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Reviews

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REVIEWS

Olson, Gary A. and Hirsh, Elizabeth, Eds. 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Zlotnik Schmidt, Jan, Ed. 1998. *Women/Writing/Teaching*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Katie Kane

In the somewhat overheated but essentially provocative and useful introductory analogy she deploys in her foreword to *Women Writing Culture*, Donna Haraway articulates the goals of the anthology of interviews using an elaborate metaphor of "marine invertebrates undergoing metamorphosis," as "... the written, collected, and published book of interviews becomes the finished scaffolding, the coralline reef, on which the next generations ... will settle. ..." (xii). Further, Haraway says that she hopes that "those who enter the nutrient web and replicative choreography of these interviews" will find an epistemological and practical reef comprised of "knowledge-crafting sedimentations [that] offer a host of promising sites to settle down and shape change" (xi). Insofar as this metaphor indicates that the objective of the text is to function as a resource for cultural workers and educators who are interested in exploring the relationship between literacy, culture, liberation, and writing for the sake of effecting progressive social change, the trope can, with important exceptions, be assented to. As well, the metaphor can even be extended to explain the similar aims of the other anthology under review here: Jan Zlotnick Schmidt's *Women/Writing/Teaching*. Indeed, both collections do provide a "reef" of support for projects that seek to assess, revise, and often subvert the practices and philosophies of the current late twentieth century Western educational status quo.

Among the six interviews and important frame material (foreword and afterword) of the Olson and Hirsh collection, of particular note for their engagement in the labor of creating (to use a phrase from Giroux's afterword) "a literacy that is ... responsive to history" (p. 196) are the conversations between bell hooks and her interlocutors, Olson and Hirsh, and between Donna Haraway and her interviewer, Olson. hooks is particularly good in her dialogic work at articulating an agenda of wide-ranging cultural criticism which responds to the lived experience of students. She is also particularly productive in insisting that educators take seriously their roles as literary activists: "I've found that we can't have formulaic teaching and we can't have formulaic syllabi, that you have to go into a situation willing to think about what the needs of the people in this situation are" (p. 119).

For her part, Haraway makes exceptionally clear and compelling the political and pedagogical ramifications of her concept of "cyborg writing." Claiming both a diagnostic and prescriptive function for the category of cyborg writing—

which reflects the “extraordinary role that communications systems and cybernetics play in our literacy practices” —Haraway explains how this mode of authorial production moves beyond traditional notions of the writer and the text: “I think cyborg writing is resolutely committed to foregrounding the apparatus of the production of its own authority . . . [to] foregrounding of the apparatus of the production of bodies, powers, meanings” (p. 50).

The interviews with Sandra Harding and Mary Belenky form interesting companion pieces with Haraway’s work in that all three scholars rigorously question the relationship among gender, social power, and the discourse of science. In addition, Belenky’s conference with Evelyn Ashton-Jones and Dene Kay Thomas includes extensive and direct discussion of her collaborative research and writing of *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. Of equal value is Harding’s identification, in talking with Hirsh and Olson, of the historically problematic relationship between experience and knowledge that feminist cultural workers inherit from Western epistemic systems. These various strands of public responsibility, cultural criticism, feminist politics, and pedagogical practice are productively rehearsed and underlined by Henry Giroux in his brief but motivational afterword.

Of less value in the Olson and Hirsh collection are the interviews with Jean-Francois Lyotard and Luce Irigaray. Although both pieces function as indices of the general origins of feminism and cultural critique in our only partially theorized “postmodern” epoch, the editors would have done better to include as well the voices of self-identified dyke and lesbian academics and activists for whom the terms “women, writing, and culture” have particular political and experiential impact. The overt homophobia of the concept of “the ethics of the couple” which Irigaray details in her interview with Hirsh, Olson, and Gaetan Brulotte (wherein the heterosexual pair is identified as “the most mysterious and creative couple”) is, by virtue of the absence of such voices, effectively left uncontested. This lack of lesbian expression was a very crucial, potentially deadly, oversight.

Jan Zlotnik Schmidt’s anthology *Women/Writing/Teaching* is equally exemplary and equally compromised in the supportive scaffolding it erects for its readers, scholars and educators in search of “autobiographical visions of our experience as women writers and as teachers” (xi). The collection represents 20 essays of autobiographical reflection on the lives of women as writers, readers, and teachers. Zlotnik Schmidt makes clear the logic of selection in her theoretically and bibliographically useful introduction to the anthology:

The essays . . . in this volume . . . arise out of a need to merge autobiographical reflection, contemplations of the writing life, and critical examination of our pedagogical practices in order to comprehend more fully our complex lives and struggles as feminist writing teachers in the academy. (p. 3)

In addition to the explicatory and definitional work that Zlotnik Schmidt does in the introduction, a comprehensive bibliography—Autobiography Studies and Feminist Theory and Pedagogy and Composition Studies—is provided for the edification of the reader.

The autobiographical form is a potent genre for the communication of the pleasure, power, and occasional stifling quality of writing for women. Lynn Z. Bloom's composition "Teaching College English as a Woman" is exemplary here. In the piece she explicates the violence and silencing she experienced as a woman in the academy; in the culminating section of her text Bloom details her escape from a rapist—a story she subsequently and productively narrates to a Women Writers class. One of the strengths of the anthology is the multiplicity of voices the editor has gathered together and put into conversation with one another. The voices of mothers and daughters who write and teach (Elaine and Gillian Maimon) are present, as are the articulations of working class women who came painfully and late to the project of education (Karen Ann Chafee). In addition, this anthology speaks with the inflections of women linguistically marginal to the dominant forms of writing in the U.S. academy (Judith Ortiz Cofer and Min-Zhan Lu) and with the cadences of women whose racial and ethnic heritage make the act of writing and reading a form of radical praxis (bell hooks, Diane Glancy). However, amid the considerable and admirable autobiographical diversity of *Women/Writing/Teaching* there are no autobiographical essays by self-identified lesbians which talk directly and primarily about the activities of reading, writing, and teaching under the coercive terms of a heterosexist culture.

It is surprising at this historical juncture in which the structures and institutions of Western "patriarchy" are recognized as resting in part on the ideologies of homophobia and on the backs of lesbian women and gay men that two texts which take this patriarchal history as an object of critique and as a matter requiring action fail to understand how the category of lesbian is important to consider along with the classification of "the female." Women, writing, culture, and teaching cannot be adequately thought in the late-twentieth century without conscious and concerted inclusion of lesbian voices. ☺

Childers, Pamela B., Hobson, Eric, and Mullin, Joan A. 1998. *ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Sheryl Mylan

For most of us, the everyday world is largely visual. We can hardly escape the barrage of images, whether at work where so many people use multimedia- or graphics-oriented computers, or at home, where the television is a major source of news and advertising as well as of entertainment. So the information we learn, products we desire, and stories we tell about ourselves often come to us through a visual medium. For that reason alone, we in the verbally-based academic world should examine the role of the visual in instruction. This is precisely what Pamela Childers, Eric Hobson, and Joan Mullin do in their exceptionally helpful book, *ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World*.

Childers, Hobson, and Mullin take up the challenge issued by the NCTE Board in 1996 to recognize visual literacy and explore its relationship to learning. One of the key assumptions upon which this text is based—that the visual image precedes language—separates their work from other approaches which simply add visual approaches, such as an occasional movie or slides, to serve as an accompaniment to instruction, or sometimes as diversion. The writers of this text know that a substantial percentage of students do not respond well to verbal instruction, but that most students, even those with high verbal skills, benefit from visual/verbal methods of writing instruction.

This assumption is based upon neurobiological and cognitive research, which the writers discuss, albeit briefly, while keeping their focus on pedagogical applications. The research indicates that visual images precede language because of their efficiency as storage units in the brain, and that language ability derives not from a separate organ but from relatively minor neural rewiring of parts of the visual system. In short, the visual/verbal neural wiring means that visual experience enhances verbal skills and cognition.

This knowledge is a major premise from which exercises, course designs, and faculty development workshops described in the eight chapters flow. Each chapter is followed by a Response, in which one of the three writers of this text discusses some of the benefits of the approach and why s/he likes it, successful applications, and other contexts in which it could work. The chapter and response design is a particularly inviting format, especially since the writers recognize that writing teachers' discomfort with the visual often mirrors students' unease with the verbal. The Response sections help situate the reader as part of the conversation about this new pedagogy. As a result, the activities described in the chapters are not so much prescriptive as they are the impetus to other new ideas.

The activities in these chapters range from the simple to the complex. One such simple task, which can be used for any grade level from elementary school through the university, involves creating name tags to facilitate an understanding of audience and ethos or self-representation in writing. A technique which can be used throughout a course is to encourage students to use visuals in their journals.

Another approach practiced by college-level writing students, which can be the basis for an entire course or one project, is to use art postcards to lead students through writings on observation, storytelling, cultural context, and critical and aesthetic reception.

A more complex use of the visual was presented in a course in which students visited the Toledo Museum of Art, which resembles a Greek temple, and the adjacent Center for Visual Arts, a postmodern construction which proved disconcerting for many of the students. After the visit, students compared the buildings and how each met or frustrated their expectations for design—how one entered or exited, where rooms were located, how visitors navigated the building, and other concerns. Then they compared the Toledo Museum of Art with a traditional approach to writing, and the CVA with a contemporary approach to writing which emphasizes risk-taking and exploration. The teachers using this approach found that it gave students a visual vocabulary to see new ways to construct their writing. Out of the course came the idea of the “footprint,” an approach which gives students a tangible metaphor for the structure of their writing. They can walk around buildings on campus to learn the same lessons students visiting the museums did. Whether students are visual or verbal learners, walking around in a building and “walking” around in a text can help them understand the ways in which structure facilitates understanding.

One of the most intriguing approaches to visual/verbal learning is demonstrated in the design of a team-taught WAC course titled, “Hallowed Ground: Monuments, Memory and the American Civil War.” Studio arts students and art history students studied the Battle of Gettysburg, learned about memorial ceremonies and monument production during the late nineteenth century, and then, in groups, produced their own bronze monuments and wrote their own dedication speech, each to a single unit that fought at Gettysburg. Students took trips not only to local cemeteries to examine, sketch, and write about monuments, but also visited Gettysburg, where they spent several days seeing various points on the battle site and monuments commemorating actions of the troops. Obviously, a course like this demands a highly orchestrated effort among faculty and student participants and a substantial cost; but the benefits, one can well imagine, are profound. The verbal practices of reading and writing deepen students’ analysis of the visual, while their visual study and production enhance their reading and writing. In her Response to the chapter, Pamela Childers discusses variations on the course which can work in other contexts, such as visits to local public statues for a history class or an early American literature class, trips to a city art museum or photographic display, or even a study of political cartoons. Designing such a course, where the visual element is integral to the students’ work rather than grafted on, helps break down the dichotomy which privileges the verbal/mental over the visual/physical. But, more important, it stimulates verbal development because it makes use of the natural connection in the brain between sight and language.

Whether writing teachers are interested in elaborate course designs like the Hallowed Ground course or in simpler approaches, they will find something valuable in this text. It encourages us to articulate the meaning of the world by reading the world as a text, but, wisely, it demonstrates that this text is both verbal and visual. 

Jerome Bump

Daniel Goleman's best selling summary of research beyond the cognitive domain is useful to members of AEPL because it validates our concerns and pushes our issues into the mainstream. Goleman adopts the definition of emotional intelligence by the Yale psychologist, Peter Salovey: [1] knowing one's emotions, [2] managing emotions, [3] motivating oneself, [4] recognizing emotions in others, [5] handling relationships. Salovey has subsumed in these categories Howard Gardner's earlier theory of multiple intelligences that provided so much support for AEPL, including the interpersonal, intrapsychic, spatial, kinesthetic, and musical.

Reading Goleman's book is like hearing a medley of AEPL themes: emphasis on our humanity, the heart (in current idiom, the right side of the brain), the power of prelinguistic, nonverbal modes of understanding, inner guides, concentration, creativity, flow, nonjudgmental self-awareness, empathy, active listening, relaxation and yoga techniques, writing as healing, among others. Goleman makes connections to the usual subjects of English courses: "the emotional mind's special symbolic modes: metaphor and simile, along with poetry, song, and fable, are all cast in the language of the heart. So too are dreams and myths, in which loose associations determine the flow of narrative, abiding by the logic of the emotional mind" (p. 54). He accents the creation of a caring community, with strong emphasis on cooperation and teamwork, and devotes a whole chapter to empathy. Spirituality is not discussed directly, but "flow" is related to the "classic literature of contemplative traditions," and presented as "A New Model for Education" (pp. 92-95).

The value of this book for the K-12 members of AEPL is fairly obvious. Goleman documents rising rates of aggression and depression in the schools and cites examples of successful emotional intelligence programs such as the Social Competence Program at Troup Middle School in Connecticut, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in the New York City public school system, the Child Development Project in Oakland, the PATHS curriculum in Seattle, and the Self Science class at the Nueva Learning Center in Hillsborough, California. Goleman concludes that "the next step is to take the lessons learned from such highly focused programs and generalize them as a preventive measure for the entire school population, taught by ordinary teachers" (p. 263).

One of the weaknesses of the book is that Goleman does not spell out what responsibilities colleges also have in this movement. The goals remain relevant to college courses: "An emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught. Emotional lessons can merge naturally into reading and writing," for example, and most classes can include "basic study skills such as how to put aside distractions, motivate yourself to study, and manage your impulses so you can attend to learning" (pp. 271-272). Fortunately, others have already picked up the baton and carried it on to the college campus. In 1994, Jeffrey Berman, for

example, in his pioneering *Diaries to an English Professor*, concluded that though “few literary critics, apart from feminists, reader-response critics, and composition theorists, have recognized the affective components of knowledge . . . effective teaching is . . . affective teaching . . . Classroom discussions of literature awaken intense emotions within teachers and students alike—love, hate, passion, jealousy, fear—and these emotions cannot be relegated to ‘guidance counseling’” (p. 226).

Many of the basic arguments in the book will be familiar to members of AEPL who know one of our founders: Alice G. Brand. She talked to us about the importance of the brain research of Joseph Ledoux, whom Goleman cites at length, at our workshop at the CCCC Preconference Workshop in Milwaukee in 1996. Moreover, Goleman would have had a better sense of the history of his movement if he had consulted Brand’s books. At one point Goleman states,

The emotional-literacy courses have some remote roots in the affective-education movement of the 1960’s. The thinking then was that psychological and motivational lessons were more deeply learned if they involved an immediate experience of what was being taught conceptually. The emotional-literacy movement, though, turns the term *affective education* inside out—instead of using affect to educate, it educates affect itself. (p. 262)

Had Goleman consulted Brand’s *Therapy in Writing: A Psycho-Educational Experience* (1980) he might have acknowledged more fully the debt of the emotional intelligence movement to the affective education movement.

Brand showed that teacher education experts in the 30s and 40s became “convinced that education and mental hygiene were one and the same thing” and in the 50s humanistic psychologists believed “therapy could take place not only behind closed doors but . . . in school and community settings as well” (1980, pp. 31–32). The focus even then was on emotional literacy. Brand cites Redl and Wattenberg, for example: “that the teacher can and must assume some share of responsibility for the emotional as well as the intellectual development of his students is today a truism” (quoted in Brand, 1980, p. 36). Nor was the program limited to students. Carl Rogers (1961) stressed that “in the school context, the first essential was that teachers reveal themselves in honest ways and exhibit the range of feelings that differentiate living persons from ‘automatons’” (p. 19; Brand, 1980, p. 33). Brand documents the persistence of this movement into the 1970s.

Rather than showing how this movement was turned inside out, Goleman has documented its flowering in the 90s and demonstrated that it is even more crucial as we move into the twenty-first century. His extensive documentation of studies of the difference between normal academic intelligence and emotional intelligence and the importance of the latter for mental health in general and education, social competence, business, intimate relationships, and physical health in particular, provide members of AEPL with the evidence they need to convince their more skeptical colleagues of the value and significance of our concerns. ☺

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