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# Critical Affects: Laughter as Inquiry in First-year Writing Courses

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I work to rethink our current approaches to teaching critical thinking and writing in attempt to collapse the distance between the critical/rhetorical methods we teach in Rhetoric and Composition and the ways students interact rhetorically in their everyday lives. I am prompted to this line of inquiry by a problem I note in both theory and practice: the critical methods we teach in our writing courses rarely translate to real-world behaviors, often leading instead to student resistance, apathy, or cynicism. I begin in Chapter 1 by examining James Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing pedagogy because I find it representative of the critical aims and methods that permeate Rhetoric and Composition more generally. I then turn to the work of Lynn Worsham, T.R. Johnson, Thomas Rickert, and others who argue (directly or indirectly) that CCS-inflected writing pedagogies elicit resistance, apathy, or cynicism. These scholars help me to show how the problems they note stem from the way CCS-inflected pedagogies try to (re)shape students simply by shaping the ways that they write, thereby neglecting the role that non-discursive forces play in who students are and what they do. In Chapter 2, I examine the solutions put forth by the scholars who helped me to frame the problem, finding that while these solutions offer productive ways to engage students' non-discursive selves in the act of writing, they do so by ceding the desire to foster the kind of critical behaviors we tend to value in Rhetoric and Composition. I argue that these scholars' inability to

reconcile the critical methods we teach with students' non-discursive, embodied ways of knowing grows from the way they frame critical thinking and emotion as incompatible. In Chapter 3, I look to the work of philosopher Henri Bergson, whose theory of intuition shows how peoples' abstract and embodied ways of knowing (which he represents with the roughly parallel terms, intellect and instinct) work together in synergy to help people find their way through the world. In Chapter 4 I turn to practice, looking back at my experience trying to collapse the distance between the critical methods we teach and the ways students think and act in the real world. Through this experience I come to suspect that there might be pedagogical value to the rhetorical and affectively-engaging properties of humor and laughter, though because I had yet at the time to make use of Bergson's theory of intuition, my solutions fell short. In Chapter 5, I examine Bergson's theory of the comic, which grows out of his theory of intuition, and which I argue shows laughter to be embodied critical cognition. I then describe ways in which I structured a first-year writing course to take advantage of these critical and engaging properties of laughter. I conclude by examining sample writing produced by a student who was positioned to expand upon the critical insight contained in moments of her (and her family's) own laughter in service of academic inquiry. I argue that this tactic resolves the problematic tension students experience between their rational and embodied ways of knowing when they are subject to CCS-inflected pedagogies, while also fostering the kinds of critical insight lacking in the solutions put forward by Worsham, Johnson, Rickert, and others. My aim in this project is not for all instructors of first-year writing to use humor and laughter in the pedagogically-strategic way I arrive at in my own courses, but to encourage others to find new ways to tackle through scholarship and practice this (potential) gap between the critical/rhetorical concepts we teach and the ways students think and act in their everyday lives.

*For Ellie*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# Preface:

*For the comic spirit has a logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities. It has a method in its madness. It dreams, I admit, but it conjures up in its dreams, visions that are once accepted and understood by the whole of a social group. Can it then fail to throw light for us on the way that human imagination works, and more particularly social, collective, and popular imagination? Begotten of real life and akin to art, should it not also have something of its own to tell us about art and life?*

*-Henri Bergson*

The irony of teaching rhetorical concepts lies in how alien students often find them. Terms and categories of analysis like audience, purpose, context, strategy, and especially, rhetoric, are often used by students in simplistic ways, or are otherwise perceived by them to contain some hidden meaning that lies beyond their reach and that makes students reluctant to use the terms lest they risk embarrassment. And yet contemporary rhetorical theory—which sees rhetorical interaction as a facet of human experience that we are never, even for a moment, without (Bender & Wellbery)—suggests that prior to their coursework in higher education, our students have already accrued lifetimes of experience interpreting and responding to rhetorical situations. We might assume that in such time students have developed sophisticated rhetorical intelligence and instincts. The following project emerges out of my own experience seeing students struggle to grasp and employ rhetorical concepts, despite the fact that such concepts speak to matters with which students already have vast experience.

Though while I believe most Rhetoric and Composition teacher/scholars would concede that students possess at least rudimentary rhetorical intelligence and instincts, most, I have also found, believe the even more mysterious practice of critically engaging texts to be utterly foreign to students. So while some instructors have found ways to help students connect with rhetorical concepts, when faced with the challenge of teaching critical inquiry, or with fostering critical habits, nearly all approach the matter as though we were training students in a skill that is completely unconnected to their past experience or ways of knowing. I don't find it a reach to say that students likely have little prior experience critically engaging texts in the manner we hope to teach in our classes. However, I disagree that without their coursework in Rhetoric and Composition courses, students would lack critical instincts and abilities.

In the dissertation that follows, I argue that just as students already possess sophisticated rhetorical perspicacity, they already possess ways of knowing that we in Rhetoric and Composition might see as doing (or having the potential to do) critical work, were we to redefine critical thinking see it as an activity that is less abstract, less far removed from the living, embodied world we inhabit. Part of my aim for this dissertation, then, is to change how we define critical thinking: where it is typically understood as an abstract, rational, and perhaps objective mode of analysis and evaluation, I argue that critical thinking—like all thinking—is an embodied practice that cannot be reduced to rational and/or linguistic representation. Specifically, I examine James Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies-influenced version of critical thinking, which employs a linguistically-focused heuristic method designed to reveal to students how the "languages they are expected to speak, write, and embrace as ways of thinking and acting. . . are never disinterested, always bringing with them strictures on the existent, the good, the possible, and the resulting regimes of power" (100-1). The critical method that Berlin hopes

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to teach involves having students unmask the ways language contains "strictures on the existent, the good, [and] the possible," and how these strictures support existing regimes of power. I believe that in some ways, Berlin's understanding of critical thinking permeates the discipline; I argue, however, that by forcing students to undertake the kind of critical work Berlin advocates falls short of shaping students into critical subjects because his method is too far removed from the embodied ways in which people actually interact with each other and the world. In subsequent chapters, I thus work towards a new definition of critical thinking, one that better recognizes the way critical cognition—like all cognition—is an embodied, social, and temporal activity. Ultimately, I will draw from scholarship on humor and laughter to argue that the guffaws, affects, and sensations of laughter are embodied forms of critical cognition that can, with some ingenuity, be harnessed to improve the effectiveness of courses teaching critical academic writing. My intention, of course, is not to argue that all Rhetoric and Composition courses ought to take up humor and laughter as their subject matter. Rather, I find that this gap between how we conceive critical thinking and the critical ways of knowing that students already employ points to a gap between the content of our courses and the ways that students might potentially make use of that content.

In its broadest sense, then, the purpose of my project is to better understand this gap between the rhetorical/critical concepts we teach and the ways students make use of them in the real world. Investigating the ways in which laughter is embodied critical cognition reveals how the critical/rhetorical habits of thought we teach in our courses neglect to account for the role students' bodies play in who they are, how they think, and what they do. This failure to account for the role embodiment plays in how our students make their way through the world has undermined our teaching in profound ways. First, there is the aforementioned difficulty of

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teaching students a concept or way of thinking that seems entirely foreign to them. This challenge is admittedly not insurmountable, and writing instructors have no doubt found ingenious ways to tackle it, and yet it remains a pedagogical problem. More importantly, however, the role embodiment plays in subject formation has serious consequences in shaping what students take away from our classes. Two works that will be central to this dissertation, Lynn Worsham's article, "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion," and Thomas Rickert's book, *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*, encourage us to distinguish between the content of our courses and how students experiences in our courses shape what they take away from them. Worsham, for example, urges us to see how forcing students to critically engage the culture that matters to them imparts a negative emotional lesson. Students subject to such pedagogies might acquire the desired critical habits of thought, while also adopting uncritical attitudes towards academic (i.e. dominant) ways of knowing (234). Thomas Rickert is both more and less optimistic about how students who are subject to such pedagogies fare emotionally, though he, too, distinguishes between the critical content of courses and the role emotion, affect, and embodiment play in the products of a pedagogy. Students who are schooled in critically engaging popular culture, according to Rickert, might succeed in acquiring the skill, but because the products of their critical work run counter to their embodied investments, students will be unlikely to act on the critical habits they acquire. Where Worsham sees the production of Oedipalized subjects, Rickert sees habituation in dissonance between students' abstract and embodied ways of knowing. For both, the failure of pedagogy to achieve its aims begins with neglecting to account for how students' emotional, affective, or embodied experience in our courses shapes what they take away from them.

I believe that this failure to account for these consequences resides in a fundamental misconception of the role bodies play in who we are, how we think, and what we do. It is implicit in Worsham's work, and explicit in Rickert's, that while discursive forces shape people in fundamental ways, they are not the only factor in subject-formation. Minds are not reducible to constellations of discursive elements. Rather, as Byron Hawk puts it, "a mind dwells in a body, and a body dwells in a real-world situation" (104). In Rhetoric and Composition, we have overestimated the role discursive forces play in shaping people, and, aside from Marxist attempts to theorize the ways that material conditions shape discursive practices (Ebert, Horner), we have largely underestimated the role non-discursive forces play in rhetorical processes and what their effects mean for our pedagogies. This dissertation is an attempt to re-think what consequences the fact of embodiment holds for Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy.

My interest in this line of inquiry grew out of my experience teaching college research writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where it is hoped that students will learn to engage in what I would describe as critical rhetorical inquiry. At UWM, students are asked to rhetorically analyze scholarly texts, and they are then asked to put those texts in dialogue in order to produce a rhetorically-nuanced picture of a scholarly conversation. Finally, students are expected to contribute to that conversation by critically engaging the perspectives of those engaged in it. For most instructors, helping students learn rudimentary rhetorical analysis is a challenge; adding critical thinking to that challenge makes for an extremely difficult nut to crack, though it is not always clear why.

My own experience was no different. From my earliest days as a teacher in UW-Milwaukee's writing program, I found it difficult to get students to rhetorically analyze texts in sophisticated ways. Throwing critical work into the mix only compounded that difficulty. And

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yet, given our existence as rhetorically-attuned beings, I felt that the concepts shouldn't be all that difficult to grasp. Further, I found it difficult to believe that students drifted along through their rhetorically-rich lives without ever having enjoyed critical insight in relation to the perspectives of others or the collective discourses they participate in. I thus suspected, as teachers so often do when students struggle, that the problem must lie in a lack of student engagement. It was the evaporation of energy that occurred at the mere mention of the word, "rhetoric," that seemed to interfere with students' ability to wield rhetorical and critical knowledge.

Around this time, I become serendipitously aware of a small circle of scholarship outside the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition that found humor and laughter to be effective at generating affective engagement in learning. The existence of such scholarship only confirmed what I and most other teachers have learned through practice about the ability of a well-timed quip to increase students' alertness and effort. In addition, while working on an unrelated project, I came across an analysis of a short story by Flannery O'Connor in which the author, J.P. Steed, used a French philosopher's theory of laughter to explain how O'Connor's rhetorical success was a product of her strategic use of humor. That philosopher was Henri Bergson, and while not technically a rhetorician, he had described humor's rhetorical properties in extremely sophisticated and, I thought, rhetorically useful ways. Eventually I would come to see through Bergson's work that humor and laughter are not simply rhetorical matters, but that laughter constitutes a simultaneously critical and embodied perspective in relation to discursive structures. Much of this dissertation will be devoted to explaining what I mean by that statement.

But at the time of my initial foray into engaging students affectively in critical rhetorical inquiry, I had only a muddled suspicion of the extent to which the body played a role in the work

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that humor does, and I hadn't yet put serious thought into its critical potential. I only hoped that there might be a pedagogical use for the way that humor and laughter are simultaneously affectively-engaging and rhetorical matters. Just maybe, I thought, the affectively-engaging properties of humor and laughter could pull students through the work of learning about something that was rhetorical. I thus conceived a course in which students would do research into humor theory. This approach was enabled by the fact that, in addition to Bergson, there is a long and rich tradition of humor theory reaching all the way back to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian, with subsequent contributions by prominent theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Herbert Spencer, and Sigmund Freud. The idea was that by engaging this tradition of scholarship on humor and laughter, students might be affectively engaged in inquiring into a scholarly conversation about rhetorical matters.

In practice, of course, my estimation of this pedagogical approach turned out to be somewhat off. Granted, the conversations taking place within humor theory did prove convenient for helping students to witness and later join an ongoing scholarly conversation. However, I questioned whether the rhetorical glimpses I hoped humor theory was providing ever translated into students growing more perceptive of the rhetorical dimensions of discourse. Would they really become more rhetorically effective through the study of humor theory? Just as important, I quickly found that the pleasure students associated with humor dried up the instant they turned to scholarly work about it. Rather than producing insightful, engaged writing, they generally produced stilted, disinterested mutations of my own research. I didn't need to draw on rhetorical theory to know that humor was something students enjoyed and with which they had extensive experience, and yet the gap between the content of my courses and my students' experience remained as wide as ever. There seemed to be something special about humor for the way it was

both a rhetorical subject and one concerned with pleasure, but taking advantage of these properties in the service of teaching critical inquiry was proving quite difficult.

The answer, I would find, lay in the humor theory itself, specifically in a contention of Bergson's that I initially struggled to get my head around: his idea that the comic, which he says he regards as "a living thing," "has a logic of its own" (1). We laugh, according to Bergson, upon the perception of the "mechanical encrusted on the living" (18). By "mechanical," Bergson refers to the abstractions that structure language and sociality. These abstractions range from grammars and signifiers to shared logics, morals, and rules for social interaction. Most of the time, our reliance on these "rule-bound ways of coping" goes unnoticed, but on occasion our dependence on them is revealed through their misapplication. We exhibit some response, either out of habit or cultural prescription, that ends up looking silly when applied to the present circumstance. In this sense, Bergson sees the comic as "corrective"; in my view, I believe it reveals laughter to be eminently critical. He says that it "throw[s] light [upon] the way the human imagination works, and more particularly social, collective, and popular imagination" (1-2). I see in this "throwing light" the unmasking of our struggle to apply culturally-shared structures such as logics, morals, and hierarchies, to the corporeal world in which we live. In this way, the "something of its own" the comic "has to tell us about art and life" has a critical edge in regards to the cultural logics, discursive practices, and personal identities that structure and inform our behavior. I believe that this "critical something" that  Bergson locates in the comic could be useful, not only to rhetoricians attempting to understand the ways bodies function in relation to discursive structures, but also to writing instructors hoping to facilitate critical inquiry while generating affective engagement.

In the years since I first came across Bergson's theory I have engaged in both research and practical experimentation in hopes that it might help me come up with a strategy for surmounting this difficulty I'd encountered. Not only did this process help me to generate what I hope to be a viable solution to a problem I'd met in my own practice, it also helped me to understand a challenge that is reflected more broadly in the literature of Rhetoric and Composition scholarship. I learned that what appeared to me to be a gap between the concepts we teach and the ways students make use of them is addressed in various ways by the work of Lynn Worsham and Thomas Rickert, and others such as T.R. Johnson, Christa Albrecht-Crane, Heather Palmer, and Byron Hawk, all of whom respond (to varying degrees) to the shortcoming which grows out of our attempt to shape students into critical people by shaping the ways that they write. Central to these scholars' framing of the problem is the notion that our focus on discursive matters neglects to account for the role our students' bodies play in who they are and what they do. By privileging the discursive, they argue, we enact a mind/body split that proves to be the undoing of our pedagogy, and so they advocate various strategies for reconciling this binary in both theory and practice.

These strategies represent an important step forward, I believe, though I also believe that the way the scholars who generate them often frame of the problem in oppositional terms undermines their ability to fully reconcile the gap between the concepts we teach and the ways students navigate the real world. However, I believe it is no coincidence that, Henri Bergson, who theorized laughter as embodied critical thinking, works from a broader project attempting to reconcile the abstract and embodied ways by which we interpret and respond to our lived, embodied world. His work with the concept, *intuition*, which for him is both a philosophical theory and method, attempts to account for the ways we make use of both abstract knowledge

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and an embodied sense of the present as we pilot our way through day-to-day rhetorical situations. I thus believe that a working-through of Bergson's ideas, mediated by my own practical attempt to harness them in the service of teaching writing, can speak back to the conversation taking place between Worsham, Rickert, and the rest.

And so, Chapter 1 is framed, not around my own experience, but around literature in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, which in various ways argues that there is a problem with the practice of trying to shape students by shaping the ways that they write. I begin with a summary of the logic behind these problematic pedagogies whose aim is to foster critical habits, focusing on James Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies writing pedagogy because, while it certainly doesn't encompass every CCS-inflected approach to teaching writing, it does provide an especially visible example of how the critical content in our courses is supposed to work. From there, I trace a conversation thatbegins with Alice Brand and Susan McLeod's attempt to show that emotion and the body are relevant to writing pedagogy. Their initial attention to the body triggers a wave of scholarship inquiring into how non-discursive matters impact the success or failure of our courses. I trace the scholarship tackling the pedagogical problems of resistance, apathy, and cynicism and how these problems arise from our lack of attention to matters which exceed discursive representation—emotion, affect, and lived temporality, respectively. I then argue that our failure to account for the role non-discursive matters play in who we are and what we do (and what students take away from our courses) ultimately undermines our ability to impart on students the kind of critical rhetorical skills we hope they acquire.

Whereas Chapter 1 examines a problem, Chapter 2 examines existing solutions to that problem. These solutions, naturally, were put forward by the scholars who framed the problem in the first place, and so I echo the basic progression through emotion, affect, and temporality,

which structured the first chapter, but this time with a focus on how successful scholars were in addressing this gap between the concepts we teach and they ways students inhabit their lived, embodied worlds. These scholars mostly provide useful ways to incorporate a concern for emotion, affect, and lived temporality into our pedagogical designs, though I argue that because they tend to frame critical and embodied ways of knowing as existing in tension, their solutions ultimately struggle to rectify the fundamental tension that arises when we try to shape students by shaping the ways that they write.

In Chapter 3, I turn to a scholar, Henri Bergson, who in his time confronted a similar to privileged the discursive at the expense of the non-discursive. In Bergson's case, the chief culprit lay in an overconfidence in mathematics and scientific method, but like Worsham and Rickert, Bergson worked toward an understanding of nature and people as things defy rational explanation and symbolic representation. Specifically, I examine Bergson's method of *intuition*, which draws together both abstract and embodied ways of knowing (Bergson uses the terms, intelligence and instinct) into a cohesive theory of how people employ abstractions to negotiate a decidedly non-abstract world. I argue that Bergson's more holistic notion of *intuition* offers both a theory to account for the role emotions, affects, and bodies play in cognition, and a method by which we might reveal the shortcomings of the abstractions (or what in the context of writing instruction would translate to discursive practices) that structure our knowing and social interaction.

In Chapter 4, having tackled the critical/embodied binary in a theoretical way, I turn back to pedagogical practice, beginning with my early attempts to teach rhetorical concepts and critical thinking to students in a first-year writing course. I begin by examining the two groups of scholarship which fostered my belief that humor and laughter might be useful to teachers of

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writing. The first consists of the tradition of humor and laughter theory; I examine this scholarship to demonstrate how humor and laughter might serve as suitable content areas for writing courses which hope to facilitate rhetorical thinking. I then turn to the second group, scholarship on the strategic use of humor and laughter for pedagogical purposes. I work to show how the pedagogical advantages of humor and laughter described by scholars in this group might (or might not) translate to writing instruction. Having explained the motives which inspired my early pedagogical attempt to address the problems I outlined earlier, I then turn to the results of that early attempt, discussing how it fell short and what that failure taught me about the relationship between embodiment and critical writing pedagogy.

In the fifth and final chapter, then, I turn to a more successful attempt that takes advantage of laughter's both embodied and critical properties. I begin by returning to Bergson, this time with a focus on the theory of laughter that grows out of his general philosophy. I show how, according to Bergson, laughter consists of critical perspective similar to the kind we hope to foster in Rhetoric and Composition courses, though that perspective is of a more embodied sort. I then explain the practical dimensions of how I structured a first-year writing course to position students to expand on moments of laughter—moments that I have shown consist of critical intuition—in the service of doing academically-viable critical work. This practice, I argue, positions students to make use of their simultaneously rational and non-rational ways of navigating the world, thereby collapsing the distance between the rhetorical/critical concepts we teach and the ways students navigate the rhetorical (and embodied) dimensions of their everyday lives.

Ultimately, my goal in this dissertation is to contribute to the growing body of scholarship encouraging increased attention to the consequences that our students' embodiment

holds for our pedagogies, and to provide an example of how we might, through approaching

course content in a new way, incorporate students' intuitive or more overtly embodied forms of

cognition into the processes of critical inquiry.

# Chapter 1: The problem with Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing pedagogies' attempt to foster critical subjects

*Abstract:*

*In this first chapter of my attempt to better align the critical/rhetorical habits we teach with the ways students think and act in the real world, I examine a problem I believe to be endemic to Rhetoric and Composition: we have thus far struggled to account for how embodiment affects the outcomes of our pedagogies. I begin by outlining James Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies pedagogy because I see it as an exemplar of the ways nearly all Rhetoric and Composition pedagogies privilege discourse at the expense of embodiment. I then trace the conversation over what embodiment means for writing pedagogy, a conversation that begins with Alice Brand and Susan McLeod and that is subsequently picked up by others such as Lynn Worhsam, T.R. Johnson, and Thomas Rickert. Through this conversation, I work to show how our lack of attention to embodiment leads to the related problems of resistance, apathy, and cynicism, thereby undermining our ability to give students the critical/rhetorical skills we believe they need. Ultimately, I argue that writing pedagogies such as Berlin's fall short because the discursively-focused critical method they teach encounters resistance from students' embodied ways of knowing.*

**Introduction**

Much of what we do in Rhetoric and Composition courses is driven by the desire to foster critical behaviors. Whether a course stresses rhetorical analysis, academic inquiry, argument, or some mixture of these, our basic aim is for students to acquire critical habits in relation to a particular discourse. We might ask students to critically engage sources in the course of research, or we might ask them to construct arguments through critically engaging the arguments of others. In James Berlin-styled, Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing courses, we ask students to inquire into the various ideologies and ways of knowing that are transmitted through culture. In all cases, but especially in the case of Berlin's pedagogy, the hope is to help students perceive how people are shaped, or "interpolated," by discursive structures and practices (Fulkerson). The idea is that by changing the ways students interact with discourse, they might resist the worst effects of that shaping to become what Thomas Rickert refers to as a "critically enlightened citizenry" (2). In this dissertation, I will take a closer look at these aims which are so pervasive in the literature of Rhetoric and Composition. Specifically, I will focus on Critical Cultural Studies-inflected approaches to teaching writing because our critical aims (and the means by which we achieve them) are perhaps most visible in these courses whose goal is to help students resist the ways they are unknowingly shaped by the discourses of culture.

The notion that by teaching students to engage discourse critically we can shape them into critical subjects looks good on paper, but some question whether this tactic produces the kind of change in students we might hope for. Rickert, for one, doubts whether forcing students to critically engage discursive structures will automatically lead them to acquire critical behaviors. If, for example, a student were asked to critically engage an Ambercrobie & Fitch campaign to uncover the way it takes advantage of its shoppers' insecurities, Rickert wouldn't be

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surprised to spot the student walking out of an A & F the very next weekend laden with bags full of overpriced clothes. After having read the student's critical examination of A & F's advertising tactics, most instructors would conclude that the student had acquired the desired critical habits. But Rickert would argue that the A & F shopper most likely wrote the essay for a grade and then dismissed the critical lesson immediately after. He thus asks us to question whether our classroom achievements really do translate to students' everyday practices.

The problem, according to Rickert, is larger than the failure of critical writing to translate to critical behavior. He argues that forcing students to critically engage something which had previously been a source of pleasure for them produces the curious result that the critical perspective students acquire is positioned to retroactively invalidate the imprint of pleasure that the students' previous interactions with culture had left on them. In a sense, the students' rational capacities are made to deny something they had previously known in an emotional, affective, or embodied way. Our Abercrombie & Fitch shopper is made to think that the pleasure derived from shopping there wasn't valid, even though his or her emotional self remembers differently. This experience, according to Rickert, leads to a kind of cynicism that is unsuitable for the "critically enlightened citizenry" we hope to foster. In all probability, the student will continue the behavior that had always been a source of pleasure, but with a newfound cynicism. To borrow from Slavoj Žižek, this new, cynical student "knows very well what [he or she is doing] but still [he or she is doing] it" (8).

This insight of Rickert's is enabled by a distinction he makes that will be central to this dissertation: the distinction between the discursive matters we concern ourselves with in Rhetoric and Composition and the world which cannot be reduced to discursive representation. Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies pedagogy, as Rickert points out, hopes to shape students into critical

people by teaching them to engage discursive structures critically. The idea is that critically engaging discourse automatically translates to critical behavior. But prompted by Rickert and others, I will argue in this chapter that adopting critical habits of thought does *not* automatically lead to critical behavior because our present interpretations of discursive structures are not the only things informing who we are and what we do. In Rhetoric and Composition, we've had a difficult time accounting for how non-discursive matters might be relevant to writing pedagogy, an understandable trouble given our institutional mission as teachers of academic writing. But as I will show in this chapter, this failure to consider what non-discursive matters mean CCS pedagogies not only leads to a failure to achieve our critical aims, it leads to unintended and undesirable consequences. Fortunately, I think simply turning our attention toward these matters is half the battle.

In the chapter that follows, I will begin by explaining the rationale of CCS-inflected approaches to teaching writing, followed by a discussion of three problems Rhetoric and Composition scholars argue are produced by the CCS approach: resistance, apathy, and cynicism. I will show how these problems share common cause in the way Berlin's critical method attempts to shape people with little regard for the role non-discursive matters play in who we are and what we do. Ultimately, I will argue that Berlin's pedagogy falls short because the discursively-focused critical method it teaches encounters resistance from students' non-discursive ways of knowing. In subsequent chapters, I will then work towards an alternative to Berlin's critical method, one inspired by the work of Henri Bergson, whose philosophic critical method, intuition, better incorporates non-discursive ways of knowing into the processes of doing critical work. I will then show how Bergson's notion of intuition, and his theory of

laughter that grows out of it, can help us close the gap between the critical work we have students do in our classes and their lives outside of the classroom.

**A critical method inspired by the power of language (and only language) to shape people**

Prior to the 1960s, writing instructors saw language as a straightforward set of grammars and semantic systems through which people could communicate, confident that they were in full control of their meaning (Berlin). This view of language translated into an approach to teaching writing aimed at giving students instruction in using language even more effectively through the employment of traditional rhetorical forms. Eventually, however, linguistic theory by Ferdinand Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes called into question this view that language is an innocuous, transparent conduit of meaning. This, in turn, led Berlin and others to question the traditional blueprint of the writing class. In the following section, I will examine what Berlin had to say about the traditional models of writing instruction that he calls Current-Traditional Rhetoric, and the Critical Cultural Studies pedagogy he advocates in its place. This section will to first contextualize and clarify how Berlin's pedagogy works, and then show how it depends heavily upon the idea that people are shaped by their interactions with discursive structures, and *only* their interactions with discursive structures.

According to Berlin, Current-Traditional Rhetoric (or CTR) is founded on the idea that language is a cohesive, rational system of signification capable of fixing meaning consistently and with precision. This clarity and precision of language enables the people who use it to accurately decode the conditions of their existence and thus to deploy language for their own ends in controlled, self-aware ways. With so much control over how they interpret and respond to their rhetorical situations, people are seen to possess a will that functions independently from

the surrounding discursive winds. In Berlin's words, the Current-Traditional subject is seen as a "transcendent consciousness that functions unencumbered by the social and material conditions of experiences, [capable of] acting as a free and rational agent [and of] authoring. . . his or her behavior" (Berlin 65).

However, the transparent rationality of language that enables transcendent, self-aware Current-Traditional subjectivity is problematized by the work of Saussure. In a truly rational and transparent system of signification, one would expect there to be some logic governing the relationship between signifiers and the signifieds they represent. But Saussure, who investigates the relationship between vocalizations and their meanings, argues that signifiers derive their meaning not from their relationship to their signifieds, but from their relationship to other signifiers within sign systems more generally. Nouns, for example, derive their meaning in part from their relationship to other nouns. The result of this observation is that language—which under the Current-Traditional paradigm was seen as a rational, transparent system—instead takes on an arbitrary quality. This arbitrariness is not innocuous. Levi-Strauss shows how language makes use of binary systems of meaning that ultimately privilege one term over the other and that thus re-produce social hierarchies. And Barthes, who applies Levi-Strauss's work in Marxist fashion, shows how the hierarchical structures built into language privilege bourgeois modes of thought and action (Berlin 62). As a result of this shift in understanding how language conveys meaning, language is no longer seen to transparently reflect and represent the world, but is seen to insert itself into our understanding of things—to "organize and communicate experience" (Berlin 61).

While Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Barthes undo the notion that language represents the world in transparent, benign ways, the notion that meaning operates through systems of

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signification in which signifiers derive meaning from other signifiers retains in language an aspect of rationality. Signifiers might not represent the world reliably, but there is at least reliability in how they derive their meaning. Derrida, in contrast, questions whether language lives up to Saussure's arbitrary-but-airtight system of signification. He argues that the relationships by which signifiers derive their meaning are so various and complex that they can never be fully apprehended by speakers and audiences. Any utterance is seen as dependent upon an endless train of relationships far beyond the comprehension of language users. In Berlin's words, the processes of discourse are "aleatory and thus unpredictable, beyond the control of any person or group" (64). Just as a speaker is never entirely aware of the full meaning of his or her words, he or she can likewise "never predict the significance the term will have for an audience," and so we "are thus all spoken by language as much as language is spoken by us" (64). In this way, according to Berlin, "language has an uncontrollable life of its own" (64).

The "uncontrollable life" of language shatters traditional notions of subjects as unified, self-aware authors of their own experience. Subjects listen, speak, and act through structures that are not of their own making and that are never fully apparent to them. Through every utterance, speakers imbibe and reify the various binaries, hierarchies, and grammars present in language. Subjects are thus regarded as constructed *by* the "various signifying practices, the uses of language and cultural codes, of a given historical moment" (Berlin 66). In an inversion of the Current-Traditional paradigm, the subject is not seen as the "source and origin of these practices" but instead as their "product." Further, because these structures are inherently unpredictable and, as often as not, in conflict with one another, the positions that subjects inhabit grow conflicted in turn. In Berlin's words, language is constituted by various "conflicting and contradictory scripts. . . that do not always square with one another" (66). At any given moment, the now fissured

subject must choose between multiple positions, a choice between logics of which the subject is likely only minimally aware and that, further, is too complex to be made through rational means. For Berlin, the resulting subject, only partially aware of what it does and why, is thus "conflicted, incoherent, amorphous, protean, and irrational in [its] very constitution" (66).

Where writing instruction is concerned, for Berlin, Current-Traditional programs appear to reify students' already uncritical use of language, setting them up for a lifetime of interpolation. In contrast, Berlin advocates training students to engage discourse critically. To that end, he offers a heuristic method for unmasking the ideologies, hierarchies, and ways of knowing built into various discourses. In order for this method to most effectively shape who students are, Berlin calls for students to examine the discourses of popular culture because those are the discourses most relevant to students' subjectivities. In this fashion, Berlin's pedagogy draws from the methods of Cultural Studies. Like Derrida, Berlin doesn't believe it will ever be possible for a single person to master all that is conveyed in discourse, and yet he hopes that by fostering critical habits, student-subjects will be more able and likely to intercede in discourse—more likely to unmask and take action in relation to otherwise invisible currents imbricated in day-to-day linguistic interactions. In this sense, Berlin's project takes on a political edge, since he views such critical subjects as better able to resist otherwise uncontested public narratives and to thus attain some degree of agency and power in political or public discourse.

At the time of its distribution, Berlin's project was mostly well-received. His work set forth a wave of scholarship by theorists such as Patricia Bizzell, John Trimbur, Alan France, and Linda Brodkey, who, in various guises, investigate what it means for writing instruction to consider the subject as constituted in language and/or who consider what the methods of Cultural Studies might contribute to Rhetoric and Writing programs (Rickert). That is not to say that

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Berlin's project was without detractors, most of whom objected to it on political grounds. Maxine Hairston accused discourse-critical pedagogies of having a leftist bias, and Victor Vitanza argued that Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing programs "remained invested in modernist, and dangerous, liberatory narratives" (Rickert 13).

But what I want to call attention to is the way Berlin's entire approach is dependent upon the idea that subjects are shaped by the language practices they have grown up into. He dismisses Current-Traditional Rhetorics on the grounds that they leave students vulnerable to being shaped by the ideological suppositions built into linguistic structures and practices. Further, his notion of the "conflicting and multiple" subject is a product of his view that people are shaped by discourse, which itself is conflicting and multiple. Berlin thus advocates the Critical Cultural Studies method in order to re-posture the ways students process culture and thereby change their very constitutions. The critical method he advocates teaching, then, works to reveal how signifying (or discursive) practices insert their will into our interactions:

> Our business must be to instruct students in signifying practices broadly conceived—to see not only the rhetoric of the college essay, but also the rhetoric of the institution of schooling, of politics, and of the media, the hermeneutic not only of certain literary texts, but also the hermeneutic of film, TV, and popular music. (100).

This method consists of heuristics for "penetrating [semiotic] codes and their ideological designs on our formation as subjects" so that in the future students can exercise awareness of the ways that the words we speak and write are "never disinterested," but instead bring with them "strictures on the existent, the good, the possible, and the resulting regimes of power" (101). Specifically, the method consists of contextualizing culture and signifying practices within larger "narrative structures" that exert "economic, political, and [cultural]" influence. A student in

Berlin's course might, for example, examine "capitalist economic narratives" and their consequences for class, gender, race relations, etc., (127). The thinking is that if students adopt the mental habit of applying heuristics for engaging culture critically, then their bodies will follow. It is important to note that this equation works if who students are and what they do is strictly a product of their position and posture in relation to discursive structures. Further, that relationship with discourse is subject to re-shaping through strictly rational means. Berlin's definition of critical thinking, it seems, is confined to the unmasking of the ways signifying practices over-determine students' (or language users', more generally) thinking on subjects such as class, gender, race relations, etc.. There seems to be little allowance in the way Berlin's discursively-focused critical heuristic pedagogy for the role non-discursive matters play in shaping who people are and what they do, and there is no allowance for the subject to have any relationship with discourse other than what takes place on the rational level. Even so, the equation that says we can shape students by re-shaping the ways that they interact with discursive structures looks pretty good on paper, particularly since it is difficult to perceive at first blush how non-discursive factors might disrupt the functioning of Berlin's pedagogical method. As we will see in the following sections, however, Berlin's Critical Cultural Studies method hasn't always produced the intended results.

**Three steps to understanding the shortcomings of Critical Cultural Studies writing pedagogy: Resistance, Apathy, and Cynicism**

For Berlin, the place to look when evaluating the success or failure of a courses is at what takes place on paper. In "Some Thoughts about Feelings: The Affective Domain and the Writing

Process," McLeod opens by narrating a scene from a writing classroom—an act which, in itself, constitutes a departure from Berlin's laser-like focus on discourse:

> I am watching a roomful of college freshman take an essay exam; I can nearly see the tension in the air. Several young men and women stare into space, pencils poised, brows furrowed, sweating slightly. A number of others gnaw their lower lips. Others chew their pens, their pencils, their fingernails. One examinee tears a page out of his bluebook, crumples it tightly, and fires it at a nearby wastebasket. When I announce that there are five minutes left there is a rustle of sighs and low groans, a burst of final activity.

> Students leave, their faces smiling and frowning; few faces are totally impassive. (426)

This moment, which frames McLeod's essay, reveals a shift in how we might approach theorizing about our courses. Where the pedagogies of Berlin-minded scholars are interested only in what students write, McLeod looks to physical, emotional, or affective cues: men and women stare into space, students gnaw their lips and chew various writing utensils, and one engages in the rather symbolic action of tearing a page out of his bluebook and throwing it in the trash. These are people—people with bodies—and between them, affect hangs in the air. Again, none of these cues would be visible to a teacher or theorist of pedagogy who confined his or her concerns strictly to the writing students produce.

To my knowledge, this concern for what lies beyond the discursive was first exhibited by Alice Brand, who, in her article, "Hot Cognition: Emotions and Writing Behavior," works against a "Western suspicion of the rational" in which people are seen to function as "dispassionate information processing systems" (5). Instead, Brand seeks to "heat up cognition. . . [and to unite] the cognitively blind but arousing system of affect with the subtle cognitive apparatus" (5). Echoing Brand, McLeod asserts that "at no level, at no state, even in the adult,

can we find a behavior or a state which is purely cognitive without affect nor a purely affective state without a cognitive element involved" (29). She thus argues that "we feel as well as think when we write" (426). Together, Brand and McLeod conclude that through emotion, bodies participate in our thinking and behavior. As such, they work to displace the Flower and Hayes cognitivist model of composing that prevailed in their time because it neglects to account for this role emotion plays in composing, thought, and action.

In the context of my project in this dissertation, however, their work offers grounds from which to critique Berlin and related critical paradigms because both the cognitivist the poststructuralist models view people in strictly rational terms. In Flower and Hayes's cognitivist model writing is reduced to a "set of distinctive thinking processes. . . [with] hierarchical, highly embedded organization. . . [and which work together in] a goal-directed thinking process" (273-4). Here, the choices we make about language are systematic and logical. Similarly, in the poststructuralist view, people interpret and respond to rhetorical situations in rational ways, which according to Berlin is what leads them, quite rationally, to take up the worldviews preponderant in various rhetorical situations. Admittedly, there are differences in the details. The cognitivist view doesn't acknowledge the way meaning lies partially beyond the control of speakers, for instance. But my point is that neither model sees people as depending on anything but rational processes in their interactions with language and each other. Brand and McLeod invoke cognitive psychologists who call this view into question, and their studies of the writing process, while yielding questionable solutions, confirm that there is at least a correlation between the emotions students feel while writing and the writing they produce. So while Brand and McLeod were reacting primarily to cognitivist approaches to the teaching of writing, the critique of rationality that drives their work applies to poststructuralist-based pedagogies as well. Brand

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and McLeod thus lead me to believe that it might be problematic to expect students to undertake the dry, dispassionate, critical method Berlin's pedagogy hinges upon. As a result, we might begin to question the efficacy of a pedagogy that hopes that the form of cognition practiced in the classroom will transfer to the cognition practiced in the real world when the cognition in the first instance is of a stilted, mechanical sort. Reading critical pedagogy through the work of Brand and McLeod suggests that if we are to foster critical behaviors through habituation in the classroom, that habituation would have to more closely account for the ways that "we feel as well as think when we write," or for that matter, the way we feel as well as think when we do anything.

For Brand and McLeod, the problem was simply how help students manage the emotions they experience during the writing process, and how, through designing courses and assignments that engage students emotionally in productive ways, to facilitate learning with "stick to the ribs quality" (Brand 306). But in the wake of Brand and McLeod, other scholars have discovered increasingly complex and challenging side effects of pedagogies which neglect to account for how non-discursive matters impact what students take away from our courses. In the following three sections, I will discuss three problems I see growing out of CCS pedagogies' attempt to re-shape students merely by shaping the ways that they write: resistance, apathy, and cynicism. In some cases, the scholarship through which I discuss these problems responds directly to CCS pedagogies; in others, I will have to make the connection more explicit. In all cases, however, the problem stems from a failure to account for the ways non-discursive matters affect our thought an action and might thus merit pedagogical consideration. In the first group, Lynn Worsham and T.R. Johnson respond to the problem of resistance and are thereby led to think about the consequences emotion holds for critical pedagogy. The second group is constituted by Christa

Albrecht-Crane, Heather Palmer, and Byron Hawk. This loosely-constructed group tackles the

problem of apathy and is thus led to consider writing pedagogy through the lens of affect, or the

way our relationships with others precedes the discursive. I have already touched on the final

group, which is actually not a group but a lone Thomas Rickert, whose response to the problem

of cynicism turns our attention to lived temporality. In the sections that follow, I will show how

each of these problems—resistance, apathy, and cynicism—grow out of our failure to account

for three, related aspects of the non-discursive: emotion, affect, and lived temporality,

respectively. Ultimately, I will argue that in this progression from resistance, to apathy, and then

to cynicism, there is an increase in sophistication in way theorists understand the problems non-

discursive matters pose for writing pedagogy. By tracking this progression in the coming

sections, I set up the work of later chapters putting forward an alternative to Berlin's critical

method, one which makes use of, rather than denies, students' non-discursive ways of knowing.


*Resistance*

　　When writing instructors hear the term, resistance, they likely think of Lynn Worsham's

essay, "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion" and the parallel she

draws between student resistance and several well-known school shootings, rapes, and various

acts of "wilding" (213). In broad strokes, Worsham argues that student resistance is similar to

particular instances of public violence in that both constitute reactions against the imposition of

frameworks that disavow people's emotional constitutions[1]. Essentially, students and shooters

alike lash out at forces that attempt to re-socialize them in ways that go against their upbringing.

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[1] By emotion, Worsham refers to the "tight braid of affect and judgement , socially and historically and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meanings" (216).

For students, having acquired affective attachments through a lifetime of acculturation, Worsham argues that being forced to undergo critical work in relation to those attachments produces for students a "moment of repudiation" (234) in which they are forced to accede to the imposition of academic, or critical, ways of seeing. Worsham thus works to reveal how writing pedagogy, in "schooling" students contrary to the ways they had previously been schooled, enacts a form of violence on the students who we subject to it. Her broader project, then, is to alert theorists to how students' emotional experience in a course shapes what they take away from that course. In this section, I will take a closer look at Worsham's view, and a similar perspective put forward by Johnson, in order to show how CCS-inflected pedagogies' failure to think beyond the discursive, or to consider the emotional ways in which students experience doing critical work, produces students who either resist the Berlin's critical lesson or are Oedipalized by it[2].

In "Going Postal" Worsham uses the common phrase, "going postal," which along with "wilding," often refers to the moment when a person lashes out for no apparent reason. For Worsham, howerver, "going postal" and "wilding" are acts of violence in response to "structures of subjection" (216). Worsham then likens resistance to writing pedagogy as a form of going postal or wilding, because though it is often not immediately apparent why students offer resistance, Worsham believes they are lashing out against the ways our pedagogies enforce

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[2] In "Going Postal," Worsham divides critical pedagogies into what she refers to as "Critical Cultural Studies" and "Experiential Cultural Studies." The former "seeks to unwork the power/knowledge relation that produces the objective conditions of domination and exploitation," while the latter "focuses on experience as the medium through which the conditions of domination and subordination are articulated and resisted" (232). Neither of these categories maps neatly onto Berlin's version of Critical Cultural Studies, though both encompass Berlin's interest in undoing the conditions of domination and subordination, and more importantly, both employ Berlin's strategy of achieving this work through asking students to critically engage discursive structures, albeit in different ways. In the context of this dissertation, what matters is that Worsham is critical of pedagogies which "[represent efforts] to change, through the language of critique and empowerment, the emotional constitution of the postmodern subject" (216), and I believe Berlin's pedagogy fits into this category.

"existing social, political, and economic arrangements" (215). The enforcement of such "arrangements" is a violence that pervades all phases of social life, though perhaps the reason so many go postal in classrooms is because the classroom often works against the ways students have been previously "arranged." Worsham thus hopes to examine the ways that pedagogy patrols and organizes student subjectivities, and so she coins the term, "pedagogic violence," as part of her effort to "make visible the relationship between discipline and violence, between what is most legitimate and what is most illegitimate, to open for examination the symbolic violence implied in teaching and learning, the real violence prepared in schooling, wherever schooling happens to occur" (215). Here, Worsham conflates "schooling" with the violence of imposing frameworks of meaning and subjectivity. Moments of wilding thus clue us in to instances in which we'd been "schooling" students without realizing we were doing so.

Specifically, Worsham argues that "schooling" occurs on the emotional level. Thus the aim of her project is to better understand how our pedagogies work through emotion to shape student subjectivities:

> A rhetoric of pedagogic violence will focus specifically on the way violence addresses and educates emotion and inculcates an affective relation to the world. In the view I develop here, emotion will refer to the tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and structure of meanings. School, workplace, and family violence are pedagogies of emotion, and as such they are particularly effective ways of locating and anchoring us in a way of life." (216)

In this passage, Worsham articulates her view that schooling, which we often see as the transmission of knowledge, is in fact an experience that functions through emotion to bind student-subjects to dominant frameworks of meaning and social organization. In this way, Worsham sees pedagogy as a "mode of social control" (221). She takes up Bourdieu and Passeron's view that it has the "power to impose meanings that maintain and reinforce the reigning social, economic, and political arrangements as legitimate when in fact they are entirely arbitrary. . . Dominant pedagogy [is thus] a structure that produces individuals and groups who are recognized as such because they have internalized the legitimate point of view" ( Worsham 221). Though she wishes to add that "the primary work of pedagogy is more fundamental than the imposition of a dominant framework of meanings. Its primary work is to organize an emotional world, to inculcate patterns of feeling that support the legitimacy of dominant interests, patterns that are especially important to gender, race, and class locations. . . [organizing] affective relations to that location" (223). Pedagogy, according to Worsham, "binds the individual to the social world through a complex and often contradictory affective life that remains, for the most part, just beyond the horizon of semantic availability, and its success depends on a mystification and misrecognition of this primary work" (223). For Worsham, pedagogy is more than the straightforward transmission of facts or course content: it is a process of organizing students' emotional dispositions toward dominant frameworks of meaning in ways that serve institutional interests, and it is a process that accomplishes this work in ways that are often not visible.

By organizing students' emotional disposition towards dominant frameworks of meaning, Worsham argues that writing pedagogy performs what Julia Kristeva calls abjection, or a "primal mapping of the body" (72):

This is essentially an affective mapping, or education, in which the future subject learns rudimentary emotional orientations that distinguish between "inside" and "outside," "clean" and "unclean," "good" and "bad," "proper" and "improper." Abjection is, then, a kind of emotional boundary-work. It is a mechanism that works affectively to create a sense of place, orientation, and, ultimately, a sense of self. Abjection knots affect and judgment together and does its boundary-work especially through what we call emotions of self-assessment, such as pride, shame, and guilt. (226).

What is important to Worsham about Kristeva's notion of abjection is the way it unites our emotional and intellectual selves through a "tight braid of affect and judgment" (216). Through shaming, students learn what is good and bad, proper and improper, etc., a process that uses an emotion to shape students' orientation towards dominant frameworks of meaning. This "emotional boundary-work" ultimately contributes to the student's sense of self.

The problem of resistance arises, Worsham argues, when the emotional boundary-work our writing courses do runs counter to the ways students had previously been 'affectively mapped.' Abjection, according to Kristeva, begins in infancy, producing student-subjects who have long histories of having been affectively "mapped" to view the discourses of dominant culture in a particular light. So when a writing pedagogy comes along and attempts to force students to engage those discourses critically, the map imposed by our pedagogy goes against the map of students' upbringing. The problem is not so much that critical pedagogies are trying to shape people, but that they are trying to *re*-shape them. The result is that the aims of the writing course are met with resistance from students' bodies.

The problem becomes even more acute in the case of critical pedagogies, which Worsham argues communicate to students that their non-rational ways of knowing are invalid.

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Meaning is "separated from content," she asserts, and emotion is "related specifically to the body, "which simply reformulates the distinction between emotion and reason," thus erecting a binary and relegating emotion to the marginalized half of it. To the binaries of clean/unclean, good/bad, proper/improper, etc., is added rational/non-rational. Critical pedagogies, in particular, accomplish this banishment of emotion by recognizing it as a necessary step towards empowerment rather than a legitimate moment of resistance (234). Granted, these pedagogies acknowledge that students have been colonized by dominant frameworks of meaning, but students' negative emotional reaction to being re-"schooled" is seen as a hurdle to be overcome. Resistance, Worsham points out, "as a sign of affective investment, is read positively,"—as the moment when pedagogy has hit upon the site of "political and social disempowerment" (234). Because resistance is seen as the product of students' emotional investments in dominant ways of knowing, students must then undergo a "negative moment" of "pure resistance and repudiation" prior to their eventual acceptance of academically-sanctioned—i.e. critical— dispositions toward discourse and culture (234). In effect, critical pedagogies hunt down and then subdue students' emotional investments. Without wanting to sound glib, Worsham suggests that perhaps that the "no" students utter in response to this kind of "schooling" "may in fact constitute a 'no'" (234).

In the context of my inquiry into the shortcomings of CCS pedagogies and writing instruction more generally, Worsham's work demonstrates the necessity of thinking beyond course content to considering how students experience that content. For Worsham, it's this experience that really matters, which represents a shift in emphasis that turns our attention away from what takes place on paper toward what takes place in our students' emotional selves. It is this shift that enables Worsham to perceive how students experience critical pedagogies in ways

that are problematic. Not only does Berlin's pedagogy invalidate students' past emotional experiences, Worsham suggests, it invalidates emotion more generally.

Worsham's work suggests that Berlin's method of shaping students through the application of critical heuristics to their discursive interactions pits the critical lesson against student's emotional constitutions, thereby invalidating their non-rational ways of knowing/being; in his essay, "School Sucks," T.R. Johnson expands on that work to show that it's not simply the critical lesson, but the very nature of academic writing which neglects bodies in problematic ways. Johnson opens by recalling a less dramatic but nevertheless significant moment of resistance from his own childhood:

> I am standing at the bottom of the steps in front of my school with several dozen other kids, looking around for pals from my neighborhood with whom I would walk home. We are all thrilling to the strong sunlight of the Louisville autumn afternoon, when suddenly and older, bigger kid comes crashing through the crowd. Before disappearing around the corner, he pauses and cries out
>
>> School's out—Ring the bell!
>>
>> Drop your books—Run like hell!
>
> I immediately laughed, for in those days, the only thing funnier than profane language was profane language that rhymed. . . I remember sharing the couplet near the end of the school year, [when another kid added]
>
>> No more chalkboards! No more chairs!
>>
>> Throw the teachers down the stairs!

We all roared, but our laughter was mirthless and mean. Though lacking in profanity, the

rhyme flared with a special appeal, a special rancor and rowdiness, for it targeted teachers

with physical violence. (620-1)

Johnson follows by recounting other, increasingly violent rhymes, one of which involves

"[meeting a teacher] with a loaded .38" (622). Looking back on these anecdotes, Johnson is

shocked by the sheer joy that he and the other children took in such violent rhetoric. Like

Worsham, he wishes to understand where these violent impulses come from and whether they

can be traced to some hidden aspect of schooling. Both arrive at the conclusion that the

discourses of academic writing privilege rationality and naked cognition while marginalizing

more overtly embodied ways of knowing.

But while Worsham sees this marginalization as a byproduct critical work, Johnson

connects it to the pressure of helping students succeed in professional and institutional circles in

which emotion is seen as inappropriate. He points out that we often hope to pull students through

the act of composing by getting them to take pleasure in interacting with text, and yet we meet

those pleasures with a "certain suspicion. . . [derived] from out sense that. . . we must familiarize

students not only with their inwardly experienced flashes of inspiration but with the public

conventions that enable successful communication" (431). Our confidence in the power of

pleasure is overcome by our belief that ultimately, students only gain rhetorical power by

"submit[ing] to the discursive codes that constitute particular disciplines," (431). We respect the

power of pleasure, Johnson seems to say, and yet we are afraid to go against the disciplinary

convention that says it is not allowed.

In "School Sucks," Johnson stops short of discussing the precise ways in which schooling

does pedagogical violence, though in another of his works, "Discipline and Pleasure: 'Magic'

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and Sound," Johnson delves further into the ways that dominant approaches to teaching writing marginalize bodies. Here, as in "School Sucks," Johnson describes a tension between individuals and their capacity to experience pleasure and the demand that they conform to social norms. But while "School Sucks" attributes the suppression of pleasure to the demand that students conform to academic and professional standards of behavior (and writing), "Discipline and Pleasure" argues that this suppression of pleasure is a consequence of the way communicating through writing inhibits the full richness of human interaction. He draws on Gorgias, who sees enjoyment in language as a product of interacting with a crowd, to describe the moment in which a rhetor is inspired or swept away by the "magic" of connecting with a group of people. This connection, according to Johnson, is enabled by the aurality of speech, which "undermines the structures that individuate the subject" (441). He seems to say that in transactions that take place through writing, individuals are separated from one another in a way that denies the writer the ability to derive pleasure from witnessing the effect of his/her/their words on a crowd. Where aurality enables a group experience, writing suppresses that experience.

Johnson's argument that oral speech is more pleasurable for the way it "undermines the structures that individuate the subject" is compelling because it turns our attention towards the way discourse can potentially stunt certain channels of human interaction. His model presents a twist on the ways we normally understand the popular either/or equation that says that students can either do expressive writing and be engaged by it or they can write for an audience but without interest; if, as Johnson argues, interaction with an other is in fact the source of pleasure and not the anathema of it, then perhaps we can indeed have writing that caters to an audience while simultaneously being pleasurable. It's the structures particular to institutional and academic contexts that inhibit these mysterious channels of human interaction. However, while

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illuminating, Johnson's work with aurality almost seems to argue that *any* writing would be guilty in similar ways.

Taken together, Brand, McLeod, Worsham, and Johnson suggest that Critical Cultural Studies-inflected approaches to teaching writing to have committed a serious miscalculation in their hope to shape people by shaping the ways that they write. Brand and McLeod begin this conversation by introducing the notion that perhaps people aren't the "dispassionate processing systems" (2) we might have thought. Their work demonstrating the correlation between students' composing process and their emotions suggests not only that cognitivist models of composing are inadequate, but that the rational discursive subjects posed by Berlin's pedagogy might be inadequate as well. Worsham re-evaluates Berlin's CCS-inflected approach to teaching with an eye for how students experience the application of it's critical method. This eye reveals that Berlin's approach produces the unintended consequence of pitting the critical lesson at cross purposes with students' emotional investments. The unfortunate byproduct is the marginalization of students' emotional or embodied ways of knowing. Johnson then builds on Worsham's work to show that this marginalization, while especially acute in Berlin's pedagogy, is an inevitable result of academic modes of writing which deny writers the opportunity to engage their audiences in ways that, perhaps, exceed representation. The work of these scholars calls into question the belief that students, and their emotional and physical selves, will accede to becoming critical subjects simply because they were forced to write critically.

*Apathy*

If the first step towards understanding the shortcomings of CCS-inflected pedagogies is perceiving how students' emotional interaction with those pedagogies produces resistance, the

second step is perceiving how affect—rather, a lack thereof—produces apathy. This step

represents an increase in sophistication over the first for the ways it incorporates sociality into its

notion of embodiment, a direction Johnson pointed us toward in the last section. Scholars in this

group—Christa Albrecht-Crane, Heather Palmer, and Bryon Hawk—implicitly agree with Brand

and McLeod that for students to write well they need to be engaged in an emotional or embodied

way, and they thus see engagement as crucial to the teaching of first year writing. However,

where Brand and McLeod saw engagement as a product of having students wrestle with

meaningful topics, these scholars, like Johnson, see engagement as a product of our interaction

with others. In the section that follows, I look to these scholars' perspectives in the interest of

incorporating sociality into the understanding of emotion laid out in the previous section,

ultimately with the aim of adding to our knowledge of how non-discursive matters—in this case,

affect—are relevant to the teaching of writing. The work of this section will be less closely

connected to Berlin's CCS-inflected pedagogy because the scholars I'm discussing are

concerned with writing instruction in more general terms. But it will be relevant to my argument

on the grounds that Berlin's pedagogy sees students strictly in terms of their discursive

interactions, while scholars in this section show how there is an aspect of students and their

interactions with others that exceeds discursive representation. Specifically, the scholars in this

section argue that the affective dimensions of the ways we interact with the world is central to

desire and/or invention. Their work will help me to build on the work of the last section, showing

that not only is embodiment (or emotion) an important thing to consider as we think through our

pedagogies, we also need to consider the social aspects of embodiment because they are key to

the mechanisms of desire, invention, and human interaction, more generally. The scholars I

discuss in this section don't address CCS pedagogies explicitly, though I will work to show that their insights regarding apathy in writing courses in general apply to Berlin's pedagogy as well.

In the opening of her essay, "An Affirmative Theory of Desire," Christa Albrecht-Crane, asserts that "desire must be liberated" (564). Like Johnson, Albrecht-Crane draws from Worsham's work, taking up her call to acknowledge that "affective struggles form the central axis for both cultural domination and cultural change" (564). The reference to desire echoes Johnson's posture of looking for positive responses to the ways "affect, emotion, desire, and pleasure [or lack thereof]. . . [lie] at the heart of how students experience our pedagogy and respond to it" (Albrecht-Crane 565). Albrecht-Crane frames her approach as affirming the role desire plays in our everyday interactions as social beings and that it can, potentially, enliven the acts of teaching and learning:

> Connecting desire to a primary manifestation of an affective involvement with the world addresses what it means for human beings—and teachers and students—to exercise agency. Such an affirmative, encompassing, Neitzschean notion of "desire" can provide a (theoretical/cultural) vocabulary with which to animate the vitality, creativity, and passion of teaching and learning. (564)

Albrecht-Crane's argument that desire is a "primary manifestation of our affective involvement with the world" presents a different take on agency than undergirds critical pedagogies and/or pedagogies that seek to teach students to master the styles and forms of academic discourse.  For Albrecht-Crane, affect constitutes both the means and end of what it means to be a person who is active in relation to discursive structures, while for pedagogies that seek to either impart critical habits or initiate students into academic and professional discourses, affect, like emotion, is seen to stand in the way of students' agency.

Though while Albrecht-Crane draws from Worsham's premise that emotion and affect are central to who we are and how we behave, she and Worsham appear to work from different definitions of the term, affect. Worsham uses the term to refer to students' non-cognitive orientations towards culture. Albrecht-Crane, in contrast, uses it to refer to the aspect of human interaction that exceeds discursive representation. So when Albrecht-Crane argues that "we must find ways to better address the amalgam of feeling, intensity, richness, playfulness, desiring, passion, excitement, rage, suffering, life, becoming—in short, affect—that characterizes teaching and learning moments" (563), she is less interested in students' relationship towards "dominant frameworks of meaning" than the aspects of students' interactions with others that take place on a non-discursive plane. Her project is thus to call our attention to aspects of the classroom atmosphere that are indefinable in discursive terms and that are yet inseparable from students' emergence as people between and among teachers and their peers. In short, Albrecht-Crane shows the importance of attending to the aspects of the writing course that cannot be understood—as Berlin tends to—strictly in terms of the words that are uttered and/or written there.

Albrecht-Crane's work helps provide a start towards thinking through how the affective dimensions of the classroom can help or inhibit the work we hope to accomplish there, but Heather Palmer makes the more difficult connection between affect and writing. Her essay, "The Heat of Composition," echoes Brand's "Hot Cognition," both in name and in the view that embodiment is somehow relevant to cognition. But where Brand focuses on writers in isolation, Palmer takes for her starting point the notion that writing is a social process, and she thus sees embodiment as relevant for the way it enables affective relationships with others. She draws on Levinas's notion of alterity, which sees subject formation through the lens of a fundamental, pre-

discursive relationship with an Other. Writing is a discursive thing, naturally, but Palmer's project is to show how it is nevertheless a function of these pre-discursive aspects of our relationships. Essentially, Palmer argues that writing emerges out of a fundamental, pre-discursive desire to interact with another. Again, Palmer never addresses Berlin's CCS pedagogy explicitly, but her vision of how writers compose reveals in contrast how Berlin's pedagogy positions writing as a relatively solipsistic act. For Palmer, engagement in writing is a product of enabling relationships with others, but in Berlin's course, writing is denied this social character and instead, as we see through Worsham, positioned to generate critical perspective that is turned inwards towards the writer.

Both Palmer and Albrecht-Crane express the aim to not only increase students' desire to write, but to make desire a productive, perhaps inventive force. They argue that traditional academic and/or critical modes inhibit desire in the writing process by inhibiting some element of social interaction. So while writing is obviously a social act, it is clear that Albrecht-Crane and Palmer join Johnson in seeing academic writing as ultimately inhibiting interaction on the affective level through the way it forbids students from engaging texts and each other in affective ways. Albrecht-Crane's work, which again sees subject-formation in Levinasian terms as a process in which the presence of the other is a requisite part of who we are, suggests that by inhibiting the affective elements of social interaction, CCS pedagogies inhibit the processes by which students engage the people and world around them, preventing them from making full use of their natural social capacities in service of writing.

Johnson and Worsham work from the same basic premise that affect and emotion are the fundamental means of subjection and should thus be the site of the primary (political) work of a writing course, decolonization, and this drives their critique of CCS pedagogies on the grounds

that CCS pedagogies don't bother to consider the role emotion plays in who people are, what they do, and how students experience our courses. Palmer and Albrecht Crane do not connect their work with apathy as directly to CCS pedagogies as Johnson and Worsham do, though they would likely add that CCS pedagogies, in addition to failing to acknowledge the role bodies play in the constitution of individuals, also fail to acknowledge that bodies are primary to sociality. I argue that as a result, writing, which ought to grow out of our fundamental desire to engage others on an affective level, is instead stripped of its social character. By denying this affective function of writing, students' interest and their full cognitive potential whither on the vine.

In his book, *A Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity*, Byron Hawk provides a more well-developed notion of the relationship between affect, sociality, and invention, while also using that notion as grounds by which to critique Berlin's pedagogy explicitly. Hawk, who is interested in improving the ways we understand and teach invention in writing courses, argues that we have distilled the process of invention into a combination of overly-formal heuristics and an overly-romanticized notion of genius. The results, he argue, are pedagogies that teach writing as a mechanical activity while neglecting to teach a method of invention (because such methods are seen to be un-teachable). He argues that Berlin's pedagogy makes a similar error by seeing our engagement with the world in strictly formal terms. Per Hawk, Berlin's method seems to imply that our relationships are coded in language and can thus be de-coded and rebuilt in rational, almost mechanical ways, while non-rational embodied processes are ignored entirely:

> Berlin misses the entire body of work that deals with bodily, tacit knowledges, which would fundamentally change his view of the subject and his relationship to language. The subject is not about ideological construction at the level of rational, conscious debate in

the classroom. A body's agency is not the universal aspect of a sovereign subject but a matter of what bodies can do, their capacity to affect other bodies by entering into relations with them." (119)

Bodies, in this passage, "enter into relations" with other bodies in ways that precede "ideological construction at the level of rational, conscious debate." This leads Hawk to conclude that "the kind of heuristic pedagogy Berlin establishes cannot achieve its end [because] ignores the centrality of the body and its levels of connectedness to specific, lived situations" (12). Hawk, like Albrecht-Crane and Palmer, sees bodies and their connection to other bodies as central to how we think, act, and invent in the world, and so he criticizes Berlin's method on the grounds that it ignores bodies' influence on who people are and what they do.

Hawk thus works to revive Coleridge's theory of vitalism in order to displace pedagogies, like Berlin's, that presuppose people are constructed through conscious, rational engagement with discursive structures. His work, alongside that of Brand, McLeod, Worsham, Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, and Palmer, constitutes an attempt to reinsert two, inter-related matters back into our theories of composition: bodies and sociality. The scholars discussed in this section, in particular, suggest that writing is an activity that must be understood as taking place in the context of bodies "entering into relations" with each other. Further, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and Hawk all suggest that, apparently, not all kinds of writing enable those relations equally. Albrecht-Crane and Palmer, especially, make explicit their belief that we need to find a way for students to interact with each other and their teachers through writing in ways that are more affectively-charged. This represents progress on the previous section's scholars who simply argued for the need for students to engage text in embodied ways. Taken together, the work of both sections underscores the inadequacy of a pedagogical model that attempts to change people

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strictly through shaping the ways they interact with text, as though text, and the rational processing of it, were all that existed. Instead, scholars such as Hawk encourage us to develop a pedagogy (in his case, a method of invention), which somehow incorporates the ways bodies can know prior to conscious, linguistic understanding. Admittedly, this goal sounds rather lofty and abstract; working towards it will take up all the remaining chapters of this dissertation. But first, I turn in the following section to the last stage in developing our understanding of what it is about the non-discursive that poses problems for Berlin's CCS pedagogy.

*Cynicism*

In the sub-section about student resistance, Worsham and T. R. Johnson demonstrated the importance of accounting for the role emotion plays in the writing process and what students take away from our courses. Their work helped me to argue that Berlin's CCS-inflected approach falls short for the way it tries to shape students through the application of a strictly discursive critical method, resulting in resistance growing out of students' emotional attachments or ways of knowing. The second section expanded on this interest in bodies, inquiring into what the social dimensions of embodiment—affect—mean for writing courses. Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and Hawk suggested our pre-discursive relationships with others play an important role in writing and invention, lending weight to the argument that CCS pedagogy struggles for the way it treats students as though they exist only through the rational processing of discursive structures. In this section, I look to Thomas Rickert's work to show how lived temporality, or the passage of time, thickens our understanding of how non-discursive forces pose problems for Berlin's pedagogy. Through Rickert, I will argue that the matter of temporality is a key aspect of the non-discursive matter scholars brought to our attention in the previous sections. In

subsequent chapters, will work toward an alternative to Berlin's discursively-bound critical method, a new method which attempts to draw upon the emotional and affective ways we understand the world, but especially, the role movement plays in that understanding.

In, *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*, Rickert begins with the line of questioning discussed at the outset of this chapter: whether helping students see the pernicious aspects of discourse ever leads to a change in their behavior. This line of questioning leads him to examine the politics of the writing course, and how students are forced to do critical work in order to earn a grade. Like Worsham, Rickert sees this condition as producing unintended and undesirable consequences, though while Worsham focuses on students who resist adopting critical perspective, Rickert is concerned with those who, apparently, mime it for the grade. The problem with this result, as I have stated earlier, is deeper than a simple failure of the critical habits taught in class to translate to critical behaviors. Rickert argues, via Peter Sloterdijk, that students who mime critical work to earn a good grade acquire a cynicism that ultimately undercuts future impulses to adopt or make use of critical perspective. We're offering students a method that will help them think and subsequently act critically, according to Rickert, but something is preventing them from acting on it.

Rickert suspects that this something lies in the emotional, affective, or otherwise embodied dimensions of our students' constitutions. Scholars from the previous sections have harbored similar suspicions and have employed numerous means for understanding these dimensions. Worsham used Kristeva's notion of abjection, Johnson looked to Gorgian "magic," Albrecht-Crane and Palmer used theories of desire, and Hawk drew on Coleridge's vitalism and the ways a body can know" prior to conscious linguistic understanding" (113). Rickert responds to the problem by working along a "psychoanalytic vs. poststructuralist axis" (21), hoping in

order to better understand the relationship between the ways we are shaped by language and the non-discursive forces that partake in—or potentially offer resistance to—that shaping. In particular, Rickert draws on Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, which denotes, roughly, the pleasure of habit, to illustrate the ways that bodies might grow habituated to various specific modes of thought or action (habits that might, on occasion, run counter to discursive influences). In the context of a CCS writing course, for example, students' habituation to seeing particular discursive structures in a specific way might run counter to the critical habits such a course hopes to impart. The student in the example at the beginning of this chapter continues to shop at Abercrombie & Fitch because the pleasure associated with prior experiences shopping there results in the student being drawn by her body to sustain the habit.

Again, this failure of a critical pedagogy to instill critical habits is more complicated than that of a lesson that simply didn't take. Extending his attention, as Worsham does, beyond course content to how students experience that content on a primary level, Rickert concludes that the product of such pedagogical moments is the lesson that students' intellectual, critical, or rational ways of knowing need not (or won't) coincide with their emotional, affective, or embodied impulses. Rickert classifies this fissure as a form of cynicism according to Sloterdijk's definition of the term:

> Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered" (Rickert 5).

Enlightened false consciousness is described as having labored "both successfully and in vain," to "[learn] its lesson in enlightenment," though the lesson is defeated by reflexivity. The student who shops at Abercrombie & Fitch achieves knowledge of how A & F's tactics are pernicious, and yet simultaneously recalls that, she had nonetheless derived pleasure from falling victim to them. Sloterdijk describes a cynicism characterized in part by misery, but Rickert describes a student who, having mimed critical consciousness in class but thereafter continued the relevant behavior, was fundamentally changed in a slightly different way. I imagine that such a student, when spotted leaving Abercrombie & Fitch post-critical enlightenment, might again smile from the joy of her purchases, but that smile would be a vapid smile, one that says "I know I'm being played for a sucker, but I don't care."

Rickert argues that the cynicism produced in this kind of hypothetical instance is a product, not only of a failure to account for the role emotion, affect, and embodiment play in our discursive interactions, but, weirdly, also by a failure to consider the role the time plays in subject formation. Borrowing from Žižek, Rickert sees subject formation as a process that is "crucially threaded through temporality," in which the subject, perhaps inspired by its present rhetorical circumstances, constantly reflects back on its past experiences. These experiences, while certainly subject to reinterpretation, thus serve as an embodied repository for what constitutes the particular subject. The A & F shopper remembers the sensation of pleasure that resulted from shopping there, so when that student returns to the store, that memory tells him or her, in a self-fulfilling fashion, that he or she enjoys it. But when in a writing class a student is postured through critical inquiry see write that the pleasure he or she experienced wasn't pleasure at all, but the fulfillment of a an advertiser's underhanded manipulation, that critical lesson goes against the imprint which, in way, constitutes who the student is. If the students'

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present self is in part constituted by past experiences, then a critical pedagogy which tells the student that those past experiences didn't happen as he or she remembers them effectively tells the student that his/her present self can't exist. The student, who obviously embodies evidence to the contrary, thus concludes that the critical lesson is rubbish. He/she learns to ignore critical impulses that might otherwise rear their heads in future rhetorical situations, all because the method of critical pedagogy attempts the impossibility of undoing an experience retroactively.

In some ways, Rickert's point was already evident in Worsham's work. Recall that for Worsham the problem with "schooling" is how the 'affective mapping' it does goes against the ways students had previously been "mapped." In a sense, the problem wasn't that critical pedagogies try to "school" students, but that they try to *re*-school them. In such instances, bodies become a source of resistance, whether we understand that resistance in terms of emotion, *jouissance*—or whatever. But the argument that emotions (or bodies) can be sources of resistance isn't necessarily new; the argument that this resistance is partly an effect of the passage of time, however, is much more novel. What Rickert adds to the conversation, then, is the idea that attending to the emotional or affective conditions of our courses requires accounting for the way the passage of time shapes those conditions.

**Conclusion: Content and Critical Method**

Early in this chapter, I discussed how the critical aims of composition can be traced back to the shift from seeing language as something people learn about to something they do. This shift affected how we conceive the work we do in writing classes, with the content of a writing course no longer being seen as a fixed set of writing strategies to be transmitted to students but an attempt to fundamentally change how students interact with text and, subsequently, the world

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that lies on the other end of it. In a way, there was a shift in what matters about our writing courses from the content teachers delivered in the classroom to how students experience a course and how that experience shapes who they become. Upon realizing that a writing course might hold the potential to shape students in fundamental ways, Berlin and others seized on the opportunity to use the writing class to produce critical subjects. Working from the notion that language has the power to shape people, Berlin argued that writing instructors could shape their students into critical subjects by shaping the ways they interact with text, and because he wanted to foster meaningful critical behavior, he chose those texts from among the discourses that matter most to students. It is important to note that students implicitly have previous experience with such texts. In this way, Berlin hoped to shape students by positioning them to unmask something about their past discursive interactions that had previously escaped their notice.

Ironically, where Berlin's pedagogy had been borne of a newfound richness in how we understand students to experience language and writing instruction, they ways students experienced Berlin's pedagogy proved to be rather negative. This interest in the way students experience our courses, we learned in this chapter, can be traced to Brand and McLeod, who while not addressing Berlin and critical pedagogies explicitly, encouraged us to consider non-rational matters in the first place. Following in the wake of Brand and McLeod, Worsham delved into how students actually experience the kind of critical work Berlin advocates, showing that rather than emerging as critical subjects, students subject to pedagogies like Berlin's were instead resistant. Johnson, Palmer, Albrecht-Crane, Hawk, and Rickert employ similar lenses, despite the fact that they apply them to differing pedagogical issues, such as apathy and cynicism. I argue that all three of these issues are rooted in the fundamental hope that we might shape students simply by shaping their discursive interactions. And while the scholars discussed

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in this chapter don't quite take issue with Berlin's critical aims (which seem perfectly reasonable), they do take issue with the what translates to a problematic critical method, one which asks students to critically take apart or unmask the discursive interactions that matter most to them; this method thus attempts to retroactively re-shape people with no regard for the role that their bodies play in who they are and what they do.

Worsham et. al. have already done an excellent job explaining the shortcomings of Berlin's pedagogical/critical method, or for that matter, any pedagogy or critical method that neglects to take into account the ways bodies, affects, and lived temporality can potentially function as sources of resistance to pedagogies which hope to achieve their work through strictly discursive means. Later in this dissertation, I will use Henri Bergson's general philosophic theory, as well as his theory of laughter, to consider how bodies, affects, and lived temporality can be harnessed as sources of critical perspective. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I want to close by calling attention to how, through their attention to the ways students experience writing courses and critical work, in particular, Worsham and others encourage us to re-imagine how we understand what we mean when we refer to course content. Under Current-Traditional Rhetorics, we understood content as a set of rhetorical strategies to be transmitted directly to students the way a high-school history course might transmit the dates of key historical events. In the wake of CTR, however, Berlin, and later Worsham and Rickert (and to a lesser degree, others I've discussed in this chapter), represent a progression toward understanding content not as what we transmit, but how students are shaped by our courses. I think it worth noting that the general project of writing courses, despite the problems that I've traced in this chapter, has shifted towards trying to impart to students knowledge, not of facts or rote rhetorical strategies, but of particular ways to interact discursively, which equates to particular ways of being. Thus the work

of the writing course, or the content of the writing course, has (and ought to) increasingly be seen as posturing students to exhibit particular (i.e. critical) postures in relation to discourse and rhetorical situations. This is an ambitious project—one which, to my knowledge, is unprecedented in formal education—and I argue that the problems that Worsham, Johnson, Palmer, Albrecht-Crane, Hawk, and Rickert have noted are all growing pains that stem from our attempt to tackle it. What we are grasping for, then, is a way to move on from pedagogical tactics that are essentially vestiges of the old ways we understood course content in favor of a critical method that is better connected to students' lived experience. In the next chapter, I continue working with the scholars who have proven so useful in helping us to understand the problems our current methods inevitably encounter, but this time with a focus on the solutions they pose.

# Chapter 2: Solutions that fall short

*Abstract:*

*In this second chapter of my attempt to better align the critical/rhetorical habits we teach with the ways students think and act in the real world, I examine the solutions put forward by the theorists who helped me to frame the problem. I find that while they engage students' non-discursive ways of knowing better and/or in more positive ways, they do so by essentially giving up on our critical aims as we currently know them. I argue that their failure to fully resolve this tension between our desire to engage students affectively and our desire to teach critical habits of thought and action stems from the way these scholars frame the discursive and non-discursive (or critical thinking and embodied ways of knowing) as existing in opposition rather than synergy.*

**Introduction**

In the first chapter, I set out to understand three basic problems confronting first-year writing instruction—problems that, I suspected, are related: resistance, apathy, and cynicism. In the first instance, I sought a better understanding of why students might react negatively to pedagogies that hope to foster critical habits by having students critically engage culture that matters to them. Lynn Worsham's work was particularly useful in helping me to show that resistance in these instances grows from the ways critical pedagogies pit the critical lesson at cross-purposes with students' bodily investments, producing an emotional experience that Worsham, in an extreme moment, likens to rape. In the second instance, apathy, work by Heather Palmer and Christa Albrecht-Crane suggested that the academic subject positions we ask students to occupy while writing inhibit the affective dimensions of sociality that produce engagement. And in the last instance, cynicism, Thomas Rickert's work helped to show how CCS pedagogies foster cynicism by critically undoing a moment that a student had remembered fondly, producing a schism between students' rational and embodied ways of knowing.

In all three cases, the shortcoming stemmed from an overemphasis on discursivity that resulted in a neglect of the non-discursive. Specifically, it became apparent that Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing pedagogies overestimate the power of language to shape people, thereby neglecting to account for the roles non-discursive matters such as emotion, affect, and lived temporality play in who we are and what we do. Having established that Berlin's critical method struggles to achieve its aims for the ways it neglects to account for non-discursive matters, I turn now to the solutions posed by the scholars who helped me to identify the problem. Worsham, Rickert, and the rest hope to solve the problems I outlined in the first chapter—

resistance, apathy, and cynicism—with solutions that, respectively, engage students emotionally in more positive ways, that better enable affectively-charged interaction, or that expressly give up on our critical aims. As with the problems they outlined in the previous chapter, these solutions (mostly) show an increase in sophistication in how we address the non-discursive forces that affect what we achieve in a writing classroom. As we will see in this chapter, Worsham and Johnson argue that *écriture féminine* better allows students to experience text in embodied ways. Albrecht-Crane and Palmer, seeing embodiment as a social matter, advocate approaches to teaching that enable teacher-student and student-student interaction on affective planes. And Rickert advocates a "postpedagogy" which surrenders the imperative to teach students to think critically so as not to conflict with their past experiences. In every case, these scholars encourage us to look beyond the discursive curtain responsible for this mistaken view that we can re-shape students simply by shaping the ways that they write. All, I believe, make valuable inroads toward forging pedagogical approaches that better resonate with the ways our students think, act, and interact in the real world. In the chapter that follows, I will look to these scholars' solutions, arguing that their value lies in the ways they better align the work of our courses with students' embodied ways of knowing.

However, where our desire to foster critical behaviors is concerned, I also believe that none manage to reconcile this tension between critical and embodied ways of knowing that plagues Berlin's CCS-inflected pedagogy. That is, they offer solutions that give students a less caustic emotional experience, or that engage students better affectively, or that don't produce cynicism by attempting to undo students' past pleasurable experiences. But they don't manage to do so while fostering critical habits. And so in addition to arguing that these scholars solutions better align the work of our courses with the emotional, affective, and temporal ways students

experience the real world, I will also argue that their solutions simply swap out rational, potentially critical ways of engaging text for more overtly embodied ones. This produces solutions that neglect the political, social, and intellectual consequences of the way people are shaped (albeit partially) through their discursive interactions. I argue that the failure of Worsham, Johnson, Rickert and others to more positively engage students' non-discursive selves while also fostering critical behaviors stems from their framing of the non-discursive and discursive as *always* in conflict. As a result, instead of looking for ways to resolve that conflict, they (generally) switch which side of it they favor. In more theoretical terms, they frame the problem as produced by an incompatibility between embodied and what we traditionally understand as critical ways of knowing, and this produces solutions that re-inscribe that tension. And so, I follow my presentation of these scholars' solutions by showing how they, as a result of the way the problem was framed, fail to resolve the discursive/non-discursive conundrum. I will thus argue that what is needed is a different way of understanding the ways our critical and embodied ways of knowing might work in synergy, for which I will look in later chapters to the philosophic theory of Henri Bergson, who advocates a more holistic understanding of cognition, one in which the body partakes in every kind of thinking—even of the critical sort. Eventually, I will work from his theory to advocate an alternative critical method that partakes of both intellects and bodies in service of generating critical perspective. In this chapter, my aim is simply to show what we gain from Worsham et. al.'s attention to non-discursive matters while also arguing that in our interest in fostering critical thinking and behaviors, there is still room for improvement.

**Enlisting emotion in service of writing and resistance**

In the previous chapter, Brand and McLeod encouraged me to note that often the composing methods we teach don't make use of students' full cognitive potential because they don't enlist their emotions in the writing process; Worsham and Johnson then helped me to build on this notion that emotion is relevant to the work we do as writing instructors by showing how CCS-inflected pedagogies give students a negative experience doing critical work, thus eliciting resistance. In this section, I examine these scholars' solutions to the problems they posed, starting with Brand and McLeod's suggestions for incorporating emotion into the methods of composing we teach. From there, I look to Worsham and Johnson's advocacy of *écriture féminine* as a way for students to experience writing in embodied ways while offering resistance to academic (or otherwise dominant) frameworks of knowing. I believe that the merit in these solutions lies in the way they collapse the distance between the act of composing and the embodied/emotional way students navigate their everyday lives. In the subsequent section, however, I will argue that these solutions fall somewhat short of providing students with an emotionally positive experience engaging in critical work because they tend to position critical cognition and emotion as in conflict rather than as a single enterprise[3].

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[3] Admittedly, Worsham's project is somewhat more complex than I'm presenting it here: she herself does not see cognition and emotion as separate enterprises—quite the contrary, in fact. Instead, her point is that dominant, phallocentric discourses are what make the distinction between rational and emotional ways of knowing in order to identify the latter as feminine and thus marginalize it. However, I do feel it fair to say that Worsham holds a negative view of critical pedagogies, which she believes marginalize emotion and ultimately colonize students in much the say way that they are colonized by the discourses of culture. For the purposes of this chapter, then, I focus on the ways Worsham sees embodied ways of knowing as incompatible with the kinds of critical inquiry we tend to practice in English Studies—critical inquiry that I believe is exemplified in Berlin's method.

In response to what they perceived as an overemphasis on rationality in the composing process, Brand and McLeod work from a more holistic understanding of cognition, one in which bodies, through emotion, are seen to participate in our thought and action. In line with this new view of cognition, they attempt to reinvent the writing process beyond "cold cognition" models in which people function more like machines than living, feeling beings. To this end, they re-tool the Flower and Hayes cognitivist model that aims to help students write better by fostering a metacognition of the writing process. Brand and McLeod, apparently, don't see why this metacognitive method shouldn't apply to emotion as well, and so in addition to fostering metacognition of the composing process, they advocate helping students acquire a metacognition of the emotions they experience while writing. The idea is that students might learn to harness the emotions that best enable the writing process while reinterpreting those that don't. Through arming students with a metacognition of emotion, Brand and McLeod hope to incorporate students' emotional, embodied ways of knowing into the composing processes.

Like Brand and McLeod, Worsham works against the "Western suspicion of the rational," though Worsham begins by looking into the root of this suspicion. Dominant frameworks of meaning, she argues, favor rationality because rationality is friendly to maintaining their position as the arbiters of discourse. In the interest of maintaining this position, these frameworks divorce emotion from rationality, casting rationality and emotion as a mind/body, masculine/feminine binary so that they can marginalize the latter as inferior to the former. As a result, where Brand and McLeod propose a solution aimed at providing a more accurate model of cognition, Worsham poses a solution aimed at undoing the mind/body, masculine/feminine binary in hopes to rectify the political marginalization of the feminine. She advocates having students write in the mode, *écriture féminine*, which she explains works against

masculine, dominant (i.e. rational) frameworks of meaning responsible for the binary thinking that ultimately enables the marginalization of the feminine. In this way, Worsham seems to sympathize with the aims of CCS pedagogies, though where CCS hopes to encourage political resistance through the application of a critical heuristic method, Worsham hopes to foster resistance to all dominant frameworks of meaning, including the academic frameworks advocated by CCS.

In Worsham's later article, "*Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of* Écriture Féminine *in Composition Studies*," she offers more detail on her solution to enlisting students' emotions in service of writing, *écriture féminine.* She says that it is writing that "takes on the very concept of concept" (110)[4] and that "disrupt[s] the dominant order of meanings by expressing forbidden content—specifically, the consciousness of difference—in forbidden terms" (106). As a mode that "defies the concept of concept," *écriture féminine* defies definition, though Worsham draws from Luce Irigaray to offer a list of qualities that characterize it: *Écriture féminine* mimics feminine positions in attempt to find ground for subversion of phallocentric discourse (Worsham 107), it uses "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (Irigaray 29), it bucks phallocentric discourse's reliance on "the of the clear and the distinct through which identities are established and proprieties maintained" (Worsham 108), it involves "nearness [and] proximity, but in such an extreme form that it [precludes] any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, [and] thus any form of appropriation" (Irigaray 79), it doesn't partake of the dominant framework in which there can be

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[4] Worsham quoting Irigaray

said to be a right and a wrong side of texts (109), it sets the signifier free from the signified (109), and it "allows departures, breaks, partings, separations in meaning, the effect of which is to make meaning infinite and, like desire, nontotalizable" (111). *Écriture féminine*, Worsham explains, is thus the "practice of self-exile within the dominant order of meaning. This is its 'meaning'" (112).

However, Worsham concedes that because *écriture féminine* resists the very characteristics that we define the writing we teach—characteristics like purposefulness, precision, clarity, and consistency of meaning—it is impractical as a method by which college freshman could compose texts that would be viable in traditional academic discourse:

> Because of [its] predispositions, *écriture féminine* cannot be imported into the writing classroom to work alongside academic discourse toward the goal of literacy—that is, to the extent that literacy and the literate mind are governed by the epistemological attitude and its positioning of the speaker or writer in a phallic position of mastery over discourse. (112-3)

Instead, *écriture féminine* constitutes a mode of resistance probably more appropriate for scholarship in the field of Composition Studies, where it "inscribes an effort to think differently, to repent and repossess writing as an experience of the limits of meaning" (113). Unfortunately, Worsham observes, this aspect of *écriture féminine* means that if it "were to make sustained contact" with Composition Studies, it would either be "neutralized," or it would "cast suspicion on the whole enterprise of composition studies as an accomplice of phallocentrism" (113). Composition Studies, Worsham asserts, "would cease to exist as we know it, and by implication the university, along with its constituent discourses, would come crumbling down" (113).

And yet, Worsham entertains the possibility of incorporating *écriture féminine* into composition courses in more limited ways. She draws from Clara Junker, who sees *écriture féminine* as a source for new "textual and pedagogical models and strategies":

> If *écriture féminine* operates against models, concepts, ready-made modes of thought, then it is just as likely to operate against strategies, routines, plans, procedures—against techniques of any kind that, because they can be applied generally across different writing situations and by different writers, deny differences and annul similarities" ( Worsham115).

Junker thus argues that students "should be allowed, even assigned, to write 'experimental texts'; students should be allowed to take possession of their own voices; writing assignments should focus on invention, emphasizing beginnings rather than closure; students should read noncanonical, even outrageous, literature in a nonaggressive, nonmastering mode; teachers should assume a nonmastering pedagogical stance" (Worsham 115-6). But of course, Worsham ultimately takes issue with Junker's approach, which she says is based on a misreading of Cixious (and others), asserting that "any attempt to appropriate *écriture féminine* as a theory of writing or as a course for pedagogical strategies swallows up its specific force in the epistemological desires of a discipline that would rather not foster questions, for example, about the ways in which culture is reproduced through its theories and its pedagogies" (116). Worsham thus concludes that *écriture féminine* is best reserved, not for "a theory of writing or the design of textual and pedagogical strategies," but for "an examination of how composition conducts itself as a theoretical enterprise" (117). In this way, Worsham doesn't exactly torpedo all attempts at theorizing a method of composing that allows students to draw upon their emotional

ways of knowing, though she does appear to deny the possibility that such methods could effectively perform the kind of critical intellectual work we value in academic circles.

In his article, "School Sucks," Johnson takes up Worsham's project inquiring into the potential *écriture féminine* holds for addressing the problem of student resistance, though where Worsham sees the mode as a way to resist dominant, masculine frameworks of meaning, Johnson sees it as a way to enable students' interaction with each other. In this way, *écriture féminine* is not seen not as a means of critical resistance in its own right, but as a means for subversive social interaction:

> One thing seems certain: If the pleasure of writing have something to do with the experience of immersion in a community, an immersion that disrupts the abstract structures of institutions, then we might expect authorial pleasure, or something very much like it, to drive the formation of subcultures. Whether beatniks, surfers, bikers, mods, rockers, deadheads, rastas, or the innumerable variety of punks. . . these anti-institutional communities are undoubtedly sources of keen pleasure for their members, especially for those who are otherwise disaffected or marginalized. (634-5).

In this passage, Johnson proposes that critical resistance to the "abstract structures of institutions" might be pleasurable if that resistance is bound up in belonging to a counter-community. In the context of Worsham's work, Johnson's perspective sees potential to eschew the pedagogical "violence" that Worsham warns us against through the feeling of belonging to a community of resistance. The key to this equation, apparently, is the feeling of engaging with others. Instead of being forced to do the lonely work of deconstructing a framework they identify with, Johnson advocates positioning students to construct and affirm critical identities through

engagement with communities partly defined by their resistance to hegemony. Critical work, as part of belonging to a community, becomes a constructive rather than deconstructive experience.

Johnson's argument that community can be harnessed in order to avoid doing the kind of violence Worsham describes offers hope that we might address the problem of giving students a positive emotional or affective experience engaging in critical work, though it still leaves teachers of writing without a critical method to offer students. For that, Johnson, like Worsham, turns to *écriture féminine*, though he re-casts it as an opportunity to embrace "bodies in general and pleasure in particular [which have previously been seen as] the Medusa like villains that pedagogy must vanish" (631). In this way, Johnson joins Worsham in arguing that we ought to leave room in writing pedagogy for students to experience texts and writing in somatic ways. Characteristically, however, he advocates a more positive twist on *écriture féminine*, for which he looks to Cixious's work with *écriture féminine* as a method that eschews the kinds of academic/non-academic binaries that undergird Worsham's work:

> It seems to me. . . that any tidy division between *écriture féminine* and academic discourse is precisely the sort of thing Cixious, wave-like, would wash across. Cixious's commitment to process and context presumably greets the conventions of the academy with so much bricolage, as convenient tools for the partial fulfillment of some particular purpose, tools to toss aside when one's purposes call for a different set of tools. . . Cixious describes the rhetor-as-wave not as destroying the cliff (an apt figure for the vertically organized monolith of the academy) but rather as embracing its "least undulation"—she makes the "stone body shine with gentle undeserting ebbs." In other words, renegade rhetorics offer us a shiny renewal, a transfusion of fresh vitality. As Cixious puts it in a slightly different context, "You have only to look at the Medusa

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straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Medusa

1239). Presumably, this laughter—and all of the other pleasures of renegade rhetoric—

are redemptive rather than antagonistic in their relations with the academy. (631)

In this passage, Johnson extols *écriture féminine* for its suppleness—for its attention to

"undulation" and bodies—and for making use of this of supple attention to the non-discursive as

a source of vitality.

Perhaps more importantly, Johnson sees Cixious's work as underlining the problems

Worsham finds in making distinctions between things like the academic and non-academic,

masculine and feminine, minds and bodies. Bodies are not cast as starkly resistant to

signification or dominant frameworks of meaning, but are instead "redemptive rather than

antagonistic" in their relationship with the academy. Johnson argues that in particular, laughter,

or "renegade rhetorics," which resonate through bodies, can serve as "critical intervention[s]

against any structure that would prove more limiting than liberating" (637). He argues, via Henri

Bergson (who, again, will play a prominent role in later chapters of this dissertation) that such

"pleasure can encounter larger forces only disruptively, only transgressively." His objective is

thus to "[invite students] into a subjectivity that links critical thinking to a sense of humor, of

play, of spontaneous 'creativity'" (639). And so Johnson suggests that we loosen the grip that

convention holds over our students' writing so that they might—through taking pleasure in

"renegade rhetorics," and through achieving a sense of belonging to communities of resistance—

tap the embodied as a source of vitality and a starting point for critique. To this end, Johnson

advocates the employment of exercises with poetry in order to circumvent the uncomfortable

experience surrendering to academically-sanctioned forms and frameworks of knowing.

*Trading emotion and resistance for academically-viable critical work*

       Taken together, the solutions put forward by Brand, McLeod, Worsham, and Johnson take significant strides toward collapsing the distance between the work students do in our classes and the role emotion plays in their everyday thought and action. Brand and McLeod teach a method of composing that, by drawing emotions into students' thought processes, is more easily adaptable to the emotionally-charged rhetorical situations students will find themselves in. Worsham and Johnson's work constitutes a significant step forward, even from Brand and McLeod, for the way it attempts to harness emotion, which CCS-inflected pedagogies had cut off and allowed to fester. Their work with *écriture féminine* redefines resistance as something that springs from the body in response to the totalizing forces of dominant frameworks of meaning, and they thus try to through *écriture féminine* to re-position the body a source for political resistance.

       However, I find that the solutions put forward by these scholars are problematic in several ways. For one, McLeod and Brand's attempt to draw the body into the processes of composing by fostering a metacognition of emotion achieves this work by bringing bodies under rational control. Students are expected to monitor their emotions objectively, discerning between those that contribute to the work of composing and those that do not. When the student detects an emotion from the latter category, he or she is taught to subdue it through reinterpretation. Emotions that are useful to the composing process are validated, while those that are not are effectively banished. For scholars like Worsham, this coopting of emotion would be seen as problematic from a political perspective; for my part, I find it troubling for the way it requires students to operate with "machine like objectivity" in relation to their own emotions. Brand and McLeod cite Piaget and Mandler in service of arguing that emotion is a necessary part of

cognition, and yet the method of composing they propose requires that students maintain a decidedly rational, emotionless self-awareness. Ultimately, I applaud Brand and McLeod for their attempt to offer an alternative to the unrealistic idea that people compose (or do anything, for that matter) with machine-like objectivity. And yet I argue that Brand and McLeod, hampered by the ubiquity of the cognitivist model in the time in which they worked, struggle to articulate the problem in terms that don't maintain this troubling distance between cognition and emotion. They correctly identify that the mind/body binary lies at the root of the problem, but they prove unable to develop a solution that escapes it.

Worsham, I believe, is more successful in this regard because she attempts to undo the mind/body binary in ways that are more productive to the teaching of writing. I argue, however, that because she positions her work as an attempt to reconcile that binary, she ultimately suffers the same either/or shortfall that inhibits Brand and McLeod's solution. Worsham introduces the tension between our institutional mission to help students succeed as academic writers and our desire to foster critical behaviors in relation to the university: on the one hand, we hope to impart on students literacy in a dominant framework of meaning, and on the other, we hope to instill the desire and ability to resist that and other frameworks. The mind/body, masculine/feminine binary is re-framed as literacy/resistance (with "resistance," in this case, being constituted by critical resistance in relation to discursive forces). The problem, as Worsham hinted in her discussion of the masculine/feminine binary, is that success in the former results in effacement of the latter. That is, success in academic writing requires fixing meaning, and the fixing of meaning is precisely what we ought to resist because it impinges upon emotion, bodies, and other matters that resist signification. She thus argues that "the desire to give meaning, to explain, to interpret. . . plays a fundamental role in human experience and characterizes our ordinary relation to the

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world," but "it is never innocent. . . It is rooted in our need for meaning when confronted by meaninglessness, our need for mastery when confronted by what we fear most: the enigmatic other that exceeds and threatens every system of meaning" (104). In this way, Worsham positions positive emotional engagement and the accomplishment of critical academic work as either/or prospects.

In relation, Johnson's arguments are perhaps more compelling, not only for their sunnier dispositions, but for their effort to offer practical solutions in response to the mind/body binary built into Worsham's cautionary tale about pedagogical violence. Johnson's version of *écriture féminine*, when used to facilitate students' belonging to communities of resistance, could potentially position students to acquire critical perspective in relation to dominant frameworks of meaning. And yet, I question whether *écriture féminine*, which by definition, according to Worsham, "unleashes a damaging critique and denunciation" of academic forms (82), and which Johnson says "falsifies and 'de-fangs'" our pedagogy (631), allows us to fully accomplish our institutional and social mission of empowering students with access and agency in discourses of the academy and professional life. Faced with this task, Johnson offers a shrug, observing that "at the moment, [exercises with poetry] are the closest thing [by which we] can off to step in a better direction" (647). Ultimately, both Worsham and Johnson leave us without a way to engage bodies (or the feminine, or the critical, etc.) while also responding to our institutional mission of helping students successfully navigate the discourses of their academic, professional, and civic lives, and the myriad other rhetorical circumstances they'll encounter.

I believe this failure to be a product of the difficulty these scholars encounter trying to reconcile the fundamental binaries of academic/non-academic, masculine/feminine, and especially, mind/body. Brand and McLeod, for instance, let the mind/body formulation of the

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problem govern their response. Their incorporation of emotion into existing cognitive approaches attempts to throw in equal sprinkles of mind and body in order to balance, rather than reconcile, the binary. The result, as I have observed, is that emotion is co-opted by reason. With Worsham, the politicization of the mind/body binary provides progress by making the binary itself something to be challenged by pedagogy. Bodies, emotion, and the feminine are seen as potential sources of resistance to dominant frameworks of meaning. However, Worsham's attempt to achieve this critical project is defeated before it gets off the ground by her definition of *écriture féminine* as a mode which, above all else, eludes political use. In place of mind/body, Worsham constructs a slightly more sophisticated binary consisting of that which is complicit with dominant frameworks of meaning, i.e. the rational, and that which is not, emotion and bodies. The binary has morphed, but it still remains, and this inhibits Worsham's ability to put forward solutions that affirm both our critical capacities and embodied ways of knowing. Johnson, however, takes a significant step forward in this regard by looking for ways in which both the critical and emotional, academic and non-academic, can resonate with each other. His argument that "renegade rhetorics" can bring together critical work with belonging to a community constitutes an attempt have our critical cake and eat it. However, in the end Johnson struggles to define "renegade rhetorics" with enough precision to make clear how they can endow students with a critical method that accomplishes the kind of work we value in Rhetoric and Composition while yet validating students' embodied, emotional, or affective ways of knowing.

**Fostering desire through affect**

The previous section traced the progression in theorist's attempts to better account for emotion in the writing process. From Brand and McLeod, and on through Worsham and Johnson, theorists moved from trying to incorporate a simplistic view of emotion as feelings that accompany cognitive processes towards seeing emotion as a potential source of critical resistance. This increasing complexity in how we understand our non-discursive selves was what was responsible for the improvement in the solutions scholars put forward, though the fundamental binary through which they framed the problem proved tough to reconcile. Still, there was promise in Johnson's finding that the affirmation of community could help students experience critical work in positive way. In the following section, I trace the work of scholars who build on the notion that the affective dimension of belonging to a community can improve learning. These scholars continue in the binary tradition of seeing tension between the abstract (or in this case, the discursive) and embodied, though their more complicated notion of embodiment as a social matter will ultimately, I argue, yield more successful—if not yet perfect—solutions.

In "School Sucks," Johnson suggests that the pleasure of belonging to a community might help students eschew what Worsham characterizes as the "negative moment" produced by doing critical work; in "Discipline and Pleasure: Magic and Sound," he elaborates on the nature of this belonging. To this end, he borrows once again from Gorgias, who observes that what is pleasurable about speech is the way it enables affective relationships. "Our bodies," Johnson asserts, "thus provide the model upon which we know and identify the human creations of the external world" (448) and so he believes that they key to making critical work more pleasurable lies in positioning it to enable affective relationships between students and their audiences and/or

peers. The problem, as Johnson understands it, is that academic writing (especially the critical sort) inhibits interaction between writing and audience on an affective level; he thus proposes loosening the conventions responsible for this negation so as to better enable affectively-charged exchange:

> The more [a] community's conventions appear to be flexible and negotiable and open to direct address, the more a corresponding laxity or potential for tension-release will manifest itself in a body of the individual to whom it so appears. In extreme cases, the differentiating structures of both bodies are experienced as dissolving together, allowing the two bodies to fuse and a lassitude to ensure in the subject that we identify, ultimately, as trance, a wild discharge of energy that can also take the shape of rhapsodic frenzy. The dissolution of these differentiating structures should not be cast as a dizzying star-burst of anarchy, however, but an immersion in the collective, an apotheosis infinitely social and conventional. (448-9)

In this passage, Johnson suggests that we cease enforcing the rigid, ready-made subject positions that require subjects to stake out individual territories. Instead, he strives to create a "'primitive[5]' classroom in which convention appears flexible, negotiable, and open to address" (449). More specifically, he argues that we can create an "environment rich in opportunities for pleasure" in three ways: foregrounding conflict, troubling the binary between writing and speech, and emphasizing the distinction Ong makes between the audience addressed and the audience invoked (449). Ultimately, Johnson hopes that these strategies will prevent pleasure from being "flatly dead-locked in a binary opposition with discipline." Instead, he hopes they will help

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[5] A term Johnson borrows from Baudrillard.

bodies "move in an inter-animating spiral in which each continuously opens the other to new territories" (449).

In her essay, "An Affirmative Theory of Desire," Christa Albrecht-Crane echoes Johnson's belief that fostering more affectively-charged exchanges in the writing classroom is key to addressing the problems—apathy, in particular—that arise when we ignore the role non-discursive forces play in who our students are and what they do. For Albrecht-Crane, enabling a more affectively-charged writing course begins with the question of agency. Instead of asking who has it —as Berlin, does—Albrecht-Crane suggests that we instead ask, "*how is agency enabled*?" (587). She seems to believe that agency is not reducible to an individual, but instead emerges through interaction with another, making it irreducibly social. By theorizing affect, Albrecht-Crane hopes to "disarticulate the notion that subjects possess and consciously execute agency" and instead suggests that agency is also "enabled and performed in quite non-subjective ways" (587). She thus seeks to "circumvent. . . the language of subjectivity and instead employ. . . a language (and concepts) of (non-subjective) affective relations between people" (587). Here is Albrecht-Crane on what this affect means for writing pedagogy:

> Considering an affective dynamic as a constitutive part of teaching and learning allows for a revised notion of community. . . Affective linkages can form a strong, wondrous sense of vitality, potentiality, and creation. Such processes involve bodies in their interaction with each other, and through each other, as they engage with other students, with teachers, and with the world around them. (587)

Here, Albrecht-Crane asserts that if we can better enable this revised notion of community, of which affective "bodies [and] their interaction with each other" is a key part, then we can inject into the classroom and the work of writing "vitality, potentiality, and creation."

Albrecht-Crane's solution to what she sees as the disabling of the mechanisms of desire in Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy is thus to work from "an affirmative theory of desire that accounts for people's affective relations. . . to provide an opening to grasping this moment of creation and community-building better. . . [And] to search for more productive approaches to belonging and communitarian living" (588). For practical, "useful tools" that use an affirmative theory of desire to further our political (i.e. critical) endeavors, Albrecht-Crane poses that "perhaps as teachers we can listen to the tales of violence, despair, and also excitement and pleasure our students tell us and hear and feel affective moves so that perhaps we can all do something more productive with our desires. We can perhaps lose ourSelves, undermine who *we* are, in order to enable a *becoming-together-other*" (589). This statement of course echoes Johnson's use of Gorgias and intersubjectivity, though Albrecht-Crane does not make it immediately apparent how we might structure courses differently so as to better enable desire as she describes it. Potentially, we might use course structures that highlight community so that by allowing students to interact, not only with texts, but with each other and the world, we might better enable the processes of becoming that Albrecht-Crane insists are a fundamental human desire.

Heather Palmer, however, shares a similar view of desire as a function of becoming in relation to others in ways that partake heavily of affect, though her solution addresses an issue more tangible to the everyday work of teaching writing: invention. Palmer believes that the first step "is to unleash our conceptions of ethos from the restraints of foundational subjectivity, which reduces everything to itself, and to do so in our interactions with ourselves, others, and communities," leading her to argue that critical pedagogy would be better served (and, I would add, perhaps more critical), if it allows students to interrogate issues from multiple perspectives:

A critical pedagogy focused on student desire would create a space for the personal and rhetorical, in which meaning is negotiated through a variety of subject positions. . . Defamiliarizations [of speech from fixed, discrete, self-conscious subjects] move us beyond the text, into a third space that pulls the writer out of the discrete identity of his or her [or their] self into a field of intersections with others—ethos occurs in a socially created space, at the intersection of the rhetorical and the personal, reaching toward a third space, community. (500)

In this passage, Palmer adopts an affirmative posture similar to that of Johnson. She seeks to open up the classroom to both the personal and rhetorical, to negotiate meaning from a variety of positions, and to pull students out of traditionally fixed academic subject positions into "third" positions in socially-constructed spaces.

Turning toward the practical, Palmer asks, "How do writers, student or otherwise, create and intensify sensuous pleasure through a sustained textual becoming, despite the fact that we are never in control of who we are, what we want to say, or even how to say what we think we want to say?" (504). For an answer, she looks, self-consciously, to a survey she handed out in her own class asking what made writing pleasurable for her students. One particularly sophisticated response said that pleasurable moments of writing were moments in which the writer "gained insight into creation, being, and duration" (Palmer 505):

There was a discovery to the process of writing. . . as though the paper itself transforms into something which has an identity of its own, and, through this transition, manages to manipulate your thoughts. . . Instead of changing my writing through myself, I have learned to change myself through my writing; I have learned to let words and ideas exist on their own and communicate their meaning to my mind. (Palmer 505)

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What Palmer believes is significant about this response is the way the writer's "I" is "an effect that arises from a co-creation of [thought and language], where one does not control the other but rather arises from the imbrication of one within the other, a mutual immanence" (505). Palmer's advice seems to be that affectively engaging students in writing requires positioning the writing assignment as a moment of genuine inquiry in relation to an other in hopes of using "desire as a force of invention" (491), a moment in which the act of writing "becomes a passage of light from one being to another through burning words that are more than individual beings or enclosed subjectivities" (506). The writing itself, according to Palmer, must use interacting with language, text, and forms in the process of engaging others and the world in order to arrive at new perspective.

Like Palmer, Byron Hawk attempts to reincorporate a concern for students' non-discursive ways of knowing into writing pedagogy through a revised notion of invention. His solution is predicated that thinking and writing are not matters of engaging individual things or ideas, but relations—"relations of things with each other, relations of ideas with each other, and the relations of things and ideas with each other" (45). In his book, *A Counter History of Composition*, Hawk works to revive Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of vitalism, which he argues has been read reductively as relegating invention to the un-theorizeable terrain of genius. These readings tend to presuppose that we use rationality—and only rationality—to make our way through day-to-day situations. That which cannot be explained in rational terms is seen as nearly magical and, effectively, irrelevant. Hawk, by contrast, sees Coleridge's theory as providing a much more nuanced way to think about how people function in relation to each other and the world, and he uses that theory to work towards a method that sees invention as a process

of developing new ideas in response to relationships between other people, ideas, and "the relations of things and ideas with each other":

> The initiative of [the inventive process Coleridge describes], then, comes from a goal or purpose that is then set in relation to circumstances. . . The ability to see these complex interactions is what enables a thinker to move toward a goal or purpose. Such a way or path is not a strict, formalist sense of method that when employed will always lead to the same end. It is both designated by the intentions of the educated mind and the conditions of possibility that the material situation sets up. Consequently, the force of genius or the limits of empiricism cannot determine the path. This middle way can unfold only through dialectical interaction. (45)

Coleridge perhaps overplays the "intentions of the educated mind" a bit much for Hawk's point, but Hawk wishes to take away from this passage how thinking is not the activity of an isolated mind, but a mind that is engaged with others and the world.

This leads Hawk to advocate a method of invention that acknowledges the way a "body can know prior to and without intelligence" (113). The subject, he argues, is "not about ideological construction at the level of rational, conscious debate (in the classroom). . . [instead, a] body's agency is. . . a matter of what bodies can do, their capacity to affect other bodies by entering into relations with them" (119). Because these relationships proceed ideological construction, they must necessarily take place on the affective plane. The body, Hawk argues, is thus "the critical, epistemological link between situation and invention" (12), leading him to advocate methods of composing in which writers construct and enact relationships with actual people and the world.

*Dropping criticality in favor of affect, desire, and invention*

Taken together, Johnson, Palmer, Albrecht-Crane, and Hawk build on the work done by Brand, McLeod, and especially, Worsham, to offers solutions that situate bodies as more than mere sources of energy, and more objects molded by discourse, but as the primary plane of sociality where the subject comes in contact with other subjects. This of course is a departure from the discursively-focused, poststructuralist pedagogies practiced by Berlin and others who see subjects as strictly the products of discourse, and yet despite their acknowledgement of the ways people exceed the sum of their discursive interactions, these scholars struggle, sometimes directly and sometimes not, to overcome what they see as a fundamental tension between the discursive and non-discursive.

Johnson, by suggesting that we might generate more meaningful engagement by adopting course structures and writing assignments designed to foster interaction, not with discursive forms, but with other, living people, works to cloud various binaries that result in academic writing and pleasure being "dead-locked. . . in opposition." He wishes to blur the lines between audience addressed and audience invoked, between writing and speech, and rather than subduing conflict, Johnson suggests that we foreground it. For Johnson, it is the lines, the clear demarcations, and the eliding of conflict are themselves seen as responsible for engendering resistance and for subduing the possibility of community. In the context of Worsham, these lines, demarcations, and eliding of conflicts are seen as various manifestations of masculine dominant frameworks of meaning. Yet where Worsham responded to those manifestations by favoring the feminine, Johnson attempts to hold the two together by enacting a classroom that "appears flexible, negotiable, and [especially] open to address." And so, it is through manipulating the codes of the classroom and the conventions for writing that Johnson hopes to engage students

affectively in the process of learning. The end result is that where Worsham works against a masculine/feminine binary in which the former works constantly to expel the latter, Johnson attempts to appease or affirm both our academic and embodied ways of knowing. If we can only find a way for students to relate to others affectively over academic matters, he seems to say, then we could eschew binary thinking, affirm both our intellectual and embodied impulses, and marshal embodied ways of knowing in service of critical work. And yet I question whether Johnson's solution, engaging students through exercises with poetry, marshals students' embodied or affective ways of knowing in service of the kind of critical work we value in Rhetoric and Composition. Like Johnson, Palmer and Albrecht-Crane dismiss the poststructuralist view that subject formation happens in relation to discursive structures and argue instead that it happens in relation to other bodies. Because they see desire as intimately tied with our desire to engage with others affectively, they join Johnson in advocating course structures that enable affective interaction between students. This is a useful suggestion, though Palmer's work doesn't quite follow through on its promise to provide a concrete method of invention. Like Palmer, Hawk asserts that invention is something that must happen in a social context, but he too leaves teachers of writing with little to offer students beyond telling them, once they've found themselves in a constellation of other writers, to go forth and think of something critical.

So while Johnson, Palmer, Albrecht-Crane, and Hawk's work helps us better understand the importance of affect and sociality, not only in engaging students in the process of writing, but in helping them think and invent in the ways more natural to people, their work leaves us without a critical method that can supplant Berlin's and yet foster critical subjects the way we might hope. Johnson seems to say, for example, that since we lack a critical heuristic that doesn't

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negate our ability to experience texts and relationships with others in an embodied, affectively-charged way, we might as well just give up on our institutional mission and teach poetry. Palmer and Albrecht-Crane don't explicitly give up on that institutional mission, but that's because they are even vaguer when it comes to presenting a real alternative to Berlin's critical method. They, as well as Hawk, suggest that we might find traction in a critical method that doesn't emerge from a fixed, rational subject in favor of a subject which occupies multiple positions. However, while it is easy to imagine how interrogating an issue from multiple angles could generate critical perspective, it is unlikely that we would consider a freshman paper successful unless it discussed these positions from the perspective of a single, unified author or researcher. And so, while Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer and Hawk have put forward strategies for more closely integrating students' affective and discursive selves in the process of writing, there remains quite a bit of distance between the kinds of affective engagement (or intuitive invention) these scholars describe and the notions of critical consciousness exemplified by Berlin's pedagogy. It seems that over the course of this progression from emotion to affect, the mind/body binary—and the various binaries that emerge from it (masculine/feminine, academic/non-academic, critical/personal)—continues to stifle our efforts to merge the critical work students do in our classes with the ways they think and behave in real life. In the following section, I continue this movement toward complexity that began Brand and McLeod's discussion of emotion and built progressively through Worsham, Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and Hawk by discussing Thomas Rickert's work with lived temporality.

**Acknowledging lived temporality**

The theorists I've discussed thus far all see the struggles of critical pedagogies as stemming from a failure to account for the role the non-discursive plays in who we are and what we do; Worsham, and some instances, Johnson, frame this problem-causing aspect of the non-discursive in terms of the individual body and/or emotion, while Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and to an extent, Hawk, expand on that frame to focus on bodies in relation to other bodies, or affects. Their solutions thus grow from the particular aspects of the non-discursive that they see as causing problems for CCS pedagogies (or writing pedagogy, in general). Worsham attempts to enlist emotion in the process of fostering critical resistance to dominant frameworks of meaning, Johnson does the same but adds relating to others through communities of resistance, and Palmer, Albrecht-Crane, and Hawk try to increase affective engagement by positioning students to engage with actual people while writing. In this transition from the definition of the problem, and the subsequent solutions put forward in response to it, I see an increase in sophistication in how theorist are attempting to understand and thus address aspects of the non-discursive that are relevant to writing pedagogy. Rickert, I argue, provides a clue to the next stage in this progression by addressing, with even more nuance and sophistication, what it is about bodies and their interactions that exceeds discursive representation: the fact that they move (or, that they change over time). This attention to temporality shapes the way Rickert frames the problem, which of course, then frames his solutions.

Recall that the problem Rickert cites with critical pedagogies is the way they try to critically unmask rhetorical experiences that, for students, lay in the past. The problem with this method is that these past experiences have habituated students, in a bodily way, towards certain behaviors and viewpoints; the critical pedagogy that tries to undo those experiences seems to tell

the student, in a way, that their bodies don't know what they're talking about. There is thus a conflict between the critical method we teach and students' embodied ways of knowing, a conflict Rickert defines in terms of cynicism. Rickert reveals how the method taught practiced by critical pedagogies is problematic for the way it effectively attempts to reach into the past and change it. He never engages Worsham directly, though again, this view that there is a conflict caused by the way critical pedagogy tries to *re*-socialize students (or to use Worsham's nomenclature, *re*-affectively map them) echoes Worsham's argument that critical pedagogies are problematic because they attempt to undo the ways students had previously been socialized. Temporality—which had been implicit in Worsham's argument, but inconspicuously so— becomes the main source of conflict between the binary that Worsham, for instance, frames as masculine and feminine. In subsequent chapters I will argue that temporality, or movement, will thus prove the key to following through on the mind/body binary that, to borrow from Johnson, has the academic and the embodied "dead-locked. . . [in] binary opposition."

For now, I follow through on my discussion of Rickert, who argues that our desire to do what is best for students, "we often have difficulty moving outside our own frames of contestation, our sense of what is important or at stake, and this makes it difficult for us to grasp how these matters will be to greater or lesser degrees different for our students" (165). Rickert thus adocates a "postpedagogy" whose aim is to enable "writing Acts" that "shift control of the dominant loci of contention from teacher to student," though he is careful to say that, rather than a simple decentering of the classroom, he proposes a "remodulation—in terms of content, practice, evaluation—that refuses to mirror the society of control with a pedagogy of control" (163). In place of control, Rickert argues that we should aim to foster invention (165): instead of simply asking what students are learning, he suggests that we "might also ask what students are

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not learning": "What other forms of thinking and writing are being shut down or distorted—forms of writing that have their own, different powers and inventive allure?" (164). Here is Rickert at length on giving up the control that characterizes critical pedagogies in favor of a pedagogy which favors student experience and ways of knowing:

> [A postpedagogy] asks us to acknowledge that we do not always know best how to rectify social problems for *them*, and this further necessitates a partial relinquishing of control and learning from students. Not only could student knowledge be incorporated into the subject of the pedagogy (as in class discussions), but it could be incorporated into the pedagogical structure itself, so that content, methodology, and affective comportment all become intermeshed with student knowledge and experience. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in cultural studies-based pedagogies that seek disruption and politicization of hierarchies of power and privilege, especially in terms of race, class, and gender. (165)

Rickert's articulation of a postpedagogy says that we must abandon the impulse which says to us, for example, that in when in the course of giving a student feedback on his or her essay we encounter a term or belief that we in the academy find socially irresponsible, we should ask them to deconstruct some term or reflect on it critically. Instead, he suggests that we take a more affirmative stance toward student knowledge, making it a part of the content of a course rather than a thing to be critically undone. In short, rather than "bemoan[ing] the difficulties of achieving a critical distance that will revitalize our hopes for making the world better," Rickert "suggest[s] that we rebegin from an abandonment of that critical drive" (170).

*Favoring lived temporality over our critical aims*

Rickert's version of postpedagogy, which includes blurbs on the postpedagogies advocated by Dianne Davis, Henry Giroux, and even Worsham, encourages us to show a respect for students' existing ways of knowing that, I think, is well-advised. And, I would argue, it is particularly valuable for the ways is calls for us to "incorporate [student knowledge] into the pedagogical structure itself." However, I wish to call attention to the fact that Rickert, in his outright abandonment of the "critical drive" in favor of "student knowledge" enacts a binary that sees two as mutually exclusive. That is, Rickert says that we can incorporate student knowledge into our course structures, or we can force them to do critical work, but we can't have both, which seems to imply that students don't already possess critical ways of knowing. The critical method practiced by Cultural Studies is problematic for the way it negates movement, or time, while our students and the world they live is, of course, in constant motion. And so, after problematizing the Cultural Studies-geared method advocated by Berlin, Rickert seems to say that there is no alternative but to give up on our critical mission completely. Ultimately, Rickert's work theorizing time hints that perhaps temporality lies at the core of this tension between critical and embodied ways of knowing which has proven so difficult to eradicate, and yet, his response to it almost seems to take a step back from where Johnson, Palmer, and Hawk deposited us. It seems that the more sophisticated these scholars get about the way they understand the non-discursive, the more trouble they have resolving this tension between the critical and embodied.

**Conclusion: guidelines for an alternate critical method, but no successful solutions as yet**

There is much to take away from the solutions offered by the Rhetoric and Composition scholars I've discussed thus far, some of which consists of approaching the problem in a certain way, some of which consists of precise solutions, and some of which helps us to know what kinds of possible solutions are, themselves, problematic. Brand and McLeod's work disrupting overly-cognitive models of composing suggests, perhaps unintentionally, that a more suitable critical method wouldn't be confined to the a strictly rational plane, but would in some way engage writers' emotions in service of critical work. Johnson, too, suggests that we find ways to make the experience of reading and writing more somatically-engaging. Both Johnson and Worsham believe that if Rhetoric and Composition is to succeed at shaping students into more critical versions of their former selves, that reconstitution would have to take place on the emotional or affective level. Even so, all three abandon the possibility that we can accomplish our critical aims to the extent that we might hope, with Johnson abandoning them for poetry, Worsham arguing that critical work would inevitably be co-opted anyway, and Rickert favoring a postpedagogy which gives up any sense of trying to influence student subjectivities—to be critical, or otherwise.

On the other hand, the affect-minded (or social-minded) theorists such as Johnson in his later work, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and Hawk, could be seen as more optimistic about the prospect of engaging students in academic writing, and even, perhaps, critical work. The problem, as they frame it, lies not so much the critical method as in the rigid, rational, and single-minded subject positions we force students to inhabit in their writing. They seem to say that only we could let students be a bit less self-consistent, a little bit more complex, and if only we could let them change and grow, both in their writing and among a community of fellow changing and

growing fellow researchers, they might experience the processes of writing (and maybe even critical work) in more lifelike—and more effective!—ways. Hawk's work, especially, suggests that our thinking as rhetorical beings is driven through our engagement with others and rhetorical situations, and he thus lays out a method of composing based on contributing to a community of living people. Unfortunately, however, none of these scholars' suggestions are tied very closely back to the critical aims of Rhetoric and Composition. If writing a critical essay means adopting a rational and consistent subject position, they would probably say, then it negates the kind of socially-geared and affectively-charged cognition they hope to reincorporate into the work of writing.

Ultimately, these scholars present a number of responses to our failure to foster the kind of critical subjects we'd hope, though none of their solutions actually gets around the problem of successfully teaching students how to engage in critical cognition. Critical cognition, they seem to conclude, is simply too rational an exercise, and as a result, it will inevitably bump up against non-discursive forces such as bodies, affect, and temporality in ways that make it problematic. Brand, McLeod, Worsham, Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, Hawk, and Rickert all work, in one form or another, to undo the mind/body split that drives the critical methods taught by Berlin and others who hope to foster critical subjects, but in their attempt to reconcile this split they end up reinscribing it. Brand and McLeod teach a method that simply rationalizes emotion. Worsham argues that any attempt to achieve political work through emotion only ends up co-opting it. Johnson says we can either enjoy text, or wax intellectual about it, but not both. Albrecht-Crane, Palmer, and Hawk say we can relate to each other affectively across the spaces of the writing classroom, but not in thoughtful, rationally-sophisticated ways. Further, Rickert argues, most

explicitly of the bunch, that critical academic work is simply incompatible with our embodied ways of knowing.

For my part, I argue that while we are much indebted to these scholars for the ways they have clued us in to the problems non-discursive forces (potentially) pose for our critical aims, they cede our institutional mission based on a reductive notion of just how intelligent our embodied or affective ways of knowing might be. It is almost as though any thoughtful activity immediately becomes incompatible with the way, as Hawk puts it, "a body can know prior to linguistic understanding." What we need, then, is a notion of cognition, or a notion of how we inhabit the world in both intellectual and embodied ways, that reconciles rather than drives apart these two poles that have thus far rendered embodied, pleasurable critical thinking a theoretical impossibility. What we need, I argue, is better understanding of the play between discursive structures of knowing the bodies we inhabit so that we might ferret out those instances of critical thinking that, unlike the critical method we currently teach, is actually practiced by people with emotions, social lives, and who, on occasion, experience temporality.

This chapter has worked to both establish what would make for a less problematic critical method while also showing how the methods scholars have offered thus far fall short. Both the strength and weakness of this scholarship hinges upon the attempt to reconcile the mind/body split evinced by our current critical method; in the next chapter, I turn to the work of Henri Bergson, who offers an alternate method, intuition, which is simultaneously a method of invention, a theory of how we navigate the world through the interplay of intelligence and our embodied access to the present, and a mode of thinking that is both highly embodied and explicitly critical.

# Chapter 3: Henri Bergson and intuition as embodied cognition

*Abstract:*

*In this third chapter of my attempt to better align the critical/rhetorical habits we teach with the ways students think and act in the real world, I examine in detail the work of Henri Bergson. I show how Bergson's theory of intuition brings together rational and embodied ways of knowing more successfully than the scholars I discussed in previous chapters. This revised notion of how people think in both abstract and embodied ways will help me in later chapters to re-imagine an alternative to the critical method taught by CCS-inflected writing pedagogies.*

**Introduction**

In the first chapter, several Rhet/Comp scholars helped me to show how non-discursive matters such as embodiment, affect, and lived temporality render problematic those pedagogies which hope to mold students into critical subjects by asking them to engage discursive structures critically. This work revealed that the problem, in its most reduced sense, stemmed from the way CCS-inflected writing pedagogies overemphasize the role rationality plays in who we are and what we do while underestimating the capacity for emotion, affect, and lived temporality to offer resistance to discursive influence. In the second chapter, I examined the solutions put forward by the scholars who had posed the problem, concluding that when faced with the ways current critical methods favor the rational in the rational/embodied binary, these scholars largely rushed to the other side of the boat, ultimately reinscribing the separation of minds from bodies that had caused the problem in the first place. The challenge we now face is a matter for both theory and practical method: we need to re-theorize subject-formation because the shortcomings of CCS pedagogies emerge from their belief that subjects—whether seen as strictly rational or as conflicting and multiple—are *only* constituted through discourse. And, we need a critical method that, unlike the method taught by CCS pedagogies, exhibits a tighter connection between abstract, critical work and the lived, embodied world our students inhabit.

In hopes of addressing these two concerns—theory and method—I now turn to the work of Henri Bergson, who attempts to combine a metaphysic theory with a philosophic method through the term, intuition. Admittedly, this marriage of theory and method can render making sense of Bergson's work a challenge, particularly because both he and those who write about him often seem to toggle back and forth randomly between intuition as theory and intuition as method. However, I believe taking the time to understand Bergson's notion of intuition, and why

it is necessarily both a theory and a method, will be worth the effort because Bergson developed the term in response to a problem similar to the one we currently face in writing pedagogy: the problem of grasping how we make use of abstract (or in the context of writing instruction, discursively-constituted) ways of knowing while negotiating the immediate, embodied present. Essentially, Bergson felt that philosophy as an enterprise had fallen victim to its own rigor. As a method of inquiry, it could puzzle out matters in shockingly precise and rational ways, but Bergson believed that the more philosophy confined itself to rational ways of knowing, the further it withdrew from the real world (which he reminds us resists codification). Bergsonian intuition, then, is an attempt to understand how the immediate, embodied present gives rise to rationality and provides an exigence for its application, but also, in a sense, exerts its own will and cannot be reduced to rational explanation. As a theory, it posits people who generate abstractions in their coping with everyday life but who also "know" the present in such ways that exceed the rational; as a method, it consists of ferreting out a specific set of mistakes in our thinking which would otherwise, according to Bergson, lead us down the road of withdrawing from the embodied world into a world that exists only as in abstraction.

Ultimately, my goal for using Bergson's work is to offer a more useful understanding of the interplay between abstract and embodied ways of knowing. That is, Berlinian pedagogies understand people as functioning only in abstract, rational ways, and this leads to the failure of these pedagogies to achieve their aims; subsequent theorists—Brand, McLeod, Worsham, and on down the line—attempt to locate embodiment on their pedagogical radar and this helps them to understand why Berlinian pedagogies fall short, though because their work responded to moments when, as a result of poorly thought-out critical methods, mind and bodies were situated in conflict, they were blind to the ways in which bodies and minds might work in synergy. It is

my hope that Bergson's theory of intuition will help me come closer to resolving this mind/body split—that it will help me to see minds and bodies, not as forces in tension, but as things which work together to influence our thought and action.

I begin my investigation into Bergson's theory of intuition with a brief biography and an outline of the context in which his work emerged, in part because that context will both help us better grasp Bergson, but also because Bergson's context in many ways resonates with our current attempt to re-shape students by shaping the ways they write. I will then tackle Bergson's theory in two main parts: intuition as a theory, which addresses the theoretical shortcoming that proves to be critical pedagogies' undoing, and intuition as method, which works towards an alternative to the methods I've laid out in previous chapters. Bergson's method alone will not, however, suffice to resolve the challenge I've developed over the first two chapters because it is a philosophic method and not a method of composing. However, I do suspect that with some work, his philosophical method might add to the list of suggestions that Rickert and others have offered as qualities we might hope for in our search for an alternative to Berlin's method. In this way, I hope through Bergson's method of intuition to make small inroads toward developing a writing pedagogy that positions students to make full use of their cognitive capacities. However, it won't be until later chapters, when I examine Bergson's theory of the comic (a particular kind of intuition which grows out of his general theory), that I expect to fully realize the goal of this dissertation, offering a method of embodied critical thinking more closely aligned with the ways students think and act in their everyday life.

*The Life of Bergson*

Henri Bergson was born to Jewish parents in Paris on October 18, 1859. A gifted student in all respects, young Bergson seemed to hold the most promise as a mathematician, for which he won first prize in the prestigious *Concours Général*. Despite his promise in mathematics, Bergson chose to enter the humanities section of the *École Normale*, though this interest in (critiquing) math and systematic thinking would remain a theme throughout Bergson's career. After graduating from *École Normale*, Bergson went on to teach at the *Lycée* and then the *University*. His early research showed a growing interest in the role unconscious memories play in recognition, and after several successful publications, Bergson was elected president of the London-based Society for Psychical Research. In 1888, He submitted two doctoral theses: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, which was subsequently published as a book under the title, *Time and Free Will*), and the then required Latin thesis, *Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit* (*Aristotle's Conception of Place*). Bergson's second book, *Matter and Memory*, led to his election to the *Collège de France*, and eventually, to a post teaching at *École Normale*. Bergson's next book, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, an oft-overlooked text among Bergson scholars (but not among theorists of humor), was followed by Bergson's being elected to the *Collège de France*, the first sign of Bergson's growing fame. Soon after, Bergson published an essay titled, "Introduction to Metaphysics," which would later be re-worked into the book many consider the centerpiece of his philosophy, *The Creative Mind*. Bergson's next book, *Creative Evolution*, sparked a great deal of scholarly controversy, was followed by a wide-ranging speaking tour, and eventually culminated in a trip to the United States. When World War I broke out, the French government recruited Bergson to serve as the diplomatic emissary to the United States, which eventually led to his work with Woodrow Wilson forming the League of Nations. In 1919, Bergson published

*Mind Energy*, though health problems also caused him to retire from his teaching post. And yet, Bergson was able to serve as president of the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation, a precursor to UNESCO, and soon after engaged in a famous debate with Albert Einstein which Merleau-Ponty would later say testified to a "crisis of reason" that was taking place in intellectual circles. Bergson's response to the debate spurred a series of essays that were later compiled into the book, *Duration and Simultaneity*, a book followed several years later by his publication of *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Bergson's last publication, a collection of essays titled *The Creative Mind*, came out shortly before his death in 1941 at the age of 81[6].

*Reacting to an epistemological break*

In her book, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Bergson*, Susan Guerlac compares the time in which Bergson wrote to our own, observing that both are marked by explosions of scientific discovery and the rapid proliferation of new technologies in everyday life (14). Just as the present day is being transformed by personal computers, the internet, and cell phones, Bergson's day had been "vastly extended and accelerated by trains, steam engines, bicycles, tramcars and, by 1902, the gasoline-powered automobile. It suddenly became possible to send a letter to many countries in the world, to communicate by telegraph, and to speak by telephone. . . It was now possible to write by electric light at one's typewriter. . . Rolls of film made photography much easier. . . Sewing machines and machine guns made their appearance" (Guerlac 15). Bergson's time is considered to be the Second Scientific Revolution, while our own is considered to be the third.

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[6] Much of this history comes from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Guerlac sees this revolution as having had dramatic effects on the ways we view the world. She cites Paul Valéry, a poet of Bergson's time, who described their time as "a period completely formed by the sciences, in perpetual technological transformation, where nothing escapes the will to innovation"[7] (Guerlac 14). This exuberance at the transformative power of technology was, however, tempered by a struggle to cope with the change, a growing anxiety Valéry attributes to the fact that through "introduc[ing] completely new powers, invet[ing] completely new means, and develop[ing] different and unforeseen habits," we have "negated the values, dissociated the ideas, and ruined feelings that seemed to us unshakable. . . And to express such a new state of affairs, we have only very old ideas[8]" (Guerlac 15). According to Guerlac, this struggle to adapt to the growing pace of technological innovation led to a change in tone in intellectual circles. Europe, she argues, suffered from a "*crise de l'espirit*, a spiritual or intellectual crises, that includ[ed] a crises of values and a loss of confidence concerning our place in the world" (16). This place appears to have been predicated upon scientific uncertainty and the romantic possibility that emerges from the unexplainable. Valéry remarks that the universe, which Guerlac says has come to resemble a machine, has become "so orderly and compact, so simple in construction, that we may reckon its past and gauge something of its future with almost as much certitude as that of a dynamo or water wheel. In its motion there is no uncertainty, no mystery" (Guerlac 16). Then, just as the world appeared ready to yield itself to the certainty of science, Heisenberg revealed that the uncertainty that remained in the field of microphysics was not simply a matter of our having yet to perfect our tools of measurement, but was a property of

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[7] Guerlac's translation of *Euvres Complètes,* 1:971

[8] ibid.

the universe itself. It seems that scholars' notions of the unpredictable and impossible to account for were swept away by the Second Scientific Revolution, leaving them unprepared for the moment when science finally proved its own inadequacy. On one hand, there was "a sense of wonder at the efficacy of science and its visible mastery over the physical world," and on the other, "a profound sense of crisis. . . because science, the very foundation of that mastery that has so transformed the world, appears to have come unstuck from the world and left it in chaos" (Guerlac 17). For Guerlac, then, two moments frame the life and work of Bergson:

> The first confidently assumes an orderly, mechanistic world disposed to yield still further to our mastery of it. The other imposes an experience of indeterminacy that characterizes not only a certain mathematical knowledge of the world but that world itself, leaving in its wake, as Valéry's essay reveals, an indeterminacy of values, of language, and of social life. Between these two moments, there occurs what Bachelard will subsequently call an epistemological break. (Guerlac 17)

This epistemological break was double-edged. Scientific inquiry had displaced romantic, humanistic conceptions of the world, even as it simultaneously proved that despite the existence of concrete and measureable ways of accounting for the world, there remained an aspect of it that defied or exceeded mechanistic explanation. Theorists, in the throes of this shift from "the uncertainties of mechanism" to the "anxieties of indeterminacy" suffered what Guerlac calls a "historical dislocation" (17). Bergson's work, according to Guerlac, "emerges on the fault line of this break," looking "backward and forward across the interval that emerges from within it" (17). Where many facing this break experienced alarm, or otherwise entrenched themselves more firmly along one side of the fault or another, Bergson used it as a way to generate theory. Rather than choosing one or the other—the mechanism of science or the indeterminacy of

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romanticism—Bergson attempted to theorize how the tension between these two starkly different ways of seeing the world are not merely matters of theory, but are reflected in human experience, with the day to day experience of individuals and groups being a matter of attempting to apply systematic, deterministic and rigid logical systems to a world which, existing in a fundamentally different form, both yields to and exceeds them.

*Je n'ai pas de système*

      The perception of Bergson's inquiry, aimed at this tension between systematic ways of knowing and the notion that there exists an aspect of the world that defies systematic thinking, would be colored by the fact that in his time, scientific ways of knowing were the dominant paradigm. Many of Bergson's contemporaries (and many today) would relegate his work to vitalism, perceiving it as a critique of the formalism that undergirds scientific thinking and language. It is true the Bergson's work constitutes a major contribution to the tradition of vitalism and that it is through that tradition that many today, such as Byron Hawk, have come to know and would categorize his work. However, Bergson himself repeatedly resisted the notion that his thinking partook of a single philosophical school (Mullarkey 5). There are two ways to interpret Bergson's resistance to categorization. The first interpretation, and I would argue, the most reductive, would be to say that as a critic of formal systems of knowing, Bergson's adherence to any systematic way of knowing or any single philosophical school would turn his philosophy in upon itself. The second, and I would say, more accurate interpretation, grows out of the first and is central to both the content and method of his philosophy: Bergson sees systems of knowing as over determining to results of their inquiries (Deleuze15), though while he sees abstract structures as central to the ways we experience, know, and respond to the world, he is

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also optimistic about our ability to experience it in ways not mediated through language or quantitative notation—or in Guerlac's words, to experience "the 'real' that resists symbolization" (43). In this way, Bergson's work can be seen as a way to incorporate the non-systemic, more immediate ways we experience the world into philosophic theory and method. Bergson's work is thus best interpreted, not as a system of thought or 'ism,' but as an attempt incorporate non-systemic ways of knowing into philosophy.

**Intuition as theory**

Bergson's theory of intuition can be broadly described as an attempt to reconcile the mind/body binary, taking for its starting point a bifurcation between rational and non-rational ways of thinking or knowing. He generally refers to rational thinking, which partakes of logics, grammars, and/or semantic systems, as intellect, while he refers to non-rational thinking— thinking that we might at the moment merely observed *doesn't* partake of logics, grammars, or semantic systems—as instinct. Bergson's theory of how these two kinds of thinking/knowing function is quite complex, and it will take some work to lay them out clearly, but for now it is only necessary to observe that, while Bergson makes a distinction between them for the purpose of his analysis, he ultimately views them as a mixture. That is, Bergson would say that there are moments when our thinking is dominated by our intellect, but in such moments, instinct is also present, while conversely, there are moments dominated by instinct, but in such moments, intellect is also present. And yet, instinct and intellect, as Bergson's philosophy will show, are different in such a fundamental way that they seem to be difficult to reconcile, not only in theory, but in lived experience. That is, it seems that as people have little trouble deploying overly-intellectual kinds of thinking, and we have little trouble deploying overly-instinctive kinds of

thinking, but we have trouble engaging in thinking that partakes heavily of both instinct and intellect. So while Bergson sees human's as always practicing a mixture of intelligence and instinct, there are moments when that mixture is more mixed—moments in which there is a higher degree of both intellect and instinct, moments in which they work synergistically, or even, moments when there might be so little distance between the two that they could almost be said to be joined. This latter kind of thinking is what Bergson wishes to describe with the term, intuition.

Understanding Bergson's theory of intuition will require further breaking down what he means by intellect and instinct, terms which, in a potentially confusing fashion given how intuition reconciles them, are fundamentally "different in kind." When reading Bergson, the importance of this phrase, "different in kind," cannot be understated. On the one hand, there is abstraction, which is the defining characteristic of intellect, and on the other, there is something else, something less understood: *élan vital*. The term *élan vital* represents Bergson's attempt to describe through abstract terms the aspect of the world that, in the terms of intellect and instinct, gives rise to the latter, but more importantly, the aspect that resists or exceeds abstraction. According to Bergson, this resistance comes from the fact that the real world moves. And so, the fundamental distinction between intellect and instinct grows from a fundamental distinction between the abstract and the non-abstract, a distinction based on the fact that the one is, in a sense, frozen in time, while the other is in constant motion. In this section, I will attempt to lay out Bergson's theory of intuition by describing in more detail the kinds of thinking whose mixture leads to it, instinct and intuition. Though describing instinct and intuition sufficiently will require that I first describe with more care the distinction Bergson makes between the abstract and the moving. Ultimately, I hope to make clear how through intuition, Bergson posits a theory of how people inhabit the world which partakes of both abstract and instinctive thinking,

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thinking which, on the one hand, uses abstraction to help us to do things like communicate with each other or use past experiences in order to respond to advantageously unfamiliar circumstances, and which, on the other hand, allows us to maintain contact with the aspects of the world which are negated by abstraction—aspects such as particularity, multiplicity, and especially, the fact that life moves. Through Bergson, we will come to see how this last quality, which Bergson dubs, *élan vital*, is perhaps the most important because it is this movement, this inevitability of change, which "pushes us down the road of life" (*Creative Evolution* 104). For Bergson, movement is equivalent to change, and change is what resists calcification into abstraction, which purports that a thing holds true across the span of time, and so movement, or *élan vital*, is a source of vitality. In the upcoming section, we will see how through intuition, Bergson posits a state of being that is simultaneously intelligent and in touch with the moving, living world.

*Duration*

Bergson's philosophy, as Lacey points out, is "primarily a philosophy of time" (26). What Bergson wants to do is to consider what the fact of temporality means for the ways we understand and exist in the world. The trouble with this project is that the means through which we would undertake it—language and philosophy—negate time (Guerlac 43). However, the discursive can serve to reveal by contrast the qualities that separate the temporal from the other elements of experience. Perhaps the most revealing example lies in Bergson's analysis of the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, which describes the gradual and inevitable degradation of energy. According to this law, concentrated matter and energy will inevitably dissipate, tending toward homogeneity (Guerlac 31). This dissipation marks the effect of time on

matter, showing the passage of time to be irreversible. After all, according to the law, matter and energy tend toward dispersal, not the other way around. When we try to represent this process conceptually, however, we do so by rendering time into a spatial metaphor, with a line going from A to B. The trouble is that in the A-to-B model, direction is not implied—just as something can travel from A to B, it can travel from B to A. In this way, Bergson's analysis of the second law of thermodynamics shows how representing time with spatial metaphors negates the directionality of movement.

In yet another example, Bergson's analysis of the parable, Zeno's arrow, shows that not only does time proceed in a single direction that is not represented on the A to B spatial metaphor, it cannot be divided, as we so often do, into points on a line (or minutes on a clock). In the introduction to his book, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi provides a useful summary and explanation of Bergson's analysis:

> When Zeno shoots his philosophical arrow, he thinks of its flight path in the commonsense way, as a linear trajectory made up of a sequence of points or positions that the arrow occupies one after the other. The problem is that between one point on a line and the next, there is an infinity of intervening points. If the arrow occupies a first point along its path it will never reach the next—unless it occupies the infinity of points between. Of course, it is the nature of infinity that you can never get to the end of it. The arrow gets swallowed up in the transitional infinity. Its flight path implodes. The arrow is immobilized.

> Or, if the arrow moved, it is because it was never *in* any point. It was in *passage* across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity.

That continuity of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed. It doesn't stop until it stops: when it hits the target. Then, and only then, is the arrow in position. It is only after the arrow hits it [sic] mark that its real trajectory may be plotted. The points of positions really appear retrospectively, working backward from movement's end. It is as if, in our thinking, we put targets all along the path. The in-between positions are logical targets: possible endpoints. The flight of the arrow is not immobilized as Zeno would have it. We stop it in thought when we construe its movement to be divisible into positions. Bergson's idea is that space itself is a retrospective construct of this kind. When we think of space as 'extensive,' as being measurable, divisible, and composed of points plotting invisible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. (6).

In his analysis of the parable, Bergson shows how moving matter is, to use Massumi's phrase, "swallowed up in transitional infinity." Bergson gives this moving, irreversible quality of time the name, *duration*. Where "most representations of time abolish what is particularly temporal about it," (Mullarkey 1), Bergson's attempt to "think time concretely," shows how, as Guerlac puts it, "time enters into the very substance of matter" (1). So while conceptual thinking posits matter in a fixed state—while it encourages us to see objects as inanimate—Bergson's analysis of the law of entropy and Zeno's arrow show that matter cannot be stopped in time, but is instead always in transition from one state to the next.

*Élan Vital*

These two observations, that time cannot be paused and that matter cannot be thought apart from movement, lead to the concept that Bergson is perhaps best known for, *élan vital*. It

might not always be apparent to us, but objects, and especially people, never reside in fixed, resting states. Movement is endemic to *what they are* and is bound up in the very substance of matter. When objects move, they change. In this way, change is inseparable from matter, and change, as the law of entropy tells us, is inevitable. The concept, *Élan vital,* is Bergson's attempt to name the force that "pushes life along the road of time"[9] (*Creative Evolution* 104). It is not simply that time moves, but that in doing so, it becomes a creative force. Mullarkey describes the inventive capacity of time:

> Essential to [Bergson's] philosophy is the realisation that every moment brings with it something 'radically new.' This is opposed to a conception of time as simply a rearrangement of the pre-existing., which is, in Bergson's opinion, its scientific definition. On Bergson's very different understanding, however, time must be creative: if it isn't inventive, it isn't time at all. In real time each new moment is qualitatively different from the last and possesses, as Bergson would put it later, 'an effective action and reality of its own.'" (Mullarkey 9).

Because each moment is different from the moment that precedes it, time "means invention, [the] creation of forms, [and the] continual elaboration of the absolutely new" (*Creative Evolution* 10). In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson employs this view of *élan vit*al to explain the change that drives evolution: "evolution is not something that happens to life" as Guerlac puts it, "[but] is life itself, a perpetually contingent movement of differentiation" (7), a notion that leads Deleuze to see Bergson as the first theorist of *différence* (Mullarkey 137). But what is important to note about

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[9] *Creative Evolution*

all this in the context of my investigation is that change and invention are central qualities of matter, and especially, people.

*The child becomes the man*

It is worth considering further what the concepts, *duration* and *élan vital,* mean for the ways we understand people and how that understanding translates to a process-oriented view of subject formation. This is best examined through Mullarkey's summary of Bergson's discussion of the phrase, "the child becomes the man":

> To Bergson's process perspective, this phrase would be better written as 'there is becoming of the child to the man'. To say that 'the child becomes the man' is to extract this particular becoming, as though the man the child become pre-existed the becoming, when in fact this becoming actually constituted the being of the man. Becoming is no longer a predicate but a subject in its own right: substance is not denied so much as reinterpreted as durée, "a substantial continuity." (13)

In other words, the man's life is best thought, not as two separate existences, one as a child and one as a man, but as the *process* of changing from a child to a man. *Duration*—that is, movement and change—becomes central, not only to objects and the world, but to subject formation. This idea that subjects ought to be thought, not as rigid constructs, but as fluid and in constant motion, is not new to conversations over subject formation, though we might ask whether such notions have their roots in Bergson, and more importantly, whether Bergson's conception of *duration* helps us to think subject formation in more productive ways. In the current context of trying to grasp the fundamentals of Bergson's philosophy, it is important only to hold onto the idea that the world and the people in it exist in the present and a state that is constantly in flux.

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*The Dancer*

It is worth examining what acknowledging this transitional nature of becoming means for how we understand individuals to function moment to moment. Just as we tend to render duration into systems of measurement that negate its temporal character, and just as we tend to compress the life of the individual into a timeless identity, we tend to reduce sensation, emotion, and our experience of the world into concepts that negate their singular and moving character. When we name an emotion, for example, we reduce particularly of the moment—the complex constellation of circumstances and history that gave rise to it—and we negate the way the emotion was not a fixed, consistent state that remained constant for a concretely demarcated period of time, but was instead a feeling that unfolded over time. To best illustrate this dynamic, temporal character of emotion, I look to Guerlac on Bergson's discussion of how the grace we perceive when watching a ballet dancer grows from the experience of seeing the dance unfold over time:

> Esthetic feelings offer us even more striking examples of this progressive intervention of new elements, visible in the fundamental emotion, and which seem to increase the degree of intensity of the feeling even though they only modify its nature. Let us consider the simplest one of these, the feeling of graciousness/gracefulness [grâce]. At first it is simply a matter of the perception of a certain easy, or facility, movement. And since these are movements that seem to flow out of each other [se préparent les uns les autres] we end up finding a superior grace in movements that were anticipated in present attitudes which seem to already indicate the following ones, as if there were somehow performed. If sudden movements lack grace it is because each one is sufficient unto itself and does

not announce those to come. If curved lines are more graceful than broken ones, it is because the curved line, which is always changing direction, turns in such a way that each new direction is already indicated in the preceding one. The perception of ease of motion is thus based on the pleasure we take in arresting the forward march of time and in holding the future in the present. A third element enters in when the graceful movements obey a rhythm, and when music accompanies them. This is because, by permitting us to anticipate the artist's movements even better, the rhythm and the beat lead us to believe that we are the masters of these movements. As we almost guess the pose the dancer will assume, the dancer seems to be obeying us when s/he actually strikes that pose. The regularity of the rhythm establishes a kind of communication between us, and the periodic returns of the beat are like so many invisible threads by means of which we make this imaginary marionette dance. If it stops for a moment, our impatient hand cannot help moving as if to push it, to place it back in the heart of this movement whose rhythm dominates our thinking and our will. Thus there enters into the feeling of gracefulness a kind of physical sympathy and in analyzing the charm of this sympathy you will see that it pleases you in and of itself. . . The truth is that, besides the lightness, which is a sign of mobility, in everything graceful we think we discern an indication of virtual sympathy directed toward us, which is always on the verge of offering itself to us. This is the very essence of superior grace. Thus the growing intensities of esthetic feeling really amount here to a variety of feelings. Each, already announced by the one that precedes it, becomes visible and then definitively eclipses the previous one. It is this qualitative progress that we interpret as a quantitative change in degree of intensity. (EDI 9-10)

Guerlac points out that what we experience when viewing the dance, according to Bergson, is a "succession of different intensities or feelings" (49). Each moment partakes the previous one while simultaneously flowing into the next, thus "holding the future in the present" (Guerlac 49). Angular lines are not perceived as graceful, according to Bergson, because they stop and start and change direction in unpredictable ways. If we were to travel across them, our paths would be marked by discrete hops and abrupt turns, like the maps of Indiana Jones's flight paths. The curved line is more graceful because it more closely resembles how each moment flows into the next. As viewers of the dance, we derive pleasure from the resemblance of the dance to real life and from the ways its blending of the past, present, and future resonate with our own immediate sense of temporality. What pleases us a about the dance, then, and what defines our experience of time, is lifelike change.

*Pure perception*

Bergson's analysis of the Dancer is helpful for the way it illustrates change as central to the world and human experience, though it also provides a useful illustration of the ways we perceive change. The viewer of the dance appreciates its lifelike quality of unfolding over time—of the way each movement flows out of the previous one in a fashion that is both dynamic and that feels predictable in an immediate, felt way. But in order to appreciate this relationship between movements—of the ways they unfold over time—the viewer needs some means by which to hold onto the history of movements playing out in the dance so that he or she might determine whether the present movement evinces the desired, graceful change.

Bergson makes this distinction between knowing the moment and the way knowledge of the past participates in that knowing by posing a hypothetical concept, pure perception. Pure

perception, for Bergson, is defined as the perception of the present, or "duration," in all its fulsomeness, without the intrusion of abstract concepts. Bergson's use of the example of the dancer to show how the perception of grace grows from the viewer's experience of seeing the dance unfold smoothly over time, which suggests that the keen perception evinced by the viewer is a function of how closely the viewer, through the dance, is stitched into the present moment. Pure perception, as Guerlac explains, is "embedded in the real, in the outside world, because it is glued to the present" (117); Perception is, as Bergson puts it, "the lowest degree of mind" (MM 297).

*Memory*

And yet, while pure perception is the only way to fully "know" duration, it would "coincide with matter itself" and would thus be a comparatively thoughtless[10], hollow way of knowing. As Bergson argues, there must be some way to use knowledge of the past to interpret the present. After all, without the ability to note how the dancer's previous movements transitioned smoothly into the present ones, the viewer would have no capacity to experience grace, only the constant motion of the present. It is telling that the metaphor Bergson uses to represent the role of memory in the perception of the dance is a spatial one. His analysis of the law of entropy problematized these very kinds of metaphors, but here their use is apt because memory, like the A-to-B line, negates movement. It seems, however, that the angular line, with its fits and starts and unpredictable turns, is of a more mechanistic character than the curved line, which does not impose artificial limits—as between one point and the next—but instead

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[10] Lacey "Consciousness essentially involves duration, and the trouble with pure perception was that it lacked all duration and existed, or would exist if it occurred at all, entirely in the present" (125).

represents a series of moments (or curves) that interpenetrate and flow into each other. There is no denying, however, that no matter how graceful and supple the line, it is of a fundamentally different character than the moving world it attempts to trace; similarly, memories become frozen in time and tenseless.

*Perception and memory: A dualism*

Of course, by parsing out perception and memory, Bergson is making a division that never exists in the minds of individuals, where perception and memory are always a mixture. The distinction is useful, however, because it points us towards the ways that this mixture of perception and memory functions in ways that are pragmatically-driven:

> There is. . . a pragmatic reason why, in actuality, memory is yoked to perception. Past images are useful in determining a course of action. Bergson even claims that memory images are more useful to us than perceived images because they carry knowledge of the consequences attached to past actions. Even more radically, Bergson suggests that the principal function of perception is to activate memory. (Guerlac 119)

In this passage, Guerlac offers insight into how, for Bergson, the metaphors of spatial thinking derived from the analysis of the law of entropy translate to the experience of individuals. Just as thermodynamicists generate the laws of thermodynamics so that we might ultimately use those laws for practical purposes, Bergson seems to be saying that individuals rely upon memories to for practical guidance on how to behave. In Guerlac's passage, memories are not the same as the moment of perception that generated them—they are not "thick" with duration—rather, they are abstracted into cause and effect narratives and other practical forms.

The model is more complex, however, than one in which perception simply activates memory. Rather, memory also acts upon our perception of the present by calling attention to specific characteristics and inserting itself into our interpretation of things. We "pair like with like," in Bergson's terms, and by this he means that recognition operates by finding traits in new objects, people, circumstances, etc. that resemble objects, people, circumstances, which we've previously encountered. Bergson's project in *Time and Free Will* was inquiring into whether this determinate quality of knowing restricted our ability to think and act "freely." However, Bergson concludes that yes, we can think and act in new ways because the unpredictability caused by the inadequacy of the abstract to represent duration allows for the non-mechanical to assert itself. This tension between the mechanical and living represents the Bergsonist dualism of memory and perception.

*Inert structures*

In the previous analysis, memories were shown to be of an entirely different order than the moving world from which we draw them. The same rigidity and tenselessness that characterizes memories is perhaps even more strikingly a feature of other structures which order and enable interaction. Such structures, Bergson seems to say, are the product of rendering subjective experience into objective concepts (Mullarkey 18). For Bergson, objectivity is synonymous with spatial metaphor, or homogenous space:

> The intuition of homogenous space is already a step towards social life. . . Our tendency to form a clear picture of this externality of things and the homogeneity of their medium is that same as the impulse which leads us to live in common and to speak.(cite)

In this passage, Bergson attributes the negation of duration to the exigence of what Mullarkey calls the "group mind" (18)—the need to efface subjective experience in order for groups to interact through shared systems of knowing. With language, the negation of duration is even more marked:

> Our external, and, so to speak, social life has more practical importance for us than our individual, inner experience. We instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language. It is for this reason that we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual mode of becoming, with its external object. Just as the fleeting duration of our inner self fixes itself by projective itself into homogenous space, so our impressions are constantly changing, wrapping themselves around the external object, which is its cause, adopting its precise contours and immobility. (EDI 97)

By forcing us to "solidify our impressions," negating the "fleeting moment of duration," language, as Guerlac puts it, "alienates us from direct experience" (69).

Where Guerlac connects Bergson to language, Mullarkey considers what this homogeneity of socially-shared concepts means for ethics. Just as language and concepts must negate the moving, lived dimension of experience, the structures of subject formation structure or impinge upon individuals. According to Mullarkey, it is this contrast between the structures of ethics and that which overflows them that inspires Levinas's ethics of alterity, which posits that the ethical imperative precedes social structures like language, concepts, and especially, subject positions or prescriptions for behavior.

*Instinct, Intellect, and Intuition*

Bergson's work delineating between our capacity to sense duration, on the one hand, and our ability to abstract from experience, on the other, leads to his distinction between instinct and intellect, as distinction that eventually leads to their loose recombination into his notion of intuition. Recall that fully sensing duration—pure perception—is a thoughtless, disinterested activity. As soon as there is a sense of self, there is a sense of perspective, and the scope of perception is limited by the needs and viewpoint of the individual. Memory, systematic thinking, concepts, and language—characteristics of thinking most would associate with cognition—which allow us to benefit from past experience in order to respond to new circumstances in (hopefully) advantageous ways, negate duration: cognitive thinking, as Guerlac puts it, "represents things in space—this is what all forms of symbolic representation do—which is why it cannot think duration" (63). Individuals are thus left in the complicated position of trying to cope with a moving world by depending upon structures that negate movement. Bergson seems to say that in response to these opposing forces—the mechanical on one end, and the living on the other—we have developed two distinct facilities: intellect and instinct. Intellect constitutes our ability to think in abstract ways while instinct constitutes our pre-conceptual or pre-linguistic way of knowing and responding to duration. Though again, Bergson doesn't see intelligence and instinct as either/or prospects: individuals are seen in any given moment to partake of both, though there are moments in which a person partakes of one more than the other. I should also make clear that instinct is not a way to fully "know" duration—that would, again, be the hypothetical concept, pure perception—but is instead a more embodied, less concept-driven way of knowing duration, even if such knowing is inevitably always incomplete.

Lacey observes that what is interesting about this division is the way it "seems to put intelligence and instinct on the same level" (141), whereas the common thinking places intelligence "above" instinct. Mostly, this bringing down of intelligence to the level of instinct is a result of Bergson's critique that in the move from duration to abstraction, the creative force of *élan vital* is negated in favor of conceptual thinking, which struggles to think anything new. Mullarkey explains that the intellect, according to Bergson, functions by "'bind[ing] like with like, as [any new thing] can only be understood as a variant of the old: the new must somehow be contained in the old" (138). But there is also an increased respect for the role instinct plays in our being and behavior that begins with the recognition of the centrality of bodies in lived experience. Guerlac explains that the bodies, "as centers of action, come into contact with matter. . . in the present" (120). We cannot grasp duration through concepts, but we *do* experience it through our bodies, hence the ways sensation consists of an unfolding over time. Instinct, then, grows out of sensation, and while intellect deals in "ready-made concepts" that are "tenseless" and "frozen in time," instinct deals in singularity and especially, movement.

*Intuition as theory and writing pedagogy*

So what does Bergson's theory of intuition mean for writing pedagogy? Recall that the problem began when James Berlin, inspired by poststructuralist theory, advocated a pedagogy that began with the premise that people are the products of their discursive interactions, full stop. That is, people were seen as the products of their discursive interactions, *and nothing else*. Based on this theory, which can be stated in terms of both subject formation and cognition, people are seen as constructs that exist through their interaction with discursive structures. These structures are conflicting and multiple, producing subjects that, likewise, are rife with contradictions, but

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there is a rationality to the way the subject is, itself, the product of rational constructs, almost to the extreme that the subject is conflated with a constellation of discursive structures. As a result, Berlin and others hoped to change student subjects by changing the way their interactions with discursive structures go down. He hoped that by helping students become critically self-aware of the ways they are shaped by discursive constellations, students might regain a sense of agency over the processes of their own subject formation, even to the extent of talking back to the political and social forces that would otherwise exert control over them. Ironically, the result was that students were less willing to submit to these kinds of critical pedagogies than they were to the political forces they were meant to be inoculated against. In various guises, Worsham, Johnson, Rickert, and company alerted us to the fact that this resistance came from a quarter not accounted for by the notion that subjects amount to their discursive interactions. Unfortunately, these same scholars were ultimately unable to get around the deficiency that caused Berlin's pedagogy to struggle because they lacked a way to sufficiently understand people as the products of discursive *and* non-discursive ways of knowing. Instead, they simply switched which side of the binary they privileged, resulting in a wholesale abandonment of our critical ambitions.

Bergson's theory of intuition frames this conversation in a revealing way. He would say that the poststructuralist notion that subjects are (strictly) the products of their discursive interactions (and the Berlinian critical method that emerged from this belief) posits subjects who are dominated by rigid, calcified, timeless abstractions—subjects who are not really subjects at all, but "snapshots" of them. Naturally, people are resistant to being portrayed as snapshots, perhaps not consciously, but in a way that emerges from their desire to live and move with the present. Bergson would say that the resistance Worsham and Johnson describe, the apathy Johnson, Albrecht-Crane, and Palmer describe, and the cynicism Rickert describes, are all

manifestations of *élan vital*—that students perceived, intuitively through their contact with the present, that the way critical pedagogies purport to reduce the world to grammars, logics, and rational linguistic structures is simply wrong. This perception is not an intellectual one, but one that emerges from the gut, so to speak, because bodies, as Bergson tells us, are what provide our access to the present.

Worsham and crew deserve credit for having sniffed out the problem, and all things considered, they come remarkably close to framing in a productive way. However, because they lack a nuanced understanding of how abstract ways of knowing can work together with tacit, bodily ones, they struggle to arrive at an acceptable solution. By simply favoring bodies, emotion, or affect, they jettison intellect in favor of instinct. If it's problematic to think about language in intelligent, critical ways, Johnson seems to say, for example, then we might as well just experience it on a baser level (relatively speaking). However, while the theorists I described in the previous chapter mostly hit a wall when it came to framing the problem in a nuanced, useful way, two theorists came significantly closer. The first is Rickert, who, tellingly, problematized the Cultural Critical Studies method by incorporating lived temporality into his theory of subject formation. The familial resemblance here isn't coincidental, as Žižek was influenced heavily by Deleuze, who in turn wrote the book on Bergson (in the most literal sense). However, Rickert's retroactive theory of subject formation frames the process more heavily in terms of time than movement, and having read Bergson, we might suspect that this turns out to be a crucial flaw because time is abstract, while movement is corporeal. That is, Rickert can't get around the problem of seeing a primary conflict between the discursive and non-discursive, or intellect and instinct, because by framing the problem through time, which is an abstraction of

movement, he can't adequately grasp a way to connect an intellectual critical method with our immediate experience of the moving world.

Hawk, however, comes much closer. His vitalist theory of invention works according to a view of people that is similar to Berlin's in that people are seen as becoming in relation to various constellations, but while Berlin sees only discursive constellations, Hawk sees constellations that (also) exceed the discursive. As a result, Hawk adopts the view that "Berlin misses the entire body of work that deal with bodily, tacit knowledges, which would fundamentally change his view of the subject and his relationship to language" (116). Instead, Hawk, who asserts that bodies can know in ways that exceed the rational (113), thus sees that bodies as "the critical, epistemological link between situation and invention" (12). Bergson would of course applaud this view which sees bodies, as that which has access to the present, as the source of newness, vitalism, and invention. But Bergson's hypothetical support would come as no surprise to Hawk, who acknowledges a direct debt to him. In the following passage, Hawk outlines a critique of Berlin based on Bergson's argument that there is a way to know the world beyond what we are capable of through language:

> Many thinkers who could be considered vitalist attempt to theorize and map [rhetorical] spaces rather than leave them leave them up to mystery. Henri Bergson, for example, argues that the spatializing and differentiating of the world, as in the communications triangle, is a product of our attempt to conceptualize it, to find a language to represent experience. Berlin writes, "In epistemic rhetoric there is never a division between experience and language, whether the experience involves the subject, the subject and other subjects, or the subject and the material world. All experiences, even the scientific and the logical, are grounded in language, and language determines content and structure.

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And just as language structures our response to social and political issues, language

structures our response to the material world" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 16). Berlin has to

conflate experience and language in order to understand experience semiotically and

dialectically. Bergson, on the other hand, recognizes that bodies can know and

understand the world prior to conscious linguistic understanding. Bergson makes the

distinction between analysis and intuition. Analysis is the procedure of science that

divides time into space so it can be conceptualized. It is propositional and based on

experiment, which results in the creation of generalizations. Intuition is Bergson's

method of philosophy that approaches time as a whole so that it can be experienced. It is

nonlinguistic and based on embodiment, which sees things as individual or particular in

the context of the individual's life history, its entire relationship to the world. This is not

simply an opposition but a complex movement. Instinct is a feeling of life for life that

drives practical relations to the world; intuition is the becoming of the former into the

latter. Intuition is a process of living in the complex, evolving interplay of bodies, minds,

and the world. (113-4)

In this passage, Hawk articulation of how Bergson might critique Berlin is quite clear for the

way it explains Berlin's perspective as one in which language is the only way individuals

experience the world, while Bergson's posits some channel of experience beyond the linguistic.

One might have to be familiar with Bergson, however, to grasp that when Hawk refers to

science's procedure of "divid[ing] time into space so it can be conceptualized," he is drawing

from Bergson's analysis of Zeno's arrow in which, recall, our measurement of time as spaces

along a line negates the way the arrow, or the world, is in Massumi's terms, "swallowed up in

transitional infinity" (cite). Hawk thus asserts that Bergson's notion of intuition provides a better

model because it "approaches time as a whole so that it can be experienced," and because it "sees things as individual or particular in the context of the individual's life history, it's entire relationship to the world" (114). But, I would hasten to add—and it ought to be clearer to us now—that the key dimension to experience, knowing, and sensation is movement. Thus the "feeling of life for life" to which Hawk refers is a sensitivity of bodies that move, or *élan vital*. Based on his view of subjects as exceeding their interactions with discursive structures, Hawk advocates a theory of vitalism that attributes the new to the aspects of our relationships with others and ideas that exceed discursive representation. His notions of movement as the source of this vitalism aren't as well-developed as they might be, but he sets us down the path toward understanding how our non-linguistic capacities contribute to what people think and do, and for that, he is much indebted to Bergson.

Ultimately, what Bergson offers is a theory which, in terms of cognition, merges both rational *and* embodied ways of knowing, or which in terms of subject formation, sees both the linguistic and non-linguistic as working together in determining who we are and what we do. Further, where other attempts at this kind of merger have fallen short in their attempts to theorize the latter—the embodied aspects of cognition, or the non-discursive elements of subject formation—Bergson's work helps us to see that what is relevant about the corporeal is the fact that it moves, and subsequently, that the intelligence of the non-discursive is derived from a sensitivity to movement, sensation, and change. And yet, while this knowledge sheds light on the struggles evinced by theorists such as Worsham, Johnson, and Rickert, it could be said to be subject to the same critique as I've leveled at them, and in particular, at Palmer and Albrecht-Crane, who were perspicacious enough to see the subject as "suspended in the act of becoming," but who failed to offer practical solutions based on this knowledge. In the following section, I

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tackle the other dimension of Bergson's theory of intuition, the half that sees it in terms of method, in hopes that it might, potentially, lead us toward a critical method that, unlike CCS, speaks to more than our discursive selves.

## Intuition as method

We saw in the previous section how the novelty of Bergson's theory of intuition lies in the way it accounts for movement, and how movement affects individual being and cognition; the novelty of intuition as method, however, lies in the way it converts this metaphysic theory into a method of philosophic inquiry. To fully grasp this method, it will help to think back to the context in which Bergson developed it. Recall that Bergson's initial training was in mathematics, and that he left the discipline because he was skeptical of the way it purported to explain the fundamental matter of existence (Stanford). This skepticism stayed with Bergson throughout his subsequent career in philosophy during a time in which, as Guerlac explained earlier, the world and its mysteries were increasingly seen as yielding to science and rational thinking (17). From a metaphysical standpoint, Bergson sees the trouble with this as emerging from the ways that concepts and logics necessary for science, mathematics, and even philosophy, are abstract and thus generalize across time and space. Specifically, this habit of generalization is problematic, not only because it negates singularity, but especially because it negates what Bergson sees as a fundamental characteristic of the living world—the fact that it moves, or *élan vital*. Whereas abstractions "freeze the world in thought," Bergson argues, *élan vital* will never yield to them, and that's a good thing, because *élan vital* is vital to who we are and what we do.

The difficulty that Bergson's theory presents for philosophers, however, is that philosophy is a discipline that is enabled by rational argument and the fixing of meaning:

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*Élan vital*, for the way it asserts the existence of an aspect of reality which defies rationality and conceptual thinking, invalidates philosophy as a method of inquiry. For this reason, Bergson is often cited as a critic of Plato, who is known for seeing philosophy as the contemplation of idealized forms rather than the messy stuff of reality. Mullarkey thus observes that Bergson hopes "to bring metaphysics down from the supersensuous heights where Plato deposited it. . . Rather than attempt[ing] to 'rise above' perception as philosophers since Plato have wished. . . [Bergson] encourages us to 'plunge' and 'insert our will' into perception" (157-8). In place of Plato's "ethereal contemplation," Bergson advocates what Mullarkey calls a "remedial technique in perception" (158).

This "remedial technique in perception" constitutes Bergson's method of intuition, a method of philosophy predicated on resisting the tendency of rational, conceptual thinking to negate and calcify the living world. Delving further into this method is the purpose of the following section, a task I undertake with the belief that what Bergson says about philosophy holds true for the discursively-bound critical methods practiced and taught by Rhetoric and Composition. Again, Bergson's method won't, in its purest form, prove immediately applicable to the purposes of writing instruction, though I hope it might help to reveal the shortcomings of our current method in a light that makes them easier to address. Ultimately, my hope is that it will offer some guidance toward a new method of critical rhetorical inquiry.

*Deleuze: Bringing back Bergson in a "poststructuralist idiom"*

The primary difficulty we encounter when considering what Bergson's method of intuition can offer teachers of writing who wish to foster critical habits in students is that Bergson's is a philosophical method and not a linguistic one. Guerlac cites this neglect of

Bergson to expound upon the consequences his vision holds for linguistics as a large part of the reason he was eclipsed by scholars such as Hegel and Derrida. There is also the challenge, however, that Bergson never laid out his method of intuition in any systematic way. Fortunately, we can look to Deleuze for help on both counts. It was Deleuze who, looking for an alternative to Hegel, revived Bergson after he'd been buried by dialectics and theories of *différence*. What Deleuze saw in Bergson was a theory in which the tension of dialectics was replaced with productive synergy and in which the destabilization of meaning that undergirded *différence* was replaced with a vitalist energy. And so, in 1966, Deleuze published *Bergsonism*, the book that propelled Bergson back into relevance, though because the book wasn't published in English until the 1990s, Bergson's return to prominence lagged in some circles.

At the heart of Deleuze's Bergsonism is the view that philosophy, as a discipline whose structures of inquiry are social and must thus necessarily partake of conceptual thinking, is problematic. Like the scientific method that Bergson criticized, it touts having the ability to penetrate to the heart of its objects of inquiry, but also like the scientific method, Deleuze argues, the very structures that enable its inquiry "insert their will" into the products of that inquiry, typically in invisible ways. Intuition, for Deleuze, constitutes a means of resistance against what Dianne Davis would call a "tyranny of meaning." For Bergson, intuition is always a (necessarily) flexible thing, though there is a consistency to it that enables Deleuze, for clarity's sake, to collapse it as a method into three parts or "rules." The first rule says to "Apply the test of true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile truth and creation at the level of problems" (15). To explain this rule, Deleuze calls our attention to Bergson's book, *Time and Free Will*, in which Bergson tackles the philosophical quandary which asks that if there can ever be free will given that structures of meaning determine the ways we see and thereby act

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in the world. Deleuze re-frames this problem through an example in pedagogy, asking whether the teacher who, by asking questions, merely positions students to learn about the world in a self-guided way:

> We are wrong to believe that the true and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions, that they only begin with solutions. This prejudice is social. . . [it] goes back to childhood, to the classroom: It is the school teacher who "poses" the problems; the pupil's task is to discover the solutions. In this way we are kept in a kind of slavery. True freedom lies in the power to decide, to construe the problems themselves. (Deleuze 15)

In this passage, Deleuze is not so much making a point about pedagogy (though pedagogy is most definitely relevant) as he is trying to illustrate the way the structures by which we inquire into things shape what we find. Bergson's method of intuition, as a critical method, is thus not as interested in the products of our inquiry as it is the means by which we formulate and engage in that inquiry.

With the second rule, "Struggle against illusion, rediscover true differences in kind or articulations of the real" (21), Deleuze calls our attention to a specific way in which he, via Bergson, sees the means of our inquiry, language, as structuring the products of our inquiry (or knowing) in a problematic way: its tendency to identify differences in degree where we ought to see differences in kind. Emotions, for example, are often seen matters of degree, with positive emotions progressing from mild amusement, to joy, to elation. In both *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, Bergson questions this sliding-scale way of understanding a phenomenon that is otherwise so closely stitched into movement (he uses the term, duration). He would say seeing positive emotions as a progression from mild to extreme renders them into quantitative data when they ought to be understood qualitatively. Intuition as method, then, starts with

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identifying what Deleuze refers to as "badly analyzed composites." In the example here, the badly analyzed composite would be the use of a spatial metaphor, a quantitative scale, to measure things of a fundamentally different order, emotions and sensations, which partake of particular histories and a key quality of which can only be experienced over time.

The third rule, after identifying false problems and rediscovering true differences in kind, is to "state problems and solve them in terms of time rather than space" (31). To illustrate what it means to abide by this rule, Deleuze uses the example of a lump of sugar, which we would normally think of in terms of its shape, but which Deleuze shows to lead a transitory existence, one which defies the typical, static geometric form:

> Take a lump of sugar: It has a spatial configuration. But if we approach it from that angle, all we will ever grasp are differences in degree between that sugar and any other thing. But it also has a duration, a rhythm of duration, a way of being in time that is at least partially revealed in the process of its dissolving, and that shows that sugar differs in kind, not only from other things, but first and foremost from itself. This alteration, which is one with the essence or substance of a thing, is what we grasp when we conceive of it in terms of Duration. In this respect, Bergson's famous formulation, "I must wait until the sugar dissolves" has still broader meaning than is given to it by its context. It signifies that my own duration, such as I live it in the impatience of waiting, for example, serves to reveal other durations that beat to other rhythms, that differ in kind from mine. (31-2)

In this passage, Deleuze tries to illustrate the third rule of intuition, but he in fact illustrates them all. First, in accordance with the first rule, he reveals to us the way we tend to think of sugar in terms of its spatial dimensions, a habit that is the product of socialization. Then, in accordance with the second, he shows how that habit makes use of a badly analyzed composite, in this case a

fixed geometric framework that is applied to an object that, instead, lives a life of change. The third and final rule, then, is to observe this life, this inevitable change. The sugar, for this life it leads, "differs not only from other things," but "first and foremost from itself" in the sense that it will eventually become something other than what it is now. Deleuze closes the passage by observing that we, too, lead transitory existences, not only to remind us that who we are at the moment is not who we will be in the future, but also to remind us that we cannot be defined by a fixed concept, but must be thought as beings suspended in a constant state of change. In short, the ultimate aim of intuition is to think things in terms, not of what they "are," but of what they do.

What Deleuze accomplishes in his laying out of Bergson's work in this fashion is to transform Bergson's original method, which sought to disrupt the belief in science and mathematics as airtight modes of inquiry, into a method which does the same work on the inherently linguistic structures of philosophic inquiry. In this, Guerlac characterizes Deleuze as having rendered Bergson into a "poststructuralist idiom" (182). This of course makes it more accessible and relatable to the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, which is concerned not with the equations of math but the role of language in rhetorical circumstances. At this point, we might surmise that Deleuze would criticize Berlin's critical method on the basis that it is not, as Worsham observes in a somewhat parallel argument, "critical enough," because it confines itself within the same discursive bounds as that which it critiques. In this way, it violates the first rule of intuition by effectively arguing, in a sense, that the world is a strictly discursive place, and all that matters is that which transpires through discourse. The second rule, then, would cast this critical method as guilty of a badly-analyzed composite for the way it collapse the discursive and

material through the negation of the latter. Finally, according to the third rule, Berlin's critical method is not sensitive to change, movement, or what Bergson would call the mobility of life. Taken together, these three "rules" constitute a method for problematizing abstract thought (and Berlin's method) in a particular way: by locating and highlighting the negation of duration, a tendency that otherwise typically slips by our notice.

The irony of Deleuze's presenting intuition as a series of "rules" or what-not-to-dos, however, is in the first place that, recall, Bergson always claimed to have no system, and in the second place, Deleuze looked to Bergson's work because he sought a philosophy that characterized the tension between the abstract and life-like in affirmative ways (as opposed to the opposition inherent in Hegelian dialectics). Thus far, Deleuze only presents intuition as a "*problematizing* method" (35). So even if intuition proves an effective way of "problematizing" Berlin's critical method, we might yet ask what it offers as an alternative. For Deleuze, intuition encourages us to "[choose] the right side" between two paths, one which leads to disconnection from the world through quantitative abstraction, and the other which, through qualitative sensitivity, acknowledges duration:

> For by dividing the composite according to two tendencies, with only one showing the way in which a thing varies qualitatively in time, Bergson effectively gives himself the means of choosing the "right side" in each case; that of the essence. In short, intuition has become method, or rather method has become reconciled with the immediate. (32-3).

When Deleuze observes that "intuition has become method, or rather method has become reconciled with the immediate" he refers to the way that, by problematizing the "path" which leads away from duration, intuition acts to reinsert the "immediate" into method. I argue that what Deleuze characterizes in this passage as a method of redirection—as the nudging of our

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gaze away from the abstract and back toward the immediate, the embodied, and the living—constitutes a critical method. The novelty of this method is that, by harnessing the living in service of its own reassertion, Bergson's concept of intuition re-conceives the living as inherently critical, at least in relation to the structures that would otherwise calcify it.

So what does intuition as method offer as an alternative to Berlin's critical method? Admittedly, it is still hard to say. Deleuze's analysis might seem to suggest that simply by problematizing Berlin's method—by revealing how it violates the "rules" of intuition—we have already shifted our thinking toward a sensitivity to duration. This act, however, is of little practical use to instructors hoping to shape students into critical subjects. One possible answer might be to teach students how to apply Deleuze's rules as heuristics for critical inquiry, though while such a method might seem more conscionable from a theoretical perspective, in application, I seriously doubt that the students employing it would feel they had gotten back in touch with the corporeality of their immediate, lived experience. In the next section, I turn to Brian Massumi, who takes up the project of adapting Bergson's work to the work we do in move linguistically-concerned disciplines.

*Massumi: Unfreezing Cultural Studies*

Deleuze has begun the work of translating Bergson's theory into terms that might be more readily useful to conversations in Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy, though obviously, there is much work to yet to be done in this regard. Fortunately, Massumi's book, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, helps with that critical step. The crux of Massumi's project is trying to grasp how movement is endemic to matter, and what that endemic-ness of

movement to matter means for Cultural Studies. Guerlac lays out his project in a particularly

clear way:

> Massumi proposes to reorient Cultural Studies from a Bergsonist perspective. For the last
>
> few decades, he argues, cultural studies has meant the analysis of cultural and ideological
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> mediations in fundamentally linguistic terms. Discourse analysis prevailed. Real bodies
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> could not be taken into account, only discursive ones, constructed according to a grid of
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> predetermined binaries. Nature too was approached as constructed in discourse. It is time,
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> he suggests, to "part company" with the linguistic model—or at least to become aware of
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> its limitations. There was so much that could not be thought in these terms: real bodies,
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> nature, affect, positioning, this approach to cultural studies was unable to account for
>
> change. After a certain point, it could not discover anything new. (195)

Guerlac makes Massumi's indebtedness to Bergson quite apparent in this passage. It seems that

just as Bergson had worked against a science-dominated paradigm that called into question the

possibility of escaping systematic thinking, Massumi works against the similarly rigid tradition

of Cultural Studies which, as he hopes to make clear, has become entrapped by its self-imposed

confinement to the analysis of discursive structures. Cultural Studies, according to Massumi,

plods along analyzing discursive structures as though bodies, affects, and especially, movement,

never existed, or perhaps, only existed in the ways they were manipulated discursively. Massumi

challenges, "How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only

responsible for its very 'construction,' but seems to prescript every possible signifying and

countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set

of predetermined terms?" (3). Essentially, Massumi is asking the same question here that

Bergson asks in *Time and Free Will*: Given that logical (or semantic) systems pre-determine the

field of possibility (recall Deleuze's example of the school teacher who poses the questions), how can we imagine there to be, not simply free will, but the possibility of anything new? And yet, we know that the new happens. . .

Massumi's response, of which he repeatedly says that Bergson is the precursor[11], is to try and "put matter. . . back into cultural materialism" (4). He opens his book, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, by asking what, where discursive matters or Cultural Studies are concerned, sets bodies apart:

> When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?

> If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, the slightest, most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. Qualitative difference: immediately the issue is change. Felt and unforeseen. (1)

Again, Bergson's thinking permeates Massumi's. Bodies are inseparable from movement (think of the child becoming the man), and sensation is a thing that takes place over time. The definitive quality of matter is not is physical tangibility, but rather, the fact that it moves.

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[11] Though he also looks to Spinoza.

The matter of movement is relative to Cultural Studies because, as Rickert has made clear, Cultural Studies is predicated on affecting change retroactively. It purports to uncover what had been going on all along, and through this discovery, to "actualize" that wisdom in our future interactions. Rickert's echoing of Bergson is for him incidental, but not so for Massumi. He, like Bergson, wishes to call attention to the distinct difference in kind between abstractions derived from past experience and the moving present, though Massumi's use of the word "actualize" probably better describes the ways those past knowledges are transformed through their merging with the present. For Massumi, there is no going back in time to alter the present, since the critic's attempting to do so can never escape his/her/their own, moving present. Massumi thus wishes to see Cultural Studies's foray into the past on the same plane with any other cultural interactions. This is crucial because it repositions Cultural Studies, which had previously operated under the notion that it was uncovering the past, as yet another act of creation—as another instance of change, newness, and movement:

> If you want to adopt a productivist approach, the techniques of critical thinking prized by humanities are of limited value. To think productivism, you have to allow that even your own local efforts feed back into reality, in some small, probably microscopic way. But Still. Once you have allowed that, you have accepted that activities dedicated to thought and writing are inventive. Critical thinking disavows its inventiveness as much as possible. Because it sees itself as uncovering something it claims was hidden or as debunking something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificationary modus operandi. 12

So why not, as Massumi asks, "hang up the academic hat of critical self-seriousness?" (13). Acknowledging movement, Massumi shows us, necessitates our reimagining of the work we do

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in the humanities. We can no longer see ourselves as Plato did, dealing with abstract concepts that supersede reality. Instead, we need to acknowledge that even as we researchers dig into the discursive past, we reside in bodies that move, however much the time we spend sitting at our desks elides that fact. Hence Massumi's own strategy as a researcher and his advice to the rest of us:

> The writing [in *Parables for the Virtual*] tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought. Letting examples burgeon requires inattention as a writing tool. You have to let yourself get so caught up in the flow of your writing that it ceases at moments to be recognizable to you as your own. This means you have to be prepared for failure. For with inattention comes risk: of silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity. but perhaps in order to write experimentally, you have to be willing to "affirm" even your own stupidity. Embracing one's own stupidity is not the prevailing academic posture (at least not in the way I meant here). The result is not so much the negation of a system as a setting of systems into motion. The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system. (18)

Bergson's notion of intuition was largely dismissed by serious philosophers as wonky—philosophers like Russell who, again, said, that Bergson would "turn us all into bees" (Guerlac 25)—and this largely continues to hold true even after Deleuze tries to transform it into a philosophical method. But here, when Massumi echoes it in a more humanities-geared dictum, it

doesn't sound quite as crazy. Bergson wishes for us to let go, somewhat, of intellect, which is so bound up with rigid, ready-made concepts as to be unable to sprout anything new.

Though admittedly Bergson and even Deleuze struggled to own up to what it means to open oneself up to intuition. In the passage above, Massumi manages this simply by urging the researcher—whether a philosopher, Cultural Studies critic, Rhetorician, etc.—to be open to being changed by the process of research. Massumi's call for us to "get caught up in the flow" grows out of Bergson's notion of intuition, which is his way of allowing for the interplay of intellect and time. Attention to time, in Mullarkey's words, "is an attention to the mobility of reality, to the particularity and novelty of each situation, and hence to the superficiality of eternal truth" (174). Massumi offers a version of intuition in an idiom directly applicable to writing. Where writing instruction is concerned, his contention that writers ought to be open to change suggests that there might be problems with the traditionally rigid, tenseless subject positions we ask our students to inhabit. Similarly, Massumi's method of engaging in analysis of "examples" might suggest that we might position writers to inquire into matters more directly tangible to them. Finally, Massumi's proposal that we might clear the way for an "open system," which invokes the open and closed societies Bergson discusses in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, suggests that rather than seeing critique as a negative process, one which attempts to reveal and subsequently separate discursivity from experience, we might instead see it as a way to construct new logics, new identities, and, most importantly, as another, just as immediate, mode of sensation and experience.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter set out to make inroads on a problem that, as we saw in the last chapter, has thus far confounded theorists working within Rhetoric and Composition. Worsham, Rickert, Johnson, Palmer, and Albrecht-Crane, all found that critical/rhetorical pedagogies were guilty in some way of overemphasizing discourse at the expense of the non-discursive, but their framing of the problem re-inscribed the tension between the critical lessons we hope to teach and the embodied ways students experience those lessons became nearly impossible. Bergson's theory of intuition in some ways echoes this tension for the fundamental "difference in kind" he identifies between the abstract and what he describes in terms of movement, duration, or *élan vital*. On the one hand, Bergson says, we use intellect (or conceptual thinking) to communicate, to make sense of past experience, and to devise ways to interpret and respond to the present. Intellect, in this view, meshes quite well with the hope that students can be shaped into critical subjects strictly through re-shaping the ways they interact with discursive structures. But on the other hand, there is the part of us that experiences sensation, that is corporeally-stitched into the present and that experiences duration in a way that exceeds discursive representation and that defies intellect: instinct. The intellect/instinct binary looks awfully similar to the mind/body binary, but Bergson's next move is to argue that individual cognition, subject formation—whatever—is (or can be) a mixture that partakes of *both* intellect *and* instinct. Intuition, for Bergson, represents an individual's capacity to make use of both intellect and instinct simultaneously, to make sense of and respond to the present through the use of rational thinking, but while doing so, to also remain attentive to sensation and the present in such a way as to prevent our veering off into the ungrounded realm of the abstract. Intuition, rather than confining itself to the abstract, ideal plane of truth, plunges into the meat of matter. So just as Bergson troubled Platonic philosophy

for its dealing in ideal forms and its subsequent belief that the products of its inquiry were irrefutably true, I argue that the critical method we teach in Rhetoric and Composition, a method that draws heavily from Cultural Studies, purports to unmask something about a rhetorical experience that was, supposedly, always present, but which, as Massumi shows us, was in fact a retroactive act of creation.

As method, intuition is inherently critical, at least from the perspective of abstract and/or discursive structures of knowing. Intuition locates the inevitable inability of such structures to represent and account for particularity, sensation, movement, change, and/or *élan vital*. It is key, however, to not see this critical work as an uncovering, but an act of keeping intellect in its proper place. Intuition, as Paul Douglass argues in his essay, "Deleuze's Bergson," "problematizes in the sense that it questions intelligence and forces it to confront its own tendency toward artificial closure" (374), but in doing so, it encourages us to "remain alert to the known tendencies of the interpreting mind" (376), a tendency toward calcifying movement into abstract concepts. Here is Douglass in more detail on intuition as a mode of resistance:

> Bergson insists that only in intuition are we forced to recall that nothing is ever finally at rest, and no reading is final. This rejection of 'finalism' does indeed occupy the foreground of Bergson's philosophical system, if one concentrates, as Deleuze has done, on duration, memory, and intuition. Bergson does not suggest that he will dispose of finality. But he says it is only intuition that keeps us from being seduced by its illusion. Intuition reminds us, whenever we believe we have "arrived," that this arrival is impossible. Intuition is, finally, a method of disruption. (377)

One way to read this, as a Rhetoric and Composition scholar, would be to see Bergson's work (and the subsequent work of Deleuze, Massumi, and Douglass) as adding weight to the existing

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argument, made most explicitly by Palmer and Albrecht-Crane, that we out to stop pushing students to write toward artificial closure or to inhabit fixed and rational subject positions. I believe that such an argument is useful, though I also believe that it misses the point, somewhat. What we should be after, I argue, and what Bergson's work encourages us to hope for, is a specific kind of intuition, one which, while plunging into the stuff of reality, nevertheless manages to see the world in critical ways—ways which, rather than focused on the negative shortcomings of the abstract, affirm the living. In short, Bergson's theory of intuition gives hope that, perhaps, critical thinking might be something other than a strictly intellectual enterprise, but one which, in a way, activates a critical impulse more closely resembling instinct.

# Chapter 4: A (not yet successful) return to practice

*Abstract:*

*In this fourth chapter of my dissertation, I move from theory to practice, backtracking to examine my early attempts at collapsing this distance between the concepts we teach and the ways students might make use of them by experimenting with humor and laughter theory as course content. I discuss the two arguments behind this attempt: the first which says that because they are rhetorical subjects, study of humor and laughter will help students think rhetorically in more sophisticated ways, and the second of which says that because they are affectively engaging, this use of humor and laughter will make my pedagogy more effective. I then discuss the results of this strategy, finding that it produces neither sophisticated rhetorical thinking nor meaningful affective engagement. This work sets me up in the following chapter to consider a different way of using humor and laughter's rhetorical (or critical) and affectively engaging properties in service of a writing course.*

**Introduction**

I began this dissertation by discussing a problem of practice: the resistance, apathy, or cynicism we encounter when we try to shape who students are as people by re-shaping the ways they engage discursive structures. In the second chapter, I began the work of attempting to address that problem by examining the ways it was framed and the subsequent solutions that emerged from that framing. I found that the tension between critical and embodied ways of knowing to which Worsham, Johnson, Rickert and others attributed the problem was useful in generating some thoughts on what an acceptable solution might look like (mostly, that it'd have to resonate with students' embodied ways of knowing). I also found, however, that in a way the mind/body binary positions cognition and embodied ways of knowing as discrete enterprises, thus reifying the problem. I concluded that if we are ever to find an acceptable solution, it'll have to be based on a notion of how people inhabit and act in the world that see minds and bodies working synergistically. And so, in Chapter 3, I turned to the work of Henri Bergson, whose theories of intellect and instinct echo the tension Worsham and others describe between the critical and embodied (or the discursive and non-discursive), but who also posits a theory of intuition that sees things like intellect and instinct as a single, unified enterprise constituted by two things very "different in kind,"—the quantitative and the qualitative—but which draws them together in a way central to how people inhabit and act in the world.

In moving from a practical problem, towards analyzing how that problem is framed, and then working to re-frame that problem, the trajectory of this dissertation thus far has tended from the practical toward the abstract. I believe this movement was necessary because, again, I argue that the problem and the failure of subsequent solutions emerged from a theoretical misconception. Now, having progressed from the practical to the theoretical, and having brought

into play a theory that I think might prove more useful, I turn back to the practical challenge of trying to use a writing course to shape students into critical rhetorical agents. In some ways this return to the practical reaches even further back than where I began this dissertation, in part because the solution I mean to advocate was as much a product of experimentation in my own classroom as it was a product of theory. In this chapter, I will tell the story that initiated this dissertation—the story of how I struggled as a teacher of writing to get students to make use of straightforward strategies for responding to rhetorical circumstances—but which I now see constituted an attempt to reshape the ways students inhabit the world. I will then discuss my initial attempt to use humor and laughter strategically to meet the aims of a first year writing course—including why that attempt fell short—in order to set up my work in the last chapter discussing my final, more successful solution.

The work of this chapter will happen in several stages. In the first stage, I will explainmy initial belief that humor and laughter might be pedagogically useful for the following two reasons: because they are rhetorical subjects, and because scholars working in general pedagogy have found them to be pedagogically advantageous. In my discussion of this first reason, I examine the three main schools of humor theory—the Superiority Theory, the Relief Theory, and the Incongruity Theory—which suggest to me that humor and laughter might make for useful content areas for students in a first-year writing course. I will then turn to the second reason, examining what I see to be the three main schools of thought on the strategic use of humor and laughter in pedagogy: the Relationships School, the Cognitive School, and the Generative School. The scholars advocating these perspectives work in disciplines other than Rhetoric and Composition—some are educational psychologists, some publish in general pedagogy, and others yet hail from various, seemingly-unrelated disciplines such as nursing—and so I will

follow my explanation of each school with a discussion on what about it might be useful to writing pedagogy while connecting the work back to the challenges I've laid out in previous chapters. I will then close the chapter by discussing my early, failed attempts at incorporating humor and laughter into writing pedagogy and what that failure taught me about content, critical method, and how we understand the role of affective engagement in writing pedagogy.

*Some context*

Initially, my inquiry into the ways we try to shape students into critical subjects was inspired by an experience I had while working in a program that taught rhetorical analysis as a way for students to respond to unfamiliar rhetorical situations. The hope was that by learning to use rhetorical categories like audience, purpose, context, and strategy, students could not only learn to write well for the various academic discourses they encounter in their time at the university, but they might also then learn to respond effectively to the rhetorical situations they'd encounter in their professional and civic life. It was also hoped that this method might foster some degree of critical perspective in relation to the specific discursive practices, values, etc., that shape those who participate in them.

In my early experience this strategy, which looked so great on paper, produced lackluster results. The trouble seemed to begin with students' work with rhetorical concepts. When asked to think about a text's audience, for example, students' initial response was almost always given in terms of demographics. Mark Twain's "Corn Pone Opinions" was written for people over thirty because it was too "old-timey" for people in their twenties. When pushed, students' analyses become only slightly more specific. Nicholas Carr's "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" was written for people who use Google, apparently. It is questionable whether such observations constitute

meaningful rhetorical insight, and it is especially questionable whether they helped students become more conscious, critical interpreters of discourse. Things looked even grimmer when it came time for students to employ rhetorical concepts in composing a text. The relatively shallow observations students made in their rhetorical analyses fell far short of giving them a useful leg-up in crafting effective strategies for which to respond to their very one-dimensional audiences—people, for example, interested in steroid use in sports—and more often than not, rhetorical thinking was an afterthought, as students would seem to write their papers according to whatever methods they'd developed prior to the class and then, in their reflective essays, work in rhetorical concepts to justify what they'd already done.

The work I've done in this dissertation thus far suggests that this failure stemmed from the employment of a pedagogy predicated on a misguided notion of how people interact with each other and the world, a pedagogy that taught a method of decoding and responding to rhetorical situations through a mechanical menu of analytical categories more closely resembling the Terminator's clumsy way of communicating with people than the affectively-charged ways we interact as embodied, social beings. At the time, however, it seemed to me that the problem lie in a straightforward lack of engagement. And yet, no matter how hard I tried—no matter how much I'd warmed the class up, or how clever the activities I'd designed, or how much I'd simply tried to animate my speech—the moment I turned to speaking about rhetorical concepts, students' eyes would glaze over. Aware, as most teachers are, that a well-timed joke can serve to enliven a dozy group of students, I considered humor and laughter as a potential means to liven-up class work and to motivate students just enough to make our work with rhetorical concepts stick.

While I was initially unsure how to make strategic use of humor and laughter in the context of a first-year writing course, there seemed to me to be two arguments for figuring it out. The first grew out of my vague awareness that someone, somewhere had touted the pedagogical value of humor and laughter. This awareness might be the product of seeing films like *Dead Poets Society*, where a large part of the inspirational teacher's success is owed to his sense of humor. Most of us, I would suspect, have heard distant reports of teachers using clown-nose tactics in their classroom, and some might even be aware that serious scholarly inquiry has been devoted to the matter. The second, seemingly serendipitous argument was that humor and laughter are rhetorical matters. Scholars as far back as Aristotle had extolled the value of humor in earning the esteem of audiences, and there seems to be something significant about the way humor binds (or sometimes separates) people. We might even, in some cases, see the work that humor does as critical. My thinking, as I have explained in the introduction, was that if I could manage to incorporate humor into my pedagogy in the right way, perhaps I could take advantage of the properties that make humor so pedagogically useful—it's affectively-stimulating properties, its ability to diffuse tension and promote a congenial atmosphere, and it's ability (as some say) to foster creativity—in service of teaching students to engage in sophisticated critical and rhetorical thinking. And so I embarked on a succession of pedagogical experiments, each an iteration of how to make strategic use of humor and laughter in achieving the aims of first-year composition pedagogy. The first attempt was a failure, albeit an instructive one, and the lesson I eventually learned from it is what turned me towards the issues addressed in the Rhetoric and Composition scholarship I've discussed in earlier chapters. In short, what began with an attempt to solve the straightforward problem of engaging students in using rhetorical concepts grew into an investigation into the apparent tension between the abstract concepts we use to engage the

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world and each other and the corporeal, moving bodies we inhabit, and what this tension means for our pedagogies.

## Humor and laughter: rhetorical subjects

As I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, my first encounter with humor theory (and with Bergson), came about while I was doing research for a project on Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Greenleaf." As I waded through the crowd of scholarship discussing O'Connor's religious background, one text stood out to me: J.P. Steed's article, "'Through Our Laughter We Are Involved': Bergsonian Humor in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." In it, Steed lays out a truncated version of Bergson's theory of the comic—specifically, his argument that humor and laughter have "assimilative properties." When people laugh at something together, Steed explains via Bergson, they share a profound sense of empathy. Steed thus argues that Bergson's theory helps to explain the persuasive power O'Connor taps when she makes her readers laugh[12]. Steed's approach to O'Connor constitutes a sharp departure from the ways she is typically discussed in literary criticism; while not exactly what I would call a rhetorical reading, he uses Bergson's theory to argue that O'Connor's work is strategically crafted to encourage readers to think, feel, or see things a certain way, and this of course is a rhetorical argument. Here, while struggling to get students to inquire meaningfully into rhetorical matters, I had come across a nearly perfect example of the kind of work I aspired for them to do.

Fascinated with Bergson's work, I did a bit more research and uncovered a whole field of inquiry into the rhetorical properties of humor and laughter. More often than not, the

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[12] Steed also cites Bergson's argument that we laugh at the "mechanical encrusted upon the living" in order to show how O'Connor constructed her characters to behave in rigid ways in order to make them funny.

conversation took place on the margins of various disciplines—from philosophy, to literary criticism, to the social sciences, and even to biology. But given that humor and laughter do complex and important social work between people (given the way they, in Steed's example, assimilate people to a particular worldview), even studies of seemingly non-rhetorical matters such as humor and laughter's physiological effects were relevant to social/rhetorical interactions. Further, the earliest work with humor and laughter was done by canonical rhetoricians: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian all formulated theories of humor and laughter. Here, I thought, I had found the answer (or *an* answer) to the problem of getting students to think about rhetorical matters in sophisticated ways. Students, by following in the footsteps of my own research, could learn about the intricacies of our rhetorical interactions and rhetorically-crafted speech. The topic might not be entirely relevant to their work in the other academic or professional discourses they'd eventually find themselves in, but so long as they were encouraged to think rhetorically in sophisticated ways, that was something.

As it turns out, there is much that is worthwhile about the field of scholarship on humor and laughter, both for students of first-year writing and rhetoricians. In the pages to follow, I will discuss some of the scholarship from this field in a bit more detail while explaining why those perspectives might be useful to students in a first-year writing course. Though again, my initial attempts at making use of this body of work largely proved a failure, so later I will discuss how I initially made use of this field of scholarship and why that use fell short.

*The Superiority Theory of Laughter*

In *The Philebus*, which contemporary theorists John Morreall and Robert Provine argue is the earliest text discussing humor and laughter, Plato seems to suggest that "what makes a

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person laughable is vice, especially the lack of self-knowledge among the relatively powerless"

(Provine 13). This view that humor is derisive, or that it plays some role in the determining of

social relationships and status, constitutes the earliest articulation of the Superiority Theory of

laughter. Generally, this theory posits that we laugh at the perception of another's inferiority

because this perception gives us a boost in self-esteem. For Plato this boost is tempered with

other feelings: laughter, he says, is a mix of pleasure and pain—pleasure derived from gloating

over another's misfortune, and pain at witnessing our friend's troubles. For other Superiority

Theorists, however, the pleasure of laughter is less complicated. Thomas Hobbes, who puts

forward the darkest version of Superiority Theory, sees in our social interactions the constant

struggle for power, wherein "the failure of our competitors is equal to our success" (Morreall

19). Seeing another comically reduced, Hobbes argues, produces a feeling of "sudden glory"—a

pleasure which is expressed in "those grimaces called laughter" (*Leviathan* 32).

But for Plato, again, humor and laughter is slightly more complex; we *do* laugh at others'

comic reduction, he argues, but only when the reduction is due to the correction of a specific

kind of vice: self-ignorance, such as another's belief that he or she is less handsome, wealthy, or

wise than he or she had previously thought (*Philebus* 48-50). This slightly more complex view of

laughter is then further developed by Aristotle in several ways. First, he builds from Plato's view

that laughter contains a malicious element, arguing that "the gentle art of wit [is] a form of

educated insolence," and that "the comic mask. . . is distorted and ugly but it is not pain

inducing" (Provine 13-14). Second, he sees laughter as a form of social currency that is a

function of having a properly-calibrated sense of humor in which one laughs at the socially-

correct things and in just the right amount:

Since life includes relaxation as well as activity, and in relaxation there is leisure and amusement, there seems to be here too the possibility of good taste in our social relations, and propriety in what we say and how we say it. And the same is true of listening. It will make a difference here what kind of people we are speaking or listening to. Clearly, here, too, it is possible to exceed or fall short of the mean. People who carry humor to excess are considered vulgar buffoons. They try to be funny at all costs, and their aim is more to raise a laugh than to speak with propriety and to avoid giving pain to the butt of their jokes. But those who cannot say anything funny themselves, and are offended by those who do, are thought to be boorish and dour. (15)

In this passage, Aristotle puts forward a complex view of laughter as a mechanism of social interaction in which ideas of pleasure, or "leisure amusement," vary across audiences and contexts. What is appropriate to laugh at among one audience is not appropriate among another, and succeeding in these various contexts means exhibiting a sensitivity toward these differences. Near the end of the passage, Aristotle advises that one must wield a sense of humor with a deft touch, showing the capacity to make light of a situation or another person without doing so in a way that gives offense.

Scholars advocating the Superiority Theory of laughter clearly have much to offer those interested in the rhetorical aspects of social interaction, from the cynical view that laughter is the "sudden glory" of realizing one's superiority over another to the more nuanced view that social status in a group is in part a function of finding pleasure in things common to others in that group. For students in a writing course studying these various view of laughter, there is the opportunity to think about how people vie for power and popularity through rhetorical means. In Hobbes's darker view, students are encouraged to think about how a person might improve his or

her social status by pointing out others' inferior qualities. Plato offers a recipe for locating such qualities in others' vice, or inflated sense of their looks, wealth, or wisdom. And finally, through Aristotle's work, writing students are positioned to think about how senses of humor vary across audiences, and how displaying sensitivity for that variation imparts rhetorical success. Ultimately, if a writing instructor's aim is to get students to think about how people strive for power and popularity in various rhetorical situations, then the Superiority Theory of laughter would seem to make for a productive area of inquiry. Of course in practice, things don't always pan out that way. But before I discuss the results of having students read and write about the Superiority Theory of laughter, I will discuss the other two theories, starting with the Incongruity Theory of laughter.

*The Incongruity Theory of Laughter*

Aristotle largely shared Plato and Hobbes's view that laughter contains a malicious element, though his interest in how having a well-calibrated sense of humor can propel a person to social success led him to look at humor and laughter in other ways as well. In addition to advising social climbers to display a finely-tuned sense of humor, Aristotle offered the advice that "a speaker can get a laugh by setting up a certain expectation in [an] audience, and then jolting them with something they did not expect" (Morreall 14). This represents a shift from seeing humor and laughter as arising out of the negative incongruity in a person's self-perception to seeing it as potentially the product of any logical incongruity, a notion Kant picks up on with his argument that laughter is produced by the evaporation of expectation. Morreall explains how, for Kant, the evaporation of expectation caused by logical incongruity turns our attention away from intellectual stimulation and towards a more sensorial form of amusement:

The pleasure we take in humor, according to Kant, is not as high a pleasure as our delight
in beauty or—a still higher satisfaction—our delight in moral goodness. Indeed, even
though amusement is caused by the play of ideas, it is a kind of sensory gratification
based on feelings of well-being, especially feelings of health. In listening to a joke, Kant
says, we develop a certain expectation as to how it will turn out. Then, at the punch line,
our expectation vanishes,. This sudden mental movement is not enjoyed by our reason,
for our desire to understand is frustrated. But accompanying our mental gymnastics at the
punch line is the animation of our intestines an internal organs, and this bodily motion
produces a feeling of health. The incongruity we experience in humor "gives a
wholesome shock to bodies." (Morreall 45).

In this passage, Morreall explains how Kant sees humor and laughter as the displacement of
intellectual processes in favor of the sensation of good health. Regarding bodies' role in humor
and laughter, Kant thus represents a step in sophistication over Aristotle's discussion of how the
pleasure we take in laughing ultimately shapes our social interactions, though he also offers
progress on the logical triggers of humor and laughter.

Arthur Schopenhauer provides and even further developed notion of incongruity, one in
which the incongruity that is the source of laughter lies not within abstract concepts, but between
our intellectual and sensorial-inflected ways of knowing. Here again, Morreall provides a helpful
account:

Schopenhauer sees in [humor and laughter] a mismatch of our sensory knowledge of
things and our abstract knowledge of those same things. What we perceive through our
senses, Schopenhauer says, are individual things with many characteristics. But when we
organize our sense perceptions under abstract concepts, we focus on only a few

characteristics of any individual thing, thus allowing ourselves to lump very different

things under the same concept, and to refer to very different things by the same word.

Humor arises when we are struck by some clash between a concept and a perception that

are supposed to be of the same thing. (51)

Schopenhauer's discussion of humor, as Morreall points out, thus "shows a negative attitude

toward abstract rational knowledge, at least to its use when uncorrected by experience in the

world" (51). For his characterization between abstract and sensory ways of knowing, it is easy to

see how Schopenhauer might be a precursor to Bergson, who makes the very valuable addition

that a key part of the sensorial knowing is its relationship to movement, but what is largely

seized upon about Incongruity Theory is its (anti) logical mechanisms.

Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca offers an even more precise theory of how humor brings pleasure

to audiences through a twist on logic. In an echo of her work with Chaim Perelman chronicling

commonly used argumentative schema, she constructs two schema of humor, the

incompatibilities schema and the dissociation schema. Barbara Warnick explains how these

schema (and the study of humor more generally), function through shared, social recognition,

and thus ought to be useful to those interested in rhetoric:

We could learn a good deal about the workings of rhetoric by observing the workings of

humor. The laughter of connivance reinforces existing and recognized communion

among participants. It reveals what we know confusedly; it discloses the diversity of an

audience as different groups respond to certain fictions, certain ad hominem arguments,

certain allusions. The comedic plays on the ambiguity of terms, the multiplicity of

audiences, and the instability of premises, thereby illustrating the specific rhetorical

effects of language use. (Warnick 77-8)

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Here, Warnick offers a nascent account, not only of the work humor does binding people, but of how this binding takes place in relation to the collective intellect. These matters which "we know confusedly"—fictions, arguments, allusions, terms, premises, etc.—are revealed to audiences through humor and laughter to be less stable or accurate than we had previously imagined. Thus what Warnick calls "the comedic" serves to reveal ambiguity, or what she characterizes as "the specific rhetorical effects of language use" in the abstractions that structure social interaction.

In this progression from seeing humor and laughter as a way to endear audiences to a more nuanced understanding of how humor and laughter play on logical shortcomings and inconsistencies, there is an opportunity for students to not only observe how speakers earn points through generating laughter, but how through this transaction, an important rhetorical function is carried out: the negotiation, or critical unmasking, of various shared logics, likely ranging from the rhetorical nature of the terms and names by which we understand people, places, institutions, values, etc., to shared beliefs and ways of seeing the world. For students in a writing class, studying the Incongruity Theory of laughter encourages a view of our rhetorical interactions similar to the kind of perspective Berlin's CCS pedagogy hopes to offer. Students are positioned to see speech and writing as intentional rhetorical acts, though importantly, they are also positioned to understand that the structures of language and social interaction over-determine (often invisibly) the ways we see the world and interact with one another. However, there is also a hint that pleasure is a factor in the rhetorical workings of humor and laughter—that bodies might play some role in our rhetorical interactions, which brings me to the third and final theory.

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*The Relief Theory of Laughter*

The last theory of humor and laughter, the Relief Theory, has two main proponents, Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, though Freud's theory is the best-developed and, in my opinion, most useful to those interested in studying humor and laughter from a rhetorical perspective. In his book, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud divides jokes into two kinds: tendentious jokes, which make a point or otherwise appear to have social meaning, and non-tendentious jokes, or jokes such as puns that have no apparent social import. Freud argues that in the case of non-tendentious jokes we take pleasure in the simple cleverness or wit in the device of the joke, with no ensuing emotional, social, or psychological result. But with tendentious jokes, important social and psychological work is taking place. Freud argues that when we laugh, we release energy we had summoned for cognition, as a result of moral impulses, or for the task of repression. In the case of a cognition, for example, we summon energy to solve the riddle of a joke, only to release that energy upon the realization that the answer defied logic. In the case of morality, we might summon emotional energy at the pang of conscience we feel at seeing another hurt him or herself, only to realize that the person was either okay or deserved what happened. And in the case of repression, we might constantly expend energy patrolling ourselves so as not to violate a cultural taboo, energy that we release as laughter once it becomes acceptable to give vent to socially forbidden views or beliefs. For this between bodily energy and mental operations, Freud's theory thus known as the hydraulic theory of laughter (Provine, Morreall).

While it is the least overtly rhetorical theory of humor and laughter, the Relief Theory might possibly offer the most potential for students to think about rhetorical matters in sophisticated manner, mostly for the way it points to a relationship between a rhetorical event,

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the joke or whatever, and the bodies of the people present. In the case of riddles (or the riddle portion of a joke), students are positioned to consider a rhetorical effect generated by triggering an audience's cognitive capacities only to bring pleasure through defying those capacities and/or rendering them unnecessary. In the case of humor, the rhetorical work is perhaps more meaningful: audiences, feeling stressed about some matter or another, are granted a reprieve through laughter. In some instances, we might even conclude that such instances serve to re-shape the moral codes that structure our individual selves and our interactions. And finally, in the case of joking, a taboo belief or emotion is given vent, an event we might see as reducing the power of a social code in an audience's eyes. Taken together, the various aspects of this taxonomy that Freud provides suggests, like the Incongruity and Superiority theories, that humor and laughter do important social work, though with Relief Theory there is the incorporation of individual psychology and bodies, and this postures students to consider rhetorical happenings as not simply functions of language, but as events that shape us in profound ways.

*Humor and laughter scholarship as content*

As a teacher of rhetoric and writing, I thus saw a lot of potential in this body of scholarship on humor and laughter. There were lessons in the way rhetorical events determined social hierarchies and organization, empowered speakers, reduced or negotiated cultural logics, and shaped psyches and bodies. If the aim of a rhetoric and writing courses was to impart on students a knowledge of how rhetoric performed a crucial and fundamental purpose in our personal and public interactions, then having students read and digest this scholarship would make for a worthwhile pursuit. But of course, having students read and memorize scholarly perspectives enacts a transmission model of course content that we in Rhetoric and Composition

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abandoned long ago. These days, we want students to learn to actively participate, perhaps critically, in a scholarly conversation. More the better, I thought, since between the various scholars working in humor and laughter theory there was a lot of cross-talk. Students could point out where scholars' priorities varied, where they seemed to agree or disagree, or how they operated from fundamentally different perspectives concerning the way individuals and their rhetorical interactions work. And so, naturally, I saw the scholarly conversation taking place around humor and laughter not as a body of knowledge students could imbibe, but as a conversation they could actively engage.

It is important to note that the particular value of this conversation, as I saw it, stemmed from the fact that it takes place over a rhetorical matter. This is significant because while it is not new for Rhetoric and Composition instructors to position students to enter a particular scholarly conversation, few (to my knowledge) had put much thought into the content of that conversation. For these instructors, course content lay in *how* students engaged and wrote about scholarship—any scholarship. But having given consideration to what that conversation was about, content became a matter of both how students participated in scholarly conversations and what those conversation were about. In retrospect, I apparently believed that in our shift from viewing language as a sometime people learn about to something they do, we had possibly drifted too far from the actual content of what our students read and write about. I seemed to feel that the next step forward was to take a partial step back: I wanted my students to not simply behave as scholars, but to behave as theorists of Rhetoric. Later, I will discuss how this early solution proved both worthwhile and foolish, though for now it is only necessary to note that, while not aware of it at the time, I had been working my way through a muddle between course content as something students learn about and content as something they learn to do.

**The Case for Humor Pedagogy**

In addition to the fact that humor and laughter constitute rhetorical subject matter, they promise the added benefit of engaging people in a positive way. We're of course familiar with these positive associations from our personal lives as well as from our experience as teachers, though it turns out that there is also a significant amount of scholarship touting the pedagogical benefits of humor and laughter. As I have observed earlier, this research takes place mostly in disciplinary margins. Ron Berk, perhaps the most prominent advocate of humor's pedagogical use, is a professor of nursing and publishes in various journals concerned with general pedagogy[13]. Similarly, Ron L. Garner and Deborah Korobkin publish in the journal, *College Teaching*. Berk, Garner, and Korobkin employ anecdotal evidence and qualitative analysis to advocate humor's strategic use for generating enthusiasm in coursework, improving the learning atmosphere, or increasing retention. There is, however, a small group of scholars investigating humor's pedagogical potential in the course of working in their native discipline. Sarah Torok, Robert, McMorris, and Wen-Chi Lin, and most notably, Avner Ziv, work in educational science, and as such, they employ the quantitative methods characteristic of social sciences. Their work in many ways echoes claims made by anecdotally-driven pedagogues like Berk, Garner, and Korobkin (claims, for example, that humor decreases tension, increases energy, and improves retention). Also, while my primary focus in this section will be on humor pedagogy advocates working outside the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, I feel compelled to include Steve Sherwood, who falls neatly in line with the qualitatively-driven, strategy-minded work of Berk,

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[13] Berk has published several books as well:*Professors are from Mars, Students are from Snickers; How to Write and Deliver Humor in the Classroom and in Professional Presentations*

Garner, and Korobkin. For many Rhetoric and Compositionists, Dianne Davis will also come to mind, though her approach departs significantly from Berk and the rest in that she does not advocate humor and laughter as pedagogical tools with particular uses, but instead uses humor and laughter as metaphors for defying the political pedagogical impulse to force students into academic subject positions. Instead, following in the wake of calls for increased affective engagement in writing classes, I will proceed to examine the work I've begun to outline here because it might eventually shed light on the relationship between (critical) course content and affective engagement.

One quick note before I begin: while Humor pedagogy falls neatly into two camps when divided according to method and area of publication (again, qualitative interstitial pedagogy, on the one hand, quantitative educational science, on the other), its map looks much different when traced according to its purported benefits, with qualitative and quantitative analysts alike choosing to focus on various particular pedagogical properties of humor and laughter, regardless of their native discipline. Mapping the conversations around those benefits proves even more difficult given that many scholars—in particular, those doing general pedagogy—tout multiple, divergent benefits at once. Recall how Steve Sherwood, for example, argues that teachers can use humor to "enhance their ethos as good persons speaking well, build effective relationships, rise above embarrassing moments, soften criticism, stimulate creative thinking, and make their students feel less like prisoners and more like welcome guests in the classroom" (2). Benefits like enhancing ethos, improving relationships, and facilitating creativity lead to disparate lines of inquiry, even when approached through the lens of affective engagement. For now, I proceed by dividing humor pedagogy into three sub-schools (schools which, nonetheless, are interrelated

and bear on issues of affective engagement in complex ways): the Relationships School, the Cognitive School, and the Generative School.

*The relationships school of humor and laughter pedagogy*

What I call the "relationships school" is defined by its concern for how humor improves interpersonal relationships—including both teacher-student and peer relationships—and/or facilitates learning by improving the atmosphere of the classroom. Sherwood, perhaps the most firmly situated in this school, approaches the work of teaching through the lens of public speaking, and thus looks to theorists who see humor as a useful tool for earning the esteem and trust of audiences. Specifically, Sherwood borrows from Aristotle's concept of the Witty Person, who "embodies all that is tasteful" (Sherwood 2), Cicero's *Urbanus*, who possesses a "delicate charm and urbanity" (Cicero I. v. 17), and Quintilian's Ideal Orator, who radiates a "complete knowledge of all that is just and honorable" (XII. ii. 2), with the ultimate goal of helping writing teachers "convey the ethos of an ethical, intelligent, humble, benevolent person who speaks with sensitivity and good taste" (5-6). Sherwood believes that through an ethos defined in part through its tactful, timely sense of humor, instructors of writing can improve learning by letting students know that "errors are forgivable" or by inviting them to "relax and participate in the business of the classroom" (7).

Similarly, Deborah Korobkin advocates the strategic employment of humor to make the work of learning "less laborious and threatening"—to "set people at ease, equalize situations and status relationships. . . and increase group rapport" (154). Korobkin also notes benefits better associated with what I am calling the cognitive and generative schools (increased retention and divergent thinking)—benefits I will discuss shortly—but the her investigation seems to focus on

the notion that humor improves "student-teacher rapport, attentiveness. . . interest, motivation. . . satisfaction. . . playfulness, and positive attitude" (155).

Lastly, James Wandersee, who is rare but not alone in taking a negative stance regarding humor's ability to increase retention (yet another matter pertaining to the cognitive-generative school, which I'll discuss shortly), nevertheless sees humor a useful tool for improving learning by improving the context in which it takes place. Humor, for Wandersee, "is like a stick of dynamite" which in the hands of an expert has the potential to "blast away obstructions between subject matter and student", but which, when deployed ineptly, has the power to "destroy a lesson just as easily" (212). Given humor's unique but potentially damaging powers, Wandersee sets out to "discover [which] types of humor are more productive in the classroom and [how] to apply them in the proper way" (212). From there, Wandersee proceeds to lay out the various pedagogical benefits associated with humor so that instructors might first ask themselves whether they need to "establish rapport, create interest, or maintain attention" (217). As with Sherwood, the list of benefits Wandersee tackles places him in multiple schools at once, but the notion that humor can improve learning by improving rapport falls squarely in the relationships school where, as with Sherwood and Korobkin, humor's pedagogical usefulness is seen to lie in its ability to improve the teacher-student dynamic.

*The relationships school and Rhet/Comp pedagogy*

In the context of the conversation over affective engagement in writing courses, it's worth noting that when humor pedagogy sets out to improve the teacher-student relationship, the aspect of that relationship which is supposed to change is its emotional or affective dimension. In place of the hierarchical relationship characteristic of many dominant pedagogies ('dominant' as

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in, 'prevailing'), Sherwood, Korobkin, and Wandersee see in humor a chance to foster more relaxed, positive, and playful relationships, while still allowing the instructor to retain the respect and esteem necessary for the job of teaching. Korobkin, for example, describes how when the tough, crusty figure of the teacher is banished, the teacher-student relationship becomes flattened. The logic runs that as the teacher becomes a less threatening figure, students feel more relaxed, unrestricted, and willing to take intellectual risks. Worsham, Palmer, and Albrecht-Crane might understand this transition through the language of subjectivity, observing that as students are freed from the bonds of strict, well-defined subject positions, they are allowed to emerge as "wild subjects"—subjects that, rather than being shackled by expectation, are suspended in the act of becoming. In this way, theorists of affective engagement in writing might ascribe the feeling of improved teacher-student relationships described by humor pedagogies towards the ways they foster different kinds of subjects (though, I believe their position would be more complicated, and I will come back to it towards the end of this section).

The subject politics of humor pedagogy reach beyond the teacher-student relationship, however, and spill over into the related by distinct realm of affect. The relaxed, playful, group rapport described by Sherwood, Korobkin, and Wandersee can be understood through humor pedagogy's way of fostering of "wild subjects" as I've just described it, but I believe theorists of affective engagement in writing would observe that there is yet another dimension to be considered: as individual students are freed from the bonds of strictly-defined subject positions, their freedom enables them to tap the socially-located energy of affect. In what Korobkin calls "group rapport," Palmer and Albrecht-Crane would see an "exteriorization of energies" and an "outward flowing of electricity in community of others" which enables desire and is ultimately generative. It is not merely that subjects are released from inhabiting the subject positions of

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serious students; through laughter, they are allowed to interact through more vibrant affective channels, and this, apparently, produces an embodied, pleasurable sense of community.

*The cognitive school of humor and laughter pedagogy*

Of the cognitive-generative school, Ron Berk, R.L. Garner, and Avner Ziv advocate the strategic use of humor for increasing retention. Nevertheless, Berk, a professor of nursing, is perhaps the most noted of the group, and has crafted a pedagogy in which key concepts are delivered alongside humor in order to increase recall. According to Berk, "it's not the humor by itself, but it's the humor linked to certain concepts that I want students to remember. It's about active learning" (Bartlett 5). For example, to help students remember a statistical concept called a "T" score, Berk has a student don a silk scarf and stand in front of the class with her arms out while another student turns a leaf blower on her to the theme from the Titanic, all in attempt to recall the famous scene in which Kate Winslet's character stands exuberantly on the bow of the ship with her arms outstretched. Berk argues that the tactic aids in concept retention, an argument he says enjoys the weight of improved test scores.

While Berk draws mostly from experience in chronicling the pedagogical usefulness of humor, Garner and Ziv, working in Educational Science, employ empirical methods. Ziv, distinguishing between "affective outcomes" (measured through student evaluations) and "cognitive outcomes" (measured through test-scores), performs studies designed to measure the latter. Students from two different courses (one in statistics and the other in biology) were measured to see whether strategically-employed humor improved retention of key concepts. In both courses, students from sections that used humor outperformed students from control groups, leading Ziv to conclude that humor can be a powerful tool in improving course outcomes.

Similar to Ziv, Garner constructed a study in which several groups of students viewed video lectures on "dreaded" college subjects. The lectures viewed by control groups were delivered in standard, humorless fashion, while other groups viewed videos that were much the same, but in which the instructor inserted humorous anecdotes at the beginning and at subsequent 15-minute intervals. Students who viewed the humorous version of the lectures scored better on subsequent exams than students who viewed the humorless versions, leading Garner to conclude that humor can indeed have a positive effect on content retention (170).

The anecdotal evidence offered by Berk and the empirical data recorded by Ziv and Garner suggest that the presence of humor in curricula improves retention dramatically, though it's important to note that all three theorists argue that in order to improve concept recall, the humor employed must be directly related to course content. To my knowledge, Ziv was the first to make this argument, and was perhaps the inspiration for the method illustrated by Berk's T-Score anecdote. In Ziv's experiment with a statistics course, for example, the instructor used the following story to help students remember the concept, standard deviation:

> While teaching about means and standard deviations, the teacher projected a slide of a cartoon prepared in advance on a screen. It showed an explorer in Africa, talking to a few native children who watch him somewhat surprised. Behind the explorer, and without his being aware of it, is a huge crocodile with a wide-open mouth, ready to swallow him. He, addressing the kids, says, "There is no need to be afraid of crocodiles; around here their average length is only about 50 centimeters." One of the children says to another, "This guy had better think about the standard deviation, too." (9)

Similarly, in Garner's experiment, the importance of conscientious reporting of research findings was illustrated by a "metaphorical" story in which two one prisoner had persuaded another to

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accompany him in his escape from jail. Upon learning, after breaking out, that the jail was surrounded by desert, the second prisoner exclaimed, "You knew! Why didn't you tell me?" whereupon the other remarked, "Silly man, you should know that no one reports negative results" (178-9).

Across Berk's T-Score joke, Ziv's Standard Deviation joke, and Garner's Research-Reporting joke, the use of humor was not random, but strategically-targeted at a particular course concept. Berk's student incongruously mimed a scene from Titanic in which the main character stood in a "T" shape, adding emphasis to the "T" of T-Score. The butt of Ziv's standard deviation joke was a teacher who was about to be eaten because he had neglected to account for standard deviation. And the unfortunate prisoner in Garner's results-reporting joke suffered because his fellow conspirator was less than conscientious about reporting "negative results." This placement of the desired concept in the jokes' punch lines is no coincidence. What Garner, in the title of his essay, refers to as the "Ah-Ha moment"—a moment mirrored in both learning and the apprehension of a joke—infuses students' recognition of the course concept with pleasure. In Garner's words, "the message makes the point and [is] well-received by audiences" (179).

Of the three, Berk's joke works most markedly through association. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed provides an example of how affect and content might be related associationally. She cites an incident in British Parliament in which the content of two speeches was linked affectively by their temporal proximity. In the first speech, the speaker railed against the unfair imprisonment of a man who shot a burglar caught entering his home. The second speech "was an anti-asylum rant against people who were lying in order to gain entrance to the country" (47): "The proximity of these two speeches articulated a common

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metonymy for the British public: bogus conmen are working their way into your country much like burglars are working their way into your homes" (Rice 205). Such incidents lead Ahmed to conclude that affects are "sticky"—that ideas accrue affective valences through processes of association. In Berk's T-Score example, the positive feelings students associate with the course—the feelings presumed responsible for the students' retention of concepts—are "stuck" to the course concept through proximity in much the same way as British immigrants were stuck with the affective baggage of burglars, except in the case of the T-Score, the temporal distance is collapsed entirely into a single, "Ah-Ha Moment." Students associate the pleasure of the joke's incongruity (again, a mechanism I will discuss further in later chapters) with the course concept. Here, the mechanism of association carries an even greater burden than in Ahmed's example, where one could argue that the affects in question had narrativized content. In contrast, if there is a narrative to Berk's example, it's perhaps that students were pleased and surprised to witness such silliness taking place in a class on nursing-related statistics. Berk's method appears to produce results, and the anecdotal evidence on which he bases his claims has been witnessed repeatedly and/or widely corroborated, and yet I believe it to be less than ideal to induce student pleasure in course concepts in a way that, at its core, is merely associational.

However, the methods advocated by Ziv and Garner fare better in this regard. Where Berk collapses the link between students' affective dispositions toward a course and their retention of course concepts, Ziv begins with the notion that the two, while related, remain distinct. This distinction leads him to employ humor that has for its content matters directly related to the content of the course. In a sense, while Berk employs humorous packaging, Ziv finds a humorous perspective on the topic itself. The teacher in his crocodile joke looks funny—and is about to be comically eaten by an alligator—because he accounted only for the average

length of crocodiles and not for deviation from that average. The lesson of the joke aligns perfectly with the lesson contained in the concept. Similarly, the prisoner in Garner's joke suffers for his ignorance, not just of the course concept's existence, but in such a way as to highlight the significance or content of the concept.

*The cognitive school and Rhet/Comp pedagogy*

I believe that theorists of affective engagement in composition would find the cognitive school of humor pedagogy interesting for the ways it figures cognition and emotion (or affect) as closely related. Recall Brand's advocacy of a theory "that unites the cognitively blind but arousing system of affect with the subtle cognitive apparatus" (1). She and McLeod would likely observe that the cognitive school of humor pedagogy provides an excellent example of what such a theory might look like for the ways its practitioners carefully place desired course concepts in the punch lines of their jokes. Again, I will discuss in later chapters the affective and cognitive mechanisms of jokes (which work in a variety of ways), but for now it is enough to observe that the punch line of a joke is a moment of realization, a moment accompanied not only by pleasure, but by other bodily reactions such smiles and laughter. I have argued that the language used by Brand and McLeod—their descriptions of emotion as playing a "critical role in cognition" or of cognition and affects being related "dialectically"—never quite succeed at articulating how cognition is embodied; I'm not sure whether the examples offered by Ziv and Garner would push them quite so far. And yet I have little doubt that Brand would find them good examples of learning with "stick to the ribs quality" (306)—as a clever way of shaping the affective dimensions of the learning process in order to improve it.

I can also see how Johnson, Worsham, Palmer, and Albrecht-Crane might view such pedagogies in a positive light. Johnson, for one, might view such play with course concepts as akin to the magic he would hope to inject into the processes of writing—as an example, not so much of students taking somatic pleasure in text, but of taking somatic pleasure in *something* pertaining to course content. And given his Gorgian sympathies, he might even characterize the instructors employing such classes as rhetors who radiate the pleasure they take in their words or message onto their audiences. At the very least, he might appreciate how Berk, Ziv, and Garner manage to deliver their content in ways that would otherwise be deemed "unprofessional," but that, for eschewing professionalism, leave room for 'sensational rushes' of pleasure.

More revealing yet is how Palmer and Albrecht-Crane might understand the mechanisms of such pedagogies. Both argue that desire follows from the "exteriorization of intensities and forces of becoming," from an "outward flowing of electricity in community of others," (492). Laughter is a conduit for the exteriorization of intensities and an "electric" current of community with others. Such a pleasure is perhaps not as individually-derived as Garner's "Ah-ha" characterization might hint, but is instead positioned in tandem with the desired course concept. In this way, the course concepts as punch lines might yet be "stuck" with pleasure in merely associational ways, but the pleasure is that derived from interacting with others affectively instead of simply "getting" the joke. Or, perhaps the message of the joke provides a more sophisticated narrative content—perhaps, rather than the merely associational link that drives Berk's examples, the logical, content-relevant component of the joke provides narrative content for group affect in a positive twist on Ahmed's anecdote from British Parliament. Either way, the pleasure of interacting with the "intensities and energies" of others serves as a source of pleasure through which students are affectively oriented toward the course concepts in positive ways.

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This wording, however, calls to mind Worsham's work, in which might see a sinister element to this otherwise rosy picture. Recall her critique of critical pedagogies and how they function through abjection to reorient students' affective dispositions. Such pedagogies are particularly insidious, Worsham argues, because they serve to patrol students' subjectivities while purporting only to engage them. That is, many Critical Cultural Studies-inflected writing programs cite the pleasure students take in popular culture as one of the most important arguments in their favor. But Worsham might say that pedagogy that uses the pleasure students take in laughter ultimately uses that pleasure to Oedipalize them. There is no laughter, such a pedagogy would seem to say, until students accept what the course is trying to teach. Such a statement, when flipped around, proves even darker: prior to accepting the course concept, students are kept in affective isolation. Worsham might say that such subjects aren't really wild subjects, but are imprisoned subjects who work under the hope that they might someday be liberated. Further, even their "liberation" is false, given that it takes place only under the condition that they accept, through the punch line of the joke, a new perspective that was in fact predetermined by the instructor. To students subject to such a pedagogy, getting the joke feels like an epiphanic moment of release, but Worsham might see in them the delivery of students into the full control of the academy.

*The generative school of humor and laughter pedagogy*

This aspect of humor pedagogy is often mentioned, though to my knowledge it has drawn the least serious academic inquiry. Berk, McMorris, Sherwood, Garner, and Wandersee all mention, in some way or another, that humor and laughter promote creativity, but none give serious attention understanding the means by which such a pedagogy might work, or even, how

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to enact it. Korobkin discusses humor's creative potential more pointedly than these others, though she does so mostly by drawing on Ziv who, to my knowledge, is the only scholar to engage in serious inquiry into the matter. In his study, "Facilitating Effects of Humor on Creativity,"—a study done separately from the one I have been discussing thus far—Ziv, characteristically, begins by first making an important distinction, in this case between what he calls "convergent" (319) and "divergent" thinking (320). Ziv describes convergent thinking as the sort that is typically sought in educational settings, settings in which it is hoped that students are trained to enact preordained behaviors or ways of knowing (my wording). Ziv's alligator-statistics joke and Garner's jailbreak-research findings jokes belong to this category for the way they position students to arrive at previously-sanctioned conclusions. Learning in such a pedagogy might be seen, essentially, as adopting the views of the instructor. Obviously, such approaches are guilty of the Oedipalization of which Worsham is so critical. One might even question whether what amounts to aping the instructor's ways of knowing amounts to learning at all. In contrast, however, Ziv offers the term, "divergent thinking." It is hard to nail down exactly what he means by the term, though he does say it's a "particular kind of thinking not bound to 'right' and conventional answers" (320). In place of 'rightness' and adherence to convention, Ziv sees divergent thinking, per Koestler, as characterized by "a greater readiness to utilize incidental cues" (Koestler 74). Later, he goes on to say that creativity requires "departure from what is usual and [acceptance] of 'crazy' ideas" (320).

*The generative school and Rhet/Comp pedagogy*

      While it is reasonably easy to see how Worsham might link pedagogies which promote convergent thinking with 'dominant' pedagogies which serve to Oedipalize students, it is less

clear how her notion of 'wild subjects' maps onto Ziv's notion of divergent thinking because Worsham is concerned with subjects' emotional constitution while Ziv speaks in terms of cognition. That said, the two surely seem to share the same spirit. Worsham argues that dominant pedagogies organize "emotional/affective attitudes in arbitrary or otherwise culturally-biased or existing power structure-friendly ways" (221). Worsham goes on to say that the mission of such pedagogies is to impose a "dominant framework of meanings":

> [The primary work of dominant pedagogy] is to organize an emotional world, to inculcate patterns of feeling that support the legitimacy of dominant interests, patters that are especially appropriate to gender, race, and class locations. Pedagogy locates individuals objectively in power relations. (223)

We might see in what Ziv calls convergent thinking the patterning of students' thinking after "dominant [frameworks of meaning]" and the placement of students in a position of subservience to the academy and existing regimes of power. Worsham would probably even say that 'convergence' itself is defined by its adherence to dominant modes of thinking. Notions of gender, race, and class location are absent from Ziv's account of convergent thinking, but where they are manifest in dominant paradigms, they will surely be present in a pedagogy that has for its aim the perpetuation of those paradigms. Divergent thinking, in contrast, is defined by its disregard for convention and 'rightness.' This departure echoes Worsham's notion of wild subjects, who enjoy "estrangement or dissolution from the structures that traditionally have supported both self and the world" (229). In the plainest possible terms, where the aims of dominant pedagogies and those that seek to foster convergent thinking have replication for their goal, Worsham's postmodern pedagogies and those that seek to foster divergent thinking strive for departure or creation.

In Ziv's study, students who viewed a humorous video before taking a test meant to measure divergent thinking scored better than students who did not (319). Admittedly, this simple result does not bridge the distance between Worsham's postmodern pedagogy and the use of humor and laughter to promote creativity. However, taking both Ziv and Worsham into account, we can see how humor and laughter can be used strategically in both Oedipalizing and liberatory ways. More importantly, the ability of humor and laughter to swing the needle in either direction so dramatically suggests that they hold great power. Where that power comes from remains as yet unclear, though in Worsham's work, both colonization and decolonization take place on primary levels of emotion and affect. The Relationships School of humor pedagogy hints at the sociality of humor's emotional and affective function; and the Cognitive and Generative Schools tell us about how that affective domain penetrates individuals' cognitive capacities. In what follows, I look for the root of laughter pedagogies' social and cognitive power by examining what humor pedagogy says about its physiological operations.

*Humor and laughter: a way to engage students in rhetorical (or critical) matters?*

The arguments for the strategic uses of humor and laughter for pedagogical purposes re compelling. For example, the argument that a well-timed joke and ease tension in the classroom, energize students, and, potentially, improve the student-teacher dynamic resonates with my experience with humor and laughter, both personal and professional. The arguments that humor and laughter improve retention and/or creativity are perhaps slightly more surprising, though they seem in line with calls made by Brand, McLeod, and others who encourage us to see cognition as an embodied activity. It doesn't take a cognitive psychologist, for example, to

perceive the merit of Berk's "T-score" tactic, which I imagine would indeed help students remember the concept.

However, it would seem slightly more difficult finding ways to apply these tactics to the work of teaching writing. This is less the case with the Relationships School, since obviously, making the classroom work well should be just as big of a boon in teaching writing as it is in other pedagogical situations. But the benefits touted by these theorists don't necessarily help with the task of generating affective engagement in the actual act of writing, which of course is temporally and geographically separated from what happens in the classroom. In this case, the Cognitive and Generative Schools would seem to offer more potential. The success of Berk's tactics, for example, suggest that engagement is an associational matter, and that, subsequently, we might hope that the pleasure students associate with humor and laughter could spill over into an interest in theorizing about it. On the other hand, there is Ziv and Garner's argument that for humor and laughter to do meaningful work, the content of the joke must be connected with course content in a more meaningful way. However, Ziv's argument that humor and laughter encourage "divergent thinking" is more promising. If the associational link between students' experience with humor and laughter and their interest in theorizing about it were indeed strong enough, then we might hope that their thinking in relation to the scholarship might benefit from an increase in creativity, and even, critical thinking. That is, if humor and laughter do indeed make students more likely to step outside conventional boundaries, then perhaps they would be less likely than the average student to see scholarly texts as always having the "right" answers and more likely utilize "incidental cues" and/or offer their own, "crazy" ideas.

In any case, at the time of my first experiment with the pedagogical potential humor and laughter (might) hold for writing instruction, I had been only recently exposed to the work of

these scholars, and of course, the controversy among them suggests that there is no clear-cut way to use humor and laughter as pedagogical strategy. I thus proceeded under the vague and rather simplistic suspicion that since humor and laughter are things that people enjoy, perhaps they'd enjoy inquiring into humor and laughter theory. With luck, I hoped, the approach I settled on might increase their level of engagement, which would lend energy to the work they did, as well as helping them achieve their full cognitive potential while reading and responding to texts. Of course, things didn't work out as I'd hoped, though the experiment would eventually prove a useful source of perspective, both on the scholarship I've just laid out and on the conversation that constituted the first two chapters of this dissertation.

## Conclusion: Producing (disinterested) rhetoricians

Given how useful I believed the field of scholarship on humor and laughter could be for students who needed to learn about Rhetoric while also learning how to participate in a scholarly conversation, and given the positive associations and possible pedagogical benefits humor and laughter offer, I set up my course as a tour through various approaches to theorizing humor and laughter. At first, this consisted of reading a theorist from each of the three main schools. Later, I switched to having students read texts from various disciplines—philosophy, rhetoric, biology, and the social sciences—thinking that students could choose the text from the discipline nearest their scholarly and professional ambitions and then enter a scholarly conversation from there. In either case, some class periods and assignments used the course texts as an opportunity to focus on strategies for reading and writing about scholarly texts. On occasion, however, I would lead the class through conversations about humor and laughter more generally in order to bring some of humor and laughter's more enigmatic properties to light and to generate interest in the topic. I

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also tried to bolster the course theme by using it in other ways; in one instance, I had students practice doing rhetorical analysis on humorous YouTube videos. As most teachers might imagine, this tactic worked pretty well, with students' interest in the videos (and perhaps their laughter in response to them) leading to an energetic, comfortable, and productive classroom atmosphere. This tactic obviously resonates with what scholars such as Sherwood and Berk had to say about humor and laughter's ability to improve the atmosphere of the classroom, leading to better learning.

When it came to students' research projects, however, scholarly conversation was the focus. Students were expected to locate a controversy among scholarly sources and then generate a research question that addressed that controversy. From there, students were expected to summarize and then engage their sources, situating them in dialogue with each other and eventually build up to sharing the student's own perspective on the matter. In the iterations of my class in which the course texts consisted of theorists from the three main theories, students tended to generate dialogue between theorists from each school, typically asking which theory held the most explanatory power. In later iterations of the class in which I used texts from several disciplines, the topics of students' papers grew more varied, ranging from the traditional humor theory project to projects inquiring into things like the health benefits of humor or humor in the workplace. These projects weren't doing rhetorical theory as explicitly as those which focused on the three theories I outlined earlier, but I was still satisfied that they retained a modicum of rhetorical relevance.

As a rhetorician interested in the study of humor and laughter, it was exhilarating to read projects in which students did research into the matter. With the projects that engaged humor theorists, for example, seeing the names of theorists I'd been writing about typed through

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students' keyboards made it feel as though I was leading them down the path to worthwhile rhetorical insight, while projects that reached out into some other area of humor and laughter—health benefits, or cohesion in the workplace—seemed both fascinating and novel. Yet despite how pleasurable reading such projects proved for me, for students, the experience of writing them proved almost entirely the opposite. That is not to say that some didn't enjoy writing research papers on the topic—two or three in every class would take it up with gusto. But most of the oral and written student feedback I received said that while they enjoyed humor and laughter in their own lives, they found researching it tortuous. This kind of feedback was especially prominent in the theory-focused classes; topics such as the health benefits of humor or humor in the workplace apparently seemed more relevant to students' particular research interests (such as nursing students, or business students, respectively). But apparently, the affective charge we associate with humor and laughter simply didn't spill over into the process of engaging in scholarly inquiry into it.

Not only did students not evince the interest in researching humor and laughter that I'd hoped, I also had to admit that there was little or no change in how well they performed. If humor and laughter actually improve cognition, as Berk, Garner, and Ziv argue, then I would've hoped to see improvements in practical matters such as sentence structure, smoothness and cohesion of paragraphs, and effective summary of sources. I might also have expected the writing to be fun, playful, and interesting as a result of the "sensational rush" Johnson ascribes to when writers are fully engaged or "caught up in the flow." It was most definitely none of those things, more often than not coming across as dry, stilted, and with a general air of disinterestedness. Finally, if humor and laughter is supposed to improve "divergent thinking," as Ziv argues, then I might've hoped to see improvement in the critical work. Unfortunately, I

observed absolutely no change in how well students were able to engage scholarly perspectives in what we might deem critical ways. If anything, students seemed to perceive the theory as sophisticated beyond their reach, leading them to place it on a pedestal far above any opinions they might have on the matter. Ultimately, none of the cognitive or creative benefits touted by Berk and others were reflected in the quality of work students produced.

And yet, the experience of using these course structures offered a glimmer of insight in the difference between how humor and laughter improved in-class work while failing to improve students' research writing. It seemed that the affective charge associated with laughter had the amperage to energize cognition in class but lacked the voltage necessary to span the distance between class sessions and homework. This seems to argue in favor of humor pedagogy theorists such as Sherwood, Korobkin, and Wandersee who argue that the pedagogical benefit of humor and laughter lies in the way it improves the work of the classroom. It also seems to speak to theorists in Rhetoric and Composition, such as Palmer, who see affective engagement as a function of the teacher-student dynamic, or even Albrecht-Crane, for whom affect is the "exteriorization of energies and forces of becoming." In both cases, it is worth noting that affect and engagement are enabled through the presence of other bodies. The challenge such a view poses is that others' bodies are of course *not* present in the act of writing. Perhaps writing as an exercise inevitably negates the affectively-engaging experience of other bodies.

However, some of the theorists I've discussed thus far would disagree. Recall that Johnson, despite his stance on the way that aurality enables intersubjectivity, nevertheless believes that students might experience text in embodied ways. And Hawk, for whom sociality is not simply affective icing on the cake but the very means by which we think and invent, would argue that even in the relatively corporeally-remote circumstance of the writing assignment, the

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process of writing entails a working out of relationships to others (and ideas), relationships that precede discursive representation. The crux of the problem, it seemed to me, was that while the in-class activities provided students with an immediate embodied experience, the scholarly research writing I asked them to do was entirely unconnected from that sort of experience. In terms of cognition, in-class activities primed students' processes of thinking, perhaps as a product of the presence of others, while the kind of cognition they were asked to do when writing denied that possibility. What I thus began to look was the remote possibility that I might, in some way, decrease the gap between students' research writing and their lived, embodied experience with laughter so that its charge, and all the attendant benefits is promises, could bridge the gap. In the following chapter I will explain how what I found was even better.

# Chapter 5: Harnessing laughter as embodied critical cognition in service of teaching critical writing

*Abstract:*

*In this fifth and final chapter of my attempt to better align the critical/rhetorical skills we teach with the ways students think and act in the real world, I build on the work of previous chapters by attempting to re-think humor and laughter through the lens of Bergson's concept, intuition, and his accompanying theory of the comic, which I argue shows laughter to be embodied critical cognition. I then discuss how I constructed a writing course in which I made use of these critical/embodied properties by positioning students to inquire into moments of their own laughter in order to generate positive emotional engagement in critical inquiry and to thus harness students' embodied critical impulses in service of doing academic work.*

**Re-cap: Toward a new critical method**

I began this dissertation by citing the problems—resistance, apathy, and cynicism—which emerge when we ask students to critically unmask interactions with culture from which they had previously derived pleasure. My investigation revealed that this unmasking pitted the critical method at cross purposes with students' embodied ways of knowing, essentially telling students that their enjoyment was somehow invalid. I then looked to the solutions put forward by the scholars who had helped me to frame the problem, finding that while they helped to move the conversation forward, their framing of the problem undermined their ability to develop an alternative critical method which partakes of *both* minds and bodies. In search of a way out of this binary, I turned to the work of Henri Bergson, whose concept, intuition, promised to rectify the tension evinced in our theory. Serendipitously, Bergson had also developed intuition into a critical method—a method intended to keep in check our habit of over-intellectualizing—but unfortunately, that method fell short of offering something which could be directly swapped out for our current critical practices. Still, Bergson had encouraged us to find a critical method grounded in the stuff of reality—a method that affirms our non-rational ways of knowing. In this vein, I turned to my own practical attempt to teach rhetoric in a way that engaged students affectively as well as intellectually. This attempt, while ultimately a failure, underscored the importance of grounding what we teach in students' lived experience. The challenge, it now seems, is developing a critical method that resonates with, rather than lying at cross purposes to, students' lived, embodied ways of knowing.

Once again, I believe that Bergson provides a solution. In this chapter I will argue that his theory of the comic, which grows out his theory of intuition, shows laughter to do useful critical work—work of the sort we value in Rhetoric and Composition, and that, to boot, partakes of

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bodies in a way that the CCS method does not. Essentially, Bergson says that when we laugh, we do so because some abstraction that previously served to structure our knowing or sociality was revealed to be inadequate in some way. Our laughter is thus an embodied way of stepping outside of that abstraction. In this vision of laughter, I see a critical unmasking similar to the kind of work we hope for our students to accomplish in Rhetoric and Composition courses, except that rather than denying our emotional, affective, and embodied ways of knowing, laughter affirms them. In what follows, I will begin by discussing Bergson's theory of the comic in more detail, followed by an explanation of how, through Bergson, I see what he calls "the comic" doing the kind of critical work that we value in Rhetoric and Composition. I will then describe a course structure in which I tried to position students to use laughter as a starting point for critical rhetorical inquiry. I will then close by analyzing some of the writing produced through this new critical method.

## Introduction: The mechanical encrusted upon the living

John Morreall, author of *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, points out that Bergson's theory of laughter grows directly out of his general philosophy (117). Bergson's central thesis, that what renders something funny is evidence of the "mechanical encrusted upon the living," echoes his philosophic theory for the distinction it makes between the "living," which we will see presupposes duration and the *élan vital,* and the "mechanical," which we will see equates to the abstract and/or inert. In its most reduced sense, Bergson's theory begins with the notion that the world changes over time and that as a result, every circumstance we encounter is unique. To respond to these new, unique circumstances in intelligent ways, we draw upon

lessons derived from past experience. These lessons can take many shapes: they can reside in the individual, as when a person looks to lessons learned from past circumstances for instructions on how to respond to the present; or they can be the products of socialization, as when people depend upon prescriptions for how they ought to behave. Often, these or prescriptions go unnoticed, slipping seamlessly into the ways we interpret and respond to the world and each other. But on occasion, our dependence such 'prescriptions' is revealed through their misapplication. Rudy Giuliani responds to every question with a reference to 9/11. A police officer uses his cop voice in the bedroom. A way of behaving that had been an appropriate response to one situation is applied to one in which it is not; when this happens, the person, who had previously appeared in touch with the present, is revealed to be dependent upon "rule-bound" ways of behaving. We thus find a person's behavior funny, Bergson says, whenever he or she gives the impression of behaving like a "mere machine" (15).

By revealing our (over) dependence upon "rule-bound" ways of coping, Bergson says, the comic is "corrective." We depend upon abstract, logical structures in order to make use of past experience in coping with the present, but this dependence produces a tendency towards mechanism. As Bergson's philosophy has shown, these abstractions are of an entirely different character than the present, and will thus never be a perfect fit for it. But just the same, we are constantly lured by their clarity and simplicity. Like Vanessa Bayer's SNL character, Jacob the Bar Mitzvah Boy, we are drawn into the script. Bergson's philosophic theory shows that such scripts always underlie our identity and interactions, though his theory of the comic adds that often, these scripts go unnoticed. In incidents that are comic, these scripts are revealed through their misapplication. The comic is thus seen as corrective because it pulls us out of moments of mechanistic myopia and encourages increased attention to the present circumstance.

In my view, what Bergson characterizes as the corrective nature of the comic is eminently critical. "Rule-bound" ways of coping are revealed through their misapplication; this statement seems to indicate the role rigid, abstract structures play in who people are and what they do, and so it might seem that Bergson's theory of the comic is strictly concerned with ethics. But as the following chapter will show, Bergson's view applies to discursive structures in ways that are quite relevant to the work we hope to do in Rhetoric and Composition. Specifically, when we apply Deleuze's rendering of Bergson into a "post-structuralist idiom" to his theory of the comic, we will find that packed into our moments of laughter is the unmasking of discursive structures that had previously served to organize the ways we understand and respond to the world but that had previously gone unnoticed. Bergson says that the comic "has something of its own to tell" (1); I argue that this something is akin to the unmasking of logics, morals, and hierarchies that we hope to position students to unmask in our writing courses.

However there is an obvious, key difference between the ways we accomplish critical perspective in CCS courses and the ways we achieve it in our perception of laughter. In CCS-inflected writing courses, the means by which we critically engage discursive structures are themselves discursive—a process Worsham characterizes as "not sufficiently critical" (235)—while the act of critical perception that Bergson sees in laughter is of a much different nature. Paradoxically, the critical content facilitated by CCS pedagogy and laughter are quite similar, and yet the form of that content is—to use the Bergsonian term—entirely "different in kind." This difference has profound effects, not only for the ability of the critical knowledge in question to mesh with the moving, corporeal world, but for the ways we arrive at that knowledge and, in the context of a writing course, our ability to connect the critical perspective we offer in our classes with the ways students understand and respond to the world in real life. On the one hand,

CCS practices a kind of inquiry into discursive matters that is, itself, discursively-bound, while on the other hand, laughter uses the failure of the discursive to fully mesh with the corporeal world as a starting point for critical perspective.

To conclude my dissertation, I will argue that understanding this distinction is key to addressing the problems with critical pedagogies that Worsham, Rickert, and others have correctly identified but thus far struggled to address in their work. Bergson's theory of laughter will serve to show, by contrast, how the non-discursive can (and should!) serve as a grounds from which to build critical knowledge. It will show we might take into account the role the non-discursive plays in how we know and act in the world, and how we might better attend to this more holistic understanding of cognition in the ways we shape our writing courses. Further, while laughter seems special to me for the ways it seems to be a highly embodied form of critical cognition, I suspect that others might find new ways in which the Bergsonian distinction between the abstract and the moving, the mechanical and the living, can support other kinds of inquiry that might serve the aims of Rhetoric and Composition courses.

In what follows, I will first provide a more detailed explanation of Bergson's theory of the comic along a trajectory similar to my earlier work with Bergson, moving from one half of Bergson's core distinction between the living (or the *élan vital*, which presupposes duration) to the other, the mechanical (abstract or discursive structures), and arriving at his conception of the ways we negotiate these forces, intuition, which in the case of laughter is inherently critical. I will then render Bergson's theory of laughter into a 'poststructuralist idiom,' or terms that make clearer how the critical perspective it contains might be relevant to the ways we understand critical perspective in Rhetoric and Composition. I close the chapter with detailed analysis of actual courses, complete with analysis of sample student writing, that suggests that coping with

the challenge the non-discursive poses for our critical aims might start with rethinking how we understand the content of a course.

**Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic**

Just as Bergson claims to "have no system" of philosophy, he approaches the study of humor with a reluctance towards codifying or taxonomizing it. He says, somewhat loftily, that "we shall not aim at imprisoning the comic spirit with a definition. We regard it, above all, as a living thing. However trivial it may be, we shall treat it with the respect due to life" (1). Bergson does manage, however, to isolate three traits that, in loose ways, help define what he call the "comic spirit":

1. The comic "does not exist outside the pale of the human." Bergson points out that "a landscape may be beautiful, charming, and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable" (2). He concedes that we might on occasion laugh at non-human things, such as an animal or object, but in such cases he insists that, in the animal's case, we laugh because we have detected some "human attitude or expression," or in the case of an object, "the shape that men [or women] give it" (2). There is something about humans, it seems, that makes them ripe for comedy, while other beings and objects lack this quality. This something, as the next trait will show, pertains to the extent to which humans rely on intelligence or conceptual thinking in socializing with one another and making their way through the world.

2. Laughter is incompatible with emotion. Bergson asserts that in a society "composed of pure intelligence there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune and in unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter" (2-3). The first part of this statement could potentially be misleading: Bergson says that in a society composed to a large degree of intelligence there would probably still be laughter, and it would be possible to read in this statement the idea that intelligence is the means through which we perceive what is comical; in some senses, this might loosely be correct, but what Bergson is trying to point to here is that "intelligent" behavior is itself what is comical. There would still be laughter in the 'intelligent' society because people would often make the mistake of over-deferring to their intellect, misapplying the rigid concepts required for intellectual thinking to a world that is fluid and in constant motion. Conversely, Bergson argues that emotion is the "foe" of laughter; "emotional souls," according to Bergson, are "in tune and in unison with life" (2). For them, "every event [is] prolonged and re-echoed." The term, "re-echoed" is admittedly vague, but when Bergson says that "emotional souls are in tune and in unison with life" he is trying to call attention to the fact that emotion, as something that takes place over time, resists conceptual representation. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson works to show how emotion (or sensation) partakes of duration because it is marked by change and the interpenetration of one emotion into another (7), and these are qualities which are negated when we attempt to represent emotions with concepts, a process that negates their temporal character.  If intelligence is what is fundamentally comical, it is the negation of temporality that makes it so.

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3.  Laughter "stand[s] in need of an echo." This statement points to affect, something not explicitly addressed in Bergson's philosophic theory, though Massumi's work is in part inspired by Bergson, and affect is prominent there. There is also the work of Palmer and Albrecht-Crane, which I have showed shares many core assumptions with Bergson and in which affect plays a large role. What is significant about the way Bergson is using affect here is that he sees laughter as an intersubjective phenomena. Recall that for Bergson, conceptual thinking is borne partly out of the individual need to use past experience in order to cope with the present, but also out of the need to render experiences into ready-made concepts that we can all understand. Given Bergson's view that the comic is contained within conceptual thinking and intellect, his view that laughter is an intersubjective phenomenon has striking consequences for the ways we understand conceptual thinking and sociality. Bergson says that laughter "implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers" (3). Where under normal circumstances sociality depends upon the use of conceptual thinking, laughter enables sociality without channeling it through concepts that negate duration[14]. There are all kinds of interesting and worthwhile ways to puzzle through the consequences Bergson's philosophic theory and his theory of laughter hold for our understanding of laughter's affective properties. But what is important to note in the context of my project in this dissertation is that while laughter preys on the comic nature of conceptual thinking, normally a fact of social interaction, it is nevertheless an intersubjective phenomenon.

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[14] Bergson's work with this idea grows even more complex: his analysis focuses on how laughter takes place among a group within a group—that is not indiscriminately social, but instead has defined social limits.

Bergson would seem to say that while the comic reveals the structures that order our interaction in a critical light, it is still, somehow, a collective endeavor.

The comic spirit, in sum, has three traits: it is strictly human in the sense that it is a by-product of the use of conceptual thinking that characterizes human intellect, it tends to emerge when we defer to this kind of intellectual thinking in lieu of more sensory-geared ways of knowing like emotion (ways do not negate time and the present), and it is inherently social, which implies that it resides not in individuals, but between and among them. The comic and the laughter that flows from it cannot be confined to a concept because the comic enjoys a critical relationship with conceptual thinking. According to Bergson, then, the comic spirit thrives among groups of people who depend on conceptual thinking to relate to one another and make their collective way through the world and who are yet capable of acknowledging the limitations of these concepts. He seems to say that the constructs that structure sociality negate parts of ourselves and our experiences, but also that we are capable of perceiving each other (or The Other) in ways that defy conceptual thinking. Bergson's more general philosophy suggests that just as conceptual representation negates movement, what we perceive of the other—that which defies conceptual representation—might be the aspects of it (him/her) that move or unfold over time. We achieve critical perspective on the structures that order our interaction, then, when we perceive them failing, as they inevitably will, to account for the way others and the world are in constant motion. In *Laughter*, Bergson argues that such perception is bound up in the (necessarily social) act of laughing. In the next section, I use Bergson's notions of *élan vital* and the "living" to examine more closely what about movement is relevant to humor and laughter.

*Élan Vital and the living*

  *Élan vital* is implicit in the Bergsonian distinction between the mechanical and living that drives both his philosophy and his theory of laughter; what Bergson sought to point out about time becomes, in *Laughter*, the defining characteristic of life and the living:

> Life presents itself to us as evolution in time and complexity in space. Regarded in time, it is the continuous evolution of a being ever growing older; it never goes backwards and never repeats itself. (44)

Here, the same notions of time that define Bergson's philosophy lurk in his theory of laughter. Life/time is in constant motion, never goes backwards, and never repeats itself. This mobility of time makes change and differentiation inevitable, and is thus, in a sense, a source of vitality: constant change demands that the people behave in 'lifelike ways.'

  As individuals and groups, then, we must respond to the new and the particularity of our circumstances—a particularity that exists, not only across space but across time—with suppleness:

> What life and society require of each of us is a constantly alert attention that discerns the outlines of the present situation, together with a certain elasticity of mind and body to enable us to adapt ourselves in consequence. Tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play. (9)

It is not enough, it seems, to simply develop guidelines for behavior—guidelines that might take the form of personality or social prescriptions for behavior (or some mixture of both). If the present circumstance will always be new, then no guideline or system of guidelines would ever suffice. Bergson's assertion that life and society require "constantly alert attention" to the present circumstance and the "elasticity of mind and body to adapt ourselves in consequence" is a

product of the creative "push" of *élan vital*. Were it not for time and movement, it seems, we might easily slip into the roboticism of our own individual and cultural logics.

*The immobility of the mechanical*

As Bergson's general philosophy has established, movement is a fact of reality. From this fact springs the inevitability of change, or *élan vital*. On the level of perception, we are plugged in to this movement, though Bergson— somewhat surprisingly for a critic of mechanism—says that we can never fully apprehend it, for to do so would require perceiving all that there is to perceive at once (recall Bergson's hypothetical concept, pure perception). Our gaze, Bergson argues, is limited by our vision, but also by the need to respond. Here is Bergson in *Laughter* on how this pragmatic need to respond shapes perception:

> Life demands that we grasp things in their relations to our own needs. Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the utilitarian side of things in order to respond to them by appropriate reactions: all other impressions must be dimmed or else reach us vague and blurred. I look and I think I see, I listen and I think I hear, I examine myself and I think I am reading the very depths of my heart. But what I see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection made by my senses to serve as a light to my conduct; what I know of myself I what comes to the surface, what participates in my actions. My senses and my consciousness, therefore, give me no more than a practical simplification of reality. In the vision they furnish me of myself and of things, the differences that are useless to man are obliterated, the resemblances that are useful to him are emphasized; ways are traced out for me in advance along which my activity is to travel. These ways are the ways all mankind has trod before me. Things have been classified with a view to

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the sue I can derive from them. . . . The individuality of things or of beings escapes us,

unless it is materially to our advantage to perceive it. (74-5)

In this passage, we see an illustration of the way that Bergson sees the need to act as limiting and

shaping perception; all that we "see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection

made by [our] senses to serve as a light to [our] conduct." Differences that are useless are

obliterated, while resemblances that are useful are emphasized.

But what is also important to note about this passage is how Bergson transitions from

individual perception to perception among groups. These obliterated differences and emphasized

resemblances are "traced out before [us] in advance along which [our] activity is to travel. These

ways are the ways all mankind has trod before [us]." Implied in this view is the idea that

knowledge and perception are, in part, the products of socialization. There are perhaps theories

that do better work drawing out the nuances of the socially-constructed nature of knowledge, but

this aspect of Bergson's theory is important to note because the mechanical, which again

characterizes conceptual thinking, is seen as an aspect of both individual intelligence and group

life. With intelligence, conceptual thinking helps us cope with new circumstances in smart,

productive ways; with group life, conceptual thinking helps us to relate to one another. In both

cases, it negates singularity and movement, rendering experience into temporally frozen,

generalized terms.


*Laughter as" reinsertion into the present"*

In its plainest terms, Bergson's theory says that we laugh when we perceive the

mechanical encrusted upon the living. The structure of this statement seems to imply that

laughter follows from the perception, as though a particular kind of cognition leads to a bodily

reaction. But recall that for Bergson, laughter is critical of the kind of rationality that we typically associate with cognition. Specifically, laughter is critical of thinking that makes use of concepts that are generalized across time. As such, the act of laughing is constituted not merely by the achievement of critical perspective on a structure that orders personality and social interaction, but by the reinsertion of one's self into the present. Laughing, in this way, is not a cognitive event followed by a bodily reaction, but is instead an escape from the over-determining, temporality-negating confines of systematic thinking. The realization of this prison is coterminous with escape from it.

Scholars such as Russel might say that in his general philosophic theory, Bergson struggled to account for the creation of the new *within* systematic thinking. His whole critique on the inadequacy of systematic thinking springs from his assertion that, in a sense, the question determines the answer, so it would be fair to put to two challenges to Bergson: First, if it's true that systematic thinking is unable to come up with anything new, how do we account for the proliferation and differentiation of thought? And second, if it truly is impossible to think anything new, then what are we to accomplish with academic inquiry? To the first question, Bergson replies that there is enough slippage within the constructs of systematic thinking to find room to create new constellations of thought. As Heisenberg's work suggested, systematic thought contains the seeds of its own undoing (Guerlac 17), and this leaves enough wiggle room for the new to emerge. To the second, Bergson advocates that we try whenever possible to depart from the use of "ready-made concepts" and that we incorporate more metaphor in our thinking and speaking because doing so highlights a new dimension of the thing in question[15].

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[15] This line of thinking leads to Massumi's argument that we should, when doing Cultural Studies, understand that we're not uncovering something from the past, but creating something new, and so we might as well 'have fun with it.'

But Bergson's theory of laughter suggests an alternative, one that is not so much a way of thinking the new but a new way of thinking. This new way of thinking will inevitably lead to fresh ideas because, unlike the frozen rationality we tend to ascribe to cognition, it is a way of thinking in which the moving, changing present asserts itself in the face of calcification into rigid concepts. Through laughter our thinking is shocked out of the grooves of mechanism; we let go of the concepts that had previously shaped our knowing and are reinserted into the moving present, where we are in closer touch with *élan vital*, the inevitable vitality of change. We might thus consider laughter to be a form of critical cognition for the ways it unmasks the role systems play in our thinking and sociality. Though because it is critical of the kinds of rationality we typically associate with cognition, laughter is cognition of a different sort. In place of hallmarks of cognition such as logic, concepts, and systems of thinking—all of which freeze time— laughter as cognition partakes of bodies, and especially, the ways they move. Another way to say this is that for Bergson, bodies and movement become the basis for achieving critical perspective.

What I mean to do in what follows of this dissertation is to consider how we might, through using moments of our students' own laughter as starting points for critical inquiry, use bodies and the ways they move as a means for generating critical perspective, but also, for encouraging a habit of being that itself is inherently critical. It helps that this habit of being, which we might call having sense of humor, is pleasurable. It also helps that unlike CCS pedagogies in which there is a large gap between the concepts we teach and the role bodies and affects play in the ways that people make use of them, laughter as critical cognition resonates with and partakes of bodies and movement. In order to move on to these more practical matters, however, I will first have to shore up this work I've done explaining the critical nature of

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laughter by giving a clearer account of how, exactly, laughter offers critical perspective that is relevant to the work we do in Rhetoric and Composition. Bergson's thesis that laughter as the critical perception of the mechanical encrusted upon the living could be applied in numerous ways, though in the following two sub-sections, I focus on the two ways of applying it that I suspect might be most useful or relevant to the teaching of writing: language (or discursivity) and ethics (or subject formation).

*The comic in language*

Guerlac and Mullarkey have argued that part of the reason behind Bergson's lull in popularity was due to the way his philosophy stuck mostly to metaphysical matters while others, such as Hegel and Derrida, enjoyed more popularity because their work was more directly concerned with linguistics. The same could be said of Bergson's theory of laughter, wherein the connection to linguistics is mostly implicit. This connection is important in the scope of my project, however, because it will help clarify a kind of critical perspective contained in laughter that might align with the kind of critical posture toward language that we hope to foster in a writing course.

Recall that for Bergson, what makes a thing mechanical is rooted in its relationship to movement—specifically, that the mechanical doesn't change over time, or we might say, that it suppresses *duration*. Given that the terms, concepts, and grammatical structures of language are relatively stable, it is fairly clear that they evince the same *duration*-suppressing qualities. Bergson best illustrates the *duration*-suppression qualities of language when he discusses emotion in *Time and Free Will*; recall that the act of naming an emotion, according to Bergson, negates not only the particularity of emotions, but the ways they unfold over time. Emotions

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interpenetrate each other, he asserts, and one emotion is in part determined or shaped by those that came before it. Bergson's analysis of the dancer provides a similarly useful illustration: our sympathy with the dancer's movements is rooted in the relationship the dancer's present movement shares (or flows smoothly out of) the preceding movements. When we name an emotion—or a dance move—we implicitly suggest that it stops and starts at a discrete moment in time and is in a constant state throughout its duration. This same rigidity implied in the act of naming applies as well to grammars and systems of thought. It is thus not a stretch to say that the same stability that makes linguistic structures work for us represent the world as though it were frozen in time.

Bergson says that "we laugh at anything rigid, ready-made, [or] mechanical," and language, he asserts, is rife with "ready-made formulas and stereotypes" (55); a term is useful because it can be repeated. A speaker uses words that I have heard before and that helps me to understand them. The same goes for grammatical or discursive structures, which might favor a particular worldview. But, Bergson points out, "really living life should never repeat itself. Where there is repetition or complete similarity, we always suspect some mechanism at work" (17). Such rigid mechanism, when we detect it, appears as a "foreign body. . . in the living community of human affairs [and] is of peculiar interest as being a kind of absentmindedness on the part of life" (43)—it reveals a "deflection of life toward the mechanical. . . [which] is the real cause of laughter (16). By containing insight into the ways that language negates singularity and movement, the act of laughing is the act of noting the shortcomings of language—of noting the ways that, when compared to life, language acts as a "foreign body. . . in the living community of human affairs." Though of course, the act of laughing may not necessarily embody critical perspective of the whole of language and discursivity, but that is the point. When we laugh at a

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particular joke, pun, or some other structure that reveals the systematic rigidity or inadequacy of language to be supple in its relationship to life (or *élan vital*)—what Bergson calls a "lapse of attention in language" (60)—we are laughing at that particular inadequacy. The realization is not necessarily a metaphysical one. Rather, it reveals a particular way in which language had structured thought. This kind of work is potentially, I argue, quite useful given the critical aims of Rhetoric and Composition courses, though I will demonstrate exactly how in later sections where I will discuss actual samples of students making use of such critical insights in service of academic inquiry.

*The comic in ethics*

It is reasonably easy to guess how Bergson's thoughts on language might be relevant to the teaching of writing, though it might be less readily apparent how ethics might be relevant, or for that matter, what Bergson's theory of ethics might look like. A theory of ethics is, however, is present in his work, and it is even more apparent in his theory of laughter, though it does require elucidation. Precisely how ethics might relevant to the work we do in writing classes will become more apparent as I make my way through this section.

In the discussion of the comic in language, we saw how it was language's mechanistic tendencies—the way it generalizes across space and especially time—that make it potentially comical. This inadequacy or negation alone, however, is not seen by Bergson as enough to render something comic. What makes it comic is when the abstract structure is in some way uttered, adopted, or employed by something that ought to resemble the living—that ought to change and move as living things do. Bergson says repeatedly that what makes a person comical

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is when he or she gives the impression of behaving like a machine (15); the inherent shortcoming in language becomes comical when it comes to dominate the actions or behavior of a person.

However, as Bergson's work discussing intellect shows, we as people are constituted to a large degree by our attempt to draw from past experiences in order to cope with new, unfamiliar circumstances. The rules for behavior that we generate might, in some senses, be described as an aspect of our personality. As a result, Bergson says that the root of all that is comic is the comic in character, and that in a sense, all character is comic to the degree that a person's character or personality is a predictor for how they will behave; character (or personality) is a propensity towards a certain way of seeing or mode of action that by its very nature lies in tension with a world which is unpredictable and which demands responses tailored to the particularity of situations. So while things like character, personality, and intellect constitute our attempts to cope with unfamiliar circumstances by drawing on past experiences, they exhibit what Bergson calls an "absentmindedness"—an innate failure to perceive the world in a supple a fashion as one might. Here is Bergson at discussing how absentmindedness of character is apparent when a person falls from hitting an object in the road:

> A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing. They would not laugh at him, I imagine, could they suppose that the whim had suddenly seized him to sit down on the ground. They laugh because his sitting down is involuntary. Consequently, it is not his sudden change of attitude that raises a laugh, but rather the involuntary element in this change,—his clumsiness, in fact. Perhaps there was a stone on the road. He should have altered his pace or avoided the obstacle. Instead of that, through lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum, the muscle's continued to perform the same

movement when the circumstances called for something else. That is the reason of the

man's fall, and also of people's laughter. (5)

A person who runs into a pole while texting is funny to behold because, in both the most literal

and abstract sense, he or she exhibits an "absentmindedness on the part of life." We laugh

because a behavior that had previously appeared to be quite natural was instead revealed to be

the product of a person's over-immersion in the abstract, his/her over-dependence on "rule-

bound" ways of behaving to the extent that he/she was unable to adapt to the present, new

circumstance. Threatened by mechanism, *élan vital* reasserts itself as a pole to the face.

Just as walking down the street demands alert attention to the present circumstance, so

too does society demand suppleness and sensitivity, and this is perhaps where the comic

becomes most poignant.  Bergson says that "each member [of society] must be ever attentive to

his social surroundings; he must model himself on his environment"; for Bergson, social life

shifts and moves and demands responses that meet the particular exigencies of any situation. A

person ought not simply rely on the habitual responses coded in his/her character or personality,

and when he or she does, such a person suffers the correction of the comic:

> Comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbor's personality ceases to affect us.
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> It begins, in fact, with what might be called a growing callousness to social life. Any
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> individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about
>
> getting into touch with the rest of his fellow-beings. It is the part of laughter to reprove
>
> this absentmindedness and wake him out of his dream. (66)

People, Bergson contends, cannot simply "shut [themselves] up in [their] own particular

character[s] as a philosopher in his[or her] ivory tower. . ." (66). Instead, we must remain open to

being affected by "our neighbor's personality"—to "get[ting] in touch with the rest of [our]

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fellow human beings" (66). Grasping the full import of this statement requires drawing on what we know (or might suspect) of what Bergson means by phrasings like 'getting in touch with our fellow human beings' and 'being affected by their personalities,' though there is slippage in the ways Bergson talks about personality here and elsewhere that could be cause for confusion. In *Laughter*, personality, which is akin to character, is seen as the relatively fixed element of who we are—a fixed element that grows out of the way our perception, which is limited by the pragmatic need for action, leads to intellect. But when Bergson uses the term, "personality" in the preceding passage, he must mean something other than the mechanical elements of character. The phrase, 'getting in touch,' is a cue that Bergson has something more tangible, more overtly corporeal in mind. The personalities of our neighbors might indeed by constituted in part by the mechanical, but the sum of our "fellows," who themselves struggling constantly to apply fixed rules (or propensities) for behavior to situations that are fluid, cannot be accounted for in strictly mechanical ways. They have bodies, and their being, like the boy who becomes a man, is defined not by a static set of rules, but by a continual, suspended state of becoming. Bergson says that "in one sense it might be said that all character is comic, provided we mean by character the ready-made element in our personality, that mechanical element which resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically" (73). The "ready-made," which is aspect of our intelligence, character, personality—whatever—helps us respond to each other just as it helps us to respond to the world, though it also simultaneously negates the fact that, like the world around us, people are not static beings but are suspended in a constant state of change.

In this way *élan vital* is not merely a characteristic of the physical, non-human world; it is endemic to what it means to be a person in it. The fact that neither we nor our fellows are frozen in time means that we, too, can never rely overmuch on fixed instructions for behavior. Such

becomes especially apparent when we are around each other. Laughter, "stands in need of an echo" because it is through the struggle to adapt and respond to one another that the mechanical both comes in handy and is, in cases of the comic, revealed to be inadequate.

This view that understanding sociality and ethics requires understanding the ways that they move is, as I have shown, implicit to varying degrees in the work of Johnson, Worsham, Rickert, and especially, in that of Hawk, Palmer, and Albrecht-Crane, though in their cases, it is employed to the end of understanding the shortcomings and failures of writing pedagogy—specifically, the ways that writing pedagogy denies students the ability to draw upon the same "vital" resources they draw upon in their day-to-day interactions. With Bergson's theory of laughter, that knowledge is employed to a different end. Bergson is not trying to simply show how individual and social life is suspended in a continual state of becoming; he is also trying to show how that state—*élan vital*—asserts itself in relation to the structures of personality and sociality in ways that we might consider critical. In a sense, where we might see the Rhetoric and Composition people as using movement to understand the problems of writing pedagogy, Bergson presents a view that could thus be construed as seeing movement as a potential solution. In the upcoming second section of this chapter, I will investigate my attempts to make use of Bergson's more positive posture and his work suggesting that *élan vital* (or movement, change) is a real and tangible source of critical perspective, one that our students already use on a daily basis. The challenge, but also the potential, lies in finding ways for students to tap those critical moments and impulses in service of learning how to write and think critically.

**Laughter, movement, and *élan vital* in the writing classroom**

I have argued in previous chapters that we need to do more than simply generate affective engagement in writing courses—that we need to generate affective engagement that resonates in positive ways with our pedagogical mission. Johnson, Worsham, Rickert, Hawk, Palmer, and Albrecht-Crane have helped to show how, in various ways, current ways of teaching academic writing and critical inquiry neglect to take into account the non-discursive elements of students' experience. This neglect results in our treating students as though they exist only through their discursive interactions, and it produces a gap between the rhetorical concepts and behaviors we teach and the ways students interact rhetorically in the real world. In some cases this failure to account for our students' non-discursive selves results in resistance, while in others it might only lead to a lack of interest and students' failure to tap their full rhetorical potential. In any case, it is implicit in the work of these Rhet/Comp scholars, and explicit in the work of Bergson, that this gap between the abstract concepts we teach and the real world is a product of the fact that concepts are rigid and frozen while the real world and people are continually in motion and in a constant state of becoming.

But how can we close this gap? Or to frame the problem another way, how are we to make more immediate and lifelike the experience of staring through a computer screen into a dimension which, unlike the world we live in, is suspended in time? How are we to make writing, which apparently requires the mental acrobatics of stopping the world from spinning, more like our interactions with the world and people, interactions of which a key component is the fact that they unfold continuously? Bergson's framing of the problem might perhaps allow us to find better solutions, better ways to allow for students' positions on the matters they research and the relationships they construct with others through the act of research writing to take place

over time. Shifting from teaching writing that is thesis-based to writing that is inquiry-based is one way. Another is to use course structures that leave more room for the intersubjective aspects of writing by positioning students to write for real audiences, or perhaps to interact over time with real fellow researchers in the context of a research community. I believe that these are worthwhile solutions and I'm confident that other scholars have already found—and will continue to find—other solutions whose efficacy stems from the ways they allow for students' subjectivity and cognition to unfold over time (whether these scholars view their work through the lens of movement or not).

But I also believe that another approach the problem could take a cue from a way that people have already attempted to solve it, almost intuitively: laughter. Nearly all of my students, and a large proportion of my peers, have at one time or another turned to a funny YouTube video or some other convenient source of laughter in order re-charge and refresh their minds when, while writing, it grows difficult to frame ideas or construct sentences or to write prose that is clear and lifelike. Bergson's work suggests that such fatigue might be the product of attempting to dwell in a tenseless world for too long; his work on laughter, but also our collective habit of looking to a funny video clip in order to reinvigorate ourselves, suggests that the act of laughing helps us to reinsert ourselves into the living, moving stream of life. While the act of writing denies us access, to a degree, to movement and change—to *élan vital*—the act of laughing allows us to re-inhabit the living, moving present, which is central to the mechanisms by which we understand and act in the world. However, as my analysis of Berk and other humor pedagogies shows, the increased energy, engagement, and creativity that grows from situating laughter temporally proximate to the cognitive work our students are engaging in might be effective to a degree, but does not entirely solve the problem posed for writers by the

tenselessness of discursivity. The boost to cognition that writers might enjoy through respites of laughter that reawaken their vital selves does not actually connect the act of writing to a living, moving world in a meaningful way.

For the remainder of this dissertation I want to consider how we might do better than merely tent-poling the somewhat tenseless activity of writing by stitching in moments of affective stimulation—as a science teacher might hope to get students to better absorb her lesson by wearing a clown nose—to instead position students to use movement and *élan vital* as a source of perspective and a starting point for critical projects. The idea will be to position students to use moments of their laughter (moments in which they perceived in instance of the "mechanical encrusted upon the living") as the object of inquiry for research projects, with students subsequently using scholarly perspectives on humor, laughter, and/or general rhetorical theory to expand upon that realization and to transform it into perspective that might be useful in academic contexts. The hope is that the affective energy of the students' moment—energy that is the product of being "in touch" with others and *élan vital*—will bleed forward into the act of writing. There is, however, the potential to object to this hope on theoretical grounds: Bergson's own theory stipulates that when we look to the past to generate insight into experience, we collapse duration and condense the living into the mechanical. This is a perfectly reasonable objection because having students look to their past experiences in order to generate discursively-bound perspectives seems almost to recreate the process by which individuals and groups generate guidelines for behavior. And yet, regardless of what the theory might encourage us to think, I noticed in my courses that when students engaged in this kind of inquiry, they were more engaged in their projects, and their thinking and writing improved as (I assume) a result. Further, the conclusions they arrived at, while slightly different than traditional critical or

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rhetorical inquiry, showed an insight into rhetorical matters that, I suspect, might be even more valuable. Perhaps instead of seeing such moments as acts of uncovering we ought to see them— as Massumi urges us to—as acts of creation.

The upcoming section will discuss the kind of critical knowledge built into humor through a student's research project in which ethics becomes both the comical matter that initially stimulated the students' laughter as well as the specific area of rhetorical insight that her research into this matter produced. Before diving into this analysis, however, I should also point out that this project is far from perfect, both from the perspective of what we hope to achieve in a research-writing course and in making as productive as possible use of a critical insight that initially sprung from a students' comedic sensibility. The work of finding ways to better enable such projects is an ongoing process, one that I do not mean to suggest ends here. And yet it is my hope that by sharing this project I might inspire others to experiment in similar ways to find new approaches to the teaching of writing that narrow the gap between the discursively-bound work our students do and *élan vital*.

*A new kind of inquiry*

In the previous chapter I explained how I had initially positioned students to engage theories on humor and laughter, and how that strategy failed to engage students affectively in inquiring critically into rhetorical matters. But then, a new kind of project was spawned by the in-between moments and tangential conversations about humor and its rhetorical dimensions in which students began sharing moments of laughter from their own lives. Such moments were somewhat startling for the degree of interest they generated, both on the part of the person sharing, but also on the part of peers who had similar experiences to share and/or who, drawing

on course concepts or texts, were eager to offers some explanation or insight on the matter. At around the same time I had been using Candice Spigelman's essay, "Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse" as one of two texts through which to frame the course and to helps student think and write about academic writing, and this lead to students beginning to consider their own lives as texts suitable for academic inquiry. Perhaps as a result, it seemed natural to both the students and myself that moments of laughter from students' own lives should make for useful research projects. Further, as we engaged in conversations over what made students' projects meaningful, the source of meaning for the student was as often less a product of anything endemic to the humor and more often a product of how he or she and her friends bonded over the humorous text  And so students came to propose doing projects in which they began by describing a moment of laughter that was meaningful to them by working from that experience to frame a research question and engage in subsequent research into the matter, and by then producing a research project that helped the student better understand the workings of the particular moment while also hoping to generate perspective that might be useful to others who might be interested in the particular subject matter.  In what follows, I will discuss one example of the kind of projects I'm advocating in order to consider its merit in generating affective engagement in critical inquiry into the rhetorical dimensions of human experience.

*"The Power of 'Wah'"*

Happily, this writer's project grows out of a joke that is less controversial, more innocent, and more endearing than the last writer's. I'll let her round out the introduction[16]:

> For as long as I can remember, I have never gotten along with my siblings. My older brother, T____, and my younger sister, A____, always seemed to team up and I was always the target of their humor. For years they would always find something to pick on me for. When I was little it was because I carried my blanket with me everywhere, then when I was a preteen they made fun of my weight. To my parents it was just normal teasing and my siblings never understood why I always took everything so offensively. When I was a teenager I realized that all this time they were just messing around in good fun so I began to play along with them. Soon I realized that I was not the target, everyone at one point was the one being laughed at. When you let yourself laugh with the people laughing at you it all doesn't seem so serious anyone and it is actually fun.

> My brother has always been the one cracking jokes and never takes anything serious, me on the other hand used to take everything literally. One day my brother was getting yelled at by my dad for something, I don't even remember, and my dad was getting really angry. My brother sat quietly just listening to my dad complain and when he had finally finished my brother loudly responded with, "WAH" in a mock baby voice. My mom and I started laughing because my dad literally had nothing to respond and just looked stunned. He could have responded argumentatively and escalated the situation, but his simple response defused the tension and ended the conversation while still allowing my dad to get his point across. So, the "WAH" response in our family was born.

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[16] A full copy of the student's research and reflective essays is included in Appendix B.

This got me thinking about what role humor plays in my family. From that point on, anytime you say any sort of complaint in my house you can bet that you're not going to get an apology or sympathy, but instead you'll receive a sarcastic "wah". (1)

From here, the student applies Cohen's theory of laughter (we used a chapter from his book and one from Morreall's as course texts) to the joke to show how it required a frame of reference that only she and her family members shared.

The writer turns next to Morreall, Freud, and Spencer, to discuss the Relief Theory of humor, which leads her to observe that "humor plays a major role in the social dynamic of [her] family. [She] feel[s] that [she is] at a certain level of comfort with [her] family members if [she] can make a joke about them and they know that [she] only mean[s] good fun" (3). She draws on David Holmstrom, who she says sees humor as a "bonding agent that creates and maintains relationships through a shared sense of humor" (3), prompting her to make the following assertion:

> I think that the ability for people to communicate through humor shows that they have a strong relationship. If you can poke fun at your family or friends and they know that you are just kidding it demonstrates just how close you are with them. (4).

The writer then examines the effect teasing has on young children. For this, she draws on the work of Samantha Cleaver, who she says "believes that teasing children is critical for young children to develop other social skills that they can use when they're older" (4).

> I agree with Samantha and think that the "wah" joke in our house is actually preparing us for adulthood. In the "real" world, people are not going to give you what you want simply because you complain. Complaining does not get you anywhere in life, it simply just makes you seem naggy. When I complain to my parents or siblings about something I

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want that I do not really need or when I whine about something unfortunate that

happened to me I feel like it is their way of saying that you just need to deal with some

things and complaining will not get you what you want you have to work for it.(4-5)

It is important to note here that the writer is seeing humor doing a particular kind of work—a

kind of work that I will soon discuss.

From there, the writer turns to the work of Randall Rogan and Betty H. La France, who

she says "believe that humor is another way to relax situation that might be blown out of

proportion. . . by replac[ing] negative feelings with positive ones by distraction" (5). In order to

test out this theory, the student applies it to the following example from her own life:

One time my sister was looking for a shirt and could not find it because I had worn it the

day before without asking. As she starting to get angrier and angrier I responded with,

"Want me to dial whine-1-1 to send the WAHambulance?"  She smirked, that was the

end of the discussion. (5)

The student concludes that the "situation is an example of how humor can be the "social glue" of

relationships because it allowed me and my sister to not argue further and get along with each

other" (5).

Following this work, the writer examines the perspectives of Stefan Stiegar, Anton K

Foremann and Christopher Burger, whose contention that teasing negatively affects self-esteem

the writer sees as revealing in some ways, but which she ultimately disagrees with, citing her

own experience demonstrating how humor functioned as "glue" among her family members. She

asserts, "when my family and I are on the border between aggression and getting along, the

"wah" joke always seems to tip the scale and make us happier with each other" (8). The writer

then concludes her research essay by explaining how it might be relevant to others and by closing with an observation that is both true and, given the context, ironic:

> Although the "wah" joke is my family's unique way to interact, other families that have inside jokes with each other might now see that their funny one-liner might be more complex after putting thought into it. Also after people read my paper they can now see just a few of the several functions of humor and realize just how important it is in our daily lives. After all of the research that I have done, I do not think that "wah" will be as funny to me as it was before, because I will be thinking of so many other things that it does apart from make me laugh. (9)

In broad strokes, the writer's research project begins in a fashion similar to that of her peer: She starts with a humorous moment that is stands out or is meaningful to her, and proceeds from there to use scholarship to help her better understand that moment. As with the first student's project, because humor and laughter are rhetorical subjects, and because the scholarship on them is subsequently concerned with rhetorical matters (even when not produced within the discipline of Rhetoric), the writer finds herself inquiring into the rhetorical dimensions of her experience. Her work with the scholarship looking first into the shared conditions of the people involved and then into the notion that humor and laughter "brings them closer together" reveals how her interaction with her family members is both enabled and made difficult by societal expectations. The dad, when the joke was first born, was yelling at his son in what we might assume was a typical dad-ly fashion, probably in regards to something like cleaning the garage or mowing the lawn. In response, the son cracks a joke. It is not a random joke, but one that reveals something about the rhetorical situation the two had found themselves in: the father's behavior was being influenced by socially-prescribed tendencies that were in some way a poor fit for the situation.

It's funny when the son says "wah" because by doing so, he inhabits and exaggerates to comedic effect how the socially prescribed parent-child relationship had previously structured the father's behavior.

It will be worth examining more closely where the grounds for this critique emerge from, but for now it is enough to observe that the writer's paper is engaged in inquiry into ethics and subject-politics. The various anecdotes she takes up—the tension between her dad and brother over the nagginess that is socially prescribed for fathers, the tendency of people to complain, the fight the writer and her sister nearly had over a missing shirt—are moments in which the writer says she and her family "are on the border between aggression and getting along." In each case, the person resolving the tension does so by finding a comic flaw. In the first case, it might be that the dad had taken up his socially-prescribed fatherly duties to an extent that seemed in some way unreasonable or overdone given the circumstance. In the second case, the comic flaw lay in writer's use of complaining to try to get what she wanted when, apparently, the tactic wasn't appropriate (or effective) given the circumstance. And in the case of the potential fight over the shirt, the comic flaw lay in applying the tendency to get upset over one's property to a missing sweatshirt. All three cases exhibit what Bergson would describe as the comic in character—an "absentmindedness" in which the person committing the comic error deferred overmuch to a prescribed or rule-bound way of behaving or otherwise was guilty of a "callousness to social life."

Of course, the writer never gets so far as to state as much explicitly. Instead, she keeps circling around this theme of her family having conflicts and then resolving those conflicts through humor. Berlin-minded critical pedagogies would expect that the student articulate in some way how the behaviors that caused these conflicts were somehow the product of people

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being influenced by discursive structures, and I agree that such an articulation would make this project more useful to both scholars and the writer. But what a Berlin-minded pedagogy would miss is the value of the writer's recurring attempt to describe the "closeness" humor and laughter enable. The behaviors she describes are inspired by structures and prescriptions for behavior that in some ways reside in discourse, to be sure, but her project spills beyond the confines of discursivity by attempt to account for that which exceeds it. Time and again the writer looks at examples of people trying to interact through discursive channels only to find that those very channels occluded their ability to connect in some way; the solution in each case was for people to connect in an affective way. Bergson says that comedy begins "at the point where our neighbor's personality ceases to affect us," that an "individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting in touch with the rest of his fellow-beings" (66). What the writer's project accomplishes is inquiring into the means by which people correct the potential errors that lie in the instructions contained in discourse. Just as she falls short of fully describing the role of discursive or ethical structures in her family's interactions, she never fully gets to the point where she can explain the nature of this closeness that was impinged upon discursively. From Bergson, we know that this closeness can be described in terms of affect, sensation, or the sustained, interpersonal unfolding of becoming. But it's not entirely necessary for the student to explain things in this way. As a product of her research, she clearly recognizes something that CCS doesn't—that there exists a plane of human interaction that lies beyond the discursive, and that this plane is not only important in who we are, what we do, and how we interact with one another, but that it can also serve as a basis for critique. In her accompanying reflective essay, the writer says that she "never realized that a joke could teach you a life lesson"; she hasn't articulated the tension between the discursive and non-discursive nearly as well as we

might hope, though I argue that after engaging in this kind of inquiry, she is more likely to see other discursive forms in a critical light than she would if she had confined her thinking to the plane of discursivity as traditional approaches to writing pedagogy would've dictated. In other words, the writer's inquiry into humor and laughter, which offers non-discursive critical perspective on discursive matters, more closely resembled the ways that we think, feel, and move! in real life, and as a result, she will be more likely to be critically perceptive in future rhetorical circumstances.

Central to this equation is the way the laughter in the story is not the product of the critical cognition of an individual, but is instead spread among the members of the writer's family. In CCS-inflected writing pedagogies hope for individuals to behave in critical ways by shaping their interaction with discursive structures as though in such interactions, people engage the structures and not each other. In such a model, cognition becomes an isolated matter that takes place between the individual and the particular discursive structures at hand. The writer's project presents a somewhat different model. In her account, critical perception of discursive structures is a social act. The son doesn't utter his "wah" for his own benefit, but to disengage his father from comical tendencies. This might make it seem as though the son used critical cognition—his sense of humor—to achieve a social effect. But this conclusion neglects to account for the pleasure that laughter imparts is social pleasure, and that the most immediate critical knowledge built into laughter lies in the physical, affective sympathy people feel when laughing together, a sympathy that reveals in a critical light precisely what had been negated by the discursive structure in question. When we take a cue from Bergson and look at the way these events unfold over time and interpenetrate one another, we see that laughter is critical cognition that is distributed socially via affect. The writer approaches humor and laughter not as things that

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helped her as an individual, but that helped her family as a group. As Bergson says, laughter "stands in need of an echo." And so implicit in the writer's project—or any project that inquires into laughter—is the notion that cognition is a group endeavor: the writer's subsequent work with humor and laughter thus serve to show how, as a group, she and her family behaved critically in relation to the structures that ordered their behavior. I argue that as such, the critical habits that the writer honed in the course of this project will be more useful to her because they mirror as closely as possible the ways that criticality in the real world is a form of cognition which is not only embodied but which is socially-distributed.

I'd like to close this section with an observation about the how much of the value of this students' project grows from the way it inquires into the rhetorical dimensions of human experience. Often, our students' research projects delve into topics having nothing to do with rhetoric: they might research an environmental debate, the effects of social media, or bullying in schools, but not rhetoric. In such projects, rhetorical thinking serves as a means to achieve some other goal. But this project is different. As with the projects I discussed in Chapter 4, rhetorical concepts go beyond structuring the student's project in formal ways; they also function as content. Where typical research projects give students practical experience applying rhetorical concepts, this tactic of uniting form and content positions students to not only generate critical perspective in relation to sources, but to eventually arrive at critical perspective regarding rhetorical operations in general. Where the student might otherwise have engaged sources critically in order to arrive at some new perspective on an environmental debate, here, the student's research and his engagement of it produces critical perspective on the role language plays in our rhetorical interactions.

But as much could be said of any project that inquires into a students' own immediate rhetorical conditions. The question remains, what does the student gain by inquiring into humor that he would not have gained were he to inquire into the rhetorical dimensions of some other rhetorical phenomenon? Berk, Ziv, Wandersee, Garner, and others might argue that laughter's pedagogically-advantageous properties—the increase in energy, creativity, and engagement it generates—might bleed forward into the act of writing. Berk, for instance, argues that part of the reason his tactic of packaging his lessons in humor is that students associate the class with positive feelings and are thus more willing to put in the work necessary to succeed in it. I agree that the positive feelings the writer associates with his anecdote likely played a large role in lending him the energy and motivation to complete the project in more conscientious ways than he otherwise might have.

But I also believe that the role humor and laughter play in the success and value of this project is far more complicated than a merely associational one. Consonant with the way this project unites form and content under one critical banner, that value lies in the understanding of the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive that emerges through the writer's tackling of laughter, a phenomenon that we have seen has both discursive and non-discursive elements. Since laughter is a cognitive but also highly embodied occurrence, the student's inquiry into its attendant scholarship has him pondering the role that bodies play in our discursive interactions.

And yet we might acknowledge that laughter's markedly non-discursive, highly-affective qualities (and the scholarship which attempts to account for these qualities) postured the writer to examine extra-discursive forces in the course of his inquiry, but still ask, why laughter? Beyond the fact that humor theory enjoys the benefit of scholarship which points students in the right

direction, why not position them to engage in inquiry into the non-discursive elements of other rhetorical happenings?

**Conclusion:**

I began this dissertation by investigating three problems—resistance, apathy, and cynicism—which emerge when we try to shape students into critical subjects by asking them to critically "unmask" cultural interactions they'd previously enjoyed. Scholars in Rhetoric and Composition helped me to show how these problems stemmed from the way the critical method we taught invalidated students' embodied ways of knowing, but it was Bergson who framed the problem in a way that enabled it to be solved. His work showed how the rational and non-rational are fundamentally "different in kind," while also offering a theory, intuition, which positioned both the rational and non-rational as key components of how people navigate the moving, embodied world. Under normal circumstance, according to Bergson, we don't notice the interplay between our rational and non-rational ways of knowing, though we might presume that it saps a good deal of energy and causes a not insignificant amount of stress. But on occasion, we defer overmuch to our rational capacities, whereupon, if we're lucky, we perceive that mistake. For Bergson, laughter could thus be said to be embodied critical thinking.

What I have been after through the course of this dissertation, and what I have hoped to deliver in the last half of this final chapter, is an alternative to the critical method advocated by CCS-inflected pedagogies. Unlike Berlin's critical method that uses as its starting point heuristics for revealing how signifying practices convey not-always-visible economic, political, or cultural baggage, this new method begins with a bodily impulse—laughter—which I argue, again, is inherently critical. In this method, scholarship works heuristically, but instead of being

positioned to dismantle and invalidate students' embodied ways of knowing, it enhances them. This leaves room for students to bring the full force of their cognition to bear—cognition they had previously been taught was unprofessional or unsophisticated. There is no reason for students to resist such a tactic because it affirms rather than denies their affective constitutions, and yet, students are positioned to acquire critical perspective in relation to the discursive structures that shape them. Instead, students are allowed to be emotionally taken-up with their projects, projects that affirm their senses of humor while also producing insight that is academically-viable. Further, the ways that students "know in ways that precede discursive representation" (Hawk 119) becomes a source of invention which, aside from resonating with what students know intuitively, I argue is actually better critical work—work enabled by the inventive (or in the case of the comic, corrective) power of *élan vital*. Finally, because the resulting critical method doesn't deny but instead affirms what students know intuitively, it does not lead to the cynicism produced when the way of knowing we teach in our classes clashes with students' non-rational ways of knowing the world.

Though of course, I don't mean to argue that every Rhetoric and Composition course ought to employ the critical method I've laid out here. I do, however, believe we could learn from what Bergson did when he observed that the comic "has something of its own to tell," an observation which required that he momentarily resist attempting to know the world in strictly rational ways. We need to revise our current understanding of critical thinking, which was influenced by Berlin's focus in unmasking the ways that positions on things like economics, race, politics, and gender are built into signifying practices, in favor of a method that attempts to "rise above perception," and we could instead "plunge" into perception and, like Massumi says, let ourselves get caught up in the "flow," a flow which begins, in very concrete and potentially

productive ways, in our immediate, embodied contact with the present. So while I hope my project here inspires further interest in the potential humor and laughter hold for both rhetoricians and pedagogues, I hope readers take away an appreciation for students' natural, intuitive processes, an appreciation that I think could serve us in a variety of ways, from the overall design of our pedagogies to the mundane matters of designing classroom activities.

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# Appendix: The Power of "Wah"

## The Power of "Wah"

For as long as I can remember, I have never gotten along with my siblings. My older brother, Tim, and my younger sister, Annie, always seemed to team up and I was always the target of their humor. For years they would always find something to pick on me for. When I was little it was because I carried my blanket with me everywhere, then when I was a preteen they made fun of my weight. To my parents it was just normal teasing and my siblings never understood why I always took everything so offensively. When I was a teenager I realized that all this time they were just messing around in good fun so I began to play along with them. Soon I realized that I was not the target, everyone at one point was the one being laughed at. When you let yourself laugh with the people laughing at you it all doesn't seem so serious anyone and it is actually fun.

My brother has always been the one cracking jokes and never takes anything serious, me on the other hand used to take everything literally. One day my brother was getting yelled at by my dad for something, I don't even remember, and my dad was getting really angry. My brother sat quietly just listening to my dad complain and when he had finally finished my brother loudly responded with, "WAH" in a mock baby voice. My mom and I started laughing because my dad literally had nothing to respond and just looked stunned.  He could have responded argumentatively and escalated the situation, but his simple response defused the tension and ended the conversation while still allowing my dad to get his point across. So, the "WAH" response in our family was born. This got me thinking about what role humor plays in my family. From that point on, anytime you say any sort of complaint in my house you can bet that you're not going to get an apology or sympathy, but instead you'll receive a sarcastic "wah".

But WHY is the humorous? Why do families tease one another and what does poking fun at one another do? Have you ever wondered why it is socially acceptable for families to joke around with one another? This is what I plan on discussing in my research paper. Does humor function as a catalyst building bonds between family members? First I will define what type of humor "wah" is according to Morreall's theories of laugher. Next I will discuss what the function of humor is in the family setting. And, if humor plays a role in my family, does it play a role in other people's families too? And Finally I will discuss whether the function of humor is negative or positive on children in their developmental stage.

"Wah", It is very simple. Merriam Webster might not even consider it a real word but, in my house it definitely has meaning. Cohen would explain much better by his theory that jokes are conditional. He discusses that people who are on the receiving end of a joke need certain background information in order to "get" the joke. Cohen states that, "A conditional joke is one that can work only with certain audiences, and typically is meant for only those audiences. The audience must supply something in order to get the joke or be amused by it." (12) I think that Cohen would consider the "wah" response to be conditional because, one would need to have previous knowledge of what it means to our family in order to think it funny. For example, when my siblings or I have friends over and they hear my 57 year old dad make crying noises like a baby in response to us, they might think that he's lost his mind, but we know that he is basically telling us to stop whining. This is also where one might ask what level of humor is appropriate in the family setting. There has been no research done on this topic, and even if there were, family dynamics vary from unit to unit so there is no way to measure the level of appropriateness. It would depend on the person, because you have have to have a comfortable enough relationship with your dad for him to cry at you and for you not not think that it is unusual. Another example

of how this joke is conditional would be if I had said "wah" to one of my friends, they might think that I was trying to be annoying rather than humorous as one of my family members would. From Cohen, we can learn that jokes are more complex than they appear because on the surface to outsiders, they maybe would not find the humor in the situation as me or one of my family members would. I think that the theory that jokes are conditional is very accurate especially with the example I have given. This example can also make others reflect on some of the jokes that they have with others and make them consider what type of background information another would have in order to be "in" the joke.

Although the "wah" joke is simple, It could still be sorted into one of the types of humor that has been shaped by the minds of great scholars John Morreall, Sigmond Freud, and Herbert Spencer: the Relief Theory. As I previously mentioned, "wah" defused the tension arising between my dad and my brother, but why? According to the Relief Theory, "Laughing, rather is just a release of energy." When emotions, good or bad, build up we as human beings feel the need to release them. Laughter acts as a nonviolent outlet for us to express ourselves by. But, how does that apply to the family setting? I think that humor plays a major role in the social dynamic of my family. I feel that I am at a certain level of comfort with my family members if I can make a joke about them and they know that I only mean good fun. Having the ability to have fun and enjoy this type of humor with another one shows that we have a bond together and that we get along. In my research, I have found some other sources that agree with me that humor plays a role in families. David Holmstrom, author of "The Family That Laughs Together..." states that, "Humor may be the safest, most inexpensive glue in the world to help hold families together" (2). What he means by "glue" is that it is a bonding agent that creates and maintains relationships through a shared sense of humor. It seems that Holstrom uses "social glue" as

metaphor for the bond that humor creates between two individuals. Throughout Holmstrom's article, he mentions how humor can be therapeutic. I think that the ability for people to communicate through humor shows that they have a strong relationship. If you can poke fun at your family or friends and they know that you are just kidding it demonstrates just how close you are with them. It would be awkward to approach a stranger and start joking around with them because how are they supposed to know that you are not being serious? It is important to have pervious interaction with someone and for them to get to know you before you start joking around with them.

So, what IS the point of humor? Why do we need humor in our lives? Well, according to Samantha Cleaver's "Just Teasing", humor is a vital developmental milestone that plays a vital role in children. Cleaver believes that teasing children is critical for young children to develop other social skills that they can use when they're older. I think that she is right because it might teach children to not take everything so literally and could help them understand sarcasm which is used a lot in the adult world. Cleaver believes that teasing children at a young age will help them develop social skills as an adult. She writes, "... productive teasing wherein children make fun of their friends without aggression or intention of hurting their feelings to assist them in building relationships and using humor to address taboo topic." (1) If parents do not explain and practice using sarcasm in the home, then their children will be ill prepared and have difficulty using it in other social situations making them susceptible to awkward situations later in life. I agree with Samantha and think that the "wah" joke in our house is actually preparing us for adulthood. In the "real" world, people are not going to give you what you want simply because you complain. Corrective Complaining does not get you anywhere in life, it simply just makes you seem naggy. When I complain to my parents or siblings about something I want that I do

not really need or when I whine about something unfortunate that happened to me I feel like it is their way of saying that you just need to deal with some things and complaining will not get you what you want you have to work for it.

Furthermore humor has more functions apart from cohesion building and life skills. Randall Rogan and Betty H. La France, authors of "An Examination of the Relationship Between Verbal Aggressiveness, Conflict Management Strategies, and Conflict Interaction Goals" think that there are several different ways to disengage tension and manage situations. I think that Randall Rogan and Betty H. La France would also agree with David Holmstrom that humor has positive effects. Rogan and La France believe that humor is another way to relax situation that might be blown out of proportion. I agree with this statement because there have been plenty of times in my house when conflict is rising and humor has acted as a scapegoat for the tension. Humor causes us to replace negative feelings with positive ones by distraction. For example, one time my sister was looking for a shirt and could not find it because I had worn it the day before without asking. As she starting to get angrier and angrier I responded with, "Want me to dial whine-1-1 to send the WAHambulance?" She smirked, that was the end of the discussion. This is a scenario of how humor can be therapeutic, my joke made her smile and realize that she was getting upset for something so small. This situation is an example of how humor can be the "social glue" of relationships because it allowed me and my sister to not argue further and get along with each other. Since humor works as a way for me and my family to connect and communicate, how, in what way? there is a good chance that it also works for others. After reading all of these sources that made me realize the lasting effect of a little joke maybe other families will realize the complexity of their own inside jokes.

So now that we have an idea of some of several purposes of humor, we might be curious as to how one develops a sense of humor. Carla Poole, author of, "You Funny, Baby!" believes that parents are advocates for developing a child's sense of humor. Poole discusses in her article that if humor is present in the home when we are growing up, we will pick up on it and it is learned from our parents. Holmstrom however, disagrees. Holmstrom's ariticle states that when people are born, they already have a sense of humor as if it were already in our genes. Holmstrom writes, "You have it or you don't, just as other talents are individual." Holmstrom believes that humor is already in the family and a person is born humorous. Poole believes that humor is cultivated throughout a persons life and is shaped by outside sources as we mature. Poole believes that when a child is young, humor is a cognitive development that evolves with thinking skills. Both Poole and Holmstrom have valid points, but I side with Poole that our parents are mostly responsible for how we view humor. If my family did not incorporate laughter into everyday situations when we are at home, I believe that I would be less likely to incorporate it into other social situations in the outside world. If humor is practiced in the home then individuals will be more likely to demonstrate their sense of humor in other social settings. However, Holmstrom's idea that we are born with humor in our genes may be true, but what is the point of a skill if there is no one to help you cultivate it and develop it further? You need to be around people who are also funny in order to express that trait with.

Clearly, humor functions as a catalyst for emotions in society but, is there a downside to humor? In our society, humor is viewed with a positive emotion, because when someone is laughing at a joke, they are seen as happy. But, is that always that case? According to Stefan Stiegar, Anton K Foremann and Christopher Burger this is not always true. Stiegar, Foremann and Burger are are researchers at the University of Vienna who are focusing on the relationship

between humor and self esteem. They believe that humor does more damage to a person's self esteem than good. Stiegar, Foremann and Burger take a pessimistic view on humor and jokes and believes that humor can have harmful negative effects such as depression, shyness and low self esteem. They write, "Indeed, we found that participants preferring a self-defeating humor style had damaged self-esteem." (3) So, when my family and I pretend to act like babies and say "wah" They would say that it is not a very positive reaction because it can have lasting negative effects. Although I do not necessarily agree with him, he does have a point. In fact, I can actually see what he means by saying that humor can make people feel bad. I have felt isolated before when my siblings gang up on me and make fun of me. Joking around is fine, but it can leave some people feeling upset while others are enjoying it. If you are constantly joking around where do you know when to draw the line between serious situations and joking ones? This is why I believe that it is important to have a comfortable enough relationship with someone in order to joke around with them Otherwise, there might be lasting effects on the way that a child perceives humor. Although no one enjoys being the target of other people's humor, I believe that when people are exposed to some ridicule, it can help them develop a "thicker skin" and make them less susceptible to getting their feeling's hurt if they are teased again.

Although the researchers from Vienna and Poole have very conflicting ideas on the effects of humor, because Poole considers humor the "social glue" that holds relationships together, while they believe that humor can cause loneliness. Stiegar, Foremann and Burger contradict themselves because they do list one positive aspect of humor in his article. On one hand Stiegar, Foremann and Burger argue how damaging humor can be and can be harmful to our self esteem. On the other hand, in the very beginning of the article they say, "Humor is an essential part of our life and an important means to cope with stressful life events". By focusing

on only the downside to humor, they overlook the fact that humor can function as a tool for families to overcome obstacles and be used as our "social glue" as Poole would put it.

In any sort of relationship, whether it be friends, family or professional, telling jokes makes people laugh and creates an emotion, but it is what we choose to do with that emotion that decides whether is it negative or positive. Even when my family and I are on the border between aggression and getting along, the "wah" joke always seems to tip the scale and make us happier with each other. When people are feeling positive, it allows them to communicate better with others and avoid aggressive conflict. Jokes help children learn how things really work in the real world as an alternative to a lecture from a parent. Making a joke about something that might otherwise be awkward or uncomfortable allows people to get their point across less painfully and in a more lighthearted fashion. Jokes, however silly or small, create bonds between people and have more impact on our social lives then we may have thought previously.

If people actually look into it, humor actually plays a very important role in our lives if we take the time to realize all of it's beneficial functions. In our chaotic would, I think that humor is a way for all of us to escape the worries of our daily lives and unwind for a minute. Humor plays a much bigger role in our lives then we might give it credit for, from building relationships, communicating, learning life skills or just having a laugh, it really is the glue that holds us all together as a family unit and as a society. So, What would the world look like if humor did not exist? Before I would have just said that it would not be that different, but after all of my research and analyzation, I can see that the world would be very different. I believe that without humor present, relationships would be different because when you are at that level of comfort with someone to the point where you can joke around with them it brings you closer together.

Although the "wah" joke is my family's unique way to interact, other families that have inside jokes with each other might now see that their funny one-liner might be more complex after putting thought into it. Also after people read my paper they can now see just a few of the several functions of humor and realize just how important it is in our daily lives. After all of the research that I have done, I do not think that "wah" will be as funny to me as it was before, because I will be thinking of so many other things that it does apart from make me laugh.

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WAH-flection

When most students hear their teacher say "ten page paper" on the first day of class it can really make you snap back to reality after a month long winter break. But, after the collective groan subsided in the classroom, I realized that we had four months to write it. The most surprising part to me about writing this paper was that I never realized how much humor plays a role in my family's life daily. Seeing the way that other scholars approach the topic of humor has made me realize just how complex a simple one liner can be. I was worried when I began my research because when a student writes a grade-deciding paper for a class the topic is normally something more serious and academic based. But, we had limited choices because the theme to our class was humor. I never imagined that I could write a multiple page paper on something that seems so juvenile and approach it from a scholarly standpoint. After analyzing my family's "wah" joke with the opinions of my sources, it made me realize it is much more than just a silly joke.

When I started my research I believed that I would easily find sources on the topic of family and humor because family is such a large part of everyone's lives and a hot topic for discussion in current events. However I found this to not be the case. I did not expect it to be so hard to find sources that focused solely on family and humor. I had to comb through several articles online about parenting techniques and research results about family surveys. I eventually found a few sources about family and the role humor plays, but I strongly considered changing my topic. Finally I decided that I was going to center my project on a running joke in my family "wah".

As soon as I began to sigh from relief that I had a subject for my paper, the anxiety set in that I had to narrow dowm my sources so that complimented my line of inquiry and were more specific to humor and family . Although the sources that I found weren't in fancy textbooks in the library and were not very extensive, I found a way to incorporate them into my paper. I figured that I was going to get a bunch of scholars that raved about how positive humor was in the family setting, and I was not going to be able to put my sources in conversation with each other and make them argue. However, I was pleasantly surprised to come across an article written by Stefan Stieger Anton K Foremann and Christopher Burger. Stiegar, Foremann and Burger are researchers at the University of Vienna who are focusing on the relationship between humor and self esteem. They believe that humor does more damage to a person's self esteem than good. In their paper they state how they want to be the first people to research this topic because it had never been addressed in an academic setting before. After reading their work about how humor can make a person feel lonely and isolated, it helped me get a perspective on how humor can been seen as negative too. So, applying this to my family's joke, I can see what they mean. If we have a guest over who does has no idea what the "wah" joke in our family means, they can feel left out because they are not included in our "inside joke". In my paper I write, "For example, when my siblings or I have friends over and they hear my 57 year old dad make crying noises like a baby in response to us, they might think that he's lost his mind, but we know that he is basically telling us to stop whining." (9911778440-2). This shows how they might feel left out or as Stiegar, Foremann and Burger would say "isolated".

After I finally found a source who took a negative stance on the effects of humor, it was interesting to contrast thier ideas with another of my sources that completely disagrees. When I read Carla Poole's article I pictured a bubbly soccer mom who was an advocate for the positive

side of humor; While I pictured Steiger as her polar opposite. In order to do engaging critical inquiry, you need to put your sources in a conversation with each other. Writing the dialogue between Carla and Steiger was probably the easiest part of my research paper because they each and very strong opinions that contradict one another.

I was struggling to find enough topics to talk about in my paper and was beginning write "fluff" in my paper that was straying away from my line of inquiry. I decided that I should look for more sources and came across Samantha Cleaver. Although she was not some renowned professor at some top university, her ideas that there is a an actual function to the way we tease each other with the "wah" joke, helped me shape and narrow down my line of inquiry. I never thought that there could be an actual lesson learned from poking fun and teasing each other but according to Cleaver, it is vital. Cleaver writes "..some teasing is critical to our children's social development." (1) This made me this about what my life would be if there was no humor. In my paper I write, "I think that she is right because it might teach children to not take everything so literally and could help them understand sarcasm which is used a lot in the adult world." (991177844-4) In response to Cleaver's idea that humor can affect the social skills you need to develop. I never realized that a joke could teach you a life lesson. (When I picked this topic, I thought I'd just do some research and write whatever I need to in order to pass; I never imagined that I'd actually learn anything except writing techniques. After reading Samantha Cleaver's idea that humor can be used to teach children social skills that they can use in the future made me realize that the "wah" joke could be used to teach children that complaining will not always get you what you want. If I had never read Samantha Cleaver's text I probably would have never made that connection.

When I chose the sources that I planned on using in my paper I made sure that they were as personally invested in what they were writing about as I was because I believed that it would make my paper flow better. For example, when I was reading Samantha Cleaver's work I could tell that she was a mom and used her own children and parenting advice in the article she wrote. She was making a personal connection to the topic she was writing about just as I was. Although, she mentioned them only at the end where she gave strategies on how to include humor in daily life, while I mentioned my own personal connection to my topic throughout.

My main source that I reference throughout my paper is Carla Poole. When referencing how one becomes humorous, Poole believes that parents are responsible for how their child perceives humor. She writes, "Shared laughter with your baby is part of the social glue that creates positive relationships and defines self." As I read this I was reminded of another idea that related to Poole's belief. This is better explained in a quote by Don H. Bialostosky, "Voice as I am defining it is not so much a matter of how my language relates to me, but how me language relates to your language and to the language of others you and I have before they speak." What this is saying is that we do not have our own voice, we get our voice from the voices of others. Poole would probably agree with the Bialostosky method because it is a way of defining voice. Bialostosky says that our voices are the voices of others. The voices that we use while writing are influential to our own voice. This could also be applied to the idea of humor, and that our humor is the humor of others.

The most interesting idea that I came up with when writing my paper came to me as I read "An Examination of the Relationship Between Verbal Aggressiveness, Conflict Management Strategies, and Conflict Interaction Goals." by Randall Rogan, and Betty H. La France. I never thought of using humor to avoid conflict until I read this. As I reflected on a way

to incorporate this into my project, I realized that it applied very easily. I thought back to examples of how "wah" is used in my house and realized that we use it often to disengage conflict. I could not believe that I never made the connection especially because that is how "wah" started. Rogan and LaFrance's ideas helped me find another function of humor and it was easy to apply it to my line of inquiry.

Now that I had my project started and was progressing in my research I reflected back to the course goals and double checked that they were all present somewhere in my paper. I had already succeed in the goal of "Using sources to frame or critically question other sources or issues" when I put Carla Poole and David Holmstrom into conversation with each other about the issue of who or what is responsible for developing our sense of humor. The goals also require that we "go beyond summary to engage sources through interpretation, analysis and critique", which to me means that when we are researching, we should look for opportunity to incorporate their ideas into our paper and also analyze that their ideas mean to me and how they can compliment my line of inquiry. The program also asks us to write a paper that "responds ethically to what matters or what is at stake for others who are addressed or affected by the research project." and "has a clearly defined central research question that reflects the writer's concerns and interests." These course goals influenced my paper the most because the subject of my paper is my family. This influenced the way I write the most because I had to make sure that I did justice to my brother's joke and got his message across. Also I was writing about people who mean everything to me so I had to make sure I did my best to show my family's character and their personalities because they are the main people affected my this research project. which means that as writers we need to build a connection with the audience. Also, the

My entire academic career, every English teacher I've ever had instructed me to not write in first person. When I entered UWM, I was encouraged to put my own perspective into my papers which was a huge adjustment for me because I had to reevaluate the way I write. As you can notice, the word "I" is frequently used throughout my paper. Since I am not accustomed to writing this way I was unsure if I put too much of my own perspective in my paper. Then, I realized that I am writing about MY family, so it was necessary to have a lot of my own opinion because I was included in the topic that I was writing about. I also think that since I was one of the subjects in my paper, it made it more personal and anyone who read it could see how invested I was in what I was writing about.

Another aspect of this paper that I struggled with was the idea of "critiquing" my sources and deciding if I agreed with their ideas or not. I did not feel comfortable criticizing these scholars and writers because they are far more educated and invested in the topic. I am just a freshman in college writing a research paper, but some of these sources dedicate their whole lives to researching information or it is their job to write about humor. I do not feel qualified to agree or disagree with these sources because they have such a different rhetorical situation than I do because they are not writing to a group of teachers for a grade.

Writing this paper was no walk in the park and I'm not going to end this reflective paper saying that I am now this amazing writer and have mastered my rhetoric skills because that would be a lie. Becoming a good writer is a process that takes years to master and perfect, and I believe that it will take a few more more years before I become more confident with my work. However, I have improved and have learned new skills and techniques that I will take with me for the rest of my academic journey. And, even If I end up failing this portfolio review, when I

tell my parents, you best believe that within the next few sentences, the word "wah" will be

present when I complain that I have to take this class again.

# Bibliography

Cleaver, Samantha. "Just Teasing." Scholastic Parent & Child, 17.2 (2009): 72-73.

Poole, Carla. "'You Funny Baby!'." Scholastic Parent & Child, 12.5 (2005): 79.

Morreall, John. "The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor." Albany, New York: State University Of New York, 1987. Print.

Rogan, Randall, and Betty H. La France. "An Examination of the Relationship Between Verbal Aggressiveness, Conflict Management Strategies, and Conflict Interaction Goals." Communication Quarterly, 51.4 (2003): 458-469.

Stieger, Stefan, Anton K. Formann, Christoph Burger. "Humor styles and their relationship to explicit and implicit self-esteem, Personality and Individual Differences", Volume 50, Issue 5, April 2011, Pages 747–750

"The Power of Wah" TS. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2013

Curriculum Vitae

# NICHOLAS J. LEARNED

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EDUCATION

**Ph.D. in English from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, emphasis on Rhetoric and Composition, expected December 2015**

Dissertation: *Critical Affects: Laughter as Inquiry in First-Year Composition Courses* argues that laughter's cognitive, embodied, and affective properties make it an excellent area of inquiry for students of writing, and they help Rhetoric and Composition to re-think the ways we understand critical inquiry and the role bodies play in cognition and writing.

Committee: Dr. Dennis Lynch (Chair), Dr. Anne Wysocki, Dr. Anthony Ciccone, Dr. Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, Dr. Alice Gillam

Preliminary/Comprehensive exam areas: Modern Rhetorical Theory, Feminist Rhetoric, Composition Studies

**M.A. in English from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, emphasis on Rhetoric and Composition, May 2010**

Master's project: *Investigating Humor in the Academy*

Committee: Dr. Dennis Lynch (Chair), Dr. Alice Gillam, Dr. Mary Louise Buley-Meissner

**B.A. in English from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, emphasis on Literature, May 2008**

Dean's list, graduated with honors

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HONORS AND AWARDS

**Student Success Award, Fall 2013**

Given by students to the instructor they identified as contributing most to their academic achievement

**Alice Gillam Award, Spring 2013**

acknowledge a graduate student whose work exemplifies Professor Gillam's commitment to holding together the intellectual and the humane in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition.

**Chancellor's Award, 2012, 2013, 2014**

For excellence in graduate studies

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Rhetoric**

Eng 240: Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture, Fall 2013

Eng 432: Rhetoric of Argument, co-instructor, Spring 2010, 2011
**English Studies**
Eng 215: Introduction to English Studies, Fall 2014
**First Year Composition**
Eng 101: Introduction to College Writing, Fall 2009 to Spring 2010
Eng 102: College Writing and Research, Spring 2011 to Spring 2015
Eng 102: College Writing and Research Living Learning Communities, Fall 2012, 13
**Online Courses**
Eng 102: College Writing and Research, 2012
**Writing Center Tutor**
Fall 07 to Spring 2010

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ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

**Eng 102 Mentor Program Coordinator, Fall 2012 to Spring 2013**
Planned new instructor orientation, provided institutional support for mentors,
implemented and designed a standard assignment sequence
**Writing Program Administrator, 2012, 2013**
Participated in shaping course goals and program policy
**Pilot instructor, Living Learning Communities, 2010, 2011**

- Adapted Eng 101 and 102 curriculum for use in LLCs

**Composition Advisory Committee, 2012, 2013**
Met with faculty from across campus to discuss first-year composition program policy
**Writing Program Assessment Committee, Summer 2012, 2013**

**Eng 101 Curriculum Committee, Spring 2011**

**English 102 Mentor, Spring 2011, 2012, 20113**

**Virginia Burke Writing Contest Judge, Spring 2011**

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Affective Collusion: Laughing Bodies and Shared Logoi." Rhetoric Society of America,
TX: May 2014.
"Pop Culture Humor as a Subject of Inquiry in the College Research Writing Classroom."
Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, IL: April 2014.
"What the analysis of argument can do for FYC students and the public sphere." North
Carolina Symposium on Teaching Writing, NC: February 2013.
"Laughing our way through critical endeavors: How the analysis of humor offers students
of First Year Composition a heuristic for critically understanding the rhetorical
dimensions of discourse." College Composition and Communication Conference,
Mo: March 2012.

"Fostering Literacy through the Analysis of Persuasive Games." University of Wisconsin Graduate Student Conferences. 2010.

"Situating Knowledge in Physical Space: How the Knowledge We Produce in Our Classroom is Inseparable From its Conditions of Emergence." Marquette University Graduate Student Conference. 2009.

## WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED

"Workshop on teaching Controlling Purpose" (Co-facilitator), UW-Milwaukee First-Year Composition Forum, WI: October 2012.

## PEDAGOGY PRESENTATIONS

"Working with the Eng 101 Course Goals" (Co-presenter). UW-Milwaukee New Instructor Orientation, WI: August 2010.

"Working with student texts in the assignment sequence" (Co-presenter). UW-Milwaukee New Instructor Orientation, WI: August 2011.

"Developing in-class activities that engage student texts" (Co-presenter). UW-Milwaukee New Instructor Orientation, WI: August 2012.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH/SERVICE

Sailing Club at UWM, Fall 2009 to Present
US Army, 1st Cavalry Division, July 1998 to December 2001

## LANGUAGES

Reading ability in French

## AFFILIATIONS

National Council of Teachers of English
College Composition and Communication
Modern Language Association
The Writing Campus: A Blog for Writing Across the Curriculum Faculty