Refiguring Prose Style

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Ron Fortune, in a 1989 article in the journal *Style*, wrote: “While style in composition has experienced the decline that several scholars in the field have noted, work currently being done seems to be laying the foundations for its reemergence as a major concern” (527). Fortune analyzed work from 1965, when Louis Milic’s foundational article “Theories of Style and Their Implications for the Teaching of Composition” appeared in *College Composition and Communication*, through the “paradigm shift” from product to process orientation that Maxine Hairston chronicled in 1982, to the then cutting-edge use of “style checkers” in word processing discussed by Randy Smye in *Computers and Composition* in 1988. Style, Fortune believed, was on the cusp of developing the two things it most needed to regain its prominent role in the field: a theory that positioned style within a generative process model of composition (that is, a model with a focus on making decisions in the drafting of one’s text rather than on the correctness of the finished product), and textbooks that employed a generative model in their approach to style to disseminate the theory-driven practice.

Yet the revolution never happened; the reemergence of style never occurred. At conferences, in the journals, the few discussions of style that appear have titles that imply its loss, such as Sharon Myers’s recent “ReMembering the Sentence” (2003), and they routinely begin with a defense of style. As to the two elements, textbooks and a theory, that Fortune believed necessary for style to regain its prominence, Sam Burke Martinez’s 1997 dissertation study of forty college composition textbooks found that nearly all of them ignored the innovations in style pedagogy that Fortune referred to in favor of a treatment of style (as “accurate” translation of thought) dating to the nineteenth century (288–89). And by 2000, when Robert Connors published “The Erasure of the Sentence,” he could point to the felt absence of a theory of style as a leading cause of style’s demise in our classrooms—despite considerable empirical evidence of its practical value (118). In fact, by the time Fortune made
his optimistic prediction regarding the resurgence of style, its tide had already turned. The “work currently being done” that Fortune described reached its publication zenith in 1980, when thirteen articles dealing with “style” or “stylistics” appeared in the field’s major journal, *College Composition and Communication* (CCC). In the intervening nine years until Fortune’s article appeared, the average number of articles declined by two-thirds, and in the decade after that, the average dropped to slightly over one article per year.

What happened? In an effort to uncover some of the answers, I examined back issues of CCC for the thirty years from 1973 to 2003, ranking articles on style by research method (the various subcategories of qualitative and quantitative methodologies) and by rhetorical orientation (reader-based or social-constructionist approaches, writer-based or expressivistic-process approaches, and text-focused or current-traditional approaches). While a number of scholars posit the decline of style as resulting from the rise of process pedagogy and the de-emphasis of attention to product, there has been to date no other study looking at the journals themselves and attempting to chronicle the trajectory of style’s reemergence from and then resubmergence into obscurity in the field’s professional dialogue. What I found suggests that style has indeed been the victim of a turn from product to process, but in a manner more complex than that simple statement implies. And recent examinations of both ancient and modern theories of style may supply the revitalization it needs at exactly this moment in the history of writing instruction.

The first thing one notices about style is the multitude of perspectives it encompasses. If “Style” were the name over the door of a conference room, the conversations going on inside would be quite varied, even mutually exclusive. We all might recognize some of them. Linguists stand in one knot, arguing about transformational-generative grammar and its effect on free modifiers. Rhetoricians shout that the writer’s attention to audience is key, while a subgroup keeps offering to teach schemes and tropes in order to reach that audience. Expressivists form a circle and argue with both groups over their belief that style can be taught at all, particularly in the mechanical manner of classical trope analysis. Feminists and multiculturalists hover nearby reminding the expressivists that the style of individual voices means culturally constructed voices. Grammarians nod silently to each other, secretly gloating at how many current-traditionalists remain in the room while bemoaning the current generation’s inability to parse a sentence. Style theorists gather in a corner and dream of a unified
theory to tie all the conversations together, while empiricists demand to know what more the theorists could want beyond well-documented studies that prove success. Pedagogues, who had entered the room wanting to share what they thought was a pretty good idea they’d tried out in their classrooms, slip away unnoticed, back into the hallway where the literary theorists read the sign on the door and wonder what all the fuss is about, anyway, since the author is dead.

Elizabeth Rankin, in the theorist gathering, proposed in a 1985 article that the first step toward a “revitalized” theory of style had to be “a broad yet workable definition” (12). This lack of a common definition is obvious to anyone attempting to study style: Martinez, for instance, found that textbook definitions ranged from “style is what makes the same lyric and the same melody sound different when sung by Frank Sinatra and Mick Jagger” to “narrow definitions of style as ‘objective’ or ‘academic’” (1997, 2, 203). Rankin offers the definition found in James McCrimmon’s Writing with a Purpose (McCrimmon, 1984) as what she considers to be the usual parameters for a professional discussion of style: “the pattern of choices the writer makes in developing his or her purpose. If the choices are consistent, they create a harmony of tone and language that constitutes the style of the work. A description of the style of any piece of writing is therefore an explanation of the means by which the writer achieved his or her purpose” (8).

Is this definition “specific enough to distinguish stylistic considerations from other concerns of the writing process” yet “broad and inclusive enough to account for overlap” between these concerns? (Rankin 1985, 12). Could this definition, in other words, be placed on the door to our imaginary conference room and accommodate everyone inside while keeping out those who wanted to mix up the issues? Apparently not, for the first thing I discovered in my search for style articles published in CCC in the past thirty years is that each of the databases cataloguing the journal indexes “style or stylistics” quite differently. In a search of the ERIC, MLA, and COMPPILE databases for articles that included the keywords “style” or “stylistics,” only six of eighty articles were listed in all three sites, and all had “style” or “stylistics” as a part of their title. In addition to including all eighty articles that appeared in any of the three databases, therefore, I also examined each issue of the journal myself, adding another thirty-eight articles that clearly dealt with style issues yet were not included in any database. (All 118 articles are given in the appendix.) Examples of these latter range from Sternglass’s “Dialect Features in the Compositions
of Black and White College Students” (1974) to D’Angelo’s “The Topic Sentence Revisited” (1986) to Skorczewski’s “Everybody Has Their Own Ideas: Responding to Cliché in Student Writing” (2000). Again, it is clear that “style” as a category is very broad, and the working definition I used for this study, “purposeful attention to language at the sentence level” (a distillation of McCrimmon with a sentence emphasis to distinguish it from form), made it especially so. Thus, with such an inclusive definition of what I would accept as a “style article,” it was interesting to find that fewer and fewer articles, as time went on, could fit into the category.

Let us first look at the 118 articles overall. It is clear from figure 1 that the watershed period for the reemergence of style in the professional journals lasted from 1979 to 1985.

During those seven years, nearly half (49 percent, or 58) of all the style articles for the entire thirty years were published. Indeed, if we divide the thirty years studied in half, 80 percent (94) of the articles were published in the first half of the period, from 1973 to 1987. In the past decade, only 13 articles have been published that deal with style in any manner, approximately the same number as were published in 1980 alone. While the total number of articles published per issue in CCC has also declined (as articles have increased dramatically in length), the percentage of style articles has fallen more drastically. For instance, in 1980, 37 percent (13 of 35) of all the articles published in CCC dealt in some way with style. In 2002, 10 percent (2 of 20) dealt with style. In the years 1998 and 1999, no articles whatsoever were written about style. Clearly, stylistic concerns, at
least in the professional journal that guides the dialogue, are an obscure topic today.

THE RISE AND FALL OF STYLE

Why has the interest in style lessened? In part the problem springs from an ancient debate. John Gage, in his 1980 article, “Philosophies of Style and Their Implications for Composition,” noted that style can be considered simultaneously as a linguistic, a rhetorical, or a philosophical concept. Linguistic concepts of style place an emphasis on grammar norms and deviations; rhetorical concepts place an emphasis on the choice of stylistic devices and their effects on the audience; philosophical concepts place an emphasis on language and the nature of reality. Another way to name these three concepts—and one in keeping with lines of argument that run through the history of style—is to say that linguistic stylists have been chiefly concerned with perspicuity (clarity), rhetorical stylists have been chiefly concerned with kairos (fitness for the occasion), and philosophical stylists have been chiefly concerned with the mimetic or nonmimetic relationship of language to reality. Thus, early rhetors such as Isocrates promised to teach young Athenians the ability to discern the proper mode of speech for their occasion, nineteenth-century rhetors such as Newman and Day taught increasing numbers of middle-class university students the benefits of the “plain style” for business discourse, and twentieth-century rhetors such as Richards and Burke recaptured a lost tradition reaching all the way back to Gorgias of Leontini to argue that style was not the ability to choose words that most accurately mirrored one’s thoughts, but was instead the attitude that one brought, unbidden, to any description.

Thus, when, in the mid-1960s, the debate over stylistic pedagogies flared up in composition with the publication of several articles by Milic, the questions he raised represented modern versions of ancient arguments. Milic viewed New Critical pedagogies focusing on the uniqueness of each writer’s syntax and diction as a problem for the teaching of style. As Milic wrote, “This curious reluctance to be specific and concrete, to admit that style is first of all made up of certain kinds of linguistic units, betrays a distrust of available methods of discussing style” (1966, 129). We can see here the renewal of the nineteenth-century debate between stylistic linguists such as Henry N. Day and mimetic philosophers such as Walter Pater and J. F. Genung (for more on this, see Crowley 1986). For Milic and his colleagues, the rise of expressivism in the 1970s and 1980s
only exacerbated the trend away from style. Such an approach Milic categorized as “monistic,” a view of style as the unique and accurate representation of the writer’s creative “vision” (1965, 67)—(for examples, see Kelly 1974 or Linn 1975). Those who followed this approach (Peter Elbow is mentioned) and celebrated the writer’s “voice” were labeled by Frank D’Angelo as the “new romantics” (D’Angelo, 1975).

In contrast to the monistic, new romantic approach, Milic categorized the other approach to style as “dualistic,” dealing with style as a “manner” (1965, 67). Its followers—such as Edward P. J. Corbett—Richard Young (1982) called the “new classicists,” and they claimed a tradition dating back to the kairos emphasis of the early rhetors. According to Milic, only this dualistic, new classical view allowed style to be external to the individual, and therefore capable of being learned (and taught). The McCrimmon definition quoted above is an example of the new classical philosophy that style is teachable by determining what experts do and developing tools to help beginners imitate them. The new classicists were responsible for the return not only of rhetorical schemes and tropes (see for an example Graves 1974), but also for such practices as sentence combining and imitation (see Winterowd 1983). According to the standard version of our history, then, style fell into disfavor when expressivist “new romantics” pointed out that not all stylistic decisions were conscious choices and, therefore, not all were teachable because one can only learn what one is conscious of doing (Pringle 1983; Milic “Rhetorical Choice” (1971)—and here we see the initial influence on composition of the twentieth-century nonmimetic philosophers. In fact, expressivists went on to argue, most stylistic decisions were unconscious and, therefore, impossible to teach.

In response to this challenge to the teaching of style, “new classicists” had two options. They could turn to research studies demonstrating the success of their practices, or they could turn to attempts to forge a theory that would systematically explain the success of their rhetorical tropes and sentence combining. Examples of the former begin to crop up in CCC beginning in 1978, with articles including Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg’s “Sentence Combining and Syntactic Maturity in Freshman English” (1978) and Faigley’s “Generative Rhetoric as a Way of Increasing Syntactic Fluency” (1979). According to Connors, however, the professionalization of composition within English departments doomed the experimental research that proved the success of new classical pedagogies because such research did not fit within the English (literature) department’s antiformalist, antiempiricist, antibehaviorist ideology (2000, 125).
Instead of relying on either textual analysis or quantitative research, then, compositionists within English departments felt pressured to explain their pedagogies via theory, as W. Ross Winterowd demonstrated in a 1983 essay: “Certain teaching methods in composition . . . are widely used, but remain largely unexamined for underlying theory and pedagogical rationale” (80). These attempts at theory formation were less successful, however, for reasons adequately summed up by Mary Hiatt in 1978:

Stylistic theory itself ranges widely. Some stylisticians hold that style is totally a matter of one individual’s writing. . . . Others take an opposing view and maintain that it is possible to describe the characteristics of a group of writers or of writers of a certain era. Stylisticians further differ on whether style is the sum total of the characteristics of the writing or whether it describes in what way the writing departs from a norm. . . . Some theorists also hold that any style can only be adequately described in the context of another style. . . . The state of the theory itself is therefore conflicting and confusing. (222)

In other words, once again the numerous perspectives on the nature of style defied any unifying statement.

Thus, the standard history tells us that the decline of style in the professional dialogue occurred because composition teachers were unable to explain to the satisfaction of their English department colleagues the underpinnings of what they were doing in their classrooms. I wondered about this explanation, however. With composition changing so much as a field from 1973 to today, was the decline in attention to style due only to an inability to theorize classroom pedagogies? Might other factors—changing interests in specific research methodologies, changes in the rhetorical stance of the field—not also play a role? I wondered if:

1. The shift away from empirical or quantitative research methods toward qualitative studies that began with the 1980s reaction to cognitive research methods, together with the literary community’s turn away from New Critical formalism, led to a decline in interest in “measuring” stylistic success.

2. The ideological shifts in rhetorical stance from those emphasizing the importance of the text to those emphasizing the importance of the writer to those emphasizing the importance of the audience rendered discussions of style outside the scope of analysis.

What I found suggests that shifts in both methodological preference and rhetorical orientation have worked together to deprive style of much of its institutional authority and intellectual interest.
I tested my first hypothesis by classifying all 118 articles dealing with style from the past thirty years of CCC by one of ten broad research methodologies described by Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan in their *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* (1992): writing theory, textual analysis, experimental research, historical analysis, diversity critique, teacher research, case study, ethnography, discourse analysis, and cognitive approaches. After examining the articles, I deleted the final two categories (discourse analysis and cognitive) since no essays used these methods, and I added two categories: reflection—exploratory articles based on years of experience discussed in a nontheorized manner—and lore—how-to articles based on localized (and nonempirical) classroom practices. Overall results are presented in figure 2:

What emerges is the fact that almost two-thirds of the articles written on style were produced using one of the two methodological options that our history says were available to new classicists seeking to justify their pedagogies: either recourse to some rhetorical, linguistic, or literary theory (28 percent of all articles), or empiricism (the 19 percent of articles using textual analysis and the 12 percent using experimental research). Another 18 percent of articles relied on disciplinary or institutional history to make their point—either through archival records (historical analysis) or personal recollections (reflection articles). The qualitative classroom- or community-based methodologies (teacher-research, case study, ethnography) were the least likely to be used when discussing style. Thus, it seems at first that quantitative research methods held their own against both theory and qualitative methods.
However, when we break down the methodologies by decade, we see a rather different story. Figure 3, which charts what percentage of articles using a particular methodology were written in each decade, demonstrates first that across the board, half or more of all articles using any methodology were written during the decade 1973–82.

The figure also demonstrates that textual analysis in particular grew less popular as the years went on, with very few articles written from 1983 to 2003 (6 of a total 22) using what had at one time been an extremely popular methodology. To a lesser degree, the same can be said for experimental research, particularly in the most recent decade (when
only one study was published). Discounting the very small numbers of community-based studies, only lore suffered a larger drop in publication rates from the first to the third decade. This last, of course, speaks to the professionalization of composition as reflected in CCC. As the field matured, the journal accepted fewer and fewer articles based solely on classroom practices. This trend is apparent in the articles themselves, with pieces from the 1980s on that are largely descriptions of pedagogy now self-consciously grounding the classroom practice in theory. Thus, articles such as D’Angelo’s 1973 unabashedly lore-based “Imitation and Style” became, by 1988, Arrington’s “A Dramatistic Approach to Understanding and Teaching the Paraphrase.” The journal’s Staffroom Interchange section was undoubtedly created to allow space for lore-based pieces, but it is interesting to note that a typical style-related Staffroom Interchange, Kaufer and Steinberg’s 1988 “Economies of Expression: Some Hypotheses” is itself as long as an article and is written from a theoretical perspective. Untheorized how-to descriptions of what works in the classroom had very little place in the principal composition journal after the mid-1980s.

Further examples abound of how style articles published in CCC followed the larger professional trends of English and composition studies. For instance, writing theory was by far the most popular methodology used from 1983 to 1992, with 38 percent of all style articles published employing it—not surprising, considering the “theory wars” then taking place on the literature side of English departments. Textual analysis was at its most popular from 1973 to 1982, when over one-fifth of all articles used its methodology, and historical analysis was equally popular from 1983 to 1992, when rhetorical historiography was fashionable and archival essays such as Woods’s “Nineteenth-Century Psychology and the Teaching of Writing” (1985) and literature reviews such as Selzer’s “Exploring Options in Composing” (1984) were published. Finally, we can note the surprising popularity of stylistic reflection pieces in the most recent decade. While personal reflection, like lore, was not unusual in the first decade examined, it virtually disappeared in the second. Perhaps it is a sign of the field’s increasing confidence in its own stance as a professional discipline that articles such as “Challenging Tradition: A Conversation about Reimagining the Dissertation in Rhetoric and Composition” (The Dissertation Consortium 2001) are again being published.
SHIFTING ORIENTATIONS

I then tested my second hypothesis, that a thirty-year shift in rhetorical emphasis from one element of the communication triangle to another (text to writer to reader) meant a corresponding shift away from stylistic concerns. I posited that the rise of process pedagogies and expressivism would have mandated a focus away from the textual product and onto the writer, and that the later rise of social critique and multiculturalism, as well as the current interest in professional writing, would have similarly shifted focus from writer’s intent to reader’s reaction. Thus, by a “text-oriented” article, I meant one in which the emphasis of the author was on the words on the page. A classic example would be D’Angelo’s “Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburgers: The Rhetoric of Graffiti” (1974), in which his argument was that teachers can use graffiti to teach rhetorical tropes: rather than discussing how students respond to graffiti in the classroom (a writer orientation), D’Angelo focused exclusively on examples of the tropes employed by various graffiti slogans (a textual orientation). By a “writer-oriented” article, I meant one in which the author’s focus was on the student writers—their individual (or socially constructed) style, and the effect of particular pedagogies or ideologies on their writing. Linn’s “Black Rhetorical Patterns and the Teaching of Composition” (1975) and Raymond’s “I-Dropping and Androgyny: The Authorial ‘I’ in Scholarly Writing” (1993) are examples of the range of this orientation. Finally, by a “reader-oriented” article, I meant one that focused on the reaction of the audience to the writing. Ede’s “On Audience and Composition” (1979) is a classic example of this orientation; Beason’s “Ethos and Error: How Business People React to Errors” (2002) more recently demonstrates this emphasis. It is important to point out that while certain methodologies more frequently call forth certain orientations (not surprisingly, for example, textual analysis most often focuses on the text), authors are not constrained by methodology to determine their orientation. For instance, Dawn Skorczewski’s “‘Everybody Has Their Own Ideas:’ Responding to Cliché in Student Writing” (2000) and John Dawkins’s “Teaching Punctuation as a Rhetorical Tool” (1995) are both textual analyses published in the past ten years, but the former is writer-oriented, the latter reader-oriented. Elizabeth Flynn’s “Composing as a Woman” (1988) employs an orientation toward the writer, Terry Myers Zawacki’s “Recomposing as a Woman—An Essay in Different Voices” (1992) one
toward the text. Other factors than methodology clearly play a role in the author’s determination of what aspect of communication to focus on.

Examining the thirty years of articles, I found that, as with methodologies, though a definite shift in rhetorical orientation took place, it does not seem to have transpired exactly as predicted. Of the 118 total articles in CCC, over half (53 percent) were primarily oriented toward the text. Another third (33 percent) were oriented toward the writer, with the final 14 percent oriented toward the reader. Figure 4 breaks this down by decade.

Here we can clearly see that emphases on the reader and writer have increased during the thirty-year period, while the emphasis on the text at first grew but then decreased dramatically in the past decade. How to explain these changes? Considering first the continued increase in articles with a textual orientation even after the movement away from product to process in the larger composition field, it is possible that during the middle decade, when people trained in New Critical formalism were attempting to incorporate more theory into their discussions, they de-emphasized a strict textual analysis in their methodology (as we saw above) but clung to a rhetorical orientation that focused on the text—that is, they theorized about the texts as a way to discuss style. We can see this in articles such as Vande Koppel’s “Some Exploratory Discourse on Metadiscourse”
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(1985) or Laib’s “Conciseness and Amplification” (1990). It is also possible that CCC’s editors published such pieces in greater numbers during this decade, as readers also familiarized themselves with theory.

The down-up shift in emphasis on orientation toward the reader is easier to explain: during the first decade, an emphasis on the reader usually meant the teacher (we see this in both Odell’s [1973] and Sommers’s [1982] identically titled “Responding to Student Writing”). During the middle decade, this orientation toward the teacher gave way to a greater orientation toward the student (articles such as Jensen and DiTiberio’s “Personality and Individual Writing Processes” [1984]), and thus away from reader to writer. In the most recent decade, a reader orientation has more often referred not to the teacher but to either the rhetorical audience or a professional audience, with articles such as Beason’s “Ethos and Error: How Business People React to Errors” (2002). Finally, an ever-increasing orientation toward the writer reflects the overall emphasis in CCC on student responses to theory and pedagogy.

In interpreting these data, of course, it is important to keep in mind the very small number of style articles published during the past decade—only 11 percent of the thirty-year total and less than 7 percent of all articles published in CCC during the decade. Articles such as Barbara Schneider’s “Nonstandard Quotes: Superimpositions and Cultural Maps,” which analyzed the rhetorical use of nonstandard quotation marks and argued that students use them to introduce voices “we do not want to recognize” (2002, 188) was one small drop in an ocean of articles in the 2000s that were more like Welch’s “And Now I Know Them’: Composing Mutuality in a Service Learning Course” or Hocks’s “Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments (Hocks, 2003).” In 2001, T. R. Johnson’s “School Sucks” noted in its abstract that “this essay explores the ways students experience contemporary writing pedagogy” (620)—a statement that could summarize a majority of the articles currently being published in CCC. Indeed, it is interesting in this light to note Schneider’s rhetorical move in orienting her study of quotation mark usage away from the text and toward the reader’s reaction and the writer’s counterreaction.

CONCLUSION

So what has happened to style? The de-emphasis of the text, both in preferred research methodology and in rhetorical orientation, has led to a tremendous downturn in publishable articles on style. Style has tried to bend with the times, placing greater emphasis on the intentions of writers
and the reactions of readers, on diverse classrooms and the application of theories of writing. But the taboo on textual discussion leaves style in rather the same place as two highly political sides of a family getting together for Thanksgiving dinner and agreeing to not discuss politics: what else will they talk about? When we think back to Gage’s three philosophies of style—linguistic concepts emphasizing grammar norms and deviations, rhetorical concepts emphasizing choice of devices and their effects on audience, and philosophical concepts emphasizing language and the nature of reality—we see that all three presume some textual emphasis. Rhetorical concepts leave the greatest room for discussions of writer intention and audience reaction, and thus it is not surprising that rhetorical theories are the ones most often applied in contemporary articles on style. When linguistic and philosophical concepts of style are not discussed, however, modern notions fall prey to older lore, just as Martinez (1997) discovered in his study of style discussions in textbooks. In other words, helping students to interpret kairos, the proper discourse for each time and audience, is an important goal, but do we really want to fall back as well on nineteenth-century ideals of clarity or a view of language mirroring reality that ignores the twentieth century?

I believe we can bring back the rest of the conversation—that both ancient and modern rhetoric are already pointing us in the right direction. First, we are recovering ancient pedagogical practices emphasizing the practice of persuasion rather than simply its appropriate consumption. When we emphasize learning “style for” a rhetorical purpose rather than “style of” a studied rhetorical or poetic text, we are taking a first step toward a renewed understanding. Jeffrey Walker’s (2000) excellent recent examination of Hellenistic and Second Sophistic rhetorical practices in which schoolboys wrote, memorized, and orated speeches on a variety of topics as a part of a humanistic discourse education points us toward a way to recapture style as integral to the entire process of writing, not as ornamentation to add at the end (if at all). Second, we can tie this practice into our relatively uniform new rhetorical/postmodern theories on the nature of language and reality. Kenneth Burke, for instance, both echoed I. A. Richards and previewed Jacques Derrida when he wrote in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* that critical and imaginative literature provides strategic or stylized answers to the social questions posed by the situations in which it is written. These stylized answers name their situations in ways that contain an attitude toward them—in fact, situations cannot be named without conveying an attitude. There is no neutral language,
no “perfect thought” that our students must transfer to the page as accurately and opaquely as possible. Literature provides an especially clear look at the employment of style to name an attitude, but all language is stylized, or attitudinal. Thus we see again that style is much more than an adornment. It becomes the only way we have to name our world.

If style assumed this level of import in our thinking on the writing process, we should indeed see a revitalization of interest. And, in fact, with the proliferation of computer writing, we may be at the kairotic moment for this renewed interest. Steven Johnson, author of *Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way We Create and Communicate*, describes how his view of the word-thought connection changed with the transition to a computer. With the ability to compose almost as fast as he could frame his thoughts and with no penalties for constant revision, he stopped composing in words, he said, and began to do so in phrases (1997, 142–45). He stopped translating his perfect thoughts into imperfect words and began instead to write his thoughts. Nancy Sommers (1982), in her seminal study of student and experienced writers, found this belief that writing is translating to be common among beginning writers. It is the attitude we have been fighting against for decades, and Johnson’s experience suggests that our students’ very writing process may now be assisting us.

Connors’s and Myers’s recent articles in CCC urging the field not to turn its back on proven successes in linguistic style pedagogies; the historical recovery of similar Greco-Roman rhetorical practices; the as-yet unexamined consequences of an increasing number of MFA-trained writers (with their concomitant focus on practice and style) entering the ranks of composition instructors; the confluence of modern rhetoric and literary theory regarding the role of stylized language in naming reality; and now the ubiquity of computer writing, which encourages recursive building of text-thoughts: all these paths converging may well be carrying us toward a renewed conversation in composition in which Gorgias of Leontini can reaffirm that “Logos [the word] is a powerful lord (1990).”
Appendix

ARTICLES SURVEYED, IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER


Where is Style Going? Where Has it Been?