ity for revising school policies on anti-harassment, attendance, and drugs—defining for themselves their school’s system of governance. High School X’s history and rhetoric are constructed around a conception of literacy that “include[s] the pursuit of racial justice” (126).

*Literacy and Racial Justice* speaks to the entire field of composition, not just scholars specializing in the history of U.S. literacy. The text details a history that accounts for racial inequity and explains the ways in which an ideology of literacy continues to inform our students’ literacies. This history, along with Prendergast’s keen analysis of key moments, provides a framework for questioning current calls for assessment and accountability, tools embedded in reform programs with catchy titles like *No Child Left Behind*. Prendergast’s award-winning words remind us that literacy—the writing and reading taught in our classrooms—is linked historically and rhetorically to racial justice, and challenge teacher-writers, as participants in and observers of this history, to do more than call “for tolerance of culturally different literacy practices” (173).

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**WORKS CITED**


Reviewed by Michael J. Salvo and Julie Staggers, Purdue University

Beverly Sauer’s *Rhetoric of Risk* does far more than explore *Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments*, as her subtitle asserts. Rather, Sauer’s large volume in the Rhetoric, Knowledge, and Society series utilizes research on mines in the U.S., U.K., and South Africa to discuss the purpose of documentation as well as a host of philosophical, ideological, and rhetorical issues involved in the communication of risk and the maintenance of safety in dangerous environments.

Early in the volume, Sauer defines the problem of documenting danger. Individuals are apt to make poor choices, particularly when under the stress of production deadlines or economic pressures asserted by workers or management. Sauer claims, “Agencies write standards because experience is a poor teacher,” a statement that she develops on a number of different levels throughout the book (37). First, Sauer asserts that uninterpreted experience is a poor teacher because
disasters overwhelm witnesses with data. This flood of data is left unexplored, and important lessons are left unarticulated and therefore invisible. Second, the “agencies” she describes are regulatory organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, which have a stake in maintaining safety. These organizations operate by scientific and administrative mechanisms which may not translate well into the lifeworld of miners. And third, Sauer explains that constant exposure to danger leaves human beings numb to what once terrified them, and therefore experience can have a paradoxical effect of making people feel immune to the danger that surrounds them. In defining stakeholders broadly, both acknowledging the stakes held by mine operators and owners, as well as those held by miners and their families, Sauer opens an opportunity for technical rhetoricians to advocate for those people traditionally silenced but most directly affected by the threats posed by dangerous workplaces such as mines.

Sauer’s study is noteworthy because of its emphasis on blue-collar workers at risk. Rarely has a scholar in technical communication focused such attention on risks to front line workers or looked to the workers themselves as the sources of significant expertise that might make working conditions safer. By looking to the men and women on the front lines—and at the greatest risk—Sauer identifies an opportunity for technical communicators to expand their advocacy role in dangerous industries. Her advice is for technical communicators to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders (who often speak disparate workplace languages) and construct spaces for dialogue among workers, managers, and regulatory agencies.

In the introduction, Sauer describes the role of the documentation specialist in high risk environments as a communication facilitator who advocates for communication between workers and management (36-37). This role takes on added importance in high-risk settings and industries where workers who face danger on a minute-to-minute basis may become inured to risk. Such a process of accustomization to danger may account for the necessity of pat-down searches of miners to weed out packets of cigarettes, which are clearly dangerous in mines where coal dust and methane create an explosive atmosphere (292-93). Similarly, Sauer recounts numerous examples of risky situations developing for days or weeks prior to a mine accident without anyone taking clear threats seriously. When coupled with the “just-in-time” approach to risk remediation common in the mining industry (an approach that requires managers to take action to remediate/correct risk just before the situation becomes critical), such inurement has lethal consequences (55). Miners fail to recognize or respond to increasing or acute risks within an always-risky environment, while management waits until the last possible moment to implement changes that might save lives but will disrupt production schedules or quotas.

Such phenomena have parallels in other industries, where danger may be even more difficult to detect or diagnose, yet there has been little development in the creation of effective means of preventing or avoiding disaster. Disaster-based cases center on failure of documentation and communication, and Sauer directly refers to a number of such cases which are staples of technical communication ethics.
instruction: train derailments, building collapses, the NASA Shuttle Challenger explosion, and Three-Mile Island.

The problem with risk communication, as Sauer defines it, is that we can document only what has already happened and try to prevent disasters from happening again; regulators cannot effectively write documentation and rules that anticipate danger. In other words, successful risk documentation has come to mean preventing accidents from reoccurring rather than preventing them from happening in the first place. This raises a two-fold problem for technical communicators and others charged with minimizing risk and assuring safety. The first is a problem of invention, of discovering the available means of persuasion to gain compliance with existing standards. The second is ultimately a more difficult one for rhetoricians and risk specialists alike: the problem of capturing, transforming, and then standardizing, the lived experience (the so-called “native knowledge”) of at-risk miners and other workers in ways that improve safety through more effective documentation.

Sauer’s argument opens documentation to include input from sources once deemed “noise” in a strict cybernetic definition of communication systems. She suggests opening documentation to input from alternative sources, which Sauer calls “pit sense” (81). In the mining towns where she did her fieldwork, Sauer makes it clear that mining towns are just that: communities that depend upon and are built by the economic as well as social networks that produce identities. Miners, shop stewards, managers, and bosses are part of this network of work, discourse, regulation, and danger, and Sauer effectively argues to include miners as important sources of information that is too often overlooked and undervalued. Sauer’s study is particularly useful for rhetoricians when she discusses the bases of risk assessment, as she defines knowledge-making in Toulmin’s terms of warrants and supports. Sauer names three sources of knowledge, bases upon which warrants rest and upon which decisions are made: “Pit sense (embodied sensory knowledge)”; “Engineering experience”; and “Scientific (invisible) knowledge” (182). Each stakeholder group judges its risk based on information from very different authorities and authorization systems. One problem of the first kind of knowledge, the kind that miners rely on, is that it is difficult to communicate, particularly from miners to engineers, scientists and managers. And this “pit sense,” the “Direct physical sensations felt or perceived in highly local environments” (182), is almost impossible to record in writing.

Sauer offers a solution. In chapters 7 and 8, she explores workers’ gestures as a source for documenting their understanding of mine danger. In the process, these two chapters offer a compelling argument for the application and development of visual rhetoric. Often, miners share information regarding the potential dangers of a given shaft or excavation site with hand gestures. These gestures indicate visual cues to dangerous practices, and present an opportunity to experiment in multi-media collection and presentation of stakeholder discourse. Offering a site for ethnographic research into the use of visual rhetoric, Sauer gives rhetoricians an opportunity to capture previously unrecordable information into databases of
new media: visual representations of workers’ gestures and spatial awareness into usable data that may help turn lore into knowledge. Offering a model for recording lore and turning it into knowledge may indeed help rhetoricians address various needs within composition studies.

Gesture offers one avenue for exploring visual rhetoric, and calls attention to the workers’ rich store of information, representing an important expansion for including stakeholders in documentation processes. Such participation clearly benefits workers by minimizing harm and documenting risk effectively. Such an expansion reflects a more generalized trend in the rearticulation of expertise in technical communication. Sauer’s study points to a shift in the relationship between mine workers, managers, and owners. In Sauer’s description of existing documentation practices, mining would continue until an event—an accident—took place. Then regulations and rules would be created by management and imposed on workers in order to keep that particular event from reoccurring. Rather than limiting danger by creating and disseminating rules, Sauer foresees new methods for collaboratively working with regulators to recognize and document dangers before accidents occur—thereby preventing accidents from ever happening—which would save both lives and money.

In their implications for work culture, the changes Sauer anticipates are quite a bit more revolutionary than she articulates. Ideologically, the shift from top-down to collaborative regulatory authority is significant. And it is a parallel development to increasing authority and responsibility throughout workplace hierarchies. Similar change is taking place in industrial and document design as usability and user-centered methodologies blur the boundaries between technology producers and technology consumers. And the change is not limited to mines and web design. For example, Ann Blakeslee chronicles how scientists work with audiences. Similar arguments are recorded in Andrew Feenberg’s critical technological histories of reproductive medicine, AIDS research, and the Internet (1995) as well as Bruno Latour’s narratives of mass transit systems and (with Steve Woolgar) laboratory life. Indeed, a trend seems evident in post-cold-war technological development towards greater recognition and inclusion of stakeholders.

Unfortunately, however, the current administration seems to believe that a return to cold-war thinking, top-down management, and secrecy may be the best strategies for preserving American security. In contrast, Sauer’s research indicates that openness, dialogue, and power-sharing offer the best opportunities for risk reduction. Such developments underscore the significance of her assertion that “communication practices within industries are shaped and constrained by political and economic assumptions that may inadvertently silence or render invisible the kinds of information that decision makers need to assess and manage risk in hazardous environments” (5).

Sauer’s book is aimed at technical communication and professional writing specialists interested in regulatory writing. However, The Rhetoric of Risk should be read by a wider audience of composition and rhetoric scholars interested in
cultural studies of power and authority. Her text provides substantive examples and authoritative insight into arguments made by composition pedagogues about the ethical and practical value of dialogue in everything from pedagogy to, here, the regulation and articulation of danger. This book deserves a wide audience of readers, as it contains a variety of arguments and examples that support much of what the field has argued for some time: share power and access so that many can benefit, and respect the various ways knowledge is made and transferred by those doing the labor.

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**WORKS CITED**


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In her foreword Carolyn R. Miller positions *Rhetoric and Kairos* as a response to skepticism about rhetoric’s remaining too thoroughly “rooted in a particular historical period, a particular language, a particular set of cultural purposes” (xi). For Miller the collection addresses concerns about “the ancient emphasis on practical production rather than theory and interpretation; the accompanying ‘ideology of human agency’ that characterizes ancient rhetoric; and the ‘thinness’ or abstract quality of the ancient productionist vocabulary that can easily be applied to anything and thus conveys little of real critical interest” (xi). Overcoming these limitations, however, may not engage some critics’ unease over “how satisfactorily that particular framework [ancient rhetorical theory] can be ‘globalized’ to become the universal hermeneutic it is often claimed to be in recent theory and criticism” (xi). The included essays do tend toward hermeneutics, but that tendency might as easily bolster critics’ arguments as refute them. The desire to (over)extend *kairos* (“right timing, due measure”) does not necessarily prove its, or rhetoric’s, useful-