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# Afterword: Horizons of Transformation: When Age, Literacy and Scholarship Meet

Louise Wetherbee Phelps  
*Old Dominion University*, [lwphelps@odu.edu](mailto:lwphelps@odu.edu)

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## Afterword Horizons of Transformation: When Age, Literacy, and Scholarship Meet

Louise Wetherbee Phelps    Old Dominion University

All of us come to a scholarly project, or a rhetorical situation like this issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies*, from the dual perspectives of exigence and motive. We recognize exigence as a problem or situation in the field. . . in society. . . that compels our scholarly and rhetorical attention: in this case, made salient by the editors' call inviting scholarship at the juncture of "age" and "literacy" to expand and advance the work of composition. We take up this call with and from personal motives, not only as they infuse an immediate situation with purpose but as they reflect lifespan experiences of composing, literacy, scholarship, and development—our own and others'. Motive is, of course, closely tied to identity: as an "older adult"—I have just celebrated my seventy-eighth birthday—and still-active scholar, I am vitally concerned with the inquiries into "composing a further life" represented in this special issue. To position my response, I want to explain how exigence and motive figure into my own reasons and ways of reading and appropriating its meanings.

I identify my own dual stance with questions asked by several contributors. In the mid-2000s, contemplating worldwide aging, Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk asked herself: "What is society doing to prepare for this huge and rapid demographic shift? And what can we as individuals do to make the elder years more meaningful and enjoyable for ourselves?" (37). In 2009, about to retire, I asked myself much the same questions, filtered through a focus on higher education and the impact I envisioned on the field of rhetoric and composition/writing studies (RCWS). To pose them publicly, I organized a multigenerational conversation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication on "retiring gracefully and living well in retirement." In my introduction to the panel, I argued that the breaking wave of faculty retirements (as baby boomers aged out of the academy) signified a generational shift with far-reaching consequences, requiring analysis from both individual and systemic perspectives:

What does it mean for us personally? How can we help each other learn what we need to know to make good choices for retirement? How can we create new options and opportunities for ourselves. . . as individuals, or through collective action in our institution, systems, states, or across higher education? But it's also important to grasp the multiple implications and consequences for the profession. These changes will be transformational. They will affect our young incoming faculty, our instructional programs, the configuration of our departments, and a range of problems and practices from funding and technology use to governance, tenure policies, policies on pregnancy and child care, and the balance of personal and professional lives. We need to view retirement in the context of the entire arc

of faculty careers and the kinds of flexibility and choice available to faculty at all stages from beginning professor to emeritus faculty. (“Introduction”)

I went on to list some questions to be addressed, including “how can [retirees] redefine their relationship to the rhetoric/composition community? How can they find new communities that meet their social, intellectual, and spiritual needs? How can the field draw on the wisdom of its elder generations while also taking up the opportunities for positive change offered by a younger faculty demographic?”

Following Goethe’s advice to “do the duty that lies nearest to thee,” I’ve worked in my field to respond to this exigence: seeking organizational support for retiring and retired professionals in RCWS; defining retirement as a multi-year process encompassing late career, transition, and post-retirement phases;<sup>1</sup> articulating a longitudinal concept of academic careers that calls for long-term career planning and support for all transitions; fostering cross-generational connections and reciprocities;<sup>2</sup> foregrounding caregiving as an issue linking and impacting all generations. But the panel also reflected my desire to understand the meaning of formal retirement for myself and others as a major transition in a life trajectory, marking one as “growing old.” In arguing for humanistic contributions to age studies—narrative, in particular—Stephen Katz notes that “[u]ltimately, a subjective dimension in age studies means that we include ourselves in what we study and write about” (21). Julia Twigg writes of feminist gerontology that it is “strongly engaged, drawing on the personal feelings and experiences of authors as they struggle to make sense of their own and other’s lives. Like earlier feminist projects, it recognizes that personal struggles and experiences offer an important touchstone for academic theorizing” (62). Likewise, I approach this reading with a personal investment in the question posed by Douglas Hall and Michael Harker: “What are we doing as scholars to maintain our literacy as we age and to develop our own literacy of aging?” (152).

Since 2009, while continuing my own “further life” as a scholar and part-time teacher/mentor to new generations of scholars (themselves of varied ages), I’ve become familiar with the distinctions and lived experiences of aging through life transitions traversed by myself and close family: the “third age” or “young-old” period of adulthood and the passage to, and through, “deep old age.”<sup>3</sup> These intimate encounters with aging have led me to read, study, teach, and write about adult development, embodied cognition, identity work, lifespan literacy, and aging in relation to composing personal and scholarly lives. Although I’ve only recently discovered age studies as an interdisciplinary matrix for these interests, I bring to these topics a long-held view of composition studies as having a broadly ecological “developmental orientation” that encompasses the lifespan (Phelps, “The Domain of Composition”; *Composition as a Human Science*). In the present moment I look to this issue for resonances with my own project at the intersection of age studies and literacy: to memorialize a lifelong partnership with my mother in our literacy practices and dialogue over writing, reading, and rhetoric.

These exigencies, motives, and questions have come together seamlessly for me in trying to appropriate this issue for my own uses and needs as a literate person, scholar, mentor to younger generations, and “older adult.” By appropriation I mean a process of following “the direction of thought opened up by the text . . . the disclosure of a possible way of looking things” that goes beyond what

the text “says” (Ricoeur 92). In this case, the “text” is not only the issue itself but the multidisciplinary knowledge base of work in which age has become a focus and a lens, accessed through the collective bibliography. In writing about what I have learned, am learning, and hope to learn from this issue, I anticipate not only that individual readers but also the disciplines we represent will make their own appropriations—recognizing, too, that appropriation is not a momentary rhetorical event but a process that will unfold and disperse over time, as we follow the lead of these articles and the bodies of work they reference.

I read this issue, then, from several perspectives of engagement and investment. The first is *phenomenological*: how does this work attend to and illuminate the lived experience of aging and aging literacies?

## Phenomenologies of Lived Experience

Although only a few authors specify their research methods as phenomenological, most of the contributions are case studies that reflect how seriously the scholars in this issue, and others in age studies, take the idea that aging must be understood and studied in part from the perspective of individuals’ subjective interpretations, symbolic expressions, and enactments of it. Broadly, these scholars adopt what Mlynarczyk calls “meaning-based approaches,” concerned with the meanings that older adults make of their lives: “varieties of meaning from commitments to connectedness of different kinds, through meaning related specifically to time and generational meaning, to ethical meaning and grappling with the human condition” (Edmondson 1). Literate activity is itself meaningful and a source of meaning in people’s lives. Literate and rhetorical activity are important ways for people to make meaning of aging, and also for us to access what aging, and literacy at older ages, means to them. While the subjects of these studies engage in literate activity (and learning) through late age, those forms of action and expression are vulnerable to losses, limitations, and fluctuations as the body-mind ages, especially in encountering accelerating literacies and new technologies. Phenomenological accounts document how older adults adapt and respond affectively to these changes, negotiating their social and cultural meanings in nuanced, complex, individualized ways. While contributors’ methods vary in researching meaning-making and subjects’ experiences, they typically examine literacies and aging in prosaic contexts of everyday life—home, library, church—and depend on “deep listening.”<sup>4</sup> These studies attend closely to how participants themselves

***“Literate and rhetorical activity are important ways for people to make meaning of aging, and also for us to access what aging, and literacy at older ages, means to them.”***

depict experience and ascribe meanings, especially through microanalysis of their speech, writing, and multimodal semiotic activity. But by observing older adults’ activities and relationships in context, researchers seek also to understand meanings that may be more tacit.

Phenomenological approaches to aging put special emphasis on embodiment, especially the aging woman’s body, as a nexus of somatic and sociocultural meanings. As Lauren Marshall Bowen’s

introduction lays out, age studies experienced the same “critical turn” as other humanistic and social science areas of inquiry: reconceptualizing “old age”—and the aging body—as socioculturally and historically constructed; critiquing ageist ideologies and age-inequality; seeking to challenge dominant cultural narratives and give voice to older adults themselves; and developing educational and activist programs in service of these goals. But studying age, especially late age, has led many scholars to turn back to corporeal experiences of the body in theorizing age. As Twigg explains,

[A]ging forces us to engage with physiology, not least because of the ultimate undeniability of death. Like pain it forces the reality of the body on to the analytic stage. It is for this reason that aging studies, together with work on pain and chronic illness, has been one of the key sites for the development of more philosophically complex sociologies of the body that challenge the excesses of postmodern epistemology and that place the phenomenon of embodiment at the heart of the analysis. . . . (63)

Many age studies scholars have noted the compelling need to understand their own embodied aging. Gerontologist Martha Holstein strives to

understand my own aging against the still limited scholarship that might inform my heightened consciousness. Above all, I do not want to pretend that my body is ‘not me’; I want to understand how I am experiencing it and how others perceive it. And I want to use that knowledge as the opening wedge in a strategy to resist how others seek to define what it means to be old. (314)

My own experience of the *coup de vieux*—the “hit of old age” (Bateson 98)—is intimately tied to my sense of self as literate. As I wrote recently, early in retirement an episode related to spinal arthritis was

the first warning that my body was deteriorating irreversibly. . . . my muscles had imperceptibly become deconditioned; my ability to carry out normal activities of everyday life—going up and down stairs, getting up from chairs—was slipping away, foreshadowing loss of independence. As I struggled to regain these functions, the disintegrative events became a cascade. Crucial parts of my body were failing me—those I relied on to write, read, listen, travel: eyes, ears, hands, feet, the sources of an embodied professional identity. And with this, pain diffused throughout my body and became constant, fluctuating and circulating in and around joints, muscles, tendons, fascia. (“Identity Work”)

One day, reading online about myofascial pain, I saw the heading “fascia as context”: it became a metaphor for my diffuse, distributed pain and the disintegration of bodily integrity it signaled. The fascia is a continuous system of connective tissue that holds the body together in a three-dimensional matrix (a neuromyofascial web) essential to stability and movement; some describe its functions as nonlinear and fractal. Its ecological connectivity—fascia as context—underlies and symbolizes for me both the integrated wholeness of bodily identity—including embodied mind—and its disruptions in aging.

My fortunate access to modern medicine meant that many of these common, prosaic experiences of aging could be mitigated or meliorated with surgeries, medications, physical therapy, and massage, extending my vitality into “Adulthood II.” Still, even in relatively good health “for one’s age,”

recurrent pain and impairment, including changes in memory and cognition, are chronic features of late aging. But, as Suzanne Kesler Rumsey said of the homebound adults she studied, “the decline in their physical abilities is still a time of agency, purpose, and personal development” (“Holding on to Literacies” 14). For me (still in the long transition to “old-old” age), the very experience and contemplation of aging in myself and loved ones, complemented by generative, reciprocal relations with younger scholars, opened new paths in my scholarship and literacy, inspiring intellectual growth and adventure over the last decade and transforming my writing as a medium for re-composing identity and integrating new learning.

My awareness of these relations between a more vulnerable, aging body and both growth and decline in literacy was made more acute by witnessing intimately my mother’s last years as one of her caregivers, supporting her in “*holding on* to dignity, independence, and agency” (Rumsey, “Holding on to Literacies” 14). As her literacy partner, I collaborated to affirm and sustain her core identity as writer, reader, and thinker against these disintegrative forces. Wanting to capture her experiences (and mine) of aging in the context of our shared lifetimes of literacy has made me particularly attentive to richly phenomenological accounts in this issue.

Here, then, are some of the themes that emerged from reading this issue through a phenomenological lens:

- “individuation”: the great diversity in how age, aging, and literacy in older ages are experienced and enacted by individuals, defying cultural stereotypes
- the vast complexity of interacting factors that shape any act of literacy and any person’s literacy development over a lifetime
- human beings’ continuing potential for adaptation, growth, learning, and change, unpredictable and emergent, in late adulthood
- the centrality of the body for older adults in continuing, extending, growing, “alienating,” or “holding on” to literacies (Rumsey, “Holding on to Literacies”)
- the corresponding importance for aging literacies of material changes in literacy tools and practices: as the technologies of literacy evolve, embodied literacy practices and meanings ascribed to them by older adults are complex, nuanced, and diverse
- the way literacies in late life reflect and draw on older adults’ cumulative life experience with literacy learning and practices, in a historical context of “accumulating” and “accelerating” literacies (Brandt, “Accumulating”; Keller)
- the interdependence of older adults’ literacies with others, through their past and present embedding in familial and other social relationships
- the conflicts, contradictions, dissonances (reflecting mixed cultural messages) that older adults experience and negotiate around their literacies (for example, in relation to religion, social media, generational differences)
- a concern and investment (among researchers) in older adults’ agency: to discern its subtle workings; to support it insofar as it is constrained, muted, or underestimated by systemic forces (as in the health care system).

## Theoretical Frameworks

The second perspective from which I read the issue is for productive concepts and *theoretical frameworks*. Not surprisingly, for an issue that introduces age into the nexus of literacy and composition studies that defines the journal, most articles work at the intersections of two or more frameworks, many of them (like feminism, disability studies, and age studies itself) transdisciplinary. I always want to know in what sense theories are productive, as tools for our purposes and as a wellspring of insight and new ideas. In this issue, theories serve many purposes—as a source of concepts, an analytic method, an ethical orientation, a principled basis for defining problems. Although theories may lead researchers to particular problems and projects, at the moment the perspective I want to invoke is that of looking for concepts and theories that fit the phenomena observed, that both capture their complexity and generate new insights into them. From this perspective, authors in this issue are attracted to theories that help them to

- view an individual's literacy longitudinally, as developing and growing over the life course, including deep old age, with later ages reflecting cumulative experiences
- place aging, or older adulthood, in a lifespan perspective: not focusing on “old age” as an isolated part of life, but on age as a deeply significant facet of identity in the trajectory of a whole life
- think ecologically about the complex web of factors and relationships that shape the life course and literacy development
- analyze lives and literacies as interdependent, both individually and generationally
- consider the histories of literacies and of aging themselves, particularly their rapid changes in the last century, as co-present contexts for individuals' lifetime literacy learning and practice
- recognize age as a political location like others whose ideologies and discourses need to be analyzed critically, and account for how individuals' experiences and practices internalize its cultural meanings, roles, and scripts, even as they also modify and resist them.

At times one can discern a disconnect or even conflict in the age literature between the subjectivity of phenomenologically rich accounts and the critical dimension of age theories, which tend to emphasize analysis at what Neal King calls the “macrolevel—‘institutional’ level—which they equate with the abstractions ‘structure’ and ‘power,’” over microanalysis of “observable, mundane behavior” (62). As Harry R. Moody remarks in his Foreword to Ricca Edmondson's book *Ageing, Insight and Wisdom: Meaning and Practice Across the Lifecourse*, in age studies as in other fields “we stumble, again and again, across dualities” (ix). But phenomenologies as practiced here are not naively subjective: their theoretical frameworks (for example, ecologies of writing, new materialism, new literacies) are chosen specifically to afford integrating dualities like agency and structure, aging as embodied and as suffused with ideology. An example is Ryan Dippre's posthumanist framing of agency as “socially constructed but individually enacted”; as “circulated. . . established situationally through the interactional work of actors, human and nonhuman alike” (77). In fact, such phenomenologies represent an emergence (in age studies, feminism, disability studies,

and elsewhere) of a viewpoint I'd call "postcritical," which attempts to recover a more grounded, embodied view of human experience without losing what was achieved by the critical turn in these fields. Yvonne Teems (this volume) describes how these fields have gone through "one turn away from the body with social constructivism, and one back toward the body with new materialism" (2-3). In another article ("My *Body* Feels Old"), Teems explains how in this last (postcritical) turn, phenomenology addresses this duality methodologically by creating a "dialogical space" between the two poles. The phenomenological—"felt"—body is already an integrative site of meaning, agency, emotion, thought, material being, discourse, and culture. In a nondualistic paradigm, "lived experience" is itself a concept that refers to the collapse of these analytically separable domains into a perceptual unity" (Hughes and Paterson 336). Teems argues that "the metrics that compose 'old age' fall along a continuum of discursive and material construction, and it is that dialectical space that must be analyzed to obtain a fuller understanding of aging" ("My *Body* Feels Old" 12).

Of the integrative (nondualistic) theories drawn on here from age studies, the life-course paradigm strikes me as especially apt and potentially transformative in its applications to literacy studies and composition. This paradigm seeks to move beyond separate studies of individual development and historical change by focusing on their dynamic relationship, studying "how societal and individual changes interact as social and developmental trajectories through specific mechanisms" (Elder, "Human Lives" 33). It is distinguished by its multimethodological and multilevel approach to studying the interplay between macro-change and individual life trajectories, especially as mediated through a web of social relations among individuals in different age groups. Anthropologists Jason Danely and Caitrin Lynch describe a life-course approach (compatible with many of the theoretical frameworks adopted in this issue) as recognizing "that as individuals age, their lives unfold in conjunction with those of people of different ages, and that all of these actors, who occupy different and changing positions and multiple cultural and physical environments over a period of historical time, are shaping and influencing each other in important ways" ("Transitions and Transformations" 3).

Life-course theory specifies four key principles: *historical time and place, the timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, and human agency*. Glen Elder elucidates these as follows:

1. *The life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime.*
2. *The developmental impact of a succession of life transitions or events is contingent on when they occur in a person's life.*
3. *Lives are lived interdependently, and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships.*
4. *Individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances.* ("Life Course" 3-4)

Deborah Brandt summarizes the contributions of life-course theory to understanding human development and explains the potential of this orientation to the longitudinal study of writing development in her chapter "Writing Development and Life-Course Development." Her own groundbreaking studies exemplify the powerful insights gained from examining longitudinally how



“people’s writing lives are drenched in historical particularity, demonstrating how trajectories of individual writing development relate to larger cultural and economic developments with which they meld” (“Writing Development” 257). I am particularly compelled by the far-reaching implications for RCWS of life-course theory’s multigenerational dimension, which considers lives as linked within and across the changing historical worlds inhabited by different cohorts and generations. I’ll explore these in my conclusion.

## Horizons of Transformation

I want to develop the metaphor of horizons in several senses to project the consequences of taking up “age” as an indispensable category of analysis for studies at the intersection of literacy and composition.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, I hope to reinforce and complement Lauren Marshall Bowen’s comprehensive vision of its potential in her introduction to the issue.

### *Expanding Horizons*

First, I want to add my voice to Bowen’s in urging us to go beyond inclusion of older people in literacy research and the related political agendas of opposing ageism and its oppressions—the primary focus of this issue—to exploit the full conceptual potential of “age” for expanding horizons in composition (or, as it has become, rhetoric and composition/writing studies).<sup>6</sup> Attention to older adults’ literacies and ideologies of aging is a catalyst for reconceptualizing the meaning and scope of *all* our subject matter by understanding time—or more precisely, chronotope—as a fundamental dimension of human lives, texts and artifacts, and their worlds. Age—a metric of *experienced, embodied time*—marks the life trajectories of individuals and social groups through their own niches of *historical time*, interacting with one another and with historical events and forces in an ever-changing material and social environment.

In 1988, writing about the implications of “process” as a key term for composition studies, I suggested that, in resonance with a broad contextualist pattern in postmodern thought, “[its] focus on event introduced a temporal/historical dimension into composition, even though dynamic axes have not been fully exploited at all levels of subject matter” (*Composition as a Human Science* 44). Similarly, in 1994 Elder wrote that the development of life-course studies was “part of a general conceptual trend that has made time, context, and process more salient dimensions of theory and analysis” (“Time, Human Agency, and Social Change” 4-5). But in 2018 composition has not yet transcended the limited temporal horizon of its beginnings in first-year college writing. Even in the broader arena of RCWS, it is only now that scholarship is coalescing around the effort to examine writing development—and its contexts—life-span and life-wide (Bazerman, et al.; Prior).

Lauren Marshall Bowen’s introduction catalogs many areas of inquiry where examining age and its meanings can *expand horizons* through the intersection of literacy and composition—and, in turn, contribute to age studies. I want to elaborate the expansive possibilities of one theme she identifies—“cross-generational perspectives”—that is central to life-course studies.

I begin with two concepts from life-course theory: *linked lives* and *social convoys*. “Social

convoys” is a way of specifying the idea that individuals’ lives are always linked, embedded in “the social fabric of evolving, overlapping networks of close and distal ties” (Moen and Hernandez 259). Life-course scholars examine “the dynamics of linked lives over time” by making social convoys—“ongoing relationships of two or more people over time” (259)—their unit of analysis. Social convoys are both intra- and intergenerational. Many studies in this issue focus on literacies linked in small social convoys: couples—husband and wife (Rosenberg), mother and daughter (Bean), longtime women friends (Mlynarczyk), a church-based group (Kelvie, Bean). The methodological importance of this approach is that its focus on relationships reveals how “[t]he impacts of large-scale forces on individuals and groups . . . are filtered through networks of close and distal ties (convoys) of obligation, expectation, and interpretation” (Moen and Hernandez 276).

***“We need to infuse intergenerational perspectives into our research, not only on older adults but on traditional and nontraditional-aged college students, to account for their past and ongoing participation in diverse sites of literacy learning—familial, religious, civic, military, workplace—that integrate people of different ages and temporal horizons.”***

Consider some implications of these concepts for research and instruction in composition. First, as we take up aging literacies and the longitudinal study of literacy our analytic unit should be relationships, not just individuals. We should conduct research combining micro- and macro-methods to analyze how social convoys mediate between macro-level changes in society and

culture and individuals’ literate lives. Such research would include cohort and generational effects, recognizing the central importance of the emergent four-generational family and its accumulating literacies. (See Allen and Walker for feminist perspectives on the diversity of contemporary families, especially late-life families, as age-integrative social units.) We need to infuse intergenerational perspectives into our research, not only on older adults but on traditional and nontraditional-aged college students, to account for their past and ongoing participation in diverse sites of literacy learning—familial, religious, civic, military, workplace—that integrate people of different ages and temporal horizons. The changes in pedagogy required by this insight go beyond teaching students a new curriculum of aging—an important step modeled by Hall and Harker in their article—to develop methods of instruction that take into account participation in cross-generational relations as a feature of all students’ lifelong experiences of literacy learning, composing, and rhetorical action. It means too that composition’s responsibility for literacy instruction is not bound to the college classroom, but stretches into the broadest reaches of literacy learning in communities of all sorts and ages (an important trend in expanding composition’s horizon) to include the oldest adults.

### *Entangled Horizons*

The metaphor in my title—“horizons of transformation”—was inspired by Jason Danely and Caitryn Lynch, who write of the transitions of aging as “a matter of entangled *horizons of transformation*,” referencing “the webs of relationships and possibility that unfold through lives as they are embedded in social, economic, and political contexts” (4, my emphasis). I liked the idea of

imagining the transformations that “age” brings to literacy and composition studies as “horizons” that expand, in part through fusing the horizons of different fields and historical times. “Entanglement” allows for many relationships—difference, reciprocity, competition, conflict, misunderstanding—that carry transformative potential. Although Danely and Lynch were thinking of macro-events and changes as the horizons for people’s daily lives, the notion of “entangled horizons” struck me as particularly apt for characterizing relations between individuals, social groups, cohorts, and generations. Their entanglements could be analyzed in many terms—cross-culturally, for example—but my focus here is temporal: specifically, on the implications of linked lives and literacies across ages and historical times.

Cross-generational relations in literacy learning are encompassed in what I’ve written above about expanding horizons, so I want to point to some less obvious examples of how and where RCWS scholars might think about entangled horizons related to age and time. In the spirit of Danely and Lynch’s observation, we can think of entangled horizons among generations as extending to their rhetorical events, cultural artifacts (texts, technologies, the material environment), and social worlds. So we need to reexamine rhetorical concepts like circulation and Bakhtinian intertextuality in their temporal dimension, as linking people of different ages and historical times. Circulation, a long-tacit dimension of rhetorical studies now receiving new attention as an “emergent threshold concept” (5), is defined by Laurie Gries as broadly “the study of writing and rhetoric in motion” (7): “a dynamic, ubiquitous flow of discourse, ideas, information . . . bodies, artifacts, words, pictures, and other things . . . within and across cultures to affect meaningful change” (5-7). Since that flow is conceived as spatiotemporal (4), or chronotopical, the study of circulation needs to be informed by considerations of age and the insights of age studies into the life course, different historical worlds, generational relations, and the ways that social convoys mediate historical forces.

Intertextuality among contemporary authors is a cross-generational practice, even without taking into consideration the ongoing life of inscribed meanings over centuries (that is Gadamer’s point in *Truth and Method* about the role of horizons in understanding the past). Certainly that is the case for scholarship itself, which too often (using the present tense to attribute words and ideas) forgets that their authors are not fixed in the chronotope of their past texts but themselves age and develop over time. The intertextuality of this issue’s quotations and citations, including my own, entangles horizons in temporally complex ways, if one considers the ages of authors in this issue, the dates of works cited, and the age of their sources at time of writing and now, as well as the histories of thought about aging and literacy that they evoke.

Continuing this focus on our own scholarship, I suggest that age-based differences and relationships play an underappreciated role in many research projects and areas of inquiry in RCWS as motive, object of inquiry, or problem. For example, professional and technical communication must consider generational differences and their entangled horizons in studying literacy practices and rhetorics in contexts like health communication (see Opel, this issue) or multigenerational workplaces. Intergenerational difference and cross-generational relations are key issues in studying the use of social media and digital technologies (see McGrath, this issue). Many projects (especially feminist) in rhetorical history and cultural rhetorics arise from a personal connection to past

generations through archives, artifacts, and family relationships, and often seek deliberately to make meanings from their entangled horizons. This cross-generational dimension is already evident in literacy research, like editor Suzanne Kesler Rumsey's study of her own Amish heritage literacy ("Heritage Literacy").

We can also turn the lens of age on scholarship as a profession that is constituted and reconstituted temporally as scholarly networks of people, in one form of linked lives and social convoys. We would think about graduate education and acculturation to a discipline quite differently if we articulated and enacted these processes for both teachers and students as inaugurating reciprocal, cross-generational relationships that unfold and change over a career-span and beyond. These entangled horizons are indeed transformational for individuals; but one could also examine their transformational impact at the level of cohorts and generations, as age demographics and the longevity revolution reshape their ratios, roles, and relations in the academy. Life-course theory would focus special attention on transitions experienced by scholars and their literacies as they age and move through a career. And we should raise consciousness about how intergenerational relations cross and complicate the borders between professional and personal lives—for example, in caregiving.

It's been said that it took scholars' own aging to get them to pay attention to age as a fundamental aspect of identity, and it is certainly true that older scholars like me are bringing their lived experience to the study of age, aging, "seniority," and ageism (see Elliot and Horning). But younger scholars are actually leading the way in RCWS in studying older adults. These synchronous motives between older and younger scholars—and their complementary strengths and perspectives—argue that the most fruitful path for future studies is a cross-generational partnership. It will take the transformative potential of scholars coming from different age locations and historical experience to develop comprehensive, integrated understandings of age, literacy, and composing across the lifespan.

Over the last decade I've felt keenly the power of entangled horizons across ages in collaborations with younger scholars, including Lauren Marshall Bowen as one of my partners in designing and conducting the Survey of Academic Lifecycles on Retirement. For that project I sought out several younger scholars who shared my interest in age studies and who brought expertise I lacked to the study. This issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies* encompasses the spectrum of age and career phases from graduate student to retiree, modeling the fruitfulness of this approach. Its contributors have drawn me into a kind of cross-generational, intertextual dance, as I worked from my own horizon of scholarship and embodied experience to appropriate an accumulating scholarship on age and the new work presented here. It's fitting that Lauren's introduction and my response book-end this special issue, because our shared visions and aspirations for composition—mine from the past, hers developed in work on age studies—align here with emerging studies at the intersection of literacy, aging, and scholarship. That resonance is captured in expressions of hope for the future of the field written twenty-five years apart by myself and Lauren, respectively:

*Louise, 1986:* [Composition] has undergone a sea change in bursting the bonds of the freshman writing classroom, and even the school, to study literacy throughout the course of human development and to consider all the possibilities in natural and school settings for supporting its growth. This expansion of the domain of inquiry and action opens a

sweeping intellectual vista. No longer confined to the bubble of the college writing class, we move back to watch literacy powers emerge from the speech matrix and develop through childhood in the home and at school. . . . In the other direction we move forward into virtually unexplored territory—the further growth of writing and reading through adulthood to serve a variety of functions at home, school, and work. . . the developmental orientation shifts us from a limited “event psychology,” in the words of Heinz Werner, to the long view in which writing and reading experiences are understood as embedded in life processes and their greater cultural contexts. (Phelps, “The Domain of Composition” 192).

*Lauren, 2011:* [W]e need to actively consider the transformation of literacy research that might occur—*should* occur—if we were to frame literacy studies as an exploration of literacy across the life course, including schooled literacies, workplace literacies, and the literacies developing beyond a full-time, wage-earning phase of life. We must recognize literate activity as always on a lifelong continuum, from birth to death and extending across generations. Only when the age continuum is recognized in full can we sufficiently appreciate the active and changing nature of literate lives. (“Resisting Age Bias in Digital Literacy Research” 603).

It looks like it is finally happening—through the entangled horizons of the oldest and youngest scholars, studying how age connects us across generations.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I initiated and am part of a research team conducting a Survey of Academic Lifecycles and Retirement (Lauren Marshall Bowen, Laurie Pinkert, myself, and Rachel Street, co-investigators). Preliminary results were reported at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2018 (see Phelps et al.).

<sup>2</sup>For an overview of the work of the Task Force on Cross-Generational Connections (Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Christine Tulley, co-chairs), see its 2018 white paper (Conference on College Composition and Communication Task Force on Cross-Generational Connections).

<sup>3</sup>Adults (in developed Western societies, and increasingly worldwide) now experience older adulthood in two stages, generally referred to as the “third” and “fourth” ages of human development (Kail and Cavanaugh 504-506). The new, third chapter of extended health and vigor extends roughly from fifty to fifty-five to late seventies or early eighties, although Twigg notes the distinction is in fact qualitative: “it is the onset of serious infirmity”—and the related caregiving that requires—“that marks the point of transition” to deep old age (64). (On personal experiences of the third age, see Mary Catherine Bateson on “Adulthood II,” and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The Third Chapter*.) With increased longevity, people may enter the fourth age later, sustain physical and mental fitness longer, and live into their hundreds, creating what Lynne Segal calls “temporal vertigo” (32). Together, these accelerating changes mean that “in the grand sweep of the history of humanity, ‘old age is young’ and its architecture is still incomplete; the effects of global longevity cross borders and generations,” requiring transformative adaptations in the life course (Danely and Lynch 5).

<sup>4</sup>Mlynarczyk’s use of “deep listening” (this issue) derives from a body of work (much of it feminist) in rhetoric and composition on silence and rhetorical listening, as developed by Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe, among others. There is also a tradition of deep listening in meditative or mindfulness practice and contemplative pedagogy that fits phenomenological research approaches.

<sup>5</sup>My variations on the concept of “horizon” build on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of horizon as of “not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further” (*Truth and Method* 217) as well as having the potential for fusion with other horizons (271-274).

<sup>6</sup>I view rhetoric and composition/writing studies (holistically understood) as convergent with international literacy studies, although (as in the case of “rhetoric”) there remains—and will remain—a considerable surplus of meaning in each field outside their overlap. Note that the code descriptions negotiated with the National Center for Educational Statistics by the CCCC Task Force on Rhetoric and Composition Databases for the 2010 Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) repeatedly use the term “literacy,” even though we were not permitted to include it in titles at any level. The Task Force wrote the following definition for the series 23.13, “Rhetoric and Composition/ Writing Studies” (which was unused because at that level the code is specified by its subcategories rather than a description): “*Instructional programs that focus on the production and use of writing and multimodal texts; literacy practices across contexts and media; writing development and composition pedagogy; and arts, theories, histories, and social practices of rhetoric.*”

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