to the Clemson University Communication Across the Curriculum (CAC) program, one guided by a commitment to expanding communication (literacy) in all of its forms and funded most notably by a gift to the University. With these very local solutions at hand, the editors’ framing of the text within a postmodern definition becomes most significant here, especially with an antinarrative understanding in mind—there is not one story, one solution that fits every institution.

Also notable, especially for WPAs working with new teachers just beginning to design writing courses, essays by Mike Palquist and Christy Desmet make insightful observations regarding the use of technology in writing courses and the struggle in meeting the needs of both individual teachers and the writing program at large. In the text’s final essay, Carolyn Handa brings together both of these issues and one significant reality reiterated by many of the essays: despite a WPA’s most deliberate efforts to consider all parties when effecting change, her position at the front of the writing program often inevitably leads to discord. Bringing together the essays as well as the comprehensive bibliography within this collection, McGee and Handa offer a number of useful resources for moving realistically from that discord to direction.

Kennesaw, GA


Reviewed by Amy S. Gerald, Winthrop University

In this book, Krista Ratcliffe has a place to explore the intersection of rhetoric and composition, feminism, and whiteness studies, which seems to be the direction of her scholarship after the 1995 publication of *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich*. Challenged by Susan Jarratt “to consider how race informed gender in Woolf’s, Daly’s and Rich’s feminist theories of rhetoric” and discomfited by her own decision to maintain the focus of that book and not add a chapter on Alice Walker, Ratcliffe sets up *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* as an answer of sorts (3). Not only does she perform the feminist act of recovering the neglected fourth literacy of listening, but also she takes a hard look at race in feminist rhetoric and posits rhetorical listening as a possible way for black and white women to work their way through, around, or past the impasse that has stalled productive dialogue between the two groups for decades. Pointing to the history of white
feminist discourse favoring commonalities among all women and ignoring
difference and of black feminist discourse stressing difference at the expense
of commonalities, Ratcliffe articulates the concept of rhetorical listening as a
hyper-awareness of our language and our identifications that can be a means of
overcoming this binary thinking and increasing the likelihood of productive
communication in resistance-prone discourse. The metacognitive path that
she sets forth is important for all of us working and studying in these overlap-
ning fields, and what I find particularly compelling in this book is Ratcliffe’s
own modeling of the sort of listening she advocates.

Significantly, in the introduction “Translating Listening into Lan-
guage and Action,” Ratcliffe narrates the origins of this important project,
describing a series of events that led her to reflect on her role in this particu-
lar corner of academic discourse. Here she recounts and analyzes her own
thought processes, showing her readers a mental journey through rationaliza-
tion, a guilt/blame logic, a search for absolution, and finally a realization of
accountability. Beyond writing a how-I-began-this-project story, she shows
readers how to identify and pay attention to the moments in our thinking when
that thinking is muddled or unsure—when we respond to ideas that are differ-
dent, difficult, or simply not what we want to hear. She models this “attention
to dissonance” in each chapter, emphasizing the need for us to shift our atten-
tion to [and attend to] the gaps in understanding, the margins between things
we know, the blurred edges, and the uncomfortable places in cross-cultural
discourse and teaching (4).

Parts of the introduction and chapter 1, “Defining Rhetorical Lis-
tening” are pulled from Ratcliffe’s previously published article “Rhetorical
Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a Code of Cross-Cultural
Conduct,” in which she explains rhetorical listening as “a stance of openness
that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture”
(1). This stance of openness is difficult even when we are willing, as Ratcliffe
acknowledges, but it is necessary in order for “people to recognize the partial-
ity of our visions and listen for that-which-cannot-be-seen, even if it cannot
yet be heard” (73). As we are usually aware of and can more readily name
ideas, people, and places with which we identify or against which we iden-
tify (disidentification), chapter 2, “Identifying Places of Rhetorical Listening:
Identification, Disidentification, and Non-identification,” analyzes the limits
of modern and postmodern concepts of identification and disidentification,
and presents the concept of non-identification as “a place to pause, a place of
reflection, a place that invites people to admit that gaps exist. Admissions of
gaps may take the form of ‘I don’t know you,’ ‘I don’t know what I don’t know
about you,’ or even ‘I don’t know that I don’t know that you exist’—whether
that you is a person, place, thing, or idea” (72-73). Rhetorical listening can
be positioned at these places of non-identification in order to encourage problematic cross-cultural identification and foster the opportunity for better communication, learning, and change.

Ratcliffe uses the last three chapters to describe different circumstances under which rhetorical listening can take place, all of which have the potential to bring our identifications, disidentifications, and non-identifications to consciousness. Chapter 3 “Listening Metonymically: A Tactic for Listening to Public Debates” encourages us develop the habit of mind “to assume that a text or a person is associated with—but not necessarily representative of—an entire cultural group” (78). Exemplifying the Audre Lorde/Mary Daly “debate” which resulted in what Ratcliffe terms a “dysfunctional silence” that “represents a current mode of exchange in the U.S. about gender and race” (79), Ratcliffe listens attentively to the communications and the silences and walks readers through the rhetorical moves necessary to consider differences and similarities simultaneously. For instance, refusing to read Lorde as representative of all black women and Daly of all white women allows “listeners to model scholarship on Daly’s method while learning from Lorde’s critique” (99). This frees scholars to benefit from opposing scholarship while acknowledging its limits. Problematic in this chapter, however, is that while discussing the necessity to pull ourselves out of binary thinking and while describing our culture’s privileging of sight and speech over listening and silence and its reflection in our language, Ratcliffe consistently uses the term “debate,” which privileges speech over listening and which signals a win/lose mentality, reinforcing the unproductive binary. She becomes trapped by the limits of our language while examining those very limits.

Ratcliffe reminds us that we are accountable for how we react to cross-cultural discourse in chapter 4, “Eavesdropping: A Tactic for Listening to Scholarly Discourses,” parts of which were reprinted from an earlier article “Eavesdropping as Rhetorical Tactic: History, Whiteness, and Rhetoric.” She redefines “eavesdropping” etymologically as a form of listening rhetorically, with an ear to the purposes of language, speaker, and self, to a place where the listener is not addressee. Such overhearing can show us how a cultural group with which we identify is viewed. In Ratcliffe’s example of Ana Castillo’s Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanismo, Castillo does not address (therefore does not privilege) white America. “I” and “We” are clearly Chicanos/as in the work. If white readers listen rhetorically to this discourse, they can pay attention to their reaction to not being privileged in order to realize their own privilege. White readers should continue reading, then, listening to realize things they would not have known otherwise, rather than deny or dismiss ideas with which they do not identify. Full of more opportunities for [white people to] eavesdrop (DuBois, Morrison, McKay, Walker, Baldwin, King), this chapter is of certain value to my teaching in a small, public, southern university with twenty-five percent African American enrollment.
Also of practical value is the picture into Ratcliffe’s classroom in chapter 5 “Listening Pedagogically: A Tactic for Listening to Classroom Practice.” To encourage rhetorical listening in her students, Ratcliffe develops classroom practices that resist student resistance to conflict-ridden classroom discourse about race and encourage students to share their stories and learn from each other. Presenting student work, she lays out goals and outcomes, lesson plans and assignments that broaden students’ world view and teach them that language is contextual, fluid, and therefore able to change and to be changed. The chapter and its appendix is an extended course design that outlines necessary pedagogical moves that build a classroom experience where rhetorical listening can occur among students and teachers. As she enacts her own reflexivity in this chapter, she advises teachers to model self-listening and attentiveness. She enjoins teachers to use tension and failure as teaching moments and says, “teachers just need to be honest about our own [gender and racial] markings and not pretend of speak as or for others” (140).

White women in the field who are concerned about race and gender and have read the literature understand the importance of not speaking as or for others, of admitting that they do not know what it is like to be black women, of not assuming commonality, and of not ignoring race. So what is new here? Speaking only for myself as a white, female, feminist teacher in the south with my own identification difficulties with black women, what resonates with me is that Ratcliffe gives me a path toward agency. I can listen rhetorically and hold in my hands both differences and commonalities to then learn something from the other. It is of value to me to have an articulate theory that can guide me consistently in my daily teaching and collegial life. This book gives white women readers a means of doing our own race work, rather than putting that burden on black women, as Ratcliffe carefully and respectfully avoids.

Rock Hill, SC

WORKS CITED