

## Book Reviews

Please note that this review essay was mistakenly excluded from 44.1 (Spring 2016). It was meant to be published as part of the special issue on Composition's Global Turn. Our apologies to Professor Dingo, to guest editors Brian Ray and Connie Kendall Theado, and to our readers. —*Editor's note*

### Deliberative Acts, Human Rights, and Rewriting Value— Engaging Rhetoric's Tools for Global Justice

**Deliberative Acts: Democracy, Rhetoric, and Rights**, by Arabella Lyon.  
State College: Pennsylvania State UP, 2015. 222 pages.

**Writing Neoliberal Values: Rhetorical Connectivities and Globalized Capitalism**, by Rachel Riedner. New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2015. 162 pages.

*Reviewed by Rebecca Dingo, University of Massachusetts*

I write this review amidst U.S. social and political turmoil. As 2015 came to a close there were several violent gun incidents in the U.S., an on-the-ground terrorist attack in Paris, and a political and social debate over whether to allow Syrians escaping war and genocide to immigrate to the U.S. At the same time, just after presidential hopeful Donald Trump called for new surveillance of Muslim Americans, two suspects in San Bernardino, California opened fire and shot several victims at a workplace holiday party. Within less than a day the police and media identified the two suspected shooters as Muslims and the U.S. media began trying to dismantle their motives—settling too quickly on the suspects' connection with Islamic terrorism.

In many ways, reading Arabella Lyon's *Deliberative Acts: Democracy, Rhetoric, and Rights* alongside Rachel Riedner's *Neoliberal Values: Rhetorical Connectivities and Globalized Capitalism* during these crises offers me perspective and hope as a scholar and a teacher. Crucially, both books provide pedagogical and analytic tools for understanding the multiple histories and discourses of power that obviously (and not so obviously) frame and link communicative acts about events such as these. In addition, both also highlight the hidden violences of actions made by nation-states, by supranational organizations, by local authorities, or by other powerful institutions. Riedner's book leads

scholars to consider the discourses that frame these events in the media. She draws distinct attention to how these representations are tangled within a web of neoliberal capital leading audiences to easily discount and render worthless and dangerous some identities and then valorize others. Lyon offers us ways of using discussion and deliberation not to solve these crises but to develop slow and reflective responses to them. Yet, most importantly for us as scholars and teachers, and in very different ways, both Riedner and Lyon's work present tactful and tangible methods for deliberation (Lyons), innovative reading practices (Riedner), and cogent response (both Lyons and Riedner) that can be applied not only to human-interest stories and acts of human rights violations (as their books examine) but also events such as those that have unfolded near the end of 2015.

Situating her research within contemporary globalization, Lyon's *Deliberative Acts* extends and joins current conversations in the field started by Wendy Hesford, Lu Ming Mao, and other scholars who are interested in transnational and cross-cultural communication and human rights discourses. The book offers a new approach to deliberation that is mindful of how Western rhetoric's centrality of the nation-state and its core ideals of persuasion, identification, and procedural democracy often fail when bringing together culturally different people. Using well-known human rights struggles such as the rape and kidnapping of Lybian women's rights activist Eman al-Obeidi (chapter two), the Chinese one-child policy (chapter three), the controversial case of Rigoberta Manchú (chapter four), and international women's suffrage movements (chapter five), she shows how current liberal approaches to human rights are limited and only serve to stifle conversation since liberal and rhetorical notions of persuasion and identification do not allow for cross-cultural communication. In chapter one, "Defining Deliberative Space: Rethinking Persuasion, Position, and Identification," Lyon argues that in our current era of contemporary globalization where cross-cultural interactions are commonplace, we need to engage in pluralistic thinking to reveal the limits of liberal models of democracy, be aware of our own cultural and contextual blind spots, and perform deliberative acts that cultivate moments of cross-cultural recognition. She shows how human rights are relational and that new rhetorical theories of deliberation can inform how we understand human rights not as universal, but as cross cultural.

Further in chapter one, Lyon draws on Hannah Arendt's notion of in-between (seeing and knowing events from different locations and perspectives [54]) and inter-est (the possibility of being together [57]) to develop her arguments on China's one-child policy and the missing women of Asia. Importantly, in chapter three, "Narrating Rights: Creating Agents," she states that:

In failing to acknowledge different norms, Western human rights discourses become victim-centered and retrospective, perhaps compelling because we are all potentially victims, but removed from broader frames of analysis, engagement, and deliberative action. Singular approaches to rights may serve to divide and oppose cultures for suspect purposes rather than find an in-between and recognize inter-ests. (104)

What Lyon argues is that while the rights discourses that circulate in Western thought stimulate compassion, they ultimately fail because compassion itself “destroys distance” and in doing so only seeks action (107). Parting with Arendt, and through her close reading of stories that result from China’s one-child policy, Lyon suggests that “compassion is limited for developing visions of performative deliberation, especially human rights deliberations, as rights are negotiated across nation states” (107). In fact, because the U.S. has been schooled to fear China and pity Chinese women, China as a nation has become the quintessential example of missing women in Asia—despite the fact that female infanticide happens all over the world in significant numbers. Moreover, Lyon claims that the individualistic rhetoric of Western liberalism positions Chinese women as symbols of state-sponsored birth control who do not have agency or choice. Such discourses reify fears of Communism and hyper state control and shut down complex notions of deliberation (110). Through a cross-cultural hermeneutic narrative model of deliberation, Lyon shows that a new notion of deliberation can have material effects and change the way that we in the West come to understand what may be more complex issues and thoughtful policies. This becomes especially important when human rights violations necessitate a group of people from different cultural and language backgrounds coming together to decide how to address egregious human rights violations.

Drawing from Confucian rhetoric and feminist standpoint theory, Lyon argues that through deliberative acts, difference can be generative for producing not teleological arguments but open-ended dialogue. As she states,

If deliberation is defined not as a procedure with a defined end, not as the futurist branch of rhetoric, not as the vote’s legitimate outcome, but as a dramatic event or a series of enactments, then deliberative theory focuses on the discursive acts responsible for altering the subjectivity of the participants, their discourses, and their beliefs. (37)

Lyon usefully critiques some of the core aspects of rhetorical theory, especially identification and persuasion because, as she demonstrates, these notions of rhetoric are impossible (and not desired) in cross-cultural communication.

Instead, she puts forth a practice of deliberation that embraces a longer-term process where the conditions for further deliberation might occur and calls for us to move outside of production- and future-oriented values (i.e., consensus and rationality) and toward sincerity, reciprocity, reflection, and recognition. As a result, Lyon provides rhetoric and composition scholars a powerfully nuanced theory that intermingles theories of performance, the performative, and performativity to address the complicated and varied speech acts that frame individuals within specific cultures and geopolitical orders. She states,

Deliberative acts define ways of responding to the word in which interlocutors exist and make claims. Deliberation considered as performance, performative, and performativity shifts the focus of deliberative theory in significant ways. Future outcomes become less significant than the current engagement, and thus success and judgment become less important than engagement. (37)

Ultimately, such deliberative acts require a significant understanding of and commitment to recognition and reciprocity.

Lyon's overall project is ambitious. Each of her chapters unfolds part of her theory by contextually and historically analyzing different case studies; her archive of cases is vast and spans several regions of the world and historical periods. She also frames the entire book around several substantial questions, most notably: How do diverse people recognize and respond to each other while respecting differences of being and knowing? Can citizens recognize and engage each other to create global justice, or are they trapped in home discourses, demanding institutions, and material, historical, and cultural circumstances that primarily benefit elites? How does a thinking and located citizen weigh the normative imperatives of rights, her home culture, and her nation-state to make decisions about her prospects or those of others? And, How can she do this in multicultural situations in harmony and conflict? While Lyon certainly makes a dent in answering these questions throughout the text, the questions themselves—much like Lyon's book intends—ultimately opens up additional scholarship on not only human rights events, but also how we come to understand the conditions of contemporary globalization through the narratives that circulate in popular media about how people fare in this new economy.

Much like Lyon's *Deliberative Acts*, Riedner's *Writing Neoliberal Values* offers important new interventions into rhetorical scholarship that implicitly extend the questions that Lyon puts forth. In chapter one, "Writing Value in a Neoliberal World: Necropolitics and Affective Rhetoric," Riedner, for example, asks scholars to more adequately consider and address the relationship between rhetoric and political economy. She intermingles a Marxist theory of

value with her unique approach to doing archival work. Riedner argues that archives should not only be taken as static entities for scholars to unearth, explore, and explain. Rather, as *Writing Neoliberal Values* so cogently shows, it is also important to consider what archives *do not* and *cannot* say. *Writing Neoliberal Values'* archive contains contemporary, melodramatic human-interest stories about women from the so-called developing world who, while living on the margins, manage to be economically successful. This archive is vast and disseminated; it is found in newspapers, blogs, websites, and nonfiction texts that circulate in the hands of supranational organizations and everyday citizens, many of whom seek to be cosmopolitan citizens.

Riedner's feminist rhetorical approach to neoliberal human-interest stories first draws from feminist historians who seek to decolonize archives, cultural studies scholars who explore aporia in colonial archives around racialized and gendered exploitation, and queer studies scholars who explore how queer voices are absent in archives and can only be heard through imaginative reading. Secondly, Riedner intermingles transnational and Marxist feminist scholars such as Grace Hong, Saidya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, Chandra Mohanty, and Lila Abu-Lughod with feminist rhetorical scholars such as Wendy Hesford, Eileen Schell, Roka Shome, and Jennifer Wingard to uniquely offer the field of feminist rhetorical and composition studies what she calls a "corrective complement" to the more traditional archival recovery work in our field. This corrective complement seeks to consider not only what is represented and said in these archives, but also what is left unsaid or underrepresented. Of equal importance, Riedner also asks *why* aspects of the archives are empty. To do this work, Riedner distinctively assembles her archive along a specific thread of repeating and circulating stories about entrepreneurial women from across the globe who are able to overcome cultural-political obstacles and find economic independence. The subjects of these stories are always self-reliant women who enter regional and global markets despite any economic or political unrest of her locale. In her assemblage, Riedner offers feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition a new method of archival research that gives the researcher the agency to assemble her own collection and then also imagine the voices of those marginalized or not represented in those archives: in this case, poor women who live on the margins of society. She also reminds us of the importance of addressing economic and geopolitical contexts in our teaching and writing.

The stories in *Writing Neoliberal Values*, Riedner first demonstrates, are persuasive texts where readers are called to uncritically celebrate the neoliberal promise that exceptional, motivated people (mostly impoverished women) can find their way out of poverty. In chapter two, "Transnational Ghosts: Regimes of Friendship, Neoliberal Abandonment, and Discourses of Mourning" Riedner begins to unpack her archive. She looks to the death of a worker who died while

installing windows on George Washington University's campus. The worker was a subcontracted immigrant laborer whose death was only mentioned in passing in university communications. Riedner uses this story to show how the "absences in discourses of mourning . . . suggest transnational regimes of abandonment and violence—the movement of the biopolitical into the necropolitical" (35). These absences provide Riedner moments to consider other discursive associations.

As a result, Riedner argues throughout her other chapters that such human-interest stories, as they narrate affirmative stories where old wrongs are righted by extending neoliberal capitalism to undeveloped places, participate in a rhetorical process of *forgetting*; they obfuscate the hidden and unpaid gendered labor, they ignore moments of gendered exploitation, and they only see gendered violence as intimate or cultural, not economic. Moreover, they exclude and ignore the fact that neoliberalism is gendered and, in doing so, abandon the evidence that poverty and violence persist beneath the surface of neoliberal subjectivity. These stories, as Riedner shows, tell us more about how neoliberal political economic values are written into mundane texts than they do about the actual lives of the women the stories depict. This is most clearly shown in chapter four "Writing Women's Capacities in Cape Town's Urban Gardens: Gendered Survival Practices and Transnational Feminist Literacies" where Riedner looks to what are often represented as insignificant economic activities in human-interest stories—such as gardening—and suggests that stories of these seemingly small activities can generate "a robust analysis of gendered local and global power . . . that [operate] in ordinary, everyday contexts" (85). Carefully reading her archive of human-interest stories about poor women's informal economic labor in gardens and their coalition with other poor women, Riedner shows how these activities trump the structural adjustments and neoliberal policies of South Africa.

The second contribution Riedner offers feminist rhetoric and composition scholarship is her attention to the gaps and forgotten parts of the stories she analyzes. It is up to the feminist scholar to compose these stories of violence that are hidden, hinted at, or seemingly forgotten. Throughout the book, Riedner practices this sort of composing. For example, in one archival case found in chapter three, "Lives of Infamous Women: Gender, Political Economy, Nation State Power, and Persuasion in the Neoliberal World," Riedner rhetorically examines the story of a young woman from Kenya, Ms. Koya, who chooses to be part of a government-led intervention program for sex workers to leave sex work. Ms. Koya's story ends positively as she is now gainfully employed as a peer educator who encourages women to leave sex work as she did. But, as Riedner reveals, there are bits of text and gaps in how Ms. Koya's story is told that hint at structural violence. Through her new form of rhetorical archival

reading, Riedner shows how within the stories about Ms. Koya that circulated among UN documents, international online HIV/AIDS news services, and PlusNews, are hints at her failure to convince many women to leave the trade. It is in this small bit of text—the women we do not hear about—that Riedner finds important rhetorical archival work needs to be done. She argues that stories like Ms. Koya's warrant deeper consideration because the sensations they evoke, and the melodrama they narrate, celebrate the neoliberal marketization of individuals and lead audiences to forget how structural violence frames women's decisions to continue working in the sex trade. As a result, stories of unsuccessful women, or women who refuse (intentionally and otherwise) to engage in neoliberal capital are left silenced by this archive. It is by paying attention to these exclusions that Riedner creates a new imagined archive full of bits and pieces of background texts. This approach to archival research invites feminist scholars to use the tools of rhetorical analysis and transnational feminism to explore what neoliberal texts do not say and then to write that story that is not obviously present. Ultimately, *Writing Neoliberal Values* gives us a new method for archival research where feminist rhetorical scholars revisualize archives using reading practices attuned to how the wider contexts of gendered violence—economic, political, cultural, and others—are absent yet very present in the stories we read. For Riedner, this method of rhetorical reading must become part of our feminist rhetorical and composing practices so that we can critically imagine what cannot be verified in archives as a feminist response to neoliberal violence.

At the heart of both these books lies concerns about how we, as rhetorical and composition theorists, might reinvent the tools and texts of rhetoric to create global justice. Both turn to feminist and critical theory as well as cultural studies (specifically Arendt and Marx) for guidance in how to open up rhetorical studies and for creating new ways of reading/interpreting. Likewise, both are usefully interdisciplinary and, as a result, demonstrate the value of engaging with a range of scholarship and archives. Both also confront the injustice, violence, and communicative rifts caused by contemporary globalization. Lyon addresses the plethora of human rights violations that are seen and addressed across cultures; she asks how, given the cross-cultural context of human rights deliberations, might we develop multiple ways of responding to them—ways that are mindful and critical of our own cultural biases. Much like Riedner, then, Lyon is concerned with how citizens read, understand, and act upon human rights and acts of violence. Both Riedner and Lyon ask that we surpass our home contexts (our institutions, economic realities, histories, and cultures) to see and engage with each other cross-culturally and transform how we understand and, ultimately, create global justice. For Riedner, looking at an archive of human-interest stories about people from the Global South

that circulate in the West, this means expanding the very definition of archive: looking not only at what is collected but also who and what is left out. She sees this archive of texts as fraught with violence. Thus, Riedner seeks to develop cogent reading and literacy practices attuned to how the economic, political, and cultural contexts of neoliberalism are violent and are very present in archives containing stories about successful women who appear to embrace neoliberal values and become independent economic actors. Riedner suggests, however, that we pay attention not only to the primary stories in the archive (i.e., the so-called successful women) but also, more importantly, to the bits and pieces of stories that frame an archive and are not fully explored—those people who live on the margins of the margins and who actually (and within the stories) become necropolitical subjects abandoned to literal and political-economic gendered violence and death.

Riedner's astute observation and Lyon's deep and complex analyses of a variety of human rights events both enable us to see what Robert Nixon calls the "slow violence" (qtd. in Balkan) that occurs out of sight—the violence that is not spectacular—and to recognize that this violence is, in fact, intensified by the recirculation of spectacular and taken-for-granted stories such as those about the San Bernardino suspects; for the very stories that circulate and connect the suspects to Islamic terrorism are what create slow violence for other Syrians escaping political violence. And it is due to these very grounded examples and in-depth and critical analyses that I will be teaching both Lyon's and Riedner's work this semester in my graduate class, "Rhetoric and Transnational Studies." Both books demonstrate another example of how to do rhetorical theory in an age of contemporary globalization—and in an era when information is so quickly exchanged and people attempt to communicate about and understand violence and inequality. I also plan to integrate portions of their work into my upper level "Writing Human Rights" course (a course I hope to teach again one day) because both books demonstrate the slow work of theory and analysis and how we, as teachers and students, do not have enough information to solve human rights crises and as a result must be mindful about the stories we circulate and tell about such events. These texts show how human rights events and human-interest stories are complexly rhetorical and as such they require careful reading and deliberation so that we do not participate in the slow violence of representation and we do not discount other ways of knowing, processing, and responding to spectacular and compelling stories and texts.

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## Works Cited

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