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Correspondences Six

Broadside opinions and conversations af fresco

Dear Reader,

In Correspondences Six, we have a response from Peter Brown to Robert Garlitz's essay on Kenneth Burke in our last issue. I like the way these Burke-readers have developed versions of his style of inquiry: a lot of questioning, of circling back and around; avoidance of cant and the doctrinaire. For those coming to Burke for the first time (and for those who've earlier been turned off) I have two suggestions: don't try to read him by the book and stay away from heavy commentary. My own experience over the forty years I've been reading him is that careful study of almost any three or four pages in sequence will provide access to his central ideas about the offices of language and the nature of the creature who exercises them. Try entering with "De Begiminus," the Bennington College commencement address I included in Reclaiming the Imagination (Boynton/Cook, 1984). Three very lively and instructive essays dealing with pedagogical implications are: Philip Keith, "Burke in the Classroom" (CEC, December 1977); Clayvon Lewis, "Burke's Act in A Rhetoric of Nations" (CE, April, 1994); and Richard Coe, "Dracula Meets Kenneth Burke" (CE, March, 1986).

I once met a graduate student at Harvard who told me what a struggle he'd had with his dissertation: "But then I found 'Thirtiness!' That is to say, he had read Peirce and found what it means to say that meanings are out means of making meaning. I don't know for sure, but I'll bet it means that he stopped amusing 3 x 5 cards and began abducting in a dialectical notebook: 'If we agree with Walter Benjamin that allegory devalues the intrinsic meaning of things for the sake of its own arbitrary meanings, then ...' What I hope is that Correspondences will help readers find Thirtiness. Letters on thinking triadically (which, of course, in the foundation of Peirce's 'pedagogy of knowing') are welcome. Write me at the address below.

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In this issue, we include a few notes on method from readers, and we offer another piece on C.S. Peirce. Readers who've been with us will remember that Correspondences started out in 1994 with Gary Lindberg's meditation on Peirce's idea that each meaning-relationship is mediated by an idea that relates the symbol and what it represents: each sign requires another sign as its interpreter. Gary showed how our purposes lead us to start over and over again on the act of interpreting our interpretations. Neal Brass and others showed how this activity creates what Vygotsky called "the web of meaning"—thus bringing to life the dead metaphor of text. Frank LaFaro in his comments here suggests that instead of the hackneyed idea of "audience," we should let Peirce guide us in concentrating on the representations we invent and construct. Since positivist philosophers (and those suffering from RUP, as Owen Barfield says: Residual Underserved Positivism) eliding over into rhetoric enjoy meager at representation—which of course they reduce to meaning copy—we triadicians must look sharp to protect the idea from gangster theories.

Burke, Garlitz, and the "Power of Relation"
Peter Brown
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Ontario

Robert Garlitz is wisely reluctant to claim Burke as a doctrinaire "process" person. But surviving the disappointment and shock he felt at the realization that Burke did not sound at all "process," Garlitz underscores the continuing hope of Burkean allegiance through the kinds of ultimate progressions and regressions of which god-terms are capable. After all, one can start pretty well anywhere and end up pretty well anywhere. Terms imply terms and common sense rolls through the ages. Often (but not often enough) what is implied makes sense—for a writer, for a reader, and for those in between and around the act of writing and the act of reading.

I have always been critically comfortable with the notion that I really could not do anything with Burke; that, after all, it was what Burke did with me that was really important—Burke beginning and ending everywhere—the energies informing and shaping: a certain ecstatic passivity was right for reading Burke. But Garlitz challenges; perhaps one small step in knowing what to do with Burke? Or ahuh! Or no! No, after all, what is done is done with Burke. Together. Not too active though.
First, a note on Gailit’s subtle use of Charles Williams’s fine logical recapitulation: “All things . . . held together by correspondence” does invite the taking up of “the power of religion,” and to the mark in this relational broadsheet, Correspondence: “Do you know what I mean? Well, yes and no, and back to Gailit’s earlier speculative key of doing something with Burke together, to knowing what Williams (and Gailit) mean. To meaning. To trying to escape the world and all its generative goodness. To evaluating it as a sensible effect. As Gailit says, “...with the right imagination and attention to the full dialectic, one could start...” Here too Thoreau or Here to Here, “Right Imagination and Attention to the Full Dialectic.” And after, perhaps, we can join with Burke. Of course, I know what you mean—we need it at the same time. We need it—Burke, you and I. Whatever. Burke is the “power of relation.” Linguistic metaphors appeal—he is both focus and motrice and a very friendly guide who constructs the motive to become with the source of being. His self, our selves, myself.

I think Gailit can claim Burke for all that “process” seems coming to mean. He notes the absence of other explicit semiotological connectors with the latest research and the “up-to-dateness” of current theory, as when Burke was heard advising students on how to improve their writing by imitating models. But that moment of overheard advice may have been the wrong one to connect Burke with the latest terms and research of the “post” movement. Elsewhere, he has been most explicit, particularly in discussing “terministic sneers.” What seems so to bathe Burke in the same sense and sentiment of “process” it is the ethical appeal signified throughout his work. In all and as usual, but profoundly so with Eliot, Burke—the project progenitor—excellence—proclamations when language works well, be sure you study well what makes it work well, knowing Burke as authority for the ever-emergent “New English,” the new kind of discipline, is a reasonable element in the rhetoric of those who would see English evolve towards greater humanistic value. For some, this evolution is a revolution to a new discipline, a paradigm shift. Here, I think, is where Gailit has been taking us on his own Burke journeys—to the “new kind of discipline.” And, paradoxically, it is at this point where Burke that I normally get stumped. We do, after all, have this need to name and “process” wears thin. What do to with Burke? Or what is Burke doing with me?

This respectful reciprocity must remain the central dialectical questioning, but to say here risks semantic solipsism. Taking up Charles Williams’s “power of relation,” he asks, “The further question is where does Burke fit, besides with me and the general characteristics of the emerging ‘process’ discipline? How can he ‘fit’ help me ‘name’ what I am becoming? Besides to me, to what does Burke relate? How does he direct my imagination and attention through his Everything to something that informs, shapes, and finally names my becoming? How is Burke to be useful to us in transcending the terminological morass and drift to express that typifies our “new kind of discipline”? Burke’s importance to me will ultimately have to do with how he helps consolidate and direct my striving and enduring disciplinarily and personal change. Burke’s “correspondence,” his image with other images, seem boundless and organic. But the “power of relation,” in his argument does focus and does provide connection through and beyond his own. Everything.

What chiefly interests me remains Burke’s language: his “god-terms” are part of Burke and part of me and part of something else—they correspond. They connect us to ideas and further terms that may once and for all help us transcend the bipolar perspectives of paradigmatic debate. We, like Burke, through god-terms may become bigger than it all.

For Gailit, the god-terms are the way into Everything: terms itself, and language, thinking, dialectic, imagination, attention. And through them to further forces and ideas—first the warning from “Terministic Schemes.”

Also many of the “observations” are but implication of the particular terminology in which the observations are made, much that we take as observation about “reality” may be the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms.

The reciprocity of thought and language, in Burke draws the imaginative attention of Gailit and through him to Bur- field and Williams. From it all, Gailit takes Burke’s critique and makes Burke the composer—or consummator or both, Burke is made to speak to the “compositionalists.” Quality of consciousness requires the message. Do not just let, thoughts happen—think through writing about them while they are happening. How is it different? What does he especially contribute? Above all, Burke teaches us to think about acting in, not only thinking about, the world. Any language, writing, is the action—the symbolic action. But at least I would want to track through the development of Burke the “compositionalist”—perhaps Rimm. And Williams has done that, at least as much as he can. I found the Gailit provoking in its reinforcement of the ties between Burke and the general notion of “process,” “Corresponding” and stimulating of a “corresponding conversation.” I would submit now my dissatisfaction with merely claiming Burke as a “V.I.P.” for our cause, which is overburdened by supporter of negative allies already. It seems to me that the importance of Burke to teachers of writing is not so much in his various assurances that they are on the right track in pursuing “process,” as in his ability to convince us that thinking differently is a legitimate option and that writing is both the occasion and vehicles for thinking that makes “difference.”

The “difference making” function of writing seems an experience that can be provided and a learning that can be taught. And Burke’s testament to all this is, of course,
continuing good news to teachers of writing. Burke allows us to transcend the worn-out polarities to escape metaphoric drift and to genuinely think differently about what we are about. I don’t think we’ve done this with Burke because of the continuing rhetoric of servitude and gratitude that seems to accompany any critical account of him. Shouldn’t we be attempting to understand Burke as part of a non-English disciplinary tradition, rather than forever excising him as our own luminous progenitor within a framework of our own remaking of him? Why is Burke not considered as part of the development of contemporary hermeneutics, particularly the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer? Our frame of reference, with Burke’s help, can become philosophical as a transcending or transfiguring, rather than a synthesizing, sense. Some of the basic tenets of contemporary hermeneutics, set in constructive dialectic with the Burke canon, could help us think differently—and not just put the parts together in new ways.

The heart of the hermeneutic experience is to understand, not better, but differently. In reading, seen as an interpretive act, the difference occurs through the fusion of personal and cultural horizons (Gadamer and Bernard Lonergan most fully develop this metaphysically-philosophical notion of “horizon.”) For Gadamer, Lottman, and Burke the active agent is the interpreting reader, see act—reading. Now, an increasingly powerful research theme of the process school is the exploration of how reading and writing are both interpretive acts and, as such, interdependent. But if the fusion of horizons is the hermeneutic act of reading merges literary and personal text, what of the writing analogue? When one writes, what fusion of horizons occurs? If writing is an interpretive act, what and where is the horizon fusion? How does the reader read? on the page parallel the literary text, the reading of which is the occasion of the hermeneuticist’s fusion of horizons? “Imaginative attention” to what is going on inside while the writing is happening outside—the language of this attention is not yet teacher-based, but alone student-owned. If the interior mirror of the language occurring on the page is to be a real concern of teachers, then language suitable for students’ purposes is needed. Our sanctioned language is the language of the page. If the interior function is to be understood as the shadow usage of publicly-appropriated language of the page, we need to “name” what is going on there and share and develop these names with students in much the same way Burke has been sharing and developing his names for things.

Scholarship is needed in connecting Burke and the hermeneutic tradition. Here are some preliminaries:

1. Both the hermeneutic experience and the Burke experience are intrinsically historical—and the temporal/spatial location of meaning shared and mutually powered by text and the reader/writer is the locus of meaning.
2. Both are intrinsically linguistic—beyond communication and beyond conscious manipulation, language is essentially revelatory of the world without and within.
3. Both are dialectical—this centrality of the “Negatio Motus Ganzgipfel” relocations from negativity to a renewed apprehension of Self (or an apophenetic renewal).
4. Both are ontologically referenced—the being of things is the goad and lineheic; the Self as cause and effect remains the beginning and end of things.
5. Both offer a subjective renewal of objectivity—the ontological “character” of a situation is conveyed not by devising language to fit it, but by getting language demanded by the situation. What is ultimately expressed in language is situation, shaped by the dialectic of self-reflexivity.
6. Both renew and define the sense of “text” beyond mere analysis, the reader’s response is to the full otherness of text, reader and text are in companion making dialogues.
7. Both escape the relativity and absolute dogmatism of it, regarding truth. Grounded in negativity, truth is the action of discovery proceeding within a dialectic. Neither bland fact nor ultimatum concept—truth happens. It is a verb.
8. Both swallow up aethetics in cognitive theory and epistemology—truth becoming manifest through the shifting power of language which is the “moment” of art, a moment beyond the simple senses.
9. Both centered subject/object schemes dead-end conceptual/positive dichotomies remain pervasive in our “new”/“old” kinds of disciplines. Again—the Dialogic.

"To make one’s own world" was, previously foreign remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics,” concludes Paul Ricoeur. Certainly, this appear, to be Burke’s accomplishment. His ownership is prodigious, his reading of “Everything” is exemplary and centered to us by the power of his accomplishment. But to turn Burke on Burke? As always, the sense of the overwhelming critical “dare,” the interpretive “bohrit,” Ingers. In proposing a hermeneutic context for Burke, I am saying that Burke the reader/writer: seems to have desaturated himself in a career-long hermeneutic endeavor and that we should be bold in our own reading/writing of Burke and regard the project as essentially hermeneutic. Always we should be winding and guided, by the advice of “Terministic Screens”—but we should try.
I harbor this final concern about Burke. Why he has not had a more direct and visible impact on "Everything"—English, things "English," English Educators and terms forever ascending? Maybe he has and I have not noticed it. His value for profound change seems ever to be becoming. Sometimes I wonder if he nears the wondrous "might-have-been." His optimism that things can be right if we could only get them right seems sometimes to fade in what others do or do not make of him.

In "Rhetoric and Poetics," Burke describes something of his own development:

"Basically the situation is this: I began to the aesthetic tradition, with the stress upon self-expression. Things started moving for me in earnest when, as a student in Counterculture, I made the shift from "self-expression" to "communication." The theory of form (and "forms") centers in that distinction. For quite a while, as with many crises, I found it enough to work with these two terms, treating them as principles that variously correct and reinforce each other. But I am happiest when I can transform any such duality into a triad—and I subsequently did so by adding what I call "consummation." One can "track down the implication of a terminology" over and above the needs of either self-expression or communication (for instance, Beethoven's last quartets in his time, or James Joyce's later works)—and I'd want to treat such formal thoroughness as not merely reducible to the stressing and fulfilling of expectations in an audience.

Most reading/writing of Burke seems dichotomized in a manner similar to his existent "self-expression" and "communication" perspectives. In unraveling the meaningful implications of Burke's terminology we need a locus of need which is not audience-based. Burke's own transformation from duality to triad, from the expression/communication opposition to a transforming recognition of consummation, seems to suggest a different kind of energizing need. Throughout "Rhetoric and Poetics," he demonstrates the fallacy of artificial absolutes. Motive, form, and function inter-relate as things 'being various, and interpretive/terminological closure seems almost the unwieldy course. The dialectic Burke proposes changes things; as once, Burke himself, his terms, and the possibilities of meaning have been changed. The task in reading and writing Burke now is to use Burke himself as the hermeneutic, to really appropriate Burke. "Appropriation" is a notion and term basic to contemporary hermeneutics. In order to appropriate Burke, one first appropriates oneself—or vice versa? A tricky business, as Lonergan notes: "to become fully involved you have to be extremely detached" and the self-appropriation sought is, after all, a matter of "maximum detachment."

What is it in Burke that needs to be understood and consequently appropriated? Ourselves. Myself. Back to Gerlitz quoting Burke:

And the more I pursue over the reflexive, the more convinced I become that all of us, in pious error, should be on guard regarding the role of reflexive in our idea of identity.

The disclosure of possible ways of looking at things is the power of the Burke text; the continuing and alarming surprise, though, is that the disclosure of terms upon terms always and ultimately unravels ourselves. Burke provides his readers with a new capacity for knowing—for knowing themselves and thereby knowing him. And, of course, vice versa: Dialectic. And finally and again to the Burke drive to the self—the self to be confronted, grasped with, feared, and won over. With the winning over, the appropriation of self, the dynamic consummation of the eternal trial allows us with Burke to be at our "happiest." Not Burke or (our)self, but both, together.

Peirce's "Speculative Rhetoric" and the Writer's Audience

Frank Linfo, SUNY at Albany

Descriptions of the writer's audience offered in contemporary textbooks generally reflect the assumption that readers respond to texts in stable and predictable ways that writers may factor in by applying terministic principles to their writing habits. Their accounts make it seem as if the production of good writing depends more on a writer's ability to imagine a subject from someone else's point of view than on the ability to frame thought in language. Textbooks seem to suggest that writers can make a valid claim to knowing the details of an audience's probable response to a text, regardless of whether they know that audience through prior significant relationships.

Whether or not framing thought in language depends on imagining others' viewpoints, can a writer's composing strategy incorporate other minds as accurately as it can exploit the meaning-making possibilities inherent in language alone? To what extent do writers and reader share the responsibility for a reader's interpretation? Does the act of reading require that readers think about not only the patterns of interpretation and meaning suggested by the text but also the mind "behind" the piece? Since a reader's response to a text exists only as a future possibility, can anyone expect writers to imagine the potential disposition of readers' minds with anything other than a fallible and subjective intuition? Can a text mean the same thing to readers as it does to the writer? Rather than poising the writer's ability to predict the possible responses of others in order to construct texts which match a reader's expectations, may not the composing task revolve more precisely on the ability to create the potential for meaning while leaving the determination and interpretation of that meaning for readers?

The well-known conception of the audience as a "fiction" invented according to criteria derived from the genre
in question suggests that writers "invoke" potential audiences rather than "address" actual persons. Such theories define the writer-audience relationship in terms of a convergence of text and reader, but that complicates the issue because a convergence "exists" not only between writers and readers but also within the minds of writers and readers not in texts. If research indicates that a writer's attention directs itself neither simply toward other minds nor merely at the reader, then what specific object-of-attention stands in reference to the exact task demanded by the phrase "accommodating the needs of a reader?" If writers do indeed evoke a hypothetical audience, then have they accommodated abstract concepts represented by the contingencies of a text? How do writers persuade actual readers to alter their attitudes and conceptions and to accept the particular abstractions represented by texts as their own? Do writers succeed by attending to the needs of personal textual readers? Do writers succeed by attending to the needs of personal textual readers? If so, then the writer's frame of reference, audiences exist only as abstractions, then do writers need to maintain a precisely defined "audience-representation" prior to composing, or may they first compose and then decide upon the ideal readership to match the significance of their texts? Can anyone really "know" another's mind, or can one know only one's own mind? Does anyone's mind exist separately and apart from all others, or do the individual minds reflect and represent the sum total of minds in an "intermediate community?" If the reality of other minds remains inscrutable, then writers can only hope to know their own mental representations of their audiences. Rather than appealing directly to other minds, disciples create relationships among their own mental representations. Writers use language to make indirect appeals to others, and language itself remains the great determiner of what writer: can or cannot successfully articulate. Undoubtedly in this way, the act of writing represents more accurately a problem in poetics than the problem of knowing other minds. Writers must enact the dialectic of becoming ever more aware of the potential implications and meanings of the language that attempts to shape into discourse, and, likewise, readers engage in the same activity by forming their responses and interpretations. The argument that offers its own implications and demands its own exfoliation, but the idiosyncrasies of readers enter into the transaction and alter the directions of meaning in discourse.

Peirce's Speculative Rhetoric can help us reform the concept of audience. For Peirce, knowledge of any object—of attention consists always in a mental representation of that object and never in knowledge of the object-in-itself. In Peircean terms, consciousness consists in signs alone. My knowledge of a subject for discourse and my knowledge of my own attitudes and thought concerning that subject consist in signs. Likewise, my knowledge of other minds consists in signs. It follows that others' understanding of things also consists in signs. Thus, what I write comprises a network of signs mediated by my consciousness for the purpose and intention of mediating the sign-constitutions (interpretations) of others. Peirce's investigation of the nature of signs implies that understanding consists in the various processes of interpretation people employ in order to analyze language and produce meaning; i.e., thought and language interpenetrate in the sense that each acts as an element to mediate and make knowable the other. A writer's composing process creates meanings and the corresponding mental state referred to as "understanding," and this seems no regarded of whatever subject, purpose, or audience adopted by a community of inquiry for the resolution of doubt and the search for truth. Peircean constitutions comprehend their understandings rather than receiving them whole as absolute givens has any validity, then access to the reality of the other minds (audiences) that writers hope to affect resides in a complex of what Peirce called "interpreta
tions," which writers can attempt to mediate, influence, and determine by means of language, the symbol-making and mind-influencing medium of expression.

Peirce's major concern in studying and classifying signs stemmed from his belief that "a sign is something by knowing which we know something more." He devised Speculative Rhetoric as a method for thinking about how one thought might with accuracy elicit another by means of language, and he analyzed that process in his theory of "sign-meanings" (sign-mediation), the study of the development of interpretant signs. The notion of "sign-development" aligns itself closely to the concept of "enunciations" in rhetorical studies, or what Peirce referred to as the "illusive conjunctions" of a line of reasoning in discourse. He defined interpretants as the mental representations arrived at as a result of thinking between reader and writer to understand and object-of-attention (texts) Peirce categorized signs in their aspects as icon, index, and symbol in order to determine how to construct representations of thought according to the nature of their particular aspects. An interpretant sign emerges from a flux of significant events in consciousness and hardly remains stable. Peirce refers to this flux and its products as "enunciations," the sign-mediation process. A sign presents itself to consciousness through the mediation of a prior sign in a series of such mediations that consists in an infinite regression of interpretant signs. Peirce also suggested an infinite progression of interpretants extending into the future, i.e., given the continuation of consciousness in the extended community of thinkers, interpretants will yield new interpretants as long as intelligence exists. Thus, an interpretant sign, at one and the same time, marks the end-point of one line of reasoning and the beginning of another. Adopting Peirce's conception of language and meaning demands analyzing writing as a symbolic process with an internal organization of its own, which becomes relevant to both the production and reception of discourse. Writers constructing texts and readers interpreting them must respond to discrete complexities of
interprétant" sight; yet, both parties engage in composing processes in such a manner as to converse the meaning of their common object—of attention—the text. As writers engage themselves in language problems aimed at mediating other's understandings of their subjects, they rely on whatever audience representation they have determined to align themselves toward textual closure. As readers engage themselves in their own language problem—the interpretation of another person's composing act—they engage in their own act of composing meanings and arrive at their own author-representations. Neither writer nor reader has direct access to the mind of the other, but each relies on the symbolizing force of language to provide them with a necessarily indirect access to the reality of ideas and the achievement of understanding. The language as represented on the page serves as the basis for any transaction shared by writers and readers, and language itself exists as the field of discovery that makes possible the communication of intellectual efforts. Thus, writers and readers discover each other symbolically through their representations in discourse.

A Peircean perspective on meaning also views it as the sum total of the effects of interpretation extending into the future. In terms of writing and reading, the effects of all possible readings (past, present, and future) constitute the meaning of a given text. Since no one can expect to identify the potential limits of such a complex audience with any degree of precision, the writer may store unrealistically aim at addressing to the patterns of meaning implied by the linguistic signs comprising the logic of the text. Thus, when Peirce examined the process by which one thought might with accuracy elicit another in discourse, he referred to the development of interpretation. He distrusted the possibility of knowing other minds directly or with certainty, but he believed it possible to identify the logic of representations of thought. Incorporating his doctrine of "vital language," he idea that conceptions of reality originate from interpretations and do not necessarily constitute knowledge with certainty, Peirce distrusted the kinds of insights gained by introspection, rather than focusing on other minds. Speculative Rhetoric seeks to identify the "vital sentences" in a series of sign-mediations comprising a line of reasoning, the logical links between the thought and another, and asks for the presuppositions which guide the elements and arrangement of particular signs in the development of meaning in discourse.

Peirce's semiotics aims at a description of language made in terms broad enough to apply to all manner of perception and intellectual activity. His approach demands thinking about language in terms which may seem impractical at best; yet, if Peirce's ideas have any validity, we engage ourselves in the processes he described with each and every utterance we make. By considering language in this broadest sense, in its semantic aspect, we see that language mediates all experience of self, others, and the world. As a philosophical enterprise, Speculative Rhetoric focuses on describing how language mediates experience by means of signs, and it attempts to enliven our knowledge of this process to work for our advantage in discourse.

**Correspondence**

1. Reading Paul Kamen's "Coherence: On Method" in Correspondence For Sale: Angela Doreakapich, Assumption College, to STC himself, when she found this passage:

   "All is how many examples are now present to my memory, of young men the most anxiously and expensively in-school-mastered, be-taught, be-learned, any thing but educated; who have received arms and ammunition instead of skill, strength, and courage; varnished rather than polished; prudishly over-civilized, and must pitifully unaccomplished and all from instruction to the method dictated by nature herself, is the simple truth, that as the forms in all organized existence, so must all true and living knowledge proceed from within; that it may be trained, supported, fed, exercised, but can never be inflated, or impressed.

2. From J.A. Quattrini, Canonsburg Central School:

   On the process of writing about writing as a process. We are using language to try to understand how we are changing at the time that we are changing. Physiologist studying molecules must decide which sacrifice to make to get more precise information about structures, some information about motion and change must be sacrificed; to get more precise information about how things are moving and changing, some information about structure must be sacrificed. When we use language to study language, aren't we sacrificing at both levels—once with the thing studied, and once with the thing with which we study it? What does PROCESS MEANS the use student's unintentional but startling metaphor: it MEANS "taking too much for granted." The word "process" wasn't in it, and won't be carved in stone. Perhaps someone could help me place the expression "writing as a process" on this timeline: avant-garde, promising, revolutionary, current experimental, sceptical, traditional, hidebound, archaic, non-research-based.
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