IDEOLOGIES OF WRITING: CONTEMPORARY THEORY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

By

JEFFREY ALLEN RICE

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2010

© 2010 Jeffrey Allen Rice

To Tanya

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Sid Dobrin, Raúl Sánchez, Terry Harpold, and Robert Hatch for their guidance and encouragement throughout this project. Most of all, however, I thank Tanya Fitzgerald, Alison Reynolds, and Michael Vastola for their unwavering support and assistance. This project would not have been possible without them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 4

ABSTRACT 6

CHAPTER

1 TAKING THEORY SERIOUSLY 8

2 COMPOSITION STUDIES AND IDEOLOGY: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS 19

Differential Rhetorics and Ideological Consistency 23
Ideological Formations, Inscriptive Economies, and Political Interventions 29
Composing Historical Ideologies 34
Semblances of Theoretical and Ideological Knowledge 52

3 WRITING WITHOUT (THEORETICAL) GUARNATEES 57

Institutions of Writing Theory 59
Theorizing the Logics of Composition Studies 67
Rethinking Plato via Neosophistic materiality 75

4 RETHINKING THE MATERIALITY OF COMPOSITION STUDIES THEORY 88

Paralogic Rhetoric and Post-Process Theory; or Inscriptive Violence as the Horizon of Composition Studies Theory 92
The Inscriptive Gesture of Networked Scene 97
Inscription, Networks, and Ideological Appropriation 107

5 COMPOSITION STUDIES THEORIZING SANS ETHIC: FROM PRODUCING WRITING'S THEORETICAL PRESCRIPTIONS TO DECLARING ETHICAL EVENTS 120

Beyond Theoretical Production and Ideological Certainty 129
Toward a New Ethics of Writing Theory: Philosophical and Material Considerations 139

6 TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF INSCRIPTIVE MONSTROSITY 153

Beyond the "False Choice" of Pedagogy 162
(Re)inscribing Pedagogical Possibilities 169

7 FIDELITY TO THE DISCIPLINARY REFUSAL 184

LIST OF REFERENCES 194

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 201

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

IDEOLOGIES OF WRITING: CONTEMPORARY THEORY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

By

Jeffrey A. Rice

December 2010

Chair: Sidney I. Dobrin
Major: English

This dissertation considers how composition studies defines theory and how those definitions affect both its theorizing practices and its engagement with writing. By arguing that theory is a moment of writing, I explore how theory can engender new understandings and methods *of* writing, rather than merely provide knowledge *about* writing. I begin by examining the ways critical pedagogy, social epistemic theory, and composition studies history use theory as a rhetorical and ideological supplement to disciplinary interests. Through these methods, theory is reduced to an appropriated, decontextualized concept that can only compliment disciplinary observations. Although these approaches appear to limit theory to purely disciplinary concerns, the next section contends that they also reveal the contingent connections between theory and ideology. I expand on this thesis and argue that such contingent connections actually make theory an affective and constitutive type of writing. In redefining theory as an inscriptive instance, composition studies can develop and use theory as a methodology of writing, rather than restricting it to an elucidation of established disciplinary ideas. The final section further expands on this theme and uses theory to rewrite disciplinary ideas of materiality, ethics, and pedagogy beyond the interests of composition studies. In these

latter chapters, I claim that theory foregrounds the contingency of material formation through a networked writing logic, and consequently makes writing a purely inventive technology. This focus on theory's material inventions also changes the role that ethics and pedagogy play in writing. Rather than using writing's probable effects to determine rhetorical and stylistic choices, I contend that ethics and pedagogy now accentuate the generalized possibilities of any writing situation, regardless of outcome. Ultimately, then, this project's argument leads toward the possibility of re-envisioning the philosophic and rhetorical connections between theory, writing, and their respective disciplinary formulations.

CHAPTER 1
TAKING THEORY SERIOUSLY

> Theory indicates that our classical ways of carving up knowledge are now, for hard historical reasons, in deep trouble
>
> —Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Stephen A. North points out that composition studies' rapid theoretical growth has produced a gap in methodological and theoretical consistency. This gap, he argues, creates "a kind of inflation: in the absence of a critical consciousness capable of discriminating more carefully, the various kinds of knowledge produced by these [theoretical] modes of inquiry have been piled up uncritically, helter-skelter, with little regard to incompatibilities" (North 3). Such inflation presents significant, systemic difficulties for both the ideology called composition studies and what it identifies as theory. The diverse and incommensurate knowledges that theory generates suffer little, but their incompatibilities undermine the general and regulative consistency that theory is supposed to ensure. Moreover, without regulative consistency—what North terms a "communal dialectic"—composition studies' oppositional, continuing, and unpredictable exchange with both theory and writing ends (60). For instance, in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*'s discussion of Edward P.J. Corbett's "John Locke's Contributions to Rhetoric," North asserts that Corbett's "object is not to take issue with [his peers'] assessments, but simply to offer them as part of his justification for making Locke more generally accessible" (83). As North sees it, the primary mistake is not that this analysis of Locke was faulty, but that it failed to engage with the theoretical community, its constitutive logic, or alter how Locke is understood rhetorically and historically.

When understood as a representative example of how composition studies disciplinarily and philosophically realizes theory, this Lockean notion implies that theory primarily, if not unwittingly, ensures an egalitarian ideology rather than create any substantive historical or ideological revision. To be sure, this is a disciplinarily persistent view that, more often than not, ideologically grounds what composition studies calls theory. Gary A. Olson describes this ideology of theory as “expansive, encompassing broad and diverse investigations of how written discourse works” (“The Death of Composition” 23). The diversity of theoretical subjects and approaches that composition studies’ journals, conferences, and university presses continue to generate certainly validate Olson’s description. But so too do the ways in which composition studies uses such diverse theories. From Nedra Reynolds’s use of Kress’s idea of *flaneur* to describe how space is a visual, rhetorical force to Paul Lynch’s adaptation of Neil Postman’s thermostatic metaphor, composition studies has long used a theoretical model that follows two interconnected assumptions (75; 728). First, the study of writing directly correlates to non-disciplinary theoretical and conceptual contexts. Once this correlation is asserted, composition studies can effortlessly import these external theories to help address specific disciplinary problems. In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, such theoretical “borrowing” is rightly identified as philosophic foraging, and conceives theory as frictionless relationships between diverse external theories and composition studies’ internal, disciplinary interests (North 102). In Shari J. Stenberg’s “Embodied Classrooms, Embodied Knowledge: Re-Thinking the Mind Body Split,” for instance, theory helps create alternative and operational logics for struggles against postmodern conceptions of the body as a symbolic and material homogeneity (43-60).

Here, what is called theory elucidates the advent—or perhaps discursive matrix—of epistemology, identity, and pedagogy; its initial task is to revise disciplinary knowledge by using external theories to produce different rhetorical ideas, strategies, and philosophies. Accordingly, it works to reconceive particular professional conversations and interpretations—whether they be administrative, disciplinary, or pedagogical—so that they are more meaningfully enacted and realized in that professional logic.

It is important to note the extent to which the potency of this ideology of theory affects composition studies' general conceptions of what theory is and what it is capable of. As a corollary to Olson's view, composition studies' theoretical pluralism reflects a general ideological logic where theory is limited by disciplinary expectations of production. Theory, that is, must produce pedagogical strategies, professional knowledge, literacy practices, and so on and so forth. Sidney I. Dobrin's *Constructing Knowledges: The Politics of Theory-Building and Pedagogy in Composition*, for example, might seem like it departs from such logic in its critique of disciplinary resistance, but actually uses a logic of production to secure its thesis. Discussing composition studies' resistance to anti-foundationalist theories, Dobrin states:

> Because anti-foundationalist theory shakes the very ground of the Western tradition and thereby seems, at least at first, counterintuitive, it should be no surprise that it frightens people; we have all invested much in the myths of 'progress' and truth building, and now they are slipping away. It becomes easier to argue that such theoretical lines do not serve any positive goal and are, in fact, counterproductive to established ways of thinking than it is to engage these theories in more productive ways. (13)

At first glance, *Constructing Knowledges'* argument seems to share much with more radical understandings of theory, particularly in its assessment of what theory does (it signals a knowledge crisis) and what it makes explicit (composition studies' fear of change). Yet, for the advances against disciplinary conservatism, it still questions

composition studies' engagement with anti-foundationalist theory from an epistemologically pragmatic view: "this debate has become a crucial issue to the academy as a whole, both in terms of how the academy engages knowledge making—what is useful knowledge?—and in terms of how the outside world perceives the academy" (Dobrin 14). Echoing North's description of composition studies' methodological gap, *Constructing Knowledges* tries to use theory to judge what is and is not useful knowledge—in this case, how disciplinary and philosophical knowledge affect both internal and external inscriptive contexts. Theorizing therefore no longer depends on the role or premise theory plays in cognitive, psychological, material, and technical writing contexts, but rather how theory influences (and is influenced by), produces, and values such diverse disciplinary contexts.

Given such ideological coordinates, it is apparent that if what is called theory is to be identified as such and taken seriously in the composition studies' context, it must do two interrelated things. First, it must forage other intellectual contexts for theoretical insights that philosophically and inscriptively compliment disciplinary ideology. Second, it must use those benign theories to produce something relevant to composition studies' professional interest in writing. Though requiring the connections between theory and the ideology called composition studies to produce professional consequences is a justifiable academic premise, making such connections primarily solidify a pluralist space beyond theoretical question is quite another. In composition studies' general ideological coordinates, that is, theory does not consider or call into question the pluralist imperative itself, including what makes it a (disciplinarily) possible and desirable mode of theorizing. As such, it cannot include those questions or concerns—its political

orientation, philosophic constitution, or inscriptive contingency—that fundamentally challenge the possibilities of its apparent ideological project. Unfortunately, in such a theoretical scene, the premises and assumptions of theory as an agent of disciplinary or inscriptive change are quite meaningless.

This project takes aim at these constricted, ideological logics of theory and rethinks the possibility of theory's relationship to the ideology called composition studies. By re-envisioning the logics by which theory and disciplinary ideology connect, my hope is that composition studies can more usefully address the disciplinary and ideological contingency that theory engenders. And since such theoretical arguments are never ideologically innocent, I hope too that this project pushes composition studies to think theory beyond its disciplinary uses and instead realize it as a systemic, affective force in its own right. Of course, this also means that theory would require a substantially different founding gesture that departs from composition studies' usual disciplinary and epistemological focus. In contrast to those inquiries that utilize theory as an ethicized accountability—that is, "what does writing make possible?"—this project argues throughout that what is signified by theory should fundamentally and seriously inscribe the very logics that connect theory and ideology. In this context, inscription signifies the pervasive, speculative contingency of any written mark; or more simply, a material, conjectural logic that purposefully engages with temporality. Consequently, asserting inscription as theory's fundamental activity helps composition studies better realize what and how it defines, configures, and circulates as theory from context to context. But inscription, however loaded a term, additionally offers theory a chance to call into question composition studies' conception of and relationship to materiality, or,

specifically, what it calls writing. This is a unique position for composition studies, if for no other reason than because it substantively reconsiders how an ideological formation can use the temporality of inscription to think (or write) itself from moment to moment and from context to context. Indeed, as this project contends, it is only within the throes of these inscriptive revolutions that the very pedagogical dynamics underlying theory can be properly—that is, systemically—refigured as affective, post-ideological moments of writing.

Chapter One begins by investigating both what composition studies realizes as ideology and how it enacts such realizations. Generally speaking, the term ideology is recognized as a problematic, decontextualized concept that, in some magical way, adversely affects the study of writing. Following James Berlin and Slavoj Žižek, I contend ideology is instead more of a self-reflexive, contingent logic that literalizes theory's inscriptive formations and possibilities. As a methodological focus, this literalization of inscription helps theory consider how a particular ideology maintains a logical constitution and consistency. Accordingly, the latter portion of the chapter illustrates these very possibilities of ideology and theory by showing how the ideologies of composition studies' history use a particular conception of theory to ensure a logic of minimal differences.

With this logic of minimal differences serving as ideological and theoretical vanguard, Chapter Two interrogates how composition studies perpetuates such a particular institutional identity through its engagement with what it calls writing. Despite the discipline's ideological dismissal of Plato's theory of writing, it nonetheless repeats Plato's conception by eclectically theorizing writing. When theory, writing, and even

thinking are conceived as distinct, decontextualized concepts, they can be combined, interchanged, and applied eclectically to any writing context. But such eclecticism is not the death of theory. As Louis Althusser and Neosophistic rhetorical theory show, theoretical eclecticism offers theory the chance to be realized as a material, critical force in ideological and institutional organization. Thus, in restricting the relationships between theory and writing to a logic minimal differences, composition studies relinquishes the conjectural, inscriptive connections that such relationships endeavor.

But once they have been realized, the speculative dimensions of theoretical inscription force composition studies to recognize that every theoretical articulation substantively changes both an institution's formation and its constituting logic. Theory, that is, does not just happen; it, for better or worse, inscriptively changes the things it theorizes. Chapter Three accentuates this thesis and contends that if an inscriptive contingency is indeed the horizon by which theory, writing, and ideology connect, then composition studies needs to rethink how it, institutionally, relates to this very inscriptive materiality. With Thomas Kent and Jacques Derrida, I argue that composition studies can find an analogous theoretical logic in networked writing scenes. For these networked writing scenes, theory and ideology articulate their relationships as material contingencies, or more precisely, as scenes where writing and ideology happen as chance, material encounters. Consequently, what is called theory affectively inaugurates new writing formations, and in some cases, new logics of materiality more than it does anything else.

Chapter Four examines how these new logics of materiality challenge ideological guarantees, specifically in terms of the disciplinary connections between ethics and

writing. As an academic discipline, composition studies seems to imply an ethical, bureaucratic framework of strategic probability that determines the productive and epistemological value of theory. This ethics of probability reduces chance material encounters that occur between theory, writing, and ideology to calculated, intentional, and ultimately, counterproductive acts. Instead of this restricted dynamic, I advocate for an ethics of possibility that capitalizes on theory's affective, material force. Here, ethics acknowledges that inscription's multiple, various, and contingent assemblages precisely happen—sometimes quite well and sometimes quite poorly—and cannot be evaluated beyond their particular, material occurrence. Thus, by rejecting the probable effects that the connections between theory, writing, and ideology might "produce," such connections are envisioned instead as precise, possible formations, and in turn, as distinct moments of writing.

With theory substantively changing both ideological formations and logics, it could be argued that it, like the methodologies it critiques, equalizes what it affects. To be sure, inscriptive change exemplifies quantifiable alterity, but to solely relegate change to quantity alone inscribes theory as a technology before-the-fact. Indeed, as Chapter Five contends, such charges of logical homogenization are pedagogical concerns because how substantive, inscriptive change happens is precisely in question. In its traditional conceptions of inscriptive change, composition studies almost exclusively offers what Žižek describes as "a false choice"—that is, a change that ultimately changes nothing. As one of composition studies' most cherished institutions, this programmatic, pedagogical framework might circulate different concepts and values, but does not once seriously affect the ways in which such concepts and values are circulated. In

conjunction with Derrida and Lynn Worsham, this chapter offers a theory of writing pedagogy that uses the violence of the written mark to continually and precisely refuse disciplinary homogenization.

It should be clear that in rethinking the constitutive dimensions between theory and disciplinary ideology this project desires to both provide for and move beyond critiques of composition studies' idea of what theory is, what it does, and how it relates to the study of writing. As a critique, it hopes to reinstate those reflexive strains of critical inquiry so essential to composition studies. For when theory's affective—if not confrontational—dynamic is foregrounded as critical impetus, the reflexive, autonomous activity it brings to the disciplinary table benefits both theory and composition studies. Theory, that is, can act as its own indifferent logic, as an inscriptive conjecture that is more or less indifferent to programmatic, disciplinary commentaries. But in its interactions with ideological formations, theory changes things. Here, that change can mean composition studies becomes attuned to the affective, autonomous theoretical currents of its disciplinary constellation. For example, rather than unconsciously repeating questions of theoretical and productive accountability ("What does writing make possible?"), rethinking the constitutive dimensions between theory and disciplinary ideology permits composition studies to finally think its horizon in terms of what writing makes possible. In envisioning theoretical logics differently, then, this project's thesis shares many things in common with those theoretical accounts that prioritize the affective and inscriptive dimensions of writing theory. As Lynn Worsham and Rául Sánchez have respectively argued, theory is a political activity that indeterminately underlines the rhetorical and ideological possibilities—that is, its

inscriptive “connections”—of any writing situation from moment to moment.1 Like these scholars, this project’s revisionary critique further addresses the disciplinary implications and possibilities that such a theoretical view warrants.

But as a theoretical intervention in its own right, I would like to think what I propose in the following chapters is more than a disciplinary revision. Extending the idea that theory is an indeterminate political activity, it here also acts as both a commentary and call. On the one hand, theory signals that knowledge has exceeded its limits; on the other, it invites and, in some cases, inaugurates change. In this latter sense, what is called theory moves beyond the ideological confines of disciplinary critique and risks itself and its constitutive dimensions in a new articulation. Risk is a central term here. In risking its established logics, its credibility, and its ideological function, theory opens itself to ways of thinking about writing not yet validated by disciplinary values. It becomes, as it were, more of a contingent opportunity. In the communal dialectic, for instance, North articulated a new logic of theory and hoped to secure a commensurate ideological space in which methodological differences could be extinguished. And much like the communal dialectic, this project’s risk entails, among other things, speculating about theory’s ideological exegesis and its precise relationship to what composition studies calls writing. Far from merely ensuring specific disciplinary concerns, such a view suggests how theory implicates ideological organization as an ontological consideration. How a method, theory, or inscriptive context can be conceived, studied, and theorized therefore depends not on what it can do or how well it does it, but the way in which such conceptions and studies are inscribed. As such, this project, like North’s

[1] See Raúl Sánchez’s *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies* and Lynn Worsham’s “Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of *Ecriture Féminine* in Composition Studies.”

communal dialectic, is not so much a revision of disciplinary habits as it is an opportunity to take the connections between theory and writing beyond disciplinary norms and comfort zones.

What follows, then, might be better described as a plea for composition studies to take theory more seriously, envisioning it beyond productive uses and epistemological value, but also thinking of it as more than philosophic play, rhetorical disjunction, or language game. For if theory is to be taken more seriously, it must also be realized as obnoxious, confrontational, violent, and generally disagreeable. It must be realized as not just a technology of change, but as the interruption of change. Perhaps it is in this way that theory, in contrast to Eagleton's assertion, would not just signal that the ways of carving up knowledge are in deep trouble, but that such carving was unnecessary to begin with.

CHAPTER 2
COMPOSITION STUDIES AND IDEOLOGY: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Though in no way exhaustive, composition studies has often oriented, interpreted, and theorized the term *ideology* according to its Marxist heritage. Following the theories of Terry Eagleton, Kathleen E. Welch's early work on the rhetoric of freshman textbooks describes *ideology* as "any system of belief [that] can become unconscious and make objects of the belief appear to be 'natural' and 'normal'…[Thus] we are all ideological" (271). In similar fashion, Sharon Crowley echoes these definitions and posits *ideology* as "any system within which beliefs, symbols, and images are articulated in such a way that they assemble a more or less coherent depiction of reality and/or establish a hierarchy of values" (*Toward a Civil Discourse* 65). James Berlin draws on Althusser's and Raymond Williams' theories to echo, extend and redefine *ideology* as "the pluralistic conceptions of social and political arrangements that are present in a society at any given time…[and that are] based on discursive (verbal) and non-discursive (nonverbal) formations designating the shape of social and political structures" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 4). Even those opposed to a formal and/or theoretical engagement with *ideology*, like Maxine Hairston, implicate the term as a derivative of Marxist logic. In her vehement argument against composition studies using cultural theory, she opposes *ideology* to the free exchange of ideas and claims: "It is a teacher's obligation to encourage diversity and exploration, but diversity and ideology will not flourish together. By definition, they're incompatible" (188). The potential for Stalinist infection aside, it should be clear that composition studies' engagement with the signifier *ideology* is both disciplinarily sustained and, to some extent, thoroughly ingrained as a Marxist enterprise. Indeed, with such a pervasive Marxist lineage and orientation, it is no

wonder that composition studies connections to *ideology* rarely depart from the term's rhetorical, theoretical, and pedagogical effects.

Yet, despite the frequency of disciplinary appropriation, most of composition studies' theoretical contributions miss what Marxist ideas of ideology offer the study of writing. Rather than emphasizing the active, theoretical role ideology plays in inscriptive formations, what is called *composition studies* permits itself only narrow, disciplinary uses of the term. In rhetorical studies, for instance, *ideology* is frequently understood as a type of false consciousness, where falsity derives from either "the cognitive errors a speaker makes because of an inability to see the whole of a phenomenon" or as emerging "generally from faulty seeing in historical time…[that is] from a faulty placement in social space" (Arnt Aune 63). Such binary depictions put the concept of *ideology* in a tight spot: either it influences disciplinary possibilities from without (the "faulty placement in social space"); or it corrupts them from within (the "cognitive errors" of disciplinary processes). Yet, in either case, this theoretical dynamic mostly points to how the concept of *ideology* is identified in contradistinction to the logics it presents, e.g. how it organizes the "whole of a phenomenon" or a discipline's interpretive rigor. This is a subtle point that is not to be missed. Instead of clarifying how *ideology* might impact or orient political and social formations, composition studies prioritizes how ideology—here, realized as a conceptualized, problematic *thing*—validates differing critical positions at the expense of organizational logics or theoretical processes. As a result, *ideology* is often used as a populist, disciplinary "touching-point" and is all too often conflated with some other theoretical term for purely rhetorical emphasis. Put another way: composition studies might know what *ideology* is, but takes little time to

understand what it means to *think in terms of an ideological logic*. Consider, for instance, how composition studies frequently interprets and exchanges conceptions of *ideology* with hegemonic processes:

> [O]ur differing ideological constructions reveal to us the various literate selves culture has generated and the various literate cultures we, ourselves, have made. Something like that at least. However, behind these ideologies is a hegemony, seemingly given ways of being and behaving, ways of participating in our academic culture that not only unite these differing ideologies but also feel so commonsensical, so natural and practical, we think it needless, even pointless to explore, let alone question them. (Evans 88-89)

By critiquing the "ideological constructions" through their "hegemonic" organization, such disciplinary theories effectively assert *ideology* and *hegemony* as interchangeable concepts; ideology, for all intents and purposes, *is* hegemony. Such arrangements have significant consequences for the relationship between ideology and theory. Rather than consider the *possibility* of a differential—or even affective—capacity invoked by theoretical concepts, this collapse of hegemony and ideology provide a pseudo-Kantian hermeneutical vantage point from which to read various understandings of literacy, rhetoric, and writing. Perhaps more importantly, this adaptive or appropriate dimension of theory does not really address anything outside of its disciplinary application. Because the theoretical terms are interchangeable, they can be solved, subverted, and so on without appealing to the specific contextual logics, histories, articulations, or uses that each respective concept brings to the theoretical table.

The particular question of whether *ideology* is a "faulty placement" or "cognitive error" is not as pressing as are *how* the (mis)understandings and (mis)meanings of the term continue. At heart, this is a difficulty of logical and grammatical proportions. As an academic enterprise, composition studies' questions and critiques should attend to how

disciplinary ideas and uses of *ideology* articulate different definitions, inscriptive logics, and/or rhetorics that intervene and reinvent critical coordinates for theorizing writing. How, that is, *does* ideology produce different conceptions of writing? What does *writing*—the act, the material system, and the pedagogical institution—do to conceptions of ideology and/or hegemony? What new inscriptive connections or links do such theoretical interventions make visible? In contrast to composition studies' seamless use of *ideology,* such questions seem to present substantive, logical difficulties to *how* the term is disciplinarily understood and used. First, it suggests that composition studies borrowed the concept of ideology from external discourses, but complicated this act of "foraging" by relying too readily on popular or commonsense applications as an interpretative framework. In Evans' argument, the theoretical interchangeability of *ideology* and *hegemony* plays heavily into commonsensical ideas of the vulgar Marxist dynamic—the familiar base/superstructure dichotomy. Since these understandings of *ideology* and *hegemony* draw from ready-made interpretations, they do not think theoretical possibilities beyond the coordinates of this vulgar Marxist conception. Second, because this theoretical practice focuses too much on what the concept *can* do and not what it actually *does*, it also hinders chances to realize the systemic and productive opportunities that such inscriptive relationships can offer. These circumstances are not, however, cause for disciplinary pessimism. Instead, they emphasize how realizing *ideology* as a substantive logic or grammar jettisons simplified, seamless uses of the term and helps bring about change in the study of writing. It is for this very reason that composition studies cannot merely rely on simplified conceptual applications, interchangeable rhetorics, and replicated logics. Rather, a more productive

and beneficial starting point for notions of *ideology* might be those accounts that habitually and philosophically engage with the theoretical imperative the term brings to composition studies. Thus, in revisiting what these accounts mean by *ideology*, composition studies can better understand how the term might be an affective force that, for all intents and purposes, calls into question the role disciplinary comfort plays in accepting theoretical definitions.

Differential Rhetorics and Ideological Consistency

Though some composition studies accounts might simplify *ideology* as a moment of disciplinary habit, others attempt to outline the self-reflexive, contingent theoretical potentialities that it brings to the table. Taken as a representative example, Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" offers a compelling account of how to productively engage with the logical ramifications *ideology* outlines for theory. Here, concepts of *ideology* rely heavily on the philosophical and epistemological ramifications of the term, particularly stressing Göran Therborn's Althusserian interpretations. To that end, Berlin recognizes that understanding rhetoric through its philosophical and political investments changes the way connections between ideology and theory are thought. Rhetorical organization and ideological appropriateness, then, invent a specific *theoretical* logic that both understands and articulates new dimensions for varying relationships of writing.

Berlin's view of ideology rests on the contingency of contextual orientation, including how such contexts offer potential theoretical redirections. The connection between rhetoric and ideology, for instance, is one of logical and philosophical instability, so any discussion of that relationship means understanding

> [a]t the outset the formulation that will be followed in a given discussion. Here I will rely on Göran Therborn's usage…[because he] so effectively counters the ideology-science distinction of his source [Althusser], a stance in which ideology is always false consciousness while a particular version of Marxism is defined as its scientific alternative in possession of objective truth. (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 20)

What makes this particular example so important is how its specific contextual and methodological constitution acts as a theoretical premise. Since Therborn's theories are merely introduced through a promise of relevancy—"I will rely on Göran Therborn's usage…[because he] so effectively counters the ideology-science distinction of his source"—these theories (and the signifier *Therborn* itself) interrupt the rhetorical context through their very introduction and inclusion. Substantive contextual changes, that is, create different discourse possibilities the moment any external knowledge, strategy, method, or signifier is invoked. As a result of these interruptions, what is called *theory* can be used less as an agent of disciplinary constitution than as a *thinking* of potentiality. When accenting a context's theoretical possibilities, Berlin can disclose "the language [that] defines the subject (the self), other subjects, the material world, and the relation of all of these to each other" by demonstrating the investment and contextualization of any theory, rhetorical or not ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 21). But this also means that if *ideology* is not a choice "between scientific truth and ideology, but between competing ideologies, competing discursive interpretations" then these invested, contextual changes denote temporary inscriptive formations rather than developed concepts (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 21). Put in a slightly different way, external ideas affect composition studies' contexts as *logical interventions*. This is precisely the difference between a politicized theory of ideology and the disciplinary collapse of *ideology* and *hegemony* described earlier: ideological constitutions—

including their productive capacities for theory—change according to the very introduction of *any* new philosophic, social, or political inscription. Thus, if, as Berlin claims, rhetoric is "always already ideological," then invested logics are literally inscribed into any rhetorical fabric—so much so that legitimate alternatives to *ideology* cannot simply be a matter of subversion or full disclosure; rather, one must "invent" a method or contextual history entirely anew.

Though this theory of *ideology* articulates new theoretical dimensions through its logical alterations, it still does not move that far beyond composition studies' habitual coalescence of *hegemony* and *ideology*. Consequently, the advances it outlines for theoretical practices and logics may not be enough to reconceive how *ideology* is understood or what new opportunities it offers the study of writing. Admittedly, part of this problem derives from disciplinary translations and limited uses of the term. Quite often Berlin discusses changes to ideological fabric by using pedagogical terminology. When he outlines the opportunities that a Therbornian ideological critique can offer teacher-scholars, he is quick to add that ideological critique is at heart a pedagogical moment:

> [a]s Kenneth Burke has shown, one does not have to accept the Marxian premises in order to realize the value of the Marxian diagnosis...It is likewise not necessary to accept the conclusions of Ira Shor about writing pedagogy in order to learn from his analysis of the ideological practices at work in the lives of our students and ourselves. A rhetoric cannot escape the ideological question, and to ignore this is to fail our responsibilities as teachers and as citizens. (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 36)

In this passage, ideological critique is envisioned as a hopeful course of action, both practical and theoretical, for countering the effects of ideological investment. Teacher-scholars, that is, can use the specific coordinates of a Marxian ideological critique without worrying about limiting themselves to a Marxian logic. At the same time,

however, *ideology* is understood as a pragmatic, disciplinary issue. It is a problem for teacher-scholars—indeed, rhetoric itself cannot escape it—and because it has been understood as such, we can provide some sort of strategy or solution to redirect it. By situating ideology as an influential *thing*, Berlin puts theory in the same conceptual schema outlined earlier: ideology *is* hegemony, and can (must?) be subverted by recognizing and only using its constitutive parts. In this manner, critical interpretations of ideological investment have not really offered new theoretical possibilities because they pedagogically localize contextually sensitive premises and assumptions.

But this disciplinary limitation also creates unfortunate conditions for those theoretical opportunities that Berlin privileges. "Power," Berlin writes, "is an intrinsic part of ideology, defined and reinforced by it, determining, once again, who can act and what can be accomplished" ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 22). *Ideology's* power is systemic—it is a counterpart of a theoretical grammar—and it can be molded or shaped in different ways, but it cannot be shaped absolutely. This precisely why Berlin envisions ideological critique as a pedagogical premise instead of a precise logic: changes in *ideology* can happen, but can only happen incrementally. As such, those theoretical interventions that advocate aggregations of differential and pragmatic concepts construct temporary logics that challenge *ideology's* hegemony. In contrast, ready-made theories that localize ideological dissent in familiar concepts (like orthodox Marxist, feminist, queer, critical race, and postmodern discourses) are less effective because they are rendered harmless by their academic, orthodox literality. In traditional Marxist theoretical discourse, for instance, its revolutionary premises, ethical imperatives, and hermeneutic denotations can all be discussed openly and without retribution in

academic circles. Yet, this acceptance is the proverbial death of Marxist thinking. As Félix Guttari notes, “Although Marx’s writings still have great value, Marxist discourse has lost its value” (43). Intellectual Marxism, that is, exists because it is impotent both symbolically and materially; it does not pose a threat to national or international political and capitalist formations. At the same time, to claim that the promise of rhetorical liberation acts as the horizon through which theory or practice is understood misconstrues the relationship between language and ideology. To be sure, language is involved in ideological processes, but can only be recognized as “epistemic” when language assumes or produces a particular *identity with respect to ideology*. Theories of pedagogical liberation, for example, are accepted as legitimate inquiry insofar as they are discussed *in reference to* preconceived and permitted ideas, logics, and radical change. Much like the intellectual Marxist, Berlin’s ideological critique is rendered harmless because it argues, thinks, writes, and so on through appropriated and safe ideological parameters.

Considering recent historical events and popular culture might make the relation between ideology and language clearer. Diverse radical and progressive movements—from the Weathermen and Valerie Solanas to Cindy Sheehan and Howard Zinn—that used a “rhetoric of change” are more often retroactively accepted and legitimized as ideological instances than not. For Sheehan, what started as a modest protest questioning George Bush’s Iraq war policies (specifically as they affected the families of soldiers killed in combat) turned into a large-scale representative argument against the Iraq War. In turn, Sheehan was promoted as an intellectual representative of a grassroots anti-war movement, going so far as acting as a plenary speaker for the

culminating D.C. rally in December of 2006. However, instead of creating a new democratic revolution or representing dissent for Americans at large, Sheehan's activism was accepted as a moment of ideological disagreement when her movement culminated in a possible run against House Majority Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2008.[1] But because Sheehan's rhetorical strategies—camping out at Crawford Ranch, vehemently arguing with media pundits, protesting, and so on—were too readily identified as those of a grassroots radical, her very symbolic identity as an agent of change localized the anti-war struggle around minority factions alone. The more visible Sheehan's persona and rhetoric were, the more quickly they were subsumed as an acceptable and isolated moment of political and ideological unrest.

Sheehan's symbolic and discursive resistance was rendered ineffective because it relied too heavily on unmediated, commonplace terms and positions of social change. In this particular instance, *ideology* meant the articulation of activist agencies and dissenting rhetorics as a mode of social resistance. As a result, such unmediated, localized, and clearly identified "revolutionary" struggles only ever addressed the symptomatic theoretical (and real) conditions of *ideology*—never the more pertinent questions of categorical and logical organization, political contingency, or theoretical possibilities. In similar fashion, "Rhetoric and Ideology's" brilliant reference to its own contextual constitution—its tentative assertions, the interdependence of ideology and rhetoric, and Therborn's ideas, to name a few—nonetheless constrains its methods and theories to a particular, marginalized, and completely acceptable ideological coordinates. Thus, much like the intellectual orthodoxy it decries, "Rhetoric and

1 See Kapochunas, Rachel. "Cindy Sheehan to Pelosi: Impeach Bush, or I'll Run Against You." New York Times 7 July 2007. Web. 18 July 2007.

Ideology's" contextualized *theory* makes sense because it helps legitimize its identity within the coordinates of an accepted logic. Put more simply: ideological critique acts and accomplishes what it does because it is ideologically allowed to do so.

But this is not to say that grappling with *ideology* cannot provide fertile ground from which to analyze and understand its relationship to theory differently. If nothing else, Berlin's essay outlines how the concept can work and what consequences it can have for theory, particularly when it attempts to realize self-reflexive formations. In this sense, articulating the consequences of *ideology* involves a reconsideration of not only the manifest "content," but also its logic or inscriptive grammars. Thus, using "Rhetoric and Ideology's" explanations as a starting point for a politicized theory, fleshing out the different logics of the signifier *ideology* might help clarify what the term offers composition studies' theoretical practices.

Ideological Formations, Inscriptive Economies, and Political Interventions

As a theoretical premise, Therborn's understanding of *ideology* signifies cohesion, particularly a social cohesion that suppresses alternative viewpoints (or the very possibility of alterity itself). The basic coordinates of Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" aptly points out this social cohesion through its analyses of discourse practices, theoretical foundations, and philosophic presuppositions. Without social cohesion and commensurate logic, these modes of oppression would not be able to maintain their dominant presence. However, this does not mean that articulating localized resistances—endorsing a particular identity, pedagogical strategy, or activist resistance—can alone create crucial differences in ideology. Changes in an ideology's constitution do not develop solely through the actualization of nodes or agents of change, but via alterations in the general horizon of thought. This, as Therborn claims in

The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology, suggests that the most widespread error of method believes it is "a dramatic mobilization that poses an acutely serious, sometimes deadly, threat to the [ideological] powers in existence," when ideological change really happens via "a change *in* rather than *of* the dominant discourse" (124). This is an important yet subtle point. *Ideology* is less of a localized suppression of agents than it is a *logical* suppression of theoretical and/or inscriptive affects. "Dramatic mobilization" does not determine theoretical or ideological change; rather, the very formational and connective logics of a particular historical and ideological moment determine any and all changes in *ideology*. Accordingly, to create ideological change, the theoretical and logical constitution of a particular formation—that is, what is theoretically and inscriptively possible given its ideological repetitions—must be called into question. Omitting such logical and theoretical considerations is precisely why "dramatic mobilizations" like Cindy Sheehan's protests are rendered ineffective. These political activities do not fail because they neglect to express political/social discontent and resistance clearly, but because *that is all they do*. Instead of theorizing what makes their particular activist protest ideologically and politically possible—instead of creating their own language of resistance—activist practices (and even ideological critique) merely assert political unrest as an ideology. Rethinking the term *ideology*, then, is a question of continually tarrying with logical and theoretical connections, and not just asserting predetermined concepts or strategies as counter-instances.

Understanding *ideology* as a precise logical possibility presents significantly different consequences than those Berlin outlined. To begin with, *ideology's* relationship

to *hegemony* changes from a complementary relationship to one of logical interdependence. Following Althusser, Slavoj Žižek argues that

> Ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological'—*'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence*—that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing'. *'Ideological' is not the 'false consciousness' of a (social) being but this being itself insofar as it is supported by 'false consciousness'*. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 21, italics original)

Much like the other accounts, Žižek sees *ideology* and *hegemony* as intertwined: the possibilities of a given social formation are regulated through an ideological fabric. Yet, unlike these other understandings, there is no "escape" or "counter" to *ideology* itself. In "Rhetoric and the Writing Class" rhetoric, writing, and pedagogy can determine theoretical and pragmatic strategies that subvert or overcome *ideology* via informed, critical critique. With Žižek, however, such aspirations are pointless because *there is nothing but ideology*. To be sure, there are differences between particular ideologies—what separates different versions of social effectivity, for example—but as conceptual, logical moments, *ideology* necessarily structures "reality" and its possibilities. As such, there is never a formative moment that is not ideological or even hegemonic. *At its most basic, then, ideology is constitutive logic*.

Ideology thusly conceived offers theory different opportunities. Theory does not revolve around pragmatic philosophies or activist pedagogical strategies; rather, it is an issue of logical formations and the possibilities thereof. For this reason, "liberating" students (or any social agent) from a misguided ideology simply means marshalling to change how possible formations maintain paradigmatic consistency. Questions of processes, textual gestures, contextual formations, and logical possibilities would

replace critiques of concepts, ideas, or abstracted strategies of ideological importance. In the traditional process paradigm, the practices and ideas of revision best describe this theoretical possibility. Nancy Welch's *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, for example, considers revision a process of textual disruption, one that endeavors to continually "mess up" coherent writing by introducing new inscriptive moments into each temporary paradigmatic organization. Here, it is important to note that the disruption Welch advocates does not solely seek ideological and disciplinary knowledge; rather, revision necessarily continues altering ideological formations by introducing different inscriptive relationships and logics. In a similar vein, Julie Jung's *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts* argues that "in privileging clarity and connection in our work on revision . . . we have failed to theorize how readers and writers contend with the inevitable disconnections that permeate their experiences with texts" (11). Practices of revision, then, do not guarantee, nor necessarily endorse, a particular process, situation, or formation of writing; like Welch, Jung's theory of revision attends to those logics that disturb composition studies' ideological and disciplinary consistency. So instead representing those marginalized, hermeneutic, conceptual connections between *ideology* and *hegemony* that Berlin outlines, these logics of revision aim to create particular "economical" lapses or grammatical "interruptions" in ideological constitution—or in this case, particular conceptions and practices of writing. Understood in this way, *ideology* rightly politicizes how writing is theorized and how its various inscriptive occurrences maintain particular formations.

This politicization of the ideological relationship between writing and theory cannot be stressed enough. Contrary to the pragmatic resistances to ideology, what composition studies calls *theory* would not incorporate or invent some "new" rhetorical concept, meaning, or knowledge *prior to, outside of, or in contradistinction to* the inscriptive context in question. Studying and theorizing writing as the logic of ideological formations would instead consider the contingency of a particular inscriptive context, especially when it potentially (re)articulates grammatical and contextual consistency. As a result, *theory* can see how disciplinary theoretical practices act as active thinking, rhetorical, and philosophical formations that address and assert their constitution through particular patterns of logical consistency—not just as "knowledge," but also as an implicit method and ethic of production.

Yet, discussing the ramifications of ideology-as-method in the abstract only partly addresses the problems outlined thus far. Asserting the contingency of inscriptive organization against a discipline's theoretical ethos just dances around the very logic called into question. The next step, then, is to realize composition studies' particular theoretical contexts according to *ideology* and retread how each theory maintains an hegemonic and disciplinary legitimacy. In the next section, one of composition studies' representative ideologies—its theorized history—will be examined according to its logical parameters.[2]

2 It should be clear at the outset that by reviewing and interpreting representative theoretical hegemonies I am not claiming a so-called totality or attempting to exhaust all theoretical contexts. Indeed, there are, to use North's terminology, many "communities" that, while arguably participating in ideological formations, do not necessarily impact the more visible, disciplinary-wide theories of writing.

Composing Historical Ideologies

Composition studies' historical theories have not traditionally had free reign over how theory is used. In *The Making of Knowledge*'s critique of the Historian community, one of the concluding points targeted "reckless" methodological considerations. Questioning the authority and methodological accuracy of Robert Connors' "Historical Inquiry in Composition Studies," North asserts: "To favor some interpretive bias in Historical inquiry is one thing. But to move outside of the bounds of that inquiry in the name of reform, however subtly, is quite another. Down that road lies the demise of methodological integrity" (90). Historical interpretations will inevitably suggest some sort of theoretical partiality, but must still represent and theorize their subject matter fairly and faithfully. To advocate or question history through ideological tropes, conceptual structures, or rhetorical topics does not just cloud historical "facts"; it also constructs an idea of history that cannot answer basic questions about writing, e. g., "how was writing actually performed?"

Though this corrective methodological warning seems appropriate, it is nonetheless somewhat misguided. Surely, history is not simply ideas or hermeneutic propaganda, but it is also not just temporal locations, geographical spaces, or clearly discernable subjects. *Ideas* of writing—including methodological constraints, however conceived—also constitute a particular way of understanding this phenomenon called *writing.* The question, then, is not a matter of theory's partial, biased, or misinformed history of writing, but neither is it a query of fairness and/or ethical responsibility. Advancing an idea of theory that disregards other acts of theory—ideological causes, rhetorical effects, methodological dishonesty, etc.—limits the study of writing to a purely

recursive and pragmatic affair. Theory, in other words, must also account for those ideational contexts of meaning, language, and reality that situate writing differently.

To be sure, many composition studies theories marked rhetorical history along such different ideological orientations. By imagining writing (and the writing situation) differently, these theories not only put their histories and ideas of writing at stake, but also what and how that knowledge affected the larger disciplinary ideology. For instance, the introduction and popularity of social-epistemic rhetoric, particularly Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* and *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* helped prompt different theoretical conceptions and considerations: a renewed study of the ideological and epistemological foundations of writing and rhetoric; a reorientation of discourse's public constitution in the wake of cognitive psychological theories, formalism, and "expressivism"; and a critical engagement with the historical narratives of writing instruction.

Rhetoric and Reality begins by unapologetically reconceiving the history of writing instruction. In contrast to some of composition studies' unmediated histories, it actively theorizes both method and history via an "epistemological taxonomy" in the hopes of "allow[ing] for a closer focus on the rhetorical properties—as distinct from the economic, social, or political properties—of the systems considered" (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 6). At first glance, *Rhetoric and Reality*'s conception of writing instruction could be construed as an artificial and somewhat arbitrary separation of interests. If taken as a moment of pragmatic adjustment, *Rhetoric and Reality*'s conceptual separation certainly allows for a clearer understanding of how rhetoric influenced the history of writing

instruction. At the same time, however, it goes beyond pragmatic interests. Because it asserts and begins with the connection between rhetoric and epistemology, its primary interest is how modes of writing create the very conditions for knowledge itself. As such, *Rhetoric and Reality*'s theory of writing and knowledge is not distinct from the rhetorical history it calls into question; in fact, it is implicated in this very history. There is no pretense to "objectivity" here, nor does chronology completely determine historical ideas and interests. Rather, understanding history means envisioning both what rhetorical-history-as-discipline is capable of and how theory's role participates in said paradigm. Rhetoric and epistemology are therefore reliable and symptomatic qualities of the larger educational and inscriptive logics that the social epistemic analysis attempts to address. For *Rhetoric and Reality*, this also means breaking down the meanings and methods of each particular taxonomical category: the objective, subjective, and transactional, respectively (Berlin 6).

With social epistemic rhetoric's politicized theory of history, understandings of 20th century writing and rhetorical instruction are much more clearly indebted to their particular conceptual (ideological, epistemological, etc.) permeations and investments than the stereotypical "objective" histories. When recounting the changing face of American educational funding during the 1960s and 1970s, *Rhetoric and Reality* points out that

> The most crucial events for the fate of writing instruction during the sixties and seventies *were* the intensification of the Cold War and changes in economic, social, and political arrangements that resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students entering college. The space race signaled by the launching of Sputnik in 1957 *eventually led* to federal funds being invested in the teaching of literature and composition studies for the first time in American history. (Berlin 120, emphasis added)

Educational changes are obviously situated in the larger material and cultural circumstances of the time: the national and economic priorities of the Cold War prompted increased college enrollment, more funding for English education, and so on. However, the more important aspect here is the connection between writing instruction and external factors. Writing instruction, including its history, gains cultural and political currency through the advent of the Cold War, and this currency then *eventually led* to more educational funding. Using causal logic, this social epistemic rhetoric articulates a division between material premises and their subsequent epistemological (read historical) changes. History therefore *negotiates*—that is, actively theorizes—the logical and connective processes that exist between particular conceptions of reality and meaning.

Of course, drawing attention to the mediated connections *between* reality and meaning are much more important for historical accounts than are chronological dates and material facts. Indeed, the primacy of theoretical mediation is precisely why social epistemic methodologies focus on the productive powers of rhetoric. As Berlin notes "Rhetoric exists not merely so that truth may be communicated: rhetoric exists so that truth *may be discovered*" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 165, emphasis added). As an invested method, rhetoric *discovers* knowledge by constantly connecting, exchanging, and restructuring the historical intersections of language and sensible world. Consequently, this historical relationship produces a fertile ground through which history and theory can continually revise their own ideological interactions and formations. As such, the communicable, sensible world and its historical account(s) cannot be distinguished from the theoretical mediation that makes them both possible.

But the rhetorical and historical possibilities of such a heavy-handed theoretical mediation are severely limited. To be blunt: theoretical mediations posit a history *for* rhetoric, not a history *of* rhetoric. More often than not, social-epistemic theories treat inscriptive moments as closed conceptual systems that ensure disciplinary legitimacy and rhetorical meaning; history, meanwhile, is constructed according to the progression of these predetermined "knowledgeable" positions. Consider how *Rhetoric and Reality*'s theoretical findings and ideological adjustments construe the relationship between national crises and English education. Citing the post-war push for a more centralized writing-based education, Berlin asserts that "the communications approach gave composition studies courses a new identity, placing them in a special program that carried with it a commitment to democracy and to the welfare of students who had just suffered the horrors of war" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 106). To be sure, when America reeled nationally and economically in the post-war years, rhetoric and writing instruction helped alleviate these crises by faithfully anchoring the country's educational ideologies and cultural objectives. Here, rhetoric's ideological and epistemological responsibility overshadows its struggle with material reality, communicative processes, and public opinion. No longer relegated to the Aristotelian idea of persuasive practice, rhetoric is conceived through mediated concepts that function as *history*, as *materiality*, and as *epistemology*. Unfortunately, as a closed, phenomenological methodology, this also means that this "new" rhetoric cannot admit conceptual particularities of logical, theoretical, or historical proportions that might challenge its findings or intellectual legitimacy. To admit differing ideologies or practices—or even to imply that such contingencies may exist—would be to dismiss *Rhetoric and Reality*'s theoretically

mediated history for concepts that it does not know. Thus, as promised, *Rhetoric and Reality*'s rhetorical "knowledge" *emerges* from social epistemic circumstances rather than the other way around.

This epistemological teleology signals further consequences for composition studies theory. Because it prioritizes method above the contingent relationships between history, theory, and writing, it perpetuates a pragmatic theoretical and institutional identity. *Rhetoric and Reality*'s mediated historical accounts, for instance, demonstrate the irrefutable link between composition studies' intellectual legitimacy and social responsibility: "The study of rhetoric is necessary, then, in order that we may intentionally direct this [epistemological] process rather than be unconsciously controlled by it" (Berlin 166). History, knowledge, concepts, rhetoric, and writing are therefore theoretical tools that can bring about a better, more pragmatic reality. Conceived in this way, the move to a rhetorical ethic of civic responsibility is not hard to accomplish—in fact, it has been structurally anticipated all along. "Education," Berlin declares, "exists to provide intelligent, articulate, and responsible citizens who understand their obligation and the right to insist that economic, social, and political power be exerted in the best interests of the community" (*Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, 55). Like "Rhetoric and the Writing Class'" use of ideology, social epistemic rhetoric navigates the historical context it created for contemporary disciplinary knowledge or gain. In "Rhetoric and the Writing Class" method, particularly theory, teaches teacher-scholars how to combat *ideology* through ideological critique; for social epistemic rhetoric, rhetoric itself provides the knowledge through which subjects

become better agents or citizens. So, history too must serve composition studies' contemporary pragmatic purposes and actions.

Given the priority and importance social epistemic rhetoric attributes to theoretical mediation, its foundation and subsequent limitation of writing to academic practices, topics, themes, and meanings should be of concern. Because it theorizes rhetorical history as self-referential, institutional epistemologies, historical events are only methodological reference points. And though this practice can secure a sense of historical authenticity and legitimacy, composition studies theory ultimately suffers in return. Social epistemic rhetoric's definitive conclusions about theoretical mediation, coupled with its foreclosure on ideological contingency, offers theory *only* a particular logic, a particular pattern of logical consistency. As a result of this restriction, the rhetorical freedom such theoretical mediations offer instead maintain closed disciplinary systems. At the same time, however, this is not to say that theoretical mediations always exclude reflexivity for the sake of unassailable, institutional ethics. Many accounts of rhetoric and writing history, such as Robert J. Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy,* theorize reflexive historical concepts and narratives that do not necessarily relate to institutional concerns; instead, they are constantly reformulated according to openly shifting ideological formations.

Connors' argument achieves this reflexive method in a few different ways. To begin with, *Composition-Rhetoric* (hereafter *C-R*) is less interested in producing a critical history than articulating an inductive pattern or genealogy of pedagogical and scholastic thematics. Most of these thematics are aggregates of disciplinary commonplaces and collegiate records, such as instruction in writing style and

invention/organization of textbook content. Instances of historical trends and change, like a gradual disciplinary shift in gender majority and discourse conventions, often illustrate a particular concept or logic in composition studies' history. For example,

> the change [in curriculum organization and intellectual emphasis] can most clearly be seen in specialization of function by gender. The decline of public agonistic contest as a way of life led to a resulting canalization of that agonistic impulse to a variety of more private arenas. Male contest cannot be done away with, and after coeducation it continued as an underground phenomenon. (Connors 50)

Unlike social epistemic rhetoric, *C-R*'s history delineates those changes in conceptual intelligibility and communication that help reorient historical accounts and their meanings. For Connors, this means that history's ability to situate concepts takes precedence over the hermeneutical possibilities of such concepts. When intellectual trends changed, so too did the curriculum's organization, particularly as it reflected the prominence of agonistic activities. But instead of drawing a teleological meaning from these conceptual changes, *C-R* provides a contextual justification for them. That these gendered changes occurred does not mean that some idea has come to fruition as much as it signifies that the educational context *has simply changed* from one ideological formation to another.

Continuing with this contextual and thematic marker, *C-R* argues that such a gendered restructuring of disciplinary scope and practice can still be seen as a dominant trend today

> The writing process movement, which became most powerful at the exact historical moment—the early 1980s—when female undergraduates began to outnumber males, is essentially anti-agonistic. If we examine the writings of the important theorists and teachers behind the process teaching movement [Janet Emig, C.H. Knoblauch, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and so on], we will see that they almost universally condemn, either tacitly or explicitly, any elements of agonistic pedagogy that still find support today. (Connors 66-67)

Tracing—or perhaps more accurately, articulating—the writing process movement as a descendant of a gendered change in intellectual and institutional emphasis suggests a powerful thesis. Composition studies' history points more to the effects of particular ideological formations, especially when they modify contextual and disciplinary possibilities, than it does to functions *within* a predetermined conceptual schematic. This is especially true given the thesis (or approach) Connors describes for *Composition-Rhetoric*: "I want here to point out how periodization can show us something new about the development of rhetorical ideas…composition-rhetoric developed both as a theory and practice through these periods and…each one presents a useful differentiation" (7). Contingent temporal formations or "periods," outlined through a narrative of rhetorical and practical effects, offers a distinct, positive component for composition studies' historical methodologies. Thematics are therefore less a self-serving theoretical institution of composition studies than they are a logical record of its disciplinary spaces or patterns.

Yet, to venture claims that this historical method is not as ideologically restricted as those of social epistemic rhetoric is unwarranted at best. In the awkward relationship between history and theory, what a historical concept does is rarely, if ever, cleanly separated from how such concepts (and their meanings) are contextually articulated. *C-R*'s revision of the male "agonistic contest," for instance, ensures rhetorical consistency by tracking changes in writing relationships, rhetorical patterns, theoretical emphases, and so on. However, these changes are made meaningful because the idea of *gender* guides this historical analysis. And though this concept additionally reveals and traces the changes in intellectual activity of which it is a part, its theoretical function—that is, its

revealing capacity—is not a logical factor in its conclusion. With such restrictions, the theoretical potential for ideological or practical revision cannot be adequately, or even contextually, established. How *would* one determine "agonistic contexts" according to historical changes in gendered majorities? *What* "agonistic" components helped determine public uses or contexts? *When* were these relations between gender influence and "agonistic" practices articulated as an intelligible context? Though the equivalency employed by a history of themes or periods might allow for greater conceptual tracking and modifications, privileging such theoretical premises still understands theory as a strictly phenomenological function.

While such theoretical problems certainly shed light on a limited conceptual and historical scope, they also point to the much more suspect relationship between ideological constitution and disciplinary theoretical practice. Throughout *Composition-Rhetoric*'s explanation of composition studies' history, textbooks, documented pedagogical practices, and gender differences bear witness the very history argued. In many ways, this sounds like general argumentative and historical research: find historical artifacts, then relay what purpose and/or meaning such artifacts had for the era in question. The term *witness*, however, should be taken much more literally in this context: conceptual and historical artifacts mean nothing if they do not refer to paradigmatic intelligibility. *C-R*'s conclusion, where the virtues of the divide between the writing process and cultural literacy are celebrated, most readily illustrates the recourse to disciplinary intelligibility:

> there has been no clear ascendant; romantics and classicists coexist—usually amiably—in almost every English department. The question persists as to what place telling personal stories and citing personal observations should have in the process of teaching students to write. Many advocates of

> the writing process movement seem to opt, at least tacitly, for personal writing as the only honest and revealing sort of discourse. At the other end of the spectrum, the advocates of 'cultural literacy' have formulized many of the vague disquiets I discussed above, claiming that student writing is threadbare because students simply do not know how enough about their culture to say anything beyond their own experience. (Connors 327)

Though theoretical identities are important here, much more telling is the communal relationship between various viewpoints. Throughout this argument, there is no attempt to reconcile or value one type of knowledge over another—all "knowledges," even if somewhat disputed, are equally tolerated, if not accepted. If concepts or theories have differing weight and importance for the composition studies context, we do not see it. The reflexive history this theory produces, most visible in the attention given to fluctuating thematic and periodic identities, assumes—*witnesses*—a theoretically open, discursive, and neutral inscriptive medium through which historical ideas can be exchanged and made meaningful. Thus, by associating a (depoliticized) thematic and contextual history with a theoretical "tolerance," *C-R* creates a static and programmatic disclaimer for an equitable, neutral discursive rhetoric. History therefore admits its ideological and disciplinary condition—*C-R* does, after all, rely on disciplinary and institutional artifacts for a neutral verification—but nonetheless dismisses that ideology as anything but foundational or partial. Regrettably, such paradigmatic "tolerance" for both theoretical applications and methodological consequences also often backfires, and thereby exchanges the potential for an egalitarian reflexivity for a primarily rational explanation.

Recourse to "tolerance" is not unfamiliar territory for theories aiming at a more rational description. In *C-R*'s methodology, such recourse occurs early on:

> readers of contemporary historiographies will quickly see that the history in this book is (to use currently popular terms) 'antiquarian' rather than

> ‘critical’. It means to construct coherent explanations for historical facts and causality, taking archival research as a starting place and consistent control. In that sense it is not a ‘radical’ or ‘subversive’ history, and I suppose that means I am (sigh) an epistemologically conservative historian. (Connors 19)

In contrast to the more “radical” or “subversive” histories, *Composition studies-Rhetoric*’s reliance on material artifacts and a “conservative” methodology allows for a theoretical exception. Rational tolerance happens here, but not through the predictable patterns. Rather, disciplinary history is authenticated and legitimized by *C-R*’s formal disavowal of ideological importance. Of course, using such disavowals as rhetorical strategy is how classical theories of ideology articulate dissent. That is, *C-R* can claim that this history is not critical, that it is conservative, *that, in fact, history can be written entirely otherwise* because this theory is not reflexive; it does not risk either its knowledge or its method to find “truth.” In fact, such rational theories can promise changes to composition studies’ ideological landscape because they only guarantee the excepted, “neutral” theoretical space for the depoliticized, transcendental critique. And since this conception of composition studies’ history completely admits the contingency of its concepts, it can more effectively dismiss this contingency and *explain*—disclose, uncover, and reveal—its content as a consistency, *as history*.

This disavowal suggests still a further point: that rhetorical history and theory are primarily institutional identities. Consider how both social epistemic rhetoric’s and *Composition-Rhetoric*’s viewpoints produce two related modalities for theorizing composition studies history. According to social-epistemic rhetoric, theory, temporal events, and inscriptive moments/practices enforce a discipline’s intellectual legitimacy. And yet with *C-R*, rhetorical history also draws on rational representations: what is called *writing* is possible because it disclaims its own limitations, contextual or

otherwise. Taken together, these rhetorical philosophies engender a commonsensical ideology that conceives rhetorical history as a representative, disciplinary context for English studies' pursuit of specialized and valued identities.

That such writing histories participate in representative contexts for disciplinary gain should not come as a surprise. Indeed, when rhetoric and writing—and to a certain respect, history—are consistently theorized as preserved, discoverable, and worthwhile practical activities/concepts/artifacts, they *can only be* institutionally realized. In other words, when *theory's* questions are, say, "what is writing?", "why study rhetoric?", "what does writing and rhetorical history mean?", its theoretical agenda can only require comprehensive and meaningful accounts of a rich disciplinary tradition. But this also means that questioning the imperative for intellectual and institutional identity, then, seems to be a forgotten (forbidden?) thread of theoretical and historical discussion. If this is indeed the current ideology of composition studies theory, then Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* addresses this theoretical taboo head on when she describes writing and rhetoric as conceptual and theoretical violations of institutional narratives. Or, put a slightly different way: rhetoric and writing serve their own elusive purposes, not the whims of functionality.

Composition in the University questions the role writing plays in the education, and particularly its ability to perpetuate humanist educational culture and subjectivity. This humanist ideology contends that "college graduates should be able to express themselves like educated persons," thereby fundamentally linking the composition studies "course toward literary study" (Crowley, *Composition in the University* 21; 22). This is a familiar argument for an English discipline often associated with Arnoldian

elitism and Platonic idealism. Writing and rhetoric operate as a moral vessel for refined and authoritarian logics. For *Composition in the University*, though, dismissing humanism outright is not as productive as reading humanism against itself. As such, Crowley views composition studies' history as a disciplinary mechanism, delineated by changes in rhetorical and cultural organization. In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, "rhetorical education was constructed to discipline citizens in the practice of civic virtue," whereas the Enlightenment rhetoricians "rejected ancient location of invention within discourse in common use, relocating it in the relation of individual minds to empirical reality and thus yoking rhetoric to the service of science" (Crowley, *Composition in the University* 33; 34-35). Thus "the task of rhetorical education in any era," maintains Crowley, "will be to discipline and maintain the dominant subjectivity" (*Composition in the University* 33). Unlike the respective histories that social epistemic rhetoric and *Composition-Rhetoric* advocate, *Composition in the University* explicitly demonstrates how rhetorical history cannot be conceived as distinct from its particular educational and cultural functions—it is, as it were, completely dependent on them. What makes rhetoric and rhetorical history possible is its institutional basis, its regulative function. It is nothing outside of these institutions.

For the contemporary composition studies' context, rhetoric's institutional dependency has severe implications. Because it is defined by its disciplinary functions, it cannot engender new ideological formations as much as protect and sustain old ones. In today's intellectual contexts, this means that rhetoric is a regulatory force, especially when it influences universities' first-year writing course requirements. As a direct descendent of rhetorical education, the freshman English requirement

> makes clear to students that they are not to write in their own voices, despite what their textbooks tell them. To the contrary: they must produce discourse that will satisfy their teachers in Freshman English and beyond. In other words, subjectivity produced by the requirement can be characterized as something like 'docile student'. (Crowley, *Composition in the University* 217)

Working as a strict policing mechanism, freshman English produces rhetorical artifacts in the forms of dominant epistemological patterns and overdetermined student subjectivities. Rhetoric, therefore, protects the institutional methods that produce docile subjectivities by normalizing how students write. But this institutionalization also means that Crowley can use this analysis to view rhetoric, and rhetorical history, in a fundamentally different light. Rhetoric, that is, is surely nothing more than the sum of its regulatory parts; yet, contradictorily, it is also an institutional frontier that permits history to be read through the chronology of its excessive productions (epistemological patterns, the writing subject, and so on). To *theorize* rhetorical history, then, would mean rewriting historical contexts so that composition studies' ideologies can be written differently. And since this makes rhetorical history a primarily institutional affair, change must happen at the institutional level; or as Crowley puts it "Let's abolish the universal [writing] requirement" (*Composition in the University* 241).

By calling for the abolishment of the writing requirement, *Composition in the University* asks for the impossible. As a politicized, theoretical articulation, such a call disengages writing from commonplace histories of composition studies, effectively opening up a new, non-institutionalized space through which disciplinary ideology can invent itself anew. In theories of ideology, such self-inflicted wounds are crucial points in both political and theoretical struggles. As Žižek puts it: "the 'subject of free choice'…can only emerge as the result of an extremely *violent* process of being torn

away from one's particular lifeworld, of being cut off from one's roots" (*Living in End Times* 52). As "subjects of free choice" ideologies are stretched, torn, and divided according to differing articulations precisely because the particular social formation's contingency is now a legitimate, participatory element. In similar fashion, by staking such a risky claim, *Composition in the University* forces those ideological, disciplinary signifiers or excesses—*the* student writer, *composition studies'* pedagogy, rhetorical *history*; in short, all of those *certain* disciplinary things—to face their own contingency through an uncertain, indefinite future. Accordingly, once composition studies recognizes that both its history and practice are not set in stone, it can realize its ideologies and practices as contingently constituted, despite their institutional conception.

However, *Composition in the University* does not push this theoretical disruption far enough. Toward the end of the book, both rhetorical history and practice are still limited to *only* an educational constitution. Describing what she calls the "vertical elective curriculum in composing," Crowley claims: "[this] curriculum examines composing both in general and as it takes place in specific rhetorical situations such as workplaces and community decision making" (*Composition in the University* 262). Furthermore, this educational philosophy "would not confine students to practice in composing. Rather, it would help them understand what composing is and to articulate the role it plays in shaping their intellectual lives" (Crowley, *Composition in the University* 262). In place of the first year writing requirement, composition studies should advocate a more rational conception of writing that extends the institutional boundaries, functions, and contexts of writing. Because such expansions relinquish the disciplinary

control composition studies has over student subjectivities, they theorize an open, egalitarian space through which students could understand and practice writing in general on their own terms. It is through this strategy that composition studies can maintain the disciplinary requirements university education demands, while publicly reasserting rhetoric's importance to real-world writing, and specifically, civic duty.

Positing a rational rhetorical ideology as disciplinary salve does little to realize the radical impact contingency can have on both ideology and practice. From a purely contextual viewpoint, *Composition in the University's* pseudo-Foucauldian analysis of history creates an inconsistent position from which to denounce the freshman English requirement. If, by its very constitution and function, composition studies regulates both students and knowledge, then simply choosing another policing mechanism without addressing the fundamental relationship between method (control) and its disciplinary constitution (university identity) misses the point. Calling for the abolishment of the writing requirement is a political modality, not an ethical modality. If theory were to follow such politicization to its logical end, it would need to actualize a completely different institutional logic, not revise current institutional limitations. Current theories of writing and rhetoric would therefore need to *think* their constitutive dimensions as moments of critical inquiry: in what ways is writing's general institutional function proportionate to its historical and rhetorical limitations? If writing is in fact an institutional product, how can *writing*—as activity, as materiality, as method—be theorized differently? Unfortunately, by missing the radical thrust of its critique, *Composition in the University* offers merely institutional revisions that are meaningless outside of disciplinary interests. Such a theoretical ethic, then, does little more than pragmatically

reference another trajectory, another function, another practical, institutional answer to the question of disciplinary accountability: “why study writing?”

Conceived as a reflexive ideology, composition studies’ history articulates a specific logic that conditions the logics, epistemologies, and material circumstances informing contemporary historical moments and theories of writing. Social epistemic rhetoric works to establish a critical vocabulary and conceptual pattern that history and theory must conform to if they are to remain intelligible. In *Composition-Rhetoric*’s view, making various methods visible guarantees that both history and theory will always escape their own articulations; accordingly, they can claim an invested, but transparent, methodology. More importantly, such an ideological investment permits self-referential, closed rhetorics to consider their own theoretical institutions as a matter of interest. *Composition in the University* takes this call one step further by using theory as a productive and progressive force for educational, social, and epistemological change. But this change exists only insofar as it reasserts history and theory as pragmatic, academic tools. Thus, one could say the project for disciplinary histories is to understand the *institution’s* interpellating processes and work to “intentionally direct [them] rather than be unconsciously controlled by [them]” (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 166).

And yet these accounts seek to only revise institutional constellations of composition studies history. This recourse to revision suggests, if nothing else, that, instead of molding determined historical content, *theorizing* composition studies’ history is really a call to discuss the differences between invested writing contexts. Though *Rhetoric and Reality, Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures, Composition-Rhetoric,* and

Composition in the University articulate composition studies history as phenomenological mediation, as discursive thematics, and as critical genealogy, respectively, the differences that exist between these accounts are ideologically asserted *as the reason for their theorization*. *Difference* is the key word here. Because composition studies history is "worked" in the fullest artisan sense of the term—molded, altered, reshaped, etc.—and (re)formulated to reflect the differences between genre and contextual convention, to theorize composition studies' history really means a reorganization of rhetorical and practical interests within the scope of disciplinary coordinates—that is, how knowledge about writing is institutionally possible *and* how such knowledge should can further ensure that institution. Composition studies' historical and theoretical differences, then, are not so pronounced that they fundamentally alter how theory or writing happens, or even how they are ideologically conceived.

Semblances of Theoretical and Ideological Knowledge

The institutional imperative outlined by composition studies' mediated histories puts the relationship between *theory* and *ideology* an interesting position. As institutional markers, these histories depoliticize theory in an effort to illuminate and provide solutions to some rhetorical or pedagogical problem. Theory does not address ideological constitution; it instead addresses the outcomes of disciplinary contexts without opening any new—hegemonic, practical, or otherwise—historical knowledge. Yet, at the same time, such differences might be precisely the point of contemporary composition studies theories: theory *should not* alter or change the coordinates of either disciplinary knowledge or ideological formations. Rather, it should guarantee that ideological differences continue to exist as a mode of (pluralist) inquiry. In other words,

in its effort to change the knowledges of writing, theory must be sure that it changes nothing.

This depoliticized, theoretical logic is cause for concern. Arguably, the biggest repercussion of such disciplinary aspirations derives from the symptomatic and troubling vision of how *theory* and *ideology* relate in this context. When theory ejects the critical dimensions that can or did occur between ideological and logical possibilities for political certitude and institutional constitution, it ensures that only these disciplinary matters (knowledge, strategies, pedagogy, ethnography, etc.) get the attention they deserve. But this also means that, in this context, *ideological consistency*—the relationship between theory and constitutive dimensions—works insofar as it excludes certain possibilities of inquiry from consideration. Theory can disrupt, draw attention, and reconfigure the relationships between writing and institution, but only if it asks the same questions that have always been asked.

Realizing that such disciplinary interests limit theory also means asking how contemporary articulations of theoretical problems influence such limitations. In the theoretical context, this immediately points to disciplinary politics. Thus, if *theory* should address its own exegesis, it is not enough to analyze what or how something is theorized, but to what a theory answers and answers for. Consider, for instance, how *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* outlines the need for the communal dialectic:

> With more and more knowledge of more and more kinds being cranked out by these [theoretical] communities, each one has more and more reason to be wary of the exchanges it is willing to make. And as this faith in the system erodes, the field's idealized self-image of cumulative, multi-methodological 'progress'…becomes harder to maintain. The tensions constrained beneath the surface are so great that that image is necessarily a distortion, and in such delicate balance that, under even the gentlest probing, it threatens to shatter completely. (North 352)

The call for better, more complicated and productive knowledge is not necessarily the scholastic gremlin, but how such knowledge is pursued is. For North, disciplinary knowledge is no longer a democratic or a shared, rough knowledge, but unapologetic stances on the philosophical and practical worth of ideational and conceptual agendas. Theory and its subsequent knowledge are phenomenologically asserted, not explained or reasoned. Thus, as an institutional resolution to this discrepancy, *The Making of Knowledge* asserts a theoretical authority as a regulative, dialectical consistency. Theories would need to follow two prescriptive conditions if equitable and reflexive democratic knowledge exchanges were to return to the study of writing and rhetoric: a heightened disciplinary consciousness, where theorists minimalize differences between various modes of inquiry; and secondly, an egalitarian basis and value for all writing theories (North 370-371). By securing a level playing field for all theoretical interests, a dialectical consistency hopes that the commonality of each theory—particularly as they compose both disciplinary knowledge and ideology—overrides the substantive differences each theory brings to the table and restores some semblance of *communal* value.

For composition studies' theory to insist that an authoritative disciplinary knowledge serve as its constitutive horizon is quite puzzling; yet a general theoretical dynamic does just this. *The Making of Knowledge*'*s* general practice of theorizing consistently interrogates those methods that contribute limited and self-interested arguments to composition studies' body of knowledge. But to suddenly proclaim that a discipline must ensure an open and equitable sphere of understanding (read North's call for "more knowledge") at the expense of realizing the substantive differences between

theoretical viewpoints seems counterintuitive. It is one thing to ask for dialectical consistency in hopes that ideological and theoretical exchanges can occur; it is quite another to implement a critical authority as theoretical vanguard. In fact, it seems that composition studies' institutional problems develop not from a lack of commensurability or democratic understanding, but rather *that* this communal authority—democratically induced knowledge, ideological commensurability—functions as the prevailing theoretical regulation. Collapsing content and logic in an attempt to pragmatically judge both does not secure better or more nuanced understandings of writing, even if the main goal is a frictionless intellectual exchange. Instead, such attempts merely reinscribe theory to the same pluralist dynamic rejected earlier—only now it is more ethically responsible.

Rather than producing different theoretical, ideological, or disciplinary articulations, the politics of composition studies theory take a right step in the wrong direction. As disavowed moments of disciplinary constitution, *theory* helps stress how ideological differences are isolated and fragmentary instances of a larger institutional idea. But instead of merely ensuring these minimal differences as minimal differences, it could exhaust a theory's incommensurability and inconsistency as a critical impetus for more radical configurations of both writing and institution. As such, relinquishing pluralist calls for pragmatic utility and authoritative knowledge can help realize what situations theory can be put in (like, say, the incommensurate knowledge communities North laments) and considers these very moments as *substantive* differences. However, highlighting substantive differences as content—as a theoretical principle—constrains both *ideology* and *theory* to the same problems outlined here. It would be therefore worthwhile to

understand the different theoretical possibilities that such an institutional dynamic engenders, especially if it can help reconceive what is at stake when composition studies theorizes.

CHAPTER 3
WRITING WITHOUT (THEORETICAL) GUARNATEES

In terms of its ideological and disciplinary effects, what composition studies calls *theory* sustains its ideological hegemony by using an ethical pluralism to play both sides of the epistemological field. On the one hand, such a dynamic suggests that differences—in ideological and disciplinary focus, genres, forms, and so on—ultimately equal the reflexive, overdetermined signifier *composition studies*. At the same time, however, *composition studies* minimalizes theoretical differences in an effort to sustain, both ideologically and disciplinarily, the very field in which these differences can be thought and employed.

This strained relationship between *composition studies* and the ideological and disciplinary differences it evokes has severe consequences for what theory is and can be for the study of writing. The first set of difficulties, as outlined in Chapter One, pertain more to theory's methodological function, and particularly to *how* composition studies uses theory to envision its own identity. But it also evokes questions about composition studies' logic of institutionalization—its theoretical horizon, its formulations, its systems, and its limitations. This, in contrast to the first set of problems, is more a question of theory's ability to articulate consistencies between substantively different writing situations. Consider, for example, how the resurgence and corrective interest in Sophistic rhetorics distinctly reconceptualized composition studies' institutional horizon by merely asserting various modes of discursive and rhetorical knowledges. Edward Schiappa distinguishes between what he calls "historical reconstruction" and the more reflexive "rational reconstruction" by culling composition studies' present theoretical

needs and outcomes, particularly as they open opportunities for newer patterns of writing knowledge:

> Since the goal of historical reconstruction is to recapture the past insofar as possible on its own terms, the methods of the historian and, in classical work, the philologist, are appropriate. Since the goal of rational reconstruction is to provide critical insight to contemporary theorists, the needs and values of current audiences justify less rigidity and more creativity in the process of interpreting how dead authors through their texts speak to live, contemporary authors. (194)

Unlike those accounts that readjust or solidify readings of history, Schiappa's rational reconstructions prioritize the interpretative and contingent aspects of composition studies theory; in fact, one could almost say that he makes room in a rational reconstruction history for rhetorical invention and reflexive writing possibilities. However, as Bruce McComiskey points out, focusing on the interpretive effects of particular historical figures does not dismiss theory's responsibility to historical paradigms: "the act of rational reconstruction is not simply a process of describing the present using historical data. The past, in whatever imperfect modes of access we have to it, guides rational reconstruction as much as it guides historical reconstruction" (9). Though rational reconstruction is a hermeneutic affair, it does not choose what interpretations carry more weight arbitrarily; rather, it works with the tension between present theoretical/rhetorical demands and shifting historical hegemonies to produce institutional "knowledge." Thus, by asserting ancient rhetorical practices' multitudes of meaning, philosophy, logic, or figures as theoretical horizon, *theory* literally separates content and logic. Consequently, it eclectically and inadvertently revises (or perhaps injects) contingency into each respective historical context. Accordingly, this formalized tension between composition studies and theory, if nothing else, questions not History per se, but the manner in which historical signifiers, and all of their connotations, create

certain contexts for theorizing writing. *Theory*, then, speaks more to a logical refiguring of the epistemological limitations and possibilities of the contemporary disciplinary context than it does to a formalized history of rhetoric or writing.

If questions of institution focus on *what,* logically, permits theory to equalize substantive differences as only minimal differences, then what composition studies perpetually theorizes is the myth of its own identity, including how it articulates its disciplinary borders and its own logical possibility. This is why this chapter will seemingly focus on discussions of institutionalization: because what is called *composition studies theory* describes, through eclectic and popular theoretical scholarship, what theory's possibility is and what it can be for those who study writing. And in the current disciplinary landscape, the logics of institutional identity—their objectives, style, and philosophic possibilities—are perhaps best articulated through theory's ideological engagement with what it signifies as *writing*.

Institutions of Writing Theory

In many of composition studies' theoretical investigations, the intersection between theory, institution, and writing is representatively exemplified as a relation between a material inscription and its hermeneutic consequences. *Writing,* that is, is primarily a representational ideology. Of course, this is an old argument that certainly does not need repeating. But for questions that aim to determine *what* theory can institutionally do, *what* composition studies understands as writing, and *what* subsequent concerns derive from this understanding, defining the patterns and limits of these relationships must take priority over methodological issues that usually dominate these definitional discussions of writing.

In some respects, the intersection between theory, institution, and writing designates ideological patterns that articulate, appropriate, and repeat particular concepts and concerns about writing. In the composition studies context, these ideological patterns are perhaps best exemplified by Plato's *Phaedrus* and how it specifically envisions writing as a theoretical articulation between agent(s) and an external technological system (or science). In Socrates' story of the Egyptian gods, for instance, Theuth sequentially presents his "technical inventions" to Thamus for the latter's judgment (Plato, *Phaedrus* 62). In this process, Thamus gives his view "about each science" in turn, and determines that writing, as the last science under review, should receive the most attention (Plato, *Phaedrus* 62). As Thamus explains, writing

> will produce forgetfulness in the souls who have learned it, through lack of practice at using their memory, as through reliance on writing they are reminded from outside by alien marks, not from within, themselves by themselves. So you have discovered an elixir not of memory but of reminding. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 62)

It is important to note that Socrates' story relays three interrelated premises that provisionally defined *writing* for future disciplinary contexts. Writing is firstly a science. In contrast to the rhetorical "knack" chastised so aggressively in the *Gorgias,* writing is a formal, systematized study or logic of thinking. At the same time, however, writing is not just a science, but a science of the last analysis. On the surface, this means that it is simply and literally considered after every other science in the dialogue's sequence; it is, after all, the last science reviewed. However, it also means that writing is the only science the dialogue mentions in isolation. In terms of institutional logics, such isolation suggests that writing is a science that *can* be separated from a particular context and that *can* be judged on its context-less merits. Yet, these first two considerations only ideologically prepare the intersections between theory, institution, and writing for an

entirely new, representative logic. For as Thamus indicates, writing *produces* forgetfulness, but only does so by *reminding* agents through “alien marks” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 62). Writing is therefore not a mere substitution for memory, but introduces—both logically and heuristically—an entirely new logic of material, mnemonic dependence into analytic considerations. The subtlety of this point should not be missed. Rather than replacing memory, writing *institutes* a new system (or science) that, because of its isolated, mnemonic logic, *can only* represent a term or concept outside of its original context. *Phaedrus*’ view of writing, then, points out how the signifier *writing* violently presents the composition studies context with a system or institution of a pure representation.

Composition studies has adapted the general coordinates of this representational ideology in a variety of ways, but in terms of defining the possibilities and limitations of institutional logics, Susan Miller’s theories most clearly trace the influences this ideology has had on contemporary ideas of writing. Much like the writing ideology found in the *Phaedrus*, Miller claims that composition studies has historically theorized writing in terms of its representationalist ideologies, albeit with slight differences. “[W]hen we look at the places composition, creative writing, and literary theory now hold,” explains Miller, “it becomes clear that the mythology of the author identity of the writer…still controls our willingness to endow seriousness and status to texts” (*Rescuing the Subject* 100-101). As a direct descendant of the Platonic dialectic, the contemporary intersections of theory, institution, and writing center on questions or authorial identity and intent. But this “mythology of the author identity” is only possible if the signifier *writing* can treat each inscriptive instance as an isolated incident. This, Miller suggests, was the most

devious byproduct of the representational ideology ushered in by the *Phaedrus*: “Turns of phrase are not the point. Phrases and words themselves are. They are, once spoken, taken by Socrates and the others to be a text…And the ground for the question is that words that are separated from their speaker and his intent are ‘texts’, the ‘speeches’ that get right understanding into trouble” (*Rescuing the Subject* 112). In this representational ideology, *how* words are used is less critical than the words themselves. As a crucial element to this ideology, these isolated, context-less words always already make “the status of [the] traditional originating source of philosophical ‘truth’ moot, for written language itself becomes all that we consider” (Miller, *Rescuing the Subject* 25). By displacing written language from its contexts, this ideology implies that *writing* can not only be isolated as a concept, but that such representational logics are *writing*’s ontological condition. Put a slightly different way: writing can only represent by its very nature. It is nothing more than a systematic, permanent technology of representation.

Writing as a permanent technology of representation has significant consequences for composition studies’ logics of institutional identity. At the outset, it suggests that the institutional relationship between what the discipline terms *writing* and *theory* is understood as a reflective, analytical practice where theory primarily articulates the normalized content or “meaning” of any writing instance. As a representative example, consider how composition studies generally theorizes instances of a writing economy as its definitional subject. As Miller suggests, since representational logics of writing “support the persisting view that written words contain disembodied thought,” the corresponding institutional ideology designates that “the educational and material

circumstances for creating visible texts [have] much more to do with spiritual regulation, a process of assuring a well-behaved, cooperative body politic" (*Textual Carnivals* 28). The terms *regulation* and *assuring* are crucial here. Because the logic and advent of any writing economy has been always already interpreted as an amalgamation of isolated, disembodied "thoughts," the relationship between *theory* and *writing* can *only* correlate to institutional context. Rather than theoretically re-envisioning, say, the contingency between writing's materiality and its moments of inscription, composition studies logically repeats its institutional, philosophical, and cultural coordinates through studies of "the form of perfectly written texts" (Miller, *Textual Carnivals* 92). At the same time, however, this institutional logic asks *theory* to merely normalize (or perhaps reify) its political and philosophical circumstances. Miller points out that this normalization often occurs through what the discipline understands as the relationship between its intellectual purpose and its contemporary identity. In its contemporary quest for disciplinary legitimization composition studies often theorizes—that is, initially articulates—its institutional coordinates as "a diminution and debasement of classical rhetoric" (Miller, *Textual Carnivals* 66). By conceptually connecting itself to ancient rhetoric, composition studies establishes itself as both historically and philosophically valid/valuable. But as an instance of a representational ideology, this institutional logic can only use theory as a primarily reflective analytic. Since the discipline representatively forgoes "alternative explanations which would in fact better reinforce the new stud[ies] of writing that composition studies scholars would want to promote," and instead uses theory to primarily advocate its conceptual connection to more recognized academic disciplines, it uses *theory* to theorize itself as a distinct,

disciplinary concept (Miller, *Textual Carnivals* 39). *Theory*, therefore, does not invent or produce new knowledge about writing and the study of writing; rather, it politically and philosophically bridges the relationship between *writing*-as-concept and institution-as-logic.

At first glance, such analyses only mean that composition studies uses *theory* to determine its ideological ethos; or, perhaps more appropriately, what, institutionally, what is called *composition studies* is, and to/for what that signifier answers. As an academic and intellectual discipline, it should certainly do no less. But when *theory* is logically and conceptually separated from its definitional subject (writing) and its functional purpose (knowledge of writing), it forecloses the very particularities every act of theory and writing can bring to the theoretical table. And though *theory* can be envisioned as a disciplinary safeguard, it can equally be an issue of *what it can create and make possible in every relationship between writing and thinking.* This, of course, evokes questions not of *how* theoretical and critical questions are posed, but *what*—institutionally, ontologically—such questions address. Louis Althusser points out that, at their most basic level, such questions show how hegemonic and ideological logics limit institutional methods and identities to a teleological eclecticism. Specifically, when an institution tries to account for the historical and material shifts in what it takes as its object, it often first conceives this object as a seamless, appropriative category. Consider, for instance, how composition studies has generally theorized the signifier *writing*. Though it has institutionally theorized writing as a process, a product, or a system, respectively, these demarcations are less important than *that* the signifier *writing* can function comparatively in each distinct context. Such theoretical eclecticism

derives from the “implicit conception only too close to the current academic conception of comparison, opposition and approximation of elements that culminates in a theory of *sources*—or what comes to the same thing, in a theory of anticipation” (Althusser, “On the Young Marx” 56). When a theory reduces its intervention to purely methodological relationships between presupposed “elements,” it runs the risk of treating each constitutive “element” as isolated and totalized representation of a larger context. By merely comparing, opposing, and approximating isolated elements or positions alone, theory really only describes its own preconceptions, and by proxy, its own argumentative premises. Accordingly, such articulations assert and limit theory to the same ideological coordinates and interests it was set out to study and explain. But these same articulations also conceive the theoretical relationship between categorization and knowledge as an arbitrary coincidence. Since theory anticipates each element as a comparative instance, it limits every relationship between substantive differences to a representative logic. Differences in *theory* can exist—and indeed, to compare the diversity of elements they must—but are not so severe that they merit logical, and especially institutional, dissociation.

Instead of managing a system’s elements, theory’s questions could principally intervene by considering the logical “*development* between the mutations of the particular ideology and the mutations in the ideological field” (Althusser, “On the Young Marx” 63, emphasis added). Rather than focusing on how the ideological object of study is represented, theory should fundamentally declare the development that occurs between an ideology and its institutional logic. The term *development* is important here: it designates that theory must attend to the historical changes between an institution’s

various writing situations and their changing formulations, uses, and functions. Theory thereby rescinds its right to explain how eclectic elements fit into the signifier *composition studies* because both elements and signifier constantly change. Instead, theory's questions attend to and articulate the very changes that happen between contexts, eclectic or otherwise. As Althusser argues, theorizing these changing relationships entail looking at "not the material reflected on…but the *modality of the reflection*," or more specifically, "how [institutional] problems are posed" ("On the Young Marx" 68-69). It is important to note that the thrust of this institutional critique does not call into question contemporary knowledge of *writing* as such, but rather the constitutive dimensions of the institution called *composition studies* itself. *How* the discipline's differing writing situations conceive, relate, and advance a particular relationship with a context is more important than *what* a theory takes as its (isolated, totalized) object. This is perhaps the most radical aspect to a materialist critique of institutional development. By re-envisioning institution in terms of its materialist (read written), historical relationships, it ontologically departs from its eclectic, idealist constitution. What is at stake in this gamble is the very philosophical, political, and practical identity of *composition studies as institution*. As such, the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* is more than what an institution means. In fact, it is really a logical intervention that asks what material and written conditions made the relationships between *writing* and *thinking* possible for a first analysis.

Moreover, the relationship between what composition studies terms *writing* and *thinking* can be one of institutional possibilities and/or horizons. Susan Miller suggests that this very relationship should reflexively tarry with the material and political

economies of every inscriptive endeavor. In contrast to a representationalist ideology, a contextualized material and political exchange between *writing* and *thinking* depends "on agreeing that writing is an action toward its surroundings" where "identities interact in response to their relational, not intrinsic, qualities" (Miller, *Textual Carnivals* 195; 179). At its most basic, this suggests that the rudimentary connections between *writing* and *thinking* condition the logics of institutional identity and theory, not the other way around. But it also implies that such re-envisioning helps foreground how what is called *theory* is an instance or particularized intervention into a larger context, including exactly how such an intervention envisions an institutionalized space to think the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* differently. And for the purposes here, Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy helps show how this politicized, contingent relationship can be laid bare.

Theorizing the Logics of Composition Studies

Though Neosophistic rhetorical philosophies outline respective theoretical aims, they generally use both disciplinary critique and transgression to champion *theory's* generative functions. Jasper Neel's *Aristotle's Voice: Rhetoric, Theory, & Writing in America*, for instance, considers how composition studies uses Aristotle's theories to transform the relationship between writing, theory, and institution. Since Aristotle's method of categorization, most notably discussed in the *Topics*, privileges particular logics over others, it outlines the "correct" or hegemonic relationship between writing and thinking. As Neel explains, Aristotle's "rage to categorize, taxonomize, arrange in hierarchies, and define teleological destiny too easily spills over into life. The role of discourse offered by Aristotle is that of a separate, perceiving intellect capable of disinterested, objective analysis. In no way is this intellect implicated or imbricated in

what it knows" (*Aristotle's Voice* 24). But epistemologically and rhetorically speaking, there is more at stake here than a simple criticism of Aristotle's disinterested taxonomy. The institutional authority of such rhetorical logic—including the signifier *Aristotle*—is thrown entirely into question by Neel's criticism. Here, theoretical pragmatism overrides any speculative or institutional revision that *composition studies* might propose. Aristotle's methodology, that is, is questioned on traditional epistemological grounds: "How do we trust this theory of intellect?" or "What does this theory of knowledge misinterpret?" Questioning a few privileged rhetorical theories on epistemological premises produces alternative spaces that contradict one of the most dominant theoretical signifiers, and/or changes the role its associated ideas and theories have for the discipline itself. Consider, for example, how Neel critiques *Categories'* theory of the slave: "The essential quality of the slave *as a slave* is so important, Aristotle continues, that if 'slave' is defined 'in relation to man' or to 'biped' or what not, instead of its being defined (as it should be) be reference to its 'master', then no correlation appears, for the reference is really inaccurate" (*Aristotle's Voice* 19). Obviously, Aristotle holds the innate quality of a slave's slaveness to be self evident; for Neel, however, this is an indication that the general pattern or logic of Aristotle's thinking is fundamentally and theoretically misguided. In other words, the signifier *Aristotle* does not just indicate particular patterns of knowledge, but posits institutional logics as explicit theoretical patterns that, once critiqued, can be otherwise.

Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy politicizes theoretical contingency by making composition studies' implied institutional limitations explicit. As Victor J. Vitanza notes, the discipline tries to control language by thinking writing as a homogenous, disciplinary

enterprise (“Three Countertheses” 140). Certainly, the attempt to control language is a methodological and political problem; however, the symptoms of this control are primarily philosophic. For Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy, composition studies institutionally encourages a homogeneous community by construing all thinking (and writing) as instances of dialectical negation. As such, the very ontological condition between thinking and writing is at stake. And since dialectical negation requires that thought and writing formally adhere to systemization, it is not possible to have an “uncoerced consensus based on a communicative model of rationality as warranted assertability; such a model is, though ever so subtle, the very epitome of the negative itself; that is, of exclusion as effected by logic and the purgation as effected by politics” (Vitanza, *Negation* 60). Thus, by compelling substantially different opinions, methods, and logics to follow a particular type of thinking and writing, dialectical negation can guarantee what any institution requires: ideological repetition.

Rhetorically speaking, ideological repetition is possible because it relies on a conceptual link between the Platonic subject and its connection to *physis* or nature (Vitanza, *Negation* 240). When the connection between language and thinking is understood as an instance of *physis,* it both exceeds and unequivocally contributes to contexts. Language and thinking are realized as concepts or, perhaps more accurately, as a machination of ontology. In Plato’s dialectical system, this meant dismissing the fluidity and irresponsibility of language for a logical principle. But differences were not only erased for the sake of logical similarities; they were also formalized so that language-users could accurately determine the redemptive qualities of each written word (Vitanza, *Negation* 188). The correlation of words to other contexts, then, is the

logic by and through which the relationship between thinking and writing merits exegesis, if not function. Consequently, composition studies translates the philosophic coordinates of this logic in its everyday theoretical practices. By violating a "subject's" differences to maintain coherent and comprehensive descriptions of what could be called *thinking,* composition studies limits itself to an intrinsic, institutional logic. It thereby realizes itself through "legitimation principles we call warrants (according to Toulmin), grand narratives (according to Lyotard), and representative anecdotes (according to Burke) and which has as its primary goal rational consensus (or hermeneutic understanding)" (Vitanza, "Three Countertheses" 151). This repetitious correlation, Vitzana suggests, is precisely what makes *a* history of rhetoric *the* history of rhetoric. Relinquishing the responsibility of every inscriptive connection between writing and thinking for ideological repetition does not require composition studies to *think*; instead, it requires it to litigate.

Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy takes this litigated connection between writing and thinking and turns it on its head. Instead of juxtaposing language to *physis*, Neosophism links language to more a malleable materiality or *nomos*. Language and thinking are therefore more indebted to the pragmatics of a contingent situation, and specifically to the ebbs and flows of both situational context and judgment. Re-envisioning what *logic* (or *logos*) outlines and how it functions for institutions is essential. In contrast to dialectical negation

> *Logos* here functions as a supernova…it is this dispersion/scattering of the antitheses that leads to 'something new, irrational', something revolutionary… [it is] based on a particular Gorgian notion of *kairos*. And it is this 'moment' that tells us something about the nature [*physis*] of the Gorgian 'subject'—namely, that the 'decision' is not the subject's, but is

> ‘willed by [*kairos*]. Here we have a view of the subject as a function of *logos/karios*. (Vitanza, *Negation* 243)

To first intervene in an institution’s everyday logics, the connection between writing and thinking must designate the philosophical coordinates, conditions, and above all, material patterns that underlie the act of theorizing instead of determining what can count as theory. The emphasis on the materiality of language in this passage should not go unnoticed. While many of the discipline’s connection between writing and thinking offer minimally different logics by which to theorize writing, they rely too heavily on conceptual and analytic imperatives. The intersection between theory and institution is still managed—albeit contrarily—through appeals to rational definitions. Here, however, Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy bases the connection between writing and thinking *in terms of* language’s materiality. This material reconception of the relationship between writing and thinking, as D. Diane Davis points out, champions the positive, inventive potential of language and helps subtly re-envision theory as a material, critical force in institutionalization. Consider how a *logos/kairos* connection between language and thinking discloses the material basis of dialectical negation’s litigation: “We can only think/speak what is thinkable/iterable within our constituting frame. We are *seduced* into linking point A to point B; and once seduced, we perpetuate that convention and call it *logical*, necessary” (Davis 109). Dialectics does not rationally convince or expose a logical connection between word and time; rather, it necessarily “seduces” via material force and form. At the same time however, this seductive logic also “de/negate[s] the *kairotic* moment with a bursting forth of *physis,* of the excess in which both the positive and the negative are inscribed” (Davis 28). As a moment of critique, of contingency, the connection between language and thought fundamentally complicates rationality (or

dialectics) because it is “not a simple logical possibility, for it is actualised at every moment by the bodies to which a given body is related” (Deleuze 62). Rather, the connection between language (writing) and thinking affirms the *relational* conditions between language and thinking as a material metaphor.

In such a metaphor, theory would become a physical or visceral force that explodes rationality’s claim to objective impartiality while simultaneously creating new, differing relationships between language and thinking. As this creative force, then, theory’s intervention into institutional logics would need to capitalize on the perpetual and irrepressible revolutions in language as much as they would the limitations of rational discourse. Davis compares this material/relational theoretical intervention to Helen Cixous’s idea of *ecriture feminine*. Like *ecriture feminine*, theory “is a force *inside* language (like Vitanza’s antibody rhetoric and Kristeva’s desire-in-language) that creates a perpetual and irrepressible revolution in language itself” (Davis 106-107). Yet, comparing theory to *ecriture feminine* alone is not enough. Rather, theory is not just *inside* language; it is also the very material, articulative metaphor that warrants its own intervention. Following Nietzsche, Davis suggests theory must use its materiality to interrupt convention. Theory, that is, must “laugh with the Laughter-in-language, [and] engage [in] a radical *redescription* of ‘the world’ through metaphors of heterogeneity and multiplicity: metaphors of *excessss* and *overffffflow*” (Davis 106). Here, the metaphorical pressures rationality through two interrelated avenues: it first capitalizes on the radical materiality that is *ecriture feminine* and then reorients the theoretical relationship between language and thinking towards this material, relational logic. Yet such an intervention also points out the how the materiality of that relational logic is always-

already contingent: it *is* only because it *can* differentiate between "excesses and overflows." As a result, such metaphors allow thought—and by extension, theory—to constantly critique and create; or, more simply to turn thought "into something aggressive, active, and affirmative" (Deleuze 106). Thus, by re-envisioning theory's intervention in terms of its material, creative affects, Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy helps determine the questions that can be asked about composition studies' institutional possibility, and especially the conditions that make such a determination initially feasible. *Theory* is a creative possibility that must think disciplinary substantiality in fundamentally different terms.

Though Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy certainly distinguishes between how theory is used and what it can potentially do, it nonetheless seems insufficient. In its attempt to create new institutional possibilities for theory, it does not think theory differently as much as show what composition studies' ideological conceptions and uses of theory do not do. To be sure, this difficulty is less a methodological issue than it is a philosophic one. In Davis's *Breaking Up [at] Totality*, for example, thinking is still asserted, but is referenced only insofar as it is the ambiguous converse to rational thought. The connection between language (writing) and thinking, Davis suggests, is "most threatening when it stops testifying to *homo serious's 'Serious Premises,'* when it interrupts the meaning-making machine and, in the instance of that interruption, opens the possibility for an/Other hearing, a hearing of that which has been drowned out by the workings of the machine itself" (234). Though theory is a critical and necessary interruption into the usual state of affairs, it cannot articulate itself beyond these initial ideological coordinates. In this context, this means that theory's restriction is a result of

hegemonic identity and processes: composition studies determines what theory can do, even in its act of rebellion.

More importantly—and perhaps in terms of its most obverse formulation—equating theory to a counter- or reactive position relegates it to the practical, administrative, and especially dialectical functions Neosophism so vehemently rejects. As Vitanza notes, “If there is no philological home, there is, more so, no philosophical (ontological) home” (*Negation* 158). But this does not mean inventing newer, different connections between language (writing) and thinking. Instead, it reasserts the “excesses and overflows” as an institutional moment by “reintroducing the *uncanny* (the unhomely) and the *will to power* (the affirmative play of differences) into historiography and education and philology” (Vitanza, *Negation* 158). Since theory’s primary task is to “reintroduce” interruptions into already-established institutions, it strictly manages its own advent as a referential instance. This distinction can be most clearly discerned through Neosophism’s attention to the signifier *interruptions*. By primarily critiquing how an institution does what it does via *interruption*, Neosophistical theories focus on an institution’s epistemological patterns at the expense of its ontological articulation. For Vitanza, such a focus suggests a Nietzschean “intervention of the middle” that “forces not only metaphysics (*physis)* but also the entire onto-theological tradition (nihilism) to question itself perpetually, to dis/engage by way of perpetual self-overcoming” (*Negation* 288). The point of “reintroducing” material metaphors into disciplinary relationships between writing, theory, and institution is not to invent composition studies’ institutional coordinates; rather, it is to reformulate how it theorizes its object (writing). But such

philosophical projects only determine the institutional limitations of theory, rather than *what* a theory makes possible or creates through its articulative gesture.

Of course, neither Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy nor its conception of what happens between language (and writing) and thought are the primary problem; rather, the disciplinary and ideological imperative to consistently critique how well a particular theory helps composition studies is. To alleviate the disciplinary tendency of philosophical critique, theory's relationships with institutional conditions and possibilities must be rethought in terms of their ideological gesture, and specifically what theoretical coordinates and logics they put into play. This is precisely what investigating the ontological gesture of *theory's* institutional logics means: that a theory's ideological and material conditions be explicitly political factors in its articulation. And given the institutional concerns outlined here—as well as Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy's theoretical project—there is perhaps no better place to rethink the relationship between theory and institution than Plato's dialogues on language and thinking.

Rethinking Plato via Neosophistic materiality

As Susan Miller's theories and Neosophistic rhetorical philosophy demonstrate, composition studies' critiques of Platonic writing have primarily centered on two interrelated, problematic premises: 1.) writing is a representationalist technology; 2.) it is regulated by a decontextualized *logos*. As such, writing unfortunately functions as both instance and system of the future anterior. But it is also a forced moral horizon. Writing is *permitted*—in the precise moral sense of the term—any logical and grammatical possibility or function. Taken together, what is called *writing* is a restricted product that, even in its purely inscriptive moment, is subject to a referential philosophic grammar.

To be sure, these critiques aim at a multitude of theoretical, ideological, and institutional concerns. Composition studies, however, frequently focuses on the contemporary ethical ramifications of Platonic writing theory. In both Susan Miller's and Neosophist rhetorical philosophy's critiques, the value (or non-value) of the representationalist ideology of writing is measured by implicit and reactive ethical concerns. Word choice is perhaps the clearest indication of this tendency. In an effort to "[*control*] our willingness to endow seriousness and status to texts" (as Miller claims), writing is "*seduced* into linking point A to point B" (as Davis asserts). Platonic writing theory does not just *create* the logical system in which writing can be thought and used; rather, this theory *controls* and *seduces* writing to believe that it *can only* function as such. Writing itself is not at fault; nor is its various rhetorical possibilities. Instead, this external, appropriative activity called *dialectics* uses writing for its own purposes. What composition studies calls *writing*, then, is already an ethical injunction that should be theorized accordingly.

At the same time, however, Plato's ethical violation is rhetorical. In his *Phaedrus*, for instance, he does not offer writing a fair and honest engagement with dialectics. Rather, what "Platonism offers in *Phaedrus* is a continuous repetition of Platonism. Plato wants to use writing, rhetoric, and sophistry to destroy themselves" (Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 23). Plato achieves this deceptive plan by "giving rules for rhetoric and writing that effectively preclude both…[and] gives us nothing but his voice and no way to generate a new opposition to that voice without speaking sophistry" (Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 50). Since Plato's philosophy suffocates writing's rhetorical possibilities, writing can never hope to escape the dialectical structure. Writing's

theoretical concerns cannot restrict themselves to purely logical concerns as a result. Instead, they are forced—obligated—to move beyond "the relative importance or unimportance of structure" because "what is at risk is the act of thinking, for Plato is defining thinking" (Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 36). Since Plato defines thinking as "knowledge [that] comes to know itself through the detour of writing," he deceptively constrains writing to one particular function or representation (Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 38). These deceptive practices cumulatively make *a* theory of writing *the* theory of writing. As such, Plato's ideas about writing engender an ethically suspect—if not perilous—theoretical situation for both theory and its ability to engage honestly with writing. Ethics, that is, must be the horizon by which a Platonic writing theory is thought.

But in its zeal to deracinate itself from Plato's influence, composition studies does not think itself outside or beyond Plato's logic. Here, composition studies' disciplinary critique is both logically and ethically problematic. When suggesting that Plato's dialectical rhetoric is too persuasive, for example, composition studies intervenes by actually determining its own ideological interests as theoretical limitation. Certainly, Plato's theories of writing create institutional coordinates, but they ultimately reject any chance *writing* has to represent itself within any discourses of knowledge (or even institution). But by using critique as *the* intervention against Platonic logic, composition studies limits both theories of writing and definitions of writing to participatory roles in a dialectical schema. As Jasper Neel explains, "What exempts rhetoric and writing from any condemnation by [Platonic] philosophy is that all philosophy…is both written and rhetorical. Rhetoric, as the sophists tried to explain so many years ago, is the prior medium in which the possibility and impossibility of truth play out in an endless struggle"

(*Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 203). Plato's version of writing, in other words, *is not* what writing is or what it can solely be. Instead, what we call *writing* can be separated, ripped, from Plato's system and can be rethought. Yet, at the same time, that very moment of separation and assertion—here, that thought is primarily rhetorical—will, by its very logic, always pay homage to a Platonic theory of writing. By employing writing as a conceptual, rhetorical term, composition studies' critiques of Plato refashion *writing* as a negative participant (read: writing *is not*) in his rhetorical system. Writing therefore still exists as a dialectical concept: it exists as something that participates in a meaning-making process (rhetoric) and is therefore still an object of study (composition studies). And as long as what is called *writing* can be separated from a system, as long as it is conceived and used as a distinct theoretical and practical concept, it will always be subject to Plato's epistemology.

This difficulty is compounded by the institutional reliance on ethical critique. As an attack on writing, Plato's dialectical system "implies some position outside writing where writing itself can be seen whole, evaluated, and regulated. That, of course, is the place Plato has claimed for himself. He attempts to judge it and pronounce its rules while at the same time condemning it. Plato wants his metaphors to work in only one direction" (Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* 37). Like the critiques of his logic, Plato maintains an ethical double standard. In studying and analyzing writing, Plato only asserts *his* version of writing. Similarly, in composition studies' logical critique, these ethical descriptions demonstrate not how Plato's system of logic determines the rules of thinking, but how he always already "deceptively" dismisses writing. This is a subtle, yet important point that should not be missed. Rather than simply analyzing how writing works in dialectics

and trying to think the inscriptive moment anew, composition studies underlines its critique with an ethical assertion: what we call *writing* should be "honest" and should be used "honestly." Of course, this critique has little to do with writing per se. Indeed, such a disciplinary critique of Platonic theories of writing seem to be just as much about the pitfalls of dialectics as it is a critique of Plato's "deceptive" character. Accordingly, composition studies' critiques of Platonic writing are little more than a contemporary, thinly veiled ethical assertion *that* Plato persuades us to think rhetoric otherwise.

This is not to say that such disciplinary views of Platonic theories of writing are incorrect, but that their focus on the epistemological and ethical value of writing theories limits their theoretical opportunities. And unfortunately, this ideological limitation often happens to the detriment of writing theories' institutional and material contingencies. Compare composition studies' ethical critiques of Platonic writing with those that suggest the dialectic's founding gesture was a *political*, not an epistemological, intervention. Walter Ong points out that, in contrast to composition studies' assertions, Platonic theories of writing were both "a minor element in the total Greek culture" and a derivative of "the new chirographic structures of thought" (109). Similarly, John Gray suggests that dialectics was the predominant advancement of new forms of writing: "How could a world of bodiless Forms be represented in pictograms? How could abstract entities be represented as the ultimate realities in a mode of writing that still recalled the realm of the senses?" (57). At first glance, these views mean that dialectics' closed system was a reaction to hegemonic Greek politics and culture. But they also suggest that what Plato called *thinking* was a product—and above all, a politicizing—of a new inscriptive system. This, as Slavoj Žižek argues, was the thrust of Plato's critique

of writing. Platonic writing theories, that is, aimed “to deprive writing of its sacred character [as presented in the *Phaedrus*], and to assert the field of rationality freed from beliefs, in other words, to distinguish *logos* (the domain of dialectics, of rational reasoning which admits no external authority) from *mythos* (traditional beliefs)” (Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes* 382). Since Platonic writing theories championed a different purpose, they offer *thinking* not only a fundamentally different context, but also a different logic. This is precisely what makes Plato’s theory of writing political: he makes writing—and specifically, its ethos—its own horizon of thought. What is called *writing* does not need recourse to the mythical or social reputation it has in ancient Athens.

Recall, for example, the *Phaedrus’s* exposition of writing’s “scientific,” “alien” components. These elements certainly attest to the novelty of new inscriptive possibilities from without, but so does the dialogue’s argument about logically organizing a written composition. In his dialogue with Phaedrus, Socrates claims that a writer must know the subject matter prior to writing so that they can define “the whole by itself, and, having defined it, [know] how to cut it up again according to its forms until it can no longer be cut” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 65). Without a doubt, systematically discerning between “whole” and “parts” testifies to an inscriptive system that prioritizes a visual over oral organization, but there is still a subtler logic at work here. By first understanding their subject, writers are better equipped to match compositions to rhetorical context and purpose. Writers can discover “the form of speech that fits each [soul] nature” by arranging and ordering their compositions so that complex audiences get complex compositions and “simple [compositions] for a simple soul” (Plato, *Phaedrus* 65). Obviously, such rhetorical capacity and strategy is commonplace to

theory's contemporary scene. However, as perhaps *writing's* most political interaction with *thinking*, the radicality of this relationship should not be overlooked. For the logical and rhetorical connections between purpose and inscription suggest, that writing anticipates and accounts for substantive differences. As a consequence, writing's fidelity is to its own inscriptive, self-sufficient economy; or, in other words, to its own ethos. Myth, communal belief and dogma, could no longer restrict either *writing* or *thinking* because this self-sufficient economy held to a fundamentally different logic. This, perhaps too prophetically, is why Thamus rejects writing in *Phaedrus*: it, unlike myth, does not need the gods to substantiate it.

What Plato called *writing*, then, thereby radically designates (or incorporates) constitutive differences in its very inscriptive, theoretical, and institutional moment. In such a scenario, Plato's purpose in critiquing writing shifts from an epistemological condemnation to a material, political intervention. The problem, Roy Harris proposes, is therefore not "that writing does not let us hear the voice of the author. The problem is, rather, that writing (like tape recording) is not language *in vivo*" (18). And given the differences in writing's purposes and functions, Plato's project becomes instead a rejection of the "whole assumption that writing provides a viable *surrogate* for speech" (Harris18, emphasis mine). Platonic writing therefore does not reject the *accuracy* of writing's depiction, but rather the very *assumption* that writing can be compared to speech. Accordingly, the relationship between what is called *writing* and *thinking* was never really rhetorical; instead, it was (and is) *always already material*. This view, in contrast to composition's critiques, highlights how Platonic views of writing emphasize the logical, material, and above all political, differences that can exist between writing

and speech. This definitional, institutional difference between writing and speech is what produces constitutive, logical possibilities for different conceptions of writing. For instance, when thinking Platonic theories of writing as a material disruption, what is signified by *writing* is a theoretical intervention that creates inventive, institutional possibilities and directions for a "scientized, non-mythological writing." Platonic writing is therefore less about the supposedly "deceptive" hierarchy between speech and writing than it is about the substantive differences between writing and rhetoric that *writing* creates. *Writing* makes new institutions possible by altering the terrain of thought, including what it *can be*.

If composition studies were to follow these Platonic theoretical coordinates to their extreme, the question of theory would not be how to redeem or assert writing into ideological conceptions of what an institution calls *writing*, but to *think* what new institutional opportunities this legitimization through separation permits. Returning to Plato's dialogues can be of help here. In the *Protagoras*, the constitutive, institutional dynamic that exists between *writing* and *thinking* changes not how writing (and rhetoric) are understood, but what that dynamic makes possible.

In the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates and a friend visit Callias's house to hear the famed rhetorician Protagoras discuss the teachability of virtue. Like many Platonic dialogues, the *Protagoras* covers several topics that echo many of Plato's main concerns: the good, the difference between truth and appearance, and so on. However, for contemporary composition studies theory, the dialogue's treatment of argumentation is perhaps the most pertinent subject. Protagoras begins the discussion by claiming that "the sophist's profession has been around for a very long time; it's just that people who

practiced it in the past devised covers for their profession and disguised it" (Plato, *Protagoras* 14-15). Sophistry, therefore, is the logic of Athenian thinking, and is represented by famous poets, like Homer and Hesiod, as well as athletes and musicians, such as Iccus and Agathocles (Plato, *Protagoras* 14-15). Sophistry's pervasiveness is important to note, claims Protagoras, because it has influenced Athenian society even though it is often renounced. And since sophistry is in fact the vehicle of Greek thought, he argues that it should be practiced and referenced openly (Plato, *Protagoras* 14-15). More importantly, Protagoras believes that this general theoretical dynamic should also condition the argument he is about to have with Socrates. Arguments, in other words, should be "talked over quite openly, in front of all of the people [in attendance]" (Plato, *Protagoras* 15). Socrates agrees with Protagoras's request, but echoing the claims of the *Gorgias*, adds that he does not care "whether you actually believe what you're saying or not. It's the idea itself I want to examine" (Plato, *Protagoras* 38).

There are a few things to note here. Like the *Phaedrus's* distinction between writing-as-science and writing-as-mythology, the *Protagoras*'s conception of argument both grounds its context and can be judged against that context. Thus, much like the *Phaedrus, Protagoras* creates a logic that requires fidelity to its own systematic movements. Yet, unlike the *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras* envisions this logic as an institutional (read written) consistency. Both Protagoras and Socrates, for example, agree that differences between context and logic are requirement for argumentation. For Socrates, of course, the key distinction is between the "truth" of an idea and its mere appearance; for Protagoras, the essential difference is between secrecy and honesty. The economy

of argumentation—in fact, how *thinking* and *writing* relate in this situation—is less a transition from sophistry to rationality, but rather an intensified *continuation of sophistry*, of a *written rhetoric*. This, Žižek proposes, is how the Platonic opposition between "truth" and "mere rhetoric" should be understood. He claims

> "Truth" as opposed to "mere rhetoric" is nothing but rhetoric brought to its extreme, to the point of self-negation; literal sense is nothing but metaphor brought to self-negation; *logos* nothing but myth brought to self-negation, and so forth. In other words, the difference between rhetoric and truth *falls within the very field of rhetoric* (Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do* 32).

Rhetoric, and specifically a written rhetoric, thereby actualizes continuity in its very economic movements. Substantive differences, then, are substantive because they are gradations of inscriptive moments. Accordingly, "truth" can be differentiated from "mere rhetoric" or mere appearance because their substantive differences are accounted for by writing. Consider, for instance, how Socrates continually introduces sequential conditions for his debate with Protagoras. When Protagoras argues against Socrates's argumentative requirements, Socrates appeals to the economy of collective differences. In contradistinction to his usual argumentative style, Protagoras must "trim his answers" and "make them shorter", to which Protagoras refuses because it would limit him to conducting "the discussion on my opponent's terms" (Plato, *Protagoras* 39-40). Initially, this seems like the usual Socratic trickery where Socrates silences his interlocutors. Here, however, thought-as-argumentation and its relationship to a written rhetoric cease being a skill of the specialized elite (Protagoras) and instead becomes a clearer, more literal, and accessible economy.

This last point is perhaps the most controversial, if not important, moment of the dialogue. Rather than completely acquiescing to Protagoras's or the audience's

demands, *Protagoras* literally rematerializes the connection between *thinking* and *writing* as an institutional logic. After Protagoras disagrees with Socrates's argumentative request, Socrates decides to end the discussion and leave. However, the audience members, eager to see the discussion continue, persuade Socrates to stay by conceiving argumentative ground rules. Prodicus, in particular, determines the systematized rules for argumentation that include a few methodological changes: 1.) participants must debate, not dispute one another because disputing implies a breakdown in communication; 2.) since respect can be construed as a systematized principle, both must respect, not praise one another; 3.) the speeches must be enjoyable rather than pleasurable because enjoyment suggests that someone is learning, whereas pleasure is instantaneously felt and consumed (Plato, *Protagoras* 42-43). After Prodicus outlines the rules for argumentation, Socrates adds a final element that will help regulate the argument: the collective group. "There's no need," he claims, "for one particular person to supervise [the argument]. You can all supervise the discussion together" (Plato, *Protagoras* 44-45). Though the dialogue seems to institute order as an ethical ideal, in actuality it invents a rhetorical consistency by maintaining the tension between context, purpose, and method. This is precisely why Socrates makes the collective group the regulating principle. When he induces the collective group as a regulatory force, Socrates effectively bypasses the immediate rhetorical situation and makes the interaction between context, purpose, and method the horizon by which argumentation can (and should) occur. The "truth" of an argument—this very argumentative consistency—can therefore be repeated, re-rhetoricized, retheorized, *rewritten* because it *thinks* its institutional dynamic as an economy.

This consistency points out how the relationship between *thinking* and *writing* is the ontological condition of any institutional dynamic. The inscriptive economy Plato produces, for instance, is a principle that tries to *think* consistency *as an institutional logic*, and in doing so, makes its relationship with *writing* and *thinking* an active, assertive, and speculative enterprise. Althusser describes this connection between *writing*, *thinking*, and their institutional counterparts in terms of an "*intervention* in the theoretical domain" by "a wild practice…which does not provide the theoretical credentials for its operations and which raises screams from the philosophy of the 'interpretation' of the world" ("Lenin and Philosophy" 37; 41). By intervening in the everyday and producing a different sense of consistency, by refusing to approve its arrival ("providing its theoretical credentials") and serving other interests, *writing* and *thinking* pronounce their institutional movements purely in terms of an inscriptive event. Consequently, this wild, ontological intervention delineates *a new practice of theorizing*, not a new way to account for different theoretical results or to identify/familiarize differences in understanding (Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy" 42). Returning to *Protagoras*, the onus of the institutional relationship between *writing* and *thinking*—its theoretical practices, its philosophic underpinnings, its intellectual contexts—does not really account for the newness or breaks from accepted viewpoints. (Socrates does, after all, subtly and violently exchange the conditional rhetorical context for an insensitive inscriptive system). Rather, *Protagoras* theorizes argumentation as an institutional *possibility* that *writing* and *thinking* create; that is, as a substantiated and politicized material, economic intervention into the immediate and fleeting rhetorical moment. Viewed in these terms, *Protagoras* holds the Sophists' pervasive institutional

logic to its own theoretical virtues of accessibility and literality, though it is now systematically that much more consistent and that much more honest.

Perhaps more importantly, as a material, political intervention, *Protagoras*'s depiction of the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* has to realize its contingency as an institutional premise—and it foregrounds its intervention into Athenian ideas of writing and thinking by changing the terms of both. For contemporary theoretical contexts, this means that such an institutional redirection emphasizes what a theory makes possible over what theory evaluates or secures. Thus, to configure theory differently—institutionally or otherwise—implies that theory must be wildly insensitive to the repercussions of its own ontological, institutional interventions. To think the relationship between *theory* and *writing* differently is then to *think* that relationship differently, regardless of circumstance, output, or ethics. First, however, what is called *composition studies* must rethink writing's materiality, and particularly how that materiality foregrounds and conditions ideological engagements with *theory*. It is in the next chapter that I discuss how *composition studies* can think this relationship differently through post-process theory and theories of networked writing.

CHAPTER 4
RETHINKING THE MATERIALITY OF COMPOSITION STUDIES THEORY

The relationship between *thinking* and *writing*, as I argued in Chapter Two, is a conjectural connection that thinks or writes theoretical considerations in terms of their very inscriptive possibility. In this scenario, this means that theory does something substantive to the relationship between *writing* and *thinking*; or more simply, that theory changes the things it theorizes. As the *Protagoras* demonstrated, theory materialized the connection between *writing* and *thinking* as a closed economy of concepts, and, in the instance of the last analysis, instituted an ontology of difference. The implications of this theory are far reaching, of course. At its worst, this economy was taken at literal face value. It is no secret that Plato's dialectical economy suppressed—and still suppresses—efforts to resist its rhetorical and material configuration. At its best, however, the relationship Plato outlines between *writing* and *thinking* construes theories of writing as political events. Consider, for instance, how Plato's conception departs from the hegemonic historical, ethical, and cultural conceptions of writing and posits theory as an aggressive, material intervention into the current economy of writing. As such, what is called *theory* is a productive enterprise, and not the hermeneutic method of investigating "knowledge" that it is so often assumed it to be.

For composition studies' interests, such ideas point out how theories of *writing* impact and affect not just "knowledge" about them, but also their very material and ideological use. In many ways, this suggests that the connection between *theory* and *writing* is primarily a material relationship. As Althusser argues, when the principle interaction between theory and its inscriptive counterpart is conceptual and methodological change, that relationship is thought according to *material* distinctions

and modifications in ideological categories and apparatuses. A theoretical intervention, he claims, “displaces or modifies existing philosophical categories and thus produces those changes in [the] discourse [itself]” (Althusser, “Lenin and Philosophy” 38). Since the identity of discourse can change from moment to moment, discourse must be thought according to those changes. The institutional politic described by the *Protagoras* most clearly presents this reflexive, inscriptive economy. When Socrates announces, through his new theoretical coordinates, changes to Athenian argumentative discourse, he effectively introduces ideological contingency into the dialogue. But these changes are not fleeting opinions that can be easily forgotten or reconciled; rather, they are recorded, accounted for, and inscribed as constitutive changes in the ideological pattern itself. Athenian discourse will have to generally appeal and/or refer to distinct, decontextualized rules and principles that will forever change its general, everyday operational formations. It is this change in discourse, this recourse to a recorded alterity, which makes the relationship between writing and theory material. When alterity becomes the horizon by which discourse must be thought, the situation systemically changes because “thought is not separable from shifts in position… [instead], one has to retrace development, [including] its breaks and bifurcations” (Balibar 6). *Writing*, in other words, intervenes in its own relationship with *theory*, and changes the coordinates and ethics of that relationship from inscriptive moment to inscriptive moment. As a result, the relationship between *writing* and *theory* is a perpetual revolution: though both *theory* and *writing* can assert a coherent identity—some relationship, after all, is signified by the terms *theory* and *writing*—neither can assert that identity without recourse to contingency. Put a different way: nothing

supersedes the material reflexivity and contingency of the relationship between *writing* and *theory*.

Consequently, the question facing ideologies of writing theory, then, is not necessarily *how* the signifiers *writing* and *theory* relate in a writing economy, but rather *when* these terms inscriptively change their ideological formations and possibilities. Though these sound like methodological questions, they are resolutely ontological. When writing intervenes in every economic consistency via radical changes in material formations and processes, it cannot but help to repeat, dislodge, and assert difference as a theoretical principle in *every* inscriptive instance. These radical interventions, as Lynn Worsham points out, thereby help change the way writing works in both theoretical and ideological endeavors. In an ontology of material intervention, for instance, writing does "not contain, possess, or appropriate but steals into language to make it fly, to make it move, to make *us* move without our ever knowing what worked or what works on us and toward what end" (Worsham, "Writing Against Writing" 93). Here, writing's radical, material interventions fundamentally alter both conceptions of writing. *Writing* is non-appropriative—it is neither method nor thing—but rather a material contingency realized through its disjointed inscriptive movements. Such material disruptions therefore help (re)construe the theoretical and ideological notions of writing "to that of writing as a strategy, without tactics or techniques, whose progress yields 'unlearning'. This result does not mean that writing produces ignorance; rather, it produces a sense of defamiliarization vis-à-vis unquestioned forms of knowledge" (Worsham, "Writing Against Writing" 101-102). Put in a slightly different way: the relationship between *theory* and *writing* is virtually nothing but a practical enterprise. I say "nothing but"

because nothing more is at stake than the very coordinates by which writing can be theorized and the principles by which theorizing *writing* can occur. By thinking the logical consequences—or, to put it in Worsham's terms, thinking "a sense of defamiliarization"—of these inscriptive disruptions insofar as they reflexively affect how both theory and *writing* are used, composition studies can better grasp what theory generally makes possible. Of course, this also means composition studies' ideological engagement with the materiality of writing must be rethought, especially since, as Plato's inscriptive politic exemplifies, it is in the intersection of *writing* and *thinking* that ideology and systemicity are possible.

At this point it should be clear that rethinking writing's materiality is a fundamentally different enterprise than both the historical and Northean projects outlined in the first chapter. For while those theories certainly described, reconceived, and recorded material variations in composition studies' history, their goal was to explain those differences *to the ideology called composition studies*. This chapter, by contrast, advocates a fundamentally different logic. Since materiality, in its very inscriptive instance, alters both a writing economy and what can be attributed to it (its history), those changes must be rethought in conjunction with their economical and material divergences. The subtle difference between these two theoretical positions resides in how an ideology maintains fidelity to its inscriptive violence, and specifically how that fidelity traces those changes as ideological markers. In the historical and Northean projects, connections between *writing* and *thinking* consistently repeat the same theoretical coordinates. This economical movement thus renders material injunctions stagnant. Certainly, "the forms and arguments," writes Althusser, "of the fight

may vary, but if the whole history…is merely the history of these [same] forms, they only have to be reduced to the immutable tendencies that they represent… [and are] a kind of *game for nothing*" ("Lenin and Philosophy" 33). To be sure, as I argued in Chapter One, what is called *composition studies* often disavows significant theoretical (and material) differences for the same arguments and concepts when it tries to make a history of writing and/or writing instruction. *Composition studies* thereby suppresses writing's capacity for material intervention to its own theoretical detriment: composition studies' history can be theorized, but its theories cannot have a history**.**

Furthermore, this impasse between ideology and disruptive materiality demonstrates that the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* can be theorized by a fundamentally different horizon. To be thought in some coherent way, composition studies might continually *think* the rupture that Plato's logic creates while also instilling new material, inscriptive horizons for each and every instance of writing. But such a venture also requires dispelling one of the discipline's most cherished theoretical premises: *that* writing produces meaning, knowledge, or even ideology. The inscriptive violence of writing, however, shows otherwise.

Paralogic Rhetoric and Post-Process Theory; or Inscriptive Violence as the Horizon of Composition Studies Theory

As Thomas Kent argues in *Paralogic Rhetoric* and later in *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*, writing's inscriptive violence is frequently described as an ideology's mediating theoretical force. For composition studies, this mediation frequently envisions the relationship between *thinking* and *writing* producing

> claims that writing constitutes a process of some sort and that this process is generalizable, at least to the that we know when someone is being "recursive" or to the extent that we know when to intervene in someone's

> writing process or to the extent that we know the process that experienced or "expert" writers employ as they write. (Kent, *Post-Process Theory* 1)

In this dynamic, *writing* and *thinking* are in service to various ideological forces and create easily managed, mediated products, such as codifiable processes, writing practices, and even knowledge about this thing called *writing*. The material differences writing continually and violently introduces into every writing situation are not a problem because they actually produce something useful. The violence of the inscriptive moment, in other words, helps these ideologies adjust their knowledge and their processes. Writing works for something else.

But upon closer inspection, this relationship is theoretically problematic because, much like the Neosophist critique of dialectics, it hinges *on the production* of those rhetorical concepts and methods inherited from Plato. For instance, when tracing the lineage of the Platonic inscriptive intervention, Kent highlights how an Aristotelian rhetorical conception of theory is perhaps the most egregious and offensive systematization of writing's inscriptive revolutions. In Aristotle's schematic "a text—whatever its kind—cannot be reduced to discrete parts that, in turn, may be abstracted from *the processes of discourse production* and then talked about without concern for each part's structural interaction with all the other parts" (Kent, *Paralogic Rhetoric* 19, emphasis added). That production plays such a central role in the theoretical relationship between *thinking* and *writing* should be of concern. Like the theory of argument found in Plato's *Protagoras*, Aristotle's mediated production can only create new inscriptive instances that replicate the same form, structure, and movements of *an* initial inscriptive violence, i.e. the enthymeme. In such a mediated system, writing is both a producing force and a product of that force because it always thinks its inscriptive

violence in terms of its antecedent potentialies. Writing, in other words, does not violate its economic function because it is always a product of the future anterior. Consequently, the movement or repetition of each inscriptive instance—of theory, of ideology, of knowledge, and so on—can be anticipated because writing (re)produces the initial, inscriptive gesture as the only approved repetition. At its most basic, this means that inscriptive differences literally guarantee the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* as a mediated, ideological object because the relationship can only produce that object. *Writing* and *thinking* therefore have no history, no material divergences, because they are, formally, the same thing.

In contrast to these assertions, post-process theory argues that since what is called *writing* is a public, interpretive, and situated act, it actually articulates a strict tension between a writing economy and its capacity for radical, self-reflexive change (Kent, *Post-Process Theory* 1). Following Donald Davidson's view that signs do not conventionally or contextually connect to real world effects, Kent describes this tension through three interrelated principles: 1.) That no system can account for the effects of language; 2.) No "logico-systemic account of discourse production" is possible; and, 3.) No system will account for the tropological use of language (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 34-35). Without a doubt, this tension demonstrates that language cannot be exhausted or codified as a part of any system because it fundamentally exceeds every act of systemization. Each moment of language, that is, is unique and cannot be formally repeated. But this tension additionally demonstrates how the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* violates its own economy. When post-process theory's *writing* rejects composition studies' claim to systematic theories of writing—that is, how writing

might happen as a process—it simultaneously *declares* the very possibility of systemicity as fundamentally irrelevant *to writing*. *Declaration* is the key term here, and it is through this term that *writing* envisions its radical recursivity as an explicit, rather than latent, theoretical factor. As post-process theory sees it, when writing is theoretically restricted to its particular material instance, it severs the connection it might have to perceived language effects, like "communication" or "meaning." But at the same time, this severance is not absolute. In fact, it also articulates a new opportunity where each distinct principle of writing is primarily *materially connected*. In the tension between writing economy and self-reflexive change, nothing logically or "naturally" associates post-process theory's principles with a knowledge or process of writing. Rather, these principles relate purely through their *having been written* for a particular context, and can therefore rely on nothing more than the advent of their respective inscriptive moments. So by rejecting both the theory by which composition studies *produces effects* (a process) and *the effects themselves* (codified, repeatable writing gestures), post-process theory shows how writing's inscriptive violence is precisely the horizon by which theories of writing must be thought.

Yet, the tension post-process theory articulates also enacts a material and ideological disruption not unlike the Platonic violation of ancient rhetoric. Just as Plato literally (re)wrote rhetoric's argumentative principles, post-process theory's critique posits writing as traced or thought in terms of its material contingencies, and specifically their ideological impact. Consider, for example, how post-process theory construes *writing's* primary principle as the hermeneutic guess, not the inventive act. In Kent's view, *writing's* material contingencies fundamentally and continually revolutionize the

economic premises that *writing* and *thinking* enact. This relationship is not based on "the inventional act: the attempt to discover how we might make our intention clear," but rather "the hermeneutic act: the interpretive guess we must make about our hearer's or reader's code that occurs even before invention is possible" (Kent, *Paralogic Rhetoric* 38). Though a quick analysis certainly demonstrates how a writing economy can only be tangentially asserted, the more important point is the very theoretical movement from critique to assertion. In its efforts to explain the limitations of writing system that produces, post-process theory describes the necessary transition from theoretical use to conjecture. When writing theories dismiss language use (invention) as a first principle, they sacrifice ideological clarity, or, more specifically, how a theory functions for the ideology in question. Instead, such dismissals emphasize the contingency (guessing) that conditions each and every inscriptive endeavor. Without a system to account for every inscriptive change, "writing and reading become simply different species of communicative interaction that require us to interpret continually and publicly the languages of others in an attempt to match our vocabularies with theirs" (Kent, *Paralogic Rhetoric* 109). Accordingly, the finite, material conditions that condition every act of writing become a theoretical principle in any connection between *writing* and *thinking*. A writing economy must therefore face its own material and temporal limits—that is, what it cannot predict, but must inscribe nonetheless.

Confronting the limits of a writing economy can be a productive space to work in, especially when used to rethink the general ideological coordinates of disciplinary appropriations of both *writing* and *thinking*. However, perhaps writing's (im)possible material inventions should be further described by way of post-process theory's initial

theoretical and political gesture—that is, the disruption of writing acts and a systematized knowledge of them—instead of how a theory in general can better modify composition studies' ideological interests. But this also suggests that the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* requires an entirely *new* logic to deny the danger of ideological stasis. Networked writing scenes offer *writing* and *thinking* that new logic.

The Inscriptive Gesture of Networked Scene

For the purposes here, the new logical possibilities that post-process theory opens for *writing* and *theory* might be best articulated through the speculative, metaphorical gesture of *scene*. These new scene(s) of writing, at first glance, are analogous to the grammatical, materialist rhetorics Kenneth Burke outlined in *A Grammar of Motives*. For Burke, *scene* designates both the plasticity of the space in which writing happens *and* the materiality of writing itself. In his description of scene, Burke notes that the scenic grammar of Hobbes' *Leviathan* necessitates "the reduction of reason itself to motion," where the full significance of such a reduction treats machines "not as the *product* of a rational man but as a *complete model* of reason itself" (134). Here, the grammatical rhetorics of a "complete" rationality are not as much of an effect of contextual premises and consequences as they are their pervasive conditions. Burke notes that this Hobbesian grammar typically outlines these pervasive conditions by speaking "of 'action' rather than 'motion'," thereby implying that when he discusses the term *motion*, he is really "talking about a subject that usually goes by the name of 'voluntary action' [like the individual will]" (136). Accordingly, when writing about, say, Elizabethan poetry, Hobbes' pervasive scene of writing explains "the *internal* in terms of the *external* conditions," thus making internal actions "follow mechanically from the disproportion in the weight of the conflicting motives" (Burke 135). At the heart of Hobbes's rhetoric is

the view that the concept of explanation can be described in terms of its materialist tendencies. This is an important insight on two accounts. When the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* occurs, it is not an ephemeral or metaphysical event; rather, it is thoroughly a case of *action*, or even better, *motion*. Reason is therefore reduced to the literal, material movements of its economy; which is to say, always in reference to its "writteness." At the same time, however, *motion*, unlike *action*, implies materiality's relationship to temporality (*kairos)*, to contingency. *Motion*, that is, embodies in its very concept and use a correlation to both what it did (or was) and what is or will be—it is never conceived as *stasis*. And it is precisely because of *motion*'s temporal connotations, Burke asserts, that Hobbes chose it as an example of *scene*. *Motion* "is essentially dramatic, and may be expected to make its dramatic genius felt even in a philosophy that aims programmatically to transform the dramatic into the mechanical" (137). Even in terms of its own program, such contingent, materialist *scenes* of writing change the possibility of thought because its relationship to thought is fundamentally different.

Combining writing's mechanical, grammatical *scenes* with the limitation of the hermeneutic guess post-process theory outlines compels theories of *writing* to realize their contingency, contextualization, and temporality (*kairos*) in each and every inscriptive moment. This is precisely what makes the connection between *writing* and *thinking* a pervasive, material iteration that can ever only violate its own coordinates. Because writing is defined by its material effects, it "is never a natural exercise of a faculty" (Deleuze 108). Indeed, according to these theoretical coordinates, the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* "never thinks alone and by itself; moreover it is

never simply disturbed by forces which remain external to it" (Deleuze 108). Writing is a pervasive, speculative application, or more simply, a logic of inscriptional conjecture. In the relationship between *writing* and *thinking*, a *scenic* grammar's inscriptive violence becomes the very condition, and even possibility, of its own theoretical coordinates. Post-process theory carries this idea further when it claims that such violent revolutions include in their very inscriptive moment a real uncertainty, and thereby makes *writing* "an extraordinary event *in* thought itself, *for* thought itself" (Deleuze 108). When what is signified by *writing* cannot guarantee anything beyond the speculation of inscription, it becomes both the *scene* of thought and the force that violates thought. A logic of *scene* thereby invents new theoretical beginnings in each inscriptive moment—it "rethinks" each writing situation through its very claim of contingency. For example, as philosopher Alain Badiou points out, the genius and politic of *The Communist Manifesto* derives not from its specific message, but from the advent of its material inscription. As an act of writing, *The Communist Manifesto* taps into the hegemonic logics of the time (German Idealism, British political economy, and French socialism), and posits a counter-hypothesis that aims at the very immutability of these concepts' shared historical logic. As Badiou succinctly puts it, "The communist hypothesis is *that* a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labor" (*Sarkozy* 98, emphasis added). Since *The Communist Manifesto* could envision the logical relationships between these various informational contexts through the radical logic of political economy, it seizes and literally rewrites the possibilities of politics and sociality through its very inscriptive moment, i.e. the manifesto form. For the relationship between *writing* and *thinking,* such a conception illustrates that scene is

never *about* writing, but is the ubiquitous, permeable condition that exceeds, describes, and reflexively affects the relationship between invention and logic: it is a contingent, inscriptive affair where time and knowledge are indubitably entwined.

In composition studies' contemporary landscape, perhaps no gesture is more indicative of writing's inventive, conjectural logics than the writing *scenes* of new media technologies. Networked writing, wikis, blogging, hyperlinking, ideographic composing, to name a few, create spaces for writing practices that radically anticipate ideological notions of space, (hyper)rational thinking, intellectual property and politics, and new epistemologies that extend well beyond the linear model traditionally associated with what is called *writing*. Thus, in multiple ways, new media technologies writing *scenes* literally re-conceive composition studies' traditional images, rhetorics, pedagogies, philosophies, and so on as economically equivalent. Consider, for instance, how new media technologies exemplify the social, collaborative connectivity often found in more consumerist technologies. These technologies articulate a different informational environment, where knowledge production is not limited to an aggregate collaboration between Enlightenment agents. New media sites that are designed for and encourage interaction from multiple and anonymous users—like YouTube, blogs, social networking sites, wikis, and so on—do not relegate knowledge and writing practices to a particular method, group formation, or environment. Rather, these sites reorganize, remix, and mash-up information as a temporary instance in an indeterminable, material context. YouTube, for instance, allows users to create and upload videos and then revise and reject, produce a channel (genre), create video "responses" to other users' videos, and so on. In Michael Wesch's YouTube video "Web 2.0…The Machine is Us/ing Us," users

disseminate and (re)direct information to and from other social networking sites, while simultaneously creating temporary and flexible directories that reorganize the video's (rhetorical) strengths and weaknesses. As a result of this networked logic, Wesch addressed other users' suggestions and revised his video accordingly. However, his video series also prompted other users to create supplementary, alternative new media arguments that are linked to and exist alongside "Web 2.0…The Machine is Us/ing Us." In such a rhetorical dynamic, new media writing scenes foreground the fluidity of writing's contingent, interchangeable materiality more than anything else.[1]

At first glance, new media technologies' integration and functional advocacy of writing's fluid materiality should evoke comparisons to how Hobbes's dynamic of *motion* conceives its material dimensions. Yet, the differences between Burke's interpretation and the economies of new media writing are pronounced enough that they warrant formal distinction. In new media contexts, for instance, the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* is not a definitive, conceptual reduction; rather, it is merely a potential occurrence within a loosely defined material economy, or perhaps even network. To be sure, as social theorists Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker observe, these new media environments constitute material networks insofar as they hold "a tension within [their] own form—a grouping of differences that is unified (distribution versus agglomeration). It is less the nature of the parts in themselves, but more the conditions under which those parts may interact" (61). Like Hobbes' reduction of reason to *motion,* the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* can participate within a material economy that includes both time and space. However, unlike the Hobbesian concept of *motion*, a

[1] See "Web 2.0…The Machine is Us/ing Us" for more information: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE.

new media network does not designate time and space in its material formation as much as it pronounces both difference and connotative logic in its very moment of inscription. This suggests that the tension between time and space is what enables a networked logic to foreground materiality as an ontological, as opposed to ideological, factor in the relationship between *writing* and *thinking.* Galloway and Thacker term this tension *multiplicity*, or "how a network is able to manage sudden, unplanned, or localized changes within itself" (61). Because the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* is always materially bound, it is always subject to the violence of inscription, which, in turn, makes this relationship "a question of formal arrangement, not a finite count" (Galloway and Thacker 60). To strictly maintain a finite count is to repeat the same ideological coordinates Plato and Aristotle outlined in their systems. Conversely, to ontologize *writing* and *thinking* as the multiple, inscriptive instances of a network means that a writing economy's arrangement, its material formation, is the horizon by which writing *can occur*. *Writing* and *thinking*, then, cannot be strictly equated to Hobbesian *motion* because new media scenes can never be exhausted, but can only be described in terms of their material arrangement or potentiality.

This focus on material arrangement should not be confused with the arrangement of classical rhetoric. Part of what makes networked materiality different from its linear counterparts is how it thinks *arrangement* as a logic of distribution. *Arrangement* is the affective/productive links, connections, indeterminate contexts, and economies that reflexively constitute each writing act. In *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention,* Gregory Ulmer articulates this affective dimension of networked arrangement through the reflexive apparatus of memory. "Writing as a technology," he claims, "is a memory

machine, with each apparatus finding different means to collect, store, and retrieve information outside of any one individual mind (in rituals, habits, libraries, or databases)" (Ulmer, *Heuretics* 16). Writing, and specifically information, do not connect to one system, context, or even inscriptive space; rather, writing, as Thamus predicted in *Pheadrus,* interconnects with information and reflexively repeats (collects, stores, etc.)—in short, *affects*—its economy. This form of affective repetition, Ulmer asserts, makes networked materiality a logic of distribution. Information and memory are everywhere because they "function by means of pattern making, pattern recognition, pattern generation. It is not that memory is no longer thought of as 'place', but that the notion of spatiality has changed" (*Heuretics* 36). Because the purpose of arrangement and its desired effects are secondary to how, and specifically when, this logic reflexively distributes its patterns of information, particular material patterns can never be predicted in advance. Writing, that is, does not have a proper "space," either in terms of a supplemental concept (such as spacing between printed marks) or an ontological medium (like a blank page). Instead, a networked materiality can only be a distributed economy of theoretical projections, or more simply, potential inscriptions. Since networked arrangement is the tenuous conjunction between what *can* happen in a writing situation and the general, inscriptive violence indicative of *writing* itself, what is signified by *space* or *place* cannot reserve a particular pattern as ontology. Space is not a noun—it is a distributed verb. As such, classic rhetorical conceptions of arrangement, including their directive focus on purpose and intent, cannot be the horizon by which a networked materiality is thought because networks fundamentally constitute and exceed that horizon.

Yet, when networked logics change the horizon by which *writing* and *thinking* can be theorized, they additionally alter the real technical and functionary status of concepts that act as currency within these networks, such as information. Like Ulmer, Mark C. Taylor observes that in such material horizons, the relationship between *writing* and *thinking* is both a declarative and adaptive event, where what is called *information* "is limited to neither minds nor computational machines but is distributed throughout all the networks passing through us" (230). Departing from its functional and ontological role in epistemology, information is distributed from network to network, from writing instance to writing instance. But this does not mean that information is synonymous with *writing*. To be sure, though information seems to permeate this signifier called *writing*, it cannot replicate the inscriptive violence of either ideological formation or the changes indicative of a writing economy. Information is not an active technology. Rather, as Taylor points out, it exemplifies the patterns or traces of a writing economy's potentiality:

> Information…does not presuppose consciousness or self-consciousness, though consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason are impossible without it. From neurophysiological activity and immune systems, to computational machines, to financial and media networks, information is processed apart from any trace of consciousness. Such information processing forms something like what Hegel describes as 'objective spirit', which emerges in and through natural and social processes. (230)

Information, as the byproduct of a networked writing, does not identify or signify the ontology of a particular writing situation. Instead, it attests to the movements of a writing economy, and in turn, acts as an economic node or indication of those movements. Put in a slightly different way: information exemplifies the contingent forces and discrepancies of writing in new media scenes of writing.

At this point, it would not be out of place to say that what new media scenes describe as *writing* is a pervasive and originary materiality. As the "'objective spirit'" of

social processes, information can help identify the inscriptive potentialities of writing, and in so doing, shows that new media writing scenes act something "like a *technological unconscious*" (Taylor 230; 231). Consider, for instance, how new media scenes envision *writing* as a radical, repeating individuality not unlike the very writing scene Derrida outlines in "Freud and the Scene of Writing." Freud's insight, Derrida maintains, was how each dream was "written" idiosyncratically within the horizon of a commonality. Freud pointed out that in each dream's logic there is a "purely idiomatic residue [that] is irreducible and is made to bear that burden of interpretation in the communication…The dreamer invents his own grammar. No meaningful material of prerequisite text exists which he might *simply use*, even if he never deprives himself of them" (Derrida, "Freud" 209). Though the commonality between dreamers is precisely that they dream, the written logic of each dream is radically original and different. A dream's logic, its "writteness," is therefore a repetitious originality that articulates itself regardless of authorization or function. More importantly, Derrida argues, this interpretive, inventive refusal is a continued reinstatement of each writing scene's material particularity: "The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language. Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes. To relinquish materiality: such is the driving force of translation" ("Freud" 210). As the residue of every writing scene, materiality is *the* singular commonality that is always inconvenient: it provides the possibility for both writing and scene, but defies conventions of functional knowledge through its utter uselessness. In the social bookmarking site Delicious, for example, users use signifier-like bookmarks and tags to create non-hierarchical temporary clusters (or folksonomies) that establish multiple,

simultaneous contextual relationships—that is, networks of writing—that cannot be adequately accounted for by any contextual translation. The tag created for, say, *composition* might yield a variety of results and further tags, but no one cluster sheds a comprehensive or intelligible light on another. Each instance of writing, of materiality, is both common and specific. Like the dream's internal logic or writteness, new media scenes of writing invent their own networked grammar through their very material possibility. The relationship between *writing* and *thinking* cannot be a guaranteed signifier because such a relationship is distributed primarily between inscription and instance. To assert otherwise is to regress towards a Platonic/Aristotelian master signifier—or even disciplinary appropriation—and to overlook how new media networks proclaim a new scene of writing.

Though such regressions might imply that appropriating what new media scenes describe as *writing* is, at best, a precarious venture, disciplinary appropriation will remain a central concern, if not danger, for new theories of writing. For if post-process theory's defense of writing's contingent materiality suggests nothing else, it is that disciplinary appropriation can easily suppress how writing's pervasive materiality can signal a radical departure from ideological systemization. In the same vein, if composition studies is to continue to theorize the connection between *writing* and *thinking*, it must tarry with writing's inscriptive violence while continuing to be insensitive to its most cherished disciplinary concerns. Among other things, this means that composition studies cannot be the sole guarantor of writing theories that think either a networked writing or its inscriptive violence. This is a two-headed problem. In the first instance, composition studies cannot simultaneously privilege its ideological relationship

to *writing* and *thinking* and contradistinctively maintain the generalized and violent connection between inscription and instance. By appropriating the connection between *writing* and *thinking*, composition studies relinquishes its right to the unpredictable materiality that is a scene of writing. Similarly, and interrelatedly, post-process theory and new media networked writing insinuates that disciplinary appropriation, including its established ideological knowledge, is primarily a reductive and reactionary logic that disavows writing's very connection to space and time. As a disciplinary concern, writing does in fact *happen* in a space during a particular time: composing a traditional essay means using a medium (paper, the screen, and so on) to record an artifact of time (a pertinent argument, for instance). New media scenes, by contrast, envision space and time as moments of writing: information moves from one node to another node and so on according to the particular economy's repetition. Writing's inscriptive violence thereby turns disciplinary ideology on its head, forcing it to question the terms of its own exegesis against the horizon of writing's inscriptive gesture. In response to these difficulties, if disciplinary ideologies are to account for the changes such inscriptive violence creates, their important questions must think how writing can relate to disciplinarity differently. If writing exceeds and affects disciplinary and ideological knowledge, that is, how can this knowledge be rethought so that it interacts with the materiality of writing productively?

Inscription, Networks, and Ideological Appropriation

As the previous discussion of *scene* demonstrates, writing's inscriptive moments reflexively condition *composition studies'* disciplinary and ideological exegesis. This is a subtle, yet distinct, claim that differs greatly from the connections between *writing* and *thinking* discussed here and in Chapter Two. Though what is called *writing* exceeds

disciplinary concerns, such assertions do little more than promote writing as a foundational premise in any and all ideological patterns. Writing, of course, cannot advocate such theoretical positions. Instead, this reflexive condition signals an intersection that calls into question the logical capacity of both knowledge and methodology, and particularly *that* their interactions with writing are thought according to a repetition of a singular material violence. The radicality of this intersection is perhaps most pronounced in the transition from post-process theory's general coordinates to new media scenes of writing. In contrast to post-process theory's purely negative declaration—that "*no* codifiable or generalizable writing process exists or could exist"—new media scenes articulate the transitory relationship between writing and knowledge of it as a contingent possibility; that is, the relationship between writing and knowledge *can be*, and every instance of this (disciplinary, ideological) writing is precisely a repetition of these very material coordinates (Kent, *Post-Process Theory* 1, emphasis added). For the purposes here, it is important to note that this distinction resides primarily in the role materiality plays in each respective ideology. As a disciplinary and ideological critique, post-process theory's intervention requires that the connection between writing and knowledge be conceptually and practically delimited. What is termed *writing* and *knowledge* can logically connect, but can do so only serendipitously. But because post-process theory focuses on what the connection between writing and knowledge can and cannot (rhetorically, economically) do, it thinks contingency only in terms of its conceptual import and impact. Certainly, the connection between writing and knowledge *can* happen, but it cannot happen absolutely. Likewise, hermeneutic guessing might produce successful encounters between writing and knowledge, but

such encounters are only possible when contingency is understood as a conceptual limitation. Writing, in other words, is judged *against* the time and space in which it happens or could happen; conversely, it cannot be thought in accordance *with* the time and space it happens or could happen. For if writing were to be conceptualized in conjunction with the contingency of its material economy, post-process theory would relinquish its critical intervention and actually assert knowledge about writing, rather determine what writing is not.

But contingency is not necessarily restricted to these post-process theory formulations. As Derrida often points out, contingency cannot be divorced from its material iteration because it is the indefinite repetition of the written mark that gives writing and knowledge the coordinates by which they can interact. The "unity of the signifying form," Derrida claims, "is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent…but of a determined signified or current intention of signification" ("Signature, Event, Context" 318). Though the connection between writing and knowledge rests on the repetition of the inscriptive mark or gesture, the more important aspect here is grammar of the iterative formulation. Iteration, as a conjunction of writing and knowledge, maintains sole fidelity to its temporal condition. By merely repeating itself—and specifically ignoring recourse to ideological limits—the signifying form does not designate either the role contingency plays in its formulations or procure that role as critical intent. Rather, it is the explicit, material *chance* by which such a relationship can happen. This last point is particularly significant, especially when thinking contingency as a material effect. In this context, *chance* is the finality of every inscriptive moment, not the concept that guarantees the

contingency of a particular outcome. This difference is best explained in terms of writing's inaugural repetition:

> [W]riting is *inaugural*, in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going, no knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future…There is thus no insurance against the risk of writing. (Derrida, "Force and Signification" 11)

Like post-process theory's initial gesture, writing's inaugural repetition attempts to demonstrate how inscriptive finitude makes the relationship between writing and knowledge impossible. Yet, unlike post-process theory's gesture, the chance (or contingency) latent in every iterative writing act no more guarantees itself as a conceptual limit than it does its economic import. Writing cannot see or know where it goes beyond its inscriptive moment; it begins and ends with the singularity of its material act and cannot postulate what it could have been or might be. As a result, contingency cannot be determined as guarantor for either the inscriptive moment in question or subsequent inscriptive moments. But this is also to say that the contingency of writing is just that: contingent. Writing cannot be predicted in advance and cannot be assured, but it can only happen. Indeed, writing's inaugurality—its iteration—is very much a condition of contingency. Iteration, Derrida claims, shows how "through [writing's] extremities of style, the best will not necessarily transpire…nor will…what transpires always be *willful*, nor will that which is noted down always infinitely *express* the universe. It is also to be incapable of making meaning absolutely precede writing: it is thus to lower meaning while simultaneously elevating inscription" ("Force and Signification" 10). Envisioning the moment of inscription as its own finitude, iteration enables writing to indefinitely remark nothing more than its inaugural inscription. What transpires from one inscriptive instance to another is a chance occurrence because

what is termed *contingency* cannot extend beyond its inscriptive moment, even for knowledge's sake. And this is only because *contingency* is another word for the repeated inauguration of the written mark.

At their most basic, such formulations mean that knowledge of writing is relegated to retroactive interpretations of each inscriptive instance. If writing is understood, even for a fleeting moment, it is only because contingency is willfully ignored. Though post-process theory articulated this limitation quite well in its initial gesture, new media scenes of writing take this formulation a step further and enact this negative relationship between writing and knowledge as precisely a material chance. Jacqueline Rhodes's *Radical Feminism, Writing, and Critical Agency: From Manifesto to Modem,* for example, envisions the link between writing and knowledge as contingent, networked iterations that happen to flare at the right time. In her argument, Rhodes traces the writing practices of the radical feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, focusing primarily on collaborative writing, and especially those instances that produced new ways of communicating. The women of these radical factions wrote in various textual modalities that rhetorically produced networked intersections or nodes, or at least instances that exemplified a repetition of a particular inscriptive instance. "Radical women's textuality," she writes, "emphasizes the idea of a networked community composed of writerly texts. In their negotiation of structure and fluidity, radical feminist texts emphasize temporary positionality and the use of available technologies" (Rhodes 66). And it is through this history that Rhodes sees the critical, textual, and inaugural intersection between knowledge and its material impossibility: "Each textuality demands a bobbing-and-weaving, in-your-face attention to politics and textual form; each makes

use of collaborative and often anonymous collective work; each, by virtue of the form of the text itself, is decidedly temporary" (67). Enacting the logic of new media writing scenes, these radical women's' political logics, identities, and temporary writings collapse both method and ethic into chance material encounters. By constantly undermining any guaranteed rhetorical or ethical imperative, these women's contingent modalities of writing structurally changed the conditions of both knowledge and writing because both were defined in conjunction with the inscriptive instance in question. If taken to the extreme, the knowledge of each writing moment, of each textual instance, can go no farther than the circulation of its inaugural iteration. This is exactly what networks demonstrate: chance material encounters between multiple inscriptive singularities. What is called the relationship between the signifiers *writing* and *knowledge*—if disciplinary ideologies insist on its existence—is therefore closer to what Joseph Petraglia outlines as "a sense of writing": a temporary and generalized disposition about the writing act that both prepares and defies disciplinary and ideological systemization as "new" ideas of writing emerge (79-84).

Perhaps more importantly, it is in these new writing scenes, where the connection between writing and knowledge inaugurally (re)inscribes itself, that the disciplinary ideology called *composition studies* can finally affirm and supplement post-process theory's claim that writing is a non-codifiable, disruptive, contingent, and necessary materiality. As post-process theory and new media writing scenes makes clear, the iterative gesture postulates writing as an auto-affective materiality. Distinct to this materiality is a contingent, distributed inscriptive violence that can engender its own repetition, but cannot guarantee it. To be blunt, what new media scenes call *writing* is

more of an insensitive assemblage of inscriptive instances (or material aberrations) than it is a coherent, developing graphic system. And though what new media scenes understand as *writing* can affirm such accusations, they also more polemically claim that *writing* can now be thought without a *logic of the writer*.

The difference between a *logic of the writer* and what is traditionally understood as *the writer* must be clear. According to the materiality new media writing scenes propose, a *logic of the writer* is better understood as a grammar of theoretical orientation than a rhetorically discrete and purposeful agent who inscribes. This theoretical orientation, as Helen Foster suggests, is a derivative of the epistemological conflict between process theories of writing and post-process theory's rejection of those theories. Foster argues that because both process theory and post-process theory rely on social and cultural scholarship, they engender a point of *stasis* or static overlap. The shared conflict between this cultural/social scholarship, she maintains, "effectively moved us off overdetermined notions of the individual and toward theorizing (1) the complex networks with(in) which writers are imbricated by merely *being* and (2) the complex networks that influence and pressure the act(or) of writing" (Foster 40-41). Here, the conflict between process theory and post-process theory redirects ideological attention away from the agent who writes and towards the writing situation and its rhetorical/conceptual influences. Such theoretical redirection is certainly indicative of post-process theory's gesture. Writing does indeed offer a very material network that both designates and divides through situated inscriptive instances and their supposed, subsequent writing economies. But it is also a dangerous environment for knowledges of writing. Foster admits that theoretical *stasis* warrants such concerns; consequently, she requires that

composition studies “conceptualize theories of rhetoric/writing according to some notion of a material writing subject who exists within complex social, political, and cultural networks” (41). With the advent of the material network, theories of writing need to reorient themselves towards the intersections of various writing situations, and particularly to how the complexity of those situations are reflected by the writing subject. The materiality of writing is therefore more than a violent assemblage of inscriptive instances. It is also, if not primarily, a network of respective material differences that find commonality in theoretical *stasis*, or, more properly, in *a logic of the writer.*

Yet such quick recourse to *a logic of the writer* departs radically from post-process theory’s initial gesture, the materiality of networked writing, and the contingency underlying every inscriptive endeavor. To be sure, to theorize writing according to the *stasis* of networks exchanges the complex, unpredictable, and violent interactions of diverse inscriptive moments for their ideological potential. In the commonality that is *stasis,* for instance, the network is invoked as a metaphorical supplement to its material advent. Networks provide writers with the situation in which they can write as well as the environmental factors that influence writing. On the one hand, this is another way of saying that networks are important only insofar as they provide the epistemological means by which writing can happen. But on the other hand, if the materiality of networks—and specifically its auto-affective contingent disruptions—is to be recalled at all, it is only in reference to its supposed reflective capacity. This is because, according to Foster, network materiality primarily modifies the assumption of the writing subject (“a *material* writing subject”), and is moreover the conceptual residue that should be added to disciplinary and ideological formulas of writing’s complexity. In Foster’s conceptions

of networked writing, materiality is thereby not commensurate to the contingent, inscriptive violence of writing; rather, writing *happens*, but only insofar as it can be accounted for. By logically equating writing's possibilities—that is, its contingent, material formations—to the horizon of theoretical *stasis,* the signifier *writing* relinquishes material differences for a guaranteed, functional commonality. *Writing* does in fact happen, and its materiality can alter both writing situations and the processes by which writing happens, but it cannot fundamentally violate *stasis*'s role as the guarantor of that theoretical horizon. When anchored by *a logic of the writer*, networks thereby afford *writing* a guarantee that it otherwise could not promise: the definitive horizon by which it can be thought. As a result, the insensitive assemblage of inscriptive instances is theoretically subdued. And, in fact, it never really moves beyond the all-too-familiar advocacy of a socially situated writing—only now that situation has a new coat of paint.

In contradistinction to the theoretical grammars Foster outlines, the relationship between writing and knowledge can be thought without *a logic of the writer* because new media scenes signal a radically new writing situation. This distinction centers on writing's inscriptive violence and what new media scenes posit as the horizon by which theorizing writing is possible. In this context, the violent contingency of *any* writing instance enables *stasis* to be an ethical and epistemological requirement of *logos*, not writer. Here, Derrida's analysis of Freud's breakthrough is again helpful. "Writing," he claims, "is a *system* of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found" (Derrida, "Freud" 227). Like Freud's description of unconscious processes, writing is its own horizon: it uses its own materials and posits a

heterogeneous logic. But, like the unconscious, writing also does all of this without recourse to validation or logical necessity:

> It is here that the Freudian break occurs. Freud doubtless conceives of the dream as a displacement similar to an original form of writing which puts words on stage without becoming subservient to them; and he is thinking here, no doubt, of a model of writing irreducible to speech which would include, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic, and phonetic elements. (Derrida, “Freud” 209)

The classical subject is certainly not a factor in a system of writing, but only because it cannot be logical recourse for any writing system. Instead, like the dream, writing ventures words as an irreducible horizon—writing, that is, conceives *stasis* as a *material* horizon that is both its displacement and site of occurrence. This contradictory (im)possibility is precisely what Derrida describes as writing’s “originary violence” (*Grammatology*, p. 110). To be sure, when enacting this originary violence, new media writing scenes combine the moment of inscription with changed content—folksonomies, collaboration, and networked logic, and so on, do, after all, demonstrate how written inscription and instance articulate a horizon of thought. As a consequence, writing ceases to “conform to a law of mechanical economy” and instead has some substantive “effect on the structure and content of the meaning (of ideas) that it will have to vehiculate” (Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context” 312). In new media writing scenes, then, *stasis* is a *functional* violence that logically anticipates—and in some senses, relieves—the relationship between each writing act and its particular purpose. And it is because of this reflexive relationship between inscriptive violence and instance that recourse to *a logic of the writer* is not necessary. Indeed, given new media writing scenes’ radical, material contingency, *stasis’s* phenomenological, functional limitation is

really as far as *the logic of the writer*, as nothing more than a critical act of "hermeneutic guessing," can go (Kent, *Post-Process* 3).

But this is not also to say that writing "is no longer usefully described as a container for [an agent's] thought" because it may be written for no other purpose than "*to have been written*" (Miller, "Writing Theory : : Theory Writing" 79)? Though new media scenes envision writing as a material, contingent formation, this does not mean that they are devoid of ideological interventions and merit. The writing new media scenes articulate is not a mechanistic materialism. More than anything else, a renewed focus on the materiality of writing realizes—and to some extent, hyperrealizes—the commensurability between writing's inscriptive interventions and disciplinary/ideological theories of those interventions. This juncture implies that theory's function and identity coincides with the moment of inscription, and must reckon itself with that horizon. As part of a material economy, composition studies theory is "an activity that produces sentences and statements, some of which come to be identified, after their production, as *knowledge*" (Sánchez 31). Perhaps the most important thing to note here is exactly how knowledge of writing engages with writing's materiality. Writing constantly violates its own economies and contexts and thereby invents a new writing situation that reflexively affects both writing and the knowledge of it. This suggests that composition studies' ideological and theoretical possibilities cannot exceed the material convergences of inscriptive instances. When writing's materiality affects *theory's* possibilities from moment to moment, disciplinary knowledge of writing becomes a temporary rhetorical situation, a kind of ideological "shorthand for the sorting of sentences and statements, while writing would become at once the generative matrix

from which such shorthands emerge" (Sánchez 31). What can be discerned about writing does not exceed a particular function or even context. Instead, what is called *knowledge of writing*—and its subsequent concepts of *theory*—are inscriptive instances in an economy of writing. This is because the violence of writing forces ideological knowledge—that is, disciplinary knowledge about writing—to limit itself to each writing act and instance. What is called *theory*, that is, is an instance of writing.

Taken at face value, the conjunction of *theory* and writing's materiality more readily demonstrates one of composition studies most fundamental assumptions about theory: *theory* is an ethical endeavor. "Composition," Sánchez explains, "is interested in *improving* writing processes and products, whatever that might mean at a given time" (59). Composition studies theory, unlike philosophy and/or literary theory, attempts to devise better ways to think about and use writing. In the current context, this formulation would additionally revise the horizon by which theorizing writing is possible to a principled ethic: just as composition studies theorizes writing, tries to make it better, it should not forget that *theory* is also an instance of writing.

Yet, at the same time, the conjunction between inscription and *theory* points out how problematic this ethical principle is for *writing's* relationship to *theory*. Though some of what composition studies calls *theory* might struggle with(in) the violent, inscriptive horizon of writing—and thereby recognize the contingency and alterity of a very material logic—the discipline stills theorizes writing in exhaustive terms. Theories of writing, that is, are often thought in terms of particular disciplinary and ideological (meta)questions: the 'who', 'why', 'what', and 'how' of writing; 'what does this theory tell us about writing?'; 'what does it leave out?'; and so on. Consider, for instance, the impetus for

Foster's analysis. As her analysis of new media's networked writing scenes demonstrates, *theories* of writing need to primarily focus on *how* writing happens, not *that* it happens. Newer and better knowledge—theories of the writer, a better understanding of the contemporary rhetorical situation, and so on—are the ultimate ideological and philosophical purposes of theorizing writing. In the first instance, this means that when composition studies disciplinarily/ideologically requires that *theory* create or produce a better process or product, *theory* is conceptualized or appropriated as a method. But it also suggests that an ethic of disciplinary accountability, theoretical or otherwise, mandates even the most violent inscriptive instances. What is presented as *theory*, then, can be primarily reckoned as an indeterminate ethic of guarantees.

This ethic of guarantees—composition studies' theoretical blind spot, as Foster's analysis of networked writing so aptly demonstrated—perpetuates theoretical questions and investigations that not only help sustain ideological limitations, but also foreclose on writing's substantive, economic interventions. To exhaustively judge or evaluate a particular theory of writing as continually "missing something" suggests the contrary. Writing, as a material economy, is not lacking; rather, this theory, ideology, etc. does not correspond with the ethical principle from which the judgment came. If writing is to seriously theorize its own horizon—*theorize theorizing*—it should not only continue to intervene in its own processes, it must do nothing but. Ultimately, then, the materiality of writing present composition studies with a still more difficult, fertile challenge: to (re)envision the relationship between *writing* and *theory* as a movement from ideological guarantee to an articulation of the new. Dispelling the ideological connection between ethics and writing will help push composition studies in that direction.

CHAPTER 5
COMPOSITION STUDIES THEORIZING SANS ETHIC: FROM PRODUCING WRITING'S THEORETICAL PRESCRIPTIONS TO DECLARING ETHICAL EVENTS

The materiality of writing discussed throughout Chapter Three suggests new and different ways to posit the relationship between theory and writing. When the materiality of writing is recognized as an explicit, constituting factor for both theoretical and ideological affairs, the identity and function of both depend on the inscriptive moment more than ever before. Consequently, theory and ideology only occur or happen in the moment they are written. That theory and ideology only *happen* is important here. If what is called *theory* and *ideology* are to account for a coherent identity, that identity must think itself in terms of its material horizon, or *that this identity happens as a contingent inscriptive instance*. As instances of inscription, theory and ideology must articulate their respective, constitutive identities as chance material occurrences and formations in writing's various economies. And it is precisely because theory and ideology merely *happen* as chance material occurrences that the horizon by which theory can be thought changes. In such a contingent material scene, what is called *theory* primarily and repeatedly inaugurates, interrupts, and (re)directs the vast assemblage of inscriptive instances. As a result, theory functions more as the arbiter of writing and writing alone.

Needless to say, the violence of such a material horizon frees theory from its explicit responsibility to disciplinary knowledge and ideological constitution. As an arbiter of writing, theory is solely accountable for material formations. At the same time, however, theory's relationship to the ideology called *composition studies* often realizes its inaugural interruptions as an ethical enterprise. This disciplinary dynamic, as I argued in Chapter Three, creates a conception of theory that works within an

indeterminate ethic of guarantees: while the signifier *theory* might consistently and continually violate its material formations, it does so in the name of disciplinary production. It invents new inscriptive assemblages, but only insofar as those formations create ideological alterity for composition studies. Of course, this means that theory is restricted not only in terms of its material inventions, but also must suppress theoretical differences to create a disciplinary principle or ethic. Following this logic, writing and the theorizing of writing, will always preclude some aspect of their contingent materiality for the sake of an ideological guarantee.[1]

Composition studies realizes the difficulty such ideological ethics presents to the relationship between theory and writing and has attended to these difficulties in a few different ways. Perhaps the most visible of these ways is the disciplinary advocacy and interest in a thoroughly postmodern ethics. Here, theory's speculative potential realizes the contingent horizon(s) by which writing can be thought differently and responsibly. In Joe Marshall Hardin's *Opening Spaces*: *Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*, for example, postmodern theory shows how ethics are a situated, pervasively material, and political activity. Specifically, since the politically and ethically invested sites of rhetorical production prompt theory to formally consider "the various

1 In his introduction to David W. Smit's The End of Composition Studies, Doug Hesse points out how this ethic of guarantees fundamentally affects the signifier composition. He writes: "I was reluctant to use composition because the term often tends to designate a narrow and artificial range of writing. This range might be circularly described as 'the kind of writing done in composition courses' or better, as those features of academic discourse that can (1) abstracted and generalized…and (2) taught somewhat respectably in one to two semesters" (x). As Hesse's argument interestingly points out, the signifier composition frequently denotes a particular type of self-referential ideological control that orients all investigations of writing around disciplinary conceptions of legitimacy. At the same time, however, this conception of ideological control does not go far enough. It is not that composition, as some kind of pseudo-Master signifier, definitively determines what can count as writing. Rather, it is that the logic of repetition called theory is eventually discerned as a particular identity (composition) via chance contextual overlap. The differences here are subtle. In the latter, the kind of writing called theory is only recognized insofar as it overlaps with a particular identity called composition, whereas in the former, the signifier composition solely engenders a determinate ideological code.

interests of the nation and mainstream culture…where the ethical and moral values of [composition studies] students and teachers are constantly challenged or reinforced," ethics cannot solely be a decontextualized, ideological principle (Hardin 60). Rather than postulating a quantifiable moral, the term *ethics* suggests a practical, and sometimes pragmatic, discursive orientation towards questions or economies of value. In the act of rhetorical production, writers and writing do not just reflect on, say, current cultural arguments about university education; they instead reflexively engage, revise, and sometimes invent different educational criteria, scenarios, and values. More importantly, as the situatedness of rhetoric and writing help make clear, the term *ethics* also denotes a critical position where situations can be changed or politicized accordingly. For Hardin, this critical position conceives *ethics* as an "open-ended critique" (64) where composition studies

> abandon[s] instrumentalist views of language and promote[s] the critical questioning of how discourse conventions and genres reinforce institutional, cultural, and individual power relations. Additionally, it would seem that teachers and scholars… should seek to examine how those ideological values are resisted or accepted by individuals and groups of individuals and the ethical questions these activities raise. (67)

There are two main facets worth noting here. First, *ethics* is not a relative term, but a constitutive consideration that is always bound up with both the exegesis and logic of discourse conventions. This constitutive dimension is what makes the postmodern approach pragmatic and critical: it is never simply a question of language's role in rhetorical production, but precisely how language's invested logics or positions create particular values and power relations for rhetorical production. Language, in other words, is never ethically innocent or a simple medium; rather, it establishes the ethical conditions for particular values and/or particular power relations. At the same time,

however, *ethics* suggests a recursive *site* of ideological contention. As a site of an open-ended critique, language's various ideological formations should be rigorously questioned, specifically insofar as these formations signify particular—if not new—ethical concerns and vice-versa. In addition to the context-sensitive, politically invested, and recursive demands of language, ethics thereby mandates different constitutive concerns and different questions. If *ethics* is an open-ended critique, then it signals a reflexive position by which a loose association or aggregation of contextually invested discourse conventions are paradigmatically negotiated and evaluated.

This invested ethical aggregate is often cited as the signature connection between writing and a postmodern ethics. Hardin points out how this open-ended critical approach realizes the contingency of writing and theory because both must constantly confront ideological and logical differences. If writing occurs in an public, inscriptive, and politicized economy, then "texts and discourse are ideological arenas where values are continually worked out intertextually in a ceaseless encounter with the Other whose trace is in the texts we read and who we construct in the texts we write" (Hardin 71). Through genres and particular discourse positions, what is called *writing* posits the material and ethical conditions for an economy of values that intertextually shifts, stretches, circulates, and reformulates from context to context. In such a view, an economy of values happens, but cannot happen in spite of the invested material and ethical sites of that particular economy. This economic plasticity, as Hardin rightly points out, thereby becomes the horizon by which writing and theory connect, if for no other reason than because they must tarry with the politicized materiality and contingency of every inscriptive moment. To be sure, it is in these very contingencies that the open-

ended capacity of a postmodern ethics lies. In the intertextual economies of a postmodern ethics, writing and theory can offer speculative and inventive encounters that resist "reification of ideological values…a critical awareness of interestedness of discourse conventions, and the ethical responsibilities of situated writers and readers in their discursive encounters with the Other" (Hardin 74). In the postmodern milieu, such theoretical possibilities suggest that *writing* never knows what will change from moment to moment, so any inscriptive economy—intertextual or not—must look to contingency (and alterity) as its theoretical vanguard. What grounds the connection between a postmodern ethics and writing, then, is an encounter with the Other—the contextually-based, particular differences that makes each inscriptive moment a unique repetition. As such, the postmodern relationship between *ethics* and *writing* is always an intertextual confrontation with substantive differences between material and rhetorical formations.

However, and even though this conception of ethics considers ideological alterity an important factor in every theoretical endeavor, it often limits the discipline's ability to invent new, speculative theoretical alternatives. This is mostly because alterity is not articulated as an ethical or even logical condition as much as it is a formal requirement. Consider, for instance, how Myrna Harrienger & Nan Uber-Kellogg's "An Ethics of Difference" theorizes alterity. Following Kenneth Burke's and Mikhail Bakhtin's rhetorical theories, they advocate an ethics of writing that envisions alterity as a theoretical principle. The goal of writing and writing education, they claim, should be the "active understanding of difference of the other," where theoretical dynamics "[create] an ethical space that is also an action, and bridges the radical distance between self and other. It

is ethical because it is directed to the good of the other" (Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg 101; 96). Though alterity may ground this ethics of writing, it does little to enforce the radical negotiations a postmodern ethics requires. In the two-part process, Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg posit, theory's first responsibility is to create the logic by which what is called *alterity* can be circulated and ultimately appropriated. Yet this does not mean that theory provides an encounter with alterity—theory, that is, does not force writing formations to recognize their contingent make-up. Rather, an active understanding *of* alterity turns it into a conceptual and ethical commodity. In such a scenario, commodification happens when theory acts in alterity's interest, or insofar as theory "*bridges* the radical distance between self and other." Here, the exchange between self and Other make alterity a rhetorical concept. If the self and Other are to connect in some meaningful way, it is only through understanding or knowing that alterity is the ultimate goal of any theoretical act. But this also to say that alterity circulates as a concept as long as theory creates commensurate spaces for substantively different material/rhetorical formations to amiably connect. Indeed, as Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg see it, creating this amiable connection is precisely theory's most ethical act. If theory is ethical, it will make alterity an explicit conceptual concern in inscriptive considerations—theory will, so to speak, produce the means by which alterity can ensure "the good of the other." There is a strict dialectical logic at work here that should not be missed. Like the concept of alterity, there is no encounter with the Other as limitation of intertextual economy. Instead, the Other is already articulated as a foundational concept for theory to consider prior to the fact. As long as theory produces a space that formally and programmatically considers the wellbeing of the Other, it has acted in an ethical

manner. Formal ethical respect for the concept of alterity, then, is the exegetical focus and goal of any theory of writing.

It is worth noting how ideologically prevalent and convincing such an ethics of alterity is. In some of the most radical rhetorical and pedagogical theory, alterity is unequivocally asserted as the ideological master-signifier of both ethical action and theoretical logic. In Noah De Lissovoy & Peter McLaren's "Toward a Contemporary Philosophy of Praxis," alterity is not so much of a theoretical invention as it is an uncontested ideological value. In their Gramscian "philosophy of praxis," theory produces a real-world space "for [agents'] autonomous intervention…in the process of education" when institutions relinquish ideological authority (De Lissovoy & McLaren 177). Once this ideological authority is removed, "it becomes possible for this space to be invaded by the imagination of [agents], with all the risks involved" (De Lissovoy & McLaren 177). Certainly, the focus in this "philosophy of praxis" is to change the epistemological and social possibilities for rhetorical/educational theory and action. When the regulatory force of ideology ceases to determine the logic and/or social space in which agents can think and act, a void opens up and makes *thinking* and *acting* primarily the responsibility of the agents involved. Consequently, the social space—including any and all ideological logics—must be thought (or imagined) anew by those same agents. And it is exactly this epistemological and rhetorical freedom, De Lissovoy & McLaren argue, that makes a "philosophy of praxis" such a powerful ethical practice. "In the field of education and elsewhere," they write, "only an equally flexible and imaginary praxis, encompassing moments of consolidation and evasion with the process of producing a new sociality, can adequately confront the hypercontrol and

repression of the present moment" (De Lissovoy & McLaren 179). Thus, as long as a "philosophy of praxis" dialectically opens a critical space for the delimitation of ideological authority and agent autonomy, theory and writing have the opportunity to create better, more ethical conditions for the future.

But, like Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg's ethics of alterity, this "philosophy of praxis" uses the logical and social capacity for alterity as a theoretical and ideological vanguard. As De Lissovoy & McLaren point out, when the prevailing ideological authority loses its ability to determine *thinking* and *acting*, agents must produce new, more organically representative logics for the social space at hand. But the conceptualization is perhaps the most problematic here. If space is represented as a place where an ideological authority and agents dialectically organize what is possible in a given situation, alterity is not a constitutive dimension of ideological logic as much as it is a particularized strategy or methodology. A principle of alterity, that is, dialectically oversees and gives meaning to the conceptual exchange between ideological authority and resistant agent. Unfortunately, this implies that alterity is kept on conceptual reserve and, instead of substantively reformulating theoretical articulations, is deployed in situations where it is most advantageous. In the same vein, when conceptualized alterity defines freedom as a formal possibility for various agents' imaginations to rethink the social sphere, ethics is a matter of conceptual equilibrium. Similar to Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg's ethics of difference, a "philosophy of praxis's" ideological authority and agent are formal considerations in every theoretical and written economy. Accordingly, when the theoretical and political goal of every instance in a "philosophy of praxis" is to produce a forceful, democratic, and representative social

space of free exchange, ethics acts as the nominal regulation of that very space. In De Lissovoy & McLaren's conception, for instance, this nominal regulation is not only apparent in the definitive qualities of "freedom," but is also recognizable in the absence of any ethical countermeasure. "A philosophy of praxis," that is, does not include any means to ensure that agents' imagination will not reconstitute ideological logics just as repressive as former configurations. As such, neither ideological authority nor agent can be construed as the Other who traces and is traced in the open-ended critical approach called *ethics*. To be sure, if a "philosophy of praxis" demonstrates anything, it is that such engagements with *ethics* are not really inventive, speculative encounters with alternative logics as much as they are concerted efforts to merely include the Other.

Yet this is not to say that alterity is the problem per se, but that composition studies' ideological reliance on minimal differences as ethical mandate is. Obviously, theorizing writing within an ethical or recuperative horizon severely restricts inquiries and theoretical productions to a closed circulation. As the aforementioned treatments make clear, ethics requires that *theory* consider and use alterity as a formal ideological concept. Theory can only be "right," it can only be accepted as theory, as long as it is conceived of and practiced in a certain way. This, and not the critical, open-ended approach, is the morality that governs the identity, methods, and uses of theory. Put another way: ethics is not an integrated approach or position; rather, it is the principle that validates any act of theory. But this is also to say that these approaches focus too much on what a theory *can* do with the concept and not what conditions or logics it makes possible. Composition studies, in other words, has become too reliant on what a postmodern ethics provides to the detriment of the differences a theoretical invention

outlines. If composition studies' goal is to theorize a definitive alterity, it will need to think *ethics* insofar as it can disregard ideological interests and think a new theoretical logic.

Beyond Theoretical Production and Ideological Certainty

Part of the difficulty in using alterity as a philosophical principle is that it makes ethics nothing more than commentary on theoretical and inscriptive logics. In both Harrienger & Uber-Kellogg's and De Lissovoy & McLaren's respective accounts, this reduction is signaled by the ability to produce a space in which alterity validates theoretical approaches. An "ethics of difference" and a "philosophy of praxis," for example, solidify their theoretical logics when they formally include the Other in every inscriptive instance. Unlike the open-ended critical approach Hardin outlined, their Other does not confront writing, theory, or even ethics with any radical alterity. Rather, it signifies an expected moment. When the Other has arrived, difference will be ensured, and the ideological relationships between writing and theory will proceed consistently and coherently. In place of an open-ended approach, a conceptualized alterity uses ethics as a purely ideological mark.

Yet, such overreliance on a logical formality signifies something far more problematic. By relinquishing an open-ended critical approach for a reified concept, ethics asks theories of writing to follow a logic that *must produce and produce alone*. Theory, that is, must not only attend to the discipline's various ideological interests, but should also create the ideological logic of alterity by which such interests are invoked and secured. Regrettably, this means that ethics primarily validates an economy of diverse concepts and/or philosophic values that is blind to its own ideological coordinates. In Patricia Bizzell's "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies," for example, the value of Marxist thought lies in its ability to offer better, more nuanced conceptions

of social analysis for the “analysis of language use in the construction and control of language” (56). The immediate disciplinary interest here is how composition studies can use Marxist ideas to ground both theoretical and real rhetorical situations. But these ideas are of disciplinary interest—that is, they are ethical—only if they produce or improve the ideological values and methods composition studies already advocates. This logic of (disciplinary) production is perhaps most apparent in Bizzell’s appropriation of the term *resistance*. Bizzell points out that Marxist thought finds in Henry Giroux’s idea of *resistance* a subtle and fertile ground for opposition strategies. Specifically, when behavior “springs initially from anger, boredom, despair, or other painful emotions aroused in students and teachers in institutional education…it can thus become the basis for further action” (Bizzell 61). As Giroux sees it, *resistance* is just as much of a material embodiment as it is an intellectual concept. Though resistance might first take form as a pure emotional reaction, it can be reformulated as the impetus for directed action. However, re-envisioning resistance as a material experience also actively changes the very role emotional behavior plays in the concept and act of real resistance. Far from being a superfluous reaction to injustice, emotion articulates an affective disconnect that fundamentally inaugurates any act of resistance. *Resistance*, in other words, is rather a contrarian, affective moment that far exceeds the more traditional interpretations of collective opposition.

For Bizzell, this idea of *resistance* accentuates how Marxist theory can help produce new or better rhetorical opportunities for the ideology called *composition studies*. Following Giroux’s example, Marxist theory can intervene in hegemonic logic and rewrite the possibilities of a given rhetorical situation:

> Marxist analysis can help us take [a] more complicated and generative view of contradictions; it can teach us to understand their origins in ideology and to imagine alternatives that break the rules of the current social game. Thus, we gain richer possibilities for studying the cultural elements in language-using processes, and we enlarge our theoretical perspective from the social units of the classroom. (Bizzell 66)

Though *resistance* is not an explicit analytical point, it does implicitly affect the way composition studies conceives a rhetorical situation. In the first instance, *resistance* demonstrates how every rhetorical act is really a politicized situation, where the logics of any language-using process can be played out and critiqued. But *resistance* also suggests creating new theoretical opportunities and alternatives. It is only after situating Marxist theory squarely in composition studies' ideological coordinates that its method and knowledges provide advantageous, ethically sensible ideas. Accordingly, the value of Marxist analysis lies precisely in its rhetorically advantageous position. By offering a different, more rigorous way of thinking and acting in the world, Marxist theory produces methods and knowledges that provide advantageous positions from which to think language-using processes. If *resistance* means anything for the study of language-using processes, it is that these processes offer a theoretically nuanced and valuable certainty to purely ideological concerns.

Perhaps the most important thing to note here is precisely how such conceptions of theory are supported by a strict ethical ideology. Marxist theory, *resistance,* and even the critical possibilities disclosed by Bizzell's analysis, must prove their appropriate worth to be theorized at all. These theoretical events, in other words, are *valuable* (in the strict economic sense of the term) because they offer composition studies theory an ideologically sanctioned position and logic. Unlike Giroux's conception of *resistance*—which sacrifices the methods of traditional Marxist theory when theorizing affective

behavior—Bizzell's conception of *resistance* compliments (disciplinary) heuristic processes already in place. This is what makes her approach an instance of a logic of production: the effect of theory's intervention is already accounted for because it is certain that it will produce something—a method or knowledge, for instance. And precisely because it produces something, it works within and for composition studies' ideological logics and will not interrogate the ontology of that productive impetus. It will instead always produce an ideological product and an ideological certainty, and, because it is creates both of those things, it will always be ethical. *Resistance* can resist ideological logics and open new rhetorical opportunities, but does not produce opportunities disadvantageous to the ideology called *composition studies*.

To be sure, this logic of production detrimentally contributes to the way composition studies generally conceives of and interacts with critical theory. As Bizzell's analysis of *resistance* demonstrated, composition studies approaches critical theory in terms of the latter's ideological import and, as a result, frequently negates a critical theory's unique inscriptive economy— or, for the purposes here, its alterity— for a generalized, appropriated and useful concept. Gary Olson's theory of ideology critique, for instance, employs critical theory as a revisionary methodology. He argues in "Ideological Critique in Rhetoric and Composition" that the discipline must constantly revitalize its critical tools beyond "the concomitant focus on the interrelatedness of discourse and ideology" (Olson 83). Like Giroux, Olson believes highlighting the affective dimension of ideology can help ideological critique stay a viable and useful disciplinary tool. In the work of Lynn Worsham, Olson finds a type of "pedagogical violence…that is especially fruitful for the creation of a more developed, richer form of

ideological critique" (Olson, "Ideological Critique" 87). This pedagogical violence illustrates how ideology is not

> a simple matter of 'forcing' someone to think a certain way. The pedagogical system works to sway individuals to cathect to the very ideas and structures they are being taught, to internalize them not only intellectually but emotionally, thereby causing individuals to embrace the authoritative, dominant world view as their own and to believe that adopting such a world view was a matter of their own 'choice', their own free will. (Olson, "Ideological Critique" 87-88)

Ideology affects more than cognitive and material ways of being; indeed, at its most effective, it even persuades through affective force. The task of ideology critique, then, is to realize the way emotions convince both thought and action to particular, unjust logics. But emotion can also help ideological critique account for and produce changes in its own constitution. Olson notices this opportunity and consequently suggests that "far from being detached from real-world exigencies of the classroom, far from being the preoccupation of a self-serving elite… this kind of [ideological critique] can revitalize composition theory and teaching at a time that we're in dire need of it" ("Ideological Critique" 89). Emotions produce an analytical currency that can frequently revitalize not just ideological critique, but also composition studies' theoretical conceptions and practices.

Though a critical theory of affection is heralded as theoretical salvation, it still acts as a prescriptive concept. Consider, for example, how Olson's theory circulates emotion as a derivative, ideological sign. Emotion does not affect and change the general coordinates of ideological critique like, say, Giroux's idea of *resistance*; it does not force and restructure ideology critique itself as a unique moment of inscription. Emotion is rather a moment *for something*: it is an emotion, a concept, for ideological critique, and by proxy, for the ideology called *composition studies*. This dependent, conceptualized

use is most visible in Olson's "revitalization" of both ideological critique and composition studies theory. While such "revitalizations" certainly suggest a revision of disciplinary interests, they also point to a generalizing of inscriptive moments where the importation and appropriation of diverse theories is both theoretical impetus and ethical imperative. This makes the act of *theorizing*—intervening, inventing, and speculating about various moments of inscription—less important than prescriptively assuring or *importing* critical theories. Of course, such prescriptive importation means a few things. In Bizzell's and Olson's respective analyses, it shows that composition studies theory ideologically engenders a plug-and-play conceptual system. Composition studies theory must *produce* something that is valuable to the discipline, so it reduces the inscriptive alterity of other critical theories to a singular, prescriptive ideological logic. But it also demonstrates how a logic of production makes theory primarily parasitic. For composition studies theory, and perhaps writing theory in general, to substantively intervene in and redirect, collate, and aggregate various inscriptive economies, it must force critical theory to play its predetermined game. Theory therefore cannot think on its own and it cannot create substantive, alternative theoretical logics. Rather, it can only synthesize ready-made concepts into a generalized, familiar economy in hopes of a few more moments of relevance. To paraphrase Hegel's famous decree, if "the real is rational and the rational is real," then perhaps composition studies' mantra might claim that the "ethical is the ideologically prescriptive and the ideologically prescriptive is ethical," even if that prescription masquerades as alterity.[2]

2 See Hegel, G. W. F. The Philosophy of Right, especially "Author's Preface," xix.

In *Bound by Recognition,* theorist Patchen Markell argues that the ethical mandate for theory to produce unequivocally is the result of a precise logical disjuncture. As he sees it, an ethical logic that requires compulsive production misconstrues the relationship between action and identity. Markell terms this misunderstanding "a politics of recognition," and points out that such a logic "demand[s] that others recognize us as who we *already* really are" because identities are treated "as antecedent facts about people that govern their action" (13-14). Identity is therefore a conceptual given that indelibly precedes any particular use and, in turn, determines what actions can be taken. Consider, for instance, how action and identity interact in M. Karen Powers and Catherine Chaput's "'Anti-American Studies' in the Deep South: Dissenting Rhetorics, the Practice of Democracy, and Academic Freedom in Wartime Universities." At the outset of the Iraq War, activist fliers appeared around their campus describing the English department as liberally biased and waging a "jihad against U.S. conservative interests" (Powers & Chaput 674). In their efforts to make sense of the fliers, they theorized them "as a means of exploring the work done in [a particular situation], the desires that frame expectations of higher education, and the fear that emerges when critical inquiry moves beyond those well-trodden expectations and into assessments of the national and international spheres" (Powers & Chaput 675). By treating these fliers as a volatile rhetorical practice, they were better able to understand what constitutes cultural and ethical differences (their identity), and consequently, how those instances toil for and against the larger idea of democracy they held at that time (their actions). In Powers and Chaput's ethical logic, then, differences are recognized, and because they are recognized, they engender particular interpretations and actions.

Yet, as Markell points out, this causal relationship between identity and action is untenable because a politics of recognition "conceives of injustice as the unequal distribution of a good called 'recognition'" and thereby treats "recognition as a thing of which one has more or less, rather than as a social interaction that can go well or poorly in various ways" (18). The important thing to note here is the connection between *recognition* and injustice. Here, when something is judged as unethical or unjust, it is because a particular inscriptive economy has less of a product than it desires and/or needs. At no point in this conception can what is termed *ethics* interrogate or approach *recognition's* distributive logic. This suggests a few things. First, it points out that fidelity to a politics of recognition equates ethical action. Second, and perhaps more importantly, *recognition* suggests that theory must primarily establish both the conditions of ideological incorporation, and the methods by which such incorporation is valued. In Chaput and Powers's case, *recognition* limits their ability to forge—or even permit—the radical alterity that is often associated with the term *democracy*. By questioning the appropriateness and function of educational boundaries, they promote a politics of recognition because they ask theory (and alterity) to identify with and participate in already established democratic processes, i.e., interrogating the rhetorical effects of conservative discourse in the wake of the Iraq War. But, at the same time, simply analyzing rhetorical effects according to their potency misses Markell's larger point. Theorizing democratic access, cultural identity, or hegemonic recognition is not enough to right injustices because such theoretical interests do not attend to *how* such injustices continually occur; that is, they do not attend to the organizational logic of *democratic* injustices. If a logic is to think the radical alterity that is the contingency of an

inscriptive moment, the ideological concept and ethical goal (*democracy*) must itself be subject to methodological consideration and critique. However, in a politics of recognition, the ideological concept and ethical goal attempt to *correct*—and I cannot stress Markell's commodity description enough here— the "unequal distribution" of democratic recognition. Because this theory primarily interprets and corrects a ready-made democratic horizon, it can only regulate—not change—the orientations of that paradigm. Much like the ideological appropriations of Bizzell and Olson, this theory merely offers interpretations, revisions, and reinforcements of a particular ideological foundation.

In contradistinction a politics of recognition, Markell stresses what he calls "a politics of acknowledgement." Instead of affirming identities (or theories) as legitimate, a politics of acknowledgement "consists in simply being treated as a co-participant in an ongoing political process, in being heard and responded to, even when the response to one's claims is partly or wholly negative" (Markell 33). At first glance, a politics of acknowledgement seems to mirror a politics of recognition's economical coordinates. To be sure, both approaches ask theory to create an ethical space for better, more responsible theorizing. However, in a politics of acknowledgement, theory does not circulate ready-made concepts like alterity or the Other in its effort to devise better, more ethical theoretical conditions. These concepts instead work with and collaborate in each political—or, for the purposes here, inscriptive—process to develop a generalized, recursive ethical logic. And it is in this cooperative dynamic that a politics of recognition distinguishes itself from a politics of acknowledgement. Whereas a politics of recognition treats every theoretical instance as more or less capable of distributing the

good called *recognition*, a politics of acknowledgement grounds itself in the recursive, inscriptive moment. For Markell, this means that "acknowledgment is directed at the basic conditions of one's own existence and activity, including, crucially, the *limits* of 'identity' as a ground of action, limits which arise out of our constitutive vulnerability to the unpredictable reactions and responses of others" (36). Identity, then, cannot be the horizon by which ethics and conceptualized theories of writing intersect because such intersections are fundamentally mistaken. They are, in Markell's words, fundamentally limited.

Though Markell's theory of a politics of acknowledgement is concerned with political action, it nonetheless presents a productive economic metaphor for ethical approaches. Acknowledgement, for instance, forgoes representation and instead works on the level of inscriptive circulation. In this context, the term *acknowledgement* pushes the open-ended conception of ethics towards its logical, inventive conclusion. In his vision of democracy, Markell not only points out how contingency and reflexivity condition every ethical and political moment, but also how such moments are constitutive in their own right:

> [Acknowledgement means] defining democratic citizenship not as the self-control of the people, but as a matter of taking part in the activity of politics, where taking part can refer not only to participation in authoritative deliberative and decision-making bodies, but also to a range of unofficial activities, both quotidian and extraordinary, through which authoritative acts are subjected to the unpredictable responses of those whose lives they touch. (188)

There are a few things to notice here. Certainly, this is a process constantly in flux, where each political interaction is precisely that—an interaction. Acknowledgment does not mean the control of government (or ideology) by a particular people or politic as much as it means articulating various encounters in light of the unpredictability that is

the activity of politics. In the composition studies landscape, such acknowledgement shows that ethics must connect to both *theory* and *writing* on their terms—that is, insofar as *theory* and *writing* are singular, material events that can engender a variety of unpredictable moments. As composition studies' open-ended approach, then, ethics would not be able to secure a particular ideological conception if it wishes to remain faithful to writing and theory because such conceptions constrain the inventive, speculative dimension indicative of both.

Perhaps more importantly, a politics of acknowledgement does not necessarily champion prescriptive theoretical economies. Instead, it interrogates logics of representation, including their circulation of concepts and their theoretical conditions. By merely participating in the political "process," *acknowledgment* fundamentally changes the circulations and conditions under or through which the "process" is articulated. Accordingly, with such fundamental changes foregrounding a politics of acknowledgement, it might be more productive to call its ethical approach a project rather than a program. As a project, a politics of acknowledgement outlines a general approach via its inscriptive interventions, thereby forsaking its ability to produce anything systematic. Or, perhaps more accurately, as a project, a politics of acknowledgement outlines a new ethical approach: *an ethics without ideological certainty*.

Toward a New Ethics of Writing Theory: Philosophical and Material Considerations

The politics of acknowledgment's ability to reflexively interrupt and violate its own economic circulations puts composition studies' relationship to ethics in an interesting position. For a politics of acknowledgment, what is called *ethics* cannot ideologically

legitimate what counts as theory (theory's identity) and what theory can do (its value) because such roles are irrelevant to an inscriptive economy. Though this suggests quite a few things, for the purposes here it means that rather than guaranteeing a theory's productive worth, ethics instead signals a fidelity to the configuration of each contingent interaction between theory and writing. Consider, for example, how a politics of acknowledgement's ethics differs from Hardin's open-ended postmodern approach. With the open-ended approach, ethics tries to better understand—critique—how language helps create invested discourse positions and how to adequately resist those ideological formations. In a politics of acknowledgement, however, there is no impetus to formally recognize and recuperate the force of language (and theory) for a particular ideological purpose because knowledge is superfluous. Instead, a politics of acknowledgement conceives *ethics* as purely interaction, where the mere fact *that* writing and theory connect in some substantive way is more important than what that connection produces or circulates.

At the same time, a politics of acknowledgement emphasizes the affective dimensions of ethics. When ethics forgoes a recuperative guarantee, it works as an active force that helps configure what theory is and what it does to writing. This active force is most apparent in Markell's description of democratic processes: democracy suggests that a "taking part" in the process is fundamental to the ontology signaled by *demos.* If "taking part," if engaging in unpredictable interactions, does not risk the constitutive dimensions of the body politic, what is called *democracy* has departed from *demos*. Likewise, as an active force, ethics's affective dimension risks every interaction between ideological certainty and theory. In a politics of acknowledgement, then, *ethics*

involves interrupting, violating, and reorienting theory's ideological call from a logic of production to a position of functional disruption, where the substantive effects and productions of writing are no longer the horizon through which either theory or writing is thought. Indeed, by reflexively affecting economies of writing, what is called *ethics* signals not an approach, but a theoretical connection or logic that realizes the contingency and unpredictability in each and every moment of theory and writing. Put a different way: a politics of acknowledgement makes *politicization* theory's ethical impetus and horizon.

Markell makes clear how a politics of acknowledgment lends itself to a conception of theory that is more or less indifferent to its subsequent effects: theoretical processes and encounters happen, sometimes quite well, sometimes quite poorly. At its most basic, theory's results or products do not matter as much as its ability to realize the contingent connections between inscription and thought. However, as Žižek notes, it also implies that theory's function becomes one of pure *politicization*. For Žižek, *politicization* happens the moment contingency becomes an explicit factor in theorizing any indifferent inscriptive economy:

> [I]t is not enough to ask how a certain theory (or art) positions itself with regard to social struggles—we should also ask how it actually functions in these very struggles. In sex, the true hegemonic attitude is not patriarchical repression, but free promiscuity; in art, provocations in the style of the notorious "Sensation" exhibitions *are* the norm, the example of art fully integrated into the establishment. (*Revolution at the Gates* 169)

Since a politics of acknowledgement dictates both a logical indifference to and an engagement in unpredictable interactions, it has no ideological guarantee. There is, so to speak, no formal ideological institution that legitimizes it or its theoretical basis. Instead, there is only an indifferent logic manifested through a contingent inscriptive

economy. This unpredictability, as Žižek argues, is what changes theory's function from a strict critical commentary to an affective intervention. With contingency, theory can double back on itself and think the substantive differences that alterity affords—theory, that is, can think not just what knowledge it promotes but also the constitutive role it plays in that very knowledge formation. Accordingly, in this indifference to particular ideological interactions and effects, theory emphasizes not what the connections *promote* but what they *are*, and *that* they form and interact in these particular, multiple ways. Consequently, theory is always contingent, always able to change, always iterable—in short, it is always *politicized*. And it is this indifferent, contingent dynamic, Žižek maintains, that prompts theory to realize that "words are never 'only words'; they matter because they define the contours of what we can do" (*First as Tragedy* 109). Or, in other words, theory is only insofar as it articulates its inscriptive, *politicized* potential.

This politicized, affective connection between theory and ethics outlines a few ideological implications. Foremost, *politicization* makes ethics jettison the privileged and explicit ideological orientations that composition studies often advocates in favor of the speculative dimensions of theory. The term *speculative* plays on what I understand as the theoretical coordinates of Žižek's critique against "liberal-democratic fundamentalism." This paradigm, he maintains, articulates convincing strategies and politics for ethical responsibility, but still limits theory to a rational, revisionary basis that risks very little. This limitation is especially apparent when considering how these strategies' and politics' methodologies help construct a hegemony of minimal change. He writes

> [T]he moment we seriously question the existing liberal consensus, we are accused of abandoning scientific objectivity for outdated ideological

> positions. This is the point on which one cannot and should not concede: today, actual freedom of thought means freedom to question the prevailing liberal-democratic 'post-ideological' consensus—or it means nothing. (Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates* 168)

As an inversion of Karl Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Žižek argues that theory has no political, cultural, or ideological allegiance outside of its own invested, self-reflexive capacities. Yet, this also suggests that theory's capacities continually change through invested speculation. Determining ethical priorities first and devising strategies to meet them is neither critical nor theoretical; in fact, it is a practical exercise entirely commensurate with ideological hegemony. Theory should instead continually return to itself and rethink its own conditions and limits, including how it might work with composition studies' cherished ideological coordinates and values. Theory will not revise what composition studies calls *ethics* as much as it will continually *reinvent* its methodological conditions and coordinates each and every time it happens. This collapsed, continued reinvention of theory's processes and goals is precisely the speculative aspect of critical theory.

For the purposes at hand, this speculative dimension implies that if composition studies is to think the connection between theory and ethics without commodifying this connection as an ideological guarantor, nothing—methodologically, pedagogically, politically, culturally, and ethically—should be off limits to theoretical speculation, including any ideological presuppositions about what theory does or how it is used. Accordingly, rather than focusing on traditional ethical matters of, say, ideological inclusion or access, theory will critically redirect and think its own *logical* or *organizational* capacities. For instance, the disciplinary relationships between knowledge production, communication, and political change will not be the only subjects

of critical analysis and theoretical speculation; rather, as a speculative, inscriptive juncture, theory's own invested logics will be continually reinvented as they are strategized. In Juha Suoranta & Tere Vadén's article "From Social to Socialist Media: The Critical Potential of the Wikiworld," such speculative logics make the theoretical relationship between information and history radically democratic. Focusing on wikis and Wikipedia in general, they claim that the history and discussion pages found in most wikis "provide a unique perspective on how the content has been created, criticized, and cooperated on. The existence of the 'edit' button already indicates a subtle but profound epistemological shift: knowledge comes with a past and a future; it is not immutable" (Suoranta & Vadén 148). Those things that have been always suspected—that knowledge is socially constructed, that writing plays an important role in knowledge production, and that thought is dependent on space and time—are made manifest by this technology's capacity to make the contingency of history and knowledge evident through writing. In this view, theory does not inform ethics—it *is* ethics. Since wiki writing technologies economize the theoretical articulations and connections between the concepts of *democracy*, *information*, and *history*, these concepts cease being formal concepts and instead find ethical functionality as fluid, malleable inscriptive instances. As Suoranta & Vadén see it, theory's speculative dimension realizes these terms new functionality as politicized interactions, where theory must make its *own* logics, its *own* knowledge through this technology regardless of ideological or theoretical import. Of course, this is just another way of saying that without the capacity to question what makes *anything* relevant, valuable, or more

importantly, possible, theory's relationship to *ethics* ceases being a worthwhile connection.

Yet, at the same time, such efforts to "rethink" *ethics* in terms of theory's speculative element remain undeveloped, mostly because they consistently apply static ideological concepts to an ever-changing, post-ideological paradigm. Consider, for instance, what Suoranta & Vadén understand as the next logical step in using new media technologies to resist an ideology's appropriative processes. After arguing that "wikis are lived, educationally-laden social situations" that participate in a fundamentally different logic, they determine that real ethical advances must appeal to the more traditional values of critical theory, specifically the means to *produce* an accessible democracy. They claim, "in the future, the initiative could be to give more and more to the hands of the learners, to the people, and their participatory cooperation. Real advances in the area of digital literacy can be only taken only if the power to learn is given to educative communities which can contribute locally and globally" (Suoranta & Vadén 160). The technocrats who control the means of information and knowledge must turn over their productive power to the people, and the people must then use this information to create their own modes of information, and by extension, modes of learning and writing. Concerns for disciplinary concepts like agency, therefore, remain the fundamental ethical logic, rather than, say, the new organizations and relationships between *writing* and *theory* that made such considerations possible to begin with.

Admittedly, as Suoranta & Vadén's mistake rightly demonstrates, part of the difficulty with theory's speculative capacity is that it requires *ethics* to be thought in terms of provisional, inscriptive logics that must not be conveyed as more than chance

material interactions. This is a subtle point about *ethics's* relationship to the contingency underlining every inscriptive act. For if the ideology called *composition studies* is to acknowledge the connection between *ethics* and theory's speculative capacity, how can it do so without instituting contingency (and alterity) as an intentional ideological or theoretical guarantee?

Like Markell and Žižek, Thomas Rickert takes such questions of constitution to mean that if *ethics* and theory's speculative capacity do connect, it can only happen as an act of inscriptive continuation. *Ethics*, that is, cannot circulate as an intentional point of departure and as an inscriptive logic's constitutive factor at the same time. *Ethics*, he claims, becomes an intentional point of departure "the minute someone says that s/he has acted responsibly, the minute someone relinquishes the specter of doubt, the space of irresponsibility is opened" (Rickert 19). Echoing Hardin's critique of ethics-as-evaluation, an intentional *ethics* pronounces a definitive theoretical and rhetorical—if not logical—condition. For Rickert, however, an intentional *ethics* is not necessarily "irresponsible" because it denies the contingency of any theoretical speculation or writing act. It is instead "irresponsible" because it requires an answer to an unanswerable inscriptive ambiguity. As he sees it, an intentional ethics outlines two notions of irresponsibility: one that dismisses ethical demands and one that follows the idea of "being nonconformist" (Rickert 19). Yet, this irresponsible decision does not outline how to decide between the two senses of irresponsibility, and it is left wondering if "even in deciding this—or, just as plausibly, in having it decided for or through us—[we are] thrown back into the domain of an 'ethics of decision'?" (Rickert 19). When *ethics* is intentional, it demarcates its interventions in a writing's logic and produces inscriptive

ambiguity. Ethical decisions interrupt inscriptive formations and offer different directions for those formations. To be sure, when *ethics* is solely conceived as either an open-ended approach or a politics of acknowledgement, it marks its intervention as both contingent and referential. But such demarcations are precisely the problem. By marking its intervention, *ethics* also localizes those contingent, referential changes as *particularized, definitive moments* in any writing economy. In Suoranta & Vadén's call for ideological access, for example, contingency is an intentional contingency for a particular moment and purpose—that is, for "the hands of the learners, the people"—rather than a general condition of a wiki writing economy. As a result, what is called *ethics* makes contingency intentional. Contingency can happen in some situations (like when deciding between dismissal and nonconformity—or even access), but not as a general inscriptive principle. Unfortunately, this also implies that an intentional *ethics*' "irresponsibility" is ultimately just as responsible as the "ethics of decision" it sought to escape.

Instead, Rickert capitalizes on theory's speculative dimension by figuring *ethics* as an inscriptive continuation. For Rickert, when theory can maintain a tension with the contingency of any writing situation, it forwards a speculative, inscriptive continuation as general *ethical* principle. This continuity, he suggests, can happen in many ways, but is most often employed through the idea of doubt. He writes, "doubt is one of the modalities that can lead us beyond critique toward, on the one hand, forms of working-through in which one develops sophisticated, comprehensive interpretive and productive approaches to texts, and on the other, forms of critical, ethical invention where skill greets a capacity for innovation, or even transgression" (Rickert 20). In this

view, doubt helps maintain an inscriptive continuation because it is a contingent, alternative principle that signals the reflexivity of not only a particular inscriptive moment (like sophisticated, comprehensive approaches), but also as a general condition of any writing economy (such as the connection between skill and capacity). It is this tension between the particular and the general that enables Rickert to carry doubt's consequences to their logical, inscriptive conclusion: "[Doubt] leaves us firmly in the realm of the probable, which is to say, on the ground where language and rhetoric come together. Nothing prevents us from *working towards…*It suggests that our rhetorical work is never done and that rhetoric will never be done with us" (213, italics added). As a generalized intervention, doubt helps demonstrate how a writing economy's contingent coordinates and subsequent logics can be the horizon by which an *ethics* is thought. This is precisely why the phrase *working towards* is so important in Rickert's formulation: by working towards the probable, *ethics* works concomitantly with theory's speculative gestures and makes what is inscriptively probable the best case scenario, a conjecture that may or may not happen either well or poorly.

At the same time, this focus on the probable still suppresses the more volatile inventions of a speculative, constitutive *ethics*. Rickert is right to point out the economical manner in which theory's speculative dimensions interact and affect moments of inscription, but, in many ways, his assertion of the probable makes writing's contingency a theoretical intent. Though doubt might situate theoretical opportunities where language and rhetoric come together, and though a working towards might engender conjectures, these connections nonetheless justify intentional theoretical coordinates. That is, by reducing the interaction between theory's speculative aspects

and *ethics* to the probable, Rickert's notion of *working towards* might acknowledge—in Markell's use of the term—contingency, but it does not embrace it. *Working towards* offers a best case scenario that is indeed the best case scenario, and the connection between *ethics* and theory should do everything it can to encourage that particular interaction with language and rhetoric. But if relegated to a best case scenario, contingency remains a useful, rhetorical point of departure for theoretical approaches, and not necessarily a condition of writing that theory must engage with in multiple ways in every inscriptive moment.

If Rickert's probable interaction goes too far (or perhaps not far enough), it is because it loses sight of how *ethics* is precisely a possibility, a contingent moment that cooperates with and for writing. *Possibility* is the key term here. As a mark of continuation between theory and inscription, *ethics* can only go well or poorly in a variety of ways: *ethics* cannot exceed writing's material horizon or the general movements thereof because it is a condition of inscriptive economies. As such, what composition studies calls *ethics* is a possibility of formation and nothing more. But this is also to say that the possibility of formation—of even inscriptive continuation—signals new, constitutive coordinates for the relationship between theory and *ethics*. Indeed, if considered alongside the continuity of writing's inscriptive horizon, *ethics'* venture is one that articulates its position as an epistemological, if not rhetorical, limitation. The possibility of formation, that is, suggests *that* writing can occur, can acknowledge, and can happen in a variety of ways, and that this inscriptive articulation is as far as the relationship between ethics and theory can go.

Yet, if *ethics* is precisely a possibility, this is also to say that it can only act *politically*. To be sure, as I mentioned above, politics in this context means more than resisting hegemonic language and identity by reworking ideological concepts or methods—it is never an issue of emphatically reasserting ready-made, disciplinarily recognized, polemical positions. Gaining ideological recognition or, say, including the Other in ideological formations is never the intent. Instead, the theoretical politics of the ethically possible demonstrates what Žižek calls "politics proper." He writes that "politics proper" is a movement in which "a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more, and starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space" (Žižek, *Ticklish Subject* 208). As a part of an ideological formation, a "politics proper" affects and restructures the ideological formation itself. "Politics proper," then, is a volatile and affective force more than an analytical position. Indeed, as Žižek illustrates through a reading of José Saramago's novel *Seeing,* the volatile force of a "politics proper" is its most discernable characteristic. When the novel's unnamed democratic city holds a general election, it finds that "more than 70 percent of the ballots cast have been left blank. Baffled by this apparent civic lapse, the government gives the citizenry a chance [to revote the following week]. The results are worse: now 83 percent of the ballots are blank" (Žižek, *Violence* 214). Though a "politics proper" can certainly testify to a few theoretical insights, it is important to note here how a particular demand articulates itself as the contingent condensation of a general ideological grammar. By not voting, voters do not just resist and politicize the individual ballot or local context/ideology, but rather strike at the constitutive dimensions of democracy itself. This is using democratic

processes to violate—that is, speculatively *politicize*—about new directions and logics of a democratic possibility. And since the absentee ballots forced a new vision on the social logic of democracy itself, they reconstitute the general dimensions of what can be possible in a democracy.

In a similar fashion, the *politicized* connection between an ethics of the possible and what is called *theory* cannot be conceived as an ideological strategy or guarantee—such a connection, to be blunt, does not "work towards" anything because it cannot be the means to an end. Rather, as the contingent condensation of a general ideological grammar, this *politicized* connection between theory and ethics is precisely an articulation of how possibility precedes and limits the contingent, inscriptive opportunities of any disciplinary ideology. The connection between theory and ethics, then, can only acknowledge the contingent conditions of any writing economy and nothing more. In such a situation, for instance, Rickert's ethics of probability—of *working towards*—would be rethought as purely contingent moments. Here, to rethink the deadlock of intentionality that a *working towards* presents, theory is realized not as ethical instances or projections that can go well or poorly, but as an inscriptive possibility, i.e. *that* these projections *can* go well or poorly. The notion of *working towards* is thereby reimagined not as an applicable probability, but as precise *ability*; as contingent, inscriptive speculations that may or may not produce subsequent theoretical and rhetorical effects. Of course, such theoretical emphases also suggest that a *politicized* connection between theory and ethics is really only a question of an inscriptive continuum. Writing, that is, might happen in a variety of ways, and it may or may not be "good" or "valuable," but it cannot determine its worth because it cannot

guarantee what it might do or make possible in the future. *Politicized* connections between theory and ethics can never exceed the moment of inscription—because the relationship between language and its use is the very ethical issue. *Politicized*, material speculations therefore really reconstitute the relationship between theory and its literal inscription as *the* horizon of *ethics*. And this is precisely what a *politicized* connection between theory and ethics means: that the possibility of continuous inscription is both the opportunity and limit of any ideological grammar; or, more simply, *that* writing can happen in a variety of ways.

Yet perhaps the most important point of a politicized connection between *theory* and *ethics* is that ethics works as a contingent, *theoretical* condition—and not as a prescriptive guarantee. Rather than developing a safe house of knowledge or incorporating an alternative Other into ideological ideas of identity and use, this more radical, politicized ethics constantly aims at theorizing *change*, and does so by constantly risking itself and its goals. At the same time, such a connection between *ethics* and *theory* would also suggest that composition studies disregard the immediate, pragmatic concerns of contemporary writing concepts and pedagogy for theories that can guarantee nothing. And that is precisely what *political* signifies here: not ideological accommodation, but continued, systemic, *reinventions*. It is in this sense that composition studies should understand what is possible within the confines of the relationship between *ethics* and *theory*: *ethics* does not denote acceptable heterogeneities, differential knowledges, or hybridities, but rather the very possibility of ideological and political (re)inscription.

CHAPTER 6
TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF INSCRIPTIVE MONSTROSITY

Chapter Four's discussion of the politicized connection(s) between theory and ethics hits on an important point: inscriptive contingency guarantees nothing but more inscriptive contingency; or even better, that theoretical change is the ethical condition for any ideological formation. This distinction is most apparent in the difference between an ethics of probability and an ethics of possibility. When the speculative, constitutive dimensions of the signifier *ethics* are thought according to their probable consequences and effects, inscriptive contingency is reduced to a calculated, intentional act. By contrast, an ethics of possibility cannot commit to any one particular ideological marker or rhetorical strategy because it is necessarily faithful to the various, multiple, and purely contingent assemblages of inscription. Writing, in other words, *happens*—sometimes quite well and sometimes quite poorly—and ethics can only acknowledge this happening as a possibility of material formation.

At the same time, *that* ethics and theory can connect means nothing if the horizons of their possible relationships frequently disregard the arbitrary, inscriptive assemblages of which both theory and ethics are a condition. As an ethics of probability demonstrates, asserting, directing, or strategizing ultimately functionalizes writing. But when both theory and ethics are conditions of writing, they are instead subject to the affective and speculative logics that coordinate the general movements of inscription. It is this slight distinction that makes *possibility* so important for contemporary composition studies' theories. Inscription happens and writing changes formations from moment to moment, but these changes only happen insofar as they are thought as a possibility. To think inscriptive happenings as anything less than contingent formations would be to

miss the non-communicative aspects of what is called *writing.* In a very specific way, then, the affective and speculative dimensions of writing maintain a strict tension with the contingency *possibility* introduces into any writing situation. Consequently, this makes what is inscriptively possible less a malleable, theoretical enterprise than a constitutive factor that serves as both theoretical impetus and limitation. For the purposes here, this really means that what is signified by *writing* is also what is theoretically possible given the contingent, material coordinates of the ideology called *composition studies*.

At heart, this is a pedagogical concern—if not intervention—if for no other reason than because the affective, inscriptive formations called *theory* change the things they theorize. To be sure, this concern should not foreground the discussion here because composition studies frequently associates writing with pedagogy, but rather because the relationships between theory, writing, and the concept *pedagogy* often foreground the inscriptive act. Susan Miller echoes this sentiment in her descriptions of commonplace writing, arguing that what is called *pedagogical* is the thinly veiled synonym for inscriptive change:

> [Writing] transmits both formal and informal versions of later culturally active categories that it can now gloss—education, gender, authorship, and especially the rationalist fiction of an enduring individual/universal human subject. All of these interests, that is, were made possible *as* categories by antecedent systems circulated in ordinary discourse networks. (*Assuming the Positions* 21)

Though it is important to note that culturally active categories were first formed as moments of writing (antecedent discourse systems), the far more crucial point here is that writing circulates—that is, changes—both formal and informal versions of these cultural categories. Writing, as it were, establishes both the logic of circulation for

ordinary discourse networks, and in doing so, introduces different inscriptive (ideological, cultural, rhetorical, and so on) logics and possibilities. And yet in introducing various possibilities into any inscriptive moment, writing is at its most pedagogical: such an introduction enables and provides the “tools” by which to realize writing’s speculative, inscriptive logics. If the relationships between theory, writing, and pedagogy are foregrounded in the inscriptive act, it is because change is the horizon by which writing happens.

Accordingly, if the task here is to frame—practically, philosophically, and ideologically—the concomitant logic of possibility underlying the relationships between theory, writing, and pedagogy, what composition studies generally calls *pedagogy* must be fundamentally rethought. For instance, part of what makes the various connections between theory, writing, and pedagogy problematic is the insistence that if pedagogy is theoretically informed, it should use theory to produce something meaningful or advantageous for the ideology called *composition studies*. This is a well worn argument that, historically, focused on the practical value of theory and its direct impact on writing classrooms. To be sure, these concerns still exist, but for current purposes, pedagogy’s engagement with theory and writing is envisioned more according to its adherence to strict disciplinary interpretations and challenges. That is, the connections between theory, writing, and pedagogy can be multiple, but they must produce some viable insight about established disciplinary interests, such as rhetorical knowledge, race, gender, class, ecology, and the like. As such, pedagogy is envisioned as a moment of applied theory, where a (feminist, current-traditional, queer, etc.) theory is reassembled for a particular context and its particularized logic. In this way, theory is *for* pedagogy,

rather than the result *of* a connection between two inscriptive, contingent instances called *theory* and *pedagogy*.

While *pedagogy's* applied theoretical function might seem a strictly rhetorical and ideological concern, the problematic logics such inscriptive habits maintain should not be overlooked. For example, the general logic coordinating liberatory pedagogies often equates what Jeffrey M. Ringer cites as the tension between reconciliations of epistemological interpretations and ethical ideals. Writing about critical pedagogies' idea of freedom, he claims: "We need to understand the ways in which individualistic liberty—what I will refer to as the incomplete or *freedom from* conception of liberty—limits our ability to conceive of liberty as collective. In naming this as a [Freirean] limit situation, my hope is that we can then transcend it" (Ringer 763). In Ringer's view, the problem facing liberatory pedagogies stems from the unexamined assumption of what freedom is and how the term's ambiguity limits access to its promises: if we just *understand* and *reorganize* this situation better, we will *have the knowledge* to create a better political and philosophical situation. Certainly, formulating liberatory pedagogical strategies for social transcendence and transformation makes them the derivative of an ethical ideal. In an ethically and just democratic society, freedom can only be freedom for all; to think freedom otherwise is to think something other than freedom. In turn, pedagogy must attempt to realize these guiding principles both in terms of the individual and the collective. At the same time, however, such pedagogical premises or ideological goals actually formulate theory as problematic instance of logical equity. In the dichotomy of a *freedom from* and a collective freedom, Ringer calls for a smooth transition from conceptions of freedom as a right (the individual *freedom from*) to a

freedom as a horizon (the collective freedom). Such a seamless pedagogical demarcation imbues the ambiguous term *freedom* with a conceptual clarity and barters that term within similarly clear logical coordinates. The signifier *freedom* has some malleable "content" that can be easily transferred from one context to another. Yet, moving so effortlessly from a *freedom from* to a collective freedom equalizes diverse terms and, using a bait-and-switch logic, understands freedom through its pedagogical effects. Writing, here exemplified by the signifier *freedom*, might seem as though it changes the theoretical and pedagogical coordinates of what *freedom* can be, but it actually does little to affect the logical coordinates of the pedagogical scene. Instead, the connection between pedagogy and theory creates a semblance of change, where theory simply tinkers with a term's role in an immutable pedagogical context. The term *freedom* might change from an individual to a collective concern, but it still functions according to the same pedagogical logic.

Similarly, Zan Goncalves's *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom* articulates a central interest for feminist and queer pedagogical theories. How, she insists, can pedagogy engender a rhetorical and cultural environment, space, or practice that best promotes critical awareness of and social action against such social ills as sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.? For Goncalves, this question is best answered through a pedagogy that uses various identity performances (especially those identifying as feminist and GLBT) and rhetoric/writing practices based on a revised understanding of ethos**.** This emphasis on ethos, she claims, helps make clear "how writers and speakers regularly craft identity performances for rhetorical effect" and how these identities are informed/inform local and global contexts for social change

(Goncalves xii). By situating ethos and identity at the core of the intersection between theory and pedagogy, Goncalves builds upon and extends much feminist and queer studies scholarship—most notably, those theories and practices that desire a more discursively pragmatic social strategy and/or politic.

Goncalves situates her argument in an ethnographic study of the various rhetorical strategies used by five student speakers of the Stonewall Center Speaker's Bureau, a GLBT resource center at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The Speaker's Bureau meetings offer unique strategies for GLBT speakers to construct a progressive ethos when speaking to an audience that presumably participates in "compulsory heterosexuality—a component of heterosexist discourse that literally demands only heterosexual expressions" (Goncalves 23). In contrast to compulsory heterosexuality, these Speaker's Bureau speakers suggest a more complicated nuance of *how* identity is formed, maintained, and circulated within a heterosexual epistemology. That is, these students construct a discourse and an identity by reconstructing or reconceptualizing ethos as a fluid and discursive method. The role rhetorical practices play in issues of identity and knowledge thereby emphasize how rhetoric traverses boundaries of knowledge, values, etc. and produce specific identity performances for each particular audience and context. The pedagogical importance therefore lies in recognizing how to become *conscious* of specific identity performances given a particular context.

Of particular interest here is how discursive logic relies on what Goncalves calls "outlaw discourse": to act as a gay man or woman "is to participate in a 'false' or 'illegal' expression of sexuality and gender that in turn upsets the gender hierarchy" (9). The very illegality of these "outlaw discourses," always grounded in concrete social

situations (legalizing gay marriage, civil unions, equal pay, privacy rights, healthcare, etc.) not only imply the contingency and fragility of gender hierarchy and discourses, but they also rightly politicize identity performances as such. By teaching and practicing rhetorically fluid ethos in concrete situations, “outlaw discourses” or identity performances lay claim to “the ‘truth’ of various normative social discourses and in turn assert subjugated ‘truths’” (Goncalves 18). But creating spaces for these “outlaw discourses” and “subjugated truths” does not include a radical systemic social deconstruction. Instead, these spaces encourage “[rhetorically] *creating* allies who claim very different identities rather than *finding* allies who share a sameness of identity” (Goncalves 89). This subtle struggle between *creating* allies and *finding* allies is where ethos becomes an invaluable pedagogical tool for identity formation and performance. For example, rather than forcing a heterosexual discourse to take into consideration any and all outlaw discourses, those rhetorical strategies that create allies can capitalize on commonalities between heterogeneous discourses to establish a common ground. Formally, this suggests that pedagogy can produce a logical commensurability between diverse rhetorical contexts, and in some fashion, explode those discursive hierarchies so frequently supported by more rational or current-traditional rhetorics. In short, such a pedagogical theory uses ethos *as a space* to actualize a progressive synthesis of differences within democratic exchange.

But like Ringer’s pedagogy of collective freedom, Goncalves’s postmodern Aristotelian pedagogy comprehends the speculative aspects of theory as a closed logic. The distinction between creating and finding allies, for instance, assumes that using multivalent *identities* to create commonality is a frictionless process of exchange. This

distinction is perhaps most visible in the spatial and theoretical possibility between "outlaw discourses" and creating allies. When creating allies, theory delineates—and in some senses, preestablishes—commonalities between disparate discursive formations. Once those discursive assertions are repositioned and realized as precise commonalities, creating allies is really just a matter of demonstrating—literally—that such commensurate links between disparate formations exist. To be sure, this is another way of saying that creating allies equals establishing discursive connections between disparate contexts. At the same time, however, it also implies that simply assuming and assembling commonalities between contexts is enough to assert a productive connection. Such assumptions should be cause for concern, if for no other reason than because they preclude the possibility of logical heterogeneity. Substantive differences, that is, *can* simply connect as commonalities because they have already been ensured as homogenously and logically equivalent. Consider how Goncalves's theory of "outlaw discourse" renders inscriptive instances as one-dimensional and economically equivalent. Once identity hierarchies have been successfully exploded by "outlaw discourses," all identities are equalized in a "flattened" logic and can be exchanged at will. Creating allies then simply means theorizing those differences that are easily transferred and appropriated in a seamless democratic exchange. Unfortunately, this also suggests that *theory* does not interact with pedagogy as an affective force. Rather, it is put in the awkward position of dialectically dissecting homogenous inscriptive assemblages for logically equivalent "commonalities" and then ensuring their frictionless exchange. *Theory* and *writing* might affect the circulation of

commonalities, but never the general inscriptive coordinates of what those commonalities attempt to pedagogically achieve.

The closed pedagogical systems that both Ringer and Goncalves employ suggest the potential danger in thinking pedagogy as a logic of circulation. When articulated as a process of equitable substitution, pedagogy simultaneously relies on and disavows the speculative, affective injunctions that an inscriptive contingency makes possible. Using a logic of inscriptive equity to produce such carefully constructed pedagogical ideas limits writing and theory so that they participate "not in a generative [way], but in a re-collected production of language" (Miller, *Assuming the Positions* 22). The intersection between writing, theory, and pedagogy thereby champions alterity and inscriptive change, but does so by endorsing "common ideas useful in argumentation...[that] 'appear' hung on well-stocked, familiar mental images" (Miller, *Assuming the Positions* 22). Consequently, the relationships between theory, writing, and pedagogy are no longer a logic of contingent inscriptive assemblages. Instead, the connections between these signifiers happen, but happen because they are premeditated—circulated—as the supplementary residue of composition studies' commonplace interests. And though part of the problem might be that pedagogy often subsumes the speculative dimensions of theory for its own purposes, this is not a problem of ideology, but of logical homogenization. *Pedagogy*, of course, changes things, but what it changes and how it changes are selective processes that never really realize the contingency threatening *all* inscriptive endeavors. *Writing* and *theory* are instead equalized because they never have the chance to indiscriminately change material formations beyond what a pedagogical substitution deems necessary.

Beyond the "False Choice" of Pedagogy

In many ways, the theoretical logic of *pedagogy* operates within what Žižek, following Lenin, calls "a false choice." In late 2006, Žižek discussed the popular political discourse surrounding the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and described the false choice as

> the moment at which the complexity of [the] situation [was] 'filtered' through a binary disposition and thus reduced to a simple choice: all things considered, are we AGAINST or FOR (should we attack or retreat? support that proclamation or oppose it? etc. etc.). [Thus]…one should always bear in mind that one of the basic operations of the hegemonic ideology is to enforce a false point, to impose on us a false choice—like, in today's 'war on terror,' when anyone who draws attention to the complexity and ambiguity of the situation, is sooner or later interrupted by a brutal voice telling him: 'OK, enough of this muddle—we are in the middle of a difficult struggle in which the fate of our free world is at stake, so please, make it clear, where do you really stand: do you support freedom and democracy or not? ("Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate" 3)

While this political discourse seems to offer a choice, it actually offers no choice at all: either support freedom and democracy by strictly adhering to its binary rules or do not support freedom at all; in both situations, one loses. But the false choice is more than a lack of viable options. Indeed, as Žižek makes clear, it is an affront not just to the exercise of supposed freedoms of choice, but rather a constraint on the very inscriptive logics that make a particular formation possible. This latter point is most visible in the actual act of choosing a side in the Iraq War debate. Regardless of what argument I "choose"—whether I am ultimately for or against the war—my decision does not change the fundamental conditions or coordinates of the question's binary logic. Such a subtle distinction shows how a false choice is problematic (and ideologically persuasive) precisely because it forwards a limited logic as a general logic. In Žižek's scenario, the choice is false because it tries too hard to provide freedom with prerequisites, with conditions that must be met before it can be acknowledged as such. Before any

decision can be made, freedom must first agree to a particular definition and usage of "freedom."

But the logic of a forced choice also suggests a far more subtle point. As a particular, limited logic, a false choice can display the limitedness of its grammar in its very inscription, and, in turn, use this non-signifying element to change its inscriptive possibilities. Žižek illustrates this argument through an old joke. In the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia. Knowing full well that all communication will be read by Soviet censors, the worker agrees to write his friends coded letters: if he uses blue ink, the letter's content is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false. After a month on the job, the worker's friends get a blue-inked letter describing Siberia's great working and living conditions, active social life, and freedom of expression. If Siberia has a downside, writes the worker, it is that "you can't get *red ink*" (Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 1). Though the joke may not look like a false choice, its logical coordinates suggest otherwise. For the joke to operate effectively, the worker must first designate a particular strategy for coding each letter's accuracy, and regardless of circumstances, must adhere to that particular logic. Like the Iraq War debate, the worker's limited dynamic—the strict, communicative logic that red and blue ink exemplify—is precisely what makes the worker's choice false. In this sense, what color the worker designates as true is less important than *that* a limited code was chosen as the logical coordinates in the first place.

At the same time, the false choice betrays the limitations of its own coordinates by inscribing those coordinates in its very logic. This, as Žižek notes, happens when the worker inscribes "*the very code into the encoded message, as one of its elements*"

(*Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 1). Though the worker must follow the false choice of the code, he nonetheless demonstrates how the code is a particular, limited logic. This critical departure, like the logical coordinates of the false choice, hinge on the code's roles for red and blue ink. By explicitly referencing the lack of red ink, the worker signifies, despite the letter's literal inscription (and adherence to the code), the code's limited logic. But this (self)-referentiality is more than mere commentary. Certainly, inscribing the code's coordinates in the very logic of the code changes those very coordinates. Once the worker references the lack of red ink, the logic of the false choice changes—he can no longer use the coordinates of the false choice for predetermined purposes. Rather, he has to violate those coordinates, reference their failure, and use their logic to make new coordinates and new logics. What this demonstrates is precisely how a false choice is never a definitive choice: though it offers limited options, those options can be made contingent *through their very logic*. Or put another way, a false choice is definitive only when it is not thought as symptomatic of a more generalized inscriptive referentially.

Like the examples of the Iraq War debate and the joke, the false choice that links pedagogy with theory and writing relies on a contentious logic. As I argued in the previous section, what composition studies calls *pedagogy* often requires that theory and writing work within particular, invested logics. In both Ringer's and Goncalves's accounts, theory and writing might change what a pedagogy circulates as concepts and ideologies, but does not seriously affect the logic of that circulation. Consequently, neither theory nor writing is able to reformulate pedagogy's logical coordinates. Theory and writing, in this way, are constrained to a false choice: either they circulate

“rethought” pedagogical concepts through a closed logic or they forfeit the right to think pedagogy anew. But, much like the joke’s auto-affective inscription, the limited relationship pedagogy has with writing and theory capitalizes on a moment that otherwise goes unnoticed. When *pedagogy’s* tentative connections cease functioning as particular moments of applied theory, they instead realize themselves as precise moments of inscriptive interaction. Consider, for instance, how the contingency of the joke is realized not as a general limitation, but as an inscriptive point of departure. Once the worker makes the code part of the encoded message—once reference to the lack of red ink stands in for red ink itself—the code’s general coordinates change functionality: the code still works, but does so in spite of its logical failure. Similarly, if in Ringer’s Freirean theory of freedom, the movement from *freedom from* to a collective freedom was theorized as an instance of inscription, the term *freedom* would act as a material signifier. Here, *that* the signifier *freedom* needs to be rethought is more important than what such rethinking produces. Accordingly, and much like the logic of the joke, *freedom* inscribes its possibilities—its multiple uses, its various meanings, in short, its contingency—as an explicit factor in the fabric of Ringer’s very pedagogical logic. As moments of auto-affective inscription, the relationships between pedagogy*,* writing*,* and theory do not just change things (concepts, contexts, principles, and so on); they change the very logical possibilities of those things.

But is this also not to say that inscriptive interactions *are* pedagogical, just not in the recuperative, invested capacity so thoroughly imagined by the ideology called *composition studies*? Indeed, as Derrida pointed out some time ago, when what is

called *pedagogy* works as a moment of inscription, its connections to writing and theory can only ever articulate *monstrosity*, or, more succinctly, an imperative of the new:

> Texts and discourses that provoke at the outset reactions of rejection, that are denounced precisely as anomalies or monstrosities are often texts that, before being in turn appropriated, assimilated, acculturated, transform the nature of the field of reception, transform the nature of social and cultural experience, historical experience. All of history has shown that each time an event has been produced, for example in philosophy or in poetry, it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity. ("Passages—from Traumatism to Promise" 387)

Texts—that is, configurations of writing—affect the possibilities of their inscriptive and ideological continuation, and in so doing, posit the incomprehensible. What the term *transforms* affects is important here. Writing transforms the *nature* of the field of reception and the *nature* of the social and cultural experience. Yet, at least in this analysis, it does not transform concepts or contexts; it does not transform ideology itself. Rather, writing transforms ideological continuation, or, more specifically, the ideological logic *that* coordinates. And by ushering in such a violent, intolerable, and incomprehensible alteration to ideological logic, *transformation* will always take the form of "a certain monstrosity."

But at the same time, this inscriptive monstrosity is not simply affective—it is also pedagogical, especially since it affects constitutive logics through its imminent inscription. How and what a monstrosity affects are less important here than *that* inscriptive instances present themselves as substantive material interruptions. For Derrida, this means that writing transforms logics via its iterable interruptions, and in so doing, presents "a species for which we do not yet have a name, which does not mean that the species is abnormal, [but rather that] it *shows* itself—that is what the word monster means—its shows itself in something that is not yet shown" ("Passages—from

Traumatism to Promise" 386). Writing affects the constitutive logics by merely presenting a material contingency that has yet to be understood. Here, writing is change: it is presented as iterable marks and nothing more. And it is because of this inscriptive presentation of contingency that Derrida uses the term *monstrosity* to designate a pedagogical relationship. A monstrosity can only be repeated—rewritten—and never contextually duplicated. In fact, a monstrosity "is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which presents itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge [and the] future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 4-5). Since change occurs within space and time, the presentation of the inscriptive mark teaches a logic distinct from the closed, deliberate systems so frequently associated with writing pedagogies. What is called *monstrosity* appeals to pedagogy's inscriptive capacities instead of its epistemological or cultural products. If change happens, it happens on the level of inscription, and beyond the closed system of knowledge. Indeed, to attempt to duplicate a monstrosity misses what such an inscriptive intervention makes logically possible: the ideological danger of inscriptive contingency. In contrast to those conceptions of pedagogy that use theory as a tool for particular closed logics (contexts, and purposes), a pedagogical monster—an inscriptive pedagogy—acts instead as both its own disruption and possibility.

Moreover, maintaining the tension between inscriptive change and repetition is central to this version of a monstrous pedagogy. As a logic of the new, as an instance of writing, pedagogy still cultivates a formulated projection, but does so in the name of an inscriptive possibility rather than as a particular ideological demand. Derrida argues that sustaining such a tension between change and repetition means thinking "*both* the

event *and* the machine as two compatible or even indissociable concepts" even though today "they appear to us to be antinomic" (*Without Alibi* 72). As incommensurate inscriptive instances, the contentious reconciliation between monstrous possibility (the event) and blind repetition (the machine) form a unique logic where the new can only ever be constantly repeated. This unique logic, as Gregory L. Ulmer makes clear, outlines how "pedagogic communication is able to perpetuate itself, even when the information transmitted tends toward zero" (*Applied Grammatology* 172). Inscription changes—creates the new—but repeats that change in every moment of inscription; or more succinctly, reinscribes "a certain monstrosity" as the horizon of every inscriptive moment. To *pedagogically* cultivate possibility as a general grammar—if it is to affect the *way* that it produces change in both logical coordinates and ideological interests—means to realize inscriptive contingency as a coordinating principle.

Of course, this is not to say that the tension between inscriptive change and repetition pedagogy exemplifies does not think ideological interests or consequences. Ideological interests and consequences are indeed part of inscriptive endeavors, but such concerns are by-products of new inscriptive coordinates rather than their guiding logic. That is, pedagogy thinks ideology, but only insofar as it transmits "a kind of 'total' knowledge of a cultural code or style by means of…unconsciously [internalizing] this style" (Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology* 171-172). Though pedagogy cannot think the contingency of inscriptive moments as particular instances, its contingent inscriptions can demand *that ideology operate stylistically*. What an ideology makes possible is more an issue of writing's temporary material formations than a strict quality of an established knowledge or culture. In this way, ideological consequences are related,

chance inscriptive assemblages rather than principles that "naturally" denote subsequent ethical or strategic concerns. But this also implies that, as a coordinating principle, pedagogically thinking contingency connects "*both* the machine *and* the performative event together" and presents "a monstrosity to come, an *impossible* event" (Derrida, *Without Alibi* 74). Indeed, in such a logic, it could even be said that the blurry incommensurability between ideological function and inscriptive possibility is *the* pedagogical possibility *par excellence.*

(Re)inscribing Pedagogical Possibilities

For the purposes of the ideology called *composition studies*, the tension between inscriptive change and repetition indicates that pedagogy cannot rely on a homogenous, circulatory logic of inscription. Though this certainly means that pedagogy is not easily captured by a closed logic of recycled concepts, it also puts additional stress on the idea that it is merely a type of philosophic negotiation. In David W. Smits's "Hall of Mirrors: Anti-Foundationalist Theory and the Teaching of Writing," this assumption is best exemplified in the loaded pedagogical relationship between theory and writing. After describing various anti-foundationalist theories' positions, he argues that the pedagogical point of theory resides in recognizing "whether theory…or any anti-foundational philosophy can provide us *with a useful language for talking about writing* or provide us *with convincing reasons* for teaching a particular way" (Smits 151; italics mine). Although there are a few assumptions here—that theory produces; that theory's value lies in its applicability; that theory should ultimately refer to teaching, and so on—the claim that theory is ultimately *a way of talking about writing* should be of most concern. In this formulation, theory and writing relate proportionally. Theory, that is, might realize writing as its object, but only referentially. It can "talk about" or "argue" its

relationship with writing, but it cannot approach writing directly. Conversely, if writing is affected by theory, it happens diplomatically: writing is informed by theory from time to time, but it confers how and when theoretical change happens.

There are a few problems with such a philosophic negotiation. Methodologically, this makes pedagogy a balancing act where inscriptive changes happen, but happen as delayed and commissioned productions. For theory and writing to relate in some productive way, they must first agree on the rules of the game. At the same time, it sheds light on why pedagogy might rely on a logic of production rather than inscription: production assumes commensurate connections between diverse inscriptive instances, whereas inscription presents alterity in its very material inception. However, and perhaps most importantly, a pedagogy of philosophic negotiation bankrupts any inscriptive power theory might have. Indeed, in Smits' account, it is enough to disregard theory as an affective force, since theory is *theory* only insofar as it "works." If theory does not "work"—referentially realize writing—then it is not a serious pursuit. Of course, this is just another way of saying that theory should affect the reality of writing as something other than an inscriptive, pedagogical moment.

In contrast to the appropriative aspects of this philosophic negotiation, the tension between inscriptive change and repetition envisions pedagogy in a different logic. A monstrosity of writing makes the pedagogical function of writing an intervention into logical homogenization. In the tension that underlines any act of writing, inscription suggests a material departure from a closed logic: "The predicates [of a general writing] are not there to *mean* something, to enounce or signify, but in order to make sense slide, to denounce it or to deviate from it" (Derrida, "From a Restricted to a General

Economy" 272). As a moment of inscription, pedagogy does not "mean" anything since inscriptive monstrosity, in its very inception, defies systemization. Rather, if pedagogy is to think a monstrosity, its very function—if such a term can be used—changes from negotiation to pure intervention, if not material declaration. Here, the pedagogical logic (re)organizing and working with such an inscriptive monstrosity emphasizes those moments that defy the habits of inscriptive continuation. This is a direct departure from a philosophic negotiation. In reconciling the proportionality between diverse writing moments, a philosophic negotiation makes pedagogy a matter of simply repeating inscriptive possibilities from moment to moment. (Indeed, it is this rejection of inscriptive possibility's generality that makes a closed logic so counterproductive.) Conversely, the tension that monstrosity presents does not put stress on what a pedagogy can accomplish through a proportional negotiation, but *that* it imagines—speculates—writing differently. In this crucial distinction, the change that pedagogy presents is, and can only act as, "a certain monstrosity." By capitalizing on its precise possibility, inscriptive contingency acts as both an interlocutor and a perpetuation in every writing situation. This makes every pedagogical connection an issue of logical apprehension. Inscriptive continuation *can* happen, but only as generalized assemblages of diverse inscriptive moments. Accordingly, if there is logic coordinating the ebb-and-flow of inscriptive monstrosities, it is the pedagogical generality that such monstrosities *can* generally connect in *only* specific ways. On some level, then, what is called *pedagogy* can only every encounter the inscriptive heterogeneity that contentiously links ideological function (repetition) and inscriptive possibility (change).

But such a pedagogical departure suggests a further, residual effect. Though a logic of monstrosity might foreground heterogeneity as theoretical principle, it additionally implies how every pedagogical articulation, in a very precise sense, fails. At its most basic, this is a grammatical concern, and one comments primarily on the pedagogical role inscriptive possibility plays in forming assemblages of writing. Consider, for instance, how writing's potential for change is often understood as a limitless dynamic, if not process. In Lester Faigley's critique of *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, he argues that Joseph Williams' stylistic reliance on the pronoun *we* creates serious pedagogical shortcomings. The term *we* "presumes a commonality and neglects differences among those it inspires to include," even if, following Lyotard, "*we* carries an obligation to interrogate the basis of that commonality and who that *we* should be or should become" (Faigley 238). *We* exemplifies two interrelated positions in this formulation. First, the term excludes via its inscriptive connotations: *we* is always partial and always linguistically implies a non-*we*. Secondly, and at the same time, the pronoun *we* is a contingent inscriptive instance that can be interrogated or "rewritten." Though *we* might exclude, that exclusion can be reformulated, resketched, and refigured for differing inscriptive contexts. In this way, *we*'s "commonality" exceeds its status as a signifier and instead reflexively references its status as a moment of writing. Faigley, however, rejects this pedagogical connection because, ultimately, it *fails to deliver on its promises.* Specifically, though the pronoun can be revised and realized as an inscriptive moment, it nonetheless naively assumes, linguistically and culturally, that *access* to inscriptive commonality is the same as the signifier *commonality* (Faigley 238). The slight-of-hand should not be missed here. *We* certainly establishes a

commonality, and that commonality can be revised, but it is still not “common” enough—it will still exclude. In some vague yet specific way, what is called *commonality* still resists reinscription, and does so through its very material basis. So, even though changes in inscriptive context and usage *are* possible, the pedagogical revision of *we* fails because it cannot secure a logically inclusive term via an inclusive logic. Put another way: if a pedagogical moment takes inscriptive possibility as its touching point, it runs the risk of misfiring or failing and never really realizing an unfettered possibility as the horizon of pedagogy.

In Faigley’s view, pedagogical failure suggests that what is called *pedagogy* can only recognize inscriptive tension as such. This perspective is best exemplified through his reconciliation of Lyotard’s interrogative call. Contrary to many postmodern rhetorical theories, Lyotard’s interrogations do not significantly depart from the Aristotelian tradition. Instead, they contest “the tyranny of coherence by investigating the politics of articulation” (Faigley 239). Like Aristotle, Lyotard’s interrogations delineate and try to figure out what the best available means of persuasion are and why they are the best given the circumstances. It is important to note here how both Lyotard’s interrogative call and pedagogy are theoretically implicated. Since inscriptive possibility cannot deliver the possibility it promises, the best case scenario is to think pedagogical change as a moment of reproach rather than as an instance of the new. Lyotard’s interrogative call, for instance, cannot offer an all-inclusive moment of critique, so rather than believing that interrogation can constitutively engage inscriptive logics, it is better to realize interrogation as a critical distance from what writing does and how it is used. In

this precise sense, *interrogation* can only deliver a limited promise: another instance of critique.

Among other things, this limited promise points out that a pedagogical failure offers composition studies the unique opportunity to think *possibility as only a maintenance* of inscriptive tension. As Faigley argues, this is why Lyotard's interrogative call quite symptomatically locates possibility in patterns of stasis. Rather than radically intervening in inscriptive processes, *interrogation's* pedagogical injunction is an acceptance of "the responsibility of judgment. It is a pausing to reflect on the limits of understanding. It is respect for diversity and unassimilated otherness. It is finding spaces to listen" (Faigley 239). Functionally speaking, the interrogation Lyotard advocates does not interrupt or intervene in inscriptive assemblages as much as it delimits its contours. *Interrogation* pedagogically changes inscriptive scenes by pointing out tensions between various moments of writing, such as ethics, knowledge, and otherness. Moreover, it is this limited change exemplified by *interrogation* that makes pedagogy less an economic event than an issue of reconciliation. Since the change pedagogy introduces cannot deliver its promises, possibility can only be thought as tense agreement between different moments of writing. Accordingly, if pedagogical failure says anything about the kind of change pedagogy presents, it is that that change serves to outline inscriptive limits.

Yet, assuming that pedagogical failure outlines nothing more than acknowledging the simple incommensurability between what writing promises and what it can deliver is to understand any inscriptive instance as *only* limitation. In some ways, this formulation is correct: no moment of writing can deliver on its promises. Writing, as I have argued in

the previous chapters, has no theoretical, material, ethical, or even pedagogical guarantee. If this view were to be taken to the logical conclusion, as it is in Faigley's critique of Lyotard, there can be no successful pedagogical articulations because such articulations cannot guarantee the change they promise. But such failure is not an excuse to constrain pedagogy to mere reconciliation of inscriptive tension. To be sure, pedagogy articulates failure, but not as pure theoretical limitation. It is instead a violence of perspective, where failure is a horizon or point of departure by which pedagogy can be thought *as* (inscriptive) possibility. This distinction differs sharply from Faigley's notion of reconciliation and even David W. Smits's idea that what is called *theory* has to "work." If, for instance, inscriptive contingency asserts itself as monstrosity, then this pedagogical failure resembles something more akin to what Žižek calls "a logic of protestation." In *The Parallax View,* Žižek argues that a logic of protestation is best exemplified by the signature phrase of refusal associated with Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: a Story of Wall Street"—Bartleby's "I would prefer not to." For Žižek, this phrase suggests a specific failure inscribed within symbolic logic and should be taken literally: "it says 'I would prefer not to', *not* 'I don't prefer (or care) to'" (*The Parallax View* 381). By reading this refusal literally, it affects the fabric of inscription and acts not so much as a "refusal of determinate content as, rather, the formal gesture of refusal as such" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 384). Unlike Smits's and Faigley's respective accounts, a logic of protestation does not reconcile or "work" the multitude of inscriptive moments, but instead *inscribes* renunciation (read failure) as part of pedagogy's general logic. Here, the literality of Bartleby's refusal presents a bankruptcy of symbolic order—and perhaps of signification in general—but nonetheless includes that failure as part of

its general theoretical coordinates. Rather than misrecognizing pedagogy's inscriptive tensions as failed moments to be reconciled, a logic of protestation presents them as the points at which pedagogical *change* can happen. In other words, it is not that what is called *pedagogy* can never deliver on its inscriptive promises, it is that it can do nothing but.

More to the point, a logic of protestation suggests that pedagogy's inability to deliver on its promises makes failure a *horizon* of thought, where inscriptive contingency "does not negate its founding gesture…it merely *gives* body to this negativity" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 382). Though failure might seem like a breakdown of symbolic order, it is actually the point at which contingency interferes with pedagogy's ability to present anything but monstrosity. Pedagogy, that is, always "breaks down" in the moment of its inscription—it will always belie its promises as a moment of writing—because it can really articulate nothing more than inscriptive contingency. Accordingly, and as a moment of inscription, pedagogy cannot but strike at itself and at its particular inscriptive formations *as a general principle*. Since what is called *pedagogy* always presents bankrupt promises, its inscriptive relationships act like a monstrous intervention that projects new coordinates and sometimes a new logic for its object, i.e. the study of writing. Yet, in that very projection, pedagogy belies its logic: it promises contingency as logical guarantee, but can never deliver on such a promise. Consequently, each particular pedagogical promise—that is, strategy or projection—cannot be realized without some sense of failure guiding it. Or, to put it another way, pedagogy can only be realized as a heterogeneous, monstrous failure that can only ever be repeated. This does not mean that no "successful" pedagogical moments exist, but that there is *nothing*

but monstrosities that have been retroactively recognized as particular pedagogical demands.

For composition studies' purposes, realizing pedagogy as a heterogeneous, monstrous failure acknowledges that the inscriptive relationship between *pedagogy* and *theory* is a violent one. Lynn Worsham describes such violence as making "visible the relationship between discipline and violence, between what is most legitimate and what is most illegitimate" ("Going Postal" 232). Though ideological and epistemological interests ground Worsham's theory, the more important thing to notice here is how this violence is pedagogically and logically recursive. As an affective force, violence both delineates the connections between discipline and demarcation and records its own inscriptive violence, e.g. delineation as such. Yet, at the same time, the violence underlining the relationship between *pedagogy* and *theory* posits material inception as *the point at which pedagogical change is thought*. Indeed, the recursive, violent logic of a material possibility "is perhaps the predictable form violence takes when meaning is cut loose from affect: free-floating violence, so to speak, and its apparent randomness makes it seem purely anonymous and impersonal, even unintentional in the sense of having no proper object or aim" (Worsham, "Going Postal" 249). The virtue of a recursive violence lies precisely in its arbitrary demarcations and divisions. By impersonally directing and redirecting material formations, inscriptive monstrosity—here, the random changes in inscriptive logic—violently forces what is called *pedagogy* to think its relationship to theory according to that relationship's contingent, inscriptive moment. If *pedagogy* and *theory* relate in some contingent way, it is only in the wake of the random, impersonal changes that such violence presents.

It is important to note that though Worsham designates such “free-floating violence” as an ideological justification for a non-systemic violence, this critique too quickly prioritizes gradations of affect over purely inscriptive change. To be sure, violent relationship between *pedagogy* and *theory* certainly attests to the heterogeneity and monstrous demarcations indicative of writing, but to hold such violent connections to variations of affect misses the larger point. The violent, inscriptive connections between *pedagogy* and *theory* are less a political or ideological goal than they are a theoretical logic, or, more properly, a way of relating inscriptive monstrosities to pedagogical failure. When theory’s speculative, inscriptive affections help transform ideological logics, they present incomprehensible alterations that pedagogy fails to deliver as anything other than the residue of inscriptive change or contingency. But this contentious connection is not contrived. Indeed, this relationship is one of systemic disjuncture, where inscriptive change and repetition are possible in the precise randomness of their material interactions. Accordingly, to assume that violence recursively affects the inscriptive relationships between *theory* and *pedagogy* as anything other than a “free-floating violence” is to conceive violence as a properly partial or guided endeavor**.**

Perhaps more importantly, since nothing is guaranteed in any inscriptive connection, a constant, generalized “free-floating” violence to what is inscriptively legitimate and what is inscriptively illegitimate is more a condition of this theoretical logic than a component of it. Consider, for example, how such “free-floating violence” recursively affects the inscriptive connection between the “will-to-pedagogy” and *ecriture féminine.* For Worsham, the “will-to-pedagogy” works within and towards a

pseudo-Kantian ethic, where both the freedom to think and thinking/writing are always subordinate to practical imperatives: “even when writing ‘specialists’ refrain from demanding that theory operate in…mechanistic terms, they nonetheless demand that theoretical questions receive explicit answers that are theoretical or practical or both” (“Writing Against Writing” 96). Echoing the pedagogical sentiments of Ringer, Goncalves, and Smits, the “will-to-pedagogy” is a call for the legitimization of a closed logic. If theory and pedagogy are to in some way affect the study of writing, that affectation or change must correlate to ideological logics. Conversely, *ecriture féminine* functions “as an inscription of heterogeneity that, in refusing to become an object of knowledge, seeks always to subvert our ordinary relation to the world” (Worsham, “Writing Against Writing” 92). By enacting the violence of writing, *ecriture féminine* disrupts ideological organizing logics through its very inception; it is a writing of both assemblage and disjuncture. It is, as Worsham notes, a gift to ideological logics because it “allows departures, breaks, partings, separations in meaning, the effect of which is to make meaning infinite, and like desire, nontotalizable” (“Writing Against Writing” 90). Unfortunately, the gift *ecriture féminine* presents is both its virtue and its liability. As a moment of writing, *ecriture féminine* is a radical Thing that, once confronted with the pedagogical force of disciplinary ideology, suffers one of two fates: either *writing* destroys composition studies as scholars and teachers understand it, or composition studies will subdue it and make it part of a more discernable, predictable logic. Either way, the inscriptive relationships between *theory* and *pedagogy* lose.

But the conflict between the “will-to-pedagogy” and *ecriture féminine* is a difficult minefield to navigate, even for the gift of writing. To this end, Worsham seems points

out how this gift always loses when she pedagogically orients *ecriture féminine* as a subversive mode of "writing as a strategy, without tactics or techniques, whose progress yields 'unlearning'" ("Writing Against Writing" 101). Departing from the logics governing the "will-to-pedagogy," *ecriture féminine* presents a compelling pedagogy as pure inscriptive strategy. Here, in this mode of "unlearning," writing works to pedagogically make "the world strange and infinitely various," and disrupts both the premises of knowledge and what the production of knowledge means (Worsham, "Writing Against Writing" 102). In its very material inception, *ecriture féminine* disrupts, redirects, opens new possibilities, and generally "unlearns" what writing means and how pedagogy could attend to the diverse answers such an "unlearning" might provide. At the same time, however, the gift of *ecriture féminine* is conditional. What writing implies in a pedagogical scene of "unlearning" is less important here than *that* writing still produces pedagogical answers. "Unlearning" might disrupt the "will-to-pedagogy," but it only in terms of what pedagogical answers can say and how those answers work in the world. In other words, *ecriture féminine* is still a gift, but that gift now has a definitive protocol: subversion.

Though it might seem counterproductive, it should not come as a surprise that *ecriture féminine* becomes a subversive mode of "unlearning," especially given the general coordinates of composition studies' ideological logics and the demands of the "will-to-pedagogy." But disciplinary logics can only partially be blamed. Because this theory adequately *produces* a pedagogical strategy—a strategy of subversion through "unlearning"—it does not change the theoretical coordinates of either the ideology called *composition studies* or the mode by which writing inscribes. This closed logic is mostly

an issue of theoretical conservation. Like the pedagogical connections of Ringer, Goncalves, Smits, and Faigley, Worsham's connection between *pedagogy* and *theory* backs away from its violent, radical possibility. In the initial description of its "unlearning," for example, *ecriture féminine* maintains the particular function of subversion despite the temporal and contextual aspects of inscription. This decontextualized function (or implicit pedagogical answer) is precisely why *ecriture féminine* remains an instance of the "will-to-pedagogy." By constraining writing to tarry with(in) the restrictive economy of disciplinary ideology, any violent or monstrous refusal is merely relegated to an object of knowledge. Worsham's subversive theory, that is, creates and generates a recuperative pedagogy for *ecriture féminine* the moment she decides to play the *productive* "will-to-pedagogy" game.

However, if the contentious relationship between the "will-to-pedagogy" and *ecriture féminine* are thought in terms of a "free-floating violence," the theoretical and pedagogical scene substantially changes. In such a scenario, every pedagogical interaction or moment is treated as a reinscription, as an assemblage of inscriptive monstrosity. In Worsham's theory, this would mean that a pedagogical relationship is less about whether *ecriture féminine* loses its proverbial teeth or destroys composition studies than *that* this relationship takes a very particular formation. For example, rather than focusing on how the violent interactions between *ecriture féminine* and the "will-to-pedagogy" try to establish some semblance of pedagogical hegemony, a "free-floating violence" shifts focus to the inscriptive relationship between theory and pedagogy. Here, there is no separation between function and content—content is function, not that which gives content its function. *Ecriture féminine's* subversive mode of writing, then, would

not directly or accidentally disrupt legitimate accounts as much as present itself as an inscriptive *possibility*, as a pedagogical monstrosity that can be precisely rewritten. Consequently, the contingent, violent connections between *ecriture féminine* and the "will-to-pedagogy" do not encourage some sort of unlearning, but that *pedagogical answers are inscriptive gifts that can only ever be (re)inscribed from moment to moment*. In the first analysis, such an emphasis prioritizes the inception and randomness of material formation over what that formation produces or how it works because such residual effects disregard *theory* and *pedagogy* as temporal and symbolic enterprises. But it also demonstrates how a "free-floating violence" actualizes the contingency underlining every interaction between *theory* and *pedagogy*. In this latter point, what is called *pedagogy* and what is called *theory* might interact in a variety of ways—some good and some bad—but they always are a first writing, a monstrosity that changes both the coordinates and the logic by which they relate *as they relate.* This is also just another way of saying that, as inscriptive instances, the pedagogical relationships between theory and pedagogy only happen as changes in iteration.

While a "free-floating violence" could easily project itself as another ideological touching point, its systemic, inscriptive presentations say otherwise. Such a violence certainly disrupts, breaks, and might even establish the logical coordinates of composition studies. Yet this is a misguided view. When a "free-floating violence" is envisioned as a limited, ideological horizon, it can often mistake changes in ideological habits (and formalities) for general inscriptive conditions, as Worsham's theory so aptly demonstrated. But by inverting this ideological order, the (re)inscriptive gifts of pedagogy suggest a different logic. Composition studies does not habitually think writing

in terms of pedagogical import for any reason than because the relationship between theory and writing is precisely pedagogical. To be sure, if the particular inscriptive presentations of a “free-floating violence” make the contentious relationships between theory and writing failed repetitions, then the inscriptive change (or possibility) such repetitions establish present new and different logics. This is what thinking *pedagogy* beyond the restrictions of a false choice entails: requiring the connection between *theory* and *writing* to constantly reconceive its inscriptive politic; or, quite literally, to write *as nothing but monstrosity.*

CHAPTER 7
FIDELITY TO THE DISCIPLINARY REFUSAL

As Stephen A. North notes *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, the disciplinary need for a communal dialectic is really a symptom of composition studies' ideological vulnerability. Unlike other intellectual and academic disciplines, composition studies cannot claim a formal methodological, theoretical, or philosophical vantage point from which to study its object, and, consequently, it cannot reach a consensus in either academic goals or intellectual identity. For North, this makes composition studies' primary task an auto-affective articulation, where theoretical approach is concomitant with the inscriptive moment. Composition studies, he writes, "is, after all, a damned awkward sort of subject, reflexive in the way that psychoanalysis is reflexive, with inquiry and practice bound together in an academically untraditional way. And to make matters worse, it has spent much of its energy…trying to run away from that reflexiveness" (North 374). Like psychoanalysis, what is called *composition studies* is a logic that defines the connections between theoretical parameters and affective practice in their very articulative moments. And though such reflexive singularity could offer radical ways of thinking about the connections between theory and writing, composition studies instead swallows this anxiety and projects itself as a general collection of disparate methodological affiliations. Indeed, if taken to the extreme, such a view could say that given the reflexive nature of both writing and theory, composition studies might establish general parameters, but is ultimately a logic of the future perfect, or an articulation of what will have been. It cannot categorically dismiss the contingent, and sometimes contentious, ties between theory and writing, but neither can it expose itself to the vulnerability of its more traditional academic brethren. To be sure, this is why the

give-and-take of the communal dialectic seems is so appealing. In its very inception, the communal dialectic protracts a general reflexivity for composition studies' various theoretical interests and interventions, and in so doing, helps restate a disavowed methodological, philosophical, and political interaction so essential to both writing and theory. In promoting a pluralistic reflexivity, a communal dialectic can alleviate disciplinary anxiety by momentarily resting any inkling of ideological vulnerability.

But in the 20 something years since the publication of *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, it seems as though the anxiety over ideological vulnerability has since been ingrained as a forgone (and forgotten) theoretical assumption. As I have argued throughout this project, such theoretical anxiety manifests in a variety of logics, but is at its most severe when reflexivity is automatically articulated as a strict ideological, rather than recursive, connection. North's comparison of composition studies to psychoanalysis is helpful here. Just as psychoanalysis's logics run the danger of methodological stagnation—analytic method as, say, a mode by which "happiness" is attained—so too do the reflexive connections between theory and writing act more as ideological parameters than logics of real inscriptive and intellectual change. Here, the relationships writing and theory have with the ideology called *composition studies* are more akin to what Alain Badiou outlines as the paradox of political reflexivity, or, more precisely, democracy's pathological condition. In today's global-political order:

> It is forbidden, as it were, not to be a democrat. More precisely, it stands to reason that humanity aspires to democracy, and any subjectivity suspected of not being democratic is regarded as pathological. At best it refers to a patient re-education, at worst to the right of military intervention by democratic paratroopers. (Badiou, *Metapolitics* 78)

For Badiou, contemporary, Statist conceptions of democracy are paradoxical precisely because they promise a post-ideological horizon that exceeds political and

epistemological boundaries. At the same time, such an initiated reflexivity does in fact constitute itself via repressed limitations and impossibilities that can never be articulated within democracy's coordinates—after all, in the contemporary political scene, it is "forbidden to not be a democrat." Still, for the purposes here, democracy's political and ethical pathologies are far less important than that democracy continuously manages to function as *democracy* despite such ingrained limitations. As a functional political form, democracy proposes and enacts a legitimacy that—in its very inception—it cannot possibly secure in either political logic or philosophic affection. Put another way: democracy has to forsake its political and philosophic reflexivity to be *democracy*. To question the legitimacy of democracy as either political form or philosophic pursuit, then, is to cease thinking democratically.

Much like democracy's constitutive paradox, composition studies' ideologies of theory—their histories, their materialities, their ethics, and their pedagogies—have ingrained a pathological condition as disciplinary horizon. Composition studies, that is, might employ theory for a variety of purposes, but theory is never to put the discipline in direct confrontation with the inscriptive monstrosity it attempts to tame. Indeed, in many ways, composition studies has continued to run away from its reflexivity, only now this retreat is less an issue of theory and practice than it is about the ideological relationships between theory and writing. At its most basic, this suggests that the connections between writing and theory are asserted as an ideological goal rather than as speculative inscriptive contingencies. As Chapter One argued, if ideology is the very logic and substance of any connection between theory and composition studies, that relationship is often stagnantly pathological because it formulates its constitutive

coordinates *through a disavowal*. This is a two-fold problem. Ideologically disavowing theory's reflexive connection to writing certainly makes theoretical enterprises merely an issue of standardizing logical patterns, but it also, again in terms of the psychoanalytic metaphor, habitually culls an almost neurotic obsession with epistemological and political legitimacy. If theory and writing are to interact, then it is only through the ideological pursuit of a constant, coherent disciplinary logic. To be sure, such a disavowal of inscriptive and affective reflexivity suggests that theory's only function is to exorcise composition studies' demons and find a happy disciplinary stability.

Given this theoretical and ideological scene, Chapter Five's advocacy of a pedagogical monstrosity suggests a unique opportunity for thinking and practicing theory in a composition studies landscape. Rather than following the standard theoretical practice of incorporating particular theoretical writings into specific ideological formulations, a pedagogical monstrosity continually and precisely refuses disciplinary recourse. As this project has argued, theory is a speculative, inscriptive endeavor that does not reflect or conceptualize content as much as change the general coordinates of any inscriptive endeavor. This primarily means that the materiality of writing becomes the practical, ethical, and theoretical horizon by which the relationships between writing and theory can be thought. At the same time, however, it suggests that theory has no fidelity to ideology, to knowledge, or to composition studies, and instead presents a random, contingent inscriptive reflexivity as theoretical impetus. This nomadic tendency is best expressed in pedagogical terms by a "free-floating violence." When the relationships theory has with writing happen as failed repetitions, they put both the "content" and the possibility of those inscriptive formations at risk. What theory

contributes to a particular situation is less important here than *that* it inscribes; or, more precisely, *that* it articulates this relationship in terms of what will have been. Such reflexivity, of course, is the general condition of writing, and by making such contingency the explicit condition of theory, theory is nothing more than the logic of alterity. If thought according to a "free-floating violence," there is never a point at which theory has an unwavering identity—ideological or otherwise—because inscription never leaves any theoretical stone unturned.

Even though a "free-floating violence" exemplifies reflexivity without cause, it does not mean that it cannot serve as an ideological point of departure. For that reason, this project's argument has not been so much a call, but what would more properly be described as an intervention in composition studies' ideologies of theory. By inscribing *theory* as an affective, post-ideological moment of writing, this project has certainly dismissed the productive utilitarianism often associated with the term. But this categorical dismissal should not be taken as another instance of ideological or theoretical critique; nor is it, to use North's terminology, another instance of "philosophic critique." In what he describes as the Philosopher community, North asserts that theory is a differential modality that "demands allegiance only to a mode, not to a subject matter: what matters is *how* one investigates, not *what*" (99). Though constant, reflexive critique and reinvention may seem like the theoretical intervention composition studies needs, this mode of inquiry provides anything but. Presumably, the difficulty with such a reflexive methodology derives from what theory conceives of and finds as its object. As North makes clear, for such philosophic critique—here, the precise and constant struggle for new method—boundaries "are essentially arbitrary, and the problem's

isolation, if not illusionary, is basically a matter of convenience…[so], just pick a spot, and go from there: it's all attached" (100). There are two problems worth noting in this context. First, philosophic critique can exclusively focus on modality and its subsequent formulations because the object of study is already defined. Inscriptive distinctions, discursive distinctions, and even theoretical distinctions are irrelevant and inconsequentially dismissed because they are all part of the same ideological fabric. But this inconsequentiality has further complications. In a philosophic critique, inconsequential distinctions also relegate inscriptive interventions to an equivalent logic or field. Echoing the general coordinates of Berlin's social-epistemic rhetoric, such a constant methodological struggle conceives interventions before-the-fact. Every intervention or change in the theoretical field is merely another instance (or another extension of an instance) because it has been already posited as a component of that field. And since equivalency is precisely the logic that governs a philosophic critique, interventions in general—theoretical, inscriptive, or ideological—are no more systemic than any other reflexive moment. Even if reconciled with the "free-floating violence" outlined throughout this project, a philosophic critique is unable to think *what* is theorized, but rather can only think *how* a theory or inscriptive moment approaches its subject matter, and specifically, how that theory can be of use to composition' studies ideology.

However, as this project has argued, the scene of *theory* is less concerned with ways in which modes limit how and what can theorized than it is *that* method and inscription are simultaneous instances in a shared theoretical logic. This perspective, in contrast to philosophic critique, is more an articulation of inscriptive possibility than it is

an issue of respective methodological functions. As an equivalent logic, reflexivity only gets it half right—it is precisely too reactive because it can only *revise* that which is written before-the-fact. So, if in a philosophic critique, reflexivity establishes an equivalent logic, then reflexivity no longer thinks the constitutive dimensions of either theory or its object. Yet, as Althusser's dismissal of academic eclecticism demonstrated, the scene of *theory* is both a break with ideological conceptions and a constitution of substantively different inscriptive formations. Far more than another productive methodological metaphor, this theoretical tension rejects the guaranteed reflexivity that grounds philosophic critique for substantively different writing formations. This tension, for instance, enables *theory* to formulate a dual function where inscriptive iterations engender assemblages of writing that violate ideological coordinates and contingency alike. Here, nothing is off the table, nothing is guaranteed, and nothing is sacred. Writing violates everything because everything is permitted. Rather than reflexively revising writing-before-the-fact, the inscriptive interventions of *theory* consistently violate ideological logic through affective speculations. Consequently, each ideology must, as Markell would put it, "acknowledge" (inscribe) its temporary, random inscriptive assemblages as general logic. This formulation, like Althusser's material development of theory, is what it means to conjoin theoretical speculation to a writing economy's random inscriptions: writing and theory enmesh in the violence of the inscriptive mark and act out the speculative, inventive presentations that, in the end, inscribe theory as much as theory inscribes.

At the same time, such inscriptive interventions suggest a further point for composition studies' ideological relationship to theory. If each moment of theorization

happens in a landscape of contingent inscription, then each theoretical speculation must maintain a fidelity to the moment of inscriptive possibility. In this context, fidelity, as Žižek explains, signifies the general coordinates of a political condition. “The proof of true fidelity” he contends, “is not that one is ready to take a bullet *for*; over and above this, one must be ready to take a bullet *from*—accept being dropped or even sacrificed…if this serves…[a] higher purpose” (Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 9). For Žižek “taking a bullet”—the logic of fidelity—is not a “conscious” choice but the necessary condition of a generalized horizon of theory (and writing). By “taking a bullet from,” by subjecting a theory to its own inscriptive violence, theory enacts an absolute logical resolve where nothing but inscriptive integrity matters. At its most demanding, this is a fidelity to the contingency of an inscriptive politics and ethics that cannot be chosen at will. Writing inscribes its material presentations in the temporary fabric of space and time, and it is to those general moments that theory—as both speculative change and inscriptive instance—logically realizes. Yet it is also this demand that distinguishes a fidelity to inscriptive possibility from the conventional view that theory creates “new or unconventional understandings and new or unconventional ways of making understandings, recognizing in the process that strange language and innovative ways of using language must embody these understandings” (Barnard 447). Certainly, to think theory as a promotion of new and unconventional understandings is to make it an effect of language, or as merely “taking a bullet *for”* that which gives it cause. Theory thereby happens only to the extent that it forecasts what “new or unconventional” inscriptions might appear to challenge the ideological status quo. And, moreover, by rejecting inscriptive integrity, such fidelity cannot predict what

monstrosities will have been written without sacrificing that integrity. But in the demand that it cultivate speculation, theory can only violate itself in the name of inscriptive integrity; or, more precisely, *that* inscription is possible. Nothing is hidden from either theory or writing because how something is unconventional is less important than *that* "unconventional" inscriptions happen (and can only happen). Unfortunately, this also suggests that thinking theory as an epistemological tool means it should never violate itself and should never "take a bullet *from*."

Fidelity to the moment of inscriptive possibility is instead a precise, violent demarcation of a speculative writing that cannot do otherwise. Theory is thereby not a production of knowledge or an assurance of ethical certitude, but literally a logic of the new. On the one hand, the connection between *theory* and *writing* does nothing but inscribe new ideological coordinates. If, as Žižek points out, ideology is both the logic and symptom of material relationships, then such inscriptions cannot but be an accident of theory. But on the other hand, a logic of the new makes writing a theoretical force in its own right, and, as I have argued throughout this project, should do so at the expense of disciplinary conversations. Of course, this is just another way of saying that theory's connections to writing are always inscriptively polemical; or more precisely, that "theory has to have a priority" (Žižek, "Living in the End Times According to Slavoj Žižek").

The pedagogical monstrosity—the refusal of writing—is precisely this type of fidelity: its priority is to suspend judgment, substantive theorization, the inclusive/exclusion imperative of disciplinary ideology, and the unchecked horizon of composition studies' theoretical logics. In this way, fidelity to the constant, iterable

alterity of the monstrous inscriptive mark makes theory a substantively difficult endeavor, if for no other reason than because theory can have no friends.

But, it would be remiss to believe that ideological habits are so easily dispelled. Though composition studies might think theory differently, it will take more than merely asserting a new theoretical program. Composition studies history has shown that in the struggle between theoretically induced change and disciplinary ideology, theory often loses. Perhaps, then, in the contentious, awkward, and uncomfortable relationships between ideology and inscriptive change all composition studies can ask for is theoretical pause. For, if the ideology called *composition studies* is to take theory and writing seriously, it too must maintain a fidelity to the randomness of inscriptive moments as such. It too must take pause and understand that its relationship to *theory* persists because the moment to realize it was missed.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Althusser, Louis. “On the Young Marx.” *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 2005. Print.

---. “Lenin and Philosophy.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. Print.

Arnt Aune, James. *Rhetoric and Marxism.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. Print.
Badiou, Alain. *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

---. *The Meaning of Sarkozy*. Trans. David Fernbach. London: Verso, 2008. Print.

Balibar, Etienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2007.Print.

Barnard, Ian. “The Ruse of Clarity.” *College Composition and Communication 61.3* (2010): 434-451. Print.

Berlin, James. “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” *Teaching Composition: Background Readings.* 2nd ed. Ed. T. R. Johnson. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005. 19-38. Print.

---. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987. Print.

---. *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies.* West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2003. Print.

Bizzell, Patricia. “Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies.” *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991. 52-68. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. Print.

Crowley, Sharon. *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006. Print.

---. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998. Print.

Connors, Robert J. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. Print.

Davis, D. Diane. *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche & Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.

De Lissovoy, Noah and Peter McLaren. "Toward a Contemporary Philosophy of Praxis." *Radical Relevance: Toward a Scholarship of the Whole Left.* Eds. Laura Gray-Rosendale and Steven Rosendale. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. 160-182. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "Freud and the Scene of Writing." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 196-231. Print.

---. "From a Restricted to a General Economy." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 251-277. Print.

---. "Force and Signification." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 3-30. Print.

---. "Signature Event Context." *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. 307-360. Print.

---. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Print.

---. "Passages—from Traumatism to Promise." *Points…:Interviews, 1974-1994*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. 372-395. Print.

---. *Without Alibi*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. Print.

Dobrin, Sidney I. *Constructing Knowledges: The Politics of Theory-Building and Pedagogy in Composition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

Evans, Rick. "'Masks': Literacy, Ideology, and Hegemony in the Academy." *Rhetoric Review 14.1* (1995): 88-104. Print.

Faigley, Lester. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992. Print.

Foster, Helen. *Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process*. West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2007. Print.

Galloway, Alexander R. and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.

Goncalves, Zan Meyer. *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006. Print.

Gray, John. *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. Print.

Guttari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies.* New York: Continuum, 2000. Print.

Hairston, Maxine. "Diversity, Ideology, and the Teaching of Writing." *College Composition and Communication 43.2* (1992): 179-193. Print.

Hardin, Joe Marshall. *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.Print.

Harrienger, Myrna and Nan Uber-Kellogg. "An Ethics of Difference." *The Ethics of Writing Instruction: Issues in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Michael A. Pemberton. Stamford: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2000. 91-102. Print.

Harris, Roy. *Rethinking Writing*. London: Continuum, 2000. Print.

Hegel, G. W. F. *The Philosophy of Right.* Trans. S. W. Dyde. New York: Cosimo, 2008. xi-xxi. Print.

Hesse, Doug. Foreword. *The End of Composition Studies*. By David W. Smit. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004. xi-xiii. Print.

Jung, Julie. *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. Print.

Kapochunas, Rachel. "Cindy Sheehan to Pelosi: Impeach Bush, or I'll Run Against You." *New York Times* 7 July 2007. Web. 18 July 2007.

Kent, Thomas. "Introduction." *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*. Ed. Thomas Kent. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. 1-6. Print.

---. *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative Interaction*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993. Print.

Lynch, Paul. "Composition as Theormostatic Activity." *College Composition and Communication*. Vol. 60, no. 4. (2009): 728-745. Print.

Markell, Patchen. *Bound by Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.

Marx, Karl. “Theses on Feuerbach.” *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy.* Ed. Lewis S. Feuer. New York: Anchor Books, 1959. 243-246. Print.

McComiskey, Bruce. *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002. Print.

Miller, Susan. *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction of Rhetoric and the Writer*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. Print.

---. *Textual Carnivals: the Politics of Composition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. Print.

---. “Writing Theory : : Theory Writing.” *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Eds. Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992. 62-83. Print.

---. *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998. Print.

Neel, Jasper P. *Plato, Derrida, Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988. Print.

---. *Aristotle’s Voice: Rhetoric, Theory, and Writing in America.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994. Print.

North, Stephen A. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field.* Portsmouth: Boyton/Cook Publishers, 1987. Print.

Olson, Gary A. “The Death of Composition as an Intellectual Discipline.” *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work.* Ed. Gary A. Olson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002. Print.

---. “Ideological Critique in Rhetoric and Composition.” *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. 81-90. Print.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 1982. Print.

Petraglia, Joseph. “Writing as an Unnatural Act.” *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*. Ed. Joseph Petraglia. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995. 79-100. Print.

Plato. *Phaedrus.* Trans. Christopher Rowe. London: Penguin Books, 2005. Print.

---. “Protagoras.” *Protagoras and Meno*. Trans. Adam Beresford. London: Penguin Books, 2005. Print.

Powers, M. Karen, and Catherine Chaput. “Anti-American Studies’ in the Deep South: Dissenting Rhetorics, the Practice of Democracy, and Academic Freedom in Wartime Universities.” *College Composition and Communication* 58.4 (2007): 648-81. Print.

Reynolds, Nedra. *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Place and Encountering Difference.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003. Print.

Rhodes, Jacqueline. *Radical Feminism, Writing, and Critical Agency: From Manifesto to Modem*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. Print.

Rickert, Thomas*. Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007. Print.

Ringer, Jeffrey M. “Liberating ‘Liberatory’ Education, or What Do We Mean by ‘Liberty’ Anyway?” *JAC: Rhetoric, Writing, Culture, Politics*. Vol. 25, No. 4 (2005): 761-82. Print.

Sánchez, Raúl. *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. Print.

Schiappa, Edward. “Neo-Sophistical Rhetorical Criticism or the Historical Reconstruction of Sophistic Doctrines?” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23 (1990): 192-217. Print.

Smits, David W. “Hall of Mirrors: Anti-Foundationalist Theory and the Teaching of Writing” *The Kinneavy Papers: Theory and the Study of Discourse*. Eds. Lynn Worsham, Sidney I. Dobrin, and Gary A. Olson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. Print.

Stenberg, Shari J. “Embodied Classrooms, Embodied Knowledge: Re-Thinking the Mind Body Split.” *Composition Studies*. 30.2 (2002): 43-60. Print.

Suoranta, Juha, and Tere Vadén. “From Social to Socialist Media: The Critical Potential of the Wikiworld.” *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* Eds. Peter McLaren and Joe L. Kincheloe. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2007. 143-162. Print.

Taylor, Mark C. *The Moment Of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001. Print.

Therborn, Göran. *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology.* London: Verso, 1999. Print.

Ulmer, Gregory L. *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. Print.

---. *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Print.

Vitanza, Victor J. “Three Countertheses: Or, A Critical In(ter)vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies.” *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991. 139-172. Print.

---. *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. Print.

Welch, Kathleen E. “Ideology and Freshman Textbook Production: The Place of Theory in Writing Pedagogy.” *College Composition and Communication 38.3* (1987): 269-282. Print.

Welch, Nancy. *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction.* Portsmouth: Boyton/Cook, 1997. Print.

Wesch, Michael. *Web 2.0…The Machine is Us/ing Us*. 31 January 2007. *YouTube.* Web. 25 June 2008.

Worsham, Lynn. “Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of *Ecriture Féminine* in Composition Studies.” *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1991. 82-104. Print.

---. “Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion.” *Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium*. Eds. Henry A Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001. 229-265. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso, 2008. Print.

---. *The Sublime Object of Ideology.* London: Verso, 1989. Print.

---. *Living in the End Times.* London: Verso, 2010. Print.

---. *In Defense of Lost Causes.* London: Verso, 2008. Print.

---. Afterword. *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*. By V. I. Lenin. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2002. 167-312. Print.

---. *First as Tragedy, Then As Farce*. London: Verso, 2009. Print.

---. *Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Ontology*. London: Verso, 1999. Print.

---. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008. Print.

---. "Badiou: Notes from an Ongoing Debate." *The International Journal of Žižek Studies 1.2* (2007): 1-15. Web. 14 May 2008 .

---. *Welcome to the Desert of the Rea*l: *Five Essays on September 11th and Related Dates*. London: Verso, 2002. Print.

---. *The Parallax View.* Boston: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006. Print.

---. *Living in the End Times According to Slavoj Žižek.* 11 March 2010. *YouTube*. Web. 16 April 2010.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeffrey A. Rice is a Lecturer and Writing Coordinator for the University Writing Program at the University of Florida. He received his Bachelor of Arts at The Ohio State University and his Master of Arts at the University of Vermont. His research interests include the intersections of rhetorical theory and philosophy, research technologies, and ideologies of writing.