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Journal #9

Week 14  
Book Review

I presented my book review last week. I read The Public work of rhetoric  
citizen-scholars and civic engagement, which was edited by John M. Ackerman and David J. Coogan. I chose it because I thought it might help me with my research project. I found articles in it that I had read, so I figured it was an edited collection that would be useful to me as I continue to search for sources for my final project. As I read through it I found that the first section, “Rhetoric Revealed” was the most helpful to me. This was due in part to the fact that I enjoyed the ideas that rhetoric needs to be done “out there,” which was mentioned in the introduction. Other suggestions in the introduction were the need to have a different professional disposition, shedding of adornment of academics, new participatory and analytic tools, and to ground rhetoric in the conception of public need. I agree with these four, but have some trouble with grounding it in public need. I’m sure this is a result of the class, but who determines what is needed, and who needs it, as well as who decides what should/could be done as a result?

There’s a push for scholars to allow rhetoric to go public, which made me question what that means. Certainly, people are aware of rhetoric, and it seems as though they are as weary of it as they were thousands of years ago due to its constant association with politics. As I understand it, the push for rhetoric to go out there is an attempt to achieve a new disciplinary identity. I grapple with this a bit because of the amount of time I spend on theory. At which point are you ready to jump from theory to application? When do you know you’re ready to go out there? I understand the need to study theory. I actually enjoy it, because I feel as though I know so little about rhetoric despite being in the PhD program, but the chapter by Ackerman “Rhetorical Engagement in the cultural economies of cities” pushed me to think about what rhetoric out there means. Ackerman focuses on

civic engagement, which he defines as an attempt to accurately name and understand the “rhetorical investments of citizen-scholar in public life” in cities. He doesn’t clearly argue that rhetoric should enjoy the prominence in public life it once did, but he does suggest that an attempt to bring rhetoric back to the public would be beneficial to both the scholars in the field and the public. His solution is more involved service learning courses that look at the economic situation of the city, as opposed to internships that mask as service learning courses. I don’t have a great deal of experience with service learning, though I do know that the description service learning is problematic for some. The book wasn’t as helpful as I thought it would be, but it did force me to rethink how it is that I’d approach my final paper. It also helped narrow the scope of the search for sources, so while it wasn’t the be all source of information I thought it would be it did help to point me in the right direction.