

1996

Reviews


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Recommended Citation

Langstraat, Lisa; Calendrillo, Linda T.; Bradshaw-Brown, Judith; and Grossman, Frances Jo (1996) "Reviews," *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*: Vol. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/vol2/iss1/13>

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REVIEWS

Katz, Steven B. 1996. *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric: Toward the Temporal Dimension of Affect in Reader Response and Writing*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Lisa Langstraat

In *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric* Steven Katz explores the sensuous and temporal nature of language in ways that challenge the tenor of epistemological inquiry, the very rhythm of our scholarship and teaching. "Affect and intuition," Katz suggests, "may not be so much an extension of rational, spatially oriented logic as another, physical kind of knowing all together" (p. 61). Probing the possibilities of this affective epistemology, Katz turns our attention to the aural and musical features of language, features suppressed in recent rhetorical theory because they have been deemed the elements of lower forms of literacy in our logocentric culture.

As he develops a theory of affective response predicated on the idea of language as sound, Katz challenges several deeply held premises in composition studies. He maintains that current rhetorical theories cannot fully account for the corporeal and emotional realm of language. We can profit, he suggests, by moving from that logocentric episteme—which, in our scientific culture, stresses visual and spatial modes of knowing—to a phonocentric episteme—which may account for aural, temporal modes of experiencing and reasoning. In concert with this challenge, Katz asks heady questions: "What else is there besides analysis and interpretation? What else can we do with texts?" (p. 8). To respond to such questions Katz reconceives reading and writing as *performance*, and he develops approaches to supplement analysis and interpretation when teaching literature and writing.

Clearly, Katz's goals are ambitious, for he departs from the prevailing approaches to emotion in rhetorical theory. Rather than considering affect within psychological, cognitive, or biological frameworks that configure affect as an *à priori* episteme that language can only describe—not embody, Katz casts language itself as inherently affective in its meter, tone, and movement across time. This conception of language, Katz suggests, was neglected in Newtonian physics and New Critical practices which erased the subjective and emotional by casting language as a transparent means of reporting a knowable, coherent reality. There is, however, an emerging sophistic in our culture, an epistemology of probability, relativity, contingency, and uncertainty that challenges the purported objectivity of knower and language.

Katz locates this sophistic in two parallel movements: New Physics and Reader Response Criticism, which place subjectivity at the center of all epistemological processes. My word choice here, however, reflects the problems Katz locates in these approaches. The center implies a spatial, visual mode of

structuring knowledge. Since emotional response is often instantaneous, physical, and diffuse, Katz argues, it might be better understood as an “indeterminate movement of patterns in time” (p. 155), rather than as visual schemata localized in space. Such a phonocentric episteme could foster new ways of hearing the form of experience that logocentric interpretation, given its spatial, print-oriented literacy, does not allow.

These insights demand that we rethink our (often unspoken) bias against orality as a lower form of literacy. Turning to classical rhetoric, Katz asserts its value based on its emphasis on aesthetic, nonrationalist response to the rhythm of words. Unravelling the phonocentric insights of Sophistic and Ciceronian rhetorics, Katz chronicles the subjective and social dimensions of oral cultures and suggests that the corporeal and emotive experience of language is tied to temporality and physiology. In contemporary music theory Katz (who is, not incidentally, a classical guitarist) finds a correlative in the sophistic philosophy of language as affective performance. The work of musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl, for example, examines how tone, melody, and rhythm challenges our common conceptions of time as a fourth or spatial dimension, rather than a separate, indeterminate vibration. Katz draws from these perspectives to suggest that time “is the basis of the experience of language as sound, emotion a lump of time caught in the throat” (p. 176).

Katz insists that he is not presenting a theory of language *as* music. Instead, he considers language sensuous, temporal sound. This reconception of language accounts for linguistic dissonance, voice, and felt sense, the very bases of writing. To teach the aural, temporal nature of language, to orchestrate in educational practices the link between felt sense and language, is to teach indeterminacy. Katz maintains that tacit knowledge cannot be learned through formalistic rules. While musical talent—an ear for language—might be grounded in natural talent, Katz argues that it can be taught through imitation, practice, and performance. If this smacks of classical teaching methods, it does so rightly. For Katz insists that such unorthodox experiments in contemporary teaching as pantomime, body movement, dance, and dramatic reading draw on the classical traditions of performance. The field, however, has favored the rationalistic, taxonomic rules found in classical rhetoric (and other cognitive rhetorics).

It makes sense, then, that no rules for performance appear in Katz’s discussion of teaching indeterminacy. Instead, Katz offers general guidelines for fostering in students the ability to create and comprehend written texts in light of their physical, intuitive responses. Katz’s pedagogy is one of performance, and teaching students through imitation and playful approaches to reading aloud figure prominently. The social forums of collaborative classrooms provide the opportunity for students to hone their listening skills. And oral finesse—gesture, delivery, and drama—becomes a key feature of reader response. In this approach voice becomes not an abstract ideal, but a material feature of rhetoric as performance. Similarly, students come to understand organization not as a visual container for their ideas, but as a rhythmic event.

Jarring by its absence, however, are descriptions of students’ prose and music. Certainly Katz acknowledges the difficulty of enacting rhetoric-as-performance: He notes that students are unaccustomed to focussing

on the felt sense of language, are rarely trained in close listening skills, and are often embarrassed by performance as well as by the emotional components of language. But Katz refers only to the prose of expert writers when demonstrating his theory of language. I found myself wondering how students' writing might present a different rhythm from Hemingway's, Heidegger's, or Welty's. Would day-to-day, temporal classroom experiences recreate and embellish Katz's theories?

My wish to hear students' texts and voices is not based on a need to hear Katz interpret language events rationally. I share with Katz the suspicion of educational impulses to return classrooms to the basics, to formalistic skills-and-drills pedagogies. However, I question Katz's argument that to teach writing as speech is "nothing less than the education of the intuitive faculty, that *natural aesthetic* [my emphasis] that Isocrates and Cicero talk about" (p. 148). Could including students' voices, their collaborative performances, clarify this claim? I am thinking here of students who speak in other-than-standard dialects, and the ways many teachers have listened to these students' voices for error rather than for music, for discord rather than for harmony. I am thinking of the ways women's voices were often deemed piercing, shrill, and unnatural in what Miriam Brody calls the "muscular rhetorics" of writers such as Cicero. (Indeed, I find it odd that Katz fails to engage feminist work on reader response, for work that syncopates the personal, political, private, and public in insightful ways.)

Katz's argument that we recast language as sensuous, aural performance offers a new theory of aesthetics. Accordingly, style is not a surface feature of language, but a temporal, emotional experience. Given this reconception of style, it is also clear that our natural aesthetics are influenced by our experiences as members of a culture. I found myself wanting Katz to account for questions of culture and difference, to explain to us how he negotiates them in the real time of his classroom.

Katz's reconsideration of language within a phonocentric episteme is, however, provocative and timely. *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric* has heightened my awareness of the ways visual metaphors operate hegemonically in our discourse; as I write this, I see that my own critical vocabulary is very much visually oriented, and I am looking for ways to revise these metaphors. Moreover, the notion of language as sensuous, and its concomitant stress on temporality and emotion, square with exciting new areas of research into rhetoric and corporeality—from Richard Miller's absorbing discussion of the "nervous system" that is academic writing, to feminist reconceptions of body, power, and emotion (L. Irigaray. (1985). *Speculum of the other woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); and L. Worsham. (1993). *Emotion and pedagogic violence. Discourse 15*). Katz's theory also has exciting implications as our culture moves from print-literacy to a hyper-visual one, characterized by what James Berlin called "space-time compression."

Generative, innovative, and compelling, *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric* is a powerful example of rhetorical scholarship. It resists easy closure and quick fixes, recognizing the complexity of researching, describing, and teaching the corporeal and emotional nature of language. In so doing, Katz reminds us of the indeterminacy of knowledge, of the possibilities for new ways to understand and feel what's right with language. ☺

Fox, Roy F., Ed. 1994. *Images in Language, Media, and Mind*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Linda T. Calendrillo

Roy F. Fox collects sixteen essays that emphasize the image while discussing the relationship between image and word, visual and verbal. While the collection is divided into three sections stated in the title—language, media, and mind—the thrust of attention is given to the second category. Unfortunately, of the three sections, this middle section on media presents the image in a most negative light. Though Fox declares that the book values the image and its meaning-making potency, the view of image as seductive deceiver prevails.

In his introduction Fox defines an image as “any form of mental, pictorial representation, however generic or fleeting” (p. x). Fox also states the book’s purposes: to show the importance of how the mind functions, how the culture is structured, and how social issues are presented. Finally, the introduction lists assumptions about images that the book relies on: that meaning comes from interacting both with images and with language, that images can be discussed by means of language, and that images are rhetorical in the persuasive sense.

Fox opens the Images in Language section with his own essay “Image Studies: An Interdisciplinary View.” This piece examines the influences on image studies that come from science, technology, psychology, philosophy, and the arts and humanities. It reviews how central images, their examination and manipulation, are related to modes of thinking and to the burgeoning field of mental imaging. With its excellent overview, “Image Studies” will be particularly helpful to those who have scant knowledge of the field.

The next four essays may be the strongest in the book because they examine image and language from a pedagogical perspective. In “People Prose” Alan Purves explores teachers’ false assumptions about the ways their students think and reason. Purves looks at how the generally image-bound student culture opposes the literary style preferred by teachers, thus placing the image in opposition to the language of the academy. Nancy Thompson writes about Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s use of imaging to encourage literacy in her native New Zealand and later in Colorado; Thompson thus gives readers access to an unfamiliar educational philosophy and approach. Carol Hovanec and David Freund describe a pedagogy linking images and language to develop critical thinking in a course that ties writing to photography. Stevie Hoffman’s piece, “Child Talk,” reveals how integral the image is to a child’s meaning making. On the whole this section of the book seems most successful of the three in matching theory with practice and in examining imaging positively and productively.

Another solid section of the book is the final one, Images in Mind, which includes some of the book’s more philosophical pieces. Herb Karl’s “The Image is Not the Thing” warns that context must be included when images are assessed; he reviews both theory and an empirical study to reinforce this claim. Kay Ellen Rutledge’s “Analyzing Visual Persuasion: The Art of Duck Hunting” reviews many of the same problems with media images which the book’s second section ad-

dresses, but pro-actively offers an educational approach to equip students to analyze such images.

Rutledge combines Burke's Pentad with Hugh Rank's Schema for Propaganda Analysis, a system that teaches students to examine what elements are downplayed and which are intensified and to apply the opposite strategy to a given communication. The last essay, Vito Signorile's "The Riddle of Visual Experience," is a fascinating discussion of how images move from specific to generic via a culture's acceptance of and identification with their symbolic nature. The weakness in this section is Fox's interview with S.I. Hayakawa and Alan Hayakawa, which opens but fails to focus the cluster of essays.

More than half of Fox's collection is devoted to Images in Media. These seven essays revolve around the idea that images used by mass media to persuade are suspect, and teachers must train students to decode these harmful and invariably manipulative images. Though this premise holds some value, it makes for reductive and repetitive reading. More significantly perhaps, it fosters the notion that images are bad, that advertisers use images to play on naive emotions rather than to appeal to the logical reasoning faculties that individuals would use were they interacting with language rather than viewing images. For those who study mental imaging in order to enhance learning and creativity, such a view is limiting and potentially destructive. This section's essays, though individually engaging and culturally revealing, may not be as productive as the book's other investigations.

Images in Language, Media, and Mind is valuable in that it provides essays that focus on the image and its importance to composition studies. Unfortunately, the collection also fosters two visions of the image that may prove inimical to this relationship. First, a number of essays rely on the idea that individuals are manipulated unfairly by images, that images are unworthy because they aren't "text-rich," aren't elaborated on or evaluated for their truthfulness but are instead accepted as true—with a "seeing is believing" naiveté. In addition, the view of the image as media temptress also reinforces the idea of rhetoric/persuasion as potentially evil because it appeals to emotions instead of to logic. This second view is equally dangerous because it separates emotions from thinking processes in a simplistic way and reinforces the notion that emotions are primitive while logic is superior to and separable from emotions in the meaning-making process. ☹

Nagel, Greta. 1994. *The Tao of Teaching*. New York: Donald I. Fine.

Judith Bradshaw-Brown

The title intrigues me. Hopeful that I'll find connections I haven't made, a different perspective on teaching and learning, I approach *The Tao of Teaching* with interest. The introduction lays out the origin, intent, and plan of the book and gives a general, very brief "historical and philosophical background" (p.5) of Taoism. I remain interested; Nagel's intent and plan seem promising.

Nagel suggests that the concepts of Taoism “align well with current ideas for learner-centered practices, holistic views, interdisciplinary instruction, and constructivist education” (p. 1). I’m with her. She tells me that *The Tao of Teaching* is a book of stories about real teachers because Taoist philosophy stresses the importance of modeling. Again, I’m happy; that suits my notion of good writing as well as good teaching. She elucidates her focus on three teachers who, she believes, were practicing Taoist principles in their classrooms: a multi-age K-3, a 6th grade, and a high school philosophy/psychology/ government class. I appreciate the broad range of her choices. I like reading about the Tao emphasis on the importance of a balance between intuition and reason, the yin/yang concepts that can help us tune in to our students’ and our own needs and act on what we come to know.

However, I begin to feel confused about Nagel’s intended audience (to whom she refers as Dear Reader) when she tells us her hopes for the book: “to influence the attitudes of teachers who yell at their students and who fill novice teachers with advice like, ‘You have to be mean.’” She goes on to list the worst practice and unhealthy environments she hopes to change. She hopes that teachers will “realize that their work is social work and that students should write poetry all year long and engage in the fine arts as necessities, not frills.” It’s a large charge for one book. And the likelihood of “the teachers who yell at their students” (pp. 8–9) reading and being influenced by this book does not seem great. Yet, if the audience is, as she suggests, preservice teachers, I’m still thinking it might be helpful.

The rest of the book is presented as 81 short chapters, each beginning with a precept of Taoism, followed by Nagel’s interpretation and connection to teaching and a narrative of one of the teachers exemplifying the precept. Nagel’s sections have a tendency to be didactic. For “[s]ilence is a virtue,” she tells us: “Do not admonish harshly or lecture repeatedly. Speak once and expect to be heard” (p. 17). The anecdote has the 6th grade teacher blinking the lights for attention, speaking only in a quiet voice and using few words to spark student interest in a new project.

By the fifth precept, I’m zoning out. The connections are none I couldn’t have made. The practice, while exemplary and admirable, shows me nothing new. I’m not comfortable with the didacticism. If the audience is preservice teachers and not those bringing to the book knowledge of and experience with constructivist, student-centered practice, then I suggest that there are other, more helpful books. I’d propose books that give readers an idea of how one might arrive at such practice as well as the struggles entailed in getting and staying there. I’m thinking of Jill Ostrow’s (1995) *A Room with a Different View: First through Third Graders Build Community and Create Curriculum* (York, ME: Stenhouse, 1995) or Randy Bomer’s *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995). Ostrow describes the journey she and her six to nine year-old students take when they decide to build an island in their multi-age classroom. They physically transform their classroom, grow into a community, and complete interdisciplinary, self-assessed projects. Ostrow’s engaging narrative shows us how she and her students move away from a traditional model to one that seems to me to exemplify Tao precepts. Bomer traces his own

growth as a teacher, offers nuts and bolts suggestions for reading/writing workshops that honor students, and invites us to reflect on such areas as our attitude toward time. Again, while Bomer never mentions the Tao, I find the precepts illustrated in his work. Teacher-educators wishing to make connections between Tao precepts and classroom practice might use *The Tao of Teaching* as a source of discussion starters in conjunction with other reading such as Ostrow or Bomer.

I like making the connection of constructivist practice to Taoism. I applaud Nagel's choice of a project and her intention. For me, however, the intention of *The Tao of Teaching* does not square with my experience of the book. Nor does it fulfill the promise of its intriguing title. ☹️

Lamott, Anne. 1994. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Doubleday.

Frances Jo Grossman

Some books delight those of us who teach composition for the recognition and reaffirmation of the universals that we experience in our daily walk as instructors. Such a book is Ann Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Lamott, a novelist from San Rafael, California, writes of the vicissitudes of living in the world from the multiple perspectives of writer, daughter-of-a-writer, mother, and friend-of-the-dying, while sustaining the writer's attention to detail in the foreground and observing larger perspectives. The book's intensely personal self-disclosure is both its strength and its hazard.

In the vein of Natalie Goldberg and Annie Dillard, Lamott writes for writers, or more specifically, for those who wish to become writers. In highly engaging conversational style, Lamott introduces her readers to her family and friends and to the motivations behind her earlier books, including the novels, *Hard Laughter* (1980), *Rosie* (1983), *Joe Jones* (1985), *All New People* (1989), and *Operating Instructions* (1993), her memoir about mothering her son.

Lamott is most convincing as one who has been in the fray and knows the territory. She announces to her students on the first day of class that good writing is about telling the truth. "A writer paradoxically seeks the truth and tells lies every step of the way. It's a lie if you make something up. But you make it up in the name of truth, and then you give your heart to expressing it clearly" (p. 52). And truth telling, Lamott style, permeates her text. She avows that "grim and horrible childhoods are okay" as subjects providing the writing is well done. Pragmatic advice such as, "Remember that you own what happened to you" (p. 6) fits all levels of writing. Lamott takes joy in rejecting the dictates of "not telling" that many writers have been subjected to; she asserts that perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor.

Her passion for writing and truth telling is a sacred alliance. She acknowledges: “Writing has. . . so many surprises. The act of writing turns out to be its own reward” (p. xxvi). She speaks of the necessity of faith and perseverance in writing and the miracle of books to comfort and quiet as they unfold “world after world after world, worlds that sing” (p. 15).

Lamott’s response to people who complain that writing can’t be taught is: “Who the hell are you, God’s dean of admissions” (p. xxvii). Her own teaching has been in the creative writing workshop setting, and her emphasis is directed to those who want to write fiction. Part One of her text is entitled Writing, with sections identified as Plot, Character, Dialogue, Set Design, and Plot Treatment. But within this same section, which specifically discusses emerging characters, she also includes chapters titled Getting Started, Short Assignments, First Drafts, and Perfectionism. These brief chapters apply to most who write or teach composition. They speak to those real issues that writing teachers, that any writer, must somehow address: the blank paper, the need for practice, the simultaneity of work and play. Lamott notes specific techniques, such as using a one-inch picture frame as an aid to sharpen focus. And she relates the story of her book’s title when, over 30 years ago in the desperate attempt of her ten-year-old brother to write a report on birds, her father gently encouraged, “Bird by bird. . . . Just take it bird by bird” (p. 19).

Lamott speaks to the writer within each of us. She knows that writing can come from a place of our deepest needs: “our need to be visible, to be heard, . . . to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grow and belong” (p. 19). Yet, she tempers this exhortation of writers to tell the truth “because something is calling you to do so” (p. 31) with reminders that we had better not forget how to laugh at ourselves. She sees the ability to be funny as part of the clarity that writers bring to the unforgivingly complex reality of our lives.

Lamott is funny, outrageous with insult and creative metaphors, such as “A critic is someone who comes onto the battlefield after the battle is over and shoots the wounded” (p. 142). However, eventually I grew weary of the excessive personal references to disaster, when waiting for feedback by the writer’s group or an editor. Yet this exaggerated style, this hyperbole, the avowedly open: “So I’m neurotic. Who isn’t? At least, what writer isn’t?” is too intrinsically a part of the book to separate it from the writing. Lamott is the dancer and the dance—charming and provocative in her steps. Her humor is self deprecating and available for any of us willing to see ourselves in her mirror.

Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* invites readers to keep on writing and/or keep on teaching others to write. Though the material is not original thematically, Lamott’s humor, candor, and willingness to reveal the writer’s vulnerability make the book engaging for even veteran teachers.

Lamott generously provides quotations and acknowledges sources from well-known writers on writing: Henry James, Mark Twain, E. M. Forster, John Gardner, Donald Bartholomae, Marianne Moore, and Toni Morrison. She even references Samuel Beckett’s tree in *Waiting for Godot*. We also find lines from Geneen Roth: “Awareness is learning to keep yourself company” (p. 31) and Hillel: “I get up. I walk. I fall down. Meanwhile, I keep dancing” (p. 130). Her gloss on Roth’s line is to learn to be more compassionate company to yourself. This state-

ment suggests the tough tenderness and honesty underlying Lamott's advice to writers.

Possibly, the richest part of reading Lamott's *Bird by Bird* lies in her reminders that ultimately writers speak hope. In a chapter called Giving, she writes that despite our fragile humanity, the very act of writing is a sign that words carry on our hope to change things, ourselves, the world, that compassion for others is the reason to write. These verities comprise the final section entitled The Last Class, in which she concludes, "Becoming a writer is about becoming conscious" (p. 225). When her students solemnly ask once again, "So why does our writing matter?" she replies: "Because of the spirit, . . . Because of the heart. Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation" (p. 237). Writers and writing teachers already know this. Lamott's book provides an inspiring reminder to stay true to what we do indeed know, and to keep our courage in speaking our heart in all domains, including the institutions where we boldly teach. Our students come to learn to write, and Lamott helps us to remember that it is possible to teach them that their words sing and that we dance together as writers. ☺