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Ethnographic Questions
and Ethological Encounters

Paul Cook

> We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—
> and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves—
> how could it happen that we should ever *find* ourselves?
> It has rightly been said: "Where your treasure is, there will
> your heart be also"; *our* treasure is where the beehives of
> our knowledge are. We are constantly making for them,
> being by nature winged creatures and honey-gatherers of
> the spirit; there is one thing alone we really care about from
> the heart—"*bringing something home.*"
> —Friedrich Nietzsche[1]

Given that "crisis" is now everywhere—the rest of the country having only recently re-discovered a term those of us in the humanities have known too well for too long—it might seem opportunistic, or even intellectually dishonest, to take as a site for examination the ubiquitous sense that rhetoric and composition studies (if not the entire English apparatus) is in the throes of a crisis over what it *is*.[2] While I don't want to give the impression of vaunting one of our many "crises" over the others, it appears that rhetoric and composition's identity crisis—our penchant for self-examination—has received a lot of attention lately. This essay considers not only the prevalence of this self-questioning, which seems fairly self-evident, but also the forces circulating within the discipline of which the posing of these types of questions is symptomatic.[3] What style of engagement, in other words, is implied by this self-reflexive mode of questioning?

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To address this question, I reconsider the Dartmouth Seminar, a pivotal moment in the disciplining of what would later become rhetoric and composition studies. Though perhaps not the "origin" of our self-questioning, Dartmouth is an important precursor, and my reconsideration in this essay unpacks the institutional, disciplinary, and conceptual presuppositions inscribed in this conference's guiding questions: ostensibly, "What *is* English?" but also, by virtue of how the discipline would later develop, "What is rhetoric and composition?" In some respects still latent, these presuppositions have shaped the conditions of possibility for how we encounter and *do* writing pedagogy in rhetoric and composition studies. And, while the discipline has proven quite capable of launching a barrage of responses to these questions of identity, my argument here is concerned to show how we might engage the forces that are expressed in questions whose validity, I suspect, usually strike us as foregone conclusions. In short, how are we to account for the fact that this pervasive sense of crisis is almost invariably reterritorialized by questions of identity, of who or *what* we are?

On Disciplinary Identity (And Other Entanglements)

But first, what exactly do *we* mean by "we"?[4] As James Berlin, John Brereton, Robert Connors, Susan Miller, and many others have taken pains to show, the conceptual, theoretical, practical, and discursive territory we now generally call "rhetoric and composition studies" developed alongside (and in most accounts, directly underneath) English studies in the traditional sense, generally understood as the hermeneutic study of literary texts and contexts. "Rhet-comp" in its contemporary state suggests a rather labyrinthine complex of theoretical-political emphases, textual approaches, specialty research itineraries, pedagogical concerns, and a whole slew of what might loosely be called "content areas," ranging from classical rhetoric to professional and technical communication to cultural and new media studies. Given its sprawling, Wal-Mart-like inventory, it's no surprise that rhetoric and composition's relationship with the rest of English (itself a polyglot, cavernous conglomeration) has been described as "utterly vexed" (Worsham, "Rhetoric" 395) and even likened to so many "tangled roots" (Goggin 63). Articulating this relationship is

even more difficult, but is perhaps most noticeable in the traces left by writing instruction, particularly the first-year writing sequence, courses that at most institutions are "shared" by both English and rhetoric and composition (Crowley). (Though, importantly, the Herculean task of theorizing, administering, and obsessing over these courses seems to have fallen to rhetoric and composition some time ago.)

As David Shumway and Craig Dionne note, "English was from the outset . . . in control of the teaching of writing" (8), but the teaching of writing (and the pedagogical theories that were later employed to buttress this project) was not considered a disciplinary practice proper to the generally interpretive, philologically and critically inflected discipline of English. David Russell has suggested that rhetoric and composition made its disciplinary debut through a process of "purification" in which "English purified itself by constructing literature and composition as two separate activities, one professional [that is, disciplinary], the other not" (40). These demarcated activities—the teaching of writing, on the one hand, and the meticulous maintenance and interpretation of a literary canon, on the other—were subsumed under the umbrella term "English" and housed in departments of the same name. In keeping with Richard Ohmann's concise observation that "literature is the subject that the profession chose, but composition is the subject that created the profession" (93), English was able to sell the "messy work" of composition to the university as a service to other disciplines and, in the process, absolve itself of anything that wasn't "pure" literary study (Russell 53).[5]

The gradual but dynamic 130-year purgation of "low" composition (in the sense of the remedial course in theme writing) and rhetoric (in the sense of the oratorical tradition of the old classical college) continued more or less unabated until the 1960s and 1970s, when incipient rhetoric and composition began a process of rapid professionalization and, as Russell puts it, "Dame Rhetoric finally found her way into English via the back stairs" (56). Not-coincidentally, the Dartmouth Seminar "happened" at around the same time, in 1966, and was for many "traditional" English scholars and teachers a fresh confrontation with the sorts of pedagogical questions that would later coalesce around the discipline we now know, with some local variations, as rhetoric and composition studies. But the boundary work begun by English's self-purification didn't simply cease

when rhetoric and composition "returned" as a proper discipline with graduate programs, journals, listservs, tenure-lines, and its own MLA Division. Like all would-be disciplines, rhetoric and composition—as if to the manor born—has always been quite diligent about performing its ablutions, particularly when it comes to the ongoing process(es) of disciplinary demarcation.

Several scholars have recently commented on this rather large catalogue of disciplinary soul-searching. Chris Gallagher diagnoses it as an "almost neurotic self-questioning" and blames rhetoric and composition's fetish for "rethinking the discipline" on our inattention to professional practices, suggesting that our tendency to conflate disciplinarity and professionalism represents an "ideological impasse" (76, 82). Because "disciplines have a limitless capacity to assimilate discourse," he writes, "our collective hand-wringing over disciplinarity *becomes* disciplinary discourse" (80).[6] Karen Kopelson recently characterized this self-questioning as a tendency to "preoccupy ourselves with ourselves" (774); she worries that rhetoric-composition's "proclivity for self-examination" distracts us from "taking up other critical concerns and . . . making other, more innovative and far-reaching forms of knowledge" (775). Kopelson urges rhetoricians and compositionists to "leave our identity crisis behind" and put an end to "our disciplinary indulgence," noting in closing the "deep irony" that her article is "yet another instantiation of the very work [she is] suggesting is detrimental to our disciplinary growth" (775).[7] In "Not Your Father's English Department: The Futures Market on the Discipline," a 2008 talk on the future(s) of English studies, Jeffrey T. Nealon argues that retrenchment—our habit of retreating back into more traditional, streamlined articulations of what we do when faced with a "crisis" situation—is "a poor strategy." He suggests we embrace diversification and "revisit the 'crisis' narrative" so prevalent in disciplinary conversations about our identity and purpose. "Only in the inverted bizzaro world of academics," Nealon quips, "can the centrifugal forces that make up 'English' be thematized as a crisis or a fall from a golden age."

But getting over our hang-ups with identity or "getting past our hand-wringing over disciplinarity" is a tall order indeed, and it's highly doubtful such a move would be either desirable or possible (Gallagher 86). A viable refiguring of the discipline would first have to work within rhetoric and

composition's boundaries and deeply entrenched professional arrange-
ments, rather than just set them aside. If, as Gallagher suggests, rethinking
the discipline is a "satisfying but ultimately empty" ritual (not unlike, I
suppose, a professed nonbeliever who nevertheless dutifully attends
church on Easter), why then is this a practice in which rhetoricians and
compositionists routinely engage (87)? And why *is* it so satisfying? The
impetus to move beyond our quest for self-identity is understandable
enough, as though just beyond yonder hill we'll finally attain the Zen-like
bliss of disciplinary oneness. But if the only impasse is that which is
inscribed in the very practice(s) of self-definition to which we have
undoubtedly grown accustomed, then it pays to examine precisely why
(and how) these issues have proven to be such sticking points for rhetoric
and composition studies. As an historical confluence of ideas, thinkers,
papers, and forces, the Dartmouth Seminar provides a glimpse of a style
of engagement structuring the conditions of possibility—as well as the
"conditions of *imposability*" (Weber, "Limits" 19)—for what would
become rhetoric and composition. Dartmouth's legacy is still with us, but
perhaps not exactly in the ways we have thought.

What Are We? A Brief History of the Question(s)

> We must seek to do justice to teaching rather than to know
> what it is.
>
> —Bill Readings

In 1962, H.A. Gleason, Jr. asked "What Is English?" at the annual CCCC
meeting. His concern was to sound an alarm to his colleagues in English
as well as to those in other areas of the humanities that the discipline was
rapidly changing, that an "ancient and honorable tradition will not avail"
(2), and to generally assert that the old ways of doing things were not going
to be around forever. Such crisis-gesturing is familiar, of course, and was
hardly new even in 1962. Gleason goes on to carefully lay out his
projections and suggestions for the future of English, all the while variously
remarking on or mourning the loss of clear boundary lines among academic
fields, the death of traditional disciplinary identities, and the general
"remolding [of] intellectual life and its academic expression" (2). His

concern is not only with what the future may hold for the position of English in the academy, but also with the extent to which such a position is definable and nameable; in short, Gleason argues that in order to meet the brave new world before us, as well as remain an economically, scholarly, and intellectually viable discipline, what is needed is a "reform[ation] of [English studies'] internal structure" (7).

Fast-forward four years to Dartmouth College. The Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of English—or what we refer to now as simply the "Dartmouth Seminar"—convened in Hanover, New Hampshire, in late summer. As Joseph Harris explains in *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, the ostensible goal of the conference—which was well-attended by both American and British compositionists and educationalists—was "to begin by bringing all the participants together to address the question, 'What is English?'" and to "define English as a school subject and to outline the ways it might be best taught" (3, 1).[8] The responses, however, were far from homogeneous. As Harris wryly remarks, "The hope seems to have been to give some *clear shape* to what many thought an almost *formless* subject of instruction. This did not occur" (3; emphasis added). What did occur at Dartmouth was a decisive split along the fault-lines of the question itself. As Harris observes, for those scholars in the American camp, the question "What is English?" could be posed the same way one could pose the question "What is organic chemistry?" (7). The question prompted a mode of response that focused on fleshing out and filling in the "substance and method" of the discipline (Bruner 33). British educator John Dixon, a conference participant and author of the contemporaneous *Growth Through English* (1967), remarked that the "characteristic American strategy" was to examine "English" as an abstraction, conceptually distanced from its embeddedness in any particular space and apart from any actual students. In their 1969 report, Dixon and Wayne O'Neil echo this sentiment, maintaining that for the U.S. participants, "the work of the scholar comes first; only when his 'definition' is complete can schoolteachers begin to 'select and arrange applications'" (368).[9] For the Americans, Dixon and O'Neil claim, "What to do in the schools has yet to be defined: curriculum starts, as it were, from a tabula rasa in the classroom, and in the process of definition the scholar looks at the 'subject' in abstraction from the pupils who will be using and

operating in it" (368). The goal, in short, was to "defin[e] and consolidat[e] the subject matter of English" to better serve the teaching of writing (Harris 5). Once scholars had adequately defined the subject, then teachers could impart some variation of that subject to their students.

For James Britton and the other "growth theorists," most of whom were in the British camp, the proper response to the question focused on the material practices of teachers and students in the classroom, and how those matters were irrevocably tied to questions of pedagogical interaction. The key question was not so much "What is English?" as "What do we want students and teachers to be doing [in the writing classroom]?" (Harris 4). Against the American "academic rationalists in the study," Dixon and O'Neil portray the British attendees as "blind enthusiasts in the classroom" (368). Noting that "since Dartmouth their conflict has been less resolved than continually displaced," Harris succinctly describes the polarity this way: "The Americans tried to define the subject matter of English apart from the ways it is taught; the British saw the work of teachers and students as an intrinsic part of what that subject was" (13).

Indeed, Dartmouth is traditionally read as the cross-Atlantic meeting of two radically distinct ways of conceptualizing the teaching of English. As such, it can be viewed as an historical expression of the emergence and rigidification of two types of questions that, despite semantic appearances to the contrary, are, I submit, two sides of the same style of engagement: (1) the traditional, metaphysically-oriented question, "What *is* English?" and (2) the operationally-oriented "What *should* English *do*?" It's generally assumed that the key difference between the two questions is that while "What is English?" enables agenda setting or engenders a call to flesh out the parameters of the discipline, "What should English do?" facilitates responses that enable one to prescriptively define along the way. The former, that is, structurally prefigures a response that would sketch out the "stuff" of the discipline from an institutional or inter-disciplinary standpoint: "How do we self-identify vis-à-vis the academy or other disciplines?" Harris' remark that the American question was an "attempt to justify the study of English to other university experts" (5) suggests its role in what I previously cited as "boundary work," the continual, complex, and highly variable processes of differentiation and demarcation through which disciplines are formed and maintained (see

Gieryn; Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan; Russell). By contrast, "What *should* we do?" seems to evoke a certain conceptual *carte blanche* and interpellates responses thought through the space of the classroom and from a practitioner's vantage point rather than from the perspective of institutional identity. It also seems more closely aligned with self-identity through growth or performance: the "doing" of the discipline as a way to define the discipline.

But—and this is the key point—for all their semantic and practical-pedagogical differences, these questions have far more in common than retrospectives of the Dartmouth Seminar have commonly allowed, precisely because what is being asked and what is being sought after remains ("essentially") unchanged: they both express a desire for the "self"-clarity and "self"-knowledge that reflexive self-examination purports to afford. The dichotomy these questions posit stops right at the surface, as the project in which they are actively engaged in constructing—what Geoffrey Sirc calls our "classical modernist project of self-definition" (8)—remains securely intact. "What is English?" and "What should English do?"—or the questions that would later emerge as a consequence of Dartmouth, "What is rhetoric and composition studies?" and "What should rhet-comp do?"—are different only insofar as they are embedded within pedagogical, conceptual, institutional, and disciplinary economies that posit (and then recognize) the possibility of such a distinction in the first place. Is there a difference? Sure. But to what extent is it significant?

One year after Dartmouth, Alfred Grommon presciently wrote in a short piece entitled "Once More—What Is English?" (1967) that the question itself "seems to serve . . . as a means of opening documents and conferences on the teaching of English" (461).[10] Grommon's essay is significant as an historical artifact and as a secondary source on the issue of the question's ubiquity: he mentions at least half a dozen instances of the question (among them the Dartmouth Seminar), one of which dates back to C.H. Ward's 1925 book *What Is English?* (Thomas Miller recently pointed out that the question "What is English?" has been raised 150 times in NCTE journals, and cites Peter Elbow's 1990 book *What Is English?* as a possible catalyst for the 50 or so responses this question received in the 1990s alone [153].) Grommon's essay indicates an early recognition that to ask the question "What is English?" is also to ask the

question "What should English do?"; or, inversely, that to ask the latter is really to ask the former in operational terms, or to presume that "What is English?" has already been answered (461). There's a logic, a strategy, a style or mode of engagement implicit in the question "What is . . . ?"— however we happen to accessorize it. As Nietzsche well knew, finding out what something *is*, in most (if not all) instances, is precisely *not* what's being sought.

But the lesson here is not to point out that these questions or positions were somehow *wrong*, nor is any of this to say that the participants at Dartmouth weren't engaged in historically significant work, but to indicate the difficulties involved in thinking disciplinarity through channels other than those institutionally conditioned "grooves" to which we've become accustomed: establishing an identity, isolating principles, drawing up boundaries, determining what constitutes an "appropriate" question or problematic field, and so on (Talburt). The task, then, is how we might engage the forces or "habits" of thought these questions express, so it would be useful to first determine from where and under what conditions these habits of disciplinary thought emerge. Commenting on how the "fixed and unquestioned boundaries" that are concomitant with the emergence of the "culture of professionalism" became the initial goal of all disciplines (Bledstein), institutional theorist Samuel Weber shows how once a given disciplinary arrangement has demarcated itself in the academy through careful "attention to borders (founding principles)," the discipline's critical gaze turns increasingly to "problems and questions emerging *within* the field" as it "institutionalize[s] a collective system of defense against anxieties" from without ("Limits" 30). Perhaps most significant to our understanding of Dartmouth is how this system of defense, our habituated disciplinary response to a threat or a crisis (or critical) moment, manifests itself in the assertion of self-identity.

Weber, in his reading of American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, flatly maintains that the doubt expressed in the "What *is* . . . ?" question is "make-believe, a fiction of the ego designed to establish its self-identity" ("Limits" 20). To quote Peirce, the only state of mind from which one can set out is "the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do 'set out'—a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed" (qtd. in Weber, "Limits" 20).

Without getting into the complexities of Peirce's epistemology, suffice it to say that "the essence of thought," for Peirce, has to do with the formation of habits, which involves dealing with disciplinary anxieties—say, the pressing feeling that an "ancient and honorable tradition will not avail" (Gleason 2) or the familiar urge to regroup, retrench, and rethink the discipline ("Limits" 20–23). But as Weber notes, Peirce doesn't think that this process emerges entirely in "the individual mind or subject," and Weber takes Peirce's notion of epistemological habit-formation one step further, suggesting that when faced with such anxieties disciplines themselves engage in a kind of either-or "mode of thinking," thereby determining what can be thought (or asked), but "in a way that diverges from the self-consciousness of the practitioners" ("Limits" 30, 32).

Weber characterizes our responses to such external pressures as "*patching up* our garments, revising and reworking our habits" ("Limits" 24). But in anticipating eventualities, he claims "we deliberately (if unconsciously) exclude ideas and possibilities, in order to preserve . . . the frontiers of our 'internal world' against intrusions from without" ("Limits" 24). If we consider the Dartmouth Seminar—an event Harris dubs a "Copernican shift" in writing pedagogy "since 1966"—as a precursor to how the emerging discipline of rhetoric and composition would not only construct and define its "internal world," but also establish the parameters of what would count as a question within these borders, then it seems this disciplinary self-questioning (and the many symposia, workshops, conversations, books, and articles through which it occurs) is, perhaps in a very real way, *in* our disciplinary DNA. Where others have called attention to the complexities of disciplinary knowledge-making, to the vagaries of professionalization, or to the processes of technical specialization intrinsic to professionalism (what Weber calls "a technical fact of the intellectual division of labor" ["Limits" 31]) as being responsible for rhetoric and composition's various ills, the matter may have more to do with a kind of institutionalized sociality or relationality, one that while certainly a product of professionalism, is difficult to pin (or *pen*) down. This is particularly so if we understand it only as the *conscious* inculcation of disciplinary conventions or values rather than, as Weber suggests, "a set of habitual *responses*" ("Limits" 25). These responses, at least for Weber, are "animated as much by anxiety as by a spontaneous desire to learn or to

serve." Moreover, if we think of the "What is . . . ?" question as a habituated disciplinary response to anxiety, it would seem that in our attempts to keep crisis at bay and exclude it from the discipline, we've actually incorporated it into our disciplinary lexicon.

An obviously popular "move," and with good reason, rhetoric and composition's self-questioning can also be read as a disciplinary expression of the desire for self-understanding, for what Weber calls the "self-contained meaningfulness" that, going back at least as far as Plato, has been the perpetual "dream" of Western epistemology (*Theatricality* 3, 7). But, importantly, it has also traditionally aroused a deep suspicion of *theater*, since the space of theatricality "allows no simple extraterritoriality" (7). The desire to inhabit "a place from which one can take everything in," and thus to position oneself "outside" theater or the shadowy illusions of the cave in what we might call a detached or critical stance, exhibits an uneasiness with what Weber calls the "*singularity of the theatrical event*," a kind of complex "happening" that "haunts and taunts the Western dream of self-identity" (7). "Theater," a term whose etymology suggests both the Greek word *thea*—a "place from which to observe or to *see*"—as well as *theory*, indicates the interrelated practices of demarcating, distancing, isolating, and observing through which disciplines self-constitute (that is, professionalize) *and* protect themselves from external threats (3). Considered as a habituated response to "crisis," this "secur[ing] [of] a position . . . from a distance that ostensibly permits one to view the object in its entirety while remaining at a safe remove from it," resonates with rhetoric and composition's anxious search for self-identity (2–3).

Consider the reflexivity of a recent symposium published in *College English* in 2006 and organized around the question "What Should College English Be?" The responses, which ranged from the meaning and value of close reading, to the function of literary and political texts in composition, to visual culture, technology, and Web 2.0, were positioned as having covered most permutations of the pertinent pedagogical terrain. Familiarly directed at "provok[ing] further thought" rather than settl[ing] things once and for all," as John Schilb briefly qualified in his introductory remarks, the collected essays traversed perennial (and comfortably predictable) topoi in the discipline (106). The ubiquitous question of disciplinarity having been

re-opened, the basic parameters of the discipline could again be fleshed out and filled in, if only temporarily. But more importantly, they could be identified and "seen." This Symposium discloses what has become the discipline's dominant disposition to matters of disciplinary identity and, hence, in its articulation of pedagogical goals and policies: the tacit recognition that to repeatedly ask "what we are" is *the* question to ask. Put differently, we might say that crisis, the disciplinary dynamic in which rhetoric and composition continuously operates, materializes a particular orientation to the discipline, one that provokes (and simultaneously makes recognizable) some permutation of the question, "What *is* rhetoric and composition studies?"

This particular Symposium is just one of the more recent installments in the ongoing "drama" of disciplinary self-identity, but along with the few examples I've briefly examined in this section, the common point of reference is not only their effort to secure a place from which to glimpse the unified self-identity of *what we are*, but also to painstakingly catalogue (or "patch up") the discipline through the operation of what I will reservedly call a kind of *ethnography*—the observing, collecting, archiving, and interpreting of descriptive statements about the discipline and about the work that gets done in its name and within its boundaries.[11] Even though the practice of ethnography privileges (and requires) a living in and among subjects, communities, or ecologies, the ethnographer is always, as in the symptomatic words of anthropologist Michael Agar, a "professional stranger." The ethnographer, in other words, is a participant observer whose immanent relations in a given community exist only potentially in terms of the "thick" descriptions, claims, or observations that will later be made on the basis of this participation. Ethnography presupposes and absolutely depends on critical distance in relation to its objects of study.[12] As such, it is a productive concept through which to explore these practices of self-identification.

In the simplest terms, an ethnographic approach is one that constructs "through direct personal observation of social behavior, a theory of the working of a particular culture in terms as close as possible to the way members of that culture view the universe and organize their behavior within it" (Bauman 157). As a practice meant to "*observe* and classify social phenomenon," ethnography is, as social anthropologist Marcel

Mauss writes, above all a descriptive practice, an approach that "require[s] one to be at once an archivist, a historian, a statistician . . . as well as a novelist" (7). "Intuition," Mauss continues, "plays no part whatever in the science of ethnology" (7).[13] If disciplinary self-identity has traditionally been sought through a kind of ethnographic encounter with the discipline, its concerns, its concepts, boundaries, and practices (a symptom of which is our apparently never-ending "crises"), then perhaps an important "alternative"—and I use that term cautiously—might be to explore a different sort of encounter with what we do.

However, I don't want to give the impression that this ethnographic mode of engagement doesn't do important work. From an institutional standpoint, it has facilitated the carving out of a disciplinary home within both English and the larger academy. It's not difficult to get a sense of just how vital a practice ethnography can be, particularly in the perennially cash-strapped, "accountability" obsessed contexts of contemporary universities, places in which individuals as well as disciplines must succinctly define what they do as a kind of mandatory self-promotion (if not outright self-preservation). Perhaps most significantly, it has served as an organizational principle in scholarly work on writing instruction, a common-place from which to name, organize, conceptualize, and better *see* our roles and functions with greater clarity. Whatever the terms of their deployment, ethnographies wield a powerful legitimating force. "Ethnographies constitute objects," writes cultural anthropologist Wesley Shumar, through the "phenomenological conceit of participant observation" (1–2). In a very real sense, it's doubtful there would be a "rhet-comp" if not for the ethnographic work we've done thus far.

But we must also be attuned to that which has been disabled by this ethnographic search for self-presence. As John Muckelbauer recently noted, "constantly turning up the resolution on the analytical microscope" undoubtedly permits us to see "new and exciting things," but it also "perpetuate[s] our dedication to the visible spectrum" (*Future* 112). Our questioning is symptomatic of the discipline's general orientation toward epistemology (toward knowing/knowledge) and our tendency to encounter pedagogical issues through discourses and vocabularies that, though quite useful, are perhaps insufficiently equipped to talk about what goes on in the space of the writing classroom in terms other than those steeped in

conscious thought, reflection, or representation (Sánchez). I'm thinking specifically of what one scholar has called our "discursive poverty" (Albrecht-Crane 889) regarding productive discussions of *affect*. In the next section, I point to potential pedagogical encounters that have been occluded by our various attempts to determine a clearly defined disciplinary territory. Given the difficulties rhetoric and composition has traditionally had with developing nuanced vocabularies of affect, it may prove useful to identify precisely what these epistemologically oriented questions of disciplinary ontology (that is, *knowing* the *being* of the discipline or its identity) have disabled to better understand what other questions could be asked.

What Can a (Writing) Pedagogy Do? "Ethology and Us"

> It might be said that this is just a matter of words, but it is
> rare for words not to involve intentions and ruses.
> —Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

While it might seem like an odd point around which to orient a discussion of the contemporary state of rhetoric and composition, the work of seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza is a helpful site from which to tease out the implications and presuppositions of our anxious acts of self-definition. Spinoza's interest in re-orienting the questions philosophy asks of itself presented a challenge to philosophy's preoccupation with questions of epistemology and, specifically, with placing subjectivity and mind/consciousness at its center. This preoccupation, which reached its zenith in the self-sustaining Cartesian theorem that "to *think* is to *be*," was countered with Spinoza's well-known declaration that "no one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body, that is, no one has as yet been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of its nature" (*Ethics* 132). Or as Gilles Deleuze succinctly renders it in the second of his two books on Spinoza, "We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and its passions—but *we do not even know what a body can do*. Lacking this knowledge, we engage in idle talk" (*Spinoza* 17–18).[14] While it is

undoubtedly true that very few (if any) contemporary scholars in rhetoric and composition would lay claim to a Cartesian understanding of subjectivity as a guiding feature of our discussions of pedagogical theory, at the end of the day the primacy of the conscious mind usually finds its way back in—particularly when it comes to conceptualizing pedagogical methods or outcomes (Sánchez 5). This is especially noticeable in some versions of critical pedagogy, in which it seems quite difficult to conceptualize the transformative potentials of pedagogical interaction without recourse to a model of subjectivity firmly rooted in conscious thought and reflection (Albrecht-Crane; Smith, "Desire"). What are the disciplinary habits that render the thinking of alternatives so stultifyingly difficult?

Taking a cue from Spinoza and Deleuze, asking not "What is rhetoric and composition?" or even "What is pedagogy?" but "What *can* a pedagogy *do*?" would involve something more than a mere re-orientation of the question. Such a shift would involve what I will call an *ethological* understanding of what individual bodies can do, the notion that individual bodies and minds—*modes*, in Spinozan terminology—are, as Deleuze puts it, comprised of "complex relation[s] of speed and slowness" (*Spinoza* 124). Adapted from the science that studies animal behavior, particularly as it pertains to a given animal's active embeddedness within its ecological milieu or "world" (*Umwelt*), Deleuze's use of the term "ethological" invokes an understanding of bodies (whether human, animal, disciplinary, and so on) not in terms of their form, but through their "capacities for affecting and being affected" and through the affects of which they are capable (125). Ethology, as Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd explain, "eschews any analysis which seeks to determine the proper function or form of an individual by proceeding from an analysis of species, to genus, to individual" (100). This is because there is more going on vis-à-vis the body and the mind—which, for Spinoza, are attributes of a human being that exist differently *but not separately*—than an epistemological understanding based in conscious thought and reflection can take into account. There is also more to understanding what a *body can do* than reflexively-derived descriptive statements, observations, or propositions—such as those that might emerge from an ethnographic approach—would allow. Importantly, this would be the case whether the bodies we encounter are human, organic, socio-political, or disciplinary.

Estonian-born biologist Jakob von Uexküll, whose treatise *Mondes Animaux et Monde Humain* Deleuze references in his appropriation of the term, is generally regarded as the originator of "ethology," though as Brett Buchanan notes, it would not become widely used until later popularized by Konrad Lorenz (2). Ethology has found a "home" in thinkers as diverse as Martin Heidegger, Georges Canguilhem, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, and Giorgio Agamben, though my use of it here operates primarily in the Spinozan-Deleuzean register. Put simply, where Descartes, and much of Western epistemology before and since, draws the contours of subjectivity and consciousness around an epistemo-logical ontology (that is, to think *is* to be, or it is in the act of thinking that one's existence as a subject-in-the-world is enacted), an ethological understanding of the body displaces consciousness as the privileged category through which an individual *exists* and acts. This ethological understanding of the body and mind points to how "the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it*" (*Spinoza* 18). Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's monist ontology suggests a displacement of self-reflexivity or self-consciousness as the epitome or foundation of what it means to *think* (and hence to *be*). Thought is not a reflexive representation (or evidence) of being, but participates in and is actively embedded in being, not unlike the animal (ecology) as encountered by the ethologist. In an ethological encounter with an (animal) ecology, the emphasis is on how we might "glimpse natural environments as meaningful to the animals them-selves . . . by multiply[ing] the world into infinite animal environments" (Buchanan 2). For instance, as in von Uexküll's famous example of the parasitic tick, an ethological encounter with the tick would define it as possessing only three affects: responsiveness to light (it climbs to the top of a branch); scent (sensing butyric acid, it falls onto a mammal passing below); and heat (as Deleuze puts it, "it seek[s] the area without fur, the warmest spot") (*Spinoza* 124). "A world with only three affects," Deleuze muses, "in the midst of all that goes on in the immense forest" (124–25). (Not coincidentally, perhaps, this also resonates with how it feels to exist in the university.)

Deleuze's point in appropriating von Uexküll's "tick" is to show how in an ethological encounter with a given body the focus is neither on its

form—the animal's "species, its color, whether it has four or six legs, etc."—nor on its surroundings—"this or that mammal, a tree, a bird, etc."—but on what a given body can do (Buchanan 156). And yet, possessing only three affects does not denigrate the world (*Umwelt*) of the tick or suggest that its world is somehow less than that of another body; as Buchanan points out, the numerical values of the three affects (and the affects themselves) are not cardinal (quantitative), but ordinal (156). Put rather crudely, this means that in the "space" between these affects lies the whole of the tick's life, such that the "tick might live . . . for many years between the first and second affect" during which time "literally nothing affects it" (Buchanan 156). Also, the affects are themselves irreducible, indivisible, and incommensurable; any alteration changes, in a very real way, *what they are*, just as "67 degrees" is a singularity and cannot be divided up or manipulated without fundamentally altering "67 degrees." A particular "temperature is not composed of other temperatures," Deleuze says, but "each temperature is already a difference, and . . . differences are not composed of differences of the same order but imply series of heterogeneous terms" (*Difference* 237). Even a partial statement of Deleuze's onto-ethology exceeds the scope of this essay, but what is most pressing for our purposes is to remember that ethology studies a given body's affective relations, and that before approaching a body ethologically, we don't yet know what it can do (see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 257).

While certainly useful (and oddly comforting), an ethnographic approach, inscribed in a question like "What is '*X*'?" and answered with a more or less exhaustive description of what '*X*' *is*, simply cannot tell us either what a body can do or the affects of which a body is capable. This is the case, in part, because a body's capacities are "determined by [its] . . . relations of interdependence with other bodies" (Gatens and Lloyd 101). A body, its becomings, and its affective relations with other bodies form a relational "world" that ethology seeks to understand with(in) the encounter by "treating an individual [body] as a fully integrated part of the context in which it lives and moves" (Gatens and Lloyd 100). If we don't yet know what a body can do, it is because the affects of which a body is capable cannot be known in advance of encounters or experimentation, as if surveyed from a distance by a critical observer or exhaustively theorized by an omniscient gaze. But this apparent shortcoming has nothing to do

with whether or not our previous attempts to catalogue a body (or discipline) have been comprehensive or refined enough, as though one more symposium or conference will do the trick (and *this* time we'll get it right); rather, the issue is that an ethnographic approach cannot tell us what a body can do precisely because it attempts to map "the power of a body in advance" of the manifolds of dynamic spatial, temporal, and relational *processes* from which it is ontologically inseparable and in which it participates (Marrati 317). Try as we might, we cannot know ahead of time the affects of which a body or "type" is capable.

As Paola Marrati puts it, Deleuze's provocation that we don't yet know what a body can do does not refer to "a contingent limit of our knowledge that should be overcome"; in fact, not yet knowing what a body can do actually "opens up a field of . . . experimentation . . . that constitutes the very domain of ethics and freedom"—a crucial point to which I will return in closing (317). This also entails "de-prioritizing" the achievement of specific effects or outcomes—unburdening practices of the task of effecting a predetermined and recognizable change—which tend to incline practices toward potentialities one *thinks* will or might produce or facilitate a certain outcome if these potentials are actualized. A "practice" of practice that is dominated by such instrumentality diminishes the likelihood a body will become receptive or attuned to potentials that may not be actualized otherwise. This, of course, involves affirming less control and predictability. The affects of which a given body is capable, Marrati suggests, "are dependent on *encounters* with other bodies" and are "known" or actualized only in the encounter (317). Consciously and reflexively analyzing, describing, recognizing, identifying, and understanding phenomena—which are fundamental elements of what many call *theory*—are practices whose operations and "powers" cannot be extracted from their past and present *participation* in various milieus, despite the fact that the way theory is often practiced suggests otherwise. Put differently, what I am here calling an ethnographic approach can be understood as a form of theory that is enabled to do what it does, which isn't false, wrong, or useless—to the contrary, it's quite useful—because it "brackets," if you will, the ethological dimensions of what it describes and, equally significant, the ethological dimensions of itself as a mode of practicing theory.

To ask of a body, "What it *is*" is already to assume the priority of form or recognition over the *relations* of speeds and slownesses of which a body (or classroom, or student, or teaching moment, or even learning itself) is perpetually in the process of being (re)constituted. Rhetoric and composition's search for self-identity, in its privileging of the recognizable, foregoes an attunement to the very question of a body's capacities to affect and to be affected (a partial explanation for our difficulty with wriggling "free" from consciousness and the conceptual hegemony of the Cartesian legacy). But when we talk about, say, the usefulness of process pedagogy or the value of critical pedagogy, are we not in fact asking precisely what this pedagogy can *do*? Are we not posing the question, "What can *X* pedagogy do?" when we think about or theorize how any pedagogy might be used in new and different ways to (more effectively) result in or facilitate various outcomes? In one sense, the answer is certainly yes. It should be pointed out that we need this mode of posing the question of "what a pedagogy can do" because it does necessary and important work.[15] However, the subtle but important difference is that this mode of questioning is governed by the priority it grants conscious knowledge and, concomitantly, identifiable measures of effectiveness. This mode of questioning vis-à-vis pedagogy could be expressed in generic form as, "Given my understanding of (which can include past experience with) *Y* pedagogy, how might I use or deploy it in a manner that will produce or facilitate particular, identifiable (that is, recognizable and hence, 'effective') effects?"

If asking the question of "what a pedagogy can do" in the conventional manner is characterized by conceiving of teaching as the use or performance of (a specific) pedagogy, which the teacher-subject knows how to do and does to produce specific outcomes; and if this use or performance is understood to be enacted in a more or less uniform place that is demarcated by identifiable spatial and temporal boundaries, which contain the varieties of layouts, artifacts, and technologies that make it recognizable as a classroom; then we are theorizing and practicing a mode of pedagogy whose performance (and its potentials) are unduly circumscribed by: (a) the idea that teaching is primarily a matter of *consciously knowing* what to do and how to do it; (b) a focus on achieving *identifiable* outcomes; and (c) a conception of how and where teaching is done, and

what is learned from it and how it is learned, that "binds" pedagogical theory and practice—and the issues, problems, or questions it can formulate and engage—to an *actual* space whose attributes are not only more or less the same from classroom to classroom but also whose boundaries are understood in a manner that ignores many spatio-temporal dynamics that are *irreducible to the actual classroom and what actual things and people it may contain but are part of it nonetheless*. But it must be stressed that the ethological approach to pedagogy I've briefly sketched does *not* advocate that we somehow jettison so-called conventional pedagogical deployments or methods as though these are now unnecessary or have been "transcended"; in a crucial (and fairly obvious) sense, one simply can't do without propositions, generalities, or predetermined approaches. And, importantly, suggesting that ethology somehow displaces or negates conventional approaches would be merely to reify the exclusionary logic that engineers the movement(s) of what I've heretofore attempted to diagnose as rhetoric and composition's "identitarian imperative." However, if we recognize that conventional pedagogies have the capacity to unnecessarily circumscribe what pedagogy *can do*, then ethology becomes a way to provoke the issue of encountering a pedagogical milieu as a singularity or "thisness," what Deleuze and Guattari call a *haecceity*: an enfolded, permeable constellation of forces to which one cultivates an attunement or affective relation. This relation is neither the same as nor reducible to subjective emotions, but has to do with the intensive affective becomings that comprise a particular body, its capacities, and its relations (*Thousand* 260–63). Thus, to speak of the teaching of writing (or teaching at all) is to speak of a kind of complex, extended *experiment* in encountering the "differential velocities," the "speeds and slownesses" whose immanent relationalities both comprise and potentialize the "learning" environment (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 123). Having understood this problem(atic) on the level of the actual, or, strictly speaking, the (verifiably) possible, we've traditionally been directed toward a solution that would resonate with(in) the concrete, unified body whose contours, form, and substance we tend to understand as the given unit of analysis: namely, "the classroom," a material node with which those of us in rhetoric and composition are surely familiar. Consciously or not, we treat "the classroom" as a space to which we bring and negotiate some version of

a pedagogical program. It is the starting point, identity-marker, discursive placeholder (parenthesis), Gestalt or ontological "given" that allows us to proceed logically, as well as pedagogically, insofar as it marks the site within which what we *do* takes place. In fact, the classroom might be considered a transitory symptom of our persistent pursuit of self-identity (and the many crises through which this project operates). And yet, for all its rigid ubiquity in our scholarship and in the everydayness of our pedagogical experiences, its status as an analyzable term (at least in the sense I'm describing) has been elusively transparent. Shumway and Dionne cite this ephemerality as a somewhat unremarkable fact of disciplinarity: an object (ethnographically) constituted by the discipline, the classroom "*embodies* the assumptions of the discipline" (6). We don't see it, but only because it's so close.[16]

And yet we do *see* it. As everyone knows, we actually pay a great deal of attention to the classroom and to the many important issues (pedagogical theory, assessment, academic labor, professional advancement) that coalesce around it. In fact, because pedagogical encounters are typically thought through "the classroom," one of rhet-comp's most enduring concepts has been the familiar notion of lore, which—by virtue of its fetishization of the empirically observable, the "what works" and "what doesn't"—might well be considered the quintessentially ethnographic concept (North; Harkin).[17] Proceeding as though pedagogy gets enacted or deployed within a more or less homogeneous space that has a substance, that has definable properties, and that organizes subjects by their individual attributes (*student*-subjects as well as *school* subjects)— which in an essential way it precisely *is*—what we tend *not* to encounter is the "singular permeability" of the classroom space, insofar as it tends to resist things like formulation, methodological deployment, and recognition (Muckelbauer, *Future* 121). But again, despite the admittedly rather critical tenor of some of my previous remarks, an ethological encounter, though different from our usual modes of deployment in significant ways, is not simply separate from more conventional pedagogical approaches and almost *always* "happens" coextensively. Charles Deemer and more recently Geoffrey Sirc have explored these encounters through the modern art inspired notion of "happenings"; Jerry Farber—who considers the classroom "a technology whose time has come"—discusses the

nebulous, elusive sense of "presence" so vital to teaching and learning
(217); and, similarly, Marshall Gregory has written about the importance
of cultivating an "ethotic" approach to teaching (78). Robert Scholes has
proposed a "pedagogical rhetoric" (65) similar to Stephen Mailloux's
provocative notion of "phronetic circumspection," a kairotic insight into
the concreteness of situations which coalesces around an encounter with
pedagogy that is "not primarily theoretical and general but practical and
specific" (52–53). Ronald Bogue writes of "zones of potential actualiza-
tion" that, against the orthodox "image of thought" (a term he borrows
from Deleuze), ask us to question a notion of learning that responds "to pre-
formulated questions and eventually arrives at pre-existing answers"
(333). What all of these approaches have in common is that they move to
take more seriously the situatedness of pedagogy and learning. Noting that
"the more rigorously we have approached the problem of situations and
contexts, the less certain we have become of what they indicate,"
Muckelbauer follows up this observation with a timely question, "[I]s it the
case that the very structure of pedagogy is finally incompatible with an
emphasis on situatedness?" (*Future* 101).

I've suggested that ethology might provide an "answer"—or at least
a more productive problem—insofar as it provokes and emphasizes
capacities to affect and to be affected, and exploits the permeability and
responsiveness of situatedness, even (or especially) when such
"situatedness" constellates within and around milieus we tend to think of
as banal or common-place (classrooms, methods, and so on). I say
"especially" because, as Muckelbauer is quick to add, provoking perme-
ability or capacities for "singular response" not only doesn't preclude but
actually depends on "the . . . movements of a generalized methodology"
(*Future* 122). One doesn't "set out" by jettisoning methods or somehow
becoming unfettered by pedagogical situatedness. (Recall that at least on
Weber's reading, this point was also articulated in Peirce's epistemology.)
Deleuze, drawing a comparison to music, puts it this way:

> The important thing is to understand life . . . not as a form . . . but
> as a complex relation between . . . deceleration and acceleration of
> particles. A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of
> immanence. In the same way, a musical form will depend on a
> complex relation of speeds and slownesses of sound particles. It is

not just a matter of music but of how to live: it is by speed and
slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with
something else. One never commences; one never has a *tabula
rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down
rhythms. (*Spinoza* 123)

The issue with *seeing* the classroom (or pedagogy or the discipline)
ethnographically mirrors Deleuze's suspicion of the organism: the "prob-
lem" with the organism (that every living thing is called an "organism") is
that while it does offer a kind of satisfying solution (the question of life is
"answered," potentially even on the most molecular level), it allows us to
ignore the multiplicity of forces, the speeds and slownesses, that, as
Buchanan puts it, "coalesce into the making of the continual becoming of
this thing we identify as an organism" (153). The question becomes how
one "slips in" among the charged ecology of the classroom in such a way
as to make it "question-able" (Smith, "Headaches"), or how one produces
a capacity to affect or to be affected that is always-already present but that
exceeds the consciousness (and conscious intent) of a particular agent.
Perhaps on the simplest level, it means that we have to learn to think
pedagogies, classrooms, disciplines, and bodies through ethological en-
counters with students, with materials and technologies, with institutions,
and with each other, rather than relying solely on "molar" encounters with
macro-political issues (the project of disciplinary self-identity, for ex-
ample). Students and teachers, even curricula and texts, cease to be
abstract artifacts or isolated individual subjects or ossified theoretico-
political positions, and become something far more dynamic and interesting.

Taking ethology seriously is no easy task; it's difficult to take a stand
without standing still. Case in point: what some have dubbed the "peda-
gogical imperative" (Kopelson; Dobrin) would now demand that I make
some positive, recognizable statements about what an ethological ap-
proach to teaching or learning would do differently, about what such an
encounter would *look* like, and perhaps even how it would be imple-
mented. Like the identitarian imperative, the pedagogical imperative
emerges from the same movement of negation/exclusion we have to thank
for rhetoric and composition's various "crises" (once we did it this way,
now we're going to do it that way—problem solved, or at least abated).
For reasons that I hope are more or less clear, I can offer no satisfying

solutions, programs, or injunctions, except perhaps to say that if one thinks of the classroom as an encounter with immanent relations or with particular capacities to affect and to be affected—an ecology of forces in which one never "begins" but experiments, "enters in the middle . . . takes up or lays down rhythms"—then "many things change" (*Spinoza* 123, 124). Experimentation becomes the indispensible affective milieu through which to encounter pedagogy, but not "experimentation" in the sense to which we are accustomed. We tend to think experimentation "scientifi-cally,"—that is to say, as an attempt to assimilate the unknown to the known and thereby render it imminently replicable. But as Weber points out, following Kierkegaard, this version of experimentation is yet another variation of "the Cartesian project of reducing the world and the other to a means for the constitution of the identity of the same, *of a subject of self-reflexivity* . . . referring to nothing but itself, to its own 'performativity'" ("Future" 232; emphasis added). Given that performativity—as discussed by Jean-François Lyotard, Bill Readings, and Gregg Lambert—has become the central activity of the contemporary university, it should come as no surprise that it would also plan a determining role in how we conceive of and perform our disciplinary business.

On the absolute necessity of experimenting in such a way that attends to singularity, Deleuze is quite clear: "you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not even know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination" (*Spinoza* 125). This changes what it means to evaluate a given pedagogy's effectiveness on any measurable scale, in part because the very notion of "effectiveness" or "accountability" suggests an economy of recognition operating to bring a "portion of the future . . . under control" and render its "alterity . . . assimilable" (Weber, "Future" 232). How then can one know what or how learning happens? It becomes less of an experiment in a controlled (that is, measurable or assessable) setting, and more of an experiment in life, in having lasting effects, though they might not be immediately present or even recognizable as effects. As Deleuze remarks, "We never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think" (*Difference* 165).

But what about the "economic imperative"? All the erudite pedagogical conversations in the world are moot if institutions can't or won't radically improve the material conditions of those who do the vast majority of the teaching (particularly the teaching of writing). The various positions within discussions of academic labor have been represented, schematically, as several points clustered around an encounter between those who advocate a pragmatic, engaged complicity with(in) a specific institution and/or the larger disciplinary-institutional system (Miller; Harris; Porter, et al.) and those who see the current state of affairs as too corrupt and too exploitive to be dealt anything but a crushing blow by a strategic collective of workers, teachers, and students (Bousquet; Horner; Nelson). How might ethology help map the affects of this encounter (or its history of affects) in such a way that didn't simply attempt to transcend (or ethnologize) it, and hence reify the legitimacy and force of these already entrenched positions? How could an ethological encounter with the discourse, with labor practices, with administrative positions, with institutionally-entrenched market logics of "accountability" or "performance," or with each other provoke capacities for response that make permeable (and more responsive) customary styles of engagement, positions, or habits? How could this issue be encountered in such a way that didn't simply repeat the terms of the debate by advocating one approach over another? A partial and unsatisfactory preliminary answer lies, I believe, in ethology's sensitivity to encounters and its understanding of individuals as relationally embedded (or suspended) within a larger totality of affective relations. A body's capacities—its transformative powers—are dependent upon its attunement(s) to its context and world (Gatens and Lloyd; Marrati; Buchanan).

Understand that I'm not suggesting we do away with ethnographic or identitarian approaches to disciplinary/institutional demarcation, to pedagogy, or to collective action—as if such a move were even possible. These approaches (or dispositions) are not only important, but they are implicit in every move we make, such that the idea of "doing away" with identity or privileging ethology over ethnography is neither possible nor what this article is proposing. Jettisoning ethnography or getting past our overarching concern for demarcating an identity would be to yet again attempt to dialectically transcend crisis—a move that would (again) merely serve to

reify the hegemony of the crisis-mode and, more to the point, would constitute yet another dialectical response to crisis. This, in short, is why "getting over" crisis would be as foolish as thinking we might "get over" identity.

What I am suggesting is that we learn to cultivate encounters with pedagogical spaces (or classrooms), with students, with ideas, and with others as *bodies* in the Spinozan sense, as complex milieus of differently existing—but not separate—attributes, as a "complex relation of speed and slowness" (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 123—24). A starting point, a different (but not separate) question might be to ask, "How does one encounter the immanent relations—the capacities for affecting and being affected—that comprise this (pedagogical-administrative-departmental-disciplinary-discursive) space?" Or, as Deleuze more provocatively puts it, "How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world?" (*Spinoza* 126). I believe the classroom, quotidian though it may be, is a fertile site at which we could begin to let this "happen." And if in the process we learn how to live differently in our relation(s) to crisis, then so much the better.

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Notes

1. The author would like to thank Daniel Smith for his trenchant insights, mentorship, and patience during the (many) revisions—and repeated pedagogical encounters—that ultimately produced this article, as well as Lynn Worsham and the anonymous readers at *JAC* for their numerous helpful revision suggestions. The author would also like to thank Ashley Cook for her support, good humor, and aplomb.

2. Weber notes that "wherever the humanities have imposed themselves as an issue of academic discussion . . . it has been in a context of crisis" ("Ambivalence" 135).

3. I refer to rhetoric and composition studies as a "discipline" for at least three reasons: first, as Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan point out, "the complex activities of boundary work" constitute *the* disciplinary practice in the university (9). That English studies (read: literary studies) is the "discipline" to which

rhetoric-composition is the "field" or "sub-field" remains a prevalent notion, of course—and it is not exactly an inaccurate one—but it is challenged by the fact of this extensive boundary work, to say nothing of rhetoric and composition's rapid professionalization since the 1970s. Second, rhetoric and composition meets the criteria Downing and several others have suggested are the three properties of disciplinarity: "(1) a discipline is constituted by a specific body of knowledge, the *object* of the discipline; (2) the stability of that knowledge is produced, constituted, and warranted by application of specific, identifiable *methods*; (3) all methods deployed depend on prior protocols for argumentation" (25). Third, as Kopelson points out, if we streamline this litmus test for disciplinarity and simply "define an academic discipline as a branch of knowledge considered distinct from other branches and marked as distinct by the existence of graduate programs, journals, professional societies, and the like," rhetoric and composition meets the criteria (777). There doesn't appear to be a limit to how far one can meander in attempting to represent, discursively or conceptually, what we do— a symptom of the epistemic-ethnographic style of engagement with writing pedagogy that this essay is concerned to delineate. For more examples on the debate over what to call the "is" that rhetoric and composition *is*, see Downing, Hurlbert, and Mathieu; Gere; Goggin; Shumway, "Profession"; Shumway and Dionne; and Smit. For a series of recent takes on these issues by some of rhetoric and composition's leading scholars, see *Enculturation* 5.1 and 5.2. For two recent responses that focus explicitly on disciplinary definition vis-à-vis contemporary rhetorical theory and the history of rhetoric, see Gunn and Muckelbauer, "Returns."

4. For an interesting take on how the rhetorical operation of the term "we," as it is commonly deployed in rhetoric and composition discourse, elides crucial distinctions between rhetoric and composition teachers and professionals/scholars, see Bousquet, "Composition" and "White-Collar."

5. For more on composition's complicity in the operative logic(s) of "purity," see Miller, *Textual*.

6. I am sympathetic to Gallagher's proposals, but I have my doubts about our discipline's (or any discipline's) capacity to transcend the "regressive tradition of managerial professionalism" (88) so thoroughly embedded in the "university of excellence" (Readings).

7. The "deep irony" Kopelson cites might well be considered a kind of observer's paradox. Her remark that her reflection on rhetoric and composition's self-reflexivity is "ironic" is symptomatic of our tendency, as (humanities) scholars, to be unaccustomed to accounting for our own situatedness in the institutions, disciplines, and fields to which we turn our critical gaze (Derrida, "Principle"; Shumar; Lambert; Yood). I exclude neither myself nor the present examination from this charge, but I will return to the implications of this (ethnographic) phenomenon in greater detail in the next section.

8. As Marckwardt writes, "Twenty-eight [participants] were from the United States, twenty from the United Kingdom, and one from Canada" (vii).

9. Note the rather firm distinction between "scholar" and "teacher"; based on some accounts of the Dartmouth Seminar, for the Americans, these terms did not appear to be interchangeable.

10. The "once more" in Grommon's title seems to imply that, already in 1967, posing this question had become somewhat *de rigueur*.

11. My use of the term "ethnography" may play a bit fast-and-loose for some readers, given rhetoric and composition's rich ethnographic discourse on composing processes (see, for example, Bishop; Emig; Heath and Street). My use of it is more abstract, however, and is only meant to suggest the operation of critical distance and observation central to ethnography, and to characterize a particular mode of engagement with the discipline as a whole.

12. Recall the close etymological affinity between "critical" [*kritikos*] and "crisis" [*krinein*], both of which have to do with judgment ("Crisis").

13. Mauss uses the terms "ethnology" and "ethnography" interchangeably.

14. It is important to understand that for "Deleuze's Spinoza," the concept "body" can, as Deleuze explains, refer to virtually "anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity" (*Spinoza* 127).

15. The centrality of the question of "what something can do," in addition to its focus on relationality and practices, may prompt some readers—as it did one astute reader of an earlier version of this essay—to ask what distinguishes the ethology described here from pragmatism, which also asks the question "what something can do" or "how can we use '*X*' to do '*Y*' or to achieve certain effects?" The quick and easy answer is that ethology, unlike pragmatism, is not governed by the aim of achieving *certain* effects. That is, the instrumentalism characterizing most of the pragmatist tradition is displaced (not eliminated) by ethology (see 21). While ethology's attenuation of instrumentality in relation to practices within milieus of bodies and practices is a significant aspect of its distinction from pragmatism, providing an extended, in-depth discussion of this and other pertinent distinctions and their implications is precluded by the focus of this essay and the necessarily delimited writing space afforded by scholarly journals. A rigorous and informative engagement of the differences between ethology and pragmatism that would adequately demonstrate why pragmatism does not afford us what ethology does could easily take up the space of its own journal article-length essay. That would especially be the case if one were to honor the heterogeneity of the thought and approaches of the thinkers typically designated as belonging to the pragmatist tradition, which could be argued also includes neo-pragmatism, as well as a number of contemporary analytic philosophers. For example, even if one were to limit one's engagement with pragmatism to the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey with the aim

of identifying and explaining the differences between them and Deleuze's adoption of Jakob von Uexküll's proto-ethology to formulate his Spinozan-oriented conception of ethology, it would require extensive work. It would demand, at the very least, a discussion of the influence of Darwinian ideas of evolution on pragmatism and the significance of von Uexküll's anti-Darwinian conceptions of life, biology, and *capacities for action* and their "sources," "development," and "purpose" (which defy quick summary or brief explanation). Indeed, exploring and explaining the differences between Dewey's pragmatism alone and the ethological "philosophy" discussed above would be quite a task. The same can be said, for different though not unrelated reasons, of the variants of neo-pragmatism espoused in works by Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish. I am not, I should mention, unaware of the paradox (or some might want to say "irony") of preferring ethology over pragmatism because of the latter's different relation to instrumentality, which implies that I believe ethology is a more *effective means toward the end* of producing change in rhetoric and composition studies. All I can say here, without elaboration, is that this paradox becomes less paradoxical—and quite interesting—when one understands what is involved in de-prioritizing instrumentality rather than rejecting it wholesale.

16. In underscoring the apparent paradox of the simultaneously rigid ontology and nearly invisible character of the classroom space, architectural theorist Robert Segrest remarks, "The classroom is itself a parenthesis (an intervening space) in an aggregate of men's rooms, the bored rooms of the academy" (11). Similarly, Lawrence Grossberg writes, "Space is rarely theorized and even more rarely recognized as active and productive" (6). For a compelling take on ecological agency and the force of non-human entities, see Bennett.

17. For another example of an ethnographic engagement with the discipline (and an indirect discussion of lore's ethnographic attributes), see Fulkerson. Fulkerson's position, in both senses of the word, is fairly typical of what I've described as an ethnographic engagement.

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