

**“Among the Audience”:  
On Audience in an Age of New Literacies**

**Andrea A. Lunsford and Lisa Ede**

*With participatory media, the boundaries between audiences and creators become blurred and often invisible. In the words of David Sifry, the founder of Technorati, a search engine for blogs, one-to-many “lectures” (i.e. from media companies to their audiences) are transformed into “conversations” among “the people formerly known as the audience.”*

--Andreas Kluth, “Among the Audience: A Survey of New Media.” *The Economist*, p. 4)

*Critics argue that privacy does not matter to children who were raised in a wired celebrity culture that promises a niche audience for everyone. Why hide when you can perform? But even if young people are performing, many are clueless about the size of their audience.*

--Ari Melber, “About Facebook.” *The Nation*, p. 23.

When we wrote “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy” (hereafter AA/AI), which was published in *College Composition and Communication* in 1984, we little realized the life that it would have. Much has changed in the teaching of writing—and in the technologies of communication—since we published AA/AI. Much has changed, as well, in our culture and cultural awareness. So much, in fact, that we saw the need in 1996 to critique our earlier essay, calling attention to several unexamined assumptions that we wished to expose and challenge. In “Representing Audience: Successful Discourse and Disciplinary Critique,” published in *College Composition and Communication* in 1996, we observed, for instance, that although we intended our essay “to invoke and address a broad range of audiences, it speaks most strongly to those whose identifications and experiences mirror our own, while turning away from the potential difficulties

and costs often inherent in the effort to achieve the kind of academic ‘success’ that our essay takes for granted as well as from those who would wish to subvert such ‘success’” (175).

More than a dozen years later still, we see the need to reflect yet again on the role of audience in composition theory and pedagogy. We are particularly interested in the role that new literacies are playing in expanding the possibilities of agency, while at the same time challenging older notions of both authorship and audience. In addition, observations of and talks with students—as well as changes in our own reading, writing, and researching practices—have alerted us to new understandings and enactments of textual production and ownership. As a result, our goal in this essay is both theoretical and pedagogical. We wish to subject the concept of audience to renewed inquiry, attempting to account for the way texts develop and work in the world in the twenty-first century. We hope, as well, that the resulting analysis will be useful in our classrooms. As we conduct this exploration, we will address the following questions.

- In a world of participatory media—of FaceBook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, and Del.icio.us—what relevance does the term “audience” hold?
- How can we best understand the relationships among text, author, medium, context, and audience today? How can we usefully describe the dynamic of this relationship?
- To what extent do the invoked and addressed audiences that we describe in our 1984 essay need to be revised and expanded?
- What other terms, metaphors, or images might prove productive?
- What difference might answers to these questions make to twenty-first century teachers and students?

### *On New Media and New Literacies*<sup>1</sup>

Before turning to these questions, we would like to situate our discussion in the context of recent research on new media<sup>2</sup> and new literacies, for how we view their relationship matters a good deal to our understanding of both audience and authorship. Are new literacies “new” simply because they rely upon new media, or is the relationship more complex? This is a question that Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear raise in the introduction to *A New Literacies Sampler*. Knobel and Lankshear argue that the latter is the case. While acknowledging that new media have certainly played an important role in the development of new literacies, they argue that what they term “paradigm cases” of new literacies have, as they put it, both “new ‘technical’ stuff and new ‘ethos’ stuff” (7). Central to the development of new literacies is the mobilization of “very different kinds of values and priorities and sensibilities than the literacies we are familiar with” (7). New literacies, they argue, are “more ‘participatory,’ ‘collaborative,’ and ‘distributed’ in nature than conventional literacies. That is, they are less ‘published,’ ‘individuated,’ and ‘author-centric’ than conventional literacies.” They are also “less ‘expert-dominated’ than conventional literacies” (9).

Thus new literacies involve a different kind of mindset than literacies traditionally associated with print media. In their introduction to *A New Literacies Sampler*, Knobel and Lankshear contrast what they refer to as a “physical-industrial” mindset—the mindset that the

---

<sup>1</sup> We are keenly aware of the irony inherent in this essay on new media and new literacies, composed as it is almost entirely of words and published in print. At least one reason for this irony is practical: we wrote this essay in response to an invitation to contribute to a print book, *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies*, edited by M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. González. The essay has been revised since this publication.

<sup>2</sup> In *Writing New Media Texts*, Anne Wysocki argues that “we should call ‘new media texts’ those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality; such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text—like its composers and readers—doesn’t function independently of how it is made and in what contexts. Such composers design texts that make as overtly visible as possible the values they embody” (15).

two of us certainly grew up with throughout our schooling and a good deal of our working lives—with a “cyberspatial-postindustrial mindset” (10). According to Knobel and Lankshear, those whose experience grounds them primarily in a physical-industrial mindset tend to see the individual person as “the unit of production, competence, intelligence.” They also identify expertise and authority as “located in individuals and institutions” (11). Those who inhabit a “cyberspatial-postindustrial mindset,” in contrast, increasingly focus on “collectives as the unit of production, competence, intelligence” and tend to view expertise, authority, and agency as “distributed and collective” (11). In a “cyberspatial-postindustrial mindset,” the distinction between author and audience is much less clear than in that of the physical-industrial mindset of print literacy.

Those familiar with research in our field on new media and new literacies—research undertaken by scholars such as Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, James Porter, Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, James Gee, Heidi McKee, Christine Blair, Cheryl Ball, Danielle DeVoss, Todd Taylor, the New London Group, and others—will recognize that the distinction that Knobel and Lankshear draw has been made before. (They will recognize, as well, the value of complicating this binary, useful as it is in a general sense.) The scholarly work of media historians is particularly helpful in this regard. (See, for instance, Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree’s *New Media: 1740-1915*.) The insights generated by these and other scholars in our field have been enriched by research in such related areas as literacy, cultural, and internet studies. In works ranging from Gunther Kress’s *Literacy in the New Media Age* to Howard Rheingold’s *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Lisa Nakamura’s *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, Keith Sawyer’s *Group Genius*, and Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody*, those

studying online and digital literacies—particularly Web 2.0 literacies—are challenging conventional understandings of both authorship and audience.<sup>3</sup>

As we have engaged this literature and have attempted to better understand what it means to be a reader and writer in the twenty-first century, we have come to see that what we thought of as two separate strands of our scholarly work—one on collaboration, the other on audience—have in fact become one. As writers and audiences merge and shift places in online environments, participating in both brief and extended collaborations, it is increasingly obvious that writers seldom, if ever, write alone. In short, when receivers or consumers of information become creators of content as well, it is increasingly difficult to tell when writers are collaborative writers or authors and when they are members of audiences.

### *The End of Audience?*

In our contemporary world of digital and online literacies, it seems important to question the status and usefulness of the concept of “audience.” Are the changes brought about by new media and new literacies so substantial that it is more accurate to refer to those who participate in new media writing, ranging from user-generated content and tagging to tweeting and digital remixing, as “the people formerly known as the audience,” as David Sifry suggests in the first epigraph to this essay?

Even before the explosion of such social networking sites as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, some scholars in the field of rhetoric and writing argued that the term “audience” may have outlived its usefulness. Some suggested, for instance, that the term “discourse community”

---

<sup>3</sup> We use the term “Web 2.0” here and elsewhere recognizing that some have argued that this term is inaccurate and/or hyperbolic. In an interview posted on IBM’s developerWorks site, for instance, Tim Berners-Lee argues that Web 2.0 is “a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people [as opposed to Web 1, which is sometimes described as computer to computer]. . . . But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along.” Berner-Lee prefers to use the term “Semantic Web” rather than Web 2.0 (Laningham).

better reflects social constructionist understandings of communication. This is the position that James Porter espouses in his 1992 *Audience and Rhetoric: An Archaeological Composition of the Discourse Community*. Others have wondered whether the term “public,” as articulated and developed by Jürgen Habermas and explored and extended in Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics*, might not be just as useful as—or more useful than—the term “audience.” In *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*, for instance, Rosa Eberly argues that the term “public” is more helpful than the terms “reader” or “audience” for her study of letters to the editor about four controversial literary texts—two published early in the twentieth century, and two published later.

These and other efforts to re-examine and problematize the concept of audience reflect developments in the field over the last several decades. In the early 1980s when we were talking, thinking, and writing about audience, the need for such problematization was anything but apparent to us. To put it mildly, our context was different. At that time, we were immersed in research on the contemporary relevance of the classical rhetorical tradition, as our 1984 essay “On Distinctions between Classical and Modern Rhetoric” attests. That same year saw the publication of our co-edited *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*.

In the years since we published AA/AI, we have come to recognize the limitations, as well as the strengths, of the classical (and more broadly Western) rhetorical tradition. In our 1996 reflection on AA/AI, “Representing Audience,” for example, we acknowledge the individualism inherent in this tradition. We also point out that the rhetorical tradition’s commitment to *successful* communication has exacted a high hidden price, particularly in terms of efforts to address the ethics of diversity: “For how better to avoid misunderstanding and failure (and to make ‘successful’ communication more likely) than to exclude, to disenfranchise

those who by their very presence in the arena of discourse raise increased possibilities for communicative failures” (174). The rhetorical tradition, as a consequence, risks indifference or hostility to issues of difference, to “audiences ignored, rejected, excluded, or denied” (174).

Does this mean that we wish to reject the term “audience”? No, it does not. We believe that “audience,” like other terms such as “discourse community” or “public,” is inevitably overdetermined, but is still (as is the case with these other terms) in many contexts both helpful and productive. Finally, terms like “audience,” “reader,” “discourse community,” and “public” gesture toward and evoke differing concerns, traditions, and interests. The emphasis on the reader in reader response criticism, for instance, was clearly a salutary response to the emphasis on the text in formalist New Criticism.<sup>4</sup> In the final analysis, one of the beauties of a fluid, multiplicitous term like “audience” is its heuristic value in exploring fine distinctions and teasing out important nuances in any communicative situation.

We continue to believe, then, that the concept of audience provides a helpful theoretical and practical grounding for efforts to understand how texts (and writers and readers) work in today’s world. We also believe, as we stated in AA/AI, that a productive way to conceive of audience “is as an overdetermined or unusually rich concept, one which may perhaps be best specified through the analysis of precise, concrete situations” (168). Indeed, in rereading AA/AI we are struck by the powerful role that the analysis of such situations plays in our own essay. As readers may already realize, in remaining committed to the term “audience” we remain committed to rhetoric and to the rhetorical tradition. Our understanding of the rhetorical tradition

---

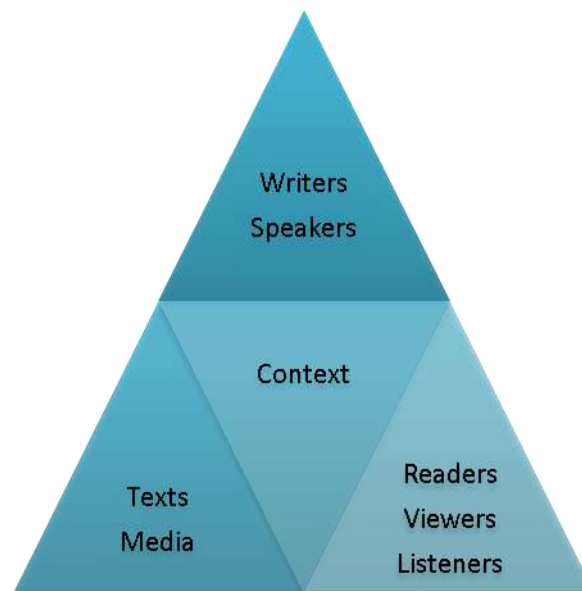
<sup>4</sup> Two recent monographs helpfully remind us of the differing concerns, traditions, and interests that scholars have brought to the concept of audience. The first study, Mary Jo Rieff’s 1994 *Approaches to Audience: An Overview of the Major Perspectives*, chronicles the development of research on audience within English studies in general and rhetoric and writing in particular. The second study, Denis McQuail’s 1997 monograph *Audience Analysis*, is written from the perspective of communication studies, particularly mass communication and cultural studies.

has changed and expanded since we first wrote AA/AI, but we continue to find rhetoric's emphasis on the rhetorical situation to be theoretically and pedagogically enabling.

### *The "Rhetorical Triangle" Revisited*

In AA/AI we described our own experiences with varying audiences, arguing that "the elements [of invoked and addressed audience roles] shift and merge, depending on the particular rhetorical situation, the writer's aim, and the genre chosen (168)." Thus we embedded our discussion of audience in the classical conception of the "rhetorical triangle," the set of relationships among text, author, and audience out of which meaning grows. Twenty-five years ago, while our work attempted to complicate these sets of relationships, this basic understanding served us simply and well. Today, however, we need a more flexible and robust way of understanding these traditional elements of discourse and the dynamic at work among them.

As a result, we now use the following figure to portray the basic elements of the rhetorical situation. This figure includes speakers as well as writers, viewers, listeners, and readers.





### Figure 1: The Rhetorical Triangle

This figure captures more of the complexity of the rhetorical situation: it acknowledges the plurality of authorship/readership; it includes media as a key element of thinking about texts; and it includes context as the element that touches on, connects, and shapes all angles of the triangle. This element of the rhetorical situation calls attention to the diverse and multiple factors that writers must consider when they compose—from generic or situational constraints to ideologies that make some writerly choices seem obvious and “natural,” while others are “unnatural” or entirely hidden from view. As the figure suggests, the relationship among writer and message and medium (or media) is complex and full of reciprocity. In a digital world, and especially in the world of Web 2.0, speakers and audiences communicate in multiple ways and across multiple channels, often reciprocally. This momentous shift has challenged not only traditional models of communication but also the relationship between “creators” of messages and those who receive them. Today, as we have pointed out, the roles of writers and audiences often conflate, merge, and shift.

The deeply participatory nature of much new media writing provides opportunities for writerly agency,<sup>5</sup> even as it challenges notions of intellectual property that have held sway now for over 300 years, leading—as we have been at pains to point out in our research on collaboration and collaborative writing—both to diverse forms of multiple authorship and to the kind of mass authorship that characterizes sites such as Wikipedia, Rotten Tomatoes, or collaborative blogs. To say that the music and film industries, along with some print-based

---

<sup>5</sup> Recent work on gaming and gamers sometimes explores agency in such venues. See the special issue of *Computers and Composition* devoted to Reading Games: Composition, Literacy, and Video Gaming and particularly the articles by John Alberti and Matthew S.S. Johnson.

companies, are resisting such shifts in authorship is an understatement. While these entities will continue to cling to traditional intellectual property regimes of the past, it seems clear that new ways of managing the relationship among texts, “authors,” media, contexts, and audiences are emerging. In this regard, consider the alternative rock group Radiohead’s decision to release its seventh album, *In Rainbows*, as a digital download on the Internet. Fans of this group could purchase the music collection on the Web—for whatever price they wished to pay.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Economics of Attention*, Richard Lanham argues that we have moved from what he calls a “stuff economy” (one based on material goods) to a “fluff economy” (one based on immaterial information). With his typical humor and verve, Lanham shows that while in a “stuff” economy scarcity is the major economic principle at work, that principle utterly fails in a “fluff” economy, where information is anything but scarce. In fact, as Lanham points out, we are drowning in it. In such an economy, what is needed, according to Lanham, is *attention*—that is, a way of attending sensibly to the information pouring in:

In an attention economy, the center of gravity for property shifts from real property to intellectual property. This shift has plunged us into confusions about the ownership of such property . . . that it will take some time to sort out. . . . Information, unlike stuff, can be both kept and given away at the same time. As long as the means of notation were fixed in physicality as books, reports, painted images, we could gloss over this major obstacle: that ‘possession’ means something different from a private property in stuff. Now, with information expressed on a digital screen, with its new means of dissemination, we can no longer continue this gloss. Hence the current agonies in the music and film business. They have been caught in a vise, squeezed between the macro and the micro economics of attention (259).

---

<sup>6</sup> After making their album available on the Web, Radiohead also released their music as a conventional CD.

We too are caught between the macro and micro economies of attention, since we cannot ignore the world of “stuff.” But we are clearly in what Lanham calls a “revisionist” way of thinking.

“Our locus of reality has shifted,” he argues:

We have not left the physical world behind and become creatures of pure attention.

Neither has wealth become totally disembodied. Our view is now bi-stable. We must always be ready to move from one view of the world to another. They are always competing with each other. We are learning to live in two worlds at once. (258)

In a time of transition, some people are differentially advantaged or disadvantaged: individuals are—or are not—members of Lanham’s “we,” a fact which reminds us that inequalities and differing degrees of access persist in an attention economy.

As Lanham’s discussion suggests, writers who want and need to shift among worlds must be able to hold flexible views of the real and potential relationships among text, context, author, medium, and audience. They must be able to negotiate distinctions between writing and reading, between author and audience that refuse to remain stable; they must also be able to sort out the competing claims of words, images, and sounds in choosing the best medium or media of communication. And they must also become comfortable with new ways of thinking about property, about ownership of the messages that are created amidst the dynamic interaction of writers, audiences, and media.

In many ways, our students are already experienced inhabitants of Lanham’s two worlds, and they are increasingly comfortable with new ways of thinking about textual ownership. Such new ways began to emerge in interviews with students conducted during the Stanford Study of Writing (SSW), when researchers asked the students in the study about their views on intellectual property. These interviews, which took place between 2001 and 2006, revealed what

at first felt like a hard-to-describe, nebulous change: the best the researchers could say was that something seemed to be happening to the way students thought about intellectual property and ownership. But more recent analyses of the transcripts of some 150 interviews indicate the kind of flexible shifting back and forth described above.

Perhaps one vivid example will serve to limn this potential shift in understanding and attitude toward textual ownership. One participant in the study, Mark Otuteye, wrote a poem during the early weeks of his first year at Stanford. Titled “The Admit Letter,” this poem was performed by Mark later that year during Parents’ Weekend; it opens with a “so-called friend” saying to Mark “Oh sure, you got into Stanford: you’re Black.” What follows in this spoken word poem is Mark’s imagining of what his “so-called friend” thought his admit letter might have said. The two imaginary versions of the admit letter that Mark performed were biting—and very, very funny; together, they not only put the so-called friend in his place but manage to send up the University as well. On the Stanford campus, news of this poem spread like proverbial wildfire and Otuteye was called on to perform it in numerous venues. In one such venue, the poem changed significantly: now it was performed by Mark and a Chicana student, who powerfully wove together versions of their “admit letters.”

“The Admit Letter” went through additional permutations during Otuteye’s college career, and during one of the interviews with him SSW researchers asked, “So is this poem yours? Do you own it?” In a lengthy conversation, Mark said that he considered the poem to be his in significant and important ways—but not *exclusively* his; in fact, he said, his work is usually written and performed collaboratively, and he sees it as part of a large poetic commons. In short, this student was already beginning to move between the information and the attention worlds, and he was comfortable writing with as well as for others, and in a range of media. For

Mark, and for many other students in this study, what has seemed at times to us the perplexing fluidity and even tension among writer, text, context, medium, and audience feels like home turf. This home turf, however, is not without its potential dangers and challenges (including challenges to notions of textual ownership). As we will discuss in a later section of this essay, other problems can arise if students fail to differentiate between the constraints and opportunities inherent in their self-sponsored writing and those of the academic rhetorical situation.

### *Taxonomizing Audiences*

When we wrote AA/AI, we literally could not have imagined the textual and material worlds we inhabit today. At that time, we were attempting to intervene in a then-contemporary debate over audience. In our effort to understand and give coherence to this debate, we grouped various scholars' work on audience under two constructs, that of audience invoked (the intended audience as well as those imagined and hailed by the writer) and of audience addressed (the actual people reading a writer's work). If reprintings and references to AA/AI are any indication, others have found the constructs of audience addressed/audience invoked useful. But we are also aware that the impulse to taxonomize—to create binaries and various other sorts of categories—has disadvantages as well as advantages. Indeed, the felt need to go beyond addressed and invoked audiences to acknowledge audiences that are “ignored, rejected, excluded, or denied” motivated our effort to look again at AA/AI when we wrote “Representing Audience” (174).

A quarter of a century after AA/AI was published, we want to look again at these two constructs to determine what relevance they hold in an age of new media and new literacies.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Other scholars have also examined these constructs in helpful ways. We would particularly like to call attention to Robert Johnson's “Audience Involved: Toward a Participatory Model of Writing,” Jack Selzer's “More Meanings of Audience,” Rosa Eberly's “From Writers, Audiences, and Communities to Publics: Writing Classrooms as Protublic Spaces,” Mary Jo Reiff's “Rereading ‘Invoked’ and ‘Addressed’ Readers Through a Social Lens:

When we look at our earlier work, we continue to value the way that the constructs of audience addressed and audience invoked enable us to call attention to (1) the fluid, dynamic character of rhetorical situations; and (2) the integrated, interdependent nature of reading and writing” (156). We value as well the extent to which they discourage overly stark binaries—such as those that posit sharp dichotomies between speaking and writing. In *AA/AI* we point out, for instance, that Walter Ong’s representative situations (in “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction”) of “the orator addressing a mass audience versus a writer alone in a room” will always “oversimplify the potential range and diversity of both oral and written communication situations” (161).

If this statement was true in 1984, it is even more compelling today with the proliferation of electronic and online media and social networking sites. Increasingly, for instance, students in our writing classes post messages to course discussion boards and blogs and/or contribute to wikis. When they compose academic texts, they may well insert images and sound, or provide tables or spreadsheets with supporting information. When students turn from academic writing to self-sponsored communication, the possibilities explode—including everything from instant messaging and texting to blogging, creating text and images on Facebook (and commenting on others pages), posting photos on Flickr, and sharing tags on Del.icio.us.

As we noted earlier in this essay, these kinds of participatory communications challenge conventional understandings of both authorship and audience, even as they provide an opportunity for anyone and everyone to become author and audience, writer and reader.<sup>8</sup> But do

---

Toward a Recognition of Multiple Audiences,” and the essays published in Gesa Kirsch and Duane H. Roen’s edited collection *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*. Though space limitations do not allow us to discuss these studies, we have benefited from these authors’ analyses and critiques.

<sup>8</sup> In “Agency and Authority in Role-Playing texts,” Jessica Hammer identifies three kinds of authorship in video games: primary, secondary, and tertiary. As Hammer notes, “The primary author develops a world and a set of

they invalidate the general constructs of audience addressed and audience invoked that we established in AA/AI? In the most general sense, the kinds of participatory communication that we have just described can, we believe, be encompassed within these two categories—which, we argue in AA/AI, are best understood as a dialogic pair.

Consider, in this regard, our experience writing this chapter. Rather than relying on the technologies of telephone, electric correcting typewriter, and photocopy machines (technologies essential to the composition of AA/AI), we relied on contemporary electronic technologies, particularly word processing, email, and the Web. Yet our experience composing this text still required us to negotiate both addressed and invoked audiences—from the readers we envisioned as we worked on drafts of this essay to colleagues and students who actually read and responded to it. In short, we find that the categories of invoked and addressed audiences still inform the much more complex online communicating we do today. As we post to listservs, look for videos on YouTube that we can use in our classes, or participate in a wiki devoted to developing an accreditation report for one of our institutions, we are conscious of both addressed and invoked audiences. In the case of the accreditation report, some thirty members of a task force are contributing to this document, which is addressed directly to the university's accreditation board. In a more indirect way, this document is also addressed to all members of the accreditation team and to our upper administrators as well. But to address these audiences, and especially the first one, we must invoke the accreditation board, which we have done very carefully and cautiously: a lot is at stake in our getting this particular invocation right.

Even so, we need to acknowledge that precisely because the constructs of audience addressed and audience invoked are so broad and encompassing, they can only take us so far in

---

rules,” while “the secondary author takes the work of the primary author and uses it to construct a specific situation or scenario. . . . The tertiary authors, then, ‘write’ the text of the game in play” (71).

our understanding of audience, including contemporary online and electronic audiences.<sup>9</sup> A person who reads Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, for instance, and then posts the 1497th customer review on Amazon.com no doubt has an invoked audience in mind, while the addressed audience is potentially vast and largely unknowable.<sup>10</sup> We are likewise fascinated by the potential relationships among the photographers who (as of our last checking) posted 66,977 photos of black labs on Flickr, tagging them so that other audiences with a similar passion for this breed of dogs can easily find them,<sup>11</sup> not to mention the relationship we might establish if we clicked on the profile of one of these photographers or if we commented on a photo we find particularly compelling. In these instances, we are invoking this photographer even as the photographer invokes other audiences, which may or may not include us. Further, our invocation of the photographer may lead us to address him or her directly—or not. In any case, the concepts of “addressed” and “invoked” seem to ripple out, overlap, and echo one another in provocative ways.

And such examples proliferate. When Henry Jenkins in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* refers to “the interactive audience” (136), it seems clear that those communicating with such an audience must necessarily both address and invoke each other. But having said that, what more might we add? How does the technology of gaming or blogging, for example, ignore or exclude certain audiences? What ideological positions may be unspoken in such activities? And how can we avoid the utopian/dystopian ways in which

---

<sup>9</sup> In *Audience Analysis*, for instance, Denis McQuail helpfully identifies the following dimensions of audience: “degree of activity or passivity; degree of interactivity and interchangeability; size and duration; locatedness in space; group character (social/cultural identity); simultaneity of contact with source; heterogeneity of composition; social relations between sender and receiver; message versus social/behavioral definition of situation; degree of ‘social presence’; sociability of context of use” (150).

<sup>10</sup> As of July 25, 2010 this was the number of customer reviews of the Harper Perennial Modern Classic paperback edition of Kingsolver's novel on Amazon.com.

<sup>11</sup> This search of Flickr was also conducted on July 25, 2010..



audiences and members of new online communities are often framed, both in the popular press and in more serious scholarly work? In attempting to answer this last question, Jenkins observes that “the interactive audience is more than a marketing concept and less than a ‘semiotic democracy’” (136). Jenkins’s comment suggests that interactive or participatory audiences fall somewhere along a continuum, from those who consume media and content on the Web in fairly traditional ways to the full shared agency characteristic of many online communities.

We have additional issues and questions as well. In an online, participatory culture, the concerns that we articulated in “Representing Audience” about audiences “ignored, rejected, excluded, or denied” become even more salient (174).<sup>12</sup> As we will discuss more fully in the next section, many students easily forget that when they post something on the Web they may encounter unwanted or future audiences—such as an employer checking their Facebook entries or a researcher checking on their use of his or her scholarly work.

Although these questions suggest potential limitations of the constructs of audience addressed and audience invoked, we believe that these constructs can still usefully remind us of the rich complexity of any form of communication, written or spoken, print or online. But as we have suggested, they are too general to directly address questions such as the ones we have just articulated. These questions require the kind of “analysis of precise, concrete situations” that we call for near the end of AA/AI (168).<sup>13</sup> Such work is currently being done, most often in qualitative studies that require the depth and breadth of ethnography. One powerful example of

---

<sup>12</sup> In *Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences’ Expectations*, John Schilb examines cases in which speakers and writers intentionally defy audience expectations.

<sup>13</sup> Scholars in such areas as media and cultural studies, communication, sociology, and anthropology have undertaken research in media reception and audience ethnography. For an introduction to this interdisciplinary body of work, see Pertti Alasuutari’s *Rethinking the Media Audience: The New Agenda*. Representative studies include Virginia Nightingale’s *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real*, S. Elizabeth Bird’s *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World*, and Will Brooker and Deborah Jermyn’s *The Audience Studies Reader*.

such work occurs in Angela Thomas's chapter on "Blurring and Breaking through the Boundaries of Narrative, Literacy, and Identity in Adolescent Fan Fiction" in Knobel and Lankshear's *New Literacies Sampler*. In this four-year ethnographic study, Thomas explores the experiences of two adolescent females: "Tiana, aged 14 years, and Jandalf, aged 17 years, friends who met online and who have been collaboratively writing fan fiction for over a year" (139). These two young authors prove to be extraordinary in a number of ways, including the degree of self-reflexivity and flexibility that they exhibit. In characterizing their writing, both individual and collaborative, Thomas observes that Tiana and Jandalf move successfully "in and out of media type, text type, form, style and literary device with an ease and poetry of linguistic dexterity that is truly exceptional" (151). In doing so, they assume a range of audience roles for each other, taking turns for example at role playing as they develop the outlines of plots and of characters for their fan fiction. Tiana explains: "[W]hen I transcribe over, I sort of become two people—Tiana and a narrator. I make myself see things from a third person POV [point of view] while still writing as my characters" (144). In describing the many kinds of writing the pair undertake, Thomas mentions "the role playing, the out-of-character discussions occurring synchronously within the role playing, the character journals, the art work, the careful plotting out of story lines, the forum discussions, the descriptions of worlds and cultures, the invention of language, the playful spoofing, the in-role poetry, the meta-textual allusions to sound effects, movie techniques" (145).<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas goes on to observe that "in addition to exploring the scope of the narrative worlds of the fan fiction, it is important to note that the girls also produce multimodal texts to enhance their fan fiction, making avatars (images to represent themselves) for role playing, making visual signatures as can be seen at the side and end of each post on the forum . . . , finding icons to reflect mood, creating music bytes, making fan fiction posters in the form of an advertisement and teaser, and creating mini movie trailers using their own spliced-together combination of existing movie clips, music, voiceovers, and text. They also draw maps and room plans of their world, draw and paint scenery, and sketch images of their many characters. As well as hand-drawn sketches, they create digital images, digital colorizations or enhancements of their sketches, or purely digitally-created images" (150-51).

Another instructive analysis of precise, concrete situations occurs in Kevin Brooks and his student Aaron Anfinson's, study of Anfinson's own capstone project as well as Brooks's response to it. The study, "Exploring Post-critical Composition: MEmorials<sup>15</sup> for Afghanistan and the Lost Boys of Sudan," examined co-author Anfinson's effort to meet the requirements of a senior English project while also, as Anfinson observed in an email to Brooks, writing "something different. . . I think I just wanted to do something I've never done and to truly learn something and have fun while doing it—quite a challenge caught up in the sometimes-captive atmosphere of the classroom" (78). An as active member of the National Guard who could be deployed at any time, Anfinson wanted to raise political issues and questions about the war in Afghanistan but was "reluctant to divulge much personal information" (85). In Anfinson's written reflections on his experience and in his discussions with Brooks, Anfinson did not focus extensively on audience. This choice was in part the result of his gradual decision to create what Gregory Ulmer terms "electronic monuments." Such monuments encourage writers to emphasize their own preferences over the interests and needs of readers and encourage such strategies as borrowing, collage, and intentional minimalism. In his only reflection on audience, Anfinson comments on how he drew upon his own inclinations in making decisions, even those related to his readers: "I think the idea for videos came actually from a bit of laziness. Rather than entertain, I wanted to be entertained. . . I enjoy finding videos. . . I too thought that a reader who is not so academically inclined would sit through a video or two, but would never read a huge block of text" (83). This example demonstrates how the role of audience can shift depending on the author's context, sense of agency, and personal inclinations.

In the case of Anfinson's capstone project, "A MEmorial for Afghanistan," genre played a more important role than audience. In Brooks' view, the MEmorial was an effective genre for

---

<sup>15</sup> See Gregory Ulmer's *Electronic Monuments* for a discussion of this concept.

Anfinson, who focused his self-evaluation on the role it played in increasing his own knowledge. In a reflective paper he submitted with his MEmorial, Anfinson observed that “Overall, in my MEmorial, I think I learned a lot. If nothing else, due to my ‘public participation in monumentality...[and] deconsultancy,’ [16] I learned what I truly think about an issue that I have been inactive in directly confronting” (86). In commenting on the power of Anfinson’s project, Brooks observes that it inspired him to undertake a similar effort, “A MEmorial for the Lost Boys of Sudan.” His own project is, he believes, “not as visually interesting as Aaron’s and I have not been able to emulate his textual minimalism, but I have tried to learn from his various strategies of composing with others’ videos (appropriation), and arranging video, text, and still images in various patterns on the screen (collage)” (86). Thus does the teacher learn from the student.

As the examples from Thomas and from Brooks and Anfinson demonstrate, understanding the complexity of writing processes, audience awareness, and collaboration calls for specific, grounded, and nuanced analysis that goes well beyond the analytic binary of addressed and invoked audiences. Issues of authority may play a particularly key role here. Tiana and Jandalf had a good deal of authority and autonomy in their self-sponsored writing. As Anfinson’s teacher, Brooks also granted him considerable flexibility and authority.

### ***Teaching Audience in the Twenty-first Century***

Imagine this: a student in a required writing class composes a research-based argument and then presents an oral version of the argument as part of a panel at an in-class “conference” held at the end of the term. The teacher of the class creates a Website and posts all of the student arguments on it, inviting response from the students as well as other audiences. Two years later,

the teacher gets a response from a professor at another university, pointing out that the student's argument drew on the professor's work, citing that work but often failing to enclose directly quoted passages within quotation marks. The professor demands that the student's argument be taken off the Website, accusing the student of sloppy habits at best, plagiarism at worst. Notified of this turn of events, the student—now a prospective graduating senior—is completely surprised: he had not meant to plagiarize, and he certainly had not imagined that one of his sources would go to the trouble of accessing his essay.

Like many others, this student experiences the Internet and many of its sites as fairly private, when the reality is that audiences are there all the time, browsing, searching, engaging, responding, sometimes accusing. Many scholars and commentators have noted the breakdown between private and public today and on the somewhat contradictory attitudes students hold: students often say they are comfortable being in public—that a public stance comes with the territory of digital communication. But they also sometimes view sites—and especially social networking sites such as Facebook—as relatively private, away from the prying eyes of parents and other unwanted audiences. We had these students in mind when we quoted Ari Melber at the opening of this essay: “Critics argue that privacy does not matter to children who were raised in a wired celebrity culture that promises a niche audience for everyone. Why hide when you can perform? But even if young people are performing, many are clueless about the size of their audience” (23).<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, even though many of our students are completely at ease in the digital landscape, they nevertheless need to become more knowledgeable about the nature and complexity of the

---

<sup>16</sup> Internet studies scholar danah boyd has done considerable research on this topic. See, for instance, her “Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?” Here boyd argues that “[n]ew social technologies have altered the underlying architecture of social interaction and information distribution” and that today's teenagers “. . . are embracing this change, albeit often with the clumsy candour of an elephant in a china shop.”

audiences for whom they perform, particularly as they shift back and forth from self-sponsored online writing to academic writing. The first lesson we draw from grappling with the questions we pose in this essay, then, is that we have a responsibility to join with our students in rich and detailed explorations of just what “audience” can mean in their writing and in their lives. Such explorations might well begin with exploring the problematics of viewing the teacher as the sole audience for student writing. As the real-life example above suggests, the teacher remains *an* audience for student texts, but by no means the only audience, especially when student writing is posted on the Web. Even if it is not posted, student writing often invokes and addresses audiences well beyond the teacher (who is also, often, both addressed and invoked).

Beyond unpacking the concept of teacher as audience, teachers can help students understand the contemporary complexities of audience by providing case studies that exemplify various kinds of audiences. The participatory audience of peer review, for instance, can be theorized and interrogated by students in their composition classes: that is, rather than simply responding to one another’s texts, students can take time to get to know these real-life audiences, along with their assumptions and values, literally examining where these members of the audience are coming from. Or students can create a genealogy of audiences for a particular social networking site, exploring the many diverse individuals and groups that have access to the site and asking which audiences the site invokes and which it seems to address. Students could examine the many issues raised, for instance, by various Pro Ana (pro anorexia) sites on the Web. Who are the sponsors of these sites? What kinds of collaborative relationships are being invoked and addressed by those who post to and read this site?

As we have noted in this essay, what began for us as two different strands of research—one on audience, another on collaboration—have all but merged during the last couple of years

as we have seen how frequently writers become audiences and vice versa. Yet more often than not, students resist collaboration in their schoolwork even as they collaborate constantly in their out-of-class online writing. There are reasons for this seeming contradiction or tension: school writing is part of a deeply individualistic system that rewards individual students through a system of grades and points that values the individual GPA, and working collaboratively runs counter to that system. Scholars and teachers need to challenge the hyper-individualistic base of higher education in the United States; we need also to engage students in substantial discussions of this issue. As we have been arguing for some time, we know that most of the innovative work that gets done in the world today gets done in collaborative groups (see Sawyer, Tapscott and Williams, Sunstein, Ede and Lunsford)—including, increasingly, teams that work primarily online. And we know that colleges and universities, for reasons mentioned above, are doing very little to prepare students to thrive in such an environment (see Bok, Light). We need to do more, then, than *assign* collaborative projects: we need to provide a theoretical rationale for such projects along with data to support it. In addition, we need to craft collaborative projects that will work hard to engage every member of the group and guide the group in analyzing their work together from beginning to end. And we need to join with students in exploring the use of free collaborative writing tools such as Google Docs, Zoho, and Writeboard.

We also need to consider the impact that new literacies are having—and should have—in our teaching. Such literacies often call for producing new texts, often referred to as “new media” texts. The question of whether and how to teach such new media writing pose significant challenges to teachers of writing today. Thanks to the work of Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson Eilola, Cynthia Selfe, Geoffrey Sirc, their collaborative *Writing New Media* paints a rich picture of the kinds of writing students are increasingly doing today, both inside and outside of the

classroom. In one chapter in this study, Cynthia Selfe points out the double-edged sword that comes along with new media texts, as she tells the story of David, a young man who teaches himself to produce effective new media texts only to fail his college classes because of his inability to create acceptable traditional print texts. The point Selfe makes is one all teachers of writing need to heed: we must help our students to learn to conceive and produce a repertoire of texts, from the convincing academic argument to the compelling Website or memorable radio essay. (Selfe has also recently published a helpful guide for teachers, *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*, as well as a passionate call for moving teacherly attention well beyond print literacy in “Aurality and Multimodal Composing”).

It is important to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in taking on such a task. At Stanford, when the Faculty Senate mandated that the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) develop a new second-level course that would go beyond academic writing to embrace oral presentations with multimedia support, the PWR teaching staff responded with great enthusiasm. By the time they began piloting courses to equally enthusiastic students, the sky seemed to be the limit: students wanted to write and produce hour-long documentaries; to produce NPR-quality audio essays; to design, write, and produce online magazines; not to mention creating other new media texts to be performed in a wide range of settings. By the end of the second quarter of the pilot, however, both teachers and students realized that their reach had clearly exceeded their grasp. Most notably, the writing that students were doing as they worked their way toward new media or multimodal texts was declining in quality. Both students and teachers recognized that time spent on perfecting visual design and enriching texts with multimedia was time—given the constraints of the ten-week academic term—that students could no longer spend on their written texts. As a result, before the new course was fully implemented, the teaching staff, working in



conjunction with the Undergraduate Advisory Board, pulled back from some of their ambitions, focusing the course first on producing a research-based argument and then working the rest of the term to “translate” that argument into various genre and media. As the Stanford teachers continued to refine this new course and its assignment sequence, they were able to inch a bit back toward those earlier ambitions. But it is instructive to note the power of tradition in the face of challenging new ways of composing. It is even more instructive to note that the response of the upper administration to this new course, even though mandated by the Faculty Senate, was less than supportive: “Are you teaching ‘real writing?’” they asked. The response to that question was, emphatically “yes,” but even an extensive rationale for the answer failed to convince some colleagues and administrators.

As this discussion has suggested, universities and the culture at large seem not to have arrived at a consensus on what “writing” is and can be in this age of new literacies. In short, we don’t yet know how best to balance our obligation to open opportunities for students to engage new media fully in their writing with our obligation to honor university mandates to strengthen and expand students’ grasp of traditional print academic discourse. The way forward is neither easy nor obvious, but scholars, teachers, and students need to work together to explore and experiment with both theories and practices that can help guide us. In this section of our essay, we have explored several important implications for teaching the concept of audience in the twenty-first century, the most important of which is to engage our students in analyzing and theorizing the new literacies and new media themselves, especially as these practices call for collaboration, for new understandings of audience, and for a robust ethics of communication. Exploring new literacies and new media with students means crafting syllabi that leave time for such interrogations and for the experimentation they will demand. In addition to working closely

with our students, we can revisit our assignments, looking in our required composition courses for ways to stretch the boundaries of academic discourse and to allow students collaborative opportunities for engaging with new media and new audiences. And we can offer advanced elective courses that move well beyond print literacy, calling on students to create innovative new media texts and to analyze them in the context of their audiences. Michigan State's program in professional writing offers a range of exciting courses on Web authoring and multimedia writing, and other examples of such classes abound.<sup>17</sup> These sites offer, we believe, fertile ground for detailed ethnographic explorations of writerly agency and of audiences, including those invoked and addressed.

### *Ethics and Participatory Literacies*

As we have worked on this essay, we have found ourselves meditating on audiences across the millennia—from audiences who gathered before the ancient Greek rhapsodes, who “read” the scriptures along with literate scribes in the medieval period, who sat among the groundlings at the Globe and other Elizabethan theatres, who waited in rapt anticipation for the next issue of the latest Dickens novel, who gathered at whistle stops throughout the United States to engage with political hopefuls, and who today log on to check in with Facebook friends or read and comment on their favorite blog. In some ways, there has always been a relational or participatory quality to audiences. Yet it seems clear that changes in technology and other material conditions that have brought us to the present moment have opened avenues for audiences to take on agency and to become participants and creators/shapers of discourse in

---

<sup>17</sup> Readers will know of many similar efforts, such as Advanced Studies in Digital Rhetoric and Writing in Digital Environments at the University of Texas, Austin; or the digital media writing courses in MIT's Department of Writing and Humanistic Studies; or Ohio State's Digital Media Studies Program. At the Bread Loaf School of English last summer, Andrea's students used WordPress to build a class blog that allowed for tagging, searching, linking, and multiple forms of interaction as well as opportunities for experimental writing that fell outside the bounds of what colleges usually call “academic discourse,” including graphic memoirs and visual/audio narratives. Students in another class filmed documentary essays aimed at changing one or more policy at the schools where they teach during the regular academic year.

more profound ways than ever before. While nineteenth-century audience members could meet in salons or coffeehouses to discuss the latest installment of *Great Expectations*, think of the possibilities for enhanced agency and participation that blogging or the ability to post comments online (to take just two examples) offers today.

In noting the opportunity for enhanced agency and participation in online writing, we do not intend to join those who characterize the Web and social-networking sites in utopian terms. If we have learned anything from our study of the rhetorical tradition, it is that the nature and consequence of any act of communication can never be determined in advance and that inquiry into issues such as these requires a deeply situated, finely tuned analysis. When consumers post reviews to Amazon.com, for instance, are they expanding their possibilities for agency and for collaborations with others or are they serving as unpaid volunteer workers for this ever-expanding company? There are no simple, decontextualized answers to questions such as these.

Our engagement with the rhetorical tradition, as well as our study of the history of communicative technologies, thus reminds us that both utopian and dystopian views of our current moment are likely to oversimplify. They also remind us of how difficult it is to predict how various communication technologies will be employed. The earliest graphic symbols, it is good to remember, were used for accounting, not writing. We might consider in this regard Twitter, the social networking and microblogging service that allows users to publicly post 140-character “tweets” or send private 140-character “direct messages” to each other. “Tweets” are used by restaurants, clubs, bands, and stores—as well as individuals—to promote and inform, and many users use Twitter as a source of personalized breaking news. Who would have expected, then, that some users of Twitter would decide that it provides the perfect online space to write haiku, much less that the haiku created on Twitter would invoke an avid audience? Just

how much interest is there in the world today in Twitter haiku? We can't know for sure, but a quick check on Google instantly pulled up 1,750,000 hits. In searching the Web, we have also found numerous references to Twitter contests. One frequent challenge invites writers to compose microessays and microstories limited to Twitter's 140 characters. In case you're interested, a search on Google using the term "Twitter contests" generated 136,000,000 hits.<sup>18</sup> Here's what one Twitter user, Calvin Jones, posted to his Web site Digital Marketing Success about his fascination with Twitter:

I love the way twitter makes you condense your writing, squeezing the maximum out of every character. Here's my swiftly penned missive:

She paused, shivering involuntarily; the wave of adrenalin surged through her, leaving her giddy and disoriented. It was quiet. He was gone!

Twitter was released to the public in October 2006, and we conducted these Google searches in late July, 2010. Thus does a software program evolve in lightening speed on the Web, making a space for readers to become writers who then become invoked and addressed audience members for still other writer/readers.

What if a friend or family member prefers not to know what someone close (or not so close) to them is doing throughout the day? Twitter.com addresses this issue by requiring users to sign up for Twitter to receive tweets and by allowing for privacy settings. But surely ethical issues remain. Twitter can be used to help groups gather quickly, whether for positive purposes (engaging in civic discussion or action) or negative. How can those interested in participating in this social networking and micro-blogging site best understand their responsibilities as writers and audiences for others? In this regard, we have been interested in the use of Twitter to call for and promote protests during the summer 2009 Iranian election. Of particular note during these

---

<sup>18</sup> Both searches were conducted on July 25, 2010.

demonstrations were the many signs protesting the validity of the elections written in English, both addressing and invoking audiences rejected by the official regime, which refused to allow Western reporters into the country. In response to this prohibition, protesters used their cell phones and hand-held cameras to document and share these signs and images with the rest of the world.

At its strongest and most productive moments, the rhetorical tradition has acknowledged the potentially powerful ethical implications inherent in any act of communication. As we conclude this discussion of audience in an age of new literacies, then, we turn to several other ethical questions that seem compelling to us as teachers and scholars. Perhaps most importantly, in a world of participatory media, it seems essential for teachers and students to consider the multiple reciprocal responsibilities entailed in writer-audience relationships. What does a student writer posting to Facebook owe to all the potential audiences of that post, from a former partner to a potential employer? And what responsibilities do audiences have toward those whose messages they receive, seek, reject, or encounter? One goal of future research on audience must surely be to explore the ethical dimensions of such relationships, following the lead of social media researcher and Berkman Center for Internet and Society Fellow danah boyd and others.

It seems equally important for scholars, teachers, and students to explore collaboratively the increasingly complex issue of plagiarism/patchwriting in an online world.<sup>19</sup> As the example of the professor who found his work used without proper attribution in a student essay on a class Website demonstrates, the ease of cutting and pasting and the wide availability of sources make

---

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Howard has written extensively and compellingly about the developmental nature of what she calls “patchwriting” as well as about the ways in which students and teachers understand (and often misunderstand) plagiarism.

holding to traditional norms of scholarly citation increasingly difficult. While students we know roundly condemn buying or downloading a paper wholesale from a Web site as unacceptable cheating, they are much more ambivalent about using a form of sampling in their writing, and they are downright resistant to the need for what they often think of as excessive (or even obsessive) citation: if you go to the Web with a question and get thousands of “hits” in answer to it, they say, shouldn’t that answer be considered as common knowledge that doesn’t need to be cited? We’re inclined to answer “yes” to this question, but if we answer “no,” which one of the thousands of sources should be *the* one to be cited? These questions and the issues they raise suggest that we must continue not only to explore students’ understandings of intellectual property but also to engage them in a full discussion of where academic citation practices came from, why they have been so deeply valued, and what is at stake in developing alternative practices—such as a much broader definition of “common knowledge” as well as alternative forms of attribution.

If plagiarism and potential misuse of sources represents one ethical problem that contemporary audiences must address, another problem has quite diverse origins and implications. What are the consequences for civic discourse in a world where those interested in a specific topic or audience can, if they have internet access, easily find sites where they can communicate with like-minded individuals, where our culture seems to promise, as Ari Melbur observes, “a niche audience for everyone” (23)<sup>20</sup>. Is our culture likely to fragment into what legal scholar Cass R. Sunstein refers to as “information cocoons”? (9) And how can we best understand and enact an appropriate relationship between privacy and free speech on the Web? One place to turn in exploring this set of ethical issues is the extensive work on public discourse

---

<sup>20</sup> In 2009, 1.8 billion people—more than a quarter of the world’s population—had internet access, according to the International Communication Union. The possibilities for audience, then, are larger than ever before.

being pursued by many scholars in rhetoric and communication studies.<sup>21</sup> Most generally, our goal as teachers should be to encourage (even inspire) students to build bridges between the seemingly private voices they inhabit online and the public ones they can establish as students, workers, and citizens.

In his 2007 “Vision of the Future,” Howard Rheingold notes the need for students who use the Web to take responsibility for determining the accuracy of what they find there and for parents and students alike to take responsibility for the ethical and moral choices they make in reading and writing online. (Rheingold cites, for example, the responsibility of parents in establishing rules for access that would protect their children from pornographic sites.) But in this talk, Rheingold is primarily interested in how young people can get beyond the small niches of the Web to participate most effectively in online settings. Noting that while students today are “naturals” when it comes to point-and-click explorations, “there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of democracy” (4), Rheingold calls on teachers to help students make connections “between the literacies students pick up simply by being young in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and those best learned through reading and discussing texts” (5). We can help students make such connections, Rheingold argues, by allowing them to move “from a private to a public voice” that will help them “turn their self-expression into a form of public participation” (5). Public voice, Rheingold insists, is “learnable, a matter of consciously engaging with an active public rather than broadcasting to a passive audience” (5).

Thus while Rheingold recognizes the potential for fragmentation, for performing only for small niche audiences, and for existing “information cocoons,” he also sees the potential for

---

<sup>21</sup> Several essays in Section IV of *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies* explore such issues; see, especially, Gurak and Antonijevic and Beasley.

developing participatory public opinion that can “be an essential instrument of democratic self-governance” (5). We believe that Rheingold is right to argue that if we want such public voices to arise, we must teach to and for them. And along with Rheingold, we recognize that teaching to and for new publics and public voices calls for “a whole new way of looking at learning and teaching” that will, we believe, require close attention to the ethical issues raised by new literacies and new media (7). It will also call for resisting the dichotomy between those who dream utopian dreams of a vast collective and participatory democracy enabled by Web 2.0 and those who bemoan a collapse into fragmentation and solipsism that can come from talking only with those who already think just as you do. Limiting an audience to or collaborating only with like thinkers will almost surely fail to develop a “whole new way of looking at learning and teaching” or addressing the ethical issues we have raised.

At its best, the Western rhetorical tradition, however flawed, has encouraged both writers and teachers of writing to take a deeply situated perspective on communication—and thus to challenge the kind of binaries that we have just described. Whenever we write, read, speak, or (as Krista Ratcliffe has so eloquently reminded us) listen, there are no guarantees that either the process or outcome will be ethical. This is an understanding that we can—and should—bring with us when we enter our classrooms, especially our first-year writing classrooms. For there we have the opportunity to help our students experience the intellectual stimulation and excitement, as well as responsibility, of engaging and collaborating with multiple audiences, from peers to professors to addressed and invoked audiences of all kinds.

#### Works Cited



- Alasuutari, Pertti, ed. *Rethinking the Media Audience: The New Agenda*. London: Sage, 1999. Print.
- Alberti, John. "The Game of Reading and Writing: How Video Games Reframe Our Understanding of Literacy." *Computers and Composition* 25 (2008): 258-269. Print.
- Ang, Ien. *Livingroom Wars: Rethinking Audiences for a Postmodern World*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Ball, Cheryl and James Kalmbach. *RAW: Reading and Writing New Media*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, forthcoming. Print.
- Beasley, Vanessa. "Between Touchstones and Touchscreens: What Counts as Contemporary Political Rhetoric." *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*. Ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage P, 2009. Print.
- Bird, S. Elizabeth. *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Bok, Derek. *Our Underachieving Colleges*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.
- boyd, danah. "Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?" *Knowledge Tree* 13. Australian Flexible Learning Network, May 2007. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Viewing American Class Divisions through Facebook and MySpace." *Apophenia*. danah boyd Weblog, 24 June 2007. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.
- Brooker, Will and Deborah Jermyn, eds. *The Audience Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Brooks, Kevin and Aaron Anfinson. "Exploring Post-critical Composition MEMorials for Afghanistan and the Lost Boys of Sudan." *Computers and Composition* 26 (2009):

78-91. Print.

DeVoss, Danielle N., Gail E. Hawisher, Charles Jackson, Joseph Johansen, Brittney Moraski, and Cynthia L. Selfe. "The Future of Literacy." *Literate Lives in the Information Age: Narratives of Literacy from the United States*. Eds. Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004: 183-210. Print.

Eberly, Rosa. *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*. Urbana: U Illinois P, 2000. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. "From Writers, Audiences, and Communities to Publics: Writing Classrooms as Protopublic Spaces." *Rhetoric Review* 18 (1999): 165-78. Print.

Ede, Lisa and Andrea Lunsford. "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy." *College Composition and Communication* 35 (1984): 155-73. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Singular Texts / Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2000. Print.

Gee, James. *What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Gitelman, Lisa and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds. *New Media: 1740-1915*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2003. Print.

"Global number of Internet users by development status, 2003 compared to 2009." *International Telecommunication Union*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.

Gurak, Laura and Smiljana Antonijevic. "Digital Rhetoric and Public Discourse." *The Sage Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*. Ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage P, 2009. Print.

Hammer, Jessica. "Agency and Authority in Role-Playing Texts." *A New Literacies Sampler*.

- Ed. Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 67-94. Print.
- Howard, Rebecca Moore. *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators*. Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999. Print.
- Johnson, Matthew S. S. "Public Writing in Gaming Spaces." *Computers and Composition* 25 (2008): 270-283. Print.
- Johnson, Robert. "Audience Involved: Toward a Participatory Model of Writing." *Computers and Composition* 14 (1997): 361-76. Print.
- Jones, Calvin. "Twitter Story Competition." *Digital Marketing Success*. Digital Marketing Success, 23 May 2008. Web. 5 June 2008.
- Kirsch, Gesa and Duane Roen, eds. *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990. Print.
- Kluth, Andreas. "Among the Audience: A Survey of New Media." *The Economist* 22 Apr. 2006: 4. Print.
- Knobel, Michele and Colin Lankshear, eds. *A New Literacies Sampler*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.
- Kress, Gunther. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Lanham, Richard A. *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2006. Print.
- Laningham, Scott. "Interview with Tim Berners-Lee." Host Scott Laningham. *developerWorks Interviews*. IBM, 22 Aug. 2006. Web. 5 June 2008
- Light, Richard J. *Making the Most of College*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004. Print.
- Lunsford, Andrea A. and Lisa Ede. "On Distinctions between Classical and Modern Rhetoric." *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*. Eds.

- Robert J. Connors, Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984: 37-49. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Representing Audience: 'Successful' Discourse and Disciplinary Critique." *College Composition and Communication* 47 (1996): 167-79. Print.
- McKee, Heidi and James E. Porter. "The Ethics of Digital Writing Research: A Rhetorical Approach." *College Composition and Communication* 59 (June 2008): 711-749. Print.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Massage*. New York: Bantam, 1967. Print.
- McQuail, Dennis. *Audience Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage P, 1997. Print.
- Melber, Ari. "About Facebook." *The Nation* 7/14 Jan. 2008: 23. Print.
- Nightingale, Virginia. *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Ong, Walter J. "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction." *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9-21. Print.
- Porter, James. *Audience and Rhetoric: An Archaeological Composition of the Discourse Community*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992.
- Radiohead. *In Rainbows*. Ato Records, 2008. Web and CD-ROM.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2005. Print.
- Reiff, Mary Jo. *Approaches to Audience: An Overview of the Major Perspectives*. Superior, WI: Parlay P, 2004. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Rereading 'Invoked' and 'Addressed' Readers Through a Social Lens: Toward a Recognition of Multiple Audiences." *JAC* 16 (1996): 407-24. Print.
- Rheingold, Howard. "Vision of the Future." Education.au Seminar. Melbourne, Australia. 2 Oct. 2007. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.

- Sawyer, Keith: *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. Print.
- Schilb, John. *Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences' Expectations*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2007. Print.
- Selfe, Cynthia. "Aurality and Multimodal Composing." *College Composition and Communication* 60 (June 2009): 616-663. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2007. Print.
- Selzer, Jack. "More Meanings of Audience." *A Rhetoric of Doing*. Eds. Stephen P. Witte and Neil Nakadate. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992. 161-77. Print.
- Stanford Study of Writing*. Andrea Lunsford and John Bravman, Stanford U, Sept. 2001-Sept. 2006. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.
- Sunstein, Cass R. *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.
- Tapscott, Don and Anthony D. Williams. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Taylor, Todd. "Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy." *Delivering College Composition: The Fifth Canon*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2006: 127-140. Print.
- Thomas, Angela. "Blurring and Breaking through the Boundaries of Narrative, Literacy, and Identity in Adolescent Fan Fiction." *A New Literacies Sampler*. Eds. Michele Knobel And Colin Lankshear. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 137-66. Print.
- Ulmer, Gregory. *Electronic Monuments*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2005. Print.
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2005. Print.

Weiser, Elizabeth M., Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. Gonzalez, eds. *Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies*. Urbana: NCTE, 2009. Print.

Wysocki, Anne, Johndan Johnson Eilola, Cynthia Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2004. Print.