Writing Practice: Invention And Pedagogy In Composition

Nathaniel Street
University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.
WRITING PRACTICE: INVENTION AND PEDAGOGY IN COMPOSITION

by

Nathaniel Street

Bachelor of Arts
Valparaiso University, 2007

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2010

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2016

Accepted By:

John Muckelbauer, Major Professor

Byron Hawk, Committee Member

Christy Friend, Committee Member

Thomas Rickert, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

To my parents, Sandra and Matt Street,
for teaching and inspiring me from a young age
to think openly, read widely, and research liberally.

Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertations start long before graduate school begins and I would like to thank Ryan Doerffler for the conversations and debates that helped spark and sustain my scholarship. I would like to thank the faculty and staff in USC’s English Department and my fellow students, especially Tony Stagiano, Justine Wells, Jonathan Maricle, Mary Fratini, and Erica Fischer. Further thanks goes to my writing group, whose support was invaluable, especially Lisa Bailey, Trevor Meyer, and Alana Hatley. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee: Thomas Rickert, who has been generous in expanding my academic life beyond USC; Christy Friend, who has modeled a spirit of professionalism, resoluteness, and cheerfulness that I can only hope to carry on; Byron Hawk, who has helped train me in just about every facet of my life at USC; and especially John Muckelbauer, who, beyond the invaluable support he has given as a teacher, mentor, director, and friend, has provoked me to be conscientious in my thinking and teaching and has been a model for what it means to care for others. Above all, I would like to thank my wife, Larissa Atkison. I am unbelievably lucky to have a smart interlocutor who pushes my thinking, a razor sharp reader of my work who leaves no sentence unexamined, and an encouraging partner who supports me through her kindness as well as her provocations. Projects like this require a community and I could not imagine writing a dissertation without the one that I have the good fortune to call my own.
Abstract

My dissertation re-engages a central question of composition and rhetoric – can writing be taught? – as a means of interrogating the relationship between form and response. In so doing, I argue that writing can be trained as a set of capacities and dispositions through repeated practice with rhetorical forms. In advancing this claim, I demonstrate that formal practices, such as modal writing, imitation, and repetition, have been unfairly dismissed as overly rote and mechanical because form has traditionally been understood as a technical means of achieving a particular end. I argue that, instead, repeated engagement with and movement between forms cultivates a rhetorical agility that allows writers to more inventively and ethically respond to the uniqueness of particular writing situations. Beyond the classroom, I argue that the pedagogical power of iterative engagements with form helps shape one’s ability to respond to difference more generally. Along these lines, my argument interrogates the pedagogical consequences of practicing writing program administration and theorizes a means by which to cultivate a rhetorical agility within an institutional context. Thus, I ultimately claim that writing cannot be taught as generalizable products and processes, but can be cultivated at un/conscious, bodily, and affective levels that enable writers and administrators to respond inventively to the singular demands of the rhetorical situations they encounter. This means that, far from functioning as technical skills, writing and rhetoric are enmeshed in a rhetor’s habitual capacity to respond to difference.
# Table of Contents

**DEDICATION** .......................................................................................................................... iii  

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................................ iv  

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................................................................................. v  

**CHAPTER ONE: WRITING ITSELF: THE STRUCTURE AND POWERS OF WRITING** .......... 1  

**CHAPTER TWO: REANIMATING MODAL WRITING** ............................................................... 36  

**CHAPTER THREE: RHYTHMIC WRITING: REPETITION, ImitATION, AND RESPONSE-ABILITY** .................................................................................................................................................. 68  

**CHAPTER FOUR: WRITING DIFFERENCE: AFFIRMING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION** .... 98  

**CHAPTER FIVE: INSTITUTIONAL PEDAGOGY: RESPONSE-ABILITY AND WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION** ......................................................................................................................... 133  

**CONCLUSION** .......................................................................................................................... 166  

**REFERENCES** .............................................................................................................................. 174
CHAPTER ONE

WRITING ITSELF: THE STRUCTURE AND POWERS OF WRITING

Sidney Dobrin and Raúl Sánchez have frequently argued that scholarship in composition studies has only nominally focused its attention on writing, instead treating it as a means by which to study “something else” that stands in for a proper study of writing. Their call to scholars is simple: deemphasize, or even drop, traditional concerns with teaching and meaning so that we can focus on the study of writing as a theoretical and empirical activity.

The substitution that Dobrin is most concerned with is the teaching of college writing to student subjects.1 While the difference between “writing” and “the teaching of college writing to student subjects” might seem subtle, Dobrin argues that the significance of the gap is quite immense insofar as the second term acts as an all too limiting condition for the first. As his argument goes, composition and rhetoric scholars do study writing, but only a particular genre (student writing) and only insofar as it equips instructors with better ways of teaching it to students. Thus, the richness of what writing studies could be is reduced by what has become a pedagogical mandate.

---

1 Postcomposition, 2011.
2 The Function of Theory in Composition Studies, 2005.
Sánchez argues that the study of writing has been substituted for the study of what and how writing means. As he puts it, most contemporary theories posit that “writing’s most salient feature is its ability to represent something else, something that is not itself related fundamentally to writing or language” (4). He goes on to suggest that the most common other things that composition scholars use writing to focus on are knowledge, ideology, culture, and rhetoric, especially insofar as they concern (student) subjects. Making a point echoed by Dobrin, Sánchez argues that this hermeneutic disposition is made possible by a “paradigm of representation” that figures writing as a technology best suited to “transmit or generate that which is considered noumenal, abstract, or conceptual” (3). For both scholars, these “chains” of writing (teaching and representation) have prevented the field from studying “writing in itself” as “a phenomena” and providing “generalized accounts of what writing is and how it works” (Dobrin 3, 10, Sánchez 1).

What both thinkers ultimately focus on is the way in which a set of ingrained theoretical commitments have hamstrung scholarship into producing what they take to be reductive visions of writing. In essence, this position sees writing as a means by which subjects represent and communicate meaning to one another. From this, the teaching of writing is reduced to the teaching of a set of skills, techniques, or processes that aid writers in better representing meaning to other subjects. In effect, Dobrin and Sánchez argue that this baseline theory of writing prevents scholarship from focusing on its deeply complex, networked, and performative dimensions because those more nuanced positions

---

2 The Function of Theory in Composition Studies, 2005.
problematize fundamental tenets of writing studies, including the function of the writing subject, representation, and teaching. As Dobrin puts it, “even the exciting new theories making their ways into the field do so tempered with pre-inscribed limits of subject, management, and pedagogy” (129). In sum, the call to move “beyond” concerns of the teaching and representation is a call to unshackle scholarship from theoretical commitments that have prevented the field from making significant advances in scholarship.

Yet, as provocative as Dobrin and Sánchez’s claims are, they assume that writing can only be encountered once the pedagogical and hermeneutic mandates have been rejected. This move assumes that representation can only be understood as reproduction of meaning within writing and that learning can only be understood as the subjective acquisition of some piece of knowledge or skill. Neither of these assumptions are satisfying to me. Thus, I contend that while Dobrin and Sánchez are correct in pointing out that subject-centered theories of writing that are focused on hermeneutics and acquisition models of learning have greatly reduced our understanding of what writing is, the prudent response is not to simply jettison pedagogy and representation from scholarship at a general level. Rather, a better response is to re-conceptualize what representation and pedagogy are and how they function in light of a theoretical investigation of writing that do not prefigure their role in the structure of writing.

Toward this end, this dissertation investigates “writing itself,” not only to develop a nuanced theory of writing, but also to reconceptualize the role that representation and pedagogy play in it. In this way, I claim that the great worth of Dobrin and Sánchez’s call lies less in their desire for scholars to abandon
representation and teaching and more in the way they illuminate the relationship between them. In effect, they allow us to see that theories of writing have assumed that writing must fit within a paradigm of representation and pedagogy. In making “writing itself” a central object of study, we can essentially reverse this relationship as a way of reconceptualizing representation and pedagogy via a theoretical engagement with writing.

In undertaking this project, I look to representation as performative power of writing that affects, or persuades, that which it encounters. Similarly, I argue that this performative power is pedagogical in and of itself. Thus, I argue that writing isn’t the object of instruction in the writing class, but is the means by which teaching happens. This pedagogical reversal is particularly important insofar as it unshackles pedagogy from the writing classroom. If, as I argue, the very operation of writing is pedagogical at a performative level, then there is no necessary connection between pedagogy and educational institutions. Thus, while this dissertation does devote significant attention to classroom practices, it also works to extend the pedagogical power of writing beyond the classroom so as to attend to how writing functions to shape the habitual inclinations of rhetorical response.

At a general level, this attention to rhetorical response is the primary concern of the dissertation. I take it as a given that the disciplinary relationship between composition and rhetoric has mostly operated at the level of object and theory. Composition scholars often use rhetoric to theorize how to best teach and mobilize writing as a means of rhetorical response. In this way, the “rhetorical turn” has shifted our focus away from the formal concerns of writing, such as grammar, style, and genre, toward more metacognitive, or “rhetorically aware,”
concerns with the “rhetorical situation” and rhetorical invention. In short, the
great lesson that rhetoric has taught composition is that writing is always
situated and that writers must adapt their writing to the specific nature of those
situations more than concentrate on its formal accuracy. In turning to “writing
itself,” I argue that the formal nature of writing can develop a mode of rhetorical
response that is rooted in the very structure of writing without sacrificing the
significance that situatedness plays in it.

In advancing this claim, I demonstrate that formal practices, such as
modal writing, imitation, and repetition, have been unfairly dismissed as overly
rote and mechanical because form has traditionally been understood as a
technical means of achieving a particular end. I argue that, instead, repeated
engagement with and movement between forms cultivates a rhetorical agility
that allows writers to respond to the uniqueness of specific writing situations
more inventively and ethically. Beyond the classroom, I argue that the
pedagogical power of iterative engagements with form helps shape one’s ability
to respond to difference more generally, much like athletic and musical training
prepare one to respond to the living dynamics of a game or performance. In
advancing this claim, I argue that writing program administration is itself a kind
of writing, and thereby a pedagogical activity, that has the capacity to train
administrators to respond inventively to their institutional contexts. This means
that, far from functioning as a technical skill, writing can be cultivated at
un/conscious, bodily, and affective levels that enable writers and administrators
to respond inventively to the singular demands of the rhetorical situations they
encounter.
In sum, the dissertation takes up Sánchez and Dobrin’s call as a prompt for meditating on the nature of writing. This first chapter does so via a theoretical investigation of its structure in response to thinkers - Nietzsche, Derrida, and Deleuze - who have engaged the question of writing at a philosophical level. While these figures are tangentially familiar to the field, their impact on how we understand writing has remained in the margins. However, I take Dobrin and Sánchez’s call for greater attention to writing as an important opportunity to bring these figures and their approaches to the logical structure of writing more explicitly into scholarly conversations. In so doing, this chapter inquires into the structural logic of writing and articulates three “powers” of writing that I argue allow us to re-imagine the role that writing plays in rhetorical invention, pedagogy, and ethics.

Chapters 2 - 5 advance this inquiry by focusing on how form functions in writing at a scaler level. Thus, each chapter treats an increasingly broad understanding of the form of writing and its role in rhetorical response. Chapter 2 begins with form in its most commonplace understanding as the shape of writing, i.e., genre, trope, figure. In doing so, the chapter focuses on the practice of “Writing in the Modes,” which is most commonly associated with the overly formal pedagogy of Current-Traditional Rhetoric. Chapter 3 adds a layer of complexity by attending to the form of “movement” between writing forms through an extended meditation on the pedagogical practices of imitation and repetition. Chapter 4 expands the concept a step further by attending to the form of rhetorical response through a meditation on the concept of “The Rhetorical Situation,” which functions as a particularly helpful example for understanding how meta-cognition and form intersect at the level of rhetorical response.
Chapter 5 pushes the question of form well beyond the classroom and traditional notions of writing by considering the form of iteration within institutional contexts. In so doing, the chapter turns to the practice Writing Program Administration to understand how it functions as a kind of writing that habituates, or teaches, administrators to respond to difference within their institutional environments. My goal in turning to these topoi is to amplify and thereby re-theorize the role that writing plays in their functioning and, thereby, the role that form plays in rhetorical response.

**Iteration**

In undertaking the question of what writing is “itself,” I begin with repeatability. I do this, if for no other reason, simply because Jacques Derrida claims it is the essential characteristic of writing as such. Without a logic of repetition, argues Derrida, the readability of writing would be impossible. This is because in order for writing to be readable, a written text must be recognizable as (more or less) the same mark across instances. If this were not the case, and all writing could necessarily only correspond with a unique thought or experience, writing would be too radically singular to function at all. While this seems obvious enough, beginning here nonetheless raises a question: what is it, precisely, that gets repeated and what is the nature of this repetition? We might naturally turn to familiar units of writing, such as particular letters, words, or even phrases; after all, dictionaries and alphabets give us a plentiful stock of written units that seem to get repeated all the time. Thus, what gets repeated is a master-set of signifiers. I would be inclined to agree with this commonplace response if it were the case
that the system of writing were totalized. That is, if writing were an enclosed system of repeatable signs, then it would make sense to render a finite set of repeatable units, or atoms, that, in their various combinations, amount to communicable statements.

Yet, writing is not enclosed and its logic does not operate within the vacuum of a totality. We might turn to etymology to see that there is nothing fixed about words, either written or spoken. But, in our digital age, we could equally as well turn to “text” that is not even composed of letters. Consider the increasing ubiquity of the emoji, which clearly does not operate outside of writing or function as a representation of established texts (≠ ‘smiley face”), but is mobilized as writing despite the fact that they have only recently entered popular usage. In short, dictionaries, and even alphabets, change over time and we cannot look to them to find any stable or final set of repetitions that constitute writing. Thus, rather than look to the individual units of expression for writing’s power of repetition, we must look elsewhere to understand what is repeated in the repeatability of writing.

Perhaps we shouldn’t look to signifiers - sound-images as Saussure calls them - but to signifieds: the concept attached to a signifier. This too is tempting, for at a certain level it seems obvious that what gets repeated in writing is a thought or an experience. We might devise a myriad of ways in which to express a thought within writing - some of which even push on conventional usages, such as the neologism, “fresh” metaphor, or even non-phonetic characters (such as emojis). In this case, the written signifier only functions so as to provoke, or to repeat, the same content intended by the writer in the mind of the reader. There
is no master set of signs, but only the need to instigate a specific mental content through whatever written provocations that will get the job done.

But, this, too is flawed: insofar as the same content would need to be repeated in a variety of mediums, this line of thinking assumes that writing is an inert medium of communication that simply bears, or provokes, a particular content. But, again, the history of language ought to dispel this hypothesis. To express a thought or experience in writing, for example, to express one’s happiness as a kind of “gayness,” does not carry the same weight that other words that describe the “same” emotional state. Words carry with them histories, connotations, and usages. We cannot act as if the same expression can be manifested in multiple ways without alteration. Thus, there can be no rigorously faithful repetition between the idiosyncrasy of a thought or experience and the signifier that expresses it.

This line of inquiry seems to produce an impasse. If writing is not a matter of repeating signifiers or signifieds, what is it that gets repeated? However, this impasse is only apparent. The iterative quality of writing is not an element or linguistic feature of writing that gets repeated, but is what repeatability enables writing to do.

Derrida’s thought is again helpful insofar as he argues the power of repeatability is that it allows writing to function in the absence of a writer. While not an immediate answer to our question, understanding the relationship between iterability and absence points us in the right direction as we attempt to uncover precisely what gets repeated in writing and what this repetition enables. While the power of writing to function without the presence of its author is self-evident - of what use would writing be to us if it required the presence of its
writer to be read? - the real power comes in how that absence is structured. Derrida argues that the “absence” of writing, which we usually only think of as a temporary absence or even as an extension of a writer’s presence, must be able to be final. That is, writing must be able to function in the radical absence of a writer and a reader. Derrida gives a convincing example that I think merits extended quotation:

Imagine a writing whose code would be so idiomatic as to be established and known, as a secret cipher, by only two ‘subjects.’ Could we maintain that, following the death of the receiver, or even of both partners, the mark left by one of them is still writing? Yes, to the extent that, organized by a code, even an unknown and nonlinguistic one, it is constituted in its identity as a mark by its iterability, in the absence of such and such a person, and hence ultimately of every empirically determined ‘subject.’ This implies that there is no such thing as a code - organon of iterability - which could be structurally secret (SEC 7-8).

The unlikelihood of this scenario is of little consequence simply because its very possibility demonstrates the extent to which writing must be able to break with its point of genesis. But we should also notice that the absence required of writing points us toward a troubling realization: writing must be able to balance two functions that are seemingly paradoxical to each other. On the one hand, it must be able to be readable, and thus capable of being recognized across instances independent of the author’s presence, as Derrida’s example illuminates. On the other hand, writing must be able to relay a singularity: an intention, an experience, or a content. Since the readability of writing is predicated on its capacity to be more or less the same in different usages and the
communicability of writing is predicated on its ability to attend to the singularity of a content, it would appear that readability stands in direct contrast to communicability. As Derrida so idiomatically argues, the conditions of writing’s possibility seem to be simultaneously the conditions of its impossibility. Thus, not only have we seemingly found a dead end in uncovering what in writing gets repeated, but we have uncovered an apparent paradox in the very function of writing itself.

Before we conclude that Derrida has only fortified the impasse we turned to him to help circumnavigate, we should note that the kind of absence, as a break, that writing enables is actually twofold. To repeat, for writing to be readable it must function in the absence of its writer. But this ability also means that there exists an absence, a gap or a break, between the author and written text. From the moment the pen touches the paper (or the finger taps the key), the singularity of intention breaks with the actuality of the inscribed mark; an impulse, desire, thought, or experience becomes text on the page or illuminated pixels on the screen and thereby becomes something non-identical with that which initiated it. We typically describe this action as a matter of representation: the written mark stands in for the intention. I too am inclined to call this representation, but I think that the commonplace understanding of representation that I just described does not take the prefix “re” seriously enough.

The representative power of the mark does not function in terms of fidelity - what does the planet Venus have to do with the word ‘Venus?’ - but one of transformation. Representation is a kind of a translative change. The nature of this translation works in two directions: In the first, backward moving direction,
written marks carry with them histories and connotations beyond those intended in the moment of inscription. This first break necessitates that writing is always capable of bringing more to the table than we wish it to. In the second, forward moving, direction, writing is capable of being repeated in future instances in ways not consonant with the writer’s intentions and are thus capable of acting in unforeseen ways with or without the name of the author attached to them. In short, any instance of writing is at the moment of its inception both aged (insofar as it is a repetition that invokes past writings) and bastardized (it is not faithfully attached to the lineage of its creator).

Maybe, then, we ought not look for the repeatability of writing in writing as if it were a power over which writing has control. Instead, we should look to how writing is subject to a logic of iterability and, thus, rather than look for iterability within familiar concepts, such as the signifier and signified, we should look to the language of repetition itself. What is capable of being repeated? The answer can only be structure. Only that which has an internal organization can be repeated because only a structure can be rebuilt. Thus, rather than look to the signifier in writing, we must look more generally to the mark. The mark is not a signified, but neither is it identical with the signifier since a mark need not signify but merely posses an internal relation that is capable of being reproduced elsewhere. Thus, it seems that the mark satisfies all of the problems we ran into above: it is general enough to account for the evolution of writing, it does not require a faithful repetition between a signifier and itself, and it powers writing to be both readable and singular.

Let’s work through these points more thoroughly. First, the mark certainly accommodates the historical mutations of writing insofar as its ability to be
recognized across instances also enables histories of past usages and connotations to be repeated with it. In other words, repetitions of a mark carry with it the force of prior iterations; for example, think of the obnoxious force that the suffix “gate” has carried with it since “Watergate.” Yet past iterations do not determine future mobilizations; writing “gate” does not exclusively invoke the Watergate event - or scandal more generally - and the intensity of that invocation will [hopefully] not always be as strong as it currently is. Second, insofar as emojis, images, pictographic symbols, and even material objects are organized by an internal structure, they may be repeated within chains of writing, despite the fact that they clearly aren’t [primarily] semiological signifiers (look up in the dictionary). Third, the very repeatability of a mark allows for it to be recognized in different contexts and therefore read; but it also allows for its singularity. To be clear, this is not the singularity of an intention - which must be broken - or even of a meaning - which must be subject to past and future iterations - but of a force. The repetition of a mark is always an iteration. A mark is always made through a marking and is always read through a reading, which, as acts, are singular in their performances.

In looking for that which gets repeated in writing, we have been led beyond the scope of writing. But, rather than see our inquiry as a failed attempt at treating writing in itself or as a demonstration in the inadequacy of writing, I think our inquiry has instead prompted us to reconsider the nature of writing as something other than our commonplace understanding of it as the transcription of thought on the page. For one thing, we need to understand that the very function of writing, in our commonplace understanding of it, depends on the
repeatability of the mark in the radical absence of its author. Second, we must consider that this repeatability always comes at the expense of a fidelity between an author and the mark: the mark is not a faithful copy of an intention but a representation of it, the mark always brings with it more than an author intends (past usages and connotations), and the mark is always capable of being mobilized in ways an author did not foresee.

Yet, while we might be inclined to see the necessary break between an author and writing as a sort of failure or limitation on the part of writing, we should also acknowledge its power. As we’ve already uncovered, the iterability of writing enables both its readability and its singularity, but I argue that the representational nature of writing points us to an inventive power of writing. The translation of a thought to a form of writing demands a “becoming other” of that thought. Past usages and future possibilities open up an intended thought beyond that of which it is capable and thereby allows for unexpected opportunities for thought, expression, and communication. Thus, while we might mourn that writing, and language more generally, is never adequate to that which it represents, I argue that we should not think of the representational relationship as a matter of adequacy or fidelity at all. Rather, we should think of this transformation as a matter of affirmative invention; a thought is transformed by its representation. It doesn’t fall short, but is affected and altered by its being written and thereby generates something that cannot be reduced to an intention, to a word, or even to a mark. Thus, the first power of writing that we should note is that the activity of writing, by means of its iterability, is an act of invention.

To recap, an analysis of the structure of writing, specifically its iterative structure, reveals that every act of writing is a kind of invention. Yet, the inquiry
also reveals that the very means by which this invention occurs is, in a very important way, not controlled by the intentional genius of a writer. Thus, not only has an inquiry into “writing qua writing” allowed for a better understanding of how writing functions, it also reveals an otherwise unseeable capacity of writing to function inventively and thereby creates an opportunity for thinking more deeply about the nature of rhetorical invention as amplified by its relationship to writing. Chapter 2 advances an inquiry into this relationship between invention and writing through an analysis of the pedagogical practice of “Writing in the Modes,” which has become marginalized for its perceived strict adherence to form. In so doing, I articulate a version of writing in the modes that harnesses the transformative power of writing as a way of undertaking rhetorical invention rather than one of “mastering” the definitive features of a writing genre.

**Structural Openness**

In continuing this inquiry of writing itself, note that while I have articulated the *what* of repetition (the mark) and the feature of the mark that makes it repeatable (a coherent structure), we have not yet inquired into how structure functions in writing. In other words, our investigation of the iterative logic of writing compels us to consider the “structurality of structure” as it functions in writing.

Derrida’s work is helpful here. The key trait of any structure is that it must be organized according to a logic; it “orient[s], balance[s], and organize[s] the structure” (SSP 352). In other words, there must be a coherence by which the parts of a structure relate to each other. This is as true for a material object, such
as a phone or a building, as it is of an abstract structure, such as a philosophy, concept, or sign. Something must hold the parts together, and that something is the organizing logic or center of the structure. This organizing logic is what allows us to recognize “K” as a letter within the English alphabet rather than as three convergent line segments, although, the organizing logic of geometry allows “K” to function within a structure other than the alphabet. In both cases, something must hold the elements of the structure together in order for it to function as such (is “it” a letter, three converging line segments, or something else?).

Importantly, Derrida notes that while the organizing logic of a structure is essential to any given structure, it does not organize itself and therefore cannot be properly thought of as part of the structure that it organizes. Let’s consider a few examples: the organizing force of the alphabet, a phonetic logic which allows us to ascribe sounds to graphic symbols, is not part of alphabet itself and it is entirely possible for a different logic to animate the same set of graphic symbols in a very different way than language. The same holds true for geometry; the organizing logic of geometry, which is that of spatial identity that allows us to consider relations between self-identical shapes in space, is not part of the geometric world itself and a very different logic could animate the same set of relations. As Derrida puts it, “it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (279). Thus, in searching for the openness of structure, we have found it at its direct center.

This point of opening - at the organizing center of any structure - must in turn be the means by which structures are both capable of relating to one another
and capable of change. In other words, the organizing logic of a structure is substitutable: new logics can animate existing structures. This means that any given structure must be capable of being restructured through a change of its center. Derrida argues that one way in which we might understand the history of any concept, and even the history of western metaphysics, “as a series of substitutions center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center.” Each substitution re-orders the whole structure, even if its immediate effects are subtle (“the good” wears the mask of “god” long before it casts off the divine moniker). Thus, a structure is structured everywhere save at its center; and at its center a structure risks change precisely insofar as it is vulnerable to importing a new logic.

The importance of this structural openness is, of course, diverse, but our concern must stay close to the question of writing. What does it mean to say that the written mark is structurally open? As we have already uncovered, it first and foremost means that written marks must be capable of connecting to other structures. But we must admit that the way in which written marks connect is not the way in which atoms relate: the relation is not between enclosed structures that operate in a vacuum, but of intertwining structures that operate in a series. Thus, in order to understand the structure of writing, we must shift our emphasis away from the logic of totality and toward that of the series.

The logic of the series is based on the relationship between terms. Thus, inserting a term into a series does not only affect the inserted term, but it affects the series as well. Giles Deleuze’s work in The Logic of Sense provides valuable insight in at least two ways that the addition of a term to a series functions. Deleuze begins by noting that the perpetuation of a series does not work in one
direction alone, but works in two directions at once. The first is that of making sense: a term, in combination with all of the terms to which it connects to within a series, expresses its own local logic. In other words, it expresses the criteria by which a series can be understood. This first line of functioning is abstract and virtual and is the expression of sense itself. The second line of functioning is the actual ordering of the series, as a whole, according to the logic of the sense currently expressed. This second line of functioning is the effect of the first; it is what allows terms to appear as more or less stable and stand in relation to the other terms of a series. To be clear, we are now talking about two levels of logic. At the general level, there is the logic of the structurality of writing, which provides the conditions of possibility for all writing to function; at the local level, there is the logic of a particular series, which governs over the sense of a particular instance of writing and is itself structurally open to mutation. What we must see in any series of writing is a contingent and local world that expresses its own logic by which it might be understood, but at the same time is itself capable of reconfiguring that world by the simple addition or subtraction of any of its terms.

Consider a relatively simple example. Take a proper name: “William.” While the name seems to stand alone as a series composed only of itself, the term is not inert: for one thing, it brings with it an entire naming history of Anglo-Germanic origins. Add “first” to make the series “William first.” This introduction re-organizes the series insofar as “first” serves to condition “William.” Now add to the series “born” to make “William first born.” This addition now designates “first” as a designation of birth and “William” within the logic of a lineage. But let’s continue the example by adding “son” to that
series to make “William first born son.” The addition creates a new sense for the whole of the expression. Whereas William had been the first born, he is now been designated as a son. He is the first born among sons, but it is no longer necessarily the case that he is the first born of children. Further note that introducing each successive term to this sentence does not simply add a new layer to an already existing meaning. “Son” conditions the series via a logic of gender and, especially when combined with the hierarchical logic of “first,” of patriarchy. Thus, with each additional term, the series simultaneously expands the possible lines of connection available to the sentence and constrains and propels the place of each of those terms. With each addition the sense of the sentence mutates according to a serial logic.

Let’s extend this example further: what if, as good grammarians and rhetoricians, we were to insist on punctuation? What if we were to insert a comma into the sentence: “William, first born son.” We typically see punctuation, similar to so called “rhetorical language,” as a supplement to the baseline meaning of a sentence. In this case, the comma causes us to pause, which aids the reader in seeing the relationship between the terms, but does not itself alter the sense of the sentence. Can we, in good faith, believe this to be the case? How does the comma distribute its own organizational logic through the sentence and, at the same time, be affected by the logic of the sentence itself? Clearly, setting off “William” from “first born son” marks the proper noun as the predominate term of the sentence, subordinating the other terms to function as secondary predicates. Does not a certain privileging of subjectivity assert itself over other modes of organization? What if we were to add a trope or figure, such as “fruit of my loin?” Does this addition simply act as an embellishment of a
primary meaning, or does it not add to the sentence its own logic, affecting the pathway of the sentence as a whole, and thereby the function of each term and the sense of the sentence itself?

What this inquiry reveals is that the structure of writing is not that of form or of forms, but of formation. In other words, the structure of writing is not a thing but an activity. It doesn’t provide a final shape for thought, but acts as an canal - we might even say it acts as an ally or adversary - that works on that to which it relates as much as it is worked on by that to which it relates. Its structural openness means that writing can always be added to, subtracted from, and re-worked. Each change in composition is a change to the entire logic of a series. And while those logics are not finally determinate, as we can see by the numerous possibilities and constraints brought to bear by each term added to our example sentence, they do alter what is capable of a series and what it is more or less inclined to accommodate. In other words, the structure of a mark does less to add determinate meanings to a sentence than it does to impose itself upon the sentence, forcing the sentence to reorganize itself in response to the imposition. Thus, given writing’s structural openness, coupled with its iterability, we must take the ambiguity of its borders seriously. That is to say that it does not seem possible, in any rigorous sense, to truly demarcate writing from what we might traditionally consider “non-writing.”

Take for instance the role of the writer and its relation to the act of writing. If writing is essentially repeatable and capable of relations beyond those pre-ordained for it, then we must rethink the writer/writer relationship as something other than a subject/object or subject/tool relationship. On the one hand, we must consider the ways in which the writer is structured within writing. On the
other hand, writing has taken on an agential power insofar as its very operation is creative. In recognizing this inventive power, coupled with its structural openness, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the implications this has for our relationship to writing, as writers. If writing has a creative power beyond that which is transferred to it through the genius of the writer, we cannot in good faith maintain that writing functions as an instrument or a technology simply commanded by writers. Thus, we must question how writers are implicated in the writing activity.

It should be evident that commonplace conceptions of writing as a tool that is *used* by writers, as if they have a total command over it, is problematic. As I have already demonstrated, the structural iterability of writing ensures that any mobilization of a mark cannot be finally bound by the intentions of a writer. Writing, and written marks more generally, bring with them their own logics and force that bear on not just that which is written, but upon the writer him/herself. Writers work within and through writing, but they do not possess a mastery over it. Thus, in understanding the relationship between the writer and writing, we need a new grounding metaphor.

Given that writers operate within writing, we might consider writing as something inhabited. From a different angle, given that writing has its own agential force, we might think of writing as something with which writers collaborate. I think that both of these descriptions have merit, particularly because each destabilizes the instrumentality, knowledge, and skills oriented discourse that so frequently describes the writing process. Both inhabitation and collaboration accentuate a give and take relationship between the act of writing and the writer. For similar reasons, I suggest that we think of writing as
something the writer “undergoes,” which speaks both to writing as activity and as an experience. As an activity, writing is something that we do, but as an experience, writing is something that happens to us. To “undergo writing” speaks to both the doing and the being done to of writing without simply subordinating one to the other. The other useful connotation of the metaphor is that undergoing also connotes journeying, collaborating, and inhabiting. Understanding writing as an undergoing emphasizes the limits of authorial intention. That is to say that if we think of writing as a purposeful journeying within an [unknowable] terrain that is constituted by its own agencies, then we must think of the writing process not only as a kind of collaboration with those forces, but as a kind of collaboration that happens within an environment. Thus, to say that we inhabit writing does not mean that we make a home out of writing so much as it is to say that writers are embedded within writing as they write; the metaphor of the journey applies insofar as we must always journey and produce within a [written] terrain. Textual production is always the result of a collaboration produced through a kind of alliance between the writer and the process of writing itself.

In understanding the relationship between the writer and writing, we must attend to the particular way in which intention becomes text. As I argue above, this act of representation is ultimately an act of invention. The act of writing is precisely the “becoming other” of an intention as it is reconfigured within the structures of writing and made subject to different iterative chains. But what is the nature of this translation? How does consciousness transform and translate to the iterative structure of writing? In some ways, we have actually already answered this question. In showing that the iterability of writing
is not a feature of writing, but a more general logic to which writing is subjected, we must look to the logic of iterability itself to understand the representative translation of intention to writing. The work of translating an intention to writing - what I have also called representation and invention - is not a matter of extending thought to writing but of repeating or citing it. What is revealed in understanding the iterability of writing and the representational relationship between consciousness and writing is the structural iterability of consciousness itself.

Conscious thought, experience, and the entirety of mental life, must be understood as a kind of iterable chain. The movement from conscious thought to writing is the citational grafting of elements from one chain to another. Thus, in our example of William, we must see that the transformational quality of writing is not contained to the sentence itself, but also implicates the chain of consciousness itself. In fact, we must understand a dual sense of the concept of writing that has been emerging through our investigation. On the one hand, there is the classical concept that has fast been dissolving and evolving in response to our inquiry. On the other hand, there is the emerging, and more general, sense of writing as an iterative and inventive activity. What should be increasingly apparent is that consciousness itself functions as a kind of writing within this second more general sense. In other words, the activity of writing - of the representation of consciousness in writing - involves the transformation of the motivating consciousness as much as it does the written chain.

In a very real way, then, we must understand that the activity of writing is simultaneously an act of self-creation and self-transformation that does not happen at the behest of a governing consciousness precisely because, as we've
already revealed, consciousness operates on the same plane as writing and does not stand above it in a regulatory role. The result of this encounter between conscious intention and the activity of writing is simultaneously distanced and immanent. It is distanced insofar as the inventive power of the encounter is not governed by a transcendent consciousness, but is submitted to the encounter itself. In other words, the inventive power is outside of the hands of the writer and is thereby, in some ways, removed or distanced from it. On the other hand, the encounter is immanent insofar as consciousness and writing encounter each other on the same plane. In other words, because consciousness does not govern, but becomes enmeshed with writing, the act of writing becomes immanent. How are we to describe an encounter that is transformative, distanced, and immanent? Perhaps surprisingly, I propose that we think of this in terms of pedagogy. Writing is pedagogical, I argue, because it drives the self-transformation of the writer by way of a submission to a structurally open logic of iteration. Furthermore, the kind of invention that writing produces - the kind that implicates the writer and is thereby self-transformative - must be understood as a kind training. It does not just invent an image of a self, but works on, and even transforms, the very inclinations, dispositions, and modes of operation that make up the writer. In short, the activity of writing is a means by which the very being of writers are shaped. This is similar to what Debra Hawhee, by way of the ancient Greeks, calls physiopoesis, or a learned second nature. In sum, writing is a cultivating activity: it is pedagogical.

To be clear, I am articulating a rather narrow understanding of pedagogy that actually opposes knowledge to learning. One commonplace of learning is that it is a matter of obtaining knowledge. The kind of pedagogical operation that
I ascribe to writing is not a matter of adding information to our personal reservoirs, but of cultivating, and even transforming, the very mode by which we encounter the world. Deleuze provides us a useful articulation of this distinction: "Learning is the appropriate name for the subjective acts carried out when one is confronted with the objectivity of a problem (Idea), whereas knowledge designates only the generality of concepts or the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions" (DE 164, my emphasis). I am not here discounting the value of knowledge, but merely differentiating the kind of pedagogical power, or force, of writing. The learning enabled in the act of writing is one wherein the writer is submitted to and transformed in response to an entire "symbolic field" (DR 164). The learning that occurs is not an addition to a transcendent human subject who then applies generalized knowledge to similar situations, but is the transformation of that subject in relation to the problematic to which a writer is introduced.

Deleuze provides the example of swimming as a way of understanding this difference: "To learn to swim is to conjugate the distinctive points of our bodies with the singular points of the objective Idea in order to form a problematic field. This conjugation determines for us a threshold of consciousness at which our real acts are adjusted to our perceptions of the real relations, thereby providing a solution to the problem... As a result, 'learning' always takes place in and through the unconscious, thereby establishing the bond of a profound complicity between nature and mind (165). The kind of learning that writing provokes is not necessarily conscious to the writer, but is informative of un/consciousness itself. In short, writing trains and shapes inclination. Chapter 3 will much more fully explore this claim by way of an
examination of imitation pedagogy and the relationship between repetition and
physiopoesis as introduced by Hawhee.

**Interpretation**

Let's take a step back to give an accounting of where we have come. Our
investigation of "writing itself" has clearly implicated far more than the
seemingly simple act of writing. In articulating the iterative and open nature of
writing's very structure, we have revealed writing to be fundamentally inventive
and pedagogical. Writing is in the business of shaping, cultivating, and
producing. But, so far, it does not seem to be in the business of communicating
meaning. Of course, my decision to start our investigation with Derrida's
observation of writing's iterability - a project directly informed by and subversive
of writing's traditional function as a mode of communicated meaning - has a lot
to do with this seemingly egregious oversight. But we should pause and reflect
on what role, if any, communicated meaning does have in writing. I argue that
while both of these terms do function in writing, they don't do so as a
conditioned activity. What I mean by that is that writing *does* communicate and it
*does* mean, but, given our investigation to this point, we cannot in good faith
claim that writing *communicates meaning*.

As we've already demonstrated, there can be no rigorous means by which
writing can be in possession of a content. It is simultaneously required to be
repeatable and mutable. Thus, even if writing were capable of *bearing* an
intention at all, that meaning would be altered at the point of its inscription and
its repetition. But, in contrast to what *seems like* a failure of writing, we ought to
recognize that writing does indeed communicate. The transformative power of writing operates to shape, condition, and reform in its representation. Thus, while writing does not communicate meaning, it does communicate a force. Derrida notes this clearly in his reading of J. L. Austin, who, according to Derrida, is the first to "free the analysis of the performative [utterance] from the authority of the truth value, from the true/false opposition, at least in its classical form, and to substitute for it at times the value of force, of difference of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force)" (SEC 13). This isn't to say that writing contains a force or that it means a force, but that it is a force: the communication of a force is that of propagation. Writing is an action and not a thing in the substantial sense of the term, i.e., writing does not have a substance to it but is an action.

This observation, about the communicativity of writing, should be evident from the sum of our investigation to this point. But what may not be clear is the relationship between writing and meaning. If the meaning of writing is not that of coded transmission, then how does it mean? Put another way, what goes on when we interpret [written] language. I emphasize interpretation here because the hermeneutic activity has been placed squarely before our investigation of writing. We know that we cannot ask "what does writing mean?" because to do so treats writing as a substance that is in possession of meaning. So, we must consider interpretation and meaning from the perspective of activity. This is precisely toward what Derrida directs our attention when he writes "Writing is read; it is not the site, 'in the last instance,' of a hermeneutic deciphering, the decoding of a meaning or truth (SEC 21)." Writing is not opened up so that it
reveals to us its essence, but is something that we encounter through the activity of reading that works on us.

I call this "working on us" that occurs in reading interpretation, but we are in clear need of re-articulating what we understand as interpretation. To this end, I turn to Friedrich Nietzsche, who provides a powerful account that I think is of great use here. In the second essay of On the Genealogy of Morality, Nietzsche describes interpretation as a "domination" or "overpowering" that results in a "transformation" or "requisition." In short, Nietzsche articulates interpretation as an encounter between two forces, wherein one force takes hold of and dominates another, forcing it to respond. This sense of interpretation is general; he is not relegating interpretation to language and, in fact, points to a whole range of things that are subject to interpretation, including "any physiological organ (or legal institution, social custom, political usage, art form or religious rite)," indeed, "anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew... by a power superior to it" (51). While the scope here seems hyperbolic, we should pause to get ahold of what is caught up in the process of interpretation that Nietzsche argues is the key to understanding the way in which the entirety of existence is evolved. The first observation we should make is that Nietzsche is not referring to things when he writes on interpretation: one thing does not interpret another thing. Rather, he is referring to forces: force interpret force, or activity interprets activity. Nietzsche’s emphasis on force here is intimately tied to his concept of "will to power," which he sees as the driving force of all life. Will to power, which is importantly not "the will to have power," is the process by which one form of life imposes itself on another form of life and, in so doing, forces a response from the mode of life onto which it imposes itself.
Put another way, the interpretational process of will to power is that by which a mode of life expresses itself through (or makes use of) another mode of life or force.

This process of interpretation, argues Nietzsche, works in two ways. The first is the activity of the interpreting force onto the interpreted force. But the second is the reactivity of the interpreted force back onto the interpreting force. As Nietzsche phrases it, interpretation is the process “of subjugation exacted on the thing, added to this the resistances encountered every time, the attempted transformations for the purpose of defence and reaction, and the results, too, of successful countermeasures. The form is fluid, the ‘meaning’ [Sinn] even more so . . . It is no different inside any individual organism: every time the whole grows appreciably, the ‘meaning’ [Sinn] of the individual organs shifts (51). What we see in Nietzsche’s physiological metaphor is a re-evaluation, or reinterpretation, of the argument I made above about the inventive and pedagogical power of writing. Our analysis of how writing works on writing to represent, and thereby transform, writing is precisely the process of interpretation that Nietzsche here describes. A term imposes itself on the series to which it is interjected and forces that series to re-articulate its sense - it's very logic - in response to the imposition. But the interpretation is not uni-directional. That is, the series does not become a mere, or transparent, vessel for the new term but reacts - what Nietzsche calls a resistance or defense - to the imposition. Thus, the newly emergent sense of the series is not identical to the sense of the old series or the new term, but is the result of the re/activity of the interpretation.

Thus, far from evacuating meaning from writing, we must acknowledge that writing is essentially interpretive. The very process by which writing operates is one wherein writing necessarily interprets anew. Furthermore, before we all
too hastily relegate this interpretive process to the technical activity of inscription, we must also realize that our sense of writing has operated according to a logic of interpretation that places the writing of consciousness and the writing in the classical sense on the same ontological plane. Thus, we must note that consciousness itself is as subject to the activity of interpretation as is writing. But, in many ways, we have already demonstrated this in revealing the pedagogical nature of writing. What I want to point out here, though, is that far from suggesting that writing is devoid of meaning, it is overflowing with meaning. To be clear writing does not contain meaning, but, as an interpretive encounter, expresses meaning in every instance. To return to Derrida's language, writing is not a site for hermeneutics; rather, writing is read and reading is a meaningful activity.

Hermeneutics, of course, has, from its beginnings in the interpretation of sacred texts been caught up in the question of correctness. In other words, the question of the “meaning” of a text has always been, at the very least, concerned with getting the meaning right; with translating the difference of the text to the sameness of our interpretational frameworks. But, our sense of interpretation prevents such an evaluation since there is nothing there to get at in the first place. How, then, are we to evaluate reading and writing? What are we to make of the differential relationship between a writer and writing, and between a reader and a text?

Our most obvious insight is quite bleak, given that I use, following Nietzsche, the language of “domination,” “overpowering,” and “requisition,” to describe interpretation. Are we left to conclude that writing is an irreducibly violent encounter? I think the answer is “yes,” and not only because we can
easily enough trace the term “writing” to the Old High German term “rizan,” meaning to “tear” or “scratch.” Although, we should not dismiss these connotations either. They provide a reminder that writing is necessarily an imprinting or an altering: inscription requires something on which to be inscribed (here we might think of ritualistic markings and tattooings of the body). But in a more structural and profound way, interpretation, and thereby writing, is violent.

As Diane Davis routinely argues, the very process of [traditional] interpretation is at its core a process of colonization. To “understand” something is to submit it to a particular interpretational framework. This submission amounts to reducing the unique differences of an interpreted object to the sameness of the interpretational framework. In other words, our frameworks of understanding do not add the difference of a text to our understanding, but reconfigures it to fit the terms of our understanding. This violence of colonization different from, but no less violent than, the Nietzschean account that I articulate: texts are *forced* to express, and alter, themselves in response to interpretation.

What I don’t want to do here, though, is provide a way out of this violence or even suggest a means by which we can contend with the violence of writing. Instead, I want to point to a feature and a power of writing. First, writing is necessarily violent. Second, to say that all writing is violent does not mean that all violence is the same. Therefore, writing is an essentially ethical activity insofar as it is a means by which of engaging otherness. Another way to say this is that writing is a mode of response-ability. Part of reconciling ourselves to this reality is caught up in recognizing that the fact that we cannot get out of or avoid violence is not tantamount to saying that we should ignore or simply accept it.
Thus, a major demand on theorizing, and especially teaching, writing is that of attending to how the violence of writing works.

Chapter 4 considers the ethical ramifications of writing’s structurally interpretative function through an investigation of the concept of “The Rhetorical Situation.” In so doing, I analyze the hermeneutic function of the rhetorical situation and articulate how that function works violently. I then reconcile this essential violence with the explicit goal of the concept to provide a means by which to attend to the otherness of the other. Lastly, I re-imagine the rhetorical situation along inventive and pedagogical lines that operate so as to affirm difference. While this chapter does not shirk the question of violence - and in no ways argues that violence is an avoidable feature of either writing or understanding - it does attempt to nuance our understanding of the violence of writing in both practice and instruction.

**Conclusions and Projections**

As a brief overview, I have argued here that writing is iterative, open, and interpretative. It is iterative insofar as the readability of writing is predicated on its recognizability and its recognizability depends upon it maintaining a certain structural integrity that is capable of being repeated across instances. It is serial insofar as writing must be able to connect to other iterative structures. Anything that is capable of being repeated - and thus is constituted by a structure - is capable of citation within a textual chain. Writing is structurally interpretive insofar as its iterative and serial logic bears directly on the way in which it expresses meaning. As I demonstrate above, we cannot reduce meaning to
information that is embedded in writing, but must understand it as the particular quality and force that is expressed through writing. In this way, writing is the process by which terms (or “forces,” to use Nietzsche’s language) express themselves through other terms.

In addition to these three structural features, I also posit three powers of writing. Writing is inventive, pedagogical, and response-able to difference. First, writing is inventive insofar as it does not simply consist of the transmission of content from one medium or form to another, but necessitates the representation of one form of writing to another. The act of representation expresses a new sense as determined by the particular relationship of a series. Thus, even seemingly simple transcriptions are in fact inventive activities. Second, writing is pedagogical insofar as its inventive power implicates the agent of writing (the writer) in addition to expressions of writing (the text). Thus, the activity of writing works so as to shape and cultivate the capacities of the writer at the same time as it represents that writer in his/her writing. Third, writing is response-able insofar as it is necessarily an engagement with difference. In taking note of the first two powers of writing - both of which may be seen as a form of transformation - we must recognize that the styles of writing have a significant bearing on how writers respond to otherness.

In recounting these structures and powers of writing, it should be clear that the initial goal to investigate “writing itself” was barely able to get off of the ground before it extended itself “beyond” itself. Yet, I do not think that this indicates that the inquiry somehow failed to keep writing at its center. Instead, it indicates that writing “itself” is relational and therefore cannot be isolated in any narrow way without simultaneously cutting off its very essence. As detailed
above, if writing is iterative, open/serial, and interpretive, then any theoretical or empirical attention to “writing itself” necessitates that writing pulls in and relates to what we might call “non-writing.” Indeed, each step of my analysis of writing extended what gets to count as writing and as well as form. In keeping with this trend, each of the following chapters provides a more extended meditation on one level at which form functions in writing. In turn, this “scaling” function of form demonstrates that the iterative logic of writing itself extends itself to thought, consciousness, and all experience in general, making it impossible to maintain a division between writing and non-writing.

While it should be clear that we must, in some very important ways, be skeptical of making “writing itself” the object of study for composition and rhetoric, I do not think my investigation works simply as a critique of Sánchez & Dobrin’s calls to more explicitly attend to writing. Both scholars make a very astute and important observation about the state of the field. Writing tends to get overlooked for either its representational function or for an institutional demand to teach writing. Writing, as a bearer of content (representation) and as a skill (teaching), tend to get amplified over its logical structure and the ways in which writing informs and works on meaning and pedagogy. In other words, I think there is a considerable opportunity to make writing more central to the concerns of the field that does not simply cut off that to which writing relates, but instead attunes our concerns through a different frequency.

For instance, one such opportunity is to consider how theorizing and practicing writing might bear on the ways in which we teach writing. Another opportunity, however, is to attend to how we practice writing and even how writing functions where it seems most inconspicuous. Toward this latter concern,
Chapter 5 attends to the writtenness of writing program administration as an iterative, structurally open, and interpretive practice.

Of course, there is an unavoidable irony in taking up Sánchez and Dobrin’s calls only to return to pedagogy along the way. But, again, I assert that there is not necessarily an opposition between writing and pedagogy. It is one thing to render writing voiceless in our attempts to teach it, but it is another thing entirely to explore writing so as to, in some ways, collaborate with its logic and force so as to cultivate better writers. In fact, I don’t think that what I’ve called the “pedagogical power of writing” need be limited to writing pedagogy, but can include a broader educational value. In short, I’m arguing that writing offers a means by which to shape rhetorical response at an ethical level.
Chapter Two
Reanimating Modal Writing

“Modal writing”\(^3\) is a phrase that we now only encounter in graduate courses on the history of rhetoric and composition.\(^4\) In fact, the term “modal” has become so inextricably attached to “multi,” that I could hardly blame you for assuming my title is missing a word. But, when we do come across “modal writing,” and remember that it is that “modal writing,” it often gets lumped in with the field’s greatest foil: Current-Traditional Rhetoric (CTR). Grammatical correctness, clarity of style, drill and repeat pedagogy, and, of course, modal writing, are all relics of an era marked by prescriptive pedagogies and poorly grounded scholarship. As everybody knows, the problem with modal writing is that it presents discourse as a set of pre-existing forms that students must master. For the process generation, and for ours, this amounts to killing invention and rendering genre stale. In direct contrast to these claims, this chapter re-configures modal writing as a method of rhetorical invention; more specifically, I theorize a version of modal writing that uses rhetorical forms - tropes, schemes, discourses, and genres - as means of transforming and reshaping thought.

---

3 Often called “the forms of discourse,” or “writing in the modes of discourse.”
4 Or, we assume someone forgot to include “multi” in front of the term.
In situating this central claim, I argue that, while there was a great need to move beyond modal writing as it existed in the middle of the 20th century, we now stand in a position to re-approach these practices and the theoretical foundations upon which they are grounds. Both CTR and modal writing drew harsh criticism from scholars, particularly in the late 1960s and 70s, who claimed that they are based more in lore and tradition than in research and theory. These critiques, however, often lump together 150s years of rhetorical theory and composition pedagogy under the singular moniker of “Current-Traditional Rhetoric” and turned that paradigm into a foil against which a newly emerging discipline could demarcate itself. But, as Robert Connors and Sharon Crowley show, neither CTR or modal writing have ever existed as a homogenous practice. Ultimately, the critiques that coined “Current Traditional Rhetoric” into being were more efficacious in spurring on new scholarship than they were in giving a robust account of 18th century rhetorical pedagogy; furthermore, the heterogeneity of what we have come to call modal writing should not be finally dismissed for its contingent association with CTR. Thus, many of the most influential critiques of modal writing are more focused on how the practice has been enacted in textbooks and classrooms than they do with modal writing’s theoretical underpinnings.

Yet, at least two important critiques deserve careful attention along these lines, both of which I believe are best articulated by Sharon Crowley in *The Methodical Memory*. First, Crowley argues that modal writing is bound by a rigid

---

6 Consider, for example the power that the term “Current Traditional Rhetoric” carries with it after Richard Young’s 1978 “Paradigms and Problems.”
methodology rooted in a modernist epistemology that treats rhetoric as tool of vehicular communication rather than as an inventive practice. Second, she claims that even in its most heuristic versions, modal writing is relegated to the sphere of universal knowledge as generated by mental reflection and is thereby cut off from the locally situated concerns that are the hallmark of rhetorical thought and intervention. In short, Crowley argues that modal writing is problematic because it is not sufficiently rhetorical.

This chapter uses Crowley’s critiques as means by which to reimagine modal writing as rhetorically inventive practice. Specifically, I turn to the 18th century philosophies of mind that underpin the earliest iterations of modal writing because, according to Crowley, they are the engine by which writing is reduced to non-rhetorical vehicular transmission. In short, empirically based epistemologies, especially that of John Locke, configure memory and method as the two primary means by which we produce knowledge. Accordingly, “good” writing is simply a matter of reproducing those methods in language clear enough for any other rational being to follow through to the same conclusions. Thus, as Crowley emphasizes, writing is reduced to a transportation device for thought and, thereby, lacks any inventive force.

In contrast to these empirical epistemologies, I examine Immanuel Kant’s work on the mental faculties from the perspective of rhetorical theorist Gina Ercolini and philosopher Giles Deleuze. I argue that Ercolini and Deleuze’s work on Kant provides the means by which to build a rhetorically inventive version of modal writing. Ultimately, I argue that the role that form plays in guiding aesthetic judgment, according to Deleuze’s interpretation of Kant’s third critique, illuminates a parallel role that form in writing plays in provoking rhetorical
invention. That is to say that form, as a kind of organizing force, provokes coordinations of thought that are not simply determined by a thinking agent. Thus, I argue that practices of modal writing, as repetitions of specific forms, works to provoke new coordinations of the very thought that supposedly animates it. Thus, when modal writing is practiced in according to an inventive disposition, it can provide a means by which to explore and respond to rhetorical situations in inventive, and thereby unforeseeable, ways.

**A Brief Overview of Modal Writing**

Before proceeding, a general refresher on modal writing will be helpful. While categorizing discourse is nothing new, the particular species of modal writing on which I focus existed in its most stable form from roughly 1827 until the 1940s and derives its organizational principles from rhetorical theories that explicitly connect discourse to the philosophy of mind. A mode of writing roughly refers to the form of a discourse as determined by the effect that discourse is to have on the mind. While there have been many modes of writing, they are most frequently and most recognizably broken up into explication, description, narrative, and argument, infamously shorthanded to EDNA. The traditional goal of modal writing is to discipline students in the conventional features of each mode so that they might be deployed in future writing situations.

---

7 As Connors notes in his treatment of the modes, “the general taxonomic impulse of Early American composition-rhetoric can be traced all the way back to the classification mania of Roman rhetoric” (211).
George Campbell’s *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, first published in 1776, serves as the most powerful theoretical foundation for modal writing, arguing that rhetoric is “that art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end” (1). The ends of discourse, for Campbell, are not directed at specific persons or situated audiences, but to the various powers, or faculties, of the mind. As Campbell puts it, “all the ends of speaking are reducible to four; every speech being intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (1). As Arthur Walzer makes clear, the move to relate rhetoric to the mind is, in large, an attempt to situate rhetoric within an increasingly dominant empirical epistemology that saw itself as opposed to rhetoric and frequently outright hostile to it.

Walzer sees Campbell as a mediator between empiricism and rhetoric, in effect arguing that “rhetoric can both inform the science of the mind (psychology) and itself benefit from the laws of science” (35). Thus, as Walzer’s interpretation of Campbell goes, rhetoric can gain legitimacy by grounding itself within the knowledge producing methods of empiricism while contributing a unique perspective on the human mind by offering “rhetoric’s tradition concern with the relationship of speech to the hearer [by offering insight into] how the mind responds to stimuli generally” (35). The rhetoric that emerges from this synthesis is thoroughly modern: for example, the rhetor who wishes to communicate knowledge to his/her audience ought to construct discourse in such a way so that it affects the means by which rational humans come to understanding. Similarly, the rhetor who wishes to persuade his/her audience

---

8 Walzer, Arthur E. George Campbell: Rhetoric in the Age of Enlightenment.
ought to construct discourse in such a way so that it affects the means by which human will is moved to action. Campbell, Walzer argues, does not see himself as departing from classical rhetoric so much as extending its purvey and strengthening its foundations (47-48). In other words, he sees faculty oriented rhetoric as a more robust version of Aristotle’s pisteis.

Campbell, however, did not teach writing or publish composition textbooks, even if his philosophy of rhetoric had a profound impact on those who did. Connors suggests that, while the origin of modal writing is difficult to pin down, Samuel P. Newman “has as good a claim as anyone to the ‘invention’ of the modal formula” (220). In his 1827 textbook A Practical System of Rhetoric, Newman divides writing into five kinds: didactic, persuasive, argumentative, descriptive, and narrative. Each of these kinds of writing aims at various faculties of the mind; but rather than differentiate these aims according to the mental faculties, Newman imported literary genres to give more recognizable forms to likely instructors of writing. Thus, as Connors notes, “Newman is a bridge from the Campbellian concepts of faculty-based aims and Blairian concepts about written and bellettristic genres to the prototype of the modal formula of narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative discourses” (220). Further delineations of modal writing informed by Newman’s faculty/genre frankenstein were fraught with two related tensions: 1) their theoretical roots were an often confused amalgamation of this or that version of literary genre and philosophy of mind and 2) the modes themselves vacillated between working as an inventive means of creating discourses aimed at various ends, on the one hand, and static forms in which discourse ought to be realized, on the other.
Connors presents us with two paths down which modal writing might have traveled as it set out conceptually from Campbell and practically in Newman. The path not taken he exemplifies in Henry Day, who, Connors argues, emphasizes invention over style in his 1850 *Elements of the Art of Rhetoric*. For Day, writing can be determined by four possible ends, each of which corresponds to a particular mental faculty: explanatory writing takes as its object the understanding, confirmative writing to that of judgment, excitation to the sensibilities, and persuasion to the will. For each object of discourse, there exists a number of modes of writing that help secure the intended end. For example, explanatory writing can illuminate thought to the understanding through modes of narration, description, and analysis, each of which can in return be further broken down into even more subtle modes of writing. Importantly, though, rather than simply focus on the generic features of each mode, Day emphasizes the logic by which each others so as to illustrate how each provides an approach for thinking about a subject matter.

For example, narration is a mode of sequencing thought “in continuous time or as in succession,” while analysis separates a theme into its component parts so as to enumerate them (54, 70). Thus, writing in a particular mode provides a writing with a framework by which to think through a subject area. Furthermore, Day’s modal writing does not treat the modes as stand alone discourses, but as composite logics that ought to be coordinated so as to

---

9 As Day posits, “if the mind be turned mainly on the matter, - the thought to be presented and the design of presenting it, the exercise of composition becomes a most interesting, attractive and profitable exercise” (iii).
accomplish one unified end.\textsuperscript{10} Any given mode can work in conjunction with any other, so long as its coordination is governed by the particular demands of the end in question. If, for example, a writer’s ends are persuasive in nature, explanatory modes of writing should only be invoked insofar as they are properly subordinated to the primary mode of persuasion. But, importantly, the particular way in which a mode of explanatory writing relates to a particular mode of persuasive writing functions to provide a specific means by which to invent what is available to say on a particular topic.

Much to Connor’s dismay, Henry Day’s version of modal writing did not instill itself in American colleges.\textsuperscript{11} That distinction largely belongs to Alexander Bain, whose 1866 \textit{English Composition and Rhetoric} organized the entirety of his pedagogy around the teaching students to adhere to the generic form of the modes of writing rather than use them as heuristic engines for exploring a subject matter. Connors notes that the Bainian style of modal writing was successful because reducing the modes to abstract generic feature made writing instruction straightforward and formulaic for American colleges that were quickly moving away from classical education and toward pragmatic training. As Connors puts it, the shift moved rhetorical instruction from “a concrete, form-based model, rooted in literary high culture, to a more pliable abstract model that was adaptable to anything a rising young American might wish to say” (223). In short, the appeal of Bain’s modal writing system is that it provided a formula for adapting writing to specific and pragmatic ends.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{10} We might be inclined to call such combinations “multi-modal.”
\textsuperscript{11} Connors laments that Day was ultimately too much of a polymath to really dedicate himself to rhetoric and composition and that his textbooks were overly systematized, even if inventive, nuanced, and intelligent.
As modal writing shifted further away from theories of rhetoric and toward the practical aims of textbook instruction, it become increasingly rigid and inflexible. As Connors puts it, “By 1920 the origin of the modes was lost in the mists of time; they had presumably been carved in stone during the Paleolithic Age... [and] the teaching of composition was frozen in its tracks between 1910 and 1930” (226). As a result, the sheer diversity and complexity of the modes slowly gave way to a reductive concern with expository, or informational, writing that had long since lost any connection to the faculty of understanding. As the modality of writing narrowed, principles of clarity, unity, and transparency eventually became the driving force of writing instruction. As Connors aptly notes, originally “the modes and methods were means, not ends, though for over seven decades they were given so much credence they were treated as ends in themselves” (256).

From this perspective, it is easy to see why scholars after 1960 had little tolerance for modal writing. Edward Corbett, referring to Sherman Hill’s 19th century pedagogy of modal writing, writes that Hill “made such a fetish of grammatical correctness that he soon reduced rhetoric to a set of ‘do and don’t’ prescriptions.”12 James Britton argues that practices of modal writing have little to no theoretical foundation, focus on the product and not the process of writing, and that their taxonomies are incoherent.13 Richard Young condemns modal writing for no other reason than its association with “Current-Traditional

---

Rhetoric,” which is the very term that he helped bring about. In addition to echoing Britton’s concerns about its taxonomic structure and obsession with product over process, Frank D’Angelo argues that the practice is “based on outworn faculty and associationist psychology.” William Woods similarly criticizes modal writing not simply for relying on outdated psychological theories, but for unreflectively mixing and matching psychological assumptions.17

Despite its overwhelming rejection, I want to emphasize that the version of modal writing that was so unanimously ousted in favor of process-pedagogy bears little resemblance to its early incarnations that were rooted in Campbell’s rhetorical theories. In fact, it is hard to call what got rejected by process-pedagogues “modal writing” at all. Rather what was rejected was a set of practices and habits that had almost completely become detached from their theoretical foundations. Thus, in re-imagining modal writing, I want to steer clear of the calcified versions of what modal writing eventually became to be and thereby avoid the critiques leveled by process pedagogues. In what follows, I focus my inquiry on the relationship between modalities of writing and the faculties of the mind. Yet, admittedly, limiting the scope of my inquiry in this way does not simply avoid critique. Sharon Crowley’s The Methodical Memory offers a sustained and nuanced engagement with rhetorical invention in Current-

16 D’Angelo cites hemispheric theories of the brain to undermine faculty and associationist psychology; although, he must reduce the mind to the brain in order to do so.
17 See also Woods, William F. “Nineteenth-Century Psychology and the Teaching of Writing” CCC 36.1 1985. While Woods does not focus on modal writing, he does give a more robust take on the psychological theories that grounded 19th and early 20th century composition instruction.
Traditional Rhetoric that simultaneously critiques modal writing at the heart of its theoretical foundation.

**Modern Epistemology: Method and Representation in Writing**

In *The Methodical Memory*, Crowley argues that modal writing, both in its best and worst versions, is inextricably linked to an empirical epistemology that dramatically reduces rhetorical practice. First, it reduces the *scope* of rhetoric to only include matters of rational and universal knowledge. Second, it reduces the *role* of rhetoric to that of transportation: rhetoric becomes the vehicle by which rational knowledge is communicated to other rational human beings. As a result, rhetoric loses its inventive potential and situated purvey. In order to re-animate modal writing as a practice, it is necessary to first engage these theoretical frameworks so as to understand its dependence on them and, thereby, reveal a means by which to reconfigure the practice.

For Crowley, the evolution of rhetorical invention into the modern era was spurred by John Locke, who shifted the place of the human away from the communal and theo-metaphysical arenas of the classical and medieval ages and into a natural one wherein humans are distinct individuals who take in the external world around them via their sensory organs as direct reflections that, in return, serve as the raw material the mind needs to create complex ideas through various processes of association (*MM* 1-2, 5). Locke’s epistemology requires a human mind that is both directly in touch with the natural world and capable of reflecting on and affecting its own operations (*MM* 16). This dual capacity of the mind to create knowledge is dependent on its ability to methodically work
through the particular ways in which sensory impressions relate to each other and how knowledge can be produced either from the immediacy of those intuitions or through rational deductions that begin from those immediate perceptions.

The paradigm is important for rhetorical invention, argues Crowley, because it shifts the locus of invention away from the community (classical invention), and the divine (medieval invention), and into the mind of the individual human (16). The various powers, or functions, of the mind are able to transform simple ideas in complex ones by creating associations between them on the basis of specific laws modeled for us in the natural world. Human reflection and abstraction are the means by which new ideas are generated and, therefore, invention moves from the external world of the community and into the personal realm of the mind. Discursive engagement, written or otherwise, loses a clear role for rhetorical invention since private, pre-linguistic, mental reflection become the primary means by which ideas are generated.

The role that rhetoric is granted, however, is quite diminished. As Crowley argues, rhetoric becomes the means by which we are able to reconstruct the mental processes by which we come to knowledge so that they are reproducible for a rational audience (44). The real problem with this picture, for Crowley, is that any rhetorical theory that presumes that communication represents a prior reality unproblematically accessible to us in nature fundamentally strips rhetoric of the vast majority of its power. As Crowley claims, “Writers may have altogether different reasons for composing than repeating the results of an investigation, reasons such as reforming community values or criticizing the decisions made by public officials” (156). If modal
writing, in its best instantiations, can only function as a form or heuristic for guiding mental investigation to predetermined ends, then it is all too limiting for rhetoric qua rhetoric.

For Crowley, modal writing operates within this “modern” rhetoric in three ways. First, as I’ve already noted via Connors, the history of modal writing is a steady progression away from the complexity of human activity, such as ethics, politics, aesthetics, and the emotions, and toward rational investigation and the communication of information. In other words, Campbell’s complex of human faculties and their corresponding discourses concerned with the will, the passions, and the imagination, were eventually almost completely reduced to expository writing focused on enlightening the rational understanding.

Second, modal writing acts as a predetermined end to which all writing ought to conform as determined by the specific aims of a given discourse. Crowley finds this to be the case even in its most heuristic iterations, such as those by Henry Day. For example, the heuristic function of the various modes was less a process of inventing responses as found in rhetorical situations as it was a means by which to explore and make communicable the intricacies of a subject matter. So, exploring a topic via narrative writing doesn’t help invent thought in relation to a kairotic moment so much as it functions as a heuristic to aid rational reflection: the engine of invention remains located in the logic of a given subject matter and, therefore, within the mind of the rhetor.

Third, it perpetuates increasingly formulaic writing instruction. Since the mental processes by which humans come to an understanding about the world are universal, good writing simply needs to attend to the workings of a universal mind and can ignore the specificities of a situation. Thus, modal writing reduces
instruction to mastering the generic features of a kind of the modes of writing so that they might be deployed according to a particular goal, not to respond to a specific situation. Thus, In short, for Crowley, modal writing perpetuates the ghettoization of rhetoric that limited its operation to a prescriptive practice of producing generic communication and stands as a relic of a narrow-minded epistemology.

I take Crowley’s critique to be damning. But, it is damning of the modal writing that we actually got. Yet, just because modal writing is actually grounded in Locke and Campbell’s theories doesn’t mean that those theories are the only frameworks from which a practice of modal writing can be built. The link between writing and the mental faculties is a promising one if the relationship could be made to flow in both directions. That is to say that if we could understand how writing folds back onto the mind, potentially affecting or conditioning its powers; and if we could understand how that process is always rhetorically situated, I propose that we could re-build modal writing to function as a rhetorically inventive practice.

In response to this possibility, I propose that Immanuel Kant work on the mental faculties, aesthetic judgment, and rhetoric provide a rich terrain from which to re-vitalize modal writing. I suggest that recent thought on Kant’s philosophy, from Giles Deleuze and Gina Ercolini, illuminate a new path by which to re-imagine the relationship between writing, rhetoric, form (of both art and writing) and the mental faculties in such a way that can inform a new practice of modal writing. In short, I argue that Kant’s philosophy of aesthetic judgment, in the Third Critique, provide the resources for understanding how form can catalyze what Kant describes as the “free play” of the imagination,
which intertwines thought with situation. As I will show, Kant’s conceptual apparatus allows us to analogously conceptualize form and style in writing as catalysts for inventively engaging rhetorical situations.

**Another Modernism: Kant, Mind, and Rhetoric**

Admittedly, Kant may seem like an odd place to turn. Very little attention has been paid to his thought and legacy in the field of rhetoric and composition. What little has been said about him emphasizes his definition of rhetoric as the art of “deceiving by means of a beautiful illusion” that is “unworthy of any respect whatsoever” (COJ §53 original emphasis). Even if we were to put Kant’s explicit thought on rhetoric aside and concentrate only on the theoretical foundations, he is still a suspicious starting point. Kant is, after all, notoriously devoted to enlightenment ideals of universality, transcendence, and method in both thought and action. Furthermore, Kant is the thinker who critiques reason so as to uncover its proper powers, domain, and method of operation. All of this should immediately raise alarm in rhetoricians sympathetic to Crowley’s critiques of Current-Traditional Rhetoric. But, despite merited suspicion, more recent scholarship on Kant’s thought in and out of rhetorical theory have re-engaged and re-imagined what Kant’s philosophy makes available to contemporary theories of rhetoric and to the philosophy of mind.

This matter aside, Kant’s work *does* problematizes the relationship between the world, mind, and rhetoric developed in the empirical epistemologies of Locke and Campbell that grounded 19th and 20th century writing instruction. Locke theorized a representational relationship between
world/mind/rhetoric that sees the natural world and its laws as reflected in the mind and subsequently communicated in language. But Kant’s epistemology is not based on representation; at least not representation understood as the activity of conforming thought to a knowable world. First and foremost, Kant critiques empiricist philosophies, like those of Locke, that start from the premise that the world clearly presents itself to us via our senses.18 The world as it is - the noumenal - is unknowable to us. Rather, the world is always already transformed and crafted by our senses and mind. Our most basic sensations, which are presented to us passively, are first categorized by the mind in terms of space and time. These presentations, however, exist as pluralities of sound, color, shape, and so forth that have little to no value for us without further mental processing.19 In order to organize these presentations in an coherent manner, the mind must be able to synthesize and schematize them (an operation of the imagination), categorize them into discrete units with qualities (an operation of the understanding) and rationalize their relations and potentiality (an operation of reason). This is a very complex and layered operation of the mind that extends far beyond the associationism advanced by Locke and other empiricists.

Yet, the operation is nonetheless what Kant calls representation. But, as Giles Deleuze reminds us, representation and mirroring are very different actions, at least when it comes to Kant: “the important thing in representation is

18 Kant’s critiques of reason are as much a critique of human reason as they are of empiricism and rationalism in philosophy. Against the former, Kant argues that the world is not available to us empirically. Against the later, he argues that our ideas about the world are generated through the dual activity of indirect sensation and thought, and therefore not preformed by a divinity or by nature.
19 One might be tempted to call these fragments, but this would be incorrect since a fragment implies a prior whole, and the whole is only generated from the mind’s ability to synthesize and unify.
the prefix: *re*-presentation implies an active taking up of that which is presented; hence an activity and a unity distinct from the passivity and diversity which characterize sensibility as such” (*KCP* 8). Thus, the mind takes on an active and creative role in relation to the world rather than one of conformity. Insofar as this is relevant for our investigation, it necessitates that rhetoric *cannot* have the same vehicular relationship to the world that it does in an empirical paradigm simply because there is no mentally represented reality for it to mirror in language.

The question then is, how *does* rhetoric fit into Kant’s schema? Despite his oft-cited rejection of rhetoric, Gina Ercolini notes that Kant’s frequent and oft-cited dismissals of rhetoric are aimed at on a version of rhetoric that can be reduced to manipulation through deceit. In fact, Ercolini notes that part of Kant’s dismissal of rhetoric is informed by his acknowledgement of its terrible power. For Kant, rhetoric and poetry, are powerfully tied to the faculty of the imagination. Poetry operates in the domain of aesthetic judgment and, within that domain, is allowed a free play so as to appreciate beauty in art. Rhetoric, however, operates within the “serious business” of understanding (CoJ § 51). This immediately makes rhetoric suspicious for Kant, given its ability to construct, via the imagination, beautiful illusions that can undermine and circumvent proper understanding.

This, however, is not the dismissal for which the field has taken it. Rather, Ercolini argues, we should take it as an appreciation of rhetoric’s immense power: on the one hand, rhetoric’s power lies in its ability to bring an abundance of lively and rich material before the mind from our external sensations of the world and our internal intuitions derived from the imaginative play of the mind. This power has the capacity to overwhelm the reason and understanding and
circumvent their authority, thus justifying Kant’s suspicion. But, on the other hand, rhetoric’s ability to mobilize sensation and imagination so as to create a plethora of vivid and lively images can also grant perspectives to the understanding otherwise unavailable to it, thus granting us more enriched and situational enmeshed perspectives on our lived experience. As Ercolini writes, “These images bring to our attention things that would otherwise perhaps go unnoticed” (187). As an additive power, the rhetorical mobilization of the imagination and sensation provides richness and depth to our available experience. So, while rhetoric can overwhelm us to the point of paralysis or irrational action, it can also provide a rich tapestry of experience to mobilize in our internal deliberations.

Ercolini contends that, within the broader range of Kant’s thought, the art of rhetoric is not just confined to the activity of generating material for the mind to understand, desire, and judge. It is also an important part of the expressive power of the mind: the way in which the mind generates knowledge, desire, and pleasure both to itself and to others. Ercolini goes to great pains to show the balancing act that Kant attempts to achieve in considering the complimentary roles that style and cognition play in expression. She particularly highlights the unique powers of style and reason in expression. Reason, she notes in Kant’s “Blomberg Logic,” is uniquely capable of narrowing the scope of an issue so as to gain precision and clarity into an issue, but at the same time risks becoming too limited. Style, on the other hand, broadens and enriches thought with energy and vivacity, but risks obscuring boundaries and confusing clear thinking. Ercolini emphasizes while traditional treatments of style often create a sequential relationship between reason and style (first reason creates a thought and then
style adorns it), Kant emphasizes the contribution that each play in the expression itself (Ercolini 186-87). In developing an expression, one must balance the focusing power of reason and the enriching power of style so as to express, and even generate, thought.

In at least two ways, then, rhetoric and style can be seen as fundamentally inventive within Kant’s thought. First, rhetoric serves an inventive role in the generation of thought and understanding insofar as it crafts images from sensation and imagination that supplies understanding with its raw material and, thereby, serves a crucial role in enabling and directing its activity. Second, rhetorical style serves an inventive role in expression by functioning to enrich the thinking process and counter-balancing the focusing function of reason. Furthermore, rhetoric functions to situate both invention and thought. In the first case, rhetoric crafts images out of the sensations made available from experience in localities as well as the imaginative exploration of those localities. This, of course, is not a replication of a pre-existing situation, but an active taking up and representing of a situation. Second, the balancing act between style and reason in expression is not determined by a transcendent ideal or universal law, but on the specific contours of a local situation. Ercolini highlights Kant’s argument that the particularity of an issue, speaker/writer, and audience must inform the particular balance between richness and acuity in expression (Ercolini 189).

A careful examination of the role and scope of rhetoric in Kant’s philosophy of mind should relieve Crowley’s concern for invention and
situatedness in rhetorical practice. Kant’s philosophy of mind can provide a place for rhetoric that is thoroughly situated and inventive in both its role in generating and expressing thought. What is less clear, however, is how Kant’s philosophy of mind can serve as a ground for a pedagogy of modal writing or how writing instruction might be informed by an understanding of the mental faculties. In turning to this question, we must consider the interplay of the faculties of mind so as to reveal the particular way in which writing might inform their operations and serve as a rhetorical means for both invention and expression.

From Boundaries to Generation: Provoking Powers of the Mind

While Ercolini allows us to re-situate the role and scope of rhetoric within Kantian philosophy, the scope of her project does not extend to the specific activity of imagination in rhetorical practice. I suggest that the process of aesthetic judgment that Kant describes in *The Critique of Judgment* can offer us a model for thinking about how rhetoric can mobilize the imagination and simultaneously shows how modal writing can serve as an engine for rhetorical invention. Specifically, I argue that form in writing acts upon us so as to provoke our mental faculties to coordinate in unique and unanticipated ways, thus transforming the means by which we are able to encounter a rhetorical situation. Modal writing, I assert, can serve as a unique means of propelling

---

20 I do not wish to argue for the necessity of this reading of Kant. I merely wish to show that such a re-articulation of rhetoric’s role in invention can be inspired from Kant’s thought.

21 Hovering over any contemporary discussion on the “mental faculties” is a certain precariousness that the faculties work as an antiquated and pre-determined set of “mind powers” that any current psychology would laugh off. As D’Angelo’s critique showcases, it is easy to
this sort of experimentation by mobilizing the form of rhetorical tropes, figures, schemes, and generic conventions to work as catalysts for transforming writing so as to explore and experiment with the conceptual contours of a rhetorical situation and thereby alter possible rhetorical action.

In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant investigates how it is that we are able to come to aesthetic judgements about the objects presented to us via sensation and how we can communicate those judgements to others with any expectation of reciprocity. He begins with the acknowledgement that the kind of pleasure that arises from beauty cannot be “guided by any purpose or principle whatever” (*COJ* §39). This stands opposed to enjoyment derived from pure sensation, which is passive, or that pleasure elicited through understanding or moral duty, which are guided by the structures of pure and practical reason. In contrast to the pleasures of sensation and moral duty, beauty is a pleasure of reflection. As Kant puts it, “the very consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, is that pleasure” (§12). In non-aesthetic judgements, purpose is always derived from a concept, e.g., moral judgements must accord with a maxim that can be made universal without inconsistency (the categorical imperative). But, the purpose of aesthetic judgments cannot be determined by a concept or end, for doing so would make the judgment objective rather than subjective. But, Kant argues, we can only engage the world as if it hangs together according to some kind of order. Therefore, the purpose of an object under aesthetic reflection reduce “faculty psychology” to a glorified form of phrenology. But, such critiques are easily dismissed if we do not equate the mind with the brain and understand a “mental faculty” simply as a contingent capacity of the mind determined in relationship to other rhetorical agencies.
becomes the singular composition of its formal relations. Those formal relations, say between color and texture, give the object a propensity to act on us in some ways over others. Given this understanding of purpose, it is easier to understand how aesthetic pleasure results: the activity of contemplating the form of an object is pleasurable insofar as it allows us to explore and experiment with its singular set of relations. It is, bluntly speaking, the indulgence of exploring all of the nooks and crannies of the form of an object, discovering the various ways in which they do relate and could relate.

The undetermined exploration of formal relations demands that the mental faculties be free to harmonize is multiple and unregulated ways. Only a free play of the various powers of the mind can produce the pleasure of aesthetic reflection because only an undetermined accord between the faculties can leave the mind susceptible to unanticipated and pleasurable discoveries. But, as I’ve already alluded to, this free-play is not chaotic or haphazard. The singular composition of an object’s form provokes and inclines the faculties toward some lines of coordination over others. Thus, while no one goal or mental power determines the role of all the others, as Kant argues is the case for judgements of understanding and moral desire, the formal composition of an object does take on an influential role in reflection.

Kant thus intimately entwines the pleasure of aesthetic beauty and formal composition with invention. The pleasure of beauty arises in the very activity of contemplating the form of an object. But that contemplative action is simultaneously inventive insofar as the formal relationships under question must

---

22 Kant is clear that it is not the materiality of the object, but its formal design (CO/ §14).
be uncovered and the possible ways in which they might relate to us and other objects must be generated. In this way, the pleasure of beauty is the very activity of inventing the aesthetic potential of a formal composition.

In *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, Giles Deleuze argues that Kant’s revelation of the free play of the faculties in aesthetic judgment determines that any specific coordination of the faculties, such as those necessary to judgements of understanding and desire as determined in the first two critiques, are predicated on the ability of the faculties to freely accord. Thus, the free play of the faculties serves as the condition of possibility for the exercise of reason in its speculative (understanding) and practical (moral desire) interests. In addition to restructuring the relationship between the faculties in Kant’s philosophy of mind, Deleuze shows that the powers of the mind cannot be naturally determined and their use cannot be constrained by an external force. In other words, any particular harmony of the faculties allows for a particular way of engaging the world. The powers of the mind are just that, powers that are capable of various things when coordinated in various ways. Kant’s life long struggle to determine the proper limits of reason so as to prevent their operation from leading us to illusion can only be carried out by fiat. In fact, the immanence of Kant’s critique does less to discipline the mind than it does to show the expanse of its power. As Deleuze notes, “we can distinguish as many *faculties of mind* as there are types of relations” (*KCP* 3). If the faculties are capable of an infinite free play, then it stands to reason that an infinite number of relations are possible and thereby powers of the mind. In the face of such a realization, it seems reductive to limit the powers of the mind to any determinate set.
But Kant’s foray into aesthetic judgment reveals something else. As I’ve mentioned, the free play of the faculties within the aesthetic realm are not chaotic or random. Rather, the faculties are provoked, albeit not determined, by the form of the object under reflection. If we take Deleuze’s insights seriously, form functions as a means for inspiring coordinations between the faculties and, thereby, generating new powers of the mind. Thus, aesthetic reflection cannot be relegated to an aesthetic domain. Or, better put, determinate modes of thought, such as understanding and desire, operate within a more general aesthetic purvey. Simply put, our capacity to engage the world is not determined by a pre-structured mind, but remains unknown to us, not because we haven’t done an adequate job of mapping it out, but because the very capacity to engage the world is dependent on the infinitely various coordinations of which it is capable. While this revelation clearly flies in the face of Kant’s explicit project to determine the structure of the mind, it also provides an alternative way of understanding the worth of that project: rather than illuminate the universal categories and functioning of the mind, Kant invented particular coordinations of the mind that allow for kinds of mental activity.

Further still, this revelation dislodges the mental faculties from the mind. If, as I have been arguing, the form of phenomenal objects work on and in conjunction with the mind to shape its very capacity of operate, then the very structure of the mind cannot be rigorously differentiated from the material world. The activity of thinking operates within a mind/world complex spurred on by the continually shifting of heterogenous relations between the aesthetic stuff of the world and newly emerging powers of thought. Thus locus of the
faculties must be shifted away from the internal structure of the mind and into the realm of relationality.

**Making the Modes Inventive: Faculties, Form, and Writing**

In extending these insights to the practice and instruction of writing, I argue that form in writing can function as a catalyst for exploring and experimenting with the potential of a rhetorical situation in much the same way that aesthetic form can serve as a catalyst for aesthetic judgement and pleasure. But, at first glance, the transition does not work perfectly. For one thing, “form” in each side of the analogy functions differently. In the case of aesthetic judgment, form is the object of exploration. In the case of writing, it is a mode of expression.

Yet, up to this point I’ve been using the word “form” in at least two ways. More recognizably, I’ve used it to refer to the structure of an object. But I have mobilized it otherwise as well. When I say that the faculties assume a particular accord with each other, as determined by a particular interest or as inspired by the form of an object under aesthetic contemplation, I refer to the form of the faculties. But this form is less of a form of an object than it is the form of an operation. The faculties relate to each other in their activity, each contributing something unique to a more holistic operation. The particular way in which the faculties relate in their activity is the form of that operation; it is the form of a movement.

In a similar way, I suggest that there is a difference between the form of a text and form of the movement of writing. Take modal writing for example. In commonplace, and well justified, accounts of the practice, modal writing has
always emphasized the form of a writing product. It presents a vision of what discourse ought to look like given a desired effect. From that effect, a mode of writing provides the model by which to conform thought within a generic mold. But this covers over form in the activity, or movement, of the writing itself. The two are, of course, closely tied to each other. The activity of writing will inevitably produce texts and the form of a text is dependent upon the form of the writing that produced it; but they are not identical to each other. And modal writing has focused on the form of texts and given little attention to the form of the writing. But it nonetheless mobilizes a form of the writing activity: that of conformity. Writing in the modes demands us to conform our writing to the form of a genre. All of the rules and steps espoused by modal based pedagogies can be reduced to a single goal: make writing fit the intended form of discourse.

I argue that modal writing can be re-animated by simply re-directing its attention away from form in writing products and onto form in the activity of writing. Textbooks oriented around modal writing offer a seemingly endless set of guides and rules for shaping thought within the form of a finished discourse. I argue that we should reposition these forms of writing so that they do not function as rules that guide conformity but as operations that transform thought heuristically. Take, for example, the form of narration. On the one hand, we can see this as a genre or a mold in which to fit thought. But the process of narrating an idea, or an exigence, or of the history of a rhetorical situation, consists of a whole set of possible operations, e.g., the act of creating a scene or of sequencing actions. Whereas traditional pedagogies of modal writing see “scene” and “sequence” as necessary elements of the narrative form, we might instead mobilize them as discrete operations that reform thought in relation to the form.
of the operation. The goal would be to use these forms as means for variating
perspectives of a rhetorical situation by making a narrative out of it, or by
breaking it up into “scenes” rather than into oppositional lines. The change in the
form of writing can serve as a catalyst for changing the form of our rhetorical
engagement with an issue.

Recasting modal writing as an inventive activity, however, requires more
than just re-situating the role that form plays in writing; it requires an
experimental and heuristic orientation on the part of the writer. In other words, it
requires that one let go of any determinate expectation of what the form of
writing is supposed to *accomplish* in terms of its stylistic or rhetorical function for
an audience. In the place of mastery and expectation, the writer must adopt an
openness to what formal transformations can reveal or generate in our rhetorical
engagements that were not previously available.

Of course, modal writing need not limit itself to the genres of narrative,
explication, description, or argument. In fact, it need not limit itself to genre at
all. The rhetorical tradition has access to a nearly embarrassingly large cache of
stylistic forms, tropes, and schemes. While we typically see these forms as
embellishments or flourishes that allow a central thought or sentence to carry a
greater rhetorical impact for a specific audience, I argue they can be mobilized in
a different way. They, like generic forms in writing, can serve as catalysts for
differentially transforming thought.
The Inventive Power of Conformity

In reflecting on the heuristic power of genre, tropes, and rhetorical schemas, I have been too hasty to pit conformity against transformation. In distinguishing between the form of an object, or product, and the form of a movement, a certain alliance between transformation and conformity is revealed. The conformity of thought to the form of a writing movement stages an encounter between thought and form that transforms that thought in unpredictable ways. This conformity is not one of resemblance insofar as the product does not look like the writing form because the writing form is a movement and not a product. To be sure, what is produced will look like something and will have its own form, but that form does not necessarily align with the form of the movement that created it. The conformity takes a movement as its model for repetition rather than a product and, in this way, we conform in order to transform, differently.

What is primarily at stake here, then, is an orientation to conformity, repetition, transformation, and invention. And, by their very nature, orientations are difficult to point to or showcase. But, for the sake of example, consider the rhetorical scheme articulus, which joins together short phrases via commas as opposed to conjunctions. According to BYU’s Silva Rhetoricae, the scheme is one of “rhythm” and is aimed at “differing speeds of style that depend upon the length of the elements of a sentence.” We would traditionally only turn to such an obscure concept as a means of adding a rhetorical weight or flourish to an already structurally complete discourse so as to adapt it to a rhetorical situation. While I do not wish to suggest that such a turn lacks invention - it is certainly an

---

23 The Greek term is asyndeton.
inventive act insofar as the stylistic alteration re-crafts writing in response to the contingencies of a local situation - I argue that we can also mobilize *articulus* differently.

Rather than execute the scheme as a means of responding to a rhetorical situation, a writing can inhabit the trope as a means of exploring and experimenting with what the logic of the trope can do to our thought and our ability to rhetorically engage the world. Such an activity, from the outside, might not look much different than dreaded “drill and kill” exercises. But, I argue, the shift in orientation makes all the difference, literally. Conforming thought and writing to the form of a writing movement, in this case *articulus*, leaves open, and in fact encourages, variation. The very goal of such an exercise is to proliferate possible variations so as to dislodge an entrenched or impoverished way of thinking about something and expose oneself to difference.

Imagine a writing exercise that asks students to mobilize *articulus* by conforming thought to the form of the scheme and thereby transform an idea in, say, 10, 50, or 100 different ways (or as many ways as possible in a determinate amount of time). Imagine such an exercise scaled differently, to engage paragraphs, sections, or entire essays by utilizing the formal relations of a whole bevy of available tropes, schemas, and generic logics. Such exercises, of course, could not exist in a vacuum or even haphazardly dropped in the classroom. As I’ve emphasized, the inventive power, while made cognizable by re-articulating the epistemological framework of modal writing, is enabled by an orientation

---

24 In my own teaching experience, I have found that these sorts of exercises can be remarkably energizing, especially after students begin to buy into the generative aspect of them. Agonism, competition, and curiosity animate the classroom on the best days and have produced intriguing results.
just as much as it is by the design of the exercise. Such orientations must be made clear, but more importantly, they must be cultivated and nurtured in class both in an instructor’s pedagogical style and ethos as well as through repeated writing assignments that inhere habits of experimentation in student writers.

Contrary to Kant’s aesthetic model, I posit that modal writing is an immanent activity rather than a distanced reflection. Rather than relate to the form of writing by reflecting on it, the modal writer must inhabit the form of the writing as a sort of thinking with and thinking through its logic. A scheme, trope, or even generic convention, must be inhabited by the writer so that its form can work on and transform his/her thought. In this way, the particular form of a mode of writing cannot be seen so much as mobilized; the form is only revealed by its affective power on the writer.

To be sure, inhabiting a scheme or trope does not yield a pre-determinable result. As Erasmus’ copia exercises show, even the simplest of sentences, sentiments, and thoughts can be articulated in a plethora of ways to various effects. Part of the power of the exercise, though, isn’t just to develop an abundance of possible expressions, but to provoke inventive and thoughtful encounters with the world. The constrictive form of a rhetorical figure inspires the the kind of encounter that is possible by provoking various mental engagements, or coordinations of our faculties. In this way, the transformative power of inhabiting a form comes from the immanent activity of conforming thought to a form of writing. The seemingly paradoxical result is a transformation through conformity, made possible by the encounter between the form of thought and the form of the movement of writing.
The particularity of that movement determines what we might call a rhythm of thought: the particular way our mental powers relate to each other, allowing for a very particular way of engaging the world. We find this to be experientially the case in both reading and writing: after a bout of either activity, we often find the world in some ways shaped by the contours of the writing process or by text we’ve been reading.

**Conclusion: Modal Writing and the Mental Faculties**

Sharon Crowley’s critique of the epistemological foundations of modal writing strikes at the center of the practice. Situating rhetorical action within an empirical epistemology reduces rhetoric to a vehicular tool and strips it of its situated and inventive power. Only be re-working that framework by making rhetoric a key operation in developing ontological realities can a new version of modal writing emerge that operates inventively. But, if Crowley strikes at the heart of modal writing, Robert Connors, and Albert Kitzhaber before him, touches on its spirit. The real historic downfall of the modes lies in a shift of orientation in their practice away from seeing the modes as a means and toward worshiping the modal forms as ends in themselves. This deadening, I suggest, is made possible and perpetuated by the epistemology described by Crowley that alienates writing from invention; but even with a more rhetoric-friendly theoretical framework, the health of modal writing depends upon the ways in which it is inhabited. We must see recently disparaged terms like conformity, imitation, and repetition as means by which we can produce variation and difference. In short, I have argued that the power of writing to shape our possible lines of thought and
engagement with the world is due to both the linguistic world we’ve inhabited - what we might call the content of that world - as well as by the formal rhythm or movement of writing. An extended reflection on the development of rhythmic writing - as a pedagogy and as a practice - will follow in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

RHYTHMIC WRITING: REPETITION, IMITATION, AND RESPONSE-ABILITY

*Repetitio est mater studiorum* - Latin Proverb

Imitation and repetition have historically central places in western education, but you wouldn’t know it if you read scholarship on composition and rhetoric pedagogy. Repetition, as a concept and as a pedagogical practice, has gone out of style, while imitation has been relegated to the margins of writing instruction. The reduction is both puzzling and troubling: how is it that a major lynchpin of educational practice and theory appears to be absent in a discipline largely centered on pedagogy? Perhaps this is simply due to the perception that they are common-sense concepts that might be reduced to the maxim, "if you want to improve a skill, find a good model and repeat it again and again." My suspicion, however, is that these practices met the same ill-fated end as many of the key features associated with Current-Traditional Rhetoric (CTR). In the wake of the process-pedagogy revolution, anything based on decontextualized, product based, “drill and kill” exercise was jettisoned in favor of situational, processual, individualistic, and self-aware instruction.
Take for instance two of the major arms of process-pedagogy: cognitivism and expressivism, each of which dismissed classical approaches to education for their own particular reasons. For the cognitive rhetorics, as championed by Linda Flower, Janet Emig, James Britton, and others, neither practice sufficiently instills a conscious awareness in students as to how to write well. Good writing, they argue, cannot be a simple matter of unconscious habit, but needs to come from meta-reflective choices. Expressionist pedagogues, such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, take their cue from the romantics in rejecting the imitation and repetition for squashing individuality in favor of conformity.

More recently, however, general shifts in the educational landscape have further condemned the practices along cognitivist lines. The rise of “learning outcomes” has coded education as a kind of acquisition of discrete bits of knowledge and skill. This is especially pronounced in the teaching-for-transfer (TFT) movement that emphasizes the need for students to be able to not only be able to reflect on their acquisitions, but be able to consciously account for how they transfer from context to context. From this perspective, imitation and repetition fail, not so much because they don’t teach skills, but because those skills cannot be differentiated from each other because their acquisition occurs at the unconscious level.\(^\text{25}\)

The emphasis on the unconscious is the real strike against repetition because the benchmark for determining successful knowledge/skill acquisition has become meta-cognitive demonstration. Students must be able to show that they have successfully claimed ownership of knowledges and skills through

\(^{25}\) Consider Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak’s Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition and Sites of Writing (2014).
reflecting on their meta-structures and, more importantly, we must be able to see a clear connection between the learned context of those acquisitions (the classroom) and other situations wherein they can be made applicable (the real world). In short, imitation and repetition based pedagogies are marred by their inability to produce meta-level knowledge of the skills they purportedly deliver.

While the field did well in moving away from mechanical drill and repeat models of pedagogy, I argue that imitation and repetition can offer much more than rote exercise or individual crushing conformity. Yet, in the haste to reject a distasteful legacy of CTR, we have exited from a rich terrain of theoretical and pedagogical possibility. Furthermore, while repetition has all but disappeared as a viable practice in scholarship, imitation has only allowed to exist insofar as it can technically demonstrate its inventive potential. This burden, I argue, reduces imitation to a technical skill that distances the relationship between the student-writer and his/her models and thereby reifying the terms of those relations. What results is a user/tool model that leaves the student perhaps better equipped, but ultimately unaltered by the educational process. This distancing effect, I argue, reduces imitation pedagogies capacity to cultivate a student’s disposition toward difference and thereby closes off a the possibility of rich response.

This chapter carves out a place in which to re-imagine what repetition and imitation can offer writing instruction. It begins with an inquiry into modern attempts to reintroduce imitation pedagogy and gradually works toward issues of repetition simply because, while the scholarship on imitation is limited, little to nothing has been written on repetition. In response to this inquiry, I argue that the burden placed on imitation pedagogy to prove itself inventive have covered
over its traditional concern for cultivating student ethos in addition to teaching skills of inventive writing. Rather than suggest that we return to ethos based pedagogies, I argue that we should reimagine repetition and imitation pedagogies as a way for cultivating trained capacities, or dispositions, for responding to specific rhetorical situations. In articulating these capacities, I link repetition practices to imitation pedagogy by arguing that imitation through repetition works to deconstruct the boundaries that separate writer, model, copy, and situation and thereby provoke new coordinations that allow for rhetorical responses that are singularly tied to the kairos of the rhetorical situation.

Ultimately, I argue that thoughtfully crafted imitation and repetition writing practices can train students to habitually provoke a productive indistinction between themselves and the rhetorical situations in which they respond. While I situate my argument within an investigation of ethos, I argue that a habit, or disposition, of self-transformation in response to difference pushes beyond the territory usually reserved for ethos. In fact, I argue that it in many ways runs counter to ethos as a more or less stable character or as a set of values and virtues. Thus, in the stead of ethos, I turn to the language of “rhythm” to better gets at the fluidity inculcated through repetition and imitation.26 Thus, I argue that the ultimate power of imitation and repetition does not lie in its technical capacity for invention or even its ability to holistically shape an ethos, but in its capacity to inculcate a rhythm of “becoming other” in response to difference.

26 In making this move, I acknowledge that a healthy line of scholarship does in fact theorize ethos as a
Imitation Pedagogy: A Square Peg in a Round Hole

In many ways, imitation pedagogy has had the cards stacked against it right from the start, at least in our “modern era” of composition studies. In the scramble to move away from what would become known as “Current-Traditional Rhetoric,” scholars of composition became suspicious of anything that emphasized the writing product over the writing process, exercise over knowledge, or repetition over invention. As Robert Connors notes, “most theorists who discussed imitation even in the 1970s felt compelled to defend their interest in it...[because] it was perceived as ‘mere servile copying,’ destructive of student individuality and contributory to a mechanized, dehumanizing, Skinnerian view of writing” (114). Thus, those pedagogues who did champion imitation practices did so knowing that they had to preemptively assuage potential accusations, especially that of “mere servile copying,” by showing that imitation is aimed at invention, not replication.

For example, in reintroducing imitation pedagogy to the field, Edward Corbett commands his reader to “imitate that you may be different” (250). On cue, most of his article argues that imitation is not a matter of making carbon-copies, but of invention, as he In doing so, he argues that the animating principle of imitation, that of aemulari, focuses on the agonistic relationship between the student and a model more than it does on the similarity between a copy and its model. Thus, a practice of aemulari, which bears etymological connection to both “imitate” and “emulate,” demands that the student seek to rival, and even surpass, their model (244). Furthermore, Corbett highlights that the imitation

process begins first with an “analysis” stage, wherein the form of the model in question is either given in advance by an instructor or is extracted from a text (245). Thus, far from being a mindlessly drilled exercise, Corbett emphasizes that imitation is a meta-reflective practice that can consciously guide writers through the inventive process.

Similarly, Frank D’Angelo attempts to reconcile the false opposition between imitation and invention by declaring, in both his first and last paragraphs, that “form exists for the sake of variation” (283, 290). In doing so, D’Angelo showcases the varying power of imitation by using a selection of Irwin Shaw’s “The Eighty Yard Run,” as a model to produce his own analysis and imitation. In doing so, D’Angelo develops a detailed schematic that quantifies the text into number of words, sentences, and words per sentence, as well as qualifies it into kinds of verb and noun phrases, clauses, and sentences. The schematic allows him to extract the principles of the text’s “form” so as to imitate it in writing on other subjects. Thus, D’Angelo’s argument doesn’t just claim that imitation is inventive, and thereby not a matter of “mere servile copying,” but it is an exhaustive demonstration in the technical mastery available to imitation pedagogy to produce and teach invention.

The result of initiatives to prove imitation inventive at a technical level by D’Angelo and others did more to confirm and marginalize imitation as a sentence-level pedagogy than it did to revive a full blown interest in ancient rhetorical practices. But, while this categorization shouldn’t be a surprise given

---

30 Connors provides a list of similar imitation pedagogues, including Weathers and Winchester, Gruber, Starkey, and Halloran.
the prominence that this revived imitation pedagogy places on syntax, it is surprising it was further criticized for, as Connors phrases it, using “exercises to build ‘skills’ in a way that was not meant to be completely conscious” (113). At least part of what D’Angelo shows is that the end goal of imitation pedagogy is to teach students to “internalize alternative modes of expression [since] the more choices he has, the more truly inventive he is” (D’Angelo 290). Thus, the hefty apparatus is for the sake of equipping students with a ready supply of possible writing expressions. For Corbett, D’Angelo, and others, imitation first begins with a conscious analysis of the model to be imitated. But the implementation of that model slips into the realm of the unconscious as students inhabit and invent through those models. In short, “internalization” is not sufficiently meta-cognitive.

In many ways, this is precisely what a Frank Farmer and Phillip Arrington glean from their 1993 survey. As they note, there is “an abiding consciousness that imitation must somehow be made to ‘fit’ a paradigmatic standard which endorses process approaches to the teaching of writing” (23).31 While process certainly emphasizes invention over repetition, it also values meta-cognitive awareness and writing practices that are grounded in the “real world.” Thus, as Farmer and Arrington claim, imitation pedagogues must demonstrate that either imitation “can be subordinated to the writing process” as a sort of pre-cursor to proper writing instruction; or that they can “subsume imitation with the writing process itself” (23, original emphasis). If, however, imitation is only capable of demonstrating its technical inventive potential and fails to justify its emphasis on

exercises that are insufficiently meta-reflective, then it becomes all too easy to
doubly reject it for simultaneously being too technical in its inventive capacity
and too rote and decontextualized in its process.

However, what is lost in both Corbett’s and D’Angelo’s articles are their
claims that imitation is aimed at “the internalization of structures” (Corbett 250).
In both cases, so much of their articles argue that imitation is in fact inventive
that their claims about the education of the student is relegated to something of a
castoff point. They do not, in effect, tackle the problem of meta-cognition head
on. While this failure seems obvious from the point of view of cognitivist
approaches, I argue that it is, in many ways, also at the heart of the expressionist
critique. For the expressivist, imitation replaces the unique presence, or
awareness, of the writer for the externality of a model. What is lost in both
accounts is awareness of the student insofar as he/she doesn’t have a
knowledgable mastery over the skills he/she has cultivated or agency enough to
express his/her own uniqueness.

Yet, these critiques seem peculiar when viewed from a wider historical
perspective. On the one hand, imitation pedagogy has traditionally been aimed at
cultivating the character and personhood of students so as to cultivate a mature
style of expression. Far from replacing one’s uniqueness with a stale form,
imitation, in it’s best versions, has always worked to cultivate individuality. On
the other hand, the strong admonishment of tacit skill seems to be more of a
result of 1) an overreaction against anything that smells of Current-Traditional
Rhetoric and 2) an increasingly general education trend to commodify learning
by making transparent and discrete the skills and knowledges that students “pay
for.” In response to the first factor, I argue that, while the process movement has
been a tremendous benefit to writing instruction, we now safely stand in a place where we can reconsider the worth of pedagogies that emphasize practice, exercise, and habit. In response to the second factor, I argue that while there are certainly benefits emphasizing meta-cognition, limiting education to only that which can be demonstrated ultimately impoverishes it. Thus, in moving forward, I turn to a wider historical perspective that considers how imitation has traditionally attended to the holistic cultivation of a student’s ethos as a way of recuperating a pedagogy that does not reduce writing to that of a technical skill, but imagines it within a diverse and complex set of ethical relations.

**Alternative Models: Cultivating Ethos**

What little attention paid to imitation’s relationship to ethos in recent scholarship has been limited to the fringes of the history of rhetoric and rhetorical theory. Consider, for example, Edward Erdmann’s “Imitation Pedagogy and Ethical Indoctrination,” which turns to sixteenth-century English humanism to argue that imitation is capable of instilling ethical values in addition to its inventive capacity. Erdmann highlights that in classical and renaissance education, imitation did not only exist for the sake of variation, but to provide models of character to imitate and emulate. Granted, Erdmann’s account is historical in nature and is largely aimed at showing that, despite criticism to the contrary, imitation pedagogy did indeed have the ability to inculcate, or even indoctrinate, students with specific virtues. He does not, thereby, offer a model for re-

---

32 The impetus of the article is to refute the claim by Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine that 16th century h From Humanism to the Humanities 1986.
introducing a more holistic understanding of imitation to contemporary writing instruction, but merely gestures toward the possibility.

Of course, there is good reason to keep such a possibility purely academic, since would do well to be wary of indoctrination. Although, we would also do well to heed Erdmann’s apt observation that he “cannot think of any system of education which is not an indoctrination - least of all the present system, which, as Grant Boswell once pointed out, convinces students that knowledge is advanced scientistically, that is, by ‘accurate description and classification of the objects of nature independent of social consensus’” (10). Thus, Erdmann opens up two important reminders. The first is that we should be mindful of how educational systems advance values systems even, or especially, when we do not make explicit what those values are. The second is that we should reconsider how the process of imitation folds back onto students as something more than a technical skill.

Despite doubts of his own, David Flemming argues that since “the thirty-year-old love affair with the process paradigm has finally begun to cool,” we have the opportunity once again to consider the worth of classical pedagogy. For Fleming, whereas current-traditional rhetoric focuses too much on writing products, process pedagogy too narrowly teaches writing as a singular and processual set of skills that turn writing into an “more-or-less uniform sequence of stages” (105). Thus, for Flemming, whereas process pedagogy focuses too much on skill, and current-traditional rhetoric on product, the ancients offer a model for teaching writing as a matter of cultivating a student’s ethos. More

---

33 Flemming readily acknowledges that “the triple onslaught of print, capitalism, and romanticism has made us moderns deeply suspicious of imitation” (108).
specifically, he argues that we should extract the animating idea of the ancient progymnasmata\textsuperscript{34} exercises as a way of building a systematic curriculum of education aimed at cultivating the whole student rather than at equipping them with technical knowledge and skills.

But, again, Flemming argues that the value of the \textit{progymnasata} does not lie in the specific practices so much as the central set of ideas that animate those practices, which are aimed at developing “deep-seated verbal habits and dispositions oriented to public effectiveness and virtue” (114). To be sure, cultivating such dispositions and habits would require systematic and thoughtfully sequenced exercises, even if they are not directly imported directly from Hermogenes’ rhetorical handbooks. Flemming argues that such a set of formal exercises would need to build on each other, so that some baselines skills and habits would need to be mastered more-or-less discretely before students could move on to mobilize them in more complex ways. These exercises and skills would be both diverse and compoundable, not for the sake of teaching a process, but for fashioning pluralities of habit that “unite rhetorical and literary training” (117).

While Flemming doesn’t “propose a new \textit{progymnasmata} for our time,” his emphasis on the idea of progymnasmata as an education of the whole person is intriguing (117). The question, however, is if such an approach is possible without reducing it to the indoctrination of a specific set of values. Oddly enough, while Flemming recognizes that the “connection between writing instruction and character makes us uneasy,” he responds with the observation

\textsuperscript{34} Formal writing and oratorical exercises driven by imitation, translation, repetition, and form.
that “the ancient rhetoricians had no such qualms (107)” I, however, remain a bit more skeptical. While I take Erdmann’s point that we are always already instilling virtues in our students and I follow Flemming insofar that we would do well to at least be conscious of what those values are, I emphasize that we should at least be careful in considering what values our teaching practices champion and how they instill them. In short, we need to consider what it could look like for a pedagogy to explicitly shape the ethos of students in a plural society.

**Imitation through Repetition**

Mary Minock offers us a way of approaching this question by re-configuring the relationship between the student, ethos, and imitation all together through practices of repetition. Rather than see imitation as a means, Minock configures it as an end, or as she puts it a “by-product” (502). Her self-described “post-modern” pedagogy is aimed at cultivating rich relationships between students and texts by staging repeated encounters between the two. The goal is to break down the authoritative mystique of texts that “result in a distancing of the text from the reader which creates a rush toward determinacy and closure that discourages fantasy, desire, and jouissance” (502). Repetition is a primary strategy for accomplishing this task because, as Minock argues, repeated encounters with a text opens up cracks in its armor that, in return, open up lines of potential inquiry and dialogue. In other words, despite the seeming paradox, repetition produces alterity. In Minock’s pedagogical framework, students don’t structure models out of texts to copy, but repeatedly immerse themselves in a

text so as to unconsciously take on its style of thought and engagement. As she argues, “imitation can be a by-product of reading methods that do not necessarily aim at direct and conscious emulation” (494). In this way, the text becomes less of a tool for the technical pursuit of variating writing and more of a dynamic partner in dialogic thought that rubs off on the student.

Minock’s consideration of repetition and its relation to imitation is of particular interest. Rather than see repetition as the repetition of some pre-determined model or structure, Minock’s version of repetition is that of repeated encounters that give rise to a more unconscious and nebulous imitation. John Muckelbauer’s revision of Richard McKeon’s taxonomy of imitation is useful in understanding the difference between the two. Rather than differentiate types of imitation based on the kind of model being imitated, as does McKeon (Metaphysical, Poetic, and Rhetorical), Muckelbauer differentiates imitation based on the particular dynamic that animates the relationship between models/objects and copy/subjects in the act of imitation, which he breaks up into reproduction, variation, inspiration (although, he is clear to note that, in practice, each dynamic often overlaps with one or the other).

The first dynamic is "reproduction" or "repetition of the same," wherein the imitator isolates and analyzes a particular aspect of a model to repeat. This style of repetition is exactly what D’Angelo works out in his pedagogy and the imitative dynamic is inventive for all of the reasons that he, and other imitation pedagogues, have argued for decades. Imitation is inventive because imperfections in the process leads to new possibilities, because the writing style

of the model and imitator often combine and compliment each other in unanticipated ways, and because students take elements of writing from a variety or models that make for unique combinations in the writing process. Thus, imitation is inventive because of all of the variables that combination and multiplication make possible.

But none of this quite gets at what Minock’s imitation is after. Nowhere in her pedagogy does she hold up texts as models for imitation. In fact, to do so, would raise the level of textual authority rather than undermine it, as is her intent. Muckelbauer’s second imitative dynamic is helpful here, which he names "variation," or "repetition of difference." This second dynamic does not focus on the internal logic of the model in question, but on its particular force or effect. The imitator, instead of revering and replicating the model, attempts to get at the unique activity of the model and produce it differently, or even surpass it. This dynamic demands that the imitator vary from the structure of model in order to re-produce its effects. As Muckelbauer explains it, the imitation makes “variation an internal engine of imitation” (70).

Further operative in the repetition-of-difference is an agonistic spirit that seeks to “surpass” the model shakes up the hierarchical relationship between the model of the imitator so as to make the it more approachable and malleable. Minock’s pedagogy attempts to create an agonistic relationship between the reader and text that becomes dialogic over the course of repeated readings. As she puts it, “I want to encourage unconscious imitation in my students as a by-product of conscious struggle” (502, my emphasis). These repetitions - fueled by a wide range of reading prompts, questions, and writing assignments - create the conditions of possibility for the student to challenge, surpass, and even
undermine the text by attending to the affect it has on them in reading. But the imitation is an implicit ending point, as she points out “I must add a clear admission of subterfuge and paradox on my part: the more students are encouraged to play the more they become seduced into using academic prose, and the more they are caught in the academic web” (492). The trick is an oldie but a goodie: invite students to work against structures of authority rather than within them and thereby entice those same students to intimately engage with the text in thought provoking ways.

Minock’s treatment of imitation offers a great opportunity to consider the relationship between imitation and repetition. While she clearly points out the commonsensical observation that “any text to be imitated must be repeated,” her understanding of repetition through that imitation allows us to differentiate between two senses of repetition (499). On the one hand, we see the repetition that is enacted in any given imitative action: a model is repeated in its copy, either in terms of its internal logic (repetition of the same) or in terms of its effect or asignifying force (repetition of difference). But the seductive power of Minock’s pedagogy does not lie in either of these dynamics, at least within any one repletion of them. Rather, it comes from seriality.

Students emulate, challenge, and develop agonistic and dialogic relationships with texts because they return to them over and over; because they repeat the repetitions of imitation. First, the text is produced differently in each encounter, which punctures and destablizes the monolithic facade that powers the text’s authority. Second, the repeated engagements close the gap between the student and the text that is perpetuated not only by its authoritative clout but also by analytic models that tend to produce pre-determined readings consonant
with those models. Unlike analysis, which applies a model to the text and produces a reading from that engagement, repeated encounters of imitation create an ever evolving dynamic between the reader and text that demands attentiveness to the particularity of each encounter.

Muckelbauer’s third dynamic of imitation is helpful in understanding the power of this repeated repetition. What he terms “inspiration,” or “repetition and difference,” works to break down the boundaries between the object (text or model) and the subject (reader or imitator) by affirming the relationship between the two. As he puts it, “with inspiration, the very nature of the model changes. Instead of responding to either a determinate or indeterminate content... within this inspiring encounter, the model becomes responsiveness itself” (73). In the other two dynamics of imitation the boundary between the subject and object is emphasized and encouraged so as to provoke imitation. This is the case either by pointing to the features of various models that combine so as to create a unique copy or in the variation in the copy created by surpassing the model. In either case, the difference between the model and the copy is maintained either through instances of infidelity, combination, or usurpation. Inspiration, however, leads the imitator to lose him/herself in relationship to the model and thereby become unable to differentiate one’s own work from that of the model. This “losing oneself” is precisely the inventive power of inspiration since it is the process of becoming other, not in response to an (in)determinate other as in the first two dynamics, but in response to “responsiveness itself.” This breakdown between

37 Byron Hawk points to this phenomenon in James Berlin’s social epistemic pedagogy by showing how ideological analysis “prefigures the types of conclusions [teachers] expect their students to reach” (Counter-History 76).
the model/object and copy/subject is immanent: the student reader does not analyze the text so much as he/she immerses him/herself in it.

Yet, inspiration stands apart from reproduction and variation because one cannot enact inspiration in the same way one can quite deliberately replicate and/or vary. This is because, seemingly paradoxically, inspiration is only possible in combination with one of the first two modes of imitation. But the paradox is quickly resolved in recognizing that “responsiveness” cannot be isolated as a model in advance and thereby cannot be enacted as can the first two dynamics of repetition. Rather, inspiration emerges from these processes and is therefore not a technical process so much as it is an activity that emerges from the process. In short, the transformations that result of the imitative process destabilize the clear distinctions that separate the model and the copy. Those changes take on a character of their own as they move from iteration to iteration. This character, or manner of change, becomes the model to which the imitator reacts and transforms in relation. In other words, the model becomes dynamic, which is why Muckelbauer names it “responsiveness itself.” But, it is not just the model that becomes dynamic, since as the nature of the model shifts between iterations, the imitator must transform in response to it. Thus, the transformative process isn’t informed so much by a determinate model as it is by a particular kind of becoming-other the emerges from the alliance between the model and copy.

We can see a version of this in Minock’s account insofar as she allows us to see that inspiration is unlikely to occur in a single repetition. The destabilization of textual authority only arises out of repeatedly puncturing its monolithic structure through re-readings and re-questionings that allow the
student to contend with the text. In short, inspiration needs more than a
repetition of the same or of difference, but requires serial iteration. But, beyond
Minock’s observation, I argue that repeated encounters do not just destabilize the
authority of the text and collapse the distance between the reader and the
student, but they fold back onto the student as well and destabilize his/her own
position of (in)authority. In other words, inspiration doesn’t just narrow the gap
between the reader and text as Minock argues. Rather, an inspired dynamic blurs
the boundaries between the two, thus making the relationship immanent. The
student inhabits the text and, in his/her encounter, subjects both the model and
copy to inventive transformation.

Thus, Minock provides a prime opportunity to explore how imitation
pedagogy can be directed at the ethos of the whole student rather than as a set of
more or less technical or processual skills. But, we should also hesitate at calling
this the cultivation of an ethos, if by ethos we mean a stable character and set of
values. Rather, inspiration cultivates a posture of self-dissolution rather than self-
creation. From this vantage point, imitation is actually antithetical to ethos.
Furthermore, the “holistic” aim of imitation is similarly at stake, insofar as
repetition through imitation is works to make the boundaries between the model
and copy indistinct. Thus, new terms are needed to capture the becoming-
indistinct that is provoked through repeated imitation.

But, Minock’s pedagogy does not provide the means by which to address
these concerns. It is also squarely aimed at practices of hermeneutics more than
writing. Furthermore, unsurprisingly, Minock’s work on imitation has gained
little traction in scholarship on writing pedagogy, save for a footnote in
Muckelbauer’s The Future of Invention and a brief response by Philip Arrington
which amounts to nothing more than a reprimand for Minock not having engaged the “right” sources in her work.\textsuperscript{38} Thus, in what remains, I seek to use the insights garnered from Minock and Muckelbauer to theorize a more writing-focused pedagogy that nonetheless seeks after inspiration.

Minock’s own practice point in the right direction. In assigning her readings, Minock asks “students to render casual undirected responses twice, making sure they read the essay the second day in a different location at a different time of day” (503). Here, Minock’s nod to the physical register of the practice is of note. While she does not explore this experience beyond noting that the different readings become more “unique” as a result, I argue that a careful attention to the embodied nature of repetition in imitation is crucial for developing a pedagogy of inspired writing. In doing so, I turn to Debra Hawhee’s work on the intersection of rhetorical and athletic training in ancient Greece in order to more thoroughly connect the seriality of repetition to the responsiveness of inspiration.

**Rhythm and Response-Ability**

Hawhee’s extended investigation of ancient Greek rhetorical practice visa-vie its deep connections to athletic training provides a useful insight for developing a writing pedagogy aimed at cultivating habits of inspiration. While Hawhee turns to the language of ethos in developing her theory, she makes it clear that for many ancient rhetoricians, ethos isn’t so narrowly confined to a set of virtues and values that make up one’s character. Rather, the concept is closely connected to

\textsuperscript{38} Arrington, Phillip K. “Imitation and Composition Pedagogy: A Response to Mary Minock.” JAC.
the deliberate attempt to alter one’s very nature. In other words, attending to one’s ethos isn’t a matter of adopting this or that virtue, but to the capacity of the student to undergo a self-transformation in response to difference. As Hawhee notes, the very concept of *phusis* (one’s nature) connotes “temperament” and “character” as well as “growth” and “implies a capacity for change” (94). Thus, “insofar as these training practices produce a capacity for transformation, arts of existence, especially in the sophistic milieu under consideration here, might be more aptly construed as ‘arts of becoming’” (87). In short, Greek-sophistic pedagogy, in athletics, music, and rhetoric, aimed at cultivating students who are capable of becoming other than themselves - of changing their very nature - in response to a changing world.

One of the major means of cultivating an ethos of self-transformation is that of habitation through rhythm and repetition. In short, students would proceed through a sequence of highly regulated training movements that might include musical forms, bodily postures, or rhetorical figures. But, since musical, athletic, and rhetorical training occurred simultaneously, the sound of the *aulos* (flute) player permeated the training space, reinforcing the rhythmic nature of the training movements of each “discipline” by regulating those movements within time. Hawhee is careful to point out that the word “rhythm” is closely related to “manner” and even, in her account of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, “education” (*BP* 141). The connection lies in the sense that rhythm, as a “regularly occurring motion,” speaks to the ethos of a person as a tendency to act in a certain way. Education, then, serves as the process by which one’s tendencies, actions, or regularities are modified.
Even more crucial than the link between rhythm, ethos, and education, however, is that rhythm is not simply the regularizing of an ethos and is, therefore, not a matter of indoctrination. As Hawhee argues, the regularity of rhythm is a regulated repetition of alterity. Hawhee terms it a “cyclical differentiation” that “combines fixity with variability” (BP 141-42). The key isn’t any given repetition so much as it is the movement from one repetition to the next. The regularized change from movement to movement - from form to form - instills itself into the student, modifying his/her very ethos or natural rhythm of response. The heart of the educative process does not lie in the technical precision of any given form (hexis) that the student habituates through training, although this is clearly still a central and important component of the process. Rather, the heart lies in cultivating in the student an ability to respond, or a response-ability, to contingent situations that cannot be known in advance by regularly exposing students to difference. For the sophists, cultivating a response-ability must take pedagogical, and even moral, priority to learning technical skill and knowledge simply because the worth of skill and knowledge is predicated on one’s ability to properly adapt them in response to a changing world.

This style of training not only operates in space and time with bodies, but takes space, time, and bodies as integral parts of both the means and ends of education. In other words, the pedagogy operates in space and time with bodies, but also operates on them. Hawhee notes that two central concepts lie at the heart of the pedagogy: kairos and mētis. Kairos, as a familiar term in rhetoric, refers to the qualitative dimension of time and generally corresponds to a notion of “timeliness” or “good timing.” Hawhee argues that kairos is not just an
element of a rhetorical situation to which we must respond, but functions as an internal part to both education and response-ability. The repeated movements of rhetorical training to which I earlier referred provide a rhythm in which students familiarize themselves with rhetorical maneuvers. More importantly, the repeated transitions from one form to the next insert a repetitive engagement with difference and change. Hawhee notes that this repeated encounter with difference operates as a means for training students to immediately adapt to changing circumstance, thus incorporating *kairos* into their very ability to respond. This understanding of *kairos* stands in direct contrast to accounts that treat it as a metric of analysis.

The incorporation of *kairos* into the fabric of a student’s ethos is quite literal for Hawhee, as the second major concept she sees as grounding sophistic training is *mētis*, or the intelligence and response-ability of the body. As she goes to great pains to show, a strong divide between the mind and the body had little place for sophistic training. The body itself can learn and develop an intelligent “cunning” to adapt and respond to its situation. Similar to contemporary notions of “muscle memory,” *mētis* speaks to a register of the body that is not simply instinctual or governed by the conscious mind, but is rather a learned manner, or ability to respond to situations “intelligently.” Thus, to say that *kairos* becomes incorporated via education speaks to the body’s ability to learn modes of response that immediately respond to a situation, unfiltered through reflective, analytic, or even conscious thought. But, as I mentioned, a primary goal of Hawhee’s project is to trouble the very boundary between the un/conscious mind and the “mechanical” body. Hawhee shows that, for the sophists, the two realms bleed into each other: the mind learns to adopt second natures just as the
body learns to become intelligent. Thus, the kind of rhetorical sensibility that
sophistic education aimed at was the cultivation of a mind-body-environment
complex that could quasi-instinctively react and respond to difference through a
training regime powered by both the regulative and alternating power of
repetition and rhythm.

This training operates most obviously at the levels at which Hawhee
showcases them (music, athletics, and oratory) because the body-mind complex
shows itself much more obviously insofar as all of these activities embodied
responses to realtime events. Writing, however, is generally separated from this
mode of training because it is, seemingly by definition, more abstract, mindful,
less embodied, and even less situated. But, despite these ingrained
presumptions, it doesn't take much work to show that writing is, in fact, an
embodied action and it does occur in response to realtime events. So, while
Hawhee helps us develop a theoretical framework for thinking about a pedagogy
of response-ability we must press on if we are to account for such a pedagogy
must take writing into account.

**Rhythmic Writing**

As Peter Elbow notes in what he calls “The Venerable Tradition of Care,” which
he traces from Aristotle to Hazlitt to Ian McEwan, good writing should imitate
the qualities of good speech, which means that it should come off as
spontaneous, in common parlance, and genuine. But, according to this tradition,
the dirty secret of “good” writing that is that behind the scenes cold, calculating,
and careful thought has crafted it to present itself as speech. The conscious
reflection of “care” in writing stands in opposition to the immediate, unreflective, and the general sloppiness of “careless” writing. And although Elbow has been a longtime champion of “careless” writing because it is the best way, in his eyes, to generate the raw material, that raw material is ultimately only worthwhile after it has undergone a careful forging process of conscious reflection. Thus, given this strange relationship between speech and writing, it would seem that Hawhee’s "extemporaneous" training program is poorly suited for writing instruction, even if it may do quite well as a means by which to train responsiveness in oratory.39

Yet, I argue that writing instruction is ripe for reconsidering a more sophisticated mode of training. Elbow’s attempt to reconcile the age old suggestion that good, clear, writing can only come of out careful and conscious reflection with the power of free writing by creating a dialectical relationship between the two, unwittingly reifies their difference more than he reconciles them. As he argues, free writing and careful forging are ends of a spectrum that one dialectically flips between depending on what a writing project needs at the time (201). But, I argue, that Hawhee provides us with the means necessary to break down that binary and see how a kind of care might be introduced to “free” writing and how spontaneity can function within care.

As I argued in Chapter 2, form in writing does not simply refer to the form of a product of writing, but to the form of the activity of writing. In writing,

39 Elbow makes similar claims throughout his many publications on writing, but I am here drawing from Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing (2012)
we undergo a series of formal operations. These maneuvers are precisely the kind of thing that sophistic pedagogy is aimed at, not so much to master each form as a skill or content (although this is still a goal), but to cultivate a rhythm that nuances and enriches a writer’s ability to transform writing to a particular situation. Though writing products may not immediately seem to function as impromptu, embodied, or in many ways even *kairotic*, responses to a situation, the *activity* of writing absolutely functions in these ways. Writing is embodied and situated in space and time and writers respond to a myriad of preconceptions, (imagined) interlocutors, competing thoughts, and ethical demands that circulate around and within the production of writing. They mobilize grammatical and rhetorical forms as part of the writing process that engage with and transform those preconceptions, thoughts, and ethical demands. Writing is, I argue, just as performative and embodied as oratory, music, and athletics and therefore requires a pedagogy more responsive to writing’s extemporaneous nature.

If this is the case, then the value of imitation and repetition in writing instruction takes on an entirely different significance than has been ascribed to them. Their value is not primarily a matter of importing a determinate skill or piece of knowledge, nor is it a matter of their technical capacity to be inventive. To be clear, skill, knowledge, and technical invention are all values cultivated by imitation and repetition, but the primary worth of such a pedagogy is in its ability to affect the writing ethos of a student, if we can feel comfortable in using that word. A pedagogy of extemporaneous writing would focus on the

---

40 Be be clear, I do not mean “formal” in the sense of something “elevated” but in the sense that all writing as a form to it: all writing has contour as do writing activities.
embodied and performative activity of writing by working students through forms and movements of writing so as to have those forms engage and respond to a complex and unpredictable set of rhetorical variables that make up even the seemingly most mundane writing exercises. The movement would involve imitation, insofar as these forms and movements serve as models for imitation, as well as repetition, both insofar as models are repeated and insofar as the movement from one model to the next is repeated as a series.

While writing exercises that move students from form to form would each provoke a singular rhythm of movement and response determined by how they combine with a particular writer, external regulation can also play a role. For example, an instructor might function as a trainer insofar as he/she both sets up the progression of a given regimen and regulates the timing of that training. In my own teaching experience, an in-class writing exercise might ask students to write in response to a series of rhetorical forms, at one time transforming a sentence in relation to a specific rhetorical scheme or trope, at another, transforming a piece of writing in one genre into a different genre. In leading students through the training exercise, I supply a timing, or a pacing that vacillates between periods constrained writing. For example, students may alternate between bouts of relatively "free" writing and periods wherein students isolate a sentence from that free writing to be transformed via a “trope change up” operation, wherein students will proliferate multiple versions of that sentence so as to conform to a specific rhetorical trope or scheme. This session may be followed by more free writing, or it may have students change up the genre in which they write, perhaps transitioning from writing an encyclopedic
overview of their issue or topic to writing it as a staged drama or even a situational comedy.

The role of the instructor is not only to set out the path and mark the transitions from movement to movement, but to re-enforce the timing of the writing and to create an environment of heightened sensibility by keeping students aware of their constraints and encourage them to give up on the anxiety of producing “publishable” work and to instead immerse themselves into the logic or form of the particular exercise. The performative and embodied dimension to this style of writing training is not, however, confined to timing, since technology, space, and the senses all play vital roles both so as to consciously remind students that the activity is embodied but also, much more importantly, to operate as additional variables for inviting students to repeat their responses to difference. For example, music can not only set an affective mood in which the writing takes place, but can also help induce rhythm in writing. Furthermore, alternating between writing on a computer, or with a sheet of paper and a pen, or even in the activity of composing a tweet on a phone, all serve as forms for students to inhabit and as transitions to which students must re-orient themselves. And further yet, as Minock notes in her practice, even the spatial environment can operate as a form by which difference can be injected into the rhythm of writing simply by changing one’s location in a classroom or altering between meeting spaces.

While scholars have given thought to the material and embodied nature of writing,41 especially in terms of considering the impact that specific, or even

41 Hawk 2007, Rickert 2013
complexes of, material variables can have on writing, none have considered the role that repeated variation plays in the pedagogical process. Alternating between forms in writing, whether they be material, rhetorical, grammatical, or even ambient, isn’t as much about the particular impact of any given form, or even the affect of complexity on writing production, as it is about the transition between the forms. On the one hand, the writer inhabits or incorporates any given form into their writing in the process of imitation, but, on the other hand, they must transition out of that form and into another. In doing so, they must re-orient themselves in response to the difference of that form and re-inhabit and re-incorporate the new contours. It is the repetition of these transitions, or the repetition of difference, that drives forward the pedagogical operation and works to cultivate an ethos of self-transformation within the student writer.

These training regimens appear highly structured and formalized. To be clear, constraint, precision, and form all play an important role. But the goal is not for students to take on a technical mastery of any given form because the training is aimed at the adaptability of the student’s writing disposition. In other words, the processes of repetition of the same and repetition of difference work so as to blur the technical boundaries between writing models, students, and copies. In short, the exercises are aimed at provoking inspiration and thereby at cultivating an posture of self-transformation in response to difference. The experience is anything but dull, as I have discovered that in-class writing informed by this approach leave students and the instructor exhausted by the end of class if for no other reason than switching between writing movements and keeping an awareness of timing and pacing demands ample energy.
**Conclusion**

This chapter set out to investigate the relationship between repetition and imitation, which should now be more clear. Imitation offers the particular form by which writing is generated. Imitative writing may take as its model a determinate aspect of a model, whether it be sentence structure, tone, or a rhetorical or generic maneuver, and thereby ask students to, as Muckelbauer puts it, enact a “repetition of the same.” Or the model might be indeterminate and ask students to repeat the effect of a model by creating a new writing-apparatus that reproduces it and enact a “repetition of difference.” In and of itself, I argue that these practices are worthwhile means of creating familiarity with writing, developing skill, and cultivating knowledge. But, I’m also arguing that this potential is transformed when thought alongside repetition. Repetition plays its most significant role in-between the imitations because the transitions are what do the work of forcing students to re-calibrate themselves in response to the new form they are being asked to imitate and inhabit. As Hawhee frequently notes, repetition provides the basis for creating rhythm in pedagogy and, as we noted in our treatment of Minock and Muckelbauer, creating a rhythmic encounter with a text, or as I’ve argued with writing, can blur the boundary between the object of imitation (the model) and the imitating subject (the student writer) which, in return, is the primary means by which we might affect ethos and potentially even allow for inspiration in writing.

In many ways, such a pedagogy is akin to Elbow’s free writing insofar as it encourages unreflective and spontaneous writing. But, unlike Elbow, I make no clear division between the dialectical ends of free writing and careful forging.
For one thing, the exercises are more carefully constrained and regimented training movements than they are free explorations of one’s inner world. These constraints are crucial for at least two reasons: first, as I argue in the previous chapter, the particular form of a writing movement can serve as a catalyst for inventively transforming our prior thought and writing by working on our mind/body complex. Second, the constraints serve as an “other” to which the student writer must respond and adapt and, when that transition is repeated, serves as the means by which students must re-orient themselves through writing. Thus, rather than attempt to tap into something internal to the student by freeing writing of expectations, extemporaneous writing attempts to bring the structure of form to the spontaneity of free writing.

This chapter extends the previous chapter’s insight into the inventive potential of form in writing by considering how imitation and repetition extend that inventive power onto and into the ethos of the student writer. In following chapter, I take a closer look at the relationship between responsiveness and analysis by examining the ability of writing to co-produce, rather than simple react to, rhetorical situations.
CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING DIFFERENCE: AFFIRMING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

The rhetorical situation has become one of the most foundational and important concepts in rhetoric and composition. While its pedagogical implementation, especially in textbooks, has been largely left untouched, if not overly simplified, from Bitzer’s now nearly 50 year old articulation of the concept; in rhetorical theory, it has undergone a series of what we can only think of as upgrades to that basic model. From Vatz, to Biesecker, to Edbauer/Rice, to Chaput, to Rickert, the concept has become increasingly complex and nuanced. These rhetorical theorists give us an increasing clear and accurate vision of the “situation” in which rhetorical address circulates. Each allows us to see something that we weren’t able to before and thereby craft our writing to better fit our goals and better respond to the needs of its audience. Yet, our focus on the sophistication of the concept - what it allows and prevents us from seeing - ignores its function. We don’t think of the rhetorical situation as an action that is mobilized. This is largely because that function seems obvious: it allows us to “see the available means of persuasion in any given case.” I think this seemingly obvious
assumption, however, blinds us to some of the side-effects of this “seeing” and, more importantly, keeps us from unlocking some of its most powerful potential.

Thus, rather than concentrate on the theoretical contours of the rhetorical situation - its constituent parts and animating logic - I focus on how the concept gets mobilized as a means of responding to otherness above and beyond its ability to interpret and contextualize rhetorical address. This investigation points toward two conclusions. The first is that the rhetorical situation functions as a hermeneutic for interpreting difference. The second is that the rhetorical situation is plagued by an ethical paradox. In short, the paradox resides in the fact that the goal of using the concept as a guide for crafting rhetorical response is undermined by its most basic operation. This is because its hermeneutic power necessarily interprets difference in accordance with the logic of its own predetermined schematic. In other words, mobilizing the rhetorical situation forces the world to fit within its own terms: exigence, audience, constraint, ecology, ambience, and so on. Thus, mobilizing the rhetorical situation colonizes that to which it is supposed to respond and thereby necessarily prevents any response determined by the other or otherness.42

From these dual conclusions, I turn to parallel threads in rhetorical theory focused on alterity ethics and rhetorical-being as a way of thinking through this ethical paradox. I specifically turn to the work of Diane Davis and Thomas Rickert. Davis, who argues that the nonhermeneutic dimension of rhetoric is crucial for understanding rhetorical ethics, shows that an rhetorical-ethical relationship between a rhetor and other actually precedes and exceeds the

42 Distinguishing between “the/an other” and “otherness/difference” is crucial for this project and will be dealt with in more detail below.
content of any particular address and, more significantly, serves as the condition of possibility for both rhetorical and ethical interaction. Rickert, on the other hand, allows us to consider the ontological dimension of both rhetoric and hermeneutic action. More importantly, Davis and Rickert together prompt us to make two crucial moves in understanding the rhetorical situation. The first is that the concept itself operates as a performative force in rhetorical address rather than as a passive way of seeing. The second, is that the role of human activity in mobilizing this force operates along the lines of animation and inhabitation rather than instrumentalization. Taking Davis and Rickert’s work as inspiration, I turn my sights back to the rhetorical situation to re-configure its performative, or asignifying, power.

Ultimately, I argue that the power of the rhetorical situation is not simply its capacity to accurately interpret the world, but its ability to engage and co-produce with otherness. In this way, the rhetorical situation takes difference as its ally rather than as its object of interpretation. Thus, I argue, the rhetorical situation, at least in its asignifying dimension, is ethical and inventive. In fact, I argue that the generative and ethical dimensions of rhetoric are intimately entwined. This revelation, I argue, has two major consequences. Ethically, I argue that our obligation to otherness must shift away from an accountability to know or attend to the other and toward a co-affirmation of difference. Pedagogically, I argue that the rhetorical situation functions best not as a technology for producing an image of the world in which one’s writing is to circulate, but as a form to repeat as an inventive engagement with otherness. Thus, the rhetorical

43 The relationship between “alliance” and “interpretation” is another crucial aspect of my argument that is further developed below.
situation ultimately operates as a form for rhetors to inhabit and, through this inhabitation, co-invent with and co-respond to otherness.

**Engineering the Rhetorical Situation**

Loyd Bitzer’s initial account of the rhetorical situation firmly situates the concept in an ontological reality.⁴⁴ For him, the world is filled with things like exigences, audiences, and constraints. It is the job of the rhetor to recognize and respond to these elements accordingly. In this way, rhetorical address starts with the world: the imperfection, in its ontologically specific urgency, demands a response. First and foremost, the rhetor-subject must be able to read that exigence-object so as to determine its particular contours and thereby derive the audience and constraints ontologically tied to it.

Subsequent thinkers take issue with the ontological primacy to which Bitzer gives the rhetorical situation and seek to nuance the concept by noting the constructive and pluralizing role that social-construction plays in the very genesis of any given situation. Thus, as Richard Vatz would have it, Bitzer inadequately recognizes the rhetorical nature of rhetorical situations themselves.⁴⁵ Rhetorical situations do not simply exist, at an ontological level, but are co-productions of the natural world, culture, and the agency of individual rhetors. Yet, what is perhaps more important than the validity of his claims is that Vatz’s thought set a tone for the scholarship that followed him. He questions where rhetorical situations sit on a continuum between subjective-creation and

---

objective-reality and thereby takes issue with the engineering of the concept. In short, Vatz’s work has operated as an invitation for future modifications and reconstructions to the very hardware of the concept itself.

Barbara Biesecker nuances Vatz’s work by deconstructing the relationship between exigence, audience, and rhetor, complicating the constituents theorized by Bitzer and ultimately problematizing the subjective/objective binary itself. Jenny [Edbauer] Rice nuances the concept yet again by noting the connectivity of quasi-distinct situations and the transferability of rhetorical affect as it moves from situation to situation. Thus, her engineering contribution is to situate rhetorical situations within rhetorical ecologies and thereby better our understanding of how invention happens via the circulation of rhetorical force. Building on her work, Catherine Chaput notes that the very nature of the rhetorical situation privileges certain features of neoliberalism by emphasizing and over-determining sites of occupancy and agency, which lead us to under-interrogate elements of late capitalism because, as she puts it, "they do not exist in a location but in the connective tissues of affectivity passing through locations" (Chaput 19). Thus, Rice and Chaput ask that we consider the emplacement of rhetoric in terms of flows of affective energies that circulate within larger ecologies, and the ideological force of those circulations, rather than as more or less static situations that are resolved dialectically.

46 “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Différance.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 22:2, 1989.
Furthering these ideas, more recent work by Thomas Rickert focuses on the agential and inventive power of the place of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{49} The power of place, what he calls ambience, blurs the boundary between human actors, discursive constructions, and even affective flows by treating "place" not as a container, or even a network, in which human action operates, but as a contributor to that human action and, further yet, as a contributor to the very formation of those human actors. Thus, in some ways extending Biesecker’s thought, Rickert demonstrates that rhetorical situations do not precede human intervention, but that place, matter, subjects, and rhetoric are enmeshed with one another at an ontological level. As he puts it, “rhetoric is a responsive way of revealing the world for others, responding to and put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means, so as to… reattune or otherwise transform how others inhabit the world…” (Rickert 162). Thus, Rickert intertwines the place of rhetorical address with address itself, positing that rhetoric is immanent to situation rather than something applied to an otherwise passive situation in order to modify it.

Each of these theorists merits extended attention. But, for now, what I want to show is that, even in a very short summary, we can see that the concept of the rhetorical situation has undergone a tremendous transformation in the past 50 years.\textsuperscript{50} What was once a relatively reductive schematization for situating writing and speech within the world has become much more nuanced and powerful.

\textsuperscript{49} Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being. 2013.
\textsuperscript{50} In some ways, we may have even outgrown the term, if not the concept. Rickert’s Ambient Rhetoric is largely devoted to rethinking rhetoric and place; and yet, despite a handful of mentions, the term “the rhetorical situation” does not even make the index.
The Function of Hermeneutic

Rather than focus on the complexity that separates these various theories, I want to focus on the functionality that unites them: the rhetorical situation (ecology or whatever else) provides a hermeneutic model for placing rhetorical address in the world. All of these versions share a hermeneutic impulse insofar as they all attempt to account for the world in which language, or affective rhetorical energies, circulate.\(^{51}\) Of course this is a peculiar kind of hermeneutics. It is not simply focused on interpreting texts, but on interpreting the rhetorical world. Each of the many theories of the rhetorical situation serve as a model for carrying out that interpretive operation. The primary difference between each model are their complexity - what they are in/capable of interpreting - but the basic hermeneutic function remains the same.

To be clear, none of these theories operate as simple coding machines through which we can run data in order to generate an output. They are, after all, first and foremost theories: ways of seeing and accounting for the world. In this case, they are ways of seeing the world in terms of rhetoric. Furthermore, they give insight into a changing world and thus must continually adapt themselves to those changes. But, nonetheless, they operate at a hermeneutic level: each gives us the terms and logic by which to interpret the world. Furthermore, I do not suggest that all theories work the same, not even at the hermeneutic level: some are quite reductive while others contain within their very logic plenty of elasticity so as to account for, and adapt in response to, the sheer difference of

---

\(^{51}\) Rickert’s work is the notable exception, here. His version of hermeneutics complicates and troubles how we make use of the rhetorical situation in ways to which I will attend below.
the world it interprets. But, despite these differences and despite their elasticity, interpretation remains a central function.

Of course, many theorists are aware of this fact and attempt to affirm the hermeneutic dimension of rhetoric. Stephen Mailloux, for example, so strongly associates the strength and function of rhetoric with that of hermeneutics that he proposes that the two are indissociable. Each necessarily leads to and relies on the other. As he puts it, “production [rhetoric] and reception [hermeneutics] are not radically separate but complementary events, in which one enables the other or becomes the other’s concern or topic” (Mailloux 4). Hence, for Mailloux, what we do as rhetoricians always operates in a dialogical relationship between interpretation and composition.

**The Ethical Risk of Hermeneutics**

The function of hermeneutics, however, carries with it an ethical risk. Any hermeneutic schematic necessarily forces its object to fit within the contours of its logical structure. In other words, the interpretational move reduces otherness into a version of the same. This activity is quite useful in most instrumentally based pursuits. For example, few people will complain about a “reduction of otherness” when medical models allow us to analyze the reproductive patterns of viruses and thereby eliminate [human] life-threatening illnesses or when we are able to fit the otherness of a ravine into a model that allows us to build a bridge and thereby extend communication, social, and economic networks. In both of these cases, a uniquely human mode of existence is prioritized over other

52 Disciplinary Identities. 2006.
forms of life. But, in each case, we can see how the dominating movement of knowledge forces one mode of life to violently conform to another form. Thus, the dominance does not begin with the eradication of the virus or the razing of the ravine, but in the move to "know" the virus and the ravine within human terms.\(^5^3\)

But unlike these purely utilitarian endeavors, rhetoric has always had, or at least has struggled with, an ethical obligation to the other in addition to its pragmatic orientation. In fact, one could write a rich history of rhetoric's struggle between its ethical and practical makeup and allegiances. We can see this tension in Bitzer's article, wherein he writes that rhetorical address "is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself" only to write a few pages later that a rhetor "finds himself [sic] obliged to speak at a given moment... to respond appropriately to the situation" (Bitzer 3, 5). Thus, Bitzer reconciles what have often been competing impulses of rhetoric by arguing that the practical nature of rhetoric to "produce action or change in the world" is beholden, not to the whims of the rhetor, but by the world itself (Bitzer 4). Rhetorical address, to stick with Bitzer's parlance, must fit the world and, much more importantly, the suitability of a rhetorical address is determined, even "invited," by the world itself (Bitzer 10). Thus, the practicality of rhetoric is ultimately governed by an ethical obligation to alterity.

The trick, of course, is to interpret those invitations; to figure out what is being demanded and how to craft a response adequate to that demand. Bitzer's

\(^{53}\) I choose these examples because our confidence in the acceptability of these kinds of violences are slowly eroding: should the life of the virus, the ravine, or the global environment be so readily subordinated to the life of the human?
answer is to theorize a schematic that can allow us to see the rhetorical demands of any given case. But, as I have already established, Bitzer’s response undercuts his very goal because by attempting to fit the world within the conceptual boundaries of "the rhetorical situation," the demands of the world get coded within the logic of Bitzer’s schematic. As Vatz frequently suggests, once one adopts Bitzer’s schematic, exigencies, audiences, and constraints start popping up everywhere (Vatz 169-70).

In a way, the scholarship that follows Bitzer and Vatz nuances the constituent parts and relations that make up the rhetorical situation to better root the pragmatic power of rhetoric in its ethical demand to fit the world. In other words, rhetorical theory has dedicated itself to constructing a model that looks more like “the real thing.” Yet, despite the fact that thanks to this scholarship, rhetors can now see the world in terms of flows, transformations, ecologies, and ambient agencies and less in terms of mechanical parts, the very operation of these modifications work to undermine their own designs by forcing the world to fit within a schematic and thereby reducing its otherness.

**Ontological Hermeneutics: Thomas Rickert & Attunement**

We should pause here, though, to consider how Rickert complicates this model. In his attempt to problematize the subject/object binary, Rickert goes to great lengths to trouble the epistemic/ontological binary as well. Thus, the interpretations we make of the world are never a matter of simply applying a hermeneutic model to the world and cranking out a corresponding interpretation. Furthermore, interpretations are not simply human generated
affairs. Both of these are so because, for Rickert, meaning is not something applied to the world, but something revealed by the “worlding” activity of the world. Rhetoric, understanding, and humans alike are always already enmeshed in a world, which means that the signs and affects that already circulate in the world provide the backdrop, logic, and raw material by which meaning comes to be.

This enmeshment of the subject/object binary calls into question whether or not Rickert’s theory of the rhetorical situation can be really considered as a hermeneutic at all. My answer is both yes and no. Rickert certainly undermines the dominance of the cognitive dimension of rhetorical action by re-framing rhetoric as a mode of being. We don’t so much read and respond to the world through rhetorical action as we do become [re]attuned to the world and the world gets [re]attuned to us. Attunement, as opposed to most theories of hermeneutics, does not simply happen at the cognitive level, but is an ontological readjustment of beliefs, bodies, subjects, objects, and environments. In short it is a realigning of the very being of the world and our comportment within it. So, from this perspective, it is hard call Rickert’s theory hermeneutic in any traditional way.

On the other hand, for Rickert, the fact that cognitive understanding no longer plays a trump card in rhetorical action does not mean that meaning takes a back seat. Instead, it shifts its location. Rather than deriving significance from the world and then reapplying it, for Rickert, meaning is ontological. As he puts it, “We do not add meaning downstream; our experience is one where something is always already interpreted as something… There is no bare intuition of something; there is only the experience itself already in the perception” (Rickert
172). The world can only conceal and unconceal itself in ways that are meaningful, and meaning operates in ways that are not simply cognitive (of course, cognition still operates, it’s just not the only game in town). But, the important point here is that meaning is still operative and, with it, hermeneutics is still an important part of the picture. However, like meaning, hermeneutics gets shifted and its operation becomes more distributed. Quoting Heidegger, Rickert emphasizes that “rhetoric is nothing other than the interpretation of concrete being-there, the hermeneutic of being-there itself” (Heidegger 75).54

Rickert is careful not to confuse this position as a sort of social-constructivism or Burkean terministic screen. Instead, both hermeneutics and meaning are ontologically enmeshed in the world; the language that we use to interact with that world is not set apart from it, but operates and circulates within it as a tool. Yet, just as that operation is not simply cognitive, neither is it simply human. So, while I think it is fair to characterize Rickert’s ambient rhetoric as being hermeneutic, doing so forces us to adopt a very different understanding of understanding. This means that Rickert also throws a wrench into the risks of hermeneutics that I outlined above, albeit in a very productive way that requires careful attention. But, before returning to those complications, I want to turn to the work of Diane Davis to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the ethics of the non-hermeneutic dimension of rhetoric.

54 Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy. 2009.
Alterity: Diane Davis and Obligation

Diane Davis provides profound insight into the ethical paradox I noted above, arguing that “understanding can only be understood by fleeing in the face of what it can’t grasp, by fleeing in the face of the very alterity that is its job to approach” (Davis 81). But, rather than focus on the specifics of the rhetorical situation, she focuses on the very act of understanding and its traditionally close relationship with communication. Of course, Davis does acknowledge the pragmatic value of understanding - “rhetoric’s hermeneutic dimension allows subjects to get things done in the world” (Davis 84) - but she also opposes it to ethics because the very process of creating knowledge about an other substitutes the otherness of the other for the familiarity of the same. In other words, for Davis, understanding instrumentalizes otherness for an ulterior end, while ethics attends to that otherness. Again, as Davis puts it, “what’s on the line here, in this place of the Same that we are content to call ‘successful communication,’ is any affirmation of the ethical relation” (84). Thus, in many ways, Davis’ project is to inquiry into the tension I noted above between rhetoric’s ethical and pragmatic obligations.

The great worth of Davis’ project is twofold. First, she allows us to differentiate between the content and the performativity of rhetoric; what she, following Levinas, names the difference between the “said” and the “saying” (Davis 65). Second, she allows us to see the specific relationship between ethics and hermeneutics and the way in which rhetoric is actually predicated on this ethical relation. That is to say that meaning and ethics do not exist as equally weighted sides of rhetoric. Rather, Davis argues, our ethical obligation to the
other both precedes and founds the very possibility for communication and action. This is why Davis argues that all rhetorical action is in fact a reaction to a pre-existing ethical obligation to the other. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, Davis argues that this priority operates at the level of identity and even ontology. As she claims, the “I” only comes into being as a response to the other. Thus, the “I” owes an infinite and existential debt to the other (Davis 62).

This relationship is not an interaction between two persons, or even between peoples, but between the “I” and “the other.” While this may come off as odd, consider what happens to “the other” when it is described as a person: in such a case, the otherness of the other is forced to fit within the hermeneutic category of “person.” It also privileges our attention on those relationships that we’ve pre-coded as between persons, thus excluding that which we code as animals, material, environs, and perhaps even rhetorical situations. Further consider that rhetorical address is always a response to something else, and that something else is not necessarily a person. As Bitzer makes clear again and again, rhetorical response is invited, requested, or called for: "Rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation; the situation which the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation to create and present discourse" (Bitzer 9). Ultimately, the sole existence of the rhetor, as such, is predicated on and obliged to that otherness.

For Davis, as for Levinas, the encounter between rhetor and other, which serves as the condition of possibility for the very existence of the rhetor, offers up one and only one choice: to speak or to kill. To kill is to appropriate the other into

56 She furthers this claim by arguing that this primordial ethical relationship is itself first and foremost rhetorical.
a hermeneutic network: to effectively configure the otherness of the other within the sameness of the rhetor’s knowledge-web. To speak is not to speak a content, but to communicate a greeting or a welcomeness: “to greet is not to grasp” (Davis 61). What is communicated is the performance of the relationship itself; the greeting affirms the exposure of the rhetor to the other and thereby affirms the existential gift of that relationship. Thus, as Davis claims, what is spoken is exposedness and obligation itself (Davis 61). This exposedness is maintained through conversation; yet we must not think of conversation as a series of constative meanings, but as a disposition toward the other to remain open by speaking to the other rather than talking about the other (Davis 63). Speaking to the other leaves open a response-able dynamic (saying), while speaking about the other solidifies the boundaries of the other and shuts down responsiveness (said).

Crucially, Davis maintains that even though speaking and murdering are our two options, they aren’t options that we simply get to choose between. As she puts it, “there is ultimately no letting up one the compulsion to know, to grasp, to make sense of the Other” (64). We don’t get to stop our hermeneutic operations; we don’t get to choose to simply speak to the other without also speaking about. This tragic reality only leaves us only with a tragic option: ‘...the speech that attempts to grasp, to negate, to oppose the Other, goes down in the facing position, keeping the murderousness in check. Ethical speech - conversation - is a discourse in which the said is not permitted to detach from the saying” (Davis 64). In facing the reality that we cannot avoid the murder of knowledge production, our only ethical option is to interrupt that process and interject it with the uncodifiable otherness of the other so as to “put murder off”
(Davis 64). In response, Davis calls for a “rhetoric of the saying” that focuses on the way that rhetorical address can interrupt the machinations of hermeneutics and thereby function as “an affirmation of the ethical relation itself” (78)

**Making Hermeneutics Stutter**

A rhetoric of the saying would, for Davis, “attend to the interruption [interjection of otherness] itself.” Yet, this attention is not that of understanding, but of recognition. To be clear, it is highly unlikely that Davis would use the language of recognition given its seemingly close relationship with understanding. This kind of recognition is not the recognition of a content, but the simple acknowledgement of the existence of the relationship itself, in all its unknowability. That is, it is the recognition of the sheer existence of the otherness of the other. So, rather than function as a hermeneutic, recognition functions much more as a paying of respect. This is why, I argue, that Davis highlights the greeting - the adieu or hello - as so important to the ethical relationship. The greeting does not (just) communicate a content, but also a recognition of exposedness. It draws attention to, and even welcomes, the relationship. Thus, what I propose Davis is after is a recognition that points to the other and is rattled by the other rather than understands it.

The performative quality of this kind of recognition as a “pointing out” or “drawing attention to” coupled with the priority that otherness plays in rhetorical address highlights in Davis’ thought what I call an ethic of respect. Paying respect is not necessarily predicated upon knowledge, but is rather a declaration of deference. It is to acknowledge a relationship that exists prior to
the business at hand that holds both parties hostage to that relationship. But, in
commonplace ethics of respect, to treat another with respect is to bound one’s
potential actions so that they do not violate personal sovereignty. For Davis,
however, respect cannot be limited to sovereign boundaries because the very
thing to which one must pay respect is the existential condition of possibility for
all members of the relationship. Thus, there are no boundaries to respect, since
the respect must be prior to the boundaries themselves. Rather, the respect must
be paid to the founding exposedness itself.

Davis offers an image of this ethical orientation in her take on a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode originally interpreted by Steven Mailloux57 to
exemplify his rhetorical hermeneutics.58 In Davis’ interpretation, the moments
wherein the protagonist (Jean-Luc Picard) works to understand his alien
counterpart (Dathon) are those wherein Picard acts more as a murderer than a
galactic ambassador: Picard’s attempt to communicate ends up functioning only
insofar as he is able to code the alienness of Dathon within Picard’s own
interpretational framework, thereby reducing Dathon’s otherness to Picard’s
sameness. But, in Davis’ re-interpretation, Picard exemplifies an ethic of respect
and obligation precisely when his hermeneutic attempts are frustrated, but
Picard responds nonetheless, either though salutation or thanksgiving. Even
more powerful are those few moments where Picard is offered the chance to
understand the alien captain, but defers that chance or interjects doubt and

58 In brief, the episode revolves around an Picard, an alien captain, and their attempt to communicate with each other. Ultimately, what had been perceived as a complete linguistic incommensurability between the two parties is met with a heavily qualified success.
hesitancy into what could otherwise be formed as knowledge. In other words, Davis heralds Picard when his "response demonstrates uncertainty" (Davis 84). It is the deferment of certitude that showcases, for Davis, an attention to Picard’s ethical relation to the other. It is his hesitancy in speaking about the captain, despite the fact that he still must do so.

Mailloux and Davis interpretations amplify and extol very different sets of virtues. The hermeneutic-Picard shows patience, civility, and imagination as he attempts to modify his own hermeneutic framework to account for Dathon. In Davis' supplemental version, Picard’s virtues are his humility, hesitancy, and ultimate refusal to develop a final accounting of his encounter.⁵⁹ In other words, Picard’s ethical worth is showcased by his willingness - if he has a choice at all - to at least slow down his hermeneutic machine. To use Davis’ parlance, Picard is able to, or forced to, make his understanding stutter. It is those interruptions of understanding that provide points of contact with the other. They serve as the cracks within the frameworks of Picard’s knowledge that allow otherness to seep through and, thereby, grant opportunities to affirm that ethical relationship. In short, the Davis’ ethical maxim seems to be thus: “at all times, disrupt the understanding so as to make contact with the other.”⁶⁰

---

⁵⁹ Davis makes clear that she does not think that Mailloux’s account is incorrect, but incomplete insofar as it does not attend to the non-hermeneutic dimension of the encounter.
⁶⁰ To be clear, I do not imagine Davis would condone reducing her work to any maxim and I am not suggesting that her work lends itself to such a reduction. I am, however, attempting to distill some of the essential virtues that rise to the top of Davis’ theory.
Risks: Respect and Paralysis

John Muckelbauer, in an article-long response to the Davis/Mailloux exchange, notes several risks inherent in Davis’ observations; risks he repeatedly insists are necessarily structured within the very essence of alterity and not, therefore, due to a lack or mistake on Davis’s part.61 Each of Muckelbauer’s risks share, at their heart, the possibility of interpreting otherness in our very attempts to prevent interpretation. In order, Muckelbauer points the possibility of 1) knowing the other as unknowable, 2) knowing the other as a subjective experience, and 3) knowing the other as an excess of signification. For the other to be absolutely unknowable, claims Muckelbauer, the metaphors of the unknowable, experience, and excess cannot be used to code otherness, even if those metaphors seemingly do not provide us with determinate content.

More significantly, these risks provide the illusion that there is an other to which we can relate and thereby treat on its own terms. This illusion that we can take the other on its own terms presents a final risk: the creation of a moralism. As he puts it, "it is not far from attentiveness to irreducible otherness to a discourse that wants to distinguish the right way of attending to this irreducible other (through such familiar terms as welcoming, generosity, and openness) from the wrong way (closing down, violence, appropriation)" (Muckelbauer 244). While Davis clearly works to navigate each of these risks, especially the final risk of moralism, it is important to note where an "affirmation of the ethical relationship" leads.

If nothing else, Muckelbauer helps illuminate a problem with the very language of alterity. I have attempted to mobilize the terms “the/ an other,” and “otherness” as distinct from one another. Each carries its own separate, if subtle, denotation. Whereas the first indicates a being, “otherness” refers to simply that which is not the same. Given the investigation thus far, it should be clear that even mobilizing the terms “the other” and “an other” smuggle in a hermeneutic operation that sets off the other as something distinct. It marks the other as something with relatively clear external boundaries, but an unclear interior. Otherness, on the other hand, does not operate within boundaries and cannot even exist as a being with an (in/determinate) interior. Rather, otherness operates much more like a force. In this way, we might think of otherness in terms of pure difference. Seen in this light, alterity politics demonstrates its hermeneutic complicity. In its very attempt to disentangle itself from the violence of interpretation, it must champion the other by bounding it within the hermeneutic category of “being other.”

In addition to this hermeneutic complicity, I argue that an ethic of respect further risks, and perhaps even invites, a kind of paralysis. To attend to existential exposedness through recognition and respect is to simultaneously seek to preserve its otherness. Any attempt to make meaning of the relationship would be to dominate and kill it. In this way, to respect the relationship is to preserve it: to hold it open and prevent any hermeneutic interpretation. This approach, however, risks fetishizing the ethical relationship. To stop at recognition and respect is akin to saying “hello” and then halting conversation there for fear committing an appropriative violence (all while recognizing that the “hello” has already carried out the murderous deed). An ethic built around
attention and interruption halts the dynamic of the relationship in favor of preserving it. So, while on the one hand, inhabiting the ethical relationship with respect interjects a healthy humility and uncertainty into the interpretative process, it simultaneously risks paralyzing those same relationships.

**Risks: Sufficiency and Entrenchment**

Rickert’s thought is helpful in thinking through this dilemma. As I already mentioned, Rickert complicates hermeneutics by taking it out of the exclusive domain of cognitive knowing and enmeshes it with affective materiality. In short, he argues that hermeneutics, along with rhetoric, is ontological. Thus, we cannot simply claim that the world (object) is submitted to and colonized by the rhetorical situation (subjective model) so as to produce epistemic knowledge (interpretation). Rather, the hermeneutic process is a matter of re-attuning rhetorical being. The question, though, is *to what* does rhetorical being become attuned?

Rickert’s answer is sustainable dwelling. In short, when done carefully, attunement brings about an enriched and sustainable being-in-the-world. As he puts it, “Dwelling is characterized by thriving or ‘flourishing’ conceived in an ecological key” (Rickert 224). But this seemingly only postpones the question. If hermeneutic attunement is aimed at “flourishing,” then what gets to count as such? On the one hand, attuning-to-flourishing is not exclusively a human affair and cannot be imported as an ideal from “the outside.” On the other hand, it is not passive. Rather, it is a co-production between the many constituencies that make up an environment or, as Rickert terms it, it is “a dynamic kind of ‘letting
be’” (224). But “letting be” is not just letting anything be; Rickert opposes the sufficiency principle of dwelling against the efficiency principle of abstraction and maximization. Dwelling “speaks to the historically attuned intensification of rationality away from efficiency-driven abstraction and back into living and being in the world” (Rickert 232). Thus, attunement must move toward something, and that something is a call from sustainable-being itself.

Rickert’s main point here is that environs have their own orientations, of which humans only make up a part. Attuning to these orientations, or as Rickert calls them “directives,” conditions us to participate in the flourishing of those environs. But, flourishing must always be held in check by sufficiency, lest any particular set of dynamics of an environment threaten to get too out of whack and thereby threaten the being of the whole environment. This is why Rickert opposes sufficiency to efficiency: while efficiency plays an important role in maintain sufficiency-in-being, when efficiency supplants sufficiency as a guiding principle, then the production of one aspect of an environment gets disproportionately valued compared to the rest. Such a revaluation necessarily threatens the very stability of the environment itself.

Despite Rickert’s very important critique of efficiency for the sake of sufficient dwelling, I argue that it comes with its own set of risks. As I mentioned above, Rickert’s hermeneutic does not operate so as to submit the otherness of the world to the sameness of an epistemological model. As he repeatedly argues, that which remains unconcealed is essential to dwelling. But sufficiency in dwelling risks forcing difference to fit within the directives of that dwelling. Another way of putting it is that sufficiency makes becoming submit to being. So, while Rickert can very rightly expand dwelling from the rustic, rural, and
nostalgic vision that Heidegger so frequently provides us when considering authentic being and technological development into urban and technologically integrated modes of being, Rickert nonetheless creates a touchstone out of sufficiency. Change, difference, and becoming are only worthwhile insofar as they can be incorporated within the dwelling of an environment. Thus, difference is colonized at an ontological level. Rather than symbolically reducing difference to the same through epistemological frameworks, Rickert shifts this violence to the ontological level, along with meaning, hermeneutics, and rhetoric. Thus, the great power of Rickert’s ethic to enmesh human-being with sufficient-being simultaneously risks privileging the sameness of sufficiency to the otherness of becoming.

**From Instrument to Inhabitation**

In addition to the great insight and ethical value - both as risks and rewards - that Davis and Rickert provide, they also point toward an opportunity for re-imagining the very function of the rhetorical situation. Both Davis and Rickert maintain that interpretation is an integral, if risky, part of rhetorical address and neither suggests that responses to those risks abstain from rhetorical engagement. But both turn our attention to the *how* of our interpretations. Both significantly show that the interpretational act, and even the encounter between sameness and difference, is not simply up to the whim of the interpreter. Rather, human action is one force among many in ethical/interpretive encounters and what matters in that encounter is the *how* of the encounter. Put another way,
interpretation, and especially interpretational models, are not so much instruments as they are forms to inhabit.

Rickert illuminates this point by emphasizing the dwelling of hermeneutics. While he wishes to focus on the sustainability of dwelling-as-being, I argue that he also allows us to see that our engagement with environments is always already enmeshed. The material, subjects, and rhetorical forms, we encounter are not separated from us along subjective/objective lines, but are intertwined in their very being, as well becoming. Thus, we do not so much choose to mobilize the rhetorical situation like it is an instrument as we animate it through the manner in which we inhabit it.

Likewise, Davis’ revolution that rhetoric operates at the level of the saying and the said, only to highlight that both are indissociable caught up in the same activity shifts the locus of ethics away from the sophistication of a given hermeneutic model and toward the animation of the itself. While Davis calls for this inhabitation to operate along the lines of respect and obligation, Mailloux too calls for his own “style” of inhabitation that is driven by patience and imagination. The act is the same, the stakes of the encounter is the same, but the way in which the terrain gets animated - the style of the inhabitation - is different. Thus, what Rickert, Davis, and Maileaux all reveal is that ethics is intricately caught up in the style of the hermeneutic process and that no given style simply gets to stand on the right or wrong side of ethics, but instead merely offers up its own particular set of advantages and risks.
Representation and the Logic of Similitude

To this point, I have almost exclusively focused on the power of the rhetorical situation to create representations of its object. The worth of those representations are determined by measuring its faithfulness to its object. But, I argue, there is an even more important power to the rhetorical situation than its ability to produce similarity. The conceptual model of the rhetorical situation transforms that which it encounters. The history of the rhetorical situation has been informed by a desire to increase similarity and mitigate the difference produced by interpretation. This difference gets coded as discrepancy, error, or illusion. I argue that this coding is itself flawed because it presumes a determinate other to which our interpretative schemata (the rhetorical situation) fails to accurately represent. In other words, the presumption that hermeneutics takes an other as its object slips into the risk of coding the other as an other that Muckelbauer describes. Failures of correspondence rely on the presumption that there exists some thing to which our knowledge structures can correspond.

Second, similitude fails to account for the activity of the interpretive move. What gets coded as discrepancy, as well as accuracy, are the product of an encounter between the rhetorical situation (model) and the world it interprets (object). While I follow Davis’ claim that this encounter is one of domination, it does not follow that difference is simply or totally erased. As Giles Deleuze says of Nietzsche’s thought, “Inferior forces do not, by obeying, cease to be forces distinct from those which command. Obeying is a quality of force as such and
relates to power just as much as commanding does” (Deleuze 40). In other words, the relationship between the rhetorical situation and the world it interprets is a struggle between forces that leaves both sides of the equation affected.

While the relationship is marked by a hierarchy wherein an interpreting force appropriates, possesses, and subjugates its object, the relationship is not one of erasure. Neither does it maintain the integrity of the interpreting force. The encounter, as well as its effects, are singular. To code those effects as either “accurate” or “inaccurate” not only presumes an original “other” against which to measure the representation, but it overlooks the generativity of the encounter itself by applying a pre-existing evaluative schemata to the resulting interpretation. Again, a secret pre-interpretation governs over the quality of actual interpretation and, as I have already made abundantly clear, actually subjects the difference of the interpretive action to an already existing value.

This leads to a third flaw of understanding the rhetorical situation purely in its ability to create similitude: it overlooks the asignifying power of the interpretation itself. Here, I am not referring to the pre-hermeneutic state of exposure to which Davis draws our attention, but to the asignifying force of the interpretation itself. This force, wherein an interpretive model “takes hold of” its object, is violent. But I argue that violence is not necessarily a bad thing insofar as it is the violence of a struggle between interpretive and interpreted forces. The

---

62 Nietzsche and Philosophy. 1983
63 The terms inferior and superior denote a relational rather than intrinsic evaluation, so superiority and command pertain to the interpreting force while inferiority and obedience refer to the interpreted force.
64 To say that an interpretation “takes” an object does not suggest that the object exists in and of itself independent of the interpretation, but that the force of the interpretation objectifies difference, that is, it makes an object out of difference by carving boundaries.
result of this violent struggle is not the erasure of the other, but the violence of creation itself. The preference of similarity over difference shifts the focus away from the force, or action, of the interpretive encounter and toward the resultant artifact, which is then coded along lines of correctness.

These three flaws point to the real risk in mobilizing the rhetorical situation. If we focus on the representations produced by the model of the rhetorical situation, then we focus our attention on the secondary effects of the interpretive action. Focusing on the image that the rhetorical situation creates highlights the bits that don’t work; the discrepancies between what is revealed and what we think should or shouldn’t be revealed. In all of these cases, the covered-over hermeneutic move is that of fidelity to similitude: any interpretation must itself be interpreted based off of this criteria. Thus, difference is interpreted as failure and sameness as success. Yet, it is the encounter between the model and object wherein becoming happens; not in creating an account of the artifacts produced by that thought. It is the difference produced by the encounter wherein invention happens.

**Affirming Life: Gamblers and Players**

Affirming difference through the hermeneutic encounter is to affirm the inventive potential of the relationship itself. The product would not be an image that reflects the contours of the relationship (the map produced by the application of the rhetorical situation), but an expression of the encounter itself. Yet, the very integrity of both terms (model and object) are at stake as well. The model and the object are affected by the encounter and neither gets to come out
unscathed. This is precisely the violence that Davis, among many others, fears because interpretation never simply snaps a picture of its object, but works to undo and reform it.

Whereas Davis is rightfully suspicious of this necessity, I take a more hesitant approach. The transformative power of an interpretational encounter cannot be known in advance, if it can be known at all. We can only evaluate it after the fact and we often cannot tell right away what the violence is or what it does, if such things could ever be evaluated on such clear lines. As Deleuze points out, “A thing has as many senses as there are forces capable of taking possession of it. But the thing itself is not neutral and will have more or less affinity with the force in current possession. There are forces which can only get a grip on something by giving it a restrictive sense and a negative value.” (Deleuze 4). Thus, it is difficult to judge a model - a version of the rhetorical situation - simply on its own merits or to judge in advance what it will do when mobilized. But, there is an alternative way of evaluating the power of an interpretation, not based on accuracy, or even on pure difference, but on based on life. Interpretation either functions to restrict and limit that which it takes up, or it works to affirm and multiply its power.

In the introduction, I proposed an alternative to the hermeneutic function of the rhetorical situation that took difference as its ally in a process of co-production rather than as an object of interpretation. But, what should be clear at this point is that these are not distinct options. On the one hand, interpretation always produces difference: we just tend to code that difference as error or illusion. On the other hand, taking difference as an ally of co-production is a matter of taking difference as an object of interpretation. The interpretative act,
though, is not revelatory of an already existing state of being, but an expression of the difference that is unique to the singularity of the interpretive encounter itself.

So, it’s not a matter of choosing a hermeneutic or co-productive version of the rhetorical situation - for both functions are necessarily operative - but a matter of how the model is inhabited. The question becomes, is the impulse to build correspondence and revelation, in which case the violence necessarily subjugates, mutes, and limits the object of interpretation, or is the impulse to produce difference, in which case the same subjugation produces difference as a matter of expression? Again, as Deleuze puts it, “... active forces affirm and affirm their difference: in them affirmation is first, and negation is never but a consequence, a sort of surplus of pleasure. What characterizes reactive forces, on the other hand, is their opposition to what they are not, their tendency to limit the other: in them, negation comes first; through negation, they arrive at a semblance of affirmation” (Deleuze Pure Immanence 74). As I hope to have made clear, the same interpretive model is capable of both affirmation and negation. The rhetorical task is to re-attune our styles of inhabitation to become sensitive to how our mobilization of the rhetorical situation either functions to shut down that which it interprets or works to multiply it in unexpected ways.

Deleuze offers up analogy of the dice-game as a way of understanding the ethics of affirming difference. In dice, Deleuze argues, we can differentiate between gamblers and players. Gamblers role the dice in hopes to return a specific number. They are methodical, patient, and stoic in their throws because they use frequency to their advantage. No specific return of the dice is important because they rely on the odds to work in their favor over time. What matters for
the gambler is the statistical spread of the actual combinations that get rolled. For Deleuze, the gambler affirms neither chance or necessity, but probability. There is no joy for the gambler, only the confirmation or frustration of a calculated expectation. In short, the gambler does not give life a chance, but attempts to domesticate it.

The player, on the other hand, affirms difference at two moments of the game. The first is the throw of the dice. Any number may be returned. This is the affirmation of chance. The second is the return of the dice. Regardless of the number just revealed, the player welcomes the return of the dice for a recasting. This is the affirmation of necessity. What matters for the player is the difference produced by the repeated throw and return of the dice. No particular combination, or spread of combinations, is of particular importance because what is really returned is difference itself.65

The image of the gambler and the player serve us well in thinking about how we mobilize the rhetorical situation, both practically in our own writing and pedagogically with our students. We have been gamblers with the rhetorical situation: we seek to load our dice as best as possible in order to weight the odds in our favor. We develop increasingly sophisticated iterations of the rhetorical situation so as to paint the right picture. Vatz keeps the same mechanics as Bitzer, but re-evaluates the importance of the components; Biesecker nuances the relationship between those components; Rice adds an affective layer to the rhetorical situation and provides a means of networking situations into ecologies; Chaput attends to the ideological force of those affective movements; and Rickert

65 See pages 25-27 of Nietzsche & Philosophy
draws our attention to agential power of the non-human elements of the situation.

To use the appropriate terminology, the exigence of each of these additions is to attend to something we’ve missed; some element of rhetorical situations that we had not yet really attended to, but is nonetheless important to consider. Not only is all of this work done to better attune our interpretations, but they are driven by a pre-hermeneutic value that privileges similarity over difference. The actual mobilization of the rhetorical situation is an execution of the concept that returns an image that can only exist as more or less accurate, but is always thoroughly colonizing. To be clear, and fair, there is nothing wrong with these revisions. Each attends to something we should be looking at, each grants an important level of sophistication, and each allows us to do things that we weren’t previously able to do. Each, in short, allows us to be better gamblers and even provide more ways of playing, but none of them show us how to play.

To play with the rhetorical situation would be to experiment with what difference the concept returns. The player isn’t as concerned with what set of dice he/she is throwing (are they Bitzer or Biesecker branded?), but with what gets produced by the action. The player doesn’t ask “is this representation of the rhetorical situation correct?” but “what can this representation do to my writing, my audience, my ethos?” and “where does this representation propel writing and thought?” To put this in a parlance more familiar to Rickert and Heidegger, the various versions of the rhetorical situation can’t be evaluated along a line of better/worse, but, rather, each has its own power to unconceal and conceal the
world differently. But, this is only the first move, for the player cannot stop with any particular combination. The representation that is returned also returns the dice, and with it the opportunity to cast the rhetorical situation again, in order to return a new combination, and new difference, and a new set of possibilities. The very act of playing the rhetorical situation is self-propelling. We may even call this “recursive” if we recognize that it is such only insofar as the turning-back (the re-curve) of the rhetorical situation is expansive and inventive and does not lead us to a determined final draft.

Another way of seeing the difference between these mobilizations of the rhetorical situation is along the lines of space and repetition. We traditionally treat the rhetorical situation as if it gives us a spatialize map of the world wherein the rhetorical relations get highlighted for us. The map is always necessarily incomplete; but it is always improvable. There is always another element we could add in order to produce a fuller and more sensitive map. My supplemental view is to see the rhetorical situation sequentially. Mobilizing it adds an iteration to a sequence of thought, action, and writing, not just a layer to the map. It connects to what came before it and helps shape what follows it. Thus, each time the interpretive move is repeated, something new gets produced. In other words, we are not just inventing by mobilizing the new concept in the latest model of the rhetorical situation, but we are inventing through addition.67

66 The correspondence here isn’t quite one to one, since concealment and the production of difference are not the same operations, but the variable power of the interpretative model holds in each case.
Conclusion: Style and Experiment

What this means for teaching the rhetorical situation is that we should be attending to how we habituate students to mobilizing their interpretations. This is a matter of style: if students become accustomed to seeing the rhetorical situation as a way of producing more or less accurate visions of their writing-worlds, then they naturally focus their attention on the fine-tuning necessary to making the world, their representations, and their writings, correspond to each other. They, in other words, are driven by a faithfulness to similitude and, in each case, the differences produced when their representational model encounters the world are coded as aberrations, errors, or illusions.

But, teaching the rhetorical situation as a means by which to affirm difference inculcates a more experimental orientation to rhetorical writing. The encounters between the model of the rhetorical situation and the world it interprets becomes a matter of producing difference and thereby a means of invention. Of course, mobilizing the rhetorical situation as a means of advancing a pedagogy of experiment cannot be treated as a content. I am not advocating for a new and improved version of the rhetorical situation, nor am I championing one iteration over the others. I am thinking through the concept of the rhetorical situation as a way of developing a style of encountering difference.

To mobilize the rhetorical situation in this way requires the power of repetition, not to create a more complete picture of an other, but to produce iterations. Consider, for example, a series of writing exercises, perhaps built into a larger research project, that call for students to produce a series of rhetorical analyses based on the rhetorical situation. The specific configurations of such an
exercise are, of course, many: students could write an overview of their research project by using a version, say Bitzer’s version, of the rhetorical situation as an analytic tool only to produce second, third, and fourth “images” of that same research project using Jenny Edbauer, Catherine Chaput, and Thomas Rickert’s versions of the situation. Each iteration would produce a different image of the “rhetorical situation” to which the student’s research project is to respond. But, the power of the exercise would not be that the various iterations produce a more complete image for the student to mobilize, but that they build off of each other, providing a different set of possibilities for invention at each step of the way. Such a project would just as easily lend itself to group work, wherein individuals, or groups, each produce their own “images” of a research topic, only to exchange their work with another student or group who then modifies that work while mobilizing a different theory of the rhetorical situation. Again, the goal would not be to correct previous iterations, but to explore the singular set of possibilities made available only by moving from one point to the next.

The greatest value of such an exercise does not even lie in the inventive power of transitioning from one image to the next, but in the shear movement of iteration itself. Students would cultivate a nimbleness in thought and writing by taking that which is produced by the logic of one hermeneutic model and transforming it to fit within the logic of another. As I argue in Chapter 3, repetition is rhythmic: the transformative power of the series is not confined to the content of the series itself, but extends to the student as well. From this perspective, the world to which we teach our students to be rhetorically sensitive takes on a very different significance. The rhetorical situation no longer becomes a way of fitting writing within a pre-existing context, or to an pre-determined
ethical demand, or even a desired outcome, but a means of engaging and affirming difference. It becomes a way to write difference.
CHAPTER FIVE

INSTITUTIONAL PEDAGOGY: RESPONSE-ABILITY AND WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Leon Coburn’s 1982 “Notes of a freshman freshman Comp director or Lasciate ogni Esperanza void ch’ entrate”⁶⁸ may very well serve as the hyperbolic Ur narrative of what I have come to call “frustration narratives.”⁶⁹ That is, a surprising genre of scholarship in writing program administration (WPA) studies that addresses important problems related to administration through personal narratives that are often sardonic, parodic, or self-deprecating. For instance, Coburn not only invokes Dante’s hellish signage in his title, but characterizes the single year he served as the director of freshman composition at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas as one “of frustration, anger, and defeat. But no matter how bleak the summary sounds, the day-to-day reality was much worse” (9). The six-page article proceeds as a chronological litany of everything that went wrong during his experience: lack of funding, bureaucratic logjams, scheduling nightmares, and even two pregnant secretaries. The accounting is followed by a brief reflection on how to survive the job: find allies and slowly wear down the (enemy) faculty in a war of attrition. While Coburn does offer the caveat that wpas have a unique opportunity to significantly impact the education of undergraduates and he does offer a few “silver linings” of his time as director,

⁶⁸ “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”
⁶⁹ WPA. 5.3. 1982.
he nonetheless goes out of his way to note that he only includes these items because his wife insisted that the original article draft was too negative.

While Coburn’s account of his WPA experience is hilariously over-the-top, it nonetheless illustrates a commonplace understanding of what it means to direct a writing program: WPAs are often tasked with managing massive programs with insufficient institutional support and garner little professional legitimacy for it. In fact, even a cursory survey of WPA scholarship shows that “frustration narratives” are not rare.70 Furthermore, plenty of empirical and theoretical work has bolstered these more idiosyncratic “frustration narratives,” perhaps most recognizably represented by Gary Olson and Joseph Moxley’s study, “Directing First-Year Composition: The Limits of Authority.”71 In sum, Olson and Moxley argue that wpas are not granted the institutional authority necessary to be “directors” in the full sense of the term. Thus, WPAs are often reduced to being the tenders of someone else’s house.

Yet, despite the prevalence of work that has been given this issue, it has gained little traction outside of explicitly WPA-centric conversations in WPA journals, conferences, listservs, and offices. In other words, it’s really only the choir that hears the message. Beyond these sanctioned spaces, little ink or effort has been spilled. Generally, the conversation simply goes unheard. Laura Micciche demonstrates as much by the sheer fact that she needs to provide an extended introduction and a direct plea to make her case that the disappointment of WPAs is worth taking seriously, writing that “WPA work is largely invisible

71 College Composition and Communication. 40.1 (1989).
to many readers of *College English,* who may not even know what a WPA does, let alone why this position is so riddled with emotional angst” (434).72

Ultimately, Micciche justifies her attention to the issue by framing it within a much broader concern for disappointment in English studies.

Yet, all too often “frustration narratives” are dismissed as a kind of institutionally sanctioned form of whining. Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley offer a glimpse of this kind of reaction by sharing a comment given them by an anonymous reviewer on their initial draft of Bishop’s own frustrating experience administrating a writing program that ultimately resulted in her resignation.73 In it, the reviewer laments, “I am disturbed at how easily the authors permit themselves to present this story as another victim-narrative that you hear so often in accounts of composition, of WPAs, and even of women WPAs” (74).74 Both reactions to the work of writing program administrators are problematic and, in poring over this kind of scholarship, what is clear to me is that the disappointment engendered by WPA work is a widespread phenomenon that is structured within the very mechanisms of WPA work. In other words, the issues that wpas face administering their programs are not isolated and they are not *simply* personal. They are systematic and they have gone largely unaddressed in the more central conversations in composition and rhetoric studies.

---

72 “More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work.” *College English* 64.4 (2002).
74 I use the term “frustration narratives” because I find that most scholarship of this type focus on illuminating the points of frustration produced by WPA work more than they do on personal victimization. Furthermore, I find that the term “victim narrative” used in this way both trivializes these experiences as “tales of woe” and de-values, and perhaps even mocks, narratives that do provide accounts of suffering at the expense of structural violence.
The significance of the issue is enough to merit a broader attention. But beyond the significance, it is unfortunate that this scholarship has gone largely unaddressed because of the valuable insight it provides for understanding how professional identity, affect, and institutional environments intersect in powerful ways, how professionals are trained to respond to their institutional environment, and, more generally, how we respond to situations outside of our control. In other words, as Micciche also makes clear, what wpas experience, and write about, exists as an amplified version of what all academics face (and, indeed, all professionals). In response to this valuable research opportunity, and as a way of bringing a marginalized issue into the view of a more general readership, this article examines the ways in which WPA identity, and especially disappointment, is produced within broader institutional contexts and theorizes possible lines of response to this production of a (frustrated) identity.

Extending the insights of Micciche, I argue that the production of disappointment in WPA work is not simply a symptom of the WPA’s position within the university, but arises out of a pedagogical context. What I mean by this is that learning-to-be-WPA is not simply a matter of learning within a classroom or even of mentorship, but is cultivated by repeated engagements with the specific contours of an institution that molds WPAs at un/conscious, affective, and bodily levels. In short, wpas are shaped by their daily practices of being a WPA in their universities. In this way, I argue that the professional identities of WPAs are more the effect of a trained set of habits and dispositions than they are the result of individual choices or a general will.

In addition to theorizing this pedagogical dynamic, I consider an example from the University of South Carolina’s First-Year English (FYE) program
wherein the program was tasked with implementing a new learning outcome for the teaching of information literacy in an existing first-year composition class. I use this example to make three major points. First, the example highlights the university-wide complexity involved in such an initiative that makes it difficult to clearly demarcate the boundaries of a writing program or its director. Second, it interprets the response to this task by the then Director of FYE, Christy Friend as a particularly admirable style of operating as a WPA. Third, I use it to make visible the pedagogical power of the task itself to re-form the identity of the writing program and, by extension, the professional identity of Friend.

In making these points, I follow and extend the work of Jeanne Gunner and Matthew Heard to show how the pedagogical mechanisms that help shape WPA identity that Miccich makes clear can be reconstituted to train WPAs in different ways of relating to their institutions and, thereby, cultivate different professional identities. I argue that this ability to re-configure the pedagogical power of one’s repeated encounters with an institution is a key means by which wpas can alter their place within universities as well as the fortunes of the programs they administer. Yet, contrary to Gunner and Heard, I argue that it is not enough to cultivate a different professional identity, despite whatever legitimate benefits it might bestow, because the cultivation of any fixed identity engenders an “us vs. them” logic that facilitates frustration and disappointment. Thus, I ultimately advocate for a kind of pedagogical training that promotes the dissolution, rather than the production, of identity to allow wpas to respond agilely to the unique opportunities available to the institutional situations they encounter.
**Disappointment Machines**

Laura Micciche argues that the powerlessness with which the WPA position is endowed affectively distances the laboring WPA from his/her labor as a WPA. This affective distancing between the identity of a WPA and his/her labor as a WPA *produces* disappointment. As she puts it, "emotional dispositions are *learned* within institutional contexts, affecting our work lives, scholarly activities, proposals for creating change in the academy, and experiences as social beings in this profession" (437 my emphasis). For Micciche, the repeated experience of having one’s “hope” to realize an imagined possibility obstructed leads WPAs to expect failure. As she puts it, “disappointment is a failure of imagination nursed by material conditions as well as by diminished faith in others” (446). In short, disappointment isn’t just the frustration that arises out of routinely coming up short of one’s goals. Rather, it is a disposition of “loneliness” that Micciche claims “can engender disconnected relations between self and other” (447).

Like an 80’s power ballad, Micciche’s title argues that disappointment is “more than just a feeling.” It is not just the emotional experience of *feeling disappointed*, as if it were merely an emotional symptom of a tough day at work. Disappointment affectively orients our reality by disconnecting us from our imaginative power. In other words, it shapes our experience of the world, including the choices and actions made available to us. Micciche’s emphasis on hope and im/possibility, thereby, provides valuable insight into “frustration scholarship” insofar as it encourages an analysis of the system of institutional relations and blockages and their relations to the identity production of the WPA. In this way, Micciche’s point that disappointment is something *learned*
suggests a pedagogical dimension to the very activity of administering writing programs. But, unlike the explicit pedagogies compositionists develop for the classroom, this pedagogy reverses the arrows and points them at administrators, who are taught through the very activity of their administering.

It would be easy to assume that “disappointment” is learned through a kind of repetition of the same. WPAs repeatedly see their agency curtailed and thereby learn to fold that experience into their way of being in the world. Furthermore, according to this perspective, the rise of “frustration scholarship” has legitimated and reified this feeling of disappointment, which, despite the overly dismissive tone, may be the more important take-away of Bishop and Crossley’s anonymous reviewer. In fact, we might argue that the repetition of this kind of confessional writing into a more or less stabilized genre has carried its own performative force in cultivating dispositions of disappointment in a set of writing program administrators.

I don’t want to suggest that this interpretation is simply wrong; it does carry weight. But I want to emphasize its narrow and reductive scope. It is altogether too easy to blame WPAs for willing their own suffering into being, and it comes at the expense of seeing the great worth of the insights they provide. Thus, rather than see disappointment as a sort of habitual indoctrination, I articulate disappointment as a kind of distancing between one’s commitment to an imagined ideal of a writing program and the heterogenous world in which WPAs attempt to realize those ideals. As Bishop and Crossley make clear, WPAs are their work in a very real way (75). Whereas most faculty more or less get to compartmentalize their service, teaching, and scholarly endeavors, WPAs bring their administrative identity to every faculty meeting.
every training session, every classroom, every meeting with upper-level administration, and often even to their scholarship.

For WPAs trained in composition and rhetoric, this means they also often bring a certain set of commitments, principles, and values to those arenas as well. From this perspective, it should be no surprise that, for many, one’s identity as WPA is often at odds with how others, especially those not trained in composition and rhetoric, see the function of the WPA simply because they have a different orientation to writing and, especially, the instruction and administration of writing. In short, WPAs and other entities in the university operate within different “political and economic systems” (Bishop and Crossley 78). And, as Bishop and Crossley point out, the gap between those systems isn’t so much a matter of mis/understanding, but simply of differing commitments: “central administration may very well understand what we are about. They just don’t like, or more likely” cannot “affirm our values” given the difference in theirs (78). Simply put, mandates to meet a bottom-line rarely go hand-in-hand with thoughtful writing instruction and administration. Thus, the rupture between Bishop’s commitments and the operational values of “central administration” serves as the fault-line along which disappointment is produced for Bishop.

Identity, Ideology, and Warfare

A key motivator for “frustration scholarship” is rooted in a disjunction between ideological value systems, and therefore between identity claims. The “failure of imagination” to which Micciche points functions within a broader system
wherein the very logic of that imagination is incommensurate with the hegemonic structures wherein a WPA must ultimately operate. Jeanne Gunner makes this point clear in her claim that writing programs “are more than a value-free housing of the first-year course... they are ideological entities, and the writing program theorist is necessarily engaged in ideological work” (7). Here, Gunner reverses the direction of the disjunction between the university and wpas, highlighting that the theories and values affirmed in composition and rhetoric never operate in a vacuum and certainly not in an idealized world. They function within an ideological landscape that only rarely aligns with its own. Thus, wpas need to not only theorize writing, curriculums, and pedagogy, but they need to learn to function within, and often against, those larger ideological landscapes.

For Gunner, the heterogenous landscape of ideological discourses means that wpas should operate tactically by striking at moments of conflict within the university. More explicitly, Gunner suggests that WPAs should observe the discordant ideological forces that circulate within universities to find spaces and moments of rupture that allow a writing director’s initiative to be “tied to more culturally privileged and hence more powerful discourses... so that it might have material force” (15). Gunner provides an example of just such a moment wherein her writing program was able to tap into a language of “cultural diversity” that had been gaining sway at her institution to disrupt the notion that her program was to teach “correct” and “standard” English, which had found its institutional support in a different ideological discourse. The momentary

rupture between these two tectonic forces granted Gunner a crevice in which to slide her initiatives with a recognizable authority. In this way, Gunner sees tactical and rhetorically savvy maneuvering as a key way for WPAs to gain agency. As she quite inspiringly puts it, “We may be able to reshape the program’s historical service ‘nature,’ its formalist-determined administering role, making it the site of active political leadership, connecting its work not back to its functions but outward to active cultural forces, changing its practices by claiming its social connections, breaking the form of the well-wrought program” (17). In this way, Gunner pushes us away from seeing the gap between universities and WPAs as fodder for disappointment, but as kairotic opportunities for enacting meaningful institutional change.

Gunner affords two powerful observations. The first is that WPAs operate within ideological structures that are not of their own making and rarely align with their own commitments. The second is that, despite the clear power imbalance, this isn’t necessarily bad if those WPAs can become tactically savvy rhetors. I want, however, to hesitate here to reflect on the significance of these observations. While adopting a tactical rhetorical orientation to the university might help to increase the limited the agency of WPAs, Gunner’s solution hinges on establishing a subversively antagonistic orientation between the WPA and the university. In other words, Gunner depends on a WPA-rhetor who affirms his/her ideological position and, at the same time, is able to skillfully and, perhaps covertly, maneuver that position within hostile territory.

As Micciche helps us see, the disappointment produced by WPA work is primarily a product of disjunction, and Gunner’s strategy amplifies, and sometimes even capitalizes on, those disjunctions. Rhetorical encounters that
struggle to achieve moments of identification between parities tend to revolve around contested areas that can be “won” or “lost.” Furthermore, competitive logics tend to entrench our identities because they amplify the boundary between “you” and “me.” It should be no wonder that Gunner’s vocabulary resonates, however so slightly, with that of guerrilla warfare in highlighting that “the director has a subversive, transgressive potential” (17). Subversion and transgression, while often quite beneficial, demand a relatively clear articulation of “the sides” of a problem that carries with it a whole “us vs them” logic that interprets the outcomes of the rhetorical engagements in which administrators partake in terms of winning and losing.

**Training Grounds**

If Gunner and Holdstein provide valuable resources for arming WPAs in their confrontations with university administration, they do so at the risk of entrenching “us vs them” identity claims, emboldening ideological commitments, and heightening the chances for disappointment and loneliness.76 In considering these same issues from a very different perspective, Matthew Heard suggests that the disappointments engendered by writing program administration may actually benefit administrators by allowing them to attune to the consequences of administrative writing.77 Specifically, he argues that “WPAs have a unique window into the scenes of conflict and contingency where writing

---

76 While I want to emphasize these risks, I do not do so to condemn Gunner or Holdstein’s arguments, both of which I think provide valuable and useful insights for thriving in hegemonic, yet always still heterogeneous, institutions.

becomes a lived habit… [because WPAs] are constantly provoked to focus on the complexities of writing as it shapes our lives” (39). In short, Heard wants to re-imagine the embattled positions in which WPAs often find themselves as an advantage that allows them encounter the conflicts produced by the writing that traffics through their programs and thereby attend to the vulnerabilities and disappointments they produce. Heard argues that this privileged position allows WPAs to attune themselves to those vulnerabilities and thereby cultivate a valuable ethos capable of attending to them.

To be clear, Heard is not advocating for a solidarity of WPAs built around a shared frustration. Rather, he argues that attuning to disappointment has the possibility of folding back on and disrupting orientations rather than simply entrenching identity. As he puts it, "if we recognize that our encounters with contingencies often pull us out of our habitual patterns of thought and action: indeed, such disruptions to our writing habits may be the only way to open our eyes to the shaping power of this larger ethos on our very practices of living” (42). This is to say that running into discordances between value systems carries with it the potential to jar us out of our habitual "patterns of thought and action" so as to reflect on their consequences on others (42). Furthermore, as a cultivated ethos, Heard, like Micciche’s work before him, emphasizes 

*disappointment* precisely because it is not simply a matter of knowledge nor is it simply an emotion, but is an affective disposition that is intricately rooted in and systematically produced by the specific ways in which WPAs encounter their institutions. In response, Heard proposes that WPAs cultivate a "posture" of sensibility that habituates them to readily adjust the way they act as WPA in response to the moments of vulnerability they encounter. Heard emphasizes that
such an orientation not only lends itself to providing valuable scholarly insight into the ways that writing operates on us, but can also help us be better WPAs and members of the academy more generally. Most important, for my purposes here, is that Heard re-articulates the same disappointment-machinery that Micciche illuminates for us so as to re-configure it to function otherwise.

I emphasize this re-configuring not so much because Heard shows us a way to make a potentially palatable wine from sour grapes (which may be admirable in and of itself), but because his move to re-make this machinery further illuminates the pedagogical function of writing program administration. By pedagogy, though, I do not mean the explicit training of future wpas or GTAs in writing programs. Rather, in a similar way that Micciche describes it, I mean the particular constraints and regimens in which all wpas partake that train them to cultivate certain sets of dispositions and postures.

To be clear, the machinery to which Micciche points us - the repeated encounter between an imagined (ideological) possibility and a foreclosed (ideological) reality - is pedagogical insofar as it teaches disappointment and loneliness. Yet, whereas Micciche’s response to this training is to draw explicit attention to administrative practices through self-conscious reflection in scholarship and administrative practice (448-454), I argue that Gunner and Holdstein point toward an alternative response. Rather than address the problem head on, these scholars offer a re-imagined account of the university that allows those same mechanisms to cultivate dispositions of diplomacy, competition and subterfuge. In a similar move, Heard re-calibrates the machine to attune to the suffering produced by often unacknowledged conflict between habituated modes of writing and action so as to cultivate a posture of sensibility.
What I want to make clear here is that none of these scholars call for large-scale material changes in resource distribution or even a wide sweeping ideological revolution. Rather, much more modestly, each offers a re-interpretation of what the same apparatus is capable of doing. Through each re-interpretation, each thinker sets up a style of being-WPA that conditions and orients them differently within their institutions. Thus, each re-interpretation doesn’t just reveal a different image of the same thing, but reconfigures the terrain as sites, and even training regimens, for becoming-WPA.

**Calcification and Dissolution**

The one characteristic that all three models of being-WPA focus on is how the relationship between a writing program and a WPA helps craft a particular kind of identity. In doing so, however, each facilitates a certain degree and kind of (im)mobility of that identity. The lonely WPA stagnates, which is precisely what Micciche warns against by noting that the “danger of disappointment is that it may become a ‘fixed’ stance, eventually hardening into disillusionment, resignation, passivity in the face of new, ever-changing situations” (446). Gunner’s model effectively mobilizes WPA agency, but it simultaneously stagnates ideological commitments. By reifying “our” position against “their” position, Gunner doubles down on calcifying WPA identity in the face of hegemonic oppression.

Even Heard, who attempts to puncture WPA identity precisely by attuning administrators to moments of (dis)identification, necessarily heightens the distinction between violence and suffering. This style of attunement, while
increasing the opportunities for someone to connect to others (as long as they are suffering in a recognizable way), increases a sensitivity to suffering that “makes other” those “violences” that provoke vulnerability. Thus, the flip side of developing a sensibility of suffering is to simultaneously develop a posture that is hostile to violence. As Heard notes, “defined as a living awareness of outside pressures and tensions that press upon us, sensibility postures WPAs to take in new insights about the identity of writing in our culture that other scholars are not positioned to see” (41). Given that suffering is produced at any point where one’s identity is violated via difference, we must understand violence not as malice, but as any action that effects change and thereby alters the integrity of an identity. This orientation seems to me excessive and leads us to code “suffering” as something that “we” experience and violence as something “they” do to “us.” In other words, despite Heard’s clear attempt to enlarge and disrupt the identity of individual WPAs, in founding his sensibility around violence and vulnerability, he ultimately creates a dividing line between the two that shifts, rather than dissolves, the “us vs them” logic.

To elaborate, each model of being-WPA offered by these scholars constructs and maintains a WPA identity against the exteriority of the writing program and the university. Each cultivates a sense of the inside against the outside; of “us vs them.” Insofar as there will always be points of disconnection between WPAs and their programs, there will always be gaps that cannot help but produce disappointment. Micciche, Gunner, and Heard each provide different means by which to contend with that disappointment, but none of them question its necessity because each operates under the assumption that the goal of the WPA is to function as a WPA. That is, that each assumes that a WPA
should be *something* determinate that, by its very distinction, is capable of
disappointment when that *something* conflicts with the writing program. And
since, as I will argue more explicitly below, writing programs are necessarily in
motion, the more centered and stable a director’s identity is, the more the
opportunity that those changes effect disappointment.

But more than the affective state of individual WPAs is at stake here. To
say that disappointment is produced when one’s identity is at odds with another
identity (that of the writing program) is to shift the issue away from an intra-
personal concern and into the realm of ethics: that is, between self and other, or
between same and different. Heard emphasizes as much by claiming that
“cultivating sensibility also directs our actions more consciously towards the
local ethics of writing that affect the practices we choose to put into place” (44).
By relocating the field of WPA action away from the frustrations that arise from
impediments of self (Micciche) and away from an ideological struggle (Gunner)
to the local encounters that happen on a daily basis, Heard amplifies the ethical
relations and responsibilities that WPAs have to others. In effect, he
demonstrates that commitments to identity and ideology work to blind us to
difference.  

Building from Heard’s impulse to puncture and jar concrete articulations of
identity, I want to articulate a mode of being-WPA that emphasizes rhetorical
invention through the dissolution of identity. By invention, I do not mean the
discovery of the available arguments that are capable of advancing a pre-

---

78 Heard gives a great example wherein his desires to train GTAs according to his theoretical
commitments worked to blind him to the needs of his students, many of whom were teaching for
the first time and needed pragmatic support more than sophisticated theory (44-45).
determined position. Plenty of WPA scholarship provides excellent rhetorical strategies for doing just that. Rather, I want to emphasize a kind of invention that does not presume an endpoint. Nor does it presume to know what it is to administer a writing program, at least in any definitive sense. This “not knowing” is not motivated by a position of ignorance, but from an explicit and carefully cultivated orientation toward the unknowability of the future. Such an ethic of invention affirms the unique possibilities that are afforded to the singular set of constraints that make up a writing program at any given moment. John Muckelbauer makes a similar point in advocating for what he calls a “principle of nonrecognition” in theorizing texts and concepts. For Muckelbauer, operating as if one “knows,” or even recognizes, a concept works to limit the inventive possibilities available to it. As he puts it, “experimenting with what a concept can do requires a certain uncertainty about what the concept is” (48). In many ways, I am advancing this principle of nonrecognition to the practice, if not the concept, of writing program administration. If we pretend to know what it is to be a WPA in advance, we simultaneously work to shut down what a WPA can do.

This concept should not be unfamiliar to WPAs. After all, many of us teach something very similar in our writing classrooms. In teaching rhetorical invention, we teach our students to uncover and create the arguments and lines of thought that are available to particular rhetorical situations. This certainly involves mapping out the various perspectives on an issue and, perhaps, uncovering the points of stasis wherein those arguments meet up, and thus how our own positions and values factor into that equation. But, in a much larger

\footnote{Gunner 2002, Holdstein 2005, Malencyzc 2002.}
sense, rhetorical invention involves attending to the unique constraints that make up a situation; or, to use a term familiar to ancient rhetoric, we teach our students to attend to the *kairos* of the moment so as to see what is available. We teach our students that these constraints are not hindrances or blockages that prevent them from saying what they really want to say. Rather, we emphasize to them that those constraints constitute the opportunity for action in the first place. The uniqueness of their configurations open very unique possibilities; and even though they *always* foreclose some possibilities, very rarely do constraints coalesce so as to completely shutdown all possible responses.

Part of what is caught up in emphasizing invention is a willingness on the part of the rhetor to alter his/her positions in response to the singularity of the situation to which they respond. This is, of course, why so many rhetoricians emphasize the persuasiveness of situations without *simply* reducing rhetoric to the act of persuading others.\(^8\) At least insofar as we teach our students, invention should first and foremost be persuasive to the rhetor; thus the rhetor must become responsive to the uniqueness of the situation to which he/she responds and only then relay the persuasiveness of that situation in adapting it for an audience at a particular time.\(^9\) In allowing the persuasiveness of the situation to fold back onto the rhetor, he/she is willing to become other. That is to say that

\(^8\) Consider Edward Corbett’s claim that rhetoric is “the art of making judicious choices” (The Enabling Discipline 207), or Quintillion’s claims in Book 12 of *The Institutes of Oratory* that a rhetor must be “the good man speaking well,” or Loyd Bitzer’s ontological account of rhetoric in “The Rhetorical Situation.”

\(^9\) I am certainly not suggesting here that rhetors are necessarily persuaded by their own arguments, or even by the situations they respond to, but am instead holding up an idealized version of rhetoric as a mode of prudent civic engagement that so many instructors have championed over the years.
the rhetor must allow for the reconfiguration, or even the partial dissolution, of identity.

The Performativity of Writing Programs: An Ontological Pedagogy

Micciche, Gunner, and Heard each help reveal that writing programs are pedagogical insofar as they habituate WPAs in ways of being-in-the-university through their repeated “styles” of encountering their writing programs. This repeated process functions as a training regimen that reveals and conceals the inventive potential that is unique to a writing program at a particular moment. In other words, whereas Heard emphasizes the writing that circulates through writing programs as a means by which WPAs can cultivate a posture of sensibility, I argue that the performativity of writing programs themselves cultivates WPA’s orientations whether they are consciously aware of it or not. In this way, writing programs function at an ontological level that attunes that which encounters them according to its own rhythm of operation. In other words, writing programs aren’t just sites for “university stuff” to circulate, but actively work on and emerge through the university in which they are situated. In amplifying the performativity of writing programs, I want to focus on three of its relevant features: writing programs function iteratively, they operate in structurally open chains of relations, and they work interpretatively. In detailing these three features, I highlight the ontological level at which the learning that

82 I’m most explicitly referring to the pedagogical effect that writing programs have on WPAs, but I would also extend that effect, to one extent or another, to all human and non-human elements that get entwined within the programatic operate of the writing program.
Micciche describes functions so as to emphasize and nuance the affective, bodily, and habitual nature of the training.

First, writing programs are iterative insofar as they function as models that are repeated in specific instances; they operate according to sets of duties, expectations, policies, and values that are *repeated* in the day-to-day and semester-to-semester operation of the program. Curricula are implemented, classes are taught, instructors are trained, and policies are enforced. All of these actions are repetitions of a writing-program-model, e.g., each individual FYC class is a *repetition* of a catalogued course just as every enactment of a policy is a *repetition* of that policy. From this perspective, a writing program *is* a collection of parts that are ideally centralized (as a model or an identity) and then written in specific instances. In fact, it is precisely this iteration that motivates the disappointment that so many WPAs feel. WPAs, and even composition and rhetoric faculty, are not the only authors of the models that make up a writing program. Models are inherited, they are introduced by upper-level administration, and they are pressured to reflect faculty interests beyond those of writing and rhetoric scholars. The disjunction between a WPA’s idealized vision of what his/her writing program should be is always frustrated from the start by a multiplicity of models, some of which, because of their heterogeneity, may even seem to contradict each other.

This leads us squarely to my second point: writing programs are structurally open. As WPAs are quick to confess, no writing program is *just* a set of goals, classes, and principles that get iterated, or written, year to year, as if a program director, or even a committee, wills into existence a coherent identity for a writing program to be instantiated. Rather, writing programs connect to a
whole host of other university bodies, each of which brings with them a particular understanding of what the writing program is and what it is for. In fact, while it is safe to say that all institutional bodies are structurally open, writing programs are rather unique, especially in the university, given that few other programs walk the tightrope between student service and academic field. They variously relate to committees, libraries, department chairs, deans, and even provosts. They are sometimes housed within departments and at other-times more nebulously distributed between departments, as in the case of writing in the disciplines and writing across the curriculum programs. From this perspective, a writing program is its particular set of institutional relations; it is how and where the program relates to other university bodies. Thus, the self-generated image of any given writing program only operates as one factor of many in determining a program’s contours. This means that we must understand writing programs as entities that emerge within institutional networks rather than as autonomous bodies that genetically (re)produce themselves.83

Lastly, writing programs are caught up in a continual process of interpreting the constant stream of heterogeneous mandates, communications, requests, and all of the other “university stuff” Heard mentions that circulate through them. I emphasize interpretation here as a way of highlighting that writing programs cannot unproblematically synthesize, relay, and execute what are always heterogenous, and often incommensurate, materials. The mandates of central-administration must be differently interpreted for administrative staffs,

---

83 Byron Hawk, in theorizing his account of the rhetorical situation, articulates emergence as the “moment of complexity when the interaction of parts or system components generates unexpected global properties not present in any of the local parts” (179). A Counter-History of Composition 2007.
teaching bodies, and students. Likewise, feedback from students and teachers must be translated for upper level administration in those moments where WPAs wish to advocate for their constituents.

But, to be clear, I do not emphasize "translate" and "interpretation" here in our usual rhetorical uses of the words. That is, I do not suggest that writing programs simply need to explain the same thing in different languages for different audiences. Nor am I claiming that since the different languages that circulate through a university are incommensurate, that a message must be in some way transformed so as to fit within its new milieu. Rather, the communication itself does the interpreting and the new milieus, or institutional bodies, within which it operates gets re-interpreted. Put differently, the force of a communication works on and through the body which receives it, thus necessitating that the body re-configure itself in response to the force of the communication and, reciprocally, that the communication expresses itself through the receiving body.  

In order to concretize this concept, consider an example from the University of South Carolina (USC), from roughly 2009 to 2013. Due to a variety of factors (among others, a desire to remain competitive with peer/aspirant universities), a series of appropriate powers (faculty committees, upper-level administrators) decided to develop a new set of general education requirements. From the very genesis of the idea, these requirements - long before they were solidified - were circulating through the university in the form of task forces and advisory committees. Once they were (mostly) determined, they began to be

---

84 Consider Nietzsche’s thought on interpretation in On the Genealogy of Morality, in section 12 of Book II.
written more concretely throughout the university: classes were (re)created, faculty and staff were trained, new support documents, policies, and protocols were developed, new evaluation practices were instituted. Thus, each affected body of the university had to grapple with the new demands and, thereby, were altered to accommodate those demands.

For instance, English 102, a first-year composition class in the First-Year English Program (FYE), was originally determined to be the sole class to teach the new Information Literacy requirement (INF). In response to that charge, a team was assembled to re-create English 102 so as to teach Information Literacy along with its other general education mandate, Written Communication. In doing so, the team researched best practices, coordinated with other university bodies that would be affected by the change (the Thomas Cooper Library and satellite campuses) and ultimately re-created the course curriculum and re-integrated it into the existing structures of the university. While, in many ways, the FYE Program and ENGL 102 were still quite recognizable at the end of the process, both were, to an extent, remade by the introduction of the new learning requirement. That is, the force of the new learning outcome re-interpreted ENGL 102. But, the INF requirement itself was also affected by the process. Information-Literacy is taught in conjunction with writing instruction and from a rhetorical perspective, which affects the way in which “information literacy” is

85 This was largely because the Writing Program Director at the time, Christy Friend, successfully pitched the course as a suitable candidate because it already emphasized research and writing through rhetorical practices.

86 At the time, I served as an Assistant Director of FYE and as Christy Friend’s Research Assistant for the project.
articulated, theorized, and cultivated in students. In short, both the requirement and the writing program were transformed through the encounter.\footnote{To be clear, this transformative process occurred at multiple levels as the requirement distributed itself out from the program and into each classroom.}

What I want to make clear through this example is that the interpretive process inherent to institutional bodies is one of continual re-making (becoming). The general education requirements that are now in place at USC moved through the university as an iterative, or writing, force. In each iteration, as it was communicated through the institution, the force imposed itself onto the various bodies of the university and expressed itself through them, remaking them and itself in each instance. We can see this evolution, in broad terms, insofar as the force of the Information-Literacy requirement was not even always articulated as such. “It,” insofar as we can ascribe it with any substance, existed at one point as a set of pressures external to the university that evolved into a series of task-forces charged with responding to those external pressures. “It,” at another point, existed as one of many other general education requirements that made up a whole “response” to those outside pressures. “It,” at yet another point, existed at a key means by which a first-year composition class was reconstructed.

What the example illuminates is the iterative process by which a force moved through a structurally open assemblage (the university) so as to shape, and be shaped by, the particular intersections of the university, one of which just so happened to be the university’s writing program. Yet, the particular configuration of USC’s writing program, combined with the trained set of capacities and dispositions of its director Christy Friend, enabled a particularly
successful outcome to what otherwise could have been a burdensome mandate
*imposed* onto the program.

From the outside, this example might equally as well illuminate Jeanne Gunner’s model of being-WPA. Friend certainly took advantage of a momentary confluence of (ideological) forces in the university that opened up a space for FYE to take on the function of teaching the new INF requirement. Furthermore, it is impossible to finally know whether or not she configured this opportunity as a tactical means by which to advance the agency of the writing program. What is clear, however, is that the result of the overhaul left FYE’s very identity altered, along with that of the learning requirement.

Given this transformation of identity, I posit that Friend operated as a catalyst for ushering in change that she could not have fully pre-conceived and thereby operated so as to re-invent the writing program and her role as its director in response to a differential force (the ever mutating learning-outcome mandates) rather than advance her identity against counter-identities. But, again, this is almost impossible to know from the outside and, more importantly, speaks to the very subtle, but powerful, differences between an agential orientation aimed at advancing one identity against others and an inventive orientation that is habituated to let one’s own identity dissipate in response to difference. An “inventive orientation” is, after-all, an *orientation* and cannot be reduced to a set of methodical steps to follow. It is quite difficult, and often impossible, to know from the outside whether a WPA is acting as frustrated administrator, a tactical agent, a sensible responder, or an inventive catalyst.

Returning to my claims about the ontologically pedagogical power of writing program administration, this example makes it clear that writing
programs function as hubs of not just the writings of others, in our traditional understanding of it, but of iterative force. They function to repeat, intertwine, and interpret the very particular configurations of “university stuff” that flow through them. This emergent, networked, and perpetually transitioning understanding of a writing program is far removed from our typical understanding of administrative bodies, which we tend to describe in terms of a relatively stable set of goals, resources, persons, and protocols. The disappointment that WPA work engenders is often produced at the intersection of these two models: administrators operate as if the writing program functions as a semi-autonomous body within a larger institution, but perpetually run into the other agencies, or writings, that have commandeered the writing program for their own purposes. The lingering question is, of course, how WPAs can cultivate a disposition of invention given the particular configurations of their institutions in such a way that does not configure a writing program as a semi-autonomous actor, but as an emergent assemblage

**Hexis, Mētis, and Becoming Responsive**

To operate inventively, the WPA must be able to shift in response to the ever-changing conditions that constitute his/her writing program at any given time. That is to say that, in order to operate inventively, the WPA must cultivate a disposition of self-transformation in response the ebbs and flows of one’s writing program and university. I find Debra Hawhee’s work on the concepts of *hexis*
and *mētis* helpful here, insofar as they provide a means by which to cultivate an inventive disposition toward administrative work.\(^{88}\)

*Hexis* is a bodily capacity that is irreducible to knowledge. Hawhee shows that *hexis* refers to a learned disposition, or set of trained habits, of (re)action enmeshed within a particular configuration of a body. That is, *hexis* refers to what a particular body is capable of doing when its particular configuration is combined with a particular learned disposition and a particular milieu. Thus, *hexis* refers to the particular response-ability of a specific mind/body/habit/environment complex. *Mētis*, on the other hand, refers to the “cunning” necessary to transform one’s body between various *hexeis* so as to seamlessly respond to an unpredictably changing set of circumstance. Thus, in many ways, *mētis* is nothing more than the *hexis* of self-transformation. Furthermore, *mētis* is not a response-ability to a particular circumstance, but to the particular rhythms, dynamics, and inclinations that propel one set of circumstances into another. Thus, if *hexeis* are response-abilities to states of *being*, then *mētis* is a response-ability to the *becoming* of those states of *being*.

While we readily grant intelligence to so-called bodily activities, such as the “muscle memories” required in athletics and music, Hawhee emphasizes that, for the Greeks, *mētis* and *hexis* were just as much a matter of what we would call bodily movements as those movements we would call mental or intellectual. That is to say that since *hexis*, for the Greeks, equally indicated “bodily state” and “habits and practices,” we cannot finally distinguish the activity of the body from that of the mind (58). As Hawhee puts it, “…*hexis* equals thought. Thought

does not just happen within the body, it happens as the body” (58). Thus, a bodily state, or a practiced configuration of habits, conditions the body to respond readily according to its particular disposition. For Hawhee as well as the Greeks, sophistic rhetoric has less to do with a rhetor’s accumulated knowledge and more to do with training in several “bodily states” that allow him/her to shift seamlessly from one style of response-ability to another, depending on the demands of a situation.

WPA scholarship has repeatedly drawn attention to the body of writing program directors, insofar as they are worn down, burned out, disappointed and lonely.89 Most of this scholarship focuses that bodily attention on individual bodies and the impact they have on crafting individual and shared WPA identities. That is, they have focused on the effects WPA work has on WPAs and thereby focused on the interiority of the individual WPA. As we’ve already seen, though, Heard draws our attention away from just the state of the WPA body to how it interacts with its institutional environment. In many ways, what Heard is calling for resembles what Hawhee describes as hexis. That is, Heard calls for WPAs to attend to the instances of frustration that circulated through writing programs as writing so as to develop a sensible posture, or style of response-ability, toward them that, he insists, “describes readiness and adjustment rather than knowledge and belief” (40). Thus, while he doesn’t draw attention to it, I see in his analysis a kind of a disruption of the WPA body as something siloed within universities and reveals where and how that body extends beyond itself through and into the various pathways whereby university writing circulates.

89 This is largely Gunner’s language from her 2000 WPA address.
What Heard and Hawhee allow us to see is that the WPA body cannot be finally separated from the institutional environment wherein it operates. In fact, they allow us to see that the WPA body does not begin and end with a person at all, but is enmeshed with the body of the writing program, and even university. But, much more importantly, we are able to see how those very institutional bodies are trained to develop certain styles of response, thereby cultivating a particular set of hexeis. In each of our three models, - Micciche, Gunner, Heard - the WPA attunes him/herself to a different dynamic, and thereby trains him/herself in a different set of response-abilities that set up an inside/outside dynamic that, despite their important merits, can be hostile to change. If we take seriously the way that individual WPAs are extended throughout, and as part of, writing programs, I argue that we can develop a kind of WPA training that, perhaps counterintuitively, habituates self-transformation as the positive result of the indistinction that characterizes a writing director, a writing program, and a university.

Thus, rather than emphasizing the disconnects between idealized identities and disaffected realities, I suggest that we look to the moments of transformation that occur through writing-programs (those moments of re-interpretation that affect both the writing program and that which passes through it) as opportunities to train in a style of administration that affirms the inventive potential available at a given moment at a given place. Thus, in a sense, WPAs should consciously attend to the particular hexeis they learn as well as cultivate a métis that is capable of shifting between those learned hexeis as circumstances demand.
This requires WPAs to undergo two kinds of training. The first is that of training the capacities that allow WPAs to respond within their institutions as more or less individual actors. In other words, in order to develop the kind of fluidity needed to respond to unforeseen circumstances, WPAs must have a repertoire of response-abilities to shift between. Furthermore, they must be in the habit of perpetually moving from one response-ability to another so as to habituate WPAs in dissolving their individual identity in response to difference.

Thus, the first kind of training I propose is grounded in exercising the deliberate and practiced movement *between* habits, skills, and dispositions. While the individual forms and skills may remain the same, an inventive style of training oneself in these forms emphasizes the copious differences that each is capable of and focuses on the movement between those forms. In other words, what is important is training oneself to seamlessly move from response-ability to response-ability. While such a style of training may seem best suited to the classroom - or even the gymnasium - I argue that the day-to-day duties of writing program administration offer ample opportunities to sharpen such habits. Writing program directors operate as colleagues, administrators (both as a managing and managed administrator), researchers, teachers, and mentors, each of which requires overlapping skill-sets. Consciously moving between those skills sets in unfamiliar ways is an excellent means for improving one’s fluidity between them as well as opportunities to transform how one acts in any of those roles at any given time.

The second kind of training would focus on the ever-shifting state of a writing program itself. As I argue above, the multiplicity of “university stuff” that circulate through writing programs are always and necessarily affected by
their very communication. So too is the body - the writing program - through which they flow. Each iteration of this flow - each encounter between force and body - is a moment of transformation that cannot be determined in advance. In order to affirm the inventive possibilities that are imbedded in these encounters, WPAs must attune themselves to the frequency at which those transformations occur. I have been trying to show that by focusing on the disjunctions between identity and difference that produce disappointment, we tend to drown out the subtle transformations that occur as a constituent feature of every action of a writing program. Heard correctly points out that WPAs are uniquely situated to recognize the movements of vulnerability made possible by the heterogeneity of the university. But, what I think he overlooks is that WPAs are also uniquely positioned to see the inventive potential imbedded in that heterogeneity. By attending to how the particular configuration of a writing program - along with its particular set of relations to the rest of the university - conditions the kinds of transformations available to it, WPAs can train themselves to affirm fuller expressions of those inventive possibilities.

**Conclusions: We don’t know what administration can do**

While the orientation for which I am advocating may risk fetishizing the new or valuing invention for the sake of invention, I want to emphasize that, while invention through affirmation cannot know its endpoint in advance, neither does it affirm randomness. This is simply because affirmation requires something to affirm. Or, better yet, it needs some set of dynamics to affirm. What is imbedded in any particular set of dynamics are inclinations, which provide a direction and
a weight to the dynamic and thereby lends itself toward certain kinds of transformation over others. Thus, to affirm the inventive potential of a writing program is simply to give the maximum amount of health to it as an investment in its becoming. Such an investment knows that what comes of it may be underwhelming, or even monstrous and a WPA is by no means permanently tethered to that which he/she affirms. In fact, as a process of becoming, affirmative invention cannot help but undo that which it has brought about by affirming the new sets of dynamics brought about by its own affirmation and thereby a new potentiality. Thus, affirmation through intensification often leads to a thing (a learning outcome, policy, curriculum) becoming unrecognizable to itself.

What I have tried to do in this article is illuminate the mechanisms of WPA work that tend to lead to disappointment in administrators and re-imagine those dynamics as capable of something inventive. Previous scholarship in WPA studies, such as the work of Micciche, Gunner, and Heard, show that frustration is produced by a set of structural relations that alienate WPAs from their work. This scholarship simultaneously provides possible means by which to ameliorate (Micciche), weaponize (Gunner), or mobilize (Heard) those points of alienation so as to re-configure the writing-program machine to produce something worthwhile in addition to disappointment.

My analysis, however, shows that without addressing the function that identity plays in disappointment, there cannot be any substantial change made to these mechanisms because the more entrenched WPA identity positions are, the more amplified the possibilities for alienation become. In response to this dynamic, I propose a kind of training that provokes the dissolution of identity by
focusing our attention on the inventive potentiality imbedded in the heterogenous dynamics that make up any given writing program. Part of that heterogeneity are WPAs themselves; and part of the inventive potential available to writing programs depends on WPAs being able to become-other in response to that potentiality. Thus, ultimately, what I am arguing here is that, to echo and adapt Baruch Spinoza, we do not know what writing program administration can do. And this “not knowing” is in no way a lack, but an invitation to invent.

Thus, the possibilities for WPAs are as open and full of potential as they are restrictive and reifying. While I do not wish to minimize the real struggles many WPAs face, I do wish to shift the focus from these struggles to the potential they also hold for invention that cannot be pre-determined and may not even fit within our recognizable domains of “writing programs.” Insofar as institutional bodies are themselves pedagogical agents that habituate their members in a given ethic, I have tried to show that cultivating an ethos of responsiveness through training oneself in the singularity of one’s writing program can serve as a crucial catalyst for transforming what appear as blockages, or even threats, to the identity of a writing program into inventive possibilities for an unknowable future.

---

90 Ethics Part II, ii.
CONCLUSION

Implicit, but nonetheless central, to this project is a sustained re-evaluation of the worth of form, exercise, and practice to writing instruction. I take it as a given that process-pedagogy has waned at the level of theory, but has nonetheless persisted as the dominate framework for pedagogical practice. While so-called post-process pedagogies have launched convincing critiques of process-theory, they have failed to make serious inroads in instructional practices.

This is largely the case because they so often rest on the premise that, as Thomas Kent puts it, writing cannot be taught as “dogma or rules of thought; rather postprocess theory, theory with a very small t, embodies a kind of general mindset about writing, a mindset that understands writing more than the conventional use of language or as a process that, once learned, leads to effective communication” (xvi). Kent’s argument that writing is not a technology that can “be codified and then applied to circumstances in order to predict some sort of outcome” is convincing (xii). Yet, his follow-up claim that writing instruction should be thoroughly enmeshed with all language and thinking activities effectively reduces writing instruction to a general textual immersion. That is,

---

91 “Preface” to Beyond Postprocess, 2011.
Kent claims that writing is honed through having students engage textual artifacts to practice their always already functioning hermeneutic machines. Such an approach simply subordinates writing to reading.

While I take Kent’s point that writing is more of a mindset, or perhaps more of a disposition, than it is a technical method, I do not take it to follow that writing cannot be taught or learned. Plenty of human activities cannot be reduced to a method and yet are learned and taught all the time. Athletes and musicians are trained, whether formally or through self-discipline; and yet neither athletics nor music can be reduced to a method. Basketball players train endlessly to perfect particular forms that are never simply executed in some pre-determined manner in a game; in fact many basketball drills are never deployed in games at all since their aim is at the body and not at strategy. The same goes for musicians, who train their hands, mouths, and minds to master and move between notes and chords. Yet, music played well can never be reduced to a methodical procession of notes. Of course, jazz is usually heralded as the example of this phenomenon, but I think it is just as true for musicians who seemingly play from a script. All musicians respond to their environment, and even when two musicians play “the same music,” the two performances are never reducible to the notes that were played.

Debra Hawhee’s work on ancient rhetorical training emphasizes this point by explicitly linking oratorical training to musical and athletic instruction. Ancient students of Greek and Roman rhetoric trained endlessly to master the forms of discourse. The often-overlooked cannon of Memory attests to this fact insofar as its primary purpose is to act as a reserve of potential rhetorical arguments or moves (always invented and arranged in response to the
uniqueness of a given rhetorical situation) to deploy in response to the ever shifting dynamics of an oratorical address. Training, according to Hawhee’s read of ancient rhetorical pedagogy, is aimed at enabling students to be responsive to the singularity of their situation, not to rigidly adhere them to a mechanical or processual method of writing.

Yet, while the hegemony of process-theory seems to be waning, the stigma attached to words like form, training, practice and exercise still runs strong. As I variously argue, especially in chapters 2 and 3, I think that this stigma has two roots. The first is simply the legacy of Current-Traditional Rhetoric. These terms too closely resonate with what has become the field’s greatest boogie-man and too hastily draw to mind images of ruler brandishing writing instructors drilling and killing their students into submission. In fact, composition and rhetoric exists as a contemporary research field largely insofar as it juxtaposed itself against Current-Traditional Rhetoric (CTR). To return to central facets of that tradition seemingly amounts to betraying the very spirit of the discipline.

The second root arises from a more general trend in education to increasingly parse out the specific “take-aways” instruction yields in terms of discrete “learning outcomes.” Increasingly, these outcomes must not only be discrete and specific, but they must be demonstrable, evaluable, and students must be aware that they have received them and must be able to consciously deploy them in contexts beyond the classroom. Any pedagogy that emphasizes training, practice, and exercise seem to run directly counter to this trend insofar as they, at least at some level, advocate for cultivating capacities at tacit, bodily, instinctual, and even unconscious levels.
In response to the first concern, my response is simple. We stand at a moment where we can safely re-evaluate the value of Current-Traditional Rhetoric without risking simply returning to it. That is, we should feel comfortable with sifting through its wreckage to see what value there might be in re-animating and re-configuring some of its practices, as I did in chapter 2 with modal writing. In short, I’m arguing that in the haste to differentiate composition and rhetoric against CTR, the field has undervalued the importance of form and exercise, and even formal exercise.

In response to the second concern, my response is more ideological. The emphasis that has been placed on learning outcomes, evaluation, and transfer is, to my mind, largely a product of the increased capitalization of the university, and of education more generally. These initiatives commodify learning by drawing discrete boundaries around the “products” of the university and, furthermore, by showcasing their exchangeability. The model treats students as customers who peruse and purchase the “knowledge wares” of the university so that they then might be showcased to employers.

I find this characterization of education to be as distasteful as it is reductive, not because of an anti-capitalistic stance, but because it covers over its own mode of tacit, bodily, and unconscious training. Such initiatives make the university experience an exercise in instrumentalizing learning, instructors, and others for a pre-determined end. Thus, it does not replace training with meta-reflective knowledge, but privileges one kind of economic training over a liberal set of trainings (Isocrates, after all, is the father of the liberal arts). In short, initiatives to increase the “meta-reflective” capacity of students are blind to how they cultivate student values, orientations, and decision-making processes at so
called “lower levels.” That is, they are unaware as to the ethos they cultivate. I emphasize the reductive quality of this training, not because I find it simply problematic for students to think about how their education fits within an economic world - this is, in fact, quite a valuable skill - but because it is unaware as to what it trains students to do and because it dramatically reduces the versatility and multiplicity of what education could be. We reduce the value of education to the degree that we attempt to pre-determine its value.

In response to these two concerns, this dissertation has re-introduced practice and form to writing instruction in two ways. First, I have attempted to re-theorize form as a site of training specific “response-abilities,” or hexies. Second, I have articulated “disposition toward invention” or métis, as the end, or telos, of rhetorical training.

Concerning form, I argue that training cultivates a tacit familiarity with how writing forms affect and are affected by rhetorical situations. Furthermore, the emphasis I place on form does not primarily focus on any specific set of forms, but on the movements and transitions between forms. Thus, form cannot be reduced to a product or artifact, but must be expanded to include movement. Training students in forms of writing-movements disrupts the idea that written forms are pre-determined products that writers methodologically deploy and, in its stead, mobilizes forms and movements of form as response-abilities, or “bodily states” (hēxeis) as Hawhee terms it, that can be ingrained as dynamic habits of rhetorical response.

Despite emphasizing form and training, I have resisted methodizing writing instruction in several ways. First, I highlight the interminability of the specific usefulness of any given form. This is most evident in chapters 2 and 4,
wherein I emphasize the transformative power of the modes of discourse, rhetorical tropes and figures, and even the hermeneutic model of the rhetorical situation. In each case, I argue that form has been traditionally treated as an ending point; as a mode of expression or as a framework for producing knowledge. Against this tradition, I argue that form first and foremost transforms that which it encounters, whether that be a writer’s thought, a text, or the observable world. Furthermore, I argue that the quality of such transformations can never be known in advance, but that a familiarity with the transformative power of a particular form can nuance the role a writer plays in its mobilization.

Second, I insist that exercises should be multi-directional so as to discourage students from canalizing writing forms into stale procedures. By linking form to form and exercise to exercise in multiple and unpredictable ways, students learn to attend to and inculcate the points of connection (how a form is capable of linking to other forms) and inventive capacity (the manner in which a form operates) of writing over their pre-determined effects. As I argue in chapter 2, we tend to think of rhetorical figures and tropes as stylistic features that add to already established writing by embellishing it in some way. We further tend to categorize those forms based on the effects we presume them to have. Against this, I argue that by habituating students to how rhetorical tropes and figures function, by repeatedly experimenting with their deployment, students can gain a better feel for the full range of potential that a form holds for a specific rhetorical situation based on how it is capable of functioning within a piece of writing rather than by anticipating the rhetorical effect it may add to it.

Lastly, I argue that the telos of rhetorical training should be shifted away from knowledge, skill, and even trained capacities and toward cultivating a
disposition of invention. The most reductive feature of education is the presumption that we can already know to or for-what education is aimed. In response, I argue that we can never presume to know the multiple and multiplying effects of an education, and in particular, of an education which aims above all to train students to “think” and to “respond.” As I point out in chapter 5, an orientation to invention risks fetishizing “the new.” But, the kind of disposition of invention for which I advocate is not one that champions the new for the sake of the new. Rather, it takes seriously the unknowability of the future affirming its potentiality.

Yet, rather than focus this inventive gaze on the future, as if the goal is to will a different future into existence, I argue that an emphasis on form, and movements between forms, orients us toward the future not as something new or better that can be achieved, but as the full expression of what a present set of relations is capable. Such an orientation turns our attention away from the promise of the future and enmeshes them within the presence of the present. Ironically, such an attention does not work to calcify the present into a determined presence, but intensifies its relations so as to provoke it into something else. Thus, the orientation of invention that I advocate is not tuned to the externality of an invention yet to arrive, but to the immanence of an invention that is always expressing itself as other; what we might call the being of becoming.

Finally, a word on theory. While the aims of this dissertation are primarily practical, it is indebted theoretically to thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, and Giles Deleuze. I draw on these thinkers differently in each of the chapters to unpack and articulate at the level of theory, the workings of an
ethical, immanent, inventive, pedagogical orientation. That said, while this dissertation is certainly indebted to and informed by these philosophic minds and arguments, it is also a project that stems from experience, observation, and reflection in the classroom. To this end, the pedagogy I recommend is neither an application of a theoretical orientation, nor is my theoretical orientation a simple piecing together of theory to support a pre-determined set of practices. Rather, theory and practice permeate each other to point to a mode of practicing becoming.
References


— “The Erasure of the Sentence.” College Composition and Communication. 52.1, (2000):96 - 128


