

## **Rhetoric/Composition: Intersections/Impasses/Differends**

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### **About this Issue**

The impetus for this issue was a variety of discussions at CCCCs about the shifting nature of the panels we were seeing every year. Fewer panels seemed to explicitly address rhetorical theory and the history of rhetoric. New issues such as literacy, technology, and cultural studies appeared to predominate. We wondered whether rhetoric was gone in name only: if rhetoric had simply shifted into these other areas or was indeed missing in action.

After discussing the possibilities of a special issue, we decided that we would invite a number of well known scholars who were part of the discussions surrounding rhetorical theory and the history of rhetoric in the 1980s and '90s to write shorter responses to the issue of rhetoric's (current) relationship to composition. Many have responded with historical accounts, theoretical speculations, and institutional analyses.

The goal was to publish these initial commentaries and then solicit both direct responses as well as longer essays on rhetoric and/or composition generally. The second stage of this issue will be in development over Spring 2004 and published in May. See the CFP for further information. Please read this issue and consider responding to one or more of the texts published here or to any of the new, emerging conversations in our field(s).

### **Framing Rhetoric and Composition**

In a discussion of Kant and his three critiques, Derrida comes upon Kant's word *parergon*. "The *parergon*," Derrida tells us, "inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field . . . but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking *in* something and it is lacking *from itself*" (*The Truth in Painting* 56). According to Kant, "Because reason is 'conscious of its impotence to satisfy its moral need' it has recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, to miracles. It needs the supplementary work" (Kant qtd. in Derrida 56).

In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, in an appended note where Kant makes these statements, he uses this word, *parergon*, to talk about that which is not proper to his treatise but which affects it nonetheless. Derrida takes this definition with him when he examines Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*. Here, Kant offers a number of examples to explain the nature of the *parergon*, including the idea of a frame around a picture, the draperies that partially

cover a nude statue, and the columns that frame a Greek temple. At first, it seems clear what the *parergon* is—something that enhances or sets off the central subject (the *ergon*), without detracting from it—but as Derrida's pictured examples deconstructively muddy Kant's waters, it becomes apparent that the more Kant works to explain the word and those concepts and things to which he would have it refer, the less he is able to control the *parergon* and its referents. The same is true, we have discovered, for the word rhetoric, a term that often eludes us just as soon as we think that we have gotten a hold on it. Even when rhetoric supposedly frames composition, it is very difficult to tell which term lies inside and which term lies outside the frame.

A reading of the frames that constitute the cover of this special edition of *Enculturation* offers a number of visual tropes that can help us hold our subject still long enough to take a look at it. *Enculturation*, the word that abuts or brushes against the colored blocks of our cover, is a journal of rhetoric, writing, and culture. Since the terms rhetoric, writing, and culture repeat themselves, taking on their own lives in the articles published here thus far, to ask in what ways we might frame (and undoubtedly get framed by) rhetoric and composition in the *Enculturation* forum is highly appropriate.

### **Rhetoric/Composition: Intersections/ Impasses/ Differends**

Looking once again at our edition cover, the title lies inside the colored blocks, apparently inside the cover's "frame." The slashes that our initial CFP—and as it turns out, our contributors—made much of, call attention to the ways rhetoric and composition brush by and impinge upon one another, while the words, intersections/impasses/differends, written without the usual spaces between them, suggest that these seemingly opposed terms have more in common than we might originally suppose.

A number of intersections have been pointed out by our contributors, some directly involving rhetoric and composition and others involving fields that remain tied to or under the auspices of rhetoric and composition. Cynthia Haynes in "Rhetoric/Slash/Composition" and Kathleen Welch in "Compositionality, Rhetoricity, and Electricity: A Partial History of Some Composition and Rhetoric Studies," allude to and discuss the intersections of rhetoric, composition, computers, and technology. Bill Bolin's piece, "The Role of Media in Distinguishing Composition from Rhetoric," and Susan Jarratt's article, "Rhetoric in Crisis: the View from Here," describe intersections of rhetoric, composition, and culture. Welch also explores intersections between rhetoric, composition, and gender, a topic that Krista Ratcliffe, in "The Current State of Composition Scholar/Teachers: Is Rhetoric Gone or Just Hiding Out," touches on by way of Andrea Lunsford. And the relationship between rhetoric and first-year composition, a much debated current topic, is eloquently argued by Christine Farris in "Where Rhetoric Meets the Road: First-Year Composition."

But the subtitle of our special edition suggests that in addition to intersecting in positive and productive ways, there are also impasses in the relationship between rhetoric and composition and differends, or points of exclusion, between the two fields that both trigger and result from these impasses. As Sharon Crowley's essay title forcefully notes, "Composition is not Rhetoric." And Bill Bolin's essay describes ways in which the media forces a distinction between rhetoric and composition and insists that academia hone the differences between the two as well. So too

do our other contributors train their eyes on impasses. Welch decries the basement real estate arrogated to writing programs, while Susan Jarratt poses the positive and negative reception of rhetoric in public, publication, and professional spheres, asking the reader through these juxtapositions to answer her questioning statement on rhetoric, "It thrives, but does it flourish?"

Differends in rhetoric and composition are central to this special issue, and yet they are not so easily described. A differend occurs when the system within which one term or concept operates excludes the operation or validity of other terms. A differend "is signaled by" a state or "a feeling." It arises when "[o]ne cannot find the words" to express that state (*Differend* 13). A differend takes place in the famous description by Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, in which he points to the argument against the Auschwitz death camps that is based on the difficulty of finding witnesses to crimes against humanity, as the rules of evidence require. The Jews came up against this differend in the Nuremberg trials when the rule of law threatened to disallow testimony from those who were not eye witnesses. So, Lyotard tells us, "By forming the State of Israel, the survivors transformed the wrong into damages and the differend into a litigation. By beginning to speak in the common idiom of public international law and of authorized politics, they put an end to the silence to which they had been condemned" (56).

According to Lyotard, "What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics, perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them" (*Differend* 12), and we can locate a more recent example of the value of this effort to bear witness in Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream*. In this book she gives a new name to the kind of literacy practiced by the historical African American women that she studies. This new phrase, "rhetorical competence" (48), creates a way for the thoughts and ideas of these women to be understood *inside* instead of *outside* literacy studies.

So what are the differends between rhetoric and composition, and could they possibly be as socially significant as the examples from Lyotard and Royster that I have provided?

We found that our contributors do not necessarily think of or define the terms rhetoric, composition, and a third term, writing, in the same way, and the contributors themselves note within their own essays a similar experience with these terms. Susan Jarratt discovers an entire literary theory textbook, *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, that does not acknowledge the field of rhetoric and composition, but only what the authors term the "rhetoricity" of literary texts, and Christine Farris describes a doctoral student in literature, who switches late in the game to a Composition, Literacy, and Culture PhD and thinks it will be interesting to put rhetoric and composition together somehow, as if for the first time. Then there's the distinction made by Pete Vandenberg in his essay, "Conjunction, Function, Reduction: A Too Brief History of Rhetoric *and* Composition," that rhetoric is the privileged term over composition, the one with the classical roots and the connection to civic engagement, while composition is a relatively new art, practical and skills based.

These differends between rhetoric and composition are socially significant, as these authors note, because if we think of our first-year composition courses as connected to this practical definition of composition, they may be taught by anyone with a modicum of training. If we think of these

courses as rhetoric-based, on the other hand, they must be taught by rhetorically educated teachers. In this case, there must be people to educate these teachers to know what it means to teach by way of rhetoric, university tenure and promotion requirements must be aligned to recognize the necessity and value of this service, and efforts like the recent formation of the Association of Rhetorical Societies "to enhance the visibility of rhetorical studies in the academy and the general public" (qtd. in McLemee, "Making it 'Big'") must be multiplied and pursued vigorously to reshape the profile of rhetoric in the media and thus in the public consciousness.

What writing classes are *for*, then, and who gets to decide, are critical to the work of all those who profess the teaching of writing. It's a money issue, a social issue, and an ethical issue as well. Here the differends may lie among several disparate groups with competing interests: the administration whose bottom line is the most students taught for the least money; the graduate student or professor of literature as composition teacher, whose vested interest may lie in reading and literary analysis over writing, invention, and civic engagement; and rhetorically-based teachers of writing or directors of writing programs (categories that collectively include most of the contributors published here), who value writing, invention, and civic engagement. This last group recognizes that an approach to writing that underscores how language and writing shape, create, and implement personal and social investments is a valuable pursuit, since it may one day lead to personal change and possibly a better chance at social justice.

Farris and Crowley, though they come down on different sides of the first-year composition issue—should it be taught or not—note the difficulties and the ethical dilemmas on both sides. Farris says that such courses informed by a critical pedagogy are worth it, even though we may have to employ barely skilled teachers to handle a postmodernist program once we create one, while Crowley tells us we cannot ethically place untenured people in rhetoric-based classrooms that are designedly engaged in politically hot topics and thus potentially volatile.

As Farris's essay intimates, impasses between rhetoric and composition may also show up by way of the differends that exist between modernist and postmodernist practitioners of rhetoric and the array of theories to which they subscribe. While I am setting up a problematic binary here, given that rhetorical practices likely fall along a spectrum between the two, a modernist conception makes of rhetoric a set of practices or an understanding of language that notes how we use and order language, while a postmodernist perspective claims that in turn language uses us. Modernism and postmodernism matter to this issue of *Enculturation*, as Farris notes, because teachers of composition are engaged in a modernist discipline with postmodernist tools, an enterprise that leads to cognitive dissonance and ethical dilemmas related to the untenured instructors who frequently get assigned to teach composition, and, I would note, to our commitment to—but still largely unexamined relationship with—technology (see Cooper "Postmodern Possibilities in Electronic Conversations").

The differends between modernism and postmodernism show up when the modernists, who are connected to history, the body, and the conscious mind, and the postmodernists, who provisionally attach themselves to a kind of utopian future anterior, the psyche, and the unconscious mind, decide, if they are modernists, that bodies are real and take precedence over the language that names them, or, if they are postmodernists, that language, image, and technology map and give name to what we call "reality": our bodies, our beliefs, and even our

selves. We become aware of this difference most readily, perhaps, in Cynthia Haynes' elegant performance piece, "Rhetoric/Slash/Composition," and Victor Vitanza's meditative essay, "Abandoned to Writing: Notes Toward Several Provocations," an homage to Virginia Woolf, in which writing becomes not something we do, but a force, an energy, a self-creating process that takes on its own life and makes demands of us. Writing (as opposed to composition), Vitanza tells us, may thrive outside the academy, but does not do so well within it.

Some other important threads that weave themselves throughout these essays are connected to graduate programs that have largely shaped the fields of rhetoric/composition. Krista Ratcliffe, Kathleen Welch, and Sharon Crowley mention the influence of the program at Ohio State and the three generations of rhetoric and composition scholars who laid and fortified their foundations there, including Edward P. J. Corbett (first generation), Andrea Lunsford (second generation), and a third generation of teacher-scholars that includes Robert J. Connors, Cheryl Glenn, Roxanne Mountford, and Krista Ratcliffe, among many others. Welch also offers what develops into a postmodern analysis of the work of several women who have come from Ohio State and other influential programs and have practiced what Welch, in a Butlerian move (see *Bodies that Matter*), repeatedly iterates as composition-rhetoric (see Connors), a rhetoric that dispenses with the slash and claims it is equally at home in both fields.

In a similar move to investigate and call foundations into question, Michael Holzman, in his commentary, "Rhetoric/Composition//Academic Institutions/Cultural Studies," describes the graduate program that he was a part of in the 70s at the University of California at San Diego. This was the university of Marcuse, Eagleton, Fabbri, and Schiller, and the graduate students, like Holzman, who were teaching the first-year composition courses at the time, began taking what they were learning from these men into the writing classroom. In this essay, Holzman, like Vitanza, privileges the term "writing" to name what he taught at UCSD, a kind of hybrid discourse that grew out of an institutionally sanctioned discourse in not literary, but critical theory.

A rhetoric program left out of the discourses that you will read here is the one at the University of Texas at Arlington (now, for all purposes, defunct), in which such luminaries as Michael Feehan, Luanne T. Frank, Hans Kellner, Charles Kneupper, Lenore Langsdorf, C. Jan Swearingen, and Victor J. Vitanza taught during the 80s and 90s, the program from which Lorie and I received Humanities PhD's. In this challenging course of study, the foundations of rhetoric and philosophy and the history of rhetoric were both given and taken away. Like the students in the UCSD program that Holzman describes, graduate students at UTA began bringing what they were learning about Heidegger, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, and Lacan; Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard; Virginia Woolf, Walter Ong, Hannah Arendt, and Simone de Beauvoir into the classroom, into their dissertations, and beyond. The questions raised in our initial CFP for this special edition of *Enculturation*, and the interdisciplinary impetus of our thoughts about rhetoric and composition, testify to this program and to the scholar-teachers who prepared us to ask hard questions and to take the bottomless leap that *is* the postmodern turn.

Our last contributor, David Bleich, does not tie up loose ends but rather asks what we might do with them. Bleich makes an interdisciplinary call to those who share his interest in bringing fields that have come to think of themselves as competitors—such as rhetoric, composition,

literature, and cultural studies, etc.—back into productive dialogue with one another. While my own theoretical interests in linking poetics and rhetorics through the work of Virginia Woolf fall in with Bleich's concerns, I am prepared to acknowledge that such linkages can seriously affect the institutional cultural capital of rhetoric and composition as Christine Farris's essay notes. And yet, it may be invaluable to recognize, as she also tells us, that forming alliances can be a good thing as well.

### **The Frame and Beyond**

To return to the images on our cover, what does the slightly off-centered Valezquez painting, *Las Meninas*, help us see when we are looking at rhetoric, especially when we are asking what lies inside and outside the frame? What is the *ergon* and what the *parergon*? For the postmodernist theorists among us, the painting intertextually refers to Foucault's *The Order of Things*, a book that describes this painting in great detail and pictures it on its cover. For Foucault, the painting both depicts and deconstructs classical representation by calling what is framed into question. The painter paints himself painting the object of everyone's gaze, the object that seemingly must be the two people dimly reflected in the mirror at the back of the darkly lit room. But we are not privy to the front of the pictured canvas; we can see only see its back on the right of the frame. Light bathes the central figure, the little girl, and light enters the back of the room as a courtier appears to exit, traversing the inner space of the painting. Foucault tells us that the mirrored subject of the painting is the King and Queen of Spain, Phillip IV and Mariana, his wife, while the ostensible subject is the little princess, Infanta Margarita, their daughter (9). But as we stand outside the frame—or the cover of the book or the cover of this issue, which, of course is only an electronic projection and no "cover" at all—we "know" that if the depiction were "real" and we were able to stand in front of the tableau, it would be our own faces reflected in the mirror.

The contributors to this special edition of *Enculturation* have taken a long look at rhetoric and its relationship to composition. Their observations have served both to complicate and clarify, and what they have seen, described, evoked and pictured here bears witness to reason, to ethics, to miracles and grace.

When we look at rhetoric, we look in a mirror that reflects back at us, and it does not send back exactly what we send it; rather, it returns the image to us with a difference. As Susan Jarratt told us in her recent presentation at the 2003 Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference, to send back with a difference is a positive return. Rhetoric traverses frames. It will not stay where we put it. It sends messages back with a difference. And it is very much worth exploring what those intersections, impasses, and differends are and what we can learn from them and each other. This *différance* is writ large in the texts that we present to you here.

Lisa L. Coleman

### **Reading and Responding to this Issue:**

Our overriding desire in the planning and execution of this special issue has been for a lively debate concerning "composition/rhetoric." For my part, this desire is admittedly nostalgic—I mourn for the days of the "star panels" at the Cs when discussion of rhetoric as theory, history,

and practice was a flashpoint of the conference, providing an exciting and energizing context for other conversations. The articles collected here are such an opening panel; indeed several of these authors have sat on those panels in the past.

*Enculturation* seemed the most appropriate space for this discussion of our differends. No mere supplement to a print original, *Enculturation* as an electronic journal provides a writing space in which the rhetorical traversal of frames in our discussion is allowed free play. The electronic writing space provides a simulacrum of conversation that we have highlighted through links and threads. Readers may follow these links to trace the differends we have identified: Rhetoric, Composition, Writing, and Institutional Practice. Our links are of course our own "readings" that we here impose on both authors and readers. Other paths are possible; we are open to suggestions.

As *Enculturation* allows us to traverse the frames of the individual articles, weaving them together into a conversation, it more importantly allows us to traverse the frames of time and space. This issue rejects the impulse to mimic the stable nature of print (in full recognition of the dangers) and instead will remain active and dynamic after this initial posting. We invite short responses and longer articles, as described in the New Call, for future posting in this issue. We will also continue to mark the threads of our differends, linking new contributions with existing ones. We envision the issue as an expanding site to which readers contribute, to which they will wish to return—to see the difference.

The nature of the relationship between rhetoric and composition is crucial to our profession; our intersections, impasses, and differends require perpetual exploration. We invite you to join us within these frames as both readers and writers.

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