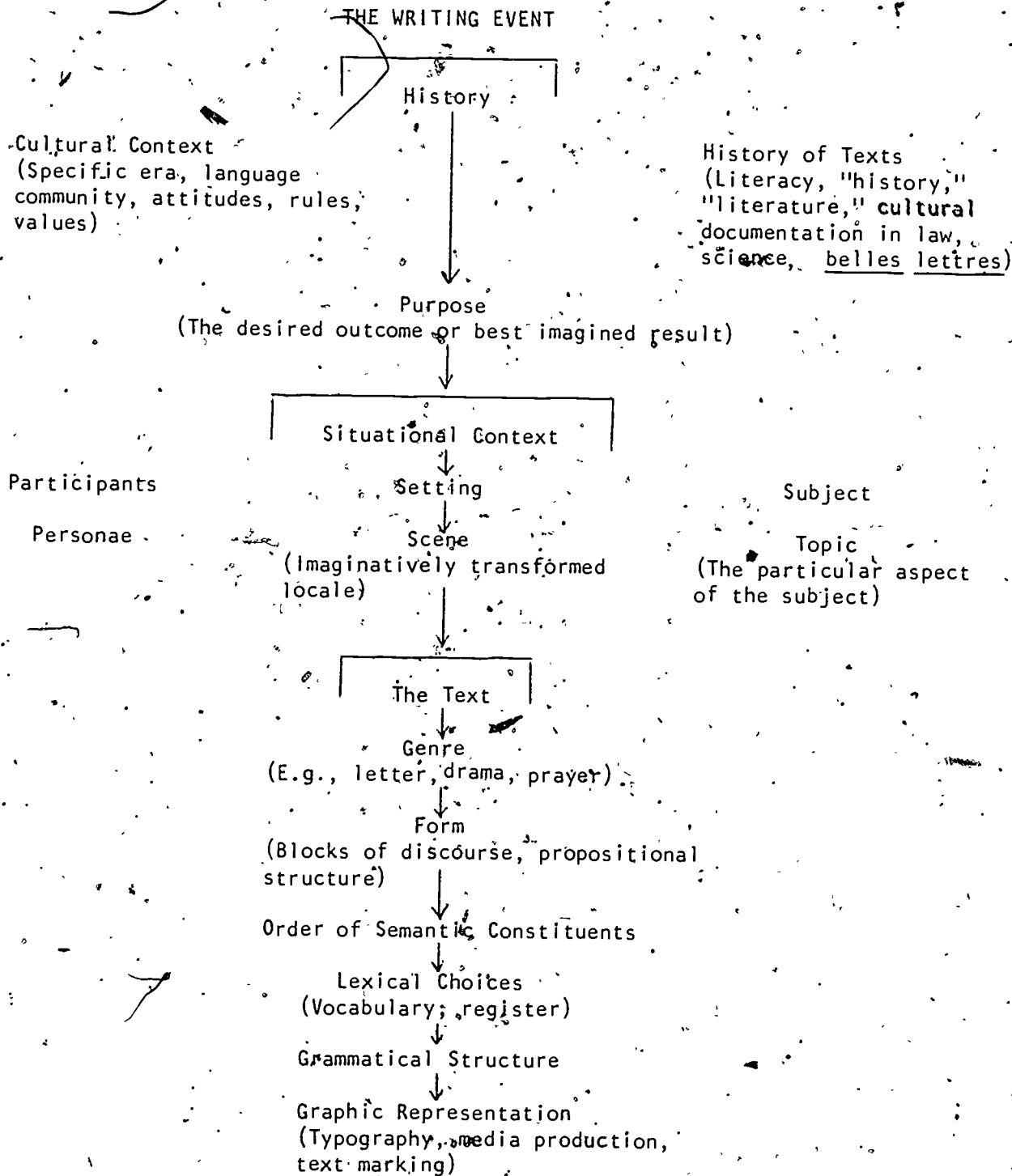(Typography, media production,
text marking)

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Figure 3 may be read both hierarchically and multivariantly. While its upper elements determine constraints and possibilities that follow, variations in any of the levels modify the possibilities at the same, higher, and lower levels.

Perhaps the best explanation of both the static and dynamic readings of the figure is a demonstration. In the cultural context of a contemporary American university, and in relation to the long, well-documented history of students taking examinations we could trace to Socrates' students' notes, the purpose of examining students in writing is appropriate as is a writer's intention to get a high grade in a university course. While earlier in history the same examination question might have called for a standardized answer that recorded the "truth" of the answer, now the best answers may be those that transform, enlarge, or bring personal relevance to the question. "Being able to write" meant one thing to the medieval students, another to ours.

Jack Welch, my next door neighbor (Participant) becomes a student (Persona) examinee Λ when our class (Setting) is transformed into an examination room (Scene) and the amount of real time available to write becomes part of the evaluative scene in which the discourse will be read. Jack writes about the Topic I may select in the Subject of composition theory. His imaginative ability to personify me as the teacher/audience of his writing, an examiner rather than the woman whose lawn mower cut his marigolds, defines my role as participant. The Text produced will meet the generic expectations of an essay examination; it will not, for instance be a review or a report. Its Form will depend on the number and length or relative weight of the questions in the exam and the response strategies they call for in this genre, in this situational context. And

choices of
these choices will determine the order of the semantic constituents, the appropriate vocabulary and terminology, the necessary grammatical structures, and, finally, the physical representation of the writing--handwriting, in an examination book.

This description shows how context and decisions made at upper levels may determine outcomes below them. But the determination of appropriateness by the hierarchical model is incomplete. The writer transforms the model into a multivariate matrix when engaged in a particular writing event. The multivariance depends on the locus of discourse generation that the writer brings to writing. For instance, some student other than Jack Welsh who does not care about grades will experience writing the examination differently. She may conceive another persona, perhaps subtly vary the topic to fit what she knows, and produce discourse different from his at every other point. In another situation, a writer may focus on the media at hand and, whether consciously or not, use a word processor or tape recorded dictation to explore the medium. The text produced will have been controlled--not only in matters of elaboration, but also in tone, form, and its relation to the history of texts--by the writer's preoccupation with the means of graphic representation. Or, a writer most concerned with the form of, say comparison/contrast will--as thousands of only partially "assigned" composition essays attest--transform significance, voice, and purpose into urecognizable background considerations.

Depending on the aspect of the discourse that most occupies the writer's attention and facilitates or constrains his or her choices, hierarchical

determinations of appropriateness instead become shifting options that may or may not realize the implications of the hierarchy. Any of the discrete items of the model may become the center of attention in a gestalt or field of vision. Consequently, to say that a written text embodies its writer's intention, or semantic meaning, is only partially to describe it. A writing is contingent on the shifts and reordering of priorities that writers consciously or intuitively make.

The figure/also suggest both a static and dynamic description of reading. Whether seen as an analytical mode that provides a reading or interpretation, or as an individual process, "reading" depends on all these contextual and textual elements. In the first, product-oriented interpretive sense, the ("ideal") reader accounts for the relation of a particular text to some or all of the elements named in the figure. The textual editor, historian, theorist, critic, or reader-for-pleasure consider these aspects of the work, either separately or in relation to others that are hierarchically higher and lower. The "reading" is an explanation of these elements of a writing event.

But reading is, like writing, also a multivariate and individual process. An ill-prepared or faded manuscript's graphic execution, an unfamiliar or archaic vocabulary, or an unidentified genre may either prevent a particular reader's understanding or excite the interest of a student of the writing. A reader may read only for information (the topic; or treatment of a subject), may read for the situation and genre (e.g., the detective "story"), may read only to edit at the levels of form and below, or may want to discover the significance of a particular text within

the history of its textual context. Reading has particular and individually

determined purposes, as writing does. Reading, like writing, may accomplish

one or another purpose in light of variations in a reader's knowledge and

attention.

Thus both thorough analyses of a "work" and individual reading

experiences might be described in reference to this figure. While it is

not my primary purpose here to additionally ask what it means to be able

to read, even this brief summary of the relation of the figure to reading

shows its possibilities for aiding/complex understanding of literacy. Seen

in light of this matrix, "reading" refers both to deciphering and to

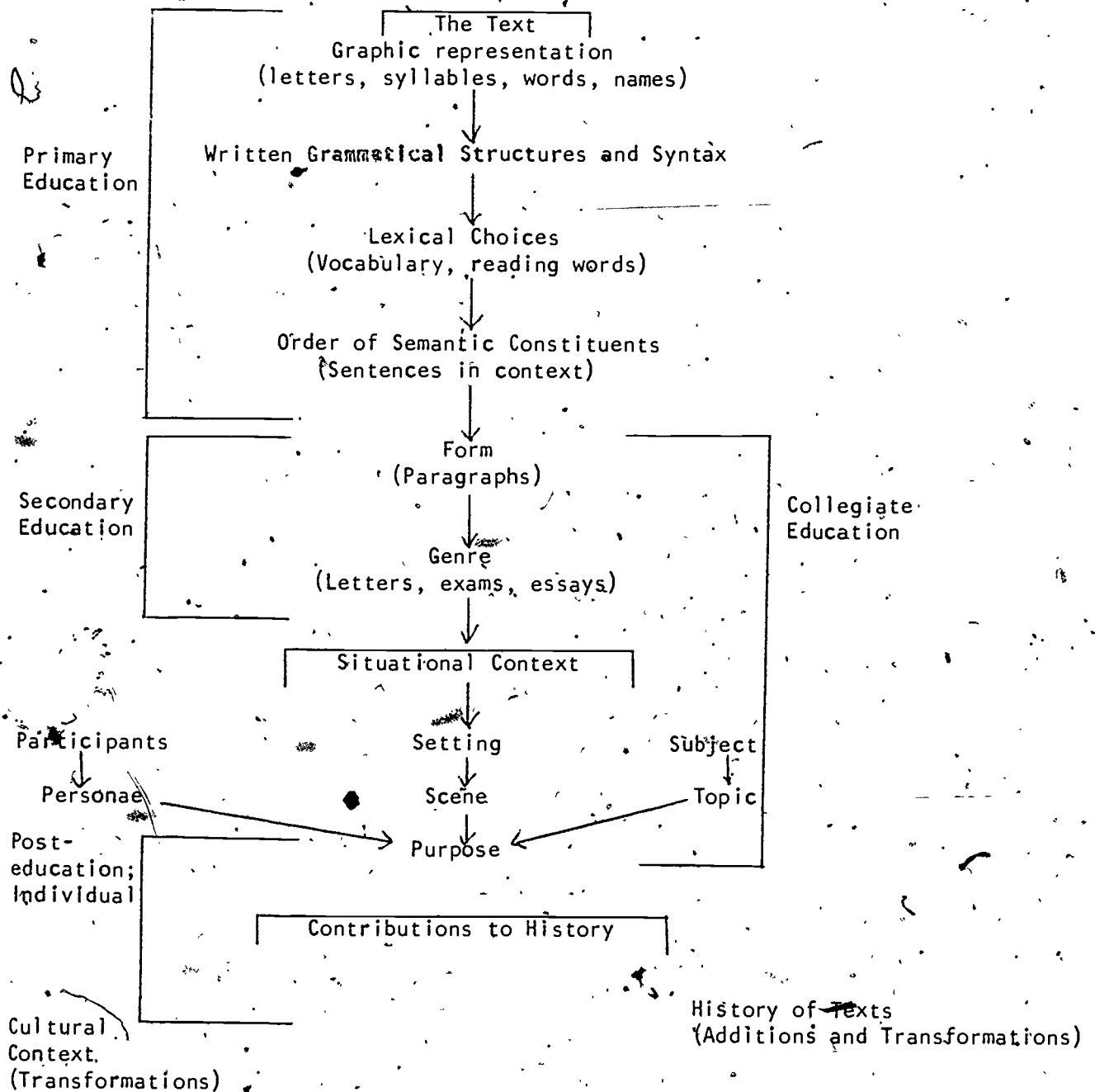understanding a text, not to one or the other.

Looking only/the hierarchical, product-oriented nature of this
description   determining
or any   too often prevents our accurately/what it means to be unable

to write and read. When we see that writers rearrange the focus of the

model, we can sensibly say that beyond stages of learning to control

graphic representation and written grammar, individual writers are only

partially unable to write. A thirteen-year-old participant, for instance,

conceives only certain desirable outcomes from writing. A poor speller's

prose may appear simplistic or unelaborated because of limited lexical

choices. A writer ordinarily outside a particular language community but

trained in a second "language" and even "literature" will nonetheless

overlook or misunderstand possibilities for choice or interpretation at the

level of situational context. And, on the other hand, non-literate adults

within a language community will have had enough practice in varying

situational contexts to imagine voice and scene in writing easily; but still

be unable to choose appropriate genres, forms, and text executions.

I could multiply such examples, but it is sufficient to notice two versions of being unable to write. First, a writer may be weak or entirely unpracticed at one or another level of the model. This point will become a constraint, or limitation, on all the possibilities for choice at levels above and below it. Secondly, a writer may be outside the figure, which is to say outside the textual context that a particular set of readers take to define a normal text of whatever kind. The most obvious example would be a second-language speaker. But a writer may also know nothing of the history, personae, logic, or genres of academy discourse, by virtue, for instance, of being a Renaissance woman proscribed from learning learned Latin and thus prevented from writing public discourse. Or, a writer may be of a class that would not conceive the values, purposes, or history of texts of another class, and might be unable to write good scripts for situation comedies, good political speeches, or advertising copy. (Similar constraints of course apply to individual readers.)

Being unable to write may also be defined, then, in multivariate terms that rearrange the model around any controlling locus. But read from bottom to top, as in Figure 4, the model does provide a possible description of moving from inability to ability. It is commonplace to expect children to learn to make letters and spell before they learn to use words in writing.
or construct whole sentences. However holistically they may acquire syntactic options and vocabulary in speech, they can rarely accelerate
their progress in writing, $\bigwedge^{\text{where they}}$ must master hand/eye coordination and separate language from immediate, instrumental contexts. While the acquisition of written language may be retarded by instructional omissions, it may rarely be reordered or accelerated within certain limits.[30]

FIGURE 4.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING ABILITY

The Text
Graphic representation
(letters, syllables, words, names)

↓

Written Grammatical Structures and Syntax

↓

Lexical Choices
(Vocabulary, reading words)

↓

Order of Semantic Constituents
(Sentences in context)

Primary
Education

↓

Form
(Paragraphs)

↓

Genre
(Letters, exams, essays)

Secondary
Education

Collegiate
Education

↓

Situational Context

↓

Participants   Setting   Subject

↓   ↓   ↓

Personae   Scene   Topic

Purpose

Post-
education;
Individual

Contributions to History

Cultural
Context.
(Transformations)

History of Texts
(Additions and Transformations)

Although we might find numerous objections to this chronology, pedagogy
in Greek and Roman schools remarkably mirrored Figure 4's description. In
primary school, students memorized and practiced writing the alphabet,
moving from parts to wholes: letters, syllables, words, and finally
sentences. In grammar school, students learned grammar, how to parse
sentences correctly, to use new vocabulary, and to speak with correct.
accent and pronunciation. They also studied important texts to reconstruct
the often fragmented, faulty manuscripts that first required restoration.
Then they read and memorized them, and finally parsed sentences, defined
and learned new vocabulary words, studied their allusions to geographical,
historical, or literary matters, and explained their content.. Instruction
in analyzing situational contexts was left for the rhetor, who taught later.
Even then, students were rarely asked to provide any of the purposes, sub-
jects, topics, personae, or scenes for their compositions.[31] Their
education in oratory depended, as ours in composition does not, on
mastering textual context.

While such a curriculum opposes almost every current instinct that has
developed in a world where the media and purposes of writing are diverse
and widely available, its suitability in the ancient world, where writing
was used to extend the voice and record thought rather than to generate
thought or itself further learning, is clear. Writing and texts were then
and throughout pre-print times archivistic or documentary; an education
in texts, textualness, and textuality was a limited but clearly purposeful
goal. If this ancient curricula does even roughly approximate children's
development, its use now nonetheless would demand integration with other
pedagogies that make the tentativeness and propositional nature of writing
as a way of learning and thinking as important as our culture allows them
to be.

Such a chronology does expose the relation of the fourth figure to
written discourse and its contexts as pictured in Figure 3. The individual
who masters lower levels may use them in the service of the higher levels.
Originality and creativity in writing that becomes part of textual contexts
and perhaps transforms cultural contexts depend on writers conceiving their
own purposes in light of elements of writing (and textuality) that they
already have mastered. Those who transcend situational context, who
schematically rise above it by proposing new results or outcomes, leave
the status of writer to become influential authors. Their writing makes,
to borrow loosely from Derrida, differance. Whether Shakespeare, the authors

of the Declaration of Independence, King writing his "Letter from Birmingham Jail;" or the anonymous reprobate who conceived the first "inter... mass-distribution form letter, they may modify /textuality" in any describable textual and cultural context.

By distinguishing writers from influential authors, I do not intend to reiterate the distinction of art from practical writing or of literature from composition. On the contrary, placing the development of writing on this comprehensive spectrum instead unites these fields in considerations of the person writing in a particular, rather than idealized or statistically flattened, situation. Shakespeare, for instance, may have been a "writer" of letters, just as Fielding was of political tracts and Wallace Stevens was of medical school examinations. The point here is that categorically privileging the literary author or conducting studies of "writers" that tell nothing of the individual's relation to a textual context at a particular time prevents a full understanding of writing in our discipline-- "the only profession that asks people to do their own writing--and reading."[32] We may wish, for good causes in the service of pluralistic demands, to privilege the literary text or produce relative evaluations of large numbers of student texts. But equating such studies with the primary, interesting studies of the agon of writing--writing despite textuality, or despite history, or despite our idealized if unrealized versions of ourselves transforming stable discourse contexts--reduces our scope. To work only in the service of passive and reified aesthetic, graphic, formal, structural, stylistic, or semiotic systems rather than in pursuit (and reading) of understanding writing /| for ourselves is to embrace rather than reject the leveling misuses of originally liberating human sciences. The lyric dimension of writing and reading, which always occur in human as

well as historical time, may be forgotten; writing and reading may become "problems" to be "solved" rather than evocative problematics. Although mutually unaware of a common aim, literature and composition may both thereby propose that what Aristotle called the action through discourse is not action but only gesture--an already canned movie, not a well-rehearsed improvisation.

Applications of Figure 3 to writing already define many studies in both literature and in composition. Whether as singular probes of a text or as the names of constituents of an "approach," the terms arranged here are easily recognizable as applicable in both fields. Textual historians and editors investigate "setting" as well as "graphic manifestation"; students of the paragraph consider "form." Both Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism and James Kinneavy's Theory of Discourse highlight "genre." Students of invention as well as critics of fiction often focus on the relation of "purpose" to elements of "situation." As a picture of a field, of course, the diagram does not hierarchically value studies of purpose over those, e.g., of style. But it does suggest that the relation of any element of the text to those pictured above it must implicitly, if not explicitly, shape the conclusions reached. Accounting, for example, for formal structures without reference to generic locales would mislead by suggesting that such structures occur without reference to immediate contexts. The provisional nature of such studies would, if the diagram is useful, need to be stated or at least understood within the field.

The pictures of writing I have proposed would allow us to ask what

being able to write and read mean in the fullest sense, whichever field

we are in. These figures are intended to translate questions between the

two textual contexts, or discourses, in composition and in literature, and

may provide new answers that would otherwise have been overlooked. The

real action in our profession is in the spaces between the two fields, where

studies) that celebrate conplex interrelations of the elements of "writing"

remain to be done.

[1] Wayne Booth, "The Common Aims That Divide Us," Profession 81:
Selected articles from the Bulletins of the ADE and ADFL (New York:
MLA, 1981), p. 14.

[2] Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism
(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 4.

[3] E.g., Robert Connors, "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,"
College Composition and Communication, 32 (1981), 444-63.

[4] Examples of this reduction are common in both fields. Some recent
examples are Paul De Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," Textual Strategies:
Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ.
Press, 1979), pp. 121-40; Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse; J. Dubois
et. al. (Group μ), A General Rhetoric, trans. Paul B. Burrell and Edgar
Slotkin (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981).

[5] (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), see pp. 5-6.

[6] Hans Robert Jauss, "Poiesis," Critical Inquiry, 8 (1982), 591-608,
traces the chronology and reversal, of the relation of the "mechanical"
to the "fine" processes of creativity; see also Raymond Williams, Culture
(Glasgow, Scotland: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), pp. 122-33.

[7] E.g., Angus Fletcher, ed., The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers
from the English Institute (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1976).

[8] E.g., Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory
of Writing," College Composition and Communication, 32 (1981), 365-87.
This is one of a series of articles by these authors that discuss the
composing process without explaining resulting texts.

[9] Janet Emig, The Composing Process of Twelfth-Graders (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971); James Britten et. al., The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18 (London: Schools Council Publications, 1975).

[10] E.g., E.D. Hirsch's proposal, "The Valid Assessment of Writing Ability," in The Philosophy of Composition (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 175-91.

[11] Richard Young, "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention," Research in Composing, ed. Charles Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978), pp. 29-47; James A. Berlin and Robert P. Inkster, "Current-Traditional Rhetoric; Paradigm and Practice," Freshman English News, 8 (Winter, 1980), 1-4, 13-14.

[12] See Lawrence Stone, The Past and the Present (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) for a description and critique of "new history."

[13] Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981) offers a comprehensive outline of this movement.

[14] New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1977.

[15] Rhetoric's decline and ostracism in universities is summarized by E.P.J. Corbett in Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, 2nd ed. (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 595-630; Northrop Frye, "Toward Defining An Age of Sensibility," in Eighteenth-Century English Literature, ed. James L. Clifford (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 311-18, discusses the shift to "psychological self-identification; Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic (NY: Harper and Row, 1948) and Paul Fussell, The Rhetorical World

of Augustan Humanism (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965) also examine emphases
that promote the subjective individual in relation to nature and diminish
the ethical, political, occasional, and local purposes of literary writing
and study.

[16] This is the view implied by Geoffrey Hartman, "Communication,
Language, and the Humanities," ADE Bulletin, No. 70 (Winter 1981); "We
are like characters in a certain kind of mystery story, who are drawn
unwillingly into a plot that we alone, rather than the official
investigator can unriddle. Leaving writing and reading to specialists
is like leaving interpretation to the police department" (p. 16).

[17] See, e.g., Jane Tompkins, ed., "Introduction," Reader-Response
Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: The Johns
Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), ix-xxvi.

[18] This debate is well-recorded in Frank Lentricchia, After the New
Criticism (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980) and Gerald Graff,
Literature Against Itself (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979).

[19] Clifford Gurty, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,"
American Scholar   p. 176.

[20] In Readings in the Sociology of Language, ed. Joshua A. Fishman
(The Hague: Morton, 1968), pp. 99-138. See also "Toward Ethnographies of
Communication: The Analysis of Communicative Events," in Language and Social
Context, ed. Dior Paolo Giglioli (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 21-44.
I am indebted to Joseph Williams for referring me to Hymes' seminal work
and pointing out its applications to writing; Figure 3 is owed to his guidance.

21 In Donald McQuade, ed., Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching
of Composition (Akron, OH: Akron Univ. Dept. of English, 1979), pp. 1-23.

22 In Richard L. Johannesen, ed., Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric:
Selected Readings (NY: · Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 381-94.

23 Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (NY: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 21-78.

24 See Joseph M. Williams, "Language as Use-Governed Behavior," in
Style and Variables in English, ed. Timothy Shopen and Joseph M. Williams
(Cambridge, MA: Winthrop, 1981), p. 44.

25 "Textual context" encompasses both "history," or precedents, and
"intertextuality," which is "not the investigation of sources and
influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include
anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make
possible the signifying practices of later texts" (Culler, Pursuit, p. 103).

26 Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy
(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981), p. xxi.

27 See, e.g., Jack Goody, "The Grand Dichotomy Reconsidered," in The
Domestication of the Savage Mind (Cambridge: · Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977),
pp. 163-67; Walter Ong, "Rhetoric and Consciousness," in Rhetoric, Romance
and Technology (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), p. 2 and passim.
I am also questioning, at least on this point, Eric Havlack's definition
of writing: "All systems which use scratching or drawing or painting to
think with or feel with are irrelevant. . . . A successful or developed
writing system . . . does not think at all. It should be the purely passive
instrument of the spoken word. . . ." Origins of Western Literacy, Monograph
Series/14, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, n.d., n.p., p. 17.

28 See, e.g., Barry M. Kroll and Robert J. Vann, eds., Exploring

Speaking-Writing Relations: Connections and Contrasts (Urbana, IL:

NCTE, 1981), passim.

29 See "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and

Writing," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 47, No. 3 (August 1977), 257-81

and "On Language and Literacy," International Journal of Psycholinguistics

(1980), 69-83.

30 Donald Graves, "Research Update: How Do Writers Develop?,"

Language Arts, Vol. 59, No. 2 (February 1982), 173-180, confirms Figure 4.

He is finding that very young children who say "I can't write" turn out to

be concerned about the messiness of a page or a misspelling. His model of

development--from "Spelling" to "Motor Aesthetic" to "Convention" to "Topic

Information" to "Revision" also approximates the order of Figure 4.

31 See Donald L. Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (Morningside

Heights, NJ: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 177-212; Donald L. Clark,

"The Rise and Fall of Progymnasmata in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century

Grammar Schools," Speech Monographs, 19 (1952), 259-63.

32 Hartman, "Communication, Language and the Humanities," p. 15.