FUSING HORIZONS: STANDPOINT HERMENEUTICS AND INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

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Abstract:

This essay emends Foss, Foss, and Griffin's invitational rhetoric to strenghten its philosophical undergirdings and release it from unfounded criticisms Standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric is the framework offered to position the theory more solidly in the canons Three strategic moves include discovering and revising its epistemological stance to reflect Lorraine Code's concepts of knowing others and second personhood: connecting Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to rhetoric: and using Gadamer's emphasis on position and historicity to develop the connection to feminist standpoint theorys Conclusions point toward the implications of invitational rhetoric as dialogue linked to practical application in public communication and pedagogys

Article:

The transformative potential of dialogue has taken center stage among communication theorists as a rational alternative to increasingly violent rhetorical strategies for problem solving in both private and public communication contexts (e.g., Baxter and Montgomery; Downey; Tannen). Sally Miller Gearhart's germinal essay entitled "The Womanization of Rhetoric" led the way for feminist theorists, in particular, to consider new forms of public communication based in a female value system. Notably, Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin have extended Gearhart's rhetorical theory of feminist nonviolence through their concept of invitational rhetoric, while argumentation theorists such as Catherine Palczewski have demonstrated the power of consensus through dialogue as a feminist strategy of persuasion (164-166).

Surprisingly, invitational rhetoric has not been embraced by large numbers of rhetorical scholars, and differences of opinion regarding the efficacy of invitational rhetoric as public argument (vs. private conversation) have made for some tense (although respectful) reading in the pages of our academic journals (e.g., Condit; Downey; Foss, Griffin, and Foss; Makau; Pollock, Artz, Frey, Pearce, and Murphy). Why has invitational rhetoric failed to win over large numbers of communication scholars and students? Its nonviolent perspective and dialogic structure are appealing, yet it remains in the background in both our theorizing and teaching of rhetorical theory, public speaking, and composition. We believe that invitational rhetoric suffers from a misinterpretation of its epistemological grounding, and, as a result of this error, falls short as a theoretically useful model of either dialogic communication or alternative rhetoric. In this essay, we propose to emend[1] invitational rhetoric by (1) clarifying its epistemological grounding to demonstrate how it includes both internal and external sources of knowledge and (2) recasting it as standpoint hermeneutics fused with rhetoric. To those ends, this essay is structured as follows: First, a brief description of invitational rhetoric and its criticisms is offered. We then follow with an argument for clarifying the epistemological foundation of invitational rhetoric by extending its premise of "knowing as self-oriented" to "knowing other people." This argument will be grounded in the literature of feminist epistemology (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tartule; Code; Hekman; Tanesini). Third, by synthesizing feminist standpoint theory (Jaggar; Wood; Young) with philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer; Jost and Hyde), we argue for invitational rhetoric as a standpoint hermeneutics fused with rhetoric. Finally, we close the essay with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of invitational rhetoric as dialogic communication.

INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

Drawing on Sally Miller Gearhart's radical notion that persuasion is ecological violence (195), Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin argue [sic] that rhetoric as persuasion is fundamentally flawed (2), and with Karen Foss (Foss, Griffin, and Foss 128-132), position themselves as feminist reconstructionists. This position, taken up in resistance to the Aristotelian, agonistic model of rhetoric, claims that persuasion is a deliberate, patriarchal attempt on the part of a rhetor to change the listener's mind, and is, therefore, a form of social and intellectual violence. The fundamental intent to change people's beliefs is interpreted by Foss and Griffin as an ethical disregard for audiences who may not want to change and may, indeed, have different, valuable perspectives on an issue. A rhetor who values the power gained by controlling and changing audience members' perspectives is recognized by Foss and Griffin as someone who underrates the audience and, by extension, contributes to a culture of conquest and conversion. Taking another cue from Gearhart's indictment of rhetorical purpose (196-197), Foss and Griffin, in their own radical, theoretical move, posit that rhetoric *may not,* in fact, always center on change as the rhetorical goal. Invitational rhetoric is offered as a non- adversarial rhetorical alternative to employ when the rhetorical situation calls for mutual understanding of issues and perspectives. Invitational rhetoric is grounded in feminist principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination and replaces patriarchal values of domination, competition, and change.

If it is possible to have understanding rather than change as a fundamental rhetorical goal, then invitational rhetoric demonstrates that intention means engagement in an issue rather than persuasion to a belief; and meaning lies not solely with the rhetor, but in the dialogue between speaker and audience members. Like Gadamer, we define dialogue as conversational give and take where "one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" *(Truth and Method* 367). The purpose of the rhetorical situation is for rhetor and audience members to engage in a dialogue in order to reach mutual understanding, and thus a more democratic society. The radicality of this concept is that rhetoric no longer functions in a democracy as a tool of truth-seeking; rather, rhetoric in contemporary times can serve a multivocal society to seek peaceful understanding and to accommodate a range of truths.

Foss and Griffin develop the concepts of *offering* and *willingness to yield* as the fundamental tools for rhetors and listeners to engage in invitational rhetoric. They extend Sally Miller Gearhart's notion of enfoldment/offering, originally explicated in her essays "The Womanization of Rhetoric" and "Womanpower," into invitational rhetoric's primary alternative to persuasive argument.[2] Rhetors who offer "tell what they currently know or understand; they present their vision of the world and show how it looks and works for them" (Foss and Griffin 7). Audience members who "ask questions and make comments . . . aimed at learning more about the presenter's ideas, understanding them more thoroughly, nurturing them, and offering additional ways of thinking about the subject for everyone involved in the interaction" (Foss and Griffin 8) are also engaged in offering. Speakers and listeners participate in offering "when they enter the interaction with a goal not of converting others to their positions but of sharing what they know, extending one another's ideas, thinking critically about all the ideas offered, and coming to an understanding of the subject and of one another" (Foss and Griffin 8).

The concept of *willingness to yield* describes the way rhetors and audience members should respond to offering. As a point of definition, Foss and Griffin, in "Beyond Persuasion," compare willingness to yield to Martin Buber's notion of the I-Thou relationship and David Tracy's notion of relationships between self and other. To properly react to offering, rhetors and listeners must be willing to engage each other's beliefs and be willing to let go of some of their own in the desire to move toward mutual understanding. Willingness to yield results in a unique dyadic position where, in Tracy's terms, "to attend to the other as other, the different as different, is also to understand the different *as* possible" (qtd. in Foss and Griffin 7).

The response to invitational rhetoric, for all its promise of dialogue as a way to move towards understanding and, by association, democracy, has been minimal. Neither Foss and Foss's public speaking text, *Inviting Transformation,* nor the essay by Foss, Griffin, and Foss entitled "Transforming Rhetoric Through Feminist Reconstruction," both of which use invitational concepts, have had significant impact on rhetorical theory construction.[3] Rather, the few published responses to invitational rhetoric, with the exception of Downey and

Makau, have been fairly negative. Fulkerson faults invitational rhetoric for its argument against persuasion, its over-identification of persuasion with violence, its position of unconditional value for all listeners, and its implied lack of action beyond just sharing perspectives (204-206).[4] Pollock et al. agree that invitational rhetoric's definition of persuasion as inherent violence is essentialized and misplaced (149-150). Condit also takes issue with Foss, Foss, and Griffin's theoretical attempt to revise traditional notions of rhetoric in her critique of "gender dichotomy" feminists, to whom she attributes essentialist beliefs, a failed recognition of the persuasive nature of discourse, and a wrongful attempt to relocate public rhetoric to private communication. Although Foss, Griffin, and Foss claim that Condit misreads invitational rhetoric and its assumptions (118-128), the problems Fulkerson, Pollock et al., and Condit raise may explain why invitational rhetoric has had little impact in the field.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

We read differently the essentialism that Condit attributes to invitational rhetoric. Condit writes, "The claim that persuasion is violent, or at least coercive, is based on an essentialist understanding of the human person. That is, it is based on viewing human beings as having stable, autonomous identities that are violated by external requests for change" (92). We think Condit's criticism is misdirected at biological/cultural separatism, and would more appropriately serve the debate regarding the value of invitational rhetoric if it were recast as a criticism of epistemological contradiction. Foss and Griffin base invitational rhetoric on two feminist principles: immanent value (all humans have inherent worth) and self-determination (all humans have the autonomous capacity to direct themselves). These two principles align with notions of feminist subjective epistemology explicated in *Women's Ways of Knowing* and actually run counter to the dialogic goals of invitational rhetoric. Herein lies a major contradiction in the theory's underpinnings that needs to be resolved.

A subjective epistemological stance rejects external authority and knowledge while looking internally to intuition and personal experience as the basis for knowing. Goldberger summarizes the subjectivist position: "Knowing is personal, private, and based on intuition and/or feeling states rather than on thought and articulated ideas that are defended with evidence" (5). Although *Women's Ways of Knowing* is seen as a watershed moment in recognizing women's capacity for looking to themselves as authorities, the notion that "truth is necessarily a private matter and . . . should not be imposed on others" (70) leads subjectivists to value their personal truths to the exclusion of outside sources of knowledge. When subjectivist 'mowers become too interior, they become "stubbornly committed to their view of things and unwilling to expose themselves to alternative conceptions" (84). We do not want to discount the positive aspects of subjectivist knowing that pioneers like Mary Belenky and Nancy Goldberger have documented because, indeed, what women know on the basis of subjective experience does matter. Gearhart and, subsequently, Foss and Griffin appear to develop a form of rhetoric based on subjectivist knowing. If the goal of invitational rhetoric is engagement in dialogue through offering and willingness to yield, yet the participants are communicating based on a subjective position, then a fundamental contradiction is set up and true dialogue is compromised.

More insight into this contradiction is evident in the way invitational rhetoric deals with the concept of *change*. Foss and Griffin argue that traditional definitions of rhetoric are based in the notion that a speaker's persuasive language is aimed at changing others for the purposes of gaining control over them (3). Indeed, the core of invitational rhetoric rests on the premise that there are times when a rhetor's goal is not about change, although they recognize that change *might* be a *result* of invitational rhetoric. However, Foss and Griffin qualify the nature of change as they theoretically conceive it:

> In the traditional model, change is defined as a shift in the audience in the direction requested by the rhetor, who then has gained some measure of power and control over the audience. In invitational rhetoric, change occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas. As rhetors and audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be compared in a process of discovery and questioning that may lead to transformation for themselves and others. (6)

In their defense against Condit's critique of their unwillingness to see change as integral to most, if not all, human discursive interaction, Foss, Griffin, and Foss write, "We agree with Condit that interaction with others

constantly produces change in individuals" (125). They further qualify their own position by explaining, "Critical to invitational rhetoric is a reliance on the input and suggestions of others; the invitational rhetor's goal is to understand the position of others and not to close the self off from them" (125-126). In other words, invitational rhetors want change as much as traditional rhetors, but the mechanism for achieving change appears to differ greatly.

Yet, another problem surfaces when one considers that the definitions of immanent value and self-determination suggest a reluctance towards change, which parallels the subjectivist's resistance to outside influence (Belenky et al. 76-86). Immanent value is a feminist principle undergirding invitational rhetoric, and it is based on Foss and Griffin's (1995) understanding of Starhawk's complex philosophy of the individual's position related to spiritual paganism and witchcraft (4; *see also* Foss, Foss, and Griffin 160-190; Foss and Griffin, "Feminist Perspective" 333-337). Immanent value is defined as "every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value . . . .Concomitant with a recognition of the immanent value of another individual is the eschewal of forms of communication that seek to change that individual's unique perspective to that held by the rhetor" (Foss and Griffin 4). Immanent value is then linked to the feminist principle of self-determination:

> Grounded in a respect for others, self-determination allows individuals to make their own decisions about how they wish to live their lives. Self-determination involves the recognition that audience members are the authorities on their own lives and accords respect to others' capacity and right to constitute their worlds as they choose. (Foss and Griffin 4)

These definitions are highly subjective; they suggest that the self is the ideal knower and support a view of the individual as isolated and separate from the negative influence of others. The emphasis on the solitary self, contained within a natural order, contrasts the notions of offering and willingness to yield, which are contingent upon the interrelationship of people and change. How can any new understanding between speaker and listener be reached if the self is the center of knowledge and external influences are seen as attacks on self-determination and human value? It can't, although invitational rhetoric suggests that the change related to offering and yielding is qualitatively or morally different from the change related to traditional persuasion. This also accounts for the choice of the term *transformation* rather than *change.* Transformation is equated with morally appropriate, dialogic change emanating from deep within the individual, whereas change is located within the rhetor's intents and motivations and may not be in the best interest of the listener.

Condit, however, points out that change is a fact of discourse, regardless of ethical motivations (104-105). This is a point well taken, and one that we wish to link further into an epistemological position. Knowledge arises out of what Lorraine Code (1991) calls the subjective-objective tension in human interaction, and notes that it is particularly manifest in gendered relationships (7-12). Regardless of one's interior, or subjective, position, we cannot help but change and be changed when we talk to others, no matter how resistant we are. In fact, a willingness to yield asks both speaker and listener to be willing to change their minds as a result of the dialogue they engage in together. New understanding implies learning and learning is change—often transformative. Because true subjectivist knowers resist looking anywhere but to themselves for knowledge, this kind of knower as a participant in invitational rhetoric logically doesn't make sense.

Given this epistemological discrepancy, we suggest a realignment towards Code's dialogic model of knowing, or subjective-objective position, that is based on the (feminist) concept of *knowing otherss* Code argues (27ff.) that despite historical inattention to the knower in main(male)stream epistemology theory development, the sex of the knower does matter and has important implications for social action, including discourse. Her critique follows this line of argument: Historically, objectivity, equated with male, has been falsely privileged at the expense of subjectivity, equated with female. In deconstructing this opposition between objectivity and subjectivity with regard to knowledge and men's oppression of women, Code argues for a different model of knowing that is based in the interrelatedness of objectivity and subjectivity. Specifically, she makes a feminist argument that theorists who have a profound interest in epistemology must move away from a physics model

for knowing objects based on objectivity, distance, and value-neutrality to a social science model that recognizes the role of subjectivity in its quest to understand how we know other people.

Knowing other people depends on a definition of self very different from the unified (and by implication, essential) self that can be interpreted in invitational rhetoric. Rejecting essentialist beliefs in a unitary, core self, Code redefines self using Linda Alcoff's (1988) notion of *positionality* (433-435). Alcoff's idea is similar to the theoretical concept of *standpoint* developed, among others, by Iris Young (1990). To wit: A person's identity is "relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on" (qtd. in Code 180). Code then draws the implication for rhetorical theory:

> In fact, "positionality" explicitly resists taking any one position as referent, be it the position of the masculine norm; of white, middle-class feminism; of female separatism; or whatever. The point is not to advocate quiescent liberal tolerance, however. It is to analyze, assess, assume accountability for the positions one occupies, while engaging in *critical dialogue* with, or resistance against, occupants of other positions, in cognizance of their political implications. (180; emphasis added)

This position would clearly release invitational rhetoric from Condit's accusation of separatist rhetoric and squarely move it into position as a form of political rhetoric that has the potential to release people from structural forms of oppression.

Standpoint, however, does not constitute the totality of Code's analysis. She links positionality to Annette Baier's concept of *second person* to define the links between subjective-objective as contextual and relational. Second personhood emphasizes the communicative possibilities involved in the process of coming to know ourselves (Baler 90). In other words, how we understand ourselves depends on connections to other people. Baier's second personhood is a way for Code to argue for the dual importance of autonomy (subjective) and interdependence (objective). Code then concludes:

> It is possible to endorse Baier's "second person" claim without renouncing individuality, if "individuality" is not equated with "individualism": she shows that uniqueness, creativity, and moral accountability grow out of interdependence and continually turn back to it for affirmation and continuation. (82)

Thus autonomy grows out of knowing other people. The model of knowing that is "knowing other people" builds on the fluidity and contextual nature of one's subjective position, which is open to interpretation and constantly in renegotiation:

> ... knowing other people, precisely because of fluctuations and contradictions of subjectivity, is an ongoing, communicative, interpretive process. It can never be fixed or complete: any fixity that one might claim for "the self" is at best a fixity in flux; but something must be fixed to "contain" this flux even enough to permit reference to and ongoing relationships with "this person." Assumptions that one knows another person have to be made within the terms of this tension. (Code 38)

Diana Fuss's deconstruction of the essentialist-constructionist binary in *Essentially Speaking* confirms the tension of "knowing other people" Code describes. Fuss's argument that there is "no essence to essentialism" and "essentialism subtends the very idea of constructionism" (4-5) reinforces this idea of establishing a "fixity in flux" to enable the dialogic exchange that is knowing other people. Instead of treating people as if they can be known as objects are (traditional epistemological view), recognizing the epistemic value of "knowing other people" brings in elements of interpretation, strategy, and community previously unrealized.

Knowing other people parallels the kind of dialogue based in offering and willingness to yield. The value of knowing other people as an epistemic foundation for invitational rhetoric is that knowing is a dynamic, communicative process located in the relationship of the self to others where the knower wants to participate in generating knowledge with others. The definition of second personhood as subjective-objective is a model for talking about the self in the larger context of the socio-political milieu and is more consistent with offering and willingness to yield than more popular feminist notions of subjectivism offered by Belenky and her colleagues.

We also begin to see that it is possible to answer Condit's charge regarding rhetoric-as-public and communication-as-private (105). While subjectivism locates knowledge in a core self, which often leads to a rejection of external knowledge, knowing other people welcomes the interaction between self and other because it is based on an understanding that people are interdependent and that knowledge grows out of this engagement between the self and another. Moreover, knowing other people means caring about and wanting to learn about others. Code writes, ¯Second persons' engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement—whether in fondness or in fury" (86). Clearly, knowing other people more readily enacts the concepts of offering and willingness to yield as strategies in dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

STANDPOINT HERMENEUTICS

Our second point is to redirect invitational rhetoric as a synthesis of rhetoric and what we are terming *standpoint hermeneutics.* If, at the fundamental level, rhetoric is defined as the art of persuasion and hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, then it is clear that offering and willingness to yield are embedded in philosophical hermeneutic practice (Gadamer, *Truth and Method),* although we wish to argue that invitational rhetoric is actually a synthesis of rhetoric and philosophical hermeneutics *(see* Jost and Hyde, 1997) bounded by feminist standpoint theory (e.g., Jagger; Tanesini; Young). This redirection shifts the focus to the strengths of invitational rhetoric and away from questions of whether invitational rhetoric is or can be rightly called a non-persuasive rhetoric. Furthermore, when invitational rhetoric is identified as a hermeneutic practice, the interpretive and dialogic possibilities of offering and willingness to yield gain greater significance and resonance for everyday use. Because we are "teasing out" the notion of standpoint from Gadamer's (1998) conception of philosophical hermeneutics, the next portion of the essay will be divided accordingly to reflect the disparate bodies of literature needed to make the argument.

Philosophical Hermeneutics

Drawing upon Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* "Rhetoric and Hermeneutics," "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Ideology-Critique," and *Truth and Method* as the primary sources, philosophical hermeneutics distills down to *understanding,* a task that involves human nature's questioning of the world around us and the implicit traditions that constitute the present state of things. Hermeneutics has traditionally been described as a way to intrepret biblical and legal texts. In short, an interpreter tries to make sense of a text by constantly reassessing pre-conceived meanings in light of new ones gained in the process of trying to read to understand. The constant reassessment of meaning brings the interpreter closer to understanding, although exact understanding of the text can never be reached because the text is always understood through the reader's historicity juxtaposed with the text's historicity. This is the familiar hermeneutic circle, conceived by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and elaborated by Gadamer as a fundamental process of inquiry in *Truth and Method* and *Philosophical Hermeneutics.* Gadamer sees philosophical hermeneutics as something quite beyond textual understanding; indeed, hermeneutics has the potential to unlock all of human understanding:

> Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he [sic] encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emanicipatory reflection. ("Ideology-Critique" 313)

Drawing on the tradition of Schleiermacher, Gadamer agrees that text and speech are hermeneutical sites, and he demonstrates the link between rhetoric and hermeneutics: "But where speaking is an art, so is understanding. Thus all speech and all texts are basically related to the art of understanding, hermeneutics, and this explains the connection between rhetoric (which is part of aesthetics) and hermeneutics . . ." *(Truth and Method* 188). Further, the process of understanding is conducted verbally, such that "it is not for nothing that the special problematic of understanding and the attempt to master it as an art—the concern of hermeneutics—belongs traditionally to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric" *(Truth and Method* 384). Gadamer's acceptance of Schleiermacher's psychological view of hermeneutics provides the fundamental rationale for invitational rhetoric: "What is to be understood is now not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker or author" *(Truth and Method* 186).

Conversation, according to Gadamer, is a process of coming to understanding. When dialogue is entered into as hermeneutic practice, participants are not engaged in changing each other's mind, but are interested in gaining a better understanding of the self and the other, which *might* lead to transformation. As in textual hermeneutics, each conversational partner brings his or her prejudices[5] to the conversation and tries to work through these to have a "true conversation":

> Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself [sic] to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. Thus we do not relate the other's opinion to him but to our own opinions and views. *(Truth and Method* 385)

Just as textual interpreters must be "sensitive to the text's alterity" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 269), conversational partners must be open to the "otherness" of the other and of the self. We will elaborate this point in the discussion on feminist standpoint.

The resonance between Gadamer's definition of true conversation and invitational rhetoric's concepts of offering and willingness to yield is unmistakable. When invitational rhetoric is linked to philosophical hermeneutics, Fulkerson's criticism that offering and willingness to yield do not lead to action (206) is exposed as inaccurate. Each person is engaged in trying to understand the other person's ideas and positions. Gadamer accepts that no one can escape his or her prejudices and historical location to completely know the other. Like Gadamer, we realize we cannot step outside or deny our positions, and as feminists we don't want to. Therefore, both participants must recognize that in trying to reach understanding, they have to consider what they bring to the interpretive moment and yield assumptions and misunderstandings to better understand the other person's perspective. In this hermeneutic exchange, to understand is to act. Active discussion, reflection, and reassessment based on the recognition of difference are integral components to conversations that might lead to new understanding. Foss and Griffin's description and analysis of Sally Miller Gearhart's conversation with the anti-abortion advocate (14-15) is not just an illustration of invitational rhetoric; it is the demonstration of the link between rhetoric and hermeneutics bounded by standpoint.

In Gadamer's concept *of fusion of horizons* lies the transformative actuality of dialogic communication. In defining *horizon*, note that Gadamer opens the door for a subsequent discussion of standpoint theory, which will be presented in the next subsection of this essay.

> We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of *"horizon."* The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. . . . In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his [sic] ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him.... *(Truth and Method* 302-303)

Understanding is the fusion of horizons of the I and Thou, to use the terminology of Buber and, according to Hekman, Gadamer when he says that "language is `I-less" and "language speaks us rather than we speak it" (qtd. in Hekman 66). What "I" knows expands in communicating with "Thou." In dialogue with others who participate with the qualities of openness, offering, willingness to yield, and here we will add Foss and Griffin's third feminist principle of equality (5-6), horizons grow and fuse resulting in understanding. Timothy Crucius explains the process in a positive light: "Our horizons do not fuse in the sense of complete identity; if I become the other, I lose the other's friendly opposition, which prevents me from becoming too hopelessly myself. Rather our horizons fuse in the sense of a mutual enlargement of horizons, which still remain different" (40). This is exactly what happened, in our analysis, between Sally Miller Gearhart and the anti-abortion advocate (Foss and Griffin 14). The conversational partners remained distinct, but the fusing of horizons resulted in a deep, personal (we might add rhetorical) transformation.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Invitational rhetoric is offered as an alternative to patriarchal forms of persuasion. It is clear that this alternative is based in feminist political ideology, which we will argue is feminist standpoint theory. We have already established a fundamental line of argument that links invitational rhetoric to Code's subjective-objective model of knowing, to Alcoff's concept of the knower's position, to Baier's idea of second person, to Gadamer's interrelated concepts of prejudice, historicity, and fusion of horizons. Although all of these concepts link to feminist standpoint theory, none explicitly makes that political claim. We do so now for two very important reasons: first, feminist standpoint theory provides a boundary line against which Gadamer's fusion of horizons finds its limitations, and second, feminist standpoint theory provides the strongest rationale for the claim that invitational rhetoric is both a hermeneutic and a rhetoric leading communicators to understanding and change through dialogic persuasion/action. Feminist standpoint theory thus releases invitational rhetoric from the charges that it is neither persuasive (Condit 95) nor inactive (Fulkerson 206).

Standpoint theory has undergone a number of serious developments since Hartsock's early work in 1983, where she extended Marxian political theory to notions of a feminist standpoint based in biological reproduction, structural differences in women's and men's work, and hierarchical dualisms.[6] Recognizing that early standpoint theorists, including Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Carol Gilligan, and Audre Lorde, established their central concern for women's oppression in essentialist terms, we emphasize here our interpretation of invitational rhetoric as a rhetorical theory that is grounded in the notions of later standpoint theory. The theoretical conceptualizations of Alison Jaggar (382-389) and Iris Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (229234) more directly reflect the position taken in this essay.

Of import to rhetorical (Davis) and communication theorists (Wood) is the way in which discourse serves a speaker's standpoint in her or his resistance to oppression. It is here that we begin to see convergence with invitational rhetoric and hermeneutics. How so? Standpoint theory explains a range of women's oppression by exploring the links between (a) the situated knowledge (Collins) that results from a communicator's gendered life experience and position(ality) in social relations (Young, *Intersecting Voices),* and (b) structural power differentials that exist between people as a result of patriarchy and positionality (Code; Collins; Davis; hooks). Communicators/ rhetors from different standpoints will have no choice but to engage what Gadamer calls ". . . a central motif of all hermeneutics, namely, the task of overcoming and assimilating the strange . ." ("Rhetoric and Hermeneutics" 53). Invitational rhetoric provides the means to engage "the strange," particularly when rhetors occupy unequal positions of power. But, rather than fusing horizons to become a single mindset, standpoint theory reinforces the argument that this total fusion of understanding will *never* happen, at least not from an experiential or positionality point of view. Rhetors from significantly different standpoints have only symbolic communication since their experiences are so divergent. The hermeneutic quest for understanding then becomes a rhetorical enterprise when offering and willingness to yield are the primary tools to uncover the situated knowledge of both oppressed and oppressor. Recognizing the standpoint of the communicators/rhetors allows the hermeneutical-rhetorical situation to strive for an active exploration, through discourse, of what Collins calls "the matrix of domination" (225), or an interlocked oppression that results from the totality of one's race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, etc.

Standpoint theory also provides a response to Code's criticism of Gadamerian hermeneutics that (1) not everyone may unequivocally desire a fusion of horizons, and (2) Gadamer does not account for power in social interaction (201-203). We argue here that invitational rhetoric, if viewed as a standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric, allows rhetors to negotiate discourse by recognizing the matrix of oppression inherent in any gendered rhetorical situation. Through offering and willingness to yield, rhetors can strive to achieve hermeneutical-objective understanding of each other's position that has the possible end result of rhetorical-active transformation of oppression through shifts in power. Only through the combined use of standpoint theory and hermeneutics do we have a tool to confront power relations. In fact, Foss and Griffin's example of Adrienne Rich's acceptance speech at the 1974 National Book Awards (13-14) is evidence that standpoint clearly influenced Rich's (and Lorde and Walker's) choices to challenge the matrix of oppression that operates in the hierarchy of the American literati.

Without an explicit link to standpoint theory, invitational rhetoric loses some strength in its very important claim that ". . invitational rhetoric provides a mode of communication for women and other marginalized groups to use in their efforts to transform systems of domination and oppression" (Foss and Griffin 16). Since this claim implies rhetorical intent, it causes us to examine Foss and Griffin's external condition of *freedom,* which is set up as. a prerequisite for the possibility of mutual understanding" (12). Freedom in the rhetorical situation is viewed on several levels: as unrestricted content or topics for discussion, as the ability for all participants to speak, as unlimited options developed by both rhetor and listeners, and freedom of choice to reject the rhetor's perspective (Foss and Griffin 12). If standpoint theory truly undergirds invitational rhetoric, then this fourth level of freedom needs to be qualified; otherwise, marginalized people have no chance of ever shifting power structures to eliminate oppression. Furthermore, although we can understand that some listeners may easily choose not to accept a rhetor's position, it is difficult to see that someone may not even try to understand a rhetor's position, as Foss and Griffin claim may happen. The whole point of invitational rhetoric is to engage hermeneutically.

We wish to elaborate this point further because we think it is important. Using the Rogerian notion of unconditional positive regard as the framing device, Foss and Griffin state:

> Freedom of choice is made available to audiences, as well, in that, in invitational rhetoric, the audience's lack of acceptance of or adherence to the perspective articulated by the rhetor truly makes no difference to the rhetor. . . . Either outcome—acceptance or rejection—is seen as perfectly acceptable by the invitational rhetor, who is not offended, disappointed, or angry if audience members choose not to adopt a particular perspective. (12)

It is then a rather audacious conclusion to draw that "should the audience choose not to accept the vision articulated by the rhetor, the connection between the rhetor and the audience remains intact, and the audience still is valued and appreciated by the rhetor" (Foss and Griffin 12). Pure prejudice, in all is virulent forms, simply renders problematic such an "unconditional" relationship between rhetor and audience. bell hooks makes this point when talking about spaces where "liberatory black subjectivity" can play out safely, and it is *not* in discursive interaction "where such moves challenge, disrupt, threaten—where repression is real" *(Yearning* 22). hooks, in fact, would probably argue the efficacy of all three external conditions, safety, immanent value, and freedom, as simply not possible in everyday interracial communication. Yet, we support invitational rhetoric's claim for these ideal conditions to the extent that rhetors must *strive* for these conditions if constructive understanding and transformation is the goal. Further, we recognize that there may be differences in the way invitational rhetoric manifests itself when used to transform social systems versus individual people. The conditions of freedom, in particular, that bound the rhetorical situation may operate quite differently across contexts and would need to be examined carefully when considering the strategic and efficacious use of invitational rhetoric.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our goal in this essay was to emend invitational rhetoric to strenghten its philosophical undergirdings, to release it from unfounded criticism, and to move it into position as a serious rhetorical theory. To that end, we made several strategic moves. The first was to discover and revise its epistemological stance to reflect Lorraine Code's concepts of knowing others and second personhood. The second was to connect Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to rhetoric, and the third was to take Gadamer's emphasis on position and historicity and develop the connection to feminist standpoint theory. These changes have important implications for both rhetorical theory and feminist praxis.

Three primary contributions to rhetorical theory can be added to four claims already made by Foss and Griffin and the tenets offered by Foss, Griffin, and Foss. First, our refraining of invitational rhetoric as a standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric serves as another heuristic test of Jost and Hyde's call for the intersection of hermeneutics and rhetoric, particularly as a "call of conscience understood as the *topos* of *topoi,* the place of places that opens up the human world 'as' a world of values, commitments, ideals, agendas, interests, and needs and that, in so doing, summons us to ourselves and to others" (1). Invitational rhetoric refrained highlights the

dual necessity of understanding self and other and being able to articulate a point of view that has the potential to transcend difference in deep and humane ways. This fusion of standpoint hermeneutics and rhetoric leads to the realization that "you're not me" in communication with others. We cannot underscore enough how such a seemingly obvious conclusion is missing from much of the communication we have observed in our daily lives, both in public and private contexts. If Foss, Griffin, and Foss's claim that "the invitational rhetor's goal is to understand the position of others and not to close the self off from them" (126) is true, then our suggested theoretical move opens the door for invitational rhetoric to take the lead in helping us to explain how understanding can lead to action as a profoundly persuasive process.

Second, our shift to standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric suggests that persuasion-as-action is as much a result of understanding as it is argument. Understanding one's standpoint through dialogue leads to rhetoric's epistemic function of (socially) constructing knowledge. In this case, rhetoric does not lead to truth; rather argument and understanding through shared horizons leads to a series of truths that are necessary for both the subjective world of individuals and the objective world of social relationships. Our position supports Foss, Griffin, and Foss in their claim that persuasion need not be a traditional process of Aristotelian argument and that, in fact, the communicative options available to us today go beyond the naive supposition that public speaking is the only true form of persuasion. A standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric also demonstrates more clearly how invitational rhetoric is enacted when communicators disagree and the theoretical basis from which the process is derived.

Third, our epistemological realignment allows invitational rhetoric to bridge the private and public spheres of discourse. In shifting to the position of knowing others, we can agree with Code's claim that there is a range of potential for dialogue:

> The practice of "second person" discourse has the emancipatory potential to open up freer discursive spaces than those constructed and constrained by the objective, impersonal forms of address characteristic of the anonymous "public" activities of late capitalist societies. In claiming this promise for discursive strategies, I am not ignoring the intrication of discourse and forms of address within power structures that cannot be overthrown singlehandedly or all at once. Neither, though, would it be reasonable to minimize the local successes that feminists have achieved in micropractices of restructuring personal, social, and political institutions and relations. (86-87)

Clearly, second person discourse is possible in public arenas where dialogue is seen as a potential for problem solving. The notion of public argument is viewed as unacceptable and culturally damaging by theorists such as Deborah Tannen; while notions of dialogue are advocated in organizations as acceptable forms of learning to meet change (e.g., Brown; Kellett; Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen; Putnam; Senge et al.). If businesses and schools can effectively use dialogue as public communication to effect meaningful change, then it appears that invitational rhetoric does have the potential to expand our conceptualizations of rhetoric, transcending the public-private dichotomy and the rhetoric-communication debate. Even in politics, conceived as the most "public" of rhetorical situations, we are witness to town hall meetings where debate and dialogue converge to help people understand issues and come together as a community. These types of rhetorical situations may also serve as criteria for helping to address Pollack et al.'s concerns about how to discern when to use more "traditional" forms of persuasion versus alternatives like invitational rhetoric (150).

Invitational rhetoric, as emended here, also illuminates a commitment to feminist praxis, which bell hooks defines, using Freirean terms, as "action and reflection on the world in order to change it" (14). By engaging in dialogic communication stemming from a standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric, everyone functions as rhetors who have the capacity to see self and other in the full "matrix of oppression," reflect on the meaning of that standpoint, and act to shift the balance of power. In this sense, we believe that invitational rhetoric is now a theory that is grounded more strongly in its political ideology. Invitational rhetoric becomes a feminist tool for everyday living and opens the door for a true participatory democracy. We can see this practice at work in both the communication and composition classroom.

As coauthors of this essay, we actually began our discussion of invitational rhetoric in a dialogue about applications of feminist rhetorical theory to composition and public speaking. We have found over the course of

our dialogue that standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric provides the theoretical framework for classroom praxis. Embedded in the theory are values of inquiry and exploration, the social dimensions of knowledge, the importance of difference and positionality, and the desire to eliminate oppression through trying to reach mutual understanding of difference. In public speaking and composition classrooms, invitational rhetoric articulates the way to engage in written and spoken dialogue that reflects hooks's notion of feminist praxis. Although hooks talks about the elements of dialogue and personal experience in "engaged pedagogy" (186), standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric more deeply theorizes the kind of dialogue that might lead to transformative moments for students as individuals and/or as a group. In public speaking and composition classrooms, our students often assume their peers mirror their values and beliefs; they seek connection in sameness in what they hear and read. As a result, their reading and communication reach early closure with statements like "I can relate to that," which embrace similarity and resist difference. Implicitly or explicitly, they have been taught to try to erase difference, resulting in little understanding about how to talk or write to an audience beyond themselves. Nor do students imagine communicating across difference towards mutual understanding. Practicing a pedagogy grounded in standpoint hermeneutical rhetoric means we can emphasize critical reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills that are necessary for dialogic engagement as students read texts or speak to other people.

Collaboration as praxis is also implied in our point of view. If invitational rhetoric is a model for constructing social knowledge, then we can readily demonstrate how dialogue is a tool for understanding problems of power and difference. Offering and willingness to yield become the strategies to use in collaboration with each other in the classroom. As Makau so concisely puts it, invitational rhetoric "stresses *connection* over *advocacy* and reconceptualizes the relationship of rhetor and audience" (139). Connection implies the sharing of authority as a way to equalize the way learners communicate ideas, an argument put forward in Wallace and Ewald's *Mutuality in the Rhetoric and Composition Class.* As teachers we can practice invitational rhetoric ourselves. Just as important, we help our students to practice dialogue as a tool for social participation that has transformative possibilities.

Finally, feminist praxis requires a different mode for accomplishing the business of life. Although Audre Lorde expressed it as altering "old blueprints of expectation and response" since "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (123), it is Iris Young who offers the new blueprint of "dialogic community." We are inspired by the notion that invitational rhetoric has the power both to dismantle the master's house and recreate a community where all people have space at the table of participatory democracy.

Notes

[1] Note our choice of terminology. Our respect for Foss, Foss, and Griffin is such that we want to improve through a critical editing rather than the more audacious *amend.* We are not interested in changing for the better by assuming that we are the more capable theorists. Rather, invitational rhetoric is, in our minds, an overlooked and underutilized theory that has incredible power. We are grateful to Foss, Foss, and Griffin for their contribution to feminist rhetorical theorys

[2] *See* pp. 274-280 in Foss, Foss, and Griffin's *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* for a complete explication of Gearhart's term *enfoldment.*

[3] Foss, Foss, and Griffin's new book, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories,* has been on the market since 1999, so it is perhaps premature to predict the text's impact. Since it is designed as both textbook and reference, it has the potential to gain widespread use in the field.

[4] Note that Susan Jarratt levels the same type of criticism at Sally Miller Gearhart in an essay entitled "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict." Clearly, defining argument and responding to communication contexts with action carry import in both speaking and writing contexts. The fact is, a similar line of criticism has run against invitational rhetoric, and by extension, its foundation in Gearhart's work.

[5] Note that Gadamer goes back to the denotative definition of prejudice: "a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been examined" *(Truth and Method* 270). Prejudice here takes on either positive or negative value, but it nevertheless is a tentative judgment. Hermeneutics allows the participant to deconstruct his or her tentative judgments that are bound up in historical knowledge and tradition.

[6] *See* Chapter 6, "The Importance of Standpoint in Feminism," in Alessandra Tanesini's *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies* for a concise history of feminist standpoint theory development in North America and Europe. Judith Evans also offers a concise critique of the essentialism of early theory in *Feminist Theory Today*.

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