

INTRODUCTION

Alan G. Gross
William M. Keith

Can a rhetorical hermeneutic, or way of reading texts as rhetoric, be anchored in coherent and enabling theory? In the lead essay in this volume, "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science," Dilip Gaonkar raises this fundamental issue. This issue cannot be addressed abstractly; only a close examination of current critical practice will do. Gaonkar intends to test the assumptions underlying rhetorical theory and criticism for coherence, and so his best choice will be a interpretive practice confined to a single disciplinary community; such a practice is one most likely to share a common theoretical/interpretive tradition. Since he also intends to test the scope and depth of these assumptions, a critical practice at the vanguard of this discipline will be necessary; such a practice is most likely to put the greatest strain on its underlying theses, forcing the underlying assumptive cracks to appear. In a reversal of the usual *topos*, Gaonkar does not attempt to question whether the rhetoric of science has understood *science* properly, but whether it has sufficiently comprehended *rhetoric*. These considerations account for the site of Gaonkar's critique of contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism: the rhetoric of science literature.

As a consequence of its more encompassing purpose, readers of this collection will extend to a broad constituency; it will include scholars who use the terms *rhetoric* and *rhetorical* substantively. Among these are literary critics, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers as well as rhetorical theorists and critics. To this group may be added scholars like Stephen Shapin or Bruno Latour, whose recent work is rhetorical criticism in all but name.¹ This broader constituency may judge for itself whether the issues raised by Gaonkar, and challenged, amplified, and modified by his

respondents, speak directly to their concerns. In our view, they do. They may judge also whether, having read this volume, they can continue to work in their usual way. In our view, they cannot.

A COMPARISON WITH WINGSPREAD

This is a collaboration among thirteen scholars that spans three generations and crosses three disciplinary formations: Speech Communication, English, and Science Studies. The germ was planted in a seminar on the rhetoric of science at an annual conference of the Speech Communication Association, blossomed into a special issue of *Southern Communication Journal*, and has borne fruit in this volume, enhanced by new contributions and revisions/expansions of prior contributions.

Such collaborations inevitably produce rigorous dialogue, as this volume illustrates. But this volume is also an illustration of an encouraging *topos*. For all the differences among the contributors concerning answers, there is general agreement concerning issues worth addressing. Rhetoric is the art of producing public oratory, and was systemized in the ancient world. Can this *productive* tradition be transformed without significant distortion into the enterprise that is before us, one that is essentially *critical* and *theoretical*? If it can, what is its legitimate scope and reason for being? Must rhetoric observe its traditional limits—a restriction to strategic, agent-centered discourse in the public realm? Or is rhetoric to extend its analysis to all discourse and, beyond discourse, to nondiscursive means of persuasion—e.g., civil disobedience in the public realm, the authority of the crucial experiment in science? And what is the goal of rhetorical analysis? Is it empirical—the investigation of practice for its own sake? Or is it normative—the government of practice? In other words, is rhetoric a tool essential to democracy, and are its critics its caretakers? Has rhetoric now become the new Master Trope, an immense body of theory that draws virtually all the humanities into its irresistible gravitational orbit?

These issues do not originate either with Gaonkar or his respondents, as a little bit of history will confirm. We can understand the context for these issues by seeing how their trajectory extends through the postwar period to the present day. To illustrate this trajectory, we would like to reflect on the relationship between the essays in this volume and the concerns of papers in *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (Bitzer and Black, 1971), a volume often called "Wingspread" after the conference it chronicles. This volume was

the outgrowth of two interdisciplinary conferences held in 1970, convened by the Speech Communication Association to "outline and amplify a theory of rhetoric suitable to twentieth-century concepts and needs" (v). In the context of social ferment, and (sometimes violent) new forms of rhetorical expression, scholars at the time were concerned about the expanding conceptual character of rhetoric and redirecting rhetorical scholarship. Their voices eerily anticipate the current dialog, dwelling as they do on analogous *topoi*: the scope and definition of rhetoric, attempts to theorize it, and its relationship to the polity.

Karl Wallace (1971) attempts to reclaim for rhetoric its traditional status as a tool essential to democracy. In light of post-structuralist critiques of power relations implicit in discursive structures, his faith in democratic process and in the normative role of rhetorical practice seems almost poignant:

Doubtless it has occurred to some readers that the nature of public discourse is virtually the same as the nature of what used to be called liberal education. . . . Some [educators], in thoughtless moments, speak of mere rhetoric or mere speech or mere language, as if communication could occur without a material and substantive basis. Or they think that rhetoric is limited to forms and styles of writing and speech and that the content and ideas of discourse belong entirely to scientific fields of study and are derived primarily from them. . . . I suggest that rhetoricians in the next decades can make their greatest contribution to the general welfare of the free and open society by acting in part as educators essential to the development of the public self of the individual. (9)

The problematic scope and definition of rhetoric was apparent even in 1970. In his response to earlier papers, Wayne Booth (1971), prescient as always, is aware of the reflexive problem implicit in the globalization of rhetoric:

A piece of rhetoric about rhetoric to a group of rhetoricians . . . ? Impossible, clearly. . . . I could of course begin on the offensive, scrutinizing each piece, especially the introductions, for weakness of *ethos*, or locating the fallacies in every argument, exposing the . . . But it is easy to see where *that* would lead. It would be like opening a conference of psychoanalysts with a paper psychoanalyzing each of the other analysts. Every statement would soon dissolve into the *true* reasons (hidden,

"rhetorical") why it was made: "Oh, I know why you said *that*. Your eccentric definition of the nature and function of rhetoric leads inevitably to . . ." "Ah, yes, but *I* know why you say *that*. Your picture of us as audience requires . . ." (93)

Booth goes on to reflect about the work done on rhetoric in other fields (psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy), and while calling for more case studies and interventions, notes, "There is simply no point in debating about how wide a field the term rhetoric covers or should cover, as if there were a hope of fixing the word in a right usage" (113). This view conforms to one of the conclusions of Wingspread: "*Our recognition of the scope of rhetorical theory and practice should be greatly widened*" (238, emphasis in original).

But is the search for definition as quixotic as Booth implies? In a trenchantly honest essay, Barnet Baskerville (1971) challenges several of the contributors:

Each day it becomes more difficult to talk even with one another (to say nothing of the generality of mankind, or specialists in other areas) about "rhetoric." Different groups use the same terms to designate different concepts; new terms are coined for old concepts; familiar terms we thought had been clarified to everyone's satisfaction turn up in unfamiliar contexts. . . . In light of such confusion, it seems remarkable that the writers of these position papers devote so little attention to problems of definition. (157)

Baskerville goes on to argue that the general definition adopted by many of the participants (rhetoric being roughly equal to persuasive discourse) may forestall the conference's objective, given the mounting evidence of nondiscursive persuasion:

We may be forced to the position that such persuasive (sometimes coercive) devices, though important subjects for study, though relevant to the rhetoricians, are not his central concern and cannot be embraced by the suitable conception of rhetoric we have been asked to outline and amplify. . . . It may successfully be argued that such a position makes it impossible to adjust rhetoric "to twentieth-century concepts, learning and needs," [and] that it would place rhetorical theorists outside the mainstream of present day communicative processes. (158)

Few of the participants are troubled by the contrast between current rhetorical criticism and its legitimation in a tradition whose *raison d'être* is the production of oratory. Edward P. J. Corbett (1971) is particularly serene in his confidence:

But as I study the so-called "new rhetoric," I am simply amazed at how much that is proposed as new is just Aristotle in new trappings or new terminology. The limitations of Aristotle's rhetoric are due not to any fundamental myopia on his part but to his restricted purview . . . [he] did indeed concentrate on a single mode of discourse, persuasion, but that concentration was the result of choice not blindness. (169)

And Corbett later notes, without finding it problematic, that:

It may seem paradoxical to propose that rhetoric, which Aristotle said had no proper subject-matter, has become a substantive art.

Although, by and large, rhetoricians have ignored Wallace's call for political relevance, they have taken to heart Baskerville's suggestion that the scope and definition of rhetoric be expanded, have heeded Booth's call for case studies, and have shared Corbett's easy assumptions about the compatibility of their critical practice with the classical tradition. In other words, they have conformed to the Wingspread admonition that "*it is imperative that rhetorical studies be broadened to explore communicative procedures and practices not traditionally covered*" (238, emphasis in original).

In this, Wingspread recognized that, as of 1971, rhetoric's globalization was not generally recognized. It is hard to doubt that the globalization of rhetoric is now complete. How quickly it has happened—how easily rhetoric has become a universal hermeneutic! In his essay, Gaonkar teaches us to reflect on the consequences of our disciplinary haste.

THE NATURE OF GAONKAR'S CRITIQUE OF RHETORICAL HERMENEUTICS

Gaonkar is a rhetorical theorist and critic himself, and accordingly he does not reject their possibility, or discard these practices themselves. Instead he turns his rhetorical eye on them: How do critics argue them? What are their characteristic tropes? How does

rhetorical theory represent itself as an academic discipline—or intellectual movement? Centrally, he unfolds the global ambitions of rhetorical theory as a *general hermeneutic*, a master key to all texts (similar in scope and success to Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* in *Middlemarch*). For this purpose, the literature on rhetoric of science is a perfect site, since it is the "hard" case: If rhetoric can prove itself of explanatory value in the inner sanctums of physics and chemistry, its claims to wide scope become genuinely cogent. Gross (1990) typifies the sweep of such views:

suppose we alter the judgment of tradition; suppose, instead, we define dialectic and logic in terms of rhetoric. From this perspective, dialectic and logic are rhetorics designed for special purposes: dialectic, to generate the first principles of the special sciences; logic, to derive from these principles true statements about the causal structure of the world. When logic and dialectic are defined this way, rhetoric cannot be dismissed as defective. On the contrary, it becomes the more general term that includes logic and dialectic as rhetorics for special purposes. (206)

Gross has, indeed, become infamous for a remark about reducing science to "rhetoric without remainder," which seemed, even for some sympathizers to rhetoric, to raise the stakes to an uncomfortable level (McGuire and Melia, 1989, 1991 vs. Gross, 1992).

Against this rhetorical tide (in both senses), Gaonkar mounts a skeptical response, which may be summarized in four claims:

1. Rhetoric's essential character, as defined by both Aristotelian and Ciceronian tradition, consists in generating and giving speeches, not interpreting them—and certainly not interpreting texts in general.
2. The productive orientation of rhetorical theory, as traditionally conceived, requires a strategic model of persuasive speech, one in which the agency of the author controls the communication transaction. Such a view is plausible only in ancient fora or their contemporary analogues (and not even there, if we take seriously critiques of agency by Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida).
3. As a consequence of its traditional focus on production, rather than interpretation, rhetorical theory is "thin." The amount of specification necessary for a handbook like the *Rhetoric* is less than that needed for a critical theory. Because rhetoric's central terms—e.g., *topos*, *pisteis*, *enthymeme*—elude precise definition,

there are few constraints on them. Consequently, they are open to unbounded use. With so few constraints on interpretation, there can never be enough evidence for legitimate interpretive consensus. The thinness of rhetorical theory, then, enables its *globalization*, its extension to every instance of text, artifact, or communication.

4. Globalization, in turn, is tied to a disciplinary anxiety: If rhetoric is in need of revival, that's because its identity has been erased (by philosophy, science, the Enlightenment, or whomever) and there is therefore the danger that marginality could be permanent, that is, "the tradition" might be lost. But there is no need to worry: globalization is predicated on a circular strategy of recovering rhetoric as a universal phenomenon by prefiguring it as something *suppressed* or hidden. On this account, there are many "rhetorical" theorists (e.g., Thomas Kuhn, Stephen Toulmin) who only use the word occasionally and have no grounding in "the tradition"—but we can see their work is *actually* rhetorical anyway, provided we can (re-)describe it properly.

Gaonkar has addressed these themes before, especially the last. In "Rhetoric and Its Double" (1990), he considered whether a discipline which takes other fields of study as its content ("the rhetoric of . . .") has not thereby doomed itself to marginality—since its substance consists in having no substance. This line of argumentation has its roots in Edwin Black's remarkable little book *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1967). Much of Gaonkar's critique extends what is implied (though not taken up) in Black. In particular, three theses stand out. First, Black describes in detail the turn from the productive tradition to the critical interpretation of speeches, in the form of "neo-Aristotelianism," a loose collection of critical approaches ostensibly based in Aristotle, but actually inspired by James Wichelns's (1925) seminal article.² Second, Black examines the strategic focus of neo-Aristotelian criticism. For these critics, the point of speaking is to persuade the audience, and a good speech is one that achieves its goal. Therefore the critical evaluation of a speech must turn on whether or not the rhetor achieved her goal with the immediate audience. This line of reasoning requires that discourse be read as strategic. Third, Black shows that neo-Aristotelianism is both false to Aristotle and inadequate to the requirements of a critical method. Aristotle restricts the range of rhetoric to those situations (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic) where the audience is attempting to make a reasoned judgment; the contemporary (and very broad) notion of "persuasion" per se does not seem

to be present in the *Rhetoric*. A critical method for contemporary rhetoric, therefore, would require a vocabulary which goes beyond the Aristotelian *pisteis* (proofs) and "types of speeches" to address contemporary persuasion's varied manifestations.

But Gaonkar goes well beyond Black in several important respects. First, Gaonkar deepens Black's analysis of the production-to-criticism turn by making explicit the problem of "thinness." While Black's critique was predicated on his desire for a method, Gaonkar attempts to show that this productive vocabulary cannot be the basis for a method because it provides critics with insufficient constraints on interpretive practices, practices for which it was not originally designed. Second, Gaonkar points out that the strategic assumptions built into the Aristotelian vocabulary are at odds with the critique of agency made by so many "friends" of rhetoric, especially Continental ones. But why then, Gaonkar asks, would this vocabulary prove so popular, so durable? Perhaps because it responds to a genuine rhetorical exigence: Reviving a discipline is no simple matter. As a consequence of the strategy of globalization, rhetoric, once Cicero's "civil science," now appears to be ubiquitous in modern life, as ubiquitous as community, knowledge, or interpretation.

AN EXAMPLE OF CRITICAL PRACTICE

Gaonkar's critique is not based on programmatic statements (like Gross, above), but on the practice of critics.³ An example of the kind of rhetorical criticism that leads Gaonkar to his skepticism about hermeneutic globalization is the following commentary on Watson and Crick's famous paper, "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid":

Watson and Crick devote by far the largest portion of their paper to describing their model of the DNA molecule, a static construction made credible by means of the precision of its fit, the sense it makes of previously isolated chemical facts, especially the fact that the ratios of the base pairs consistently approximate unity. But the achievement of this task accomplishes only the lesser of their two persuasive goals. Watson and Crick promised that DNA was not just another moderately complex molecule, however correctly described, but was also "of considerable biological interest." Given the ironic pregnancy of this assertion, it seems odd that the two researchers should spend so little time in its support. Seemingly, we have

only the one sentence: "It has not escaped our notice that the specific base pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material."

The answer to this puzzle lies in the rhetorical function of the adverb "immediately," really an instruction to the reader to re-view the description and depiction of the DNA molecule, to see the dynamic possibilities of an entity hitherto viewed as static. We are asked to perceive a just-described static structure in a new way, to undergo a Gestalt shift. In one sense, "immediately" is a rhetorical exaggeration, a hyperbole; in another sense, it is not. We may not instantly see the dynamic possibilities of the molecule; but once we do, our perception must be immediate. The molecule then fits beautifully into its new, more interesting context, that of Mendelian genetics. It is the fit of the now-dynamic molecule into this second context that fully satisfies the promise of the paper's opening sentence. (Gross, 1990:64)

This passage of rhetorical criticism illustrates all the characteristics Gaonkar criticizes. Gross insists that he can discover something interesting about science through an examination of the rhetorical features of its texts. Yet his analysis is so unconstrained by the tradition he professes to represent that his two terms of art—*irony* and *hyperbole*—can be deleted without ill effect, as can the two instances of the adjective "rhetorical." In addition, Gross's criticism glories in its readerly versatility; his is, in effect, a virtuoso performance. Because of this, however, his claims for the text are not legitimately contestable: they are themselves rhetorical performances. (Would a cadenza improvised by Pinchas Zuckerman be contestable?) In addition, Gross views the text exclusively as a strategic performance of its authors. But is this really the case, or is the strategic effect a consequence, not of authorial intent, but of critical reading? The gap between these opposing claims is where Gaonkar probes most deeply, running his finger, as it were, again and again over the space between a vocabulary suited to a productionist reading and the reconstructive readings of critics. And he seems to find it empty.

This passage also exhibits characteristics in rhetorical criticism criticized by Steve Fuller and Andrew King (both in this volume): a neglect of real audiences and an avoidance of the political and social implications of cognitive activity. On Fuller's account, Gross's claim equivocates between the empirical and the normative. Is it a claim about the way texts are *actually* constructed and received? Or is it a normative claim about the way texts *ought* to be constructed and

received? Not the former: it contradicts Crick's recollections in *What Mad Pursuit* (1988:66–67) and posits a reader more sensitive to textual nuance than any actual reader could be. Not the latter, because no norms are suggested. On King's account, Gross unreasonably isolates his text from the social and cultural contexts that gave rise to it. This isolation helps free from social and political criticism not only the original discovery but its contingent consequences: recombinant DNA technology, the rise of molecular biology as *the* hegemonic discipline within bioscience, and the Human Genome Project. On this construal, by avoiding these linkages, rhetoric of science tacitly supports the *status quo ante*.⁴

Examples of the critical practices criticized by Gaonkar are legion, across a range of disciplines. For readings analogous in virtuosic intent to that of Gross, see, for example, Evelyn Fox Keller on Bacon, Stanley Fish on Freud, Stephen Greenblatt on Shakespeare, Steven Shapin on Boyle, or Clifford Geertz on Balinese cock-fighting. Examples of the elision of political relevance are also legion, also across a range of disciplines: such elision is the effect, if not the motive for deconstruction in literary criticism, the effect if not the motive of positivism in the social sciences. The spectre of political irrelevance thus haunts the theories of thinkers as different as Thomas Kuhn and Bruno Latour.

REPLIES TO GAONKAR

Examples of these tendencies could be adduced from many kinds of criticism, across a range of disciplines. So, despite a focus on the rhetoric of science literature, we take Gaonkar to be raising foundational issues for rhetorical theory and criticism. Their sharp and compelling quality insures a rich variety of responses. Each respondent takes up different threads of Gaonkar's argument, contesting, modifying, or extending his ideas.⁵

Production and Criticism

Gaonkar argues that the rhetorical tradition is essentially one of practice. When theory *is* in evidence, it is firmly subordinated to practice and teaching. Topical theory and stasis theory are typical. The *topoi* (topics) provide orators in deliberative and forensic contexts with a fund of arguments; stasis theory provides them with a way of determining the points at issue. Gaonkar asks whether it is really possible for a theory so firmly grounded in practice for over

two millennia to be translated into a theory of interpretation. The strengths of a productive theory—its “rule of thumb” qualities—seem like weaknesses in a theory of interpretation. (Aristotle is one of the few classical writers on rhetoric to take a theoretical stance, which is perhaps why his brief definition of rhetoric has been so influential in the revival of rhetoric.)

In response to this charge, Michael Leff counters that Gaonkar's view is too extreme, treating as opposites two positions that the tradition places in fruitful dialectical tension: rhetoric as production and rhetoric as interpretation. By isolating the interpretive turn, Gaonkar is able ingeniously to “[establish] a causal rather than an accidental relationship between [that] turn and the globalization of rhetoric” (90). In Gaonkar's view, interpretation requires a metadiscourse that would, in its hermeneutic perfection, efface the object of study: The rhetorical text itself is now subsumed and invisible as a consequence of complete theoretical redescription. But to speak thus, Leff contends, is to hold too rigid a notion of the gap between production and interpretation. Leff attempts to show that there is a (hidden) interpretative element to classical theories, as exemplified by the doctrine of *imitatio*; the extension of a practice is an interpretation of it. This interpretive function is intrinsic to any hermeneutic. In fact, says Leff, Black's *Rhetorical Criticism* itself illustrates how “the act of interpretation becomes part of a tradition rather than a detached observation of its history” (94). Indeed, Gaonkar's own practice in “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science” is analogous to Black's: “he describes an interactive and generative network of influence that shapes, though it does not determine, the positions of those who participate in it” (93). Leff seems to best Gaonkar at his reflexive game: In identifying a rhetoric of rhetoric, Leff claims, Gaonkar must at least make his account consistent with his (Gaonkar's) own rhetorical practice in reading the texts he critiques.

In his response, John Angus Campbell agrees with Leff, objecting that “in driving a wedge between performance and interpretation [Gaonkar] disables a rhetorical interpretation before it gets off the ground” (119). What Gaonkar misses, Campbell feels, is a point Leff has also continually made, “that criticism is *itself* a performance” (119). To recognize this is to “remove the absolute barrier between performance and understanding” (119) and to espouse the position that Hans Georg Gadamer states so well:

Where, indeed, but to rhetoric should the theoretical examination of interpretation turn? . . . Convincing and persuading

without being able to prove—these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion. (quoted in Campbell 120)

Carolyn Miller responds by extending Leff's claim that Gaonkar overdraws the binary opposition between production and interpretation. She points out that none of the distinctive pairs of classical theory—performance/interpretation, practice/theory, *rhētorica utens/rhētorica docens*—can be described in terms of complete opposition: "Rhetorica utens, or 'rhetoric in practice,' for example, occurred as performance and led to performance imperatives for the *orator perfectus*, but performance includes an audience, and rhetorica utens can thus be understood equally from the point of view of the auditor—as a matter of reception, a matter of interpretation" (158). She also finds an inconsistency in Gaonkar's claim that the vocabulary of criticism is Aristotelian and the claim that it is primarily "fashioned for directing performance": "since Aristotle's vocabulary is not primarily productionist, our use of the classical vocabulary for interpretive criticism would seem to be less of a distortion than he implies" (158).

But Miller's main contribution to the debate consists in her careful analysis of *translation*, *dialectic*, *dialogue*, and *conversation* as metaphors for interpretation. Dialogue is the metaphor she prefers "because dialogue requires relationship between interlocutors, and such relations inevitably involve power" (166):

Gaonkar . . . idealizes translation not only by implying that it should be an unproblematic process of lexical matching . . . but also by presupposing that it constitutes a helpful model for describing what is involved in the globalization of rhetoric. Rather than being a secondhand translated lexicon for interpretation, globalized rhetorical hermeneutics is doubly hermeneutic: it is a conceptual vocabulary for interpretation which has itself been created by the process of interpretation. (166)

Strategy

Gaonkar has a second quarrel with rhetorical theory as a global hermeneutic: He finds the strategic, agent-centered orientation of classical rhetorical theory inconsistent with postmodern views of the subject and its agency. After deconstruction, one might ask, how

could anyone still make sense of intentional persuasion, in any psychologically real sense? He is supported in this by James Jasinski and Steve Fuller. Jasinski holds that appeals to intention based in textual analysis are not strengthened by invoking a notion of rhetorical context, since in practice historical reconstructions of rhetorical context have been little more than extensions of the textual strategies they were supposed to be evidence for. Fuller thinks that intentions are, in a sense, irrelevant: what matters is how people read the text, how they interpret it. He doubts, seeing no evidence, that the normal audiences for scientific discourse read "intentionally," and so can't see why it matters to critics.

Leff, Miller, Campbell, and Keith also deal with this issue. Leff counters that Gaonkar's notion of agency is unreasonably rigid. To Gaonkar, agency cannot circulate freely. But Leff prefers a theory in which "agency becomes a matter of circulation of influence, something that remains fluid as one positioned subject engages the work of another, altering the work while being altered by it" (94). Carolyn Miller questions the historical basis for Gaonkar's claim about the univocality of classical agency: she wonders "whether it is possible for the classical vocabulary to promote *any* strong ideology. . . . the classical tradition is far from univocal. . . . It comes to us in fragments; some authors are internally inconsistent; several 'strands' within it have been discerned (perhaps the best known version is George Kennedy's analysis of the tradition into technical, sophistic, and philosophical strands)" (159).

John Angus Campbell attempts a radical defense of intentionalist reading; he feels that the idea of agency is irreducibly present in any rhetorical theory that makes ethical, political, or psychological sense. Moreover, to see the agent/rhetor as *either* "the point of origin" of rhetorical discourse *or* its "point of articulation" hampers the critic with a choice that is both false and hermeneutically naive. William Keith attempts to rescue the strategic character of rhetorical reading without privileging them with a psychological reality (i.e., without saying "Here is what the author/speaker was really trying to do"). As with Daniel Dennett's "intentional stance" toward machines, we don't have to make dubious claims about *psychological* reconstruction in order to give readings that *rhetorically* reconstruct a sense of strategy and *kairos*. Perhaps subjects and agents have been eclipsed, says Keith, as *foundational* explanatory elements in cultural and political theory, but Gaonkar takes these views too seriously: They don't mean that strategy can't reappear in a nonfoundational role.

Thinness and Contestability

Gaonkar's third argument against seeing rhetoric as a global hermeneutic focuses on the epistemic properties of rhetorical precepts. Do they provide the critic with a respectable set of constraints? Do these constraints produce interpretations that are legitimately contestable? Let us take the first question first. Gaonkar argues that, to the extent that there is theory, it consists not of a systematic array of insights but of a set of rules of thumb which cannot be deepened systematically. Once you have penetrated the first layer of explanation, you do *not* find another set of theories to explain the terms, claims, and relationships of that first layer. As contrasts, Gaonkar cites Marxism and Freudianism. While the top layer of Marxist theory invokes "class," underneath can be found a host of theories to flesh out "class" both conceptually and historically. Is there really a "theory" of the enthymeme in the same way?⁶ Gaonkar's metaphor for this problem is "thinness": the theories of rhetoric are thin theories. This property is exactly right, he feels, for a productive art, exactly right for pedagogical purposes. But, when translated from production to interpretation, it has the unfortunate consequence that claims derived from theory lack appropriate constraints. Because virtually "anything goes," the application of such theories to texts leads to conclusions that are not falsifiable, not even legitimately contestable.

Alan Gross and John Campbell counter that the "thinness" of the theory does *not* entail the absence of constraints. Gross claims the tradition constrains rhetorical criticism even in the absence of rhetorical terminology: In *Narratio Primo*, for example, the first work on Copernican astronomy, "style persuades." We can see for ourselves that the

increase in Rheticus' conviction is also mirrored in the gradual elevation of Copernicus's symbolic status: from heir to Ptolemy, to king, to general, to philosopher, to mythical hero: like Atlas, shouldering the world, or like Orpheus, rescuing the muse of astronomy from the underworld. . . . It adds nothing to the intellectual content of these statements to present them in the technical terminology of rhetoric, the classical vocabulary of . . . *taxis* and *climax*. (142–143)

His argument does not entail the uselessness of the technical terminology of rhetorical analysis. On the contrary, as in the case of anatomy, a technical terminology both embodies and enables sys-

tematic understanding: "it adds nothing to intellectual content to call a *kneecap* a *patella*. But no one would argue that therefore the technical terminology of anatomy is useless" (153, n.1). Equally important, as in the case of the Watson and Crick passage cited above, a technical terminology evokes a tradition of analysis: even the adjective, "rhetorical," allegedly vacuous, serves this purpose.

Campbell's argument is complementary. While Gross claims that the tradition constrains rhetorical criticism even in the absence of explicit rhetorical terminology, Campbell claims that the text itself and its tradition of interpretation forms a complementary constraint. In effect, these become a set of Burkean "recalcitrances," against which (and with which) the critic must work. Campbell's example is Eugene Garver's readings of Machiavelli and Aristotle:

Garver is a deep and insightful reader, but his readings, while involving choice and perspective setting, are not voluntaristic. . . . In the hands of a Garver . . . rhetorical criticism (like hermeneutics) becomes a form of radical questioning and as such can combine a high view of textual fidelity with an expansive view of critical freedom. (118)⁷

James Jasinski, by contrast, thinks the situation is not quite so dark as Gaonkar paints it. He notes that the public address tradition, which would generally include Campbell, Leff, and Gross, attempts to ground itself—stabilize a set of contestable claims—through a kind of historicism, which masquerades as a critical appeal to context. Moving through a variety of critics (most of whom, admittedly, have not dealt with science), Jasinski shows how, on the basis of recent work by historians, a thin and flexible notion of historical context can provide the nonstrategic ground for criticism.

William Keith and David Kaufer take the issue in a different direction: They redefine rhetoric as a design art, analogous to engineering and architecture. Like engineering and architecture, Keith argues, rhetoric fulfills its purpose by accommodating itself to its exigencies: the computer keyboard seems well designed to the extent that it seems "naturally" to accommodate the data-entering fingers of the operator. The rationality of all these fields is *both* practical and deep. To recover the craft inherent in rhetorical artifacts, therefore, we need the idea of *reverse engineering*:

Confronted with an artifact . . . an engineer might have the job of making something "like it" or that "works like it." She

would thus have to understand how it works, and how it was made, and attempt to duplicate the process. (How *do* they get the lead into the pencil?) (236)

While reverse engineering cannot establish, *a priori*, how the lead *actually* got into the pencil, it can specify the constraints on the process tightly enough to enable one to say that one's solution approaches the actual solution. Reverse engineering presupposes only one kind of rationality is manifested in an artifact's design, when there might be many plausible reconstructions; rhetoric conceived of as reverse engineering has analogous limitations. It cannot reconstruct the actual historical/psychological process that engendered the verbal artifacts it analyzes—usually abbreviated as the rhetor's *intent*—and it cannot pretend that those artifacts are *essentially* rhetorical, that rhetorical interpretation is the privileged method of analysis. But Keith does not see these limitations as important—since they don't limit *practical* uses of criticism.

Kaufer turns Keith's programmatic account into a theory. His chief methodological tool, which is borrowed from cognitive science, he calls "complexity theory": "the study of the minimal complexity needed to describe a system, either as it exists in the abstract or for some specific application or purpose. . . . In a rhetorical theory, complexity analysis seeks to develop an explanatory framework that accounts for a significant portion of the observed results of a rhetorical artifact with minimal conceptual complexity" (248–249). Kaufer wants a weak theory, one that models not the psychological reality that was the source of the rhetorical artifact but the constraints that any plausible model of psychological reality must accommodate.

To illustrate his theory at work, Kaufer uses the Lincoln-Douglas debates. He interprets these by tracking their *interpretations-by-design*. These are interpretations of what the speaker could have meant, those that can be "*rescinded through alternative rendering of the speaker's productive choice*" (256). During the Freeport debate, for example, Lincoln begged his audience for time to put on his spectacles, saying, "I am no longer a younger man." We can interpret this comment culturally as a statement about what counts as being older, scientifically as a statement about what counts as a loss of optical accommodation, and sociolinguistically as what counts as an apology (as distinct from an excuse). But rhetorically we can only deal with the speaker's interpretation-by-design: Lincoln was appealing to his common humanity, and, through *litotes*, to a common nostalgia for lost youth. At the same time, he was referring indirectly to his status as a man of experience, making the most of the

four-year age gap between Douglas and himself. Within the constraints of interpretation-by-design, Kaufer builds his model of an "architecture of rhetorical design," an impressive first pass at a successful marriage between the rhetorical tradition and cognitive psychology.

Gaonkar also argues that the "thinness" of rhetorical theory issues in interpretations that are not falsifiable, or, in his weaker formulation, not legitimately contestable. The charge is serious: it means that the results cannot be classified as knowledge. Kaufer and Gross face the problem directly. Kaufer thinks that "rhetorical accounts should be falsified and improved upon"; he is certain, moreover, that his is such an account (250). Gross also takes the bull by the horns. He demonstrates that his interpretations have been legitimately contested and, what is more, his claims have been legitimately generalized by others in later work building on his. He feels that this legitimacy derives from the generalizability of case studies, by means of methods already in use in comparative political science and in sociology. He therefore concludes that "Gaonkar's criticism should be taken less as dismissal than as admonition. In future . . . the case study method must be more systematically employed as a starting-point for generalization and theorizing" (152).

Effectiveness and the Polis

Steve Fuller and Andrew King differ from other respondents in that they seek to extend and deepen Gaonkar's critique, albeit in ways he might not agree with. Working outside the tradition, Fuller plays the naif in the fairy tale of the emperor's new clothes. He notices the obvious point that the adults in the story uniformly neglect: Rhetorical critics go about their business by performing virtuoso feats of reading whose special quality is their distinctive results, and these critics claim to see something in a work—"The Gettysburg Address," *The Origin of Species*—that everyone else has missed. Then they claim that this unique reading has explained the rhetorical effect of "The Gettysburg Address" or *The Origin of Species*. Fuller points to the obvious problem with this picture: Since nobody actually reads (listens) that way, how can what the critic unearths explain the effects on readers or listeners? To Fuller, when Aristotle said, famously, that rhetoric concerned only discovering the means of persuasion, he did not solve but only formulated the problem. How can you know they are means of persuasion *unless* you encompass actual effects? But the documentation and analysis of effects is an empirical, not a normative task.

Fuller illustrates this point from the work of John Angus Campbell, who, through his adherence to a classical, strategic model, fails in Fuller's view to capture the real effects of Darwin's rhetoric. To Fuller:

it would be better to think of *Origin* as having been thrown into the middle of many ongoing debates, subject to the vicissitudes of several parties trying to get whatever mileage they can out of what the book says. In that case, the rhetorically interesting feature of *Origin* is its ability to restructure the debates in which it so variously figured. (286)

As might be expected, Campbell takes exception to these animadversions. He feels that it would be a serious mistake to avoid "the strategic qualities of a scientific text. . . . Our question is a historical and philosophical one about the fact and function of rhetorical invention, not merely an empirical question about success" (130). But Campbell insists that his work also grapples with the empirical question of rhetorical success in a manner appropriate to a rhetorical critic:

Darwin's specifically rhetorical achievement—whether one examines it in the strategies manifest in his writing or in the actual public response to his work—is to turn convention against itself and thereby change the terms of public debate. This is a spectacular achievement and it is a specifically rhetorical one, on any definition of rhetoric. (132)

King plays a different game. He criticizes the rhetorical tradition as an insider with the aim of locating the failure of classical rhetorical theory not in the theory but in the absence of political community on which the theory depended: "classical rhetoric . . . has lost (temporarily) the center of gravity (community) and the locus of a social role (citizen) that gave it vitality and relevance" (297). This relocation may seem at first a substitution of one myth with another: the ideal polis for the ideal orator. But by shifting the problem of theory and criticism from the rhetorical skill of the speaker to the political health of the audience, King's relocation does serious intellectual work. With this relocation in place, he is able to dismiss Fuller (and his intellectual predecessor, Comte) as antidemocrats substituting their own wills for the absence of community: "while Comte's unacknowledged rhetoricians practice the engineering of consent, Fuller's [Social Studies of Science] specialists

(despite his pretense of broadening the debate by including subalterns and silenced people) will act as guardians by framing the technical issues in ordinary language" (305). The attack on Fuller, then, as on Comte, stems from King's belief that "postmodernism . . . is only another name for broken community and the consequent fragmenting of traditional civic discourse" (309). Thus, King feels that Gaonkar may have got his story backwards: if the current disarray of rhetorical criticism cannot be solved by despotism, however benevolent, it cannot be solved either by having critics ally with the forces of disintegration.⁸

Globalization, Suppression, and Anxiety

For Gaonkar, globalization and suppression are intimately tied together. Keith accords this issue a central place in his response: efforts of the rhetor are effective to the degree that they seem effortless: "the invisibility of rhetoric is exactly accounted for by rhetoric's focus on strategy, which accounts for the disciplinary problem of repression/recognition" (233). To Keith, this invisibility is at the center of the interpretive problem. If rhetoric intrinsically tends to deny itself then it will always be difficult to decide exactly "where" it is. The logic of globalization and suppression—

"Rhetoric is everywhere."

"Why isn't that obvious?"

"It is suppressed."

"Then how do you know it's everywhere?"

"It's everywhere suppressed."

—does not develop, as Gaonkar seems to suggest, primarily from disciplinary difficulties attendant on developing a modern theory of rhetoric, but is intrinsic to the character of rhetoric itself. It represents a problem that will not go away or be solved, and so a field of rhetoric will have to come to grips with the possibility that it will not become "just like" psychology or physics. The worry that rhetoric is, or has been, suppressed reflects a real disciplinary anxiety: the worry that one's discipline might be marginalized or become, like the profession of the Roman *haruspex* or the modern astrologer, no longer intellectually intelligible.

For some, this anxiety gets the better of them. Those questioning the methods for the revival of rhetoric become heretics: D. McCloskey responds to the problems of globalization, suppression, and anxiety by dismissing them entirely. In the great revival of

rhetoric, McCloskey sees Gaonkar as a leader of the forces of darkness, those voices of barbarism and backwardness characteristic of the Enlightenment's worst face. For McCloskey, Gaonkar's case is half bluster, half non sequitur—and all hogwash. McCloskey finds Gaonkar's worry about the translation of practice to theory unfounded: "On these grounds no applied subject could be continuous with a theoretical subject: medicine would be discontinuous with anatomy and biology" (104–105). In addition, he finds that Gaonkar's argument that rhetorical claims can't be falsified is nothing more than a throwback to the outmoded philosophy of Karl Popper. McCloskey cannot imagine why there would be any limitations to an Aristotelian approach, and he is not impressed by the argument that if everything is rhetoric, we cannot be discriminating critics; the fact that "everything is atoms" doesn't hamper physicists. Finally, he thinks that Gaonkar's argument that the position of relativists is incoherent is itself incoherent. In a word, McCloskey has no problems with the globalization of rhetoric, *period*: "If the rhetoric of science from Fleck to Gross had to be put in a sentence it would be, The substance of science *is* its rhetoric" (111).

CONCLUSION

As the century turns and a new generation of scholars comes to the fore, it will be a matter of some interest to see whether the four questions we posed at the beginning of this introduction continue to be addressed. On the basis of the debates in this volume, we would be willing to give odds that, however much the answers change, the questions will remain the same.

NOTES

1. See Latour (1987) and Shapin and Shaffer (1986), as well as Shapin (1994).

2. In "Object and Method in Rhetorical Criticism" (1991), Gaonkar discusses the development of neo-Aristotelianism, and how it may have arisen from erroneous readings of *Wichelns*.

3. His privileging of practice over theory will turn out to be significant. Although his *position* does not entail that rhetoric does not respond to well-articulated theory, this inference seems like a legitimate extension of his analysis.

4. Incidentally, Gaonkar's practice of rhetorical criticism conforms to his theoretical views. See Gaonkar and McCarthy (1994).

5. Some of these authors have replied before, in another forum, see *The Southern Communication Journal*, vol. 58, no. 4, 1993. Of these, Lawrence Prelli was unable to participate in the current volume.

6. Of course, there *is* such a theory for metaphor—but it's questionable whether it's a rhetorical theory, leading back to issues of suppression and globalization.

7. This view does not exclude the textual violence of readings such as Burke's: "The textual violence of Burke wears a grin. . . . His readings are not merely willful, for in opening up possibilities within received *texts* he invites us to complicate fruitfully our understanding of *contexts*. In reminding us of alternative interpretive possibilities Burke does not destabilize or reduce our decisions to groundless acts of will but informed acts of deliberation" (116).

8. As we understand King's challenge, it concerns neither criticism nor theory directly, but the polity itself, not speech acts, but social action. If this is the case, it will not be an argument against him that Keith (this volume) and Gross, in recent papers, have insisted that the theories they espouse make possible a criticism that can create a fruitful commerce between the cognitive and the political. Nor will it be an argument against King that Gross and Miller have written papers severely critical of one status quo or another. King is not talking about talking.

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