

AH: Let's begin with your book, *Electric Rhetoric* (1999), which examines the intersection of classical rhetorics and digital communication. You've claimed that electronic discourse has an "inherent rhetoricity" and that electronic discourse has made rhetoric a "compelling issue" once again. Would you mind elaborating on those points?

KW: I'd be happy to. You mentioned my book on electric rhetoric and writing practices. When I had read your first question, I assumed you were referring to *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric: Appropriations of Ancient Discourse* (1990) and in particular, Chapter 6, "Electrifying Classical Rhetoric," which deals with that issue. In that book, I was trying to analyze post-1963 writing and rhetoric practices as they have been playing out with great intellectual rigor. I'm thinking of the 1963 [Richard] Lloyd-Jones, [Lowell] Schoer, and [Richard] Braddock book, *Research in Written Communication*. [Jix] Lloyd-Jones was my dissertation director at the University of Iowa when the Iowa English Department arguably had one of the best two rhetoric and writing programs in the country. That book, as you know, demonstrated that not a lot of teaching of writing was taking place in most writing classes. I also made a different historicizing move with the Dartmouth Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of Writing. Many people have looked at those texts, and I added the Edward P.J. Corbett first edition of *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1965), a textbook that has remained in print. (I think it's in its 5th edition now, and the late Robert Connors was brought on for the last edition.) I looked at

those three texts and the extraordinary social changes that were going on at that time as reasons for the latest wave of interest in writing and rhetoric studies. What I have tried to do throughout my entire career—beginning in graduate school in the 1970s—is to look at classical issues, and then, eventually, with my graduate training I looked at what I've called “contemporary writing issues.” I started working on Latin in my freshman year of high school and Greek in my junior year. I was lucky to have Miss Ruth Tapper as my teacher in those courses as well as in advanced math. (She later received her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Wisconsin at Madison). In the fall of 1976, I had one of the best courses I've ever taken from one of the best professors I've ever had, Donovan Ochs, who was a professor of Speech Communication at the University of Iowa and Director of Freshman Writing. Many of the Speech Comm [courses], as they were called at that time, and English courses were cross-listed. That course was one of those really earth-shaking courses that changed the way I thought about everything.

Then I took course work from Douglas Ehninger. I did many independent studies with Jix Lloyd-Jones. I also studied in a six-week course with James Britton, who was visiting at the time. The Britton course was another that really changed the way I was thinking. And then there were courses available for people who were specializing in composition and rhetoric. I wrote my dissertation on Aristotle and autobiography, focusing particularly on the *pisteis*. I published one article from that piece, and I twice have had another article accepted for publication, but I've

withdrawn it both times (Laughs). I still want to return to the issue of the *pisteis*, particularly James Kinneavy's and Phil Sipiora's important work on the topic. In 1984, after I had accepted a tenure-track job in the Department of English at the University of Oklahoma, I responded strongly to Lil Brannon and Cy Knoblauch's *The Rhetorical Tradition and the Teaching of Writing* (1984) and was concerned about the way they represented classical rhetoric. Instead of publishing my dissertation, I wrote a whole new book, and that ended up being *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric: Appropriations of Ancient Discourse*. I worked through the ways that writing was central to all classical rhetoric systems. My work in Attic Greek, Homeric Greek, and Latin was helpful there. Chapter 6, "Electrifying Classical Rhetoric," was also published in *JAC* and then republished in a wonderful kind of hybrid book I've taught a lot, William Covino and David Jolliffe's, *Rhetoric – Concepts, Definitions, and Boundaries* (1995). That chapter has found quite a few audiences.

I realized that chapter was a book, so then I launched into *Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and the New Literacy*. You used the word "claim," in your question earlier, and I guess I thought there was a claim, a strong claim, and I worked out those conceptual issues first in various parts of *Contemporary Reception*. And then, sure enough, the last chapter of *Electric Rhetoric*—and I've got to tell you that I love that chapter. I was almost exuberant. I remember writing and redrafting it 11 times. Out of the appendix of that book came a case study that I've done on classical *topoi* and computer writing classrooms. I've

written about that on the first scholarly blog in rhetoric studies, edited by Laura Gurak at the University of Minnesota and her colleagues (blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/). I also just did a piece from that case study at CCCCs [2007]. It was a great session with Writing Program Administrators. I've been looking at material conditions in computer classrooms within English Departments that have rhetoric and composition programs as well as some stand-alone programs.

It seemed to me that the more I studied composition-rhetoric texts and taught them, I could see how what I prefer to call classical rhetorics and writing practices offered ways to theorize and talk about what some people term "new media." I think of [new media] as new forms of the fifth canon of rhetoric, delivery. I became entranced by and committed to the belief that those theories, problematic as they are, given that Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian are so-called "foundational fathers of the West." Aristotle, in particular, is one of the most misogynistic writers I've read. If you look at *On the Generation of Animals*, for example, he works out a lot of his material on women and other humans, and everybody who's not a Greek citizen. You can see the reception of Aristotle's misogyny in various kinds of medical, spoken, and written texts today. There's a whole tradition there, so I really prefer to talk about the *site* of Aristotle.

I was a part of second-wave of United States-ian or Anglo-North American feminism beginning close to the year 1970, and when I was in college, I was very

active in working on feminist second-wave issues. At that time, I don't think I knew it was the second wave. I mean, I *knew* about the first wave that Adrienne Rich has taught us all, that we have to know our histories. . . . [W]omen particularly have to know our histories. I kept thinking, "Well, where are the women? There must be women." A lot of us were working on dealing with women's narratives: Susan Jarratt and her groundbreaking book *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (1991); Jan Swearingen's chapter in her book *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies* (1991); and Elizabeth Flynn's "On Composing as a Woman" in *CCC*. Swearingen's subtitle, *Western Literacy and Western Lies*, I think sums it all up. She's got a really amazing chapter on women. A decade later [there was] Cheryl Glenn with *Rhetoric Retold* (1997) and then the important volume edited by Andrea Lunsford *Reclaiming Rhetorica* (1995), especially those first two chapters on classical rhetoric--one by Jarratt and Rory Ong on Aspasia, and then a second chapter on Diotima by Jan Swearingen. That work was being done, but as we presented our work in the 1980's, we encountered a lot of resistance. The word "antipathy" is really not strong enough. We were received with verbal brick bats, metaphorical rotten tomatoes.

If you look at Elizabeth Flynn's "Composing as a Woman" and then the follow up, "Composing 'Composing as a Woman,'" both in *CCC*, you can see Flynn writing those issues. She talks about the responses of antipathy toward women who trying to write about *any* women, in *any* era. The message was, "You are an

interloper. You are destroying Western civilization. You are not normal.” It was just amazing. It seems like a dinosaur issue now, but that was what we faced. If you look at Louise Weatherbee Phelps and Janet Emig’s very important edited volume *Feminine Principles and Women’s Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric* (1995), you can see narratives of women in rhetoric and composition who were fired from their jobs frequently in the 1980s. Many men were fired, too, but more women were fired.

If you were a “double other” (a phrase I use in an article I presented at a meeting of the [Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition](#))—that is, if you're *white* in rhet/comp and you're working on white women, there really was such antagonism. (Not to mention how we might classify Aspasia’s race and ethnicity which certainly was not white.) We had some men supporting us, certainly. . . .[Still] I’m writing *Contemporary Reception* in this context. People went into the realm of strong negative emotion so quickly that sometimes their reason left them, and they could not respond.

Eventually white women, African American women, Native North American women, Latinas and so on were really working across many sub-disciplines of English and other areas of the humanities to make change. It *worked* to a large extent, although white women and women of color remain profoundly underrepresented in the highest ranks of the Humanities. I heard again here on my campus—that rhetoric and composition studies is populated mostly by

women. Theresa Enos treated this issue in *Gender Roles and Faculty Lives in Rhetoric and Composition* (1996). The MLA statistics from the mid-1960s indicate that the same number of Ph.D.'s granted to women in English beginning about 1965 are nearly the same, over 50 years later. Something's still holding up the progress of many women, especially women of color.

Classical rhetoric as it has been regendered has been a really important issue in my research. I've found that when I do my own translations of the Greek and Latin a lot of things change for me. I took six Latin graduate courses in graduate school at the University of Iowa, particularly with Professor Roger Hornsby, who is one of the best teachers I've ever had, a brilliant scholar and so difficult. We would walk down the hill in Iowa City from Professor Hornsby's classes with *headaches* because we'd have a 75 minute class and he would just keep us there for 3 hours, 3 ½ hours, no questions asked. We would sit there and he would carry on about, you know, Aeneas! [Laughs]

I hardly had any women professors at Iowa. I did learn a lot also from Dudley Andrew from whom I took film courses. He was on my dissertation committee as well. Everything came together at Iowa. I feel that much of what I've learned was done in high school and graduate school. Iowa ha[d] this excellent film department with Dudley Andrew teaching French film theory and producing really brilliant books. He and his spouse were always having us over to his house. Richard (Jix) Lloyd-Jones would do four-hour tutorials with me. He was chair of

the English Department and he was so generous. I would walk in there, you know, pretty much scared all the time, and he was very, very wonderful.

Then there was Mr. Hornsby from the Classics Department who was so, so demanding and once in while, you know, he needed to sort of bellow at us because he didn't *care* about our translations, but he just thought that they were bad [Laughs] and that our interpretations were bad. But he always supported my work very strongly. He was also on my dissertation committee and then ended up being on leave, so he was replaced by Dudley. I was at the University of Iowa getting all this training in writing and rhetoric. I did tons of work in traditional literary studies, tons of feminist work. Gayatri Spivak was at Iowa at the time. I didn't work with her, but her influence was ubiquitous. She was a professor in Comparative Literature. I just had this coming together of fields so that I was able to do the electronic work. I feel lucky that I got all that training, and it's all served me well.

I've also realized you can't *regender* classical rhetoric and writing practices if you're not also *reracing* that issue. That connection took me into Whiteness Studies. One center of Whiteness Studies in rhetoric and composition is Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (2005). It is in Cheryl Glenn and Shirley Wilson Logan's series with SIU Press, *Rhetorics and Feminisms*. I've been on a couple of Whiteness panels, and I've talked to Ratcliffe and others such as Joyce Middleton whose work on the writing practices

of Toni Morrison and various oral structures of consciousness have been fascinating. In fact, Joyce and I had talked about writing a joint autobiography.

The issue of reracing is a very difficult one. I'm white. I just tell people that. I lived in Oklahoma for a long time, and I love Oklahoma very much. I'm studying Cherokee, by the way; it's my latest language. I had to put German aside and delay German in order to learn Cherokee because I was living in Oklahoma. Of course, the Native American studies groups in the English Department and all over the University of Oklahoma are just the *best*; they're the best. It became clear when I moved here that to talk about race as a construction is a very iffy thing if one doesn't I mean, my whiteness feels very much like a construction in the same way that white bread is constructed. . . . The interface between our Composition/Rhetoric/Literacy graduate program within the English Department and the Native American studies within the English Department at the University of Oklahoma has just been great.

I've really had to look at critical race theory as I've worked on whiteness issues. I teach Martin Bernal and others to talk about the "Aryan myth" and the Arnoldian Anglo-German construction from the early 19th century that Bernal calls "the Aryan model" of classical Western culture. He has another model called the "extreme Aryan model." That work has been very important to me, as has a lot of work of Toni Morrison in this regard, and Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (2000). I

think it's another *tour de force*. [A]s we reread, for some people it's a "nomos/physics" issue. Is it a nomos, or a law, or is it physics, is it part of nature? That really is a very important concept in all of Western classical cultures, including classical rhetoric along with all those other binaries.

As Ratcliffe points out, eloquently, the use of the word "whiteness" is problematic. I didn't know this until I was studying Ratcliffe's work: "whiteness" is a word that was used by white supremacist groups. I had forgotten that or had not even known that. Geneva Smitherman has suggested that we give everybody a linguistic marker (e.g., "you're white, this"); that way everyone is identified and there isn't the situation of white people being neutral or non-raced.

I've been able to stitch together a lot of [gender/race] issues in connection with various texts and receptions, particularly in 5th and 4th century B.C.E. classical rhetorics and writing practices. George Kennedy, in his preface to the English translation of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* from Oxford University Press, states that he has restored Aristotle's enthymemes to the text and also taken out sexist constructions in many of the 20th century and 19th century English translations. He makes the point that seems to me to be true, that you don't need to add any more sexism to Aristotle's work. [Laughs] There's plenty there! That's another reason I think that Kennedy's translation is standard and brilliant and really is the one that needs to be used. [Add] to this constellation of work Sappho's important school and the fact that she had such wonderful reception in her lifetime. That

would be one site for beginning classical rhetoric, not Corax and Tisias off in Sicily doing issues of probability. These are all kinds of originary moves.

You can look at this constellation of work and say, “This is really helping us to understand what happens when we turn on the TV” (or when the TV turns *us* on, as it does, as I argue in *Electric Rhetoric*) using theories from classical rhetoric and writing practices. We’re dreaming, our dreams are infiltrated, and we’re dreaming images that we see.

I was not the first person to make this point. Language speaks us, we don’t speak language necessarily. We wake up and think, “Gee, I really need that Volvo” [Laughs], or “I really need that book that costs \$300.” These consumerist desires are inculcated by screens of all kinds. You probably just saw at the CCCC’s [2007] that irritating little CNN screen on the elevators at the Hilton that a lot of us commented on. Laura Gurak and I covered it up at the CCCC’s in 2003 in the same hotel. We were distressed about the beginning of the Iraq War, but also one should be able to get on an elevator and not hear ads and CNN and so on. The screens are ubiquitous. Rhetoric and composition is absolutely set up not only to analyze these screens but to produce stronger and more ethical student writing in a sequence from the freshman level into the sophomore level, the junior level, the senior level, on through all the stages of graduate school. We are uniquely positioned – and I make this argument in an essay in *Living Rhetoric and Composition: Stories of the Discipline* (1999) edited by Duane Roen, Theresa Enos, and Stuart Brown.

These are the things that I've been working on. I also very concerned about the usurping of discourse communities by the mass media in late capitalism, where there's been no effective control by either Democratic or Republican administrations, so that the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has just been a real problem. I've spoken to a political science colleague and some other people because I thought, "We need to get a rhet/comp person on the FCC." There is an historian on there, and he's been a wonderfully effective advocate of – I'm not sure how to phrase it – fairness in new media and not allowing capital to continue to control fully everything.

AH: In some of your work you've likened the contemporary academics' complaints about training students in various electronic media to Plato's complaints about training students to write. Now more composition textbooks are including visual texts, and even privilege visual texts. There are movies and podcasts being created in composition classrooms. Do you find that visual and other kinds of multimedia texts are being marginalized in the academy? Or do you think that what you've called "fifth-canon consciousness" is being raised sufficiently?

KW: Yes. I do think that fifth-canon consciousness is being raised. Look at Cynthia Selfe, Richard Selfe, Gail Hawisher, Laura Gurak, Barbara Warnick, Andrea Lunsford, Hugh Burns, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (and I've left out a lot of

people here). These scholars in composition and rhetoric have absolutely done marvelous work in this field. There is also Todd Taylor, whom I haven't met; I just keep seeing his incredible work. Yet what I see as I evaluate English departments around the country is an amazing recurrence of the Current-Traditional Paradigm. I see the five-paragraph theme or five-part theme with a focus on error correction, putting the teacher –the writing teacher – in the subject position of being really a police officer enforcing correctness. It's everywhere. We think that we have transcended it, moved beyond this 18th century construct. Sharon Crowley's *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric* (1990) shows where the methodical memory came from, how it takes hold, and why it's so difficult to get rid of. While important writing instruction is taking place all around the United States, at the same time, the Current-Traditional Paradigm keeps popping up. Sometimes it pops up in universities that have strong rhetoric and composition programs in English departments or in stand-alone departments because of the idea (which remains very strong in the United States) that anybody can be a writing teacher and that if you know how to write, if you're functionally and mildly critically literate, then you can teach writing.

It's striking that the Current-Traditional Paradigm was renamed in one of my computer classrooms "CURTRAD" by Benjamin Harris, who's now an Assistant Professor of Library and Information Studies at Trinity University in San Antonio. We were talking and writing synchronously in the same room, and he came up with "CURTRAD." And I thought "CURTRAD" really summed it up. There has

been a dramatic increase in the number of excellent writing textbooks, and there continues to be a very large percentage of books that, in my view, make students hate their own language, if that language happens to be English.

I see a lot of work going on with the undergraduate and graduate students and various people doing exciting things with imaging. What I don't see is . . . more coursework. What I've been promoting is a sophomore-level course in arguing with images. Learning argument is so hard. Learning enthymemes and syllogisms and how they morph is so profoundly difficult that you need more than the freshman writing sequence (and every college and university should have a year-long freshman writing requirement, in my view). Even if you're as good a writer as, say, Shakespeare, that's fine. You still need more work. We need a sophomore-level semester long or quarter long or two-quarter long writing and imaging course taught by rhetoric/comp people or rhet/comp graduate students or other people who are trained by us in imaging. This could take place in a technology-rich classroom.

Of course, we all know that in the junior year, students need to be writing in the disciplines in which they've chosen to major, so we have to do more Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines. In the senior, year it's very important to do some kind of capstone thesis or continue to write. I think all the longitudinal studies have indicated that students who write formally and with

professional response through their four college years are able to retain the work, and they're able to build complexity in the way they write.

There's a tremendous need for dissertations and M.A. theses in rhetoric and writing studies on these issues. The courses and curricula are there at many places. Ohio State comes to mind; Purdue also has a stunning program. Many of these--University of Texas, University of Oklahoma, University of Colorado, New Mexico State, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Stanford—are doing exciting things with both writing and imaging. In other words, we need more required courses. We can't really add any more to the freshman writing course. It's so hard now [Laughs].

AH: Though the Internet contains a good deal of print text, the popularity of YouTube and other image-rich sites depend on audio/visual texts. When you think of “texts,” do you think that writing should still be privileged? What is “writing” becoming?

KW: I'm not sure, but I don't think it's determined. Comp/rhet specialists can help to decide what that future might be, which is one of the reasons I want Andrea Lunsford or Douglas Hesse on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and I want rhet/comp people and other English professors all over these government commissions. Let me give you an example. My nephew Kyle Dare has just finished a really strong Bachelor's degree in Cinema Studies, and he's

looking for a job in LA, as are so many of our young twenty-somethings. They're flooding into LA, they're writing scripts, they're doing all these things that you're describing, but who is going to get which particular kinds of jobs? The writing sample remains, for good or ill, a crucially important part of any job application. If you can't do that kind of complex analytical writing without images, then adding images just becomes an interesting issue. I asked my nephew, "Have you checked YouTube to make sure that an employer is not looking at anything you don't want out there?" Employers are checking all of these sites and looking for material. If they [employers] see someone presented in a certain way that can lose that person a job. Our students are out there imaging . . . We have to train our students with our vast knowledge base in rhet/comp.

AH: Do you include here Facebook and other social networking sites?

KW: That's right. It is great that young people are doing all those things, but I'm thinking that all of our students have to get jobs and put bread on the table. We have to maintain the strength that we have in freshman writing, continue to resist CURTRAD, and to develop year-long freshman writing sequences. [We have to] get the sophomore-level course going in a rich technological environment that's based on imaging so students can then translate written issues to the visual realm.

We know that every translation is a completely new work; it's not the same. [We need to] move ahead with the WAC and WID initiatives that universities have [which] in turn is connected to the number of tenured and tenure-track professorial jobs that exist for rhetoric/composition scholars. It's just one of the reasons we need lots and lots of rhet/comp scholars, scholar/teachers, to do this kind of work.

AH: I want to ask one more question. In *Electric Rhetoric*, you discuss television as the prevalent screen in our lives. Is this still the case or have the Web and the Internet eclipsed television as the most all-encompassing screens?

KW: That's such a good question. I might comment that there are more televisions than toilets in the United States, something I had learned from my friend David Marc, who wrote a really brilliant book (his dissertation at Iowa in American Studies) called *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (1984)--an homage to Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. I would have to look at hard numbers and studies of the numbers of televisions and the numbers of computer and other screens. The data I have seen are showing that a lot of new screen use—computers and text messaging screens on telephones and Blackberries and so on—may not have the ubiquity of the television.

What we do know is that things are changing very quickly. My question is, "Are we going to just be technological determinists and say, 'Oh, capitalism made us

do this. Late capitalism is doing that to us.’ Or, are we going to say, ‘We don’t want to see *this*; we want to see *that*.’” If you go to CCCC’s and listen to[Gail] Hawisher and Selfe, they’re saying, “Don’t do *this*; we need to do *this*.” Or Lunsford and [Lisa] Ede say, “Don’t do *this*; we need to do *this*.” Then they go off to their universities and do those things, and I’ve tried to do that as well.

I’ve also collaborated with [Laura] Gurak. We were writing an article on small screen literacy, partly as a result of looking at that little screen in the elevator at the CCCC’s [Laughs]. I imagine we’ll get that article done, and then she blocked out the table of contents to turn it into a book. I would like to finish that collaboration, but technological things are changing quickly.

Another part of the issue is, “Are Humanities intellectuals going to step forward?” This is one of the points I made in *Electric Rhetoric*. Are we going to admit that we watch TV or stare at screens of various kinds, or are we just going to look at print books? I could read print books 14 hours a day and drink coffee and that would be it--or read student essays. I love to read student essays on screen and in print. Things are changing, but we’ve had, other periods of faster technological change. I would like to see intellectuals in the United States step up and [say] we need to be working *in* these media.

We need to take the lead here, and CCCC’s is doing that. I think the Rhetoric Society of America has done a lot of exciting work looking at old and new media.

And I think the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition is doing good work in that field. The Association of Teachers of Technical Writing is one of my favorite professional organizations. I just gobble up their *Technical Communication Quarterly*. Four times a year I learn so much about imaging. I also think of people like Robert Johnson, Professor of Humanities and Chair of the Humanities Department at Michigan Tech. He deploys classical rhetoric, by the way, so seamlessly, so wonderfully. All these scholar-teachers and organizations are doing wonderful work so that I have great hope that we'll be able to help make them pedagogical and scholarly. And we need to have a government that is not bought and paid for by big media and other big companies. That is a larger problem of capital.

AH: I think we'll end on that note of hope.

KW: Good! Because I am very hopeful! [Laughs]