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Places in Time: The Inns and Outhouses of Rhetoric

Steven Mailloux

I smell a bad word.
—Roman Mailloux, four years old

There's only one question: Are we the good guys or the bad guys?
—Retired Brigadier General, U. S. Marines, at author's 35th anniversary high school reunion

Rhetoric is often about “good guys” and “bad guys.” Even more basically, it concerns who's in and who's out, what's included and what's excluded, who's placed inside and who outside a cultural community, a political movement, a professional organization. These ins and outs concern both the commonplaces of rhetoric and the rhetoric of common spaces. Such rhetorical locations are, of course, not simply spatial; they are also temporal. Rhetoric is about time and especially about timing: the *kairos* of the present, the traditions of the past, the utopias of the future. In this paper, I talk about the ins and outs of rhetoric by focusing on places in time along some rhetorical paths of thought, paths that traverse various public and private spheres, such as the academic, the non-academic, and the everyday. In three sections, I trace rhetorical paths across these three overlapping domains: first following rhetoric through academic space/time, primarily through the institutional history of rhetoric as a university interdisciplinary; then moving to rhetorical theory and practice beyond the academy; and finally ending with something on the rhetorical hermeneutics of the everyday. In so traveling along these rhetorical paths, I hope to respond directly to the fourth cluster of questions at our conference: “What should be the institutional and social goals for academic rhetoric in the twenty-first century? How can rhetoric best contribute to the social, political, and cultural environment that extends beyond the university? How can rhetoric thrive in the university system and contribute outside to the world of public affairs?”¹

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One of my guiding tropes is *rhetorical paths of thought*, by which I mean both the rhetoric of thinking and the thinking about rhetoric, both the rhetorical instruments and the rhetorical themes of thought. Tracing these rhetorical paths means to point out places in time for thinking about rhetoric as well as to follow the movements of rhetoric for thinking through periods and places. It is, for example, to attend to what is said about rhetoric in theory and to how it is said rhetorically in practice. This tracing of rhetorical paths leads me to tracking tropes, pursuing persuasion, and navigating narratives.

Rhetoric in the University

Today rhetoric in the university is most significantly about disciplinary identities and interdisciplinary work. Identifications with scholarly professions, placing oneself within a specialized field as one speaks, writes, publishes, teaches, hires, and engages in other rhetorical practices: such disciplinary-identified praxis constitutes perhaps the most powerful conditions of academic work, both constraining and enabling intellectual accomplishment, closing down and opening up possibilities for thinking. By “academic disciplines” I mean hierarchically organized, institutionally supported, self-perpetuating networks of practices for knowledge construction and dissemination. Disciplinary identities are created and shaped through agents working within these disciplinary matrices, which in turn establish more or less porous boundaries around places in time separating one disciplinary community from others and the academy from lay public spheres. English departments, the Modern Language Association, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) are institutional and professional places for cultivating at least one disciplinary identity; and communication departments and the National Communication Association are locations for nourishing another disciplinary identity. Most rhetorical scholars work within such independent disciplines as they also identify with their interdisciplinary field of rhetoric.² English, Communication, Classics, History, Philosophy, Sociology, and other departmentalized disciplines currently provide the intellectual/material conditions of possibility for commerce and collaboration among academic rhetoricians.

These disciplinary identities have institutional histories, of course. I have in other places tried to suggest the value of discussing these histories from a rhetorical perspective, especially the parallel and sometimes intersecting histories of those disciplines explicitly claiming rhetorical studies as part of their domains: English, Speech Communication, and Composition.³ We can think of these fields as disciplinary sets of practices, theories, and traditions. Each element in the set can be defined in terms of the others: Theories are meta-practices within traditions of disciplinary thought. Practices are theories performed in actions embedded in disciplinary traditions. Traditions are interpreted canons and interpretive contexts for disciplinary practices and theories; and as canons and contexts, traditions are constituted through the paradigmatic practices and meta-practices of a disciplinary formation.⁴

Let me give just one example of how such practices, theories, and traditions get established, one place in time where a disciplinary identity is performed, one moment located within the history of my home discipline of English. At the second meeting of the Modern Language Association at Boston University in December 1885, James Morgan Hart of the University of Cincinnati delivered a paper on “The College Course in English Literature, how it may be Improved.” Subsequently published in the first MLA *Transactions*, Hart’s paper illustrates how a disciplinary identity gets performed through a certain placement of rhetoric in relation to literature and modern philology within the academic study of English.

There are still only too many persons of influence and culture who persist in looking upon the instructor of English literature as necessarily the instructor of rhetoric. I am unable to share this opinion. To me rhetoric is a purely formal drill, having no more connection with the literature of England than it has with the literature of Greece, Rome, France, Germany, or Arabia. The canons of the art were laid down two thousand years ago by Aristotle, and quite one thousand years before there was an English literature in any sense.

Hart describes literary study as an interpretive method and rhetoric as a productive art; and with the two thus characterized, he is quick to advocate their disciplinary separation.

The proper object of literary study, in one word, is to train us to *read*, to grasp an author’s personality in all its bearings. And the less rhetoric here, the better—in my judgment. Rhetorical exercises are, of course, useful. So are the parallel bars and dumb-bells of a gymnasium. Need I push the comparison farther?⁵

Interestingly, in a footnote to the paper when it was published in the *Transactions*, Hart claims that he is not “arguing in general against the utility of training in Rhetoric and Composition,” but rather against the way they are often taught in college: “In my experience, college-students have a positive dislike of such drill, while they are almost invariably attracted to literature proper.” He goes on to suggest:

Rhetoric, if taught at all in College, should be taught by the professor of Philosophy. It should come *after* the instruction in literature, should be treated in a very liberal spirit, in fact, as a national mode of *envisager* the subject, and especially should the instruction be of a kind to contrast ancient methods and tastes with modern, English with continental. It will be perceived that all this is very different from recitation upon Tropes, Introduction, and Arguments and from the writing of Themes.⁶

From our later age, though the comparative note is worth remarking here, there is little else that is surprising. We continue to wrestle with the static divisions and active separations assumed and advocated by Hart in this early MLA essay. However, in his enthusiasm to distinguish the productive art from the interpretive discipline, rhetoric from literature, Hart makes the rather curious claim that rhetoric as a “formal drill” has little connection with any literature including that of Greece and Rome. Perhaps he simply means that drilling in rhetorical art has no relation to disciplined reading of a literary text, ancient or modern. But even this seems an odd disconnect when viewed against the claims of humanistic scholarship to consider the author’s

historical context, presumably including the author's and original audience's training in classical traditions, in order to understand that author's literary accomplishments. Hart does clarify his position when he calls rhetoric "verbal jugglery" and suggests it is an obstacle to "*understanding* an author, the influences that moulded him, his peculiar mission, his hold upon us." That is, Hart seems to say, paying attention to the author's rhetoric, his verbal jugglery, gets in the way of understanding the author's thought. ("Literature is thought.") Furthermore, since for Hart "the study of English literature means the study of the great movement of English life and feeling, as it is reflected in the *purest* poetry and the *purest* prose of representative men," he seems to view rhetoric as hiding that life and feeling, making the poetry and prose impure.⁷

Hart engages here in a rhetorical act of doing disciplinary identity. Helping establish his field by privileging literature over rhetoric in interpretive and pedagogical practices, he employs an implicit literary aesthetics and an explicit cultural nationalism to support a claim for the disciplinary singularity of English studies. In the twenty-first century, we are still feeling the effects of the founding disciplinary rhetoric exemplified in Hart's essay as literary/cultural studies and rhetoric/composition come to a crossroad of separation or mutual reconceptualization. Should rhet/comp be established as a separate departmentalized discipline, or should English studies be radically reconfigured within traditional English departments?⁸ I continue to argue for the latter—for a re-thinking of all English studies as cultural rhetoric studies—an argument to which I will return later. But for now let me comment on the place in time of Hart's paper, on its historical context of disciplinary identity politics.

Hart's argument for modern language teaching and research was mounted against the waning influence of classical studies within the emerging research university based on a German model transformed in its importation into the United States.⁹ During this time Harvard's President Charles W. Eliot vigorously promoted more elective courses in such articles as his 1884 *Century* piece, "What Is a Liberal Education?" in which he asserted, "The first subject . . . entitled to recognition as of equal academic value or rank with any subject now most honored is the English language and literature."¹⁰ A version of German philology was used to institutionalize modern language study within an emergent elective system that replaced the classical curriculum. Where was rhetoric in this institutional transformation? Put simply, according to Hart's essay, rhetoric was reduced to written composition drills within many English departments, replaced by literary history and philological method in teaching and research.¹¹ However, the story I am telling (one that is becoming more and more standard in English studies) is not as straightforward as all this.¹² One symptom of the complications is the fact that within ten years of publishing his paper denigrating rhetoric as "formal drill" and "verbal jugglery," James Morgan Hart had moved from being Professor of Modern Languages and Literature at the University of Cincinnati to Professor of English Philology and Rhetoric at Cornell University; he had published *A Handbook of English Composition* in 1895; and in the same year at the MLA convention, he devoted his presidential address on "English as a Living

Language” to recommendations about how to teach writing at different grade levels.¹³ Still, research into literature rather than teaching composition or developing rhetorical studies was the priority of disciplinary identity-building at the turn of the century within English.

But what about oral rather than written rhetoric inside or outside English departments? Rhetoric as forensics and public address, attention to debate and speeches, sometimes gained institutional independence in separate departments of oratory before 1910. For example, in 1890, the year Hart returned to Cornell as Professor of English Philology and Rhetoric, the teaching of English was re-organized into three distinct but related divisions: English literature, rhetoric and English philology, and elocution and oratory; then in 1904 a separate Department of Oratory and Debate was established, with James Albert Winans appointed as Assistant Professor.¹⁴ Most often, however, oratorical training remained within English departments but only as a marginalized teaching subject hardly associated with any interest in rhetoric as a research field. A research agenda was created for speech teachers beginning in 1915: Winans, by then a full Professor of Public Speaking at Cornell, joined with sixteen others and established the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking as an association independent of both the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English.¹⁵ The founding of this public speaking organization, now the National Communication Association, formally marked the separation of oral rhetoric (speech) from written rhetoric (literature and composition) within the academic humanities. This separation of speech and English department rhetorics has been just as debilitating for rhetorical study as has the literature/composition split manifest in Hart’s essay. These various separations make for a highly fragmented approach to all things rhetorical in academic scholarship and, resulting in isolated disciplinary work on everything to do with tropes, arguments, and narratives in historical research and contemporary culture.

To remedy this disabling fragmentation and disciplinary isolation, I recommend continuing our efforts at cross-disciplinary co-operation. Remember Hart’s footnote suggestion that philosophers (theorists?) should teach rhetoric as a comparative study, comparisons between ancient and modern, English and continental? Such a comparative model might serve as a useful basis for rethinking not only English studies today but rhetoric in all its disciplinary identifications: we might reconceptualize these fields as cultural rhetoric study—the critical, pedagogical, historical, and theoretical consideration of the effects of trope, argument, and narrative in different cultures. This comparative cultural rhetoric study would encompass the productive and interpretive aspects of the rhetorical tradition, embracing classical and modern invention in spoken and written rhetorics and including modern and postmodern hermeneutics applied to oral, print, and digital media as well as various cultural technologies, whether aural, visual, or kinetic. In our particular place in time, there is much more for this cultural rhetoric study to do, as I hope to show in the next two sections.

But beyond such rhetoricizing of cultural studies, more-concrete institutional recommendations also seem to be in order. So I will make one: the academic role of rhetorical studies requires rethinking through institutional reconfiguration, a re-placement at this historical moment within the university. My simple suggestion is that rhetorical studies should exploit its dual institutional place as discipline and interdiscipline. As rhetoric continues to develop within individual disciplines its own subfield identities, rhetoricians from different departments should come together in interdisciplinary centers, on the model of current humanities centers throughout the country. But such rhetoric centers should be simultaneously more comprehensive and more focused than most humanities centers, more comprehensive in being centers for the human sciences and arts generally—humanities, social sciences, and performative fields—as well as more focused on the pedagogy, criticism, history, and theory of rhetoric as a tradition. The founding of such local institutional centers will help solve the problem of the academic fragmentation of rhetorical scholarship—the unnecessary intellectual isolation caused by our different disciplinary identifications. These local centers will complement the national and international efforts of our professional societies.¹⁶

Beyond the Academy

So much for rhetoric's place right now within the university. A second question: How can rhetoric best contribute to the social, political, and cultural environment that extends beyond the university? This is a rather large question, but, alas, I have only a small answer, which begins somewhat eccentrically with a recent Supreme Court opinion on affirmative action, *Grutter v. Bollinger*. On June 23, 2003, the Court affirmed that race could indeed be used as a factor in student admissions at the University of Michigan Law School. There is a moment in this opinion when the Court explicitly states its view of the relation between the academic and the non-academic, the university and the wider public. The justices write, "We have long recognized that . . . universities occupy a special niche in our constitutional tradition," positing as a given "the important purpose of public education and the expansive freedoms of speech and thought associated with the university environment."¹⁷ These statements are followed by a list of citations to previous cases, a list that constitutes a rhetorical trail of references leading back to Justice Felix Frankfurter's concurring opinion in *Wieman v. Updegraff* 344 U.S. (1952), written during the McCarthy era controversies over teachers taking loyalty oaths.

Frankfurter argues that "our democracy ultimately rests on public opinion," noting that this assertion is "a platitude of speech but not a commonplace of action." The significant consequences of this ground for action can only be realized, Frankfurter continues, when public opinion is "disciplined and responsible," and:

[I]t can be disciplined and responsible only if habits of open-mindedness and of critical inquiry are acquired in the formative years of our citizens. The process of education has naturally enough been the basis of hope for the perdurance of our democracy on the part of all our great leaders, from Thomas Jefferson onwards.

Frankfurter ends his concurrence with a lengthy quote from Robert M. Hutchins's testimony before the House Select Committee to Investigate Tax-Exempt Foundations and Comparable Organizations (November 25, 1952). The University "is a place that is established and will function for the benefit of society, provided it is a center of independent thought. It is a center of independent thought and criticism that is created in the interest of the progress of society." This progress depends on a system of education that is "a kind of continuing dialogue, and a dialogue assumes, in the nature of the case, different points of view." What we aim to create as educators is a "civilization of the dialogue, where instead of shooting one another when you differ, you reason things out together." Crucial to enabling this deliberative process is the university, which "is a kind of continuing Socratic conversation on the highest level for the very best people you can think of, you can bring together, about the most important questions." Hutchins concludes that we must do everything to ensure that people in the university are guaranteed "the freedom to think and to express themselves."

This track of citations and quotations illustrates a particular rhetorical path of thought in the legal domain that is consequential more generally. The tropes used ("a civilization of the dialogue"), the arguments made (for academic freedom of expression), and the narratives assumed (about the United States as a continuing deliberative democracy): all these constitute a trail that is rhetorical through and through, and, I suggest, it is at least one of our functions as academic rhetoricians to note this cultural rhetoric, follow this path of thought, and—here's the leap—to affirm or critique its functioning in the legal realm and elsewhere. That is, academic rhetorical studies has the special role of describing and evaluating the rhetoric employed within and beyond the academy. We can certainly question the persuasiveness of any notion of a free marketplace of ideas out of which truth necessarily arises; but in so questioning, we necessarily assume the importance of rhetoric (as well as its relation to power) even if we end up rejecting the usefulness of an ideal speech situation as a regulative norm.

What does this mean in practical terms, the terms that the rhetorician must always attend to? First, academic intellectuals in general have an obligation—either as individual citizens or as members of a professional collective—to address the concerns of non-academic publics, not only the specific issues but also the rhetorical conditions in which those issues are considered. Universities are special places from which such address can be made, rhetorical interventions that are always potentially double: supportive as well as critical of the larger society. That is, besides teaching and researching the knowledges and arts that society needs for its survival and development, academic intellectuals must also critique the society that supports it. This critical function certainly seems to have been ignored by those who too quickly condemned the academic critics of the U.S. response to the horrendous events of September 11.¹⁸

But my choice of this example brings up a second point: A rhetorical analysis and evaluation of rhetoric in the public sphere might be the order of the day for academic rhetoricians; however, the specific politics, the specific ideological position from which and for which the critique is made cannot be determined theoretically

beforehand—out of place and time—nor can it be derived directly and necessarily from the rhetorician's duty to do the critique in the first place. That is, the critical analysis and evaluation can be from the right, left, or middle of the political spectrum. An academic rhetorician can be a neo-conservative, a radical socialist, or any other kind of political animal. Perhaps this goes without saying but I think it is important to emphasize anyway: no specific politics follows from a commitment to rhetoric in the university or beyond.

I might happen to think that a particular neo-pragmatist, post-Marxist radical democratic ideology is closer to, is more rhetorically affiliated with, rhetorical studies and its civic traditions (sharing tropes of dialogue, arguments about deliberation, narratives of change), but I can't argue very effectively that such a politics necessarily and logically follows from a commitment to rhetoric as such. We always have to argue our cases in specific times and places; we even have to argue our case as academic intellectuals that at this place in time we are indeed justified in criticizing our government in its domestic and foreign policies, our lay publics in their social practices, or our cultural communities in their educational agendas. There's no escape from this rhetorical hermeneutic situation, no apolitical place out of time. Or, as I say to my students: it's interpretation all the way down, rhetoric all around, and ideology here there and everywhere.

By training and interest, the academic rhetorician seems especially qualified to negotiate effectively the hermeneutic, rhetorical, and ideological context of places in time, especially prepared to suggest roles and strategies to employ in bridging the gap between the university and the larger society, between professional and lay publics, between academic and public intellectuals. One such role is as a translator of disciplinary knowledges and specialized perspectives to non-academics. Who better than a rhetorician to suggest how an academic speaker or writer might most effectively communicate his or her specialist ideas to a lay public audience? I will end this section with a quick example suggesting the difficulties of rhetoricians taking on this role.

In the aftermath of September 11, many meetings were held throughout the land to address the military, political, social, and cultural consequences of the terrorist attacks and then the War on Terrorism. Some of these meetings took place in university settings. In early 2002 I was invited to a conference at Cardozo Law School in New York and asked to talk about academic postmodernism and the political challenge of tolerating radically dissenting opinions, whether they originated from religious fundamentalist resistance to Western secular values or from academic resistance to government policies on international terrorism. As one of only three humanities professors speaking at a conference made up primarily of lawyers and law professors, I was placed on a panel charged with addressing the question of whether postmodernist theories led to a form of relativism and nihilism that in turn disabled condemnation of even terrorist attacks. I won't restate my negative reply in detail except to say that, as a good rhetorician, I claimed that we are *always* rhetorically situated in some ethical and political values; there is no theory, postmodern or otherwise, that can take us to any place in time where all values are just as good (or

bad) as all other values; there is no relativistic space where just anything goes and we are unable to condemn actions as ethically unacceptable or politically objectionable. However, also as a good rhetorician, I tried to mediate the disagreements and misunderstandings between so-called academic postmodernists and their non-academic critics in the national press.¹⁹

One member of the latter group was a respondent on the panel, Edward Rothstein, cultural columnist for the *New York Times*, who had written an editorial, "Attacks on U.S. Challenge the Perspectives of Postmodern True Believers," within days of the September 11 events. In the editorial Rothstein expressed the hope that the terrorist attacks would lead to a rejection of academic postmodernism, which he characterized as challenging the universal values, objective validity, and transcendent ethical perspective that were absolutely necessary for the condemnation of terrorist attacks. Rothstein called for an end to, what he termed, this "Western relativism of pomo."²⁰

I tried in my panel paper to correct such misunderstandings of postmodernist theory and then to mediate the academic/non-academic split, partly by arguing that the non-academic journalist had perhaps helped us see something the academic specialist had ignored: the potential rhetorical consequences of pomo theory in the public sphere. Then, unfortunately, in my rhetorical hubris, I announced to the conference audience that they should measure the degree of my paper's success by how positively Mr. Rothstein responded to its thesis.

According to that measure, I failed miserably. Rothstein found my argument that he had unintentionally pointed out something pomo theorists had missed to be a backhanded rhetorical compliment, full of "tempered condescension." As he put it later in the published version of his response:

Mr. Mailloux urges that the academic writers who attack non-academics on the issues of postmodernism be aware that their rhetoric may have an impact beyond the real substance of their argument. They must understand, in other words, that they are speaking to those less sophisticated, less aware of nuance, more vulnerable to crudities of thought and conscience.²¹

My response to this criticism could be (and was partly at the time) that Rothstein didn't quite get my point and certainly I was not assuming in my own rhetoric a distinction between "substantive argument" and "non-substantive rhetoric." But to make this response was and would still be precisely to miss the lesson of this unsuccessful (from my viewpoint) encounter between the academic and the non-academic. Also, it leaves unaddressed Rothstein's assertion that "there is an academic fundamentalism at work" in my position when I declare my "allegiance without justifying it, and then condescendingly [argue] that unconverted readers outside the academy should be dealt with a bit indulgently and tolerantly until they realize the errors of their ways."²²

Throughout this exchange of charges, there's something going on rhetorically that is more than a simple misunderstanding over what I meant by postmodernism and rhetoric: a lack on both sides that more deeply troubles the possibility of understanding each other across the academic/non-academic divide. Probably

rhetorical attitude has much to do with what I am trying to get at here, a certain strategic generosity of spirit, something perhaps akin to Kenneth Burke's "comic frame," which is "neither wholly euphemistic, nor wholly debunking—hence it provides the *charitable* attitude towards people that is required for purposes of persuasion and co-operation, but at the same time maintains our shrewdness concerning . . . simplicities."²³ In any case, whether or not I am making too much of this non-encounter between an academic rhetorician and a non-academic journalist, I do want to use it as a way of saying that the role of rhetoricians in the larger public sphere outside the university is not just about an intention to participate in wider cultural conversations—the desire to be public as well as academic intellectuals—nor is it simply about the commitment to participate from a particular political position in that conversation; it is also about the attitude we adopt, the topics we address, the way we perform our rhetorical analyses and translations, the substantive conduct of our rhetorical thinking in public. As rhetoricians, we have much to contribute to these larger conversations beyond the university, not the least of which is our purported ability effectively to judge our own situations, to attend to our place in time as we make our contributions across the academic/non-academic divide.

Everyday Rhetoric

There is a passage in Heidegger's *Being and Time* that has received more and more attention of late from rhetoricians: "Contrary to the traditional orientation of the concept of rhetoric according to which it is some kind of 'discipline,' Aristotle's *Rhetoric* must be understood as the first systematic hermeneutic of the everydayness of being-with-one-another." Here and earlier in his 1924 seminar on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Heidegger emphasized the rhetorical hermeneutic of the everyday in terms of affect and mood. "Publicness as the kind of being of the they . . . uses mood and 'makes' it for itself. The speaker speaks to it and from it. He needs the understanding of the possibility of mood in order to arouse and direct it in the right way."²⁴ But there are other ways of rhetorically thinking the everyday, including ones that posit the everyday as one place in time where academic specialization and non-academic publicness come together.²⁵

One direction of rhetorical flow is from the everyday to the academic: university disciplines are, most basically, the transfiguration of practical wisdom into accredited techniques, of non-academic, everyday *phronêsis* into academic, specialized *technê*. In following rhetorical paths of thought, we must attend to this trail of the everyday within academic disciplines and interdisciplines: first, because this transformation of everyday *phronêsis* into specialized *technê* conditions the possibilities for thinking in our multiple communities; and, second, to evaluate our disciplinary options, the rhetorical hermeneutic practices of disciplines need to be understood against the background of everyday beliefs and activities in the world, disciplinary *technê* in the context of extradisciplinary *phronêsis*. This extradisciplinary *phronêsis*, itself historically evolving in unpredictable ways, constitutes a part of the scene of inquiry,

functioning as a contingent ground for disciplinary self-analysis and potential transformation.

But if one direction of flow is from the everyday to the academic, then another is from the academic into the everyday. Extradisciplinary phronesis constitutes not only (part of) the institutional context of academic rhetoric; it also serves potentially as one of that interdiscipline's objects of study. This movement from the academic toward the everyday implies a certain blurring of the boundaries among places in time. In the rhetorical study of the everyday, the academic and the non-academic are juxtaposed and interpenetrate. Indeed, as one theorist of the everyday puts it:

There is . . . no everyday knowledge or reason which is different in kind from that of the fields of knowledge to which it is characteristically opposed. Far from being a domain of the non-specialized and the unconstructed, the everyday is that place where relations between a heterogeneous array of knowledges and reasons are worked out.²⁶

A rhetorical hermeneutics of the everyday will follow the transfer of specialized disciplinary jargon into non-academic public and private spheres. To take one example close to home, the term "deconstruction," as associated with Jacques Derrida, has migrated promiscuously across several cultural domains. It has moved from being a rather arcane bit of academic jargon into non-academic elite and popular cultures and even into everyday speech: from *Of Grammatology* to the scholarly *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* to the popularization *Derrida for Beginners* through newspaper and magazine articles to a DC comic book called *Justice League Europe* and a character named "Deconstructo" to a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode in which Lieutenant Reg Barklay complains about using the ship's transporter and the "idea of being deconstructed molecule by molecule." Now, the rhetorical path of this term is in no way as direct as I'm suggesting by this list of appearances, but my point is simply that rhetorical study can attend to such movements, translations, and misappropriations. In such cases, this study becomes a critical analysis of traveling rhetoric from specialized academic disciplines through specialized non-academic public spheres into everyday practices and back again.²⁷

Attention to such rhetorical paths takes us beyond just terminological and conceptual transfers to the ways in which the rhetorical hermeneutic of the everyday can complicate the divisions between the academic and the non-academic or the public and the private. To take a not entirely trivial example even closer to home: The everyday of my own private rhetorical path takes me through a certain on-going game I have played with my kids for about twenty years. This particular blurring of the academic and the non-academic in the everyday consists of my writing down utterances like that of my opening epigraph: "I smell a bad word," said my four-year-old son as we drove by a cattle ranch along Interstate 5. For two decades he and my other two children have received a dollar or more every time I used their statements as examples in talks or essays. This game of verbal and monetary exchange has led over the years to a rhetorical self-consciousness on their parts in which, among other things, they have ridiculed their father for such silly collection practices; asked to read

and then been intrigued and amused by the growing record of their comments; and sometimes reflected on the record, commenting on their comments, for example, my then 11-year-old son saying to me, “You know how you do theories about us? When I say the word ‘theory,’ is it a theory about theory?” or my youngest daughter, then 14, simply asking: “What is bigger: theory or rhetoric?”

Acknowledging the gentle mockery of these last two questions, I move on to some additional issues: How does the rhetorical hermeneutic of the everyday trouble certain disciplinary identities within rhetorical studies? In particular, what does it have to do with recent debates over Big versus Little Rhetoric and over academic rhetoric versus cultural studies?²⁸ “Big versus Little Rhetoric” is a shorthand for the controversy over the globalization or universalizing of rhetoric: the defining of almost everything as rhetorical. The rhetoricizing of the everyday is just one aspect of the ever-expanding compass of rhetoric. There have been some heated exchanges over this broadening of rhetoric’s scope, especially among NCA or communication rhetoricians.²⁹ Certainly the rhetoric of the everyday is one of the areas where the force of rhetorical imperialism is most strongly felt. This also seems to be a place in time where the relation between cultural studies and rhetorical studies is now being worked out.

One highly symbolic performance, one ritual rhetorical act, where some of these issues were significantly addressed, has been ignored by most academic rhetoricians: the inaugural lecture of the latest appointee to the Edinburgh chair originally held by Hugh Blair. On May 11, 2000, John Frow, the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature, delivered “Text, Culture, Rhetoric: Some Futures for English,” which he introduced by saying:

I shall talk about rhetoric . . . by turning to the moment in which this chair was founded, the moment of the Scottish Enlightenment of which its first holder, Hugh Blair, was a central figure, the moment of a strategic cosmopolitanism in which a group of Scottish intellectuals invented the discipline of English literature; and I shall try to make parallels with the rhetorical focus that in part, and at its best, I take to characterize contemporary cultural studies.³⁰

Some of Frow’s points will not be news to most of this audience, for example, his noting the unresolved tensions in Blair’s *Lectures*.³¹ Still, what I find significant about Frow’s address is his attempt to use Blair as an allegory to persuade his Edinburgh audience, “an allegory of the possibilities which are open to contemporary criticism and theory; in particular as a way of thinking about the possibility of a ‘rhetorical’ dimension to literary study.”

For our purposes here, Frow’s specific proposal is less important than his general attempt to rhetoricize literary study, to use rhetorical categories and definitions to think through an affiliative relation between rhetoric and literary criticism within cultural studies. He begins with a definition of rhetoric close to my heart: “[R]hetoric understood as ‘figurative and suasive force might be characterized as the effects of texts or, more pointedly, as the political effectivity of trope and argument in culture.’”³² Frow sees tensions in this definition: we can “understand textual force either as a consequence of intrinsic textual structure or in terms of the relative

contingency of the reception and uptake of texts.” Frow goes on to recommend making the tension work productively in our interpretive practice

by seeking to move backwards and forwards between detailed textual analysis and analysis of the framing conditions under which texts are taken up into the complexities of public cultural space. And this is in part how I understand the project of contemporary cultural studies.³³

If cultural studies works within the tensions of a definition of rhetoric, could we not say that rhetoric provides the framework for that study rather than the other way around, rhetorical study being subsumed by cultural studies?

This question returns us to the issues about universalizing rhetoric and promoting rhetorical study’s academic imperialism. At least Frow would not, I think, be bothered by these implications of his lecture. He says, for example, that “the notion of the rhetorical *force* of texts is . . . an important one to the extent that it points to the socially formative and performative nature of all textuality.” Attempting to establish linkages across disciplinary divides, Frow follows with the assertion:

[L]iterary texts are the acting out of a speech situation which they themselves model; to read is to enter into and to some extent to accept—to take up, and in turn to act out—this situation of speaking, which is both contained within texts as an embedded formal structure and at the same time mimes the larger social organization of speech, symbolically contesting or confirming or transforming it, or all of these at once.³⁴

Here Frow presents a helpful model for rhetorically rethinking disciplinary differences, rhetoricizing literary study while affiliating it with speech. Frow has not yet displayed the same disciplinary cross-dressing, the same rhetorical translations, in his more recent work on the moral economy of the everyday, from which I have already quoted. However, the same kind of co-operative and co-optive thought can also occur in that rich area of potential development within the interdiscipline of rhetoric. More to the point, I believe it is one of our most pressing challenges to engage in such thought across our different disciplinary identities as we work together to develop rhetorical studies within the academy and practice its best traditions in our various other places in time.

Notes

- [1] For more on the ARS conference, at which these questions were posed, see Scott McLemee, “Making It ‘Big’: Rhetoricians Regroup in Era of Tight Purse Strings,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 31, 2003, A14; Gregory Clark, ed., *The Alliance of Rhetoric Societies Conference, 2003: Conversations in Evanston*, special issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2004).
- [2] For a fuller discussion of disciplinarity, see Steven Mailloux, “Practices, Theories, and Traditions: Further Thoughts on the Disciplinary Identities of English and Communication Studies,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33 (2003): 129–38, from which this paragraph derives; also see Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

- [3] See Steven Mailloux, "Disciplinary Identities: On the Rhetorical Paths between English and Communication Studies," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 5–29. Besides such standard histories as James A. Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900–1985* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: The Emergence of a Discipline, 1914–1945* (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1994), also see the bibliographies for individual disciplines in Maureen Daly Goggin, "The Tangled Roots of Literature, Speech Communication, Linguistics, Rhetoric/Composition, and Creative Writing," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29 (1999): 63–87.
- [4] I develop this formulation in Steven Mailloux, "Using Traditions: A Gadamerian Reflection on Canons, Contexts, and Rhetoric," in *The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Janet Atwill, Richard Graff, and Art Walzer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 181–94.
- [5] James Morgan Hart, "The College Course in English Literature, how it may be Improved," *Transactions of the Modern Language Association* 1 (1884–85): 84–85.
- [6] Hart, "College Course," 85, n. 1.
- [7] Hart, "College Course," 85. Reviewing a poetics handbook, Hart later reiterated his view: "The special connection between rhetoric and poetry is not obvious. My individual preference is for keeping them as far asunder as possible. The less readily poetry lends itself to rhetorical analysis, the more truly poetical it is" (James Morgan Hart, review of *A Handbook of Poetics for Students of English Verse*, by Francis B. Gummere, *Modern Language Notes* 1 [1886]: 17).
- [8] See Susan Miller, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); John Clifford and John Schilb, eds., *Writing Theory and Critical Theory* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1994); John Schilb, *Between the Lines: Relating Composition Theory and Literary Theory* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1996); Maureen Daly Goggin, *Authoring a Discipline: Scholarly Journals and the Post-World War II Emergence of Rhetoric and Composition* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 192–98.
- [9] See Hart's comparison of the German and American systems of higher education, based on his own experience at the University of Göttingen from 1860–64, in James Morgan Hart, *German Universities: A Narrative of Personal Experience* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1874); also see Carl Diehl, *Americans and German Scholarship, 1770–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). For accounts of the late-nineteenth-century emergence of the American university, see Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Vintage, 1962); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). On the disciplining of oral and written rhetoric during this period, see histories listed in Goggin, "Tangled Roots"; and Donald C. Stewart, "The Nineteenth Century," in *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric*, 2nd ed., ed. Winifred Bryan Horner (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 151–85. For useful collections of primary documents, see Gerald Graff and Michael Warner, eds., *The Origins of Literary Studies in America: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1989); and John C. Brereton, ed., *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875–1925: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).
- [10] Charles W. Eliot, "What Is a Liberal Education?," *Century Magazine* 28 (1884): 205.
- [11] Mentioning Hart's essay in passing, Seth Lerer provides a rhetorically inventive account of performing disciplinary identity in his history of American philology and its relation to rhetoric: Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 195–207. Also see Michael Warner, "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature, 1875–1900," *Criticism* 27 (1985): 1–28;

- Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 55–118; Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 176–257; Robert J. Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 171–209; David R. Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*, 2nd ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 35–132; John Guillory, “Literary Study and the Modern System of the Disciplines,” in *Disciplinarity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19–43.
- [12] On the more complex and locally varied situation for writing instruction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Kathryn M. Conway, “Woman Suffrage and the History of Rhetoric at the Seven Sisters Colleges, 1865–1919,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 203–26; Susan Kates, *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885–1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001); David Gold, “Never Mind What Harvard Thinks: Alternative Sites of Rhetorical Instruction in American Colleges, 1873–1947” (diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2003). I thank my colleague Susan Jarratt for these suggestions; see her “Rhetoric” essay in the *Introduction to Scholarship in the Modern Languages*, 3rd ed., ed. David Nicholls (New York: Modern Language Association of America, forthcoming 2007)
- [13] See James Morgan Hart, *A Handbook of English Composition* (Philadelphia: Eldredge and Brother, 1895); and his “English as a Living Language,” *PMLA* 10 (1895): xi–xxi. Hart’s father, John S. Hart, had published a widely adopted textbook, *A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* (Philadelphia: Eldredge & Brother, 1870), which his son took it upon himself to defend in a letter to the editor in 1890, ending with the sentence: “May our teachers of rhetoric, instead of criticizing sentences by arbitrary rules from without inwards, evolve them from the inner thought outwards” (“Notes on Rhetoric,” *Modern Language Notes* 5 [1890]: 25). On composition texts of the period more generally, see Nan Johnson, *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).
- [14] See Waterman Thomas Hewett, *Cornell University: A History*, vol. 2 (New York: University Publishing Society, 1905), 47, 52, 65; and Thomas W. Benson, “The Cornell School of Rhetoric: Idiom and Institution,” *Communication Quarterly* 51 (2003): 1–56.
- [15] Andrew Thomas Weaver, “Seventeen Who Made History—The Founders of the Association,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 195–99; and Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: The Emergence of a Discipline, 1914–1945* (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1994), 29–36.
- [16] I’m thinking here especially of the Rhetoric Society of America (see <http://rhetoricsociety.org>) and the International Society for the History of Rhetoric (see <http://ishr.cua.edu>) as well as ARS (see <http://www.rhetoricalliance.org>).
- [17] *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. (2003).
- [18] For a more recent, extensive rhetorical account addressing the post-9/11 challenges, see Robert Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).
- [19] Steven Mailloux, “Contingent Universals: Religious Fundamentalism, Academic Postmodernism, and Public Intellectuals in the Aftermath of September 11,” *Cardozo Law Review* 24 (2003): 1583–604.
- [20] Edward Rothstein, “Attacks on U.S. Challenge the Perspective of Postmodern True Believers,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2001, A7.
- [21] Edward Rothstein, “Pomo at War,” *Cardozo Law Review* 24 (2003): 1605.
- [22] Rothstein, “Pomo at War,” 1606.

- [23] Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 166. The Burkean association was suggested to me by Jack Selzer's ARS position paper (see <http://www.comumn.edu/ARS/Goals/Selzer,%20goals.htm>).
- [24] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 130. For recent discussions, see Daniel M. Gross and Ansgar Kemmann, eds., *Heidegger and Rhetoric* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
- [25] Also see the essays and bibliographies in Martin Nystrand and John Duffy, eds., *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life: New Directions in Research on Writing, Text, and Discourse* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). The editors define "the rhetoric of everyday life" as "the rhetorical character and dynamics of language in mundane contexts especially beyond school, and also the rhetorical interpenetration of school discourse and political and cultural forces transcending the academy" (viii). Cf. Ralph Cintron's focus on "the rhetorics of public culture or the rhetorics of the everyday," an approach "interested in the structured contentiousness that organizes, albeit fleetingly, a community or a culture" (Ralph Cintron, *Angels' Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday* [Boston: Beacon, 1997], x).
- [26] John Frow, "Never Draw to an Inside Straight': On Everyday Knowledge," *New Literary History* 33 (2002): 637.
- [27] See Steven Mailloux, *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), especially 97–98 and 175–76.
- [28] On the first debate, see Edward Schiappa, "Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 (2001): 260–74; on the second within communication studies, see Thomas Rosteck, ed., *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies* (New York: Guilford, 1999).
- [29] See Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith, eds., *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Herbert W. Simons, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics and the Project of Globalization," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 86–109; William Keith, Steve Fuller, Alan Gross, and Michael Leff, "Taking Up the Challenge: A Response to Simons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 330–31.
- [30] John Frow, "Text, Culture, Rhetoric: Some Futures for English," *Critical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2001): 5.
- [31] For background, see the introduction and bibliography in the new edition of Blair's *Lectures*: Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran, eds., *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, by Hugh Blair (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), xv–liv.
- [32] Frow, "Text, Culture, Rhetoric," 12; quoting Mailloux, *Reception Histories*, 4.
- [33] Frow, "Text, Culture, Rhetoric," 12.
- [34] Frow, "Text, Culture, Rhetoric," 12–13.