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English 591  
December 12, 2005 - *Revised 8/26/06*  
Semester Project: The Book Review Essay

### **Review**

“Toward a Multidisciplinary Method of Teaching Visual Literacy in First Year Composition.”

John Trimbur. *The Call to Write*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005. 784 pages. \$74.00 (with MyCompLab).

Andrea A. Lunsford, John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. *Everything's an Argument, with Readings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 813 pages. \$57.25.

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004. 480 pages. \$69.00.

Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade. *Seeing and Writing*. 2 ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. 563 pages. \$53.25.

#### *Introduction: Bobbing and Weaving at the Water Cooler*

Teaching visual literacy in first year composition (FYC) can be a tricky topic to bring up regardless of the company you keep around the water cooler. Mention it to an advocate, and you're likely to argue about what the term visual literacy actually means and how to teach it. Bring it up in “mixed company,” and you may find yourself scrambling to defend the teaching of visuals in a writing course housed in traditionally text-based English departments. But if it's one thing we *may* agree upon (and I've opened myself up there) is that using visual literacy in FYC courses is not likely to disappear any time soon. If the subject matter included in many new college writing books is any indication of our growing interest in visuals, a good number of students may soon find themselves discussing what visual literacy actually means, how to study it, and they may even ask one another, “Why do *you* think we're studying ads and making flyers in a writing class?”

*Review Goals*

One of my goals for this review is to help WPAs and writing teachers better understand visual literacy and to discuss some of their options for teaching visuals in writing classes. I do, however, want to make it clear that I advocate a particular strategy for teaching visuals in the FYC course. Specifically, what I'm promoting is a compromise between classical rhetoric, media studies, and critical/cultural studies—a melding of the three into a multidisciplinary method to studying and writing about visuals. Some scholars do not believe this type of combination is possible—James Berlin<sup>1</sup> would insist that such an ideological smorgasbord is loaded with philosophical contradictions. I believe, however, that it is positive and productive to offer students a variety of approaches and writing options to help them navigate the rhetorical situations they may encounter in college, the workplace, and in civic discourse.

Specifically, I believe instructors should begin their study of visuals based in classical rhetoric and then move to media studies and design. Writing teachers can then integrate cultural criticism. Cultural criticism, however, should be studied toward the end of the course when students have practiced some higher-level rhetorical analysis, and when they have a stronger grasp of classical rhetorical and the writing strategies they've been studying during the semester. In addition, I believe that leaping into cultural criticism with visuals at the beginning of the term does not give students the footing or vocabulary they need to analyze and write about images. From my experience teaching writing in one form or another since 1996, I believe many students are ready and willing to question their culture—that may be one reason they're in college;

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<sup>1</sup> “It should now be apparent that a way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed...a rhetoric cannot escape the ideological question, and to ignore this is to fail our responsibilities as teachers and as citizens” (492-493). “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” *College English*, Volume 50, Number 5, September 1988: 477-494.

but I've found that dissolving students' concepts of power, gender, race, and history without teaching them the basics of rhetoric and composition leaves them with fewer options to voice their criticism and makes it more difficult for them to join their new discourse community with any hope of defending their new positions with arguments.

Each of the books I discuss in this review takes a different approach to teaching visual literacy. I believe it's valuable to refine our discussion of the different approaches to teaching visuals in writing classes because the next stage of this debate is not whether we *should* use it in FYC courses, but *how* we will use visuals in composition courses. *How* we approach and use visuals in FYC may determine the number of writing program administrators (WPAs) and writing teachers willing to integrate visual literacy into their programs and their syllabi. In addition, it's important to analyze textbooks' approaches to visuals because many writing teachers haven't yet decided what they're actually going to do with the visuals they will be using in class. Therefore, composition instructors may have a number of questions concerning visual literacy:

- What is visual literacy, and how can we most effectively teach it in a writing class?
- How can we most effectively teach rhetoric and composition using visuals?
- Should we use classical rhetorical to study and teach visuals, or should we use another pedagogical approach: expressionist, media studies, critical/cultural studies? Can we mix these approaches, and if so, how?

All four books I review here attempt to tackle these inquiries in very different ways.

### *Textbook Choices*

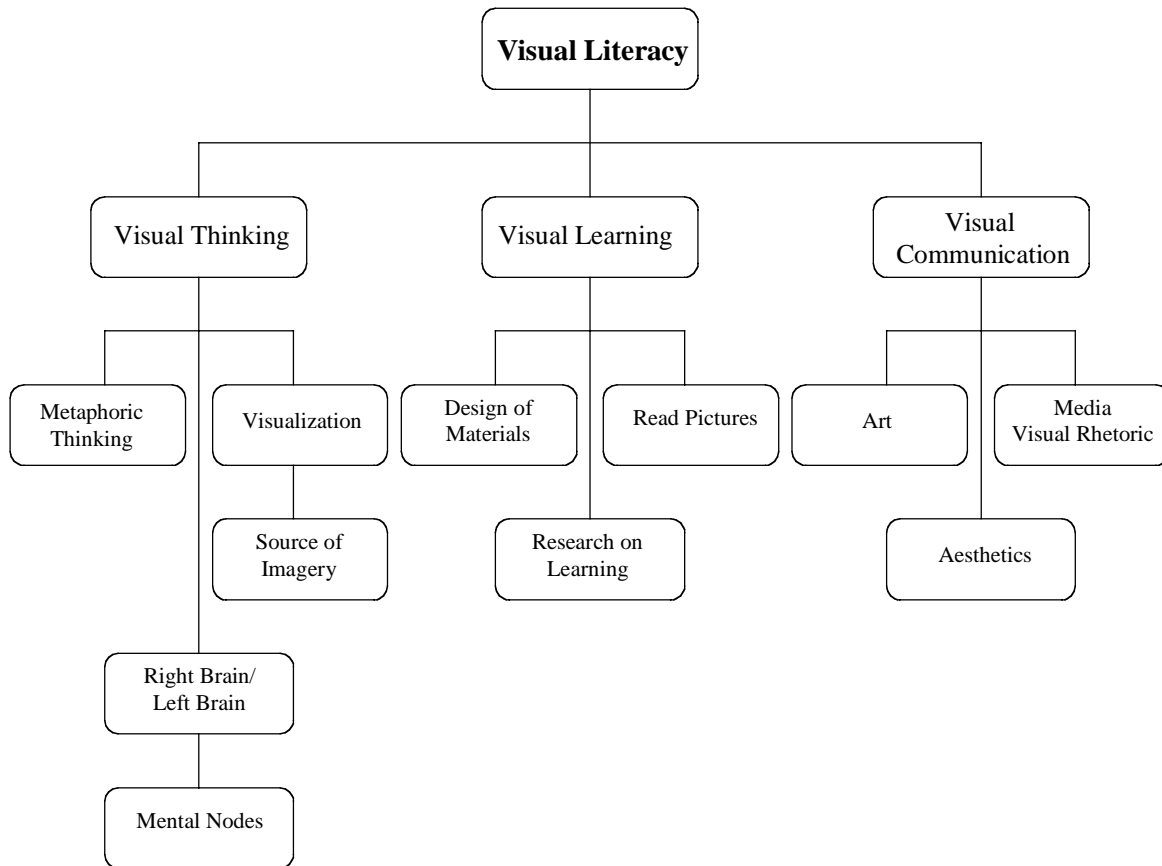
So, you're a WPA, a writing instructor, or new GTA. And you now want to integrate visual literacy in your writing course based on a conversation you had with a fervent colleague at a water cooler in the English department. Which text do you choose? Many textbooks use visuals.

Confused? That's not surprising.

There's a good chance most publishers and authors you speak with about books that use visuals will tell you that their text: 1) calls for critical analysis of visuals; 2) encourages insightful reading of visuals; 3) challenges students' original concepts of visuals; 4) discusses prewriting and the writing process involving visuals. But *how* do they do all this? Before I discuss the books in this review, I think it's wise to first establish a baseline for our definition of visual literacy. Then I will discuss the scholarship supporting the use of visual literacy in writing classes so we can study the four texts in this review.

### *A Definition of Visual Literacy*

Visual literacy is an umbrella term containing the subcategories visual thinking, visual learning, and visual communication. The diagram below, modified from Sandra Moriarty's diagram in her essay *A Conceptual Map of Visual Communication*, outlines what I believe is the clearest explanation of visual literacy (9-24).



In the broadest terms then, visual literacy is the overall discipline (general awareness) containing subcategories related to the use of visuals from the most rudimentary (visual thinking<sup>2</sup>), to the acquisition of information through visuals (visual learning<sup>3</sup>), to the use of visuals to convey information (visual communication/visual rhetoric<sup>4</sup>). I will be working from the understanding that teaching visual literacy to students in FYC means introduction to the following:

<sup>2</sup> First discussed at length by Rudolph Arnheim in *Visual Thinking*, 1969, then by Robert H. McKim in *Experiences in Visual Thinking*, 1980, and more recently by Robert E. Horn in *Visual Language: Global Communication for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* in 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Also discussed by Arnheim in *Visual Thinking*.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed at length by scholars such as Sonja Foss, David Kaufer, Brian Butler, Lee Odell, Dixie Goswami, Stephen Bernhardt, Elizabeth Tebeaux, Charles Kostelnick, and Eva Brumberger in a number of journal articles, books, and conference presentations.

- Visual thinking: the important contribution of visuals to the cognitive process
- Visual learning: the acquisition, understanding, and retention of data through visuals
- Visual communication: the use of visual thinking and visual learning to create documents that convey information using visual cues, graphics, and elements of document design to promote access, understanding, and action (visual rhetoric).

Important to understand, however, is that visual literacy need not be limited to studies using classic rhetoric, though I believe classical rhetoric forms a valuable base for students in FYC. Visual literacy can most certainly move into media studies and then into critical/cultural studies to analyze the ways visuals may reinforce hierarchies of power, gender, race, history, etc. In the next section, I trace some of the scholarship supporting the movement of visuals into writing courses.

#### *Support for Visual Literacy/Rhetoric in the Writing Course*

The argument for teaching visual literacy/rhetoric in writing classes generally breaks down into five categories:

1. We should integrate visuals into writing courses because a very basic and important part of our cognitive processes is visual
2. We should integrate visuals into writing courses because we learn information quicker, understand information more thoroughly, and retain information longer if it is presented in text *and* visuals
3. We should integrate visuals into writing courses because students can learn global organization *and* local mechanics requirements more efficiently with visuals (this is especially meaningful for students with learning disabilities)
4. We should integrate visuals into writing courses because we can use them to help satisfy university writing requirements; we can use visuals to teach rhetoric, and we can use rhetoric to teach visuals

5. We should integrate visuals into writing courses because we live in a visual culture, and we owe it to our students to teach them how to read, analyze, and create the visually dynamic texts they will face in other college courses, in civic discourse, and in the workplace.

Composition scholars such as Sonja Foss, David Kaufer and Brian Butler all believe that the movement of visuals into the writing course is necessary and positive.

In her essay, “The Construction of Appeal in Visual Images: A Hypothesis,” Sonja Foss asserts that images from our culture bombard us with argumentation. She explains how “...images presented through the media such as advertising, television, MTV, films, signs, and building exterior and interior design constitute a major part of our rhetorical environment” (210-211).

Further, she asserts

To study only verbal discourse...is to study only a minute portion of the symbols that affect us daily. To understand and influence culture, to teach students to respond critically to the symbols around them, and to discover how to create effective messages, an understanding of the process by which visual images appeal is needed. (211)

Foss concludes that rhetoric is actually all around us in the furniture and machines we use and in the structures we build. She contends that as teachers of rhetoric, we would be remiss if we did not teach our students to “read” these texts just as they read words:

Rhetoric scholars use visual imagery as data to investigate questions related to the nature and function of rhetoric. In such studies, visual images constitute artifacts to use in illustrations, explaining or inventing rhetorical constructs developed from the study of discursive rhetoric. Visual images, in this approach, are assumed to have essentially the same characteristics as discursive symbols.

(212)

In *Rhetoric and the Arts of Design*, David Kaufer and Brian Butler assemble a wide variety of work that speaks to the rhetorical nature of visuals and design. In their introduction, they emphasize the importance of understanding how influential—and how rhetorical—visuals and design can be. They also note how the growing use of visuals and design in our culture underscores the shift in composition theory from the cognitive to the Aristotelian approach, and thus the more visual. Kaufer and Butler maintain that cognitive composition dominated the late 1980s (xiv). They admit that this was a limited approach and that more “public rhetorics of the Aristotelian tradition” are needed to develop effective arguments (xiv). Most importantly, Kaufer and Butler feel that traditional and modern scholars have not fully explored the socially formed products of shared knowledge within the discipline of rhetoric. They feel rhetoric should move in a more analytical direction, “to look more like an organized body of analytical knowledge” (xvi). Kaufer and Butler believe that part of this process includes reshaping our concepts of rhetoric to incorporate much of what Arnheim discusses in *Visual Thinking*:

We determine that not only modern theories of written composition but also modern formulations of classical rhetoric could benefit from an account of rhetoric as a type of productive knowledge. We suggest that neither the ancients nor moderns fully envisioned rhetoric in the family of arts we associated with modern design: architecture, engineering, graphics. We show...the advantage of doing so far into granting classical theories of rhetoric and modern theories of written argument. (xvi).

In the opening sections of *Rhetorical Movement: Essays in Honor of Leland M. Griffin*, Kaufer and Butler point out that rhetoric and design are intrinsically related and that we have lost sight of rhetoric’s productive and civic nature—two primary goals of many FYC courses. First, they state that

Rhetorical knowledge, whether practiced in civic communities or by schooled professors, is a type of design knowledge...all professions and disciplines are also publics, and by following a theory of rhetoric as design within a general public, we can begin to track how public rhetoric is transformed or elided when taken into a professional or disciplinary context. (7)

Second, they assert that when we do not connect rhetoric with design, our modern understanding of rhetoric is limited to modes of thought out of step with the original Greek and Roman concepts of rhetoric. To support this position, they site Richard Buchanan<sup>5</sup> (1995 p 44):

Rhetoric is still perceived by many people in its Renaissance orientation toward poetry, belles letters, and beaux arts, rather than its twentieth century orientation toward technology as the new science of art, where theory is integrated with practice for productive purposes. (9)

This concept is important to consider, because in classes such as FYC, some instructors teach students to write for and from themselves, with little concept of audience, which opposes the original public, civic, communal, and productive purposes of rhetoric. Further, some instructors do not teach students how to add their voice to the community of analytic knowledge, or how to solve problems with their writing. When we use classical rhetoric to begin teaching visual literacy, we help students understand how to produce knowledge within their communities as civic discourse.

It should be clear that a good number of composition scholars believe that we can fulfill university writing requirements and teach rhetoric by integrating visuals in our FYC courses.

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<sup>5</sup> Buchanan, R. "Rhetoric, Humanism, and Design." *Discovering Design: Exploration in Design Studies*. Eds. R. Buchanan, V. Margolin. Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago Press, 1995.

These scholars believe that visuals play an important role in students' thinking, learning, and writing processes, and they believe that we are obligated to teach visual rhetoric because we must help students negotiate our visual culture (college, civic, workplace) in a critical manner. In the following sections, I review in detail the four books I outlined above.

*Pedagogical Approaches to Visual Literacy in the Textbooks*

John Trimbur's *The Call to Write* begins with an explanation of the various rhetorical situations students may face and then works through a classical rhetoric approach of these genres with visuals integrated into every section of the book; visuals are highlighted specifically in three chapters. *Everything's an Argument, with Readings* by Andrea A. Lunsford, et al, begins by using contemporary language to discuss the different types of argument in classical rhetoric. The authors then explain how all the elements of our culture establish arguments. Next, the text moves through traditional composition essays such as definitions, evaluations, and proposals. *Everything's an Argument* also covers visuals in three separate chapters but does not integrate conversation on images throughout the text.

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee take the most traditional approach of the four books, as the title of their text might imply: *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. *Ancient Rhetorics* defines ancient rhetoric and explains how these theories influenced the Hellenistic and Roman worlds and how they influence us today. The book then takes a classical approach by working through the rhetorical canon and ends with rhetorical exercises. Crowley and Hawhee discuss visuals only once, in the section on delivery, and not surprisingly, they use classical rhetoric in the dialogue. *Seeing and Writing* by Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade takes primarily an expressionist approach to an exposition, description, narration, argument (EDNA) format.

At times, *Seeing and Writing* asks students to argue a position, but curiously, the book does not contain a defined section on argumentation nor does it discuss classical rhetoric. *Seeing and Writing* is visually dynamic and integrates the study of visuals throughout; the pedagogical strategy for this study is expressionist-focused, but it also uses elements of cognitive theory, media studies, and cultural criticism. The following section discusses each of these books in turn.

### *The Call to Write*

For the past thirty years, John Trimbur has been an outspoken supporter of “ordinary” people’s writing education and how these average citizens “...use forms of writing to voice their needs and participate in public life” (WPI English Faculty Site). Trimbur has published on a broad range of topics including ideological pedagogies (“The Politics of Radical Pedagogy: A Plea for ‘A Dose of Vulgar Marxism,’” 1994) and writing program administration (“The Problem of Freshman English (Only): Toward Programs in the Study of Writing,” 1999). And recently, he has turned his efforts to updating *The Call to Write*, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Trimbur’s primary goal for *The Call to Write* is “...to help students become effective writers in their college coursework,” though he is quick to point out that writing encompasses genres outside academia (xxxvii). Personal writing, civic discourse, and workplace writing all play major roles in *The Call to Write*; this stance is consistent with Trimbur’s philosophical beliefs in the discursive rights of ordinary people: “...writing should belong to everyone in the various roles people play—as private individuals, as students, as workers, and as participants in public life” (xxxvii). This egalitarian approach to writing certainly matches Trimbur’s academic interests, but what is puzzling is his pedagogical shift from cultural studies and Marxist positions to a more classical rhetoric approach in *The Call to Write*.

In Trimbur’s front matter, he outlines his basic assumptions regarding visuals and writing. He emphasizes visuals by setting his Guide to Visual Design before the Preface.

In the *Guide to Visual Design*, Trimbur states “Writing is increasingly a matter of integrating text and graphics. The persuasiveness of many types of writing relies on effective visual design...*The Call to Write* contains many examples of texts that combine words and images” (xxxiii). So right up front, we see Trimbur’s belief in visuals as rhetorical, that images not only belong in a writing class, but that they should be taught along with text-based communication. In his Preface, Trimbur outlines his strategy for the content and organization of the text. He states that his book “offers students a broad introduction to writing, so that they can learn to write with flexibility and influence in a variety of settings” (xxxvii). Trimbur’s primary goal is in step with many of the composition scholars I discussed above because he believes that

...writing is much more than a school subject. Writing is an activity individuals and groups rely on to communicate with others, organize their social lives, get work done, entertain themselves, and voice their needs and aspirations. (xxxvii)

It’s no surprise, then, that Trimbur organizes his text into genres.

In *The Call to Write*, Trimbur allows instructors and students to work in a variety of rhetorical situations by organizing his chapters around genres, or “literacy events,” such as letters, memoirs, public documents, and proposals. He begins by explaining the literacy events and students’ need for skills that will empower them to navigate these writing situations. We then move into the chapters on rhetoric and argument. Despite his previous stances on the need for ideological approaches in the writing class<sup>6</sup>, Trimbur uses classical rhetoric in this text—though most of his “real life” examples ask students to think critically about cultural topics, such as Coca Cola’s ad campaign vilifying water consumption in restaurants before their move to distribute Dasani. He integrates the study of visuals into each chapter and dedicates three entire chapters to visual design, web design, and oral presentations, respectively.

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<sup>6</sup> “The Politics of Radical Pedagogy: A Plea for ‘A Dose of Vulgar Marxism.’” *College English*, Volume 56, Number 2, February (1994): 194-206.

Trimbur even includes a section on the Ethics of Information Design. Trimbur primarily uses a classical rhetoric approach to study visuals, but he also uses elements of media studies throughout his book to discuss design. To reinforce his lessons in visual literacy, the page layout of Trimbur's is vibrant and usable. The full color format, clear tables of contents (brief and detailed), multiple headings, generous white space, and numerous tables make *The Call to Write* easy to navigate and understand. The book works as a good model of usable document design for students to replicate. The page design clearly reflects Trimbur's work with professional communication.

To study and write about visuals, Trimbur asks students to view images through a classical rhetoric strategy: consider the rhetorical situation, the purpose, and the audience; analyze the persuasive tactics in the visual; practice using visuals persuasively in your own documents. Still, I must admit that after reading Trimbur's other publications—some of them heavily influenced by Marxist and critical/cultural studies—I was somewhat surprised by *The Call to Write*.

Of the four books I review here, Trimbur's follows the strategy I believe to be the most effective for teaching visual literacy in a writing course. However, I think that Trimbur could incorporate more overt critical/cultural studies in the text to make this book's pedagogy multidisciplinary. It would not take much supplementing on the instructor's part, however, to push Trimbur's lessons into the critical/cultural studies arena, and perhaps that's the sort of flexibility he intended when he wrote the book.

### *Everything's an Argument*

*Everything's an Argument* by Andrea Lunsford, John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters offers another method of studying and writing about visuals. In the Preface, Lunsford, et al., clearly establish their pedagogical beliefs that fashion the backbone of the book:

Language provides the most powerful means we have of understanding the world and of using that understanding to help shape our lives...all language—including the language of visual images or of symbol systems other than writing—is persuasive, pointing in a direction and asking for response. (v)

Their purpose is equally clear. Lunsford, et al., believe that argument permeates our lives, or as they say, "...we walk, talk, and breathe persuasion very much as we breathe the air: *everything* is an argument" (v). And while this may sound like a critical/cultural studies approach, the authors maintain a classical rhetoric methodology of studying text, visuals, architecture, and electronic media. It's also obvious the authors are dedicated to integrating visuals in analysis and writing:

And we have tried to broaden the context of argument to include visual media as well as the public spaces and electronic environments that students now inhabit so much of the time by adding a chapter on visual argument with advice about how to use images and design elements persuasively. (vii)

*Everything's an Argument* begins with thorough sections on argument, rhetoric, and the composition of traditional categories of essays such as the Toulmin argument, definitions, evaluations, and proposals. The text ends with a large selection of readings. Like Trimbur, Lunsford, et al., dedicate three chapters to visuals specifically, covering visual arguments, arguments in electronic environments, and spoken arguments (slides, etc.). However, the authors do not integrate visuals or discuss visuals in each of the chapters. Lunsford, et al., ask students to consider culture in many of their response questions. Questions regarding culture, however, move strictly within the classical rhetoric tenets of commonplaces and ideologies. The authors discuss some elements of media studies in the chapter on Visual Arguments. And like Trimbur's text, this book uses color (though not *full* color), numerous headings, abundant white space, and a mixture of fonts to create navigable, functional pages.

Areas the authors could improve include integrating more elements of professional documents, such as résumés and reports that use graphics. Another area the authors could work on is integrating *some* critical/cultural studies questions on images (as well as text) to give instructors the flexibility to move into these areas at some point in the semester. Short of this, though, I believe that a truly multidisciplinary approach to teaching visuals with this book would take minimal effort from an instructor.

Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, by contrast, offer a very traditional approach to visuals in their book, *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. Sharon Crowley has, for quite some time, championed the abolition of first year composition. In *Composition in the University*, she even refers to the FYC course as being similar to "... 'hell night' in fraternity initiations: people do it because it was done to them, everybody sentimentalizes it by forgetting about its more painful aspects" (228). In addition, she has struggled to reposition classical rhetoric in undergraduate study so that it is no longer taught subservient to composition<sup>7</sup>. I believe that it is this reluctance to use rhetoric within a composition context that makes *Ancient Rhetorics* a challenge to use in the FYC course<sup>8</sup>; it's possible to use *Ancient Rhetorics* in FYC, but instructors must explain to students that the book's purpose is to introduce them to rhetoric not to teach them to write. A good deal of supplemental material, and a handbook such as Lester Faigley's *The Brief Penguin Handbook* is needed to help students learn more about *writing*.

To their credit, Crowley and Hawhee never pretend that their book is meant to teach first year students how to compose academic papers, inquiry essays, cover letters, or reports.

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<sup>7</sup> Crowley, Sharon. "Composition Is Not Rhetoric." *Enculturation* 5.1 (Fall 2003): [http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5\\_1/crowley.html](http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_1/crowley.html).

<sup>8</sup> I used *Ancient Rhetorics* during my first year as a Ph.D. student in rhetoric and composition at Purdue University. Though I had used classical rhetoric in my composition and technical writing courses for five years preceding my experience with *Ancient Rhetorics*, it was very difficult to teach rhetoric and writing with this book. It took patience (from me and my students) and a good number of supplements and *The Brief Penguin Handbook* by Lester Faigley to pull it off.

They make it quite clear in their preface that undergraduates and graduates in speech and writing classes can use *Ancient Rhetorics* to learn about classical rhetors and rhetoricians and as a source of knowledge on, primarily, methods of invention (xiv-xvi). And so it's with these goals in mind that we must enter into *Ancient Rhetorics* understanding the following: 1) any discussion of visuals is circumscribed by a very traditional approach to rhetoric; 2) the media theory discussed in the small section on visual rhetoric is placed in a classical rhetoric perspective; 3) the authors come nowhere near critical/cultural studies.

Crowley and Hawhee begin by explaining why ancient rhetoric still matters today and how it affects us in our American democracy. Then the text recalls a thorough history of ancient rhetoric, beginning with the early rhetors and moving through the Hellenistic and Roman periods. From here, *Ancient Rhetorics* maintains a classical structure: invention, kairos, stasis, the proofs, sophistic topics, the rhetorical canon, and finally, rhetorical exercises. Crowley and Hawhee never venture into cultural/critical studies, expressionist approaches, or cognitive theory, which is no surprise given the objectives of the book. And although Crowley and Hawhee include visuals in their chapter on delivery, visual rhetoric seems relegated and buried due to its placement in the text (near the end) and its brief discussion (three pages with one black and white picture). They've included visual rhetoric, but it seems, only because they *had* to.

In addition, while the three other books I review embrace contemporary document design by using headings, color, ample white space, and numerous images, *Ancient Rhetorics'* pages do very little to invite readers into the information contained within their lengthy paragraphs. This book is difficult for first year students to navigate, read, and comprehend, and it's arduous for them to retain the text's valuable lessons. Though the book discusses delivery, it does not live up to the design standards the authors advocate to help audiences understand meaning.

It's a shame *Ancient Rhetorics* is so hard to use because many undergraduates may abandon the text in favor of a watered-down Website on rhetoric.

### *Seeing and Writing*

*Seeing and Writing*, by Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade, takes a different approach to teaching writing; it is the only book in this review to focus primarily on an expressionist line of inquiry. Donald McQuade has a background in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American literature, the American Renaissance, and the essay as literature (University of California, Berkley Website). With so much training in transcendentalist philosophy and writing, it's no surprise that *Seeing and Writing* asks students to begin with close observations of the world around them and then "...relate their initial perceptions and interpretations of this material to their own life experiences" (ix). Donald McQuade, and his daughter Christine McQuade, emphasize that *Seeing and Writing* is "...the first composition reader to introduce the skills students need to read both kinds of texts [words and visuals] and then to write effectively about them" (vii). I applaud their move into studying visuals. However, there are underlying theoretical problems with this text that keep this book from being an effective tool to teach visual literacy or argumentative writing.

The theoretical approaches the authors use grow out of expressionist thought—the authors even begin their text with a quote from Thoreau's *Walden*; but from here, the text provides only a nod at writing process. To explain writing process, the authors use a mixture of cognitive theory (phrases such as "composing is a recursive process" and "brainstorming or freewriting" pervade) and current-traditional approaches of purpose, audience, drafting, and revising (xlv, xlvii). There is no mention of classical rhetoric or invention, and there is very little material on argument, though the authors claim that students will practice critical analysis and argument as part of their EDNA<sup>9</sup> formula (vii).

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<sup>9</sup> EDNA: exposition, description, narration, and argumentation.

Furthermore, the authors tell us that students will develop skills to read critically, to analyze and write effectively. To clarify their definition of critical reading and analysis, the authors ask students to

...take a closer look, to see actively beyond the surface of words and images...carefully analyz[e] for meanings and effects...to better understand each part and to explore the relationship of each part to the whole. (xxxiii)

Ok so far. But the process of this analysis leads to personal reflection, examination of structure, and cultural studies rather than any sort of assessment of rhetorical strategies. The authors' list of questions to prompt analysis in the introduction is as follows:

What response does this text evoke in me? And why?

What are the strategies that the author or artist has used to create these effects (*emotional* not argumentative)? --*my parentheses*.

What might this text—and the strategies used in it—say about contemporary American culture? (xxxiv)

Finally, we are told that writing “effectively” means moving through prewriting (involving observation as they have defined it) and deciding on a purpose.

Writing purposes, to the authors, include the following options: “to narrate or describe an experience, record a personal anecdote, recall a concert, remember a family story, or recover the pleasure of reading a book or seeing a film or a play” (xlii). Again, the authors do not mention rhetoric or argument. The authors continue their description of writing process by asking students to envision their audience; this section contains questions such as “Who is my reader? What do I have to do to help that person understand what I want to say about my particular subject?” (xlvi). Unfortunately, the authors never tell us how to go about answering these questions.

In other words, *Seeing and Writing* doesn't tell us what to do—specifically—to convey our information to a peer, a relative, a colleague, a professional, a community. We are left to guess. Writing instruction, after the introduction, is limited to brief prompts following images, articles, or creative works that ask students to

Write an essay comparing the way objects are presented...write an expository essay in which you analyze the nature and extent of the different effects produced by a poem and a painting...draft an argumentative essay in which you articulate and defend your position. (7, 11, 87)

These prompts don't sound confusing or contradictory when read out of context; however, the authors never explain the compare/contrast essay, the expository essay, or the argumentative essay—or its rhetorical strategies—in their book to help students compose these papers. In addition, *Seeing and Writing* doesn't contain examples of these essays as models, so students, it seems, must wholly depend on the instructor (often times an under trained, overworked GTA or out of work literature professor) to fill in the numerous gaps.

If WPAs or writing instructors want to integrate visuals into their programs or syllabi, to have students study images in the argumentative arena, Trimbur's *The Call to Write* or *Everything's an Argument* by Lunsford, et al. will serve as effective tools. *Ancient Rhetorics* is simply too difficult to navigate for first-year students and does not effectively address visual literacy. And even though *Seeing and Writing* seems like a venture into visual literacy (it's a visually striking book that asks students to write about images), the McQuade text contains too many pedagogical gaps and theoretical contradictions to be effective in teaching visual literacy or argumentation.

*Conclusion: Same Water Fountain, One Semester Later...*

I believe a very important part of our thinking process is visual—a concept posited by Arnheim in *Visual Thinking* published in 1969. I also believe that Arnheim was on to something when he stated that Western culture has marginalized the visual in favor of the textual because of the distrust of the senses presented by Plato in his *Allegory of the Cave*. Further, I believe that we can harness students' visual thinking abilities to help them navigate the visually dominated world in which we live; we can help them read and write in what Robert Horn calls "...the emergence of a new language: visual language" (6). Finally, I think we *can* satisfy university writing requirements when we teach students to read and produce visually dynamic texts.

A good number of composition scholars maintain that we can use visuals to teach classical rhetoric and that we can, in turn, use classical rhetoric to teach visuals. Some writing scholars assert that one way instructors can use visuals is through expressionist theory—this helps students read images so they can define who they are and compose personal observations on images. Still other theorists think it's important to use critical/cultural theories to read images to help students analyze how definitions of power, gender, race, and history have been constructed by hegemonic forces in our culture. I don't disagree with any of these approaches—what I disagree with is a limited or tunnel-vision curriculum that excludes a pedagogical strategy that might help a student write more effectively, regardless of the purpose and audience of the writing situation.

Based on my six years in the composition classroom, and my study of composition pedagogy, I believe students should begin writing classes studying classical rhetoric, move into media studies, and wind up the semester with critical/cultural studies, all the while writing personal reflections. If we apply this strategy to teaching visual literacy, our students will receive a truly multidisciplinary FYC course dealing with writing and images and the inexorable relationship between the two.

This multidisciplinary approach is needed if we are to harness visual literacy's potent influence in our writing classroom. And after reviewing these four texts, I believe that Trimbur's *The Call to Write* nearly accomplishes this goal. With minimal supplementation, Trimbur's text could form the framework of a multidisciplinary course that would tap into students' visual thinking processes to help them read, understand, and compose visually dynamic documents for college courses, for civic discourse, and for workplace writing.

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