COLLABORATION AND AUTONOMY, OWNING AND SHARECROPPING

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A lover in a George Gershwin song tells of stylistic differences with the beloved, and we know, of course, that stylistic differences may mean everything:

> You like potatoes,
> And I like potahtoes.
> You like tomatoes,
> And I like tomahtoes.
> Potatoes, potahtoes,
> Tomatoes, tomahtoes —
> Let's call the whole thing off.

The matter is lighthearted enough in the Gershwin song, but the mode is not lighthearted elsewhere in our lives, and it has often been our mode: not rapprochement, but separation.

When divergent, non-isomorphic rhetorics come together — that is to say, when *any* two rhetorics come together — the consequence is sometimes happy. Insight and learning occur, and sometimes love and marriage. Sometimes, however, the consequence is not happy; our habits of competition are too strong. Sometimes one rhetoric expands to fill all available space, prevailing as the other is compressed into submission. Sometimes two rhetorics compromise, to no one's complete satisfaction. Sometimes they are paralyzed, as practitioners are unable to choose. Sometimes, they go to war.

Over in the arena where we work, usually at least not a physically perilous place, in that arena where we read books, go to class, grade papers, write papers, devise pedagogies, and invent theories, it sometimes happens that one rhetoric catches or creates the fashion, and decides that the other is not only unworthy of courtship and matrimony, but is before that unworthy of notice:

> Potatoes, potahtoes,
> Tomatoes, tomahtoes —
> Let's call the whole thing off.

This last is what I earlier called a common mode among us.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when some of us were infected with the New Criticism, we decided that the old-fashioned biographical and historical studies of literature were no longer worthy of notice. We called the whole thing off. In the 1960s and early 1970s, when some of us caught rhetoric, we decided that the New Critics were quaint and altogether errant for their failure to examine the inventive contexts of writing. They were no longer worthy of notice. We called the whole thing off. Lately, when some of us came down with deconstructionism, we decided that the rhetoricians had failed by not knowing that they were already inside a rhetoric. They were unworthy of notice. We called the whole thing off.

Often as not, there were no overt attacks in these separations. The other was unworthy of notice, so we didn't notice. We didn't bother to cross-reference each other, even when we were working in the same territory. Those who publish in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* don't commonly footnote those who publish in *College Composition and Communication*, and that's true the other way around, too. Those who publish in *Yale French Studies* don't commonly footnote those who publish in *College English*. Harold Bloom and Wayne Booth don't seem to chat. Jacques Derrida and Walker Gibson don't seem to have met. Richard Ohmann and Hillis Miller don't seem to visit much.

In these circumstances, I want to recommend a fanatic eclecticism. Let's *not* call the whole thing off. Let's *not* decide one way or the other. Let's believe and enact this *and* that, *and* maybe also the other.

My account of our circumstances may make a little more sense if I settle into a particular context, the debate between those who see writing as invariably a collaborative act and those who have wanted to see writing as the work of the lone author. Actually, I think, it's no longer much of a debate. For the moment, at least, those who propose that writing is collaborative and intertextual have prevailed, and they are supported by the practice of writing pedagogues.

Social constructionist and intertextual thought is engaging, sometimes exhilarating and provocative; it challenges the habits that we call thoughts and recognizes that we are all rhetorical creations. It's late in the day to deny what social constructionism assets, that, as Bruffee articulates it, in any discipline the entities "we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities or of like-minded peers" (774), that "the matrix of thought is not the individual self but some community of knowledgeable peers and the vernacular language of that community" (777). It's late to deny the impact of intertextual readings. The prevailing composition textbook pedagogies, James E. Porter says,

> ...by and large cultivate the romantic image of the writer as free, uninhibited spirit, as independent, creative genius. By identifying and stressing the intertextual nature of discourse, however, we shift our attention away from the writer as individual and focus more on the sources and social contexts from which the writer's discourse arises. (34-5)

"The traditional notion of the text as the single work of a given author," Porter continues, "and even the very notions of author and reader, are regarded as simply convenient fictions for domesticating discourse" (35). The idea of Jefferson as author of the Declaration of Independence, for example, is "but convenient shorthand." In intertextual criticism, the idea of the "lone inspired writer" and the "scared autonomous text" both "take a pretty hard knock" (40). In Porter's account,

> Our immediate goal is to produce "socialized writers," who are full-fledged members of their discourse community, producing competent, useful discourse within that community. (42)

Composition pedagogy appears to support this view of writing. There is a new law for writing classes: you have to sit in circles. In writing classes, we sit in circles, we do group-brainstorming, we practice group writing, we learn from peer editing and peer tutorials.

But whether or not one can accept and learn from a particular conceptualization of writing depends upon who one is in the private places of the heart and mind. We are all alike in many ways. "We are all prompted by the same motives," Dr. Jonson remarked, "all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by

danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure." We are also different in many ways. We move through experience by different routes. Some of us, for example, take our pleasure, our strength, and our energy from others, learning with them and from them, seeing with them and through them. Some of us, however, take our pleasure, our strength, and our energy from what's inside our headbones, turning our own experience over, looking at it this way and that, trying to see what sense we can make of it. Some say potatoes. Some say potahtoes. Let's *not* call the whole thing off. Neither party is enough; each can learn from the other. (I'll suggest parenthetically that the students who can learn most in collaborative settings may be those who think of themselves as citizens for whom writing will be at most an occasional task, while the smaller number, who think of themselves as writers, may need the hardship of working along.) At any rate, why should we imagine that any one conceptualization of writing would serve us all? We are too various and lovely for single visions to hold us.

I don't want to be misunderstood. I'm not opposed to either collaborative theory or collaborative practice. If you'll forgive my presumption, or even if you won't, I'll testify that I was the person responsible, some 15 years ago, for changing the name of our Freshman Composition 1 and 2 to Writing Workshop 1 and 2, and I believe that at the time I proposed the change, I understood its implications, as I do now and applaud ensuing developments. I was looking, I believe, for new strategies and alternatives. I guess I didn't know that the noun *workshop* would breed a verb, *to workshop*, that would become right action everywhere. Not long ago, I heard a colleague say that he had "workshopped" his paper with his students before coming to read it at a conference. O Lord, deliver us.

Why, I wonder, should we move all one way or all the other? I know it's more fun, and I'd propose that it's also more fruitful to move all this way *and* all that way, *and* maybe also the other way. If you worry about the youngster who needs company, think of the youngster who finds group writing and editing utterly distasteful and wasteful, who will *not* share himself or herself. Each may need the other. Each needs us.

It's not hard to believe if we will that when we write, we're always with someone and alone. We're never in language or using language alone. That's one of the things we should have learned from the concept of rhetorical invention. But don't deny them the absolute hurt or the absolute exhilaration of being absolutely alone. Perhaps we can some day surrender any notion of ownership in language and writing in favor of sharecropping the language. But even if you're sharecropping a 1200 acre farm with a group of peer plowers, there's a time to say, "I by God plowed these 80 acres all by myself."

It's not, after all, hard to believe contraries. We carry the reason and need for doing so around with us all of the time. An 18th century rabbi remarked: "Keep two truths in your pocket, and take them out according to the need of the moment. Let one be: 'For my sake was the world created.' and the other: 'I am dust and ashes.' " Today, I may be able to manage beautifully by myself, but tomorrow I may need your help.

WORKS CITED

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A PROBABILITY THEORY OF COMMUNICATION AND THE FRESHMAN WRITER

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In this paper I am going to argue that we customarily teach writing by methods that are guaranteed to produce as little meaning as possible. Obviously, this heresy requires close examination and should not be made without some support. I intend to offer that support, first, by showing that some current pedagogies are more limited than they need to be, and second, by arguing the case for a completely new paradigm that allows us to have new ideas about how meaning is expressed in communications. The dominant pedagogy in the field of composition today is highly structured and process oriented, emphasizing problem solving and heuristics, as suggested by or implicit in the cognitivist approach of Linda Flower and Janet Emig, for example. Alternatively, we take a more traditionalist approach to teaching as in the work of Frank D'Angelo, who emphasizes the underlying structure of discourse.

THE INTERACTION OF THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

In particular, the pedagogies determined by cognitive process theory have been shown by empirical research, ably summarized by George Hillocks in his *Research on Written Composition*, to produce some gains in writing skill, depending of course upon how we measure gain in this context. I should point out, however, that many scholars have raised questions about the value of the research itself. In doing so, they cast doubt on the efficacy of pedagogies (Emig's and Flower's early work, for example) based on these foundations of positivist empirical research. There are too many critiques and rebuttals to review here, so I will mention only one of the most influential. It is by William Irmscher in a 1987 essay in *College Composition and Communication*. Irmscher writes:

> It is practically a given that one cannot say positively what causes improvement in writing effectiveness or whether a particular teaching approach is responsible for a change. (84)

Although there are many scholars who disagree with Irmscher, notably Hillocks himself, what is clear is that there is no consensus whether empirical research leads to better teaching of writing, and the same may be said for process-based pedagogies.

This general disagreement over theories and research leads many of us who teach writing to ask ourselves whether we even need an encompassing theory of what it means to write. After all, we have managed for hundreds of years without it, and yet we still produce able writers, often using trial and error — what Stephen North calls "folk knowledge"—to arrive at a productive teaching method. The reason why we need an encompassing underlying theory, according to North, is inscribed in the 1963 report of the NCTE Committee on the State of Knowledge about Composition. The Committee's role and its point of view had been stated by J.N. Hook, whom North quotes: "In teaching English we have relied too long on our best guesses" (16). The report of the Committee, entitled *Research on Written Composition*, complains that "the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations" (5). In short, I think the present position is that many of us in the field agree we need to teach with some theory in mind in order to provide discipline and