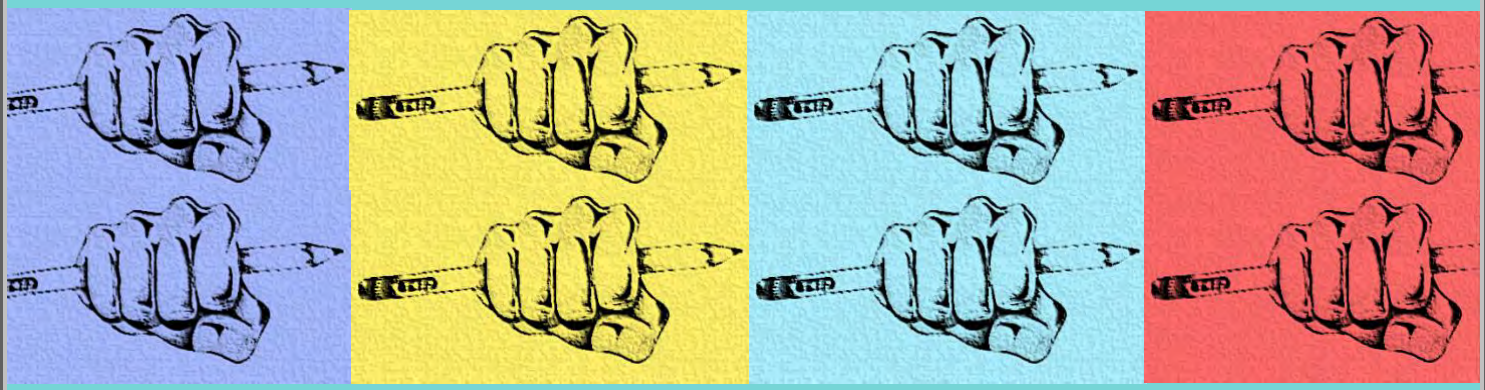

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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CEA-MAG PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: ADJUSTING THE LITERARY NARRATIVE (AND OURSELVES) FOR IMPACT AND CURRENCY IN THE 'NEW' WORLD

LaTanya L. Rogers

For more than sixty consecutive years, the College English Association - Middle (now Mid-) Atlantic Group (CEA-MAG) has hosted an annual conference. During this meeting, we have explored the literatures of the world, discovered new approaches to teaching, and contemplated the ways in which our *craft* (yes, our art form) imitates and impacts life. In this spirit, we have also considered the ways in which *life* imitates/impacts our art form. Perhaps in no other year is this latter matter more significant, more relevant, than it is now. In the midst of a global Pandemic, CEA-MAG 63 offered a unique opportunity to gather virtually to consider the myriad ways in life impacts our art form. We were thrilled that scholars from across the region and beyond joined us to celebrate the beauty and rigors of teaching and learning English and literature. Authentic, revealing, and "woke," each author presented a scholarly paper that responded to the challenges and opportunities of our "new" era. Many of those papers appear in this new journal in reinvigorated forms. Considered together, they function as co-signers on an English discipline that is destined to shape-shift as it makes room for multiple voices, perspectives, orientations, and ideologies.

In the age of COVID-19, we all have had to revise and adjust our understanding of teaching and learning, literature, and writing. We have learned new ways to expand our repertoire of teaching strategies to help students develop their literacy skills across all six strands of what we commonly call the "English language arts:" reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing. All six strands draw our attention to remaking "form," given our largely virtual teaching environments. We have been called upon to adapt the ways in which we consider access, alienation, and assimilation as we contemplate how our students are coping, thriving, and/or mastering the online environment. We have learned that our discipline must not cling to imperceptible mutabilities. That instead, as professors, we must be clear about what our role is and how we shepherd our students toward hope—the hope that can emerge as a result of mastering reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing.

In these times, we are partially charged with helping our students consume and embrace, discover and practice, apply and explore research-based instructional

approaches and techniques that are effective for teaching literature and writing in the higher education classroom. Some of that relates to how they maneuver and encounter research and whether or not they feel represented in and by that literature. What we do, as professors, helps them play with words in new ways. This means that we are charged with learning how current pedagogical theory and research inform "best-practice" models and methods for exploring writing and literature. And this, to a diverse community of young scholars. This involves overcoming our own blind spots and perceptions of cultural normatives in academia. The duty of social responsibility, indeed social justice in the classroom, mandates that we chastise our own sense of universalized utilitarianism.

The panel sessions at the CEA-MAG 2021 conference expertly privileged these notions and the conference's theme: "Writing and Teaching Justice in an Age of Unrest." In the first session, "Entrapment and Escape," Dr. S. Selina Jamil (Prince George's Community College) discussed "The "Well-Sprung Trap' in 'The Answer Is No.'" Professors Albert Pearsall and Lawrence Covington (University of the District of Columbia's Community College) offered their thoughts on "Responding to the COVID-19: Attaining Academic Success through Transformative Learning. Dr. Tawnya Azar (George Mason University) spoke on "Bridging the Digital Divide: Community Engagement in a Pandemic."

The keynote panel offered two scholars an opportunity to theorize rhetoric, hip hop in critical writing, and language research in composition studies, particularly at minority-serving institutions. Dr. David F. Green, Jr. (Howard University) led a discussion on "When It Hits Different: Language, Memory, and Social Justice Teaching in the Modern Era." Dr. José R. Ballesteros (St. Mary's College of Maryland) questioned the complex ways that poetry, culture, under-representation, language, and origin provides a context and a current for critical pedagogy, retention, and persistence toward degree.

During Panel II, called Death Diaries, Dr**.** David Kaloustian (Bowie State University) offered a talk called " 'Public Good and Private Mischief': The Individual and the Universal in Camus's The Plague." In this presentation, he discussed our own freedoms in relationship with responsibility to argue that some politicians have driven a wedge between us to convince us that there is a deep connection between private good and callous indifference.

Following the theme of "Writing and Teaching Justice in an Age of Unrest," Dr. Amy Branam Armiento (Frostburg State University) delivered a presentation called "Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death': A Tale for our Time." In this presentation, she explored her students' responses to power differentials between the wealthy and other classes and recounted how they (her students) relate their current conditions in COVID-19 to the conditions in Poe's short story. In doing so, they determined that the wealthy often respond with callous indifference to the

poor and that we can aptly employ literature to comprehend our own times as a manifestation of the universal human condition.

During "Forked Tongue," the final panel of the conference, Dr. Aparajita De, Dr. Helene Krauthamer, Dr. Cherie Ann Turpin, and Dr. Ada Vilageliu-Diaz (all University of the District of Columbia) presented a joint presentation called "English at the Intersection." The first presenter, Helene Krauthamer, discussed her NEH grant and the impact it's making on the campus community. She applauded the diversity of the English Program at UDC as unique and acknowledged the ways in which it reflects and celebrates the demographics of the city that houses it: Washington, DC.

In the second talk, Dr. De chronicled the empathy and growing that is an outreach of this Pandemic. She addressed making space for dialect and strategies for grading essays written by native English and non-native English speakers. She also asked the CEA-MAG listeners how diversity is actually addressed; how do we constitute teaching and learning; and what pedagogy or content is included?

The third speaker on the panel, Dr. Turpin asked: How do the generations of academics insist upon tools and systems that help students progress into self-assigned, voiced, intersectional individuals who function fluently in multi-diverse spaces?

Finally, Dr. Vilageliu-Diaz helped us understand why community engagement must chastise hetero-normative ideals of self and humanity. With her background in African American literature, Latina literature, and Black Lives Matter, she has created a project that helps children see themselves in bilingual ways. She insisted that the stories they are told must come from communities of color in order to accurately represent the narratives, voices, story lines, skin tones, and perspectives of their communities.

Since part of our duty as literature and writing professors is to usher our students toward the content and professional knowledge needed to prepare them for graduate study and professional careers, it is recommended that we also teach them to interact with social justice, identity, and belonging as part of their understanding of liminal positionality. For more than 60 consecutive years, the College English Association Mid-Atlantic Group (CEA-MAG) has hosted an annual conference that has done just that. And now, under a revised banner, *CEA-MAR* will take up the charge of inviting scholars to deeply and earnestly considered culture, language, writing, form, orientation, and more. Here's to the joys of that endeavor!

ART-MAKING AS ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY IN COMPOSITION COURSES

Peaches Hash

This article explores how a lecturer of undergraduate Rhetoric and Composition courses envisions art-making as a method for antiracist pedagogy. Art-making serves as a practice of freedom by allowing students to compose in ways that are not restricted to Standard Edited American English or even alphabetic text. Nonlinear, experimental processes of art-making may disrupt students' previous views of writing in academic settings, invite pleasure into the classroom, and create spaces for expression and inclusivity. Dr. Peaches Hash uses her own pedagogy and student examples to illustrate how art-making enhances her Rhetoric and Composition classes, showcasing two student examples from an arts-based rhetorical analysis assignment. Through this assignment, students' visual data, and students' reflection responses, she found that art-making created space for students to connect their lived experiences to rhetoric.

Key words: higher education; composition; antiracist pedagogy; rhetoric; writing

The concept of teaching justice in composition courses is often synonymous with assigning readings by a diverse group of authors and discussing social justice topics in the classroom space. Ashanka Kumari and Brita M. Thielen, for example, explain in "English 150: Writing as Inquiry--Explorations of Identity and Privilege" how a unit centering around privilege can teach students writing skills such as research and exploring rhetorical concepts while also "engaging with and conducting self-reflection and analysis of their own lived experiences in connection with larger social issues" through writing and class discussion (71). In their examples, they discuss how they infused course readings with written testimonies of "writers whose lives experiences might differ widely" from their students' to "[broaden their] worldviews" (72). The authors found their unit successful. Still, if not designed thoughtfully, educators can run the risk of attempting a diversity approach by infusing racially diverse authors into already existing curriculum to be inclusive, but, as Octavio Pimentel, Charise Pimentel, and John Dean articulate in "The Myth of the Colorblind Writing Classroom: White Instructors Confront White Privilege in their Classrooms," educators could create an "othering effect" by viewing these texts as "multicultural," while other course readings are standard (109). As teachers of writing, we owe it to our students to include texts with content and authors that represent a wide range of lived experiences and identities. We also owe it to our students to provide them with

brave spaces where they can discuss ways to contribute to a just world. Yet, even when instructors make these pedagogical choices successfully, they still often emphasize methods of composing that rely on using alphabetic text and written words. In order to teach justice in the writing classroom, we should also consider how to teach writing in just ways, which include creating and celebrating methods of composing that deviate from standard alphabetic displays of knowledge.

Reinforcing Domination or Practicing Freedom

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks explains that education can either be a "practice of freedom," or something that "merely strives to reinforce domination" (4). Several scholars have discussed ways that traditional methods of writing instruction reinforce domination rather than practice freedom, especially when educators assess students' compositions based on what they perceive as Standard Edited American English (SEAE). Too much of an emphasis on academic writing can, as Geoffrey Sirc articulates in *English Composition as a Happening*, disempower students because they are made to feel that "good writing" takes high level of mastery in literacy and conventions and a low level of individual expression and choice (219). These restrictive beliefs and negative emotions can influence any student in the classroom but may especially affect students from marginalized communities. Some scholars take the focus on academic writing even further, stating that evaluating student writing based on how students enact white colonized expectations is reinforcing domination. In "Standard English and Colorblindness in Composition Studies: Rhetorical Constructions of Racial and Linguistic Neutrality," Bethany Davila explains that while SEAE is assumed to be a neutral pedagogical choice, it involves coded language that calls students to navigate expectations of grammar and dialect that are not clearly defined (168-69). Expecting uniformity in writing courses in structure or language will serve an institutional system of oppression that silences many students' voices and lived experiences. Ira Shor and Paulo Freire's views on writing in *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, compliment Davila's view of SEAE, stating that students must, at times must "fight *against* grammar, in order to be free to write," and holding students to rigid communication expectations is a way to control whose words and beliefs count: the teachers' (20). Pushing the concept of expectations of SEAE in the writing classroom even further, Asao B. Inoue pointedly states that if teachers of writing grade under the expectation of "Standard English," they are "engaged in an institutional and disciplinary racism, a system set up to make winners and losers by a dominant standard" (xv). It is true, as Shor and Freire explain, that "education is more controllable if the teacher follows the standard curriculum and if the students act as if only the teacher's words count," but what

could become possible if students felt invited to break free from their previous perceptions of what composition looks like, sounds like, and feels like when they engage in the process? (10).

H. Samy Alim and Django Paris envision in "What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does it Matter?" for teaching and learning to involve exploring, honoring, extending, and problematizing cultural practices rather than seeing how closely students can perform expectations that are based in white colonized curriculum (3). In the writing classroom, it would take writing for justice with liberating education for this goal to become a reality. Shane A. McCoy explains in "Writing for Justice in First-Year Composition (FYC)" that writing for justice involves a framework of "affective approaches to learning," "creating pathways for successful knowledge transfer," and "privileging interrogative approaches to learning material rather than prescriptive approaches" (27). Imbedded in critical and feminist pedagogies, writing for justice seeks to foster relationships between students and teachers, empower students, build community, and "[challenge] traditional pedagogical notions" (28). McCoy's framework invites the process of metacognition, or "thinking about thinking" through processes of introspection and self-reflection (29-30). Metacognition, according to McCoy, is an affective approach to learning that invites students to explore *how* they think, learn, and experience in the world. Writing for justice also gives students agency as writers, allowing them to make decisions in processes of creating original work through re-contextualizing course content based on their choices (31-32). But, as Timothy J. San Pedro illuminates in "'This Stuff Interests Me': Re-Centering Indigenous Paradigms in Colonizing School Spaces," "[o]ur internal identities are multiple and varied depending upon the environments we enter" (112). Curricular choices are only one part of teaching writing in just ways; we must also seek to be liberatory educators. Shor and Freire explain that liberatory education involves experimental, creative activities that create conditions for transformation (26-27), with educators seeking to learn from students' experiences so everyone may be "critical agents in the act of knowing" (33). Liberating educators "gradually withdraw as the director of learning," while students become increasingly self-aware, self-directed, and self-confident (90); however, even when educators adopt concepts of writing for justice and liberating education, alphabetic text can still be too restrictive, unengaging, and linear for students to express themselves fully, which is why art-making is an effective method for teaching composition in just ways. We cannot just open the door halfway to allow different forms of students' alphabetic text in; we must open it all the way, inviting students to step through to opportunities of composing their knowledge in nonlinear, experimental methods.

Art-Making

Art-making is a nonlinear, experimental process of composition that can be used as an inclusive curricular method as well as facilitate students' own writing for justice through transcendence of course content. Art-making is a form of composition that many students are not accustomed to in writing courses by the time they get to higher education. Shor and Freire state that "[w]hen students come to us in the university, their experience of language is much more the experience of defining the concreteness of their existence, not an experience of dancing with concepts by themselves" (148). Allowing students to select their own topics and engage in different writing styles may help some of them begin to "dance" with concepts, but without opening up composition processes further from alphabetic texts, students still may rely on dance steps they have seen before, already tried with success, or feel safe doing. Instead of restricting students' composition to alphabetic language, we should allow them to express their ways of knowing through the arts, including visual arts, movement, and music-making of their choice. According to Shor and Freire, education becomes an artistic event when learning is centered around acts of knowing, a process of unveiling of understanding and an animation of knowledge (188). Although alphabetic texts can offer these processes, to what extent do they limit students who want to express themselves in nonlinear, creative ways? How much is lost in composition when students are asked to take their complex ideas and force them into restrictive formats that privilege those who have successfully navigated writing tasks in the past? Composition courses could instead be what Maxine Greene defines in *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* as aesthetic education, where teachers of writing make "an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed" (6). Although alphabetic text is valuable in writing courses, students can experience composition in more individualized, experimental, pleasurable ways if they work with the arts as well. When art-making is infused into writing courses, it does the following: disrupts and destabilizes perceptions of writing; encourages pleasure in composition processes; invites expression and inclusivity; and Provides opportunities for transcendence.

Art-making disrupts and destabilizes perceptions of writing. By the time students come to higher education writing courses, they are accustomed to composition looking certain ways. Even if we allow students to play with formats and presentation, alphabetic text is typically the primary, if not only, method students use to compose. In *How We Write: Writing as Creative Design*, Mike Sharples argues that a common misconception often shared by writing teachers and their students is that "composing is essentially concerned with generating words," when, in actuality, the "essence of composing is not to write words, but to design

text" (90). To extend further, a text does not have to be alphabetic, and allowing students to make authentic design choices that not only deviate from form, but also methods of composition, disrupt how they have come to know composition since they began learning to write. Making images is especially valuable in this process for both teachers and students because, as Kristie S. Fleckenstein expresses in *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*, imagery "does and undoes, enables and disables not only the teaching of writing-reading but also the act of writing-reading" (2). But art-making also facilitates knowledge construction after disrupting and destabilizing. If composing is "a process not of emptying the mind, but of actively reconstructing it," art-making offers students physical ways to reconstruct their knowledge so that their internal processes can stabilize (Sharples 92).

Art-making encourages pleasure in composition processes. When the atmosphere of the classroom is disrupted, it creates space for learning to be pleasurable (7). No longer facing restrictions of linear formats and SEAE, art-making invites students to invent, explore, and *play* with composition. Without pleasurable experiences that make learning joyful, many students will still be excluded from learning. When discussing learning environments for Black students in white spaces in *We Want to do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, Bettina L. Love states that "[j]oy provides a type of nourishment that is needed to be dark and fully alive in White spaces, such as schools," and that abolitionist teaching involves disruption and destabilization through "tearing down and building up" as well as joy that is "necessary to be in solidarity with others" (120). Pleasure, joy, and excitement disrupt serious, restrictive atmospheres within learning environments. Art-making facilitates joy by encouraging students to speak from their "authority of experience" (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 90). Students can integrate and share lived experiences, ideas, and beliefs in ways they choose without having to restrict them. Moving away from solely focusing on alphabetic ways of displaying knowledge, they can play more with colors, shapes, and forms.

Art-making invites expression and inclusivity. Art-making is a productively challenging method for all students to compose, while allowing students who prefer to deviate from alphabetic texts to authentically express themselves. In *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing*, Patricia A. Dunn notes that art-making allows students who prefer less alphabetic forms of composing a chance to use their talents productively, while those who excel using traditional writing methods are challenged to think differently. Unconventional methods of composing can "work with or against [students'] customary thinking patterns, producing valuable insights regarding overall purpose, structure, use of evidence, etc." (Dunn, 2001, p. 66). Art-making challenges students who were

previously rewarded for writing uniform essays in SEAE to take risks and provides space for students who felt restricted by SEAE to thrive. Additionally, art-making can benefit students of color in significant ways. As bell hooks expresses, "in African-American vernacular there has always been a concern for the soul" (*Art on My Mind* 19), but methods of expression in writing courses are often too restrictive to let students' souls speak. Shor and Freire state that educators can only learn about their students if their students are "open to performing," but creating space for performing means students "producing language that reveals what they know in the words they know it," and for that, students must feel they are "respected human beings in an important project of learning" (145). Respecting students' voices means opening composition to all methods students may select, especially when they are personally and/or culturally significant. Love perceives art-making as significant in learning because it is how "many dark [students] make sense of this unjust world," provides a way to "sustain who they are," and is "a homeplace" where "they find a voice that feels authentic and rooted in participatory democracy" (100). If we desire to teach composition in just ways, we must consider how focusing on creating alphabetic texts disempowers, discourages, and silences students' expressions of identity.

Art-making provides opportunities for transcendence. Teaching composition in just ways serves as a model for students to consider how they can contribute to social justice. The playful, destabilized, inclusive learning environment can open opportunities for ways of knowing as well as ways of coming to know. hooks and Love both note transcendent qualities of art-making. Love explains that on a personal level, "[a]rt helps people remember their dreams, hopes, and desires for a new world" (100). Extending from constructivism to social constructionism, hooks states that "[a]rt constitutes one of the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have a wide-ranging transformative impact" (*Art on My Mind* 8). Art-making is a more free, nonlinear way for students to express what personally matters to them, but those individualized topics are situated in how they experience the world and what they hope to contribute to it. Love articulates that making art is "resistance personified" (99) because it allows students to "see what is possible" as they create "[blueprints] for the world we deserve and the world we are working to make" (100). Shore and Freire agree, expressing that for critical thinking to occur, there must be imagination where "students and teachers practice anticipating a new social reality" (185). Art-making opens imagination, which can be used as a resource to "expel dominant ideology and to open up some space in consciousness for transcendent thinking" (185); therefore, all aspects of the composition process from idea generating to production can transcend course assignments and move towards students composing for social justice. Art, as Love describes, is "freedom dreams turned into action," but educators must allow opportunities for students to compose

those dreams in methods of their choice that do not restrict their beliefs or voice (100).

Art-Making and Rhetorical Analysis

My art integration into my courses took a few semesters to execute effectively. In the beginning, I asked students to create artistic responses to a text of their choice, but then still asked them to write a standard rhetorical analysis. The result was some captivating art paired with formulaic, voiceless writing. At best, students did select a text they actually enjoyed instead of one they recalled "had rhetoric" from a previous course, but it was still not a significant improvement in expression. Some compositionists such as Jody Shipka in *Toward a Composition Made Whole* allow students' artistic compositions to serve as their full text for an assignment, but I still wanted my students to engage with alphabetic text; I just wanted them to compose creatively, thoughtfully, and, hopefully, enjoy it. I hoped that art-making would connect and enhance their writing, not completely eclipse it; therefore, I redesigned my prompt so that the art-making and essay would be an artistic response to texts of students' choice, and each piece of composition would help tell stories of how they were rhetorically persuaded. Through their work, I found that this redesign of my assignment allowed students to not only find pleasure in the curriculum and express themselves, but also use this assignment to comment on social issues that meant something to them. Students' data was collected under an Institutional Review Board exempted study and pseudonyms are used to protect their identities.

My first-year and second-year undergraduate composition courses are designed in a typical format of three multi-draft paper sequences: the personal narrative, the rhetorical analysis, and the research paper. Although I have found success in using art-making with all three assignments, I am showcasing the rhetorical analysis because I noticed the biggest shift in some of my student writers. In the personal narrative, some students find it easier to be expressive because they are asked to write from their personal experiences, and by the research paper, students are accustomed to my methods (and their creativity increases a great deal by the end of the semester). The rhetorical analysis, however, has always been complicated. My students range from those who took Advanced Placement English and tested out of the first-year writing course, to students who never excelled in writing because they were always asked to write formulaic essays in SEAE. Interestingly, I noticed that when I assigned a standard rhetorical analysis, even my students who would boast that they could write one in less than an hour due to their training in high school would express negative feelings over having to write another.

I teach at a predominantly white university in the south, and Morgan was the only Black student in one of my second-year writing sections. In conversations with

me, she stated that she was accustomed to being "the token Black friend" in every space she was in, and although she desired to select an impactful text and topic for her artistic rhetorical response, she was unsure how her art and writing would be perceived by a white audience of her peers and myself. She selected a poem from a

FIGURE 1. MORGAN'S DOLL. CREDIT: P. HASH

recent book of poems called *Magical Negro* by Morgan Parker, and desired her art and writing to be a commentary on cultural imperialism. For her art, Morgan sewed a doll (Figure 1) that also served as an image in her writing. She chose to write words from the text on the doll. She stated that although she thought of making a wig, she decided to focus on the doll as a metaphor for how culture is represented in multifaceted, significant ways in beauty shops that extend past hair. For her writing, Morgan wrote a script about women in a Black-owned beauty shop, and noted that making the art made her consider how to deliver her message in writing in thoughtful, creative ways, which was a contrast to writing for her other courses. She enjoyed the assignment on a personal level because it allowed her to consider aspects of the poem she had not thought of before and integrate her own lived experiences, telling me "This is my truth to be able to speak on." But Morgan enjoyed sharing with her peers and myself equally, if not more, than composing her project. She told me that the art provided a space for her peers to ask questions that may not have arisen without the visual representation of her topic, and I noticed when she shared with her group that she stood up and read the poem as well as gestured to the doll as she discussed. Before the day came to share in class, she disclosed to me that she worried, "Do I really want to do this in a classroom where I'm going to have to stand up for every single part of this project?" But the experience proved to be pleasurable as well as significant. Morgan told me that before my course, she had yet to have an opportunity to speak on her topic in an educational setting and appreciated that she could reveal to her peers a side of her identity while also connecting to social justice in an inclusive space.

Melody was also the only Black student in a different one of my second-year writing courses. She told me that going to college in a predominately white setting had conditioned her to be cautious about selecting topics for assignments, especially when sharing with peers. Before this assignment, she considered selecting a topic of Black women straightening their natural hair for her narrative but told me in our end-of-the-semester interview that she decided not to because she was "afraid of stepping on toes" or "[inciting] any anger" because friends' experiences and the media showed her that those reactions could occur. She disclosed to me, "Most of [the professors] are white, and I don't know where they stand on certain issues, so I try to avoid racial topics because I do not want to get a bad grade." She also previously censored her topic selection because she was worried about making her predominately white peers feel uncomfortable. She noted that as one of the only racial minority students in a course, she automatically becomes "the Black voice in the room," and writing on topics that relate to social justice can emphasize that. But after her first paper, Melody did select a topic that related more to her racial identity because the art-making throughout class made her feel more comfortable and included by me and her peer group. For her artistic rhetorical response, she chose Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech because it was one of her favorite speeches and she could relate to it through multiple aspects of her identity (McKissack). Figure 2 is her art for this assignment, which she created using acrylic paint, markers, pencils, and poster board. She chose to put a head wrap on the woman because she remembered hearing that Black women used to be "forced to cover their hair in the 1800s," which has now become a part of Black culture. She also looked up depictions of Truth and noted that she wore hair coverings. When analyzing data, I noticed that Melody and Morgan both included hair in their processes of composition. Morgan used hair as a method to situate her characters in a specific location (the beauty shop) and provide a context for the characters' social dynamic. The beauty shop was also a metaphor for the dynamic culture that she chose to represent in her analysis. Melody composed a hair covering in her design choices to represent how hair coverings have functioned rhetorically in different ways over time. She told me that she chose to make the hair covering more intricate and vibrant because "it shows that women were once ashamed of their hair but are

not anymore." For her writing, she wrote a creative piece about traveling in time to view Truth give the speech in person, allowing her to creatively explore how the speech would have resonated with her if she had been in that historical environment, hearing it live. By the end of the semester, Melody told me that her favorite part of the course was not the art, but the essays she composed to pair with the art. She noted that she felt a sense of pride for stepping "out of the box" and gained confidence in expressing herself. Melody also happily told me that she sought to "annoy" her other professors by trying to write in less restrictive, more expressive ways because she wanted her writing to reflect who she was and "spice [her writing] up." She stated, "I'm going to do it differently. I don't care [. . .] Now that I have had fun with these papers, I don't want to go back." Through the semester, composing became more for Melody than receiving a grade; she started to enjoy expressing herself and articulating her voice, something that became so important to her that she was no longer as concerned about grades and expectations her other professors could place on her.

Through these narrative depictions of student data, it is clear that art-making allowed these students who felt underrepresented and unsupported in higher education learning environments opportunities to express themselves in authentic, pleasurable ways. Morgan and Melody also recognized that the art-making aspect of the assignment disrupted what they were accustomed to in writing, encouraging creative, nonlinear formats of displaying their knowledge. I allowed students to

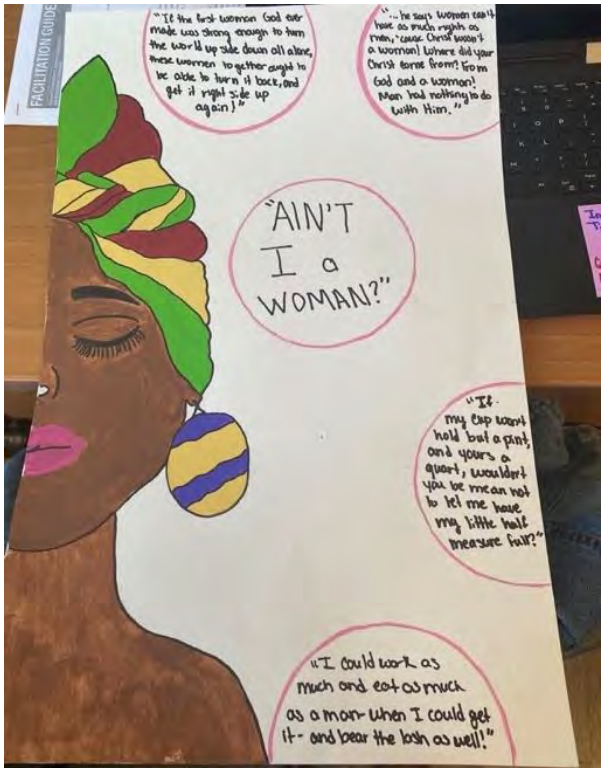

FIGURE 2. MELODY'S ART. CREDIT: MELODY

select any text of their choosing as long as it meant something to them, and many students picked popular movies, songs, etc., but multiple Black students decided to make social justice commentaries, taking the risk of possibly being in uncomfortable positions and having to represent their culture in a predominately white learning environment.

Conclusion

I used to state that my writing courses were not political, which was an extremely inaccurate as well as privileged statement. All choices we make as educators, from the wording to assignments, to our interactions with students, to how we are willing to receive students' constructed knowledge are all political decisions that have the ability to create space for expression or exclude it. There are definitely benefits to making themed curriculums, activities, and courses centered around social justice in the writing classroom, but we also must consider if we are teaching writing in just ways. How much do we rely on SEAE, restrictive alphabetic texts, or digital technologies that limit students' expression? If the goal of composition courses is to teach students to compose, we are putting them at a significant disadvantage by focusing on our own preferred methods of composition that have benefitted us instead of encouraging students to find their own. I do not think art-making should always replace writing in the composition classroom, but I believe that art-making can encourage, guide, and support students in the writing process as they compose in multimodal ways. I do know that, like Melody, now that I have seen what is possible for composition, I can never go back to the old way. I hope others will meet me where I am now and bring their students with them.

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STRATEGIC DISRUPTIONS: BLACK FEMINISM, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND AFROFUTURISM

Cherie Ann Turpin

Black women writers have possibilities for multiple locations of expression. When Black women as other speaks and writes in resistance, she is no longer a silent object of derision or object of degradation; she is a radical subject of resistance. As a speaking ""other" "she is not the muted other, but a subject of power, power which is used to deconstruct the structures of oppression. Afrofuturism positions the master narrative about the past, present, and future into one of instability and uncertainty, which is, without a doubt, a critical and political strategy that can align and inform with that of a Black feminist process that seeks to develop a discursive strategy that complicates and disrupts those narratives and myths that depend on a singularity of timelines or more importantly, identity politics. Afrofuturism and Black feminism are both vital critical apparatus vehicles for Afro-Diasporic women and men who seek to enter and disrupt an otherwise homogenous ideological framework. As "alchemists," Afrofuturists invoke the past as a means towards imagining a future that is not only inclusive of us as participants but as shapers of worlds that embrace new permutations of existence, as well as new permutations of expression, artistically. Afrofuturism is also a reclaiming of space previously assumed to be alien to us; it is not so much about being included in someone else's cultural and technological conversation, as it is a reclaiming of authority to speak as creators and inventors.

Keywords: Afrofuturism, Black Feminism, Afro-Diasporic

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a shift towards a shaping and attempts at cultivating an aesthetic and critical apparatus to respond to the artistic movement within literature, music, and visual art known as Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism opens possibilities of developing responses to ideas about where and how people of African descent can position themselves as intricate parts of human collectives and unknown futures, especially as we move towards realizing virtual and digitalized forms of cultural expression. Further, subjectivity and taking personal agency to create imagined worlds where Black people are leaders is a strong challenge to the weakened but still existing stereotypes of Black women and men as non-intellectual or limited in technological knowledge. Development of Afrofuturism as an aesthetic, theory, or as a process, is fraught with many of the same critical debates and discursive tensions that continue

to permeate through Black Feminism with regard to essentialism, identity politics, performativity, and aesthetic concerns.

Parallel commentary regarding bodies, gender, and race have continued to impact critical responses to speculative and science fiction coming from Afro-Diasporic writers. Making connections between two flourishing movements is not so much the issue as it is negotiating the discursive tensions with regard to political and aesthetic concerns. In order to understand these discursive tensions permeating critical reception of gender and race in Afrofuturist culture, this essay will discuss the role of critical debates and critical tensions in Black Feminist theory, as well as its role in the development of Afrofuturism as critical theory.

Stereotypes regarding Black women and intellectual abilities continue to be extremely difficult to unravel in the twenty-first century by Black feminists who seek to build a counter-text to them. However, as noted earlier, some Black feminist theorists have attempted to take on this difficult task in order to recover Black womanhood from degradation: "Women develop theories, characters, art, and beauty free of the pressures of meeting male approval, societal standards, color-based taxonomies, or run-of-the-mill female expectations. The results are works that some critics call uncategorizable" (Womack 10). Black feminists have persisted in creating fissures in these "bodies" of "knowledge" in order to question and unravel these stereotypes, while opening possibilities for critical inquiry that would traverse new terrain in Africana women's speculative/science fiction.

Early Approaches to Black Feminist Theory

Over the course of more than forty years, Black women intellectuals have engaged in theoretical debate and discussion as a means towards building a critical apparatus that would address both aesthetic and political concerns regarding the "place" and "position" of Black women writers, artists, in addition to our presence as academics in higher education. Barbara Smith's "call to action" for a Black feminist theory during the 1970s, argued for a breaking of racial and gendered silence in understanding Black women writers' work: "Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these in the in 'real world' of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown" (Smith 2). For Smith, Black women struggled to be heard and acknowledged as contributors to literary traditions, and as 'outsiders,' were subject to marginalization in academic discourse. During the '70s, '80s and '90s, Black Feminism as a form of literary inquiry, or what became known as "Black Feminist Theory," came into the academic community through the work of Barbara Smith, the Combahee River Collective, Mary Helen Washington, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, Michelle Wallace, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Alice

Walker, Evelynn Hammond, Barbara Christian, Deborah McDowell, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, Valerie Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, June Jordan, and Hortense Spillers.

Approaches to Black feminist theory during the 1980s were fraught with debates regarding politics of language, which in turn unfolded tensions between what some Black feminists saw as essentialism and what other Black feminists saw as articulation of what had been deemed by the hegemony as unspeakable and unacceptable in an overwhelming white, male, heteronormative academy: the Black female body. Barbara Christian warned of the dangers of becoming entangled in "academic language" that could not only alienate and exclude, but also miss engaging in crucial inquiries: "Academic language has become the new metaphysic through which we turn leaden idiom into golden discourse. But by writing more important thinking exclusively in this language, we not only speak but to ourselves, we also are in danger of not asking those critical questions which our native tongues insist we ask" (31). Christian's concerns were in part a response to critiques regarding Black feminism becoming infused with dense, Eurocentric language designed to exclude: "For I feel that the new emphasis on literary critical theory is as hegemonic as the world which it attacks" (Christian 31). Carby, paraphrasing Elaine Showalter in her introduction to *Reconstructing Womanhood*, suggested a model of Black feminist theory, which would occur in three phases:

> the concentration on the misogyny (and racism) of literary practice; the discovery that (black) women writers had a literature of their own (previously hidden by patriarchal [and racist] values) and the development of a (black) female aesthetic; and a challenge to and rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study and an increased concern with theory. (16)

Carby rejected the notion of shared experience between Black women critics and Black women writers as ahistorical and essentialist. She did "not assume the existence of a tradition or traditions of black women writings and, indeed, is critical of traditions of Afro-American intellectual thought that have been constructed as paradigmatic of Afro-American history" (Carby 16). She saw *Black feminist* and *Black woman* as signs; Black feminist theory, in her view, must interrogate the sign as "an arena of struggle and a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction [and] as conditioned by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interactions" (Carby 16).

Language in Black women's literature, in Carby's view, was not some universal code of communication or an essentialist vision of communion between Black women. Carby demonstrates this by intersecting critical and political aspects of reading which serve to modify poststructuralist models of criticism with the intention of moving Black feminist criticism directly into the midst of "the race for

theory." McDowell noted the importance of the work completed and progress made by critics coming out of Black Arts Movement and the Black Feminist Movement to bring Black women writers into the larger academic discourse, emphasizing that by "isolating and affirming the particulars of Black female experience they inspired and authorized writers from those cultures to sing in their different voices and to imagine an audience that could hear the song (McDowell.110). In contrast, Elizabeth Alexander views the eighties and nineties struggle for theoretical ground as counterproductive to transformation of academic inquiry and academic space:

> As "race" became a "category," and much intellectual energy was put into critiquing "essentialism," the focus was lost on actual people of color, their voices and contributions, as well as, more practically, the importance of increasing their—out—empowered presence on campuses and in other workplaces. The extreme reaches are not unimaginable: a gender studies without women, "race" studies without Black people and other people of color. (202)

Thus, Black feminists closed the 1980s and the majority of the 1990s without a clear resolution to this theoretical debate. Given ongoing challenges to supporting the presence of Black women and other women in color in academia, Alexander's concerns were not without merit. Further, Black feminists such as Michelle Wallace, bell hooks, Gwendolyn Mae Henderson, and others found themselves struggling with these issues during the 1990s while attempting to "retool" European theories in a direction similar to that of Carby's inquiry.

Black Feminism and Marginality Politics

Other Black feminists furthered the call for theory through a series of reshaping and reimagining European theoretical apparatuses, such as borrowing discursive strategies introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan. All of this was an attempt to do what Audre Lorde warned could not be done: use the master's tools to dismantle the "master's house," which is signified through the imposition of theoretical discourse. For example, Wallace borrowed Houston Baker's trope of the Black hole, in which

> Black holes may give access to other dimensions ...an object ...enters the Black hole and is infinitely compressed to zero volume...it passes through to another dimension, whereupon the object...reassumes...all of the properties of visibility and concreteness, but in another dimension. (Baker qtd in Wallace 55).

The dialectic of Black women's art is forced into the position of the Other by white women and Black men, who are themselves Other to white men. The trope of the Black hole described the dimensions of negation and described the repressed accumulation of Black feminist creativity as compressed mass, negated

from existence in the race and production of theory: "The outsider sees Black feminist creativity as a hole from which nothing worthwhile can emerge and in which everything is forced to assume the zero volume of nothingness, the invisibility, that results from the intense pressure of race, class and sex" (Wallace 55). Wallace attempted to address what Mary O'Connor considered to be "nothingness....as a place of origin for ...much of Black feminist writing...imposed from without, entity defined by the patriarchal and white world of power and wealth" (Wallace 55). Further, Wallace illustrated a methodical, constant process of erasure rendering Black female voices silent. Her assertion here joined other Black feminists engaged in the process of understanding the negative historical impact of racism, sexism and classism on Black women's access to artistic and intellectual opportunities. Significantly, Mary Helen Washington declared that Black women "have been hidden artists—creative geniuses...whose creative impulses have been denied and thwarted in a society in which they have been valued only as a source of cheap labor" (209). Through the margin of resistance Black feminists like Wallace and Washington encouraged Black women to write, to create works of art, and to break through the "Black hole."

Further, bell hooks theorized that art created in the margin should be seen as radical acts, saying that "[i]n this space of collective despair resistance to colonization becomes a vital component to the creativity at risk. hooks continues: "Space is interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary intervention" (152). Black women's creative works reach back into the broken and silenced past and re-cover and re-claim the repressed words of their ancestors, while speaking of their experiences and beauty. hooks argues for consideration of aesthetics as plural instead of singular, as well as a plurality of Black discursive locations. Her reasoning came in part from the recognition that Eurocentric discourse was not only not singular, but also not necessarily located at the center. Plurality disrupts binary reasoning in the assessment and articulation of "cultural practices": "The realities of choice and location are confronted in the gesture of re-vision, shaping and determining the response to existing cultural practices and in the capacity to envision new alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts" (hooks 145). hooks also sees subjectivity in Black women as a process towards political radicalness, and that Black women writers should resist Western notions of subjectivity, which limits the ability to commit to political upheaval the structures which oppress Black women. For hooks, although Black women's writing contained radical resistance to racist oppression, many Black female writers limited Black women characters' progress after breaking away from oppression instead of becoming radical subjects of resistance.

Contemporary Black women writers linked subjectivity with emotional and spiritual health, ignoring the possibility of commitment to radical politics and the

possibility of resisting unity concepts and accepting difference in female experience and in subjectivity itself, reinforcing dominant feminist thought and essentialist notions of Black identity. Further, hooks viewed marginality as being more than a site of deprivation; for her the margin was a position of political possibility and a space of resistance, and a location of counter-hegemonic discourse which also came from lived experience. Black women writers have possibilities for multiple locations of expression. When Black women as other speaks and writes in resistance, she is no longer a silent object of derision or object of degradation; she is a radical subject of resistance. As a speaking other she is not the muted other, but a subject of power, power which is used to deconstruct the structures of oppression. However, like Christian, hooks warned Black feminists regarding slippage between the voice of the oppressed and the voice of oppressor, especially with regard to power relations and domination of the oppressed. Language was "a politicization of memory" (hooks 147) which explained the present while articulating the past.

Henderson referred to this articulation as a sort of "speaking in tongues," an ability of Black women through their location as marginalized to see and speak more than one language as reader by proposing a discursive strategy that "seeks to account for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity" (117). To Henderson, critical theory in the dominant hegemony negated the multiplicity of voices of subjectivity within Black women's writing, which was in "dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of Black female subjectivity," and was in "dialogue with the aspects of "otherness" within the self." Henderson's critical model proposed the existence of heteroglossia in Black women's writing, borrowing from Bakhtin's theory in which he dispels the notion of language as ideologically neutral. He posits that it is instead a seemingly endless discursive process of layering histories and ideological intentions.

Bakhtin's notion of the heteroglot served as a promising theoretical path towards articulating Black women's strategies to disrupt dominant ideals of language and meaning because of Bakhtin's recognition of an utterance or word as infused with socio-political histories and paths: "[language] represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form" (Bakhtin 291). Henderson expanded Bakhtin's theory beyond his initial iteration to include Black women's voices as a means of disrupting assumptions that tended to reinforce racism and sexism. Henderson saw Black female creative writers as "enter[ing] simultaneously into familial, or testimonial and public or competitive discourses" that…enter into testimonial discourse with Black men as Blacks, with white women as women and with Black women as Black women . . . [and] . . . enter into a competitive discourse with Black men as women, with white women as

Blacks, and with white men as Black women" (120-121). She argued that Black women were in a unique position of possibilities as prophets, as with the Hebrew prophets of old, who were in a unique position of being the mouthpiece of God.

Conversely, Michelle Wallace offered the caveat that romanticizing or privileging marginality as a primary theoretical/political strategy would lead to a reaffirmation of the white hegemony through reinforcement of the image of the silent "strong matriarch" who is "already liberated" from her oppression. These and other images could be used by the hegemonic forces to silence the process of resistance. According to Wallace, "It seemed to me the evidence was everywhere in American culture that precisely because of their political and economic disadvantages, Black women were considered to have a peculiar advantage" (181). For hooks, a strategy of building a critical apparatus could resist a fixed position or singularity of identity that risked being co-opted and could open possibilities of opening inquiry on multiple experiences and voices.

Still, other critics like Deborah Chay offered a blunt observation that the dilemma faced by Black feminist critics was one that was brought on by their dependency on a paradigm that was evidently in need for them to transcend its limits and traps. In the essay "Rereading Barbara Christian: Black Feminist Criticism and the Category of Experience" Chay constructed a strong theoretical rebuttal to the notion of "experience" or "representation" as theorized by early Black feminists:

> I would like to suggest that it is precisely to the extent that the grounds for their differentiation cannot be maintained that Black feminists may make their strongest case for both the continuity and the importance of their critical project. That is, the conditions which continue to make an appeal to experience as a logical, appealing, and invisible foundation themselves constitute the most powerful argument for the continued need for 'Black feminist critics' to organize and inventively challenge the apparatus and terms of their representation." (Chay 649)

In other words, the strategy of relying on "experience" or "representation" as a theoretical foundation exposed a theoretical flaw that would and did, in time, prove to become intellectual traps for Black feminists.

In addition to critiques on the limits of identity-based theory that focused on race and gender, significant contributions were published by Black feminists who felt the need to address what Spillers and Hammonds referred to as "silences" in mainstream feminism with regard to Black female bodies and sexualities. For instance, Spillers argued that mainstream feminism's silence towards Black female tended to perpetuate dominant ideological paradigms that continued to perpetuate oppressive impressions of Black female sexuality:

> I wish to suggest that the lexical gaps I am describing here are manifest along a range of symbolic behavior in reference to Black women and that the absence of sexuality as a structure of distinguishing terms is solidly grounded in the negative aspects of symbol-making. The latter, in turn are wed to the abuses and uses of history, and how it is perceived. (Spillers 156)

Spillers asserted a need for Black feminists to pursue a discursive strategy to correct "official" histories of Black female sexuality that would reposition us as a disruptive force to counter hegemonic influence: The aim, though obvious, might be restated: to restore to women's historical movement its complexity of issues and supply the right verb to the subject searching for it, feminists are called upon to initiate a corrected and revised view of women of color on the frontiers of symbolic action" (Spillers 174).

In addition to Spillers' call to Black feminists, Hammonds also proposed a much more decisive and unequivocal discursive strategy for Black feminists. She saw Black feminists' reluctance to pursue a theoretical direction that included discussions on lesbian eros as an exclusionary tactic that exposed the privileging of heterosexual desire: "Since silence about sexuality is being produced by Black women and Black feminist theorists, that silence itself suggests that Black women do have some degree of agency. A focus on Black lesbian sexualities, I suggest, implies that another discourse—other than silence—can be produced" (Hammonds137). Hammonds believed such discourse to be crucial to the development of Black feminist criticism that would contend with Black women artists and writers articulating from a previously missed context that needed to be explored in order to address sexual difference and multiplicity: "Disavowing the designation of Black female sexualities as inherently abnormal, while acknowledging the material and symbolic effects of the appellation, we could begin the project of understanding how differently located Black women engage in reclaiming the body and expressing desire" (Hammonds 138). For Hammonds, breaking this silence was a decisive move that could not be ignored

Black Feminism and Intersectionality

In the twenty-first century Black feminism has continued to engage in a series of complex struggles to engage a rapidly changing academic and theoretical landscape challenged by instabilities and uncertainties with regard to political and cultural alliances. For some Black women, disengaging themselves from the limits of a feminism aligned with a singularity of racial identity while remaining committed to dismantling oppressive ideological frameworks entailed developing and encouraging a critical strategy that promised a much more complex engagement: intersectionality. Scholars Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Jennifer C.

Nash respectively outlined critical strategies that exposed the limitations of legal and social remedies to address Black women's experiences of discrimination and challenged feminist groups and Black social justice groups' methodical erasure of Black women's voices and perspectives in order to maintain social hierarchies. Collins referred to these social hierarchies as "a matrix of domination," where "[e]ach individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives" (Collins 287). Like Collins, Crenshaw argued for a much more complex concept that could address oppressive practices that affected Black women in ways much more devastating because of the intersection of race and gender as crucial factors. According to Crenshaw, using "a single-issue framework" to address racial and gender injustices further isolated Black women from "the very movements that claim them as part of their constituency," in addition to disempowering them from successfully escaping from the effects of racist and sexist oppression (Crenshaw 30).

Considering how an intersectional lens could advance Black feminist theory, Jennifer Nash's essay "Rethinking Intersectionality" criticized intersectionality's tendency to persist in Black feminism's theoretical problem of "continuously and strategically jamming the workings of binary thinking" by "continu[ing] in the tradition of Black feminism with the addition of a new name for conceptualizing the workings of identity" (Nash 9). For Nash, intersectionality as a truly useful and progressive theoretical apparatus needed to undergo a critical overhaul that would correct its ambiguity as to how it distinguishes itself from previous versions of Black feminism, whether it remained a part of Black feminist theory as a revised or emergent version, or whether it served as a critical strategy that completely "departs" from it. Nash asserted that "[i]n conceiving of privilege and oppression as complex, multi-valent, and simultaneous, intersectionality could offer a more robust conception of both identity and oppression" (Nash 12). She suggested an intersectionality strategy that would study "race and gender as co-constitutive processes and as distinctive and historically specific technologies of categorization," which would in turn allow a much more robust intellectual engagement that would result in "insights that far exceed imagining race and gender as inextricably bound up" (Nash 13).

By 2011, Nash takes her call to reconsider intersectional analysis in a critical and political direction that seems to anticipate and invite what I would refer to as a theoretical "bridge" for those who would seek to engage in Black feminism beyond identity traps, especially for those who seek to connect Black feminism with Afrofuturism. Her essay "Practicing Love: 'Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality'" takes on Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" and remixes it with affective theory, proposing a Black feminist love politics that would expose "the existence—indeed, vibrancy—of multiple Black feminist political traditions"

through "a radical conception of the public sphere" and through "a new relationship to temporality generally, and to futurity" (Nash 13). Nash asserts what I would consider a theoretical bridge that invites an Afrofuturist vision of Black feminism when she theorizes that "love-politics practitioners dream of a yet unwritten future; they imagine a world ordered by love, by a radical embrace of difference, by a set of subjects who work on/against themselves to work for each other" (Nash 18).

Bridge Towards Afrofuturism

The rise of Afrofuturism in the twenty-first century actually began its climb in intellectual circles as a continuation of a discussion regarding Black science fiction writers. The term *Afrofuturism* was first articulated and defined by Mark Dery in his 1993 essay "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," where he defined it as "[s]peculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery 180). It is inclusive of science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction, as well as visual art, music, and technological infusion into Afro-Diasporic cultures. Jewelle Gomez refers to Afrofuturism as a space where new landscapes and life experience are imagined beyond the limits of the so-called real: "[s]peculative fiction is a way of expanding our ideas of what human nature really is, allowing us to consider all aspects of ourselves; it is important that a diverse range of writers, Black lesbian writers included, participate in this expansion" Gomez. D. Denenge Akpem, discussing the 2011 Afrofuturism Conference in *Chicago Art Magazine*, describes Afrofuturism as "an exploration and methodology of liberation, simultaneously both a location and a journey . . . [w]e are alchemists in this city of steel, akin to the Yoruba god Ogun, fusing metal to metal." As "alchemists," Afrofuturists invoke the past as a means towards imagining a future that is not only inclusive of us as participants but as shapers of worlds that embrace new permutations of existence, as well as new permutations of expression, artistically. "Afrofuturism as a movement itself may be the first in which Black women creators are credited for the power of their imaginations and are equally represented as the face of the future and the shapers of the future" (Womack 16). Like Black Feminists, Afrofuturists engage in a recovery and retelling of the presence of people of African descent as contributors to cultural production and articulation. "Afrofuturism has evolved into a coherent mode not only aesthetically but also in terms of its political mission. In its broadest dimensions Afrofuturism is an extension of the historical recovery projects that Black Atlantic intellectuals have engaged in for well over two hundred years" (Yaszek 14). Rather than following dominant cultural assumptions of Africana culture as being in opposition to a digitalized future or present, Akpem

invokes an Orisha who symbolizes humanity's changing relationship with those elements that provide us with the tools for innovation, invention, and advancement. Ogun, the God of iron, shapes not just spears and guns, but railroads, locomotives, cars, and ships. His "children" are not just warriors, but also inventors and drivers. Given its persistence as both an artistic and as an aesthetic and critical process that articulates gender, racial, and sexual pluralities in the African Diaspora, Afrofuturism can be considered as existing at the side of and through the development of Black feminist theory and its emergent critical companion "intersectionality."

Afrofuturism is also a reclaiming of space previously assumed to be alien to us; it is not so much about being included in someone else's cultural and technological conversation, as it is a reclaiming of authority to speak as creators and inventors. For Black feminists, such a process surpasses socio-cultural codes demanding containment. "While Afrofuturist women are obviously shaped by modern gender issues, their creations and theories themselves emerge from a space that renders such limitations moot." (Womack 104) This process intervenes and interrupts what Alondra Nelson (2002) refers to as "the racialized digital divide narrative" in a collection of essays on Afrofuturism called "Future Texts," a special edition of *Social Text*: "The racialized digital divide narrative that circulates in the public sphere and the bodiless, color-blind mythotopias of cybertheory and commercial advertising have become the unacknowledged frames of reference for understanding race in the digital age." (Nelson 2002).

Racialized tropes that dominate the "public sphere" have been flooded with the notion that a digitalized or highly technological space cannot exist or flourish in a future populated with people of color because they/we are outdated, or of a past existence. Cultural expressions coming from such ideological paradigms assume a future free of those populations that signify a racialized limitation, as well as a past with a very limited or dim view of racial others. Nelson sees writers like Ishmael Reed as an example of a futurist vision that counters the hegemony's script: "Like [Ishmael Reed's] critique of the dominant mythos of "Western civ," his anachronistic use of technology in Mumbo Jumbo begs the question of what tools are valued by whom, and to what ends. With his innovative novel as an exemplar, Ishmael Reed has supplied a paradigm for an African diasporic technoculture (2002)."

Reed's depiction of technology serves as a subversion of the dominant tropes by revising and reimagining stories of both our past and our future from a vantage point of one who is able to see our presence as both inventors and users of technology. As Nalo Hopkinson notes with a certain joy, speculation in fiction offers Afrofuturist writers a means towards "shaking up" the hegemony such that science fiction and fantasy are already about subverting paradigms. Further, Teresa Goddu asserts that African American writers who have ventured into speculative fiction

featuring horror or the fantastic engage in a counter-text or counter-theoretical mode of writing about the past, where the "horror" of the slave institution, Jim Crow, and the aftermath provide rich, fertile ground upon which to imagine supernatural or preternatural figures who exist in a world already rife with evils of racism, subjugation, and dehumanization. Goddu asserts that "[f]rom Morrison's vampiric *Beloved*, who sucks the past out of Sethe, to Eddie Murphy's *Vampire in Brooklyn*, which replays Dracula's landing in England as the entrance into New York harbor of a crumbling Caribbean slave ship populated with corpses, the African-American vampire reminds us that the American gothic travels from elsewhere and is burdened by the horror of racial history" (Goddu 139).

Kodwo Eshun's theorization moves in a direction similar to that of Nelson's trajectory, in that he also sees Afrofuturism as interrupting the old version of the story of the future. Further, Eshun views Afrofuturism as an emergence of "temporal complications and episodes that disturb the linear time of progress" which "adjust the temporal logics that condemned the Black subjects to prehistory" (297). Put another way, Afrofuturism is a process or performative that disrupts and erupts commonly understood sequential order of things, or what we have understood to be history, or even fact. For novelist Hopkinson, the speculative possesses a political vehicle that allows writers to explore racial and social class performativity, "so one might say that, at a very deep level, one of the things that fantasy and science fiction do is to use myth-making to examine and explore socioeconomically configured ethnoracial power imbalances" (Hopkinson 46). According to Herman Gray, Afrofuturist writers such such as Octavia Butler, Samuel Delaney, and others inspire this movement in such a way that encourages an imagined existence in the African Diaspora beyond colonized borders and the legacy and terror of slavery and its aftermath. Gray notes how "Afrofuturists claim that Blacks scattered across the Atlantic world are aliens in an alien land, ever on the lookout for clues and resources that point the way out of alien nations and conditions of bondage" (166). Connecting Afrofuturist fiction to Afrofuturist music as similar movements away from these limits, Gray contends this movement as a significant step towards liberation, where the liminal could produce innovative modes of fashioning the African diasporic self, "it is possible to rebuild old and make anew different diasporic connections, as well as to imagine possibilities for inhabiting the spaces and identities about which Sun Ra wrote" (Gray 166).

Afrofuturism positions the master narrative about the past, present, and future into one of instability and uncertainty, which is, without a doubt, a critical and political strategy that can align and inform with that of a Black feminist process that seeks to develop a discursive strategy that complicates and disrupts those narratives and myths that depend on a singularity of timelines or more importantly, identity politics. Afrofuturism and Black feminism are both vital critical apparatus

vehicles for Afro-Diasporic women and men who seek to enter and disrupt an otherwise homogenous ideological framework.

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MY LONESOME ADVENTURES WITH THE LATE JAMES KELLY BETTER KNOWN BY HIS LAKOTA NAME HAIR IN THE WIND

Cacayo

I. A Mother's Sorrow

We've tried it all so far
stitching together
quilt almost
our time with you
shared spaces sacred now
dirty alley's water
navigated on less than drift wood
cardboard paddles or worse materials
wilted by the tears of the women you left behind
mothers' quarrels
brothers' pointing fingers
at insufficiencies
swept under rugs
made by forefather weavers eons ago
that now decorate entryways
that no one dares step into
even to say hello
let alone to hang a hat
and stay for the poison
we danced in our veins
leaving marks
on any wall with only the smallest spaces left
to carve out some sort of message
to say WE WAS HERE
now and forever
or
I heart this damned thing of ours
knowing that after fumbling around
to make piss hit its mark
leaning up against a wall
flushing with a boot and drying hands
on pockets worn out by wallets that clung
on to chains barely holding
an empty night's loot
you may be there at the door
saying what took you so long
there's a lesbian bar
we have to hit right around the corner
that we forget about

after a fist fight cause unknown

–No, the wasichu frat boys were teasing
that homeless guy!
your two cents story
retold a million times better
worthy of the best verse
in the worse town ever known
to any lawyer we've ever met
the sound of the last record
just one more hole in the wall
before we take to the lake
before clothes come off
a glimpse of the tan lines
of those we may/did marry
all in days work
before a night errantry two out of three
won't remember most of
comes to an end.

II. Bullet Holes and Three Ring (Pop!) Binders

I'm not sure how to write about
having had to wrestle a gun
out of some drunk's hand
pinned him down real good
yelling I've gottim
it's on the floor.

Then bats out of hell
hoping someone finds the poor bastard ok
praying we can make it out
shuffling through the crowd
swaying on the twang
before they realize
the brown kids in back
are making a run for it.

That's when you'd show up
what's going on, Josie?
where you goin'?
me giving you that look
once again:
HELP.

Who's gonna tell the boys
of ending up somewhere in a pool stories
shooting bullets up at the sky stories
waiting for the thunk stories
back stories.

Then running again
and at the foot of the Kansas River
hell mud
black men knoodled here mud
asking whatcha read lately mud
of stumps and men mud
as the sun rose
cutting into the mid-week
we knew what had to be done
at the dusk of when reasonable people
began another

this-is-what-normal-people-do
doo-days, doo-days

hitching a ride from pot smoking done up executives
or pot smoking farmers in for market
to your house
where you would cook for us
study you'd say
and painted our papers red
comments that made me cuss out loud
what the fuck's wrong with using a semicolon?
retyping at blazing speed
trying to just pass
passed anything
that wouldn't change our lives forever

or take us straight into life's groin
always back by the time
the bells tolled for class
legal pad in hand
our paper rolled up
still warm like Vallejo's bread
and vinegar in our pens
ready to take on the wasp's nest
that tried to make us gentle men and sober women
dissecting boringly

the book
that we
aspired to be.

POST-COVID PEDAGOGY AND ETHICS: A CALL TO TEACH THE BANALITY OF EVIL

Mike Piero

This essay argues that the banality of evil serves as a much-needed concept through which to understand and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Toward reducing COVID-19 spread, suffering, and death, humanities professors should engage their students about the tendency we each have to locate evil in the other, thereby exculpating ourselves from being complicit in such evil. Looking to the worst Crime(s) of the twentieth century and without equating the Shoah—or other events of genocide and mass violence—with the COVID-19 pandemic, this essay draws upon philosophers like Arendt, Todorov, Adorno, Sontag, Nancy, Agamben, and others to suggest that considering our own complicity in the spread of this virus in the daily, banal activities of life is paramount for ethical decision making today. While some—notably anti-maskers, anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, and the politicians who support them—are more complicit in spreading this virus (and should be held responsible), to locate the "evil" of this pandemic's disastrous spread only in them would neglect the "little" ways in which most of us are complicit in this global catastrophe. A post-COVID pedagogy of ethics requires us to instruct students about the banality of evil to spark within them the critical self-reflection needed for more just, ethical relations towards others, even beyond that required by law. So long as we continue to locate evil in others alone, COVID-19—and the next pandemic or catastrophe—will continue to proliferate through the everyday actions of otherwise good people going about their daily lives.

Keywords: banality of evil, COVID-19, pedagogy, humanities, ethics

"Yet a gaze averted from the beaten track,
a hatred for brutality, a search for fresh concepts
not yet encompassed by the general pattern,
is the last hope for thought."
— Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* pp. 67-68

As I write, the COVID-19 death toll in the United States (alone) has reached 694,701 people, a mind-boggling number that serves as a reminder that education today can no longer afford to tackle societal problems and catastrophes in sanitized terms. Indeed, the SARS-CoV-2 virus has engendered a great rupture in education—among many other institutions and fields—across a myriad of fronts, including the role(s) of technology in learning, institutional equity issues, student and teacher safety, racism as a public health crisis, and the digital divide to name just a few. While this pandemic has incontrovertibly exposed what was already visible (to many)—the rampant

inequalities that permeate our socio-economic systems, institutions, and lives—it has also reinforced the need for a renewed and reimagined humanities education. As I have taught my English and humanities courses online over the past year (itself a privilege from a safety standpoint), I have been struck by an unshakable sense that the humanities bear some complicity in this global catastrophe.

It is, after all, the humanities that are primarily responsible for educating communities about ethical relation to others, social justice, and the difference(s) between rights and justice. As humanities programs and departments at schools, colleges, and universities continue to come under threat by cost-cutting and budget-balancing schemes, I offer a reminder that scientific advancement alone will not save us from COVID-19.[1] A vaccine is of little use unless you have a population educated enough through the humanities—and English Studies in particular, given the importance of rhetorics of public health, (dis)information, and community—to take it, a community of leaders and judges courageous enough to require it, and citizens who care enough about their neighbors to continue wearing masks and socially distancing for the safety of their communities. This essay responds both to the widespread campaigns of disinformation and conspiracy theories (especially among former President Donald Trump and friends) along with a banal yet "rationalized" indifference to the lives of others that can be found, however subtly, across the U.S. political spectrum. I argue throughout this essay that professors in English and the humanities must learn, teach, and live with an awareness of the banality of evil if we are serious about preventing—or at least mitigating the damage from—this kind of catastrophe in the future. A humanities education rooted in the lessons of the banality of evil offers students and communities a powerful, inner way to conceptualize ethical experience in relation to the often-unseen suffering of others, a key component of life-saving and life-affirming behavior in times of global catastrophes.

At every point in this writing process, my thinking on this topic attempts to resist the easy—and, frankly, deadly—routes of rigid self-righteousness, on the one hand, and a noncommittal politics on the other hand. The difficulty here lies in the compassion needed to register just how devastating and traumatic this pandemic has been on all of us (some more so than others, no doubt) but also the clarity needed regarding the socio-cultural roots of the current civilizational failures, in which each of us is complicit. Again, this is a matter of degree. In struggling to discover this balance, I am encouraged by Homi Bhabha's words from July 2020:

[1] This is not to make an attack on science, as should become clear throughout the essay, but instead to register the crucial role the humanities play in effecting an educated public willing to embrace science, think critically, and live justly in relation to others. It is also worth mentioning that challenging some of the messianic rhetorics of Science proper is not the same as ignoring or refusing it; in fact, such critiques are a friend to the sciences.

> Being unprepared may be for the citizen an inflection point, one that primes you for becoming an effective agent by first taking you aback and then giving you an opportunity to recover and write yourself and hence to stand up against the illegitimate uses of power and the uses of authority that we see when governments use "unpreparedness" to shield themselves from their own failings. (Bhabha, "On Being Unprepared")

At least in the United States (to which I limit this current discussion), English as a field—and by extension all of the humanities—must seize this moment as an inflection point not only to affirm and extend the rhetorical analyses that strive towards an always-ever emergent equitable society as has long been championed in the field but also to interrogate our own potential failing in light of COVID-19. A new ethical "demand" presents itself to us in this moment, and our "ethical experience," in precisely Simon Critchley's sense of the concept, requires us to respond to it (Critchley 21). If the ethical demand—in this case, to reimagine how we conceive of and teach the banality of evil in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—is "the fundamental principle of the subject's articulation," as Critchley argues, then discussion of our own complicity, our own relation to the suffering of others, and our own assumptions about "evil" become paramount in responding to this moment of unpreparedness, even in our own field (20). To be clear, I write everything contained herein to myself, in the first instance.

The "banality of evil," a phrase borrowed from the philosopher Hannah Arendt as discussed a bit later, encapsulates how the most evil crimes, violence, and suffering is perpetuated not primarily through "monstrous" or "demonic" figures but through the boring, everyday decisions and activities of ordinary people.[2] The scale of death and suffering resulting from COVID-19 would not be possible without exceedingly large groups of people being unaware of the banality of evil, one of the principal lessons of the twentieth century. As such, the task of post-COVID-19 education in English and the humanities must include explicit instruction on the lesson of the banality of evil with an eye toward 1) critical self-reflection that considers evil in light of its banality and as existing internally rather than solely in

[2] For Arendt, the banality of evil was merely a fact emerging from the trial—the fact of how boring, ordinary, and unimaginative a person Eichmann was: he followed rules dutifully and respected his own career advancement (*Eichmann* 287). The lesson here, of course, is that *thinking* of our own capacity for evil—even and especially through our everyday duties, boring chores, and most banal tasks of labor—is a possible escape from evil. As she clarifies in *Responsibility and Judgment* in writings collected after *Eichmann*, without whitewashing Crime whereby "where all are guilty, no one is" (21), to understand how such radical violence emerges requires not primarily analysis of the breakdown of personal responsibility but instead the breakdown of personal judgment (24). When faced with such a totalizing evil that presents itself as a daily temptation, an authorized action even, the question for educators in English becomes how do we teach about language, art, and rhetoric now *knowing* these risks, these temptations, these effects, and the critical need for all citizens to be equipped to judge, refuse, and locate evil (especially in themselves)?

the Other and 2) the "mechanisms," as Theodor Adorno has termed it, "that render people capable of such deeds" ("Education" 193). Public response to the pandemic spans from anti-maskers protesting "violations" of their "freedom" at state capitol buildings to those who have bunkered down and remained home regardless of local and state mandates, and everything in between. I am particularly interested in the space between the extremes, as it were, those large throngs of people who are in our classes and can—if they choose—take an approach that often allows them still to gather unsafely with others, dine unmasked indoors at crowded bars and restaurants, and engage in other activities that are patently dangerous during this stage of the pandemic. While the non-vaccinated are now driving this pandemic during the Delta variant surge, we should remember that even the fully vaccinated can spread this variant even while vaccines remain highly effective against individual hospitalization and death. These activities become possible because the "evil" of this pandemic is located, however unconsciously, in *others*—anti-maskers, anti-vaxxers, politicians, news media, businesses, capitalism, or other loci of complicity in this current catastrophe. To be sure, these various groups have been complicit in the current pandemic and the suffering and death stemming from it—they should be held responsible in public discourses, courts, and classrooms. My concern, however, is that the overarching problem that the humanities is uniquely positioned to address is the widespread location of evil in the Other and how that mechanism of relation to self and others prepares a way for the banality of evil to thrive.

Arendt coined the phrase "the banality of evil" in her coverage of Adolf Eichmann's trial for his unimaginably heinous and deadly role in orchestrating the Shoah (*shoah* is Hebrew for "catastrophe").[3] Although the phrase provoked decades of controversy largely due to careless reading and misinterpretation, particularly in the United States, Arendt's point was that the most unthinkable violence and crime rely on the banal, everyday happenings that enable horrific cruelty to occur on a massive scale.[4] Eichmann's work in engineering the mass extermination of European Jews and other marginalized people is unthinkable, but his evil violence and disregard for life was underwritten by an enterprise of everyday, banal activities and an inability to think (about others). This frighteningly all-too-human

[3] While customarily referred to as the Holocaust, I instead use Shoah here to register the absolute senselessness, horror, and violence that cannot be associated with the "sacrificial" insofar as it was neither given freely nor redemptive. The word "holocaust" derives from the Greek *holos*, meaning whole, and *kaustos*, meaning burned, and was used to describe a Jewish sacrificial offering that was completely consumed by fire upon the alter. Rather than being in any way associated with religious offering, a freely given sacrifice, or a demand from Jehovah, the genocide of European Jews and mass murder of non-Jewish people by the Nazi regime is the Shoah, which translates in Hebrew as "catastrophe" or "calamity."
[4] For historical perspective on the early controversy surrounding Arendt's phrase and report, see Amos Elon's introduction to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt."

violence—unthinkable in scale and unable to be represented in word or art, though art comes closest—must be extended also to camp guards following orders and advancing careers, soccer games in camps, countryfolk living a few miles away from camps who remained silent, business and community leaders who maintained their livelihoods (at unimaginable costs), and a host of complicit others "merely" going about their lives. For Giorgio Agamben, the recreational spectacle of the soccer match held between the *Schutzstaffel* (SS)guards and the *Sonderkommando* on the village green at Auschwitz represents "the true horror of the camp" (*Remnants* 26). The fact that such everyday, casual events—that normalcy—could continue amidst the unthinkable violence happening at the same time and in the same place affirms the dangers to all of us without exception of the banality of evil: "If we do not succeed in understanding that match, in stopping it, there will never be hope" (26).[5] The banality of evil extends, of course, not only to the Shoah but also to the crimes of mass murder, genocide, and slavery whenever and wherever it occurs, including the genocide of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa at the turn of the twentieth century (see Macaskill 410-419), the far-reaching Soviet crimes and violence under Stalin, the Armenian Genocide begun in 1915 by the Young Turk government, the Cambodian (auto-)genocide under Pol Pot of the 1970s, the Rwandan genocide of the minority Tutsi community in 1994, and the respective systemic and institutionalized horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, American slavery, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas that continue to harm Black and Indigenous lives in the U.S. to this day, to name only a few of an unspeakably long list of state-perpetrated genocide and mass ethnic violence.

Without equating the horrors of Auschwitz and COVID-19 (the events are entirely different in nature and scale, let me be clear), the *lesson* of the banality of evil that Arendt calls attention to should be one to which we each take heed for our survival of this current pandemic and the mitigation of future catastrophes.[6] As I look around, I see endless groups of people—some masked but many not—going about their daily lives while somehow managing to neglect the fact that in each such activity, they could be spreading the virus and, therefore, be complicit in the death of people in our community. I notice this occurring across the U.S. political spectrum and socio-economic status, albeit through radically disparate discourses—and, it is important to add, to varying degrees—that allow people to take ostensibly

[5] I should mention here the controversy surrounding Agamben's comments about the pandemic in Italy in February and March 2020. Space does not permit me to address this matter thoroughly, but for more on this controversy, please see the insightful discussion (particularly the late Jean-Luc Nancy's response) in the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* ("Coronavirus and Philosophers") and more recent responses by Irfan Ahmad and Michael Peters.

[6] Peter Singer mentions in response to J.M. Coetzee's fictional character Elizabeth Costello's comparison of Nazi death camps and abattoirs that "a comparison is not necessarily an equation" (86). This cannot be overstated.

calculated risks that figure merely as rationalized efforts to reclaim some sense of control, freedom, or normalcy. If through critical, inner insight we each saw ourselves as potential killers, we might consider our seemingly benign actions more carefully in light of others around us. We can no longer afford *not* to look for evil in our own daily, banal actions—or even in our teaching practices. Today, one can lead an otherwise "good" life and still be a killer, and this is precisely the lesson that we must do better at teaching to our students, and more fully understanding ourselves. Such a lesson regarding ethical living extends far beyond the scope of the pandemic alone, potentially impacting all areas where social justice is wanting. The critiques of governmental, political, and institutional failures are crucial to expose, address, and correct, to be sure; just as important, however, is the critical self-awareness it provokes in each of us with regard to the other.

Tzvetan Todorov's *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*, published twenty years before COVID-19 lockdowns and global spread, offers a timely reminder that the problem with evil is that we generally locate evil in *others*: monsters, dictators, murderers, political opponents, and so on. If we do not—or are not prepared to, or fail to—see our own capacity for and complicity in evil, violence, and death, we will ensure the perpetuation of suffering. There is no shortage of things outside our control—employment rules, school openings/closures, business restrictions, and so on—but we have the ability to be vigilant in the caution and care we take in daily tasks, recreation, and social events to the best that our ability and privilege affords under the circumstances. For now, this clearly means full vaccination for everyone who is eligible, avoiding crowded gatherings, social distancing, and masking when indoors, all done whether required by law or not. As Todorov writes, "In everyday life too, we easily forget the harm we've inflicted but hold onto the memory of the harm we've endured" (80). In the smallest decisions in life—such as attending a large birthday party or meeting some friends indoors for lunch—folks could unknowingly be spreading this virus, and it kills people on a massive scale, whether they see such suffering and death or not. In short, it is all too easy to forget our own complicity each day: such a realization is a sobering fact of life today. In a politically divisive and partisan landscape, it is all the more important to remember that a post-COVID pedagogy will require a more keenly intentional approach to the banality of evil and our own capacity to reproduce evil, suffering, and death in ways paved sometimes with even the best of intentions.

In "Education After Auschwitz," Adorno advocates that "the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again" ("Education" 191). He reminds us in sobering prose that the conditions that prepared the way for Auschwitz—using that as a metonym for the horrors of all the camps—"continue largely unchanged. That is the whole horror" (191). If we extend Adorno's exhortation more broadly not only to the Shoah—and not only to the many crimes

of genocide and ethnic violence of the twentieth century—but also to all violence and suffering that occurs on a wide scale, and I think we should, it becomes clear that post-COVID-19 education requires a more explicit education about the nature and location of evil and violence, regard for the suffering of others, the mechanisms through which everyday people come to perpetrate violence against others, and the ethical necessity for critical self-reflection in daily life. As Adorno writes, "The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection," and he correctly locates this need in childhood education, in the first instance, but also throughout one's life and education.

Today, with each drink at a bar, each (indoor) family gathering with multiple households, each unnecessary airplane trip, we pretend we cannot hear their gasps for breath, their mournful tears, their ongoing suffering. We convince ourselves that others (alone) are to blame, and affirmation of differences in "COVID values" merely masks the fundamental problems under the guise of tolerance. This level of self-deception is deadly—I write this to myself. Part of our tasks as professors teaching in the humanities, as I understand it, is to differentiate for students the implications of Law—with its proclivity to a discourse on (juridical) rights—and that of justice, or, just relations between people, even in everyday life. The Law alone is insufficient to cope with COVID-19. If *all* we do is follow the letter of state and local mandates (which themselves are often woefully inadequate) with regard to masking, social distancing, large gatherings, and public events, we each will help ensure that this pandemic continues to ravage our communities well into the future. If, on the other hand, we live in accordance with but also beyond the Law according to an ethics that takes into account the banality of evil, many lives shall be saved. This pandemic is not primarily a matter of legal rights; it is a matter of just behavior toward the other, especially the unseen and unknown other whom one can protect by getting vaccinated, keeping a mask on when around others, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces whenever possible until this pandemic is over. As more hospitals reach capacity and as healthcare professionals continue to face unthinkable challenges, risks, and burnout, doing everything we can to prevent the continued transmission of this virus in our communities is each of our ethical obligations.

Many of us have been teaching this for years, of course, either explicitly or implicitly: regard for the silenced Other, just and empathetic relations among people, and the difference between focusing on individual rights versus collective justice. It would seem, however, that we have not done enough in our teaching of literature, rhetoric, and cultural texts to communicate to students the hallmark lesson of the twentieth century: that each time one locates "evil" in the other, one guarantees the conditions that allow evil, violence, and suffering to proliferate. I write this because while I expected, sadly, to see anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers making noise in the U.S. (as upsetting as this is to me), I was unprepared to see

groups of well-educated students, graduates, and colleagues in the humanities—and of all ages, incidentally—engaging in dangerous and risky behavior, all while simultaneously decrying the pandemic behavior of others. While the scourge of anti-maskers, anti-vaxxers, and the like must be countered with ongoing persuasive appeals, we should not forget our own ethical obligations to others in the face of the aforementioned groups' unjust selfishness. To forget—or refuse—our own complicity, even if much smaller than others' complicity, is the greatest danger. This is the lesson of the "coexistence of normality [and banality] with bottomless cruelty" (Elon xv). Memory of the past alone is not enough to impede history repeating itself:

> The memory of the past will serve no purpose if it is used to build an impassable wall between evil and us, identifying exclusively with irreproachable heroes and innocent victims and driving the agents of evil outside the confines of humankind. (Todorov 79-80)

The difficulty here and now of this comparison is the paradoxical dangers of memory and representation. The Shoah refuses representation insofar as no testimony can bear complete witness to the whole horror of the genocide of the Jews that attempted to annihilate the very possibility of its witness (Agamben, *Remnants* 17). This also remains true for attempts to represent genocides within and beyond the borders of Europe: art, as previously mentioned, brings us closest.

In each act of representation—including in this essay, but also in literature, film, interview, and so on—the danger that persists is precisely that of erasure. Of this matter, Jean-François Lyotard poignantly writes, "Whenever one represents, one inscribes in memory, and this might seem a good defense against forgetting. It is, I believe, just the opposite. Only that which has been inscribed can, in the current sense of the term, be forgotten, because it could be effaced" (26). Lyotard expresses here what has always been the objective not only of all literature but all of the humanities:

> to reveal, represent in words, what every representation misses, what is forgotten there: [...] a forgotten that is not the result of the forgetting of a reality—nothing having been stored in the memory—and which one can only remember as forgotten 'before' memory and forgetting, and by repeating it. (5)

Again, without insisting on the similitude of the horrors of genocide and the COVID-19 pandemic, the lesson of the banality of evil should be instructive to us regarding the kind of pedagogy needed today to lessen the frequency of evil, violence, and suffering in all forms, including what we (each) contribute in everyday ways to catastrophes. For Adorno, narratives of reconciliation and positivism (e.g. the "gratefulness" movement during COVID-19) is the real nihilism, narratives that are easily reterritorialized by the culture industry and are, therefore, put in service to the perpetuation of suffering and death (Critchley 28). In a "post-fact" world, it

would be easy to focus exclusively on corrupt politicians pushing disinformation and lies, organizations and media companies that manipulate (or allow manipulated) facts and data, and large groups of neighbors ensnared by populist ideologies that (over)emphasize individual "freedoms" (even nonexistent and nonsensical ones) over ethical and just relation to others. To be sure, all of these matters are serious problems and deserving of critical and pedagogical attention. The risk underwriting these problems today, however, is precisely in locating evil—or danger, or violence, or complicity—solely in the Other. That inner psychosocial mechanism of repressing one's own complicity in COVID-19 is what will ensure that the next pandemic—SARS-CoV-2 is certainly not the last nor likely even the worst—wreaks unimaginable death and suffering. Again and again.

If we are serious about preventing the conditions that led to the massive loss of life at the proverbial hands of COVID-19, English and humanities educators need a post-COVID pedagogy that explicitly instructs students and the wider public on the banality of evil, the dangers of locating evil in alterity, and the power of critical self-reflection. This is no easy task, especially given the impossibility of representing such horror. If "the modern manipulation of facts ushers in a pure simulacrum, and image-making is the main concern," writes Jean-Michel Rabaté, then our instruction must speak to the degree zero of the conditions of barbarism (87). In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this includes the repressed condition in many of us to locate the evil of this virus' spread in some *other*. I do not intend to erase the privilege(s) at play that impact precisely what care and caution one can take; the inner, ethical experience of which I write is limited, perforce, be each person's unique circumstances as well as the systemic inequities under which some communities unduly suffer. My intention is neither to load up people with guilt, nor to induce an overwhelming anxiety regarding each and every decision made in daily life—some of which are simply outside of one's control. Instead, I offer a reminder about our vocational obligation to address and make visible, whenever possible, the deadly, reactionary, and overarching norm of status quo life and thought in all of its socio-political formulations (from conservative to liberal ideologies): that is, in Adorno's words, how "one pursues one's own advantage before all else and, simply not to endanger oneself, does not talk too much" ("Education" 201). In other words, the pedagogy needed today and moving forward requires an intentional rupture of the us/them opposition, even at the ontological level, about which I have written elsewhere (Piero, "Cloudy" 105; Piero "Gaming" 55). It requires a rejection of passive sympathy for others and instead an empathetic imagination that involves an active "reflection on how *our* privileges are located on the same map as *their* suffering and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their own suffering" (Sontag 102-103, my emphasis). While not a new ethical demand, a post-COVID pedagogy now as much as ever demands the courage to speak that which

most—even ourselves and our colleagues—may prefer not to hear, especially after the trauma we have collectively and individually endured through this pandemic.

It is worth pausing here to clarify what I am calling for and some of the dangers of misinterpreting this call. To teach the banality of evil in a meaningful way is not the same as calling for collectivism, acknowledgement of shared human bonds, or even one's "responsibility" to others, where these words—collective, bonds, and responsibility—all give rise to a variety of philosophical and situated problems.[7] If as Agamben has written, dominant secular ethics has conflated juridical and ethical categories, one must be careful in how one frames the ethical call for critical self-reflection regarding one's complicity in suffering and our capacity for evil (*Remnants* 24). Not a matter of theoretical quibbling, the difference in locating just relations between one another in a properly ethical category and not in the realm of responsibility in the most technical sense (to the absolute Other, to God, to the Law, and so on) is an important one, one that Jacques Derrida has also poignantly addressed with regard to the responsibility/ethics paradigm seen in the Binding of Isaac narrative (Derrida 69-71). Instruction about the banality of evil should be sobering for most individuals, and that sobriety regarding the nature and location of evil would be nothing less than transformative in the social (and political) arena. Whether in the realm of Crime—with a capital C, such as the previously discussed genocides, death camps, and state ethno-terrorism—or with regard to other iterations of violence and suffering, such as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the ability of each person to reflect inwardly on one's own complicity and capacities is the hinge upon which our ethical and just relations to others rest.[8] Until such a time when community spread and death are seriously lowered, perhaps even through the use of more effective, scientifically-proven treatments for COVID-19 patients, preventing the spread of this virus will remain one of the utmost ethical obligations in our daily lives.

[7] The recently-passed Jean-Luc Nancy—whose work and ideas continue to touch us—understands that ethics is always a matter of ontology and that "Being is together, and it is not a togetherness" (60). In this way, words like community, collectives, and togetherness as typically invoked give way to problems insofar as "collection assumes a regrouping that is exterior and indifferent to the being-together ('in common') of the objects of the collection" (60). Adorno describes a similar concern with the word "bonds": "People who adopt them [bonds] more or less voluntarily are placed under a kind of permanent compulsion to obey orders" ("Education" 195). In thinking about the "responsibility" we have after COVID-19 to teach about ethics in the domains of our field, it is important that we not conflate responsibility and ethics in our teaching of the banality of evil. Responsibility is a matter of juridical law (in my use of it above: what our profession demands of us), but ethics does not respond to law, guilt, or responsibility but instead to life. For more on this, please see Agamben, pg. 24.

[8] For this distinction, I am indebted to Brian Macaskill, whose artistically academic work on Crime—especially the oft-overlooked genocide of the Herero and the Nama, Shark Island being the first death camp of the twentieth century (Macaskill 409)—constitutes an affirmation of life, a memorial to underrepresented victims of genocide in Africa, and a tribute to art.

In the course of my writing, I considered providing some examples of my own enactment of teaching the banality of evil, since illustrative examples seem fairly compulsory when matters of pedagogy are being discussed. The practical application in this instance, however, runs the risk of subordinating the theoretical considerations presented hitherto to a set of sterile examples, and for this particular writing occasion, such a risk is not worth taking. We all, I trust, know how to do this in our courses, professional development workshops, and collaborations with K-12 partners, especially in ways that refuse sentimentality, which, "notoriously, is entirely compatible with a taste for brutality and worse" (Sontag 102). One of Adorno's indictments of modern society—which has become all the more convincing since his death—is that "the haste, nervousness, restlessness observed since the rise of the big cities is now spreading in the manner of an epidemic, as did once the plague and cholera" (*Minima Moralia* 138). It is in this haste, he argues, that we come to be occupied with a life(style) that is all too practical, a life(style) from which stems a deeply embedded compulsion to obey orders and reduce life—and also teaching—to a series of tasks, (best) practices, and professional mandates.

This call, here and now, is not a call for a specific intervention, lesson, or activity; instead, it is a call to consider our shared responsibility to cultivate in our students (and ourselves) an ethical experience of the banality of evil. It is a call for each of us to consider—through critical self-reflection from within—how we teach in response to the banality of evil, which involves how we sublimate (and hence respond to) the infinite ethical demand(s) of modern life (Critchley 85-86). It is a call to consider not only our own teaching practices but also our own repressed anxieties that stem from being products of cultures that render people capable of being unable to see their own complicity in the suffering of others. It is, ultimately, a call to reimagine where we locate evil in our teaching and ourselves, including our teaching of the rampant and longstanding inequalities even further exposed by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Our shared ability to mitigate suffering—and even survive the next pandemic, or another worse catastrophe yet to be imagined (e.g. the realities of climate change)—relies, at bottom, on each of our understanding of our capacity to perpetuate suffering. Such an awareness of how widespread violence and suffering occur—and the everyday motives of such horror that are usually repressed—is the first step toward a more just, empathetic, and ethical future yet to be imagined and always coming into being in every banal activity and spoken word each day.

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POE'S "THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH": A TALE FOR OUR TIME

Amy Branam Armiento

One of the injustices the global pandemic underscored is the U.S.'s class inequalities. When thinking about how to teach my students about (in)justice, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" seemed ideal. Even though Poe's story is set in a European country during the medieval period, its portrayal of the injustices that those with wealth, status, and power inflict upon those without these privileges transcends time. I taught this class in an introductory literature class and an intermediate "gateway to the major" course, emphasizing not only the content but also some of the formal elements of the work, including symbols, particularly color symbols, allegory, ironic plot twists, the multiple meanings of the title, and the theme. In this article, I outline my assignments for each level, relay parts of the class discussions, and share some of my students' work. As a result of these activities, students realize that this "old" tale by an "old" writer remains relevant; it captures a dynamic in human relationships that has not changed, and it is one to which my students easily relate.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death," class inequality, pedagogy

Throughout 2020, politicians, journalists, and others bandied about the phrase "unprecedented times." However, those of us who work in the humanities probably met this characterization with some skepticism. Professors of philosophy, history, languages, and literature do not have to reach far back in time within their disciplines to find similar examples of human susceptibility to illness on grand scales and the erratic – sometimes heroic, sometimes shameful – reactions. For example, in the field of literature, fictionalized accounts of life during an outbreak of a devastating disease have been published for centuries, including Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353), Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947), and Gabriel Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985). Many of these writers drew on their own experiences, historical documents, and their knowledge of human nature to depict the human response – personal, social, and political.

During the summer of 2020, I was considering readings for my fall literature classes. I knew I had many literary works from which to choose to incorporate a pandemic-themed story into my pedagogy. However, I had some self-imposed parameters. I wanted a story that would work well for both my 100-level Introduction to Literature and the 200-level Literature of the United States: Pre-Colonial to Present classes. The restriction to the United States narrowed my

options considerably. One candidate that came to mind was Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799), which is set in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic. However, a novel did not seem like an ideal candidate for the students who would enroll in the general education class. Katherine Ann Porter's novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), which is set during the 1918 influenza pandemic, seemed like a better choice due to its relative brevity and updated vocabulary. I even considered assigning excerpts on scarlet fever or fever and ague (malaria) in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series (1932-1943). Yet these options did not satisfy my desire to assign a relatively short and accessible text that would allow me to demonstrate specific literary techniques for the introductory class while also challenging students in my intermediate course. The ideal text to meet these requirements, I decided, was Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842).

One of the injustices the global pandemic underscored is the U.S.'s class inequalities. When thinking about how to teach my students about justice, Poe's tale seemed ideal. The story reminds students that the disparities of the past continue to manifest themselves in our lives today. Not only does Prince Prospero and his one thousand friends mirror the affluent class in Poe's time, but they also represent the rich in the present. These characters do not merely have more than enough resources to live. Rather they have amassed an obscene amount of money that they could not hope to ever exhaust in their lifetimes. The students learn that the idea of an upper class declining to exercise the option to relieve the suffering of others – even to prevent death – is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, these characters, like many billionaires today, sustain their wealth on the labor of those they refuse to aid. This story shows how the plague exposes the ever-present system of oppression between the lower and upper classes, which students can easily apply to the COVID-19 pandemic and the varying reactions across classes in 2020.

Set during a plague, the story's protagonist, Prince Prospero, chooses to isolate himself, along with a thousand members of the aristocracy, inside a "castellated abbey" rather than provide resources and guidance to his subjects (257). Using the language parlance of today, we might say he and his friends are self-isolating; however, the prince has abandoned his subjects, leaving them to languish outside the abbey's "welded" gates (257). After a few months pass, the prince grows weary of biding his time as the plague rages without, so he decides to host a masquerade for his one thousand guests. During the ball, a party crasher is discovered. The prince's anger at this trespasser is intense, for the mystery guest has dressed as the embodiment of the plague itself: a gory, "stiffened corpse" (258). In order to confront the intruder, the prince must pursue him through the numerous rooms designated for the revelry. The prince reaches him in the final chamber. To the prince's horror, which is brief, he discovers the person is no person at all but the

plague personified. The plague has infiltrated the crowded space and infected everyone. Within minutes, all succumb to the dreaded disease.

For ENGL 150: Introduction to Literature, this story works well, particularly because it is approximately 2,500 words. For students who are not English majors, concision can be an important factor for engagement. Moreover, this story appears after our midterm. This sequencing allows students to practice concepts that have already been introduced, including deciphering allegory and symbols, particularly color symbols. We also cover ironic plot twists and the multiple meanings within the title.

I begin this class with a color association exercise. This activity is perceived by many students as engaging – even enjoyable – because it is low stakes. There are no wrong answers; to receive points, the student merely completes the task. In addition, I do not ask students to explain their responses; I simply want to know their first impressions. Before the class meets, I create a Discussion Board assignment, "Preparing to Discuss Symbols in Poe's 'The Masque of Red Death.'" Students are unable to see one another's responses until they submit their own answers. Here is the prompt (Fig. 3):

For this discussion post, copy and paste the list of colors in the Reply textbox. For each color, note what emotions/behaviors/or anything else **you** (not the Internet) can think of that can be associated with the different colors. It is important not to limit yourself to the context of today's story. You might find that some of your associations with a single color seem to contradict one another. That's okay. Generate at least one association for each color to receive the point (this point will go toward your quiz grade). Time for task: Approximately 3 minutes.

blue --
purple –
green --
orange --
white --
violet (this one may be tricky because it's so close to purple -- just try) --
black –

FIGURE 3. DISCUSSION BOARD ASSIGNMENT, "PREPARING TO DISCUSS SYMBOLS IN POE'S 'THE MASQUE OF RED DEATH'"

In the story, the rooms are presented in the order noted in the prompt. However, during our discussion, I start with green or black since students have an easier time making associations with these colors. For example, my students associated the color green with "nature," "living young and free," "growth," "fertility," and "vibrant, full of life" in addition to "money" and "luck." For black, they suggested "death," "evil," "darkness," and "mystery," as well as "fear," "depression," "suicide," and

"sadness." After the students complete the Discussion Board, I segue into Poe's story by noting that color symbols can fluctuate over time. I draw upon three sources to inform my discussion of colors in this story: H.H. Bell's "'The Masque of the Red Death': An Interpretation" (1973), Brett Zimmerman's "The Puzzle of the Color Symbolism in 'The Masque of the Red Death': Solved at Last?" (2003), and William Pitcher's "Horological and Chronological Time in 'Masque of the Red Death'" (1976). We compare what these colors may mean to us today to color associations from over 150 years ago. This activity teaches which correlations have been sustained, which ones were unpopular in 1842, and which ones existed when Poe wrote but confuse or surprise us today. For example, orange is the color that stumps most of my students. I encourage them to take a guess. Some of their answers indicated negative or somber connections, such as "hectic," "confusion," "mad," and "fall" or "autumn," but most responses indicated positive connotations, such as "warmth," "sunshine," and "bright." As is evident from this list, a few of the students generated answers that aligned with the ones Poe's contemporary readers may have had in mind: "middle age, lust, infidelity, hypocrisy, and love of falsehood" (Zimmerman 68). Once we complete this discussion, the students learn that many scholars interpret the prince's journey through these rooms as an allegorical representation of his lifecycle. This realization leads to a discussion of other allegorical elements. Students are primed to identify that the character masquerading as the Red Death is not a person but a flat character that is the literal manifestation of the plague. Moreover, the dominant symbol outside of the use of the colors is a great ebony clock that emphasizes the fleeting passage of time, conveying the idea that the lives of those in the story are about to end. This symbol is complemented by another – "the flames of the tripods expired," a striking image used at the end of the tale (259).

While discussing symbolism, the students offered explications that demonstrated their mastery of detecting irony. They pointed to specific instances in the text that they appreciated, such as the futility of these aristocrats' actions when it comes to trying to protect themselves from contracting a disease by hiding behind fortifications. They also call attention to the irony of the protagonist's name. Prince Prospero may have riches and power, but his resources cannot prevent his agonizing death. Many notice, as well, the irony of the Red Death's ominous presence at a masquerade party intended to be a diversion (and distraction) from the plague raging beyond the walls of the abbey.

In the last few minutes of class, we turn to the title. The story makes it clear that "masque" is short for "masquerade." I emphasize that this is a type of party in which concealed identity is the theme. I add that "masque" also has ties to a type of show of the early modern period that was designed to ingratiate the actors with those in power, which underscores another irony in Poe's use of the word in this context. I conclude by noting that "masque" is a homophone of "mask" and how

removing a mask in this story results in the realizing the fear we have today of removing masks in close proximity to others who may be contagious.

For the 200-level course, which is a requirement for our English majors, we talk about the same elements as those covered in the introduction class; however, these students' more advanced literary analysis skills can make a lengthy discussion focused on symbols and allegory somewhat tedious. In my experience, many of these students weave in these elements into their contributions to discussion, and I can elaborate on these elements if necessary. Therefore, I focus this class on theme, irony, and relevance of the story to today's readers.

Throughout the semester, these students keep a digital commonplace book. Essentially, each entry features a quotation that the student has selected from the day's assigned reading(s) followed by a short paragraph in which the student records their impressions. Some students choose to reflect on how the excerpt relates to something else they have read for our class; others relay their personal opinions and feelings about the assigned work. The entry concludes with keywords or hashtags, which are intended to assist students with formulating a paper topic near the end of the semester. Students are also encouraged to insert pictures and illustrations that relate to the entry's content (Figure 3).

The students compose their commonplace book entries before participating in class discussion. Since many of the students submit their assignments an hour or so before class meets, I am able to take the time to read their reactions before we meet. I find this step is important for encouraging participation, especially at the beginning of the semester when we are cultivating our group dynamics and learning to become comfortable interacting with one another. If students are reluctant to share their thoughts, I can gently prod them to do so by noting general trends and particularly astute comments. This tactic usually results in students feeling more confident about sharing the details of their assignments, but I do not require them to disclose their entry content to their classmates. The

assignment is not set up so that students can see one another's responses. Rather this assignment is designed to enliven class discussion, and students may decide to share the information in their entries, engage with other students who choose to share their own assessments, or discuss other elements of the reading that they did not address in their commonplace book. In addition, I express to students that they

Entry #8 **"The Masque of the Red Death"** **Edgar Allan Poe**
Paragraphs 4 & 9

"These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened."

"There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion."

Edgar Allan Poe has always been one of those writers who really inspired me. The first poem I ever read by him was *Annabel Lee* when I was in 6th grade. I haven't ever read this short story before. I feel as though to someone who isn't used to darker literature, this might be seen as 'scary'. With having prior exposure to Poe, I just thought it was intriguing. I especially love his detail in the first quote. It does paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind. With the second quote I feel like he's saying that the Prince should feel bad for hiding away and avoiding the 'Red Death' while his subjects are dying, but he chooses to ignore it. All he seems to be worried about is the people who are currently with him, and having fun with his party. The Prince is very ignorant to what is happening around him, because he seems very selfish and hotheaded. The Prince, along with all of the people he has at this party, all die at the end. It's sort of poetic justice or irony, which is usually a central theme in most of Poe's works. I thought it was cool to read that the Prince sees this masked person and pursues them, only to die once he looks at him. Along with all of the people at the party dying one by one. Also, the clock could potentially symbolize the time ticking down to everyone's inevitable death. I'm not crazy, I promise. I really enjoy darker literature, and Poe is phenomenal at keeping the reader's attention and having them consumed within the story he's telling. Plus keeping readers wondering the deeper meanings within the writing.
#Dark #Death #PoeticJustice #Irony

FIGURE 4. STUDENT COMMONPLACE BOOK ENTRY ON POE'S "THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH"

may find that the finished commonplace book makes a nice memento of the class material. To illustrate how this assignment works with class discussion, I have included excerpts from student commonplace books along with my commentary, which is similar to what I would say as I moderate.

In preparation for this specific iteration, I noticed that the students' impressions fell into four categories: power differentials between the characters, abdication of responsibility, hubris, and poetic justice. I was pleased because these are the main themes Poe covers in this tale. With this information at the ready, I

opened our conversation by acknowledging how well the students understood the content. At this point in the semester, post midterm, the students were fairly comfortable sharing their work.

One student submitted, "People like us just have to risk dying to get the education we want, while those on the upper echelon get to hide away from the deteriorating economy, and climate, and society, and just party their cares away." The student identifies with the prince's subjects -- those made to suffer the consequences of decisions made by their leaders. This person placed the story within a contemporary context and alluded to real fears about attending class in person and living on campus. This entry is a reminder that Frostburg State University's administrators did not know for sure that the measures they followed were going to protect the students and professors. The University followed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines on wearing masks and maintaining distance, but some faculty, staff, and students felt that the decision enacted by university administrators exposed a power dynamic in which those who would not be in classroom spaces forced those who would be to take risks. The uncertainty of the disease's transmission placed them in a vulnerable position if they did not decide to take a leave of absence. This student expresses an anxiety, a helplessness, about the situation. Now we know that following these guidelines worked relatively well in the classroom, but at the time, no one knew for sure that these precautions would be effective.

Whereas the previous comment focused on the power discrepancy based on positions within an organization, this excerpt highlights the power differentials inherent in economic class differences. Moreover, this student not only identified with the subjects in the story but also the author:

> I couldn't help but think of the challenge I faced when COVID first hit […]. The world was told and still is told that the only way to stay healthy is to stay indoors. On the news, YouTube, and video clips on Instagram or YouTube, celebrities shoot small videos for the public inside their mansions, lounging in pools and hot tubs, telling everyone to stay inside, it's easy. My problem was I do not have a Prospero-esque mansion to shutter myself inside, a bank account fat enough to keep myself sustained through weeks and months without work [….] Survival during a pandemic seems a luxury afforded by only the rich. Reading the description of Prospero's castle and his high society revelers made me think about myself and others like myself who have to go out into the thick of it to earn money, to work during a national health crisis. Poe understood this too, it was no different in his time. He wrote from the perspective of another struggler, an American

> voice without much privilege, not a dime to his name or a nickel to save himself.

This student conjures an image of Poe as a critic of the upper class, portraying its members as unsympathetic toward the lower classes. Both of these students see themselves in the position of the subjects – those with little to no agency – and they transpose the setting of the story to the U.S. in 2020.

As the conversation continued, most students articulated how the power differential in this story is exacerbated by the prince's abdication of his responsibility to his subjects. One student remarked,

> I think Poe is correct for speaking out against this because it has been a cycle in society for way too long to ostracize the poor for simply existing when the affluent use their wealth not to better society or even to provide for themselves, they use it excessively to put on this sort of masquerade. I think the whole story is about the masquerade that keeps the wealthy feeling like they can be distanced from the people who are not as well off because the socio-economic gaps make them feel powerful for having an advantage over others. This story directly calls out the assumption by arguing that the wealthy may have an advantage in life but in death, and even in pandemic, they are not immune to issues that plague other members of society as well.

This student incisively critiqued those who are wealthy being unwilling to engage in philanthropic work. The student's disgust relies on the assumption that the rich have an implied obligation to invest in the community. In the U.S., we hear this rhetoric, especially in relation to CEOs. We have a narrative that insists that business leaders who accrue mass wealth will redistribute their wealth to benefit the lower classes, such as assistance may take the form of philanthropic endeavors, hiring more workers, or expanding workers' perquisites. This student seemed to take solace in Poe's depiction of a divine punishment awaiting those in the upper classes who ignore this moral imperative.

Although abdication of responsibility and power differentials are at play, the main point of the tale is to impart a lesson on hubris, which the grim punishment of the prince emphasizes. This student stated the tale's message and related it to the U.S. today:

> Though the entire story features the downfall of a society by plague, it's the particular brand of denial in these lines that now feels so realistic. The prince, who is wealthy enough that he feels he doesn't need to worry about the plague that is killing his people, has quarantined safely for five or six months: he could have been completely safe in his seclusion. But he screws himself over when he becomes bored of the isolation and invites a thousand friends to his event. The spectre of the Red Death that appears in person is

> the literal interpretation of this deadly mistake. Prospero was confident and careless enough to welcome death into his own home. I see this sentiment in every group of partiers that flouts COVID regulations out of boredom and loneliness. They seem to have the idea that 'it's not likely to happen to me,' or that 'if it does, it won't kill me,' as if their social life is worth risking everything. We are seeing the perfect real-life match to Poe's story of the illimitable dominion of death.

The student ended with a variation on the final lines of the tale. What draws my attention in this excerpt is that the student did not emphasize the class distinctions so much as spotlight how some people deny reality. The motive for this behavior is quite simple: they think they are exceptional. In today's context, this belief manifests itself in those who do not follow the CDC guidelines. They do not social distance. They do not wear masks. They do not take the precautions that have proven to prevent or slow down the transmission of the disease. This close contact and unmasking occurs in the tale, and readers witness that those who tried to construct an alternative reality paid a terrible price for their selfish and misguided self-delusion that they were somehow different from everyone else.

This student paraphrases the tale's purpose succinctly:

> I feel like [Poe's] saying that the prince should feel bad for hiding away and avoiding the 'Red Death' while his subjects are dying, but he chooses to ignore it. All he seems to be worried about is the people who are currently with him, and having fun with his party. The prince is very ignorant to what is happening around him, because he seems very selfish and hotheaded. The prince, along with all of the people he has at this party, all die at the end. It's sort of poetic justice or irony.

Another student echoes that this story is a vehicle for Poe's own severe judgement:

> In a way, Poe's story released his fury and played as a sort of revenge fantasy, a way to remind the wealthy that it only takes one infected person to bring the whole castle down, that nature and disease hold sway overall.

Again, the last part of the entry mimics the sentence structure and some words from Poe's story, which I think the students gravitate toward because they express the finality so well. The student suspect Poe's presence in the story, seeing this work as a moral indictment and a horrific reminder of all human beings' frailty – no matter their social standing.

Our cultural investment in the truth of the adage "Pride cometh before the fall" is satisfied in this tale. A student, a bit irreverent in tone, reveled in the poetic justice embedded in the tale's conclusion, writing, "Haha. Rich people getting what

they deserve is a trope that I just adore. I can see that, obviously, this short story has a great amount of relevance to how society is functioning currently." This sentiment was an excellent way to wrap up discussion. Not only did it bring some levity to the subject but also it gratified me in my role as the instructor. It confirmed for me that the story is accessible. There is nothing esoteric or tricky about this story – even the vocabulary level is easier to comprehend than some of Poe's other works. Moreover, the students made connections between Poe's time and today.

"The Masque of the Red Death" has a track record of renewed scholarly and public interest in times of pandemics or epidemics. Sadly, during Poe's time, so many epidemics occurred, that scholars debate which outbreak or outbreaks may have inspired the Red Death. As recently as the 1980s, the story's resemblance to the U.S. government's response to the AIDS crisis resulted in articles extolling Poe's timelessness. In 2020, the same phenomenon occurred with COVID-19. Many of the Poe Studies Association members, myself included, received invitations to classes, book groups, and library events to discuss the tale's relevance to and resonance with readers today.

In addition to making sure that my students can identify and explain symbols, irony, theme, and other literary techniques, one of my overarching teaching goals is to demonstrate to students of all ages that human nature has not changed much. Even though Poe's story is set in a European country during the medieval period, its portrayal of the injustices that those with wealth, status, and power inflict upon those without these privileges transcends time. Sadly, despite the rhetoric, a lesson this tale offers is that our current situation with the concomitant callous indifference many people show toward vulnerable groups is nothing new. When these students graduate, maybe – just maybe – they will attain positions in which they can ensure that future responses under similar circumstances will improve, which, could indeed be unprecedented.

Appendix

a. Commonplace Book

Purpose

A commonplace book is a mode of personal reflection that collects and analyzes notable quotations for future reference. They originated in early Modern Europe as a means of keeping a record of one's personal responses and thoughts to numerous texts. In this class, your commonplace books will anchor our class discussion, help us to follow themes and questions across course texts, and help you to develop paper topics.

Process

Before each class, you'll choose one passage from the assigned reading for that day (1-20 lines) and copy it into the Commonplace Book Canvas assignment for that due date. You should include the passage itself (with page references when available), as well as a few sentences about why you selected it and what questions it raises for you. If you focus on addressing why you selected the passage, why it is significant, what strikes you about the passage, how you understand or interpret it, how it can be interpreted in different ways and which way is particularly convincing to you, what insight the passage offers about a particular character/theme, and/or how the passage impacts the meaning of the entire text, you'll have a satisfactory entry. This exercise is designed to help you practice close reading, think about the relationship between a single quotation and a text as a whole, to generate ideas for essays, and to test interpretations.

At the end of each entry, identify a few categories for your entry; some might be very broad (i.e. love, loss, envy, etc.), others might be narrower (i.e. dogs, sibling rivalry, plant imagery, etc.). Categories might reveal themselves to you after you have selected several passages, and you are always welcome to go back and make changes to past assignments. Other categories that may be relevant include art, aesthetics, and imagination; race, ethnicity, and nationality; gender and sexuality; emotion, affect, and sensation; class, labor, and political economy; religion, spirituality, and secularization; nature, environment, and Anthropocene; and, science, technology, and medicine. For more information on these categories, see Ray Horton's handout.

Sample Template

Title, Author, Page Number (if available) – "Quotation"

Analysis: [after the quotation give the annotation—approx. 8-10 sentences. Remember, I do not need a summary of the text, just your ideas, reactions, questions, and/or analysis.]

"Hashtags": [list themes or keywords that may be used to categorize your entry]

Resources

See my example first, for it follows all of my requirements.

Here are links to other versions of commonplace books. I highly encourage you to peruse them. However, please note that our commonplace book entries meet different requirements than the entries in these books.

Elizabeth Lyttelton's commonplace book composed between the 1640s-1713

E.M. Forster's commonplace book composed between 1879-1970

G.E. Moore's commonplace book composed between 1919-1953

Thomas Jefferson's commonplace book composed between 1758-1772

Wendell Phillips's commonplace book

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READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM: A PRINCIPLED APPROACH

ALEX POOLE

The symbiotic relationship between reading and writing permeates college composition classrooms. Particularly in research-intensive courses, generating written products necessitates critical engagement of complex scholarly sources. Pedagogical practices which ignore students' previous experiences with reading instruction and assume the presence of certain schemata can impede the success of all learners, but especially those from low income and minority backgrounds. While some instructors recognize the need for reading instruction, they lament the lack of time to do so. The following paper demonstrates how instructors can facilitate text comprehension by helping students become more strategic readers. It begins by discussing the importance of reading for writing and highlights the centrality of using a variety of strategies in this dynamic. Instead of prescribing specific strategies, it proposes an approach which draws on best practices, seeks student input, and promotes flexibility in teaching and using strategies. Each of the five principles it offers is illustrated by examples from a junior-level research writing course.

Key words: reading, composition, strategies, writing, research

Conversations about the role of reading instruction in composition classrooms often reveal ambivalent attitudes. On a relatively recent discussion board for writing center directors, for example, a participant requested insight into how to assist students comprehend the texts which form the basis of their written products. While respondents volunteered helpful recommendations, they worried reading guidance could transform the writing center into "a learning or academic center" (Adams 74). Suggestions to connect students with an "Adult Basic Education Department in your college or a Literacy Center in your city" (74) show that reading instruction is seen through the prism of remediation.

Perhaps worse are conceptions of composition which exclude reading instruction altogether. Lisa Bosley's study of first-year composition instructors at a large southern university showed an overt rejection of reading in pedagogical schemata, in addition to unsophisticated perceptions of its substance (296). David Jolliffe has observed instructors who display a "blissful ignorance" about their students' reading abilities: "A great many composition instructors quite frankly

don't know whether their students are able to read critically and have a rather difficult time finding out if they do" (131).

Text Production as Text Comprehension

On the other hand, a large body of scholarship has stressed the importance of reading instruction and documented its pervasiveness in classroom activities. In the early 1980s, Mariolina Salvatori noted "improvement in writers' ability to manipulate syntactic structures—their maturity as writers—is the result, rather than the cause, of their increased ability to engage in, and be reflexive about, the reading of highly complex texts" (659). Research papers require "a dialogue between the writer's ideas and those in the text she is using" (Adler-Kassner and Estrem 37), thus putting comprehension on par with production. A survey of workshop activities implemented by first-year writing faculty at the University of Michigan exposed numerous reading goals, including viewing assigned texts through another interpretive framework and considering structures to include in revisions (Bunn, *Reimaging Workshop* 57-59). Widespread alarm about the reading skills of first-year writing students (Jolliffee and Harl 599-602; Scholes 165-166) suggests that similar practices are common.

While many students enter first-year writing classes unable "to read carefully and critically" (Jolliffe 128), some of them leave "capable of responding to readings only through a decidedly personalized, idiosyncratic lens" (130). Other problems can persist into upper division courses—especially for first-generation students from challenging socioeconomic circumstances— such as coping with large quantities of reading and unfamiliar vocabulary in assigned texts (Byrd and MacDonald 32); understanding the elements involved in critically analyzing texts (Schnee 66-68); and lacking familiarity with the structures of peer-reviewed research (Mazella et al. 45).

Negative attitudes held by students toward reading and shallow reading practices in first-year composition contribute to this lack of preparation. Students may find textbooks tedious and therefore read only for compliance (Jolliffe and Harl 608-612). Activities limited to identifying main ideas and students' feelings about them may encourage surface-level engagement (Keller 45). While first-year writing courses should make students better readers and writers, structural inequities can limit their ability to do so. First-year composition courses are frequently taught by underpaid and under resourced part-time instructors who lack the time necessary to create a captivating classroom (Mckenna; Wardle). Compared to White students, a greater percentage of African American and Latinx students enroll in institutions which struggle with appropriate levels of funding and professional development (Libassi). Socioeconomically disadvantaged students are also less likely to have the necessary technological resources outside the classroom, which COVID has only

exacerbated: “Among those who have fallen the furthest behind, experts say, were students who lacked reliable technology and quiet places to study, had to work and take care of siblings, and worried more than others about losing their loved ones to the pandemic. They’re disproportionately low-income and minority” (Mangan, par. 4).

Moreover, instructors may stigmatize students’ previous educational experiences, home languages, and devalue the discourse patterns they utilize in writing (Jones 79, 87). In an analysis of popular first-year composition texts, Behm found that texts with which students’ reading abilities would presumably develop marginalize or exclude the experiences of minorities and low-income students and instead lionize privileged white males of European descent (Behm 14-17, 58). In lieu of facilitating actions which lead to deep textual engagement (e.g., asking questions, using background knowledge to compare/contrast ideas, making predictions), they promote compliance with specific ideologies (Behm 114-117, 135). Such passivity stunts motivation and rarely creates self-directed readers. As a result, students may leave first-year composition courses suffering from estrangement and underprepared to comprehend discipline-specific texts encountered in upper-division courses.

The Importance of Reading Strategies

In the required junior-level research writing course I teach at Western Kentucky University, students utilize discipline-specific texts to produce “research appropriate to his or her chosen field” (“WKU” 290). Engaging original research contained in books, journal articles, and government reports allows students from a number of different majors—ranging from nursing and electrical engineering to theater and art therapy—to explore areas of interest within their discipline (e.g., gender discrimination in nursing, the role of digital diagnostics in preventing engine failure, drama education and academic achievement, the use of art therapy in mental health counseling). However, digesting these texts can prove extremely challenging, as they assume levels of background knowledge and comfort with disciplinary vocabulary students have not yet developed Theoretical perspectives, statistical methods, and qualitative modes of inquiry unfamiliar to them form key components of relevant research. No composition instructor has the time or knowledge to scaffold readings for individual students. Moreover, the selection and analysis of sources largely take place outside of class time; thus, my approach to reading instruction aims to create autonomous readers capable of producing research papers based on a firm understanding of sources. Pedagogical practices which promote the effective use of *reading strategies*, or “the deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand

words, and construct meanings out of text" (Afflerbach et al. 15), facilitate such understanding.

An extensive body of research has shown that skilled readers maintain a flexible strategic repertoire that draws upon a broad range of individual strategies, while unskilled readers tend to apply the same handful of strategies, regardless of their efficacy in aiding comprehension. Skilled readers monitor their comprehension, possess awareness of their lack of understanding, and subsequently make strategic modifications. Their struggling peers neglect comprehension monitoring or "seem not to realize they do not understand" (Mokhtari et al. 45). Not surprisingly, college students with high and low GPAs, standardized test scores, and evaluations of themselves as readers approach texts in strategically disparate ways (Poole, *Reading Strategies* 4-5).

Five Principles of Strategy Instruction

Task requirements and reading research guide my initial selection of individual strategies. Making students aware of the importance of strategies and presenting diverse opportunities to utilize them cultivate motivation and procedural knowledge. Folding reading strategies into writing tasks and utilizing student input promote relevancy, in addition to efficient use of instructional time and resources. Assessment communicates student needs and provides insight into possible instructional modifications as well as student gains. The following principles further justify and exemplify these practices. Within them, the names of individual strategies reflect terminology from the *Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory* (MARSI), a 30-item survey designed to capture the actions students take to comprehend academic texts (Mokhtari and Reichard 258). Individual strategies appear in italics when first mentioned. Examples of my experiences and student voices are drawn from one class during the 2017-2018 academic year.

Principle One: No Strategy Is an Island. Instruction begins with establishing criteria for strategy selection, a process entailing examination of the elements involved in task completion and identification of the reading strategies they likely occasion (Simpson and Nist 530). Four types of writing form the core of this course: critique, annotated bibliography, explanatory synthesis, and argumentative synthesis. All consist of summarization and evaluation. Two critiques help students determine a research focus and familiarize them with summarizing and evaluating sources in their discipline. Each ranges from 300-400 words and utilizes one source within an area of research interest (e.g., causes of childhood obesity). Annotated bibliography entries reflect an established research concentration (e.g., the connection between video games and childhood obesity) and require more concise summaries and evaluations of ten sources (i.e., no more than two hundred words

each). In an explanatory synthesis, students summarize and evaluate the collective contents of the annotated bibliography. Summarization and evaluation of more sources lead to the addition of ideological positions, recommendations for policy changes, and ideas for future studies, thereby transforming this work into an argumentative synthesis.

Merely telling students to include these two features can result in summaries limited to impressions of a source's purpose and evaluations which ignore key components of research, such as the methodologies used to carry out experiments and the interpretation of results. Models of effective summaries and evaluations foster awareness of the information to incorporate and the structures to present it (Bunn, *How to Read* 78), consequently making reading intentional and urging students to *summarize* and *evaluate* while engaging texts. However, they may try to understand everything they read, leading to excessive engagement of individual texts and the inclusion of superfluous information in their summaries and evaluations. Discussions of sample texts therefore should feature guidelines for determining parts of the text which merit attention and those to ignore (i.e., *selective reading*). Difficult texts may require students to *adjust their reading speed*, *increase their attention*, and even *re-read*. The sheer volume of research encountered will tax short-term memory. Efficient retrieval of central ideas and key details from numerous sources necessitates *highlighting specific words, phrases, and sentences*, in addition to *taking notes*. To avoid wordiness and plagiarizing annotations and other marginalia, skilled *paraphrasing* is essential. At the actual summarization stage of writing, students need to know how to *go back and forth to make connections between elements* within individual texts and across many sources. Before utilizing any of these strategies for their own research, they have to select appropriate texts. Although this is a multifaceted process, one step involves *previewing* a potential source to establish its relevance. Examining abstracts, *scrutinizing charts, graphs, and tables*, and *identifying terms in bold and italics* are actions students can take without reading the entire text. In reality, one-to-one relationships between writing tasks and reading strategies are illusory; the former comprise many of the latter. While actual instruction may not always follow this schema, planning should account for such complexity and devise ways to address it.

Principle Two: Scourer the Research. Insight into students' strategic needs also emanates from instructors' classroom experiences. Most of us have noted students lack vocabulary and struggle to comprehend texts containing unfamiliar words. However, observations of exterior behaviors supply scant information regarding students' beliefs about engaging texts, a key determinant of strategy use (Nist and Holschuh 85). Research from linguistics and literacy journals can fill this gap. It has demonstrated that while unskilled readers possess an inadequate vocabulary for college-level reading, they consider reading to be essentially a matter

of understanding lexical items (Kamhi-Stein, *Reading in Two Languages* 53-54; *Profiles of Underprepared* 613-615). Attempts to do so may result in excessive time spent with individual texts and risks completion of the reading task. In the process, students might gain little understanding of the text's overall meaning and the evidence authors use to construct it.

Utilizing a dictionary is a traditional recommendation for those attempting to learn words. Research has shown that college students generally use dictionaries and other reference materials with low frequency (Poole, *Reading Strategies* 9-10), yet skilled readers utilize them more than their unskilled peers (Poole, *Fiction* 99; *Comprehending Poetry* 371). One study showed students tend to select the first or simplest definition (McCreary 194-195), thereby casting doubt on their level of sophistication when deciphering unknown vocabulary.

This research has prompted me to focus on when and how to use dictionaries. During a discussion about selecting appropriate sources, I noted that journal articles often contain unfamiliar words. To encourage awareness of the importance of strategically approaching such words, I asked students to describe their responses to them. Several admitted to simply skipping them. While this generated gasps of disbelief from peers, I affirmed that not all words require attention and proposed that attending to them only need occur when the main idea of a paragraph, section, or entire paper remains unclear without understanding them or if they appear frequently.

I then solicited examples of unknown words from students' sources, one of which was *affect*. The student who volunteered the term had encountered it while reading journal articles about helping parents of children with schizophrenia, yet felt unsure about its meaning. A peer assumed it was a synonym for *cause*. While searching the word in an online dictionary, , I explained virtual formats were less time-consuming than paper ones, especially when used to search for words in electronic documents. I modeled procedures for selecting an appropriate definition by verbalizing my thoughts (Mokhtari and Sheorey 223), during which I remarked that the first definition—a change or impact—seemed implausible in a mental health framework. Further use of contextualization (Nist and Olejnik 190) suggested the third definition—an emotional state—was most likely correct. I added that web searches with the target word and associated terms (e.g., mental health, schizophrenia) can also unearth contextualized examples that illuminate the chosen definition.

Principle Three: Engage in Direct Instruction. This direct approach results in more reading gains than types of instruction lacking explicitness (Simpson and Nist 532). In addition to helping students become cognizant of a strategy, recognize its utility, know how to employ it, and analyze examples of it, a pedagogical schema that fosters autonomous reading presents opportunities for practice and self-

assessment (Holschuh and Aultman 129-130). Summarization instruction employed all these components. The syllabus stated daily work would involve this strategy and recommended utilizing aspects of it while reading assigned texts (e.g., recording main ideas, distinguishing between sections, and identifying important vocabulary). The first reading assignment focused on the importance of writing summaries and the steps involved in constructing them. However, it began with a discussion of how to read for summarization, which emphasized noting main and supporting points, establishing the purpose of each section, and identifying transitions. Examples of student writing included information extracted from such actions, thereby showing the strategy's relevance (Behrens and Rosen 6-23). Discussion board questions required students to indicate the components of reading for summarization they typically used, along with rationale for their choices. Students then summarized a short text about the school's budget from the university newspaper. The following class period, I showed them my own summary of the same text and drew their attention to my use of tense and reporting verbs.

Subsequent assignments seeded in practice by focusing students' attention on aspects of summarization. Discussion board questions about a report on college affordability in Kentucky asked students to identify key terms, define main points, and speculate about the authors' motivation for writing it. Peer reviews of annotated bibliographies required determining whether summaries reflected source titles and evaluating the coherence of summaries. Plagiarism detection involved comparing summaries with sources to ensure that language had been substantively changed without sacrificing fealty to meaning. Self-assessment asked students to contrast their approach to summarization in their first and second critiques.

Direct instruction need not occur in this order. In fact, the teaching of *taking notes* began with self-assessment. For one homework assignment, students filled out the *Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory* (MARSI). As stated above, the instrument is a 30-item survey designed to capture the actions students take to comprehend academic texts. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (I never do this) to 5 (I always do this) indicates the frequency of individual strategy use (Mokhtari and Reichard 258). They also listed the five most and least important strategies, in addition to those which presented conceptual or procedural difficulties.

During the next class, I asked students about their use of specific strategies, one of which was taking notes. Some students complained the strategy consumed excessive amounts of time and lacked purpose, while others felt an inability to identify and concisely document important information resulted in verbatim copying of the original source. I affirmed the difficulty of taking notes and explained that impatience is responsible for some of it. Before writing anything, students need a global understanding of the text. As they re-read, they will have more cognitive

space to determine parts of the text which merit attention and those to ignore (i.e., selective reading), thereby making note taking less overwhelming and more purposeful.

Although I emphasized the multiplicity of ways to take notes, I encouraged them to use annotations. Students viewed a short video by Gail Shirey of Southwestern Michigan College in which she defines the practice, explains its utility, and verbalizes her thoughts while annotating a text. I also modeled my own strategy-based approach to taking notes with a journal article students had already used for another assignment. This focused on highlighting specific words, phrases, and sentences, generating short summaries and evaluations in the margins, and *asking/answering questions about the text* (e.g., Are arguments evidence-based? What is the source's contribution to my paper?).

Principle Four: Seek Student Input. Relevance was the primary motivation for teaching this strategy. Scholarship has shown that unskilled readers infrequently take notes (Poole, *Comprehending Poetry* 372), yet research-intensive courses necessitate it to accurately remember information, efficiently retrieve it, and reduce the risk of plagiarism. Feedback from students can also reveal erroneous beliefs about the reading process and problems with text comprehension. Instructors can implement strategy instruction to address these issues. When students recognize the relevance of strategies, their motivation to complete tasks increases (Alvarez and Risko 201-203). While this feedback can benefit all students, it can have a particularly powerful effect on students from marginalized groups. In a case study of a first-generation college student who spoke Spanish as his first language, Betsy Gilliliand found that unpleasant literacy episodes in high school were devoid of dialogue between students and instructors: "She helps with the [work]sheets, but sometimes you ask, for say, that's the part I didn't like, we were doing the sheets and you'd go ask her, and then she'd just tell you, look it up in the book or, she didn't tell you like a clue or something, or help you whatever" (190). In contrast, the student—Ivan—felt feedback increased his openness to asking questions. The interaction with one college composition instructor resulted in confidence-inspiring comments about his abilities: "The teacher said she thinks I'm one of the smartest in the class. Cause she said something in you makes me, I don't know how she says it all the time. That I have, she has faith in I'll do very good" (189).

Homework assignments facilitate collection of such information. After having assembled ten library sources, students responded to discussion board questions about the level of engagement they required: "Look at the articles from your annotated bibliography. Which ones took longer to read than others? What made them difficult and/or time-consuming?" Many stated vocabulary challenges still inhibited understanding main and supporting points. In response, I showed students a short video which encouraged the use of several strategies during

repeated readings. The first reading involves *skimming the text to identify its structure*, highlighting unknown words, asking questions about the text, and summarizing its content. While re-reading the text, students go back and forth to make connections between elements, use context to *guess the meaning of highlighted vocabulary*, and answer questions. On the third reading, they evaluate the appropriateness of the article's methodology and the validity of its conclusions (Meyers).

Opportunities for student input also arise during conferences. Rose, an elementary education major, expressed concern about being able to complete her explanatory synthesis paper by the due date. She initially attributed this to being a "slow" writer, but later in the conversation revealed frustration when analyzing sources on her topic—the benefits of recess for elementary school students—because she lacked familiarity with statistics. Worried that she might misinterpret them, she sought research without raw data but found little of relevance. I suggested she take a research methods course and noted that while errors are possible, statistical maleficence is unlikely in major peer-reviewed journals. For this course, she could read comprehensible parts of methodological sections (i.e., purpose, participants, procedures) and skip statistical analyses. In addition to selective reading, I recommended re-reading and paying closer attention to discussion sections and pedagogical recommendations to make sense of results.

Student input within the classroom also models strategies for peers and leads to rich discussions about their use. Besides difficulties taking notes, several noted problems concentrating because they felt bored or the challenging nature of sources decreased their motivation. A classmate recommended turning off phones and music while reading. Several students vigorously objected, pointed out that low levels of noise helped them *get back on track after losing concentration*, and suggested listening to "study music" found online. This led to further debate about the characteristics of noise which facilitates concentration (i.e., low volume, no speaking, or speaking in a foreign language) and that which inhibits it. Before the period ended, a student claimed that placing a piece of candy at the end of each paragraph helped her maintain interest in the text. While many of her peers laughed, I highlighted research showing that motivation stemming from food and money can foster short-term gains, but it quickly wanes (Kohn).

Principle Five: *Engage in Assessment*. Certainty that this conversation or any other facet of strategy instruction met the needs of all students is impossible to achieve. However, instruction can become more student-centered through regular reflection (Risko et al. 266-267). Mindful of time limits and the need to balance reading with other aspects of the course, I focused on two questions to identify instructional gaps: *Was instruction relevant? Did I provide enough practice?* Relevance impacts strategy selection, direct instruction, and student motivation.

Student evaluations from previous semesters expressed frustration with the teacher-centered focus of the class and inadequate time available to ask questions.

The omission of humanities and arts-based texts from strategy discussions and absence of them during modeling became evident after a few weeks. They differ from natural and social science sources in their use of abstracts and headings. Arguments are formulated with dissimilar rhetorical structures (Shanahan et al. 415-417). Since only one student was not majoring in natural or social sciences, the negative effect of this oversight was minimal; however, I will need to make future strategy instruction relevant to a broader range of academic texts.

Future classes also need to facilitate more opportunities to use online dictionaries. Instruction took place during one class period and was limited to discussion and modeling. Such an underutilized strategy is unlikely to become part of students' repertoire without extensive practice, opportunities to ask questions, and instructor feedback. Instead of dedicating entire class periods to practicing it, I could seed dictionaries into peer reviews (e.g., requiring identification of unknown words and use of an online dictionary to determine their meaning).

While dictionary use was addressed in an online format, note taking instruction was entirely paper-based. Given that other strategy instruction (e.g., summarization, previewing) also took place with electronic texts and students frequently utilized them as sources, failure to demonstrate note taking in this format made instruction less relevant. The final exam revealed that it also led to wasteful practices. The self-reflection portion of it asked students to "Explain (in detail) how your reading of academic texts has evolved. Focus on three areas. These areas could include anything from specific actions you take to understand a text to your thinking about the value of specific parts of texts." Maria, a business major, reported that printing journal articles and taking notes on them helped her "engage and stay focused for a longer period of time." In addition to consuming natural resources, producing physical copies of more than a dozen journal articles between twenty and thirty pages likely occupied a significant amount of time that could have been spent working directly with texts. While instructional goals should avoid encouraging students like Maria to abandon beneficial practices, they must at least present other options which may produce comparable and perhaps better results with less negative environmental impact.

This part of the exam showed additional benefits of strategy use to discuss in future instruction. Paul, a construction management major, reported that paraphrasing and summarizing helped him better understand texts and "decide which sources I wanted to talk about more than others." Edgar, a computer science major, stated that a key "component of defining unknown words is that most of the articles I have read throughout this semester have been major specific and have

allowed me to further my knowledge about my major," thereby demonstrating that reading and writing are not limited to required English courses.

Finally, several students displayed *comprehension monitoring*, or "the ability to know what has been done right or wrong and to integrate new information with prior existing knowledge" (Yang 19). Jean, a graphic design major, found this ability grew with her increased awareness of strategies: "After learning different reading strategies, I was able to notice when I wasn't doing something that I should, like stopping to reflect on what I'd just read. I would catch myself starting to space out as I was reading, stop, and try to name something I had learned. After reading so many articles, it started to get easier and I was able to notice a difference."

Conclusion

To be sure, such positive outcomes are not universal. No singular approach can produce equal gains among students. Students enter the course with disparate reading skills, levels of motivation, and knowledge of their major. Many are accustomed to skimming assigned works merely to pass formal assessments and never read for pleasure; others labor over class readings and devour fiction between class periods. While some have taken courses in their major and arrive ready to explore several areas within it, others have yet to complete those at the introductory level. Even skilled readers find academic sources within their discipline daunting. The transition from highly scaffolded textbooks and popular publications to highly technical works within obscure publications requires students to reframe their notions of content, structure, and purpose. Few imagine that a research writing course entails culture shock of this sort.

On the other hand, using these principles has provided the flexibility necessary to improve the reading comprehension—and by extension, the written products—of students at various stages of their academic life. Rather than presenting one-size-fits-all lessons, they obligate me to respond to the needs of each class, keep abreast of recent research, communicate with students, and constantly assess my effectiveness.

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A RHETORIC OF PROTEST

Amir Kalan

A rhetoric of protest is a rhetoric of poetic realism.

A rhetoric of protest portrays the exuberance of pain, the fluid compass of suffering, and the power that oppression unwittingly fosters among the powerless. A rhetoric of protest targets the human in the inhuman.

A rhetoric of protest is not beautified trauma (smart wordsmanship, academic verbal gymnastics, or official lip service). A rhetoric of protest is traumatized beauty.

A rhetoric of protest cannot be encouraged, inspired, or taught. It just happens. Like a lump of outrage in the throat.

A rhetoric of protest is not meant to persuade. Does not engage in debate. Does not conform to the oppressor's deceitful projection of civil dialogue (Remember? He has always been the only speaker!).

A rhetoric of protest prisms human relations through righteous tints, tones, and tunes. Through sophisticated primal rhythms that capture the multilayered-ness of oppression. Its shades of aggression. All its complex apparitions. Its sharp shadowed corners.

A rhetoric of protest is shaped through forest fires, poisoned waters, tar sands, reservations, disappearing forests, heroin syringes, debt, abuse, incarcerated labour, foodbank lines, factory farm antibiotics, bombed school yards, drone-struck villages, … .

A rhetoric of protest burns like His bombs, drones, missiles, drills, and chainsaws. It boils like the recurring nightmare of savage occupation of lands, languages, spirits, and spiritualities.

A rhetoric of protest cannot be formulated. It prevents genre dictatorship and propels rhetorical revolution.

A rhetoric of protest is not peer reviewed. It will not conform to institutional manuals of style.

A rhetoric of protest is not published in prestigious journals or in corporate bestsellers.

A rhetoric of protest can be plagiarized, does not follow copyright rules. Like prayers and lullabies. Ancient ethnic songs. Communal farm chants.

A rhetoric of protest is accented. Is written in mother tongues. A rhetoric of protest smells like immigrants' spices. It looks like the rawness of labouring hands. Is bitterly wise like survivance. Is colored. Is colorful. Multi-shines like the rainbow.

A rhetoric of protest is not plugged, promoted, or advertised. It doesn't have an author photo. It doesn't require paid interviews. It's organically contagious. It catches imaginations like wildfire, like the peak of a pandemic.

Like reality, a rhetoric of protest just exists. It organically happens.

Like poetry, it complexifies with each reading, each interpretation, each whisper, each shout.

Like reality, it cannot be avoided.

Like poetry, it mobilizes anger towards the ultimate creation.

Like poetry, it warms the lips and burns the hearts.

Like reality, it is easy to grasp but wets the eyes.

"THE DARK MIRROR OF OUR LIVES": RICHARD WRIGHT, *12 MILLION BLACK VOICES*, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Joseph Millichamp

During the 1930s, the photobook evolved as a hybrid genre in American culture by integrating photography with nonfiction prose. One notable, if neglected example is Richard Wright's 12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States *(1941). Wright was invited to write the text to accompany a collection of documentary photographs focused on African American life in the Depression era. Although this notable example of the then new genre was conceived as a social documentary, the inherent power of this black writer's personal narrative fused its graphic and literary elements into a version of an African American autobiography. Wright organized his text as a narrative of "Negro" history in America, drawing parallels with his personal history.* 12 Million Black Voices *is presented in four parts—"Our Strange Birth," "Inheritors of Slavery," "Death on the City Pavement," and "Men in the Making" —or birth, growth, death, and rebirth in my existential and autobiographical view of Wright's text—and its photographic counterpoints within this hybrid text. Wright concludes with an autobiographical and a visual image that demonstrates why black lives must matter to all Americans, then and now, "we are you, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives."*

Keywords: photobook, African American autobiography, Richard Wright

During the 1930s, the photobook evolved as a hybrid genre in American culture by integrating photography with nonfiction, not just as a book of photos or only as a book illustrated by photos but as a creative balance of both formats. Despite the considerable variety in their subject matters, many generic examples published in the Depression era are similar in terms of their graphic artfulness, literary ambitions, and progressive principles. One source of this affinity is found in their photo resources, often within the files of the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The visual legacy of the agency, some 177,000 negatives now held in the Library of Congress (LoC), includes iconic images of the times created by many notable photographers including Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Arnold Rothstein, Marion Post Wolcott, Jack Delano, and Gordon Parks. American authors who committed their prose to photobook projects included several of that period's most representative figures, such as John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty, Sherwood Anderson, James Agee, and Richard Wright. In this article, I will reread Wright's photobook, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941), in terms of its documentary and artistic purpose, its visual and verbal intertextuality, as well as its psychological and autobiographical configuration.

Though this notable example of the new genre was conceived as a social documentary, the inherent power of this black writer's personal narrative fused its graphic and literary elements into an African American autobiography. Wright's conclusion envisions the psychological mode of his text in a powerful visual image, as "the dark mirror of our lives" (146).

The generic hybridity of word and image begins with the original dust jacket of Wright's photobook, where its title and its author's name are separated by a photograph from the FSA of African American refugees displaced in the floods of 1937. This striking image is focused on four anxious black boys in a segregated food line, and it previews how powerfully Wright's photobook will represent America's racial trauma. The dust cover also presents another tension in this particular photobook with an additional line announcing "photo-direction by Edwin Rosskam," an FSA photo specialist. The cover image was made by Walker Evans, the finest photo artist to develop under the aegis of that federal agency. Almost all the photographs in the book were taken by whites, as the FSA had no black photographers at that time. Wright's photobook became a work of black and white In several senses--in its print and image pages, in its writer and photographers, as well as in its recreation of tensions along the color line. Wright's formulation of African Americans as the darkly reflective images of American whites provides the perfect representation of *12 Million Black Voices* in which photographs of blacks captured and edited by whites illuminate "A Folk History of the Negro in the United States" and the autobiography of its author.

Like the best of FSA efforts, these images of African Americans during the Depression years are significant as social documentary and as graphic artistry. The white photographers of the agency's Historical Division were both skillful artisans and political progressives for the most part, so that their record of black lives in the 1930s and later proves both sympathetic and significant. Wright's co-creator Rosskam provides a notable example. An intriguing figure on the peripheries of American art photography throughout the mid-twentieth century, Rosskam most often worked together with his wife Louise. Edwin was born in 1903 to Jewish and American parents then living in Germany and emigrated to the United States as a teenager. At the Philadelphia Fine Arts Academy, Rosskam turned from painting to photography, and through the 1920s he supported himself with part-time and free-lance camera work. During the 1930s, he married a fellow photographer and progressive. Both Rosskams worked for the FSA at different times and in various roles until the government project ended in 1943. She is better remembered as one of its photographers now, but he also did considerable photographic work of all sorts for the FSA, while making connections in the worlds of government, photography, and publishing. For example, in 1940 Rosskam launched a new

photobook project focused on American ethnic groups that would begin with *12 Million Black Voices* in the following year.

Wright had published his bestselling novel *Native Son* in 1940, so he became the natural choice to write a text on the "American Negro" for Rosskam's new series of ethnic titles. Rosskam recruited Wright, researched photography from the FSA files, and designed their hybrid photobook. For his part, Wright embraced all these developments enthusiastically, doing considerable reading and research, viewing the FSA photo files and taking pictures himself, as well as writing some 25,000 words of his text over the same six months. The power of Wright's contribution reflects that of its FSA images to a great extent, but even more of it derives from his own life experiences as a black man in America. Wright had come to view himself as a representative of African Americans, though an example individuated by his development as a literary artist. In his brief "Foreword" to *12 Million Black Voices*, Wright previews the poetic prose that elevates this full text from social documentation to literary art. For Wright, those few blacks who had achieved a modicum of success in America are "like single fishes that leap and flash for a split second above the surface of the sea" (5). In a dark contrast are ordinary black Americans, "that vast, tragic school that swims below in the depths, against the current, silently and heavily, struggling against the waves of vicissitudes that spell a common fate" (5). Wright would tell their story by drawing on his own life narrative. As the African American writer David Bradley concludes in his introduction to its 1988 edition of the hybrid photobook, ". . . among all the works of Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices* stands out as a work of poetry, of passion, of lyricism, and of love" (xix).

In my view, the details of Wright's personal development easily support an autobiographical reading of *12 Million Black Voices.* Born in 1908 on a Mississippi Delta plantation, Wright grew up in Natchez, had his elementary education in Jackson, came of age in Memphis, and then joined the Great Migration northward to Chicago in 1927. Working at menial jobs, Wright educated himself over the next decade while he became increasingly active with leftist groups, including the Communist Party. Although Wright broke into print while living in Chicago, his major publications came after moving to Harlem in 1937. Wright's short fiction cycle, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), was derived from his early years in the segregated South, while his novel, *Native Son* (1940), evolved from his experiences of urban racism in northern ghettos. His surprise best seller made him a national literary figure and then led to his collaboration on *12 Million Black Voices*. The photobook project occurred during a significant transition in Wright's career as a professional writer and of his personal life as black man. He had immediately begun a substantial second novel, an effort that he never had under control and that never would see publication. Like *Native Son*, the new narrative tentatively titled *Black Hope* involved social naturalism and personal melodrama, but Wright never found their balance as they did in his first novel. After finishing his text for the

photobook, Wright turned away from fiction toward nonfiction in order to recreate his literal autobiography in 1941, an ongoing project that would be published first as *Black Boy* in 1945, then as *American Hunger* in 1977, and finally as *Black Boy (American Hunger)* in 1991.

Despite its collective title, *12 Million Black Voices,* and its subtitle*, A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*, this hybrid effort becomes Wright's inner life story, his shadowy autobiography as I will use that phrase here. My own recent works have engaged with autobiographical theory and practice, most notably in regard to Robert Penn Warren. This expatriated southern person of letters imaged his own life story revealed as "a shadowy autobiography" within his fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Wright's best biographer is well aware of a creative autobiography within his work, as when she quotes his personal essay "On Literature,'' "all writing is a secret form of autobiography" (Rowley 410). Wright's initial fictions were to some extent drawn from his own life experiences, and he then was beginning his own formal autobiography. The narrative point of view in the text of his photobook suggests these sorts of personal and psychological connections. Wright's folk history is narrated in the third person plural, but his own voice is the only one heard consistently, for he recreates himself here as a sort of black Everyman. The story of the African diaspora in America is patterned by an individual life narrative. The "Contents" of *12 Million Black Voices* is presented in four parts--"Our Strange Birth," "Inheritors of Slavery," "Death on the City Pavement," and "Men in the Making"--or birth, growth, death, and rebirth in my existential and autobiographical view of Wright's text--and its photographic counterpoints within his hybrid photobook.

Wright begins the identification of his symbolic narrative with his own life and voice in his "Foreword." Although his purpose is "to render a broad picture of Negro life," Wright omits what he calls "the so-called 'talented tenth'" in allusion both to Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois; rather he identifies his text and its viewpoint with "the collective humanity whose triumphs and defeats are shared by the majority" of those *12 Million Black Voices* (5-6). Rosskam's selection from images of blacks made by white photographers actually encompasses a greater variety of individual African Americans, however, suggesting that this collaboration could as well be titled *12 Million Black Faces*. "Part One" demonstrates this possibility by picturing contemporary "Negroes" from the FSA files as the legatees of the slave culture as presented in Wright's prose. Rosskam's careful choices of a dozen images by six FSA photographers introduce thirty plus black individuals still suppressed by the long shadow of slavery. These FSA photographs are presented on full pages, paired with each other in two-page spreads, and interrelated in collage-like sequences often complemented by verbal catalogs drawn from Wright's text. Several such sequences throughout the book recall the byplay of scene and

narration in documentary film as employed by the New Deal during the Depression era.

"Part One" of *12 Million Black Voices* thus provides the initial examples of its documentary and creative patterns, its intertextualities of text and image, as well as its psychological and autobiographical constructions. Wright recreates the historical transition of Africans to America as "a weird and paradoxical birth," with the Middle Passage seen as a dark gestation period completed by "the slow, painful process of a new birth" into a new world of slavery (12). The text then traces this dark nativity down to the present, outlining the awful maturation of "Negro" identity under the long shadow of its slave legacy in a psychological trope. Rosskam's photo editing then complements Wright's thematic emphases by matching them images of contemporary black Americans from the FSA files. The closeup of a farm worker's hands on his hoe illustrates the title page of "Part One," and it is followed by two uncaptioned, closeups of rural black men that serve as a visual introduction (9-11). A half dozen urban images with captions from the text then become a central sequence, and a pair of agricultural images finally provide a conclusion (18-23). This selection of FSA images, much like the photobook itself, reveals a predilection for working men representing the stages of masculine autobiography. Images of birth continue throughout *12 Million Black Voices*, however, in the succeeding three sections of the text, ensuring that female life narratives will be considered if less than male identities.

The first full page photo in "Part One" is of an ex-slave, a man who must have been in his seventies when Jack Delano captured his portrait in 1941 (10). The final half page image of "Part One" is Dorothea Lange's medium distance shot of black teen hardly big enough to guide the plow he holds (25). The middle half dozen images become a photo-collage and a catalog of their captions. Wright formulates slavery as, "the beginning of America's paternalistic code toward her black maid, her black industrial worker, her black stevedore, her black dancer, her black waiter, her black sharecropper" (18). Rosskam incorporates each phrase as a caption for six FSA images, creating both graphic and literary continuities. Visuals in collage and captions in catalogs become intertextual with each other in related imagery of individuals and couples, and of groups and gatherings--all focused by black bodies beneath the appropriating gaze of a white patriarchy (18-23). The strongest image of these six for me is Arthur Rothstein's striking portrait of a black steelworker who projects strength and sadness at once, as if this black man has achieved much in his life but is still constrained by America's racial codes (19). Midway between older and younger black males at the opening and closing of "Our Strange Birth," this black working man in Pittsburgh at midlife centers a triptych of masculine portraits forming an autobiographical preface to both "Part Two" and "Part Three" of *12 Million Black Voices.*

"Inheritors of Slavery," or "Part Two" of *12 Million Black Voices* is introduced by a title page focused on the auto/biographical image of an aging black couple from rural Georgia taken by the FSA's Jack Delano in 1941 (29). His medium distance shot balances their full length, seated likenesses with their individual wedding portraits hung above them on the wall, suggesting the life stages of their mutual developments over several decades. The FSA file heading also reveals that the male sharecropper was once a preacher, and his social decline is visually suggested by the intertextual contrast of his work overalls with his wedding photograph in a suit and tie. The same difference is seen with his wife as well, though both of their workday outfits are worn and patched, if cleanly scrubbed. As with so many FSA portraits the most arresting details seen here are their eyes. They both return the gaze of the camera lens with the sort of bewildered resolution, or sadness and strength, that personifies so many subjects of FSA photography during the Depression years, both black and white.

The greater scope of "Part Two," "Inheritors of Slavery," within *12 Million Black Voices* seems to derive more from Rosskam's sixty photo selections than from Wright's thirty pages of text. For the photo editor, the traditionally rural and agricultural life of southern blacks was easily documented from the FSA files. Wright had to learn more about the history of the people he described as the "folk" in sociological terminology, or those blacks living in the rural South of the twentieth century not far removed from their heritage from slavery. Although he was born on a plantation in Mississippi, Wright matured in several cities, first small southern ones and then large northern ones. This black writer can recall an early childhood of survival in the cotton culture, and he can recreate it in a verbal catalog. "Our days are walled with cotton . . . . we plow, plant, chop, and pick cotton . . . . Queen Cotton [rules] . . . and when she dies we do not know how many of us will die with her" (49). Wright's narration employs this historical pattern, as he follows black southerners and the cotton culture from Reconstruction through the Great Depression with his focus on the autobiographical stages of birth, life, and death--even for Queen Cotton.

The words of Wright's catalog provide captions for two six-page photo sequences visually portraying this dreary round of life experiences (50-55, 80-85). In the initial collage gathering, Lange took the first three photographs, which show the same humane empathy with her subjects better known from her iconic images of the western states (50-52). The other three were taken by FSA artists often ranked with Lange--Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein, and Walker Evans (53-55). Viewed as a sequence of six, the first pair both focus on lone black laborers lost in the landscape of cotton; the next two complement them with small groups of blacks cultivating rows of cotton; and the third two-page spread makes a forceful contrast of a barren field on one page and an earthen grave opposite to it. These images

project the demise of the cotton culture as natural and human detritus found in eroded landscapes and worn-out workers. The most striking instances of life wasted in "Part Two" are of the social conflict that Wright names as "a war that never ends . . . war that inevitably brings destruction and death for southern blacks" (46). Often this death is by lynching, seen as in a shocking newspaper photo shown full page to reveal its ghastly details (45-46).

The second collage sequence in "Part Two" proves less lonely and forlorn even as it depicts similar conditions of living and labor for the "Inheritors of Slavery" in the South. Again, these several photographs are presented in pairs, all captioned by another catalog Rosskam draws from Wright's descriptions. The two-page pairings show black migrants crowded together on trucks or in the fields, but at closer distances so as to reveal their essentially humanity despite the harsh conditions of their lives (80-84). The most moving are images of migrant families sleeping in rough wooden barracks, parents and children all exhausted. Wright's narrative pattern thus follows the history of southern agriculture between the two World Wars as mechanization drove tenants and sharecroppers off the plantations to gather in the towns to be hired only as seasonal day labor.

The seasons of the year parallel the stages of life as autobiographical elements within Wright's larger framework of folk history, especially in the introductory pages of "Part Two" describing the southern landscape (32-34).

Within these larger expanses of verbal text and visual image comprising "Inheritors of Slavery," many interesting examples undergird a deep structure modeling the stages of life. One remarkable photograph reveals the interior of a rural house, seemingly a more or less permanent home in Georgia that features a poignant scene suggestive of female life passages (76). This type of shelter is known as a "dog-trot cabin" as it consists of two small structures with an open porch between for the dog. Here a maturing black girl on the cusp of womanhood muses wistfully, as if aware of Wright's line paired with Delano's image, "There are times when we doubt our songs" (76). She sits at an open door at one end of the cabin, but the camera's gaze looks beyond through the other door, across the porch, and into the far room where two more women replicate her pose, perhaps her mother and grandmother from their distant appearances. The visual effect suggests reflecting mirrors, ones reproducing images at different angles and distances to draw attention both to their similarities and differences as black women moving through life. Like the images viewed as a male triptych in "Part One," this single one accomplishes similar autobiographical effect in "Part Two."

The historical organization and psychological imagery drawn from black life narratives in the segregated South is extended into Wright's description of the Great Migration to distant northern ghettos in "Part Three." "Death on the City Pavements" presents his best writing in the photobook, at least in my view, as it seems enriched

by Wright's recent life experiences. This third part of *12 Million Black Voices* does reveal many artful photographs, beginning with the first one by Russell Lee of a grotesque city tenement, but overall the visual quality does not match that of "Part Two" (91). Early on in the editing of their photobook, Rosskam realized that the FSA files offered little enough on American cities, much less on urban blacks, for the support of Wright's written text. As a stopgap measure, the photo editor then drew on his own images of relocated blacks from his home base in Washington. Although Wright was living in Harlem, his formative experience of the black exodus stretched between the South and Chicago, so he made return visits back to both places for inspiration. Rosskam joined Wright in a trip to the Windy City, and he also had photographer Russell Lee to join them with other support from FSA director Roy Stryker. Lee's assignment on loan was limited in time, however, so that much of his Chicago imagery seems more like newspaper photography than the best efforts from the real talents at the FSA.

Wright continues his narrative of folk history here, essentially moving though the two decades between the World Wars, while tracing the spatial movement of the Great Migration. This grim account begins by cataloging the trials and traumas that blacks encountered along the northward trajectory of their epic exodus in a complex sentence composed of seven repetitive clauses. His vision begins, "We, who were landless upon the land"; it ends, "we men who were struggling to be born . . . set our awkward feet upon the pavements of the city [and] life began to exact of us a heavy toll in death" (93). Rosskam selects four lines of this long passage as intertextual for a quartet of photographic images (94-97). He begins with an earlier photo of his own, a family portrait of a black couple and their four children in a dilapidated alley dwelling under the very shadow of the nation's capital. Wright's prose also introduces urban continuities and disjunctions then seen in Lee's images inside a storefront church service, or outside an "UNDERTAKER" advertisement on a shadowy brick wall looming above huddled black figures, or finally of an aging black trash man "blasted with two hundred years of slavery" pulling a wooden cart filled with the urban trash and junk that also represents the remnants of his own life passages (94-97).

Wright's historical account of southern emigrants transitioning into northern urban life continues by way of topics such as employment, housing, entertainment, and institutions. The second visual sequence in "Part Three' is thus focused around the "kitchenette," the tiny living quarters carved out of the houses and apartments abandoned by whites before black advances in this new theater of the American racial struggle extended from South to North. Wright's prose reveals these makeshift human warehouses in harsh and violent images of conflict. "The kitchenette is our prison, our death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in ceaseless attacks"

(106). A visual sequence mirrors Wright's imagery, at middle distance, straight on, flash lit documentary photographs in the manner of tabloid exposes very popular in that era. This visual shooting style presents the subjects as helpless victims, however, rather than more complex individuals capable of reflection, action, and growth as seen elsewhere in 12 *Million Black Voices*.

"Part Three" of *12 Million Black Voices* ends with another visual triptych, one even more representative of the very finest in FSA photography. All three of these images are concerned with children, the subject of Wright's last paragraphs here condemning the failures of traditional institutions like churches and schools during the Great Migration. "We watch strange moods fill our children," he says, "the streets claim our children" (136). These two sad truths caption the three photographs that conclude "Death on the City Pavements," all of them taken during the final Chicago sojourn of Wright, Rosskam, and Lee in search of documentary and creative subject matter. Rosskam's half-length closeup of a black boy standing with other boys and girls outside a kitchenette apartment building recalls Lange's boy at the end of "Part One," or Delano's girl in "Part Two," kids old beyond their years, at once lost children and young adults (137). In the second photograph of the pair, Rosskam focuses downward from a higher position, perhaps from an upper window, onto a street corner in a decaying area of the Chicago "Black Belt" (138). This difference in perspective focuses on a group of children much like the preceding one, but isolated against a dark brick wall and related to a nearby junk pile like just so much waste of urban life. Lee's third image in the triptych balances more with Rosskam's second one, if anything more bleakly by isolating black children within a wasteland of empty buildings, vacant lots, and elevated railway tracks (139). Taken together, these three FSA photographs conclude the darker naturalistic themes of "Part Three" and preview the brighter idealistic visions of "Part Four" by suggesting that the lost child may find a way at last to a realized personhood in an autobiographical sense.

In "Men in the Making," Wright balances his earlier images of birth and death in the past with ones of rebirth and resurrection in the future. He opens "Part Four," "We are a folk born of . . . devastation, slavery . . . emancipation, migration, disillusion . . . joblessness, and insecurity" (142). These harsh and rapid changes fragmented black cultural identity in America during the Depression era, evoking neurotic responses in urban ghettos in Wright's view, ranging from nervous servility among the talented tenth to angry riot among the inarticulate masses. For Wright, the most encouraging events are tentative alliances of black and white groups, such as labor unions, as represented in the striking image of another stalwart black working man from Pennsylvania by Rothstein behind the chapter title (141). Wright's optimism does not extend past these comparatively few developments though. Instead of the progressive plans and programs that concluded many

photobooks from the Depression years, Wright finishes with a flourish recalling Whitman, much like his many prose catalogs earlier. “The hot wires carry urgent appeals. Print compels us. Voices are speaking. Men are moving! And we shall be with them” (145).

I believe that Wright at last recognized his historical setting in 1941, near the exact transition between the Depression and the Second World War, and his realization leaves progressive activism for a nebulous state in the future. “Part Four” has only six pages of prose and three photographs; the first two, of the black working man and a NAACP street protest, are only illustrations and just that. Rosskam’s final selection mirrors and even exceeds Wright’s poetic vision and provides a fine visual ending for this photobook. FSA photographer Carl Mydans captures another alley dwelling in the American capital, one lit by sunshine that draws a smile from a black man who meets the day with a stoic calm despite his obviously difficult circumstances (147). We do not know anything of his black life, nor do we hear his black voice; it is enough that we see his black face lit with sunlight in a moment of natural and human transcendence.

I trust that my consideration of *12 Million Black Voices* by way of its verbal and visual intertextualities in its collages of images and catalogs of words, as well as its psychological and autobiographical perspectives, has demonstrated how the evolving genre of photobook is best appreciated as documentary art rather than as progressive propaganda. Wright’s text has been read for the most part within the politics of race and first dismissed as biased and then as unfocused. When the photobook was published late in 1941, a month before Pearl Harbor, World War Two changed the priorities of American culture overnight. Early reviews were mixed, even in the black press, though Wright’s renown after *Native Son* helped sell out the first edition (Rowley 259). One interested reader was J. Edgar Hoover, who found the book’s politics suspect and opened an FBI file on Wright that trailed him until his death (Rowley 275-76). Fellow black author Ralph Ellison was a more sensitive reader, as he told Wright, his mentor at that point in his life narrative, that he was moved to tears when reading it.

Wright replied to Ellison that he planned a series of volumes to expand the African American history outlined in his photo-book, and in some ways his later canon did just that, though his own life passages would take him far away from America to Europe and Africa. As for Rosskam, he stayed on while the FSA photography program became the Office of War Information, leaving at last when it closed in 1943 for a long, varied, and successful career in photography and in publishing. When the collaboration of Wright and Rosskam in *12 Million Black Voices* is viewed as documentary art, it powerfully encapsulates the traumas of race in America. The autobiographical aspects of such universal experiences make this hybrid cultural artifact humanly accessible for both blacks and whites. Wright

concludes with an autobiographical and a visual image that demonstrates why black lives must matter to all Americans, then and now, "*we* are *you*, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives" (146, emphases in original).

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