JOURNAL WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: A RECONSIDERATION

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There is a long and fairly honorable tradition of journal writing in composition. It derives part of its legitimacy, presumably, from a rich literary heritage: One thinks first, perhaps, of Thoreau, but also of Twain and Hawthorne and Emerson, as well as a host of others. Indeed, one might argue that it has become a peculiarly American kind of writing, a legacy of the disciplined self-examination of our Puritan founders. Of course, journals have never been the kind of staple of writing instruction that, say, the handbook has, or the theme. There is always some suspicion about what might be labeled its lack of intellectual rigor. As a result, instead of being a regular and constant feature of writing instruction, journal writing seems to make cyclical appearances, discarded by one generation of writing teachers only to be rediscovered by the next.

The journal's most recent resurgence has come about, in large part anyway, as a side effect of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Toby Fulwiler, probably the journal's most ardent and visible promoter, concludes his essay "The Personal Connection: Journal Writing Across the Curriculum" (in *Language Connections*, NCTE, 1981) with this assertion:

> Journals are interdisciplinary and developmental by nature; it would be hard for writers who use journals regularly and seriously not to witness growth. I believe that journals belong at the heart of any writing-across-the-curriculum program. (p. 30)

The conception of the journal Fulwiler makes these claims for appears to be a modified version of the conception we inherited from its last peak in popularity in the late 1960's and early 1970's. That journal was one of the key features in what James Berlin, in "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" (*College English*, 44, 8, 1982) has called the Neo-Platonist or Expressionist theory of composition instruction, a rhetoric we might associate with Ken Macrorie or, though he would undoubtedly resent the association, William Coles. Central to this cluster of pedagogies, he argues, is a conception of truth as "the result of a private vision that must be constantly consulted in writing" (p. 772)—a consultation, of course, for which the journal seemed ideally suited.

This conception has been, as I say, modified. Essentially, the journal has been swept along with a general shift in rhetorical theory. The Expressionist perspective — influential, though never dominant—has diminished, and, to stay with Berlin's labels, the New Rhetoric, which he associates most closely with James Moffett, Ann Berthoff, James Britton, and so on, has taken over much of that influence. Now, among at least a fair-sized and rather visible proportion of composition teachers and researchers, rhetoric generally, and so journal writing too, is seen as "epistemic, as a means of arriving at truth." (p. 773) And, since the journal seems to be generally regarded as a place likely to invite what Britton, arguably the most prominent theorist of the New Rhetoric, has called "expressive" discourse; and since expressive discourse, in the New Rhetoric, takes on tremendous importance—is, write Britton et al., a "matrix from which differentiated forms of mature discourse develop" — the stock of journal writing has taken off once again.[1]

Two major problems with the resurgent journal, however, derive from just these origins. The first is this assumption — I am inclined to label it naive — that journal writing is, by definition, expressive discourse, expressive writing, writing that is "close to speech" or "for the writer." In the sense of the term offered by Britton et al. in *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*, expressive discourse is the center and foundation of a continuum describing discourse function that has transactional discourse at one pole and poetic at the other.

This continuum, though, is an abstraction, a relative scale. Despite some apparent confusion in Britton et al.'s application of it to their samples of student writing (where they seem to want to claim that the features they use to identify different discourse functions are derived from the discourse of the larger culture), it does not and cannot single out universal generic features that always mark any discourse function, including expressive discourse.[2] Rather, it offers one way to describe the relative tendencies of discourse function in any given set of texts; if particular features or genres are to be identified with particular functions, they must be so identified for that particular set in context. In other words, some collection of journal writings might be determined to be expressive discourse, and we could identify the features that we thought characterized them as such, but we could only do so in some specific communicative context *relative to* the other kinds of discourse in that context.[3]

This assumption that journal writing is always expressive discourse becomes even more troubling when it is extended to include journals assigned in academic settings. We have been alarmed, I suppose, by the reports in *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* and Arthur Applebee in *Writing in the Secondary School* (NCTE, 1981) about the relative scarcity of what they have identified as expressive writing in their surveys of elementary and secondary education (extended, by guilt-fueled self-examination, to post-secondary education), and so we are looking for ways to inject it into the curriculum. Obviously, though, if we cannot know, in any universal sense, what constitutes expressive writing, we would be hard-pressed to say whether, how, or even if it can be curricularized, let alone that journal writing is the way to do so.

But this misunderstanding of journal writing and the contextual identity of expressive discourse seems to me symptomatic of a second, more fundamental problem, one that has implications for our understanding of and claims about any academic "genre." The rhetorical theories that have heretofore been the basis for our attempts to move writing-across-the-curriculum tend to assign to language — and, of especial importance here, to the relationship between language and knowledge — universal properties,

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properties that are assumed to be operative regardless of context. The dangers of such an assumption have not shown up so glaringly in regular writing classes, where neither a field or kind of knowledge nor a method of inquiry are controlled by some governing discipline. But they become obvious very quickly once these theories are invoked as the basis for writing across-the-curriculum. The result is that they are limited in the kinds of explanations they can offer for the function and value of journal writing — or any writing at all, really — in discipline-based classrooms. I will offer an alternative theory that will, I think, address that problem.

* * * * *

In the short and often highly politicized history of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement, the battle lines over just what role writing plays in the learning of a discipline have been drawn to mark out two basic positions. Probably the dominant one — although there are no statistics on which to base such an assertion — might be called the formalist position. It is an extension, to return once again to Berlin's taxonomy, of what he calls the Current-Traditional or Positivist Rhetoric:

> The aim of rhetoric is to teach how to adapt discourse to its hearers — and here the uncomplicated correspondence of the faculties and the world is emphasized. When the individual is freed from the biases of language, society, or history, the senses provide the mental faculties with a clear and distinct image of the world. The world readily surrenders its meaning to anyone who observes it properly, and no operation of the mind — logical or otherwise — is needed to arrive at truth. To communicate, the speaker or writer — both now included — need only the language which corresponds either to the objects in the external world or to the ideas in his or her own mind — both are essentially the same — in such a way that it reproduces the objects and the experience of them in the minds of the hearers . . . The emphasis in this rhetoric is on adapting what has been discovered outside the rhetorical enterprise to the minds of the hearers. The study of rhetoric thus focuses on developing skill in arrangement and style. (Berlin, p. 770)

Berlin is not very happy about the implications of such a rhetoric's influence on college writing curricula ("It is discouraging that generations after Freud and Einstein, college students are encouraged to embrace a view of reality based on a mechanistic physics and a naive faculty psychology — and all in the name of a convenient pedagogy." [p. 771]), but he also grants that this is the dominant college writing pedagogy, so perhaps it is no surprise that it should have asserted a good deal of influence over the writing-across-the-curriculum movement as well. And it also seems clear enough that this view of the nature of discourse and its relationship to knowing and learning might well appeal to our colleagues in other disciplines. They frequently perceive their task, as we often seem to perceive ours in teaching literature, as that of initiating their students into what their discipline recognizes as knowledge. For that purpose knowledge is not, so far as most of them are concerned, *generated* through writing — generation being the task of whatever kinds of inquiry are characteristic of the discipline — but mastery of it can be *demonstrated* in writing. Moreover, one of the measures of such mastery — one of the means by which the initiate's fealty to and growing eligibility for the disciplinary community can be tested — is the extent to which this written demonstration is offered in acceptable form.

Thus — to take an example from close to home — as literature teachers we will often think we recognize, in the perhaps inchoate form of a freshman's paper, what we consider to be a sound, valid, perhaps even sensitive reading. We will be pleased, of course, that this student shows promise in our particular means of 'generating' knowledge — reading and textual interpretation — but we would also try to (a) steer that student toward the interpretation we considered to be valid and (b) to channel whatever promise he showed into the conventional forms of the critical essay. We might grant that there are other ways to go with such sensitivity, other ways to channel such potential — writing in reaction or imitation, keeping a journal, or sketching, for example — but we would maintain, too, that in our discipline, and in the sub-community of that discipline that is our classroom, there are appropriate and inappropriate means of reading and writing about reading, and that if this learner wants even temporary membership, he will have to conform with community standards.

Contrasted to this formalist position — formalist because, for the purposes of writing-across-the-curriculum, it asserts that what writers moving into a discipline need to learn are its generic forms of discourse — is what might be called the epistemic position, an outgrowth of what I referred to earlier, in Berlin's terms, as the New Rhetoric. The implications of this position have been offered, clearly in reaction to the formalist position, by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon in "Writing as Learning Through the Curriculum" (*College English*, 45, 5, Sept. 1983, pp. 465-474). They, like Berlin, find the influence of the assumptions of Current-Traditional Rhetoric pernicious, and that they lead to "sadly restricted versions of writing across the curriculum" (p. 466); such assumptions about the relationship between knowledge and discourse, they contend, are "venerable and deep-seated — and wrong:

> A more plausible argument, substantiated over three hundred years of insight and research, is that knowing is an activity, not a condition or state, that knowledge implies the making of connections, not an inert body of information, that both teachers and students are learners, that discourse manifests and realizes the power to learn, and that teaching entails creating incentives and contexts for learning, not a reporting of data. Specifically, learning is the process of an individual mind making meaning from the materials of its experience. (p. 467)

The problem with the formalist position, therefore, is that writing ends up being treated as a "species of social etiquette" (p. 468), with the teacher as a kind of Emily Post; whereas the desideratum is "intellectual conversation, leading to enhanced powers of discernment." (p. 473) This position's attraction for our colleagues in other disciplines is that they will be less likely to see themselves as taking over what they consider (rightly or wrongly) the work of the English department — a concern for correctness, for prose decorum — and will, instead, see how writing serves their own instructional aims. Returning to my example, then, the epistemic literature teacher would respond to that sensitive if chaotic student essay by using it as the basis for a dialogue, asking the student questions or offering challenges calculated to keep the student exploring in his or her own terms, in whatever form seemed most appropriate. Eventually, perhaps, the student would have to learn that there are conventions governing the way people in the discipline write about what they read, but such learning can wait:

> Naturally, all students should learn, over time, how to observe the prose decorum in the forms available to writers in different fields. So too we would hope that their writing will "improve" as they continue their education. But we should put first things first, creating motives to write by showing its value for learning before laboring the mastery of superficial constraints. (p. 473)

These two positions are founded on what appear to be diametrically opposed assumptions about the nature of language, and so about its role in classrooms. From the formalist perspective, classroom discourse must be almost exclusively ritual, ceremonial: It is the means by which candidates for a given discipline are initiated into that discipline. From the epistemic perspective, this view of language is anathema. Classroom discourse should *never* be (as they would put it) "merely" ceremonial, ritualistic: Learning is, they argue, "the process of an individual mind making meaning from the materials of its experience" (p. 467), and in no sense the initiation of that mind, via language, into some community.

They are not, however, complete opposites, and neither one provides us with the classroom-specific understanding of discourse that we need here. Instead, both make the same sort of assumption about language that I earlier suggested leads to misunderstandings about the status of journals as expressive discourse: they attribute to language as a "thing" universal properties outside of the contexts in which it is used. What would make more sense, it seems to me, would be to assume that language in general, and classroom discourse in particular, can have both formalist and epistemic (and, quite probably, other) properties, and *that the kind and distribution of such properties are a function of the community in which the language is used.* The same may be said for what passes in a given community as knowledge, and thus for the relationship of knowledge to language, as well: All three are, as it were, legislated by the community of users. The truth value of assertions about any of these — about discourse, knowledge, or their relationship — can only be established by reference to specific communities, not assumed as universal properties, or tested against language or knowledge somehow existing *in vacuo*.

What I am proposing here then, is that the classroom — each idiosyncratic, individual classroom — is just such a language and knowledge community: relatively short-lived, perhaps, and arbitrarily assembled, but a community nonetheless. I want to further propose that we can most usefully think about discourse, knowledge, and their relationship in such communities in terms of power; that is, in terms of who gets to decide how these are defined. Thus, what is relevant here in what I described above as a formalist classroom is that the greatest portion of power over these features — all of it, really — resides with the teacher. Not the teacher as a person, of course, though there is a kind of parallel institutional power conferred on teachers in our educational systems, but the teacher as a member and representative of some discipline. The teacher, then, empowered by training, experience, and (usually) advanced degrees, determines what constitutes reality and how all class members are to gain access to it; represents — as reader/evaluator — what the discipline considers an appropriate audience; and determines, too, how discourse is to be used: not only what the right things to say are, but what the right way to say them is. When a classroom community's knowledge and discourse are thus fully under the teacher's control, I call them *non-negotiable*.

By contrast, it is clearly possible — and desirable, at least for proponents of the epistemic position — for some or even all features of knowledge, discourse, and their relationship to be, in this sense, *negotiable*. Hence, in a classroom which has legislated for itself exclusively negotiable territory, any member of the community could assign any sort of value or significance to any "feature" of knowledge, with the proviso that the member be willing to negotiate — with classmates or teacher, and according to whatever rules the community imposes for such transactions — for the right to hold that position; and community members are free to negotiate for various uses of language, too, by trying them out, and being prepared to defend them in the same way.

In the scholarly tradition, this sort of negotiation is usually called dialectic, and that seems, indeed, to be what Knoblauch and Brannon have in mind when they write about "intellectual conversation." But such negotiation can, in fact, take any sort of form, and even the rules that govern it can be subject to it. Thus, if my imaginary literature class were fully negotiable, our student might well, in the absence of rules to the contrary, have handed in a haiku in response to whatever it was he had — after group or individual negotiation — determined to read. This haiku would not be "wrong," then, or out of order, but the basis for further work: for negotiation. And the same would hold true for any other offering any student might make.

The third possibility, of course, is for all this power to be in the hands of the learner — to be what I would call *private*. A fully private classroom would represent, at least in any conventional college setting, intellectual anarchy. What would be deemed crucial for the student's learning, with whatever results in terms of disciplinary control or "recruitment," would be complete freedom for self-guided exploration and expression. Here, all the power that is given to the teacher and the discipline in the non-negotiable classroom would be in the hands of the learner. The issue of what was real, what had "objective" status, would not be settled by disciplinary fiat delivered by the teacher, nor by negotiation, but by each student. The same would hold true for the kinds of discourse appropriate to such exploration. The teacher's role in such a classroom obviously would change radically — would, in fact, correspond almost exactly with the student's role in the non-negotiable classroom. Whereas in the latter the student must accommodate her "self," her learning style, her personal perspective on the world to that of the teacher-as-discipline-member; in the former, the teacher-as-discipline-member must similarly accommodate the student.

Here, then, my imaginary literature teacher would simply accept — reading only if asked, presumably — whatever sort of response to a text (also presumably of the student's choice) the learner decided was worth making. (In fact, I think it might be argued that the teacher — like the student in the non-negotiable classroom — could refuse to read, or refuse to respond, though I don't know at what cost.) And though, as a matter of fact, I do recall from my own late Sixties undergraduate days a few classes that followed this model pretty closely, they are presumably fairly rare. Between the pressure exerted by the instructor's disciplinary ties, and that exerted by the classroom as a community, it can be very difficult to make room for genuinely private work of this kind.[4]

It seems clear enough that, most of the time, no one of these sets of conditions ever prevails — at least in the Humanities. (My limited experience in introductory natural and social science courses suggests that the non-negotiable model may not be so hard to work there.) However rigidly a teacher may try to construct a course, the learners — especially as talkers and writers — are going to alter, by their very presence in it, the discipline-approved universe of discourse that the teacher, as a member of

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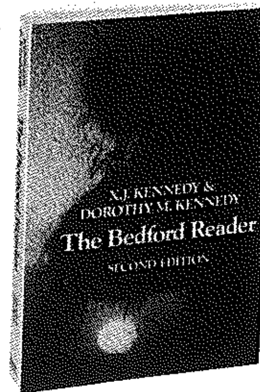

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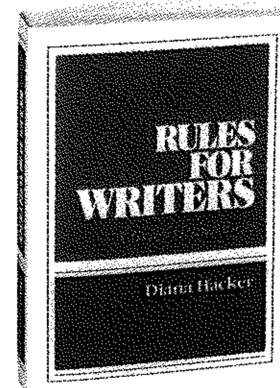

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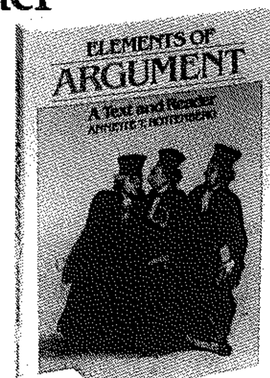

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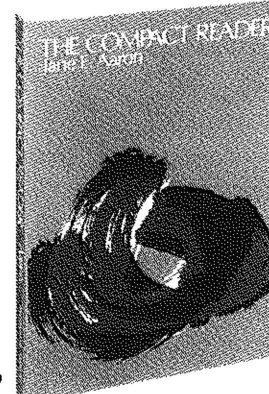

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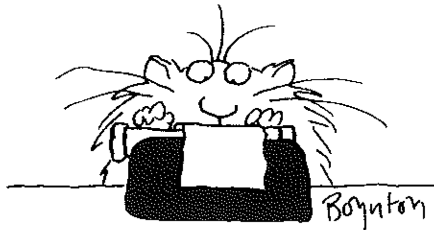

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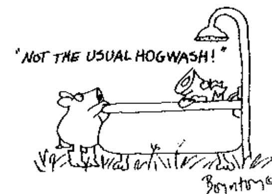

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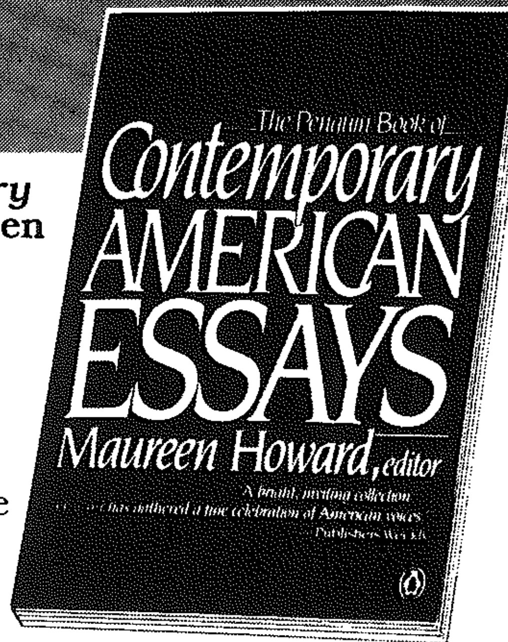

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that discipline, inhabits. On the other hand, no matter how much a teacher asserts that she welcomes negotiation — say, for example, variant readings of a poem — most of the students will resist, and will insist, in effect, that the teacher's reading must be authoritative, non-negotiable — a communal decision which, after a while, the teacher will in some way have to acknowledge. And full doses of private control clearly subvert the notion of classroom as community. Most often, then, a classroom community will operate with some combination of the three. Some kinds of knowledge — a set of critical terms and their definitions, for example, or the authorship of texts — will be non-negotiable; others — interpretations of particular works — will be negotiable; and still others — the personal experiences the works read evoke for individual readers, for instance — would be deemed private. And corresponding distinctions would be made for kinds of discourse. Critical papers, then, would be dominated by the presentation of non-negotiable material in non-negotiable form. Two less formal papers — say, perhaps, a take-home midterm and final — would be the place for negotiation over interpretations of works of the student's own choosing, and acceptable in a much wider range of form. And, finally, some other writing — let's say, to return to the topic at hand, a journal in which the students were invited to record, regularly, their most personal, if not "literary" responses in whatever form took their fancy — would be private.

* * * * *

The implications of this way of looking at classroom discourse for our understanding of journal writing ought to be pretty obvious. First, it reminds us of what we surely already know: that our casual use of generic terms for "types" of classroom discourse — "the journal," "the research paper," "the critical essay," and so on — is just that: casual usage. There are no such genres, or at least no universal, context-free features of such genres that we can assume to be constant. The function of any written discourse will be determined by the context in which it is used. Maybe we could claim something closer to generic status for some kinds of such discourse than for others — when, as for instance with the critical essay in literature courses, the relatively uniform disciplinary training of instructors reduces the room for variation across classroom communities. Even here, though, there is room for considerable variation, as a few years in a writing center or any look at a cross-section of a department's assignments (and student responses) will demonstrate: different conceptions of audience, of acceptable personas, of purpose (e.g., the demonstration of mastery of class lectures *versus* the demonstration of sensitivity to new texts); variant forms of evidence (quote from text / do not quote from text; use critical or primary sources / do not), and so on.

And if there is so much room for variation across classroom communities in discipline-connected kinds of writing like the critical essay, it is easy enough to imagine just how variable something like the journal is. Rather than calling it, as Fulwiler does, interdisciplinary, journal writing can more accurately be termed *a-disciplinary*: a sort of discourse chameleon, its form and function changing to suit the dynamics of the specific classroom in which it is used. In a sense, of course, it is just this flexibility, as thought of in logistical terms, that makes journal writing such a marketable commodity in the drive to move writing across-the-curriculum. It can be structured or not structured, collected or not collected, read or skimmed or not read, related to a specific subject matter or not, graded or not graded, and so on. But it is not the case that somehow, beneath these logistical variations, journal writing is otherwise the same elemental "thing." Thus, in one philosophy course on our campus, a journal represents 90% of the writing the students do. It is to be a deliberately "philosophical journal," according to the Syllabus, and to follow topics and questions set out in advance. Students are invited to negotiate about their positions on various issues (Truth, Beauty, Right and Wrong), but there are two general rules governing such negotiation: All arguments must be rational (one cannot simply assert that one believes); and they must all be made in an appropriate philosophical context (i.e., with reference to the positions of relevant philosophers as outlined in the class textbook). Entries that fail in either of these ways are sent back for further work. All entries can be the basis for further negotiation. Successful passage of the course depends largely on a satisfactory journal performance.

On the other hand, in the introductory literature course I just used as a transition into this section of the essay, students are expected to keep a journal of their essentially private responses to each work they read. These responses can take any form at all, and need not be logical; the theory is that such writing will give the students a better sense of themselves as readers. Responses to these writings — given when the teacher has time, basically — are not even really dialogic. There may be questions or observations or even shared responses, but their function is merely to encourage writers to explore their private worlds further. There are no calls for revisions or additions, no testing against established or communal knowledge, no negotiation.

However, the grade for the course is based primarily — 80% or so — on more formal critical essays. In this classroom, then, it is clear that the journal is a place for essentially private discourse on private knowledge. It is also clear, though, that such private knowledge, whatever its educational value, is not highly regarded in terms of what most members of that community — at least coming in — will regard as its basic currency, the "cash" in which they are rewarded for their labor: grades.

I am not harping on this variability of journal writing in order to suggest that the idea of journal writing, however that idea is realized in classrooms that use it, is a bad one. Clearly, in these two examples, in those that Fulwiler offers in his essay, and in plenty of others, something that we call, for the sake of convenience, journal writing can play an important role in classroom communities. I do want to argue, though, that it renders claims about the potential of some "genre" called journal writing, especially as it moves out of writing classes and across-the-curriculum, highly suspect. Presumably what Prof. Fulwiler and other journal proponents favor, in the terms I have used here, are classrooms with plenty of private and negotiable territory, in terms of both knowledge and discourse — territory that they assume (a) students will recognize as such; (b) teachers will consistently honor; and (c) that both will see as explorable in a form they agree to call a journal.[5] Certainly there is plenty of support for such a classroom model among various educational theorists, but to think that the introduction of journal writing in a classroom will somehow automatically invoke it is to assume that the tail will wag the dog. Indeed, it seems to me that the journal's erratic, on again, off again performance even in writing courses is partly the result of this kind of expectation having gone, again and again, unfulfilled.

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It may seem that I have gone to a good deal of trouble here, and traveled a long theoretical way, to make the relatively simple point that the thing we call journal writing is not one "thing" at all, but a loose collection of classroom practices to which we give a single name at our peril. But it seems to me that our selling of

the journal across-the-curriculum — for isn't that, surely, what we do? — is symptomatic of a dangerous tendency that could taint all of our writing across-the-curriculum affairs. As an emerging field, we have only just begun to sort out the significance of what we ourselves do in the peculiar no-man's land of writing classes. Now, rather suddenly, and in a sense before we are ready, we are being asked to export what little we know to new kinds of classrooms, where its significance is bound to be different in ways that we cannot pretend to predict. When we were experts only for ourselves, maybe our ignorance didn't matter so much: Writing programs seem to go on, to survive, however well — or badly — we serve them. But now the fate of a much larger, and much more fragile, enterprise is in our hands, and we need to keep our performance credible.

Fervor and zeal aside, therefore, we cannot proceed too cautiously. When we sell colleagues on journal writing — because *we* think of it as flexible, because *we* find it doesn't significantly add to our paper load, because *we* find that students take advantage of it to make kinds of inquiry *we* find exciting — we must remember that our experience of it is based on its use in our own, specific classroom communities, communities very different, by virtue of discipline, teacher, and class membership, from theirs. If we must play the expert, we would do better not to tell them what those activities we call journal writing can do for them, but to ask what they think they can make of them.

Notes

[1]James Britton, Tony Burgess, Nancy Martin, Alex McLeod and Harold Rosen, *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975, p. 83.

[2]Britton and his research team used these function categeories to answer the question, "'Why are you writing'" (p. 74) for the 2122 samples of student writing they had collected. They determined that function would be a sort of compromise between "'intention' and 'effect': those aspects [of texts] that were customary, part of the expectations shared by writer and reader, *typical*." (p 75, Britton's emphasis) Where they confuse matters is in their effort to claim a validity for the "typical" features they decide to focus on that transcends their sample, suggesting that these features derive from the "conventions and presuppositions maintained by the mutual acknowledgement of communicating subjects that provide a mature writer with a repertoire of known choices of function within our culture, and enable a mature reader to recognize what choice has been made." (p. 76) In other words, they want to claim that the texts they sorted were marked by features which, apparently independent of context, any literate adult member of our culture ought to recognize. But there are no such universal features or combinations of features of texts that would enable us to determine any given text's function. The features derive their significance—or, rather, we determine their significance — on the basis of our construal of the context in which the discourse occurs.

[3]This confusion has probably been reinforced by James Kinneavy's placement of journal writing under Expressive aim on a chart in his rather differently based, but also influential *A Theory of Discourse* (New York: Norton, 1971 — see Figure II, p. 61). Kinneavy makes all the appropriate disclaimers about the rarity of pure or unmixed aims in any given discourse, and about overlap between aims, but I suspect the chart is nonetheless taken at face value often enough.

[4]I am particularly indebted in my thinking here to David Bleich's *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Bleich goes on to argue, however, that the classroom is the central source of knowledge for the discipline of literary studies. I am not ready — nor in a position, anyway — to make a similar connection between the classroom and any other discipline. The effort might, however, prove interesting.

[5]Fulwiler himself — and I find this a little puzzling — never actually uses the term 'expressive'. He does say that "Ken Macrorie calls journals the 'seedbeds' from which other, more public (transactional or poetic) kinds of writing will emerge" (p. 18), so that it is clear he thinks of it as "expressive." The best explanation for the omission is presumably that he is writing a mainly practical, how-to essay: describing, with plenty of usable examples, the many ways in which journals can be used. He may not, then, consider the philosophical issues I am raising here as particularly germane.

Stanley Fish's Theory of the Interpretive Community: A Rhetoric for Our Time?

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This essay seeks to provide specialists in rhetoric and composition with a critical exposition of Stanley Fish's most recent position on interpretation. It will identify the key hypotheses in his theory of the "interpretive community," locate it in the context of current thought in other disciplines as a means of explaining why it has already begun to influence our field and is likely to do so in the future, and specify ways in which I think it may and may not be true.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with the story Fish tells in his *Is There a Text in This Class?* about a joke he once played on an undergraduate class. One summer school Fish wrote on the blackboard at the end of his first class, a course in the relationship between linguistics and literary criticism, the following list of names as an assignment for the next day's reading:

Jacobs — Rosenbaum
Levin
Thorne
Hayes
Ohman (?)

The first five men on the list as well-known linguists; the last, Richard Ohmann, is a literary critic who has sought to apply the concepts of transformational grammar to literature. Fish misspelled Ohmann's name, but because he knew he couldn't recall whether it had one or two n's, he placed a question mark after it.

Fish then told the students in his next class, which met in the same room but which was studying seventeenth-century poetry, that the assignment was a poem like those they had been studying and asked them to interpret it. The class apparently did not suspect anything amiss and went to work applying the critical tools they had learned in the course. The first student got the ball rolling by identifying the poem as a hieroglyph, either of a cross or an altar. This observation led to a discussion of specific words. Jacobs was taken as a reference to Jacob's ladder, a traditional symbol for the Christian ascent to heaven. The pairing of the word Rosenbaum with Jacobs suggested, however, that in this case the means of ascent was not a ladder but a rosenbaum, a rose tree, which the class saw as an allusion to the Virgin Mary, often traditionally referred to as a rose without thorns. The poem was thus seen to pose the question, "How is it that a man can