

CHAPTER 17.

CHANGE, CHANGE, CHANGE— AND THE PROCESSES THAT ABIDE

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The generous gift in this volume of such wide-ranging essays from so many friends, from so many regions is overwhelming. Their careful reading of my work here comforts me in knowing I have contributed to a dialog of possibilities for the generations to come. These essays highlight that writing has always been about change, as writing has constantly evolved in its capacities and genres; as writing has changed the forms of social organizations, activities, and communities that have drawn on its potentials; and as writing has changed people as they have become immersed in worlds saturated with writing.

CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

Several of these essays explicitly address the opportunities new technologies afford for changing the conditions of writing and inspiring creativity in composing in multiple media. Carolyn Miller rightly points out that new technological means of production and distribution have facilitated the emergence of new genres that rapidly and widely share serially evolving information, thinking, observations, or other content, with a kind of informality consistent with its transient location in changing moments. As people engage creatively with blog opportunities, genres differentiate and proliferate. New technologies and platforms open up new potentials. Yet even as new genres emerge, the underlying processes of genre proliferation and differentiation remain as they have been since the earliest days of communication at a distance through letters.

Jack Andersen similarly looks at how genres respond to the enhanced searchability affordances of digital technologies, making texts more findable. To make texts more findable, searchability enters into the design of born digital documents, both in their production and their final form. As well, searchability creates its own genres of recognizable texts, such as hashtags. People in their communicative cleverness keep pushing the possibilities and limits of new technologies, and then designing their messages to take use of these possibilities. Yet while the texts and the practical problems to be solved in

writing them are new, yet the longstanding processes of genre adaptation and proliferation remain at play.

These new technologies and the genres that explore their potentials give rise to new skills in the production, design, and distribution of the texts that come to inhabit the new media far beyond the obvious skills of learning and manipulating the technologies and the traditional skills of academic publishers. The electronic production and distribution of texts have made possible new publishing collectives, no longer dependent on the commercial or quasi-commercial presses that have attached human editorial services to industrial costs of materials, printing, and book distribution. The possibilities of such collectives are particularly striking for academic and scholarly publishing which has long relied on the voluntary labor of academics for authorship, text evaluation, and developmental editing. But creating and sustaining voluntary collectives of people to build, organize, and maintain academic publishing that will support the selection, production, and distribution of open access books, while building academic credibility that will attract authors and readers, require new sets of social, managerial, and financial skills that extend far beyond the necessary facility with the technology. Mike Palmquist offers a history of one of the most successful of such new academic publishing collaboratives and offers a guidebook for others in creating an open-access future for academic publishing.

Otto Kruse and Christian Rapp in considering how new technologies can work to support writing are led back to fundamental and longstanding psychological and psycholinguistic issues of how humans formulate words and statements. They gather together what we know about formulation theory, focusing on the relation of oral speech to inscription, the bottleneck of the inscription processes, the linearization of thought and attention into sequentially inscribed words, and projecting a role for the feeling and cognizing reader. In carrying out these formulating tasks, what writers have to work with is words, so this then directs them to consider grammar and syntax. Providing technological support for human meaning making and creativity leads us to think more deeply about the nature of writing work. Formulation at the sentence level is one piece of the larger issue of the formulation of new ideas, arguments, coherences, and tensions. Technological innovators, seeking to offload some of the work of formulating and offering what the writer needs at the right time, have cause to understand fundamental human writing processes; otherwise, the technology, no matter how clever, will find little human uptake.

CHANGING CONDITIONS AND CULTURES

Change in writing comes from sources other than technology as well. A case

in point is the pandemic which has disrupted what had become a fairly stable genre system of classroom activities performed by teachers and students. Previous gradual experimentation with online learning carried out by volunteers suddenly became a pressing issue for all teachers as whole universities and school systems had to reinvent the organization and interactions of students and teachers. Administrators as well needed to find ways to support the teachers in managing the technology and redesigning their curricula. This has forced programs and teachers to rethink the nature and interactions of education in order to make it work under the new conditions. Joanne Yates in her essay documents the process by which this occurred at the Sloan School at MIT and considers what changes in classroom and faculty communication may endure past the pandemic.

Changes in conditions and relations in relatively stable scholarly communication systems may evolve in ways that are realized even at the level of word choice, as Ken Hyland documents in his corpus study of changing engagement and stance in applied linguistics, sociology, electrical engineering, and biology over five decades. Each field shows a different pattern of change suggesting different cultural changes, as some fields have become more author evacuated and others have become more author present. As well, some fields have sought higher degrees of audience engagement while others treat their audiences at greater distance. While the data do not clearly identify why this is happening, we can recognize that there are internal dynamics at work in each of the fields.

Even within a discipline each person experiences accidents of events, opportunities, and people that define how and when they engage further with their fields and what they learn to advance their knowledge. Their previous experiences and dispositions, as well, influence how they respond to these accidents. So even though each may engage with the thoughts and practices expected of their field, they develop a unique position and voice. Fatima Encinas and Nancy Keranen in their interview study find early literacy experiences and early career experiences are particularly important to opening the door to later accomplishments, and they suggest emerging scholars be aided in recognizing and taking up the opportunities that chance events offer.

CHANGING PEOPLE

Each individual working within each field also changes by entering into the practices and forms of expression of a particular field. Some of these practices may be quasi stable for generations of practitioners and represent key elements of intellectual and social enculturation. Each new practitioner needs to learn to

produce credible work in their field, pursuing credible modes of reasoning supported by credible methods of data collection and use of evidence.

Montserrat Castello reviews her research program with her colleagues into how writers develop systematic regulation of their texts through self, collaborative, and social processes. Within specific situations scholars internalize increasingly sophisticated cognitive practices which help them think as scholarly writers. Her work helps us unpack the complex kinds of processes writers come to use to give direction and form to their emerging thoughts and statements.

Paula Carlino, similarly, found that master's students in education in the process of writing their theses gained new concepts of themselves as writers and as inquirers. They also gained new concepts of how to formulate research questions that can contribute to the systematic knowledge to their fields, changing their view of what they do as teachers in their classroom.

Lucia Natale in her chapter follows university trained professionals out into their workplace to see how their university-trained ways of writing disciplinary work become transformed as they enter the practical problems of the workplace with new genres. Yet they still rely on the analytic skills and professional modes of thinking developed in their university projects.

CHANGING GENRES

Changes in genres themselves can change the working and activities of groups and individuals. Genre innovations can make more visible and rearrange responsibilities, roles, regulations, and resources of different participants, aiding participants in seeing their roles and possibilities in new ways. The central role of genres for creating new possibilities runs through Yrjö Engeström's work—possibilities for new roles, new identities, new ways of working, and new senses of the self. In his first example here he considers how mobility agreements within home care fomented changes in how elderly clients conducted their lives and increased their physical activity. He then examines a graphic scheme used in multiple settings to make visible possibilities for increasing clients' responsibility in self-care and diminishing passivity. He then looks at how pathway models co-constructed with formerly homeless clients help them understand and take charge of the possibilities of their changing lives. I find the kind of work here in using genres of representations particularly poignant as it shows how abstract concepts of genres in activity system can be brought into the concrete world to help people in their own life struggles, or as Yrjö calls it "ascending from the abstract to the concrete."

Karyn Kessler and Paul Rogers also show how genres can give shape and legitimacy to a kind of work that may have occurred before, but that becomes

empowered and more readily funded by documents that recognize roles, provide criteria for recognition, and create potentials for support. In short, new valued social types are brought into being, encouraged, and rewarded within an application system, enlisting people to identify with a kind of work. Potential social entrepreneurs are given identities and guidance through the categories in an application for funding. Over time as the identity emerges, the skills, criteria, accomplishments, and possibilities expand. This process suggests more broadly how social roles are formed by their naming, support, and recruitment in various documents, which in turn bring them into organizations that make their work possible. This is as true for nurses and doctors, teachers, and financiers and truck drivers as well as social entrepreneurs, although the activity and documentary systems that support these roles are longer standing and more complex, and perhaps even taken for granted. Each of these roles are given shape, regulation, training, support, sponsorship, criteria for success and failure, and organized relation to others in countless kinds of documents. The visibility and value of these roles then serve to attract new generations to fulfill these roles.

While genres evolve and new activity systems emerge, and as people experience genres new to them as they live their lives, yet the genres culturally experienced in youth and reinforced through local schooling can have enduring effect in how people engage in writing tasks throughout life. Liliana Tolchinsky and Anat Stavans examine how secondary school students in different countries (though of equivalent social economic status and given matched argumentative tasks) will write in ways particular to their region. It is unclear whether differences in curricula fully account for the patterned differences or if there are also connections between the literacy practices and ideologies in the community beyond school. In any event, the two cohorts emerge from their secondary education with distinctively different patterns of writing which they would carry with them even if they were to attend the same university in a third country. Those of us who have taught international students have seen these differences endure, even in the face of another layer of distinctively different instruction and genres, even if over time there is some accommodation and change within the more recently experienced expectations.

Two chapters here document how writing address writing education in two different parts of the world, showing the local dynamics and forces that are shaping emerging practices and institutions. Natalia Ávila Reyes, Elizabeth Narváez-Cardona, and Federico Navarro in their chapter show how writing education is particular to region and educational sector within South America. Wu Dan and Li Zenghui point out even within one country the distinctiveness of second language English writing from first language education. Writing cultures grow out of different circumstances and needs.

CHANGING KNOWLEDGE

The process of change itself concerns Clay Spinuzzi in his chapter: where change comes from and whether it is directed by inevitable dialectics or by the diversity of viewpoints that arise in dialogic processes. This question leads us not only to issues of logic and testimony which Spinuzzi raises, but also to systems of evidence, reasoning, theorizing, and credibility arising within various groups and enacted in their communications. This returns me to the issues of relativism that haunted me as a young scholar as it did many others, as we come to see the limits of our own knowledge and cultural worlds, bounded by the blindnesses, errors, interests, and limitations of practices within the systems that have taught us ways of seeing, inscribing, and conceptualizing—no matter how open we try to be. The doubts raised in undergraduate philosophizing, the dilemmas of democratic politics, or the conflicts of the science wars have only been deepened as I have come to understand the fecundity and variety of writing. Ludwik Fleck's account of thought styles of thought collectives, which in his practical analysis comes down to representational styles, I have found the most comforting, but even he has a trap door of agnosticism about the values that lie below the choice of representational styles. He characterizes scientific cultures as those that actively seek to maximize the passive constraints on discourse imposed by experience of the material world. I share with him a bet on this value preference as I think that nature will ultimately constrain our words. But since each scientific culture is particular in its practices, methods, forms of evidence, reasonings, and theories, we need to attend to all those who offer methodically gathered evidence of all sorts. This I take from Joseph Priestley. No knowledge is absolute; it is all process embedded within human communication and human activity. What we know at the present moment will influence the conditions of the future, even if those conditions raise new questions, invoke new processes, and lead us to different experiences and knowledge.

CHANGES IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WRITING

My whole career I have been surrounded by change in writing research. When I started teaching writing in 1971 there was no journal devoted solely to research on writing and there was only one practitioner journal focused solely on composition. Research monographs could be counted on one hand. What little research that existed was primarily linguistic, closely tied to traditional grammatical and syntactic categories and a small number of traditional school assignments. Five decades later we are aware of many more dimensions of writing and pursue many different methods. Process, genre, activity systems, WAC, WID, social

networks and relationships, values, motivation, efficacy, metareflection, development, anxiety, neurological organization and diversity, affect, trauma writing, atypicality, corpora, language varieties, translanguaging and hybridity, marginalization and systematic discrimination, access, history, technology, eye-tracking, keystroke logging, fMRI, autoethnography, interviewing, participant observation, and so much more are familiar to those in the field. But we are far from the end. We have become and remain highly interdisciplinary, looking for new ways to conceive of and view writing. The chapters in this volume continue to open new doors and make new connections.

Perhaps at some point writing studies will develop a small, stable canon of issues, ideas, and methods, but we are not there now. I feel fortunate to be part of this period of proliferation and expansion, opening our eyes to the complexity of writing. It has certainly provided me the pleasure of new vistas coming into view through the haze. It at least fit my disposition to look broadly and seek underlying processes. I suspect our field will remain interesting in this way for a time to come, or at least I hope so, for it seems to me there is so much fundamental still to be discovered, beyond the reach of our current disciplinary tools and imagination. I thank my friends and colleagues, those contributing to this volume and so many others, for accompanying me on this rewarding journey into the haze of the unknown.