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Private, the Public, and the Published

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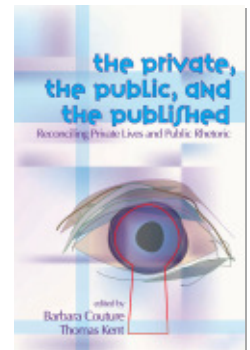
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PREFACE

We live in an era where communication is virtually ubiquitous. The joys and hazards of living in a small town where everybody knows you are quickly becoming a reality for everyone. Television, the internet, cell phones, and a host of new communications technologies assure that anyone who does not already know you can quickly find out all about you. Indeed, as television exposés and Internet Web sites with streaming voice and video have revealed, if we wish, we can make everything we say and do available to nearly everyone. This ubiquity of access to personal communication has begun to blur the boundary of the private and the public. What meanings and consequences do our words have in a world in which there appears to be little that is private? Can and should our personal lives be separate from our public rhetoric? Indeed, what connection is there between what we privately think and how we publicly communicate with others? And what implications do our answers to these questions have for how we interact with others as speakers and writers?

This anthology contains sixteen essays by scholars in the fields of rhetoric, communication, and critical theory who examine the ways in which concepts of the private relate to public communication. The first essay, Barbara Couture's "Reconciling Private Lives and Public Rhetoric: What's at Stake?," serves as an introduction to this volume and addresses one of the central questions inherent in our attempts to reconcile private lives with public rhetoric: Does the blending of the private and the public in speech and writing contribute to the public good? The fifteen essays that follow Couture's introduction employ a wide variety of disciplinary and philosophical perspectives concerning the nature of private lives and public rhetorics, but each essay in its own way asks us to consider, as Couture phrases it, the ramifications of "saying that private lives, identities, and values remain out of the sphere of public rhetoric and, in contrast, in making a private value the standard for public rhetoric."

To address the central topic of this book—the intersections and the interactions of private lives and public rhetorics—we have organized the chapters of this volume thematically into four segments. The first segment,

“Public Expression Meets Private Experience,” contains four chapters that address the complex interplay between our private lives and our public expressions in divergent social realms such as politics, jazz, and medicine. In the first chapter, “Ain’t Nobody’s Business? A Public Personal History of Privacy After *Baird v. Eisenstadt*,” Nancy Welch examines milestone legal decisions concerning the protections of privacy, decisions that liberalized access to birth control information and devices and created a shift from what Welch calls the “politics of the personal” to the “politics of *privacy*.” In “Virtuosos and Ensembles: Rhetorical Lessons from Jazz,” Gregory Clark argues that the private jazz performance, although improvisational, may be understood nonetheless as a rhetorical model that teaches us “something about how private intention can be rendered publicly useful.” In chapter three, “Keeping the World Safe for Class Struggle: Revolutionary Memory in a Postmarxist Time,” John Trimbur describes what he terms “revolutionary memory” and explains how revolutionary memory might enable us to think beyond national borders and “articulate a program to extend literacy and the higher learning” to anyone who seeks a college education. In the final chapter of this segment, “Mary Putnam Jacobi and the Speaking Picture,” Susan Wells examines Mary Putnam’s personal fascination concerning the relation between word and image and how Putnam’s experiments in visual representation reveal a medical “truth about the tempo and structure of complex bodily processes, particularly as they were actively constructed by human beings in displays and experiments.”

Part two of this book, “Confronting the Public and the Private in Written Language,” concentrates directly on the problematic intersection of private experience and public expression within the academy and within the academic disciplines that constitute our colleges and universities. In “The Collective Privacy of Academic Language,” David Bleich points out that “in the history of the academy, only one sense of privacy has existed, the collective privacy of the male group,” a group “bound together by a language few others in society knew.” Bleich concludes his chapter by arguing that this limited sense of privacy and the privileged academic language that is allowed by this limited sense of privacy can no longer be assumed to be necessary, in that no justification now exists “for not letting the language speak of all the constituencies now entering the university.” Addressing issues concerning the essay as

a genre—issues central to the discipline of English studies—the second chapter in this segment, Lynn Bloom’s “The Essayist In—and Behind—the Essay: Vested Writers, Invested Readers,” argues that the work of canonical essayists is qualitatively different from the work of other essayists, and “[i]f more teachers wrote essays, or academic articles with presence that acknowledged their authorial investment, they would be better able to teach students not only the craft but the art” of the essay genre. In the third chapter of this segment, “Upon the Public Stage: How Professionalism Shapes Accounts of Composing in the Academies,” Cheryl Geisler explores the ways in which writers construct professional identities, and she argues that professionalization shapes “the very language with which we account for our work, the daily stories we and our students tell of our progress in the academy, the stories through which we shape our identities.” The final chapter of this segment investigates the role of the individual within groups of collaborative writers, an issue centrally important to a variety of academic disciplines. In his chapter “Ethical Deliberation and Trust in Diverse-Group Collaboration,” Geoffrey Cross argues that common trust drives successful collaboration and that we frequently need to go beyond the *logos* of collaboration into the *ethos* or “spirit” of collaboration.

Part three, “Public and Private Identities in Popular and Mass Communication,” brings together three chapters that investigate the role that personal identity and private experience play in a world dominated by popular media, especially the Internet. The first chapter of this segment, Douglas Hesse’s “Identity and the Internet: The Telling Case of Amazon.com’s Top 50 Reviewers,” provides a provocative analysis of the process employed by Amazon.com to review the products sold through its Web site. In “The Influence of Expanded Access to Mass Communication on Public Expression: The Rise of Representatives of the Personal,” David Kaufer investigates another aspect of mass communication. Kaufer poses the intriguing question, “What is public expression and what properties does it confer to ordinary expression?,” and he concludes that “our increased access through technology has weakened the ties between ourselves as individuals and has further weakened our attention to one another’s messages.” In the concluding chapter of this segment, Marguerite Helmers, in “Private Witness and Popular Imagination,” describes the “personal narrative of trauma,” and she provides a remarkable analysis of several mass-media accounts

of the 1996 “disaster season,” when several professional and amateur climbers died while attempting to scale Mt. Everest.

The final section of this book, “The Public and the Private in the Discipline of Composition Studies,” concentrates on the important debate regarding what has come to be called the “personal turn” now occurring in the areas of rhetoric and composition studies. In his investigation of this topic, Bruce Horner in “Mixing It Up: The Personal in Public Discourse” argues that the “confusion over what constitutes the *personal* . . . prevents us from more productive engagement with the personal in public discourse, in both our writing and our teaching.” In “Cultural Autobiographics: Complicating the ‘Personal Turns’ in Rhetoric and Composition Studies,” Krista Ratcliffe reviews the two “personal turns” that have occurred within the discipline of composition studies. She argues that “these two personal turns, though related, generate debates with different histories, definitions, and stakes,” and she concludes her chapter “by imagining how autobiography theory, particularly a concept of cultural autobiographics, may productively complicate our field’s thinking about ‘personal turns.’” Addressing what he takes to be the false distinction between public and private discourse held by many scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition studies, Sidney Dobrin in “Locating Public/Private Discourse” argues that the reductive distinctions between public and private discourses often limit our understanding of communication, and he concludes that “[a]ny discourse, no matter what we chose to label it for the sake of convenience . . . is, then, always already public.” In the final chapter, “Public Writing and Rhetoric: A New Place for Composition,” Christian R. Weisser investigates some of the pedagogical ramifications of the personal turn, and he concludes with the observation that “[if] we wish to create assignments, courses, and pedagogies that enable students to interact more effectively with other groups and individuals in public arenas, we could begin by considering where and to whom meaningful and productive public writing might be delivered.”

Taken as a whole, the chapters in this volume define, dissolve, and bridge the gaps that distinguish the private and the public as epiphenomena that have implications for theorizing and practicing rhetoric and composition studies. These chapters also serve as an important first step toward a better and more nuanced understanding of the intersections and interactions between private experience and public expression, and

perhaps more important, these chapters stand as excellent examples of the informed, lively, and often controversial conversations that currently animate the disciplines of rhetoric and composition studies.

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