

PROCEDURAL SLAVES:
LIBERATING DIGITAL CLASSROOMS THROUGH AFRICAN-AMERICAN RHETORIC

By

SAM HAMILTON

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To Jessica, mom, and dad

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Sam Hamilton

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There exists a long history of conceiving of students as slaves. The procedural rhetoric of education/schooling/training forms this rhetorical and pedagogical position. This same procedural argument reinstantiates in contemporary digital learning environments and through contemporary digital learning tools. In order to liberate students from history's long-held procedural metaphor that likens them to slaves, scholars and students of rhetoric and composition studies might turn our attention to various rhetorical and pedagogical traditions that emerge from a history of slavery. Specifically, we might turn to the work of 21st century African-American rhetorical scholars such as Adam Banks and Vorris Nunley.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: CLASSROOMS AND POWER

In a 1967 manifesto published in the Los Angeles Free Press, critical pedagogue Jerry Farber explosively claimed, “[s]tudents are niggers. When you get that straight, our schools begin to make sense” (para. 1). Farber thus snatched pedagogical rhetoric from the clear water of institutional acceptability, and shoved it into invective mud. In doing so, he disrupted a long history of pedagogical theory and practice – indeed the *entire* history of pedagogical theory and practice – that conceives of the student/teacher (and administrator) relationship as firmly and necessarily grounded in a strict power dynamic; administrators and teachers have it, students don’t. Farber went on to state, “school amounts to...for white and black alike...a 12-year course in how to be slaves...obliging and ingratiating on the surface but hostile and resistant underneath” (para. 11). This slave mentality continued into post-secondary education. Farber’s students retained a servile, submissive, and self-loathing mentality, having “thoroughly interjected their masters’ values that their anger is all turned inward” (para. 14). For Farber, the power and pervasiveness of educational subjugation is such that students internalize its machinations, believing them legitimate, beneficial and even necessary. Therefore, describing students as “niggers” or “slaves,” Farber recognized the long historical truth that while students in state-run educational institutions have the most to gain or lose from their participation in that education, they are rarely, if ever, able to play a part in how these institutions organize and conduct themselves on any level, particularly, and most significantly, the classroom level.

We can understand Farber’s criticism as a response to two histories of education. The first, “long” history relates to state-run educational practices across the world, from

the earliest written records of global teaching practices to present day. The second, short history is that of secondary and post-secondary educational practices in 20th century United States, specifically as they manifested in the literature and writing classes Farber taught at Cal. State. While the first history tells an enduringly depressing story of student subjugation and servility, the second illustrates specific pedagogical policies and practices Farber and other radical educators enthusiastically, even vitriolically, rejected in the 1960s. These policies, in promoting the supposedly democratic ideal of “education for all,” maintained the position that different people were naturally suited for different jobs and, consequently, would benefit most from different educations. As such, state-produced educational policies lead to myriad models that do as much to open experiential doors for some as close them for others. Specifically, Farber critiqued the educational positions following early 20th century American psychologists and pedagogues such as Lewis Terman, Robert Yerkes, and Henry Goddard, and eugenicists such as Charles Davenport, Harry Laughlin and the Eugenics Record Office (ERO). While this second, short history represents the most direct target of Farber’s ire, it is clearly the result of the long history of institutional education practices that place teachers and administrators in positions of power, and students in positions of subjugated powerlessness.

Farber’s essay and the history to which it responds both emerge from the unique educational, psychological, and political climate of the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States. Unfortunately, the problematic educational models collectively promoted at this time, and to which Farber and his contemporaries were so opposed, have found a foothold in composition classrooms around the world, and they continue to

play major roles in how writing is taught in the early 21st century. More problematic still is the degree to which these models have infiltrated digital learning spaces that many in our field hoped could be potentially – even inherently – liberating. The long history of conceiving of students as slave continues apace in many 21st century digital “learning” tools and practices, ranging from course management systems to digital teaching and writing environments to newly designed, digitally-integrated school buildings. This stems from the fact that many 21st century digital “upgrades” to schooling parrot the same procedural arguments about education’s purpose and a student’s role that have been enacted in school and course design and implementation over the long and global history of education. More than ever, then, we need new arguments. Toward that end, this essay identifies classroom-level pedagogical possibilities in certain rhetorics of resistance. Specifically, I accept Farber’s incendiary metaphor and wonder: if students are slaves, how might rhetorical traditions emerging from the history of African-American slavery help conceive the liberatory possibilities of education in the 21st century? Ultimately, these rhetorical traditions present models through which writing instructors can and should conduct our classrooms in light of the myriad communication and writing strategies available to our students, both in and out of our classrooms.

CHAPTER 2 ARISTOCRATIC EDUCATION: SLAVES BY BIRTH

In some of its earliest forms, state-run education was intimately connected with commerce, religion and legal practices. Of Athenian education, Aristotle writes in Book Eight of *Politics*, “the neglect of education does harm to the constitution. The citizen should be *molded to suit* the form of government under which he lives” (300, emphasis added). Students were typically of a higher class, and their education prepared (read: transformed) them for a role in a field widely recognized as valuable for the bureaucratic functioning society as a whole, rather than the practice of a distinct trade.

Apprenticeships and family training provided teaching related to specific trades, while the “education” of which Aristotle wrote was the distinct privilege of a very few, what Gabriel Compayré refers to in his 1887 book, *The History of Pedagogy* as “an aristocratic system of education” (40). According to Compayré, even in the few historical examples where so-called universal education existed, the educational models either served to enculturate the population so as to maintain a rigid social structure (e.g. ancient Sparta or China during the Zhou dynasty), or they dissipated because of societal pressures, as with the Vedic education system in ancient India which faced unstoppable pressures to limit access from the developing caste system. This system, which was as limiting in terms of access as it was in terms of methods and goals, was particularly prevalent in composition instruction. In *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*, James Berlin writes,

For centuries [Classical Rhetorical education] had served the needs of a society in which wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a ruling class, a group that used the university to conserve its power. (18)

This was as true of ancient Greek, Spartan, and Chinese education, as it was of Ibn Sina's (Avicenna) pedagogical model throughout the Muslim world, or the models in place in Central and South America. People either never learned how to read and write, or if they did it was in order to perform a very specific, limited task such as transcribing religious texts or preparing contracts or legal decisions. In the case of the former, students in the ancient models were locked in place, so to speak, with their learning opportunities – and post-learning life opportunities – pre-determined by virtue of their birth. In the case of the latter, even the elite few in a position to benefit from their birthright to education still learned skills deemed beneficial and appropriate, in Farber's words, "by reason of authority" (para. 8).

CHAPTER 3 MIDDLE-CLASS EDUCATION: SLAVES BY SCIENCE

In the late part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, however, the limited scope and arbitrariness of this model needed rethinking, particularly in composition classrooms. Berlin identifies the expanding middle class as a major reason why composition instructional practices shifted at this time, stating, “the middle class...came to value the practical” aspects of education, particularly as it related to getting a job (18). As such, rhetorical education was a part of the 20th century college’s promise of upward mobility. As Berlin argues in *Writing Instruction*, at its loftiest the new model of rhetorical education was intended to emphasize “the importance of the student’s pursuing his own *natural talents*” (60, emphasis added), while at its most basic – he continues in *Rhetoric and Reality* – it was “designed to provide the new middle-class professionals with the tools to avoid embarrassing themselves in print” (35). The new rhetorical educational model – what Berlin calls the current-traditional rhetoric – emerged from Harvard and Columbia, and while it was adopted and adapted by state universities across the country such as Illinois, Wisconsin, and Texas, it was staunchly opposed by schools such as Yale, Williams, and Princeton which promoted a more conservative model.¹ This model, following the long history of education briefly outlined above, “was elitist and aristocratic, contending that the aims of writing instruction in the English department ought to be to encourage those few students who *possessed genius*” (35, emphasis added). Though the current-traditional model sought to “teach up” individual students to the best of their natural abilities, its rival sought only to teach those with the natural abilities of genius. Both relied necessarily and fundamentally on the so-called Noble Lie of Plato’s *Republic*: one’s value to and role in society – one’s “metallic worth” – was

immediately identifiable and predetermined by virtue of the societal position of his or her forebears. That is, both the current-traditional and its rival maintained that all people, particularly students, possessed a predetermined set of abilities, talents, and intelligences. Aristocrats begat aristocrats; carpenters begat carpenters.²

Equally spurred by the rising middle class and its emphasis on “the practical and the scientific,” supporters of both models of writing instruction recognized a deficiency in their founding principle that people were naturally ordered according to ability, namely that it lacked any legitimate scientific basis. Without this, the claim for dividing people up according to their abilities was transparent; it merely served those already in positions of authority by eliminating the possibility of true upward mobility. But rather than abandon the idea of inherited natural worth, however, professionals in the burgeoning fields of comparative psychology and eugenics – nearly all of whom researched and taught in Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton – conceived of various mechanisms for measuring an individual’s natural abilities, specifically an individual’s intelligence. These methods theoretically – though not practicably – measured IQ removed from and regardless of their parents’ social position. In the run-up to the First World War, one of these mechanisms was the Army’s Alpha and Beta tests. Designed by Harvard psychologist Robert Yerkes, these testing precursors for the modern-day Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) aimed to determine a test-taker’s inherited intelligence. Literate recruits took the written language-based Alpha tests, while illiterate recruits took picture-based Beta tests. Yerkes and his fellow psychologists used the tests to categorize potential soldiers using the familiar A through E grading scale. The officially stated motivation in testing and in categorizing test-takers was to allow Army recruiters

to place the individual into the appropriate field and division with the armed services. Yerkes and his colleagues' primary motivation, however, was to discover a scientific, psychological explanation for why certain groups seemed to be locked in place, one that went beyond the arbitrary historical explanation of "because that's what my dad did."

As an evaluative and explanatory mechanism, the Alpha and Beta tests yielded many startling results. Not only was the average white recruit's intelligence equivalent with that of a 14 year old, but also over 80% of all immigrant recruits from Eastern Europe, Central and South America, Asia and so on, as well as US-born African Americans, demonstrated testing intelligences far below the predicted "average" intelligence. Psychologists and eugenicists at the time interpreted these results as scientific proof of the Noble Lie: intelligence was inherited, which explained why the sons and daughters of aristocrats tended to be aristocrats, while the sons and daughters of carpenters tended to be carpenters.³ Carl Brigham, a professor of psychology at Princeton and author of *A Study in American Intelligence*, interpreted these results further, concluding:

'The Nordics [Western Europeans, Scandinavians, etc.] are...rulers, organizers, and aristocrats...individualistic, self-reliant, and jealous of their personal freedom....The Alpine [Slavs, Mediterraneans, Russians, etc] race is always and everywhere a race of peasants....The Alpine is the perfect slave, the ideal serf.' (qtd. In Kamin, 185)

Brigham's statement perfectly reflects the problematic early 20th century relationship between the questionable scientific conclusions of comparative psychology and the applied science of eugenics. Ostensibly his statements are merely descriptive in nature. He does not ever say, for example, that Alpines *should be* slaves; he merely indicates that they *are* perfectly suited to be slaves. But to suggest that Brigham and his

colleagues insisted such a distinction is laughable. The Alpha and Beta tests, as well as their progeny, were and remain sorting devices.

As Walter Lippmann writes in the fourth of six essays published in the *New Republic* that criticize IQ testing, “the intelligence test is likely to become a useful device for fitting the child into the school” (para. 43). Though the title of this essay categorizes such a move as a troubling “Abuse of the Tests,” writing programs across the United States already employed a similar tactic when populating their classrooms well prior to Lippmann’s statement.⁴ In one such example at the turn of the century, the Harvard Committee on Composition – comprised of diplomat Charles Francis Adams, journalist EL Godkin and publicist Josiah P. Quincy – reviewed student essays from college entrance examinations and first-year writing courses to determine the state of composition instruction. Ultimately, they recommended Harvard’s composition teachers take immediate action in addressing that the litany of deficiencies in the writing of their students. Rather than addressing the problem directly, however, Harvard officials sought to evade it entirely by raising admissions requirements on Harvard’s entrance exam, presumably to eliminate those not fit to participate in higher education (Berlin, 1984, 61). By raising entrance exam requirements, schools such as Harvard stacked the deck, so to speak, with students already demonstrated to be competent writers according to the standards of groups like the Harvard Committee on Composition. Harvard’s decision to raise their admissions standards throws into serious doubt the current-traditional rhetorical model’s emphasis on middle class upward mobility. Students were encouraged to develop their own natural talents in college, as long as their natural talents were already developed enough for them to attend college in the

first place. This makes it hard to differentiate between the current-traditional model and the rivaling model at Yale, Williams, and Princeton.

And for those programs that did not resort to such gate-keeping exams, the focus of writing instruction became to, according to Albert Kitzhaber,

[D]iscipline and strengthen these separate faculties through drill and exercises; and secondary to supply the student with a store of general principles in the light of which his trained faculties would, in later professional life, make needed particular applications. (qtd. in Berlin, 1984, p. 31)

This was a troubling return to the pervasive model of education and writing instruction that existed globally prior to the 20th century. Now, instead of social position, students were the inheritors of the more nebulous, ill-defined concept of intelligence. Those who did not inherit enough intelligence, or those that inherited the wrong kinds of intelligence – primarily individuals from various subaltern groups – would be denied access to higher education and elevated writing instruction. Those who did inherit enough of the right kind of intelligence would progress into a model in which, in Farber’s words, teachers “tell [students] what to read, what to write, and frequently, where to set the margins on his typewriter” (para. 4).

This cursory and ramshackle history is far from complete. Instead, my limited history is meant to highlight – through broad, sweeping strokes – the historical pervasiveness of a power dynamic between teacher and student that has remained relatively constant throughout the long, global history of education generally and writing instruction specifically. At its core, this dynamic emerges from the historically and globally ubiquitous belief in the Noble Lie: people are what they are by birth, and they cannot change predetermination save through state intervention. And while earlier models relied upon a system of inheritance as a determination of individual worth,

contemporary models turned to the questionable sciences of comparative psychology and eugenics. Once arranged according to “worth,” those in a position to receive instruction did so in a manner that generally reified and ossified societal values and principles. Teachers, in acting as agents of the state (willfully or not), imparted to students pre-ordained principles (intentionally or not) that succeeded in maintaining the order and structure of the state. What Compayré writes of Rome seems to hold true for historical and global educational models the world over: education’s “purpose was simply the education of soldiers and citizens who should be obedient and devoted” (44).

Notes

1. “Conservative” here exists in opposition to “democratic,” as opposed to “liberal.” A conservative educational model is one that seeks to educate according to inherited models. What one teaches and will teach is based on what has been taught. The goal of a conservative model is the preservation of the already in place. Democratic educational models, on the other hand, teach based on the emerging values of those being taught and, to a lesser extent, those doing the teaching. The goal of a democratic model is to construct a new reality that might better “fit” the group being taught.
2. As Berlin states, the current-traditional model promoted upward mobility. Presumably, however, an individual’s ability to improve his or her social condition was fundamentally limited by his or her “natural talents.” This is a kind of naturalistic glass ceiling. Just because one can see the possibility climbing higher and higher on the social ladder, doesn’t mean that one will ever really be able to reach the higher rungs.
3. Almost since their creation and administration, the Alpha and Beta tests – and their “results” – have been the target of profound and full-throated criticism, from a series of *New Republic* articles in 1922 by Walter Lippmann to biologist Stephen Jay Gould’s 1982 article “A Nation of Morons.” In perhaps the most influential and systematic debunking of intelligence testing, *The Science and Politics of IQ*, Leon Kamin – former chair of the same Princeton Psychology department in which Carl Brigham once served – posits in his introduction, “There exist no data which should lead a prudent man to accept the hypothesis that IQ test scores are in any degree heritable” (1). The purpose of examining the results, therefore, is to highlight the theoretical paradigm in which pedagogy generally, and writing instruction specifically existed in the early 20th century.
4. Lippmann’s prescience is also particularly troubling when one considers that in addition to the ASVAB, the direct descendants of the Alpha and Beta tests include the SATs (conceived of and originally designed by Brigham), as well as every single standardized test administered by the Educational Testing Services (ETS), the Princeton-based campus of which features the Carl Campbell Brigham Memorial Library. Even in their retooled and revamped contemporary forms, these tests remain a better indicator of the test-takers’ parents’ socioeconomic status than they do of the test-takers’ intelligence or ability (see Helen Ladd’s 2011 report “Education and Poverty: Confronting the Evidence”).

CHAPTER 4 INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES: HOW TO BE A SLAVE

This obedient devotion emerges equally from the content of instruction – what is read, what is written – as it does from the processes of instruction itself. Instructional processes deploy what Ian Bogost refers to in *Persuasive Games* as procedural rhetoric, “the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures” (ix). That is, they are the processes we internalize as necessary based on their constraining actions, repetition, unstated suggestions, etc. Unlike written rhetoric, procedural rhetoric “author[s] arguments through processes” (23), as opposed to writing, speech or other types of discourse. For example, Bogost highlights the ways in which the building and product purchasing processes deployed in the *Sim City* series generate a procedural position advocating conspicuous consumer culture. Though the foci of *Persuasive Games* are video game and computer processes, Bogost does recognize the use of procedural rhetoric in general processes as well. For example, court room processes or military procedures.

The vividness and power of procedural arguments are readily apparent in the repeated attitudes and behaviors of teachers and students throughout the long history of education and composition instruction. As the scattershot history presented above indicates, education is rife with procedural models that extend from where a student should sit to how a student should address a teacher to what is and is not a relevant subject of study. If the representational goals of the majority of educational models throughout history and the world were to produce obedient, devoted, servile citizens, then it should follow that those models would enact processes promoting obedience,

devotion, and servility. Or, to return to Farber, a 12-year course in how to be a slaves. These courses, obviously, are never explicitly stated. They are not a part of a course catalog, yet they remain a key component of a student's graduation requirements. As Bogost states, "written media do not express their arguments procedurally; instead they describe the process at work in such systems with speech, writing or images" (31). The inverse remains true, as well. So while education's *articulated* purpose is for students to brush up on the three R's, its procedural purpose – perhaps, to brush up on the three Ses (submissiveness, servility and shame) – remains unstated, but always present.

Consider the geography of schools. As suggested in William Lyons' and Julie Drew's *Punishing Schools: Fear and Citizenship in Public Education*, there is a long history of controlling the entry-points into and out of a school, as well as the various access-points within a school building. Though relatively recent incidents such as the Columbine school shootings pressured school administrators into many of these procedural changes at the primary and secondary level in the United States, there has been longstanding tradition of denying students access to the entirety of a school's buildings and campus at all levels of education. As Farber noted, "where I teach, the students have separate and unequal dining facilities. If I take them into the faculty dining room, my colleagues get uncomfortable, as though there were a bad smell" (para. 2).

The segregation metaphor subsists into the classroom itself, where students and teachers operate from speaking and listening positions that were established well before either entered the room. Cathy Davidson and David Goldberg remark that:

Ichabod Crane, that parody of bad teaching in Washington Irving's classic short story 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow', could walk into most college classrooms today and know exactly where to stand and how to address his class. (2)

Unsaid in this poignant criticism is the idea that students also walk into college classrooms and know exactly where to sit and how to address each other as well as the professor. Think of first-year college students entering a lecture hall and sitting in the same seats week after week, simply because it is with this procedure that they are familiar. Bogost might argue these students have developed procedural literacy of a specific and pervasive secondary classroom policy: assigned seats. Used in many elementary through high school classrooms, assigned seats serve a specific purpose within primary and secondary schools. They both organize students according to the instructor's preferences (alphabetically, by student number, by learning style, and so on) to better facilitate role call or classroom activities, and they also allow the instructor to operate in one of her secondary functions: protector (read: manager) of somebody else's child. Even when they have changed environments (and presumably educational models in which different procedural rhetorics and literacies are enacted), most first-year college students carry with them procedural literacies from their extensive experience in secondary education. Bogost indicates that procedural literacy:

[C]omes from interacting with procedural systems themselves, especially systems that make strong ties between processes in a model and a representational goal – those with strongly argued procedural rhetorics. (255)

Though a professor might laugh or scoff when a student raises her hand to use the restroom, or refer to a professor as Mrs. Smith, rather than Dr. Smith, these represent obvious moments of procedural rhetorical code slippage; the inadvertent reversion to a procedural literacy from that student's past.

These historical procedural arguments place students in positions of subjugation. These arguments are not, however, limited to classroom behaviors, though this is

perhaps where they are most endemic. The evaluative procedures of most writing classrooms exist as a compensation-model in which students' effectiveness only ever diminishes as the course progresses, except in those rare cases when teachers deign to mete out extra credit. In the first-year writing courses at my university, the core syllabus features assignments whose point values add up to 1,000 points. Ostensibly – and I've heard of many of my colleagues repeating this line on the first day of class – students start the course with a perfect score, 1,000 out of 1,000. As the semester progresses, however, students' total score dwindles. Ten points off an early assignment, 15 off a later assignment, and so on and so forth. Eventually, at the end of the semester, students' once-flawless 1,000 point total has been chipped away by each successive assignment until they are left with their final score out of the 1,000 possible points. This is uncompensated labor, spurred not by the promise of reward, but by the fear of punishment. Students learn to fear the red pen's punishing lash, rather than accept the encouragement or constructive criticism it offers via marginal comments, questions, or suggestions.

And, with rare exception, students entering into a writing classroom will likely focus entirely on the output of their writerly efforts, rather than the involved process of production itself. This concern over product over process, as with the inclination sit in the same seat week in and week out, emerges from a lifetime of educational processes that emphasize assessment's summative role in one's educational growth, rather than its formative role. That is, because many of our students emerged from a public secondary educational system in which the culminating educational activity of their K-12 learning careers is often a standardized exam of some kind – either a state-sanctioned

standardized test linked to NCLB, or the SATs or ACTs – students have come to expect that they will somehow need to demonstrate their mastery over various skills in a discrete, gradeable object that will be sent away to be evaluated by an expert in the appropriate field.

Significantly, this final point places pressure on educators as well, often spurring instructors at both the secondary and post-secondary level to teach what is expected of them. As Kelly Ritter notes in *Who Owns School?: Authority, Students, and Online Discourse* (2010), “[t]he faculty member rarely ‘owns’ his or her pedagogical content, and so the overarching curriculum as well as the individual lessons themselves are truly state-administered” (39). At a secondary level, this means short, repeatable document structures that lend themselves to quick reading and easy comprehension. Oftentimes, the summative writing experience for secondary students is the timed response to a standardized prompt. When instructing high school juniors and seniors how to successfully and quickly respond to these prompts on Pennsylvania’s State Standardized Assessment (PSSA), as well as the SATs, I was advised by my curriculum director to emphasize structure over content. Even as I winced internally, I found myself insisting to students: “the people that read this exams have to pore through hundreds of essays in a short amount of time. They’re looking to check off basic elements in your writing: an introductory paragraph with a guiding question and thesis statement, two or three body paragraphs, a conclusion that sums up your position. If you include these elements, it does not matter as much what you are arguing for or against.” I was able to dump these tips on my students because the tips had been dumped on me by an assessment supervisor preparing me and a group of fellow high

school English teachers to act as readers for a set of standardized, state-administered writing exams.

I was not overly surprised, then, when upon shifting from secondary to post-secondary writing instruction, I discovered startlingly similar amounts of standardization and emphasis on the end-product in first-year writing courses. I suppose it was naïveté on my part to expect something different. Though my fellow graduate instructors and I pooh-poohed the formulaic nature of the five-paragraph essay, many of us still snuck some of the advice I had heard from the assessment supervisor into our lessons and student conferences. Insisting that a student's essay contain a clearly articulated thesis statement plotting out the sections of the essay to come made the reading and grading of essays that much easier. More than that, however, was the expectation that we all teach in measurably similar ways. Both of the first-year writing courses – an argumentation and a research-based course – used communal syllabi and shared assignments. This was acceptable to many of us, as we all seemed to struggle to cut planning and grading time, which we balanced against our coursework, thesis and dissertation writing, and social lives. Centralized and distributed lessons, assignment descriptions, and lecture notes cut down on planning time, even if we had no ownership of the material, and our teacherly idiosyncrasies became as homogenized as our students' writing.

Procedurally, these assessment and assignment expectations of secondary and post-secondary writing education argue for a system in which student writers produce massive amounts of highly structured and rigidly formatted essays that are nearly indistinguishable from each other, excepting, perhaps, for the amount of mechanical

errors they feature. Bogost would argue that this is not an instance of educating but rather a clear example of training or schooling. He writes:

Being schooled means becoming an expert in the actual process of schooling, the requirements and conditions of doing well in school, so as to ratchet up in the system. Being schooled means understanding how to stand in line, how to speak when acknowledged, and how to follow directions. (262).

In terms of writing instruction, schooling results in the “White Shoes” student of David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.” Syntactically precise, the “White Shoes” example in Bartholomae’s essay lacks elegance, originality, and creativity. It is a safe product produced by a student intent on ratcheting himself up within a system of schooling. Such students are, according to Farber’s metaphor, “old grey-headed house niggers...who don’t see what all the fuss is about because Mr. Charlie ‘treats us real good’” (para. 12), their academic output a sort of Stepin Fetchit routine, a shuffling performance aimed to please, never disrupt.

Eventually, Farber’s metaphor veers from the outrageous toward the absurd. No teacher conceives of his or her role as one intended to produce docile, submissive, and shuffling students. Writing teachers want students to write with elegance, originality and creativity. We want verve and dynamism, even if it means more time spent conferencing and grading. We can shout down the demons of our classroom processes with the better angels of our stated preferences. Significantly, however, according to Bogost, procedural rhetoric – whether located in video games or in the “real world” – does not simply represent just another mode or style of rhetorical expression or argumentation. In analyzing the power of procedural rhetoric, Bogost invokes a “comprehensive continuum of vividness” from Charles Hill’s essay “The Psychology of Rhetorical Images.” In this essay – the first in the collection *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (2004) – Hill

posits that moving and static images exist closer to actual experience in terms of vividness than do written descriptive accounts or basic statistics. Hill concludes that visual arguments, therefore, often impact the receiver with more power than do written or spoken arguments, simply by virtue of the fact that they more vividly resemble lived experience. Reflecting on this continuum, Bogost declares, “procedurality is more vivid than moving images with sound, and thus earns the second spot on the continuum, directly under actual experience” (35). This is because procedural rhetoric often structures lived experience in a way written and visual rhetoric does not, whether it be the assumed rules governing highway driving, the unspoken etiquette of waiting in a long line, or the inherited classroom, assessment, and assignment procedures outlined above. Consequently, for Bogost, procedural rhetoric represents perhaps the most powerful method of argumentation that can be produced by a rhetor. By implication, then, the rhetoric of our teaching processes argues with more force and vividness than even our most full-throated denial that we are slave drivers and overseers. To invoke the cliché, actions speak louder than words.

More problematic still is the great degree to which these procedures – both in terms of the necessary separation between teachers and students, as well as the content of and assessment strategies for assignments and lessons – subsist in digital learning technologies being deployed and adopted in writing instruction classrooms around the world. In *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age*, Davidson and Goldberg identify a number of learning institutions in which various technologies are used to monitor students’ contributions to, behaviors within, and even movements throughout the school building itself. For example, the boldly named School

of the Future in Philadelphia employs various devices that allow school administrators to track students' Internet activity inside and outside of school, their exact location inside a school building, and even how many calories they consume over the course of the school day. Though these practices tend to be more prevalent in secondary educational institutions, similar digital traps and tracking devices – for example, Turnitin or SynchronEyes – are deployed in many post-secondary institutions. In these situations, digital technologies aid in monitoring student behavior, rather than supplementing or modifying learning objectives. These “learning” tools simply expand the role of panopticism, instilling in students the sense that all their actions are under scrutiny, both at home and in the school. One can easily read Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (1995) as relating to both prisoners *and* students when he writes,

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (202-203).

In this internalization of the power relationship between teachers and students, students become their own (hall) monitors, checking behaviors and beliefs that could or would be deemed inappropriate by the schooling system in which they are situation.

As it relates to writing instruction specifically, perhaps nowhere is the digital instantiation of subjugating teaching processes more evident than in the preponderance of institutions around the world that use course or learning management services (LMS), most notably the industry giant Blackboard. As of late 2012, more than 9,000 clients in over 70 countries used Blackboard as the primary LMS (Blackboard, 2012), while thousands of other institutions used some similar open-source or proprietary course management systems. Their ubiquity, however, belies their success in

generating a truly advantageous and beneficial learning space. As Darin Payne notes, LMSes “[undermine] many of the currently professed goals of English studies” (485). Specifically, Payne points out the myriad ways in which LMSes – specifically Blackboard – normalize students interactions in a “digital classroom,” eschewing expressive and original discursive behavior by limiting students’ ability to personalize pages, interact with each other and the teacher, and contribute to the learning goals and objectives of course shells. This consequence is hardly accidental, given that as their name suggests LMSes were designed for the *management* of learning, as opposed to say the fostering, development or facilitation of it. As such, they are systems designed with the teacher in mind, not the student, providing mechanisms that simplify the distributing and grading of assignments, monitoring of student interactions, and organizing of lesson and units. In one sense, as Ritter notes, “the online course simply takes the physical, on-the-ground classroom, and repositions it physically in the world of cyberspace” (39). This transliteration of subjugating educational processes into a digital realm occurs in nearly all institution of higher education, and even in counter or anti-institutions such as MIT’s Open Courseware, or Khan Academy, particularly as these institutions attempt to compete with the ease and ubiquity of online colleges like the University of Phoenix and DeVry University. But the problem extends beyond a simple digital reiteration of analog teaching practices, no matter the ubiquity. Students are doubly indentured in classes organized by LMSes. First, by the reiterated classroom procedures outlined above, and second by the very code of the LMS itself. While a physical classroom enables various possibilities of counteraction,¹ digital courses afford no such opportunities. Students can either choose to participate according to the

procedural rules governing the administration of the digital course, or they can choose to not participate in the course – and, by proxy, education itself – at all.

Seemingly, Farber’s slave metaphor has reinvented itself for the digital age: student-as-slave 2.0. Farber’s metaphor, and the critique contained therein, mirrors other liberatory pedagogical models of the era, most notably the school-as-machine metaphor pilloried by the Free Speech Movement (FSM) of Berkeley and the oft-anthologized “Banking Model” metaphor of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000). Each of these emerged from distinct theoretical frameworks, and as such, each yields a distinct, though related, metaphorical interpretation of students. While Farber’s involvement in and dedication to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s led to him to read students as coded-black slaves, FSM spokesperson Mario Savio evoked a mechanical, post-Fordist metaphor envisioning students as mere cogs in a machine, and Freire’s Marxism inspired his commerce-based “banking model” interpretation of teacher/student interactions. But regardless of the metaphor, Farber, the FSM, and Freire each fear the dehumanization, cooption, and consumption of students’ bodies and minds.

Each metaphor, however, differentiates and directs the aims of each movement’s liberatory pedagogy. For example, Freire sees a two-stage process for liberatory pedagogy:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage...this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. (54)

Freire’s educational aims are unequivocally Marxist in nature. He sees his critical pedagogy as a necessary and initial component of a proletarian revolution. Members of

the producing class must come to know both their *de facto* powerlessness and subjugation at the hands of the bourgeoisie, as well as their inherent, *de jure* power as the majority class. Then and only then, can this class also produce curricular objectives to guide their own education, which will set the stage for the proletarian revolution. Students must recognize their status as passive vessels, question the validity of the information being deposited in them, resist the authority of the dominant banker educator, and develop their own pedagogical transactions that will guide their future education.

Similarly the FSM, through the words of Savio, proposed a pedagogy based on disrupting the production of the educational machine. From the steps of Sproul Hall in 1964, Savio called upon his fellow students to,

[P]ut your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it – that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all. (para. 8)

In the vacuum left by an educational system disrupted, Savio insists that Sproul Hall will become home to “real classes” (para. 11), with topics ranging from Jean Genet’s film *Un Chant d’Amour* to the 1st and 14th amendments, “things this University is afraid that we know” (para. 11). In identifying these elements of a yet-to-be-actualized curriculum, Savio clearly sees a liberatory pedagogy whose primary purpose is the humanization or re-humanization of its students. Such students will first learn that they are empowered to organize and speak freely against anyone or anything that attempts to deny them the procedural rights guaranteed them in the Constitution. And even if these oppressive forces should deny students their bodily freedom, they are nonetheless able to maintain mental freedom, as with the older prisoner in Genet’s 1950 film.

Both Freire and the FSM (vis-à-vis Savio) figure the history of education in slightly inaccurate ways. There exists a gap between the metaphor used to describe a student's status in the educational system, and the actions students must take in order to resist that status. This gap is highlighted by asking what, on the face of it, might be considered a naïve question: how does an empty vessel or cog in a machine *do* anything? Ostensibly, they cannot. They are objects, and objects can only ever function as passive tools, vessels, or parts. Farber's "student as slave" metaphor closes this gap. Read as human chattel, students are both objects in a system of education (empty vessels or cogs in a machine), as well as subjects participating in that system. They are slaves, human objects, an ontological paradox. Unlike the FSM and Freire, therefore, the most direct system of subjugation for students in Farber's procedural metaphor is the educational system itself. It is not a machine serving a larger social construct, as with the FSM, or a bank serving the economic interests of the bourgeoisie, as with Freire. The processes of education itself ensnares and enslaves, encodes and enculturates students, and it continues to do so even as digital educational possibilities emerge.

Significantly, Farber – unlike the FSM and Freire – does not offer a solution to his procedural reading of students as slaves. He concludes his essay with a partial gesture at the possibility of a student-led pedagogy, pointing out students "could, theoretically, insist on participating in their own education" (para. 35). But the question of how students might participate in this education remains unanswered. In recognizing the ways in which the FSM and Freire inaccurately extended their procedural metaphors of students into questionable liberatory pedagogies, however, a blueprint emerges for

finishing Farber's task. Perhaps all we need to do is extend Farber's central metaphor. Understanding and acceptance of Farber's metaphor to its fullest are crucial if an instructor wishes to enact the promises made by liberatory pedagogies. First and foremost, if students are slaves, instructors are masters. I must recognize that it is my authority in the classroom that neuters my students' ability to participate fully in the direction of their own education. The only way I can abandon this position of authority is to abandon the educational institution itself. In that regard, I am as much a slave as my students. Confronting this metaphorical reality, then, I am left with a limited number of options when it comes to how I conduct myself in the classroom. On the face of it, I could be nice, forgiving, and permissive, or mean, unforgiving, and draconian. In either case, and anywhere in between, however, I remain the authority. As an authority, I have specific goals, learning objectives for the class, as much my own as a professional educator, as my institution's. Problematically, as I experience often, the nice, forgiving, and permissive authority often has difficulty in guiding a class to those objectives. My only option, it seems, is to be hard, mean, unforgiving, draconian, to embrace my authority, to wield it menacingly, to threaten rather than cajole, punish rather than inspire, train rather than teach. This is the old model; it seems to work.

But the old model leaves little room for students to participate fully in the construction and implementation of their own education. It reiterates the idea that teachers know best, and students should sit idly back, keep their mouths shut and their minds out, and sponge up the information that we deem worthy. It posits that students should be slaves, instructors their masters. As with a slave breaking the ontological or spiritual strictures of bondage, however, there are many things a student can do to

liberate herself and take a leading role in the construction, organization, and implementation of her own education. In searching for such a way for students (ostensibly enslaved in our writing courses) to participate in their own education, we might turn to historical accounts of actual slaves rhetorically confronting and navigating their enslavement. Specifically, we can engage Vorris Nunley's and Carmen Kynard's work on hush harbors and Adam Banks' concept of the digital griot in order to demonstrate how writing instruction – particularly students of writing instruction – might be served by these rhetorical models of resistance and expression that developed during and emerged from a history of slavery

Notes

1. See Robert Brookes' conception of underlife, for one salient example.

CHAPTER 5 HUSH HARBORS AND GRIOTS

Historically, hush harbors represented secret places in which African slaves could meet to converse and pray outside the gaze of their controlling masters. Typically located in the hidden rooms of a volunteer's quarters, or even in a secluded camp deep in the woods, hush harbors developed as slaves searched for ways to maintain pre-Middle Passage traditions and practice newly bestowed Christian rituals. As secretive spaces of worship, hush harbors allowed slaves to develop a sense of spiritual liberation. In *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South*, Janet Cornelius writes, "the excitement of the hush harbor transported [slaves] 'out of the valley up to a spiritual summit' and helped them to endure the trials of their lives, as they slipped home" (12). Faced with the impossibility of escape from physical bondage, slaves looked to hush harbors – and the spiritual services therein – as a way to transcend their bodily servitude. These services mentally transported slaves to the Promised Land, the penultimate gift of spiritual freedom after a lifetime of punishment, dehumanization, and oppression.

Though historically entrenched in a Judeo-Christian tradition, the rhetorical concept of hush harbors carried over to many present-day Black communities. In contemporary times, they exist as secret, often secular rhetorical spaces whose primary functions remain inventive, liberatory, and ontologically transformative. Vorris Nunley and Carmen Kynard offer the two most developed conceptions of hush harbors in the field of contemporary rhetoric. While Nunley's work identifies and examines the concept of African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric (AAHHR) in detail, Kynard examines AAHHR in its practical deployment in a university environment. Nunley's *Keepin' It Hushed*

(2011) investigates the hush harbor rhetorical space of the barbershop, as well as the features of AAHHR enacted in that space. For Nunley, “giddy rhetorical energy and force of Black men speaking their hearts and minds” fill barbershops-as-hush-harbors, allowing these spaces to operate “in a manner *unsanctioned* in public spheres” (72, emphasis added). Similarly, Kynard outlines a comparably unsanctioned rhetorical freedom in “From Candy Girls to Cyber Sista-Cipher” (2010). While Nunley’s liberated rhetorical space exists in the barbershop, Kynard and a group of her former students established and maintained a virtual space, an email exchange in which the participants exchanged ideas, praise and criticism on a variety of topics. Kynard sees her email exchanges as “enacting and embodying discursive spaces that teach working-class/working poor people *alternate* gendered and racialized roles in white institutions” (33, emphasis added). For both Nunley and Kynard, hush harbors – as alternate and unsanctioned rhetorical spaces – allow subaltern groups to speak freely in a manner that disrupts dominant institutional, ideological, and rhetorical practices.

Significantly, though, for both Nunley and Kynard, hush harbors do more than merely provide a safe space to speak your mind. As Nunley points out, a hidden space in which subalterns – or specifically African Americans – engage in ungoverned rhetorical exchanges provides a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for defining a hush harbor. He points to social clubs such as black fraternities and sororities as sequestered spaces that are not necessarily hush harbors. The missing ingredient for both theorists is *what* is being talked about and *how* that conversation fundamentally changes the participants. Both Nunley and Kynard conceive of hush harbors as spaces for agency *creation*, not simply agent *expression*. That is, hush harbors exist not only as

rhetorically liberated spaces, but also as ontologically transformative and liberatory spaces. In early hush harbors, this liberation was spiritual, and it occurred through the inventive and transformative spiritual practices that defined the secret space as a hush harbor. Cornelius addresses the inventive nature of early hush harbors, stating “hush harbor services showed how blacks could take white ritual and create unique services with elements from the African and slave experiences” (10). Essentially, hush harbor participants altered white, European spiritual traditions and practices, conjoining them with other traditions, and ultimately producing unique cultural and rhetorical expressions. This production of unique expressions involved a three-step rhetorical process that demonstrated participants’ empowered agency. It was first, and perhaps most importantly, an act of appropriation, a lifting or taking possession of another group’s rhetorical practices. Second, an act of alteration and manipulation, amendments to traditional spiritual practices, as well as the Judeo-Christian narrative itself. Endemic to the hush harbor tradition, as Cornelius and Nunley point out, was the rereading of Christ as liberator. And finally, the rhetorical production of hush harbors was an act of distribution or redistribution, a dissemination of the appropriated and altered spiritualism.

This act of appropriation, alteration, and redistribution indicates the empowered agency of rhetors in a hush harbor, as well as the possibilities of ontological empowerment through AAHHR. It is not simply that the words spoken in a hush harbor reflect an ideology of resistance – though they frequently do – rather, it is that the rhetors in a hush harbor are able to speak at all, and speak in way that utilizes an appropriative approach. Kynard specifies that the ontologically transformative power of

a hush harbor emerges from the space's ability to "enact African American rhetoric" that works toward "maintaining, rescripting, and retheorizing African American challenges to white hegemony" (34). In early, spiritual hush harbors, this act of empowering appropriation occurred during the component of the hush harbor known as "the shout." The consistent structure of antebellum hush harbor services built to the shout as the acme of spiritual liberation. Marked by the trance-like possession of those participants having reached this zenith, the shout manifests a liminal ontology in which the physical bodies of the slaves commune directly with the spiritual world. In fostering this communion, the shout of a hush harbor service transported participants to a khoral space or interval, bound by the physical strictures of slavery, but emancipated by the spiritual trance of ritual. The shout was a flipping of the script, so to speak, a redefining of the physical reality of slavery as a mere part of a greater, spiritual progression towards eventual and inevitable salvation.

We might better understand the "shout" as an instantiation of the rhetorical concept of nommo. Indeed, Nunley specifies "nommo" as one of the key transformative features enacted through contemporary AAHHR. Janheinz Jahn's *Muntu: An Outline of New African Culture*, published in 1961, provides what remains one of the most significant and influential conceptual handlings of nommo. Roughly translated as "the word," nommo is a traditional West African rhetorical concept that addresses the empowering and transformative power of speaking itself. To understand nommo's operation on speakers and in the world, we must address the specific metaphysical and ontological conditions Jahn describes. According to the metaphysics NTU: the world is a force, NTU, of which there several subcategories, two of which are of concern here:

Kintu refers to the things that populate the world, and Muntu, the subject of Jahn's study, humanity. A subcategory of Kintu is bintu, things or forces without intelligence such as rocks, animals, plants; essentially all the observable things populating the physical world around us. Bintu, "Of themselves...are without activity. Only through the effect of a muntu, a man...can 'things' become active and in their turn influence other 'things' and also rational creatures" (121).

The "effect of a muntu" occurs through nommo, the spoken word. Jahn points to the interconnectedness between the spoken word, the speaker's ontology, and the ontology of the world, specifically as it relates to power, stating that nommo is present when an "incantation is at the same time transformation" (137). According to Jahn, this transformation applies to both the speaker herself, as well as the world around her. He goes on to say, "Nommo, the word, creates images upon images and transforms them and the poet with them" (138). According to the metaphysics of NTU Jahn describes in *Muntu*, these images are not separate from the world, but constitute the world itself, both in terms of its written, historical record, as well as the fundamental ontological and metaphysical principles on which it operates. Both the speaker and her world exist in a sort of rhetorical positive feedback loop, in which the spoken word of the former alters the constitution of the latter, which in turn alters the ontology of the former, and so on.

Metaphorically, nommo exists as a distant cousin of JL Austin's performative utterance, in which the very act of speaking in some way actually alters our being. The concepts differ, however, in that Austin's performative utterance enacts ontological transformation through the meaningful content of the utterance, while nommo generates ontological transformation through the mere act of uttering itself. For example, in

Austin's terms by speaking the words "I empower myself" I create a new ontological condition: I am the being that empowers and is empowered. In merely uttering "I," however, I have – through nommo – already indicate my power, not just to myself, but to the world around me. This is crucial in understanding nommo's significance to the ontological subject/object paradox that is a slave. Nommo, the spoken word, the utterance, subjectivizes the object and liberates the slave. That is, in the very act of speaking itself, a slave, human chattel, signals her agency, identifying herself as more than a mere object, no longer a usable thing, but a speaking subject, a rhetor. The instantiation of nommo in hush harbors bolsters rhetors' agency further, emboldening participants to not just speak, but to speak the master's words; to not just speak them, but to change them, mix them up, layer them upon each other, and ultimately own them. Hush harbors, therefore, do not just result in the alteration of rhetorical expression, but also the empowerment of the rhetors themselves.

In both facilitating and identifying the ontological shift of slaves into rhetorical agents, nommo marks those agents as, what Kimmicka Williams calls "word-warriors." In her essay "Ties that Bind: A Comparative Analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's and Geneva Smitherman's Work" uses the concept of word-warriors to describe "technicians of verbosity" (96) such as preachers, tricksters, shamans, and griots. Indeed, the empowering act of appropriating, altering, and redistributing typifies the rhetorical practices of the griot. Also known as jelis, guewels, or gawlos, griots were West African poets or storytellers who were experts at the type of metaphysical and ontological alteration enacted through nommo. Not only do both nommo and griot emerge from West Africa – Mali, specifically – but also the procedures and results of each are

inextricably entwined. Specifically, griots attended to the metaphysical and ontological transformation of their peoples' past and present. Griots recited and sang stories, resituating both the past and the present in a projected and shared cultural narrative. That is, they refashioned both traditional stories and contemporary events to fit within a productive cultural narrative that could guide the social group in which they operated. As such, griots possessed a deep and inescapable understanding of the traditions of their culture and community, which they were able to call up at a moment's notice and recast in light of current events. This clearly marks the rhetorical practices within a hush harbor as firmly emerging from the griotic tradition. Hush harbor participants, acting as griots, combined both inherited and conferred spiritual traditions with their lived experience as slaves to craft a productive narrative of spiritual liberation. In short, they revised, recast, and rewrote their story as one of empowered freedom, rather than slavery.

We can see how crucial this type of griotic revision is to the student-as-slave. Students need a space in which they can transform their ontological position in the larger education system generally, and our writing classrooms specifically. They need an opportunity, to return to Farber, to participate in their own education. In emerging from a historical context that is metaphorically simpatico with that of our students, hush harbors seemingly provide this opportunity. Exactly how our students or we can use hush harbors in our writing classrooms is not immediately obvious. Kynard offers one possibility, detailing the benefits of a digital instantiation of students interacting via a list-serv email exchange. Problematically for those seeking a helpful teaching tool for their writing classrooms, however, Kynard's digital hush harbor existed outside of, rather than in conjunction with her classroom or the classrooms of the other participants. This

allowed Kynard's participation in the correspondence to be, for the most part, removed from her empowered position as an instructor-as-institutional-agent. Significantly, Kynard was invited to participate in a hush harbor that she did not herself create or maintain. Consequently, attempting to recreate the interactive, digital space in which Kynard participated in our own writing classrooms – without significant attention to our disruptive operations in those spaces – would likely be perceived as a veiled attempt to, in Ritter's terms, commodify, appropriate, or de-liberate our students' "own spaces for institutional study" (38). So, too, is the very notion of an instructor *using* a hush harbor in her classroom paradoxical. To paraphrase Ritter, how can we *use* our power to *empower* our students so they can *subvert* our power?

An alternative approach emerges from Ritter's *Who Owns School?* Specifically, she identifies a variety of ways in which students' extra-institutional discourse already challenges instructors' privileged position of power. In highlighting digital services such as RateMyProfessors, Ritter identifies potential alternatives to Kynard's purposeful participation in a digital hush harbor. Simply, we might encourage our students to set up some space – digital or analog – of their choosing that could facilitate their communication about the course with each other. This could not be, by necessary design, a requirement of the course. It could not be assessed because we, as assessors, could not see it.¹ Rather, a student's incentive to participate in such a space – if needed – is simply the opportunity to potentially change how the course is structured. As an instructor, I must be willing to present a problem to my students relating to the design or implementation of the course, and I must be willing to let them solve this problem without my intervention. For example, when approaching an

assignment focusing on synthesizing ideas, I might present to my students an assignment description, replete with grading criteria and even a rubric, and ask them, “is this the best way for you to demonstrate your ability to synthesize ideas?” Or, of a rubric, “Is this the best way for you to be assessed on whether or not you’ve successfully synthesized ideas?” And, of both, “what ways might better demonstrate or assess your ability to synthesize ideas?” These are not easy questions, but their difficulty does not mean that only experts are in a position to answer them. After all, having sat through numerous faculty meetings, conferences on best-practices, team-planning sessions, and so on, it is clear we experts need as much help as possible in attempting to answer them.

Perhaps ideally, teachers and students could exchange ideas about pedagogical best practices in a setting in which each participants’ contribution is as valued as the others’. Indeed, some teachers and some students can seemingly participate in such an egalitarian environment. But ultimately – and both students and teachers know this – the teacher remains the final arbiter because both she and her students expect her to remain so. Further, her position in her educational institution and her status in society relies upon her remaining in a position of controlling authority. Students are slaves, teachers their masters. Significantly, therefore, any conversations our students have about the direction of their education, must take place beyond our instructorly gaze. As noted by Ritter, the advent of various digital writing technologies and services provided ideal spaces – digital hush harbors, so to speak – for these conversations to take place. Our job might merely be, therefore, to direct our students to the digital spaces they already inhabit, and tell them how they might empower themselves through those

spaces. This would at once disrupt the hegemonic procedural managing of our students through LMSes, as well as avoid the commodifying de-liberation of these spaces Ritter describes.

In my own experience, students have arranged online groups via social networking services such as Facebook, established prolonged email exchanges and message boards, arranged alternate meeting times, and even, in a pinch, asked me to leave the room. We can see similar tactics employed by students across the world, as evidenced by the massive student presence in the Arab Spring, the student-organized university boycotts in central London in 2011, and the various Occupy campus protests throughout the United States, particularly those in California state universities, all of which were organized, to varying degrees, by social networking tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. The result of these student-organized hush harbors – in both my personal teaching, as well as in global, political movements – was a significant and productive disruption of the very system of education so poignantly criticized by Freire, the FSM, and Farber. For those more fearful of the results of students conspiring against us, than intrigued or excited for the results of students collaborating with each other, it should be noted that ideally students and teachers share a few common goals. For writing instructors and students in writing classrooms, for example, each group wants students to become better readers, writers, and thinkers. Though our opinions might differ when it comes to the best ways to reach these goals, it is foolish and unproductive to suggest that any of our students truly believe them to be unimportant. The suggested alterations my students made to me never reflected a disdain for writing instruction or education generally. They have never, for example, suggested that there be no reading or writing

in my reading and writing courses. They have, however, challenged the primacy of canonical texts, rejected the necessity of a point-based system of evaluation, and insisted that preparation for daily discussions be the responsibility of individual students, rather than me.

Perhaps most obvious, however, has been my students' desire to write in ways more in sync with the type of writing they already do on the web. Specifically, they design and suggest assignments that reflect writing practices best described by in Adam Banks' *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*. Drawing from the same West African and African-American rhetorical tradition of nommo and hush harbors, Banks' work repositions writers and students of writing. Writers are DJs, and DJs are digital griots. As with their analog forebears, digital griots write and tell stories. They possess a profound understanding of digital culture and communities, and they can refashion, repurpose, and redeploy this knowledge using the myriad digital tools at their disposal. In terms of multimedia writing, digital griots composit, rather than compose. In "Composing and Compositing: Integrated Digital Writing and Academic Pedagogy," Jamie Bianco identifies compositing as "the digital design and authoring of cut and paste visual, aural, tactile, and textual objects, capable of circulations of information exchange and reintegration through a potential network of like objects" (para. 20). They stack and layer multimedia elements – texts, conversations, images, videos, and on and on – cohering these seemingly disparate elements into a process, a movement. They build and build upon tradition, simultaneously creating, citing, and revising it.

Significantly, Banks' theorization of digital griots is simultaneously prescriptive and descriptive. That is, for Banks, writing as a digital griot is not only something students in a multimedia age should do; it is something they already do. Just not in classrooms in which students are procedurally made to be slaves. In my experience, though, the procedural possibilities of a classroom hush harbor opens up the space for our students-as-digital-griots to participate in the contemporary reading and writing practices with which they are familiar. In this vein, my students have proposed a variety of composition and compositing assignments, ranging from films composed of narrated screen captures of video games known as machinima, to the creation of pithy Internet memes, to how-to instructions mimicking those of sites such as eHow, to websites and character Facebook profiles and tweets, and on and on. Additionally, they have produced more familiar analytical and evaluative essays in which they cite both peer-reviewed publications, as well as digitally published reviews by their peers, deftly navigating the difficult and confusing terrain of establishing and maintaining ethos when using a variety of sources on a continuum of expertise. They often share with each other, with me, and with the entire class, various news articles, videos, sound clips, and images they find in their daily surfing they find humorous, relevant, poignant, significant, or otherwise related to the subject of our course, or some snippet of discussion we shared that day. In short, they create an abundance of writing demonstrating their commitment to the course, to each other, and to all the nebulous and idealistic aims of a humanities-based education.

Notes

1. Significantly, though I address ways in which my authority as the assessor should also be disrupted, I do not think it valuable to have students assess each other based on their participation in class-related hush harbor. This could result in a panoptic scenario in which

students, reporting on each other's participation, could simply adopt the role of a guard in service of a centralized authority, namely the instructor

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION: POWER AND CLASSROOMS

In *The Future of Thinking*, Davidson and Goldberg describe the new model of reading and writing that emerges from a world immersed in technology. They indicate:

Interactive reading and writing now increasingly engage us. One can read together with others remotely, commenting between the virtual lines and in the margins, reading each others' comments instantaneously, composing documents together in real time by adding words or sentences to those just composed by one's collaborators. (65)

The problem is, this writing does not look like the writing we are used to, the writing we often assign, or the writing we tend to value. In our efforts to change, to alter the content of what we do and do not value in terms of writing, we might make the tragic misstep of simply identifying some form of digital writing or composing with which we are passingly familiar and ask our students to replicate it. We might scan the seemingly innumerable methods through which our students write these days – methods that produce, according to Andrea Lunsford, more writing than any generation prior – and we might settle on one form, one method, one practice that we can get a grasp on, and we might tell our students, “write like that.” We might have them keep a blog, or tweet their thoughts about a particular reading. But to do so would be to assert our authority; to appropriate what belongs to our students; to claim what is not ours as our own. As Ritter argues,

[I]t is not enough to simply mimic these online structures that subvert academic literacy values, including reading practices, in institutionally sanctioned online course programs; we must also recognize the power and viability that the extra-institutional systems have in further defining the shape and tenor of our classrooms, beyond the simple introduction of like technology into our teaching methods. (57)

As Banks indicates, imbued in the practices of the digital griot is “both participation in American society and resistance to oppression” (17). Students are as much in a

gatekeeper position as teachers, as students tend to more enthusiastically and wholly adopt emerging digital tools than do academics struggling to stay at the forefront of specific field. It is as invigorating as it is overwhelming to consider the possibility that as an academic, I must simultaneously learn as much as I can in my specific discipline, the digital programs and tools I am expected to employ in my teaching, not to mention any personal interests or life lessons I might have or need to learn if I am wish to remain “with it” (are the kids even saying this anymore?). What is required of me, as a teacher, goes beyond simply foisting digital stuff onto my students, and expecting them to be comfortable with, and responsive to it by virtue of the fact that it is digital. What is required of me, as a teacher, goes beyond simply recognizing what digital tools or services my students are using, and attempting to shoehorn those tools and services into my pre-established syllabi. Instead, what is required of me is an attendance to how those tools and services already affect what and how my students interact and learn in my classroom. I am required to encourage my students to use these tools to shape their learning experiences, to free themselves from the enslaving procedures of a traditional classroom. That is what writing means, both inside my classroom, and inside the larger institutions – educational, governmental, societal, etc. – my classroom ostensibly serves.

Conceiving of our students as digital griots that employ nommo through AAHHR offers a powerful method through which we can dismantle the ontological problem outlined by Farber. Specifically, as writing instructors, we might consider the ways in which we can open up or encourage the use of rhetorical spaces outside the immediate purview of our courses to challenge and supplant the content and methods of those

courses. Writing instruction and composition studies exist, after all, as fields wholly concerned with all types of utterances, written, spoken, and otherwise. Specifically, we seek to know how and why people speak and write the way they do, and we strive to help our students develop and strengthen their abilities to speak and write in functional, creative, expressive, and yes, empowered ways. We want them to own their words. We might, therefore, champion the appropriation, alteration, and (re)distribution – as well as analyses, evaluation, critique, and so on – of our hegemonic writing practices. And while these instructional goals can be accomplished (with limited success) through directed practices in our classes, they work better in spaces unsanctioned by our institutional(ized) gaze. After all, on the face of it, a student-led, instructor-free educational hush harbor empowers our students by minimizing the distance between us and our students in terms of classroom authority, encouraging our students to challenge *our* direction of *their* education; in short, it destroys the notion of the instructors as, to quote Farber, “high priests of arcane mysteries” (para. 21). These models can be and should be used to encourage students to engage, analyze, evaluate, critique, and create everything from course elements such as individual activities, syllabi, and assignments to university or state-level educational policy. As one of my former students put it to his fellow classmates, “guys, I don’t think we understand exactly how much power we have here.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sam Hamilton was born in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. An only child, he grew up on a small farm in nearby Blairsville, graduating from Derry High School in 2001. He earned a dual B.A. in English and philosophy from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2006, and a M.A.T. in secondary English education from the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) in 2007, where he met his wife, Jessica.

Upon graduating from Pitt in July 2007, Sam taught for four years in and around the greater Pittsburgh area, acquiring invaluable professional experience working with a variety of students, ranging from students deemed “at-risk” by Pittsburgh Public Schools, to the sons and daughters of public officials and figures at an elite private academy.

Sam is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in rhetoric, writing, and composition studies.