Comment on Writing Across Boundaries

Professor Irving Horowitz

One of the many people we contacted in putting together the Writers on Writing page was the eminent sociologist Irving Horowitz [Hannah Arendt Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey]. Professor Horowitz first began his academic publishing career in 1951 and went on to create a prodigious annual output that continues to this day [See bibliography in McIntosh, Ivins and Berger 2005]. He declined our invitation to write about his writing. However, his response was not only courteous and elegant, it was instructive. With Professor Horowitz's permission we have reproduced part of the correspondence.

Dear Colleagues

Thank you for your cordial letter and invitation to participate in the Durham University programme on "writing on writing". It is a good idea, worthy of support. As you know, many have tried but few have succeeded in a pedagogic route to better literary performance. If I had "thoughts, feelings, pearls of wisdom, anecdotes, theoretical musings or other content likely to give insight and inspiration" I would drop other tasks and follow through on your gracious invitation. For now, your option is impressive and entirely worthwhile.

The early statements that you have received that are posted to your web site are worthwhile and even helpful. Then again, several reflect some strong personal proclivities (such as theatricality) that may or may not be readily reproduced by graduate students. My own views, as summed up in Once More unto the Breach rest on the presumption that if younger scholars examine in depth and detail the writings of our best and brightest social scientists, they will do just fine. With all good wishes, I remain ILH

Professor Horowitz is making a serious and important point. We are aware that by drawing attention to the craft of writing and how things are said, rather than just what is said, we are in danger of a kind of 'theatricality' in which medium and message get out of kilter. By pointing out quite straightforwardly the need to study the writings of the 'brightest and the best', Professor Horowitz identifies perhaps one of the simplest and most effective ways to improve social science writing - critical analysis followed by emulation (or rejection). In this sense, his comments provide a useful corrective should we begin to get carried along by our own rhetoric, let alone anyone else's. With these thoughts in mind we nonetheless remain committed to the project of improving the writing of graduate students

McIntosh, A, Ivins, P. and Berger D.A. 2005. [**Once more unto the breach, dear friends. Incomplete theory and complete bibliography of Irving Louis Horowitz on the occasion of his 75th birthday**](http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&id=aa0Rf4cBYdoC&dq=horowitz+once+more&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=InG1fDKz6g&sig=UXtF1Vh0BOWW-FtT3RB4hG6t5Dk&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result). New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.