Introduction

Marking Trails in Studies of Race, Gender, and Culture

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> Only the Black Woman can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*."
>
> —Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*

A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE

In 1892 Anna Julia Cooper issued a bold challenge when she invited her audience to imagine African American women as trailblazers for their race, as intellectual scouts audaciously dedicated to carving out pathways to full participation in American society. Moreover, she invited all to consider that, as those held in lowest esteem, African American women inevitably foretell the entry of their ethnic group as a whole into "civilized" conversations and onto the world's stage. She envisioned a place where her talents and the talents of those like her (i.e., African American women and men) could have equal authority and agency in the human enterprise of making a better world.

Since Cooper's publication of *A Voice from the South*, there have indeed been increased educational opportunities for African Americans and other marginalized groups as well. These opportunities have

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enabled formerly disfranchised people of various identities to enter academic circles and participate more actively as well-trained researchers and scholars. We have worked for and claimed the authority to acquire and use academic credentials, and even harder in many ways to do so as ourselves—as racialized, gendered, sexualized, and culturally distinctive human beings, rather than as mirrors, imitators, shadows, or other categorizations that might suggest apparently prescribed models of "academic professional" and indeed "academic work." Entering this world, however, has not been simple. As evidenced by this volume, over the generations, we have faced challenges on several fronts in the effort to operate with agency, autonomy, authority, professional respect, and also to get the work done that we feel impassioned to do.

One hundred years ago, William E. B. DuBois, a contemporary of Cooper's, articulated the basic dilemma in his often-quoted statement about the peculiar sensation of "double-consciousness," "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 5). DuBois brought to bolder relief the longing of African American men for "self-conscious manhood" and the persistent barriers they faced in their desires to exhibit a sense of agency and authority "without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (5).

While DuBois's focus was on African American men and the social order more generally, the message is no less meaningful for a full range of individuals in academe (African American scholars included) who have faced the pulls and tares of being both scholar and Other—racialized, gendered, acculturated beings amid discourses where dominant social and political forces are privileged to ignore and disregard us and our work with the same type of amused contempt and pity articulated by DuBois in 1903. Being different with regard to race, gender, and culture, and/or choosing focal points for research, scholarship, and teaching that go against the grain of academic traditions with regard to these same types of factors has been and continues to be a story of resistance and struggle.

In 1984, eighty-one years after *Souls of Black Folk*, bell hooks rearticulated the dilemma for yet another generation as she sought to make a place for the full participation of people who continue to be deemed marginal:

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . . . Living as we did–on the edge—we devel-

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> oped a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. (*Feminist Theory*, Preface)

Profiting from well over a century of experience, hooks focused on the distinctive variety of agency and authority that marginality enables rather than constrains. She provided a springboard for seeing the two-ness as both challenge and opportunity, making more visible yet another challenge that remained unacknowledged, the need for an ongoing "public" awareness of an ongoing "private" understanding.

Typically, we have positioned academic discourses in the realm of public discourses, highlighting abstracted, objectified, and dispassionate voices as most valuable. In the schema of private, social, and institutional discourses, academic work operates most vibrantly within the institutional realm, relegating the individual and even social experience of academic work as private—not institutional, not public, not scholarly. The peculiarities of either personal or social experience, therefore, are typically cast as not academically salient, interesting, or consequential, and thereby institutionally inappropriate. Traditionally, personal and social peculiarities exist below the waterline, with only the sanitized tip of the iceberg viewable or valuable. Out of sight, out of the purview of a more deliberately "public" awareness, the desire to incorporate such views and experiences into knowledge-making or policy-making schemata poses a challenge.

In the ongoing evolution of resistance and struggle, with this volume we join those who want to recognize, not only the artificiality of public-private dichotomies as demonstrated, for example, through feminist analyses of public and private spheres (Fraser 1989 and 1997; Ryan 1990), but also to recognize that dualities (two-ness, double-consciousness, margin-center relationships) are more often than not multiplicities. Our sociocultural environment is endowed by the impacts and consequences of complex histories, including the implications of race, gender, culture, sexuality, etc. This type of contemporary scholarship embraces the value added in an accounting of differences in specific contexts, and particularly the intersection of differences (see, for example, the work of Kimberle Crenshaw (1995) and others in

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critical race theory). Theoretical perspectives have evolved, in fact, in ways that permit a reimagining, not simply of when and where we might enter disciplinary space, but how.

Using the idea of "calling cards" as a metaphor (see the explanation in the preface), we have the option of presenting ourselves in terms of disciplinary values (as the "Americans" in DuBois's terms), as people with politicized interests (by our focus on race, gender, class, culture, sexuality, and other intersections), and also as participants in academic circles who, given the merging of public and private discourses, assert more forthrightly that none of us, regardless of our personal identities, set aside ideological assumptions when we participate in academic enterprises. None of us are really objective in our knowledge-making work; all of us are stakeholders of one sort or another in the work; all have beliefs, presumptions, and alliances that shape and direct the work; and the knowledge that we make has potential for social and political consequences. What has become more visible, therefore, is that in the case of traditional academic values where ideologies are naturalized, ideology goes unnoticed and uninterrogated. In contrast, when ideologies are against the grain of traditional values, they are deemed problematic, contentious, or even "un"-natural. Studies of race, gender, and culture have emerged from value sets that were not traditionally naturalized within academic constructs, such that engaging in such studies politicizes both the work done and the people who do it.

This ability of researchers and scholars to acknowledge disciplinary values, politicized interests, and ideological assumptions as part of public academic engagement represents a paradigmatic shift in scholarly practices. The change not only shifts who enters the conversation when and how, but also the qualities of the discourse itself as the conversations make room for participation in more inclusive terms. This latter shift is toward dialogues that operate more freely as a process of interchange rather than as a core process for acculturation or indoctrination. The task, however, is still the task of joining ongoing worldly conversations. The twist, as suggested by this volume as one example, is in having the privilege of envisioning such conversations as dynamic rather than static. As Kenneth Burke suggests in *A Grammar of Motives* (1969), we reset the fidelity of the scene, modifying the arrangements and the terms of engagement in order to make a more accommodating space for qualitative differences.

In *Calling Cards*, a volume deliberately and explicitly centered in studies of race, gender, and culture, the mandate is to claim the authority to enter worldly conversations and to claim an equal authority to

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bring in with us by whatever pathways we have followed the interests and concerns that have formed along the way. We claim the right to narrate our peculiar experiences, to situate them within larger social frameworks, and to enter by these terms into institutionalized discourses, whether those discourses have been designed with our viewpoints in mind or not. The ongoing need is for a public acknowledgment that individual and social experiences are necessary and vital dimensions of the wholeness of academic enterprises. We present our various perspectives, therefore, in this textured way, understanding that our own ability to thrive as productive academic professionals and the capacity of academics in general to sustain excellence depend on an ongoing public awareness of the multidimensional realities of our work and the separations that continue to exist between margin and center.

MAPPING A PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY

In my own work, I view forbears such as Cooper and DuBois, and a legion of others, as having established a legacy of trailblazing, entering uncharted spaces and raising voices of resistance to hegemonic practices. As those of us in this volume move forward with our own work, my view is that we must learn from prior experiences and insights just as those after us may learn from us. Learning well, however, is tied to recovering more fully articulated accounts of the work and from the privilege of thinking about these stories of achievement in the company of others, not just by ourselves in isolated private ways, with the goal of contextualizing this intellectual ancestry and determining our own relationships to these legacies.

This collection affords me a fairly rare opportunity to account for the research that I have done over the last two decades in rhetorical studies within this historical framework. In mapping my experiences below, my intention is twofold, to:

1. trace the development of my concern that researchers and scholars need to interrogate critically the goals, nature, and processes of knowledge making in rhetorical studies in light of shifts in who researchers and scholars are these days, what their focal points are, the contexts in which we exist, and the hegemonic ways that quality and value have been established for both the focus and the process of knowledge making;

2. situate my interests in the rhetorical practices of African American women within a call for a transformative vision of rhetoric

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> by asserting the need to extend disciplinary parameters for what counts as knowledge, as well as to actually use these extended boundaries to rethink aesthetics and integrity.

In 1995 in my CCCC Chair's address, I spoke publicly for the first time about challenges that I saw in knowledge-making processes in rhetorical studies. I placed myself within the tradition of DuBois and others of his generation and claimed that I was dedicated, as I said then, "to raising this veil [as he had tried to do], to overriding these systems of insulation by raising another voice, my voice in the interest of clarity and accuracy" (CCC 34). In the article in *CCC* that followed the address, I tried to make clear that the type of work that I do, in its being so thoroughly informed by a viewpoint that centralizes race, class, gender, and culture, just did not fit neatly into traditional knowledge-making paradigms in our field and that this fact of scholarly life dictated a need for transformation. I asserted the following:

> In discussing nineteenth century African American women's work, I bring tales of difference and adventure. I bring cultural proofs and instructive examples, all of which invariably must serve as rites of passage to credibility. I also bring the power of storytelling. These tales of adventure in odd places are the transitions by which to historicize and theorize anew with these writers re-inscribed in a rightful place. Such a process respects long-standing practices in African-based cultures of theorizing in narrative form. As Barbara Christian says, we theorize "in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" ("The Race for Theory," 336). The problem is that in order to construct new histories and theories such stories must be perceived not just as "simple stories" to delight and entertain, but as vital layers of a transformative process. (35)

I have been consumed actually since then with the effort to carry out in historically sanctioned arenas, rather than marginalized ones, the mandate that I created for myself that day, with three examples serving as landmarks along this path. The first marker is in my co-authored article with Jean C. Williams, "History in the Spaces Left: African American Presence and Narratives of Composition Studies." In this article, we sought to broaden the information base in histories of composition with a more fully textured view of the presence of African

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Americans in higher education in terms of both student participation and achievement, and the long history of contributions in research, scholarship, and disciplinary practices by African American scholars. At the end of the article, we stated the need for a paradigmatic shift along three basic fault lines. We called for:

> 1. A systematic commitment to resist the primacy of "officialized" narratives;
> 2. A search for better interpretive frames that are capable of accounting more richly for the participation and achievements of the many rather than the few, and;
> 3. A renewed interest in using the knowledge and understanding acquired through suggestions one and two in order to help a broader range of students to perform at higher levels of achievement. (582–83)

The second and most substantive trail marker actually addressed item number 2 from this article in searching for a better interpretive frame. In chapter 6 of my book, *Traces of a Stream,* which I titled "A View from a Bridge: Afrafeminist Ideologies and Rhetorical Studies," I sought to write in a more direct, deliberate, and metaconscious way about knowledge-making and interpretive practice along two planes: to discuss what I had previously named in my CCCC address as "the systems of deep disbelief as contending forces, as prevailing winds that push against scholarly proactivity and toward a continual re-inscription of the status quo" (254); and to draw attention to the nature of scholarly ethos and how it informs research and practice. I was particularly interested in the intersections of these two planes, and I proposed a model for action for those who participate in knowledge-making processes in which race, class, gender, culture, and other such values matter. I explained that my approach embodied the notion that mind, heart, body, and soul operate collectively, rather than separately, even in scholarship, and that this view of collectivity requires intellectual work to include, from my point of view, at least four sites of what I called "critical regard": careful analysis, an acknowledgment of passionate attachments, attention to ethical action, and a commitment to social responsibility (279).

At the end of the chapter, I sought to reconnect this approach to my own work, and I ended with this paragraph:

> These women's stories suggest that, as users of language, we construct ways of being, seeing, and doing in recognition of

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> the materiality of the world around us and of who and how we are in our sundry relationships to it. Their work suggests that we should not automatically discount the discordant, revolutionary, or evolutionary voices of the unsanctioned or un-institutionally authorized. It also suggests that, in order to be generative in our interpretations of contemporary language practices, we need analytical models of discourse that are flexible enough to see the variability of the participants and their worlds, to draw meaning from the shifting contours of rhetorical negotiation across and within material relationships, and to imagine the possibility of building bridges . . . we can see how connections are merging between private, social, and public space. We can understand the simultaneity of competing and conflicting agenda . . . we can imagine, as African American women have traditionally done, that the "public" arena is a place where negotiation can be with words rather than with weapons, and we can commit ourselves, as African American women writers have done, to turning our thoughts toward action in making a better world for us all. (285)

A third and most recent marker on this trajectory is "Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric" (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 148–67). In this article I take up the argument where I left off in *Traces of a Stream* and propose the need to understand knowledge as an interpretive enterprise and thereby a social construction; to articulate the limitations of historical and current knowledge-making practices and the scholarship produced by such practices; to sustain perspectives in the history of rhetoric that assume, rather than minimize the view that the terrain of rhetorical experiences is much fuller than we have documented and embraced in our scholarship; to reform disciplinary practices. Moreover, I assert that the legacies of rhetorical scholarship demonstrate the extent to which theories and practices have operated hegemonically and tended to function with a heavy and relentlessly constraining hand. Even a cursory survey demonstrates that we have privileged Western territories and elite male experiences within those territories, and in the article I raise this question:

> What if I started a rhetorical interrogation with a consideration of more southern territories, with a focus on women, and with the possibility that eliteness may or may not hold its viability across variations in rhetorical performance? How,

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> after all, might the concept of eliteness shift when the focus of interrogation or the site of interrogation shifts? (150)

My goal in this essay was to draw attention to the complexity of the rhetorical landscape as variable and dynamic, a terrain that we are just beginning to envision in more global (as compared with more Western) terms. Further, I underscored the idea that much work remains to be done if we are to understand more fully the potential of human beings as "symbol-using animals," to use Burke's (1966) term and I raised the idea that we can benefit greatly by showcasing other areas, reframing and foregrounding different features, and becoming more attuned to the aesthetic values of other views. Basically, I proposed that there are values added when we start with the notion that the history of Western rhetorics is indeed what we *know* best, but with an understanding that such a distinction does not suggest that this record automatically constitutes what *is* best. I proposed in the article that there is plenty of room in knowledge-making enterprises to celebrate what we know while still extending those parameters in dynamic and generative ways.

SITUATING A SCHOLARLY SELF

I have taken time in this rather ego-centered way to trace the development of my own concerns about knowledge-making processes in order to assert two points that I consider to be critical to my own academic calling cards. First, I claim that as a scholar in the history of rhetoric I have not been operating arbitrarily but well within the scope of theories and methodologies in the field. Second, I claim that my interests in race, gender, class, and culture are not shaped by a series of random or opportunistic events but by the application of critical apparatuses to focal points that have not always garnered central attention in the past. By these terms, I present myself as a scholar who sustains an abiding professional commitment to the rhetorical history of African American women but who also understands that the context for critical engagement requires a transformative vision, one that imagines the possibility of things currently unseen.

Further, I might frame my editing of this volume as a fourth marker along this trajectory since I expect this collection to deepen the critique of disciplinary habits and to serve as a concrete display by which we can reconfigure what counts as knowledge, recognizing, of course, that knowledge is indeed socially constructed. While the chapters in this volume certainly do not constitute the fullness of the rhetorical landscape with regard to race, gender, and culture, they do

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bring texture to the need to rethink interpretive frames; to assess continuities and discontinuities with regard to both terms of engagement and terms of credibility and excellence.

In situating my own work within this historical context, my central points of inquiry have included: What difference did education, particularly higher education, specifically literacy education/rhetorical education, make in African American women's lives? How did it function? What conditions made it possible for such women in such a time, place, and context to believe in their own agency, despite contending messages that dominated in their sociocultural environment, and not only to believe in their own agency, but to act so defiantly and so courageously? What made them think that they had the capacity to do anything at all, but particularly to speak and to write in the interest of social, political, economic, educational reform? As this series of questions suggests, I have developed a habit of critical questioning, of speculating in order to make visible unnoticed possibilities, to pose and articulate what we see now, what's missing, and what we might see instead.

In the process of gathering data about nineteenth-century African American women, I began to realize that I had been aware of many of the *facts* of African American women's lives, conditions, and contributions intellectually for a long time, but through my own scholarly efforts I came to understand in a more visceral way the importance of the transformation of *facts* into *knowledge*. I began to see how important it is to understand that, certainly, I had *seen* before, I had *known* before, but in so many ways I had not *noticed* before not just what has been happening with this group but what has been going on with them. For example, strangely, it was not that I didn't know that nineteenth-century African American women went to school. I actually knew that. It was that their being there had not operated in my mind and imagination with consequence. My knowing had not been transformed into knowledge or understanding until my head, my heart, my backbone, and my stomach had also become more fully engaged. During that moment of more holistic awareness, I was drawn to a quotation from Audre Lorde that came to be very instructive, and I have referred to it often in my writing since then. Lorde says:

> It's not that we haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds. (Foreword, *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, xi)

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Coming to this distinction between facts and knowledge constituted a moment of scholarly growth in that I came to understand both intellectually *and* viscerally that knowledge making is sense making, and sense making is an interpretive process.

A general challenge for me continues to be to build, balance, and harmonize experience in the making of a common ground in which knowledge related to African American women's practices can be made and have the capacity to operate persuasively, with impact and with consequence. I recognize, especially in cross-disciplinary work, the importance of mechanisms, including narratives, that permit knowledge to be amplified. With amplification, knowledge can be perceived as significant, understandable, *and* believable across multiple audiences. We see the sea of information. We understand the claims. We occupy a common space that permits an opportunity for substantive interaction and for persuasion.

With these two frameworks—the use of speculation in critical inquiry and the viewing of knowledge as a persuasive process of interpretation, I return to the example of *Traces of a Stream.* I wrote *Traces of a Stream* with an eye toward demonstrating appropriate places for storytelling as a process that helps to reset the conditions for engagement; for history telling as a process for enriching the conceptual base through experience building; and for theory making as a process throughout sense making that in the case of African American women not only enables the creation of a usable past, but also amplifies knowledge in ways that help to make that knowledge more persuasive and help, thereby, to make it recognizable as *news.*

In general, my goal in *Traces* was to account for the systematic ways literacy has functioned in the lives of African American women in support of sociopolitical action. I wanted to shift analytical paradigms that have habitually marked the historical presence of African American women at 1619, rather than acknowledging a much longer historical trajectory that considers cultural continuities as African women were transformed into African American women through the bizarre circumstances of the rise of chattel slavery. I wanted to use this shifted view to look again at their survival of these oppressive conditions and at their persistent uses of their talents as speakers and writers to bring about social changes. I sought to make a distinction between what we know in finely drawn detail about African American women's heritage and what we know with much less detail from a more landscape view, a distinction that mirrors the difference between looking at a digital image that seems seamless and knowing that the image is made of pixels.

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There is a truth in broad/long range scope. There is a truth at closer ranges. I talk about this interpretive distance in terms of both time and space through the use of two Swahili terms, *sasa* and *zamani.* I raise, at that point, the question of a place in scholarship for what I call the "critical imagination," a term that encodes the need to engage in a reconstruction process that includes what might be called "educated guesses." I chose "critical imagination" as the operational term, however, because I wanted to underscore this concept as a skill to be consciously developed and strategically used relative to seeing, analyzing, and interpreting data. In my view, such speculation begins with a mindset, a willingness to imagine the possibility of truth in order to develop an ability to recognize small pieces of a puzzle as meaningful.

Ultimately, what I think that my work demonstrates most clearly, as suggested by *Traces of a Stream,* is that I have been engaging in a disciplinary ground-clearing process in terms of theoretical, historical, and ideological practices in the field. The imperative has been to enable not just my own work but also to encourage more generally scholarship that commands greater interpretive and persuasive power. My basic goal, therefore, has been to acquire a better understanding, certainly, of the ways and means of African American women's writing, as a racialized, gendered, and culturally distinctive group, but also to understand human creativity in the exercise of language well used. I have labeled this imperative the search for a transformative vision in the history of rhetoric, and I see it as responsive to a very practical interest, one that I attach historically to long-standing intellectual habits among African American women.

In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* Robin D. G. Kelley speaks similarly of the role of imagination in revolutionary movements. He cites the example of his mother's ability to "dream out loud" (1) as a springboard for understanding the extent to which revolutionary movements use imagination to inspire passion and to enable change. He says:

> Sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures accessible to most of us, render much of our imagination inert. We are constantly putting out fires, responding to emergencies, finding temporary refuge, all of which make it difficult to see anything other than the present. As the great poet Keorapetse Kgositsile put it, "When the clouds clear / We shall know the colour of the sky." When movements have been unable to clear the clouds, it has been the

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> poets—no matter the medium—who have succeeded in imagining the color of the sky, in rendering the kinds of dreams and futures social movements are capable of producing. Knowing the color of the sky is far more important than counting clouds. Or to put it another way, the most radical art is not protest art but works that take us to another place, envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling. (11)

In reinvoking the spirit of Anna Julia Cooper as a woman with a radicalizing imagination, we need to imagine a world for rhetorical studies that is global, flexible, and specifically aware of its own complicity in the deploying of systems of domination and oppression. By resetting the parameters by which we engage in rhetorical work, we open new possibilities for sense making and for mediating the gaps between what we know and rightly celebrate and what we might see more insightfully if we developed the habit of looking again and looking with different eyes. Such commitments to encouraging paradigmatic shifts will, no doubt, disrupt longstanding hegemonic practices and likely reconfigure what constitutes knowledge. The question that remains, then, is one of imagination. Can we clear the clouds that currently engulf us in studies of race gender, and culture and discover the color of the sky?

PARLOR TALK

When Ann Marie Simpkins and I distributed the call for this collection, we were drawn to an image in Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1973):

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. (94–95)

We wished for an opportunity for the contributors to engage in a collective conversation after we all had the chance to see what each

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other had written. Our thinking was that too often we engage in this type of work alone, crossing paths and exchanging ideas in meetings and conferences, using articles and books that we find evocative in teaching and research, but not typically having the chance to think about and talk about what our work together suggests. Opportunities are rare for eighteen professionals who have engaged in the exact same task to think about what they have done together, how we see it individually and collectively, and even more rarely writing about these metaperspectives in public.

As explained in the preface, we decided to make the effort to have such a moment of reflection and conversation by setting up an online exchange. We didn't have the time or space in the collection for it to function as a full and substantive dialogue in the way suggested by the quotation above from Burke, but we did take the time to read, to think, and to put forth some last words. That section of this collection, like the articles that we have contributed, does not represent all that we might say. What it does, as we hope the full volume does, is to use our professional "calling cards" as a signal that the dialogue remains open and that indeed it is an important one.

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