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This dissertation argues that theories of collaboration in rhetoric and composition studies have for too long relied on social constructionist epistemology to explain what collaboration is and how it works, resulting in a widespread, if not tacit reluctance on the part of instructors to encourage collaboration in the teaching of writing that goes beyond various forms of group work and peer-review. In an attempt to recover and renew the values of collaboration, I suggest that it can be re-conceptualized ethically as a discursive relationship collaborators foster with one another to invent discourse that transgresses and transforms the limits of what individuals are able to articulate alone. Moreover I use the rhetorical canon of invention to explain why social constructionist epistemology is incapable of theorizing collaboration other than as a “style” of doing work. I draw upon the tradition of classical American pragmatism, along with the more contemporary work of language philosopher Donald Davidson and other externalist theorists to theorize the techné of collaboration, which I argue manifests in the habits of dialogue collaborators foster to engage its inventive work. Finally, I explain how such a re-conceptualization of collaboration informs the pedagogical possibilities of post-process composition theory, which has waned in recent years for its lack of pedagogical articulation.

TOWARDS CONSEQUENCE AND COLLABORATION IN COMPOSITION  
STUDIES: THEORIZING COLLABORATION  
AFTER THE SOCIAL TURN

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## PREFACE

### ON EUREKA, SLOW HUNCHES, AND THE ORIGINS OF INNOVATION

“The trick is to figure out ways to explore the edges of possibility that surround you.”  
- Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From* (41)

In his newest book *Where Good Ideas Come From*, the popular science writer Steven Johnson takes what he calls a “long-zoom” approach to understand how creativity gives birth to innovation. Rather than rely on individual case studies and inductive speculation, Johnson identifies patterns of innovation that only become visible when looked at macroscopically. One of these patterns, what he calls “the adjacent possible,” speaks to how good ideas are never the product of isolated moments of creativity, that even if we credit certain breakthroughs to particular individuals, there is always an environment within which these breakthroughs emerged, an environment in which the individuals were only a part. Put in different terms, the proverbial “light bulb” that sparks with electricity in a moment of eureka has to get its power from somewhere. Nothing gets created out of thin air. For Johnson, the adjacent possible names the conditions of constraint that at any given time limit feasibility. It denotes the myriad limitations—conceptual, physical, and technological—that constrain and, in a way, direct how we think. If the world is capable of change, the adjacent possible reminds us to keep our eyes on the horizon.

To say all of this differently, we cannot transgress the boundaries of the adjacent possible because the adjacent possible marks our perceptual limits at any given time.

Instead we must adjust our perspectives—how we see the world—to manipulate the perceptual borders of the adjacent possible itself. “The strange and beautiful truth about the adjacent possible is that its boundaries grow as you explore those boundaries,” writes Johnson. “Each new combination ushers new combinations into the adjacent possible” (31). Johnson suggests that we can study the history of great inventions and innovations through the lens of the adjacent possible, through an examination of the environments that made certain kinds of novelty possible. One example he offers is the story of YouTube, the fantastically popular website started by three former PayPal employees who launched the site in 2005. “Had [Chad] Hurley, [Steve] Chen, and [Jawed] Karim tried to execute the exact same idea for YouTube ten years earlier, in 1995, it would have been a spectacular flop, because a site for sharing video was not within the adjacent possible of the early Web” (39). For example, Internet users were constrained to slow dial-up connections incapable of streaming video content with any modicum of efficiency, but in 2005 this was no longer the case. “Another key to YouTube’s early success,” Johnson adds, “is that its developers were able to base the video serving on Adobe’s Flash platform, which meant that they could focus on the ease of sharing and discussing clips, and not spend millions of dollars developing a whole new video standard from scratch. But Flash itself wasn’t released until late 1996, and didn’t even support video until 2002” (40). Without high-speed Internet and an easily adaptable Flash video platform, in other words, YouTube probably wouldn’t exist.

The point Johnson makes with his explanation of the adjacent possible is that good ideas don’t spring eternal from some transcendent ether. Nor is innovation really ever the



result of private genius. To understand how good ideas become good ideas, we have to understand the ecology out of which they develop. While it is impossible to trace the development of ideas *as ideas* with an engineer's accuracy, the takeaway for Johnson is nevertheless straightforward: innovation can be explained. We might need concepts like "the adjacent possible" to aid in these explanations, but certainly we need not rely on the magic of Archimedes's bathtub insight to imagine how innovation works.

To put this glibly, there is no magic to conger invention. Eureka has no metaphysics.

Of course, rhetoricians have known this for over two millennia. To learn the arts of invention, orators were trained using *topoi*, those "places" of argument where one could locate the materials to construct effective enthymemes. Whether argumentative procedures or topical commonplaces, the *topoi* were never conceptualized as mystical sources of invention; they represented trails of thought already blazed by the experience and deliberation of others. What could be considered a "good" idea had to first be recognizable within a rhetorical space appropriate for its delivery. These kinds of spaces don't magically emerge; orators craft them drawing on the available means of persuasion; they utilize the tools already available to them.

As a rhetorician and a pragmatist, I read Johnson's book heuristically, which is to say I believe crafting theory to understand innovation, or any concept for that matter, is valuable insofar as it helps us to expand some aspect of "the adjacent possible" in our own thinking. In other words, the benefits of theory can be measured according to heuristic application—how well it informs our attempts to think productively in the abstract. Interestingly, the terms "heuristic" and "eureka" share a similar etymology, both

dependent on the Greek stem meaning “to find,” yet today they get invoked in vastly different contexts. Heuristics are conventionally understood as reasoned, systematic procedures utilized methodologically in the service of problem-solving, whereas eureka is for many people the echo of stumbled upon insight or the catchphrase of accidental genius. One is rhetorical, rooted in the world of topical relationships while the other is metaphysical, nothing more than romance and lazy curiosity.

Johnson’s book takes the phenomenon of eureka (originally spelled *heureka*) and examines it through heuristic metaphors. He “invents” the idea of the adjacent possible—an idea, by the way, very similar to Lev Vygotsky’s notion of ZDP (zone of proximal development) as well as Paulo Freire’s notion of “untested feasibility”—to demystify the metaphysics so often ascribed to innovation. Another heuristic Johnson crafts to explain the origins of innovation is the “slow hunch,” those ideas that are only really fragments of ideas and take years, maybe even decades or centuries to actualize into usable insight. “Sustaining the slow hunch,” explains Johnson, “is less a matter of perspiration than of *cultivation*. You give the hunch enough nourishment to keep it growing, and plant it in fertile soil, where its roots can make new connections. And then you give it time to bloom” (78). Johnson observes that all good ideas benefit from other good ideas. How to cultivate a slow hunch, then, is to fertilize it with more of the same. But this never happens in isolation. When we work alone, Johnson notes, ideas get trapped and thinking stymied, and thus “the most productive tool for generating good ideas remains a circle of humans at a table, talking shop” (61). Indeed, if one argument stands above all the others in *Where Good Ideas Come From*, it is that good ideas are always borne out of collective

inquiries. Whether through deliberate collaboration, borrowed inventions, stumbled upon partnerships, shared insight, careful feedback, or some combination thereof, innovation is never a private affair.

For teachers and theorists of language and writing, the same principle holds true. In fact in the late 1970s and early 1980s the discipline of rhetoric and composition studies embraced the idea of collaboration as a central ethic in its understanding of how effective writers develop both within and without the spaces of formal instruction. Call it a kind of slow hunch, but theorists in writing studies began conceptualizing the generative capacity of collaboration as both a theory and a teaching practice. When in 1984 Kenneth Bruffee published his seminal essay “Collaboration and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” in *College English*, the adjacent possible for welcoming the idea of collaboration into our professional discourses was ripe with potential and, in fact, for the next decade scholars in rhetoric and composition used critical lenses to examine the idea of collaboration to assess both the virtues and vices of how this concept was getting articulated into the disciplinary frameworks of composition. Indeed, when one reads early articles about collaboration’s role in the teaching of writing, there is an obvious tension balancing inquiry into what collaboration is and how it works alongside pedagogical articulations about how best to “do” collaboration in practice and what it means to name collaboration as such.

As I will argue over the course of this dissertation, the slow hunches about collaboration that scholars in composition studies started to articulate thirty years ago never connected in ways that could substantially expand the adjacent possible of how

humanists and other academics envisioned the work of invention and innovation—what I call novelty—in the study of writing. In fact, collaboration as such is today little more than a corporate buzzword, while on the academic front it at best names a vague ethic for cooperation while at worst it denotes a negative quality to our habits of work, which is to say that too much collaboration does not bode well for tenure and promotion.

Collaboration is, after all, not near as rigorous as “individual” work and thus it should not count as much. At least this is the conventional wisdom. But we should not be too quick to condemn the myopic policies about collaboration that inform the work of many P&T committees because as a whole we embrace the same policies (if you want to call them that) in the ways we approach our teaching practices. That is to say, many of us have not been willing to pragmatically reject the romantic notion of individual genius (e.g., “performance”) in how we teach and assess our students. This is especially true in composition studies, which is ironic considering that ours was one of the first fields to expansively incorporate collaboration into our disciplinary rhetorics and pedagogical philosophies.

In a way I wish to call this dissertation a slow hunch, one that I have been trying to realize for several years. The ideas I develop in these pages—which, as you will see, are merely adaptations of borrowed ideas—have benefited from the collisions and connections I’ve been able to exploit in my attempt to expand the adjacent possible of collaboration in composition studies. Ironically, this is a “solo-authored” work. Of course, I might have been the one to render these words into text but I cannot claim these ideas exclusively as my own. I had a lot of help. Not only did my advisory committee

help articulate the consequences of my slow hunches, but my friend and collaborator, John Pell, was there every step of the way as well. The politics of my institution's graduate school dictate that a collaborative dissertation is not an option. I hope one day this will no longer be the case.

At some point even the blackest kettles and pots have to reinvent themselves.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE IDEA OF COLLABORATION IN THE STUDY OF WRITING

During my first year as a doctoral student, I responded to a CFP that found its way into my email inbox, a call for book chapter proposals for an edited collection. The year before I experienced my first 4Cs rejection, but the paper I proposed for that conference seemed to fit reasonably well with the subject of this proposed collection. So I threw together a two-page chapter proposal without much difficulty and sent it to the editors. Their response was both prompt and positive; they found my proposal interesting and believed it had potential, although they did have a few questions. The editors knew I had not yet written the full draft, so they requested I sent the first half of the essay for further consideration.

Even though at that point I considered myself a relatively effective writer, suddenly the stakes had risen and I doubted my ability to write something that would persuade the editors to include it in their collection. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was faking it, because after all I was still a relatively new graduate student and at best only a novice practitioner in the study of rhetoric and composition. Who was I to think I would write something good enough to be included in a scholarly book? Perhaps I didn't expect the editors to be interested in my proposal, but whatever the reason I felt paralyzed at the moment to move forward. Therefore I did the only thing I could think of doing: I went to



one of my professors and explained the situation. “What I have I gotten myself into?” I asked. This professor knew that my friend, John, was also interested in the same subject this edited collection was surveying, so she suggested I invite him to collaborate on the piece. I like the idea of working with a friend, but I had no idea how to *write* with another person, especially in a situation like this one where the stakes seemed relatively high. Nevertheless I asked John to join me on this project. He said yes.

John and I were already friends, and moreover we shared scholarly interests, so I assumed that our collaboration would be easy. In other words, even though neither of us had experience writing with another person, we assumed it wouldn’t be *that* difficult. Needless to say, we were inexperienced and naïve. During our first two or three meetings, we spent the entire time talking about what we wanted to write, and we even put together an outline. But when we tried to actually write, we were stymied. For the next handful of meetings, what we planned for as drafting sessions, we spend more time talking about *how* to write together than we actually did writing. Moreover we kept adjusting the ideas we wanted to render into text, which is to say our conversation bounced back and forth between talk about what we wanted to say and talk about how best to get these ideas down on the page. In this way the writing proved to be impossible and befuddling. After one laboriously unproductive session, we decided to sit down over coffee to rethink our collaboration and how best to turn all of our talk into usable writing. We certainly were not at a loss for conversation because we filled page after page with ideas about what each of us were noticing about the subject of our essay as it was developing through our repeated attempts to write about it. Indeed, we were able to

recognize that what at first felt like wasted time together *not* drafting was in fact a necessary phase of our collaboration, one in which we were able to invent both ideas and language for those ideas that we could subsequently draw upon in the essay. Even though we still didn't have a draft, we felt confident that what we were going to write would be smart and persuasive.

Something else we noticed about the collaborative process was that we were getting better at anticipating what the other was thinking. That is, during our repeated meetings we started to arrive at similar ideas seemingly simultaneously as we fostered conversation, and pretty soon we were able to guess how the other would respond to certain ideas and observations. In this way, the more we focused on listening to each other the more we saw our ideas develop complexity and nuance.

Motivated as we were, the process of actually rendering words into text continued to be difficult, but we managed to get a draft completed by the date the editors stipulated. We were proud of the document (even though so far it was only half of a essay), but we were even more proud about discovering the ideas we were writing about. Even though we didn't have a recognizable method, we knew it was possible to synthesize our voices to invent smart, compelling ideas and arguments. This had been our first experience writing collaboratively, and even though we were exhausted, we were also eager to continue the work.

It did not take very long to get a response from the editors. They appreciated us taking the time to put together a draft, but after further review they didn't think it would fit well with the rest of the book. That was it. The essay was dead in the water.

We had the best intentions to nevertheless complete the second half of the essay so we could send it elsewhere, but it never happened. Nearly five years later as I look back at that writing, I realize it isn't nearly as good as we imagined, which is to say I understand why our half-written essay wasn't positively received. I hardly feel embarrassed about the ordeal, however, because even though the essay was never published (or, for that matter, even finished!) that initial experience of collaboration itself had provided me with a new level of confidence as a writer, one built on the knowledge that my discourse was somehow strengthened because John and I had collaborated in the first place. More specifically, I noticed that when we were able to foster reciprocal discourse about a shared object of inquiry, in effect using our collaboration as a method for rhetorical invention, it seemed like I was able to articulate ideas that previously, and on my own, sounded incoherent. That we never finished the essay is therefore inconsequential, because what we needed to glean from that experience we did: the knowledge that successful collaboration has very little to do with material production, and that it has everything to do with the discursive relationship collaborators foster with one another and the objects of their discourse.

\*\*\*\*

When Joseph Harris published "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing" twenty years ago, he criticized the "extraordinary rhetorical power one can gain through speaking of community." Using the adjectives "seductive and powerful" to describe the rhetorical force of the word "community" itself, he says the term "offers us a view of shared purpose and effort" (13). While Harris suggests that "community" is virtually

never pejoratively invoked, the thrust of Harris's argument is directed toward scholars in composition who use the idea of community as both a floating signifier and a "stabilizing term," one that is utilized "to give a sense of purpose and effort to our dealings with the various discourses that make up the university" (14). In short, for compositionists the term functions as a common discursive denominator, for lack of a better phrase, the value of which is relative to however one constructs the idea of community in passing.

Pointing to David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" as an example, Harris argues that the discourses into which students must be socialized, the ones with which they must use to invent the university, are not nearly as stable or adoptable as many compositionists makes them sound. Echoing theory suggested by Stanley Fish, Harris proposes that "community" should come to reference the different social circles each of us always already inhabits. In other words, community need not always imply consensus, agreement, or association; nor should it be something we possess or inhabit, let alone something we attempt to create or achieve. In fact, Harris offers the metaphor of the city as one to replace the metaphor of community: "I would urge an even more specific and material view of community: one that, like a city, allows for consensus and conflict, and that holds room for ourselves, our disciplinary colleagues, our university coworkers, *and* our students" (20).

Not long after Harris proposed curbing the idea of community as a commonplace metaphor in composition studies, Susan Miller made a very similar, if not identical argument for ditching "community" as a disciplinary metaphor that informs the work of collaboration. Just as Harris proposes the metaphor of a city to better denote the field's

loose associations and contingent discourse practices, so too does Miller use the city metaphor to propose how we might understand the associations that collaboration instantiates.

In “New Discourse City: An Alternative Model for Collaboration,” Miller reflects on the experience she shared with five freshmen composing an essay that would eventually be published in *College Composition and Communication*. Committed as she was to social constructionist notions of collaboration rooted in the metaphors of community and consensus, Miller acknowledges that during their meetings together this group of collaborative writers acted more like a “committee” instead of a “community.” There was substantial negotiation or compromise, and the final draft of the essay eventually “relocated many of the students’ observations in an appendix” because it became impossible to include everyone’s voice in the body of the text. As such, Miller confesses “my informed understanding of social constructions of knowledge and language, and the students’ practical experience of them, hadn’t been worth a damn, not in any *essential* sense of revising their stance toward educational practice” (289). Later confronted by students in a graduate seminar who unapologetically “refused to allow collaborative processes to occur” (291), Miller eventually decided that the metaphor of city life was a more viable model for understanding collaboration later in this dissertation, but I briefly raise her concern for rethinking what collaboration is and should be in order to situate the idea of collaboration itself in composition studies. Much like the idea of community, it is one that the field of rhetoric and composition has come to value, perhaps even overvalue, for reasons that at best appear sentimental, not to mention cursory and uncritical.

What I suggest is that the field of composition values an idea of collaboration that has remained at best simply an idea, or rather an ideal that social constructionist theory helped to institutionalize when we embraced the “social turn” in composition theory which suddenly placed primary value on the processes of writing above its product. As seen above, Miller confesses to something like a nostalgic feeling of loss, for example, when her graduate students rejected the social constructionist discourse of collaboration that she used to organize her seminar. Or take for example what David Smit says about the value of collaboration:

Many of the published reports on collaborative learning indicate that rather than consensus collaboration may promote a wide variety of points of view; students often do not agree in their responses to the work of their peers, and their responses are often quite different from those of their teachers. Thus, collaborative methods seem to have created a dilemma. On the one hand, they may unleash irreconcilable differences in assumptions, values, and points of view; on the other hand, the emphasis on achieving consensus may result in unnecessary peer pressure to conform to what the group decides. Of course, the goal is a proper balance between individual differences and group consensus, but given the tension inherent in the method, it seems excessive to claim that it is intrinsically better than other pedagogical techniques in achieving a change in values. (“Some Difficulties” 48-49)

What Smit draws attention to are the arguments like those posed by John Trimbur in “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning” and Greg Myers in “Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Teaching Composition,” two canonical essays in composition studies that suggest why consensus should not be the aim of collaborative learning. Of course, Trimbur and Myers are extending the theoretical discussion of collaboration introduced by Kenneth Bruffee with his landmark essay “Collaboration and the ‘Conversation of Mankind.’” The point I wish to highlight is that it’s not just the

social constructionism of Bruffee to which Smit takes aim, but also the arguments like those posed by Trimbur and Myers who suggest that difference and contingency should play a key role in how we conceptualize the pedagogical spaces that social constructionist theory informs. Smit's conclusion, similar to but somewhat more pointed than Miller's, is to question why we need "collaborative learning" in the first place, at least when it comes to collaborative learning as a specific pedagogical model. "Even if we grant the tenets of social construction," Smit writes, "it is not at all clear that collaborative methods best implement that philosophy" (49). Even though Smit issued these observations about collaboration in 1989 during the height of composition's love affair with social constructionist theory, his conclusions about the efficacy of collaboration, especially as a pedagogical strategy, feel quite contemporary and even recent.

Scholars in English studies like Daniel Green and Richard Miller have recently followed in the footsteps of Smit when it comes to questioning and ultimately abandoning certain disciplinary ideals related to literacy education. Green confesses that he entered the profession because, as he says, "I understood the job of the English professor to involve primarily writing about and teaching literature, activities I had come to think of as the twin poles of a vocation both eminently civilized and, as far as I could tell, uncommonly satisfying" (273). What Green found, however, is the messy and competitive reality of fighting for faculty positions in places where his idealistic take on the merits of literary study were practically muted by a corporate "service" mentality that rendered the study of literature impractical. "Nothing in the history of literary study or, more broadly speaking, in the evolution of the English department, gives much credence

to such a nostalgia for the lost purity of the literature curriculum” (276). Green’s solution was simply to walk away from the profession, leaving his wrecked ideals aside. Richard Miller, on the other hand, while not quitting the university nevertheless experienced a similar dissatisfaction with the profession. “If you’re in the business of teaching others how to read and write with care, there’s no escaping the sense that your labor is becoming increasingly irrelevant.” As he continues, “the vast majority of the reading and writing that teachers and their students do about literature and culture might not be all that important. It could all be a rather labored way of passing the time” (5, 6). Miller is responding primarily to the idealistic notions of liberation and self-actualization that social turn epistemologies thrust upon the field of composition in the early 1980s. His solution to curbing what might appear to be simply hyperbolic pessimism is to give up whatever idealistic mindsets about literacy education with which we enter the profession for ones that operate more harmoniously within the bureaucracy of higher education. As he explains, “I find it hard to mourn either the passing of these ways of imagining the business of higher education or the decline of this rhetoric’s power to capture and mesmerize higher education’s clientele. Perhaps the hard economic times that are unquestionably ahead for the academy will occasion a reconception of the opposition of world of thought and the world of work” (169). In effect, Miller suggests we need to stop imagining that the university is a site of cultural liberation and personal actualization, and start imagining it as a space where learning to read and write in critically engaging ways can be used to navigate the bureaucratic terrain of the increasingly corporate and globalized marketplace.



When it comes to the idea of collaboration in the study of writing, I do not want to follow Green and Miller by painting a bleak picture of the prospects for energizing and perhaps even dramatically altering how we think about collaboration and the teaching of composition. Nevertheless, whatever idealistic stance the field of composition once assumed toward the possibilities of collaboration in the 1980s now seems all but a fuzzy memory. In this respect it might seem impractical to engage in a critical review of such a generalized idea as collaboration, especially when it comes to how it has been conceptualized in our theories of writing and translated into pedagogical practices. Like Miller, some compositionists are invested in collaborative learning; others such as Smit, not so much. Still probably the vast number of scholars and teachers of rhetoric and writing are not invested one way or the other.

It is this last attitude that points to what in this dissertation I call *collaborative nihilism*, a term that names a type of disciplinary stance marked by apathy towards the current status of the idea of collaboration in rhetoric and composition studies. It is not an attitude one necessarily assumes with any amount of critical engagement; rather, it is a position most of us simply come to inhabit by virtue of the reality that within the academy, especially the humanities, collaborative work is markedly undervalued, and thus we learn to forego it as a serious activity. But *collaborative nihilism* is also manifested in what is sometimes a blatant dismissal of collaboration altogether. All of us, no doubt, can anecdotally reference some instance or another when someone's collaborative work was challenged on its merits of originality or scholarly rigor.<sup>1</sup> As I mentioned in the Preface, we know that for many tenure and promotion committees

scholarship that is collaborative doesn't "count" as much as scholarship that is not (even though there is plenty of *scholarship* that questions the "individual" nature of individual scholarship).<sup>2</sup> But here I am talking about collaboration as it applies to how we conceptualize the work we do with one another in our disciplines and departments; this blatant *collaborative nihilism* also surfaces in how we talk about collaboration in discussions of pedagogy as well. Again, many of us need not reflect long to recall occasions when the efficacy of collaborative learning was challenged in classroom contexts where students openly resisted it, or maybe it simply failed to deliver on whatever outcomes we trusted to it.

In Chapter Two, I will explain how this disciplinary attitude, this condition of *collaborative nihilism*, has emerged from our existing scholarship on collaboration. Specifically I will consider how our discipline's history of collaboration theory stems directly from Kenneth Bruffee's social turn collaboration based on the principles of social constructionism. As the title of this dissertation alludes, I will be proposing new theory for understanding and enacting collaboration, theory that departs from social constructionist epistemology. In Chapter Three, I begin to articulate a pragmatic theory of collaboration, one that highlights the discursive relationship that collaborators foster as the most critical objective collaborators must engage during collaboration itself. In Chapter Four, I explain how we can draw upon the rhetorical concept of *techné* to understand the conceptual work required to actualize the pragmatic theory I propose. I call my approach to theorizing collaboration "externalist" because this term points to the school of discourse studies that I believe best understands the way that discourse works in

the world. Therefore before I continue, it is perhaps profitable for me to explain how I understand the term “externalism” and why I am utilizing it as a moniker for the theory of collaboration I will develop in these pages.

In “Externalism and the Production of Discourse,” Thomas Kent explains that most of our theories of discourse rely on “the Cartesian claim that a split exists between the human mind and the rest of the world.” Cognitive, expressivist, and social constructionist theories of discourse all support this Cartesian claim and can therefore be labeled as “internalist.” Kent continues, “The internalist imagines that a conceptual scheme or internal realm of mental states—beliefs, desires, intentions, and so forth—exists anterior to an external realm of objects and events. In relation to meaning and language, the internalist thinks that we have ideas in our heads, a kind of private language, and then we find a public shared language to help us communicate these ideas” (57). Internalist theories of discourse therefore support arguments for cultural relativism since what we know and how we speak get shaped by and confined to whatever conceptual schemes through which we learn to live and work. But Kent points to the problem of skepticism as the first major challenge to internalism, especially when it comes to addressing how we can account for things like discourse communities, for example, if they are the product of shared conceptual schemes. As Kent explains, “When we imagine that separation exists between an inner subjective realm of meaning and thought, and an outer objective realm of objects and events, we obviously cannot explain how it is that we can know anything at all about the world outside our own subjectivity” (61). The second objection Kent raises concerns the public nature of our discourse production. That is, internalist theories

cannot account for how communication occurs between people who do not share conceptual schemes.

Kent thus proposes that we abandon internalist approaches and develop a theory of discourse “without getting caught up in the old Cartesian dualisms and paradoxes” (62). What we need, in other words, are *externalist* theories that do not rely on conceptual splits and *a priori* constructions of language to account for our communication. Here is how Kent defines externalism:

Externalism defines itself within a philosophical tradition marked off roughly by Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, the latter Wittgenstein, W.V. Quin, [Richard] Rorty, and especially Jacques Derrida and [Donald] Davidson. Broadly speaking, the externalist takes the position that no split exists between an inner and outer world and claims that our sense of an inner world actually derives from our rapport with other language users, people we interpret during the give and take of communicative interaction. Because language requires the existence of others, the public nature of language-in-use presupposes knowledge of other minds and of the world in which we operate. Although clear differences exist among externalists concerning the public nature of language and meaning, most externalists agree that the dualism inherent in internalism cannot tell us much about how language enables us to understand others or how language enables us to get things done in the world. (62-63)

When I utilize the term “externalism” to describe my approach to theorizing collaboration, I am therefore referencing this line of discourse theory that presupposes there is only one world, to echo Davidson, and we all interact within it and can therefore understand and communicate with one another given enough interaction. In Chapter Four, I will offer a more detailed account of Kent’s articulation of externalism as I discuss how we might use post-process composition theory to understand the pedagogical implications of an externalist theory of collaboration.

But before I conclude this introduction, I want to spend a few moments discussing the goals of this dissertation and what I hope to achieve with a new theory of collaboration. First, I believe that rhetoric and composition lacks usable, pragmatic theory that can account for the discursive potentialities of collaboration. As I will explain in the next chapter, our most popular theories of collaboration are extensions of Kenneth Bruffee's social turn collaboration, which draws on social constructionist theory to present collaboration as a type of discursive interaction which functions as an epistemic mediator that sustains "knowledge" or "discourse" communities. One of my central arguments about this theory is that it proves inconsequential in practice and can only result in the *collaborative nihilism* that I introduced above and will further develop in the first chapter.

Second, I want to introduce a theory of collaboration that not only better accounts for the discursive work collaborators engage *as* collaborators, which will constitute the bulk of my writing in Chapters Three and Four, but I also want to promote the work of collaboration as a legitimate mode of inquiry through which teachers, scholars, and students can engage their intellectual work more generally, which is a clumsy way of saying that I believe collaboration makes us better critical thinkers and discourses. Third, and finally, I want to develop an approach to understanding how collaboration can account for and represent what a non-foundational writing pedagogy might look like *as a pedagogy*. Collaboration emerged in rhetoric and composition studies as an extension of the process-oriented pedagogies that directed attention onto the subjectivities through which students actually write and use discourse, and in this way the study of collaboration in composition was meant to cultivate our understanding of how to promote

pedagogies that allow students to proactively exercise individual agency in their journeys toward becoming effective writers. The move towards embracing collaboration in composition, therefore, always was about promoting students' discursive development as communicators, and so I hope to present an interesting discussion of how we might revitalize the pedagogical possibilities of collaboration without relying on social constructionist theory.

One of my central arguments in this dissertation is that theoretical complexity can actually make us appreciate what sometimes might be considered commonplace terminology. Collaboration is just such a term. With that said, I am not satisfied with the language of collaboration that currently circulates in our field, and thus a tangential aim of this dissertation is to develop a new vocabulary for talking about collaboration. While each of these aims points to particular sets of problems and professional challenges, this last aim to develop a new vocabulary for collaboration is perhaps the most tenuous. As Harris's plea for reconceptualizing the idea of community in composition suggests, much of this work relies on changing the way we actually *talk* about community in the first place. Unfortunately, not much has changed in the two decades that have passed since the publication of his article. In "Rescuing the Discourse of Community," Gregory Clark offers us a reasonable explanation for why "community" has continued as a valued term in the teaching of writing: in short, he says, we need it. "I remain committed to the necessity of a broad concept of community because I believe that anyone's ideas and purposes find value and use when conceived and refined in the context of cooperating collectives" (62). In response to Harris, Clark suggests that we cannot simply throw out

the baby with the bathwater; in fact, we should be celebrating the many different ways compositionists deploy the idea of community in their teaching. As Clark writes, “my argument is to describe a discourse that might enlarge and diversify the concept of community by offering a method of discussion—a rhetoric—that includes as equals people who differ in their own values and in their power to influence those of others” (68).

If we put Harris’s article next to Clark’s, what finally distinguishes them is that for Harris “community” simply names the various interpersonal positions we occupy at any given time, and since these positions are obviously myriad and unstable, we should look for a better metaphor to describe these relationships. For Clark, on the other hand, “community” is what we aim for as an end; it is what we must foster, the thing that designates the conditions for equal cooperation within a context of difference. But the kicker for Clark is that what makes a community truly democratic is its ability to account for otherness. That is, a community built around democratic participation must be able to account for the differences that would normally exclude others from that community, if “community” in this latter sense refers to Bruffee’s conception of a group of constitutionally like-minded individuals.<sup>3</sup> In effect, Clark’s formulation of community is founded squarely on bringing people together as a peaceful, productive collective; it emphasizes the goal of productively working together in proximal spaces of cooperation alongside a commitment to their maintenance.

But herein is where the idea of collaboration in the study of writing seems to have floundered. Like Clark’s vision of a community rooted in democratic proximity, for the

vast majority of scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition “collaboration” is first and foremost a proximal marker, a term that designates a kind of proximal democratic engagement in which Clark’s idea of community does its work. I will develop this argument in the next chapter, but I bring it up here to point out what I believe is the first priority of an externalist theory of collaboration, and that is to account for how two or more individuals can deliberately foster discourse in order to share perspective, not necessarily how to share work. When “collaboration” and “community” both get conceptualized primarily around notions of proximity and consensus, I cannot help but think about how the educational philosopher Parker Palmer once humorously defined community: “Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives” (20). Palmer defines community negatively to underscore the effort necessary to maintain the illusion of an impossible ideal. In this way, I believe, for too long “collaboration” was positioned disciplinarily as the ideal method through which to actualize something like a democratic ethic for doing work connected to social constructionist epistemology. When the illusion of that impossible ideal slowly dissolved amid the realities of teaching within the competitive, performance-driven arena of higher education, like Dorothy’s Wizard, that initial appeal was eventually lost.

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At the beginning of this introduction, I recounted my first experience with collaborative writing. With that narrative I meant to illustrate the untidy and irreconcilably subjective ideas with which I will be wrestling in this dissertation. I do not intended to mute the myriad contingencies that will necessarily affect the externalist



theory of collaboration I develop once we try to locate its pragmatic consequences in experience. The fact of the matter is that all theory is at best a generalized explanation that, if successful, can productively anticipate how something in the world will operate. I do not present my work here as the last or even the best word on collaboration, but I do believe it is a step in the right direction for taking seriously what externalist epistemologies offer to those of us in rhetoric and composition who no longer find productive the internalist mentalities that for so long have directed the production of theory in our discipline.

In the same piece in which Parker Palmer humorously defines community, he also notes, and this quite seriously, that the best conceptions of “community” must boil down to some capacity for relatedness. “We talk a lot in higher education about the formation of inward capacities—the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, the capacity for critical thought. I want us to talk more about those ways of knowing that form an inward capacity for relatedness” (24). Despite his use of the term “inward,” Palmer is not suggesting that we cultivate an internalist-informed capacity for fostering identifications with others. In fact, I believe he is appealing to something like an externalist ethic for recognizing how our imagined borders of incommensurability need not divide this one world we share. It is in this vein that I offer the present study of collaboration theory, because it underscores the necessity for considering how any theory of discourse or writing will itself point to a way of knowing.

I want to conclude with Palmer’s words about what we wager whenever we debate the aims and methods of academic inquiry because such an observation points in good

externalist from the broader consequences of theory building that even the most anti-idealistic among us cannot deny:

My thesis is a very simple one: I do not believe that epistemology is a bloodless abstraction; the *way* we know has powerful implications for the *way* we live. I argue that every epistemology tends to become an ethic, and every way of knowing tends to become a way of living. I argue that the relation between the knower and the known, between the student and the subject, tends to become the relation of the living person to the world itself. I argue that every mode of knowing contains its own moral trajectory, its own ethical direction and outcomes. (22)

### Notes

1. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede reflect on the different ways collaborative work is “punished” in the competitive spaces of higher education in “Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration.” Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner also consider the disciplinary rewards and punishments for collaboration in their article “A Single Good Mind: Collaboration, Cooperation, and the Writing Self.”

2. Obviously two theorists of importance here are Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bahktin, see especially the latter’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays and Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. In composition theory, see Thralls, “Bahktin, Collaborative Partners, and Published Discourse”; Reither and Vipond, “Writing as Collaboration”; Lunsford and Ede, “Collaborative Authorship and the Teaching of Writing”; and Roen and Mittan, “Collaborative Scholarship in Composition: Some Issues.”

3. Clark’s position is one I’d call optimistically anti-idealistic and it represents for the discipline of composition specifically what Bill Readings proposes for higher education

in general in his book *The University in Ruins*, which was published two years after Clark's article. There Readings argues that universities as a whole are slowly assuming the status of transnational corporation that peddles degrees like widgets while trafficking in the currency of "excellence," a vague signification that marks the highest degree of quality in educational marketing. According to Readings, the problem with conceptualizing the university in terms of community is that our modern tendency to universalize experience turns the idea of community into a false ideal since it presupposes a "shared *human* capacity for communication" (182). Furthermore, if fostering community (or communities—of academics, students, citizens, social activists, etc.) is the social function of the university is to "pretend to be the institution that is not an institution but simply the structure you get if transparent communication is possible" (183).

But if we can embrace the idea the university is where thinking occurs *beside* other thinking—without holding fast to notion that we are thinking as a unified community—then we can begin to describe the university as something like a "community at loose ends," a more accurate moniker for the space of university actually represents. In a community at loose ends there is no authoritative master, and the differences between "I" and "you" are caught up in a network of relational obligations that require everyone to constantly recognize that our common humanity doesn't mean we will ever fully understand the depth of our responsibility to others (185, 189).

Whereas Readings essentially posits that the University should exist as a ideologically neutral space where teachers and students learn beside one another in a

community of dissensus, Clark argues for what is essentially the same idea—that a community of dissensus marks the necessary conditions for democratic cooperation—but instead of talking about the university as whole, he is simply addressing the discipline of composition. Nevertheless, both Clark and Readings hold an optimistically anti-idealistic ethic. It is the supposed necessity of this network, be it the cooperative collective Clark calls for, the discourse community Bartholomae names, or the “city” that Harris proposes, that squarely grounds the metaphor of community into the disciplinarity of composition.

## CHAPTER II

### A DISCIPLINARY REVIEW OF SOCIAL TURN COLLABORATION

Although social construction has a venerable history in twentieth-century thought and although writers in a number of fields are engaged in an effort to develop the disciplinary implications of a nonfoundational social constructionist understanding of knowledge, that history remains largely unacknowledged and the effort fragmented. Terminology proliferates. The result is that in some cases positions not only similar but mutually supportive seem alien to one another.

- *Kenneth Bruffee*, "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay"

As a critical term in the field of rhetoric and composition studies, "collaboration" has assumed a catch-all status that has, ironically, allowed theorists and practitioners to deploy it in decidedly uncritical ways. To call something "collaborative" is tantamount to saying nothing particular at all, except perhaps that two or more people have worked together in some capacity. Indeed, to invoke the idea of collaboration is to invoke a floating signifier the referent of which exists in whatever conceptualization of the social one brings to bear on the idea of sharing work. For scholars in rhetoric and composition, the idea of collaboration has become inextricably linked to the idea of collaborative learning, which as a pedagogical concept tends to beg more questions than it presumably answers. This latter point is one that David Smit addressed in his attempt to understand what it means when teaching is described as collaborative. "I find it difficult to sort out the claims of collaborative theorists so as to discover just what kind of pedagogy they are recommending when they champion the benefits of collaborative learning." He continues

by acknowledging that theorists of collaboration “can cite an impressive body of theory and evidence to support their claims”; nevertheless, Smit questions “whether this body of theory provides an adequate basis for a collaborative pedagogy and whether it clearly demonstrates that collaborative methods improve writing” (“Some Difficulties” 45-46).

Composition’s interest in collaboration and collaborative learning gained disciplinary traction in the 1970s and 1980s at the same time when open admissions policies were ushering in an increasingly diversified student body while in philosophy and the social sciences theories of social construction were also starting to emerge. Within composition studies the work of Kenneth Bruffee represents the crucible of this interaction between open admissions policies and social constructionist epistemology. The above epigraph, taken from “Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay,” reflects what is ostensibly a common thread that links all of Bruffee’s scholarship to an attempts to unify disparate iterations of social constructionist theory in order to articulate a categorical imperative for understanding the social origins of knowledge as rooted in conversation. “Social construction assumes,” writes Bruffee in this essay, “that thinking is an internalized version of conversation. Anything we say about the way thinking works is conversation about another conversation: talk about talk” (777). It is out of the social constructionist metaphor of knowledge as conversation that Bruffee shapes his philosophy of collaboration and collaborative learning, one that to date has had a profound effect on how we talk about collaboration and the teaching of writing. For example, it is Bruffee’s bibliographic essay along with his landmark “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” that Susan Miller, in her

own essay about collaborative learning, cites first in her list of influences “that comprise current standard tests of collaborative pedagogy in composition theory” (283).

John Trimbur and Harvey Kail further attest to the impact Bruffee has played in our understanding of collaboration when they position him centrally as one who recognized the value of collaborative learning in the beginning years of open admissions: “The joining of practical rhetoric with collaborative learning pedagogy is an interesting story in itself, one that is both specific to Bruffee and germane to higher education reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (“Forward” xxi). It is worth quoting Trimbur and Kail at length to share their take on *A Short Course in Writing*, the textbook Bruffee first published in the early 1970s that articulated a pedagogy rooted in collaborative activity (the textbook was re-published in 2007 as the first volume in the Longman Classics in Composition book series):

In his review of the original manuscript of *A Short Course*, Richard Beal, the most prominent English editor at the time, told Paul O’Connell, who published the first edition at Winthrop in 1972, that Bruffee could either alter the book and sell a lot of copies or publish the book as is and make history. What Beal predicted has indeed come to pass. As *A Short Course* appeared in subsequent editions (the second from Winthrop in 1980; the third in from Little, Brown in 1985; and the fourth from HarperCollins in 1993), it has influenced, far out of proportion to its sales, the actual practices of writing instruction and, more broadly, of educational reform in U.S. college composition. (xix)

There is much to say about the important contributions of Bruffee to the field of composition, especially in regard to the role he played in shepherding the idea of collaboration into critical perspective. But despite what Bruffee and those who contributed to our understanding of collaborative learning achieved in the 1980s and

early 1990s by way of extending the scholarship on collaboration, it is evident that the terministic status of collaboration is today much like that of “interdisciplinarity,” the latter of which Louis Menand discusses in his recent book *The Marketplace of Ideas*. “There are few terms in twenty-first-century higher education with a greater buzz factor,” writes Menand. “No one, or almost no one, says a word against it. It is invoked by professors and by deans with equal enthusiasm” (95). Certainly the idea of interdisciplinarity is more popular today than the idea of collaboration ever was, but “collaboration” certainly had a buzz factor at one time, and this matters precisely because the popularity of collaborative learning as a pedagogical watchword, connected as it is to the “social turn” in composition theory, has evolved in such a way that today collaboration seems like old news. Thus am I able to suggest, as I do above, that to say something is collaborative is tantamount to saying nothing particular at all.

I want to suggest neither a retrospective reeling-in of sorts to account for the myriad ways collaboration has been articulated disciplinarily nor a nostalgic stroll down roads of terministic clarity that never existed; for as Smit evidences, to call something “collaborative” has always proved problematic upon close inspection. Rather, I suggest that as professionals in rhetoric and composition—whether teachers, researchers, theorists, or graduate students—we should consider how a popular epistemological theory has influenced how we talk about an equally popular pedagogical model. To this end, I believe that the discourse of collaboration can be renewed, that its evocations can rise above “exertions of mechanical skill,” to echo Emerson when describing our sluggish intellects in “The American Scholar.” Additionally, I believe we can use



pragmatist philosophy to understand collaboration consequentially. But the purpose of this present chapter is to examine how our field's scholarship on collaboration has primarily revolved around the politics of social constructionist theory, and that despite important criticisms that have interrogated what collaboration is and how it works, there has been no attempt to question the foundational assumptions about social constructionism that have been utilized to inform our basic assumptions about what it means to "collaborate" with others. Consequently, the cumulative result of this scholarship on collaboration has been manifested disciplinarily into an attitude I call "collaborative nihilism," a term that, as I pointed out in the Introduction, names the combination of both apathy and meaninglessness that the current status of the idea of collaboration in rhetoric and composition studies reflects; it also points to why, as I explain above, collaboration has fizzled in its disciplinary value as a critical term for how we understand the work of composition. My review of the scholarship on social turn collaboration is relevant because it explains why as an idea "collaboration" today has no pragmatic value for compositionists outside its utility as a vague gesture that points toward certain unquestioned assumptions about knowledge and discourse that I will discuss at length below.

### **Collaborative Nihilism: A Brief Conceptual Sketch**

"Movements of thought involving vague concepts," wrote I.A. Richards in 1932, "can have a power and coherence which analysis would destroy. And once analysis is introduced, the especially troublesome problems of logical machinery...we use in

analysis are on our hands” (39). “Collaboration” certainly qualifies as a vague concept, but is it worth engaging the “troublesome problems” of such an inquiry? Some of us are invested in pedagogies of collaborative learning, others of us not so much, while still probably the vast number of scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition are not invested one way or another. Collaboration for this last contingency is simply a word that means too many different things for too many different people to warrant critical examination. This last attitude points to what I am calling *collaborative nihilism*, a term that names a type of disciplinary stance marked by apathy and meaninglessness towards the current status of the idea of collaboration in rhetoric and composition studies. I am using the term *collaborative nihilism* in the tradition of Cornel West who has made direct and nuanced appeals to various type of cultural nihilism he has observed through his experiences as a theologian, pragmatist philosopher, educator, and political activist.

Beginning with *Race Matters* and *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times* in 1993 and extending through *Democracy Matters* in 2004, Cornel West developed a conception of nihilism both contemporary and inclusive that he applied, first, to describe the black experience in America, and next, to classify America’s collective disillusionment with democracy, namely our nation’s failure to manifest its core democratic principles in its public policies and discourses. In *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, West defines nihilism as “self-paralyzing pessimism” and the “lived experience of meaningless and hopelessness and lovelessness” (18). A decade later in *Democracy Matters*, West writes “This monumental collapse of meaning, hope, and love primarily resulted from the saturation of market forces and market moralities in black life and the present crisis of

black leadership,” but he continues, “nihilism is [now] not confined to black America.” At present America suffers from a “political nihilism,” the felt experience of “disillusionment with the American democratic system” (26, 27). One facet of this political nihilism West dubs *sentimental nihilism*. For example, “Many newspeople are deep believers in the principle of the free press and the special role it’s meant to play in our democracy, and yet that belief all too often amounts to sentiment because they fail to act more consistently on that principle” (37). Sentimental nihilists are those “willing to sidestep or even bludgeon the truth or unpleasant or unpopular facts and stories, in order to provide an emotionally satisfying show” (36). In the end, West says sentimental nihilism “is content to remain on the surface of problems than to pursue their substantive depths” (38-39).

So in the present context, *collaborative nihilism* can refer to those attitudes of frustration and disillusionment when it comes to fostering an interest in theories and practices of collaboration. But it primarily references the more pervasive disciplinary unproductiveness that has resulted from a failure to critically engage unquestioned assumptions about collaboration and collaborative learning that are manifest in our literature on the social nature of composition and discourse production. After all, scholarship in rhetoric and composition that directly investigates our theoretical understanding of collaboration has practically fallen by the wayside. There were two edited collections in the early 1990s (*Writing With* [1994]; *New Visions of Collaborative Writing* [1992]) that explored the theoretical dimensions of collaboration, but practically nothing of substance since then. Here I want to add another quality to the idea of

*collaborative nihilism*, one that distinguishes it a bit from West's positioning of nihilism as primarily an attitude. Specifically, I believe it can also point to a certain type of recognition, in particular when it comes to the status of collaboration as a pseudo-concept. In *The Mysterious Barricades: Language and Its Limits*, Ann Berthoff, borrowing from Richards and Vygotsky, warns us to be wary of "gangster theories" that rely on "killer dichotomies" and "pseudo-concepts." To understand the function of gangster theories is to understand how they emerge from what at one point is critical inquiry that eventually just stops being critical. "A common sequence is for a theory to move from statements of the self-evident, based on incontrovertible fact, to pronouncements of absolute truth and then, gradually, to qualified and restricted application, not logically different from the original." Berthoff continues, "A gangster theory can start out as a reasonable analogy, with ambiguities noticed and limitations recognized, but then it will be 'strengthened' by being pushed to an extreme, the qualifications dropped, the principles formulated as law" (16). As an example of what is pseudo-concept, one of the conceptual consequences of a gangster theory, she turns to the idea of discourse:

*Discourse*, for instance, has become a pseudo-concept in Vygotsky's sense: it has gathered to itself many analogous or at least comparable ideas and terms, but there has emerged no criterion by which to differentiate the members of this new class. The field of application of this pseudo-concept is virtually limitless; *discourse* can mean *language, procedure, culturally determined attitudes, historically determined conventions, unconscious habits, deliberate habits, rational conventions unconsciously followed, arbitrary conventions deliberately deployed*. Discourse analysis has thus become a safe house for gangster theories. (17)

Obviously we could replace “discourse” with “collaboration” here and the latter’s status as a pseudo-concept would be clear. But it is not just that collaboration can mean too many different things for too many different people that fuels *collaborative nihilism*; rather it is that “collaboration” is often deployed in our disciplinary discourses *as if* this word is self-interpreting, even though, echoing Richards, we recognize that with some careful analysis and practical inquiry, the “power and coherence” of collaboration as a critical term would fall apart.

What follows in this chapter is a review of Kenneth Bruffee’s social turn collaboration, my attempt to trace how exactly a social constructionist epistemology informs his articulation of collaborative learning. Next I will offer a brief overview of the most relevant scholarship that complicated Bruffee’s rendering of both the methods for and purposes of collaborative learning. I will show that even though important criticism furthered our discourse on collaboration, it nevertheless failed to seriously question the social constructionist mooring to which it had been tied. Finally, I will offer a two-part discussion that explains what I am calling the poles of *collaborative nihilism* in composition scholarship—a heuristic distinction that locates scholarship in relationship to one of two conceptual poles, ones that roughly can be labeled “theory” and “practice.” What I will demonstrate is that when collaboration is primarily conceptualized through a social constructionist epistemology, it can only be rendered theoretically as an over-determined quality of our discourse *or* pedagogically as a teaching mechanism that functions much like a tool teachers can deploy at will. The cumulative result of this theory-practice conceptual split, I argue, is that we are left with untenable theory and

elective pedagogy, which leads collaboration to the place where it now resides in our critical vocabulary: as a pseudo-concept that can mean just about anything that involves the work of more than one person.

Before I continue, let me return I.A. Richards and what he offers by way of his practical criticism, the theoretical orientation that undergirded his New Rhetoric. As Berthoff notes, Richards opposed “systematic procedures and experimental techniques” as methods for testing theory; instead, “He wanted to develop what he called a ‘natural history of opinions’ (later, of ‘meaning’)” based on the pragmatic principle that, as Richards worded it, “How we use a theorem best tells us what the theorem is” (*Richards* 23). I have already described my work in this chapter as an experiment in practical inquiry. By “practical inquiry” I mean to play off Richards’s notion of practical criticism, which in part calls for us to consider how we use a theory as the best test for what a theory is, or stated more pragmatically, what difference a theory makes. At this point, to best see how the idea of collaborative learning took root in composition studies—how it has been used—I now turn to Bruffee.

### **Kenneth Bruffee and “Social Turn” Collaboration**

I wrote ‘Collaborative Learning and the “Conversation of Mankind”’ to redirect the way we think about teaching literature and writing. It was the groundwork for almost everything I have done since.

- *Kenneth Bruffee*, Comment to his essay in *The Norton Book of Composition*

The social constructionist-informed theories of collaboration at our disposal in composition studies ultimately position collaboration on opposite ends of a theory-

practice dichotomous pole, on one end of which collaboration is collapsed into over-determined theory that leaves no room for nuance and fallibility, on the end of which collaboration is situated tactically as a pedagogical tool teachers utilize in the classroom. When the meaning of collaboration can be explained in both categorical and qualified terms, and when no attempt is offered to question what difference this bifurcation makes, collaboration has no practical meaning.

Before I review those specific works that have contributed to the polarity of scholarship on collaboration in the study of composition, it is first necessary to examine the principles of social constructionist epistemology that have been utilized by compositionists to explain the nature of collaboration itself. An implicit component of my argument here is that we cannot study the scholarship on collaboration without also studying the social turn in composition, because to recognize how our field understands collaboration is to also recognize how we understand social constructionism. Coming to terms with how collaboration has been theorized in composition studies must begin with properly situating the work of Kenneth Bruffee in relationship to this theory since his work has most explicitly connected collaboration to this social turn in composition. Therefore in this section I offer an introductory primer to social turn collaboration via a review of how Bruffee appropriates social constructionist principles to construct a theory of collaborative learning.

In the penultimate chapter of *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*, the second edition of which was published by Johns Hopkins in 1999, Kenneth Bruffee begins with a reminder that the

purpose of higher education is to “reacculturate” students into academic communities that maintain certain discursive requirements for membership. This is, in fact, an argument Bruffee makes throughout the book: “College and university education should help students renegotiate their membership in the knowledge communities they come from while it helps them reacculturate themselves into the academic communities they have chosen to join” (231). The means through which this goal of reacculturating students’ membership into academic communities requires what Bruffee calls a “nonfoundational curriculum.”

The goal of such a curriculum is to help students understand their academic studies—of mathematics, chemistry, sociology, English, whatever—*as* reacculturation, and specifically as reacculturation into communities in which knowledge is a construct of the community’s constituting language or form of discourse. Along with this basic expertise in the workings of language and other symbolic systems, furthermore, necessarily goes a basic expertise in how people live and work well together. (231)

At this point Bruffee explains what are three necessary phases through which a nonfoundational curriculum moves students. In the first phase, students should be directed to recognize how they are already members in certain communities of knowledgeable peers; in the second phase, students learn how to interrogate which of their beliefs and the beliefs of their peers have been socially justified and in which particular communities; in the third and final phase, students are instructed in the discursive techniques of justifying belief to better engage those particular knowledge communities in which they are seeking membership *and* to recognize that knowledge itself is produced, or constituted, through a knowledge community’s discourse (232-36). These phases and the particular vocabulary Bruffee utilizes to describe the work of each



phase represent a fairly precise articulation of what collaborative learning is meant to achieve when it is informed by the principles of social constructionist epistemology.

When the first of edition of *Collaborative Learning* was published in 1993, Bruffee had already established himself as the principle theorist of collaborative learning in composition studies. Virtually every piece of scholarship in the discipline that has highlighted collaboration in one respect or another has explicitly drawn from or at least referenced Bruffee's work; moreover his articles on collaboration have been copiously used in disciplines outside of composition. For example, after one brief search I found Bruffee cited in the following journals: *Computers and the Humanities*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *College Teaching*, *The Urban Review*, *Journal of Adult Development*, and *The Classical Journal*, just to name seven sources I found after a cursory search.<sup>1</sup> Today Bruffee's name is synonymous with the study of collaboration and its theory, even though he doesn't identify as a theorist.<sup>2</sup>

The focus on collaborative learning that marks Bruffee's disciplinary footprint in composition is not just the product of his appropriation of collaborative learning theory gleaned from the likes of British pedagogues Edwin Mason and M. L. J. Abercrombie, which is usually where discussions of Bruffee's work and those who inspired him begin. No doubt, Mason and Abercrombie play an important role in locating how Bruffee's interest in collaborative learning developed, but I argue the tradition of collaborative learning theory sparked by Bruffee is primarily the result of his translation of social constructionist epistemology into pedagogical theory. Indeed in one of his earliest articles

about the social nature of learning, “The Structure of Knowledge and the Future of Liberal Education” (1981), Bruffee casually mentions Mason and Abercrombie’s names only once, and only in the article’s final paragraph to boot. The names that do appear prominently in the article are all used to explain what Bruffee calls the “revolution in our conception of knowledge” (178). Einstein’s theory of relativity, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, and Goedel’s argument that mathematics is not a self-validating system of knowledge are the theories out of which Bruffee sketches his argument for reimagining what knowledge is and how it gets produced. The result of this “revolution” Bruffee chooses to articulate quite poetically:

Knowledge must be regarded as a social entity today because we have no other alternative. All our touchstones, ancient and modern, are gone. Whether we like it or not, our knowledge is no longer hitched to the stars. What we know and how we know it—at best a lumbering wagon—is drawn by ourselves alone. (181)

It is because of this “unhitching” of knowledge that Bruffee then suggests we need to reevaluate the role of “peer group influence” in the classroom. He concludes by suggesting that collaborative learning might be the “practical means” of revitalizing liberal education according to this social turn in our collective epistemological moorings (186). At the end of his essay, Bruffee casually suggests that Mason and Abercrombie’s work might be “roughed out” as a guide for conceptualizing what collaborative learning looks like pedagogically. Nevertheless, collaborative learning as such was for Bruffee the natural consequence of heeding this “revolution” in the conception of knowledge.

Bruffee’s 1984 article, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” acted as the catalyst for scholars in composition to heed the pedagogical implications of

social constructionist epistemology and its significance for understanding collaboration. At the beginning of this essay Bruffee points to what at the time appeared as a practical problem in conceptualizing the work of collaboration. Despite what was ostensibly heightened interest in collaborative learning at the then recent CCCC and MLA annual conventions, Bruffee observed that within both of these professional contexts “collaborative learning is discussed sometimes as a process that constitutes fields or disciplines of study and sometimes as a pedagogical tool that ‘works’ in teaching composition and literature” (635). That collaboration was understood both as a theoretical orientation and as a pedagogical mechanism, and usually in only one of these frames of reference at a time, prompted Bruffee to recognize the frustrations inherent in understanding collaborative learning in the first place. It is, of course, ironic that the problem Bruffee names at the outset of this landmark essay is one that I argue still persists; nevertheless, Bruffee’s observation about the lack of consistency in how collaborative learning is understood in English studies established the disciplinary positioning that allowed him to forward collaboration not as its own subject of study (that is, as a pedagogical theory that exists in a vacuum) but as the logical extension of a social constructionist epistemology that explains how knowledge is not an inherent property of nature, the mind, or anything else for that matter, but a product of conversation.

The term “conversation” is perhaps the most important watchword for a social constructionist epistemology because it represents the action through which belief gets socially justified. The notion of “socially justified belief” is another critical phrase for which to account because knowledge within a social constructionist epistemology *is*

socially justified belief. The discursive space of conversation is a social space; it is where ideas and observations get forwarded, discussed, and debated. When conversation continues to “justify” any of these ideas or observations, they become “beliefs,” those concepts that count as knowledge within a particular discourse community. But a social constructionist epistemology must also account for how discourse itself functions as discourse—as the meaningful exchange of verbal and symbolic gestures; and it is through an explanation of the difference between “normal” and “abnormal” discourse that such an account is provided. These key terms—“conversation,” “socially justified belief,” “normal” and “abnormal discourse”—for Bruffee become the critical vocabulary he utilizes to justify the social constructionist principles of collaborative learning, to which he also adds another critical term, “consensus.”

Certainly the most important figure from whom Bruffee shapes his basic understanding of social constructionist epistemology is Richard Rorty.<sup>3</sup> It was in Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) where Bruffee was introduced to the concept of socially justified belief. Rorty’s sketch of what he called “epistemological behaviorism” used the notion of socially justified belief to challenge philosophers to recognize “knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature” (171). Rorty’s anti-foundationalist epistemology emphasized that the notion of socially justified belief represents the most tenable starting position for epistemological inquiry since it does not rely on the faulty belief in a metaphysical split between mind and nature that undergirds Cartesian epistemologies. “We have considered it to be a universal truth,” writes Bruffee explaining the epistemological paradigm social

constructionism replaced that constructed knowledge as kind of “matter” with which human beings fill their minds. Such a theory “assumes that knowledge is a mental construct...it draws its authority, on one hand, from the quality of that mental construct and, on the other hand, from the quality of the reliability of mental constructs’ reference to a reality external to the mind” (“Scholarly Community” 231). This Rortian understanding of Cartesian epistemology Bruffee folds into his social constructionism in order to position, like Rorty, the social justification of belief as the primary factor in negotiating the fluidity of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Bruffee had already formulated a working interpretation of Rorty’s social justification of belief by 1982 when he published an article that outlined the implications of this concept for resolving how educators debate the purpose of liberal education. On one hand, Bruffee explains, “some of us tend to feel that the purpose of education is mainly to provide students with a world to understand, whereas other of us tend to feel mainly that the purpose of education is to help students develop ways to understand the world” (“Liberal Education” 96-97). Instead of debating from one or the other of these camps and thus risk what he viewed as the stymieing effects of circular argument, Bruffee implicitly forwards an altogether different question about how both goals might be one in the same if we “replace post-Cartesian epistemology with another concept of knowledge equally powerful and more appropriate to our present and future educational needs” (99). Turning to a review of Rorty’s social constructionism, Bruffee explains that knowledge can be easily situated as “what we are justified in believing.” Here is how he explains the social justification of belief:

In this concept of knowledge all three terms are operative: social, justification, and belief. The definition assumes that each of us maintains BELIEFS about the world that are private and particular to ourselves....The second operative term in a Rortean definition of knowledge, JUSTIFICATION, has to do with what must be done to turn beliefs into knowledge. Private, particular beliefs are not knowledge. They become knowledge only when they are justified or shown capable of justification....To justify a belief does not mean to establish a relationship between ourselves and some individual we believe to be most knowledgeable, between ourselves and the object known, or between ourselves and some ideal reality or touchstone of truth. To justify a belief is to establish a certain kind of relationship among ourselves and among the things we say. This insistence that justification is a matter of conversation among persons brings us to the third operative term in a Rortean definition of knowledge: that the justification of belief is a SOCIAL process. (104-05)

What Bruffee (mis)takes from Rorty is a philosophical argument for theorizing collaborative learning as the pedagogical model for actualizing socially justified belief in classroom learning, and although he doesn't word it this way here, Bruffee nevertheless shapes what becomes an important premise for his later articulations of collaborative learning. "If I say, then, that knowledge is socially justified belief," he writes later in this same essay, "we seem to be saying that knowledge results from *acknowledgement*, the mutual agreement among knowledgeable peers that a belief expressed by a member of that community has been socially justified or is socially justifiable" (106). The social justification of belief therefore functioned for Bruffee as the epistemological starting point in which to ground a pedagogical theory that positioned *consensus* as the practical goal of conversation in small group work.

Whereas Rorty provided Bruffee with a philosophical explanation of how knowledge is the product of socially justified belief that gets negotiated through conversation, it is Thomas Kuhn who first articulated for Bruffee a clear explanation of how knowledge is the product of group consensus. Indeed, in his monograph Bruffee outright declares that

collaborative learning follows “the Kuhnian assumption that knowledge is consensus: it is something people construct interdependently by talking together” (133). This is, of course, a misreading of Kuhn’s “paradigms” which the latter meant to reference paradigmatic *practices* and not just ways of talking. Nevertheless, ever since Bruffee began publishing defenses of social turn epistemology, especially as it related to the work of a liberal education, Kuhn occupied a central place in these explications. “The implication of this indeterminacy of knowledge most important for modern higher education,” writes Bruffee in reference to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, is that “the very ‘laws of nature’ are ‘discovered’ and remain in force through consensus. Scientific knowledge is what is accepted by an assenting community of scientists” (“The Structure of Knowledge” 181). Just like Rorty, Kuhn is manifest in Bruffee’s explanations of collaborative learning according to social constructionism. In “Liberal Education and the Social Justification of Belief,” for example, he explains the idea of conceptual change according to Kuhnian perspective:

Even in the most sophisticated, complex, and demanding sorts of thinking human beings ever undertake, it seems, “the path from object to [us] and from [us] to object’ still ‘passes through another person.” Several of Kuhn’s illustrations demonstrate this social or collaborative nature of adult thought....Kuhn gives the hypothetical example of two members or factions of a scientific community trying to reconcile incompatible assumptions on which their work is to proceed. Incompatible assumptions cannot, of course, be reconciled through experimentation. The rules of experimentation are defined by those very assumptions. Incompatible assumptions can be reconciled only through debate. And in that debate, Kuhn explains, scientists must rely on techniques that are neither “straightforward, [nor] comfortable, [nor] part of the scientists’ normal arsenal.” Because of the extraordinary nature of the debate, in fact, evidence of the collaborative nature of learning is available to us (102)

What is particularly interesting about this early explanation of Kuhn's importance to the project of collaborative learning is how Bruffee recognizes that an exceptional kind of discourse is needed to overcome communicative stalemate if debate is to lead to any resolution, to any new knowledge. By 1986 when Bruffee published his bibliographic essay on social constructionism in *College English*, he had discovered how to characterize Kuhn as a visionary figure of sorts who anticipated the social turn in epistemology that Rorty would formalize with *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. In "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" easily Bruffee's most important essay for the field of rhetoric and composition, he asserts "For us as humanists to discover in Kuhn and his followers the conceptual rationale of collaborative learning is to see our own chickens come home to roost" (646). Even though Kuhn becomes something of a tangential figure for social turn collaboration—an important tangential figure for sure, if such a role is possible—Bruffee's recognition in Kuhn that exceptional discourse is needed to overcome stalemated debate gains its theoretical footing in Rorty, who, using Kuhn's conception of normal science, constructs the roles of normal and abnormal discourse as the means through which knowledge is socially challenged.

Normal discourse refers to what a particular group considers standard habits of discourse. For Bruffee, like Rorty, in order to understand normal discourse one must recognize how knowledgeable peers are the agents of this discourse. "A community of knowledgeable peers," explains Bruffee, "is a group who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions." And echoing Rorty (who is building from Kuhn), Bruffee explains that in normal discourse



there is general consensus about what counts as a question, and argument, a relevant contribution, and sound criticism (“Collaborative Learning” 642-43). In other words, normal discourse generally marks the uninterrupted flow of conversation among knowledgeable peers. By way of example, in “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” Bruffee explains, “The essay I am writing here is an example of normal discourse in this sense. I am writing to members of my own community of knowledgeable peers. My readers and I (I presume) are guided in our work by the same set of conventions about what counts as a relevant contribution, what counts as a question, what counts as having a good argument for that answer or a good criticism of it” (643). What is important about Bruffee’s interpretation of normal discourse is that it gets positioned as the discursive space in which collaborative learners negotiate their apprenticeship into the knowledge communities in which they hope to become members. “Collaborative learning provides the kind of social context, the kind of community, in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers.” He continues, “This is one of its main goals: to provide a context in which students can practice and master the normal discourse exercised in established knowledge communities in the academic world and in business, government, and the professions” (644). But it is not enough however to simply say that knowledge is the product of conversation among knowledgeable peers because as such this explanation leaves little room to account for paradigm shifts (when a knowledge community’s basic assumptions are replaced with new ones) or the creation of new knowledge (when individual members of a knowledge community contribute something novel to the conversation). Here Bruffee uses Rorty’s

concept of abnormal discourse to show that conversation is not simply the uninterrupted flow of normal discourse; instead, the epistemological space of conversation is riddled with stops and starts and negotiations among its participants. In normal discourse knowledge is simply circulated through the exchange of conversation, and while debates about what counts as knowledge will occur, there is always a set of accepted epistemological assumptions from which discourses argue; in abnormal discourse an unconventional idea is injected into the normal discourse of a community that must then be accounted for in relation to that community's normal discourse. With his formulation of how groups of knowledgeable peers engage in "normal" conversation to sustain knowledge, and when abnormal discourse is introduced to the conversation to create new knowledge, Bruffee has the basic outline of social turn collaboration conceptually sketched.

So what, then, is social turn collaboration exactly? The short answer to this question is simply to say that it is how collaborative learning, explained in the work of Bruffee, has come to be theorized in composition studies according to these central components of social constructionist epistemology. A slightly longer answer can be found in reviewing an article Bruffee published in 1987 titled "The Art of Collaborative Learning" in the magazine *Change*, a publication for educators and other professionals in higher education. There, Bruffee recounts to readers a recent experience reading a colleague's book manuscript. He remembers how he carefully read the draft, marking it up in the margins, and then composed a thoughtful six-page letter offering revision suggestions before sending the manuscript back to its author. Bruffee explains that he "learned a lot

reading his [colleague's] book" and "[they] both learned something talking out the stickier points in it" (42). In short, this is what collaborative learning is about: engaging in focused "conversation" to arrive at consensus about some question, problem, or idea. Collaborative learning is not just what professionals like Bruffee and his colleague do when talking through a book manuscript, however, and Bruffee explains this much when he articulates that when teachers utilize collaborative learning, "Students learn better through non-competitive collaborative group work than in classrooms that are highly individualized and competitive" (44). At stake in collaborative learning is therefore the shared authority that collaborators grant each other; when teachers give up some of their "traditional" authority, collaborative learning is most successful. At the end of this article, he writes:

Because we usually identify the authority of knowledge in a classroom with the instructor's authority, the brief hiatus in the hierarchical chain of authority in the classroom that is at the heart of collaborative learning in the long run also challenges, willy-nilly, our traditional view of the nature and source of knowledge itself. Collaborative learning tends, that is, to take its toll on the cognitive understanding of knowledge that most of us assume unquestioningly. Teachers and student alike may find themselves asking the sorts of questions Abercrombie asked. How can knowledge gained through a social process have a source that is not itself also social? (47)

In the end, this is Kenneth Bruffee's social turn collaboration; it is collaborative learning theorized and deployed with the express purpose of giving students the opportunity to not only re-acculturate themselves into a new academic community, but to also recognize how this new knowledge, and all knowledge for that matter, is *socially rooted in conversation*, and as "members" of a conversation they are able to use their discourse to

change this knowledge and add to it. Bruffee has also referenced at multiple points the work of Clifford Geertz and Stanley Fish, but what he takes from these latter thinkers is further theoretical evidence that knowledge is a “nonfoundational social artifact,” such as, for example, when a group of literary critics “establishes an interpretative language” that functions as a normal discourse, which in turn “embodies the interpretation that the community accepts, and it literally constitutes the community” (“Scholarly Community” 232, 234).<sup>5</sup>

In 1986 when he published “Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay,” Bruffee gave compositionists, rhetoricians, and literary theorists what has become one of the most recognizable definitions of social constructionism in English Studies: “Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities—or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or ‘constitute’ the communities that generate them” (774). While not as poetic as explaining that “our knowledge is no longer hitched to the stars” and is “at best a lumbering wagon...drawn by ourselves alone,” the evolution in theoretical explanation Bruffee made in the half-decade that separates these two summary attempts at explaining social constructionist thought testifies both to his persistence as a theorist and the scholarly environment in which social constructionist epistemology flourished in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the first line of Patricia Sullivan’s review essay in *College English* where she critiques Bruffee’s *Collaborative Learning* reads, “Social constructionism has become the default theory of the nineties” (950); and this just a few

years after Donald Stewart's 1988 proclamation in *Rhetoric Review*: "the era of the social constructionists is just beginning" (58). While there were certainly challenges to Bruffee that questioned some of his terminology and his claims about the ends of collaborative learning, they nevertheless left unquestioned the basic social constructionist argument that knowledge is socially justified belief that exists within the discursive boundaries of knowledge communities, ones in which new members must be apprenticed before they can assume the privileged status of knowledgeable peers.

### **Authority, Consensus, and the Complications of Collaboration**

Donald Stewart's remark about the era of the social constructionists is actually not a proclamation; it is critique that questions both the project of collaborative learning and the soundness of social constructionist theory. This social turn in composition theory fails to deliver on "the educational panacea that its advocates imply," writes Stewart. Even though collaborative learning might reinvigorate sterile learning environments and encourage student engagement, Stewart asserts "there is a point beyond which I won't go" (67) when it comes to crediting collaboration pedagogically. One of those points is what Stewart sees as a "rather flexible definition of the word *collaboration*, specifically its lack of a clear distinction between *influence* and *collaboration*" (66). But he also questions the histories of collaborative learning and social constructionism, at least those that framed collaboration as a novel pedagogical strategy. For Stewart the values espoused by social turn collaboration advocates are neither new nor particularly revolutionary, and he cites a number of historical examples from the history of

composition to show that certain of our forebears recognized and wrote about the social principles espoused in collaborative learning.

Despite its status as a “default theory,” to echo Sullivan, or its popularity in discussions about collaborative learning, everyone in composition did not embrace the hype that was social constructionist epistemology in the eighties and nineties. In a response to Bruffee’s bibliographic essay, for example, David Foster says “What undermines Bruffee’s claims on behalf of social constructionism is his uncritical eagerness to herd together profoundly divergent thinkers on both sides” (“Comment” 709). As Stewart moreover evidences, there were also critics who questioned what they viewed as old news—collaborative learning—tethered to social turn composition theory. But the scope of this criticism was much narrower than the impression Stewart’s critique might suggest. In fact, the most vocal discussions about collaborative learning (and, by default, the social constructionist ideals it premised) focused on how best to articulate what are and should be the outcomes of collaborative learning and how best to facilitate collaboration pedagogically in the rhetorical spaces of peer-response, seminar discussions, and small group work. The ideas most debated in these discussions questioned the role of consensus in collaborative learning and invoked problems associated with the concepts of normal and abnormal discourse. The problem of how to negotiate authority in collaboration also surfaced, such as what counts as power and how it can best be shared. Additionally, scholars raised important flags that signaled the need to address the role of trust that collaborative learning seemed to assume (or take for granted).

One of the most anthologized of these attempts to complicate our field's understanding of collaborative learning is John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning" (1989). At the time, Bruffee's explanation of consensus as the goal of collaborative learning remained largely unquestioned, partly because of the way Bruffee uncritically situated consensus as a type of benign agreement. In response Trimbur used his article to complicate the idea of consensus and signal how so simple an outcome is unrealistic, not to mention coercive and marginalizing.

Trimbur suggests that "consensus" should remain a central term in our discourse about collaborative learning, but in order to complicate the role it plays in our understanding of collaboration, we should use it heuristically to locate differences among collaborators that make consensus an impossible destination to begin with, at least insofar as the concept remains unproblematicized. "Consensus," writes Trimbur, "can be a powerful instrument for students to generate differences, to identify the systems of authority that organize these students, and to transform the relations of power that determine who may speak and what counts as a meaningful statement." (603). Note that Trimbur does not question the function of consensus as a goal for collaboration; he simply wishes to complicate what consensus means in collaboration. More precisely, he challenges the argument that collaborative learning appeals to totalitarian thinking and forced conformity. Consensus does not have to equal conformity because it is through the social interaction required in collaborative learning that we are empowered *as* individuals.

Trimbur implies that consensus-reaching can work towards the democratic principles that Bruffee asserts are realized in collaborative learning: “Bruffee sees collaborative learning as a part of a wider movement for participatory democracy, shared decision-making, and non-authoritarian styles of leadership and group life.” Trimbur continues,

From the late seventies to the present, Bruffee has asked what it means to reorganize the social relations in the classroom and how the decentering of authority that takes place in collaborative learning might change the way we talk about the nature of liberal education and the authority of knowledge and its institutions. (605)

Collaborative learning can be used to counter hegemony in the classroom, especially as it pertains to the distribution of power between teachers and students. So when students can use their attempts at reaching consensus to understand the differences among them that make consensus impossible, they are, in effect, negotiating the power relations that mediate our interaction with others, and not just in the classroom, but all of the time.

Another argument Trimbur makes rejects Rorty’s positioning of “abnormal” discourse as the corrective mechanism that ensures that knowledge remains fluid and open-ended:

For Rorty, the term conversation offers a useful way to talk about the production of knowledge as a social process without reference to metaphysical foundations. Rorty’s notion of conversation describes a discourse that has no beginning or end, but no crisis or contradiction, either. Cut loose from metaphysical moorings and transcendental backups, the conversation keeps rolling of its own accord, reproducing itself effortlessly, responsible only to itself, sanctioned by what Rorty sees as the only sanction credible: our loyalty to the conversation and our solidarity with its practices. All we can do is continue the conversation initiated before we appeared on the scene. (606)

Abnormal discourse supposedly destabilizes the conversational flow of normal discourse,



but as Trimbur explains, “at just the moment Rorty seems to introduce difference and destabilize the conversation, he turns crisis, conflict, and contradiction into homeostatic gestures whose very expression restabilizes the conversation” (608). According to Trimbur, Rorty “identifies abnormal discourse with the romantic realm of thinking the unthinkable, of solitary voices calling out, of the imagination cutting against the grain,” or in other words, “Rorty makes abnormal discourse the activity par excellence not of the group but of the individual” (607).

Instead of relying on a Rortian distinction between normal and abnormal discourse, Trimbur positions the social interaction necessary to locate “difference” in collaboration as the abnormal function (if we can still use that term ) in collaborative learning. That is, Trimbur’s argument is that collaborative learning becomes meaningful through a group’s *attempt* at consensus, and this “represents the potentiality of social agency in group life” (603).

While Trimbur offers a significant challenge to how we conceptualize just what exactly is the work of consensus in collaborative learning, and even though he does reject the social constructionist principle of abnormal discourse as it is articulated by Rorty, he nevertheless upholds the social constructionist claim that knowledge is mediated through the conversational interaction among members of discourse communities. “Collaborative learning can help students generate transitional language to bridge the cultural gap and acquire fluency in academic conversation,” Trimbur wrote in the essay “Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing,” which appeared four years before “Consensus and Difference.” Following Bruffee, Trimbur tentatively concedes that “the function of

collaborative learning is to recontextualize composing and to externalize the process by which writing acceptable to an interpretive community is generated and authorized” (101, 100). So while Trimbur does extend how we understand successful collaboration to work in a classroom environment through his critique of abnormal discourse as a critical component in collaborative learning, the extent of this critique does not go beyond what is essentially a repositioning of consensus as a complicating factor that makes collaboration purposeful. In other words, Trimbur demonstrates that collaborative learning is not a self-explanatory pedagogical theory; it requires critical explication to understand. But the essential purpose of collaborative learning as a method for mediating the shared knowledge of a community, as it is outlined in Bruffee’s social turn collaboration theory, nevertheless remains in place.

Where Trimbur sees potential for complicating the idea of consensus while still maintaining its general purpose as an aim in collaboration, Greg Myers surmises that consensus is too often a negative effect of unchallenged ideology. In the latter’s “Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching” (1986), collaborative learning, specifically the teaching of writing through collaborative methods, is positioned as a pedagogy that relies too heavily “on an appeal to the authority of consensus, and an appeal to the authority of reality” (155). Pointing specifically to how Bruffee and Peter Elbow have relied on the ideas of consensus and a reified notion of reality, Myers uses a rudimentary conception of ideology to show the shortcomings of these appeals:

To explain why I find these appeals problematic, I need to draw on an indispensable piece of Marxist jargon, the concept of ideology. I am not using the word the way it is

commonly used to criticize any systematic political belief....I am using it in the sense established by Marx, and modified by twentieth-century Marxists, to describe the whole system of thought and belief that goes with a social and economic system, the thoughts that structure our thinking so deeply that we take them for granted, as the nature of the real world. The concept has been much discussed by Marxists because it helps explain the apparent stability of the capitalist system, despite all its contradictions. It helps explain why people who are oppressed seem to go along with their oppression; the ideology of the oppressive system gives them the structures through which they make sense of their world. (155-56)

For Myers the pedagogical implications of social constructionism must be examined alongside its political implications. That is, despite whatever supposedly anti-authoritarian objectives collaborative learning reaches for pedagogically, the risk of reproducing oppressive ideological systems in which such collaborative learning takes place will only undermine the best of these pedagogical intentions. What troubles Myers in works like Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* and Bruffee's articles on collaborative learning is how the concept of difference seems to be rendered unimportant once students and collaborators share a common goal.

Thus the ideology Myers wants students to resist is represented by the "economic, racial, and sexist injustices" that are "fundamental and systemic" in so much of America's ideological infrastructure. In this way he questions the claim that "reality is always a social construction" because if we support this claim, "then to accept the reality we see now is to accept the structure of illusion our system gives us. Worse it is to see

reality as something natural, outside our control, rather than to see it as something that we make in our actions in society” (157). When it comes to consensus, Myers wonders if what actually counts as consensus sometimes is simply what seems most natural within a perceived ideological structure, and it is in this way that Myers connects the social constructionist notions of consensus and reality to criticize what ultimately might not be “reformed” teaching at all, but instead just a stylistically pseudo-novel way of reproducing ideology. “But while Bruffee shows that reality can be seen as a social construct,” Myers writes, “he does not give us any way to criticize this construct. Having discovered the role of consensus in the production of knowledge, he takes this consensus thing that just is, rather than a something that might be good or bad” (166). To Bruffee’s credit, however, he relies on Rorty’s idea of abnormal discourse as a corrective tool, but perhaps Myers simply does not believe abnormal discourse matters within an oppressive ideological system that silences such discourse from the start.

Myers’s ideological critique of consensus in collaborative learning is extended by John Schilb in “The Sociological Imagination and the Ethics of Collaboration,” an essay in which Schilb points to the work of Myers, Trimbur, Stewart, David Smit, and Bill Karis who all note “how consensus may amount to compliance with unjust power” (107). Building on one recommendation offered by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford in their research study on practices of collaborative writing, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*, Schilb says that we should be fostering “dialogic” forms of collaboration as teachers of writing in order to challenge those contexts of collaboration that might “impinge upon women, people of color, and other historically victimized groups” (107). Schilb mentions

that the term “collaboration” once was almost exclusively associated with treason—“collaboration” with the enemy—and he amplifies this word’s prior history to demonstrate how even our pedagogical renderings of collaboration as a democratic, anti-authoritarian teaching strategy might uphold oppressive ideologies that Myers, for example, raises concerns about. Drawing from C. Wright Mills’s 1959 book *The Sociological Imagination*, Schilb proposes that collaborative learning should not just examine the differences that make consensus impossible, like Trimbur argues, but also how the struggles students encounter with collaborative learning might be particular extensions of larger sociological struggles. “I propose that we have our students consider how their ‘collaborations’ might be seen by others as being distant from the darker sense of the words or as sliding toward it.” Schilb continues, “when we have our students ‘collaborate’ with one another in our classrooms, and prepare them to ‘collaborate’ in their workplaces, we should encourage them to study how their activities connect to struggles for freedom in the larger world” (106).

While both Myers and Schilb question the social constructionist ethic of “consensus” by way of questioning the ideological and sociological implications of collaboration in the writing classroom, there remains in both of these important critiques an understanding that collaboration somehow pedagogically represents the social conditions necessary for the creation of knowledge. In other words, Myers and Schilb are critical of what collaboration might do if it is uncritically deployed in the classroom without first considering the social contexts in which this collaboration is to transpire. That is, the types of collaborative learning specifically discussed by Myers, Schilb, and Trimbur are

the types of collaborative learning most associated with collaboration in composition: small group work, peer response sessions, and group writing projects. All of these, we must remember, happen within the disciplinary spaces of a classroom that is managed by a teacher. In this way, collaboration is a style of teaching through which teachers choose to engage their students, even if this engagement is indirect. Myers and Schilb are right to point out that there are ideological considerations teachers must take into account with collaboration, but this is true of any pedagogy.

Within a social constructionist paradigm students engage particular discourse communities as apprentices and potential co-creators of knowledge. Social constructionism, adds Schilb, “does constitute a significant advance over the unduly individualistic models of the composing process that predominated in the seventies,” and it “spur[s] us to undertake wide-ranging analyses of the networks in which acts of collaboration take place and have their effects” (108). While its critical vocabulary should be interrogated from time to time, especially when it comes to what it means to engage the social processes of knowledge production, these scholars demonstrate that collaborative learning is connected to social constructionism in such a way that makes discussion of either one impossible in isolation from the other.

In an attempt to direct critical attention back towards the actual interactions of collaboration, David Bleich published “Collaboration and the Pedagogy of Disclosure” (1995). He specifically focuses on the “other challenges” posed by collaboration, ones that “emerge less from ideological considerations than from pragmatic difficulties in schools. Increasingly diverse classroom populations evince distances among students as

well as between students and teachers” (43-44). The problems inherent in collaborative learning are for Bleich those problems that make simply talking to one another sometimes difficult:

Even among culturally homogeneous students and teachers, we know that both sharing and working together are not simply a matter of “opening up” or “expressing” ourselves, but above all require the slow, gradual buildup of trust and understanding. Because each site of collaboration is different, there can be no formula with which to instruct every group or class....At this stage in our pursuit of fulfilling collaborative work styles in the academy, I think a pedagogy of scholarship, and a criticism of disclosure are needed. I call this a “pedagogy of disclosure” both to be brief and to emphasize teaching....At issue for us now is the project of moving our habits of sharing and confiding, of even analytically exploring our inner feelings and thoughts from their traditional venues of complete “privacy” to the classroom, to which, under conditions of disciplined collaboration and circumspect thought-sharing, we seek to bring this additional resource. (44)

A pedagogy of disclosure is one in which both students and teachers are encouraged to “disclose” what might at first appear to be sensitive personal information (cultural traditions, political affiliations, ethical stances, religious beliefs, etc.) in such a way as to encourage conversation among these types of differences—ones that might even seem incommensurate with opposing stances.

Unlike those by Myers and Schilb, Bleich’s contribution to the literature on collaboration underscores the undeniable exigence that must be accounted for in classroom-based pedagogies: the role of teachers as both the managers of and participants in the collaborative “conversations” that social turn composition so highly values. Of course, simply disclosing personal information without rhyme or reason can have negative effects, and this is why Bleich repeatedly stresses that teachers must help construct the right moments when appropriate levels of discourse are safe. “Such

teaching,” Bleich contends, “can maintain the necessity of understanding the collective *within* the subjective, and the subjective *within* the collective” (47). What else is noteworthy about Bleich’s “pedagogy of disclosure” for collaborative learning is its implicit argument that our education is ultimately influenced by the individuals with whom we interact in order to know things. And while this account of collaboration does avoid overreliance on social constructionist principles, Bleich nevertheless illustrates what this pedagogy looks like through a discussion of “modes of disclosure,” types of particular interactions that upon close inspection are set up as types of discourse situations that, much like Rorty’s abnormal discourse, artificially create the conflicts necessary for disclosure to remedy.

The final piece I want to review here is Susan Miller’s “New Discourse City: An Alternative Model for Collaboration,” because here the author attempts to not so much extend social constructionist principles and metaphors, but instead to circumvent them for the purpose of introducing just what the subtitle of her essay suggest, an alternative model for conceptualizing collaboration. Interestingly, Miller begins her essay admitting that she once harbored a “pre-social-constructivist” bias against collaboration because she conflated it with cheating and plagiarism. As her experience developed, however, Miller came to associate collaborative learning with various types of workshop scenarios and explains that along the way she “was predisposed to accept the tenor of the varied and individually developing arguments that comprise the standard tests of collaborative pedagogy in composition theory” (283). Citing as influences Bruffee, Karen Spears,



Trimbur, Lunsford and Ede, Anne Ruggles Gere, and Bleich, Miller explains what exactly she has learned about social constructionist collaboration.

“Collaborative teaching” easily became not a mere technique to produce a better text for evaluation against my standards and meanwhile to provide an analogue to school recess in class, but theorized “collaborative learning” and “collaborative writing.” I agree, on the Johnsonian basis of the experience of my senses, that most ideas and all published texts result from the presence of more than one person. I am aware that learning done in discussion and engagement with others is retained better than the results of isolated study. As a theorist, I accept that ideas and texts reiterate and displace other ideas and other texts in social interactions that comprise intertextual exchange, not individualistic or inspired referents. I know that “meaning” resides in language rather than in extrinsic referents, and that agreements about meanings and about the significance of texts are produced by negotiation about words and cultural purposes, not agreements about a truthful, or valid, arrangement of an unmediated “reality.” (284)

Miller testifies to her commitment to collaboration in principle as well as to the basic social constructionist argument about the relationships between knowledge, conversation, and communities of knowledgeable peers. She indeed admits that the various connotations of collaboration which get manifested in notions of “community,” “conversation,” “dialectic,” “sharing,” and “respecting man voices” are “the pedagogic equivalents of a philosophical commitment to the socially constructed nature of knowledge” (284). What Miller proposes in her essay, however, is a model for collaboration that, not unlike Trimbur’s argument, still adheres to these basic principles but accounts for the unavoidable conflicts and struggles with authority to be accounted for as part of the normal, healthy workings of collaborative engagement.

Using as a case study the essay Miller composed with five freshmen students which was eventually published in *College Composition and Communication*, she wishes to

explore how a “new logic” of collaboration might be developed around the metaphor of the city instead of the community. Collaboration works according to a two-part configuration, she says. “One is the metaphor of social ‘community’ that identifies itself at least temporarily as constituting a body with common goals, and the other is exemplary practices that are proposed as socio-political alternatives to modern ‘individualism’ and its capitalist and masculinist pedagogic manifestations” (285). The challenge with this model is located in questions about how the individual is “altered” through these exchanges. To what extent, asks Miller, “is ‘community’ either descriptive or desirable?” Does the pedagogy of collaboration here represent a “genuine alternative” to how we think about knowledge and discourse, or does it constitute a “reproductive ‘alter-[the]-native,’ a way of extending the colonizing educational project of fitting students to participate in newly diverse demographics within an old individualistic culture of identity politic?” (285).

When it came to her experience working with students on the composition of their collaborative essay, Miller notes that “my informed understanding of social constructions of knowledge and language, and the students’ practical experience of them, hadn’t been worth a damn, not in any *essential* sense of revising their stance toward educational practice” (289). After recounting the various conflicts and roadblocks Miller encountered among these students, she testifies that social constructionist models of collaboration were undermined “insofar as the students...neglected or actively refused to identify themselves as communities, or ‘groups’” (292). The solution for Miller is found in reconceptualizing the community model of collaboration into one that better reflects the

discursive practices of multiple voices who most negotiate the conflicts of collaboration. Her “new discourse city” model is one that calls on collaborators to conspire together but recognize that like life in the city, our exchanges with others are structured around an attempt to maintain movement and the mutual exchange that keep a city alive, but to do so while recognizing that a city is not a community, at least not in the sense that social constructionists describe the idealized collaborative groups that are the models of their community-focused pedagogy. The “discursive model” of new discourse city collaboration, Miller writes,

would celebrate four qualities of urban societies: it would allow for *differentiation* without exclusion: appreciate *variety*, encourage *erotic* attraction to novel, strange, and surprising encounters; and—as Bender and Young argue (if differently)—*value publicity* in ‘public spaces...where people stand and sit together, interact and mingle, or simply witness one another, without becoming a unified community...’ (299)

Just like Trimbur, who argued that accounting for the differences among us helps move collaboration towards a more realistic goal of compromise and consensus (instead of an idealist rendering of uncomplicated consensus), Miller believes the urban metaphors implied through a city-centered model of collaboration offer us a way to account for and appreciate the differences that make community sometimes impossible to actualize.

While certainly not exhaustive in its scope, this review of how social turn collaboration has been complicated by theorists in rhetoric and composition testifies to what has become the problematic use of collaboration as a pedagogical descriptor and organizing concept for theoretical principles that many in composition have used to understand the social dimensions of knowledge and its location in discourse or

“conversation.” However, in the end what ultimately gets complicated is *how* the idea of collaboration can be expressed without unmooring it from the social constructionist paradigm that Bruffee’s scholarship practically initiated. The result is what, as Miller’s piece shows, has come to be our best attempts at making collaboration relevant: extending and replacing certain of our metaphors to somehow better explain how collaboration demonstrates the social construction of knowledge. For Miller in particular, she wanted a better model to explain how those essential social constructionist ideas she recounts in the beginning of her essay might translate pedagogically through explanation of how we negotiate conflicts and account for differences in collaboration.

This leads us to what I call the poles of collaborative nihilism, a term I described earlier in this chapter to explain how collaboration gets bifurcated into the exclusive categories of theory and practice. Accordingly, we can organize most of the scholarship on collaboration and collaborative learning around these two poles, the points of which represent a kind of “killer dichotomy,” to borrow yet another term from Berthoff. The next and final section of this chapter explains the poles of collaborative nihilism and demonstrates why we need a better starting point than social constructionism to explain the work of collaboration.

### **The Poles of Collaborative Nihilism in Composition Scholarship**

But we should not let our enthusiasm for this social view lead us to accepting social construction of knowledge as something good in itself.

- *Greg Myers*, “Reality, Consensus, and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching”

It is somewhat of a commonplace to question the dichotomous split between theory and practice, the purely abstract from the functionally practical, and this is true especially in a field like rhetoric and composition where pedagogy has always remained important to its scholarship, thus creating an urgency of sorts to understand the practical applications of theory. Paulo Freire is perhaps the best known pedagogue to compositionists who explains the pedagogical imperative through his notion of praxis, “reflection and action upon the world to transform it.” Praxis names the necessary combination of critical reflection and applied performance; it marks the conditions necessary to resolve oppressor-oppressed contradictions. “To achieve this goal,” writes Freire in his now trademark Marxist idiom,

the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality. A mere perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality—precisely because it is not a true perception. (51, 52)

Over the years American educators have ironically shaped Freire’s oppressor-oppressed distinction into a new type of killer dichotomy in the work of how we conceptualize the power dynamics in our systems of modern education. We can see this dichotomy at work in some iterations social turn collaboration, especially in the early attempts to situate collaborative learning as an alternative mode of learning that takes authority away from the teacher. Besides what is only a vague social-interventionist imperative for collaborative learning in such justifications, when situated next to Freire this reworking of authority distorts what he viewed as the dialectical relationship between oppressor and

oppressed. It was not that there is a clear “oppressor” who has all the power and wields it against a completely helpless and hapless “oppressed.” The oppressor-oppressed binary in the work of Freire represents the relational dynamic that restricts *all* subjects from the liberating work of problematizing the cultural conditions that constrain critical inquiry (and for Freire, literacy education) through which to actualize *consientização*.

When it comes to how collaboration has been theorized in rhetoric and composition, I believe as a discipline we lack the “critical consciousness” represented by Freire’s concept of praxis—that mediating relationship that uses reflection and action to conceptualize the consequences of a contingent principle or theory in order to develop a sense of its experiential efficacy; how to make theory into “true perception.” The chief reason for this is that there is a clear theory-practice dichotomy at work in how collaboration gets explained in scholarship according to a social constructionist paradigm. As I have suggested, it is possible to organize the scholarship on collaboration heuristically around two dichotomous poles—poles that roughly represent the difference between theory and practice conventionally understood. We can examine these poles of theory and practice according to how they have emerged from

When social turn collaboration is theorized in scholarship, it usually is explained as the methodological imperative resulting from the aphorism that knowledge is socially constructed. Collaboration becomes synonymous with conversation—at least insofar as “conversation” is positioned in the social constructionist framework provided by Bruffee, who, echoing Michael Oakshott, refers to philosophical discourse as the “conversation of mankind.” Collaboration in this context gets rendered as a *natural* process of in the

production of knowledge. The problem with such a theoretical positioning, of course, is that it is practically untenable *as theory*. To say that all writing is collaborative, or that knowledge is the production of conversation, which is mediated by collaborative discursive engagements with the world, none of these descriptions allows collaboration to actually be anything other than an effect of something else. That is, collaboration just happens; it is not something we can control. In social turn collaboration theory, this imperative is manifest; this collaborative imperative—if I may use this term—is what marks the condition of collaboration around its “theory” poll.

Around the other poll, the “practice” poll, collaboration *is* something; or rather, it is something particular: a type of engagement that signals a specific type of interaction that is required for the social construction of knowledge to be realized through conversation. In other words, collaboration on this side of the dichotomy is explained through specific types of *activity* that usually are organized according to specific *tactical configurations* of students in proximity. Here we see scholarship that debates how best to organize and *do* collaboration in classroom settings where, according to the social constructionist imperative, learning will be achieved through the conversational interactions among students and between students and teachers.

When situated heuristically around contradictory polls, it is easy to recognize the paradoxes at work when our theories of collaboration are translated into “practice” through recipe-style scholarship that explains how best to implement the processes of collaborative learning—processes that, according to the theory at least—are already at work in our discourse. Below I offer a brief review of how particular pieces of

scholarship can fit into this theory/practice dichotomy to illustrate the poles of collaborative nihilism. By no means exhaustive, the pieces I have chosen to include are used representatively to illustrate how collaboration is conventionally explained theoretically as a default function in the social construction of knowledge or it tactically as a pedagogical strategy for teachers to implement.

### **Collaboration as Theoretical Imperative**

Robert J. Connors likened the social turn in composition theory to a Kuhnian revolution. Indeed, he begins his Forward to Greg Clark's *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing* (1990) with this assertion: "Revolutions in composition studies are a dime a dozen" (ix) and then offers something of a poetic reflection about how composition studies has arrived at this new social constructionist paradigm. The "shift" for Connors occurred at one of those particular "free-for-all crowdfeasts where college comp types go for free food and booze at CCCC" and there it all became perfectly clear: the theories of writing that positioned language and composition as an isolated, inner-born outgrowth of mind and creativity were wrong. "This bunch of people was the whole situation, the sine qua non, that without which nothing you had been trying to say—or BE—for years and years now would have any meaning" (ix-x). Here is a sampling of this reminiscence:

For a long time—who knows what metaphysical dream we were living?—we had been scratching around with fragments, isolated elements, sequestered theories, disconnected atoms. Assumption: you can learn about something by taking it to pieces. Assumption: putting pieces together makes a whole. Assumption: the Self creates significance. Assumption: numbering and ordering systems create self-evident, objective meanings. Assumption: the writer is an Artist, alone, supreme...(x)



By the end of his Forward, Connors reigns in the romanticism and stiffens his tone.

While a revolution has occurred, we are not out of the realm of questions. “This social constructionist deal doesn’t solve too many *problems* for us, does it?” For teachers of composition, we are “where the rubber meets the road” and as such, “Our teaching will have to reflect these social-constructionist ideas or not” (xi).

Connors’s brief Forward to a relatively brief book, for Clark’s text is direct and demanding in its exactitude, represents what is perhaps the natural zenith of social constructionist thought when it comes to explaining how the theory works in composition. Social constructionism doesn’t solve all our problems, says Connors, but it does help give us a better idea about the origins of our knowledge in discourse. While still a little mysterious, social constructionism is oddly comforting in its non-reliance on metaphysical foundations and ideal Forms. We still have to work out the details, in other words, but at least we know we are moving in the right direction.

In *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation*, Clark outlines in more detailed language what this direction looks like. Social constructionist theory shows us that we communicate “neither to present reality nor to transmit it, but to constitute it”; and moreover, communication is at rock bottom “a collaborative process through which a community of people construct a shared understanding of their common experience that provides the foundation for their continued cooperation” (1, 2). When social constructionist theory is taken at face value, then there is no discourse that is not collaborative because all knowledge is mediated by the conversation shared among knowledgeable peers. Collaboration, then, is the discursive imperative of social

constructionism insofar as social constructionists use “collaboration” to describe the discursive mediation of knowledge through conversation. Such is the working premise of Clark’s social constructionist epistemology on which he establishes the three-part description of how discourse works in a knowledge community.

The title of his book reflects this three-part description, terms that Clark suggests many assume to be different words for the same thing. But these terms imply important distinctions, he says, at least when it comes to theorizing the social dimensions of our discourse production:

The term *dialogue* describes the cooperative shape of that process [of discursive exchange], an exchange of discourse that is characterized by its participants’ consciousness of each other, by their conscious efforts to interact cooperatively. The term *dialectic*, by contrast, describes its collaborative function, how that process of exchange enables people to construct together assumptions and agreements they can share. The familiar term *conversation* describes that process itself, the natural experience of cooperative, collaborative interaction through which people enact the essence of communication. (xvi)

Reviewing his book for *Rhetoric Review*, Elizabeth Ervin observes that if the aim of Clark’s project “lies in his curious insistence that dialogue, dialectic, and conversation *are not the same things*, and that tendencies to equate them are facile and oversimplified—and on this point Clark simply does not deliver” (368). Ervin’s criticism illustrates that when social constructionism is plumbed for all it’s worth, the results will always fall back on equivocation and conflation. As Ervin points out, even if Clark is occasionally “overzealous,” he still “nearly numbs us...by relentlessly bombarding us with words like *sustain, transcend, negotiate, cooperate, collaborate, share, consensus, and compromise*” (368).

Such is the case for “collaboration” in Clark’s rendering of how to explain the social dimension of our discourse production. According to Clark’s schema, *dialectic* is collaborative because meanings become sharable through the give-and-take of *dialogue*, which requires a kind of cooperation or collaborative goodwill, while the idea of conversation encompasses the whole process. As Clark puts it, “The familiar term *conversation* describes the process itself, the natural experience of cooperative, collaborative interaction through which people enact the essence of communication” (xvi). Obviously Ervin’s confusion is not unfounded when it comes to differentiating concepts like collaboration from others like consensus, cooperation, and compromise. Regardless, the point here is how “collaboration” functions theoretically for Clark, and thus we turn to the book’s most concise statement about discourse:

In communicating we collaborate with others in constructing and continually reconstructing from our commonality the community that enables us, both individually and collectively, to survive and progress, a community comprising people engaged in an ongoing process of renegotiating the beliefs and values—and, consequently, the action—they can share. (1)

As one can see, collaboration isn’t so much something in itself for Clark as it is a default condition of something else, that something else here being communication. But if all communication is collaborative, then what does it mean, pragmatically, to value collaboration?

Less than a year before Clark published *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation*, James A. Reither and Douglas Vipond published “Writing as Collaboration” in *College English*, an essay that like Clark’s book demonstrates what is the logical result of social

constructionist theory that uses collaboration to explain the production of discourse: that *all* discourse is ultimately collaborative. For Reither and Vipond, however, their aim is to understand how the “revolution” in composition studies “produced by social constructionists theories” might actually translate practically into our teaching, for as they note, this revolution has produced “little substantive change in either course design or classroom practice” (855). Noticing the ambiguity inherent in simply describing writing as a social process, Reither and Vipond contend that such an idea “does not tell us much at all about what people do when they write or about what students might do to learn to write” (856). Their proposal is to replace descriptors, switching “social” with “collaborative,” since the latter better implies what the social looks like in the practice of writing. “Thinking of writing as a collaborative process gives us more precise ways to consider what writers do when they write, not just with their texts, but also with their language, their personae, their readers” (856).

My question is, does it? Such arguments seem to encourage a grand theoretical narrative that leaves little room for nuance. Reither and Vipond’s essay is significant in this regard because they acknowledge collaboration’s presumed status as an unavoidable condition of our discursive engagement with the world. Their aim is to articulate how we can recognize this imperative collaboration in the realms of our practice. I use the term “realms” deliberately because this is how Reither and Vipond propose we recognize the collaborative condition of our writing. Specifically, they propose that the collaborative nature of writing can be understood as composing three separate but related practices that directly apply to the work of composition instruction. As they explain, “These different

ways can be thought of as comprising different forms, or realms, of collaboration, three of which are especially important: coauthoring, workshopping, and knowledge making” (858). To explain how these realms of collaboration function to give meaning to the “social” nature of writing, the authors reflect on an occasion when Vipond collaborated with Russell A. Hunt on an essay that was eventually published in the journal *TEXT*. Reither and Vipond use this experience as a case study—their term—to illustrate how writing and collaboration are inextricable.

The first realm of collaboration that Vipond and Hunt engaged was of course the literal process of co-authorship, one of the “salient advantages” of which was the “synergy” this co-authoring venture harnessed. Certainly an unfortunate term that invokes the jargon of a corporate teambuilding seminar, their understanding of “synergy” is fair enough: these writers “were able to accomplish things together that neither could have accomplished alone” (858). Even though Vygotsky’s theory of ZDP seems to be a better, more reasonable (and non-mysterious) explanation than a reference to “synergy” for why collaboration results in work that is greater than its individual parts, nonetheless the interaction required to mutually render discourse into written text is for these authors the first realm of how we can conceptualize writing as collaboration. Next is workshopping, the second realm, and this level of collaboration involves the processes of appropriately shaping a text for a specific discourse community.

Hunt and Vipond’s colleagues consciously ‘conspired’ with the authors, not only to ensure that the article argued accepted knowledge claims (for, after all, their ultimate project was to advance knowledge in the field), but also to help them write a piece that would withstand the scrutiny of journal editors and reviewers, the official

representatives of the discipline. To help Hunt and Vipond get their piece published, the trusted assessors functioned as stand-in reviewers and editors. (859)

Here the idea of peer review, a concept the authors conflate with workshopping, collaboration is utilized as the critical term to describe the nature of this activity. So far collaboration exists in the actual interaction of two writers composing a single document, but it also exists when these writers give their drafts to others to review. The third realm of collaboration is “knowledge making,” the most essential marker of collaborative engagement:

[The] third realm of collaboration, however, is essential. We call it knowledge making. Hunt and Vipond collaborated with others who had written and spoken before them as, collectively, they constructed and reconstructed the field of knowledge in which their project found a fit. That field exists solely because writers have made public their thinking about literary reading. Those who have published statements about literary reading have combined their knowing with that of all others who have participated in the conversation; collectively, their statements make up the pool of knowledge that is the field. Hunt and Vipond, in writing their article on literary reading, tossed their thinking into a pool of knowing—they strove to make their own contribution to knowledge-already-existing. In adding their bit to knowledge about literary reading, they participated in the process of collaborative knowledge making. (860)

So as this last description of collaboration-as-knowledge making is presented, even the act of “tossing” one’s own contribution into that pool of knowledge-already-existing gets to count as collaboration, or at least a form of it. So what is not collaboration for Reither and Vipond? The answer is nothing—everything is collaborative when it comes to writing. Of course, when put into a pragmatic frame, another way of saying this is that collaboration, because it is everything, actually means nothing, nothing in the sense that it can be examined consequentially as a specific approach to the study of writing. If writing

is collaboration, i.e., all writing has inherent collaborative structures to it, then it does very little good to call on us to transform how we understand composition because there is, really, nothing to change. In other words, Reither and Vipond essentially thrust themselves under their own critical light, putting their description of collaborative writing, or really their description of writing in general, within a social constructionist framework that leaves no room for their theory to translate into practical action.

The final essay I will briefly review to illustrate the over-determined status of collaboration in terms of its theoretical orientation towards social constructionism appeared in the 1992 collection *New Visions of Collaborative Writing*, edited by Janis Forman. In “Bakhtin, Collaborative Partners, and Published Discourse: A Collaborative View of Composing,” Charlotte Thralls extends our working theory on collaboration by using Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism to account for the “collaborative impulses” inherent in writing. “The purpose of this essay,” Thralls explains,

is to develop the claim that all writing is inherently collaborative. More specifically, this essay seeks to show how texts, whether individually or jointly authored, should be considered collaborative to examine how this collaboration works.(64)

Turning to an explication of Bakhtin’s theory of the communication chain, Thralls underscores the centrality of “the other” in the process of speech communication. We do not merely listen to others with passivity, explains Thralls; instead our response to others are prompted by the dialogic interactions that Bakhtin implies through his conception of “partner-interlocutors” (66). Dialogue is therefore a connected series of utterances that point both backwards to particular discursive prompts and forwards to potential

discursive responses. “Every utterance is linked to others through dialogue,” Thralls explains, and “in the utterance we see the responsive nature of language.” She continues, “To communicate is to engage dialogic partners. To speak—to write—demands collaboration with others in a communication chain” (66). It is here where Thralls not-so-subtly conflates dialogism with collaboration, situating the latter as a descriptive alternative for the former.

In the remainder of her essay Thralls explains how we can understand different types of utterances to work in the process of examining published discourse. There are, for example, author utterances, editor utterances, and reviewer utterances that all contribute to the dialogic (i.e., collaborative) structure of a text. In the end, Thralls argues that as writing instructors we should “teach our students the collaborative activity inherent in all writing, rather than reserve instruction on collaboration to those situations involving plural authorship” (65). At most, then, what we can “teach” is theory—in this case a brand of Bakhtinian dialogism—in the hope that once this theory is understood, students will be able to harness it while grappling with their own struggles to render discourse onto the page. I’m not sure what difference this is supposed to make outside of the way students are oriented to the stuff of composition, because essentially what Thralls achieves is a renaming of Bakhtin’s dialogism for compositionists. By the conclusion of her essay, Thralls, like other social constructionists, finds a way to conflate terms. Dialogism is basically collaboration, and speech communities are basically discourse communities.



In all three of these examples of scholarship, collaboration is situated as an unavoidable consequence of social constructionist theories of discourse. I should underscore what I believe are sincere attempts by these scholars to explain collaboration in ways that are both accessible and utile. In other words, these scholars' commitment to and belief in collaboration is commendable, and certainly these books and articles have helped to make collaboration a recognized disciplinary practice in composition studies. Yet taken as whole this theory leave little room for pragmatic negotiation. Collaboration may be open to different interpretations, as evidenced by these three different explanations, but there is nothing contingent about the underlying theory that fuels the collaborative imperative itself that is a holdover from social constructionist epistemology. So what difference does it make? What *is* collaboration, then, if *it is* simply a descriptive marker that describes the social construction of discourse? The theoretical imperatives of collaboration, according to a social constructionist framework, render collaboration untenable *as theory* when it comes to the "practical inquiry," as understood by Berthoff, that is necessary for making our theories pragmatic because no conceptual space is left for identifying collaboration as something other than our general conversational intercourse with others.

### **Collaboration as Pedagogical Tool**

When collaboration is not positioned in scholarship as a theoretical imperative linked to a social constructionist epistemology, it is usually positioned pedagogically as a *type* or *style* of teaching and learning. That is, when collaboration is not explained theoretically as natural extension of the social constructionist notion of conversation, it is instead

explained as a particular type of pedagogy that involves particular types of tactical configurations among students and teachers.

One example of this tactic-oriented approach to explaining collaboration is Muriel Harris's 1992 *College Composition and Communication* article, "Collaboration Is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups." Harris attempts to shape a taxonomy to categorize types of collaboration in the hope of explaining that "collaboration" is not always "collaboration," to play off her title. She specifically emphasizes the difference between collaboration as it often takes place in peer-response groups (like one might encounter in an FYC course) and collaboration that occurs during a writing center session, or "tutorial" as Harris then called them. It is thus towards clarifying and defining distinctions in what counts as collaborative work that Harris sets out as the aim of her article. At several points Harris defines collaboration, although none of her definitions appear systematic. "Collaboration, a process writers engage in and teachers facilitate," she writes, "is firmly entrenched in our thinking about the teaching of writing. But the term is also used as a blanket tossed over a variety of activities that are not identical, thereby blurring useful distinctions" (369). And this is the exigency, obviously, for the her essay—how to distinguish between types of collaboration so that it is not simply a "blanket tossed over a variety of activities." The term she uses I want to draw attention to here is "activities."

For Harris, collaboration is essentially a way to tactically organize students according to certain prestructured discursive situations—those situations being either a peer-response type scenario in a classroom or a tutorial scenario in a writing center. Harris

goes on to explain how peer-response differs from a tutorial in the writing center. For example, here she comments on the general conversational nature of each type of “collaborative” situation:

The emphasis on general skills in response groups rather than individualized concerns in tutorials also explains why the collaboration is different in each setting. In the response group, there is back-and-forth conversation intended to offer mutual help as writing groups work together in a give-and-take relationship. Generally, all are expected to benefit both from the responses they receive about their writing and from the practice they get as critical readers of the discourse of other writers. In tutorial collaboration, however, students are asked only to respond to their own texts. (373)

Implicit throughout Harris’s essay are two assumptions about the idea of collaboration as it applies to the teaching of composition. First, collaboration occurs through two primary modes or activities, peer-response and one-on-one tutoring. Second, although this assumption is not as blatant as the first assumption, Harris also assumes that the work of a composition class is to develop an *individual’s* writing ability. In other words, what gets produced in a composition course are single-authored texts by students who, although they might “collaborate” with one another and with writing center tutors during the preparation of their draft, nevertheless “compose” their papers by themselves and therefore can be counted as single authors.

Both tutoring and response groups are student-centered approaches that rely on collaboration as a powerful learning tool to promote interaction between reader and writer, to promote dialogue and negotiation, and to heighten writers’ sense of audience. (369)

But Harris also comments on the idea of collaborative writing, a concept that obviously bears on the work of writing center tutorials and peer-response groups.

“Although there has been some confusion in the use of ‘collaboration’ to refer both to collaborative writing and collaborative learning about writing, collaborative writing is now identified as writing involving two or more writers working together to produce a joint project.” She continues, “When writing collaboratively, each may take responsibility for a different portion of the final text, and there may be group consensus or some sort of collective responsibility for the final product” (369). What is important to notice here is how Harris essentially rejects the mantra of process-oriented pedagogy that says process (and not product) should be the focus of writing pedagogy in a composition classroom. That is, for Harris “collaborative writing” begins with its product, a text that is “jointly” produced; therefore, collaborative writing can take place, in theory, between people who have never met, let alone interacted with one another.

Even when we extend charity to Harris’s two-part taxonomy, her distinctions still come across as fastidious. I too can understand the desire and even the value of outlining the differences between the discursive space of a writing center session and a peer-response session, however it is difficult to understand why the idea of collaboration must be used to categorize these types of interaction. By the end of Harris’s essay she doesn’t privilege one “form” of collaboration over the other, but she simply asserts, “Given the advantages and disadvantages of tutoring and group work, then, there is indeed solid argument to be made for helping our students experience and reap the benefits of both forms of collaboration” (381). Collaboration is thus situated as a pedagogical tool from the outset of Harris’s work, and even though it is a “powerful” tool, it is a tool nonetheless.

Like any tool understood as such, collaboration is useful insofar as it helps us achieve particular ends, but to a certain extent tools are interchangeable. I don't need a hammer to effectively drive a nail into a wall so that I may hang a picture; I can just as easily find something around the house that might stand in for the hammer, like the antique iron I use as a bookend. Similarly, as a tool "collaboration" is useful insofar as a composition instructor deems it helpful in achieving certain pedagogical ends. For Harris, some of these ends include promoting interaction between writers and readers, encouraging dialogue and negotiation (although I am not sure how this latter goal is any different from promoting interaction between writers and readers) and developing a heightened sense of audience (369). These are outcomes that pedagogically might be achieved through any number of specific scenarios according to any number of philosophies, so why does "collaboration" matter here? Harris's formulation of collaboration as a tool makes it that much easier for teachers of writing to reject it. Tools are interchangeable and therefore, depending on the situation, arbitrary.

In "Portfolio Evaluation, Collaboration, and Writing Centers," Irene Clark follows in the footsteps of Harris and articulates a distinction between types of collaboration in order to defend the work of writing centers. Framing her article in a discussion of how the Freshmen Writing Program at USC adopted a portfolio grading rubric and how this requirement translated into a new onslaught of students into the writing center, Clark attempts to answer those critical questions that inform how professionals negotiate the ethical terrain of managing writing center tutorials. Two of these questions are: "What do we mean when we assert that writing centers "assist" students in becoming better

writers?” and “What are the ethical limits of such assistance?” (516). Knowing what “counts” as responsible assistance obviously bears upon the work of successful writing center tutorials, for as Clark notes, “too much assistance is not only counterproductive, but can result in a form of collaboration that strains ethical boundaries” (516). When it comes to the idea of collaboration itself, Clark observes that the term is “often bandied about among compositionists without a great deal of reflection or acknowledgment of the difficulty of incorporating it into composition pedagogy” (519). Taking into consideration that Harris, too, recognized a certain amount of ambiguity at work when teachers invoked the idea of collaboration, it is interesting that Clark essentially argues the same point *and* attempts a similar method at remedying this ambiguity.

When it comes to this first part, Clark’s recognition of collaboration’s ambiguity, I think it is worth quoting Clark. And considering my own emphasis in this chapter on explaining how collaboration gets rendered pedagogically according to social constructionist epistemology, the following is particularly relevant.

But what do we really mean when we say that we believe in “collaborative learning?” A strict examination of the concept suggests that true collaboration can occur only when collaborators are part of the same discourse community. As I have noted elsewhere, true colleagues regularly “collaborate” by discussing their work with one another, assisting one another by suggesting sources, trading drafts, perhaps even polishing style in another’s drafts....This type of what may be termed “collegial” collaboration aims to assist the author in perceiving conceptual or perhaps stylistic blind spots that are unavoidable for even experienced, competent writers. (520)

“True” collaboration can mean something as simple as suggesting a source to a colleague, but it might also mean simply talking about ideas together, and “perhaps”—I guess in extraordinary circumstances—“polishing style” in someone else’s manuscript. Besides

Clark's catchall use of "collaboration" to describe all these different types of interaction between colleagues, it is also interesting to note that Clark tacitly implies that collaborators don't actually help one another invent content for a draft; the most direct influence on another's writing we have might be through "polishing," e.g., cleaning up a text. I must admit that descriptions such as this one baffle me, but then again within such a pedagogical discussion nothing is not collaborative, at least when we are dealing with social constructionist theory. But this now leads to the second aspect of Clark's article I want to discuss, and that is her method of distinguishing between types of collaboration.

Unlike Harris who attempts to distinguish between collaboration in writing center tutorials and collaboration in classroom peer groups, Clark aims for an ethical distinction in her schema, and this is the difference between "legitimate" collaboration and "illegitimate" collaboration. At first Clark conflates collaboration with assistance, but she also implies several other ethical distinctions, such as "true" collaboration and "collegial" collaboration and their obvious corollaries: untrue and hostile collaboration. These latter two ideas might help further illuminate Clark's explanation of legitimate and illegitimate collaboration—or "assistance": "*Illegitimate* assistance...substantially effaces or overrides the student's own contributions to a text...[and it] not only fails to help the student's development but also renders the student vulnerable to charges of inadvertent plagiarism." On the other hand,

According to what has come to be established writing center "lore," *legitimate* collaboration is primarily directed at developing the student's writing *process* and at improving the student's understanding of how texts operate in terms of their readers and the expectations of an appropriate discourse community. With this aim in mind,

tutors can, for instructional purposes, make or suggest changes in a text; however, they must make sure that the student's own contributions remain predominant. (520)

By far the most important implication in Clark's rendering of legitimate vs. illegitimate collaboration is on how she positions illegitimate collaboration as "assistance" that *blurs or obscures the individual voice of a single composer*. Conversely, legitimate collaboration is assistance that somehow improves the quality of that individual voice. In other words, for Clark collaboration comes down to how it gets interpreted by the ones assessing the work, and in a writing class only individuals compose papers and therefore the "individual talent" is what matters most, to echo the title of an essay by a poet whose most famous piece, "The Wasteland," has been accused of plagiarism. Of course, Clark might say this is just a case of Eliot's editor's illegitimate collaboration. Regardless I believe my point is obvious: while clearly writing from a social constructionist foundation, Clark nevertheless concerns herself with the work of differentiating types of collaboration—the ethical and unethical—that make *individual* work either legitimate or illegitimate.

Clark's article points to what is a necessary evil for some teachers of composition, and that is the messy work of assessment and evaluation. Of course it is easier to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of writing without actually having to attach a grade to it, but grade we must and Clark's discussion, while extending on the work of Harris, also builds on work by Harvey S. Wiener in 1986 in his *College English* article "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation."



From the very beginning of Wiener's article, collaboration is situated as a learning "method" that represents the pedagogical consequence of a "new paradigm" in composition theory brought about, largely, by the work of Bruffee and the latter's appropriation of social constructionist theory cobbled together from the work of Vygotsky, Piaget, Abercrombie, Rorty, and Kuhn (52). But instead of accepting this new paradigm unproblematically, Wiener poses that Bruffee's model, "built on the delicate and necessary tension between theory and practice, may not, I suspect, have guided much of what teachers are calling collaborative learning today" and then he suggests that as a profession composition studies has yet to establish "any standards for judging our attempts to implement the evolving concept of teaching and learning as a social act" (52, 53). The purpose of Wiener's article is therefore pragmatic insofar as he attempts to articulate a utilitarian essay for compositionists to understand the work of collaboration in the classroom.

Wiener offers his readers a set of heuristic markers that can in theory be used to evaluate the successfulness of collaborative learning, thus he practically situates collaboration as a something that can be seen and evaluated as such. According to Wiener the central marker of successful collaborative group work is found in the group's ability to reach consensus. "The group's effort to reach consensus by their own authority is the major factor that distinguishes collaborative learning for mere work in groups" (54). He further explains how consensus is what distinguishes collaborative group work from "mere" group work: "Students put into groups are only students grouped and are not collaborators, unless a task that demands consensual learning unifies the group activity"

(55). It is important to observe that Wiener essentially equates collaborative learning with consensual learning, explaining that the former is an example or consequence of the latter. Herein is where we can see a nihilism emerging—the kind that will allow critics of collaboration to argue that “collaborative learning” is not always a preferable mode of organizing a pedagogy.

Nevertheless, Weiner situates collaboration as something that can be organized and deployed by a teacher, who, by the way, has three roles he or she must play when managing the collaborative learning underway in a classroom. The teacher must be task setter, manager, and synthesizer. As the task setter, a teacher composes a clear “written task” that collaborators can collectively read. A clearly written task makes it easier, says Wiener, for collaborators to come to consensus about the task ahead of them because there is a common starting point from which the group can proceed *as a group*.

A good written statement of task will probably have a number of components: general instruction about how to collaborate in this particular activity; a copy of the text, if a single text is the focus of the collaboration; and questions appropriately limited in number and scope and offered in sequence from easier to more complex, questions requiring the kind of critical thinking that leads to sustained responses from students at work in their groups. (56)

Notice here how, first, collaboration is organized in terms of the specific configuration of a task via the instructor’s specific instructions. But it is not enough for a teacher to simply create a task appropriate for collaboration, for she must also successfully manage the collaborative environment as students engage in their group work. Indeed, the teacher is a “classroom manager” when it comes to collaborative learning, and Wiener offers a paragraph worth of questions about the layout and organization of the collaborative

environment for the teacher-manager to evaluate during times of collaboration. Wiener is careful to articulate that as a manager, the teacher should not micromanage groups when collaboration is underway. He explains that teachers “can easily undermine the development of that authority and confidence” that is the purpose of collaborative learning in the first place” (57-58). Wiener then turns his attention to how one can evaluate a teacher’s ability to manage classroom collaboration:

An observer can learn a great deal about prior instruction by watching how students engage in the group task. The noise level in the room, the arrangement of furniture, the ease with which the groups are formed, the tone of conversation among students, the nature of reports emerging from groups all indicate how much the class has practiced efficient collaborative schemes in the past. Evaluators, therefore, should note very carefully how students behave in their groups as a signal of the teacher’s advance preparation. (58)

I can’t help but consider the arbitrariness of these evaluative conditions listed by Wiener when it comes to considering the theoretical thrust of social constructionist collaboration. Specifically, I wonder how we can count these organizational and cosmetic features of a classroom as evidence for collaboration? At best, these represent the specific markers of how one teacher believes group work should proceed. Other than that, these conditions—these markers of successful collaboration—can be rejected at will for what, rightly so, some teachers might consider to be arbitrary decisions about classroom management.

But the tactical nature of collaborative pedagogy only gets more specific for Wiener as he concludes his series of evaluative measures by insisting that the final role the teacher must play in the collaborative classroom is that of synthesizer:

Once the groups finish their work, it is important for each recorder to share the group's consensus with the rest of the class. With this done, the teacher must help the class as a whole to make sense and order out of the sometimes conflicting and contradictory reports. Writing the points raised by each group on the chalkboard or on a transparency for the overhead projector (or asking recorders themselves to do this) allows everyone to discuss and evaluate the conclusion arrived at by the groups. (58)

In the end, collaboration here is reduced to a kind of classroom activity, something the teacher plans, organizes, manages, and synthesizes for her students. Hardly does this sound like the kind of organic, socially constructed learning that is advocated by Bruffee—that is, here the “practice” of collaboration seems completely arbitrary, a mere style of pedagogy that might in theory promote the kind of learning that, thinking nihilistically, always already takes place according to a social constructionist theory of learning:

The critical underlying principle for evaluators is that in the collaborative learning classroom the instructor is in no sense a passive figure. Collaborative learning is not unstructured learning: it replaces one structure, the traditional one, with another, a collaborative structure. (61)

What is particularly nihilistic in Wiener's final formulation is that collaborative learning can ultimately be evaluated by considering the instructor's ability to organize a “collaborative structure” in the classroom, the kind outlined by Wiener in his explanation of the tactical moves that instructors should follow to create an effective and efficient collaborative learning environment.

In a way I have reserved some of my most pointed criticism for Weiner's article, although like my point above about those essays that render collaboration as the theoretical imperative of social constructionism, I wish to extend some charity to

Weiner's piece. But then again, to a certain extent his article represents a paradigmatic iteration of collaboration scholarship that falls smack on top of the "collaboration as pedagogical tool" pole in my dichotomy of collaborative nihilism. In all three of these examples what matters is how collaboration becomes not something but *some thing* that functions as a pedagogical tool. As I've already noted, tools are to a certain extent arbitrary: replaceable, convenient, and optional.

### **Whither Collaboration? The Move Towards Consequence**

The notion of collaboration has not only generated an important body of research and pedagogical innovation, but the term 'collaborative' has now entered into the discourse of studies of writing as a part of the conventional wisdom. The value of collaborative learning and collaborative writing has taken on a kind of self-evident and self-valorizing status.

- John Trimbur & Lundy A. Braun, "Laboratory Life and the Determination of Authorship"

Cornel West said that nihilism is troubling in our times. At the risk of hyperbole, so too is the collaborative nihilism that prevents collaboration from being more than an over-determined theory or a particular pedagogical configuration for those of us in composition studies. When we survey the different ways collaboration has been explained over the past thirty years, it is clear that we don't "know" too much about it except for those theoretical claims that connect it to the social production of knowledge. When in orchestra, the iterations that explain, describe, and justify collaboration that I have here reviewed meld into an explanation of collaboration that bifurcates it into either tactical or theoretical terms, and while some of these scholars try to explain the

pedagogical value of social turn collaboration, what we end up with are contradictory, over-simplified, and in some case just outright *bad* explanations. From the pragmatist position I occupy, all of our discourse cannot be collaborative because collaboration would make no difference. Moreover, collaboration *cannot* be anything from recommending a book to a friend, polishing the style on a colleague's manuscript, tutoring a writing student, synthesizing the various levels of consensus that small peer groups arrive at in class, to borrowing discourse from sources unconscious to my immediate apperception according to Bakhtinian theory.

So, whither collaboration?

No.

In the prophetic pragmatism for which West has become a modern prophet, there is a necessity for hope and optimism. For without hope all we have is nihilism, but for the prophetic pragmatist our nihilism can become an invaluable reminder that our ideas and beliefs must be continually informed through practical inquiry that shows us what consequences these ideas and beliefs yield. The purpose of this chapter has been to engage in an overview that sets up the practical inquiry I propose with this dissertation: not only to reinvigorate our critical study of collaboration, but also to instantiate the pragmatic experiment of trying out some new beliefs about collaboration to see if they might not yield better results. This new belief must begin at where I leave off here, which is a proposal for us to try, as much as it is possible, to divorce collaboration from its social constructionist moorings. In the next chapter I offer what might be a better starting

position for conceptualizing what is the work of collaboration, which, as the title of my next chapter stipulates, involves the work of rhetorical invention.

## Notes

1. See Carol L. Winkelamm, “Electronic Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, and Collaboration: A Case Study for Cyborg Writing” (*Computers and the Humanities* 29.6 [1995]: 431-48); Susan W. Hardwick, “Humanizing the Technology Landscape through a Collaborative Pedagogy” (*Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 24.1 [2000]: 123-29); Timothy Koschmann, “Computer Support for Collaboration and Learning” (*The Journal of the Learning Sciences* 8. 3-4 [1999]: 495-97); Sue Ellen Atkinson, “Collaboration: That Awful ‘C’ Word” (*The Urban Review* 31.2 [1999]: 173-83); Christopher W. Lovell and John Nunnery, “Testing the Adult Develop Tower of Babel Hypothesis: Homogeneous by Perry Position Collaborative Learning Groups and Graduate Student Satisfaction” (*Journal of Adult Development* 11.1 [2004]: 139-50); and Mark F. Williams, “Collaborative Learning in the College Latin Classroom” (*The Classical Journal* 86.3 [1991]: 256-61).

2. In “Liberal Education, Scholarly Community, and the Authority of Knowledge” (1985), Bruffee identifies himself as primarily a literary critic. Additionally, in his response to the *JAC* interview with Richard Rorty, Bruffee argues that social constructionism is not a theory and therefore it has no theorists: “Rorty is not a ‘theorist.’ Neither am I. Social construction is not a theory. It is a way of talking, a language, a vernacular. Least of all is social construction a ‘theoretical rationale for collaborative

learning.’ It is a way of describing collaborative learning” (236). Whether or not Bruffee accepts the title, his work is used in composition studies as theory; moreover, it seems little more than splitting hairs to differentiate between “theoretical rationale” and “a way of describing” something.

3. Bruffee interestingly admits that he willingly accepted Richard Rorty’s critical vocabulary for describing social constructionism. As he writes,

Reading the *JAC* interview with Richard Rorty makes me realize once again why I adopted him as one of my heroes ten years ago. By ‘him’ ... I don’t mean the whole warty man, with whom I am barely acquainted. I mean the language of a lot of what he has written and said...his language, more than that of anyone else I know, has given me ways of saying things that I have been unsuccessful trying to say myself. (“Response” 236)

4. In an interview with Gary Olson published in *JAC*, Richard Rorty questions—sort of—the label “social constructionist.” I say “sort of” because Rorty assents to Olson’s explanation of Bruffee’s definition of social constructionism. See “Social Construction and Composition Theory: A Conversation with Richard Rorty.”

5. Bruffee references Geertz and Fish in “Liberal Education, Scholarly Community, and the Authority of Knowledge,” as well as in “Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay.”



### CHAPTER III

#### FROM STYLE TO INVENTION: RE-CANONIZING COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

In the previous chapter I offered a conceptual sketch of collaborative nihilism, what I defined as an attitude marked by apathy and meaninglessness when it comes to critical engagement with the catch-all status of “collaboration” as a critical concept in rhetoric and composition studies. The nihilistic quality of this attitude points to what I perceive as our disciplinary unproductiveness at crafting new theories of collaboration not tied to epistemologies that link collaboration to social constructionism, a move demonstrated by the popular conflation of collaboration with conversation. I also offered a disciplinary review that begins with an extensive reading of Kenneth Bruffee’s scholarship on collaboration, what I call his social turn theory of collaboration. I then transitioned into a two-part review of literature that illustrates the theoretical binaries of collaborative nihilism that explain collaboration in either strictly pedagogical terms as a teaching tool and classroom strategy, or as an over-determined quality of our discourse, one that functions much like an epistemological fiat that underscores the collaborative impulse that fuels (all) our communication with one another. I concluded the chapter by explaining that the nihilistic status of collaboration in rhetoric and composition has resulted from this forced coupling of tactics-based pedagogy with otiose theory, deflating collaboration as a critical term in writing studies.

What I want to suggest in this current chapter is that we need pragmatic theory to help conceptualize both the purposes and possibilities of collaboration in the study of writing, especially for those of us in rhetoric and composition who are invested in questions about the relationship between epistemology and discourse: For instance, what do our gestural interactions with one another and the world tell us about how we know things and communicate them? And how do we encourage students to view collaboration in terms of one's rhetorical ability to manipulate discourse? Expanded possibilities for collaboration should further how we imagine the work of composition itself both within and outside university contexts. So if collaboration is to be consequential, we need theory that explains the deliberate engagement between individuals with the world for which collaboration might account without falling back on the theoretical imperatives of social constructionism. Further, if collaboration is to be something more than merely a pedagogical or corporate buzzword to denote various types of cooperative group work, we need a pragmatic definition that can conditionally explain collaboration without imposing tactical guidelines.

As the title of this chapter suggests, to begin the work of fostering a pragmatic theory of collaboration it is first necessary to re-canonize collaboration rhetorically as an inventive art. Instead of positioning collaboration in stylistic terms to denote some type of tactical configuration, one that is utilized merely as a method for sharing work, collaboration theorized rhetorically under the rubric of invention enables us to imagine collaboration as an inventive art marked by the reflexive relationship that individuals foster with one another to anticipate novelty. There are a handful of terms that need

unpacking here: Why does collaboration need “re-canonization,” especially when rhetoricians like Karen Burke LeFevre have already used the idea of collaboration to theorize invention? How does the idea of “reflexivity” figure into collaboration? And what do I mean by “novelty”? Most importantly, what do I mean by “collaboration” if one of the purposes of this chapter is to offer a redefinition of this slippery concept?

To address this last concern first, let me offer a working definition of collaboration, one that I call pragmatic and consequential, and one that I will begin to explicate in this current chapter. *Collaboration points to the ways in which interlocutors use reflexive dialogue to intervene in and enhance the progression of their interaction with an object of discourse.* I use the concept of novelty to identify “what” collaborators produce through their interaction with objects of discourse, which are simply new ways of thinking about and articulating ideas in the world. It will be in the next chapter where I discuss in detail what it means to “intervene in and enhance” the progression of our interaction with “objects of discourse,” but I offer this redefinition of collaboration at the onset of this current chapter to establish the terminology to which I will be turning as I discuss what it means to “re-canonize” collaboration for the work of composition.

I explain the need for this re-canonization by positing that social constructionist theories of collaboration limit our ability to explain collaboration other than stylistically as a particular proximal configuration of individuals sharing work. In other words, if collaboration is an imperative function of our discourse, which is what happens in social constructionist theory that conflates collaboration with conversation, then a rhetorical explanation of *what* collaboration is and *how* it works must always fall back on

discussions of style because there is nothing actually to invent (or “represent”) outside of the knowledge of a community’s normal discourse. Additionally, if collaboration can only denote a particular style of engaging the already-at-work processes of our communication with one another, then collaboration is at best temporary engagement with others limited by the episteme of a particular “discourse community.”

Understanding the relationship between collaboration-as-style and how this social constructionist approach supports an epistemic theory of rhetoric therefore underscores why collaboration, if a pragmatically viable theory is to support it, should be theorized under the rhetorical canon of invention.

After I review what it means to “re-canonize” collaboration from style to invention, I discuss the relationship between social-epistemic rhetorical theory and social constructionism. I then review existing definitions of rhetorical invention to suggest how we can identify a pragmatic opening for understanding collaboration in terms that position rhetorical invention as a discursive activity we enter into with others, and I turn to the sociologist George Herbert Mead for explanation in this regard. In the last section of this chapter I discuss the *kairos* of collaboration alongside the idea of reflexive dialogue, both of which are important concepts for understanding collaboration pragmatically.

### **The “Style” of Collaboration**

In their article “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship,” published in *PMLA* in 2001, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford remind scholars in English about “the socially

constructed nature of writing—its inherently collaborative foundation,” and how it “functions as an enthymemic grounding for much contemporary research in the discipline.” In an endnote corresponding to this statement, Ede and Lunsford offer a short list of scholarly work and further qualify what they mean by the “inherently collaborative” nature of writing. “Collaboration is a key term for composition studies,” they write, “where it can refer both to collaborative learning activities, such as peer response and group problem solving, and to the actual practice of cowriting texts and negotiating power among members of workplace writing groups” (355, 364). Indeed, in the collection *Keywords in Composition Studies*, Maureen Daly Goggin says that “collaboration signifies not only the phenomenon of two or more authors working on a single project but also extends to the view that all writing is collaborative” (35). Finally, in her overview of collaborative pedagogy in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Rebecca Moore Howard observes that since “composition studies includes pedagogy as a central concern, collaboration holds a particular fascination for the discipline,” and then reminds her readers, much like Ede and Lunsford, that many professionals in composition “go so far as to assert that all writing is collaborative” (54-55).

While all of the above claims similarly posit that as a discipline composition recognizes the “inherently” social dimension of writing, it is harder to discern just how the idea of collaboration itself is supposed to unite, even if only tentatively, the many different ways the social character of writing can be explored theoretically in composition scholarship, not to mention pedagogically in the teaching of writing. That is, what does it mean to link collaboration ontologically to the notion of writing, which the above claims

do, while at the same time illustrating collaboration in practice with various tactical configurations of individuals working in proximity? Collaboration *just is*, in other words, but *it is* two or more people deliberately engaged in some kind of cooperative activity. Here is the theoretical problem that prompted my discussion of collaborative nihilism in the first chapter: the rendering of collaboration in theory that makes no pragmatic difference for how we conceptualize the work of teaching writing in practice.

If all writing is collaborative, and if collaboration is manifested through such various activities as peer response, group work, and co-writing, then what difference does it make to say, as Ede and Lunsford do, that the “social dimension of writing—its inherently collaborative foundation—functions as an enthymemic grounding for much contemporary research in the discipline”? As I did in the previous chapter, I want to call attention to a contradiction inherent in the social constructionist view of collaborative learning that presents collaboration pedagogically as primarily a tactical configuration of individuals working together. If collaboration *just is*; if it “functions as an enthymemic grounding” for how we understand the nature of writing, then our discourse production in general must be understood to be dependent on the various ways we interact with and respond to other discourse producers with whom we are in contact. As illustrated above, we can look to various types of pedagogical activities that configure individuals into pairs and groups to therefore see collaboration at work. The problem with this explanation of collaboration, however, is that it relies on a relativistic epistemology for explaining how we come to know and interact with the world.

Beginning with Bruffee's articulation of collaboration theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s, compositionists have used social constructionist claims about the relationship between knowledge, thoughts, texts, selves, and the "discourse communities" that produce them to situate collaboration as a pedagogical model that somehow embodies the always-already happening processes of communication and knowledge production. Indeed, Bruffee helped to establish the argument that the epistemic practices of a discourse community are what shape and give meaning to what we are able to communicate. Consider, for example, what he wrote in "Collaboration and the 'Conversation of Mankind'":

To the extent that thought is internalized conversation, then any effort to understand how we think requires us to understand the nature of conversation; and any effort to understand conversation requires us to understand the nature of community life that generates and maintains conversation. Furthermore any effort to understand and cultivate in ourselves the kind of thought we value most requires us to understand and cultivate the kinds of community life that establish and maintain conversation that is the origin of that kind of thought. To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is we must learn to converse well. (421)

It is largely through this progression of warrants about the nature of conversation leading to his claim about the connection between thinking well and conversing well that Bruffee establishes the foundation for how collaboration would be theoretically conceptualized in composition studies. Specifically, collaboration understood through tactical configurations of individuals in conversation somehow demonstrates the social constructionist claim that our knowledge is dependent upon the discourse communities that shape and give meaning to what we know and how we communicate. Even though Bruffee doesn't actually utilize the term "discourse community" in his early work, he

does explicitly argue that social constructionist theory views knowledge and language as inseparable, even identical (“Social Construction” 778). In *Keywords in Composition Studies*, Peter Vandenberg offers a general gloss on this basic function of a discourse community. He quotes Bruce Herzberg who explains that

language use in a group is a form of social behavior, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending [a] group’s knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group’s knowledge. (Vandenberg 68).

While there has indeed been much scholarship that questions both the goals and methods associated with collaboration and the constitution of “community,” some of which I reviewed in the Introduction and Chapter One, Bruffee’s conceptualization of social constructionism is still very much at work in the myriad conversations about collaborative learning that his work helped to initiate in composition studies, in part evidenced through Herzberg’s explanation of discourse. Situating knowledge and discourse as “epistemic” and “constitutive” of a community has the double effect of situating discourse communities as both the sources of and limits to what we can know (and speak of) in advance. James Paul Gee unequivocally lays out just such a conclusion:

Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction (even less so than languages, and hardly anyone ever fluently acquired a second language sitting in a classroom), but by enculturation (“apprenticeship”) into social practices through scaffolding and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse....This is how we all acquired our native language and our home-based Discourse. It is how we acquire all later, more public-oriented Discourses. If you have no access to the social practice, you don’t get the Discourse, you don’t have it. (“Literacy, Discourse” 7)



Utilizing the notion of *discourse constitution* (which is also at work in Herzberg's quotation), Gee says "various Discourses...constitute us as persons," but he quickly follows with a qualification, asserting that these discourses "are changing and often are not fully consistent with each other." In other words, with various discourses come conflicting notions of value and belief that at best an individual can only acknowledge but never resolve; therefore, "there is no real sense in which we humans are consistent or well-integrated creatures from a cognitive or social viewpoint, though, in fact, most Discourses assume that we are (and thus we do too, while we are in them)" (7). Theories of social constructionism fail precisely here when attempting to resolve ontological claims about the collaborative nature of writing with pedagogical strategies for enacting collaboration in practice. As Gee unabashedly demonstrates, social constructionists cannot help but theorize discourse as Discourse with a capital-D, as something like a metaphysical sphere of practice one enters into, or as some kind of cultural possession one slowly comes to acquire. Accordingly all discourse is collaborative because "in" discourse we are enculturated "through scaffolding and supported interaction." But herein lies the rub: through our pedagogical practices of collaboration we can only really mimic individual agency—play at being free and deliberate users of discourse—because what we can know, how we speak, and to what limit we actually communicate is ultimately determined by the discourses from which we are constituted. In other words, novelty is impossible because what we are able to communicate has been predetermined by the discursive limits established by the epistemic practices of a discourse community.

The problems inherent in accounting for the production of discourse using social constructionist theory have already been thoroughly critiqued by rhetoricians such as Thomas Kent (“On the Very Idea”), Stephen R. Yarbrough (*After Rhetoric* and *Inventive Intercourse*), and literary theorist Stanley Fish (“Anti-Foundationalism”), although Fish’s own version of social constructionism has itself undergone a similar critique (Dasenbrock, “Do We Write”; Yarbrough, *After Rhetoric*). According to Kent’s analysis in his essay “On the Very Idea of a Discourse Community,” social constructionist theory cannot reasonably account for two central questions that arise from its foundational claim that discourse communities account for and justify their own categories of knowledge. The first of these questions underscores the problem of how a discourse community can reasonably establish the authority to argue what counts as knowledge if knowledge itself changes from community to community. Secondly, if one must be a member of a discourse community to fully participate in and engage that community, then how can one recognize other discourse communities outside of one’s own? Indeed, Kent concludes that social constructionism is always liable to justified criticism about its ultimate position as a theory of cultural relativism:

By claiming that our knowledge of the world is relative to a conceptual scheme, social constructionists endorse the Cartesian notion that a split exists between an ‘in here’—usually thought as mind or subjectivity—and an “out there”—usually thought as world or objectivity—a split that is mediated by a network of social conventions, mental categories, or simply loosely-held beliefs. When they accept this position, social constructionists run headlong into a well-known and, I believe, insurmountable problem of relativism that, in turn, leads inexorably to a debilitating form of nay-saying skepticism. (426)

Moreover as Stephen Yarbrough points out in *Inventive Intercourse*, social constructionists replace the metaphysical gap cognitive theorists assert exists between mind and reality with one that exists between culture and reality, and in both cases language is the mediating factor (57). Still more, Kurt Spellmeyer takes notice of a “missing step” in the philosophy of social constructionism: “the step between the premise that perceptual schemas give shape to experience and the conclusion that communities make them.” As he continues by way of example, “If the tree and the watcher [someone looking at the tree and imaging the idea of a tree at the same time] are both givens of a particular schema, then communities—collective associations of watchers—must be givens in exactly the same way, made by the schema, not makers of it. And if everything is a construct, then nothing, strictly speaking, can be constructed” (158).

Lest I come across as, one, an unwavering critic of social constructionism who refuses to extend charity and play Elbow’s “believing game” with its key theorists, or two, as someone who simply wishes to beat a dead horse with criticism that has already been well-articulated, let me remind readers that reviewing the theoretical shortcomings of social constructionist theory is necessary to establish a pragmatic motive for questioning the state of collaboration theory in composition studies today. It is obvious that social constructionist theories of collaboration need to be replaced with an orientation that can account for discourse production devoid of metaphysics while simultaneously acknowledging the deliberate work of collaboration itself in practice, as something two or more individuals purposely pursue as they interact *with* and not *through* discourse.

As I have demonstrated, collaboration has been comfortably established within a social constructionist framework that positions it as a mediating force through which writing (and discourse in general) is automatically produced *and* as a tactical configuration individuals assume in response to a common task. So in pedagogical terms collaboration gets manifested through various forms of group work that somehow enact the already-active communication within a discourse community, the conceptual scheme that sanctions what can and cannot be discursively authorized by its members. Using Yarbrough's conclusion about Fish's take on the teaching of writing, "if the doctrines of social constructionism are true then it logically follows that everyone who teaches composition is already doing what can be done to help students improve their writing" (*After Rhetoric* 221); and thus we need theory that can account for collaboration as a kind of deliberate activity. If collaboration *just is*, if at the end of the day it simply names one take on the social construction of knowledge, then pedagogically collaboration can never be more than simply *an activity*, something teachers do to keep their students engaged. Put another way, collaboration becomes at best simply a means to divide labor, to delegate responsibility, and to play at what is already at work pushing our discourse and shaping our writing.

Following Yarbrough's logic, such a view necessarily leads us to conclude that teachers of writing can at best only utilize collaboration tactically to help demonstrate to students how they already learn. In other words, collaboration does not promise to make us better writers, it just encourages us to practice more deliberately the skills that shape us into authorized members of a discourse community. That is to say, if individuals do

emerge from collaboration better writers, that is because they were able to connect the internalized discursive practices of a “community of knowledgeable peers” (to echo Bruffee) with their own practical attempts at deploying the appropriate skill sets that mark a discourser as an authorized member of that community.

We have thus arrived at a point where I can again pose my question about Ede and Lunsford’s assertion about the “social dimension of writing”: What difference does it make? How does such a claim in theory actually justify our discipline’s dominant pedagogical approaches (largely tactical ones) to collaboration in practice? To me, it makes no difference. To echo Michael Spooner and Kathleen Blake Yancey, “if our theory must call all writing collaborative, then ‘collaboration’ becomes moot and useless as a theoretical construct” (“A Single Good Mind” 56). Insofar as collaboration remains a theoretical arm of social constructionism, in practice there remains no reason to give up collaboration as a pedagogical category to simply name specific kinds of classroom activities that involve multiple individuals working together. Really, the only work necessary for teachers is to decide which collaborative activities to use and how best to deploy them. Again, there is no difference at stake in theory; there is no actual consequence. At the end of the day, a social constructionist can really only forward collaboration to designate a particular *style* of learning because if collaboration *just is*, then all we can do pedagogically is dress it up or dress it down to decide the best configuration through which to construct those tactical engagements that will promote the specter of collaborative learning. In this way teachers will always remain what social

constructionism positions them as: classroom managers who must defer to the conventions of discourse communities to determine what pedagogy to pull off the shelf.

### **The Epistemic Mediation of Social Turn Collaboration**

As I have argued, for social constructionists the ideas of conversation and collaboration function synonymously to describe how the members of a discourse community share particular conventions that make that discourse community a community in the first place. Remember that Kenneth Bruffee, for example, implores his readers to recognize how collaborative learning “provides the kind of social context, the kind of community, in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers” (“Collaborative Learning” 644). From the social constructionist perspective, collaboration enacts how knowledge is generated and maintained through the normal discourse of a knowledge community’s conversation. Within the field of composition studies this perspective on the epistemic function of discourse first gained popularity in the early eighties, but rhetoricians and discourse philosophers (especially in communications studies) have been engaged in scholarly debate about epistemic rhetoric at least since 1967 when Robert L. Scott published his short but celebrated article “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic,” which was then, as William Harpine notes, “a new, radical way to understand rhetoric” (337). As Harpine explains, “Scott’s article is founded in a concept of argumentative justification in rhetoric, viewed as an alternative to analytic logic” (335). Or as Jeffrey L. Bineham explains, “At base, Scott’s assertion that ‘rhetoric is epistemic’ implores scholars to rethink the relationship between

discourse...and the processes and substance of knowledge.” Scott’s thesis forwarded the argument that what we know is inextricably tied to how we communicate. “Epistemic rhetorical theory,” continues Bineham, “advances propositions about both how people know and the nature of what they know. It has, in sum, epistemological and ontological implications” (43).

In Bineham’s article, “The Cartesian Anxiety in Epistemic Rhetoric: An Assessment of the Literature,” he explains that one approach to studying rhetoric as epistemic embraces “the social knowledge theory,” and he points to Thomas Farrell as its paradigmatic theorist (49). Nearly a decade before Bruffee asserted that the work of collaboration required individual discourses to deliberate over a problem until consensus is reached, Farrell had already articulated a rhetorical theory of knowledge that hinged on the role of consensus. In “Knowledge, Consensus, and Rhetorical Theory” (1976), Farrell suggested that if the idea of “knowledge” is to be linked to rhetoric it must be conceptualized socially as that which comprises “*conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behavior*” (4, emphasis in original). Social knowledge, then, represents the characteristics of what Kuhn would call normal science and implies that a certain amount of consensus is needed to authorize whatever counts as “preferable public behavior.” But Farrell’s conception of the epistemic function of rhetoric rests on what he calls a “peculiar kind of consensus”:

That is to say, it rests upon a consensus that is attributed to an audience rather than concretely shared. This means that such knowledge does not rest upon agreement which is both fact and known to be fact. The assumption of agreement may be counterfactual. Some people may, in fact, disagree with what is attributed. Yet it is this assumed understanding of agreement—as an hypothesis, rather than fact—which makes rhetorical argument possible. (6)

Farrell's observation here is quite straightforward: to a certain extent social knowledge is a fiction, something discoursers appeal to as members of a social body to establish that social body's identity. In other words, it doesn't matter whether everyone actually agrees on a certain point or shares an exact belief; what matters is that one's audience agrees that agreement is, generally speaking, not only a possibility but also an assumed necessity if that social body is to share in some type of collective identity. For a theory of epistemic rhetoric, it is the collective identity of a community that social knowledge helps to delineate. The idea of social knowledge therefore serves a particular rhetorical function: it makes possible room for the discursive give-and-take that makes actual consensus so difficult. As Farrell continues:

Rather than being fixed, permanent, and static, therefore, social knowledge is transitional and generative. As individual problems are encountered and, through the frustrating incrementalism of human decision-making, managed or resolved, new problems emerge; and with these, new knowledge may be attributed, based reasonably upon the collective judgments which have previously been made. Not only does social knowledge provide a context of relevance for artistic proof in collective inference-making; it also establishes social precedents for future attributions of consensus in situations which have yet to be encountered. (9-10)

Farrell basically explains in epistemic rhetorical terms how social constructionists theorize the production of knowledge through the relationship between normal and abnormal "science" (for Kuhn) or "discourse" (for Rorty). There are "established social



precedents” that function to guide “future attributions of consensus” when “new problems emerge.” Theories of epistemic rhetoric thus inform the social constructionist paradigm that explains collaboration as the always-already discursive mechanism that maintains the conversation of a knowledge community. That is, meaning is circulated through the “normal” discourse shared by knowledgeable peers until “abnormal” discourse, discourse that for some reason does not harmonize “normally” with the existing talk, prompts that community to assess this abnormality to determine if and how their normal discourse must be adjusted to incorporate whatever interruption has disrupted the original conversation. If that knowledge community deems the abnormal discourse legitimate, not only will it then be folded into that community’s normal discourse, but by default it will also alter that community’s knowledge, since knowledge is mediated via that abstract mechanism Oakshott first called the “conversation of mankind.”

The social precedents, whatever one chooses to call them, are what collectively make up a community’s episteme, the body of knowledge a community shares through the give-and-take of its discourse. No matter an episteme’s ethereal quality, explains Farrell, it nevertheless plays a primarily “affective or normative impact upon decision-making” for that social body; it provides discoursers with what he terms a “zone of relevance” for situating assumptions and deducing reasonable conclusions (10, 11). In a later essay, Farrell explains that social knowledge is “*rule-like* in form,” which suggests “a regularity found in the ongoing patterns of human experience.” To conceptualize social knowledge as rule-like “is important to the view of rhetoric as a practical art” because it accounts for

personal responsibility and one's ability to either conform to or deviate from such norms ("Social Knowledge" 331, 333). A similar theory is posited by James Herrick, another prominent epistemic rhetorician in communication studies, who asserts that

rhetoric's epistemic function in society can be seen in some ways to be the result of its benefit of testing ideas...once an idea has been tested thoroughly by a group, community, and society, it becomes part of what these groups take to be knowledge. (qtd. in Harpine 336)

For Harpine, however, claiming that rhetoric is epistemic relies on definitional assumptions that theorists like Scott, Farrell, and Herrick take for granted. As he explains,

When theorists say that rhetoric is epistemic, do they mean that *persuasion* has an epistemic quality? Do they mean to distinguish communication that is persuasive, or will they allow any communication to count as rhetoric? How broad, or how narrow, a conception of rhetoric is necessary in order to make sense of the claim that rhetoric is epistemic? (340)

It is here, I believe, where we can link epistemic rhetorical theory to social constructionism in the development of social turn collaboration theory in composition studies.

What compositionists call "social-epistemic" rhetoric essentially refers to the epistemic rhetorical theory developed by the likes of Scott and Ferrell applied to the social constructionist theory that Bruffee's scholarship explicates. One of social-epistemic rhetoric's proselytizers, James Berlin, folds epistemic rhetoric into what he calls a "transactional" theory of rhetoric, which, as one can see, restates how compositionists have come to understand the idea of a discourse community:

Epistemic rhetoric holds that language is the key to understanding the dialectical process involved in the rhetorical act. Knowledge does not exist apart from language. Thus, the task of the interlocutor is not simply to find the appropriate words to communicate—to contain—a nonverbal reality. Language, instead, embodies and generates knowledge, and there is no knowledge without language. For epistemic rhetoric, language is not, however, a single, monolithic entity. Within each society there is a host of languages, each serving as the center of a particular discourse community. (*Rhetoric and Reality* 166-67)

Berlin describes the dual-function of language within a discourse community; first, it mediates knowledge, which is to say even though words do not “contain” knowledge, the language practices of a discourse community nevertheless manage beliefs that count as knowledge; second, it is through language that we generate knowledge in the first place.

As Berlin continues:

Each community—whether made up of biologists, composition teachers, autoworkers, ward members, or baseball fans—is built around a language peculiar to itself so that membership in the group is determined by the ability to use the language according to the prescribed methods. The specialized language can serve an inclusionary function because it prescribes and enforces assumptions about *external reality* and the relationship of its members to this reality. Knowledge of what is “real” to the group can only be displayed by using its language. (167, emphasis added)

In Berlin’s estimation, to understand social-epistemic rhetoric is to understand how members of a community can relate to and interact with that which exists outside of the community—“external reality”—and it explains the socially constructed nature of what that community believes about itself, what Berlin would by extension logically call “internal reality,” although he doesn’t say this above. Again, we see a Cartesian split between an “in here” and an “out there,” one that must be bridged to fully appreciate the complexity of one’s relative positioning in the world. But here is also where collaboration

plays a role (within social constructionist epistemologies), because as Bruffee explains throughout his scholarship on collaborative learning, the purpose of collaboration as a pedagogical tool is to help acculturate new members into an already existing discourse community with its own language conventions and meanings—its own epistemic reality. If knowledge is both generated and maintained through the language practices of a discourse community, then the only way to gain entrance into a community is to share in the same language practices, which in turn is a prerequisite for sharing the same knowledge. Collaboration is therefore a pedagogical method through which the internal talk of a discourse community is externalized so as to allow new members access to these language, (and, by default, knowledge) conventions. So when Bruffee posits his definition of social constructionism, the one in which he asserts that social constructionism understands concepts such as “reality” and “knowledge” as “community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities,” Richard Rorty, the one from whom much of Bruffee’s definition of social constructionism is built, when presented with Bruffee’s explanation responds with uncomplicated acknowledgement that “yes...[this]seems true enough” (Olson 4).

Collaboration is therefore something that can really only occur within discourse communities, because collaboration according to a rhetorical epistemic theory is simply the process through which such communities maintain knowledge. Again, note how according to Berlin epistemic theories explain language as the lens through which communities view an “external” reality. Even though social constructionism is in theory non-foundational, just as is the epistemic rhetoric that marks the type of discourse these

communities share, implicit in these theories is an idea that situates discourse communities in isolation from one another as a series of microcosms, of little worlds, that each view reality and knowledge in different terms. In other words, social constructionism does have unacknowledged metaphysical foundations: abstract entities like “language” and “culture.” In this way it becomes hard to distinguish just how much agency members of discourse communities actually have to invent the novel concepts and perspectives that, according to epistemic rhetoric, our language both mediates and generates.

### **Composition and Rhetorical Invention**

The above review of social-epistemic rhetoric and its relationship to social constructionist theory is important because just like with the latter, within epistemic rhetorical theory a metaphysical gap gets posited, one that separates an external reality from an internal one. For social-epistemic theories language is therefore a tool, something that exists and is made meaningful through its instrumental use within particular discourse communities. Moreover, the language of these communities actually shapes the reality these communities experience. This is, after all, how social-epistemic rhetoric gets presented in the literature, and thus an inside/outside binary is manifested. We get stuck in a certain sense, confined to the reality that our language allows us to experience because we cannot get outside our language to examine the larger Reality within which our communities (and their languages) are only a microcosm.

It is this metaphysical dilemma that social-epistemic rhetoric and social constructionist theory can at best only exacerbate and consequentially invite charges of supporting a philosophy of cultural relativism. This is why no pragmatic difference exists between the theoretical imperatives of social constructionism, social-epistemic rhetoric, and the pedagogical attempts at making this theory tenable through tactics-based explanations of collaborative learning in action. All collaboration does within these theories is demonstrate somewhat more explicitly what we already do. In this way, collaborative learning becomes a kind of self-defeating pedagogy that will work only to the extent that our expectations about how our students should discourse are met through how our students actually do discourse. If these expectations are not met, then it becomes easier to set aside collaboration for some other pedagogical strategy.

As I suggest at the beginning of this chapter, the work of re-conceptualizing collaboration must begin with defining collaboration as a form of rhetorical invention. “The term *invention* has historically encompassed strategic acts that provide the discourser with direction, multiple ideas, subject matter, arguments, insights to probable judgments, and understanding of the rhetorical situation,” explains Janice Lauer. “Such acts include initiating discourse, exploring alternatives, framing and testing judgments, interpreting texts, and analyzing audiences” (2). When it comes to the idea of rhetorical invention in the study of composition, Karen Burke LeFevre’s definition offers rhetoricians and teachers of writing a fairly expansive explanation of this idea. She describes rhetorical invention as the attempt to be both wise and eloquent:

Conceiving rhetorical invention as a search for wisdom—a search for analyzing subjects, audiences, and problems as well as generating and judging ideas, information, propositions, and lines of reasoning—aligns rhetorical invention closely with inquiry or with ‘invention’ in the generic sense. (2)

In Lauer’s survey of theories of invention, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*, she classifies LeFevre’s approach as falling under a social constructionist paradigm because it “characterized invention as a dialectical process in which the individual and the socio-culture are coexisting and mutually defining” (100). Indeed, the thesis forwarded by LeFevre is that invention, “conceived broadly as the process of actively creating as well as finding what comes to be known and said in the discourse of any discipline, is, I think, best understood as occurring when individuals interact dialectically with socioculture in a distinctive way to generate something” (33).

In *Invention as a Social Act*, LeFevre points to how invention is often conflated with conceptions of “individual introspection,” a process by which “ideas are created in the mind of an atomistic individual and then expressed to the rest of the world.” Or as she alternately words this idea, “Invention is [often] regarded as an unfolding, a manifestation of an individual’s ideas, feelings, voice, personality, and patterns of thought.” She explains that such individualized, “Platonic” conceptions of invention sketch an “incomplete picture” and forwards her own thesis about the social act of invention. As she explains, “rhetorical invention is better understood as a social act, in which an individual who is at the same time a social being interacts in a distinctive way with society and culture to create something” (1). LeFevre is careful to caution that a social theory of invention does not completely undermine or contradict Platonic theories,

especially when it comes to conceptualizing the role of individual agency; but she suggests that rhetorical theory has come to understand how cognitive acts take place within social environments, so that to theorize invention socially simply offers a wider rhetorical context for understanding how invention

occurs through the socially learned process of an internal dialogue with an imaged other, and the invention process is enabled by an internal social construct of audience, which supplies premises and structures of belief that guide the writer. (2)

To understand invention as a social act, including those Platonic theories that privilege the inventive power of the individual, LeFevre creates a four-part continuum that situates rhetorical approaches to invention in a linear relationship to one another. On one end are “Platonic” theories, followed by “Internal Dialogic” theories, which she describes as theories that explain invention as a process that “is affected and indeed made possible by an ‘otherness’ that is dynamically present in each I” (54). The third realm of invention she describes, the “Collaborative” approach, is distinctive because its theories posit how the physical presence of others is necessary for invention. Finally, “Collective” theories of invention, characterized by the work of Emile Durkheim, explain invention as dependent on supra-collective forces and entities like cultures, bureaucracies, and organizations.

LeFevre’s social act perspective on invention through which she constructs her continuum easily translates into how other social constructionists theorize communicative interaction. For example, consider Kenneth Gergen’s four-part taxonomy that categorizes how we discursively negotiate conflict. First, we can imagine “internal others,” the



process through which we attempt to understand how our identity is composed of a multitude of voices that shape how we respond. Or we might seek to understand the “conjoint relations” that keep arguments taut through the discursive impasse of two “conjoined” discourses who have yet to remedy their conflict. In other words, writes Gergen, “I may be able to locate ways in which it is not you alone who is to blame, but our particular pattern of relating” (157). Third, he suggests exploring “group realities” by which we recognize that “there is a way of seeing ourselves not as singular individuals but as representatives of groups, traditions, families, and so on” (157-58). Fourth, and finally, we might understand what it means to participate in “the systemic swim,” the way in which we participate in and construct wider social patterns that help us to locate meaning (158). The similarities between Gergen’s taxonomy and LeFevre’s are significant, and not just in the way each taxonomy follows a similar sequence of categories. Rather we should notice how both Gergen and LeFevre attempt to corral incommensurable social theories as simply different iterations of a single, cohesive explanation. For Gergen it is that we can understand all of our discursive conflicts in terms of how others construct us as individuals, and for LeFevre all four approaches she describes ultimately account for the social dynamics through which we create meaningful relationships with the world via rhetorical acts of invention. As theoretical models, both taxonomies certainly offer a convenient method for comparing and contrasting what are large and multifaceted philosophical traditions, but this convenience is also their shortcoming, for obviously the categories constructed within these taxonomies rely on generalizations of complex theoretical traditions.

We can examine, for example, how LeFevre constructs the “Collaborative” arm of invention on her continuum to see this kind of generalization at work. I focus on this particular branch of her social act theory of invention because with it she reviews how some theorists suggest how the interactions between and among individual agents are a necessary condition for the work of invention to be undertaken in the first place. The quintessential “Collaborative” theorist for LeFevre is the sociologist George Herbert Mead. According to Mead’s gestural theory of communication, explains LeFevre,

One person acts, and in the act of making the gesture, calls out for a response in the other. Something new is created here.... New meanings are thus brought into existence by means of a social interaction involving a symbolic gesture and a response. (62)

LeFevre correctly observes that Mead’s perspective “takes the invention process out of the mind of the individual and into the interaction of real people, where it may be defined as an act, a response of another individual to an initiator’s gesture.” But when it comes to how LeFevre uses Mead’s theory to explain what makes this particular approach to invention collaborative, she relies on the mediating presence of a tangible product or specifically outlined activity, something collaborators actually make or a specific process they follow, to illustrate the practicality of collaborative invention:

In contract negotiations or business proposal writing, for example, two or more rhetors collaborate to invent, and in fact, to negotiate, a text. One person may suggest an idea; the other responds; the response becomes a gesture to the first speaker, who then generates another idea; the other responds again, and so on. (62-63)

Unfortunately while LeFevre's description of Mead's theory is more or less accurate, her description of the discourse collaborators share doesn't explain the purpose for which she says this discourse occurs, which is "to invent, and in fact, negotiate, a text." The point here is that LeFevre's description of "collaborative" invention not only fails to actually explain what pragmatic difference Mead's theory of communicative interaction makes when conceptualizing the work of invention, but it also conflates collaboration with conversation, just as Bruffee's theory does. That these collaborators are talking through "contact negotiations or business proposal writing" seems inconsequential within LeFevre's explanation of invention; what matters is simply how we conceptualize the talk itself as a kind of conversation.

Stephen Yarbrough has suggested that LeFevre's inclusion of Mead in her continuum of invention theories is inappropriate, namely because within such a framework there leaves no room for Mead's "collaborative" invention to yield pragmatic consequences different from the consequences of other approaches to invention on the continuum. As he explains:

I need to emphasize that Mead's explanation of discourse lies on no such continuum. It differs radically from other theories LeFevre places on that continuum because each of these, unlike Mead's theory, subscribes to the same old metaphysical distinctions—language/reality, subject/object, mind/world, culture/nature, and so on—and therefore each not only is subject to deconstruction but, more importantly, also has no pragmatic effects. (*Inventive* 18)

It is important to single out Mead because his approach to theorizing communication is, as Yarbrough suggests, significantly different than other theories LeFevre includes on her continuum. One important difference in Mead's theory is the belief that we exist in only

one world, and it is through our interactions with one another that we continue this common world. As Yarbrough explains Mead, “Belief in schemes of dual or multiple worlds that function according to conflicting laws deprives us of the tools we need to come to terms together” (19).

For Mead the world is made meaningful through the ongoing progression of conduct, and Mead uses the term “gesture” to name this conduct. As Donald Bushman explains, “He [Mead] describes the uses of language as ‘a conversation of gestures,’ with the term gesture referring to all human social activity, any activity that is sensed by another and that evokes a response in another” (“Conversation” 254). Mead believes we use gestures in anticipation of certain responses, and when our anticipations are not met we must revise our gestures, and it is in this way that Mead explains how communication works:

Communication is a social process whose natural history shows that it arises out of cooperative activities...in which some phase of the act of one form, which may be called a gesture, acts as a stimulus to others to carry on their parts of the social act. It does not become communication in the full sense, i.e., the stimulus does not become a significant symbol, until the gesture tends to arouse the same response in the individual who makes it that it arouses in the others. (*Selected Writings* 312)

From Mead’s pragmatist standpoint, communication is the word that signifies when gestures have become meaningful, when human interaction becomes intentional and conduct is deliberative. From this perspective, Mead is able to argue that it is through conduct that truth is created.

As a concept “truth” is significant here because it denotes a kind of end; it is something that gives our actions purpose. In true pragmatist form, however, Mead does not believe truth is something that exists outside of experience, that it is something to

which our beliefs must correspond. Instead, truth for Mead is a concept that represents the test of belief itself; it is what makes the ability for certain beliefs to provoke actions that sustain the continuance of the common world. As he explains,

The criterion of truth does not then transcend experience, but simply regards the conditions of ongoing experience which has become problematic through the inhibitions of the natural processes of men. The solution of the problem lies entirely within experience and is found in the resolution of inhibitions. (342)

Put another way, “Truth expresses a relationship between the judgment and reality...the relationship lies between reconstruction, which enables conduct to continue, and the reality within which conduct advances” (338). Embedded in this approach to truth is the idea of mutually conditioning conduct; it is through our mutual actions with others that problems arise and are solved. Experience is the realm of this interaction; it is not something that exists separate from the cooperative activities of a group of interlocutors. Yarbrough sees a connection here between his use of the word discourse and Mead’s use of the word experience. “According to Mead,” writes Yarbrough, “human interaction within the world, what I call discourse, must be understood as being always already part of the world and not as a different kind of entity and over against other entities” (14). Truth therefore cannot be located outside the realm of experience, the realm of discourse, because that is where all of our interaction with the world takes place.

I offer this (what might seem tangential) explanation of Mead’s theory of gestures because it departs significantly from LeFevre’s conclusions about language and, by extension, her conclusions about rhetorical invention. First, Mead suggests that what we call language can be folded up into his much more general term “gesture,” which simply

denotes those things we intentionally deploy like marks and noises when interacting with others to foster communication. So words, body movements, sounds, signs, all of these things can be conceptualized as gestures we use for communication. Gestures are what we use to interact with one another and the world, and the meaning of a gesture arises through the process of communicative interaction itself. For LeFevre, however, language is a symbolic communication system. In the process of coming to understand invention as a social act, LeFevre writes,

I ask that we give serious consideration to two main conclusions. First, language should be viewed as an active force in the way we constitute—not simply *copy*—reality; language thus plays an active role in how we perceive and think and invent.

Like social constructionist theory before hers, LeFevre cannot separate the concept of language as a constituting force apart from the concept of knowledge as an epistemic system of beliefs that exist within mutually defining discourse or knowledge communities. Just take LeFevre's second conclusion she wants readers to consider: "Second, language should be viewed in its development and its use as a dialectic between individual and social realms" (96).

LeFevre's basic premise that invention is a social act is not in itself incorrect, nor is it an unhelpful way to begin thinking about the sociality inherent in how we come to make sense of and interact with the world, including other people. But like other social constructionists, LeFevre relies on the idea of language as a system, as a scheme that defines and gives meaning to our gestures. Mead, on the other hand, suggests that our gestures are not systematic but rather habitual. He would not suggest, as LeFevre does,

that language should be understood as a dialectic, a kind of reasoning, that individuals negotiate within “social realms,” as if the boundaries of such realms are what fuels the opposite end of the dialectical process of communication. Instead he would say that language is gestural, that we interact with other people and not abstract social realms, and that language is not systematic because appealing to an abstract symbolic system of meaning will not always help us overcome the practical problems of communicating with others.

The point here, of course, is that to conceptualize our gestures (*parole*) as arbitrarily connected to a system of meaning (*langue*) that exists over and above the ecology of relationships we actually cultivate with other people too easily positions the conflicts that inhibit our interactions with one another as ontological in nature and therefore to a certain point beyond our control. When there is only one common world, however, a world in which we must continually interpret one another’s gestures, in a world where the meanings of our gestures are located in the specific exchanges in which they occur, and thus when our discourse is theorized as causal and not socially constructed, then all of our conflicts are ultimately discursive conflicts. And all of our discursive conflicts, our breaks in communication, can be resolved when interlocutors use their discourse to relocate the common world that our communicative interaction serves to continue. In other words, when interlocutors can recognize that rhetorical conflicts are not the result of incommensurable worldviews, discourse communities, cultures, languages, or the like, and instead see that they more often than not result from the failure to locate a common object of concern, then the prospects for discursive remedy are made brighter.

In short, Mead offers a theoretically viable explanation of rhetorical invention, one that can account for all of those things LeFevre specifies rhetorical invention is good for, without relying on the presence of metaphysical schemes to explain how our gestures become meaningful, how they become “significant symbols” as he calls them. Rhetorical invention can therefore be conceptualized as the interaction in which we participate with one another and the world as we attempt to continue this common world with our discourse.

### **Inventing the Collaborative Moment: *Kairos* and Reflexivity**

On the one hand, science posits emergence, the occurrence in the evolutionary process of novel elements. On the other hand, the rationalistic procedure of scientific method is deterministic, postulating that every event can be causally explained by its antecedent conditions. Hence a serious antinomy arises between the principle of emergence and the principle of causation, both espoused by science and scientific philosophy; and this antinomy illustrates the nature of a metaphysical problem, since the assertion of the reality of one side seems to entail the allegation of the unreality of the other. Its solution, Mead held, rests upon an adequate theory of time, which would reconcile emergent novelty with causal conditioning.

- Andrew Reck, Introduction to Mead's *Selected Writings*

To move collaboration in theory away from social-epistemic and social constructionist explanations that situate it as either an essential quality of communication in a discourse community or as an instructor-managed pedagogical tool, one that can be adopted or rejected by teachers at will, we first must re-conceptualize collaboration away from explanations that can only locate it under the rhetorical canon of style. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I repeat that in most of our theory on collaboration, it can at best only denote a type of procedural interaction, one that requires certain conditions of



proximity and temporality. That is, within a social-epistemic framework collaboration usually denotes a type of temporary engagement between or among individuals who are proximally linked and sharing some kind of work.

Now I wish to discuss how we can begin to think more specifically about collaboration as invention; in particular I want to highlight the role of deliberation and forethought necessary for invention if collaboration is to denote something more than the always-already happening conversations within a discourse community. To this end I want to forward the notion of what I call *the invention of the collaborative moment*, a phrase I have come to use to explain why we must understand the temporal dimensions of collaboration in order to recognize what kind of deliberation and forethought is necessary for collaboration itself.

“Inventing the Collaborative Moment; or, Why  $1 + 1 = 3$ ,” is the title of a 4C’s paper I wrote several years ago that was part of a panel about what my co-presenters and I were calling the “collaborative imagination.” Unfortunately our panel proposal wasn’t accepted for inclusion on the conference program that year, nevertheless the ideas I tackled in that paper helped me articulate a problem I had identified as a teacher, one that took the shape of a question: “How do we encourage students to recognize the opportune time for collaboration?”<sup>1</sup> By “opportune time” I was referencing the classical notion of *kairos*, what often gets translated as “right” timing and in opposition to *chronos*, the concept we use to denote linear time. I had not yet worked out the problems inherent in theorizing collaboration within social-epistemic and social constructionist paradigms, yet I had noticed that for many students “collaboration” denoted a temporary engagement

with others that begins and ends when a collaborative assignment itself begins and ends. In other words, when collaboration comes to an end (its teleological end) is also when collaboration comes to an end (its temporal end). At the time this was an underdeveloped idea and one I had limited language to articulate, but I noticed that for many people collaboration is *temporally* linked to the *temporary* engagements with others that we enter into “collaboratively” to complete some kind of task. In my own experiences with collaboration, especially with my colleague and collaborator, John Pell, I noticed that our collaboration was not strictly mediated by the specific projects on which we worked. The value of our collaboration was for me located in the myriad ways in which we were learning how to understand new ideas and formulate new ways of articulating those ideas. Moreover, I recognized how even when John and I were not “working” on something together, our collaborative perspective could nevertheless inform my other “individual” work as a teacher and scholar.

Thus I developed a curiosity about the idea of collaboration in the study of writing, curiosity that developed in such a way that you are now reading a dissertation on the subject. The point of this anecdote, however, is that I wanted to understand how to talk about collaboration to students in a way that could promote the work of rhetorical invention and promote in them, my students, an ethic for collaboration that extended beyond those temporary engagements with other students that begin and end with particular assignments. Another way of framing this problem is that I wanted to promote in my students an understanding of collaboration they could utilize in order to foster relationships with others to enhance both their understanding of and ability to

productively intervene in discursive conflicts. To “invent the collaborative moment,” then, came to denote those times when we recognize a new idea or understanding or way of saying something as being connected to the work of rhetorical invention with another person.

To explain how we can recognize these collaborative moments, I return to the above point I make about *kairos* and how we must move away from the association of collaboration with temporary engagements with others. In other words, we should move away from conceptualizing collaboration as something with a clearly articulated beginning and end. In his recent *RSQ* article, “On ‘Getting It’: Resistance, Temporality, and the ‘Ethical Shifting’ of Discursive Interaction,” Stephen Yarbrough explains that successful discursive interaction “requires us to not only ‘account’ for the objects of their [others’] attention but to adjust our actions to their actions’ timing.” To interpret others, to follow the give-and-take within discourse, “we must re-order time” (7). Yarbrough’s understanding of discursive interaction is partially informed by Mead’s theory of the gesture, which I briefly reviewed earlier. As Mead explains, “the existence of motion in the passage of events depends not upon what is taking place in an absolute space and time, but upon the relation of a consentient set to a percipient event” (*Selected Writings* 315). Mead suggests that our individual perspectives (consentient sets) are relative to particular discursive situations (percipient events). To suggest that our discursive interaction relies on our ability to re-order time, as Yarbrough does, is to suggest that in discourse the linear time of *chronos* is less important than the opportune time of *kairos*.

Although popularly understood as right or proper timing, the etymology of *kairos* reveals a rich and complicated history in rhetorical theory. As Philip Sipiora explains,

*kairos* carried a number of meanings in classical rhetorical theory and history, including ‘symmetry,’ ‘propriety,’ ‘occasion,’ ‘due measure,’ ‘fitness,’ ‘tact,’ ‘decorum,’ ‘convenience,’ ‘proportion,’ ‘fruit,’ and ‘wise moderation,’ to mention some of the other common uses. (1)

For Sipiora, to understand *kairos* requires that we recognize how the experience of temporality is influenced by the appropriateness of discourse in certain places and at certain times. In other words, to understand someone’s talk requires us to recognize the ways we experience the temporality of discourse itself:

The “grasping of concepts” means to think in a particular way at a particular time, a function of epistemology. It is necessary, according to sophistic rhetoric, that a rhetor “scientifically” know the various forms of the discourse (*eide ton logon*), in order to avoid violating the rules of appropriateness (*ton kairon me diamartein*); to alter the discourse for convenience (*preontos holon ton logon katapoikilai*); and to choose forms that are harmonious with each other. All of these issues demonstrate the magnitude of *kairos*. (4)

For our current discussion, it is necessary to recognize that conceptually *kairos* points to the qualitative dimension of time; it suggests that time is not simply the linear progression of seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years because while this might be how we experience time *in passing*, it is not necessarily how we experience *the passing of time*.

The temporal shifts we often associate with the passing of time really just point to the temporal quality that we assign to experiences. This is why, for example, events that happened a decade ago might be remembered as if they happened yesterday. Similarly, this is why I can catch up with a friend with whom I haven’t spoken in several months

and remark that “it feels like years” since we last talked. Still more, this is why two people can “lose track of time” during a conversation. To conceptualize a moment as such is therefore to play with time, at least insofar as we use “the present” as the starting point for remembering “the past.” As Mead explain in *The Philosophy of the Present*,

It is idle, at least for the purposes of experience, to have recourse to a “real” past within which we are making constant discoveries, for that past must be set over against a present within which the emergent appears, and the past, which must then be looked at from the emergent, becomes a different past.(36)

We understand time, in other words, through the kairotic shifting and re-ordering of experience that allows us to conceptualize things like “the present moment” in the first place. John E. Smith offers a nice explanation of this necessity quality of *kairos*:

I shall suggest that *kairos* presupposes *chronos*, which is thus a necessary condition underlying qualitative times, but that, by itself, the *chronos* aspect does not suffice for understanding either specifically historical interpretations or those processes of nature and human experience where the *chronos* aspect reaches certain critical points at which a qualitative character begins to emerge, and when there are junctions of opportunity calling for human ingenuity in apprehending when the time is “right.” (48)

Put simply, *chronos* is less important than *kairos* because we “experience” time through the latter. When it comes to the timing of our discourse, as Yarbrough stipulates,

We need to re-order time when our interlocutors are acting within different ethical fields than we because our fields’ temporal orders are different: events within them have different temporal spreads, different rhythms or patterns of emphasis, different urgencies, and so on, such that what will constitute an exigency—to use Lloyd Bitzer’s term—will be different in each field. (12)

At stake in successful discourse, then, is the shared timing that not only makes discursive interaction possible, but also determines whether discourses will be able to successfully anticipate the future meanings they might come to share.

When it comes to collaboration, what gets invented is the ethical space for reflexive dialogue through a kairotic reordering of time, which is supplemented by and dependent on an ability to triangulate the “moments” necessary for novel discourse. For example, when I write with my collaborator, John, we must first talk through the idea we wish to render into text. But this talk isn’t meant to simply reach agreement on “what we want to say,” for it is what we want to say that is the problem, e.g., we must invent a shared understanding of the object of our discourse before we can—with any success at least—render this understanding (translated through discourse) into text. As we converge on meanings through our discourse, that is as we begin to recognize that we are sharing ideas, so to speak, it is then that we can anticipate the invention of discourse to articulate these shared ideas. In this way our collaboration “reorders” time so to ready our discourse for textual articulation.

As Jerry Blitefield suggests, “*kairos* is less about the ‘right-timing’ of rhetoric and more about a domain of time created for rhetoric, a time which makes possible the emergence of a multitude of meanings not attributable to any particular agent.” It is therefore possible to consider *kairos* in terms of place, because as Blitefield continues,

Shifting away from a human focus, rhetorical agency here is in large part given order to the confidence of *kairos* (a temporally bordered domain) and place (a physically bordered domain), a confluence in which rhetorical time and rhetorical action are marked off and contained. (69)

What Blitefield suggests is that before the right timing of discourse can be assessed, there must be a place for discourse to transpire. In other words, “prior to the *kairos* of discourse, we must take into account the place of that discourse” (71). The primacy of place grounds *kairos* in the world, not over and above it. While a social constructionist might use this idea to argue why tactical configurations of individuals (in a space) is necessary for collaboration, what is really suggested is an interactionist conception of language as-always-in-passing. This is true insofar as I correctly interpret Blitefield’s central thesis to mean that we cannot hang the *kairos* of future discourse on the expectations brought to bear on prior occasions of discourse that took place at other times and in other places; and insofar as place and time mark the conditions for *kairos* to emerge in the first place, *kairos* is nontransferable; it is always an *emergent* quality of discourse-in-action.

If we understand collaboration as an inventive art, one that requires collaborators to invent the “moments” for their collaboration, it reasons to ask what collaborators do to ready this timing. Here I want to return to the first characteristic of my redefinition of collaboration, that collaborators use *reflexive dialogue* to intervene in and enhance the progression of their interaction with an object of discourse. The discourse collaborators enter into is best described as a kind of reflexive dialogue that serves two primary functions. First, it allows collaborators to discursively engage a common object (be it an idea, problem, meaning, question, way of saying something, etc.) and in the process they come to create a shared perspective or “consentient set,” to use Mead’s term, to interact with the object. Second, this reflexive dialogue is undertaken with the expectation that

novel discourse will emerge—that this collaborative “thirdspace” as a pragmatist might call it will yield a perspective that allows for the emergence of discourse that wasn’t anticipated before the collaboration itself. As I say at the beginning of this chapter, novelty in this context simply refers to new ways of thinking about and articulating an idea that collaborators invent with their reflexive dialogue. Thus we can begin to conceptualize the connections between and among novelty, rhetorical invention, and the timing collaborators create for their reflexive dialogue. To invent the collaborative moment, as I say above, therefore points to the recognition we ascribe to those occasions when novelty emerges through our rhetorical invention with another person.

We can further understand the reflexivity of collaboration by turning to what Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater say about the interaction with one another collaborators engage. They point to a paradox inherent in collaboration, “that through the process of interacting with others, individuals (re)discover their selves,” and that it takes the loss of self to realize one’s selfhood:

The paradox of collaboration also contains its promise. Borrowing from Gadamer, we might say collaboration allows for a “fusion of horizons” that results in an enlargement of one’s perspective, what we call a more “complicated understanding.” If collaboration is to provide a way for students to negotiate multiple (and often contradictory) positions, it must involve two recursive moves: a dialectical encounter with an “other” (a person or idea) and a reflexive engagement with the self. (111)

According to Qualley and Chiseri-Strater, viewing collaboration as a “simultaneously dialectical and reflexive” process is how to recognize the transformative consequences of collaborative inquiry. “As we see it,” they explain, “collaborative inquiry exposes and highlights the creative and ongoing dialectical tension that is *always* present between



individuals and their worlds” (112). Qualley and Chiseri-Strater examine the idea of collaboration from a pedagogical lens, and they use ethnographic observations of their own students to reach their contingent conclusions about the dialogic and reflexive work of collaborative inquiry. Interestingly, they posit that the production of a product (or the completion of a project) is not what makes collaboration valuable; indeed, they suggest that reflexive dialogue—“dialogue that may lead to the construction and examination of one’s own position”—is what makes collaboration an important pedagogical concept. Reflexive dialogue, therefore, “should be the aim of a pedagogy intent on enlarging, complicating, or challenging students’ experiences and belief systems” (113).

In her monograph *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry*, Qualley defines reflexivity as “the act of turning back to discover, examine, and critique one’s claims and assumptions in response to an encounter with another idea, text, person, or culture.” But it also involves “a commitment to both attending to what we believe and examining how we came to hold those beliefs *while we are engaged in trying to make sense of an other*” (3, 5 emphasis in original). It is Qualley’s distinction between reflexivity and reflection, however, that merits attention:

Reflexivity is not the same thing as reflection, although they are often part of the same recursive and hermeneutical process. When we reflect, we fix our thoughts on a subject; we carefully consider it, mediate upon it. Self-reflection assumes that individuals can assess the contents of their own minds *independently of others*. Reflexivity, on the other hand, does not originate in the self but always occurs in response to a person’s critical engagement with an “other.” Unlike reflection, which is a unidirectional thought process, reflexivity is a bidirectional, contrastive response. The encounter with an other results in new information or perspectives which we must hold up to our current conception of things. The juxtaposition of two different representations often reveals their ill fit. In order to make sense, we are compelled to identify and examine our own underlying assumptions. Once we actually articulate

these tacit beliefs, they themselves become open to reflection, critique, and perhaps, transformation. (11-12)

I quote Qualley at length because her distinction between reflection and reflexivity reveals the difference at stake for collaborators when they engage in reflexive dialogue, especially as it concerns the function of their “reflection” together. As Qualley clearly explains, reflexive dialogue requires interlocutors to consider their own positions as interlocutors, which is to say that collaborators don’t discourse in a vacuum. If they are to share an object of discourse and engage in reflexive dialogue that anticipates the creation of novelty, they must take into consideration the ethical positions from which they approach the collaborative grounds of their interaction.

When collaboration is explained simply as conversation within the boundaries of an epistemic system like a discourse community, the ground on which collaboration occurs is preestablished; moreover, so are the aims of collaboration preestablished insofar as collaboration serves as a method for doing work as “members” of that discourse community. But if collaboration is theorized as an inventive art, one that occurs when individuals deliberately attempt to transgress and transform the limits of their discourse through reflexive dialogue, it is reasonable to imply that collaboration does not occur when common ground is located; rather it emerges when collaborative ground is invented. To understand this claim, it might be helpful to review how Yarbrough theorizes the grounds for discourse, those perceived boundaries that limit how and to what extent discourse itself is possible. In *After Rhetoric* he explains that because rhetoric is often understood as the counterpart to dialectic, the human mode of response to

discursive conflict is through the marshalling of rhetorical arguments. Rhetoric, says Yarbrough, “as it has been traditionally understood, is a symbolic substitute for war and forms of agonistic struggle.” While “rhetorical force” is often preferable than “actual force,” nevertheless there is always present the promise of inevitable discord. His description of how “fields” (another term for the grounds of discourse) get established highlights the relevance of conceptualizing collaboration according as an inventive art.

My hope, however, is that settlement by force is only inevitable when the parties involved believe the field of play is closed prior to deploying rhetorical strategies in struggles that will determine what the parties believe the configuration of reality within the field will be. Rhetoric presumes that the field is already closed, and every rhetor’s strategies could be divided into (1) those that aim to persuade others that his or her view of the configuration of the already closed field is the best view, and (2) those that presume that others have the same view of the field’s boundaries and seek to gain better positions within it. I proposed a new approach...that presumes (1) that no field is ever closed in advance except by mutual agreement of (not necessarily all the) parties involved, and (2) that the determination of the field is more important than struggles for positionality within the field, because (3) fields that are arbitrarily closed can be arbitrarily reopened and then reclosed. (51)

The central consequence of Yarbrough’s proposition about rhetorical fields bears upon how we conceptualize whatever boundaries we assume exist that limit what, when, how, and where we can speak. If collaboration involves reflexive dialogue aimed at the creation of novel discourse, it makes sense that part of what distinguishes collaboration from non-collaborative discourses is the establishment of the collaborative ground in which collaborators’ inventive discourse emerges. Lest I come across as suggesting that we can clearly distinguish collaborative from non-collaborative discursive ground, I am not. In fact, the type of dialogue collaborators might be said to engage certainly occurs between individuals who might not identify themselves as collaborators, such as, for

example, when a student and teacher discuss an idea in detail together, or when a writing center tutor dialogues with a student about a paper the latter is writing, or simply when two friends are discussing the NFL draft over beers. What I am suggesting, however, is that collaborators become collaborators with experience as they learn to deliberately engage the reflexive dialogue that together they have learned to foster in the service (and anticipation) of novelty.

### **Note**

1. If you are keeping track, this is the second time I've mentioned a CCCC rejection. It's interesting to consider how the papers that don't get accepted to the conference usually yield generative value in other venues, ones I would argue are much more valuable than a single conference presentation.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TECHNÉ OF COLLABORATION: TRIANGULATION, RESISTANCE, AND INTERVENTION

In the previous chapter I introduced a new definition of collaboration and specified why collaboration should be conceptualized rhetorically as an inventive art. At the end of that chapter I discussed in some detail how the ideas of novelty, *kairos*, and reflexivity figure into this redefinition. In particular I explained that what collaborators do is foster reflexive discourse with one another as a method for inventing novelty—a term I use to signal new ideas and ways of articulating those ideas discursively. I did not, however, carefully explain my redefinition of collaboration as such because it was first necessary to review why and how collaboration can be linked rhetorically to the canon of invention. So in Chapter 4, I want to discuss what actually happens in collaboration. As I have already proposed, collaboration points to the ways in which interlocutors use reflexive dialogue to intervene in and enhance the progression of their interaction with an object of discourse.

That collaborators foster reflexive discourse with one another to invent novelty broadly names what we do with and in collaboration, but it does not adequately explain collaboration in terms that sufficiently move it away from the collaboration-as-conversation model popularized through social turn epistemology. In other words, to say that collaboration is better theorized when we use the idea of reflexivity to name the

interaction collaborators engage with one another may indeed provide a more helpful lens for understanding the roll discourse plays in collaboration, but certainly this is only marginal. Collaboration-as-reflexivity does not sound like much of a stretch from collaboration-as-conversation. To say that collaboration is entered into for the sake of novelty does provide us with a relatively unrestricted end with which to explain why we might utilize collaboration in the first place, one that is not limited to the material and temporal constraints of isolated rhetorical exigencies where “collaboration” is considered temporary and ends with some kind of material production. Take for example when a team of professional writers finishes the draft of a grant or when students give their final “group” presentations at the end of a course; these are examples of “collaboration” defined by the material conditions associated with certain kind of production—a grant, a report, a presentation. But to rely on the relatively undefined idea of novelty to situate an understanding of collaboration that departs from social constructionist models only seems to amend how we theorize the ends of collaboration and not how we understand what actually happens in the kairotic spaces of collaboration itself. This latter point represents the ideas I will explore presently.

To recall one of my primary arguments, I have explained why within social-epistemic theories of rhetoric collaboration has no inventive consequences because at best it can only be engaged *stylistically* as a method for enacting the practices that already occur within things like “discourse” or “knowledge” communities, groups whose very definition is constituted by the epistemic practices therein. In my positioning of collaboration as a reflexive relationship that collaborators engage to invent novelty, I

have redefined collaboration as a kind of engagement with one another that intervenes in and enhances the progression of our interaction with objects of discourse. If part of this redefinition means moving away from using material and temporal constraints to define collaboration, which is what I suggest, then the invention of novelty that collaborators anticipate occurs within the discursive space that collaborators create. In other words, unlike social constructionist explanations that explain conversation as something we enter into—a “conversation of mankind” for example—collaborators should recognize that “time” and “proximity” do not automatically aid in the progression of their discourse; they must actually create—invent—the right timing *for* their discourse. This is the claim I posed at the end of the previous chapter. Now I want to explain how collaborators do this, how they re-order time to invent the discursive space for their collaboration, and to do so I propose turning to the classical concept *techné*.

So to continue the work of fostering a pragmatic theory of collaboration, let me suggest that to understand the difference between collaboration-as-style and collaboration-as-invention is to differentiate between *episteme* and *techné*. Although each of these terms has a rich and contested history in classical philosophy, an Aristotelian approach suggests that *episteme* refers to a body of knowledge while *techné* refers to an art or craft. Within social-epistemic theories of rhetoric, *episteme* points to the intellectual boundaries of knowledge communities; or more precisely it denotes the body of knowledge and social practices one must “know” in order to participate within and be considered a member of a community. As distinct from *episteme*, *techné* denotes a productive power, one that is developed over time and with practice, a power to create

and render—to bring about something. However the products one produces using his or her “craft knowledge”—another way to think about techné—do not define a techné as such because techné denotes technology, a kind of practical equipment that suggests an informed capacity to invent that itself never static and always in development.

### **Techné and Collaboration: An Overview**

If collaboration is to be conceptualized apart from episteme, it must be imagined as a kind of power or craft, one that we deliberately utilize instead of unconsciously enact. In other words, to move collaboration away from social turn concepts that position it as conversation that mediates the episteme of a discourse community, it must have an inventive function, one that signifies a clear *difference* between conversation for conversation’s sake and collaboration for the sake of invention. To this end, we can utilize the classical concept of techné to understand the power collaborators foster with their discourse to intervene in and enhance their interaction with whatever ideas, problems, questions, and the like motivate their collaboration in the first place.

What does it mean, then, to theoretically position collaboration as a techné that allows writers to intervene in the processes of rhetorical invention? First, it might be helpful to review how the notion of techné itself developed in classical philosophy and rhetoric. David Roochnik explains that the term “techné” is derived from the Indo-European root “tek,” which means to fit together the woodwork of a woven house. By the time of the Homeric poems, techné “came to refer to the knowledge or skill of the *tekton*, he who produces something from wood” (19). With time techné came to mean “craft” or



“productive knowledge.” As Roochnik continues, “It is knowledge of a determinate field (or subject matter), knowledge of how to shape specific material into a useful product” (22). The idea of techné naturally came to denote the artistic capacity necessary for producing things that required technical knowledge—shipbuilding, medicine, animal husbandry. By the time of Prometheus, writing was also included on many lists of technai. “Writing is techné,” Roochnik explains, “because it requires mastery of a determinate subject matter: namely, a fixed set of elements (letters) and their specific rules for their proper combination (orthography and grammar)” (34). Before Plato would criticize writing for these same reasons, Roochnik notes that many praised writing for its capacity to stand in for memory. As well writing afforded humanity the capacity to become more self-sufficient, less beholden to the will of the gods.

While Aeschylus’s Prometheus is hardly the figure revered by nineteenth-century Romantics...it is clear that writing tokens some measure of liberation from the gods and fate; with this techné, human beings become their own Muse. (36)

From a rhetorical lens, writing becomes a source of invention, a craft through which humans come to control their lives through a new kind of order and a new kind of memory.

So the idea of techné came to suggest a capacity to exert technical force in the world to intervene in the natural order of things. Indeed, this is how Aristotle came to understand techné. As Joseph Dunne notes, “For him [Aristotle] techné is reason as source of purposive change in the world” (250). But it is a *reasoned capacity* to make that separates techné from other forms of production, which is to say that a “technician”

can provide a rational account of his craft separate and distinct from the products of the craft itself. As Dunne explains, “The end determines the form, and it is in his knowledge of this form that his *techne* essentially resides,” and this knowledge is what accounts for the technician’s reasoned capacity “to give a rational account (*logos*) of his procedures—an account which is rational precisely insofar as it can trace the product back to the ‘causes’ (*aitiai*) to which it owes its being” (250).

Because I propose that collaboration is not the effect of something else, that it is instead a deliberate engagement between individuals (a source of causes, per say), it makes sense why using a classical approach to *techné* might help to account for the discursive work collaborators engage without falling back on metaphysics as a source of explanation. For example, Ede and Lunsford called their early collaboration a kind of “magic” while later scholars have used terms like “synergy” to explain the power of collaboration.<sup>1</sup> While I do not want to treat what are offhanded remarks as arguments in themselves, I do suggest that scholars of collaboration have as a whole inadequately explained what exactly *occurs* in collaboration that distinguishes it from other kinds of interaction. Therefore I believe it is reasonable to consider how collaborators together foster an inventive *techné* for their discourse, one that does not reside in the minds of each individual collaborator but emerges as a shared capacity between collaborators to engage the work of rhetorical invention with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

To further conceptualize collaboration alongside *techné*, I turn to Janet Atwill’s masterful book on the liberal arts, *Rhetoric Reclaimed*, where she carefully interprets the history of *techné* and explains how contemporary rhetoricians can profit from this history

in their own adoption of the term. Atwill defines techné as a transformative power or engagement, usually of the kind that transforms limits and transgresses various restraints. In particular she describes techné according to three defining characteristics, ones that she develops throughout the course of her book. These characteristics together situate techné as a capacity one must develop over time with practice and patience. Moreover these characteristics show that a techné is not a reproducible art from technician to technician because at most a techné is only half “skill” in the conventional sense. Technicians bring to their techné unique visions for what their “reasoned capacity” will produce, visions that change and develop as the craft is enacted. In this way Atwill suggests a techné cannot be reduced to “a set of deductive postulates” (7). But before I explain how Atwill’s explanation of techné bears upon our thinking about collaboration, let me review these three primary tiers in her definition of techné.

First, a techné is not a body of knowledge (episteme) because that would imply it has a systematic quality that can be mapped and subsequently represented. Techné should instead be conceptualized as something like a power, ability, or capacity:

(1) A techné is never a static body of knowledge. A techné is described as a *dynamis* (or power) and a set of transferable strategies, both contingent on situation and purpose. A techné neither represents reality nor encompasses a set of deductive postulates. (7)

So a techné is heavily contingent on the visions a technician casts for what is possible through the manipulation of certain objects (e.g., material) in the world. This vision is contingent precisely because the *positioning* of the technician in relation to her craft is

never wholly stable. As the technician accounts for changes in the world, so too must she account for changes in the technical orientation she brings to her subject.

(2) A *techné* resists identification with a normative subject. The subjects identified with *techné* are often in a state of flux or transformation. For example, when an art is employed or exchanged, characters frequently change their identity. They cross the boundaries that separate animals from humans and mortals from immortals. Since a *techné* is always transferable, no matter how brilliant the plan or strategy, it is never confined to a specific human or god. In other words, *techné* is never “private” knowledge, a mysterious faculty, or the product of unique genius. (48)

With this second characteristic, Atwill’s description also points to the mythological roots of *techné* as a power that allows subjects to cross boundaries and engage various limits and constraints, transgressing and in the process transforming them, which leads to the third characteristic Atwill explains to define *techné*: its inventive quality.

(3) *Techné* marks a domain of human intervention and invention. What is at stake in a *techné* is neither subjectivity nor virtue. In both ancient literary and technical treatments, *techné* is defined against the forces of necessity, spontaneity, experience, chance, compulsion, and force; it is often associated with the transgression of an existing boundary—a desire for “more” that challenges or redefines relations of power. In contrast to philosophical knowledge, a *techné* is defined by its relation to situation and time. A *techné* is knowledge as production, not product; intervention and articulation, rather than representation. (7)

A *techné* functions neither to produce knowledge nor to somehow transmit it, so in this way a *techné* is not epistemic. Moreover, neither is a *techné* teleological in the Aristotelian sense of this term because predetermined ends cannot define it. Atwill’s triadic definition of *techné* suggests it references the power to transform the perceived limits of one’s subjectivity through inventive engagement with the world. To situate this in terms that highlight the pragmatic work of collaboration, one’s rhetorical agency is

heavily influenced by the limitations to our discourse we perceive at any given time and place, constraints that can be transgressed as one develops the capacity to recognize how these constraints are actually lapses in “technical” vision. As collaborators develop a shared capacity to “see” discursive remedies to these constraints, they foster the technology necessary to develop and “transform” this kind of rhetorical agency.

When considered alongside the idea of rhetorical invention, *techné* is thus the apperceived power within one’s subjectivity that anticipates the potentiality for discursive interaction, for what we consider, that is, to be discursively possible. If we agree with Stephen Yarbrough that discourse is the human mode of interaction with the world (*Inventive* 14), then it makes sense for *techné* to denote the perceived potentiality of this interaction; potentiality that of course is partially understood in terms of its limitations, of what is and is not possible with our discourse. So what collaborators foster for their inventive interaction is a unique *techné* that resists identification with a normative subjects and “deductive postulates.” Already this approach renders insufficient any attempt to reduce collaboration to certain tactical configurations or step-by-step processes, which is to say that we cannot “point” to collaboration as such because it speaks to the reasoned capacity individuals develop in their discourse to transform and transgress particular rhetorical exigencies. To further explain the inventive interaction that marks the technological quality that emerges in collaboration, I turn to three concepts—triangulation, resistance, and intervention—that provide some helpful definition for developing a pragmatic belief in the *techné* of collaboration. I denote these concepts as qualities because it is through an understanding of each of these ideas that

one fosters a qualitative knowledge necessary to invent one's own recognition of the technology collaborators foster.

### **The Quality of Triangulation**

Atwill's multi-tiered definition of *techné* begins with her explanation that we should imagine it as a kind of power or *dynamis*, one that denotes an ability to manipulate. We can understand the idea of manipulation here in two ways. As Atwill explains, the "earliest uses of *techné* found in Homer and Hesiod frequently convey the sense of trick or contrivance" and *techné* "is often associated with *apaté*, or 'deception,' and the product of a *techné* is often a ruse—something that is not what it appears to be" (52-53). So on the one hand *techné*-as-manipulation can be associated with trickery, one's ability to manipulate others with shrewdness and cunning. But *techné* also refers to a craft or trade, one "that can generate economic capital." In this latter case *techné* "is generally identified with artifice as opposed to nature." That is, "the material of *techné* may be taken from nature, [but] by skill the artist produces something that nature on its own could not create" (53).

In this second sense *techné*-as-manipulation refers to one's ability to take some kind of raw material and manipulate it into a good, one that might carry "economic capital." It is from this second sense of *techné* that we derive the term "technology," but there is generative potential in attempting to balance both of these conceptions of *techné* side-by-side to imagine the hybrid notion of "technique." To manipulate a raw material like speech, for example, requires technique if we intend our words to persuade others.

“Technique is both a rational, conscious capacity to produce and an intuitive, unconscious ability to make,” explains Byron Hawk.

This dual conception of technique moves *techné* away from a reductive, generic, a-contextual conception of technique toward a sense that technique operates through human bodies in relation to other bodies (animate and inanimate) in larger, more complex contexts (372).

Understanding the persuasive power of language accords with Hawk’s conception of technique because not only must we intend our speech to bring about certain effects, but we also must possess the capacity to adjust our language to whatever resistances arise within the local contexts of particular rhetorical engagements. Discourse requires technique, in other words, because we enter into communication with expectations about what our words and gestures will *do*, but we must possess the *power* to adjust these words and gestures accordingly because communication is never a straightforward, uncomplicated process.

To recall Mead, we continually adjust our words and gestures to account for the breakdowns in understanding that make communication necessary in the first place. Sometimes this linguistic adjustment is a conscious process, like when we explain an abstract concept in concrete terms, or when we interact with others who do not speak the same “language.” But most of the time this linguistic adjustment occurs under the radar; it is, to echo Hawk, “an intuitive, unconscious ability to make” shared meanings with whomever we discursively interact. Our discursive interaction with others, however, always occurs within environments, “complex contexts” where we exist “in relation to other bodies (animate and inanimate).” In short, if we wish to account for how our

discourse with others is meaningful, we must take into consideration the ecological factors that at any given moment influence the ways in which we adjust our words and gestures to better serve the purposes of communication itself. It is therefore not enough to stipulate that we engage (just) each other to construct shared meanings for our discourse because our discursive interactions always occur *in the world*, which is to say that interlocutors always discourse *about something*. Communication is therefore never dialogic because there is always a third component at work in our communicative interaction, those objects of discourse about which we communicate in the first place.

In this way social turn theories of collaboration prove inadequate because they rely on the metaphor of conversation to explain what collaborators “do” with their discourse. Collaborators enter into conversations with one another as a method for enacting knowledge within a discourse community, but a discourse community is defined in epistemic terms by conversation itself. Just like the paradigmatic “conversation of mankind,” discourse communities are recognized by the “conversations” in which their members interact with one another. Collaboration from this perspective is therefore undertaken for the value of conversation itself. It is talk for talk’s sake. If the world is part of how social turn theory explains collaboration, it is rendered into the concept of artificial but distinct “discourse” and “knowledge” communities that come into being in the larger world itself. A discourse community is like a little world within the bigger world, and our “talk” only makes sense within the contexts of whichever little worlds recognize it as authorized discursive behavior. Theoretically speaking, a conceptual split is



therefore established that our discourse must bridge between an “inside” in which our talk is familiar and an “outside” in which it is foreign.

Philosophers of language who rely on these kinds of conceptual splits to delineate one discourse community from another can be said to embrace an “internalist” theory of language that positions meaning as something that exists prior to discourse itself. From an internalist perspective, meaning is something that gets transported *through* language to other people, and thus the conceptual split between an “in here” (the mind) and an “out there” (the world) that language itself serves to bridge. The conversation model of collaboration fails pragmatically because it cannot account for novelty—how individuals might use their discursive interaction with one another to invent new ideas and ways of articulating those ideas. From a social turn perspective, novelty is not really “novel” within a discourse community because the community itself (however one decides to define it) has to authorize any “abnormal discourse” and therefore render it a viable epistemic contribution to an existing conversation. If this explanation of collaboration sounds too heady and abstract, it should. My point is to show why the conversation model of collaboration does not provide us with a useful theory to understand what collaboration is and how it works. Moreover it fails to position collaboration as something we voluntarily choose to enter into, which I argue is an imperative quality of collaboration if we are to recognize its pragmatic consequences in terms that depart from theories of social construction.

If we turn to Donald Davidson’s theory of communicative interaction, specifically what he calls “triangulation,” we are given a pragmatically viable theory of discourse that

can account for the *technique* required for any kind of effective communication. Moreover it provides us with a useful heuristic for conceptualizing the techné of collaboration, the inventive craft or *dynamis* collaborators foster with one another to engage their discourse. In the remainder of this section I will explain Davidson's concept of triangulation and then explain how it informs what I am calling the techné of collaboration.

Triangulation basically names how Davidson envisions the work of communicative interaction, the process of discursive exchange we enter into with others to communicate. Davidson's approach has been labeled "externalist" (as opposed to "internalist") because it positions the relationship between thought and speech as intersubjective and therefore inherently dependent on the actual interactions between discourses (and thus "external" from our individual minds) to account for the meaning of our "language." I have been putting this term—language—in quotations because Davidson promotes the radical argument that abstract schemes like "discourse communities," "cultures," and, yes, "languages" do not exist, at least not in the way that philosophers have traditionally explained what these things are. As he explains,

A language may be viewed as a complex abstract object, defined by giving a finite list of expressions (words), rules for constructing meaningful concatenations of expressions (sentences), and a semantic interpretation of the meaningful expressions based on the semantic features of individual words. I shall not be concerned...with the details of how such objects should be described or defined. ("Second Person" 255)

What Davidson does care about, however, is how discourse—our actual gesture interactions with one another—works.

In his seminal essay “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” Davidson answers the following question: What must interlocutors share to understand each other’s utterances? Note that Davidson does not attempt to theorize language as a conceptual system; instead he approaches the problem of language looking for the path of least resistance, which is to say he is primarily concerned with what happens in discursive interaction itself, the messy and unpredictable moments in which we actually interact with others using words, gestures, and marks. As Davidson explains, to understand discursive interaction we have to make a distinction between what a speaker means with his or her words and what the words actually mean. He points to malapropisms for a prime example of this distinction. I might say to a friend, “For all intensive purposes, the party has been canceled,” without realizing that the correct phrase is “for all intents and purposes.” I *intend* my utterance to convey the conventional meaning of this latter phrase, which means “for all practical purposes,” but the *literal* meaning of my utterance is something all together different. If my friend picks up on the malapropism, it might elicit a guffaw, but my misspoken phrase is likely to go unheeded because we both understand what I *intend* my utterance to mean. “All that is needed” to understand discursive exchanges like this one, says Davidson, “is a firm sense of the difference between what *words* mean or refer to and what *speakers* mean or refer to” (98). We associate the meaning of specific words with conventions or “theories” of what a word means based on prior experience with that word. But our theories of what words mean are not always sufficient for actually interpreting another’s discourse, especially when someone uses “language” in a way that doesn’t align with our expectations (e.g., as with malapropisms). In these instances we

can usually adjust our expectations to arrive at the intended meaning. “To put this differently,” explains Davidson, “the theory we actually use to interpret an utterance is geared to the occasion. We may decide later we could have done better by the occasion, but this does not mean (necessarily) that we have a better theory for the next occasion.” We might realize in retrospect that our interpretation of another’s discourse could have been more effective, in other words, but this realization does not guarantee the efficacy of future discursive interaction. “The reason for this is, as we have seen, perfectly obvious: a speaker may provide us with information relevant to interpreting an utterance in the course of making the utterance” (101).

It is in the work of how we constantly adjust our expectations about how discourse “means” in the actual moments of its use that Davidson explains why we do not need conceptual entities like “language” to account for discursive interaction. Rather all we need is a working concept of what Davidson calls *prior theory* and *passing theory*:

For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he *does* interpret the utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he *believes* the interpreter’s prior theory to be, while the passing theory is the theory he *intends* the interpreter to use. (101)

Philosophers have tended to theorize language as an abstract system of signifiers (*langue*) that exists prior to our speech (*parole*). To understand the latter we must have access to the former. According to Davidson, however, what we call “language” really just amounts to a set of expectations (prior theories) about what certain sounds and marks mean. What these sounds and marks *actually* mean is contingent to the occasions in

which they are deployed. Thusly, and “for all intensive purposes,” we cannot rely on the idea of language to account for discursive understanding. “What must be shared for communication to succeed is the passing theory,” says Davidson. “For the passing theory is the one the interpreter actually uses to interpret an utterance, and it is the theory the speaker intends the interpreter to use. Only if these coincide is understanding complete” (102). Sharing a “language” in the conventional sense certainly makes communication convenient, but as Eli Dresner explains in his summary of Davidson’s theory, “this is not to say that convention is a prerequisite for interpretation.” As he continues:

For one thing, understanding can be attained without persons adhering to the same convention. It is sufficient that each party knows how to interpret the different idiolect of the other. Furthermore, it is not an essential condition for communication that the contemporary linguistic behavior of two people engaged in conversation be the same as their behavior yesterday, in virtue of following some kind of convention. Regularity, albeit a flexible one, is not the issue here. Rather, what is essential is that persons will be mutually understandable on each concrete occasion. (“Davidson’s Philosophy” 164)

Davidson therefore takes the process of interpretation out of the minds of individual interlocutors and locates it within their discursive interactions with each other and the world. This is why, hypothetically speaking, two individuals who do not speak the same language can nevertheless learn to communicate with each other, because with enough interaction they learn to adjust their utterances to arrive at enough passing theories for understanding. Granted, this understanding might be only partial and fragmented in the beginning, but this is only a matter of degree, for with enough time and interaction their mutual discourse will require less effort.

So to recognize the difference between prior and passing theory accounts for an understanding of how interlocutors respond to one another's discourse, but remember that we interact with others *in the world* and so we must also account for the objects of discourse interlocutors actually share. Here is where Davidson's concept of triangulation emerges. As Dresner notes, "Davidson maintains that we assign meaning to another's utterances not by translating them into our own language, but rather by associating them with things in the world surrounding us" ("Radical" 124). Triangulation therefore names the process through which interlocutors adjust their discursive interaction to share objects of discourse. In "The Second Person," Davidson alludes to the necessity for triangulation in this way:

So we can say...that if anyone is to speak a language, there must be another creature interacting with the speaker. Of course, this cannot be enough, since mere interaction does not show how the interaction matters to the creatures involved. Unless the creatures concerned can be said to react to the interaction, there is no way they can take cognitive advantage of the three-way relation which gives content to our idea that they are reacting to one thing rather than another. (263-64)

It is through the process of triangulation that interlocutors actually discourse because discourse itself presumes discourse *about something*. Therefore when interlocutors converge on passing theories, they are converging on a shared meaning of an object of discourse. I use this term "object of discourse" in the same way I employ it in my definition of collaboration; it can mean an idea, problem, meaning, object, or whatever "thing" in either the concrete or abstract sense constitutes an object of attention.

It has required a fair amount of explanation to get to this point, but triangulation undergirds the technological work of collaboration because first and foremost

collaborators must learn to actively share objects of discourse. That is, collaborators don't just engage in conversation for the sake of conversation; moreover they do not discourse with one another *simply* to locate shared objects of attention; rather collaborators are deliberate about heightening the efficiency of their discursive interaction. Remember that, first, *techné* points to a power or *dynamis* with which we create (or manipulate) something natural into something that nature on its own would not have created. According to Davidson's theory of triangulation, we "naturally" adjust our discourse with one another to converge on shared meanings about an object of attention, which is to say that triangulation is not the exception, it is the rule; it is how we come to understand utterances in the world.

If collaboration is to yield pragmatic consequences, however, it has to be more than simply a "natural" process. Keep in mind that according to social constructionist epistemology, collaboration names the natural processes of conversation through which individuals get assimilated into the conceptual sphere of a discourse community. Collaboration is not a natural process if we theorize it as an inventive *techné* because collaborators must foster the *dynamis* with which they will *enhance* the triangulation process through which they communicate. So in a sense, to understand the concept of triangulation as a critical component in the *techné* of collaboration is to recognize that what collaborators foster with one another is an enhanced capacity to share objects of discourse. The more effectively collaborators anticipate the passing theories necessary to share meaning, the more effectively they can use their reflexive dialogue to trace the invention of new ideas and articulations that have emerged within their discursive

interaction. One way to imagine what collaborators bring about or “manipulate” technologically with their discourse is thus critical awareness of the triangulation process itself.

But to fully understand the concept of triangulation, we must account for the third point in the triangle, those objects we discourse “about” at any given moment of communication. I say these are the objects we discourse “about” because a fuller interpretation of Davidson here suggests that these objects are just as important as the utterances of each interlocutor because what these utterances mean will be shaped by how we interact with an object. An externalist theory of discourse might therefore stipulate that objects of discourse interact with us just as much as we interact with them. We therefore must account for this triangulated interaction, and we can do so with the idea of resistance.

### **The Quality of Resistance**

To continue in my consideration of how Atwill’s multi-tiered definition of techné informs how we can conceptualize the techné of collaboration, I turn to the second tier of her account. As Atwill notes, often the subjects of techné—the artistic vision technicians engage with their craft—are in a state of flux and transformation. Moreover,

when an art is employed or exchanged, characters [those who employ the techné] frequently change their identity. They cross the boundaries that separate animals from humans and mortals from immortals. Since a techné is always transferable,



Atwill continues, “no matter how brilliant the plan or strategy, it is never confined to a specific human or god. In other words, *techné* is never ‘private’ knowledge, a mysterious faculty, or the product of unique genius” (48). Keep in mind that Atwill is describing how the idea of *techné* works in the contexts of classical literature; nevertheless her expansive interpretation of *techné* provides contemporary rhetoricians with a generative lens through which to imagine the technological work that goes into our discursive interaction.

When we recognize that discourse is always the product of triangulation and not just the two-way exchange often associated with dialogism, Atwill’s insistence that *techné* never amounts to “private knowledge” or “unique genius” makes sense because the craft knowledge we associate with *techné* originates through our exchanges with one another *and* with objects in the world. From a rhetorical standpoint, what gives collaboration its practical difference is in the deliberate attempt on the part of collaborators to heighten and enhance this work of triangulation. Indeed, what gives successful collaborators their edge is the capacity they share to triangulate with the world in ways that enlarge the potential for rhetorical invention. And how collaborators foster this capacity is to recognize how they each individually and together account for the resistances involved in triangulation itself.

This idea of resistance, the second quality I ascribe to the *techné* of collaboration, points to the critical role objects of discourse play in the give-and-take of our interactions. What we come to “know” about an object of discourse through triangulation—what we come to share with interlocutors—is knowledge of this object’s

resistances. To put this in simpler terms, just as our material actions are constrained by objects in the world (for example, my ability to sit down at any given time is constrained by things like chairs, gravity, social conventions, and the occasional pain in my lower back), so too are our discursive actions constrained by the ways in which objects resist our beliefs (e.g., “meanings”) that we share with others about these objects. As

Yarbrough explains,

what interlocutors come to know together is the ways the objects resist their intentions toward it. We can describe these resistances as relations within the objects, and between the object and other objects. The set of these relations, what the objects will come to *be* to the interlocutors, is unified by their common relationship with, or attitude toward, the object. (“On ‘Getting It’” 5)

Yarbrough provides a helpful example of “resistance” in the context of discursive interaction, one I will quote at length:

For example, if you and I come from different social groups and have no common “language,” when I point at a couch and say “couch” you will not necessarily think my word “couch” indicates a “couch.” Such an object may not even exist for your society. You might think that “couch” indicates leather, or furniture, or obstacle, or that it could be translated into your language as “mine,” or “sit down,” or any of a thousand different things until interactions with the object I had indicated to be a “couch” take place, such as my pointing to another couch not leather and saying “couch,” or saying “Sit on couch” and then sitting on the couch followed by “Sit on floor” then sitting on the floor. If you were to join in sitting on things and calling them “couch,” and so on, and observing not only my reactions but the couch's reactions to the interactions—to its resistance or consent, as it were, to our intentions toward it—before too long we would both have a fair idea of how the other uses the word “couch” as we gradually triangulate upon a common object of the discourse. The important thing to note is that both I *and* the couch “resist” your possible misinterpretations of my use of the sign “couch.” Not only will I resist if you interpret “couch” to mean “edible,” but the couch itself will resist if you try to eat it. The couch, as it were, has its own say in the conversation. (5)

Yarbrough's example is useful because it takes a hypothetical (although nonetheless reasonable) scenario to demonstrate how an object of discourse, in this case a material object like a couch, "interacts" with discourses in the process of triangulation. While this example brings with it a quality of obviousness, the point Yarbrough makes is that *all* of our discursive interaction requires this type of engagement with resistance. Therefore if collaborators intend to heighten and enhance their triangulation with objects of discourse, they must learn to anticipate and account for how their discourse "resists"; how to adjust and readjust their expectations (prior theories) to arrive at passing theories more efficiently.

When we step back to consider what is at work in our discourse, one can see that our words are selected because they represent the best possible articulation that can be shared with another person at any given moment with an object of discourse. Yarbrough's example of the couch is helpful because it illustrates in very clear terms how objects resist our interactions with them (e.g., a couch will resist our belief that it tastes good). But we can turn to an abstract example of resistance at work, one that further demonstrates the quality of resistance in the triangulation process. If during a church service the pastor holds up a piece of bread and utters the phrase "the body of Christ," I will have to share a similar field of perception to understand his meaning. Far from a hypothetical example like eating couches, this is a very common utterance to hear, one that gets spoken tens of thousands of times every week at various church services around the world; the utterance is part of the ritual pastors engage to ready the elements for their use in the sacrament of communion. So if I am to understand the pastor, especially if I am

to understand that the pastor is not crazy—that he can recognize a piece of bread from a human body—I have to interact with the bread as an object of discourse in way that aligns with the pastor’s interaction with it. In fact, there are two primary objects of discourse, a piece of bread and the idea of Christ’s body, objects that will resist my belief if I propose that the bread is literally Christ’s body. But to debate this idea we then get into the theological problem of transubstantiation, so it helps to recognize what is meant by this theological doctrine—yet another object of discourse that requires our attention. The point I wish to make is that very rarely are we ever focusing on only one object of discourse, that to engage in discourse both efficiently and effectively we must possess the skills to address multiple objects simultaneously. In the case of the communion bread, I will probably need to consider the myriad other beliefs the pastor associated with the idea of Christ as an object of discourse. So if I were temporarily stymied by the pastor’s utterance about the bread being Christ’s body, and if I decided to talk with her after the service, we would have to triangulate with these multiple objects of discourse for me to understand that the pastor is making a theological observation rather than a physical one. Certainly she does not believe that the physical qualities of the bread are identical to the physical quality of a human body, but she may very well believe that a mystical transformation has occurred.

So what does the above example mean in reference to our discussion of collaboration? If I were to partner with this pastor, for example, to write an essay about the rhetoric of transubstantiation, we would have to identify the various resistances to these objects of discourse as a method for developing a shared perceptive of and vision

for what we might be able to say together within the essay. The tricky business of theorizing collaboration within an externalist theory of discourse is that one runs the risks of unduly amplifying the “moves” collaborators have to make in response to one another for the work of collaboration itself to proceed. Like the bicycle rider who crashes because he pays too much attention to the interrelated tasks of balancing, pedaling, and steering, so too can a theoretical discussion like this one tempt readers to overanalyze what is much like the work of riding a bike. Indeed, as collaborators learn to discourse with one another, it takes practice and a fair amount of trial and error for them to recognize how they “triangulate,” but soon enough the immediacy of this effort will subside as collaborators more readily converge on passing theories while learning how to relate. And learning how to relate—figuring out how to share an object of discourse—is another way to understand the idea of resistance as a component of the *techné* collaborators foster. To this end, *ethos* becomes a critical concept in an externalist theory of collaboration.

To understand resistance requires one to consider the ethical stances discourses assume within an environment. Externalist theory, what I will also call from here forward interactionist rhetorical theory, understands that these ethical positions determine what how we account for the objects of our perception. More than simply accounting for an individual’s character, an interactionist theory of *ethos* considers how certain beliefs about the world are made possible through the topical relationships we recognize from perspective *within* the world. In this way, how we interact with other objects in the world, including people, influences what we are able to “know” about those objects. The

connection to the idea of resistance should be apparent here. In interactionist rhetorical theory *ethos* does not refer to the cultural relativism implicit in social-epistemic rhetoric; how beliefs can be neither right nor wrong because our individual characters are determined by and confined to certain “networks” of knowledge and belief. For this reason an externalist conception of *ethos* can be stood oppositely and in response to classical conceptions of *ethos* since in the latter *ethos* is more or less universally defined by character traits. The virtues Aristotle outlines in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, are distinguishable qualities that maintain their meaning across contexts. Interactionally, however, and departing from a culturally relative epistemology, Yarbrough writes that one’s *ethos* “describes a familiarity with how things relate to one another with respect to a particular purpose in a particular place, a familiarity with the *topoi* used habitually to solve certain kinds of problems and answer certain kinds of questions” (*Inventive* 171). Those who are able to imagine the perspectives of others, those who can willingly assume new ethical stances, are those who are better situated to respond to the exigencies that stymie our interactions. They are the ones who can use discourse to invent arguments, to foster understanding, and to create novelty if need be, all for the purposes of maintaining interaction, maintaining Mead’s continuance of the common world.

Elsewhere I’ve tried to explain how this discursive continuance of the common world can be understood through a virtue ethical approach to invention that provides a non-relativistic, non-foundational lens through which to understand what makes rhetoric “good” (“Rhetoric, Virtue”). In short, because we are beings who use discourse to

negotiate and make sense of our experiences in the world, and because of our ability to respond to exigencies, we also seek resolution to the problems that upset our habits of belief. By virtue of rhetorical invention existing beliefs can be maintained and novel beliefs created in the face of our day-to-day experiences. From the purview of rhetorical interactionist theory, the discourse we share with the world does not exist prior to interaction itself because discourse is the interaction, which is the claim Mead uses to support his theory of truth; it is the idea that fuels Davidson's theory of communicative interaction; and it is the premise from which Yarbrough constructs his interactionist theory of *ethos*.

A rhetorical interactionist approach to *ethos*, combined with Davidson's account of communicative interaction, informs the inventive interaction that collaborators engage when they are no longer simply conversing for conversation's sake, but instead using their discourse to anticipate something novel, whether it be an idea, observation, or textual articulation. In interactionist terms, collaborators foster discourse that helps them to recognize ethical relationships between objects, including themselves, objects that continually resist systematization within the symbolic bounds of something like "normal discourse." That is, objects in the world, including abstract objects like ideas, become meaningful as we learn to negotiate their resistances to our expectations. As Mead explains, "Meaning is a statement of the relation between the characteristics in the sensuous stimulation and the responses which they call out." He continues, "If the occasion for the consciousness of meaning is not found in the habitual act may it not also be found in the conflict of acts?" (*Selected Essays* 129). It is in both the development of

expectations (habits) and the challenges to these expectations (conflicts/resistance) that meaning emerges, and it is through this continual adjustment of expectations that we communicate.

The techné of collaboration therefore suggests the ways in which collaborators develop a sensitivity to the flux and transformation, to echo Atwill, that a good technician traces and anticipates as they perform their craft. In fact, Joseph Dunne explains that those who can be said to possess a techné do not rely on chance to determine the outcomes of their craft. But neither do they presume a static and reproducible product, which is to say technicians cultivate sensitivity for the craftwork itself, the dynamic process of molding something natural into something synthetic.

Success is to be achieved in them not so much by keeping one's gaze fixed on the preconceived form which one will impose on the material, as by a flexible kind of responsiveness to the dynamism of the material itself. It is sensitivity or attunement rather than mastery or domination that one strives for. (256)

In collaboration individuals use their interaction to cultivate discursive practices that lead to iterations of novelty, but their communication, unlike within a social constructionist framework, is not meant to inevitably arrive at some manifestation of “consensus” in the epistemic sense. Rather collaborators use their discourse to heighten each other's sensitivity to the rhetorical work of invention. Put in Davidson's terms, one can understand collaboration as enhanced triangulation enacted to foster the convergence necessary to arrive at understandings that make rhetorical invention better. What collaborators foster with their techné isn't just talk; they fosters *habits* of discourse that establish enhanced communicative relationships with one another. Collaboration is



therefore not a static marker of a type of discourse or an epistemic model for knowledge production; it points to a fluid discursive engagement that over time individuals can more readily manipulate in order to, as J.L. Austin might say, do things with words.

### **The Quality of Intervention**

If we theorize collaboration as an inventive art, one that informs the work of a *techné*, then it makes sense that we consider the ethical positioning of collaborators in response to a common object of concern. In the previous two sections I have explained how to use the notions of triangulation and resistance heuristically to recognize the “external” quality of collaboration theorized as a discursive *techné*. But if collaboration is to be imagined as an inventive art, and indeed, to understand my redefinition of collaboration as a method of intervention individuals engage to progress their interaction with an object of discourse, we must also consider a third quality to collaboration’s *techné*, one that compliments triangulation and resistance as characteristic markers of the reasoned capacity needed to collaborate.

The idea of intervention is pulled directly from my definition of collaboration but it also echoes how Atwill understands the value of *techné* as she articulates it in the third tier of her interpretation of this classical term. *Techné*, as she explains in this regard, “marks a domain of human intervention an invention...it is often associated with the transgression of an existing boundary—a desire for ‘more’ that challenges or redefines boundaries” (7). If collaborators foster a *techné* for their collaboration, then this engagement anticipates the transgression of some type of boundary or limit. In particular,

I suggest the limits collaborators engage are the limits of their individual apperceptions of objects of discourse. The reflexive dialogue that marks the kind of talk collaborators foster therefore serves two primary functions. First, it allows collaborators to discursively share a common object, or rather, a set of objects as they come to share an enhanced ethical positioning in relationship to this set of objects, a kind of thirdspace, one that belongs to neither collaborator in isolation from the other's discourse. Second, the dialogue collaborators share is undertaken at least in part with the expectation that novel discourse will emerge—that this collaborative thirdspace will yield perspective that allows for further discursive interaction about an idea, problem, question, or what have you. So the *techné* of collaboration is what emerges when collaborators recognize that their discourse engages and transforms the boundaries of their individual rhetorical agency, the agency that gives them the power to discourse about certain things in certain ways at certain times in certain places.

So collaboration as a kind of intervention speaks to the deliberation collaborators bring to their discourse as well as the discursive agency they foster to enhance the work of rhetorical invention. But the idea of intervention is what also gives the *techné* of collaboration its strong pragmatist bent. One way to imagine how to forward collaboration in composition studies “consequently” is to recognize how collaboration transgresses and transforms boundaries in order to widen the possibilities for future action. In fact, thinking about collaboration as a kind of intervention in these terms harkens back to how John Dewey defined pragmatism in 1925 “as an extension of historical empiricism, but with this fundamental difference, that it does not insist upon

antecedent phenomena but upon consequent phenomena; not upon the precedents but upon the possibilities of action” (“American” 196).

If there was ever an educator who supported the pragmatic work of collaboration it was Paulo Freire. Although he never discussed collaboration as a distinct pedagogical concept, all of his work as a progressive literacy advocate builds on the necessity of combining perspectives in order to transgress and transform the material limits of our experience. To be a progressive educator who speaks “*to* the people,” says Freire, “one must convert the ‘to’ to a ‘with’ the people. And this implies respect for the ‘knowledge of living experience’ of which I always speak, on the basis of which it is possible to go beyond it” (*Hope* 19). Freire believed that learning was at its best when “limit situations” are engaged, when discernable obstacles that impede critical consciousness, or “conscientização,” are overcome through reciprocal dialogue and interaction. There is always a temptation with Freire to over-romanticize, or some cases simply write off, the Marxist jargon that gives his prose its sense of urgency, especially when reconciling the liberatory calls to action advocated by Freire within American contexts that hardly represent the oppressive material realities out of which Freire wrote.

I bring up Freire because he provides a rich storehouse of generative vocabulary to conceptualize what it means for discourse to intervene in and provide agency for critical action in the world. To this end I turn to his notion of “untested feasibility” because it nicely extends the quality of intervention as I understand it within my theoretical approach to collaboration. Untested feasibility is another name for conceptualizing what collaborators anticipate with their reflexive dialogue, particularly when deciding what it

means to attach the qualifier “novel” to this kind of discourse. That is when it comes to *how* a collaborative’s discourse *anticipates* future rhetorical exigencies, particularly when anticipating how a collaborative’s discourse will have to answer for as-yet-to-be-encountered problems of articulation, this is where Freire’s concept might prove especially useful from a heuristic standpoint. Furthermore, when positioned as a speculative instrument untested feasibility represents a concept with which collaborators can imagine the possibilities for how their discourse names the world, as Freire would say. But before I comment on this point, let me briefly turn to the pragmatic dimension of untested feasibility.

In their essay on Freire’s relationship to pragmatist philosophy, Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly explain that both pragmatism and liberatory pedagogy promote the testing of experience as the primary method through which limit situations are transformed and transgressed. “Being able to break through limit situations means being able to see them as problems rather than as givens and thus being able to act to change them as well as reflect on the consequences of that action” (615). Untested feasibility becomes a useful concept because it points to the imagined limitations of our critical perception that inspire praxis, that critical interplay between action and reflection.

Critical literacy for Freire involves movement between participant/reflector, reflector/participant; for the pragmatists, too, movement between doing/reflecting/doing constitutes the path of learning. Central to both the pragmatic agenda and Freire’s praxis is the necessary connection between action and reflection; this connection leads both Freire and the pragmatists to a sense of hopefulness, a belief at least in contingent possibility. For both philosophies, belief means a willingness to act and the assurance that reflection on action will lead to better, more helpful acts. Freire calls this kind of hope “untested feasibility”. . . . (614)

As a critical term used to denote the potentiality that exists beyond the constraints of limit situations, untested feasibility therefore has rich potential as a speculative instrument, especially since its very terminology, the idea of undetermined possibility, calls upon us to keep in mind the pragmatic qualities of contingency and consequence when assessing discursive feasibility. Of course, what is feasible is not necessarily guaranteed, but to offer guarantees betrays the metaphoric function of feasibility for Freire, namely because “feasibility” is a term that denotes the necessary use of imagination to anticipate how to transform and transgress limit situations.

Put another way, untested feasibility as heuristic calls for a kind of unchecked imagination. As a speculative instrument untested feasibility can therefore be utilized as a lens through which to imagine the pragmatic possibilities of our discourse. Berthoff explains the import of Freire’s pedagogy is in its emphasis on inviting students to imaginatively experiment with language:

The experience of recreating their language becomes the model for transformation of the world they inhabit. The power source of their reclaimed imagination: they can envisage real change in their lives because they have experienced real change in the literary process.

Understanding the heuristic potential of Freire’s work is located in the intersections of how we conceptualize transformation and “reclaimed imagination.” There is nothing mystical, magical, or metaphysical here. “Conscientization must be demystified,” exclaims Berthoff. “Critical reflection is an act: it is praxis: it is transformation” (“Remembering” 308).

The pragmatic possibilities for untested feasibility as a kind of intervention are most recognizable when I return to the argument for conceptualizing collaboration as a pragmatic techné. According to the externalist principles of triangulation, the technical work of collaboration is to construct triangulated interaction that illuminates the untested feasibility of our discourse. As I've already described, what collaborators craft is the reflexive dialogue they use to anticipate novel discourse. Accordingly, using Janet Atwill's interpretation of techné as a domain of invention and intervention, I utilize Aristotle's definition of techné as "a certain state involving reason concerned with production" (1140a) but with the added component of intervention. In this way, the techné of collaboration isn't so much a "reasoned capacity to make," which is a pithier way to interpret Aristotle's definition of techné (Dubinsky 6); it is perhaps best described as a reasoned capacity to *anticipate*. Of course, even for Aristotle the product is not what defined a craftsman; it is his skill, the *reasoned capacity* that is used to explain the craftsmanship. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says the following:

Every craft is concerned with coming to be, and the exercise of the craft is the study of how something that admits of being and not being comes to be, something whose principle is in the producer and not in the product. For a craft is not concerned with things that are or come to be by necessity; nor with things that are by nature, since these have their principles in themselves....A craft, then, as we have said, is a state involving true reason concerned with production. Lack of craft is the contrary state involving false reason and concerned with production. (1140a)

While for Aristotle a techné is not defined by its products, it is nonetheless product-directed, but with collaboration no material product necessarily has to develop in order for the techné of collaboration to be successfully engaged. Keep in mind that I have

defined collaboration primarily in terms of *ethos*, as a shared discursive commitment to not only invent but also intervene in the perceived limits of a collaborative's ability to articulate whatever subject their discourse engages, and hence the potential of untested feasibility as a speculative instrument to name this kind of critical perception.

When the notion of *techné* as a domain of invention and intervention is combined with the idea of untested feasibility, it makes sense that the *techné* of collaboration could be described as the ethical relationship discourses manipulate to anticipate the feasibility of their discourse. Remember, I am utilizing *ethos* in the interactionist sense, which is to say it speaks to the relational dynamic that both constrains and directs our apperceptions and, by default, our discourse with the world. To bring this back to Freire, the *techné* of collaboration is what collaborators engage to craft a shared *conscientização*:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very conditions of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be "in a situation." Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Humankind emerge from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. (*Oppressed* 109, italics in original)

To a certain extent Freire's explanation of *conscientização* might be too abstract for us to recognize its relevance for understanding the work of collaboration, but the resistance one might have to this comparison is itself an invitation to consider what Freire means by *emergence*. Emergence is Freire's term for the initiation of consciousness that is required to pursue limit acts, engagements that challenge limit situations, and for collaboration to

be a limit act we must first experience the resistance of trying to coordinate anticipation in the first place.

The point here is that to foster the techné necessary to anticipate the untested feasibility of their discourse, collaborators must be able to share a disposition that allows them to observe the changes in what they can articulate—in what “objects” they are able to share discursively. In a way, the techné of collaboration can be described as the power or *dynamis* that gives collaborators an enhanced ability to observe *differences*, which is how Dewey actually defines the work of inquiry: to evaluate aims and experience side-by-side, or as he says elsewhere, to make activity intelligent: “[I]t means foresight of the alternative consequences attendant upon acting in a given situation, and the use of what is anticipated to direct observation and experiment” (*Democracy and Education* 129). Patterns of inquiry, the observed consequences of certain modes of action, are for Dewey what create the quality of continuity that we use to distinguish useful from non-useful habits of action. Indeed, like James and Peirce before him, Dewey equates knowledge with the way we develop habitual responses to the anticipation of future consequences. As Melvin Rogers says, “Continuity between action and production is the origination of knowledge, which, in turn provides points of departure for future encounters with an uncertain world that either reaffirms that knowledge or throws it into question” (94). In *Logic: A Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey develops the term “pattern of inquiry” to distinguish the sustained commitment necessary to probe problems beyond the surface value of simple asking questions. We can turn to Dewey because the way he pragmatically



situates the work of inquiry serves as conceptual glue for linking untested feasibility to Atwill's sense of a techné's interventions.

To understand inquiry, Dewey suggests that what we look for are patterns to help us assess the practical consequences that a particular problem has yielded. As he explains,

The search for the pattern of inquiry is, accordingly, not one instituted in the dark or at large. It is checked and controlled by knowledge of the kinds of inquiry that have and that have not worked; methods which, as was pointed out earlier, can be so compared as to yield reasoned or rational conclusions. For, through comparison-contrast, we ascertain *how* and *why* certain means and agencies have provided warrantably assertible conclusions, while others have not and *cannot* do so in the sense in which "cannot" expresses an intrinsic incompatibility between means used and consequences attained. ("Patterns" 483)

Through the identification of patterns of inquiry Dewey suggests logic is used to test the methods used within the borders of an experiment to evaluate their usefulness. "Inquiry as a mode of conduct is accessible to objective study," writes Richard J. Bernstein in his sketch of Dewey, "and the function of logic is to discern the methods and patterns of inquiry in order to provide us with a guide for better and more successful inquiries"

(102). Before I continue, however, let me share Dewey's definition of inquiry, for even his articulation of what inquiry is helps to illuminate the discursive situations

collaborators create: "*Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole*" (483).

Embedded in this definition is what Dewey calls an indeterminate situation, which names the context in which the need for inquiry arises; it is an occasion that "evokes inquiry" and is "uncertain, unsettled, disturbed." But to diagnose such a situation, discourse is

required that can map possible directions that transform an indeterminate situation into a determinate one. As Dewey explains, “In the intermediate course of transition and transformation of the indeterminate situation, discourse through the use of symbols is employed as means. In received logical terminology, propositions, or terms and the relation between them, are intrinsically involved” (483).

The social dimension implied with Dewey’s understanding of what constitutes a pattern of inquiry should not be underemphasized. In fact, inquiry is what Dewey considers to be the principle activity human beings pursue to anticipate and direct future action. As noted above, inquiry differs from questioning because the former can become its own object of study and reflection, and this is what gives inquiry its dynamic potential. Bernstein notes, “A successful inquiry results in knowledge, and knowledge can now be characterized as the warrantably assertible product of inquiry” (110). As Dewey explains in *Democracy and Education*, “To have an *idea* of a thing is thus not just to get certain sensations from it. It is to be able to respond to the thing in view of its place in an inclusive scheme of action; it is to foresee the drift and probable consequence of the action upon us and of our action upon it.” He continues,

To have the same ideas about things which others have, to be like-minded with them, and thus to be really members of a social group, is therefore to attach the same meanings of things and to acts which others attach. (36)

Inquiry is the dynamic process through which we are able to test our meanings in light of our actions within an indeterminate situation, to maintain Dewey’s diction, that prompt a common response. Keep in mind the “individual” and “social” are not mutually exclusive

for Dewey, so to individually respond to an exigency implies simply one mode of thinking about how our individual agencies are linked to those of others and a shared common environment. I like how Dewey words it this way: “There is not, in fact, any such this as the direct influence of one human being on another apart from use of the physical environment as an intermediary” (33). Inquiry requires deliberately holding some form of experience as an object that can be observed as such, but to communicate this observation requires there to be a shared disposition that can recognize the very object under consideration. To this end, there is no such thing as purely individual inquiry. As Dewey says, “participating in a joint activity [is] the chief way of forming disposition” (34).

The import of understanding intervention as a quality of the *techné* collaborators foster with their discourse can therefore be found in Dewey’s call for us to develop sensible methods of deliberating about the possibilities of action in an uncertain future. In other words, to bring Dewey’s empiricism in line with Freire, the emergent critical consciousness we harness to transgress those constraints that limit the potentiality of discourse we can understand pragmatically as the “logical rectification” that is invented as we probe the concrete ground of our discursive interactions with the world.<sup>2</sup> So what does it mean to say that as a *techné* collaboration is used as a method of intervention in the processes of triangulation? In short, collaboration becomes a way for individuals to deliberately step outside their limited points of view. But more importantly it is when collaborators recognize that their capacity for rhetorical invention is enhanced because of how they are pushed to the limits of their discursive potential through their purposeful

interaction with one another that the techné of collaboration displays its consequential affect.

### **The Novelty of Theorizing Collaboration**

Whenever definitions are suggested, theories questioned, philosophy expounded upon, or metaphors extended and established, all of which I have been doing in this chapter and in my dissertation as a whole, both writers and readers must wrestle with the challenge of forcing clarity into abstraction. Over the course of these last three chapters I have been challenging readers to understand the epistemological commitments that must be given up if we wish to embrace pragmatic agency in our practices of collaboration over and above theory that leaves no room to conceptualize how such agency is possible.

In his lectures on pragmatism, William James suggested that beliefs were “instruments of action” valuable to the extent they proved true (78), and for all the pragmatists, including the ones I’ve discussed in this present chapter, “true” beliefs are those that sustain continuity of action. The heuristic reflection I have offered in this chapter through discussion about the qualities of triangulation, resistance, and intervention serve as a critical lens through which to test one’s beliefs about collaboration, and this is how I suggest collaborators can develop their own interpretation of collaboration using these concepts from the school of interactionist rhetorical theory.

One pragmatist principle demonstrated through this discussion is that like pragmatism itself, the reflexive discourse and inventive techné collaborators foster “is uncomfortable away from facts” (James 26). Collaborators begin with tracing the practical consequences

of their discursive interaction to, again echoing James, initiate the discovery of “all sorts of definite working values in experience” (27). But these working values are fallible and therefore collaborators must recognize the need to hold their articulations contingently until better, more productive discourse emerges. To a certain extent, then, one consequence for theorizing collaboration as an inventive techné is the recognition that the reflexive discourse collaborators foster directly engages the indeterminacy of meaning and its articulation. But here is where collaboration shows its pedagogic hand.

Indeterminacy gives our discourse its pragmatic virtue because it requires substantial work to engage the untested feasibility of this indeterminacy. In other words, collaboration makes us better writers and discourses because it requires a heightened awareness of and therefore more taxing engagement with the hermeneutic processes of identifying and sharing objects of discourse and deciding how best to render them textually. For sure, working “alone” is a much easier and less arduous process.

But for those who are willing to recognize that collaboration can yield discourse greater than the sum of its individual parts, and as well are willing to embrace the messy work that comes with engaging collaboration’s techné, then there is much to be gained in reconsidering the place of collaboration in the study of rhetoric and composition. To review three of the important arguments I have posited over the course of the last two chapters, I offer the following summary:

- First, collaboration implies that individual interlocutors have fostered a discursive relationship with each other, one that is marked by a deliberate commitment to reflexive dialogue.

- Second, what collaborators foster is novelty, a term I use to denote the emergent meanings and articulations that a collaboration precipitates. It names what gets created when two or more individuals attempt to share perspective. Therefore “novelty” in this context simply points to new ways of both thinking about and articulating an idea.
- Third, collaboration implies that limits of some kind have been engaged and transgressed if novelty is its outcome. In this way, collaboration can be conceptualized as a techné, a technology with which collaborators use to interact with and invent discourse that enhances their engagement with objects in the world.

Something I have not been able to discuss at any length is what some critics will negatively credit to this externalist theory of collaboration: that collaboration so understood requires an excess of time and personal engagement that many people, whether students or teachers or researchers, simply cannot afford. Collaboration no doubt takes both practice and patience, but pragmatically speaking all of our reflective practice requires time. Such an ethic is reflected by Dewey in *How We Think*: “Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance” (13). For a pragmatist, reflective thought is what allows us to test the effectiveness of our beliefs, and for pragmatist collaborators, to use their reflection deliberately to anticipate novelty is nothing short of what Emerson once called the still, quiet voice speaking out of experience: genius.

## Notes

1. See my discussion of Reither and Vipond (“Writing as Collaboration”) in Chapter
2. Also see Ede and Lunsford’s “Why Write...Together?”
2. See Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism”

## CHAPTER V

### THE POST-PROCESS OF COLLABORATION IN COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

So far this dissertation has focused primarily on a theoretical discussion of collaboration, beginning with a review of its conceptual history within the critical terminology of social constructionist epistemology. In addition, I have offered a substantive theoretical argument for redefining collaboration according to an externalist epistemology rooted in pragmatist philosophy and interactionist rhetorical theory. Because my redefinition of collaboration remains fairly open-ended, contingently based on general principles rather than well-defined premises, I have deliberately avoided giving this redefinition a formal moniker and instead have chosen to call it, rather generally, an externalist theory of collaboration. My approach therefore has been to suggest an “externalist” avenue of thought for rethinking collaboration in composition studies. I have not, however, spelled out what this approach does or even should look like in practice. In this way, I have resisted buying into the theory-practice binary that might tempt readers to imagine that externalist collaboration should follow certain rules or adhere to particular configurations of individuals working in proximity. In fact, proposing that collaboration conforms to such standards was the focus of my critique of social turn collaboration theory in Chapter Two. Nevertheless some readers might reasonably contest that a study such as mine is much too speculative and abstract, that theory by itself always begs for evidence that can demonstrate its practical value. In short, one



might reasonably ask what are the pedagogical implications of “externalist” collaboration theory.

But to question the pedagogical implications of a theory is not quite the same as questioning how a theory works in practice. The former type of inquiry is pragmatic in scope and implies that theories become meaningful when we can identify the differences they make in our experience. The latter type of inquiry, however, begs the question that there exists a conceptual gap that must be bridged between theory and practice for either one of them to have pedagogical legitimacy. When this latter question is posed, it is implied that theory and practice represent two separate ontological spheres, one that is wholly conceptual and the other that is wholly material. Within this framework, pedagogy functions as the mediator between these spheres; it is a practical art that bridges training (knowing) with practice (doing). It is therefore understandable that in the discipline of rhetoric and composition there exists a strong pedagogical imperative to articulate the practical applications of theory, especially since the modern history of composition studies is rooted in the *teaching* of writing. Yet throughout composition’s disciplinary ascension into the realm of a “legitimate” academic field of study, debates have persisted about how best to negotiate theory alongside practice.

One commonplace argument to which compositionists frequently appeal is that theory and practice should not be conceptualized apart from each other since they both represent vital ways of thinking about the work we do as teachers of writing. In “What’s at Stake in the Conflict Between ‘Theory’ and ‘Practice’ in Composition” (1991), John Schilb presents just such an argument. It is problematic to define theory apart from practice, says

Schilb, because “each of these terms bears contradictory meanings and thus proves unstable.” That is, both categories are constructed on “phantasms conjured up by each other” (91, 94). In a gesture to Stephen North’s taxonomy of the “methodological communities” of composition professionals that he outlines in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (1989), Schilb suggests “the very act of labeling groups one or the other is a reaction to disorienting shifts in the terrain they inhabit” (96). Debates concerning the relationship between theory and practice are a natural consequence of composition’s expanding disciplinarity, especially since it is harder to define standards for scholarship (95). Schilb’s proposal at the time was for English departments, journals, and national organizations to sponsor “forums that address the variety of disputes obscured by these terms,” *theory* and *practice*, and to “juxtapose them for rigorous evaluation” (96). Given that two decades have passed since Schilb’s article first appeared in the pages of *Rhetoric Review*, it is easy to suggest in the present that simply teasing out all the different ways these terms can mean is something of a fool’s errand, especially if one’s goal is to simply deconstruct the ideas of theory and practice themselves, which is what Schilb admits is one of his goals (91). In other words, simply identifying the different ways we reify terms does little to address where the need to deconstruct these terms comes from in the first place.

So when Schilb posed the question “what’s at stake?” when rhetoricians and teachers of writing imagine their work in the dichotomous terms of theory and practice, he should have asked whether the tension generated between the supposed split between theory and practice could be avoided altogether. But this is exactly what Lester Faigley set out to do

in *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, published one year after Schilb's article. Faigley's purpose is to consider how "composition studies has maintained a modernist tension between form and chaos, coherence and fragmentation, and determinacy and indeterminacy, consistently privileging the former over the latter" (14). He draws attention to the "postmodern" epistemologies proffered by Richard Rorty, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Kuhn, and the like—all of whom compositionists have used to articulate their understanding of social constructionism—and points to how at best the discipline has only played lip service to these theorists while still maintaining the primacy of a foundationalist, product-centered pedagogy even though it has been dressed up in non-foundational "process" garb. Even though "composition studies professes to value process, it is not process for its own sake but rather the process of teleological development toward a product" (14). "What's at stake" for Faigley therefore is whether a "postmodern" writing pedagogy is even possible, one that runs counter to mentalities that construe pedagogy itself as a conceptual balance between something called theory and something else called practice.

The only line of scholarly inquiry to actually imagine what a "postmodern" (which from here forward I'll call "non-foundationalist") theory of composition would actually mean for the teaching of writing is the school of theory that today gets labeled as "post-process," even though that term is something of a misnomer. As noted by Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch, "post-process" unfortunately came to mean "anti-process" in many circles: "Because process is so often the topic of discussion in post-process scholarship, post-process has come to mean a critique of the process movement in composition

studies,” and thus post-process scholarship often gets “shortchanged.” (120). The perennial criticism that post-process theory faces is that it has no practical application; of course it didn’t help matters when several high profile post-process theorists glibly suggested in the 1990s that writing itself could not be taught, but I will return to this criticism momentarily. Therefore I do not want to suggest that collaboration cannot be taught, even though the externalist theory that informs my understanding of collaboration in this dissertation is the same theory that informs post-process theories of composition.

As the title of this chapter signals, I nevertheless believe we can locate the pedagogical value of an externalist theory of collaboration by connecting it to post-process composition theory. Rethinking how collaboration is understood pedagogically might require some teachers to give up attempts that allow for collaborative interaction in the classroom without diminishing the individual writer as composition’s privileged pedagogical subject. As Faigley notes in *Fragments of Rationality*,

Where composition studies has proven least receptive to postmodern theory is in surrendering its belief in the writer as an autonomous self, even at a time when extensive group collaboration is practiced in many writing classrooms.

As he continues,

Since the beginning of composition teaching in the late nineteenth century, college writing teachers have been heavily invested in the stability of the self and the attendant beliefs that writing can be a means of self-discovery and intellectual self-realization. (15)

While Faigley questions how we identify the subjects to whom our pedagogy is directed, what post-process theory has historically challenged is the primacy of process as

composition's privileged pedagogical *object*. In both cases there is an amplification of the modernist tension Faigley names, tension that pulls theory and practice in opposite directions, especially when it comes to the formulation of pedagogy as such—theory rendered into craft. If non-foundationalist, pragmatic theory were actually informed the organization of a writing classroom, one consequence might therefore be that teachers privilege the interactions between students and the world, including the discourse they create through these interactions, over the “self-discovery and intellectual self-realization” students supposedly tap into through private, single-authored writing.

Regardless, crafting an externalist theory of collaboration into a clearly articulated pedagogy is therefore something of an impossible task, at least insofar as we continue to demand something called “practice” from something else called “theory.” I nonetheless believe that teaching students about collaboration from an externalist perspective is not inconsequential. Indeed, I hope this final chapter provides compositionists with motivation to recognize the possibilities of incorporating a new language of collaboration into their teaching, as well as the courage to allow students to experiment with collaboration in ways that might seem counterintuitive when viewed alongside our discipline's emphasis on the individual writer as the primary agent in how we conceptualize the teaching of writing.

Moreover, an externalist approach to collaboration can bolster the legitimacy of post-process composition theory because we can link collaboration to a non-foundationalist approach to teaching. In the next section I briefly review the emergence of post-process criticism and offer a summary of what I understand would be the central precepts of a

post-process writing pedagogy. Next, I explain how these precepts apply to an externalist theory of collaboration. I conclude with a brief discussion that returns to the original question about the teachable qualities of an externalist approach to collaboration. In the end, I suggest that if we credit post-process theory with forwarding legitimate claims about how discourse works, in addition to taking seriously pragmatism's imperative for heuristic reflection, what we can therefore "teach" is how to foster and evaluate those moments that collaborators engage in reflexive dialogue as a strategy for inventing novel discourse. What students "learn" is the messy work of deliberately engaging discursive production alongside discursive reception. The material interaction that collaboration requires opens opportunities for students to conscientiously engage the ever-changing rhetorical dynamics between themselves, their words, and their audiences. In short, a post-process pedagogy rooted in collaboration promotes a rhetorical education.

### **Post-Process Theory on the Process Horizon**

The emergence of post-process composition theory has been well documented by a number of scholars interested in its potential for changing the way compositionists conceptualize the work of teaching writing; however, defining "post-process" is difficult because there is not a single definition that can be pointed to as conventional.<sup>1</sup> I nevertheless defer to Joseph Petraglia who explains that post-process theory simply points to thinking that rejects arguments that writing and communication in general can be reduced to well-defined formulas or frameworks. In this way post-process theory should not be conceptualized as anti-process, even though post-process critics do suggest

that process pedagogies can easily be rendered into systematic formulas for teaching students how to write. Certainly the idea of process utilized as a heuristic metaphor for understanding how writers negotiate the production of texts has its merits, but as Petraglia says, “we now have the theoretical and empirical sophistication to consider the mantra ‘writing as a process’ as the right answer to a really boring question. We have better questions now, and the notion of process no longer counts as much of an insight” (53). To suggest that the teaching of writing cannot be reduced to systematic formulas and neat pedagogical expressions is not a particularly radical suggestion, and for anyone who teaches writing this kind of insight is commonsensical. Even though John Trimbur is not considered a post-process theorist, he was one of the first scholars in rhetoric and composition to temper suggestions that process pedagogy might have its flaws.

If fact, Trimbur is actually credited for coining the term “post-process” in his review essay for *College English*, “Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-Process.” Evaluating what were then new books by Patricia Bizzell, C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, and Kurt Spellmeyer, he explains how all three texts “locate their concerns in relation to the much publicized literacy crisis in American education” (108). When read together, these texts underscore a common concern for the development of critical consciousness through the teaching of writing. At the time, books like E. D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy* were popularizing new debates about literacy (or returning to older ones, like “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” to echo the infamous *Newsweek* cover story that appeared in 1975) while at the same time professionals in composition studies were championing the rise of process pedagogy over what they termed current-traditional

rhetoric. As Trimbur explains, “the distinction between product and process, which initially seemed so clarifying, not only proved conceptually inadequate to what writers do when they are writing, it also made writing instruction appear easier than it is” (109). Once product-centered pedagogy was replaced by process-centered pedagogy, “the canniest among them [students] recognized that sincerity and authenticity of voice were the privileged means of symbolic exchange,” and in an ironic turn, Trimbur notes how “teachers’ desire to operate outside oppressive institutions and avoid the errors of the past only reinstituted the rhetoric of the belletristic tradition at the center of the writing classroom.” Far from reprimand, however, Trimbur does not intend “to accuse the process movement of self-deception but to recall the heady sense of breakthrough that many writing teachers, myself included, experienced in the name of process pedagogy” (110).

Trimbur’s review functions as a reflection on how the process movement has not tempered anxieties about how teachers negotiate their authority in a writing classroom, and if anything it has showed us the limitations in believing “a particular kind of discourse, whether storytelling or essayism or anti-foundationalist theory, can be privileged as the means to liberate students or empower its practitioners” (118). So when Trimbur uses the term “post-process” he is not referring to a school of theory but instead referencing the temporal shift in composition’s pedagogical focus, one from process to a kind of critical/political advocacy as evidenced by the books under review in his essay. In short, Trimbur asks readers to consider how the problems of teaching writing, especially



those challenges of negotiating teacher authority alongside student agency in the classroom, still persist “post” this turn to process pedagogy.

In a sense, Trimbur is responding to teachers of writing who welcomed process pedagogy as the long-awaited anodyne to current-traditionalist teaching. As an example, when Maxine Hairston published “The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing” in 1982, she effectively declared the emergence of a new paradigm in the teaching of writing, one that emphasized the primacy of process over product in composition instruction. Hairston explained that this new process paradigm “views writing as a disciplined creative activity that can be analyzed and described; its practitioners believe that writing can be taught” (448). Even though Hairston acknowledged that the process paradigm “is sketchy and leaves many problems about the teaching of writing unresolved” (450), her enthusiasm for process pedagogy communicated a sense of equilibrium insofar as the theory and practice of teaching writing was concerned. Process theory seemed to naturally inform process pedagogy, in other words, and the result for Hairston is a new paradigm, a completely new way of imaging writers at work that trumps all the older pedagogies.

It should be noted that those compositionists often credited as the first generation of process theorists did not herald process pedagogy as a new paradigm that would completely change how we imagined the teaching of writing. Nor did they believe that utilizing the metaphor of process as a pedagogical heuristic always resulted in effective teaching. In fact, one of these early process theorists, Peter Elbow, suggested that the value of process pedagogy can be located simply in how it lessens the stakes of writing

itself, allowing students to approach the work of composition with less trepidation. When describing freewriting in his essay “Freewriting and the Problem of Wheat and Tares,” for example, Elbow notes “that there is no such thing as freewriting badly,” and as we get more comfortable with this messy activity of spilling words onto the page, “we can move in and out of the freewriting mode at various moments in the writing process” (85, 86). Freewriting is therefore not a part of the “invention” stage one must move through to enter the “drafting” stage, it simply names a strategic activity writers might engage to render words into text. Donald Murray, perhaps the earliest prophet of process, reflects on how his early advocacy of this pedagogy was misinterpreted by compositionists who believed he was defining how writing should always be taught. “I considered process *one* way of speculating about writing, a play of possible meaning; many seemed to take it as *the* way of teaching the writing act.” As Murray continues,

I considered the writing process as a way of separating the knowing from the not knowing, or, to put it differently, a way of organizing knowing so the writer could be launched into the more important world of not knowing. (“Knowing Not Knowing” 60)

An advocate of expressivist pedagogy, Murray believed writing allows individuals to render the unknown into the known, i.e., it allows for discovery and the exercise of imagination. He admits, however, that it is difficult to *teach* writing from the position of the unknown. “As a writer I was comfortable with not knowing but as a teacher I was less comfortable. I needed the answers to the questions my students who were not content with not knowing were asking” (62). In short, Murray is describing what happens when students are not content to experiment with their writing; when all they want is for

teachers to *tell them* what and how to write. Murray's reflection on "not knowing" is therefore a reflection on embracing the speculative work of teaching—on embracing teaching rooted in "not knowing," i.e., experimentation.

What today gets labeled as "post-process" composition theory is built on the work of a number of scholars who speculated that writing pedagogies *in general* too often rely on tenuous "internal" (as opposed to external) theories of discourse that misconstrue language as a community-mediated, systematic set of rules and conventions that when properly followed result in successful texts. In other words, post-process theorists questioned the efficacy of teaching writing as sets of conventions, rules, and grammars. The scholar most associated with post-process as a school of theory is Thomas Kent, who actually did not utilize the term "post-process" to describe his work until the publication of his edited collection, *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm* (1999). Similar to the questions Trimbur raises in "Taking the Social Turn," the post-process theory Kent has popularized interrogates the limitations of process pedagogy; but unlike Trimbur, Kent's focus is not so much on issues of power as it is on what exactly it means to teach writing in the first place. As Kent explained six years before Trimbur's review essay was published,

I believe that neither discourse production nor discourse analysis can be taught as an epistemologically centered body-of-knowledge, and if we are serious about finding better ways to help our students improve their writing and reading skills, we might rethink our traditional ways of doing business and attempt to account for the powerful paralogic/hermeneutic dimension intrinsic to the production and analysis of discourse. ("Paralogic Hermeneutics" 40)

This latter line of inquiry helped Kent and others make the argument that for many teachers of writing “process” simply replaced “product” as the thing students work toward to make the grade. Put another way, the idea of process became the synthetic marker to which a student needed to perform in order to be labeled a competent writer within composition’s disciplinarity. As Gary Olson notes in the lead essay to *Post-Process Theory*,

The problem with process theory, then, is not so much that scholars are attempting to theorize various aspects of composing as it is that they are endeavoring (consciously or not) to construct a model of the composing process, thereby constructing a Theory of Writing, a series of generalizations about writing that supposedly hold true all or most of the time.

As Olson notes, the problem with process scholars is that they “are attempting to systematize something that simply is not susceptible to systematization” (8). Ironically, Olson champions post-process theory because it abandons “the rhetoric of assertion” (9), yet he does so, rather unfortunately, on the back of a straw-figure rendering of process pedagogy. It is justifications for post-process theory such as Olson’s that have prompted critics of post-process thought to simply write it off as an intellectual exercise that has no practical value for teachers of writing.

But post-process composition theory also gets written off because some of its most vocal advocates, like Kent, Olson, and Sydney Dobrin, for example, have supposedly suggested that teaching composition is impossible because “writing” as such cannot be reduced to an epistemological system of rhetorical moves and discursive conventions. Obviously such a suggestion would invite criticism, especially if it were interpreted as an

attack on the idea of teaching in general. Take for example the way Bruce McComisky rehearses his refutation of post-process:

Post-process theory, as Dobrin and Kent describe it, received its very generative impulse as a paralogic and oppositional reaction against what is arguably composition studies' most valuable pedagogical strategy—teaching the composing process—yet post-process theory offers no pedagogical strategy of its own; regarding actual writing instruction, then, it is purely a negative dialectic. (40)

Another line of criticism against post-process is evidenced by Richard Fulkerson, who essentially writes off post-process theory because, as he claims, it rejects process pedagogy in the same way that process pedagogy rejected current-traditional rhetoric. As he explains, composition theorists created a need for process theory by arguing that

pre-process teaching constructed writing as an 'act'—not an extended, complex process, not a process of 'discovering' meaning or something worth saying, not a recursive, messy procedure, but a simple set of activities that any competent writer could perform 'on demand'.(96)

In other words, Fulkerson points to how process pedagogy gained popularity in part through its construction of current-traditionalist teaching as backward and wrongheaded.

But now the process theorists are also being treated as backward, hopelessly retro from the perspective of 'post-process' theorists. The small revolutionary post-process group looks down their noses at old-fashioned 'process' folk, and want to drag them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a brave new postmodern post-process (pmpp) era of composition. (97)

Fulkerson calls Kent's position on the teaching of writing "radical" (98), and then he pretentiously asserts that advocates of post-process theory don't actually teach anything when they enter the classroom.

What the various post-process and “social” pedagogies have in common is that they don’t “teach writing” (in the sense of explaining various invention and revision tactics for students and directing the students to practices using them) but do require it, while focusing on reading instead. What I mean by saying that post-process teachers do not “teach” writing is that there is no indication from write-ups of their courses that they [the teachers] try to explain to students, and have them rehearse, such practices as various techniques of invention, principles or tactics of revision, the rhetorical use of titles and introductions, etc. Instead, the students and instructor read some texts together, usually texts on liberatory topics, often with all the writings being about a single theme for a semester. Then the students write about the readings and their own worlds. (113)

As a critique of post-process theory, Fulkerson’s is more bitter than it is thoughtful, evidenced especially by his vague anecdotal evidence based on the “write-ups” of “their” courses that Fulkerson uses to suggest how post-process advocates are irresponsible teachers who simply encourage students to write about readings “and their own worlds,” whatever this is supposed to mean. Such a reductive perspective on post-process theory is not uncommon, but keep in mind this perspective is primarily in response to the supposed claim by post-process theorists that writing cannot be taught. But where does this claim come from? Have post-process theorists indeed suggested that at best teachers of writing can only get their students to “read some texts together” and write about them without pedagogical rhyme or reason?

In his essay “Paralogic Hermeneutic Theory, Power, and the Possibility for Liberating Pedagogies,” Dobrin includes an epigraph that reads “No course can teach the acts of either reading or writing,” a line taken from Thomas Kent’s 1989 article “Paralogic Hermeneutics and the Possibilities of Rhetoric.” This is the type of claim critics of post-process hold up as evidence that Kent and other post-process thinkers offer nothing of

practical value to teachers of writing. In one of the more recent studies of post-process theory, Helen Foster's *Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process*, the author similarly quotes Kent in order to summarize this negative view on teaching. "As for the potential repercussions of paralogic hermeneutics," Foster writes, "Kent says the theory would require us to re-think the student/teacher relationship...we would also understand that writing and reading 'cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach'" (9). While both Dobrin and Foster are sympathetic to post-process claims about the limitations of process pedagogy, they both misrepresent what Kent has actually claimed about teaching; in fact, they both misquote Kent and fail to acknowledge that he has never suggested it is impossible to teach writing.

The epigraph Dobrin utilizes is presented as a stand-alone sentence (beginning with the capitalized "No"), but this is not what Kent writes in his essay. Here is the full quotation, one that suggests an idea noticeably less stringent from what is implied in the truncated quotation Dobrin constructs: "Although specially designed composition and literature courses can sharpen and expand a student's writing and reading know-how, no course can teach the acts of either writing or reading" (37). Next, the piece of quotation Foster utilizes comes from a relatively clear explanation Kent offers about how conventions of writing are valuable "background skills," ones that are teachable and ones students should learn.

If we accept these claims [the principles of paralogic hermeneutics], we cannot ignore the pedagogical consequence of our position: writing and reading—conceived broadly as processes or bodies of knowledge—cannot be taught, for nothing exists to teach. In order to be understood on this point, I need to repeat the commonsense observation that certain background skills, such as understanding of grammar, can be

taught, but the acquisition of these skills never guarantees that a student will be able to communicate effectively; no framework theory of any kind can help a student predict in advance the interpretation that someone else may give to an utterance. So, any composition or literature pedagogy that presumes such a framework assumes that writing and reading consist of a well-defined process that, once mastered, allows us to engage unproblematically in communicative interaction. (*Paralogic Rhetoric* 161)

I don't see Kent suggesting anything here that a reasonable composition instructor would counter; certainly effective writing requires much more than simply possessing background knowledge of certain discourse conventions, and nothing we teach can guarantee that our students will become—as a direct result some particular pedagogy—better writers or readers. Students can certainly “learn” something like grammar or how to write a thesis statement for a research paper, but this doesn't mean students will assimilate this knowledge in such a way that allows them to, as Kent says, “engage unproblematically in communicative interaction.”

Those who write off Kent's claim that teaching is not possible are therefore writing off a claim Kent never made. He finally acknowledged in 2002 that this misrepresentation of his position on teaching is one that “haunts me and often hounds me.” As Kent explains,

I have never claimed that *composition* cannot be taught, for we certainly may teach systematically and rigorously subjects dealing with how texts operate, how texts shape understanding, and how texts function within different social contexts. My claim that writing cannot be taught means simply that we need to know a bunch of stuff before we can effectively communicate (write, speak, employ appropriate gestures in public situations, select the right attire, and so forth). Certainly, we need to know some sort of language (a system of signs or sounds) before we can communicate, but we don't need to share a common language in order to communicate. Knowing a language and knowing how to knock about by employing it are necessary but not sufficient for communication. (“Principled Pedagogy” 432)



Another post-process theorist, Stephen Yarbrough, agrees with Kent's general assertion that teaching writing and reading as bodies of knowledge is impossible. But Yarbrough goes further to suggest that teaching a course on writing is not much different from teaching a course on living. In other words, when Kent says that people "need to know a bunch of stuff" to effectively communicate, he effectively asserts that knowing how to write requires knowing far much more than simply how to use commas and when to avoid the passive voice; in fact, to successfully communicate with others we must be able to successfully interact with them, and successful interaction requires successful navigation of an environment, which itself requires knowledge about that environment, and so forth. Yarbrough simply takes this idea and flattens it: learning how to write requires the same skills needed for learning anything else:

I still think teaching a "composition" or "how-to-write" course makes about as much sense as teaching a course on "how-to-live." We can learn about and teach students how people have lived, are living, and might live; we can teach them how the conditions in which people lived made their ways of living necessary and possible; we can teach them how people's beliefs about those conditions have affected how they live; we can teach them how the requirements for life differ under differing conditions, and so on—but we cannot teach them how to live *as such*. All we can say about the teaching of life we can say about the teaching of discourse because once we erase the distinction between language and things, nature and culture, we have erased the difference between saying and doing—and so too the difference between discourse and life. (*After Rhetoric* 213)

Certainly on its surface, Yarbrough's explanation is decidedly more pointed than anything Kent has written about teaching, yet for both Kent and Yarbrough the point is not that we should stop teaching students about writing and the common habits and expectations certain groups bring to written discourse; what we should give up is bad

pedagogy that pretends writing is something *as such*, something that exists within its own epistemological matrix. The post-process theorists argue that any writing pedagogy that fails to acknowledge the artificiality of process instruction does a disservice to students who might come to associate certain ways of writing effectively as the only ways to write effectively. But again, any competent instructor would *teach* their students about the artificiality of discourse no matter what specific angle a composition course takes, whether through principles of rhetorical theory, certain modes of academic discourse, or heuristic strategies like teaching writing as a process.

To understand post-process as something other than “anti-process,” one must grasp how post-process composition theory explains the artificiality of our discourse, specifically with what Kent calls “paralogic hermeneutics,” his account for how discourse works without appeals to grammar, language, discourse communities, and other manifestations of conceptual schemes (e.g., conventions). As he explains, “both [Donald] Davidson and Derrida agree that an irreconcilable split exists between the sign or sentence and its effect in the world. Because of this split, what Davidson calls ‘the autonomy of meaning’ and Derrida calls ‘displacement,’ we can never be certain that our hermeneutic strategy—our use of signs—corresponds to another hermeneutic strategy.” In other words, when speakers of the same “language” who utilize the same “grammar” discursively interact, appeals to either language or grammar as systems that maintain the stability of a discourse’s meaning are misinformed, namely because we communicate through paralogic hermeneutics, the constant interpreting and reinterpreting of discourse so as to arrive at common “passing” theories of meaning in the actual moments of

communication, and since no two rhetorical situations are ever completely identical, this constant hermeneutic guessing is required for communication to proceed. Kent does say that

social conditioning, the sharing of certain common practices, helps narrow the split by supplying a heuristic starting place for interpretation; that is, in day-to-day communicative interaction we assume that our neighbors employ the same hermeneutic strategy that we do, although, of course, we may be wrong. (“Paralogic Hermeneutics” 28)

What we call language, the signs we draw upon habitually to communicate with others, might therefore more accurately be described as a kind of communicative theory—a common cache of gestures and words we draw upon because others use these same gestures and words in a similar way.

What post-process composition theory posits, then, is a slightly less philosophical description of how the principles of paralogic hermeneutics inform the work of composition teaching. To this end the most extensive, and in my view the best explanation of post-process thought, is Kent’s edited collection, *Post-Process Theory*. In the book’s introduction, Kent claims that most post-process theorists “hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated” (1). To say that writing is public is to acknowledge that even though we sometimes write privately, that is, in isolation from others, discourse in general is always a public act, a kind of communicative interaction based on our previous experiences of using discourse with others. As Kastman Breuch explains, “Emphasizing the public nature of writing reminds us that beyond writing correctly, writers must work

toward communicating their message to an audience” (133), and this holds true even if a writer has no immediately discernable audience outside of herself. On the surface these three claims are not provocative, but Kent insists that when taken together they negate the claims of pedagogues who insist that learning to write can be boiled down to learning certain formulas, rules, conventions, or processes.

To argue that writing is interpretive, Kent’s second characteristic of post-process theory, is to acknowledge that both the reception and production of discourse is a hermeneutic act. The implications of such an observation warrant teachers of writing to use the products and our procedures of our discourse, what we use to explain things like the writing process, for example, as heuristic models instead of rigid guidelines. But as every teacher of writing can probably testify, teaching the difference between how to expect our discourse to work (prior theory) and how it actually does work (passing theory) is much easier said than done. In other words, novice writers don’t just struggle with putting words on the page—how to get from five pages of written text to ten pages of written text—they also struggle with how to reconcile the differences between speech and written discourse. That is, successful writers recognize that written discourse is just as malleable as spoken discourse, and to do either well requires the same skill base, one that is rooted in the work of paralogic hermeneutics—having the ability to effectively anticipate how others will use discourse and interpret one’s own.

Finally, to say that writing is situated simply underscores that discourse is only meaningful when we place it within a context. “Because writing is a public act that requires interpretative interaction with others,” explains Kent, “writers always write from

some position or some place; writers are never nowhere” (*Post-Process* 3). The flipside of this observation is that the products of our discourse, like a written text for example, are never stable entities that perfectly translate from situate to situation. Another contributor to *Post-Process Theory*, George Pullman, explains that texts are

the diaphanous effect of multiple interpretative efforts by people who may or may not share contexts or interpretative practices, who may or may not occupy the same context at the moment of the text, who may in fact have the text in common only as a site of combat over other issues such as control over a circumstance of which the text is merely a sign or even an epiphenomenon. (27-28)

The point Pullman suggests is that contexts can never be fixed, that even if we can successfully anticipate how someone will interpret our written discourse tomorrow, for example, the day after tomorrow might be different.

Surprisingly, there exists a dearth of criticism that points to how post-process theory aligns with the classical rhetorical tradition. As I have suggested at several points already, there is very little that post-process theorists advocate that runs counter to how most teachers of writing already think about their work. In a sense, post-process theory presents a novel conceptual vocabulary for actualizing how classical rhetorical theory informs the work of teaching composition. In particular it underscores the philosophical work associated with teaching writing—how we should think about the unstable nature of discourse and how to explain this phenomenon to our students. Ann Berthoff, certainly not conventionally labeled a post-process theorist, nevertheless connects how our philosophies of discourse influence how we teach it. Explaining reflexive inquiry as a

strategy for “forming” composition (one of her metaphors for writing), she insists that teaching writing must always be framed as a speculative endeavor:

Unless we think philosophically about thinking, what’s likely to happen with *mind* is what has already happened with *process*: it will be used and manipulated within the framework of positivist assumptions and thus will not help us develop a pedagogy appropriate to teaching the composing process. (*The Making of Meaning* 63)

Berthoff essentially calls for process pedagogues to be more rhetorical, to recognize the ever-changing relationships between writers, readers, and the texts they share in order to become, as Kent would say, better hermeneutic guessers. The enemy of rhetorical sophistication, as far as Berthoff is concerned, is positivist philosophy that looks for one to one correlations between our words and our meanings. As she writes,

Positivist presuppositions are everywhere to be found in current rhetorical theory, and they are the chief cause of our woe. Let me offer a polemical summary. Positivism is a philosophy whose epistemology is fundamentally associationist. The positivist notion of critical inquiry is a naïve misconception of scientific method—what is sometimes called “scientism.” Positivists believe that empirical tests wield true facts and that’s that; they do not understand that scientists test hypotheses. Underlying all positivists methods and models is a notion of language as, alternately, a set of slots into which we cram or pour meanings, or a veil that must be torn asunder to reveal reality directly, without the distorting mediation of form. (If that sounds mystical, it’s because if you scratch a positivist, you’ll find a mystic: neither can tolerate the concept of mediation.) I believe that we should reject this false philosophy, root and branch, and in doing so it is important to realize that we are in excellent company. (62)

The company Berthoff names include noted pragmatists William James and C.S. Peirce, but she also names I.A. Richards, Susan Langer, and Alfred North Whitehead. To this same list I would append Thomas Kent and the post-process theorists, including Donald Davidson, the philosopher to whom Kent is most indebted. Just as Berthoff rejects

positivist epistemologies that ignore the contingencies of experience and expectation, what rhetorical theory has always aimed to negotiate, so too do the post-process theorists reject positivist pedagogies. The difference with this latter group, a difference Berthoff hints at in the quotation before the above longer excerpt, is that they specifically are addressing the reality that many teachers of writing uncritically adopt positivistic attitudes that betray the paralogic hermeneutic work we actually do to communicate.

What post-process theory offers is a call to compositionists to acknowledge the legitimacy of a non-foundationalist (e.g., non-positivistic) theory of discourse as the starting position for teaching students how to understand the way our words work. Insofar as we are teaching students how to become better, more competent writers, the flexibility of our methods matter. Our responsiveness to how our students negotiate the discursive terrain in class should be reflected in their own maturing responsiveness to the plasticity of language and the written word. In other words, we want our students to develop rhetorical sophistication and be sensitive users of discourse. Post-process therefore represents an approach to theorizing composition that is non-foundational and open to contingency. What is noticeably absent in some of the articulations of post-process are “pedagogic” formulas that teachers of writing can appropriate and graft into their teaching, but criticism of post-process theory in this regard completely misses the point. If we want a non-foundational writing pedagogy then we need to stop pretending that theory and practice are two separate conceptual entities that must be mediated pedagogically. This is not a claim originally forwarded by advocates of post-process, for this is exactly the kind of argument made by all the classical American pragmatists: C. S.

Peirce, William James, G.H. Mead, and John Dewey. Take for example what Dewey writes in “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” which should certainly be considered one the best treatises on the fallacy of philosophical dualism:

For the static, cross-sectional, non-temporal relation of subject and object, the pragmatic hypothesis substitutes apprehension of a thing in terms of the results in other things which it is tending to effect. For the unique epistemological relation, it substitutes a practical relation of a familiar type—responsive behavior which changes in time the subject-matter to which it applies. The unique thing about the responsive behavior which constitutes knowing is the specific difference which marks it off from other modes of response, namely, the part played in it by anticipation and prediction. Knowing is the act, stimulated by this foresight, of securing and averting consequences. The success of the achievement measures the standing of the foresight by which response is directed. (226-27)

With some slight tuning, Dewey’s emphasis on the experiential processes through which apprehension of knowledge takes shape is the basic argument Kent uses in his articulation of paralogic hermeneutics. We can never predict with complete certainty how our words are going to mean, just as we can never predict with complete certainty that our knowledge of something will hold as we enter future exigencies. Hermeneutic intelligence is like pragmatic intelligence, the latter Dewey says is akin to “creative intelligence, not a routine mechanic” (229).

While theorists like Kent have resisted explicit discussion about the pedagogical value of post-process theory in any conventional context, several recent scholars of post-process theory have risen to the occasion, including Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch and Matthew Heard. According to the latter, post-process theory “when carefully mapped onto more familiar pedagogical strategies...can be practically instituted in ways that build toward a promising and workable future for writing instruction” (283-84). Toward



the end of his essay “What Should We Do With Postprocess Theory?,” Heard explains that process pedagogy and post-process theory need not contradict each other.

I have seen the perceived conflict between postprocess ideals and the reality of students’ experiences brought into a harmonious and productive dialectic, with students ultimately benefiting from the dual attention given to their individual “prior” theories (shaped through culture) and also their participation in moments of “passing” with dominant discourses. We as instructors have a unique opportunity to foster students’ growth into adept producers and analyzers of discourse, and therefore we need to figure out together how we can best catalyze and facilitate the metacognitive awareness of postprocess using our own ‘prior theories’—the resources and methods we already employ. (291)

Heard offers rather detailed discussion of how he has come to “practice” a post-process pedagogy in his writing courses, a reflection that I certainly recommend to critics of post-process. More importantly, Heard demonstrates what post-process theory inherently demands of teachers: to experiment with its principles pedagogically in order to develop their own practical methods of teaching “post-process.” That is to say, to teach post-process is not to teach something (or rather, some thing) in particular; it refers to the philosophy of language from which an instructor responds to the writing his students produce. To teach students that writing is a process, for example, is not necessarily antithetical to a post-process philosophy, especially when an instructor uses process pedagogy as a kind of prior theory, to echo Davidson, which students use to anticipate how their written discourse will develop. What a post-process mindset stipulates in these cases, however, is that the instructor couches the idea of process in heuristic terms, presenting it as a kind of inventive strategy, speculative instrument, or simply a guiding metaphor, one that is helpful to the extent that students use it to become the rhetorically

savvy discourses we encourage. Of course, if we return to those original teachers of process like Donald Murray, this is exactly how process pedagogy was utilized.

I have offered this brief review of post-process composition theory because it suggests possibilities for what a non-foundationalist composition pedagogy looks like in philosophical terms. But as Heard points out above, to make any kind of non-foundationalist philosophy applicable to one's specific circumstances, teachers must develop this practical avenue of application for themselves, pragmatically testing *what* they teach with *how well* it promotes the discursive values teachers want their students to adopt. To this end, I want to suggest how collaboration speaks to what I interpret to be the pedagogical consequences of post-process composition theory. Collaboration, in other words, is the practical application through which I have come to experientially understand the principles of paralogic hermeneutics. I want to therefore explain how one might conceptualize an externalist theory of collaboration within the framework of a non-foundationalist pedagogy, one that supports the general tenets of post-process theory, but before I do this, in the next section I offer a short overview of what specifically a non-foundationalist composition pedagogy might stipulate by way general principles teachers of writing can use to test the post-process quality of their instruction.

### **From “Non-Foundationalist” to “Externalist” Writing Pedagogy: Some Provisional Guidelines**

When understood as a guiding philosophy, post-process composition theory paves a road for teachers of writing to understand the pedagogical implications of non-

foundationalist epistemology. Non-foundationalism of any sort usually gets conflated with *postmodernism*, which at the sake of oversimplification simply references philosophical arguments that assert there is no ground or permanent point of stasis on which to plant appeals to truth, rationality, meaning, and the like. In short, postmodern philosophy dismantles epistemological foundations. Externalist language philosophy such as interactionist rhetorical theory, for example, explains why some supposedly non-foundationalist theories are actually foundational, like social constructionism and sociol-epistemic rhetoric. Indeed, social constructionist theory is quite modern insofar as it uses ideas about cultural relativity to account for the phenomenon of incommensurability, when two or more competing arguments, beliefs, or points of view seem hopelessly deadlocked.<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Bruffee, for example, supposedly forwards a non-foundationalist theory when he argues that consensus arrived at through collaboration enacts the work of a discourse community, but this supposedly amorphous, metaphysical concept of a discourse community is a foundation, a ground on which epistemological appeals are given root.<sup>3</sup> Because the term “non-foundational” (and its variations) has been frequently used by rhetoricians and compositionists to describe schools of theory like social constructionism, I find it necessary to drop the term and employ in its place the term “externalist,” the same marker I use to name my theory of collaboration. While this latter term is in many ways just as generalized as the term “non-foundationalist,” it not only encourages readers to separate interactionist rhetorical theory from other supposedly “non-foundational” theories, but the term also benefits from no negative prefix (the “non”), which some might interpret as needlessly oppositional and contrarian.

An externalist theory of writing, therefore, must somehow offer an adequate explanation for why writing should not be taught through conceptual schemes, whatever artificial systems of language use (rules, grammars, conventions, etc.) that mark the discourse communities in which they are to be initiated in college. In this section I connect post-process composition theory to a provisional list of guidelines that an externalist writing pedagogy would support. I present these guidelines as ones teachers of composition can use to help articulate the post-process quality of their pedagogies. In addition, these guidelines can be utilized to pragmatically test pedagogy after the fact, to determine how well the principles of post-process have been actualized in our actual teaching.

So an externalist writing pedagogies would generally support the following claims:

- The most important object of inquiry is the paralogic hermeneutic process.
- Our written discourse is a form of communicative interaction, subject to the same contingencies of all discourse.
- The most effective writers are those who can anticipate the prior theories of their readers and adjust their written discourse accordingly.
- The most effective assignments are those that require creative experimentation with discursive conventions.
- The products students compose are only contingently valuable in relationship to the rhetorical awareness that reflection on the production of those products evidences in a student's discourse.

**The most important object of inquiry is the paralogic hermeneutic process.**

Many iterations of process pedagogy imply that the stages of writing, what we do from one moment to the next when we actually compose, so to speak, is the most important object of inquiry in a composition course. Post-process theory emphasizes, however, that if the teaching of writing is reduced solely to the teaching of process, that is, to a narrow articulation of “how to” lessons that move students from stage to stage—how to invent, how to draft, how to revise, how to edit—students are presented with a false and potentially unproductive outlook on what the work of composition involves. As Berthoff writes in *The Making of Meaning*,

Composing is not a process like playing a game of tennis or cooking a meal; there are no hard and fast rules, and it does not proceed in one direction—in a straightforward manner. Composing is not a linear process, though what it creates has a linear form.  
(20)

With that said, understanding paralogic hermeneutics gives compositionists an explanatory space in which to couch ideas like “process” or any other strategies for (or metaphors of) composing as examples of prior theory. “Prior theory,” as you will recall, is the term that Donald Davidson uses to denote how we are prepared for others to interpret our discourse. As part of the triangulation process within Davidson’s theory of communicative interaction, prior theory anticipates (but cannot account for) passing theory, how others actually do interpret our discourse. Davidson’s theory of communicative interaction has been interpreted by a number of post-process theorists who clearly explain the difference between prior and passing theories, so I will simply

point out here that for Davidson successful communication boils down to coherence, the convergence and sharing of meaning, and this requires successful hermeneutic guessing.<sup>4</sup>

To put this differently, successful communication occurs when two or more interlocutors can anticipate how others will use gestures (like words) to mean. It is through the constant process of adjusting both our words and how we take these words to mean that prior theories converge into passing theories. As Stephen Yarbrough explains the process,

Triangulation refers to the response and counter-response of (minimally) two interlocutors to a third object that both can come to identify as the “common cause” of their respective responses. This process of trial and error, vision and revision, action and reaction, allows the interlocutors’ responses to ‘converge’ upon a common cause. Moreover, this process of learning together what things *are* is the *same* process as learning what the words that refer to those things *mean*”. (“On the Very Idea” 495)

To therefore say that the most important object of inquiry is the paralogic hermeneutic process is to suggest that students of writing should be invested in the deliberate examination of how discourse works on the level of hermeneutics. In other words, when writers can come to terms with the reality that our language is inherently unstable, that our words and how we deploy them can never be fixed so as to ensure successful future communication, that we are always having to adjust our prior theories, then they are better prepared to rhetorically engage the “processes,” or rather “acts” of composition. As Yarbrough might suggest, they are better prepared to rhetorically engage what he calls the phases of discourse, his reinterpretation of how the traditional rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos can be explained within an interactionist rhetorical framework.

As an example of how to emphasize the paralogic hermeneutic process that accounts for our discourse, Yarbrough's rendering of the rhetorical appeals is quite useful on a pedagogical level. For many teachers of writing, the rhetorical appeals often get rendered in our teaching as interchangeable parts of discourse; Yarbrough uses the production of car as an ongoing example of this kind of thinking. As he explains,

the assumption seems to be that the associations among thought, emotion, and ethics are merely coincidental—much as one might assume that a car's color, shape, and material are coincidental—and that one might well alter an argument's ethical appeal without affecting its rational or emotional appeal—just as one might alter a car's color without affecting its shape or material. (491)

Using interactional rhetorical theory, Yarbrough explains why this assumption is incorrect and explains that our communication is an ongoing process, that we use discourse to interrupt, alter, and redirect. When our discourse is viewed as a unitary process, we can think of the rhetorical appeals as representing phases through which our gestures and words are made meaningful. Calling these the cognitive, ethical apperceptive, and affective phases, Yarbrough explains how we converge on meanings through this hermeneutic process of adjusting prior theories (the cognitive phases), but the topical relationships that condition perspective, “how we relate to things” (the ethical phase), often must be altered to adjust to broken expectations “either about how our interlocutors will interact with things with words, or about how things will interact with us” (the affective phase). He explains that if our expectations were never broken in our discursive interactions, “if everyone thought and spoke as we do, and if we were gods who could rightly predict the behavior of all things all the time—we would never

experience emotion” (502, 503). Even though this is a quick summary of Yarbrough’s take on the rhetorical appeals, it nevertheless presents one way teachers of writing can teach students about the paralogic hermeneutic process through which we communicate.

Having an explanation for how to think about the rhetorical appeals as interrelated phases of our discourse instead of as a set of interchangeable parts obviously yields pedagogical appeal since, for me at least, I want my students to think rhetorically about their writing without reducing the rhetorical appeals to qualities we use to dress up a text.

Extending his car metaphor, Yarbrough explains that discourse

is not some thing that can be broken into parts and put together again like a car. Discourse is an intervention in an ongoing, complex, but normally habitual process. Writing is more like driving a car than building one. (508-09)

So when it comes to locating the paralogic hermeneutic process as the most important object of inquiry in a composition course, this simply means that in all of our explanations and responses, in our assignments and discussions, writing is never treated like a closed system. In fact, when it comes to the teaching of writing, Davidson’s concept of prior theory, just like Yarbrough’s rendering of the rhetorical appeals, can be adjusted to denote those ideas with which we use to anticipate how our composing will work, what will be required in order to render whatever words we believe will become effective written discourse.



**Our written discourse is a form of communicative interaction, subject to the same contingencies as all discourse.**

Obviously related to the above discussion of the paralogic hermeneutic process, this second guideline underscores the fact that our written discourse operates the same way as our spoken discourse, according to the principles of communicative interaction, a fact that many teachers of writing either do not understand or have never carefully considered. One of the potential hazards of an over-determined process pedagogy is that students never have the opportunity to reflect on and subsequently incorporate this knowledge about communicative interaction into their understanding of writing. From an externalist perspective, when the subject of writing is presented as a closed epistemological system, a student might come to conceptually separate written discourse from other forms of communication, what no doubt contributes to many forms of “writer’s block” and other instances of stymied discourse. As Reed Way Dasenbrock notes,

An author’s understanding of what the words he or she uses is never perfectly matched by a reader’s, and, therefore, theories that posit such a shared understanding as necessary for communication aren’t going to work for writing. (“A Response” 524-25)

In the end, teachers need to emphasize that writing, speaking, and even reading are all forms of the same hermeneutic process, which post-process theorists account for using paralogic hermeneutics.

Thomas Kent suggests that an externalist pedagogy supports the following claims, ones that exclusively point to the work of communicative interaction:

(1) writing and reading are kinds of communicative interaction; (2) communicative interaction requires triangulation; (3) triangulation requires us to make hermeneutic guesses about how others will interpret our utterances; (4) the process we employ to make our hermeneutic guesses cannot be codified; (5) consequently, no system or framework theory can predict in advance how utterances will be interpreted; (6) therefore, neither writing nor reading can be reduced to a systemic process or to a codifiable set of conventions. (*Paralogic* 161)

Kent follows these claims with the stipulation that even though things like grammar, paragraph cohesion, and so forth are often codified into conventions of discourse and useful as “background knowledge,” such conventions by themselves are not sufficient for communicative interaction. As Kastman Breuch points out, Kent “does not suggest that teaching writing is impossible; he suggests that teaching writing *as a system* is impossible” (123). The pedagogical takeaway of understanding that our written discourse is a form of communicative interaction can therefore be developed into a continual commitment to highlight the contingencies of our discursive conventions.

**The most effective writers are those who can anticipate the prior theories of their readers and adjust their written discourse accordingly.**

As is my intention, I hope this tentative discussion of an externalist writing pedagogy shows that hardly any radical adjustment is required in how many of us probably already conceptualize the work of teaching writing. Perhaps this third guideline is the one that most reflects the reality that a non-foundational writing pedagogy does not dismantle commonsense knowledge about composition. Just as we must continually adjust our discourse with interlocutors so as to promote the convergence of passing theories, so too does our writing require constant hermeneutic guessing that anticipates how others will

read our words. To write effectively, then, requires that we correctly anticipate how an audience is prepared to interpret our discourse.

From James Kinneavy's articulation of the "modes" of discourse, to Linda Flower's distinction between writer-based and reader-based prose; from Peter Elbow's conception of private writing, to Mike Rose's analysis of the "language of exclusion"; from Jacqueline Jones Royster's meditation on voice, to Nancy Sommers study of response "between the drafts," scholars in composition have always emphasized in one way or another the importance of anticipating an audience for one's writing. But in a similar way to how Yarbrough makes an argument against treating the rhetorical appeals as interchangeable building blocks, so too can we think about audience from an interactionist perspective. Many students of writing get introduced to the rhetorical triangle in composition courses, that figure which connects the idea of an audience to a writer/speaker and a text/discourse. Certainly there is heuristic value in utilizing the rhetorical triangle to isolate certain elements of a rhetorical situation to better understand the situation, but each of these elements can easily be misrepresented as different parts of our discourse if the three corners of the rhetorical triangle get emphasized more than the lines that connect them. In other words, the heuristic value of the rhetorical triangle is located in its ability to illustrate how one's conception of a speaker, for example, affects that discourse's intended audience, which in turn simultaneously influences how we conceptualize the content of a discourse itself.

It is valuable then to encourage students to develop a healthy conception of what an effective writer does as a means to illustrate that there is no body of knowledge or

specifically defined skill set that can ever be mastered on our way to becoming better writers. In her discussion about a writer's agency in her essay in *Post-Process Theory*, Barbara Couture contends that actualizing

personal agency is a constant process of matching available expressive resources with our design for our own lives, of adjusting to those resources, and of noting how they coincide with or differ from our intended expression. (44)

Using Charles Altieri's understanding of what he calls "willful acts," Couture suggests that we conceptualize writing, i.e., the inscription of discourse, as a form of design that experiments with writing skills that get developed through emulation of "recognized discourse practices." As she continues,

The process of achieving alignment with certain recognized discourse practices, for instance, discourse styles and ways of knowing, involves choosing what to value on the basis of some formula for one's own happiness, idealizing that choice, and then negotiating that choice with others to see it realized within our lives. (43, 44)

In short, we might say that effective writers learn to anticipate the prior theories they read in "recognized discourse practices" and through negotiation of these prior theories through activities like rereading, revision, and peer review, we attempt to "realize" our discursive expression in text.

The catch here, however, is that from a non-foundational perspective there can never be "correct" ways of adjusting our discourse for an audience. That is, making appeals to grammar or certain conventions of academic discourse as the "right" way of doing things in our writing misrepresents the rhetorical nature of our communication. As I constantly tell my own students, when it comes to rhetoric and the principles of communicative

interaction, our writing can never be “good” (a relative marker of value) because at best it can only be effective (at communicating the meaning we intend an audience to understand).

**The most effective assignments are those that require creative experimentation with discursive conventions.**

“In emphasizing the mutability of our prior understanding,” explains Dasenbrock, “Davidson establishes creativity and innovation at the very heart of communication” (“A Response” 525). When teachers of writing continually direct the attention of their students to the paralogic hermeneutic process while emphasizing that effective writers learn to recognize and anticipate how their written discourse is affected by the same interactive conditions that affect their spoken discourse, they illuminate the contingent operations of communicative interaction. But students are placed in composition courses because colleges and universities want their student body to foster the discursive skills that will make them successful (usually academic) communicators, and obviously students can expect that in college they will have to perform discursively in ways that might be unfamiliar and will require the development of skills they do not yet have.

To encourage the discursive skill set a composition teacher wants for her students, she obviously designs writing assignments that require students to practice these skills. But from an externalist perspective the most effective assignments are those that require creative experimentation with discursive conventions. To echo Couture’s argument that as agents of discourse we identify “recognized discourse conventions” in which to develop our communicative skills, so too must compositionists identify “recognized

discourse conventions” for their students to emulate and with which to experiment. As Dasenbrock notes, “We attain our own voice, a Davidsonian approach to usage suggests, not by slavishly following nor by desperately avoiding received conventions, but by playing off them” (525). I have no stake in making an argument about what types of discourse conventions, “modes” of argument, styles of writing, and the like should be included in the teaching of a composition course; in fact, attempting such an argument would run counter to the provisions of an externalist writing pedagogy offered here. What matters, however, is that students are given ample space and time to experiment with conventions of discourse *in order to recognize how conventions of discourse are contingent and interactive*. By this latter term, interactive, I mean that when it comes to communicative interaction we are always engaging others through our use of discourse even when those others are not immediately present or physically identifiable. Discursive conventions are conventions because other discourses initiated them and still others emulate them, and thus writers can benefit from experimenting with such conventions as a means of honing their hermeneutic guessing. As David Foster reminds us, “Language is the source of conventions, not the result of them, and they come to light only in the act of language making” (“Contingency” 152). Or as Matthew Heard has observed, it is necessary “to emphasize conventions and strategies as active, living prior theories gathered from real interaction between writers and audiences” (295). While certainly teachers might value certain conventions of discourse over others in the writing classroom, what makes an assignment effective is how and to what extent it asks students to play with these conventions as a means of developing their prior theories about them.

**The products students compose are only contingently valuable in relationship to the discursive awareness that reflection on the production of those products evidences.**

Like many of these guidelines, this last one points to what many might consider conventional wisdom. Process pedagogy, after all, is founded on the notion that if writers can reflect upon and identify the different parts of their writing processes, they are better positioned to intervene and remedy problems associated with writing in general. Post-process composition theory is founded on the observation that, upon reflection, our communication is paralogic and thus resistant to codified criteria; it is thoroughly hermeneutic. At the risk of sounding aphoristic, effective writers are reflective writers. The longer I teach composition the less concerned I am with the final products my students compose; what I care about is a student's ability to evidence knowledge about her writing, how it is and is not effective, and how well she can reflect upon her own discursive awareness of this effectiveness. In other words, it doesn't matter, for example, if my students can write a summary according to whatever standards to which I imagine good summaries conform. What does matter is that my students can talk about what they did as they composed a summary, why they did it, how well it adheres to certain conventions, and maybe even how it could be done differently.

To this end multiple and varied opportunities for discursive reflection are absolutely necessary if teachers want their students to understand the paralogic hermeneutic process that informs their communicative interactions. By discursive reflection, I simply mean that students consider different questions about their discourse, how it works, and why they write in certain ways. In fact, the questions are limitless depending on what a teacher

wants students to direct attention towards. No matter the specific direction teachers encourage reflection, students should always be prompted to consider the how and why of their prior theories, how and why they have assumed their discourse will work in certain ways. “In my own experience,” notes Heard,

I came to realize that practicing postprocess theory requires a moment-by-moment, class-by-class commitment to the goal of teaching writing through engagement and interaction. Without this commitment, instructors may find themselves slipping back into habits that subtly reinforce writing as a tool to be mastered. (294)

Addressing his role as an instructor, Heard’s observation holds true for students as well since they, too, often conceptualize writing as a tool. What he calls a “moment-by-moment, class-by-class” commitment to engagement and interaction is where discursive reflection is most important. Many standard elements of composition courses, such as instructor feedback, peer-review, and one-on-one conferencing represent “passing moments,” as Heard suggests, “where the prior theories of students and teacher meet, and create new discourse that in turn affects the prior theories of both parties” (297).

Discursive reflection in this case means that we pause to reflect upon the passing theories of our discourse in retrospect as a means for revising these prior theories in anticipation of their future deployment.

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I suggest that opportunities for discursive reflection should be multiple and varied because the overall experience of reflection is most effective when we have multiple perspectives through which to evaluate our discourse. In a composition course, discursive reflection can be encouraged through formal and informal writing assignments, various



forms of group interaction, different types of rhetorical analysis, peer-review reflections, individual and group conferencing, and, for which I will make a case below, collaborative writing. Some might suggest that valuing the discursive awareness students develop through reflection on the processes and products of their writing is undercut by the reality of assigning grades, which of course must be calculated according to whatever (arbitrary) standards of evaluation we use to assess student performance. But as Heard suggests, “grading does not necessarily paralyze students’ development of metacognitive awareness within a postprocess environment,” and he credits the discursive space created during conferences as evidence. He notes,

I came to understand that the most helpful and authentically postprocess moments during the quarter ultimately took place during one-on-one conferences, wherein individual students and I collaborated to solve the problems that were affecting their writing.(298)

In other words, the metacognitive reflection that occurs during one-on-one conferences is how, for Heard at least, he came to value post-process theory pedagogically. “My students commented that the time spent in individual conferences was the most productive and useful activity for them during the quarter,” Heard concludes, “and their comments altogether credit the postprocess claim that learning takes place through the kind of collaborative negotiation that postprocess embraces and that these conferences enabled” (298-99).

It is not coincidental that Heard references collaboration twice in the conclusion of his essay; indeed he credits the “collaborative negotiation” fostered in student conferences as evidence of how post-process theory can productively inform a non-

foundational writing pedagogy. But as Heard notes, his students say they most benefited as writers in these conferences, confessing that these valuable interactions between he and his students were significantly limited in comparison to the time these students actually spent in class. Therefore, I believe fostering opportunities for sustained collaboration, like the kind of collaboration that Heard shared with his students, can benefit students of writing in ways that exemplify the guidelines of an externalist writing pedagogy that I have been suggesting.

### **Collaboration and Externalist Pedagogy**

In response to the consideration of whether an externalist writing pedagogy is experientially possible, I wish to continue my discussion of collaboration by explicitly connecting it to post-process philosophy. The externalist theory of collaboration this dissertation develops is linked most directly to post-process in my suggestion that we cannot predetermine the outcomes of successful collaboration, at least not when it comes to material production. The same applies for composition when informed by post-process: there is no generic system of criteria that can be met to ensure an effective written text. Collaboration points to a discursive relationship fostered by individuals who want to engage in novel discourse; it is not a neutral method for mediating the epistemic workings of a discourse community. As a technology for rhetorical invention and intervention, collaboration is valuable for the ways in which individuals come together to foster reflexive dialogue. Collaboration is a non-formulaic process of interaction

discourers must deliberately initiate and carefully reflect upon in order to pragmatically test the effectiveness of their discourse.

As I pointed to above, Matthew Heard's appeal to collaboration is the most effective method through which to pedagogically enact the principles of post-process theory. I want to mention several other scholars who have reached similar conclusions. In *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley says that at least since the late nineteenth century, "college writing teachers have been heavily invested in the stability of the self and the attendant beliefs that writing can be a means of self-discovery and intellectual self-realization," and this continues to be the case, "even at a time when extensive group collaboration is practiced in many classrooms" (15). In "Paralogic Hermeneutics and the Possibilities of Rhetoric," Kent points to the preponderance of "monologic writing" in composition courses, writing that "always stops" and "never engages the other in open-ended dialogue and collaboration" (38). This latter type of writing, what Kent calls "dialogic writing," occurs "when students enter into collaborative—and therefore hermeneutic—interaction with the other" (37). For David Foster, collaboration is the perfect method for negotiating the discursive conflicts that concern the ethical demands of teaching writing. "The turn toward the social and the emphasis on difference create unpredictable, often unstable interactions that can often lead to conflicts." Conflict, he says, is more than the petty clashing of opinion, "I mean the collision of divergent attitudes, values, judgments, and personal temperaments compounded in any classroom group dedicated to recognizing difference" (150). Following the lead of David Bleich,

Foster believes that students and teachers must carefully engage conflict through dialogue and sensitive forms of disclosure via collaborative discourse.

The only limitations to connecting collaboration to post-process composition theory is that no one has yet considered with any detail what collaboration might mean when it informs a post-process perspective. That is, even though Heard, Faigley, Kent, and Foster all point to collaboration as a productive mode of inquiry in a writing classroom, none of them tease out what they mean by collaboration as such. Indeed, post-process theorists as a whole have failed to consider the pedagogical implications of post-process through a externalist explanation of collaboration. More than twenty years ago, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, anticipating Faigley's similar observation in *Fragments of Rationality*, reminded the field of composition in their book *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* how "collaborative learning theory has from its inception failed to challenge traditional concepts of individualism and ownership of ideas and has operated primarily in traditional ways." They continue, "Students may work together on revising or on problem solving, but when they write, they typically write alone in settings structured and governed by a teacher/authority in whom power is vested" (118). Ede and Lunsford challenged the discipline to experiment with extended collaborative writing in the classroom, especially in ways that substantially undercut the privileging of single-authored texts. In addition, this challenge is bolstered by the post-process indictment of product-centered pedagogy that places ultimate value on the material inscriptions that students produce despite process rhetoric that asserts otherwise.

But what does collaboration look like from a pedagogical perspective, especially when we give authority to students over the direction of their collaboration? Ede and Lunsford resist outlining definitive guidelines for collaborative writing because they believe such outlining would undermine the spirit of collaborative inquiry to widen the potential for discursive novelty; it would undercut, as they put it, our ability to “problematize both theory and practice” (122). Nevertheless, they do offer some guiding principles for teachers who want to experiment with a collaborative writing assignment:

Poor collaborative writing assignments are artificial in the sense that one person could really complete the assignment alone: such assignments lead only to busy work and frustration.... [They] also fail to provide guidelines for students about the processes they might best use to complete the assignment effectively. Students are simply assigned a topic or a project and abandoned to negotiate the minefield of interpersonal and group processes.(123)

Certainly Ede and Lunsford are correct in their assessment that instructors should provide helpful strategies for students to negotiate the intersections of their collaboration with one another, but to say that to do otherwise means casting students aside, abandoning them in the “minefield of interpersonal and group processes,” seems like an overstatement. From the perspective of an externalist theory of collaboration, this is what students should be doing when they engage each other through a collaborative writing assignment. That is, when teachers leave collaborative writers on their own, they have the opportunity to create and develop the discursive relationship necessary to engage in successful collaborative writing in the first place. Certainly they should be given direction and even resources to understand their discursive engagement (such as collaborative heuristics, for example), but jumping in to their collaboration and learning

on the fly is necessary for that reflexive dialogue to organically grow out of this interaction. So where Ede and Lunsford are right is in their suggestion that teachers should provide collaborative writers, especially inexperienced ones, with pedagogical coaching, or as they say, some “guidelines for students about the processes they might best use to complete the assignment effectively.” To this end, John Pell and I have written a forthcoming essay for college students about collaborative writing, one that offers novice collaborative writers twelve different heuristic, process-oriented strategies for actually engaging in the work of collaborative writing, but as an advocate of post-process composition theory I certainly won’t hold up these strategies as the only strategies teachers might use to instruct students about collaborative writing.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the advice of Ede and Lunsford, I suggest there is tremendous value in letting new collaborative writers struggle with the various frustrations they are sure to experience. Moreover, I don’t believe that a collaborative writing assignment need be any different from a non-collaborative writing assignment. If collaboration with another student is presented as an option on an assignment, no special rules or requirements need apply as far as the assignment details are concerned. The purpose of collaborative writing from a pedagogical standpoint is to heighten the *experience* of composition; a bad collaborative writing assignment would probably still be bad even if there was no collaborative requirement. In other words, instructors need not believe that some extra element should be included to make a collaborative writing assignment somehow truly “collaborative.” To suggest that such elements exist, moreover, is to fall back on an arbitrary material division between collaboratively composed and single-authored texts.

I have suggested that we can use an externalist theory of collaboration to demonstrate how collaboration itself, especially collaborative writing, can be deployed productively as a working model of what a non-foundationalist writing pedagogy might look like in practice. To briefly return to the guidelines presented in the last section, I will draw a few connections between those and the working tenets of an externalist theory of collaboration that were developed at the end of Chapter Four. Now slightly amended for brevity, those tenets are:

1. Collaboration refers to the dynamic commitment between two or more individuals to engage in reflexive dialogue in order to anticipate novel discourse.
2. Collaborators negotiate the ethical spaces of their collaboration through concerted efforts recognize, retrace, and reengage moments of discursive novelty.
3. The primary purpose of collaboration is discursive, to anticipate novel discourse, so collaboration may or may not result in material production.
4. Collaborators attempt to transform and transgress the imagined limits of their discursive inquiry, which requires both a commitment to think alongside another person while consciously shaping effective discourse.

These tenets nicely complement the guidelines for an externalist writing pedagogy through a relatively focused articulation of what collaborators might do when they make the paralogic hermeneutic process the primary object of their inquiry. As I suggested in Chapter Three, reflexive dialogue requires interlocutors to consider their own position *as interlocutors* in response to each other; it requires them to think about their discourse *as discourse*; it opens opportunities, in other words, to identify and examine the paralogic

hermeneutic effects that have influenced the progression of their discourse. Moreover, while I have already explained how we might conceptualize the idea of novel discourse within an externalist theory of collaboration, I think there is heuristic potential in thinking about how the anticipation of passing theory—as yet arrived at interpretations—might also help us to define novel discourse for students in a pedagogically accessible manner.

To recognize how writing is subject to the same rules and contingencies of all communicative interaction, the work of collaboration, especially collaborative writing, is one method through which to encourage students to make this connection on their own. Collaborative writing requires a healthy combination of talking and writing *with another person*. While certainly collaborative writers at some points will write separately, they nevertheless must talk through their writing as they craft text that reflects their shared discourse. The more (and varied) opportunities teachers can provide for collaborative writers to experiment with the simultaneity of speaking/writing, the more “real” writing becomes for students as a form of communicative interaction, one that requires the same kinds of hermeneutic guessing they perform in throughout their day-to-day interaction with the world. And this holds true when we consider the third guidelines for a non-foundational writing pedagogy, that effective writers can both anticipate the prior theories of their readers *and* adjust their written discourse accordingly. Collaborative writers have the very intimate spaces of their discursive relationship in which to test out these prior theories on each other; they have more freedom and an increased potential to hone their skills at this kind of deliberate hermeneutic guessing.



Collaboration also provides the discursive space in which students can experiment with various conventions of discourse, the fourth guideline, through the anticipation of novel discourse that an externalist theory of collaboration stipulates. The last guideline, that the products students compose are less important than the discursive awareness that results from reflection on the production of those products, resonates with all four tenets above because it is through reflection that we construct experience, and it is through the accumulation of experience that we establish the working knowledge from which to shape and anticipate things like prior theories, for example, or the discursive awareness that allows us to name the novel qualities of our discourse.

So to ask, then, a direct question: Is collaboration teachable? The answer, like the question posed to post-process theorists about whether writing is teachable, is both yes and no. Post-process theorists assert that writing is not teachable if we conceptualize writing as a body of knowledge that operates according to its own epistemological systems. On the other hand, we can certainly “teach” conventions of discourse, naming them *as conventions*, but teaching certain conventions of discourse does not mean that we are teaching writing, at least when writing is presented as something with its own “thingness.” Similarly, if collaboration is broken down and presented as a series of discreet steps that collaborators follow to actually collaborate, collaboration is certainly not teachable since collaboration as such does not exist. There is no right or wrong way to collaboratively foster the reflexive dialogue collaborators share, nor is there a right or wrong way to identify the novel discourse collaborators anticipate, for this is what collaborators must do themselves as a function of their discursive commitment to each

other. So just as post-process theorists insist that writing cannot be reduced into a “how to” mode of discourse, so too does an externalist theory of collaboration resist such reduction. Furthermore, just as post-process theorists use externalist philosophy to explain the paralogic hermeneutic character of communicative interaction, an externalist theory of collaboration simply explains how this communicative interaction functions for individuals who enter into a collaborative relationship.

An important observation about my discussion of collaboration and post-process composition theory is that I have resisted discussing with any detail what these things might look like by way of concrete, road-tested examples. That is, while I have mentioned a few ways in which to enact collaboration and practice the values espoused by a non-foundational writing pedagogy, I have at best only pointed in certain directions when it comes to the development of actual assignments, activities, discussions, and everything else for which as teachers we are responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing in the classroom. But this is purposeful, because as a theorist of collaboration, one who values externalist, non-foundational values, I don’t want to tell teachers what to teach. The externalist theory of collaboration I offer is meant to initiate discussion about how we conceptualize the work of composition, in addition to what it means to actually share work in the work of composition. I think of myself as both a realist and an idealist when it comes to collaboration and the teaching of composition, and in this way I recognize that collaboration cannot completely remodel how we teach composition in the university; however, I do believe that as a discipline rhetoric and composition can embrace something like a collaborative ethic, one that encourages instructors to

experiment with extended collaboration while making good on the challenge set forward more than two decades ago by Ede and Lunsford, two teachers of writing who have certainly established their collaborative work as a resolute testament to the pedagogical value of collaboration. Byron Stay observes, however, that to be “successful” collaborative writers like Ede and Lunsford “require[s] a level of sophistication and commitment not easily transferred to the classroom, and the success of these teams does not mean that classroom co-authorship is either possible or desirable” (43). Certainly Stay is correct, since after all, collaborative writers who have had success like Ede and Lunsford have also had decades to hone the sophistication of their collaborative voice. But I would argue the only difference between the reflexive dialogue that two freshmen writers create together and the reflexive dialogue shared by collaborators like Ede and Lunsford is simply a matter of degree.

### **Coda: Why Teach What is Not Teachable?**

With an externalist theory of collaboration the theory/practice debate that exists between process and post-process thought dissolves into questions about how students might come together collaboratively to negotiate their prior theories of discourse and writing, anticipating these expectations and finding ways to effectively render text. My arguments have been primarily theoretical, taken from interactionist rhetorical theory, pragmatist philosophy, and the limited scholarship on post-process pedagogy that the field of composition has produced. Understandably, some compositionists resist capitulating to theory that might seem completely untenable pedagogically, theory that

leads teachers down a “hall of mirrors,” to echo the title of an essay about non-foundationalist philosophy and composition pedagogy by David Smit. As he writes, proponents of non-foundationalist philosophy (he uses the term “anti-foundationalism”),

often seem to imply that our language and knowledge of the world is an infinite hall of mirrors, in which diction and syntax, rules of grammar, the neurological structure of the human mind, and what we call reality reflect one another with no ultimate source of all the shifting mirror images. (36)

Smit projects what is an understandable frustration towards such theory because, as he explains, if theory “is to have any relevance to composition and rhetoric, it must offer some convincing suggestions about how we ought to teach writing, suggestions which seem to be organic or integral to the theory” (41).

Like so many others, Smit divides a line between theory and practice, how we think and what we do. Such a perspective obviously has serious consequences for the prospects of something like post-process composition theory or my own externalist theory of collaboration. But Smit makes an interesting observation, one that is certainly worth consideration when weighting the potentialities of an externalist writing pedagogy even if we have theory that “seems to accurately describe some aspect of the way language works or the way language reflects the material world, it does not necessarily follow that the best way to teach is to model instruction after that theory.” He continues,

A certain state of affairs may not necessarily be the best model for how to teach others *about* that state of affairs. Similarly, a certain kind of behavior may be the goal of instruction, but simply having students engage in that behavior may not necessarily be the best way to teach it. (45-46)

My externalist theory of collaboration is certainly implicated by Smit's observation since, after all, my advice has been (to a certain extent) "engage in that behavior" of collaboration as a means of learning what collaboration is and how to manipulate it. On the other hand, I've also used this chapter to consider how post-process pedagogy might help us conceptualize collaboration pedagogically.

On the flipside, an externalist theory of collaboration also informs why post-process is not "anti-process." While post-process philosophy is important because it underscores the instability of discourse, process thinking is helpful in the way that it can help us historicize our understanding of how particular texts we have composed came into being, and in this way process thought helps to widen our awareness of our passing experiences with writing. That is, it can help us to better understand how our expectations were both met and had to be revised during the actual acts of composing. In this way, process theory is helpful because it provides us with a vocabulary for breaking down our experience by, however arbitrarily, identifying the various stances we assume in the process of composing. We develop prior theories through experience, through observing how our meanings get conveyed and understood in passing. In this way, we can view language as a kind of theory, a set of hermeneutic expectations to rely on as prior theories, but ones that must be adjusted to enact passing theories. Certainly a responsible composition teacher knows, and makes sure students know, that what they write will be interpreted according to certain expectations and conventions, but the existence of expectations and conventions does not dictate what those students can or should actually write.

If on the surface an externalist writing pedagogy supports the post-process idea that there is nothing to teach when teaching writing, i.e., there is no static body of knowledge that constitutes “writing” that can be transferred from context to context or spliced into tip sheets or skill sets, then one obvious limitation to an externalist writing pedagogy is that “writing” becomes a consequence, an activity, something we do in response to some exigency. That is, the subject of a composition becomes the study of one’s writing, for example, not a study in how to write. This might seem a fuzzy distinction, but it is an important one. Surely even the staunchest anti-pedagogues among us will concede that even if composition teachers cannot teach students how to write, they can certainly help students understand their writing.

But the perceived limitations of an externalist writing pedagogy might well be viewed as potential advantages when we come to terms with what it means to actually privilege process over product. Another way of putting this is that what post-process theory does in terms of pedagogy is to actually spell out the implications of truly valuing the writing process, whatever we take that to mean, over the products of writing, whatever material inscriptions this process yields. Process pedagogy was supposed to wrest the authority of discourse from the hands of teachers and give it over to students as a way for them to actualize their agency as writers, but that never really happened. “At best students are in apprenticeship to authority,” explain Ede and Lunsford when discussing how students often get situated as subjects in composition courses, “they do not help constitute it” (*Singular* 119). As Dobrin notes, moreover, in every instance of communicative interaction, “no matter how adept a participant is in his or her hermeneutic guessing

skills, issues of power affect the manner in which triangulation occurs” (143). Post-process theory therefore might account for how discourse really works, but it cannot ameliorate the issues of authority about which process and post-process scholars alike might raise concern. In collaborative writing, at least when conceptualized from an externalist perspective, there are no right or proper methods through which collaborators must compose. Collaborative writers become their own authority, which is to say that collaborative writers appeal to each other as an authority for negotiating the direction of their inventive discourse and how it will be rendered into textual form.

Collaborative writing is pedagogically valuable because it requires constant hermeneutic negotiation between collaborators, not only to understand each other, but also how to understand their discourse as it gets inscribed into text. In other words, collaborative writing requires individuals to reflect on their communicative interaction on a number of levels, including the level of diagnosing what is and is not working within the development of a text. But more than that, the communicative interaction that collaborative writers enter into has the potential for making them *better communicators in general*, better hermeneutic guessers, because to successfully write collaboratively requires special sensitivity to the unstable and unpredictable ways language works in the first place. According to Dobrin, composition instruction is at its best when students “become participants in communication [as opposed to mere transmitters]; they must constantly engage in developing the skills needed to be adept triangulators” (144). Again, here we see how post-process theory makes room to argue the case for an externalist approach to collaboration, since what successful collaborative writers do—what makes

them successful anticipators of novel discourse—is founded on a discursive relationship created to experiment with, test, and transgress the limits of their shared discursive inquiry, what, in other words, they are capable of expressing together in discourse. As Yarbrough notes,

The communication process is one of interlocutors *coming together toward* a single way of talking about a single world. Said in pedagogical terms, the more we learn from the other the more we can teach to the other—so long as what we are trying to teach and learn is something that actually exists, something we can triangulate, not language, conventions, ideas, or anything else we imagine might lie between ourselves and the world we come to share. (*After* 183)

Of course, even if things like language, conventions, ideas and what not lack an ontological existence that separates discourses into multiple worlds, one's belief in such things is certainly a belief that must be accounted for, something Yarbrough would concede since he has noted the same observation. With that said, using ideas about the rules of language, conventions of discourse, and how writing is a process all as prior theories with which to experiment does not mean that as teachers of writing we will necessarily reduce the paralogic hermeneutic act into stubborn systems of codified rules. Indeed, if we take post-process theory seriously then at best all we can do is anticipate how our students will interpret our teaching in the actual moments of this engagement.

The important work, the real work, is all in how we choose to respond.



## Notes

1. Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch offers a concise review of post-process composition theory in her essay. “Post-Process ‘Pedagogy’: A Philosophical Exercise”; Helen Foster offers a substantially longer history of the division between process and post-process history in her book *Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process*.

2. Yarbrough talks about incommensurability at length in the Introduction to *After Rhetoric*.

3. Faigley calls Bruffee an anti-foundationalist in *Fragments of Rationality*, as does Fish in “Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition.”

4. For a clear articulation of what Kent means by “hermeneutic guessing,” see his “Externalism and the Production of Discourse.”

5. Our essay, titled “Inventing Texts Together: The Practice of Collaborative Writing,” breaks down collaborative writing into three phases: approaching, listening, and translating. In our discussion of each phase, we supply specific process strategies for students to work within each phase. At present we have just pulled the piece from a forthcoming collection on the teaching of writing in the first-year course (because the editors wanted us to make changes that would flatten the externalist quality of our instruction, thus rendering the piece into a safer and, we feel, pointless essay). We are now shopping the piece around for a new home.

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