

Re-situating and re-mediating the canons—

Reflections on writing research and rhetoric

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Introduction

I should begin with two clarifications. First, I need to acknowledge that the ideas I present here have incubated over years in rich dialogues with a number of current and former graduate students, particularly Karen Lunsford, Jody Shipka, Kevin Roozen, Mary Sheridan-Rabideau, Elizabeth Rohan, Kevin Leander, and Joyce Walker. However, I have crafted this talk on my own, so whatever is found lacking or off the mark is fully my responsibility. Second, I am addressing the canons of rhetoric as a writing researcher rather than as a rhetorician (or at least as a classically-trained rhetorician, whether there is any other kind seems to remain a matter of some debate). As a writing researcher, I approach rhetoric, much as Roland Barthes suggested, as a matter of a history. It is in part to address the freight of this history—woven, often tacitly, into our languages, institutions, and practices—that I take up the canons of rhetoric and propose re-situating and re-mediating them.

The Classical Canons

- Invention (*inventio, euresis*)
- Arrangement (*disposito, taxis*)
- Style (*elocutio, lexis*)
- Memory (*memoria, mneme*)
- Delivery (*actio, hypocrisis*)

Slide 1

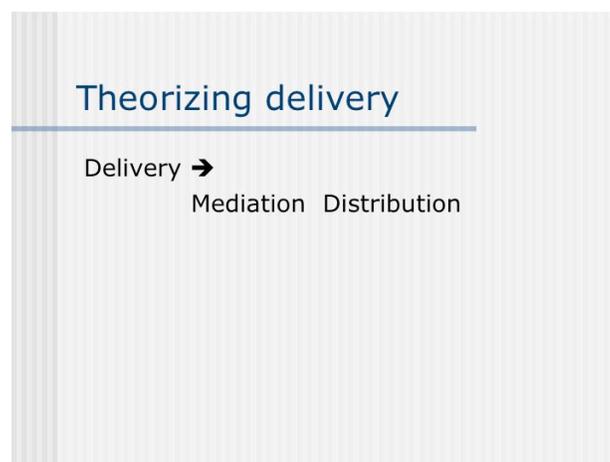
Here are the classical canons: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, Delivery (with in parentheses first the Latin and then the Greek names). I want to begin by focusing on delivery, a canon that, under the prototype of oratory, was about gesture, stance, gaze, dress, voice quality, intonation and so on. As writing seemed to overtake talk as the dominant mode of civic-legal life, delivery fell into neglect, along with memory, conceived as being about recall for lines of argument in oral debate. Observers as different as Roland Barthes and George Kennedy could agree that the last two canons became peripheral in a literate age. (What use gestures, dress, stance and voice to a text?) This fading of delivery (and memory), by the way, tells us much about rhetoric. (Consider, in contrast, Lev Vygotsky, who saw externally mediated memory, like in writing, as a matter of the revolutionary reorganization of memory, a key step in human development.) The fading points to the way rhetoric was anchored in a narrow range of contexts for specific sociocultural conditions and with a prototypical mode. Rhetoric was tailored to the public life of Greece, then Rome, then the Church. Speech was the prototypical mode, though more recently, rhetoric has been repurposed for composition courses. Across these changes, rhetoric has certainly adapted to new modes. Orality was partly eclipsed by literacy (a process obvious with the medieval *ars dictaminis*, the manuals of letter writing) and both now feel the pressure of the digital age. However, rhetoric never really theorized mode.

It is instructive to attend to recent attempts to rehabilitate delivery. When Connors sought to revive delivery, for example, he did so in another local institutional context and mode, exploring the delivery aspects of the student research paper—the type of paper, the typography, margins, printer options, etc. Kathleen Welch has been arguing for almost 20 years that we should reconceive *delivery* as *medium*, especially through the theories of Ong and McLuhan. *In Electric Rhetoric*, she notes varied media, but Ong's electracy leads her to focus primarily on retro-fixing

rhetoric to address television, with delivery becoming an important televisual domain—adding panning cameras, newsroom furnishings, corporations, and postmodern HUTS (houses using televisions) to the old issues of delivery. In short, when delivery becomes unfixed from one set of institutional contexts, one mode, it is typically refixed in another institutional context and mode.

For the Greeks, by the way, oral rhetoric was already multimodal; they didn't need the printing press or the web. Early in Plato's famous *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus reads Lysias's speech on love to Socrates, who has guessed Phaedrus would have the written text hidden in his cloak and would have been poring over it for his studies. In fact, Socrates insists that Phaedrus read the speech on love so he can get a precise representation of it. Socrates does not want Phaedrus to practice his oratory on him when "Lysias himself is here present." For Plato then, writing was already a familiar, expected pedagogic practice and a way of storing precise, detailed representations.

Like Welch, I propose that we theorize delivery, but I am offering a different name to start and a different mix of theoretical lenses.



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Delivery might be reconceived as mediation. By mediation, I am thinking of Bolter & Grusin's re-media-tions (close to McLuhan), but also of Vygotsky's mediated activity and Latour's technical mediations, his detours, delegations, and hybrids. (Latour, by the way, begins with another Greek, Daedalus, the crafty engineer).

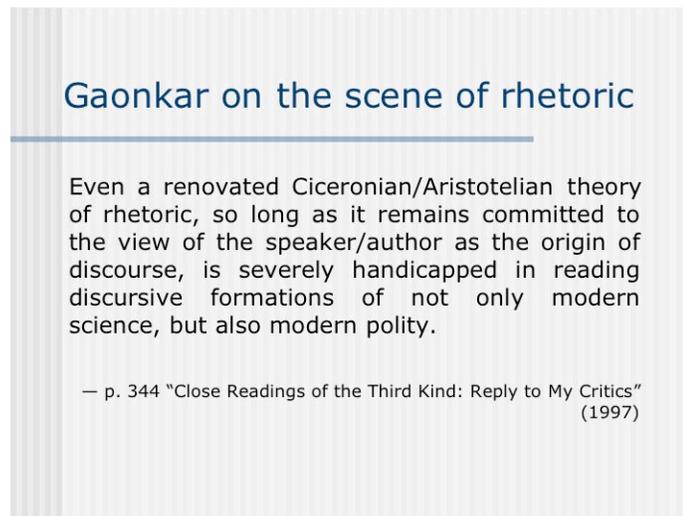
What mediations, what kinds of detours, might delivery of a text involve? Do I write a text to be read silently, to be read aloud (as a speech) or to record it on a DVD, or to have various groups of actors read it in stage performances? What typeface do I use? What color? Do I deliver the document on paper, on the screen, or in some other medium? If on paper, by mail or by hand? If by hand, do I do it myself or do I have someone else do it? Do I synchronize the delivery with some other event? Or perhaps I deliver it (think espionage; think, like Erving Goffman, of the stratagems of con artists), by allowing others to find it in another place. Do I need to deliver a text to an editor or publisher for review to get the text beyond them to a public of some size? Or do I want the text to be distributed in encrypted formats to a small select distribution list? Or do I divide up the delivery of the message so that the chances of illicit use are limited? (Think about systems to deliver the authorization codes for nuclear weapons.) Actually, delivery seems to encompass two related but distinct types of issues, mediation and distribution.

Jody Shipka has an article in press at *College Composition and Communication* that offers a first glimpse of her activity-based, multimodal approach to composition. She invites, pushes, her students to conceive of their work as engineering rhetorical events, and many students have devised truly complex means of mediation and distribution to achieve specific rhetorical effects.

Moreover, mediation is not necessarily singular, a choice of ‘this means or that means.’ It may involve distribution of means, a configuration, a dispersion. I may pursue rhetorical goals through a variety of genres, in different media, with different distributions.

And of course, just as invention is a process that goes on throughout the entire work (not something done first, then funneled into an arrangement, then enacted in words, then stored in some memory, then delivered), mediation and distribution are also ubiquitous phenomena, always happening. We’re on the edge of several other problems here, a key one being the prototypical scene of rhetoric.

Critics of classical rhetoric’s modern redeployments are fairly united in their concern for the scope of a model grounded in a speaker and hearer, essentially in monologue. Dilip Gaonkar wrote:



Slide 4

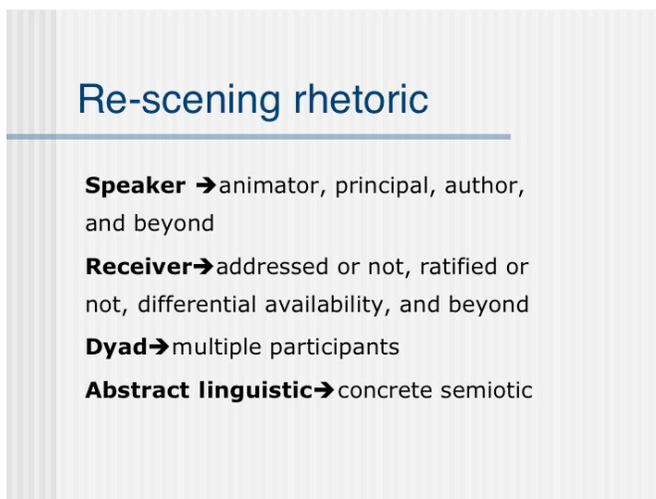
Science, of course, represents the extension of rhetoric, but polity is what rhetoric was designed for, should be where it has the home court advantage. Gaonkar went on to mention things like legislative tracts, commission reports, the congressional records, radio talk shows,

television, etc. Media, in the corporate mass sense, are not a trivial detour from the old model. Kenneth Burke noted the way modern media alter the scene and effects of rhetoric.



Slide 5

Erving Goffman's phenomenologically-situated critique of modern language and communication theories for their allegiance to prototypical speaker-hearer dyads is perhaps the best remedy to such scenes.



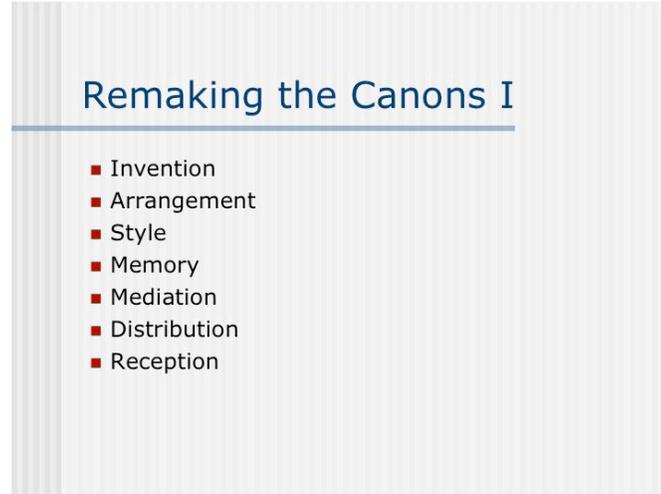
Slide 6

When Goffman discusses footings, frames and participation structures, he explodes every term. A speaker must be decomposed into author, principal, animator and really Goffman was just

offering that scheme as a generic first pass toward a much more complex array of potential footings. Listeners (or viewers) are likewise decomposed into addressed or unaddressed, ratified or unrated, with variable access to the speaker's communication. Goffman moves from an idealized pair of talking heads to people, say, haggling in a crowded market. He rejects the imposition of a shared consensual homogeneous space and re-portrays interaction as laminated and asymmetric. Goffman's scene of semiotic interaction challenges productionist biases. He rejects turn-taking as the ground of communication, insisting on the simultaneity of multidirectional communication. For Goffman, audiences are constantly active and are, at least potentially, complexly layered and positioned.

Writers routinely work to shape the reception of their texts. I might hand a draft to someone, for example, suggesting a motive for reading ("I thought you might want to read this before our meeting so you'd know how things are going in the program"), or a framing ("it's still as rough draft"), or a kind of desired response ("please let me know if I've addressed your concerns"). I might work, more diffusely, to build a positive climate for reception. Oddly, audience is not one of the canons. Audience is addressed, considered through the back door of invention by way of the commonplaces, but real audiences receiving the text and doing something with it are not figured in. Taking into account the reception and the response of audiences would expand the canons, would imagine rhetorical utterances as, in Voloshinov and Bakhtin's sense, dialogic, a circuit only completed when it is closed. Folded back into the process, reception directs our attention to the many different receptions, from a writer's moment-to-moment reviewing of a text, which protocol research identified, to in-progress oral, written, and material responses to a series of texts cycled through an organization. What if we redesigned the canons starting with the prototype of a bill in the U.S. becoming a law and being enacted in practice?

Where are we now? Perhaps here?



Slide 7

But, let's go on a bit farther. Gaonkar and Burke were not pointing only to more complex participation structures, but to complex institutional networks. Consider recent developments in the U.S. political system. How would the classical canons, or topics, or ethos/pathos/logos, help us to analyze the effects of, or plan a strategy comparable to, that of the far right over the past few decades? David Brock, as a former insider, has detailed some of this long-term campaign. The formation of far-right think-tanks. Cultivation of journalists, intellectuals, and media personalities (like Rush Limbaugh). Changing FCC rules on media concentration and regulation. The campaign to centralize and politicize protestant religious organizations. Recently, commentators secretly on the government payroll. The IRS review of the NAACP's nonprofit tax status. Consider the following quote, found in a 2004 report of the Defense Science Board's Task Force on Strategic Communications (aka propaganda):

Defense Science Board (2004)

Information saturation means attention, not information, becomes a scarce resource. Power flows to credible messengers. Asymmetrical credibility matters. What's around information is critical. Reputations count. Brands are important. Editors, filters, and cue givers are influential. *Fifty years ago political struggles were about the ability to control and transmit scarce information. Today political struggles are about the creation and destruction of credibility.*

Slide 8

Ok, rhetoric could say *ethos* here, but note whose *ethos* is being highlighted—editors, filters, cue givers. No part of classical rhetoric was oriented to sustained ideological struggle for control of the apparatus of the state and of cultural production.

What we need here is something more like Latour's actor-network theory or Bazerman's heterogeneous symbolic engineering (the rich account he offers of Edison suggests the kind of shape and complexity we should anticipate in considering rhetorical action). Latour's notion of black-boxing is suggestive as it highlights production of artifacts (material and semiotic). To take a semiotic example, if, in this setting, I make a reference to *evolution*, I think I can relatively safely assume that most or all will understand and think favorably of it. Darwin had much less assurance of such a reception in his time. (And if I were speaking at a conference on Creation Science today, so would I.) When I utter "evolution" then, I utter it not alone, but as part of a collective history, Darwin and many of his descendents (scientists, science fiction writers, science teachers, citizens of all kinds) have made my work much easier.

Reading translations is tricky. In the English translation, Barthes points out that Plato defined rhetoric as a "psychogogy (the formation of men's souls)," a formulation which caught

my interest because *making people* is at the core of cultural-historical activity theory. However, when I read the *Phaedrus* in English, I read that he defines the function of rhetoric as influencing men's souls. Though I cannot return to the Greek text, the elaborations Plato offers seem to say a lot about knowing what types of souls there are and what types of arguments move them. And Plato, of course, did believe in souls. Marx offered another way to understand types of people, seeing them as made in historical conditions, as shaped, though not determined, by the social relations of production. Immersed in both traditions, rhetorical and Marxist, Kenneth Burke began to articulate why it was critical to see making people as part of rhetoric .

Burke on socialization

Such conditions make us alert to the ingredient of rhetoric in all socialization, considered as a moralizing process.

◆

Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within.

◆

...often we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill.

—A Rhetoric of Motives

Slide 9

The last quote seems to resonate with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*.

Socialization, the production of people, is extended work, not a focal event. It is an institutional process; it may be relatively self-organized. However, if persuasion has been prefabricated through socialization and through populating the world with black-boxed artifacts, then little or no work need be done at the moment. Karen Lunsford's studies of distributed argumentative activity highlight ways that multiple mediations, socialization, production of artifacts (texts and others), establishment of institutions, all combine in argumentative activity,

now understood less as crafting a focal message than re-structuring, re-mediating the world. Burke pointed toward socialization, but I think we can find richer toolkits for exploring socialization than those he offered. Voloshinov and Vygotsky in the 1920s began active traditions, grounded in a Marxist framework, for considering semiotic mediation of thought, action, and personality as concrete historical practice.

The canons of classical rhetoric then offer us a snapshot, a synchronic rhetoric, too situated in particular homogeneous worlds, and not situated enough in emergent, laminated histories, too centered on the producer rather than the system. CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory) points to a concrete historical rhetoric. Where Aristotle asks what are the commonplaces of the people, a sociohistoric approach asks how people, institutions, and artifacts are made in history.

Where are we now? Further I think from the classical canon. Let me offer this as a potential revision.



Slide 10

Let's begin on the left. These terms are meant to constitute a multidimensional model, like Roman Jakobson's model of language functions, not a series of linear steps.

Production directs our attention to the tools, practices, and contexts that shape the formation of a text (or series of texts) as well as to the series of texts and artifacts produced.

Representation involves the way a discourse is entextualized in talk, text, and mind. Representation highlights semiotic codes, discourses, genres (as representational artifacts). I'm thinking here also of Hutchins' notion of distributed cognition as the 'propagation of representational states across media,' with media including the human mind and body.

Distribution involves the way particular media, technologies, and social practices disseminate a text and what a particular network signifies. It's important to stress that a person sitting alone writing on a piece of paper that is read only by herself is displaying a type of distribution.

Reception is actual reading and response, how meaning is made and under what conditions. It is a mental and social activity. Reception can also be shaped by writers or distributors.

Socialization is the making of people.

Activity points to the more or less durable, goal-oriented, motivated projects that lead people to cooperation, indifference and conflict. CHAT offers perhaps richer ways to investigate and define rhetorical situations.

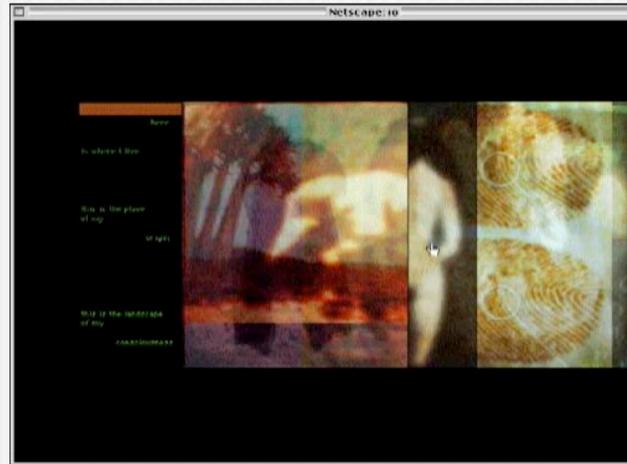
Ecology points to the biotic and natural world, which enables and constrains all the previous functions and which may also be a domain of rhetorical action. Bazerman (*Shaping*) noted the ways scientists must deal with the responses not only of other scientists and publics, but also of the world. And Monsanto certainly recognizes that the debate over GM (genetically modified) plants will be lessened when all plants have GM DNA, a condition I understand we are fast approaching in the case of corn and soybeans.

Let's call this scheme of literate activity a new set of canons for rhetorical action. You may have noticed that mediation is not on this list. What happened to it? Did I drop it? No. From a CHAT perspective and adopting James Wertsch's terms, I take mediated activity and mediated agency as fundamental units of analysis. Everything in the above list is about mediation.

I'm simply going to note here the next two steps in my proposal for re-situating and re-mediating the canons. I would place literate activity within a larger frame of functional systems— typified and fleeting, and both within a yet larger frame of laminated chronotopes, time-spaces understood as embodied, represented, and embedded. I have explained these terms and their rationale in earlier work (especially my 1998 book, *Writing/Disciplinarity* and in a chapter I did with Jody Shipka on chronotopic laminations, in Bazerman and Russell's online book *Writing Selves, Writing Societies*).

Let me turn now to illustrate the implications of this approach for research. In keeping with the theme of the conference, I am describing research in the making, more strategy of the inquiry than findings, though various findings will be presented. The case I will highlight is a group engaged in remediating an art object called *IO*, an interactive web site mixing words and images. I followed the collaborative re-design and re-mediation of *IO* by Joseph Squier and Nan Goggin, Professors of Art and Design and two graduate student research assistants, Tony and Eunah. Data collection, with assistance from Jody Shipka and Kathy Gossett, involved interviews, document collection, videotaped observations, and online use of the sites (including screen captures). In a few cases, participants videotaped their own groups or individual work sessions.

IO at Walker Art



Slide 11

Here is the old version of IO, which Joseph made. Joseph is a photographer who has largely stopped taking photographs and become a recycler of cultural images. He describes his work as collecting and repurposing. One of the best illustrations of his practice might be *Urban Diary* (<http://theplace.walkerart.org>). (Some of you may have seen an image of this in Bolter & Grusin's *Remediation*.) Joseph explained that all objects and texts represented in that piece were ones he had found in a baggie in an alley. He still stores the original images in the baggie in his office at the University. Nan Goggin is a graphic designer and director of the Narrative Media Program. Joseph and Nan have worked on a number of projects together, from their current work on *The Ninth Letter*, a literary-design journal with paper and electronic versions to a CD publication—think immersive video game meets artistic film meets art work. Tony and Eunah were both international graduate students in Art and Design and specialized in programming.

As this screen capture (**Slide 11**) displays, the original *IO* presented words on the left and images on the right. The found images are photoshopped, repurposed and complexly layered.

Clicking on an image called up a new image that appeared in a part of the image space, replacing an older image but also sometimes overlaying existing images. The text on the left consists of words that Joseph had first written in a notebook. On this screen, the text was called up in response to typing “IO” into the rectangular input box. The text on the left reads: “here is where I live, this is the place of my origin, this is the landscape of my consciousness.” Presented in a sans-serif, reversed (white on black) typeface, without capital letters or punctuation, set up in broken lines and arranged asymmetrically in the column-like text space, the words invite us to read them as poetry. Each clause begins, somewhat ironically for a piece of virtual art, with a deictic reference to place (*here, this, this*). Moreover, the text is animated in a very particular fashion by an open-source Artificial Intelligence (AI) program named Bob, a distant cousin of the famous Eliza, who has featured in many tales of the Turing Test. Bob feeds the text to the screen letter by letter at an uneven pace and randomizes certain responses to input to prevent the site from being predictable or mechanical. Joseph explained that he liked this way of animating the text because it mimicked features of human behavior. Joseph described the production of the original *IO* in an interview:

I actually started *IO* in Italy

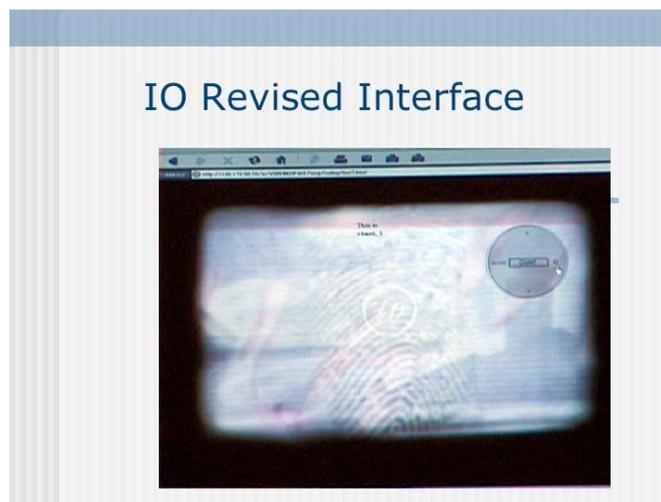
I went to Italy for a month and worked on this piece every day... I went with nothing but still images and this camera and my journal—my journals—that’s all I had and when I came back after a month this is what I had. I did it all...I had a studio and I did the same thing ... I’d, like, get up in the morning and go sit in the studio all day and I would actually close the blinds so I couldn’t look out the window and turn the lights out and I sat in there in the dark, practically, for almost a month and, um, that’s the best situation for me.

Joseph Squier Interview 12/2000

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Actually he also noted that he, of course, had his laptop computer.

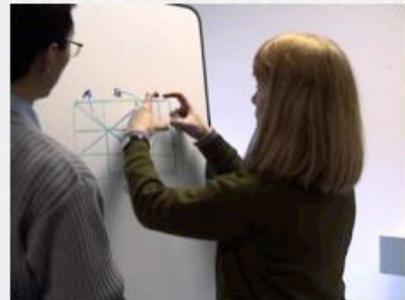
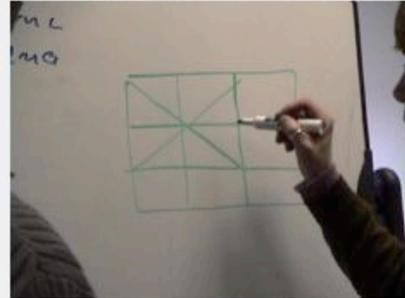
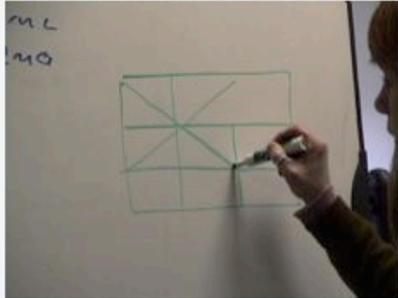
Interestingly, what led Joseph to decide to revise *IO*, the first art object he had ever chosen to redo after exhibition, was a change in technology. The first version of *IO* had many interesting features, but Joseph had no way to relate the images to the words directly, so that a particular input word would trigger images as well as words. In addition, Joseph began to think about adding sounds to the site and adding an interactive component where users could offer potential new text and new images. What triggered his decision to revise was the release of Macromedia Flash 5, which brought the integration of sound, image, and text into the realm of the possible, as long as Joseph could work with a team, distributing expertise (skill sets).



Slide 13

Here is a screen capture from the revised *IO*. The text that is beginning to feed to the screen again triggered by typing in the input window. In this case, the words no longer appear in a separate space but are blended into the space of the images. The box where words were input in the old *IO* (upper left light colored rectangle) has been replaced by another rectangle, but now in a circle that can be dragged around the screen by the user. The images layered in the background are still complex, but at this point more blended, more seamless, less distinct. The boundary between the black border and the display space is not a straight line, but fuzzy and uneven.

Drawing, Talk, and Gesture



Slide 14

Complex mediated activity stood behind the remediation of *IO*. This series of images (**Slide 14**) from an early planning meeting displays the progressive articulation of a Flash template for how the images from the *IO* database should be delivered to the screen. Nan is sketching out the design for Tony, who is in charge of (and most expert on) the PHP database and MySQL program that manages input queries. The box is drawn, talked and gestured into existence. Nan uses different colors markers and her hand gestures over the drawing, and talk to depict the goal for Tony. Her hand gestures dynamically indicate the spaces to which images from the database will be directed. Much later, I learned that Nan was also remediating ancient Pythagorean theories of harmonic numbers, as her design approximated the golden section (see Elam).

What would IO say?

Nan: So do you think—ok, this, should say um, do you want it to say like, “Are you sure you want to leave?”

Eunah: [nods] I just put the word [laughs]

Nan: or maybe you should say, uh, you wouldn't, I mean the machine's talking to us, right?

Eunah: umhm

Nan: so maybe we wouldn't say um “Do you Want to leave IO? Cause you're- you'd say, “Are you sure you want to leave me?” Maybe that's What it should say.

Eunah: Yeah

Nan: “Are you sure you have to go?”

Slide 15

Next we see a small segment of a conversation about 5 months later as Nan and Eunah discuss the redesigned interface. Interestingly, this conversation focused on what IO should “say” in the written text dialog box of the circle interface, to users before they quit the program. In the first line, Nan points to the text on the screen and suggests possible alternatives. Indexically, Nan quickly moves from what “this” should say to what “you” and “we” would say, making the point explicitly in her second turn (“the machine is talking to us”). She offers three direct representations of what the machine might say, intended to function as candidate revisions. “Are you sure you want to leave me?” “Are you sure you have to go? This kind of externalization of the motives for specific revision of wording and the way it is being orally composed is interesting. Nan here seems to also be directing her comments at Eunah. She explicitly highlights the personalization of *IO*, coming up with a somewhat petulant sounding dialog box (“Are you sure you want to leave me?”) and then moves it back to a more neutral form (“Are you sure you have to go?”). In other words, I read Nan's responses here as directed at socialization of Eunah as well as entextualization of *IO*'s personality.

In tracing the production of the revised IO, we see multiple levels and types of mediation.

IO: Tools, Practices, Artifacts

Heterogeneity of mediational means

- Computer programs— Flash, Photoshop, Illustrator, PHP, MySQL, Dreamweaver, Bob, text editors
- IO Texts—Drawings of the interface with numbers and words, notes on paper with drawings, screen texts (e.g., MySQL)
- FTF interaction—talk, gesture, object manipulation, shared writing and drawing
- Print and online texts—books on Flash and PH; online user forums for Flash.

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Not only are these means heterogeneous, they also come from different times and spaces. There is a chronotopic lamination, or what Hutchins refers to as heterochronicity, with multiple times and places uniting in the present. Here is some of the heterochronicity I would identify in the literate activity and functional systems of this group and their work.

Heterochronicity of Mediation in IO

- PHP and Pythagoras
- Screens, paper, and hands
- The web and photography
- Art and the University
- Images and the database
- FTF talk and online chat forums

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Implications for writing research and rhetoric

Implications for Research

- 1) Attend to the full range of multimodality or material ecologies throughout the process
- 2) Attend to the shifting relations among production, representation, reception, and distribution, both in process and in final texts
- 3) Attend to socialization of people, to black-boxing and profusion of semiotic objects
- 4) Networks do not live in sociocultural boxes, so study outside the box.

Slide 18

1—**Attend to the full range of multimodality....** It's not about the web or television, and it's not electracy. It's about semiosis in whatever materials.

2—**Attend to the shifting relations....**

3—**Attend to the socialization of people....** I mentioned the Far Right, but also think of Disney, which is populating our world with t-shirts, stuffed animals, pajamas, coffee cups, TV shows, films, DVDs and CDs, mall stores, theme parks, books, etc. When Disney wants to promote the next Brittany or the next film, they are not making a focal argument. They are working instead to populate the world with Disney artifacts that make Disney naturalized, that incline people to attend favorably to Disney's next product.

4—**Networks do not live....** Life is not an archipelago of focal events so attend to extended semiotic campaigns and to heterochronicity.

In short, this view argues that writing researchers should trace trajectories, follow actors and artifacts, attend to the focal/local but also the disattended/backstaged/unofficial, to the concrete histories. Resituating the canons in this fashion is not a panacea for writing research or rhetoric. I believe however that these revised canons are an artifact that affords certain useful reworkings and expansions of the realm of rhetoric.

And, as I think of Lunsford, Fishman, and Krampetz's rich descriptions yesterday of students' diverse semiotic productions, of Tom Fox's moving accounts today of young people, teachers and family members engaging in literacy and learning against staggering odds, and of Cezar Ornatowski's attention to the texts, murals, and museums of Cape Town as South Africans work to forge a new national identity, I think it is clear that we need to really open up our lenses and adopt frameworks wide enough to put into focus the remarkable richness and complexity of literate lives.

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