

English 3844: Writing and Digital Media Guidebook

Andy Lautenschlager

2018-08-28

Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Readings	7
2.1	From “The Rhetorical Situation” by Lloyd Bitzer (1968)	7

Chapter 1

Introduction

Welcome to English 3844: Writing and Digital Media! In this class we write blogs, create podcasts and videos, and then curate all of this content on our own websites.

This booklet contains instructions and resources related to English 3844: Writing and Digital Media. Inside you'll find instructions on how to install and use Atom text editor, GitHub Desktop, and GitHub pages, as well as a few readings and a collection of audio and video development resources.

I'll add more and more content to this booklet as the semester progresses.

Chapter 2

Readings

We won't have many readings this semester, but I have compiled a few excerpts from longer works below.

2.1 From "The Rhetorical Situation" by Lloyd Bitzer (1968)

The study of rhetoric dates back thousands of years, predating even Socrates. Since then, countless scholars have tried to answer the question, "What makes discourse rhetorical?" Lloyd Bitzer offered one of the clearest answers to that question in 1968. Below is a collection of excerpts from his essay "The Rhetorical Situation".

Rhetoric alters reality

In order to clarify rhetoric-as-essentially-related-to-situation, we should acknowledge a viewpoint that is commonplace but fundamental: a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive.

The rhetorical situation

Let us now amplify the nature of situation by providing a formal definition and examining constituents. Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. Prior to the creation and presentation of discourse, there are three constituents of any rhetorical situation: the first is the exigence; the second and third are elements of the complex, namely the audience to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience. Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.

Exigence

In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected. The exigence may or may not be perceived clearly by the rhetor or other persons in the situation; it may be strong or weak depending upon the clarity of their perception and the degree of their interest in it; it may be real or unreal depending on the facts of the case; it may be important or trivial; it may be such that discourse can completely remove it, or it may persist in spite of repeated modifications; it may be completely familiar - one of a type of exigences occurring frequently in our experience - or it may be totally new, unique. When it is perceived and when it is strong and important, then it constrains the thought and action of the perceiver who may respond rhetorically if he is in a position to do so.

Audience

The second constituent is the audience. Since rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience - even in those cases when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience. It is clear also that a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.

Constraints

Besides exigence and audience, every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like; and when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints - for example his personal character, his logical proofs, and his style. There are two main classes of constraints: (1) those originated or managed by the rhetor and his method (Aristotle called these "artistic proofs"), and (2) those other constraints, in the situation, which may be operative (Aristotle's "inartistic proofs").