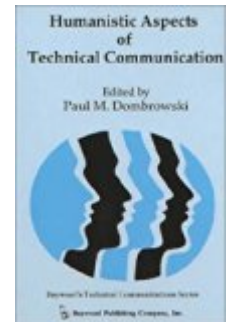**Paul M. Dombrowski, ed.**. *Humanistic Aspects of Technical Communication.* Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 1994. viii + 239 pp. $64.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-89503-159-4.

Reviewed by John Gooch

In the spirit of Carolyn Miller's "A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Communication" (1979) and Steven B. Katz's "The Ethic of Expediency" (1992), Paul Dombrowski's *Humanistic Aspects of Technical Communication* (1994) further emphasizes the need for attention to the "human" element in technical communication. In recent years, scholars of technical communication have become increasingly aware of the importance of the human condition, and furthermore, that this human condition poses implications for technical communicators as they design and develop discourse. In relating this theme of "humanistic aspects," Dombrowski organizes the anthology into four major areas: rhetoric of science, social constructionism, feminist perspectives, and ethics. The book concerns itself primarily with establishing that social and cultural influences have played no small role in the development of scientific discourse and technical communication, broadly defined, as an academic field of inquiry. Furthermore, the text rebuts traditional positivistic notions of knowledge and language which assume that "the objective world can be known directly and this knowledge remains separate from lan-

guage and the theories articulated in language" (p. 7).

The text provides a more postmodern look at the field because the essays argue the importance of social and cultural issues in the development of technical communication. In each of the four sections of the text, the authors argue technical communicators exist in a social and cultural context in which they create knowledge, and that this context directly influences the creation of that knowledge and the development of technical discourse. In the section devoted to the rhetoric of science, R. Allen Harris and Alan Gross argue that the scientist operates in a socially situated paradigm which requires rhetoric to advance a particular belief. The idea that persons exist in communities and the community's beliefs impact the construction and development of knowledge is further advanced by both Miller and Dombrowski in the section entitled "Social Constructionism." In addition, Mary Lay and Jo Allen advance that gender issues pose important implications for the technical and scientific communicator. Finally, Mike Markel and Dale Sullivan heighten the

awareness of the social/cultural context by exploring ethical issues for the technical communicator.

These essays represent changes in mentalities which govern and advance the field of technical communication. Furthermore, Dombrowski's anthology significantly contributes to the body of research in technical communication. Much of the text focuses on scientific communication; little information specifically addresses technical communication such as on-line documentation, manuals, and proposals. Moreover, the text provides no discussion of technologically-based communication whatsoever because the book does not offer any ideas with regard to the implications of the World Wide Web and hyper-text for technical communication. Discussions related to the use of technology and humanistic aspects of technical communication would not only be timely, but they would also be important as practitioners approach the twenty-first century. However, the text does present sound philosophical perspectives and does advance the importance of social and cultural issues in technical communication.

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