needs to understand “the way in which an organization allocates people and resources to organizational tasks” (Hill & Jones 223), with special attention to the distribution of decision-making authority, would be right at home in many of the essays in this collection.

Be that as it may, this is an incredibly valuable book. Current and future program administrators will benefit greatly from having it on their bookshelves or as required reading in their graduate seminars in program administration. Once again Rose and Weiser have done the WPA community a great service.

Alliance, Ohio

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Mary Lamb, Georgia State University

English academics often blame television and new media for students’ literacy difficulties; indeed, composition studies itself has been seen—both from within and from without—as a way to offset the detrimental effect of television by offering print literacy and the incumbent critical thinking and analysis as a “social inoculation” against a mass media mentality (31). However, a growing body of scholarship on the rhetoric of new media offers a fertile field for exploring the complex relationship we all have with electronic media. Most notably, Kathleen Welch’s Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy (1999) addresses both computers and television. Drawing on classical rhetorical theory,
communication scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s Eloquence in an Electronic Age (1988) explores how television affects rhetorical features in speechmaking read. Williams’s book indicates that we are beginning to pay well-deserved attention to how new media influence writing and how we might “engage students in print literacy more effectively and with less resistance and anxiety” (34).

Writing teachers’ privileging of print literacy over electronic media prevents us, Williams argues, from teaching students effectively. Composition scholars have traditionally examined the relationship between reading print texts and writing skills, but Williams extends this comparison to reading television. What he does is refreshing—he provides specific evidence about students’ literacy practices and attitudes within our broad cultural shift from print literacy to the secondary orality of electronic discourse. Notably, he resists merely offering techniques for using television’s content in traditional assignments that read programs as printed texts. Nor does his book simply suggest we study the “enemy” in order to mitigate its nefarious influence. Instead, his own enjoyment and consumption of television spurs his examination of “mass popular culture literacy skills and what articulations might exist with the writing and reading skills we have thought and theorized about so deeply” (6). Yet he remains committed to the value of print literacy, so in “Classroom Practice” sections following each chapter, Williams offers practical assignments that engage students’ televisual literacies in order to teach a facet of print literacy. Thus, Williams’s book successfully bridges the growing body of televisual rhetorical theory to the practical demands of the writing classroom.

The bulk of the book explains what Williams learned from his interviews with fifteen first-year composition students at a northeastern state university. His detailed discussion of students’ ways of watching in Chapter Two, “Ways of Watching: Learning from Students’ Print and Television Literacy Histories,” lays out the students’ viewing habits from which Williams extrapolates the rhetorical skills they bring to print literacy. Williams’s study is clearly limited (a fact which Williams carefully acknowledges) and pays scant attention to how students’ different subject positions shade their responses; nevertheless, his book is compelling in its attention to students’ voices and its eclectic argument that draws on film and television criticism, psychology, sociology, rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies—a welcome expansion of our field of inquiry.

In Williams’s argument, reading, or “consuming,” television is analogous to reading print texts, both of which produce certain attitudes about textual production. Each chapter describes the skills that students gain from television as a way to illustrate their expertise in this arena, even though they may lack the vocabulary to articulate their knowledge in traditional rhetorical terms. Writing teachers, he argues, should help students use this expertise to acquire rhetorical skills for print texts. However, rather than translate television’s rhetorical features to print in a simplistic way, Williams nuances his discussion by including how the two differ. Television viewing, for instance, is bound by time (length of programs), while print reading is bound by space (number of pages). Television reinforces “speed,
liveness, affect, and associative thinking,” while our writing courses value “recursiveness, reflection, detachment, and linearity” (152). To offset this change in the way students attend to texts, Williams argues, writing teachers must foreground these differences and offer specific strategies for developing the habits we value, habits “of reflection, of exploring interiors, of stepping back for analysis, of slowing down to let thoughts emerge and be refined” (147-48).

In Chapter Five, “Switching Channels: Authorship and Authority on Television and in Print,” Williams offers another useful distinction between visual and print literacies when he discusses students’ knowledge of televisial authorship against their own emerging sense of being an author, a topic that often gets blurred in our thinking about television’s influence. Students, he finds, do not feel confident about writing television scripts, only receiving the programs. Likewise, he distinguishes between writing for and writing like television. Undoubtedly, many writing teachers will recognize these characteristics in student writing—“impersonal detachment, as if through a camera lens” (114) and lack of details as if “readers are watching the program with them” (117). By contrast, printed work is valued for its ability to evoke ethos, or “signs of the logical workings of that single author’s mind” (122). Williams suggests using students’ skill at locating television’s commercial motives to help them develop the written ability to construct a motive or ethos in print texts. This chapter provides teachers with a more theorized understanding of rhetorical televisual and print qualities and offers useful ways to discuss these features with students. These observations are a few of many throughout the book that invite further thinking about not only how television influences students’ writing, but also how it changes the culture at large—our thinking patterns and the way we communicate.

The book’s final chapter, “Shimmering Literacies: Television’s Place in the Future of Teaching Writing,” highlights the pragmatism that has underpinned Williams’s project—that we can no longer afford to ignore the changes in print literacy wrought by television, computers, film, and other electronic media, “entrenched behind the ramparts of some romanticized view of essayistic print literacy” (176). Rather, Williams argues, those of us working in composition studies “should be in the forefront of exploring the evolving nature and interactions of print and electronic literacies” and deciding how to address such literacies in the classroom (176). If we do not, our field will quickly become one of the “marginalized, vestigial organs of the humanities” (175). Williams’s study specifies a way to prevent this uselessness by examining how students read television in order to change the types of texts we ask students to produce. “Our work should be concerned with the composition of texts. Technologies that let us choose to compose texts with print, image, and video will force us to consider how those choices affect the way we deliver a message or explore an idea” (176). To accomplish this, he advocates cultural studies as a common field in which communication and composition scholarship might “meet and collaborate” (184).
While he sympathizes with critical pedagogies and hopes students gain “more control over their lives in society” (186), some writing teachers interested in social change may not find in the book an explicit enough interrogation of the cultural and market forces shaping media production. However, this book succeeds not only by providing practical pedagogical strategies for addressing the current sea change in literacy, but also for advocating and inviting additional research into these questions. For example, I find myself questioning not only how to “translate” print, rhetorical, academic skills to students versed in televisual literacy, but also how the epistemological changes wrought by secondary orality affect knowledge claims, evidence, and style within academic writing. As I read, I also wondered how students’ viewings might be influenced by their gender, race, cultural and political leanings. In particular, since many have posited the “feminine” aspects of television, how does rhetorical knowledge of television vary within each of these subject positions? How might this variance (resistance?) affect the rhetorical knowledge we foster in the classroom? How does television’s favored narrative mode influence argument, political debate, and civic rhetoric? Williams closes by claiming, “We have an ethical obligation to practice and teach the communicative forms that are in the center of our culture, as well as the valuable forms that exist on the margin” (187), and his book succeeds by inviting us to examine more closely all the variations in these communication forms.

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