

Review

MYA POE

Writing in Knowledge Societies. Edited by Doreen Starke-Meyerring, Anthony Paré, Natasha Artemeva, Miriam Horne, and Larissa Yousoubova. Anderson, SC, and Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, 2011. 441 pages. Available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/winks/> or <http://www.parlorpress.com/winks>

WRITING IN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES is one of the current offerings in the Perspectives on Writing series, published by Parlor Press and WAC Clearinghouse and edited by Susan McLeod. Books in the Perspectives on Writing series are available digitally at no cost or in print, which makes them a wonderful resource for writing scholars globally. Like some other books in the series, *Writing in Knowledge Societies* is a collection of articles drawn from conference presentations, in this case, two conferences from the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW). As a fan of earlier collections of conference papers from Canadian genre scholars, including Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway's *Genre and the New Rhetoric* (1994) and Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko's *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* (2001), I was keenly interested in reading current research by many of the same scholars who contributed to those genre collections. Of course, Canadian writing scholars do much more than genre research as shown in this collection of "rich accounts of the diversity of knowledge-making practices and the roles rhetoric and writing play in organizing and (re)producing them" (5).

The ambitiousness of this project, as signaled in the book's title, is both a strength and weakness of this collection. On the one hand, I found it a useful intellectual exercise to let go of *genre* and *rhetoric* as controlling frames in lieu of the concept of *knowledge making*. Likewise, I enjoyed the multiplicity of voices and perspectives offered in the collection. Textual analyses, ethnographies, and case studies can all be found here. On the other hand, the expansive reach of the book was also one of its limitations, and I kept wanting more framing from the editors throughout the book, not just in the introduction, to help me navigate the intersections and departures offered by the contributors.

Despite my complaint, Doreen Starke-Meyerring and Anthony Paré do a lovely job in the introduction in tracing a lineage of writing and the formation of knowledge through classical rhetoric, explaining that “rhetoric’s function is not simply to dress up and effectively convey some prior truth, but its role is in the creation and contestation of understanding and knowledge itself” (9). Starke-Meyerring and Paré articulate the connection between rhetoric and genre studies within a clear historical framework that scholars of writing studies will find useful. Yet, I was hoping that the introduction might also make connections between knowledge and rhetorics that lie outside the Western tradition. Forces other than those found in the Western rhetorical tradition have certainly influenced the knowledge economy, and it would be nice to hear about those other influences.

While the introduction to *Writing in Knowledge Societies* provides connections between rhetoric, writing, and knowledge production, the contributors in the following twenty chapters explore those connections using various methodological and theoretical approaches. In the first series of essays, “Conceptual, Methodological, and Historical Perspectives on Studying Writing as an Epistemic Practice,” Catherine Schryer narrates a history of the development of rhetorical genre studies, offering a useful explanation of the importance of Bakhtin to the field as well as distinguishing North American and Sydney School approaches to genre. What’s especially useful about Schryer’s chapter is that she connects genre theory with theories of social context, including activity theory and learning theory, thus bridging these various areas of scholarship. Likewise, the always-engaging Janet Giltrow takes up the question of how we learn genre in her historical essay about the eighteenth-century trader James Isham in “‘Curious Gentlemen’: The Hudson’s Bay Company and the Royal Society, Business and Science in the Eighteenth Century.” Tracing Isham’s travel writings and business writing, Giltrow uses the concepts of *robustness* and *precariousness* to describe the social interactions that make for the acquisition of genre knowledge. She writes, “If we see genre emerging from . . . collegial but also fortuitous, intermittent, and interrupted social interaction, then genre must be a precarious phenomenon—and also robust, to survive such interruptions” (64). *Robustness*. *Precariousness*. What great terms to describe genre acquisition, yes? Concluding the section is an expansive essay by Charles Bazerman on communicative technologies. Reading Bazerman’s work, I am always reminded of my scholarly inferiority as I cannot synthesize in a lifetime the amount of scholarship that Bazerman can marshal in a single essay.

The second series of essays, “Writing as Knowledge Work in Public and Professional Settings,” provides case studies of knowledge making at the intersection of public and private/government spheres. Diana Wegner follows a local environmental group’s attempts to maintain its activist identity while also building its

political capital in civic discourse. In a different context—the Canadian court’s decision in *CCH Canadian Ltd. v. Law Society of Upper Canada* (2004)—Martine Courant Rife explores shifting interpretations of copyright law. Using intertextual analysis that compares copyright laws in the U.S. and Canada, she shows how judicial opinions rely on what she calls “global remixing” (140), that is, drawing from similar legal cases, statutes, and regulations in other national jurisdictions to arrive at a decision. These two chapters, as well as chapters by Philippa Spoel and Chantal Barriault on government-risk reporting in Ontario and William Hart-Davidson and Jeffrey T. Grabill on initiatives at the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center at Michigan State University, illustrate the role of writing in knowledge making as well as knowledge-sustaining practices within organizations and communities. They also nicely illustrate that as an organization’s goals and purposes change, the organization’s writing changes as well.

The third series of essays, “The Role of Writing in the Production of Knowledge in Research Environments,” includes a set of very good essays on knowledge making in academic contexts. Ken Hyland writes in his accessible, informative essay:

The view that academic writing is persuasive is now widely accepted. Exactly how this is achieved, however, is more contentious, and raises a number of important issues, not least of which are those concerning the relationship between reality and accounts of it, the efficacy of logical induction, and the role of social communities in constructing knowledge. (193)

Through an analysis of 240 samples of disciplinary writing for markers of stance and engagement, Hyland argues that it is interaction—“positioning,” or adopting a point of view in relation to both the issues discussed in the text and to others who hold points of view on those issues” (197)—that matters in making academic writing successful or not. Hyland’s finding—that humanities and social scientist scholars adopt more involved and personal positions in their writing than science and engineering scholars—will not be surprising to any WAC reader, although it is fun to see a quantitative demonstration of the linguistic resources that disciplinary writers use to ensure their ideas are accepted within the academic community.

Other contributors in this series of essays explore additional strategies used by academic writers. In the case of physics, Heather Graves examines examples of metonymy as a figure that furthers persuasive claims. Graves’s analysis suggests not just that scientific knowledge is rhetorically constructed but how ontological and theoretical claims are collapsed linguistically in the scientific literature. Anthony Paré, Doreen Starke-Meyerring, and Lynn McAlpine draw upon learning and genre theories to study doctoral students in two education departments. Their findings about the nature of sponsorship, competing discourses, disciplinary boundaries

(and academia's relationship to the audiences beyond them) will also strike a familiar chord with WAC readers. Finally, Miriam Horne's essay on the feeling of insecurity that newcomers experience in academic contexts reminds us that the body should not be removed from discussions of rhetoric and knowledge making (Thank you for this reminder, Professor Horne). She examines inkshedding, a free-writing activity at the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning conference in which participants "collectively generate knowledge as in a Burkean parlour" (238). Through an analysis of discourse about vulnerability (parsed into themes of fear, resistance, and abuse), Horne suggests that such emotions "may impede both individual and community knowledge by causing individuals to hold back from participating in knowledge generating activities" (249).

Readers will likely turn to the fourth series of essays, "The Teaching of Writing as an Epistemic Practice in Higher Education," with the goal of finding new insights on the role of teaching writing in the knowledge economy. In "Writing and Knowledge Making: Insights from an Historical Perspective," Paul M. Rogers and Olivia Walling offer a historical review—an essay whose scope feels similar to the essays by Bazerman and Rogers in the *Handbook of Research on Writing*—on how writing "contributes to knowledge production in the context of the knowledge society and writing pedagogy in higher education" (259). In "Reinventing WAC (again): The First-Year Seminar and Academic Literacy," Doug Brent explains how forging a relationship between first-year writing and a WAC program can allow for the integration of writing across the curriculum at institutions where writing instruction has been viewed primarily as remedial and faculty have had little interest in teaching writing.

In essays describing quite different institutional contexts, those where writing is taught in the disciplines, Anne Parker and Amanda Goldrick-Jones as well as Natasha Artemeva explore engineering students' varied relationships to professional communication. Artemeva maps the struggles of Rebecca, an engineering student from a farm in central Canada, and her shifting understanding of engineering communication. Drawing on a synthesis of activity theory, learning theory, and rhetorical genre studies as a frame of analysis, what Artemeva calls a "unified social theory of genre learning," she argues that learners should be encouraged to develop their own strategies for dealing with workplace communication rather than adopting expert models in a cookie-cutter fashion. Contrary to other research, Artemeva finds that students like Rebecca can quite successfully transfer knowledge across contexts, in part because of their increasing confidence in using genres as meditational artifacts. Like Rebecca, the two South Korean students in Heekyeong Lee and Mary H. Maguire's chapter also face difficulties navigating academic discourse. Lee and Maguire argue that the ontological and epistemological assumptions that international students bring with them are often not shared in other contexts, thus leading

to conflicts between authoritative and internal discourses that ultimately leave them unable to participate in knowledge-making practices.

In the final series of essays, “Articulating and Implementing Rhetoric and Writing as a Knowledge-Making Practice in Higher Education,” contributors take up the issue of rhetorical action within institutional spaces. Roger Graves analyzes the digital and print university of Western Ontario writing program documents he created in an attempt to change how writing was conceptualized within the university. In a different forum, the town hall, Tania Smith explores how “boundary events” like the Wingspread Summit on Student Civic Engagement allow members of the university community, including students, faculty, administrators, and staff, to work together to find solutions to the challenges facing the college. Because of the fragmentation of communities within academic contexts, she argues, “simply improving the effectiveness of existing communication modes in courses and meetings is unlikely to enable an academic community to function as a whole” (410). Town hall meetings, on the other hand, act as rhetorical spaces “to teach ethical or democratic communication practices, to collectively demonstrate the value of the liberal arts to the public, to resolve internal institutional divisions, and to meet the external pressures and opportunities facing higher education and society” (410). Finally, Margaret Proctor writes about the role of writing centers in the Canadian higher education context. She posits that writing centers, such as those at the University of Toronto, have helped foster Writing Studies and the teaching of writing in Canada despite being positioned outside an academic home department.

In conclusion, writing does not merely transmit ideas; writing does things. Through writing, we define, make, and sustain knowledge. That’s not a new idea to anyone in WAC, but this collection contributes to our growing understanding of *how* writing makes knowledge. Through the carefully-edited papers selected for this collection we’re given a compelling range of approaches and locations from which we may continue to pursue that question. Yet, other questions remain unanswered: Where does writing fail to transmit knowledge? Where is it resisted? And where is it co-opted? Where is writing positioned in the knowledge economy in relation to the visual and auditory? And if writing plays such a crucial role in the knowledge economy, how is its role also changing everyday life? Perhaps these are questions for the next thought-provoking collection of essays from our Canadian colleagues.