COLLEGE COMPOSITION & COMMUNICATION

Special Issue: Cultural Rhetorics

Including essays by:

Stephen Kwame Dadugblor

Brandon M. Erby

Misty D. Fuller

Isabella `Amne Gomez and Amy J. Lueck

Mara Lee Grayson

V. Jo Hsu and Jennifer Nish

Ada Hubrig

Andrés C. López

Andrea Riley Mukavetz

Karrieann Soto Vega

Elliot Tetreault, Megan Faver Hartline, and Sarah Cardwell

Stephanie West-Puckett, Nicole I. Caswell, and William P. Banks

Kimberly G. Wieser-Weryackwe, Christina V. Cedillo, and Rachel C. Jackson

SPECIAL SECTION: *Forum, Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*

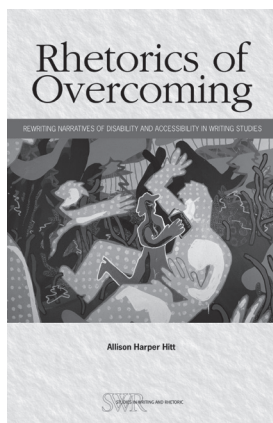# CCCC Studies in Writing & Rhetoric series

Rhetorics of Overcoming

Rewriting Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies

Allison Harper Hitt

Rhetorics of Overcoming addresses the in/accessibility of writing classroom and writing center practices for disabled and nondisabled student writers, exploring how rhetorics of overcoming—the idea that disabled students must overcome their disabilities in order to be successful—manifest in writing studies scholarship and practices.

Allison Harper Hitt argues that rewriting rhetorics of overcoming as narratives of "coming over" is one way to overcome ableist pedagogical standards. Whereas rhetorics of overcoming rely on medical-model processes of diagnosis, disclosure, cure, and overcoming for individual students, coming over involves valuing disability and difference and challenging systemic issues of physical and pedagogical inaccessibility.

Hitt calls for developing understandings of disability and difference that move beyond accommodation models in which students are diagnosed and remediated, instead working collaboratively—with instructors, administrators, consultants, and students themselves—to craft multimodal, universally designed writing pedagogies that meet students' access needs.

Rhetorics of Overcoming

REWRITING NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN WRITING STUDIES

Allison Harper Hitt

SWR | CCCC STUDIES IN WRITING AND RHETORIC

Allison Harper Hitt is assistant professor of rhetoric and composition at Ball State University.

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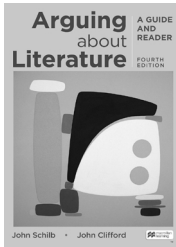ncte.org

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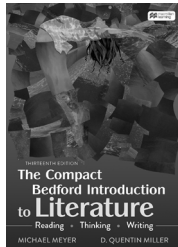

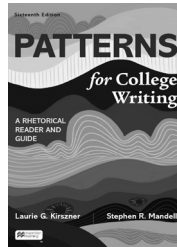### NEW IN ⬛ Achieve

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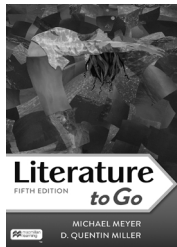College Writing, 16e**

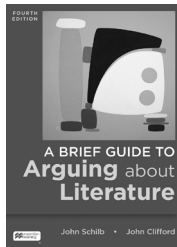**Rhetoric**

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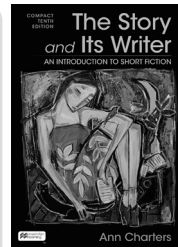Researcher, 8e**

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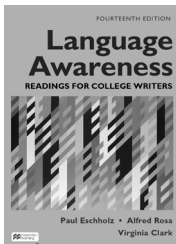**Literature**

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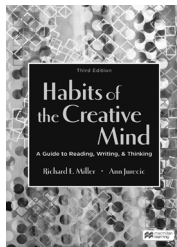**A Brief Guide to Arguing
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Kimberly G. Wieser-Weryackwe, Christina V. Cedillo, and Rachel C. Jackson

Cultural Rhetorics Stories and Counterstories: Constellating in Difficult Times

In our introduction to this special issue on cultural rhetorics, we as editors recognize that members of the field maintain many different approaches and frameworks. This diversity suggests that the work of prioritizing emplaced stories over universalizing theories brings cultural rhetoricians together, making research and teaching accountable first to communities, rather than the academy, and continuously examining our ethical commitments to O/others. This work, then, requires that scholars situate themselves within networks of places and spaces, cultures and peoples, power and privilege, so that we may practice relationality and accountability, actively seeking to make meaningful connections within and across research sites, and create space for silenced voices while building a more just world and disciplinary community.

In the near-decade since the inaugural Cultural Rhetorics conference was held, the term "cultural rhetorics" has become a more frequent sight in calls for papers, job ads, and publication titles. Scholars across locations found ways to do cultural rhetorics work even as the term itself came into being.

Cultural rhetorics genealogies emanate from a multiplicity of cultural, historical, and material places, interrelated with a desire to expand an already vibrant and growing discipline. However, because of this multiplicity, there still appears to be some confusion about what cultural rhetorics—as a practice, a discipline, and an orientation—actually is. For example, the term has been used (erroneously) to refer to scholarship that focuses on the practices of marginalized communities even though western traditional approaches to research remained centered. Or, the term has been used to signify work that only uses autoethnographic frameworks or work that somehow never engages more traditional scholarship. Hence, we conceived of this special issue as a way to clarify for our peers in the discipline, and for ourselves, what cultural rhetorics is, what its goals as a field are, and the ways in which different people see themselves *doing* cultural rhetorics differently. Perhaps you yourself, dear reader, are currently doing cultural rhetorics work and don't even know it. Certainly, it is by asking the question "What does cultural rhetorics mean to you?" of ourselves and one another that a number of us came to identify as a community of cultural rhetoricians. Our differences draw us together as much as our shared values and practices, and both help us create an inclusive home for cultural rhetorics work.

We all came to cultural rhetorics on our own paths. Our work is impacted in ways specific to each of us.

We start here by drawing attention to the interconnectedness of cultures and communities and the stories we tell in building both. In 2014, as part of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL) at Michigan State University, Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, and Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson composed "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics," a performance and story that framed cultural rhetorics as being methodologically grounded both in story and relationship. Relationality gave rise to *constellating*, or examining ideas and stories in a piece of scholarship based on their relationships to one another and on making new knowledge/s in those in-between spaces or liminal zones that are always ripe with change. In the constellation process, authors-scholars-performers-makers learn the different relationships among them and their work and, more broadly, to others in the field and other disciplines. Beyond academic relationships, connections between communities and campuses resonate as an emergent constellation across cultural rhetorics work. Within cultural rhetorics, connections to communi-

ties, distinct from institutional community engagement models, prioritize relationship and reciprocity and require a new set of methodologies adapted to community-centered and community-led designs. Thus, **cultural rhetorics reminds us that knowledge-making is not the exclusive domain of the academy and that our research and teaching should always be ethically accountable to the very real people whose cultures and practices we study and engage with, not just to the scholarly community.**

Kim:
In 1999, while I was a graduate student at Baylor University, I began doing work in the area of American Indian rhetorics, when nearly all of the scholarship that existed consisted of a few articles by non-Native people. Malea Powell completed her PhD at Miami University the previous year, so there was her dissertation. Scott Lyons was still working on his degree as well. I was working in isolation until connecting with Malea whom I knew through Wordcraft Circle, in Puerto Vallarta at a 2000 conference where I presented on the ideas that would become my dissertation. Malea convinced me to attend CCCC's Caucus for American Indian Scholars and Scholarship business meeting in Denver. In 2014, I was working on my book, Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and Literacies in American Indian Studies*, when Malea, alongside Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, and Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson—The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab—published "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics." I began to notice and trace the emergence of cultural rhetorics as a field, which added new ways of thinking about our methodology. I became a managing editor at* Constellations *in 2019 and began working with Ersula (Ore) and Christina (Cedillo) on editing special issues across the CCCC caucuses after the murder of George Floyd. To me, what we today call cultural rhetorics is what my work in rhetorical studies has always been—putting things together: synthesis/constellating; relationality; positionality; scholarship that is* for*, not just* about*, community.*

The CRTL noted that rhetorics are "always-already cultural" and that cultures are "persistently rhetorical," bypassing the question of what constitutes "real" rhetoric to instead situate the analytic and theoretical authority squarely within the communities that compose and use specific practices. Through their use of decolonial frameworks that decenter the academy as the sole, even main, purveyor of learning, they invited us to

decenter traditionally western rhetorical scholarship as *the* way to know. This does not mean that certain western approaches or frameworks are unwelcome. Instead, ***we must recognize all approaches and frameworks as necessarily composed through specific cultural lenses; therefore, they cannot and should not be universalized and made invisible, nor should they make invisible other cultural frameworks.*** This point matters because historically the academy encourages scholars to analyze and write from the "hubris of the zero point," meaning a colonial epistemological position that renders itself *the* voice of a neutral, objective reality (Castro-Gómez). Self-authorized to make pronouncements and engage in intellectual extraction, "[z]ero-point epistemology, as a normative and unmarked form of knowledge, is a continuance of western supremacy and colonial agency" (Ramirez 479). Common and seemingly mundane academic practices duplicate these actions, and thus coloniality, as scholars benefit from their work on (rather than with and behind) communities, especially those marked by social precarity and vulner-

By asking researchers to consider their own cultural positionalities in storying their relationality to the communities they write about, cultural rhetorics renders visible what colonialism tries to hide: no matter how much systemic authority or privilege one party may have over another, no one can lay claim to ultimate truth.

ability. By asking researchers to consider their own cultural positionalities in storying their relationality to the communities they write about, cultural rhetorics renders visible what colonialism tries to hide: no matter how much systemic authority or privilege one party may have over another, no one can lay claim to ultimate truth. We need each other, and our relationships with each other require self-reflection, feedback, shared goals, mutual support, and safe, respectful space for generative disagreements.

Christina:
Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui points out how decolonial theorists can "proclaim themselves spokespeople and interpreters of the demands of [I]ndigenous people" only to turn around and use high theory that renders their work inaccessible to those they claim to champion; they wind up repackaging Indigenous ideas for academic consumption only, without acknowledgment or giving due credit (103). I think about this problem a lot, and so, I view cultural rhetorics as a space where communal practices like stories are valued

as homegrown, community-centering, and land-based theories with more power to tell us about how and why rhetoric matters than any "ventriloquizing concepts" drawn from the standard intellectual centers of power (107). When I first started doing the work I do now, I wanted to prioritize accountability to my family and communities by showing that I speak with them rather than for or over them. I recognize that our communal and familial knowledges are indispensable for change, but not everyone feels safe speaking out, and so testimonio, or collective storytelling, permits me to use my platform while reminding readers that these stories are never just my own. Also, story makes research legible to those outside academia because stories are communal technologies, and even if our stories don't sound the same, we often share reasons for telling them. Using the rhetorical forms that people themselves use matters when we (claim to) represent the interests of others.

Cultural rhetorics can prove useful in dismantling illusions of authoritative objective knowledge that animate the western academy. As a field, it unsettles the sublimation of subjective knowledges that maintains systems of oppression like colonialism, white supremacy, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia and disallows those with power to assert total control in naming or unnaming, legalizing or criminalizing, and legitimizing or disqualifying particular ways of being, knowing, living, and loving. Tessa Brown highlights this epistemological potential by using cultural rhetorics as "an important vehicle for understanding whiteness as rhetorically produced and maintained," especially when "seeking to understand and disrupt systems of racism, patriarchy, and empire" (235). **By asking us to situate ourselves as individuals, instructors, and scholars within networks of culture, power, and knowledge-making, cultural rhetorics demands that we continuously examine our own motives and commitments as we research, teach, and otherwise communicate with others.** Hence, in "Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversation," Phil Bratta and Malea Powell explicitly note that our work "requires an examination of issues of power, both those that arise within each cultural site of practice, and the power relations between the cultures involved in the comparative analysis." Even the supposedly small decisions we make regarding our practices can have significant implications when sanctioned by the academy. We must ever remember that, as John Gagnon states, "the decisions we make about which stories to tell and not to tell, the words we use and don't use, the

underlying concepts and theories we convey or suppress, not only have the potential to but in fact do have very real impacts on not just ourselves and our relations, but also to those unseen and unanticipated audience members who come into contact with our tellings" (2). How we treat these stories matter as much as how we treat each other. As rhetoricians, we know that our choices regarding identification and dissociation, what is worth saying and what is not, have major consequences in terms of who is seen as worthy of inclusion, attention, care, and respect and whose positionalities, perspectives, and participation receive space, resources, and esteem.

Rachel:

I come from cultural rhetorics before Cultural Rhetorics. We all do. That's because we come from stories, and stories come from way before us. My mother and father and their mothers and fathers were storytellers. I came into this story through theirs, and through me their stories remain. I came to the Cultural Rhetorics story as a PhD student in composition, rhetoric, and literacy at the University of Oklahoma after a decade of teaching composition across the state with an MA in literature—mostly white male American literature. I received no pedagogical training save for the textbooks I was handed. In teaching excerpts from Mike Rose's autoethnography and Paulo Freire's educational theory in both urban and rural community college composition classes, I saw cultural identities, contexts, and exigencies—my students' and my own stories—surface in discussions as critically emplaced, alive, dynamic, and complex. In conversations concerning economic struggles, educational experiences, and alienation narratives that the readings evoked, what emerged were personal, historical, and cultural differences and an unexpected solidarity. From those differences, relationships appeared, and from those relationships a kind of collective agency through which students could speak about and back to power together. I study Indian Territory's/Oklahoma's peoples and places and suppressed rhetorics of local cultural resistance in the state's prehistory and history. Early Cultural Rhetorics (pre-CRTL) scholarship, community literacy scholarship, rhetorical recovery work, and Native American literary and cultural theory encouraged deeply personal field and archival research into Oklahoma's diverse, politically racialized, and marginalized communities in order to identify shared histories, material exigencies, and transrhetorical strategies. What I found were stories. Stories conjoin communities, cultures, rhetorics, literatures, and literacies, just as stories connect the present to the past and the future. They traverse space

and time through our own bodies and identities, places and communities. Stories come together, even if (and as) they diverge.

Given these ethical and epistemological concerns, and the recognition that communities themselves dictate the utility and worth of their practices, we cannot be surprised that the field of cultural rhetorics has indeed attracted members of groups long ignored or denigrated by western traditional approaches to rhetoric. Women; Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); disabled people; LGBTQIA+ people; working-class people; and members of other marginalized groups find rhetorical space to write about their communities not from a distant perspective of deficiency or exoticization but from within their own cultures, informed by both scholarship and experiential knowledge. Writing about Black women's rhetorical authority and vulnerability on social media, Tamika Carey explains how racism frames them negatively compared to white rhetors, demanding that they walk a "tightrope of perfection." She writes that "the conditions that I call a tightrope of perfection stand in stark contrast to the apparent parachute of imperfection that members of other dominant groups have ridden into positions of power" (Carey 157). We find that, like other rhetorical spaces, academia facilitates this same kind of power dynamic that Carey highlights in her work. Indeed, academic constructs related to axiology and entelechy have long authorized and habituated a reliance on hierarchized difference that operates as status within our classrooms and department meetings, the field and the discipline. Recognizing this destructive tendency is, of course, not enough, so we must call one another into relationship to challenge and change these hierarchies in all our spaces. **Within cultural rhetorics, relationality expects that we always recognize how networks of power implicate and situate us in relation to others, while accountability means actively working for a more equitable and just world within and beyond the academy.**

By this very presupposition, no one scholar or group of scholars can own or define cultural rhetorics. Instead, we comprise cultural rhetorics. As a field, cultural rhetorics theories and practices, methodologies and methods, proceed from cultural locations and epistemologies well beyond the rhetoric and writing studies discipline or individual campuses and their programs. Cultural rhetorics cannot be about privileging voices or locations, but must be instead an intellectually intersectional zone where we

learn from one another, inform each other, and dream of "a world in which epistemic plurality is recognized and appreciated" (Castro-Gómez 444). The academy and scholarly publication mechanisms bind us to a system of differential power that the relationality inherent in cultural rhetorics aims to resist. While remaining cognizant of the effects of lived identity, positionality, and power differentials on relationships and rhetorical practices, we must watch for and safeguard against our own human tendencies to settle into our own perspectives by erasing others. In writing about Native museums, Lisa King states that these museums must make Native peoples rhetorically legible and legibly sovereign, meaning they retain the authority to define themselves and their cultures on their own terms. She writes that "cross-cultural spaces are precisely where a legibly rhetorically sovereign practice would be useful, those places that seek the widest possible audience or that must, by default, work with multiple audiences. Effective, understandable—*legible*—communication is key" (King 8). Likewise, cultural rhetorics is, by its nature, a "cross-cultural space," a contact zone where people enter to share with and learn from one another with empathy, consideration, and affability while maintaining and sharing positionalities. Thus, we hold up cultural rhetorics as a field that encourages communication across differences, locations, spaces, and conversations with respect, reciprocity, and accountability (see Wilson). **As cultural rhetoricians operating in the western academy that charts and names disciplinary fields, we can still imagine together what our worlds might be like if we focused on developing storying and listening technologies from diverse locations that build bridges between cultures and experiences, disciplines and fields, one scholar and another, rather than reinforcing taxonomies of status and control.**

We also recognize that what we do in this moment is only made possible by those who have come before us, those who make up our respective cultural and scholarly lineages. As Casie Cobos, Gabriela Raquel Ríos, Donnie Johnson Sackey, Jen Sano-Franchini, and Angela M. Haas explain in "Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call," cultural rhetorics draws on a long (hi)story of scholarship. Writing about the many different ways that cultures and rhetorics interface with one another and the varying trajectories that different scholars have traced for cultural rhetorics, they cite scholars whose important works have influenced "disciplinary thinking about how culture, rhetoric, and composition come together"

even if they did not necessarily use the term "cultural rhetorics" to refer to their own work (140). "Specifically," they state, "we think of research by scholars like Geneva Smitherman, Helen Fox, Victor Villanueva, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Shirley Wilson Logan, LuMing Mao, Julie Lindquist, Terese Guinsatao Monberg, Ralph Cintron, and others who have long engaged questions of rhetoric and culture" (Cobos et al. 140). Likewise, in her work on counterstory, Aja Martinez acknowledges ongoing "traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance, and justice" as exemplified by the scholarship of Keith Gilyard, Adam Banks, and Carmen Kynard, among others already mentioned in this introduction—and others whose names you will find cited in the following essays (26). Because relationality and accountability also entail giving credit where it is due, **as cultural rhetoricians, we want to emphasize that the disciplinary use of story precedes us; the use of story as method also precedes the academy, being one of the oldest and most culturally nuanced rhetorical forms that we have for making sense of the world around us.** We agree wholeheartedly with Martinez when she argues, "I believe that we've all *been* telling stories all along, but some stories are elevated to the status of theory, scholarship, and literature. . . . While I don't know when or if these academic gatekeepers will arrive at a point of admission that all work, especially in the humanities, is story, I do know that narrative has always been theoretical" (2). We invite you to join us and the authors featured in this special issue and bring your own story and your community's stories, and imagine what these stories share with—and how they differ from—ours. Our differences, too, teach us.

> **"I believe that we've all *been* telling stories all along, but some stories are elevated to the status of theory, scholarship, and literature. . . . While I don't know when or if these academic gatekeepers will arrive at a point of admission . . . narrative has always been theoretical" (Martinez).**

The issue opens with "Another Temporarily Hopeful Intervention: Cultural Rhetorics as a Commitment to Indigenous Sovereignty, Cultural Continuance, and Repatriation of Land and Life" by Anishinaabe scholar Andrea Riley Mukavetz, a former co-chair of the American Indian Caucus for NCTE and CCCC, who recently left academia to work in other areas of public service. Riley Mukavetz is part of a group of scholars who helped build up the field since a foundational workshop at the 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication. Looking back to that moment,

she remembers "when cultural rhetorics became an intervention . . . too niche . . . too radical" (25). Riley Mukavetz's essay is another kind of intervention. Angered by the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous scholarship within cultural rhetorics, she wonders how anyone can write about story, decolonization, and situatedness without citing the critical Indigenous scholarship from where cultural rhetorics extends. Beyond mere acknowledgments, however, Riley Mukavetz calls for relational accountability, actual introspection, and action by those with power and privilege that counter the rhetorical and material erasure of Indigenous peoples and members of other marginalized communities.

Jewish rhetoricians are often erased in academia or read as "white," while still experiencing antisemitism in the academy and in their lives. As Grayson points out, these disconnects, or "fissures," help "illuminate . . . the disciplinary positioning of Jewish discourses and the lived experiences of Jewish people in RCWS."

Next, Karrieann Soto Vega's "Amplifying *Autogestión* and Cultural Rhetorics of Resistance" examines the rhetorical conditions needed by cultural groups in order to thrive. Soto Vega defines *autogestión* as "a response to compounding colonial crises, including what anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla calls the coloniality of disaster" (46) in relation to 2017's devastating Hurricane Maria. Rejecting a colonial chronology that places Puerto Rico in a post-hurricane space—arguing that there is no post-hurricane space for Puerto Ricans—Soto Vega deploys *autogestión* as a counter-praxis of survivance. She explains how it can aid in understanding communal rhetorical practices and how it offers a venue for allyship that can contribute to changing material realities in Puerto Rico. Soto Vega also examines the work of artist/activist collectives such as Vueltabajo Teatro and Defend Puerto Rico and, in particular, the activist work being done through plena (a traditional Afro-Puerto Rican musical genre). Analyzing how *autogestión* is practiced in popular culture by not just Puerto Rican artist/activists like Bad Bunny but also by Black artist/activists such as Lizzo, Soto Vega frames these artists as models for cultural rhetoricians looking to "amplify [activisms] with accountability" (52).

Mara Lee Grayson's "Assimilation/Appropriation: What Jewish Discourses in the Western Rhetorical Tradition Tell Us about the Limitations of Inclusion" uses a cultural rhetorics framework to examine Jewish rhetorics, critical whiteness, and the prevalence of antisemitism. Jewish rhetoricians are often erased in academia or read as "white," while still experiencing an-

tisemitism in the academy and in their lives. As Grayson points out, these disconnects, or "fissures," help "illuminate . . . the disciplinary positioning of Jewish discourses and the lived experiences of Jewish people in RCWS" (57). Building her argument with not only the scholarship in the field but also with primary research and embodied "experiences as a white Jewish woman" (57), Grayson shows how "Jewish discourses are pathologized and marginalized in RCWS spaces in ways that impact professional experience and disciplinary knowledge production" (57). Grayson argues that "cultural rhetorics contributes a more critical conceptualization of 'inclusion' for the academy that acknowledges the limitations and dangers of assimilation into whiteness" (57).

In "To Embrace Tension or Recoil Away from It: Navigating Complex Collaborations in Cultural Rhetorics Work," Isabella Gomez and Amy Leuck provide a complex model of self-reflection within relationship as they share their experiences and observations from working together on Muwekma Ohlone lands now occupied by Santa Clara University (SCU) to revive and reestablish cultural campouts for Muwekma Ohlone youth. Their article, written in a shared voice that includes intermittent passages in each author's individual voice, demonstrates how Gomez, a Muwekma Ohlone high school senior and tribal youth activist and leader, and Leuck, an associate professor at SCU who works on spatial rhetorics, public memory, and representation, center and share reflexivity in their project by learning to recognize and speak to the complexities within and differences between their positionalities. Cultural rhetorics, new to both of them, provides a framework to center community members, relationships, realities, and resources rather than "institutional scripts and expectations" (81). Drawing from a wide swath of cultural rhetorics scholarship and locations, they lean into transrhetoricity (Jackson) as a practice of foregrounding the dynamism operating rhetorically within intercultural relationships to track movement and change.

V. Jo Hsu and Jennifer Nish invite readers into relationship by using epistolary form in "Crip Letters: Storying Slowness and Re/Writing Academic Work." Through interpersonal communication as friends and allies, they explore their relationship via shared experiences of living with myalgic encephalomyelitis while working within the academy and learning together to bridge these identities within their work. Each identifying themselves within the broader community of chronically ill peoples, the relationality at the heart of cultural rhetorics unfolds between them in

exchanged letters and invites readers to share "intimacies usually discouraged in hyper-individualistic academic spaces" as they "speak openly and unpack the factors—internalized and structural ableism, academic elitism, past trauma, and present vulnerabilities" (100). With each other as with readers, they offer the vulnerability of deep connection amid "learning and disciplinary conditions—what manufactured scarcity—that encourage interpersonal resentment rather than mutual uplift" (105). Using a critical disabilities lens, they acknowledge injuries to the bodymind connection within capitalist, colonial systems and, more importantly, honor that connection as a shared site of healing.

Ada Hubrig follows bodymind connections to community in the article "Beyond (Favor) Access: Constellating Communities through Collective Access," a critique of "favor access," or access granted as "a favor," that supports institutional agendas while making institutions appear benevolent and a "strategic deployment that sidesteps more meaningful accountability" (122). Closely critiquing their own previous work in curriculum development and classrooms, Hubrig observes that a culture of access can only be created in community and therefore arrives at "collective access," a disability justice model and a framework created by disabled BIPOC and disabled queer and trans people that "makes it abundantly clear that we cannot work to challenge ableism without addressing other forms of oppression" (124). Intersectionality inherent to disability justice opens up opportunities for complex relationships and coalitions that mirror the connections and constellations cultural rhetorics encourages wherein community provides both support and accountability. Hubrig asserts collective access as a process rather than an outcome, one that invokes and promotes community as a sustainable approach to meeting both mutual and divergent needs of all, even as those needs continue to shift and change.

Next, Stephen K. Dadugblor's "Stories and/as Civic Pedagogies: Making a Space for Participatory Knowledge-Making in Cultural Rhetorics" applies a cultural rhetorics focus on story to examine how African storytelling practices contribute to participatory decision making and how those practices can be utilized in civic pedagogy that prepares students as citizens of a democracy. He demonstrates this process by looking at the international response to *An African Election,* a documentary about democracy-building in Ghana that utilized participatory knowledge-making by having Ghanaian stakeholders share their stories in their own voices and sharing actual

production control with them. Dadugblor shows how the story told by this film negates the negative "single story" of a politically inept Africa by constellating multiple stories, illustrating how cultural rhetorics is put into action outside of the academy to effect real change for real people in real places. Speaking to the importance of story in everyday life, Dadugblor writes, "If we are to make space for participatory knowledge-making in cultural rhetorics scholarship, then we ought to reckon with who tells the stories, what those stories are, and how they function in the world to shape us" (148).

Misty Fuller centers the cultural rhetorics emphasis on embodiment and lived experience in her article "Where I've Been and Where We're Going: Academic Culture's Work toward Inclusivity" to build a relationship between whiteness, class, and personal experiences in the academy. At the same time the article constructs a critical space for understanding whiteness outside of settler frameworks that erase constellated identities. Fuller uses story to critique education as an

> López theorizes Maya K'iche' backstrap weaving as an Indigenous-centered and -centering methodology for preserving *memorias históricas* of the Guatemalan Civil War [and] erasing bounds of colonial chronotopes. López defines backstrap weaving as "a digital practice . . . embodied and coded with meaning . . . [with] patterns recognized by members of specific communities."

"equalizing" process, using the cultural assumptions built into class bias to situate herself and her work within cultural rhetorics. Through close historical examination and rhetorical analysis of the term "white trash" and how it shapes and limits her experiences, the article constructs productive connections between critical whiteness studies, class studies, and cultural rhetorics discourse that open space in academic culture for collaboration and change. This important work counteracts "rhetorical distancing," or the denial of race and class privileges, as Fuller analyzes "white trash" as a category that regulates difference (156).

Andrés C. López highlights the cultural rhetorics field's indebtedness to Indigenous decolonial methods and storytelling in "*Kemenik le Ch'o'b'oj / Tejiendo Historias* / Weaving Histories/Stories: Creating a *Memoria Histórica* of Resistance through Maya Backstrap Weaving Rhetorics." In their essay, López theorizes Maya K'iche' backstrap weaving as an Indigenous-centered and -centering methodology for preserving *memorias históricas* of the Guatemalan Civil War beyond the erasing bounds of colonial chronotopes.

López defines backstrap weaving as "a digital practice . . . embodied and coded with meaning" because it is based in patterns recognized by members of specific communities (172). As a survivance technology, backstrap weaving contests the imposition of Eurowestern written language and centers women as the primary keepers of cultural knowledge, subverting colonial logics and placing the power of making—and making meaning—directly in the hands of community members themselves.

Stephanie West-Puckett, Nicole I. Caswell, and William P. Banks invite us to use cultural rhetorics to rethink evaluation in "Counterstory as Strategy and Tactic for Humanizing Writing Assessment." As we enter the era of artificial intelligence (AI), with perceived threats to the sanctity of the essay and its reification as the penultimate product for measurement in the discipline (and in many others), they suggest, "To speak back to our discipline's anxieties around assessment, we need a methodology that values processes over product. Cultural rhetorics—as orientation, methodology, and practice—has made meaningful contributions to writing pedagogy, providing ways to notice and account for the rich, relational, material, and embodied work of composing" (188). They argue that an assessment methodology is needed "that validates cultural rhetorical practices so that they can speak back to institutional(ized) models of assessment" (188), proposing Queer Validity Inquiry (QVI) as a possible alternative that "honor[s] the complex, interpersonal, identity-driven work of writing" (188).

Then, Elliot Tetreault, Megan Faver Hartline, and Sarah Cardwell use a cultural rhetorics approach to challenge normative constructions of time in "Community-Based Temporal Practices for Creating Change in Hostile Institutional Systems." The authors constellate stories that show how different people maintain different relationships to time due to the constraints of material and physical barriers, the community responsibilities they respectively bear, and the relationships they maintain. Then, they show how, taking advantage of these very real concerns, political institutions attempt to convince changemakers that they are asking for "too much, too fast" even as they (the political bodies) run out the clock before change must be instituted. As a result, activists must compose and share stories that show up temporal scarcity as deliberately manufactured. Showing how political institutions purposely inhibit opportunities for coalition based on "kairotic intervention" (213–14), Tetreault, Hartline, and Cardwell call for stories that allow "relationship building, what we name culturally responsive temporal practices" (207).

Finally, in "Imagining Freedom: Cultural Rhetorics, Digital Literacy, and Podcasting in Prison" Brandon M. Erby examines the "multiple episte-mologies" and "rhetorics of freedom [that] are used to speak truth to power, survive cruel conditions, demonstrate individuality, and maintain a sense of dignity" among incarcerated people in the US prison system (226). Erby examines *Ear Hustle*, a prison podcast begun in 2017 to show how multiple forms of literacy, including music, writing, and relationship building, al-low incarcerated people to practice rhetoric and envision conditions of freedom beyond the carceral state. Bringing together cultural rhetorics methodologies and scholarship on justice-oriented Black radical tradition, Erby highlights how Black rhetoricians and activists have long invented, remade, and deployed "technologies of persua-sion" to contest dehumanizing conditions and pursue their creative interests despite, and in resistance to, the carceral state (228).

Constellated together, these articles range across widely variant and intricate cultural positionalities to reiterate relationality, respect, reciprocity, and accountability as foundational aspects of all our rhetorical praxes. Unlike restricted categories and fixed, limited, stable identities, the constellations we build between us transcend and subvert limitations to allow for expansive transformation for all via new connections, dynamic change, and points placed in relationship to each other. There is no singular location of power in such an energetic field, but rather a broad distribution of experiences, perspectives, insights, resources, and efforts. There is space for all of us and our stories, though there may not be a singular term that can encompass us. Cultural rhetorics extend to us from origins far before and beyond the work any of us has done or the work we will do; from the cultures and histories we carry; from the places we live; from the stories we inherit, hold, and share; from the com-munities and peoples we love and to whom we are committed; from the identities we claim for ourselves. Cultural rhetorics and the self-reflexive, reciprocal relationships we create and enact doing this work protect those origins and commitments.

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As we edit this 2023 special issue on cultural rhetorics, an increasing number of states are enacting dangerous and cruel legislation that censors diverse histories, denies and promotes racial oppression, interferes with queer and trans people's bodily autonomy and safety, and threatens academic freedom in favor of political ideology. As cultural rhetoricians, we know that telling our stories is but one way to resist dehumanization; however, it remains an important one. Otherwise, such brutal laws would not be needed to hinder their telling. This special issue invites readers to build connections with the storied work gathered here and join us in comprising, composing, seeking, finding, recovering, reclaiming, sharing, and changing stories to structure a burgeoning field and a better world for us all.

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Andrea Riley Mukavetz

Another Temporarily Hopeful Intervention: Cultural Rhetorics as a Commitment to Indigenous Sovereignty, Cultural Continuance, and Repatriation of Land and Life

In "Our Story Begins Here" (2014) the CR Theory Lab offers key concepts related to cultural rhetorics such as constellating and relationality. Drawing from decolonial theory and practice, these concepts allow cultural rhetoricians to develop a scholarly practice that is reflective of the cultural community they are a part of and write for and to address the long histories and cultural practices of the land they dwell on. Where the CR Theory Lab is committed to a decolonial practice invested in the theories and lived experiences of the tribal nations people of Turtle Island, they also offer that it isn't the only approach to cultural rhetorics. I argue that both scenarios reflect a larger political and cultural issue regarding how the occupied territories of Turtle Island (also known as the United States) don't know what to do with tribal nations people, our fight for sovereignty, or our ongoing effort for cultural continuance. In other words, I will make an argument that maps how our discipline's approach to decolonial theory, cultural rhetorics, and Indigenous rhetorics reflects the ongoing efforts of survivance and resurgence of Indigenous people.

"Our discipline founds itself at the heart of the narrative of modernity, and it is deeply mired in the muck of the logic of coloniality" (Powell 393).

"We can only assent to its certitudes and ask ourselves how they comport with our own. One of the ways of coming to understand a certitude is to study the belief which nourished it. This is such a study"(Pearce xvii).

"But Indigenous peoples miss none of the implications. Because international and state recognition of Indigenous rights is predicated on the cultural authenticity of a certain kind of Indigeneity, the costumed affiliations undermine the legitimacy of Indigenous claims to sovereignty and self-determination by rendering Indigenous culture and identity obsolete but the costume. Imperialism and colonialism require Indigenous people to fit within the heteronormative archetypes of an Indigeneity that was authentic in the past but is culturally and legally vacated in the present" (Barker 3).

*"For scholars of indigenous **rhetoric**, the trope of colonization matters differently in this context than it might for other scholars, and it probably matters differently for students and faculty who are marked as indigenous or who identify as indigenous as well" (qtd. in Cobos et al. 146).*

In 2012, I was a part of a Wednesday workshop titled "Co-imagining Cultural Rhetorics: Practice, Performance, and Pedagogy,"[1] which included cultural rhetorics scholars from across the profession. This workshop was held during the CCCC conference in St. Louis. Most of us were graduate students except for three faculty members. Since then, all of us have gone on to write foundational texts on how cultural rhetorics is defined and practiced. Yet at this time, during this conference, we created a workshop mainly to connect and find more folks with shared interests. We all knew but didn't know what cultural rhetorics was. We were in the process of making it. We disagreed on some things. We agreed on a lot more. What we agreed on feels like the intention and goals of cultural rhetorics: story, meaningful community relationships, rejecting Greco-Aristotelian frameworks as the referent for all rhetorical knowledge, the importance of embodiment and space and culture. What we disagreed on reflected our histories and

relationships to knowledge and how we oriented to knowledge. Of course, there were strained relationships and personal differences. But we weren't using our conflict to discredit each other's scholarship and contributions.

I remember sitting in the audience and listening to some of these peers present their dissertation research. I remember, at the time, graduate students in the field sharing fantastic theoretical, big-hearted scholarship that encouraged all of us to think more deeply and carefully about what it meant to do ethical and inclusive rhetorical scholarship. I also remember that the questions they received had little to do with their frameworks, their process, or their potential contributions. Instead, they were asked how their scholarship could become activities—lesson plans for a general first-year writing program. I hated this. I hated this for them. I hated it for myself who shared similar experiences.

It's powerful to connect and find commonality through the shared experience of teaching. Yet to request that marginalized scholars do the labor and service work of shifting their scholarly contributions and relegating it to an applicable lesson plan for a first-year writing classroom affirms *a belief* that our scholarship is useful only if it serves white teachers and white students. It affirms a belief that our role in the discipline is to serve the betterment and growth of white people who are trying to understand us through their framework and lived experiences.

For me, that experience and the gained realizations were when cultural rhetorics became an intervention. It wasn't exactly hopeful yet. It was born from frustration. It was born from witnessing our scholarly elders also be asked similar questions. At this time, it was difficult being a cultural rhetorics scholar. I was on the job market that year and heard stories of peers being told that they would never get jobs. Cultural rhetorics was too niche. It was too radical. No one would publish it. I watched brilliant scholars switch their area of focus to writing program administration, technical communication, or writing center direction because they were told they would not get a job or be published for doing theoretical research that did not invoke the Classic Antiquity. Most of these scholars all found a way to do the work they wanted. But no one should have told them to move into an area of focus because it was less niche and more palatable.

Where each person's focus has incredible contributions to make to our discipline, again, there is a messaging that promotes a universalism versus niche focus. It communicates that cultural rhetorics scholarship is

already on the margins and that to be accepted, we must provide a service to the profession. What this also does is underscore that the work of historically oppressed communities isn't central to rhetoric and composition. For the Theory Lab and those workshop participants, we felt this. We lived

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it. We knew of other possibilities. We knew that these arguments of what is acceptable scholarship represented the role of dominance in academia. We knew that we could model other possibilities where one did not have to be compliant and sacrificing to publish.

When I first wrote my dissertation, I didn't write it with the intention that it would decide how cultural rhetorics was practiced. I wrote it as a form of survival. I wrote it to celebrate the intellectual contributions and

teachings of the Indigenous women I wrote about and for. I wrote it because I was starting to believe my mentors who told me I didn't have to wait to do the work I loved. I could do it from the very beginning: unapologetically, fiercely, and sincerely. I tell students practicing story as methodology: to write in our languages and on our terms is to write for and with our own communities. It's to actively demonstrate awareness that there are multiple approaches to theorize and practice rhetoric. For me, this is one way I understand cultural rhetorics values as community focused.

In 2014, the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab described cultural rhetorics as a temporarily hopeful intervention that is invested in story and relationships—using both as methodology, as paradigm, as framework to create scholarship and (re)build the field. One challenge was to demonstrate that we were not the only ones practicing cultural rhetorics values. Scholars were already arguing for the importance and significance of story, place-based scholarship, drawing vastly from methodologies and frameworks beyond rhetoric and composition, and shifting the referent of rhetoric to be beyond and more than the Greco-Roman era. To address that challenge was to practice constellation—to acknowledge that there is no center to the discipline but a series of complex relationships.

In this article, we also framed our cultural rhetorics scholarly practice as decolonial while offering that not all cultural rhetorics scholarship needs to imitate our framework. This was an intentional decision that we

debated. We didn't want to put too many rules on cultural rhetorics. We didn't want to make it the exclusive politics that we had endured. And also, we were truly drawing on and engaging with Indigenous worldviews that needed to be recognized as just that. Reflecting on this, I wish we were more intentional about the nuance of that explanation around the role of decolonial practice and cultural rhetorics values. This feeling of regret—of the need to return to and expand—comes from witnessing the last decade of cultural rhetorics scholarship and decolonial scholarship omit the lived experiences, scholarship, and practice of tribal nations and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

I am ready to make another intervention. This time, both within the profession and within cultural rhetorics. Relatives, I usually begin my scholarship with the epithet: *I come to you with a good heart.* As Anishinaabekwe, this phrase is related to teachings around Mino Bimaadiziwin. In graduate school, I read this phrase from my Cree cousin, Shawn Wilson (2008), which guided my understanding of the relationship between Indigenous worldviews, decolonial practice, and cultural rhetorics. Beginning with the reminder of my responsibility and role in the discipline and that cultural rhetorics values are about good relations, I offered it as prayer—a way to create a space for participation, intervention, and new possibilities. Relatives, I know—I know so well what it feels like to want to share something so precious from one's history, one's lived experience. It's scary. It's vulnerable to openly demonstrate that how I think, write, and theorize is different from the people I encounter every day in academia.

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There's a reason why this article doesn't begin with my epithet. My heart doesn't feel good. In the most loving way that I can say it: y'all, I am kinda pissed with you. Truthfully, it hurts too much to offer that prayer of relations when Indigenous scholarship and the lived experiences of Indigenous people continue to be ignored, erased, and appropriated by our discipline. Relatives, I am at a loss for how one does cultural rhetorics scholarship without addressing colonialism, without addressing decolonial practice, without addressing and engaging with the Indigenous people of Turtle Island—of the land base you are on. You are literally on ancestral

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territory and ignore the stories of those First Peoples. How does one write about story, land-based relationships, or decoloniality without recognizing and citing Indigenous rhetorics and critical Indigenous studies scholarship?[2] This is the question that I have been asking myself for the past five to eight years.

In general, I do not think our profession truly understands or is invested in the lived experiences of tribal nations and Indigenous people. I do not think our profession understands concepts of sovereignty, cultural continuance, survivance, and self-determination, no matter how many articles and books are published on this topic or how many of us may bear witness to global water activism efforts or the staggering numbers related to residential schools, murdered and missing women, two-spirit people, and children; the brutality Indigenous people experience by the settler state, including our continued pursuit for hunting and fishing rights; as well as the efforts to incarcerate Indigenous and tribal nations people. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has gifted me with an ability to understand the logics of violence. From that framework, it "makes sense" because the ~~United States~~ and ~~Canada~~ do not understand or invest in these lived experiences. There will always, always be a relationship between the settler colonialism of these nations who continue to occupy Indigenous land and academia.

In *Savagism and Civilization*, Roy Harvey Pearce begins by framing his study of how Americans understand Indigeneity and civilization as a "book about belief." Americans are embedded, complicit, and intertwined in the study of civilization and savagery. To study beliefs is to study epistemology, axiology, methodology, and ontology. To study these paradigms is to study rhetoric. To study rhetoric *should be* a study of conquest, of colonialism. And yet, we continue to ask those who do this work how it relates to the first-year writing classroom. In doing so, our discipline demonstrates a refusal to engage with the lived experiences of cultural rhetorics scholars and our scholarly practices. We only become acceptable when we are of service. As I said before, to make that request is reflective of a *belief* that the gifts of historically oppressed scholars are niche and designed to be absorbed into dominant populations to better them. It is, again, a story of American

Exceptionalism, where the discipline receives the gifts and talents of the "primitive/savage" and that "primitive/savage" can eventually disappear into the forest. Meanwhile, settlers are bestowed with those gifts and can use them to create the future of the settler state. I know that I am being direct and perhaps harsh. But why must I/we continue to explain concepts that one can easily find in dozens of publications—including trade publications, general media, and scholarship—on the topic? Why must we be forced to assimilate or remain at the margins?

> I would *rather* that discourse be focused on turning the mirror toward our discipline to tell the truth of our complicity in settler colonialism. I would *rather* our discipline reflect on how we continue to sustain settler colonialism . . . how we benefit from white supremacy, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, heteronormativity, and antisemitism.

Instead of showing you how this has taken place, I will provide a path forward. A lot of this realization around the devaluation of Indigenous lived experiences occurred as I took on more visible service work in the profession, specifically when I began collaborating with the CCCC Executive Committee regarding a land acknowledgment. It was strange to walk up on the national conference stage—still only the second Native woman to do so—and speak to the entire profession. I was shocked and not surprised to learn that while I was sharing the teachings of a land acknowledgment that peers were debating whether or not our profession should even have one. True, there are a lot of critiques around a land acknowledgment. Yet debating its need is to question the reality and lived experiences of Indigenous and tribal nations people. Instead, I would *rather* have those concerned peers use their power/privilege and capacity to theorize to focus on upholding the sovereignty of tribal nations people. I would *rather* that discourse be focused on turning the mirror toward our discipline to tell the truth of our complicity in settler colonialism. I would *rather* our discipline reflect on how we continue to sustain settler colonialism, which is also how we benefit from white supremacy, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, heteronormativity, and antisemitism. I would *rather* our discipline engage in discourse about the appropriation of the theories and lived experiences of historically oppressed communities and the privilege that comes with people not from those subject positions publishing on and receiving jobs related to trans/queer rhetorics, disability studies, decolonial theory, and nonwestern rhetoric, while those very scholars who share

those identities are struggling to make a living wage, get access to proper healthcare, and are generally ignored by the profession except a few who are held up as exemplary. This path I provided reflects a method of cultural rhetorics called relational accountability. Drawing from Wilson, to practice relational accountability is to enact right relations. It is to enact respect, responsibility, and reciprocity in everyday practice, not just our scholarship.

Relatives, we've been through some hell these past ten years, from the travel ban in St. Louis, to bearing witness to the 2016 election and its aftermath, to the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and thousands of Black Americans. We cannot forget about the incarceration of migrant children and their families, the literal burning of California and Oregon, the murder of Savanna Greywind and Tina Fountaine, or the staggering numbers of discovered remains of children from residential schools. We continue to experience the impact of a mismanaged pandemic that stole millions of lives. In the midst, we've published significant contributions to cultural rhetorics and its related areas of focus. We've been elected as leaders in the profession. We've formed interventions to revise and draft statements demanding more ethical treatment of each other, recognition of our communities, and social justice pedagogies. Throughout all of this, there has been a lot of in-fighting. There have been claims of ownership over cultural rhetorics—over decolonization and decoloniality. As Rachel Jackson has affirmed in a personal communication, for me, "This directly reflects the settler colonial academic context in which cultural rhetorics exists." We tend to notice, more and more, who gets the recognition and visibility. What this reveals is a lot of lateral oppression, a lot of trauma, and our continuance in working in a scarcity mindset. We are responding to that belief and consistent pressure that our scholarship is on the periphery, the margins, or that it is niche and there are only so many publication opportunities, jobs, or titles. Relatives, this is not how I want to play this game. In many ways, this is why Cindy Tekobbe and I wrote that

> Whiteness is a zero sum game that requires us to accept a false reality that there is only so much merit to go around, and we must wrestle with our kin for the right to be validated in the meritocracy. But y'all already know meritocracy as a concept is inherited from settler capitalism, a system that pits us against each other and divides and distracts us rather than honoring our connections and kinship.

Of course, it makes sense that we are in this scarcity mindset. Of course, it makes sense that we've been fighting each other and engaging in the territorializing of beliefs and ideas. But what if we reset? What if we use this issue as an opportunity to form another intervention in the discipline? I don't want to do this on my own. I want to share this work and imagine the possibilities of this intervention with you all. Here is my contribution to the next path forward:

Relatives, do you know whose land you're on? We are all on the ancestral land of Indigenous people who are still alive, engaging in survival, and practicing their cultural traditions. In the next part of this staged intervention are offerings from how I want to move forward that demonstrate my cultural rhetorics values. These values are forms of cultural continuance which keep me committed to a community while maintaining respectful and responsible relations.

Relatives, come out on the land with me. In Michigan, it's unseasonably warm. The earth is burning. Every day, I look at my garden, and I hate the lack of snow covering the seeds I left for next spring hoping for an early harvest of spinach and kale. My friend tells me her daffodils are coming up. I leave scraps for the deer and rabbits who share my backyard. I laugh at the squirrels who leave apple cores on my porch. Let's return to land-based practice, something central to understanding cultural rhetorics but also the relationship between Indigenous rhetorics and cultural rhetorics.

I began taking foraging classes online during the early months of the pandemic. As I have already written (Riley Mukavetz 2020), I'm afraid of snakes, which restricts my ability to truly enjoy being outside. I still go outside. I still hike, but the snakes will always be in the back of my mind. I wanted to learn to forage and harvest because I wanted to better understand land-based research and methodologies beyond a thought experiment or a pedagogical activity. From an early age, I was taught urban foraging for wild grape leaves. But I didn't understand it as foraging. Instead, it was simply how we got food. I never even bought jarred grape leaves until I moved to Illinois for graduate school and didn't know how to find grape leaves in my neighborhood. I came to foraging and harvesting through a deepening connection to the local Indigenous and tribal nations community of West Michigan. They are sugar bushing. They are harvesting manoomin. They are engaging in food sovereignty practices.

Through those relationships, I felt called to expand my own educational journey and relationship. For two years, I had weekly online video lectures. Our instructor sent us outside. That was our homework. We had to find stinging nettles, dandelion, burdock, mushrooms, and ramps. We were never allowed to harvest what we found until we found a lot of it, and she approved, partly to make sure we didn't poison ourselves and also because she was teaching us how to honor what we found. Instead, we documented it. We took photos. We illustrated it. We learned each part of the plant and how it grew. We learned its ecosystem and what it grew around. To engage with the land, to learn from and with the land, to allow the land to be a paradigm for knowledge-making is a cultural rhetorics practice. To be on the land teaches us how to practice an honorable harvest whether it is literal or metaphorical and connects to how one harvests ideas and shares them with community.

When cultural rhetoricians emphasize the importance of space and place, it's a way into understanding the historical, social, and cultural contexts and factors that inform our subject position as researchers to make visible ethical research practices.

When cultural rhetoricians emphasize the importance of space and place, it's a way into understanding the historical, social, and cultural contexts and factors that inform our subject position as researchers to make visible ethical research practices. It allows us to create a framework that is constellated and culturally informed. It allows us to make visible a rhetorical tradition that reflects our current context to understand the past and future instead of feeling the pressure to return to a context or framework like the Greco-Roman era told through the Enlightenment belief systems. All of this has been published before by multiple scholars. Yet how can we talk about the land and where we, as scholars in the ~~United States~~ and ~~Canada~~, are without talking about the histories, lived experiences, and cultural influences of Indigenous and tribal nations, the people of the territories in which we currently live in? My answer: because our profession doesn't know how. They forget. It's hard, really hard, to tell a story that constellates across cultural communities. But here's the thing: it takes practice. Like my foraging instructor, don't harvest what you first find. Take the time to learn, document, draw, and play. When you harvest something, make sure it's not near a place where dogs pee, people spit, or cars exhaust. Take small bites to see how it feels first. And always, always cook wild mushrooms.

I am a language learner. This has been one of the hardest things I have ever done. I am not sure how to further emphasize the pain, the bravery, and

the healing that come with learning a language that was stolen, appropriated, and almost made extinct. Kin, I know many of you know this and feel this. I have always been called to language learning, but have stopped myself. Using academia and being busy has always been my excuse to further my cultural learning. But that's not actually true. It's been fear and exhaustion.

I am the very worst language learner. It's beautiful and hilarious, but I am surrounded by a lot of folks who really want me to do better. Each week, I take an online class via Zoom with an elder and a handful of experienced speakers—who are also language learners/teachers. What I have learned is that language teachers are committed to their learning because they are willing to acknowledge there is more to learn—that what they know is clouded through a framework of colonialism and they seek community knowledge—elder knowledge to clear the veil and move into their cultural framework. Language learning is a commitment to culture and continuance. We can say it's important—that we need to protect languages. We can scatter words in our everyday practice, which is an important opening. Yet when we speak in the language, our framework changes. Our worldview changes.

The Zhaaganaash learned our language to control and colonize us. Academics and clergy went around and asked, "How do you say this?" And then they wrote it down. They missed the action, the movement, the relationality of the language. Or they ignored it because it was too complicated.

The elder teaches how the old people teach. She says class goes from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. It actually goes from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. We don't begin with the alphabet or numbers. We begin with her explaining her pedagogical philosophy. She doesn't want us to translate from English. There are no literal definitions. There is Anishinaabemowin. There is the language of the Zhaaganaash. The Zhaaganaash learned our language to control and colonize us. Academics and clergy went around and asked, "How do you say this?" And then they wrote it down. They missed the action, the movement, the relationality of the language. Or they ignored it because it was too complicated to summarize or conflicted with their worldview. Amitig is not tree. Ozhaawashko is not green. Makizin is not shoe. Zhaaganaash made it that.

In the translation and publication of our language, the stories, relationships, and autonomy were moved to the periphery and occasionally erased. So, the elder begins from a different worldview, a different framework. She explains the story of each sound, the relationship the sounds have with each

other. We speak the language through our relationship to both. Even though we share the Zoom space, we are physically in different parts of Turtle Island. Some of these learners have been speaking for over fifteen years. They use different words to describe carrots or the process of getting wet. They understand these differences as history, of place, of how the actual bodies of their communities experienced the land and colonialism. But they also argue and disagree. This mainly happens when they feel they have to justify their knowledge and expertise as real, as intellectual, and in doing so, feel like they must critique other fluent learners/teachers.

The elder says, "Send me some sentences so you can learn." She doesn't assign homework. She doesn't give us a deadline or length limits. It's up to us to decide what we want to work on. For the first session, I don't send her anything. The second session, I take some time coming up with sentences. They are so very wrong. She corrects them. I have a thick skin and am grateful for the correction. I learned so much in the process. The next day, we have class and on the virtual whiteboard she writes a sentence about new language learners. The largest challenge, she says, is learning with Zhaaganaash ears. I am still in the Zhaaganaash mind. Makizin is still shoe. Amitig is still tree. But I also know they are not and are more. My responsibility is to engage in those relationships. So, I keep sending her sentences. I keep thanking her for her feedback and critique.

I want to conclude by returning to one more cultural rhetorics value. When the Theory Lab wrote that as rhetoricians we need to move from creating frameworks of *that* to *how*, we were forming a deliberate position around the beliefs of how to *make* scholarship. No longer would we apply a Eurocentric lens to write about our cultural communities. Instead, we would create that framework through the wise practices of our communities. This story about learning Anishinaabemowin reminds me of the importance of that practice. We literally need to change our bodies and minds and understand how our beliefs, our efforts, our scholarly practices are embedded in colonialism. It's painful. It takes bravery and time. In this next path forward, I will enter into a space of patience and understand like my elders taught me. And I hope that you will enter into a practice that commits to my/our survival.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Workshop organizers included Daisy Levy, Timothy Dougherty, Angela Haas, Madhu Narayan, Matt Novak, Malea Powell, Martine Courant Rife, Donnie Johnson Sackey, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, and Doug Schraufnagle.

2. Often I see scholars finding ways to get away with this by using "Indigenous" and then not being territorial or nation specific. Returning to Craig Womack, when talking about Indigenous people, we need to find ways to be as tribally or regionally specific as possible. Also, we need to recognize that there are many kinds of Indigenous people living in what we know of as the United States and also make sure to acknowledge and engage with the tribal communities on the land you are dwelling on.

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Andrea Riley Mukavetz

In March 2023, Andrea Riley Mukavetz left higher education right after receiving tenure. Andrea felt pulled away from higher education and rhetoric and composition to do more intentional community work. Currently, Andrea is the Community Engagement Manager for the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Drawing from her expertise and experience in curriculum, community-based research, and cultural rhetorics, Andrea is developing a framework and a set of wise practices for all community engagement efforts for the second-largest city in Michigan. Since 2012, Andrea has provided multiple contributions to cultural and Indigenous rhetorics through her research, teaching, and service. Now, she is navigating another complicated institution and community relationships and also coaching kids' softball, lifting heavy weights, gardening, and facilitating a romance-genre book club called "Between the Covers."

Karrieann Soto Vega

Amplifying *Autogestión* and Cultural Rhetorics of Resistance

Expanding conceptions of material cultural rhetorics in activism, I explore how amplifying *autogestión* by artist-activist collectives allows for an approach to allyship that contributes to changing material realities for those involved. Writing about artistic collectives that engage in *autogestión* amplifies projects calling out corrupt governing practices rooted in systems of oppression, while emphasizing and exercising the power of relying on each other. In this article, I reflect on how amplifying *autogestión* as cultural rhetoric in venues outside of the field expands the reach of cultural rhetorics and how bringing that work back to the writing classroom encourages interdisciplinary perspectives where students learn about their relationality and responsibility to Puerto Ricans and other colonized peoples within the United States.

The first-ever exhibit on Puerto Rican life by Puerto Rican artists at the Whitney Museum of American Art opened in November 2022.[1] In her opening remarks, the exhibit's chief curator, Marcela Guerrero, described how she was struck by the emotional weight of witnessing the impact of Hurricane Maria in September 2017 and how—from her diasporic location—she

felt the urge to commemorate the moment somehow. As a curator for the Whitney, she had previously collaborated with fellow Latinx/Latine artists, but this time she wanted to do something for and with Puerto Rican artists. As time passed, she recounted, she started reading the work of scholars writing about Puerto Rican artists and artistic collectives who addressed the tragedies that were wrought by the magnitude of the Category 5 storm, many of whom were well aware of how colonial capitalism exacerbated the impact of the storm. After consulting one of my scholarly essays on how grassroots artist-activist collectives engaged in *autogestión* for Puerto Rican survival, Guerrero asked me to contribute an extension of that work in the catalog for the exhibit titled "*No Existe un Mundo Poshuracán,*" or "A Post-Hurricane World Does Not Exist." Taken together, the work of the artists, writers, and curators involved suggests that Puerto Rico's precarity and re-sistance are not exclusively tethered to a singular natural catastrophe, but to the catastrophic impact of colonial-capitalism. This message was variously articulated and amplified in the exhibition and in subsequent press coverage (Brown and Thoet; Cotter; Kennicott; Solá-Santiago; Vanasco). In the essay Guerrero consulted, I explained how Vueltabajo Teatro, a transdisciplinary artistic collective in western Puerto Rico, provided their artistic space as a hub for the collection of aid in the aftermath of Hurricane María, but also how this kind of self-propelled solidarity work they defined as *autogestión* was part and parcel of their artistic activism before and after the storm.

As a discipline, cultural rhetorics is an orientation to scholarly work that transcends the academy, work that concerns the rhetorical conditions necessary for a cultural group to thrive. Some scholars have historicized cultural rhetorics as a field that attends to both *culture* from rhetorical stand-points and to *rhetoric* from cultural studies frameworks (Cobos et al.). A lot of cultural rhetorics scholarship addresses identity, embodiment, positionality, and/or institutionalization, while many scholar-practitioners often strive for decolonization and abolition (Wieser et al.). Methodologically, scholars of cultural rhetorics emphasize the importance of story and community-engaged work (Powell et al). Expanding conceptions of material cultural rhetorics in activism (Arellano), in this article I explore how amplifying *autogestión* by artist-activist collectives allows for an approach to allyship that contributes to changing material realities for those involved. Although I explain the concept in more detail in a later section, at this point I should note how *autogestión* has been theorized by Henri Lefebvre as "a model of

grassroots democracy or workers' control in the context of a wide-ranging analysis of oppositional sociopolitical mobilization in neighborhoods, cities, regions, rural peripheries, national states, and ultimately on a world scale" (Brenner and Elden 3). And considering debates about the radical potential and perils of defining *autogestión* as apolitical self-management or as a type of liberatory mutual aid (Garriga López), I reflect on my experience writing about the work of artistic collectives that engage in *autogestión*—such as Vueltabajo Teatro and Defend Puerto Rico—amplifying projects that are publicly critical of oppressive governing practices and actively work toward emancipating self-reliance and mutual aid. In their artistic-activist work, grounded as it is in *autogestión*, both groups establish alternative modes of relationality and responsibility—key tenets of cultural rhetorics—enacting disidentification (Muñoz), particularly from the state. *Autogestión*, thus, is a counter-praxis of survival that imagines and enacts alternative relations and strategies of resistance.

In what follows, I reveal how amplifying *autogestión* as a cultural rhetorics practice in venues outside of the field expands the reach of cultural rhetorics scholarship, and I explain how bringing that work back to the writing classroom encourages interdisciplinary perspectives where students learn about their relationality and responsibility to Puerto Ricans and other colonized peoples within the United States. First, I employ *"amplifying* to listen to and raise the volume of Puerto Rican voices that resist and refuse dead-end relationalities rooted in master logics that normalize extractivism and expendability" (De Onís 5). Second, I explain how *autogestión* provides a counter-stance to a nation-state's inability to secure the well-being of its peoples, a counter-praxis of survival in relation to conditions of crisis. Lastly, I describe how this work makes its way to a rhetoric and popular culture composition classroom and elaborate on students' responses. I conclude by attending to how amplifying *autogestión* is a necessary rhetorical strategy in a contemporary context of compounding crises in the post-pandemic neoliberal era.

Situating DiaspoRican Cultural Rhetorics

Before going into detail about the main proposition of this article—that amplifying *autogestión* expands the reach of cultural rhetorics scholarship striving toward social justice—I should situate my orientation to the field. As a DiaspoRican born in Orlando, Florida, and raised in San Sebastián,

Puerto Rico, English was a subject I was easily drawn to throughout my public schooling. I'm an '80s baby who grew up on a media diet of MTV and VH1, as well as *Contra el Reloj* and *El Chavo del Ocho*. I cherish memories of listening to music in my room, dancing, creating mixed tapes, transcribing lyrics, and later on attending and helping friends create fliers for local punk shows. In short, I have always been interested in cultural production.

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When it came time to choose a path for undergraduate studies, I merged my interest in communication technologies with my proficiency in English to enroll in the then-newly created secondary English education with the use of multimedia technology bachelor's degree in the University of Puerto Rico in Aguadilla. These interests were further advanced in pursuing a master's in English education at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, where my thesis investigated critical media literacy practices by English as a second language (ESL) students utilizing multimodal, multilingual texts—mainly rock music, videos, and performances—as part of the composition classroom curriculum. There, I was also introduced to radical cultural studies theories from a literary perspective, which certainly inform my scholarship and teaching still today.[2] After a brief stint at teaching English in a for-profit institution during the height of an economic recession in Puerto Rico, I ventured north, crossing the oceanic pond (*cruzando el charco*) to New York City, where I worked in the restaurant industry while I researched opportunities and charted out a path for my return to academia. This may come as no surprise to the reader, but, having had no explicit introduction to the field of rhetoric and composition in my undergraduate and master's degrees education, at the time there were only two programs where I felt like I could explicitly attend to cultural rhetoric. I ended up pursuing my doctoral studies at Syracuse University's Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program.

Across all my projects and seminar papers during my time at Syracuse University, my intention was to provide a Caribbean-based Puerto Rican perspective to US-based academia. Therefore, in my work, the concept of geopolitics has been of central importance, especially because studying

Puerto Rican cultures, conditions, and circumstances necessitates an awareness of location, both in terms of physical geography and broad(er) colonial politics. For me, focusing on anticolonial efforts and decolonial praxis requires an understanding of the agency of colonial subjects. This has meant reading scholarship from people situated in other programs and universities.

Attending to colonial structures affecting the presence and survival of minoritized peoples in the field of rhetoric and composition has been at the core of the projects of many scholars representing a diverse set of identitarian and therefore political positions. As I have learned, cultural rhetorics scholarship stresses storytelling as a significant epistemological and ontological expression (King et al.; Powell et al.). For example, Andrea Riley Mukavetz advances the story of Frances "Geri" Roossien to tell a broader story of Odawa resilience (Roossien and Mukavetz) and has written about decolonial theory and methodology (Mukavetz). Relatedly, Angela Haas has explicitly called for de-colonial stances in technical composition scholarship. Particularly relevant for my purposes here is the work of Lisa King, who studies the formation and communication of Native American museums to argue for *legible sovereignties*. As she explains, "Museum practices are rhetorical practices in that these institutions are always making choices about what stories to tell, how to tell them, and for whom to tell them toward a particular goal or consequence" (1). It is not surprising that the aforementioned scholars work from (and) within Indigenous standpoints. I am drawn to consider these as intricately connected to the burning questions in my own scholarship, given that the systems we contend with demonstrate the impact of colonialism and emphasize decolonial resistance manifested in a multitude of ways, while still prioritizing presence.

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Nevertheless, Native American cultural rhetoric is not the only way in which I situate my own perspective. For example, in "Ethically Working Within Communities: Cultural Rhetorics Methodologies Principles," there is certainly an attention to, as Sonia Arellano suggests, communities

Cultural rhetorics is an orientation to scholarly work that transcends the academy, work that concerns the rhetorical conditions necessary for a cultural group to thrive. But the question remains, how can our field attend to geopolitics in cultural rhetorics and also engage (in) activism for social justice?

where you already have ethical and personal bonds, while at the same time being mindful of how limiting that could be (Hidalgo et al. 9). Embracing a humble position in relation to the communities we are part of or passionate about entails acknowledging our limits. There is only so much that I (or other scholars situated in the continental United States) can do to contribute to the well-being of my people. Here I am referring to the geographic distance affecting the potential of understanding the breadth of the work needed in terms of justice, but also the limitations that academic work may have upon those communities featured in our work. These constraints relate to Alexis McGee's suggestions on cultural rhetorics methodologies regarding "*vulnerability*: know what you don't know and ask for help; allow for intervention and disruption" (Hidalgo et al. 10). In her entry to the collaboratively written article, she further suggests *collaboration*, where one can "learn from others [and] share" (Hidalgo et al. 10). Therefore, from my diasporic position, I aim to highlight the work and conditions of those whose work inspires my writing, while also attending to inter-relational bonds with other cultural rhetoricians. This is especially pertinent for the context of Puerto Rico because of the potential for isolationist politics inherent in the Puerto Rican psyche (especially through *insularismo*)—after all, it is a(n) (collection of) island(s) surrounded by water, as one former president of the United States asserted in response to his administration's inefficient disaster recovery response.

Reflecting on the implications of including the voices of the subjects that are explored in my academic writing, I explain how amplifying *autogestión* aims to highlight the work that is already happening in the Puerto Rican archipelago. It expands the reach of solidarity webs to include the diaspora and broader US- and Canada-based academics. Amplifying *autogestión* in North American publication venues outside of the immediate field of rhetoric and composition results in a decolonial education project in the classroom, in the academy, and in other cultural venues, such as museums. As I suggested previously, cultural rhetorics is an orientation to scholarly work that transcends the academy, work that concerns the rhetorical conditions necessary for a cultural group to thrive. But the question

remains, how can our field attend to geopolitics in cultural rhetorics and also engage (in) activism for social justice? The answer I am providing is amplifying *autogestión*.

Amplifying *Autogestión*: Cultural Rhetorics In and Out of the Academy

In "Amplification by Counterstory in the Quantitative Rhetoric of Ida B. Wells," Daniel Libertz suggests that as an abolitionist and journalist, Wells used counterstory to amplify quantitative rhetorics in her retelling of lynching reports in the late nineteenth century. Libertz provides a synthesis of the ways that "amplification" has been conceptualized in rhetorical scholarship, particularly referencing Temptaous Mckoy and Jeanne Fahnestock. Mckoy's tenets for amplification rhetorics are "(1) the reclamation of agency (ownership of embodied rhetorical practices), (2) the accentuation and acknowledgment of narratives (validated lived experiences), and (3) the inclusion of marginalized epistemologies (that add to new ways of learning)" all of which function as "a theoretical framework for understanding another community's rhetorical practices and also a way to showcase pride in the rhetorical practices of certain communities" (28, in Libertz 314). On the other hand, Fahnestock explains amplification as rhetorical styles intended "to heighten and to be copious" (Libertz 313). Libertz relies on these stylistics to describe how the addition of African American Verbal Tradition in statistical rhetoric by Wells functions as counterstories about the impact of lynching for Black human beings and their communities—how anti-Blackness has resulted in the murder of a staggeringly large amount of people during the Jim Crow South era/locality, and still today. Libertz correlates Wells's rhetorical strategies with those used by contemporary antiracist activists like those in the Black Lives Matter movement and Say Her Name campaigns.

As a decolonial and antiracist cultural rhetorician, I am attuned to creative-critical scholarship, sonic rhetoric, and performance, especially attending to work by communities suffering the impact of compounding colonial crises. Much like Mckoy, who focuses on agency, lived experience, and marginalized epistemologies, in my approach I consider how we can amplify this kind of community-driven work. My work mainly focuses on the conditions that call for resistance in the Puerto Rican archipelago, but certainly also in other communities that have been disinvested from and discriminated against, and whose labor and lands have been oppressed by

racialized capitalism and death, as well as extractive economies. And yet, as scholars who strive to form ethical bonds in the communities we feature in our scholarship, we ought to question the ways in which such scholarship can potentially enact a kind of extractivism, even without us intending to (Soto Vega, "Colonial Causes"). Although the classical definition of colonialism suggests resource extraction, in the context of Puerto Rico and other colonized societies, extractivism often also entails outside scholars parachuting into and writing about communities in precarious conditions. Often, we create initiatives and write articles and win grants with the hopes of garnering attention to a site or community we deem lacking, but don't necessarily follow through with the ways that such efforts may result in knowledge production for the sake of knowledge production. Of course, the more people know about Puerto Rico's colonial history, the better the chance of a widespread consciousness and concern about colonial capitalism's injustices arising among diverse audiences.

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Across the various disciplines informing my approach, amplifying comes up as a strategy that necessitates an expansion of the areas where scholar activists publish their work. For instance, in "Amplifying Our Voices: Feminist Scholars Writing for the Public," Carrie Baker and her coauthors suggest that "developing and amplifying one's public voice through writing for the popular press is an important form of activism for feminist scholars."[3] In their presentation at the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 2022, they further explained that their writing for *Ms.* magazine is a way of "picking up the megaphone and saying what needs to be said." This literal application of amplification in terms of soundwaves is similar to the ways in which it is used by editors and contributors of *Amplifying Soundwriting Pedagogies: Integrating Sound into Rhetoric and Writing* (Farris et al.). In that volume, the concept of "amplifying" serves as an apt metaphor for what these teaching scholars want to do with sound in the writing classroom. The editors amplify sound as a prominent modality for and in writing instruction, as they amplify the lessons from the featured writers. In both instances, amplification suggests expansion.

For Catalina de Onís, "Amplification is inseparable from energy in terms of both physics and communication. In the first sense, this effect uses an amplifier to strengthen a signal or wave, which increases power. In the related second sense, amplification involves strengthening rhetorical energy to achieve greater impact, as activists, scholars, and practitioners increase the voltage of their rhetoric" (10). In her award-winning book she explains how "amplification also can function as an enactment of voice" (10). Caitlyn Bruce also cites de Onís to refer to amplification in the context of mural graffiti writers in Ciudad de León, Mexico.[4] Her chapter argues that "the mural is a civic and affective form for amplifying attunement." Among the many resonances between Bruce's work and the context of Puerto Rico is how neoliberal governance results in resistance. In a similar key, Geo Maher's *Anticolonial Eruptions: Racial Hubris and the Cunning of Resistance* also addresses how resistance is inevitable in contexts of oppression and how it demonstrates the decolonial cunning of those oppressed by racialized capitalism and death, as well as extractive economies.

Ultimately, cultural rhetorics projects that amplify *autogestión* must expand their reach to include publication venues that are not considered "disciplinary" —that is, publication venues in other disciplines and even those outside the academy altogether. To expand cultural rhetoric's reach, we must broaden our conception of where scholarship worthy of "merit" happens.

Following the line of amplification as emphasizing agency for marginalized communities, expansion, and impact in a context of neoliberal colonial capitalism, I argue that scholarship and activism guided by cultural rhetorics principles cannot remain isolated to the composition and rhetoric community. We need to expand our audience. As a scholar activist, one strategy that has been productive in emphasizing the work that is already happening is by engaging in what I refer to as amplifying *autogestión*. Ultimately, cultural rhetorics projects that amplify *autogestión* must expand their reach to include publication venues that are not considered "disciplinary"—that is, publication venues in other disciplines and even those outside the academy altogether. To expand cultural rhetoric's reach, we must broaden our conception of where scholarship worthy of "merit" happens.

Autogestión

Having established a notion of amplifying cultural rhetorics methodology toward social justice, this section aims to explain *autogestión* in the context of Puerto Rico. The concept of *autogestión* has roots in socialist worker activism in Europe and Latin America. It provides a counter-stance to a nation-state's inability to secure the well-being of its peoples,[5] though it does not pretend to ignore the injustice wrought by governmental neoliberal rule prioritizing corporations over people. *Autogestión* is not simply self-management, and it does not necessarily always translate to mutual aid. Focusing on the work of two Puerto Rican artist-activist grassroots collectives, I elaborate *autogestión* as a counter-praxis of survival in relation to conditions of crisis. In the case of Puerto Rico, *autogestión* is a response to compounding colonial crises, including what anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla calls the coloniality of disaster.[6]

In Vueltabajo Teatro

Vueltabajo Teatro describe themselves as "*un colectivo de artistas transdisciplinarios que adopta su nombre con la iniciativa de habitar y activar un espacio para la investigación y formación artística enfocada en el teatro como medio*." In other words, their collective aim is to inhabit and activate a space for investigation and artistic formation, focusing on theater as their main medium. And yet they do much more than artistic formation, especially as they strive toward coalitions with other artist-activists and collectives.

Artistic collectives that engage in *autogestión*, such as Vueltabajo Teatro, call out corrupt governing practices while emphasizing and exercising the power of relying on each other. In so doing, they establish alternative modes of relationality and responsibility, enacting what the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz described as disidentification: a strategy of survival, particularly embedded in performance, that must imagine and enact alternative relations and strategies of resistance. This was quite evident in the way that Vueltabajo Teatro used their creative space to collect donations in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017. However, coalitional *autogestión* as a counter-praxis of survival is not exclusively tethered to climate catastrophe; it is a response to neoliberal capitalism used to remedy the inadequacy of colonial officials.

Catalina de Onís also discusses concerns of climate disaster exacerbating already-entrenched vulnerabilities in Puerto Rico. She makes note of

the 2017 Hurricane Maria catastrophe, but also the swarm of earthquakes in early 2020, Tropical Storm Isaías in the summer of 2020, and of course, the ongoing pandemic. De Onís joins other scholars who assert that the plague of colonialism manifests itself in the fossil fuel perversion of the environmental well-being of majority-Black and/or poor and/or rural communities in Puerto Rico. More importantly, she writes about the work that happens on the ground, featuring prominent voices within the archipelago. Adding to these accounts, in describing the work of Vueltabajo Teatro in the immediacy of Hurricane Maria's impact, as well as their ongoing work of reclaiming the commons (common spaces like the public plaza in downtown Mayagüez) to entertain and provide psychological sustenance while rehabilitating abandoned spaces, I amplify *autogestión* as relational counter-praxis of survival.

Having coordinated efforts with Vueltabajo Teatro members to send in a collection of donated goods from my immediate scholarly vicinity and in fundraising efforts in other scholarly settings (like the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference), I was able to have a reflective conversation with the members of the organization about what *autogestión* meant for them. The founding members, Zuleira Soto, Eury Orsini, and Raul Reyes, explained how *autogestión* guides their collaboration with other artists and cultural groups to improve the well-being of the arts and general populace in the western area of Puerto Rico due to the negligence of governmental and other artistic institutions that have been divested from due to neoliberal governance. These practices became essential for physical survival in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in September 2017. After presenting this work in a variety of settings (such as the Cultural Rhetorics Conference and Puerto Rican Studies Association Conference), I submitted an essay for publication in the *Feral Feminisms: An Open Access Feminist Online Journal* special issue "State Killing: Queer and Women of Color Manifestas Against U.S. Violence and Oppression," edited by rhetorician Annie Hill ("Puerto Rico Weathers," Soto Vega). It was this piece that Marcela Guerrero read as she prepared her Whitney exhibit. When Guerrero requested a contribution to the catalog for the "*No Existe un Mundo Poshuracán*" exhibit, she suggested I expand on my *Feral Feminisms* piece. To do so, I added a description of another artist-activist collective.

Defend Puerto Rico

Defend Puerto Rico is a transmedia project "designed to document and celebrate Puerto Rican creativity, resilience, and resistance."[7] They work across diverse media platforms, writing stories, designing images, and producing films that shine light on the detrimental situation in Puerto Rico. They also emphasize how other artists and activists there are responding. In fact, in December 2022 they announced that the group is "opting out of resilience" because "resilience lets accountability be too malleable for the oppressor" (Defend Puerto Rico). Part of Defend Puerto Rico's disidentification strategy is to emphasize citizenship-rights-based injustices. Ironically, the same year that Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico was the one hundredth anniversary of Puerto Ricans becoming US citizens. Early that year, Defend Puerto Rico created an exhibit titled "CitiCien," where they and other artists reflected on the momentous occasion, taking stock of its benefits and drawbacks, in an event held at the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center in New York City (Acevedo). The exhibit focused on how the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, which provides citizenship to all Puerto Ricans, intersects with the similarly named Jones Act of 1920, both of which have established the legal-economic provisions impacting the potential for survival based on goods not being able to enter Puerto Rico from neighboring countries eager to help in 2017. This limiting condition is one of the many reasons that *autogestión and mutual aid* became so essential for survival. Instead of waiting for the state, mutual aid groups galvanized the Puerto Rican diaspora to acquire the material resources needed to survive, while also highlighting the complex fallout of governmental (in)action.

In the immediacy of Hurricane Maria's impact, as I was collaborating with Vueltabajo Teatro and their associated Brigada Solidaria del Oeste, I was also signing and sharing petitions created by Defend Puerto Rico, which included the temporary halt of fees and restrictions imposed by the Jones Act mercantile law. Long after the 2017 crisis, I have continued to support these groups by amplifying their work not only in my scholarship but also through social media networks, as well as materially supporting their efforts by providing monetary donations. Writing about participating in some of their events, such as Vueltabajo Teatro's "Isla Cancelada" exhibit during the Santurce es Ley art festival, and using short films Defend Puerto Rico made in the aftermath of the earthquake swarm in early 2020 in my courses has helped me expand their social justice education project. Incorporating the

work of these artist-activist collectives in a variety of scholarly endeavors has meant that a variety of publics are being exposed to the kind of *autogestión* that was and still is necessary in the colonial context of Puerto Rico.

Resounding Puerto Rican Activist Rhetorics in the Writing Classroom

Much can be said about bringing in our own affinities into our composition and communication classrooms as amplification, particularly attending to the intricacies of diverse approaches in discussions and course content that are traditionally meant for white audiences.[8] Due to space, I focus here on a pandemic-era course titled "Activist Rhetorics & Popular Culture" (Figure 1). For that virtual class, I assigned readings from a variety of perspectives and scholarly traditions addressing popular culture in different media modalities and genres.[9]

Figure 1. Course flier for "Activist Rhetorics & Popular Culture" featuring examples such as Taika Waititi's speech at the Oscars, Public Enemy, young activists, Beyonce juxtaposed to John Carlos, Jennifer López's Super Bowl performance, and Bad Bunny on Fallon.

Early in the semester, I assigned the aforementioned piece published in *Feral Feminisms* as a way to explain how students could engage in the assignment I called a Consistent Study, where they would focus on one person or group that students considered as activist, applying different theoretical perspectives we read throughout the semester. Reading my work not only gave students an idea of my own writing style (not that they were expected to replicate it) but also certainly an understanding of Puerto Rico's geopolitical position, particularly for all but the one student who was herself Puerto Rican.

Later in the semester, I introduced students to the final assignment for the course by assigning a piece I created for a *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics* special issue on creative-critical curation. One of the goals I had with assigning this piece was to showcase an example of curation (for their final portfolio projects); I also wanted to show how complex colonial and racial hierarchies manifest even within a majority-minority culture.[10] "Sounding Out a Rhetoric of Resilience: Curating Plena in DiaspoRican Activism" (Soto Vega) presents multiple scales of inclusion and exclusion, necessitating nuanced understandings of "activism" and a "popular culture" that may be considered outside the purview of the United States. As an Afro-Puerto Rican musical genre that initially represented a kind of communication of the events of the day in a call-and-response form that involves a portable hand drum, plena has become a traditional folkloric dance and music typically heard most during holiday celebrations, but also in protests.

The student who signed up to present their reading of "Sounding Out a Rhetoric of Resilience" to the class was a white woman who admitted to not knowing anything about Puerto Rico's political status and relationship to the United States prior to engaging with the text. In her presentation, she summarized the main points presented in the various videos. A few of the screenshots she included featured the "Historicizing La Plena" section's opening image next to the folkloric approach of Las Hijas de Borinquen in Houston, and an image of the #RickyRenuncia protests in the summer of 2019, which was presented toward the end to demonstrate how "Plena Is Protest." What might get lost in this quick summary is the exploration of complex racial dynamics of representation and folklorization of Afro-descendant Puerto Ricans, which Puerto Rican studies scholars and activists have been pointing to for decades. It also glosses over gender and sexuality dynamics of respectability that would be disrupted through a consideration

of other Afro-Puerto Rican genres like reggaetón. Nevertheless, there were other instances in the semester where these kinds of conversation were had.

For the one Puerto Rican student in the class, it was a surprise for her to be able to consider how "her culture" could count as popular culture. She focused her own discussion facilitation on the work of José Esteban Muñoz, addressing the art and life of Jean Michel Basquiat and the relationship the Haitian-Puerto Rican-New Yorker artist had with Andy Warhol. As evident in the following excerpt of that student's reflection, she perceived the course to provide a diversity of topics relating to rhetoric, popular culture, and activism.

> In part, I was right, we did discuss activism in popular culture and media, but the artifacts we analyzed throughout most of the semester were ones of our choice. In class, we studied important concepts and literature that aided in our understanding of activist rhetorics, such as Brummett's Rhetorical Methods in Critical Studies and José Esteban Muñoz's "Famous and Dandy Like B. 'n' Andy." Not to mention, the examples of these concepts provided in class by the professor were crucial and allowed me to comprehend how I would be able to apply them to the artifacts I analyzed. My understanding of culture was vital for this class. At the beginning of this class, my initial definition of culture, more specifically pop culture, was US-based. I did not take into account how my Puerto Rican roots and my experiences living in the archipelago are also considered culture. As the semester progressed and we delved deeper into materials, my idea of popular culture evolved.

As evident here, students relied on material culture that is typically the purview of entertainment industries to explore their understanding of what counts as culture, and what and how it becomes popular. More importantly, this and other student reflections show how students were pushed to rethink their knowledge about perspectives other than their own. Resounding Puerto Rican activist rhetoric, therefore, prompted both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican students to expand their thinking on rhetoric, activism, and popular culture as they are constrained, informed by, and/or motivated by a matrix of privilege and oppression. Whether in teaching or engaging in cultural rhetorics scholarship that amplifies or draws public attention to issues facing our communities, honest conversations about privilege and oppression's complex overlaps necessitate reflection on the potential for extraction, even as we also acknowledge our inevitably marginal positions as insiders or outsiders.

Amplifying Cultural Rhetorics of Resistance

Besides amplifying *autogestión* as scholarship in and outside of rhetoric and composition venues, it may be helpful to highlight how Puerto Rican artists have accrued cultural capital and chosen to use it to advocate for their communities. A prominent example is the case of Bad Bunny. One example featured in my flier for the "Activist Rhetorics & Popular Culture" course (Figure 1) from his *Tonight Show* performance features Bad Bunny as a presumably cisgender man wearing a skirt and a t-shirt that reads "Mataron a Alexa" to highlight the horrific murder of a transwoman in Puerto Rico. Another example would be his music video for "El Apagón" featuring an investigative reporter doing a deep dive on gentrification and colonialism in Puerto Rico. But an especially important example for rhetoric and composition is this global superstar's consistent insistence on using Spanish for his songs—speaking to the resistance to English only in the contiguous United States and Americanization efforts in Puerto Rico.

That could also be the case for other communities, particularly Black communities, as Mckoy has argued. Lizzo's 2022 People's Choice award acceptance speech is the most explicit example of amplifying *autogestión* as I've developed it here—amplifying social movement activism for and by women of color in the contemporary United States.[11] In her acceptance speech for the People's Champion award, she shared the stage with seventeen activists whose message Lizzo wanted to amplify, and she said: "Being an icon is about what you do with that platform. And ever since the beginning of my career, I've used my platform to amplify marginalized voices" (Lizzo, in Zhan). While I am not suggesting that in amplifying *autogestión* by Puerto Rican groups I am anything like Lizzo, or Bad Bunny for that matter, I bring up this salient example to suggest further study into the ways in which cultural rhetorics can continue to amplify with accountability: to argue for amplifying *autogestión* as a methodology for social justice.

Notes

1. The curator, Marcela Guerrero, noted that the last group show of Puerto Rican art by mainstream museums was organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and El Museo del Barrio in New York in 1973.

2. I will be forever thankful to my MAEE mentors: José Irizarry, Jocelyn Géliga, Mary Sefranek, and Mary Leonard.

3. Ryan Skinnell has also advocated for the importance of public writing, adding that we should heed our own advice as writing teachers.

4. Forthcoming book.

5. Brenner, Neil, and Stuart Elden, "Introduction. State, Space, World: Lefebvre and the Survival of Capitalism." *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, U of Minnesota P, 2009, p. 14.

6. See Bonilla, Yarimar, "The Coloniality of Disaster: Race, Empire, and the Temporal Logics of Emergency in Puerto Rico, USA," *Political Geography,* vol. 78, 2020, pp. 102–81.

7. "Mission and Vision." *Defend Puerto Rico*, https://defendpr.com/.

8. Refer to Khirsten Scott's "Whose World Is This?: Explorations in Hip Hop, Writing, and Culture" and Yanira Rodríguez's "Pedagogies of Refusal: What It Means to (un)Teach a Student Like Me."

9. I am happy to share the entire syllabus, but for now I should say that the writers featured includes rhetoricians such as Barry Brummet, Jenny Edbauer, Adam Banks, Phaedra Pezzullo, and Cate Palczewski. I also included the work of communication scholars such as Tatiana Tatarchevskiy, Marco Bastos, Dan Mercea, and others. In addition, Kyle Mays's writing on "Decolonial Hip Hop" proved to be eye-opening for students, as was the work of José Muñoz, which I discuss in more detail in the manuscript.

10. Shout-out to Ames Hawkins and Maria Novotny for their editing work and to Christina Cedillo for creating the publication space for this kind of scholarship.

11. As of August 2023, there is an ongoing investigation regarding serious allegations of abuse against Lizzo from her backup dancers. This fact brings up a further complexity about activism in popular culture that was not possible to address due to time and space constraints at the time of this writing.

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Mara Lee Grayson

Assimilation/Appropriation: What Jewish Discourses in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies Tell Us about the Limitations of Inclusion

Drawing upon original post-structural phenomenological research, this article explores how Jewish discourses are pathologized and marginalized in rhet/comp spaces in ways that impact theorizing, pedagogy, professional interaction, and disciplinary knowledge production and how the academy's white Christian hegemony reifies itself through these processes. As the limited assimilative success of Jewish people demonstrates, inclusion is not inherently equitable, nor does it necessarily change the structures of white supremacy. Ultimately, I suggest that cultural rhetorics contributes a more critical conceptualization of "inclusion" for the academy that acknowledges the limitations and dangers of assimilation into whiteness.

For many Jewish teachers and scholars of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies (RCWS), it is their Jewish background and meaning-making practices that bring them to or connect them with their work (Durst; Fitzgerald; Grayson); yet in graduate programs, conference spaces, and disciplinary journals, these same teachers and scholars are unlikely to find

comprehensive exploration, or sometimes even explicit acknowledgment, of those same discourses or the traditions from which they originate (Fernheimer; Fitzgerald; Grayson; Greenbaum and Holdstein; Holdstein). Jewish educators and students, generally speaking, also experience marginalization, misrepresentation, antisemitic symbols and stereotypes, religious microaggressions, and, occasionally, overt physical violence (Flasch; Laitman; Levine Daniel et al.; MacDonald-Dennis; Nadal et al.). These experiences are significant in part because "they represent the fissures in our perceived and presumed privilege, the spaces where a disconnect between the experiences we've had and the experiences we think we've had (or are told we've had) is exposed" (Grayson 120), yet many Jewish people initially downplay the antisemitism they encounter (Laitman; MacDonald-Dennis).

In this article, I explore the dynamics of assimilation and appropriation such fissures illuminate with regard to the disciplinary positioning of Jewish discourses and the lived experiences of Jewish people in RCWS. Drawing upon existing and original research and my own experiences as a white Jewish woman, I explore how Jewish discourses are pathologized and marginalized in RCWS spaces in ways that impact professional experience and disciplinary knowledge production. Cognizant of the reminder from members of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab that "*all work in the discipline is already focused on or arises from specific cultural practices*" (Powell et al., emphasis original), I also explore how the discipline's white Christian cultural hegemony reifies itself through these processes. As the limited assimilative success of Jewish people demonstrates, inclusion is not inherently equitable, nor does it necessarily change the structures of white supremacy. Ultimately, I suggest that cultural rhetorics contributes a more critical conceptualization of "inclusion" for the academy that acknowledges the limitations and dangers of assimilation into whiteness.

Christian Hegemony and the Limitations of Jewish Whiteness

In "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," Sara Ahmed uses the story of Edmund Husserl, a Christian convert, mathematician, and philosopher stripped of his university position in 1933 Germany because of his Jewish background, to illustrate the tenuousness of whiteness and the access whiteness allows or denies. Bodies seen as "out of place" in white spaces are "stopped" from entering, which reinscribes the whiteness of the place and the bodies in it (161). Jewish people once were "stopped from" white academic spaces in

the United States through official university admission quotas and biased admission criteria (Karabel). Speech tests were also present in places with high Jewish immigrant populations to ensure prospective teachers spoke "'standard,' i.e., nonimmigrant, nonaccented English" (Brodkin 32). Jewish people are not, however, readily "stopped from" white academic spaces today. Owing in large part to the conceptual whitening of Jewish people in the binary racial discourse that sustains the popular imaginary, Jewish people, who remain a very small global and national minority, are not generally considered minoritized in academia.

> **Despite the notion that in the late twentieth century Jewish people "became white" . . . and despite the very real white privilege light-skinned Jewish people carry with them today, the absorption of Jewish people into whiteness is conceptual and limited.**

I should draw readers' attention to the diction I've employed in the previous sentence, and two words in particular: "conceptual" and "considered." For various reasons, including multidimensional and fluctuating understandings of Jewish identity as race, ethnicity, and/or religion (Kaye/Kantrowitz), the historical and ongoing racialization of Jewish people (Brodkin; Gilman; Grayson; MacDonald-Dennis), and the diversity of the Jewish diaspora (Kaye/Kantrowitz), the assumption of Jewish whiteness is inaccurate and problematic, especially amidst rising white nationalism in the United States and a global increase in antisemitism (Shaheed). While the sort of comprehensive explication of Jewish racialization I have offered elsewhere (Grayson) is outside the scope of this article, in this section I provide some background on Jewish racialization to contextualize the marginalization of Jewish people and perspectives in the academy and, more specifically, in RCWS.

Despite the notion that in the late twentieth century Jewish people "became white" (see Brodkin) and despite the very real white privilege light-skinned Jewish people carry with them today, the absorption of Jewish people into whiteness is conceptual and limited. The popular conception of Jewishness in the United States is Ashkenazic, denoting Jewish people of Central or Eastern European descent, and Ashkenazi Jews (myself included) *tend* to be light-skinned, but approximately one in five US Jews is Sephardic (Southern European), Mizrahi (Middle Eastern), Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, or of mixed race (Levine Daniel et al.). The assumption that Jewish

people are white erases Jewish people of color, the historical racialization of light-skinned Jewish people, and the contemporary positioning of Jewishness in a "liminal zone . . . somewhere between the dominant position of the white majority and the marginal position of peoples of color" (Biale et al. 5).

In the United States, Judaism is framed as a religion, officially (as in workplace accommodation requests or the absence of "Jewish" from most demographic information forms) and unofficially (as in media reports or calls for "religious tolerance" following antisemitic violence). In the logics of the white supremacist imaginary, however, Jewishness is conceptualized as racially distinct from Christian whiteness, as "a thing in your blood" (Baddiel xvii). More importantly, *Jewish people* do not define Jewishness and Judaism in solely religious terms (Flasch; Kaye/Kantrowitz), nor do we define ourselves solely as race or ethnicity either. But in a white Christian hegemonic society wherein the very language used to speak about race and religion were constructed and are maintained through Christianity and whiteness (Gilman), we have not had the opportunity to define our own terms.

Christian hegemony is deeply embedded and secularized in the United States. Major Christian holidays are celebrated as national holidays; Christmas music plays on the radio and in stores from November to January; many businesses are closed on Sundays, the Christian day of worship; and time is marked via a Christian lens that begins with the beginning of Christianity. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited in public schools, athletic events open with patriotic songs that include Christian references, and Christian prayers are recited before governmental proceedings (Clark et al.; Kivel). Christian views of morality govern how we understand virtue and vice, hygiene, gender, sexuality, and decorum (Kivel). We are encouraged to seek "the truth" in our academic pursuits and advised to show "grace" to those who are struggling. Young children are socialized to treat others as they wish to be treated; regardless of whether one agrees with this advice, which arguably predates Christianity, its common phrasing ("do unto others . . .") and its identification as the "Golden Rule" originate in Christian scripture.

To take leave to celebrate holidays unaccounted for in the Christian calendar, students and employees must "verify, document, and otherwise prove to a person in a position of authority—who is usually Christian—that their absences" are legitimate (Clark et al. 52). Accommodations, if granted, reinforce the saliency of Christian hegemony by reinscribing Christianity as

the norm from which other practices deviate and by cementing a "religious" framing (via a Christian definition of religion) that does not fully represent all belief systems and cultures.

In the United States, just as Christianity is white (Butler), whiteness is Christian. Thus, while Jewish people are not "stopped from" white spaces in academia or elsewhere, those spaces remain ideologically, practically, hegemonically Christian.

Jewish Cultural Rhetorics and the Experiences of Jewish Scholars

As part of a comprehensive post-structural phenomenological study designed to better understand the experiences of being Jewish in the discipline(s) of RCWS, in 2021, with institutional review board approval, I interviewed thirteen RCWS teachers and scholars who self-identified as Jewish. Participants included graduate students and tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty members. Participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to nearly seventy; had lived and worked across the United States; and identified as male, female, and genderqueer. Some identified with Judaism as a religion; they were affiliated with Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist denominations. Others identified their Jewishness as cultural. Participants were Ashkenazi and Sephardic; one had converted to Judaism.

I also engaged in casual conversations with other Jewish teachers and scholars, of whom I will speak only generally, and I logged in a journal my own experiences and reflections. In the following sections, I draw upon my experiences and stories shared with me to illuminate two seemingly para-doxical dynamics: the disciplinary appropriation of Jewish discourses and the expectation of assimilation for Jewish people to whom those discourses are culturally significant.

"It's Bizarre": Appropriating Jewish Discourses

Most educators I spoke to connected their interest in RCWS to their Jewish identities and culturally situated practices, such as storytelling (Blum-Kulka), critical questioning (Spolsky and Walters), and collaborative textual analysis (Fitzgerald). Julie, a professor, called Judaism a "culture of storytelling" and said: "The potency that I see in language . . . largely stems from my Jewish identity." Mark, a professor, said he learned in bar mitzvah

training "how I was supposed to be thinking about ideas and how I was supposed to be thinking about texts." For Shoshanna, a writing center director, "it connects . . . to a certain relationship with inquiry." In Jewish spaces she had "learned to ask questions" and to assume "an answer is going to . . . have six different sides." For Asher, a graduate student, "it's about that sort of dialogue, that sort of question-asking that is foundationally Jewish."

These participants are not alone. Compositionist Russel Durst has said his work is informed by "Jewish cultural and religious traditions," including "academic study and social justice" (45). Charles Persky, cofounder of the writing center at Hunter College, said his "Jewish background" experience with *chavrusa*, the collaborative practices of Talmud study, informed the structure of the writing center and helped him adapt to disciplinary changes over time (quoted in Fitzgerald 34).

Societal dynamics and hierarchies manifest in the microcosms of academia and RCWS. Like the United States, which professes freedom of religion amidst hegemonic, secularized Christianity, we rarely acknowledge, let alone challenge, "the Christian ideologies that are transparently assumed and unquestioned" in our discipline (Holdstein 14).

Despite the (largely unwritten) "history of the influence of Jewish thought and practice on composition studies" (Fitzgerald 31), participants in my study struggled to locate explicit acknowledgment of those influences. Shoshanna "had a really hard time" finding Jewish topics in writing center work: "I kind of came up blank." When she heard religion addressed at writing center conferences, it was through a Christian lens: "I've certainly seen presentations about religious forms of marginalization, and it's actually been rare that it has been about a religion other than Christianity."

Danielle,[1] a writing instructor, emailed me after our interview. She had been thinking about how "BIZARRE and absurd for a culture/religion centered on textual analysis to be absent. . . . [I]t's such an obvious misalignment between areas of knowledge and the authorship of the field." Danielle was not the only participant in my study to use the word "bizarre" to describe her experiences as a Jewish person in RCWS, and as antisemitism scholar Deborah Lipstadt noted in response to a professor's use of the same term: "It is bizarre unless one acknowledges that something else is hovering beneath the surface" (180).

Indeed, societal dynamics and hierarchies manifest in the microcosms of academia and RCWS. Like the United States, which professes freedom of religion amidst hegemonic, secularized Christianity, we rarely acknowledge, let alone challenge, "the Christian ideologies that are transparently assumed and unquestioned" in our discipline (Holdstein 14). This dynamic impacts how all non-Christian religions and cultures are represented; as a result, non-Jewish students in the field are unlikely to learn about Jewish rhetorics or their influences on the discipline.

At the same time, Jewish meaning-making practices have been appropriated in scholarship and practice without attribution and in ways that serve Christian hegemony (Fitzgerald; Holdstein).

Scholarship on Jewish discourses is by no means nonexistent in RCWS—consider the work of Michael Bernard-Donals, Janice Fernheimer, and Eli Goldblatt, for example—but it is limited, despite calls for greater attention (Fernheimer; Greenbaum and Holdstein). My own review of this journal's output between 2011 and 2021 located fifteen articles with the word "Jewish" in the text, though most use the term in passing. Three articles explore Jewish perspectives or experiences; one was written by Goldblatt, and another includes my brief contribution to a collaboratively written symposium. This is to say that "the community of RCWS scholars whose work centers Jewish people is very, very small" (Grayson 79).

At the same time, Jewish meaning-making practices have been appropriated in scholarship and practice without attribution and in ways that serve Christian hegemony (Fitzgerald; Holdstein). Studying cultural rhetorics requires we do more than apply one culture's rhetorical frames to another; we must understand a culture's "systems, beliefs, relationships to the past, practices of meaning-making, and practices of carrying forward" (Bratta and Powell). Yet Jewish perspectives and rhetorics in RCWS largely have been filtered through frameworks and logics of whiteness and Christianity. Lauded by early Greek rhetoricians, Judaic philosophy was broadly dismissed as barbaric with the advent and dissemination of Christianity (Holdstein). Today, we rarely acknowledge that the much-studied genre of the sermon, seemingly intrinsic to Christianity, was in fact "born in the early synagogue and became the prototype for modern Christian practice" (Tauber 57) or that Jewish approaches to textual analysis have influenced collaborative pedagogies (Fitzgerald). Deborah Holdstein has pointed to Beth Daniell's "unexamined, unchallenged rhetorical appropriation" (17)

of *I-Thou*, a term coined by Jewish theologian Martin Buber, who receives nary a mention, in the fiftieth anniversary issue of this journal. Consider also two other articles published here in recent years: Jeffrey Ringer's generous analysis of an evangelical student's appropriation of a Jewish text and Thomas Deans's exploration of Jesus's rhetoric. Deans acknowledges Jewish rhetorical traditions, the unchecked religious ideologies of RCWS, and even that calling the Hebrew Bible the "Old Testament" suggests that Hebrew scripture is relevant only insofar as it informs the Christian "New Testament." Still, he uses "Old Testament" throughout, and Jewish traditions are primarily used to situate the rhetoric of the Christian Messiah.

> If Jewish people, regardless of the skin color of actual Jewish persons, are conceptualized as white . . . our discourses can be easily dismissed as part of the white Western traditions of RCWS. Ironically, because of that same racialization, we aren't really seen as a minoritized group, despite being a statistical minority.

Cultural rhetorics methods necessitate we "investigate and understand meaning-making as it is situated in specific cultural communities," recognizing culture not as a static "object of inquiry" but as constructed through everyday practices, relationships, human bodies, and the societal systems and discourses "that exist around and within it" (Powell et al.). To point, in her essay about *havruta* (or *chavrusa*), the collaborative learning practices of Talmud study, Lauren Fitzgerald reminds readers that "context is a crucial, defining factor of collaboration" and that *chavrusa* is "rooted deeply in, and in many ways a product of" Jewish cultural values of "fellowship and dialogue" (28). Fitzgerald warns that appropriating *chavrusa* as a metaphor for collaborative practice would "dismiss the uniqueness" of a culturally situated practice: "And doesn't the impulse to turn traditional Jewish practices into a metaphor for secular activity resemble Christian allegorizing" (39)? After all, in the Christian allegorical approach to scripture, stories and events from the Hebrew Bible (labeled by Christianity as the Old Testament) are believed to hold Christian significance. We might say, then, that the appropriation of Jewish texts and practices is indeed quite Christian.

Acknowledgments of RCWS's unexamined religious ideology have not necessarily led to broader disciplinary self-reflection, nor do such acknowledgments fully account for the various ways Jewish people identify, religion being only one. This brings me back to Jewish racialization. If Jewish people,

regardless of the skin color of actual Jewish persons, are conceptualized as white (Brodkin), our discourses can be easily dismissed as part of the white Western traditions of RCWS.

Ironically, because of that same racialization, we aren't really seen as a minoritized group, despite being a statistical minority. Graduate students I interviewed said there had been little to no discussion of antisemitism in their programs, even in classes or events focused on social justice and equity, and even when overt acts of antisemitism occurred on campus. One student, Blair, was asked by a professor to explain Judaism to their classmates after experiencing antisemitism that the university—and that same professor—had previously refused to address. Another, Talia, was disappointed that after swastikas and Nazi propaganda were found on campus, the administration did little more than provide contact information for psychological services. "So, the impetus is still really on students or faculty or staff to go seek out help," she said. Another, Cindy, said that until she recommended supplemental readings for a course on diverse cultural literacies, "there was just no talk of Jewish identity there at all."

We have assimilated, we are told. We aren't underrepresented. Why, then, can't we find our knowledges, voices, or experiences in so many of the disciplinary spaces we have been allowed to access? As I suggest in the following sections, presumptions of Jewish whiteness and discriminatory narratives about Jewish people may provide some explanation.

"I Am White until They Know I'm Jewish": Assimilating the Jewish Body

We might begin to counter the limited visibility of Jewish discourses in RCWS by directly acknowledging that Jewish people enter our classrooms, conferences, and department offices. But considering Jewish bodies poses a conceptual problem: we aren't always easily identified. That's why others have tried to make us identifiable, whether through yellow stars or attempts to racialize us as white or nonwhite depending on place, time, and context (Brodkin; Kaye/Kantrowitz).

Some of us have features stereotypically associated with Jewishness (I'd point to my nose) or wear clothing or jewelry that marks us as Jewish. Markings may impact our experiences, particularly of antisemitism. Rebecca, an Orthodox graduate student, attributes the overt antisemitism she experiences to being "visibly Jewish": people in her Southwestern town have shouted "Kike!" and thrown objects at her and her husband, who

wears a skullcap called a *kippah* or *yarmulke*. On campus, she is subjected to microaggressions like antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish people and wealth and incessant questioning about her religious practices (Nadal et al.). Yet at an event about the harms of discriminatory political rhetoric, her professor admonished her for using the term "we" and self-identifying as one of the people harmed. A person of color in the group reminded the professor "that Jews are also . . . victimized by this stuff."

Jewish students may hide visible markers of Jewishness as a means of self-protection (Flasch). Blair, who is genderqueer and Sephardic, used to be open about their Jewishness and gender identity but grew cautious after facing antisemitism and homophobia in a Midwestern graduate pro-gram: "I put myself in physical danger by doing that." In a room of white women, Blair says, they could be mistaken for a white woman yet would feel uncomfortable and unseen. Of white privilege, Blair reflected: "It's like being undercover." A practice not available to all minorities, or all Jewish people, being "undercover" may offer protection, but it can also mean feeling invisible. Isaac, who teaches at a southeastern university, doesn't typically feel unsafe, but he also doesn't feel fully represented. He isn't sure what would help, though he would find it "comforting" to work with other Jewish people. Isaac knows his white privilege offers "a sense of safety," but he is "still trying to figure out" his relationship to whiteness. He says: "I am white until they know I'm Jewish."

Isaac's remark illuminates one of the problems of understanding Jewish bodies. For many Jewish people, Jewishness is not the most visible part of our identity. Even when visible, it may be unrecognized, such as by those who do not see Jewish people as vulnerable. For example, though Rebecca's Jewish body exposes her to antisemitic violence, her embodied experience was unacknowledged by her professor (but not, tellingly, by a peer whose body is marked as nonwhite). Research tells us that our bodies hold our own and our ancestors' racial traumas (Lerner and Yehuda), yet for many Jewish people, it is our bodies that obscure that trauma. For that reason, next, I narrow my exploration of Jewish bodies to one aspect that may be of particular relevance to RCWS scholars: the Jewish voice.

"You're Just So . . . New York!": Assimilating the Jewish Voice

When I took a faculty position on a campus far from my hometown of New York City, I struggled to communicate in my new department. I asked questions no one answered. If I spoke passionately, others were silent. I was

Jews speak more quickly and animatedly and use a broader range of pitch than non-Jews. . . . Other common practices include cooperative disagreement . . . a form of simultaneous speech called cooperative overlapping, participatory listening via verbal affirmations and interjections, and persistence, or reintroducing topics not picked up in conversation.

told to be "nice." When, like a good Millennial, I vented, if cryptically, on social media, I received messages from other Jewish educators who'd had negative experiences at work because of their communication styles. Some were from New York City but no longer lived there and, like I did, they had learned to preface utterances with "I'm from New York, so . . ." in anticipation of being seen as too direct or critical (Grayson). Those not from New York struggled for similar reasons: They were perceived as rude, pushy, and loud. Questions were seen as impertinent. Passion was interpreted as anger.

A coworker tried to explain away the tone-policing I experienced: "People don't know how to respond to you," she said. "You're just so—"

Don't say it don't say it don't say it.

"—New York!" She said it. "People just aren't like that here."

In the popular imaginary, there is a long-standing conflation between "New York" and "Jewish" (Baddiel; Burdin; Laitman). The stereotype of the "pushy New York Jew" (Tannen) lingers even when the word "Jew" is omitted, for, rhetorically, "New York" long has functioned as code for "Jew" (Laitman), a code that persists today (Baddiel). Linguist Deborah Tannen situates the stereotype in the historical influence of Eastern European Jewish cultures and languages on New York City.

In the mid-twentieth-century United States, "being able to write and speak as white" was integral to gaining acceptance as white by non-Jewish people (Brodkin 143); Jewish women in particular were advised to change their speech to succeed in school or work (Tannen). Though often less pronounced today, Jewish people still tend to speak differently from their non-Jewish neighbors (Benor; Burdin). The "distinctly Jewish linguistic repertoire" of Jewish English includes loan words from Yiddish and Hebrew, Yiddish-origin syntax, and pronunciation of vowels in ways associated with the New York accent (Benor). Speech patterns associated with New York are common among US Jews (Burdin), and Yiddish syntax and prosody are exhibited by Jewish speakers for whom Yiddish is not a language of origin (Benor). Jews speak more quickly and animatedly and use a broader range

of pitch than non-Jews (Benor; Burdin; Tannen) and, in storytelling, often focus on the "teller's emotional experience" (Tannen 137). Other common practices include cooperative disagreement (Schiffrin), a form of simultaneous speech called cooperative overlapping, participatory listening via verbal affirmations and interjections, and persistence, or reintroducing topics not picked up in conversation (Tannen).

Jewish communication is rooted in cultural meaning-making practices. The Talmud comprises "discussions and argumentations of virtually hundreds of rabbis who debated issues, weighed alternative explanations, and ventured logical conclusions and generalizations" (Ben-Amos 26). For rabbinical scholars, the goal is not consensus, but complexity of meaning (Horn). Even children are encouraged to ask questions (Spolsky and Walters) and participate in storytelling (Blum-Kulka). Coming from Jewish people, challenging questions and interjections are attempts at connection, sociability, and better understanding (Schiffrin). We're not fighting—we're trying to make meaning together.

Unlike the one-upping that may occur in academic discourse, overlapping is not competitive, but collaborative. That said, we know that white cultural hegemony can manifest as racist assumptions about nondominant language practices.

It's ironic that the Jewish voice is criticized as "loud" by white Christian people, who are, like the white audience members Victor Del Hierro, Daisy Levy, and Margaret Price observed speaking over a presenting scholar of color, "seemingly oblivious to the historical loudness of their voices." Del Hierro and colleagues note the audience's obliviousness to "the way their efforts to interrupt each other have silenced everyone else." This type of interruption differs from the cooperative overlapping and participatory listening often misidentified as interruption (Tannen). Unlike the one-upping that may occur in academic discourse, overlapping is not competitive, but collaborative. That said, we know that white cultural hegemony can manifest as racist assumptions about nondominant language practices (Lippi-Green). White Christian norms become expectations for all, and white Christian perceptions become the authoritative interpretations of nonwhite and non-Christian discourses.

Though disciplinary scholarship challenges such assumptions, we are expected to conform. I remember one supervisor's advice: "Use your rhetoric." Rhetorical awareness and flexibility require not only audience

awareness but also recognition of context and authorial ethos. Yet while I was expected to codeswitch to be better received, there seemed to be no expectation that others should consider my culturally situated discursive practices on their own merits, not through the lens of Christian whiteness. The people I was accused of interrupting could interrupt and silence my meaning-making, ignoring the "historical loudness" of their own voices.

For Jewish people of color, who tend to be seen by the white gaze foremost as people of color, not as Jewish (Kaye/Kantrowitz), codeswitching and tone-policing may not be new phenomena. But for those of us with white privilege, these experiences may be confusing. They are unexpected encounters with the limitations of Jewish whiteness. Studies on listeners' perceptions of Jewish and non-Jewish speakers have found that Jewish voices are typically associated with New York City, but not with American-ness or whiteness (Burdin). Where skin may mark a Jewish body white or not, a Jewish voice marks the body as Jewish, not white, not American. Indeed, as historian Sander Gilman explains, "the image of the 'Jew who sounds Jewish' is a stereotype within the Christian world which represents the Jew as . . . unable to truly command the national language of the world in which he/she lives" (12).

The dynamics of tone-policing may be covert, but they are *felt* by Jewish people. In fact, covertness compounds their harm. As psychologist Kevin Nadal and colleagues explain of microaggressions, "because prejudicial and discriminatory acts have taken less overt and less explicit forms . . . victims may often feel confused as to whether they actually experienced discrimination" (304). To point, some Jewish people who reached out to me off the record suspected there was something antisemitic about how their voices were perceived but were hesitant to name it as such.

I noticed a similar hesitance among interview participants when describing antisemitism in any form or context, as did multicultural education scholar Christopher MacDonald-Dennis, who has studied how Jewish people understand their experiences "as ethnoreligious targets in a society that is characterized by Christian hegemony" (271). The students MacDonald-Dennis interviewed initially "invalidated" their experiences, for they had been led to believe that antisemitism wasn't a problem. At the same time, they were frustrated that non-Jewish people didn't understand "the complexity of being Jewish and the ways in which Jewish identity confounds whiteness" (276).

One participant I interviewed, Cindy, posits that the presumption of Jewish whiteness makes Jews "feel like they do not have the right to speak up or talk about their identity." Cindy thinks it's "easier" for her to enter conversations about minority experiences because she is Sephardic and her father is Brown. Some participants were told explicitly not to make a big deal of antisemitism. When Ben, a doctoral student and instructor, shared his research at a conference focused on discrimination, he was accused of "trying to inject antisemitism into the conversation." Rebecca remembers a classmate's remark when she mentioned antisemitism: "You know you're white, right?"

Perhaps it should not be surprising that Jewish voices present a problem in academic spaces. Light-skinned Jewishness, in the context of the United States and its persistent racial binary, becomes a failed attempt at whiteness, a failed attempt to do what we are expected to do, what our skin suggests we should do. The logics of whiteness dictate that, since our skin has allowed us to assimilate, the rest of us should assimilate as well.

Assimilation and Appropriation Versus Equitable Inclusion

During graduate school, I read an article in which the author, in passing, compared contemporary gang violence to the Holocaust. Not *a* Holocaust, but the *Shoah*, sometimes termed the Nazi Holocaust or the Jewish Holocaust. Toward the end of our class discussion of the article, I said that while I inferred the author's point about systemic racism creating conditions for and perpetuating gang violence, the comparison seemed a false equivalency. As a (Jewish) person who studies language and text, I was curious: What was the purpose of the Shoah comparison?

No one, not even the professor, responded. If the question weighed on me, the silence was heavier. I realized that was the first time I'd seen anything remotely related to Jewish people in the course material. And it wasn't related to Jewish people, not really. In the United States, the genocide of European Jews is a measuring stick, a metaphor for human violence; its rhetorical function is comparison. But as novelist and Jewish studies scholar Dara Horn explains, "for us, dead Jews aren't a metaphor, but rather actual people that we do not want our children to become" (189). I'd posit that the author of that article understood the function of the comparison, though perhaps did not register the casual cruelty of turning six million murdered Jewish people into an abstract concept for rhetorical purposes. Ironically,

though Jewish genocide has been appropriated as a reference point for societal evil, Jewish people who bring it up or take issue with how others do are labeled hypersensitive or reminded that "anything short of the Holocaust is, well, not the Holocaust" (Horn 197).

In the United States after World War II, while Jewish women tried to sound less Jewish, or bleached their hair, or got nose jobs to "not look like a Jew" (Kaye/Kantrowitz 29–30), a "commoditized cultural Jewishness" was adopted by non-Jewish people via a "philo-semitic" proliferation of stereotypes in popular culture: "Anyone could be a Jewish mother, and there were joke books full of ways to know one when you saw one" (Brodkin 142). Stereotypes and caricatures aside, many media representations depicted Jewish people as assimilated whites and not particularly Jewish (Brodkin), perpetuating a narrative of Hollywood as the "medium of American Jewish assimilation" (Meyers 14). While Jewishness on film in the years since has at times been coded, visible "in the eye of the Jewishly literate beholder" (16), Jewish characters in popular media have generally been "occasionally, casually Jewish" or represented stereotypically, such as via association with wealth (Kaye/Kantrowitz 12).

> Internalizing these dynamics, we deemphasize our Jewish identities, acknowledge that we "are seen as part of a white power structure," and overlook how that "very argument can be viewed as a variation" of dominant anti-Jewish narratives.

Similar dynamics of appropriation and assimilation play out in RCWS. Proposals are labeled "too Jewish" (Greenbaum and Holdstein), yet non-Jewish authors use Jewish concepts and frameworks without attribution toward decidedly not Jewish ends (Holdstein). Jewish people are "told that their perspectives are wrong and too strongly influenced by their personal identities and affiliations" yet are subjected to other people's "unsolicited views" on the same topics (Grayson 108). Internalizing these dynamics, we deemphasize our Jewish identities, acknowledge that we "are seen as part of a white power structure," and overlook how that "very argument can be viewed as a variation" of dominant anti-Jewish narratives (Spack 22). When we challenge antisemitism, we are accused of hypersensitivity or ascribed political affiliations and perspectives we do not hold (Baddiel; Grayson). We experience marginalization at work, yet dominant narratives claim we are not marginalized.

Del Hierro and colleagues note that the "marginalization" metaphor is limiting, for we often "forget that this metaphor is just a metaphor" and that we "are the center of our own experiences." For many Jewish people, our cultural rhetorics are central to our identities as Jews and as scholars, but in RCWS, as in white Christian society, those "who attempt to construct a place for Jewish rhetorics" encounter "the ambiguity of space and place" and the complex question of where Jewish traditions, and Jewish people, belong (Fernheimer 582).

"Mapping" what is marginal and what is central may maintain the inequity that marginalizes, for the marginal is "never meant to expand the center" (Del Hierro et al.). However flexible whiteness may be (Mills), as a model minority, Jewish people are not supposed to expand Christian whiteness into something less Christian, nor are Jewish rhetorics intended to expand white, Western, Christian rhetorical traditions. We are expected to assimilate to them, dissolve ourselves into them, whether or not we see ourselves in them. As cultural critic Noah Berlatsky explains, we are "embraced as long as we let Christians do whatever they want . . . and as long as we don't make a big display of our skepticism."

Cultural rhetorics helps us understand how various modes of meaning-making in context construct and sustain culture. It reminds us that academia and RCWS are also cultural communities (Powell et al.) with meaning-making practices designed to sustain themselves. If "*all* rhetoric is a product of cultural systems and . . . *all* cultures are rhetorical" (Bratta and Powell), it stands to reason that any incorporation of that which has been made marginal into the supposed center of white Christian hegemony will be incorporated through the very logics of white Christian hegemony that created the marginalization. In other words, the absorption of nonwhite and non-Christian frameworks and practices by an academic disciplinary culture defined by white Christian hegemony will inevitably result in the appropriation, dilution, and misapplication of those frameworks and practices by the white bodies, spaces, and discourses that remain central in our discipline. For those of us whose identities are "liminal," who believe ourselves to be oriented toward equity and antiracism yet who benefit from the privileges of white skin, Jewish cultural rhetorics should serve as a reminder that appropriation by whiteness leads not to inclusion or liberation, but to assimilation.

Note

1. All names of study participants are pseudonyms.

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Isabella 'Amne Gomez and Amy J. Lueck

To Embrace Tension or Recoil Away from It: Navigating Complex Collaborations in Cultural Rhetorics Work

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In this article, we share and reflect on our experience working together (as a Native youth and settler scholar) to develop a cultural camp for tribal youth. Through reflection and storytelling, we came to realize the complexities of attempting to support what Scott Lyons terms "rhetorical sovereignty" (particularly of youth) in real institutional contexts, of appealing to different audiences without compromising our vision, and of determining where the line really is between "I" and "we" in our writing and our visions for this work. In short, we have come to realize how complicated justice-driven work really is and how the process has actually changed us both along the way. We use our own stories of collaboration and the program we designed to explore both the possibilities and complexities of allyship and collaboration across difference in our cultural rhetorics practice.

Horše Tuuxi Hemmenya. We write to you as a Muwekma Ohlone youth and settler scholar on Ohlone lands.[1] *It's important to begin by acknowledging the ancestral homeland on which this work is being done. Santa Clara University and the city of Santa Clara are established within the ethnohistoric*

tribal territory of the Thámien Ohlone. These homelands were tended to and occupied by the Thámiens, Alsons, Matalans, and the Paleños, whose tribal region was named after their powerful chief, Capitan Pala. The history of this land is interwoven with the living successors of the Verona Band, now formally recognized as the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. In the Muwekma Ohlone Chochenyo language, Muwékma *means La Gente—The People. While our history enriches us, we also don't let it limit us. Because we are more than history.*

The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe has been working for decades to combat the politics of erasure that has seemed to relegate them to the past and led to their current lack of federal recognized status (Field et al.; Field with Levanthal and Cambra; Muwekma.org). Exercising their rhetorical sovereignty in public contexts and revitalizing cultural traditions and practices, they bring a community fractured by settler colonial violence together for a thriving future. They have engaged in Native language and dance revitalization; advocated for the renaming of local sites across the San Francisco Bay Area in their native Chochenyo; conducted and published ethnohistorical research on their tribe's history; engaged as consultants to archaeological work across the Bay Area; helped cities, schools, museums, and other colonial institutions develop land acknowledgement practices; and in other ways researched, revived, and advocated for their cultural heritage practices for more than forty years.[2] This has included work at Santa Clara University (SCU), where groups of Ohlone leaders and university faculty, staff, and students (including the authors) have been working for a number of years to revise the public memory landscape to make Ohlone history and presence more clear, particularly following the 2018 Ohlone History Working Group report (https://www.scu.edu/kob/ohlone-history-wg-report/), coauthored by tribal and university representatives (Baines et al.), which outlined goals for recognition on campus (see Lueck et al.). Most recently, we have been working on a grant-supported project to create public interpretive installations marking the Native cemetery that is currently unmarked at the center of campus.

As the daughter of a former tribal council member, Isabella 'Amne Gomez has contributed to this work her entire life. She attended language revitalization classes as an infant, engaged in cultural gatherings as a child, and attended government hearings with the state and national legislatures to advocate for the reaffirmation of their federally recognized tribal status

as a teen. What she hadn't had the chance to do was to attend one of her tribe's cultural campouts, which were important annual events that ceased in the years just before Isabella's birth.

> *Isabella: My tribe used to have cultural campouts in the early 2000s. I wasn't born yet to experience the cultural campouts, but whenever tribal members reflect on memories at cultural gatherings, there is always the mention of the cultural campouts. Hearing tribal members express their fondness of the past campouts made me realize how unifying it would be to start the campouts again.*[3]

Cultural campouts were a tradition begun by Isabella's aunt, Monica V. Arellano, which the tribe had held for several years at various regional parks like Sunol Regional Wilderness Park and Del Valle in Livermore, California, where families gathered to engage in traditional Ohlone practices like gathering and weaving tule reeds into baskets, collecting and mashing acorns, and making clapper sticks. The campouts were a meaningful opportunity for the tribe to learn, practice, and revive important cultural practices and to build community, but they have gone dormant in recent years as the tribe began to direct its energies more intensely toward the issue of federal reaffirmation, which requires extensive research, administrative work, meetings with local and national politicians, and the like.[4] Gloria E. Arellano Gomez, former tribal councilwoman and mother of Isabella, explained that the main issues have been constrained resources of time and lack of funding. As a currently unrecognized tribe, Muwekma receives no federal or state funding support. The work tribal leaders do is often on top of other jobs that they also need to support their families in the expensive Bay Area of San Francisco. While focusing on the cause of federal reaffirmation, there is simply not enough bandwidth among tribal leadership right now to also support an event like the campout, which is an involved and potentially costly undertaking. However, that doesn't mean that these events don't matter to the tribe, and the frequency with which they talked about the camp and remembered it, while working on other important public-facing work, was telling.

Amy: It was striking how often the cultural campouts were mentioned by tribal leaders as we worked on other projects. It was something I had to pay

attention to—that we were working on public history installations for the campus, but that the campout was the thing so often on folks' minds. Were we focusing our energies in the right place?

Though the tribe may not have the time or financial resources to support such an event, those are things the university certainly could provide. Doing so is a gesture that the institution is committed to engaging and supporting not only non-native publics (the primary audience of public history installations) but also tribal members themselves. But this engagement and support have to begin with creating a space where the ideas for meaningful interactions can be spoken and heard, from the perspective of those most impacted. It begins with relationships.

Creating such a space through the establishment of a research internship, Isabella, a high school senior, worked with Amy, faculty at SCU, to revive the cultural campout experience for a new generation, focusing this iteration on the needs and interests of youth tribal members like Isabella herself. While she does not speak for her whole tribe, much less for all Ohlone or Native Californians, Isabella is well-positioned to contribute to this work because of her close, lifelong involvement with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe's cultural and political work and her close proximity to the tribe's past and present leadership. As a daughter of a former councilwoman, niece of the current vice-chairwoman, and member of what is a relatively small tribe of just over 600 individuals, Isabella does a lot of advocacy work, which for her entails both family representation and interaction with the general public.[5]

> **This engagement and support have to begin with creating a space where the ideas for meaningful interactions can be spoken and heard, from the perspective of those most impacted. It begins with relationships.**

Although the camp had not yet occurred at the time of this writing, we had spent many months designing it, planning it, and advocating for it among administrators and outside funding agencies, on top of the several years of relationship building and shared work that predated this particular project. Meeting weekly and with regular formal and informal consultations and conversations with the leaders of the tribe, we worked hard to think through the possibilities of this camp, negotiate the space between our individual visions and goals, and articulate shared goals and processes before translating this all into an academic discourse necessary to receive funding and administrative support on campus.

Initially, we thought these outside audiences would be the biggest challenge we would face, but a key aspect of our learning in this process has been in recognizing the complexity of our own perspectives, frameworks, and motivations in working together and confronting them honestly as we shift from public-facing work to this culturally specific, Ohlone-serving project. This new project has made us alert to the limitations of our own frameworks for approaching this collaborative work. After all, Isabella was still in high school when we started working together. Amy is a white feminist historiographer who did not previously self-identify as a scholar of cultural rhetorics, though she is someone who had worked with this community for a number of years attempting to support Ohlone efforts to share their history with tribal members and other publics as a rhetorical strategy to combat the politics of erasure they face. She benefits academically from this collaboration, which is important to acknowledge. Thus, while we originally thought Amy could be more of a neutral conduit supporting Isabella's vision of this camp, we came to realize the complexities of attempting to support what Scott Lyons terms "rhetorical sovereignty" (particularly of youth) in real institutional contexts. Some of these complexities include appealing to different audiences without compromising our vision and determining where the line really is between "I" and "we" in our writing and our visions for this work. Others are related more to how we (and our expertise) are positioned and perceived by outside audiences, whether administrative or scholarly. In short, we have come to realize how complicated justice-driven collaborative work really is and how the process has actually changed us both along the way.

In short, we have come to realize how complicated justice-driven collaborative work really is and how the process has actually changed us both along the way.

In this article, we share and reflect on our experience working together to develop this camp as a site of culturally specific rhetorics and community for tribal youth. Following Indigenous methodologies of storytelling and constellating perspectives (T. King; Powell et al.; Riley-Mukavetz; Wilson), we use our own stories of collaboration and the program we designed to explore both the possibilities and complexities of allyship and collaboration across difference in our cultural rhetorics practice. In this braided narrative (see Montoya et al.), we have preserved a distinction between our separate perspectives and voices in order to reveal the individual specificity of our experiences and stories as they have come together. Preserving those

distinct stories here, we have sought out both resonances and frictions, or places where it was revealed that our own cultural perspectives and positions were in tension with one another, to help illuminate the moments of translation and transmogrification of ideas that we suspected were happening along the way but had not been given sufficient time and attention.

Cultural rhetorics has provided a framework for helping us to better understand and carefully approach these stories and the work they represent, allowing us to recognize our own collaboration and the space we are creating together as an important site of cultural rhetorics work—of "meaning-making as it is situated in specific cultural communities" (Powell et al., Act I)—interpellated with the culturally specific rhetorics of the tribe and the camp itself. That is, cultural rhetorics has transformed the language with which we talk about the camp and our collaboration, particularly by providing a distinction between the closely related tribal, or culturally specific, rhetorics and the cultural rhetorics practices we have engaged in together in our planning work. We use the former to indicate the Ohlone practices and experiences supported by the camp itself, including cultural revitalization, community-building, and reflection on youth tribal identities, while the latter are the rhetorical practices and research methodologies of relationship and listening that have enabled us, as a research team, to understand and support such tribal practices in a careful and responsible way. Recognizing the relationship between culturally specific rhetorics and cultural rhetorics practices in this way illuminates how a strong dividing line between our respective stories and practices as Native and settler collaborators, such as we had early on in our experience designing this camp, can be seen as antithetical to cultural rhetorics and its decolonial aims, inadvertently isolating and marginalizing tribal rhetorics and naturalizing Western rhetorics as other-than-cultural (Cushman et al., "Delinking").[6] As John Gagnon articulates, a cultural rhetorics approach, based in relationships, instead "breaks down the researcher/community distinction" and "encourages the researcher to be an active participant in the community under investigation" (12). Lorenzo Veracini asserts that such meaningful and ongoing Indigenous-settler relationships are key to decolonizing futures (9).

Thus, while our camp experience seeks to highlight and center the culturally specific rhetorical practices of this tribe, we are increasingly interested in the ways those practices and stories articulate with and transform in relation to other stories as part of a cultural rhetorics practice.[7] Following

Cherokee scholar Rachel Jackson, we identify our approach specifically as a transrhetorical cultural rhetorics practice, "insofar as *trans-* implies rhetorical movement and change/exchange" (Jackson, "Story" 6). Embracing this as our definition is our attempt to make space for ourselves within an expansive range of cultural rhetorics conversations—one that cannot be said to essentialize or isolate the practices of marginalized communities but instead focuses on multiply constituted communities and practices in relation to the ways they persist, change, and evolve. Those trans-ing moments of our collaboration, and their consequences, are the focus of our account.[8]

Using cultural rhetorics as a methodology has helped us to understand and better navigate the core problems of Ohlone representation that we have encountered throughout the experience of designing and advocating for this camp, which have arisen both from within our collaboration and from outside audiences. For example, with a cultural rhetorics lens at hand, we have been able to articulate the importance of starting from and centering individual experiences and relationships rather than academic or institutional scripts and expectations. We believe that thinking through the complexities of this process from our own highly specific, localized context of developing this camp will be valuable for *CCC* readers who might be asked to engage in similar work without very much support for considering the hows and whys of these relationships as cultural rhetorics practices. As Audre Lorde has said, "We are anchored in our own place and time, looking out and beyond to the future we are creating, and we are part of communities that interact" (57). In what follows, we use our own experiences and reflections to lay bare some of the complexities and cautions of this work for academics and administrators working from their own places, times, and communities.

Layers of Colonialism in Our Place and Time[9]

The camp experience we designed was specifically to engage descendants of the Thámien Ohlone peoples. While the colonial histories of Thámien Ohlone lands and peoples share some things in common with those of other tribes across the state and beyond, it is crucial to remember that American Indians are not "one thing" (Vizenor). To this end, it might be helpful to begin by explaining some of the complexities of tribal politics, organization, and identity in the Bay Area and how those specific contexts have come into our own relationship and collaborative process.

The present-day Muwekma Ohlone Tribe comprises all of the known surviving American Indian lineages aboriginal to the San Francisco Bay region who trace their ancestry through the missions Dolores, Santa Clara, and San Jose and who were also members of the historic Federally Recognized Verona Band of Alameda County. Their ancestral homelands were first colonized by the Franciscan missionaries, who established Mission Santa Clara at this site in 1777. During the mission period (1777–1836), some 9,400 Native Californians, the vast majority of them Ohlone, lived and labored at the mission, constituting nearly the entirety of their population (barring a very small number of Mexican and Spanish soldiers and even fewer Spanish priests) and generating all of their economic value. As the designation of "fugitives" and the occasional "emancipation" of Mission Indians in church records makes clear, this was unpaid and coerced labor, attended by harsh colonial living conditions, including family separation, that led to devastating rates of mortality for Mission Indians, more than 7,500 of whom are currently buried in unmarked cemeteries at the site of the mission and present-day SCU (Panich).

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Shortly after California came under Mexican rule in 1822, the missions were secularized, or converted into local parish churches rather than economic and residential centers. At the time of secularization, the lands that had been held in trust by the missions were distributed by the state to its representatives and other claimants, including a very few Mission Indians who received land grant parcels on which to live in recognition of their high status within the missions. The vast majority of California Natives were left landless, having to find work in or around the missions on nearby farms and ranches (Field with Levanthal and Cambra).

The American period, beginning in 1846, represents the most recent iteration of colonial domination for Native Californians, who suffered throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under cultures of intense racism and disenfranchisement (Field et al.). The first governor of California, Peter H. Burnett, announced a "war of extermination" against Native Californians in an 1851 speech, and the genocide was carried out over the next decade and a half. Burnett had a particular connection to SCU, serving

on its first board of trustees, his son numbering among the college's first graduates. A plaque dedicated to Burnett was, until very recently, featured at the front of the Mission Church, having been removed in response to the Ohlone History Working Group recommendations in 2021 (Baines et al.).

The deep historical significance of this piece of land, as well the ongoing colonial erasures being perpetuated here, position the university as a particularly wounded/wounding site for the community, motivating our decision to engage in cultural healing practices here (Till). In spite of this legacy of colonial violence, Ohlone people have persisted in this area. One particular group of Ohlone people resided near Pleasanton, Sunol, and Niles (as well as other towns and ranches surrounding Mission San Jose) throughout this time, particularly at Alisal Rancheria (Field et al.; Levanthal et al.). This group was known as the Verona Band of Alameda County, who traced their lineages through missions Santa Clara, San Jose, and San Francisco. This group was formally recognized in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) censuses between 1914 and 1927. Their practices and stories were researched and documented by anthropologists such as J. P. Harrington, whose records have subsequently served language revitalization efforts in the twenty-first century (muwekma.org).

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Despite being suddenly and unjustly dropped from federal lists of land claimants in 1927, along with 133 other Native California tribes, the Verona Band has reorganized as the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and continue to organize and self-advocate for their rights from within the context of ongoing colonial domination and its fracturing effects (Levanthal et al.). They are currently seeking to have their federally recognized status restored, having first filed for reaffirmation of their previous federal recognition in 1995.

While there are numerous other tribal organizations across the Bay Area, and not all Native individuals identify as Ohlone or are enrolled members of Muwekma, Muwekma is one of the largest and most established organizations, with long-standing relationships with municipalities and universities, including SCU. Without essentializing Native Californian experience or identity, it is in recognition of Muwekma's historic position within the area as much as in recognition of Isabella's own affiliation with

this group that our efforts have coalesced around supporting a cultural campout for this tribal organization on SCU's campus.

Designing the Campout

It was to redress SCU's specific colonial legacies and discursive erasures that Isabella and Amy began working together, creating space for relationship through a research internship originally designed for Isabella to contribute more generally to ongoing public history work on SCU's campus. However, in trying to customize the research experience to meet Isabella's own needs and interests, as a reciprocal research practice, the cultural campout project quickly emerged as a new area of focus and a clear priority for the team.

> *Isabella: I remember my mom telling me to answer the questions Amy gave her. The questions consisted of what were my professional goals, personal strengths, growth areas, and goals related to Muwekma Ohlone youth. When I answered what my goals were related to Muwekma Ohlone youth, I elaborated on my desire for fellow youth to be able to do more activities with each other. I mentioned how our tribe used to have cultural campouts. That mention of the past campouts is when our current project was first set in motion.*

Amy: In a move that has since become something of a running joke among our group of collaborators, I rather simplistically offered, "Let's just get you the funding and bring the campout back!" We laughed because this revealed a pattern of mine of just jumping feet-first into each new suggestion from this group and committing my fellow faculty collaborators to helping me make it happen. But I felt like a simple "yes" to these projects was the least I could offer. What this "yes" means to me is listening, responding, acting in solidarity. "Yes" is a moment of attending to the possibility of solidarity. At the same time, I also recognize this as a colonial value and tendency, grounded in cultures of white supremacy and colonial logics of "progress." I continue to grapple with my own sense of urgency, my desire to make progress, to fix things. The dangers of my "yes." Is it even my place to contribute?

We started our work together by doing readings to establish some shared language and frameworks for our work, especially since the proj-

ect was begun in the context of a research internship for Isabella. As the research and discussion became focused on the cultural campout project, we began doing some additional reading to support this more specific goal of creating a program to engage local Muwekma Ohlone youth with tribal culture and history without knowing exactly how to begin or what that program should look like in the end.

Meeting each week, we built up our vision for the program gradually, with regular visits from tribal leadership to provide feedback and advice. The resulting summer program brought Muwekma Ohlone youth together on their ancestral homelands at SCU to engage in traditional cultural and land-based

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practices and to share and learn about one another's distinct experiences of Native identity. We believe that convening Ohlone youth on the lands of their ancestors is an opportunity to learn about, connect to, and activate the power of these land-based connections and develop critical literacies about the histories of colonialism that have disrupted them, allowing us to connect youth both to their ancestral homelands and the histories of survivance represented by the particular site of the mission.

Designed as a culturally sustaining program (Paris 2012), the goal of the camp is to empower Ohlone youth to activate tribal knowledges, experiences, and identities through a range of literacies and technologies. With our goal of bringing tribal members together to support and complement the tribe's efforts toward cultural revitalization and community building for a future of federal reaffirmation, activities we knew right away that we wanted in our program included lessons on tribal continuance and federal recognition, storytelling and personal reflection exercises, and material rhetorics work, such as the creation of abalone jewelry or clapper sticks. As Chelsey Murdock asserts, "We must come to understand the power in moving and speaking across, through, and among these material rhetorics and how they articulate continuance," and our camp programming seeks to engage youth in this understanding (16). Other possibilities for activities emerged as we talked over the months, such as the prospect of sharing with participants the online and augmented reality walking tours developed by tribal leadership that represent place-based tribal histories of the campus

space, or of conducting archival research into the mission sacramental registers that contain the names and provide a glimpse, however fraught, into the stories of thousands of ancestors. Starting from our base in public memory work, and being located on a university campus, we were excited about the prospect of utilizing these resources as part of the experience for youth.

But we have struggled to find the right balance between what might be understood as more traditional academic activities and more culturally specific practices from past campouts, while we have also struggled with the language we use to describe this balance so as not to reinforce the assumed Eurowestern binary between the two. In relation to archives, for instance, we are alert to the complexities for Native communities of working with archival materials and the explicit binaries that organize settler archives, as they do other US spaces (Garcia; L. King). We remain wary of the role of the university in this project and of Amy as an agent of the university as well, while also alert to the dangers of approaching culturally specific rhetorics as "meaningful only differentially," which is to say that we are wary of essentializing or inadvertently isolating Ohlone cultural practices away from "academic" literacies in our attempt to focus on and revive them among youth (Cushman et al., "Delinking" 17). Again, the concept of transrhetorical cultural rhetorics practices have provided us a way to begin to address and reconcile some of these complexities in our program design, focusing on change and the dynamics of contact and interaction as a strategy for healing (Jackson, "Red Flags" 79).

> *Isabella: As California Natives, we have been forced to be wary of interactions with higher institutions. And for good reason, too; our people have historically and presently been unprofessionally treated and harmed by higher institutions. At times, being Native feels like one is only gazed at as a walking history museum, expected to spew out filtered information that is tolerable for non-natives to hear. But in order to heal from history, acknowledging the historical wrongdoings as well as the tenacity and cultural legacy of a tribe, it is essential to heal from the wounds of generational trauma. This is the exact reason as to why it is so important that this project unfolds, because by paving a path to heal from historical wrongdoing, we also pave a path for youth enrichment and unity.*

In particular, it is our priority to center Ohlone *youth* both as learners and experts about their own experiences, creating space to share and reflect on their own terms. Adult chaperones and instructors are leaders from within the community, with only administrative and operational support from SCU faculty, staff, and students when necessary. But it is especially important to this aim to understand Ohlone cultural practices as dynamic, shifting, and ever-changing. Indeed, the focus on youth experiences is predicated on this insight, recognizing the ways young people both rehearse and revise traditional versions of ethnic and linguistic difference (McCarty et al. 2006), and recognizing that our pedagogies, in turn, "must be open to sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by contemporary young people" (Paris 95). Holding the camp on the SCU campus while centering Ohlone youth expertise and practices centers processes of change and use, creating a pluriversal space of cultural contact and dynamic meanings among participants as they engage their own tribal identities and values (Cushman et al., "Delinking").

> *Isabella: With this campout, our youth are able to learn our Muwekma Ohlone perspective about our history and culture and not in an objective American school curriculum manner. Since the start of the project, one of the values I have made sure to embed throughout our work is the assurance that our Muwekma Ohlone youth will feel safe, because as we intake an enrichment of knowledge about our intricate and complex culture, there needs to be a net of safety in order for these interactions to take place. Threading an assurance of safety in our project has included weaving in our tribal values into all the work we do—tribal values of having the best interest of our community in mind as well as reaching out to tribal leadership and making sure they feel comfortable with the work we do. Essentially, maintaining Muwekma Ohlone perspectives and values is the most impactful way to ensure a universal feeling of safety for our Muwekma Ohlone youth. Knowing that a safe space will be created for Muwekma Ohlone youth to learn in makes me enthusiastic the more I see our project unfold.*

The process of creating this space has not been without friction. The uncertainty about support has been a stress throughout this process, even as we are assured by university administration that the project aligns

perfectly with the institution's goals and will happen. Feedback we receive from administrators has been marked by resistance and skepticism as we struggle to find the language to articulate our values and experiences to various audiences. Colonial perspectives continue to hold sway in outside audiences and even within our own ways of naming things at times, and we have much to learn.

But we are hopeful. We trust Isabella's expertise and vision as a tribal youth able to both design the summer camp experience and to speak to her own experiences meaningfully and powerfully. We trust our own ability to learn and connect to one another in solidarity, however imperfectly. Cultural rhetorics has provided a methodology for naming and supporting this work.

Conclusions: Writing This Article and Understanding Our Cultural Rhetorics

> *Isabella: Writing for the camp allowed me to address the, at times flooding, amount of viewpoints I hold in regard to both the intricacy of my people and culture, as well as the raw aspects of our people's plight both in the past and present. Morphing both the educational aspect of writing and the cultural viewpoints from my tribe is what ultimately makes this project fulfilling to be actively involved in. The cultural rhetorics characteristics within our project doesn't neglect the different ways we are able to maintain culture for our youth, but instead highlight the importance of maintaining cultural legacy so that it never becomes dormant.*

Amy: When I mentioned the prospect of writing this article together, Isabella's response was: Who will be reading this? And will they learn about the tribe and our work for federal reaffirmation? This was a powerful reminder of the different stakes of this work for us each.[10]

Though the camp planning efforts led to a reasonably successful July 2023 pilot program, we still struggle with the complexities that have emerged through this process, which have been revealed particularly through our attempts to write about them here. We never wavered on the value of creating our camp and the value of our own relationship-building through doing so, but we definitely considered pulling this article halfway through the

process of writing, recognizing the ways we were struggling to translate our experiences and insights for this specific disciplinary audience and to put ourselves meaningfully in conversation with the cultural rhetorics scholars we knew we would speak alongside here.

The first drafts we tried to write sharing about this experience got some resistant feedback from colleagues and friends who seemed to confirm our hesitations. Resistance to Amy's role as a non-native person speaking out of turn was understandable, but we really struggled with what to do with feedback that seemed to misunderstand or deauthorize Isabella's knowledge and contributions, to suggest that she was going about her ways of knowing wrongly because she wasn't speaking the academic languages of (variously named or positioned) Indigenous studies professionals and hadn't yet come into contact with some of the theories circulating in academic versions of this conversation. Some of these languages and theories Isabella may come to embrace as she continues her journey of learning and reflection. Others, she may not. How do we make space for and honor where she is *now*? How do we learn from it and learn to listen to it on its own terms?

> We have found that trans-rhetorical cultural rhetorics, as a framework, helps us to answer this question, allowing us to approach Isabella's (and Amy's) experiences from a nonessentializing perspective that embraces her own processes of change and the ways her stories intersect with other stories.

We have found that transrhetorical cultural rhetorics, as a framework, helps us to answer this question, allowing us to approach Isabella's (and Amy's) experiences from a nonessentializing perspective that embraces her own processes of change and the ways her stories intersect with other stories. It entails beginning with our own experiences, bottom up, rather than with predefined expectations of Native or settler experience, top down, allowing us to "closely consider and account for the stories that individuals tell about themselves . . . in their own words, juxtaposing these with the stories that institutions put forward" (Gagnon 16). With the story-centering power available to us through cultural rhetorics, we can build relations across difference by recognizing that everyone has a story and we have to listen to one another to learn what we can't know on our own. And that begins with each of us knowing our own stories—which is the work our camp participants will engage in, as well as the work Isabella and Amy have engaged in here.

*Amy: What we have been navigating are the complex intersectional re-
alities of solidarity work. I see what Isabella is saying as already speak-
ing directly to questions and interests of the discipline, albeit in different
languages. Isabella is obviously not (yet) invested in the discipline of
rhetoric and composition, and her language reflects her own contexts of
meaning within her family and community. The trick for me is honor-
ing Isabella's knowledge and goals, while also translating the wisdom
generated there for disciplinary and institutional audiences. This is the
problem of speaking for others outlined by Linda Alcoff and others.*

We decided to move forward with writing and publication about this
experience in an attempt to do just that—to listen and learn better. The
goal of our camp, as much as of our sharing about it here, is not simply to
essentialize Isabella's knowledges as "Native" and therefore somehow more
true or pure than other knowledges or practices because she is "located
on the oppressed side of power relations," as cultural rhetorics has been
accused of, but instead to acknowledge the value of the specific and thus-
far understudied rhetorical practices of Muwekma Ohlone youth such as
herself, to consider how they take shape in contexts of collaboration such
as our own, and to see what might be learned from them as part of our
shared project of advocacy and justice-seeking. To this end, we kept writ-
ing in order to understand *both* of our processes of meaning-making and
community-building better. As a result, this article has transformed from
being about the camp we are developing to being about the challenges and
opportunities of trying to enter scholarly and administrative conversations
about Indigeneity, especially as an Indigenous youth and non-native ally.
Even with the well-intentioned guidance of other scholars, the process is
fraught at best, as is our discussion of it here. We share our own experiences
of this process in the spirit of vulnerability and learning. As a glimpse into
the work in progress that we are in the midst of. As a mess. But that mess
is a site of transrhetorical possibility in the ways it has changed us and
changed the rhetorical landscape of our campus as a site of collaboration
and community writing (see Jackson, "Decolonizing").

We believe the choices we have made in the camp do support many of
the culturally specific priorities of Isabella and her tribe; at the same time,
they have also been unavoidably altered (and also facilitated) through Amy's
participation, which has necessarily shaped the vision and process and

outcomes in ways profound and subtle. Our conversations, our collaborations, create community between us, changing us both. Through reflection and writing, we are trying to make the most of these changes for the future.

> *Isabella: Watching this project take course, the most interesting aspect has been seeing how my and Amy's ideas intersect. With our different perspectives as an Ohlone youth and a settler scholar, we knew that we were bound to have different approaches and ideas the more the project began to unfold. When we first met, Amy voiced that she didn't want to taint the Muwekma Ohlone perspective of our work by being too involved with the project. I, in turn, explained to her how I understood her and even agreed with this since there is a certain fragility with representing my people who have historically and presently been shunned. However, instead of being wary of the tensions that can arise with two people working together with different identities, we have been consistent in communicating our different ideas and approaches. Through this, we embrace tension instead of recoiling away from it.*

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The first paragraph of this intro is written by Isabella in consultation with her mother, Gloria E. Arellano Gomez. While some have critiqued land acknowledgments in academia as performative (Ambo and Beardall), this cultural practice remains meaningful for Isabella and the Muwekma Ohlone and is part of a broader practice of Ohlone recognition and revitalization engaged and described in what follows.

The remaining introduction and body text are largely authored by Amy, based on conversations with and feedback from Isabella and in consultation with the leadership of her tribe. Without wanting to speak for Isabella, or even for their collective vision of the camp and collaboration, it was labor considerations that most informed this approach, as Isabella and other tribal members are busy with other personal and tribal responsibilities in their lives. As an academic, Amy enjoys material support and rewards for academic writing that her collaborators do not.

Our goal in the structure of this piece is to provide a holistic sense of our argument to readers, while being clear and intentional about what aspects of this collaborative article are grounded in which of our experiences and perspectives, as that distinction is salient to our argument and approach to our cultural rhetorics practice.

2. Learn more about the tribe and their activities at http://muwekma.org.

3. Italicized sections indicate an individual author's perspective, narrated in first person. Isabella's perspectives are right-aligned, and Amy's are left-aligned.

4. Please learn more about this process and the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe's exceptional experience of bureaucratic neglect at http://www.muwekma.org/recognition-process.html and consider supporting their efforts by donating or signing the petition at http://muwekma.org.

5. The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe is a corporate entity organized under the leadership of a chairwoman and vice-chairwoman with an advisory tribal council consisting of five members, several of whom are also elders.

6. We do not actually take on the heading of decolonial for our own project, in recognition of the complexities of this claim and the work we have yet to do before our work approaches this threshold (Tuck and Yang). At the same time, we do embrace the agendas of decoloniality, including epistemic delinking from the colonial matrix of power and trans-ing pedagogies and practices (Cushman; see also Mignolo and Quijano). Our camp and our own work together both strive to move in the directions of more liberatory, anticolonial, social justice practices in this vein.

7. Using this definition of cultural rhetorics, we position our collaboration as a model for bridging the ostensive divide between cultural rhetorics and what has been termed *pluriversal rhetorics* because of the ways we center change and relations across difference in our cultural rhetorics practice. We are aware there is a much larger debate about decolonial and cultural rhetorics that we cannot do justice to here. Our intent is to position ourselves among a range of authors doing work to sustain and amplify Indigenous rhetorics, whether in relation to Indigenous rhetorics, cultural rhetorics, decolonial rhetorics, or elsewhere, and acknowledge that we can join many within self-identified "cultural rhetorics" conversations who also engage these problematics through their definitions and uses of that term (Cobos et al.; Hidalgo).

8. By trans-ing, we indicate change, not the specific conversations about trans* identity, which are also important.

9. Our definition of settler colonialism is derived from scholars like Aimee Carillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, who identify it as "The specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a land inhabited by (Indigenous) people and declare that

land to be their new home. Settler colonialism is about the pursuit of land, not just labor or resources. Settler colonialism is a persistent societal structure, not just an historical event or origin story for a nation-state. Settler colonialism has meant genocide of Indigenous peoples, the reconfiguring of Indigenous land into settler property. In the United States and other slave estates, it has also meant the theft of people from their homelands (in Africa) to become property of settlers to labor on stolen land" (4).

Following Courtney Rivard, we position this story, published in this journal, as "another key strategy . . . to use my privileged position to publish 'legitimate evidence'" necessary for Muwekma to make the case for federal reaffirmation, thus "mak[ing]way for other projects of imagining" for the tribe (Rivard 11).

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Isabella 'Amne Gomez

Isabella 'Amne Gomez is a member and youth ambassador of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area. Since childhood, she has represented her Tribal Nation in numerous ways: by reading land acknowledgments, volunteering at information and cultural exhibit booths, teaching cultural projects, and dancing at cultural events and powwows. She is also an intern at Santa Clara University, doing community-engaged writing, research, and cultural programming. She was recently selected to be in the first cohort of the Webb Scholars Program and is a graduate of the Green Foothills Leadership Program. She will attend Santa Clara University in the fall, majoring in philosophy.

Amy J. Lueck

Amy J. Lueck is associate professor of rhetoric and composition at Santa Clara University, where her research and teaching focus on histories of rhetorical instruction and practice, women's rhetorics, feminist historiography, and public memory. Her book, *A Shared History: Writing in the High School, College, and University, 1856–1886* (2020), brings together several of these research

threads, interrogating the ostensible high school–college divide and the role it has played in shaping writing instruction in the US. Her recent research builds on this work by attending to the conceptual boundaries and metaphors shaping history and remembrance at various sites, from universities and the tribal homelands on which they are built to historic attractions such as the Winchester Mystery House. Her work has previously appeared in journals such as *College English*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Composition Studies*, and *Kairos.*

V. Jo Hsu and Jennifer Nish

Crip Letters: Storying Slowness and Re/Writing Academic Work

Composed in a series of letters, this essay explores the interdependent knowledge and survival work of crip communities. The authors discuss their experiences of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME or ME/CFS) in a practice of Akemi Nishida's "bed activism," which challenges ableist demands for productivity from spaces of rest and care. Hsu and Nish ask what we lose—in intellectual and cultural growth and in actual lives—when academic spaces continue to devalue physical and cognitive difference. The resulting conversation considers illness as both an inevitability of lived experience and something exacerbated and ignored by academic spaces. It then explores how crip communities expand definitions of knowledge and knowledge-making—offering wisdom that is not only valuable for a more inclusive profession but also necessary for a world increasingly sickened by extractive economies.

January 10, 2023

Dear Reader,

  I tried writing this introduction in generalizations—in broad brush-strokes and theories about bodies and pain. But this is a story best told in specifics. Let me begin with a scene: In September 2022, Jennifer and I are seated on an outdoor patio in DC. We're in these adjustable lawn chairs, and I keep

accidentally reclining in mine, tipping backwards at random intervals. Earlier that day, we joined a few dozen people outside the White House, protesting for millions of other chronically ill folks who could not participate—who are similarly endangered and debilitated by the systemic neglect of ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis or ME/CFS), long COVID, and other complex chronic diseases.

That evening, we debrief with a few others. It is my first time in a physical space surrounded by folks with ME. There is unique freedom in the company of others who know, viscerally, what it means to live in a bodymind that works so differently from how common knowledge assumes it should. This evening is the first time that I experience chronic pain and exhaustion not as loneliness but as something that can be carried with company. It is the first time I say out loud exactly how much this disease has affected me—how frightened I've been in the moments I could not stand or speak, let alone form whole sentences.

I begin with this scene because I need you to sit here with us—in a small circle of wooden chairs, as the temperature falls with the evening sun. I need you to unclench the fist you've carried through a day of walking and yelling, of reporters and police barricades. I need you to breathe out the truths you swallow each day for fear of how others will hear them, how they will be honed and turned against you. Stay for a moment and envision research as slowing down, as salve. This is important. How much knowledge can we make at the pace of panic and precarity? How freely can we explore when we could lose our jobs, our homes, and any semblance of stability if we showed the ways we hurt or stumble?

This collaboration emerges from constellating[1] knowledge with other ME patients, mapping together our distinct experiences, other patient testimonies, and data from medical and pharmaceutical studies to chart a way toward collective survival. Jennifer and I both experience milder cases of ME, an illness that leaves 25 percent of patients housebound or bedbound (Pendergrast et al.). So what do we owe the many who do not have the privilege, resources, and sheer luck to access sites of "higher learning"? What do we lose—in human lives, in cultural and intellectual growth, and in meaningful relationships—when we exile those whose bodyminds refuse the rhythms of capitalist exploitation? This article asserts that storying illness into academic spaces can be transformative rhetoric, that the wisdom of crip community is worth building upon, and that our disciplines must

expand their definitions of knowledge and knowledge-making not only for a more inclusive profession but also to remain relevant in a world increasingly sickened by extractive economies.

We learned much about navigating our illness from what Akemi Nishida calls bed activism, meaning the "resistance and visioning as well as bedcentered critique of social oppressions emerging from people's bed spaces" (159). Patients' articles, blogs, databases, and other resource banks, conjured from beds and couches, provide urgent information and incisive critiques of the medical-industrial complex, which minimized and ignored the disease for half a century. With ME now appearing in roughly half the cases of long COVID,[2] many leading theories about ME pathology and treatment echo what patients have insisted for decades. In addition to advancing scientific inquiry, these patient testimonies make *present* experiences suppressed by ableism and its entanglements with race, gender, and class. Bed activism then offers a crucial tactic for cultural rhetorics, challenging knowledge suppression from spaces of rest and care.

We join others in cultural rhetorics who have turned a lens back on academic culture as a site in need of revision (Powell et al.; Riley-Mukavetz). Addressing academic ableism is particularly pressing right now, with US policymakers ignoring the lasting damage of COVID-19. We live in a world gravely unequipped for people with chronic illness, the rates of which continue to escalate. In fact, uncritical pressure for "productivity" undoubtedly hastened the demise of public health protections, exposing vulnerable workers to sickness and death. That uncritical pressure underlies the foundation of our profession—one that often quantifies our worth through CV lines, word counts, and grant totals. Faced with the "mass disabling event" of long COVID (Ducharme), we insist on the invaluable wisdom and leadership of communities who have already been charting accessible ways to share knowledge and resources. ME, which amplifies physical and mental stress on our bodyminds—through pain, fatigue, and physical and cognitive malaise—provides a particularly potent case study as a disease that ebbs and flows in relation.

To better capture how context and community shape inquiry, this article takes an epistolary form.[3] After returning from DC, Jennifer and I began to exchange letters, asking what it would look like to center people with ME and chronic illness—to write from this experience and for people who share it. In Jennifer's words, "What would happen if I just let go, and

brought my whole self to my job and my writing?" For me, this discussion provided unprecedented space where I could speak openly and unpack the factors—internalized and structural ableism, academic elitism, past trauma, and present vulnerabilities—that make it difficult to even name my fears and insecurities. Our exchange summons intimacies usually discouraged in hyper-individualistic academic spaces, permitting us to emphasize the relationality that drives cultural rhetorics (Hidalgo et al.; King; Powell et al.; Riley-Mukavetz).

We do not include our actual semester-long conversation for several reasons. Practically, the text would far exceed our word count. Additionally, this stance of refusal (Simpson; Tuck and Yang) shifts focus away from personal affliction and shame and toward the conditions that not only disempower chronically ill people but often exacerbate our illness. We emphasize the power of storying experience, but not at the expense of vulnerable people who should not be forced into disclosure. We also take inspiration from Sonia Arellano's "Quilting as Method," which extends understandings of research to the physical and intellectual labor that happens *off* the page. Beneath this article is the effort of getting one another through everyday ableism, of conspiring toward more inclusive disciplinary structures, and establishing care networks that literally keep us alive. While we could never capture all this relationship-making in words, we insist that it is not only justifiable work—it is vital knowledge.

What follows are the concluding letters[4] that Jennifer and I offer to each other and to you. First, we each reflect on our discussions this past fall and then we reply to one another, speculating about how this process has responded to the research questions with which we began: What do we need to change or break or abandon to make academic spaces actually work for the bodyminds that compose it? How do we center the *people*—with our ailments, our flaws and limitations—rather than the staid ideals of a profession? What can we learn from crip communities who have held and carried us through the abuse and neglect of formal institutions?

This article is more an invitation than a definitive answer. It is a process, like the life of chronic illness. Both of us have lived with ME for most of our adulthoods. We may never "get better," but we still must *live*. This is an article about the long road between/beyond *infection* and *cure*, written on the unstable ground of *sickness* where some of us spend entire lives. This is about the work that gets us through the messiness of everyday living, which

will never be perfect or complete, but is nevertheless the only way we survive.

Thank you for being here with us,
Jo

————————

December 29, 2022

Dear Jennifer,

The day after Christmas, I woke with the hangover that follows "over-doing it," in a dense fog of autonomic dysfunction. Through the haze, the one thing I was certain of was that I wanted to write to you. Amid everyone else's holiday festivities, I needed this document where I could be *not okay*.

I'm realizing that we made a space where I could seek refuge through writing. I want to ask what it means to inhabit a field *of writing studies* that often does not recognize, let alone make possible, spaces that shelter us from ableism. When Akemi Nishida asks, "How can I engage in disability studies that help us—disabled people—to live?" I think, *this is the work*. None of the CV lines matter, ultimately, if we are not fostering conditions of mutual thriving.

I did not slow down enough to even know I needed to slow down until we started this exchange. We are three years deep into a global pandemic where each trip in public might take us from "mild" to bed-bound. We both live in Texas, where the legislature has relentlessly terrorized trans youth, and school boards continue to ban books with content about racial injustice and LGBTQIA+ lives. I get emails from strangers demanding that I leave the state. Being openly disabled in this environment feels like an invitation to further harm.

But also, Texas is home to the third highest number of transgender people in the United States (Herman et al.). It is a majority-minority state and has the second largest number of disabled individuals in the country (Texas Workforce Investment Council). Researchers find that disabled Asian Americans are "underserved and receiv[e] lower quality support and rehabilitation than other [racialized minority] groups" (Hasnain et al.). Though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 26 percent of the general population has disabilities, an estimated 4 percent of faculty members have disabilities—and even fewer identify openly as disabled (Grigely). A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request at UC

Berkeley revealed that only 1.5 percent of the university's full-time faculty reported having disabilities (ucbdisabilityrights). Where is the line between self-protection and complicity?

We both work at "research-intensive" universities whose faculty demographics look unreflective of the student populations, which are themselves unrepresentative of the communities around our schools. Making race, gender, disability, queerness, etc., present on the page—placing those pages at the center of our field—is inherently political.

So this is the part I want to direct readers to—and that I'm underscoring for us: This collaboration was possible because of *who you are*, fully—with your lived experience of ME, with the care with which you reached out to me however many years ago, with the resources that pulled me out of my worst relapses. It was possible because I knew you would not judge me as weak or inept when I stumbled—that you would know there are few things stronger than a sick person's will to make the most out of this life. I trusted us to bolster one another—perhaps a rarity in a profession where we're trained to *criticize* and *deconstruct*.[5]

Perhaps a story will tell this better: On the 27th of December, the day after I read your last letter, the *Huffington Post* published a personal essay of mine about political scapegoating, I received a handful of predictably petulant emails.[6] The first one quoted my self-description ("Taiwanese American, transmasculine, 5'2"") and then told me: "you forgot cognitively impaired."

I laughed—first, because the statement was factually wrong. The essay begins with a description of ME's crash-induced brain fog. But I was also reminded of this benediction by Andrea Gibson:

> Choose to spend your whole life telling secrets you owe no one
> to everyone until there isn't anyone who can insult you
>
> by calling you what you are. (5)

I have spent so much of my career learning to hide my often meandering and disorderly thinking. Speaking/writing together openly about these struggles felt like freedom. By the time an internet troll chose "cognitive impairment" as an insult, I stopped hearing it as one. If what we call "research" does not make such wisdom possible, then what is it even for?

With gratitude,
Jo

———————

December 30, 2022

Dear Jo,

I was sitting in bed on December 26th, trying to gather the energy to get up, when I saw you had written a new letter in our shared document. I felt this sudden flicker of relief that made me realize how much I value the connection we've cultivated over these last few months.

I had a terrible crash during my family gathering on Christmas Eve and missed much of the day, but I hadn't processed my feelings about it yet. With several quilts keeping me warm—despite the subzero midwestern cold seeping in through the walls—I read your description of how you were feeling. I felt . . . safe, somehow, and also *seen*. Your words resonated so deeply with my own experience of the holidays: navigating risk, trying to pace myself, and processing the emotions that come up when I acknowledge that moments of joy often lead to negative consequences for my bodymind.

During the 2022 #MillionsMissing protest, I was so grateful to be surrounded by others who understood my fluctuating energy levels, cognitive functioning, and sensory sensitivities. I longed for that community year-round. Since then, you and I have developed a collaboration that is truly *vital*, both in the sense of being important and of supporting and sustaining life. Part of that radical vitality is being able to bring my whole self to this writing and knowing that I can trust you with it. Some people would call this vulnerability, and certainly vulnerability is an essential part of connecting deeply with others, but that framing seems incomplete to me. I'm not quite sure why.

These letters also created a very different affective space than what I typically associate with academia. I have been excited to write you: motivated in a way that I haven't felt in ages. I've loved reading and writing since I was a kid. I used to approach writing with curiosity, playfulness, and energy. I loved and deeply respected what words could do, which led me to pursue a PhD in rhetoric and composition. What I didn't realize until after graduate school, though, is that I'd have to learn to write in fits and starts, sometimes scraping writing time together by taking it out of evenings, weekends, and holidays. Even if the recovering workaholic in me might sometimes want to throw everything into work, I physically cannot do so. Without regular breaks, I will stop being able to function cognitively and/or physically. This need is often discordant with institutional timelines.

One of the radical things about crip community is that it helps us break down illusions of control—because control, if we have it at all, will only ever be temporary—to work out what we need and how to access it together.

As I review the questions we asked at the outset of this project, some of them seem to be about how letting go could make academia more livable and accessible. This involves relinquishing *control,* both individually and collectively. Academics are trained in control. Mel Chen writes that academic institutions are "adept at producing what I would call disciplined cognators." I love the phrase "disciplined cognators"; it resonates so richly with the ways that academic work *requires* disciplined bodyminds, which becomes a problem when our bodyminds refuse that control.

One of the radical things about crip community is that it helps us break down illusions of control—because control, if we have it at all, will only ever be temporary—to work out what we need and how to access it together. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, "real access, crip-made access, is the rich and flexible and subtle dynamics of noticing each other, working shit out, trying things, moaning and groaning, laughing and stopping, and negotiating we find as disabled people in disabled-on-disabled friendships" (73–74). I think that's what we're doing here: cultivating access and community that makes our lives inside and outside academia more livable. It's hard to find the time and space for that kind of work because it's not about the institution, it's about *us.*

Sometimes my mid-crash narrative to myself is: "You should have known this would happen. Why didn't you plan better?" Reading your letter helped me be gentler with myself. It helped me expand my frame of reference beyond my inner perfectionist (who is often enabled by academic standards and practices) to see that this wasn't an individual failure. My social media feeds up to and on Christmas were full of folks seeking support as they navigated inaccessible holiday gatherings, ableist relatives, and the stress of living in a body that doesn't produce enough energy. Special occasions, which involve a lot of concentrated activity, are antithetical to managing ME, for which the primary expert-backed advice is pacing one's physical, emotional, and cognitive activity.

The idea of "emotion work" kept coming up as I reflected on my Christmas Eve crash; one of the most difficult things about crashes is the imperative to perform the right emotion. The complicated calculations

people with ME perform around energy expenditure highlight the extent to which nearly everything we do—teaching, engaging with colleagues, socializing—involves constantly laboring to emote in a way that satisfies expectations and how much energy this actually requires. In the space we've created through these letters, I don't feel like I have to mask. The message my nervous system gets is "it's okay to be how you are," and writing this letter to you has made me realize how rare that feeling is.

What I'm left wondering, then, is: To what extent can we carry this space forward, or apply lessons we've learned here in other contexts?

Take care,
Jennifer

————————

<div align="right">**January 6, 2023**</div>

Dear Jennifer,

Re: lessons. This conversation has taught me to look directly at the falterings of my bodymind, rather than evade and deny. It has enabled me to see other memories in new light. An example: I published "late"[7] in my PhD, having assumed that I would never land a tenure-track job. I took myself about as seriously as the graduate school peers who informed me that I got a job because my research areas—or, more blatantly, "diversity"—was trendy. I'm less interested in what compels an individual person to say that to someone else than what sorts of learning and disciplinary conditions—what manufactured scarcity—encourage interpersonal resentment rather than mutual uplift.

I hear in that condescension the values that motivated a stranger to call me "cognitively impaired." His logic presumed that trans, queer, and racialized bodies are inherently cognitively deficient—a belief that has been and continues to be codified in psychiatric practices. Similarly, my classmates reflected disciplinary structures that regard studies of race, gender, disability, and sexuality—and their experience-based methods—as innately unintellectual.

Let me put this differently. When I'm ashamed of my own wayward cognition, I'm reminded of the white, cishet male professor who offhandedly told women and BIPOC students that they "didn't think." I'm reminded of the racist and eugenicist origins of IQ tests and standardized testing

more broadly. I'm reminded that there are large followings devoted to the presumed genius of Elon Musk and Donald Trump, and that almost all the Nobel laureates in science—over 120+ years—have been cisgender white men. As a child, I was taught that queerness was a mental defect, an accusation still pervasive in anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. I know that the metrics through which we measure intellect are cudgels of white supremacy and not standards I'd ever want to meet. I know these things because of spaces like this, which illuminate how we define and demean cognitive and physical difference. As you point out, arriving at this knowledge requires more than vulnerability, which to me just signals exposure to the possibility of harm. It requires the co-construction of safety—of mutual protection.

> **I also don't want to romanticize this disease. Cognitive dysfunction can be *both* a construct weaponized against marginalized people *and* a devastating physical affliction. It can be both a colonial fabrication and the terrifying experience of getting lost on the way home.**

I also don't want to romanticize this disease. Cognitive dysfunction can be *both* a construct weaponized against marginalized people *and* a devastating physical affliction. It can be both a colonial fabrication and the terrifying experience of getting lost on the way home. That's the thing about chronic illness: We must dismantle disabling fictions while addressing the physical disablement of our bodyminds. Here's where ME's particular nature is insightful. This disease absorbs physical and psychological stress and amplifies it in our nervous systems and immune responses. It transmutes social disability into bodily and cognitive dysfunction.

While ME is rooted in viral triggers and physiological abnormalities, it is intensified by the structured abuse of Black, Brown, and femme bodyminds. It is overwhelmingly more common among cisgender women than men and more pervasive, but underdiagnosed and untreated, among people of color (Bhui et al.; Jason, Katz, et al.; Jason, Richman, et al.). As COVID has made starkly apparent, already-vulnerable people are more often forced into viral exposures and, once sick, less likely to receive competent care. Racialized and gendered stereotypes also mark certain people as intellectually inferior or morally suspect, regardless of ability (Bruce; Clare; Stern). From this perspective, "cognitive impairment" is a concept laden with gendered and racial violence enacted in the name of science and Rationality.[8]

More simply, the ways we understand cognitive "deficits" cannot be separated from oppressive intellectual genealogies. These frameworks

denigrate many abled people *and* those who actually live with cognitive dysfunction. The intellectual hierarchies we take for granted are unusable. What would it look like to *let all this go*? To embrace the vast range of cognitive diversity not in search of superiority, but in search of stronger connections and mutual healing?

When we began, you asked how you could "find value in the ways my bodymind works now?" What if a lesson here is that *we should not have to prove our value*? Regardless of the fluctuations of our bodyminds, regardless of remission and relapse, we were always already worthy of respect, agency, and the opportunity to make our voices heard. You and I, we both played the game well enough for a long stretch of our lives to ignore too many of its injustices—until our bodyminds insisted otherwise. What if this is an invitation for refusal?

I'll close with an anecdote: Like many people socialized into femininity, and perhaps especially with Western expectations of Asian femininity, I was taught to be compliant. I entered every space with an apology in my chest, as if my existence were an imposition. The thing about chronic pain, though—about debilitating fatigue, and about experiencing your own body as torture—you run out of fucks to give. It was only after I became sick that I became (slowly) better about holding my boundaries and making space for my emotions. After too many years of being sick, I finally recognized that the ways I subordinate my needs and (dis)comfort can be passive endorsements of a system that will impose those expectations on others. Sick Jo had to learn to protect what Healthy Jo would not.

Whether or not the Academy™ will value us for who we are, we are here. With such extreme limits on my energy, I want to spend none of it placating expectations meant to deny my humanity. Not only are we already here, but you and I and disabled communities have already been making ways for one another in these economies of abandonment (Povinelli). Crip visionaries have known, through their bodyminds and lived experiences, what medicine took decades to "discover." Imagine what we could do if we no longer had to prove our value to those who refuse to see it.

With care,

Jo

_____

January 7, 2023

Dear Jo,

This is the third time I've started writing this letter to you. Yesterday, I was sitting here trying to write and my brain was sluggish. I had to cram a lot of work into a short period last week, which led to a crash that affected my cognitive function. During a mild crash, it's hard to process abstract concepts or the "whole" of a text. During a more severe crash, I have to "translate" sentences or paragraphs into simpler language so I can process them.

In a way, a crash is my body's way of *refusing* the demands of capitalism and academia. Since my ME diagnosis, I realized I'm so accustomed to suppressing my body's messages that it requires conscious effort to notice and respond to my physical needs, such as hunger, thirst, or needing rest. Many things can affect interoception, such as trauma, systemic oppressions, and ADHD. Living with undiagnosed ME has also contributed to my history of overriding my body's messages.

Last year, I requested my medical records from the family doctor I saw for many years. I remember the onset of some of my cognitive symptoms, but I've been inexplicably fatigued for so long I couldn't remember when it started. 2005 was the answer I found in those records, just after my second time getting mono (which likely triggered my ME). My ME diagnosis came in 2020. For fifteen years, I had no explanation for how much my body struggled to keep up. So I learned to ignore it.

> When I applied to grad school, I'd spent a few undergraduate semesters in and out of rehab. I had some poor grades to explain away in my personal statement, which I did with a vague reference to "health issues."

I get these little earworms, where a snippet of song will pop into my head, inserting itself into my thoughts. It's often oldish pop—either a song I heard a lot as a kid or a teenager or replayed too much as an adult. In the first verse of Sia's "Chandelier," she sings, "I push it down, I push it down," and that often pops into my head when I'm thinking about interoception. Fifteen years of pushing it down.

When I applied to grad school, I'd spent a few undergraduate semesters in and out of rehab. I had some poor grades to explain away in my personal statement, which I did with a vague reference to "health issues." In every semester of grad school, I'd start out strong and then fall behind and call in sick to help myself recover and catch up. Each time, I felt like a failure. Internally, my narrative was that I was performing "responsible adult"

and needed to keep "passing" because everything—my classes, my job as an instructor, etc.—was precariously balanced. Retrospectively, I realize that these weren't failures but examples of #WhyDisabledPeopleDropOut (Wong 102–04).

I shed some anxiety as I moved into a faculty position, but I started hiding a new set of things. The extra work and stress exacerbated cognitive symptoms that had, up until then, been mostly subtle. I had no problem following three-hour-long seminar conversations as a graduate student, but by spring of 2017, I struggled to follow even a single speaker in the seminar I taught. I muddled through as my impostor syndrome flourished. Looking back, if I could change only one thing about that time, it would be my lack of connection to disabled wisdom.

It's collective work to create the conditions in which people feel comfortable letting go, being who they are. We are not all equally vulnerable to harm in academic settings.

I've been reflecting on those lines from Andrea Gibson. I was deeply moved by these words of yours: "By the time an internet troll chose 'cognitive impairment' as an insult, I stopped hearing it as one. If what we call 'research' does not make such wisdom possible, then what is it even for?" I got chills when I read those words, and again when I retyped them here. Those chills radiated outward from the base of my skull to let my whole body know that *this* is what I want to work for: this kind of wisdom and liberation.

It can be a political act to be fully who you are, in public, for others to see. Of course, we don't all have the option to hide. My privilege—my identity as a white, middle class, cis woman—and the invisibility of my disabilities have allowed me to choose what and when to reveal to others. I wonder if my admiration for academics and public figures who write and speak openly about intimate things is, in part, a desire that I haven't fully recognized before now.

You're right that it's collective work to create the conditions in which people feel comfortable letting go, being who they are. We are not all equally vulnerable to harm in academic settings. Not only does academia have a long history of racist, sexist, classist, and ableist exclusions, the knowledges produced in US universities have undergirded and legitimized the violences of racism, capitalism, settler colonialism, and US imperialism (Chatterjee and Maira, 6–7). It's not just about who isn't here in a roomful of academics, but about how academic knowledge and practice have engineered and

justified those exclusions. Inclusion is often framed as something that will diminish rigor. (As a matter of fact, that's exactly how some attacks on DEI in universities are currently being framed.) The risk of letting go, I suppose, is knowing that we still work among people who would defend those oppressive knowledges and practices.

A couple of years ago, a colleague told me she appreciated me talking openly about my health. My response was, "I'm not particularly courageous, I'm just out of patience." Sometimes I can feel my body soften when I let something out instead of holding it in. But accepting the risk of disclosure as an individual is not enough; we need to build spaces and communities that prioritize care and collective safety.

Building an environment in which letting go feels more possible is a form of access. Mia Mingus calls this "access intimacy"; she writes that "access for the sake of access is not necessarily liberatory, but access for the sake of connection, justice, community, love and liberation is." Elsewhere, Sandy Ho, Mingus, and Alice Wong argue that "access is love." This process of writing to and with you has been deeply healing. To be honest, I could take or leave my tenure-track job, but I do not want to live a life without the interdependence, kinship, and knowledge of crip community. So, if I'm going to stay in academia, I want to direct my limited time and energy toward crip love.

With (crip) love,
Jennifer

—————————

January 14, 2023

Dear Reader,

As I sat down to write to you today, I picked up my copy of *The Cancer Journals,* a book I last read in my early twenties, long before I knew I was sick. When I first read this book, I was certainly moved by it, but I was also not nearly so close to the feelings and experiences Audre Lorde describes. Of course, in some ways I am also far from them. But when she writes that "imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness," she helps me understand the political and epistemological value of this project, in which Jo and I have shared things—some with just each other, and some with you—that we hadn't given voice or thought to before (9). This value is not just in what you see here on the page, though

there is certainly value there, but in the way we have allowed ourselves to listen to, acknowledge, reflect on, and voice our needs and our dreams.

I did not sit down and read the book cover to cover, nor have I done that with any of the sources I quote in this letter. I have flitted in and out of the words of different writers, moving from page to screen and back again, pausing to think, pausing to *feel*. This has been a deeply emotional project for me, bringing up feelings of loneliness, desire, grief, fear, validation, and, perhaps most importantly, love. I have often sat here writing with tears in my eyes. I think those tears have come from feeling that this project was healing, that it drew together so many connections between experiences, knowledge, political commitments, and scholarly conversations in a way that felt liberating. As Lorde writes, "We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us" (23). As adults who have lived with ME for years, Jo and I have learned to do a lot of things while we are tired. And while not all of you know the same debilitating ME fatigue that we do, I suspect that you, too, have learned to push through.

> **This has been a deeply emotional project for me, bringing up feelings of loneliness, desire, grief, fear, validation, and, perhaps most importantly, love. I have often sat here writing with tears in my eyes. I think those tears have come from feeling that this project was healing.**

Shayda Kafai writes that "revolutions begin with rest, with time to think, feel, and create our way into dreaming new realities" (165). In US culture, we[9] often think of rest as, at worst, "lazy" (which really just means "not subsumed by the machinery of white cisheteropatriarchal capitalism") and, at best, as "passive." Kafai, drawing on Tricia Hersey's work,[10] argues that rest is not passive. Rest is where we pause, reflect, imagine, and dream. These activities have radical, political, transformative potential, especially for those oppressed by white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, cissexism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. For me, living with ME has highlighted two things connected to this. First, many people don't know how to rest; we associate rest solely with physical inactivity and do not know how to (or do not want to) rest our minds.[11] Second, white supremacy and capitalism have pushed many of us to be deeply judgmental of rest. I cannot tell you

how many times I have winced when someone says "I was so lazy on Saturday" to refer to the fact that they rested. I, too, still say this on occasion and immediately regret having allowed myself to attach guilt and shame to a practice that I need to survive.

The irony of this problem is that many people avoid rest as a way of occupying our minds so we don't have to deal with pain, pain that is often rooted in or amplified by systems of oppression. We are not avoiding rest because we want to support the systems that harm us. Overwork can be a trauma response. Academia, and US culture more broadly, will always have more fuel for the workaholic avoidance that some of us find refuge in. Therefore, it is a political imperative that we collectively learn how to slow down, rest, reflect, and dream better worlds into being.

JD Davids, a longtime health justice activist, uses the word "illders" to refer to "wise elders of any age who turn the demands of living with chronic conditions into opportunities for self-knowledge, growth and connection" ("An Interview"). Jo and I have learned a great deal from our ME illders. Without illder wisdom, I would not be here writing to you today, having pulled myself back from my lowest level of functionality through extensive research into symptom management and treatments, some of which I've accessed through collaboration with my doctor, but none of which came from her first. Instead, they came from other people with ME, and now some with long COVID, who have been building community, sharing information (published research, specialists' advice, personal experience), and supporting one another.

Academics live and work in environments of manufactured scarcity and competition. What we need to create instead is interdependence. As Mia Mingus writes, interdependence "flourishes in abundance, appreciating and honoring difference, collective care and collective access." She reminds us, "We need you. We need all of us. . . . We need each other. We need each other. *We need each other*" (Mingus, "You Are Not Entitled"). I want to end, then, by inviting you, dear reader, to understand that survival and a different world are both possible, but not alone. How can you use your time in academia to foster interdependence? To make space for rest? What kind of wisdom, love, and liberatory dreaming will come out of that work? Will you share it with us?

Love,
Jennifer

Notes

1. See Powell et al. and Hsu, *Constellating Home*, p. 10.

2. Due to shifting diagnostic criteria, inaccessible medical care, and limited provider knowledge, actual numbers for ME and long COVID cases are rough estimations. See Bonilla et al. and Jason and Dorri.

3. For more on epistolary scholarship, see: Calafell; Hawkins; Hsu, "Toward QTPOC Community"; Ono.

4. Abridged for word count.

5. Not to say that this isn't important work, but that it is not the *only* work. As Powell et al. remind us, cultural rhetorics is about *options*.

6. Along with an onrush of support from ME/CFS patients—I loved that they showed up here.

7. By particular chronologies, anyway.

8. Capitalized to echo La Marr Jurelle Bruce's definition of Reason as "positivist, secularist, Enlightenment-rooted episteme purported to uphold objective 'truth' while mapping and mastering the world" (Bruce 4).

9. I realize that it is a fraught move to lump all of us, with our very different positionalities, histories, and embodied experiences, into a collective "we." Please know, dear reader, that I do not mean to erase the beauty and wisdom of you, in all of your complexity and specificity, by writing you into a "we." Instead, I want to invite you to think and work and rest and dream and converse with me because changing the world requires us to work together.

10. See, for example, @TheNapMinistry (on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) and *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*.

11. For some illder wisdom on this topic, see Miller, "What Does It Mean to Really, Truly Rest?"

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Ada Hubrig

Beyond (Favor) Access: Constellating Communities through Collective Access

Drawing on disability studies analysis of institutional narratives of disability by composition and rhetoric scholars, this article theorizes "favor access." Favor access gestures toward inclusion, but is steeped in the capitalist, colonialist logic of academic institutions in service of ultimately extractive, dehumanizing agendas. Instead of favor access, the article points to collective access as articulated by disability justice activists. As opposed to favor access, collective access rejects institutional logics and values community and collaboration rather than academia's emphasis on individualism and competition. This article considers sites where collective access is happening in composition classrooms and in the field of composition and rhetoric.

> *We believe access should be a collective responsibility*
> *instead of a sole responsibility placed on a few individuals.*
> **—Mia Mingus, Alice Wong, and Sandy Ho** *(Access Is Love)*

Leaning onto my cane, I hobble into the room for an interview portion of my campus visit. The senior faculty member conducting that portion of the interview stares at me. "Oh? A Cripple?" he says, literally raising his damn eyebrows, "Good for you!"

I smile meekly and try to put it out of my mind. But as the conversation progresses, and he asks about my research, I tell him of my community-building work with autistic/Mad/neurodivergent writers.

Eyebrows raised again, he interrupts: "But people with autism don't go to college," he says, before launching into an anecdote about a distant relative.

I grimace at his comment. "Excuse me," I interject, mid-sentence, "I am an autistic person. Despite the barriers, some of us go to college."

He audibly scoffs, continuing his dehumanizing rant.

As I write this article, I'm reminded of many related experiences, both my own and those other marginalized scholars have confided in me. And I emphasize that I choose to disclose *microaggressions,* here, because macroaggressions—more plainly abuses—are even less safe to disclose, as we often face stigma, bias, or retaliation (Kerschbaum et al.; Price et al.; Samuels). As I recount my own experiences and those shared with me, I keep circling back to a thought: Is the access work I do within higher education, in effect, sticking a ramp onto a burning building? I worry these slipshod attempts toward inclusion are only bringing marginalized people into violent systems.

And yet disabled people are expected to be grateful for broken access, for missing access, or no access at all, because an institution *tried*. In this article I move to define *favor access*, that is, access work framed through neoliberal academic milquetoast diversity efforts, provisional access that is meant to placate marginalized people while allowing inaccessible institutions to parade as benevolent and dodge responsibility for the institutional harms they perpetuate. Favor access is never going to address the root causes of ableism and the many interwoven forms of oppression in higher education—and beyond—because it is steeped in the same cultural assumptions that create these oppressions in the first place. I theorize—and interrogate—the institutional practice of favor access by writing alongside other scholars thinking through issues of access in composition and rhetoric in the first section of this article.

It's devastatingly clear that academia is wildly inaccessible as we witness our multiply marginalized colleagues perpetually pushed out of the pretentious halls of academe. Or met with constant hostility from academia's many raised-eyebrow institutional arbiters. Or never allowed in academic spaces to begin with. As Maier et al. have argued, writing about the overlap

of trans and disabled access and its connections to other marginalized people in academia:

> You and we do not take our access to institutional resources for granted; we are all familiar with what it's like when we are barred from some of those resources. Part of our work, therefore, consists of self-creating access.

While access work is necessary triage (with all the problems triage implies), I see most access work as treating the *symptoms*, not the *causes*, of ableism. In writing *beyond* favor access, I hope we can make institutions more accessible (and less ableist) by addressing root causes of ableism. To this end, I write alongside disability justice organizers, activists, and cultural workers who offer us the framework of *collective access*—in short, sharing responsibility for our access needs as a community (Sins Invalid 26)—in the second half of this article.

"Favor Access" and the Diversity Stories Academia Likes to Tell

Questions of access—who is granted access and who is denied it, whose systems are tailored to fit comfortably and who must contort ourselves to fit through them—tell us a great deal about institutional values. As Christina V. Cedillo and I have argued, "Access isn't neutral, and politics of access are fraught with oppressive power dynamics that reflect the political agendas of the institutions that offer access to some and deny it to others" (Hubrig and Cedillo 2). Disabled people often find our positionality within academic institutions to be tense and tenuous, in part because our existence in academic spaces is often at odds with the values of academia itself. The stories academia likes to tell about us, about disability and access, elucidate the values of higher education. In our own stories, the limits of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) models of disability as neoliberal diversity inclusion are rendered more clearly as what I call *favor access*, described in more detail throughout this section.

But I begin by turning my attention back to the yarns academia likes to spin about disabled folks, an iteration of academia's tendency to tell on itself. Disability scholars in composition and rhetoric have traced institutional narratives of access and inaccess, demonstrating how our classrooms, campuses, and the field of composition and rhetoric orient toward disabilities. I write alongside these scholars who have labored to parse these nuances of access in academia.

The stories academia likes to tell about us disabled folks often have more to do with institutional agendas than reality. Consider how Dolmage establishes the conflicting academic narratives around students and access, which are deployed as an institutional smokescreen. These narratives create something of a Schrödinger's disabled student, narrativizing our existence to suit university whims: we're cast as lazy, greedy system-milkers when providing us access presents any inconvenience (101–03); as supercrip, fast-capitalist mascots in service of bootstrap-meritocracy-mythos (103–07); or, when our disabilities seem less compatible with neoliberal fast-capitalist agendas, we can be narrativized as beyond help and too slow, too needy, and too much to be bothered with, seen as a drain on institutional resources (107–13). Institutions are quick to supply whatever narrative of disability will best fit their current agendas (Dolmage), while ignoring the actual, material realities of disabled people.

> **I refer to this provisional institutional orientation . . . as *favor access*, an extractive process by which access is offered to a marginalized person (including disabled people, but including other marginalized people as well), making the institution *appear* benevolent, though this access is ultimately granted *primarily to support institutional agendas*.**

I stress that these narratives are deployed strategically to support systems of inequality. As Allison Hitt has argued, disability narratives are taken up for institutional purposes within writing studies, where approaches to disability often "recognize structural issues but are marked by neoliberal values of efficiency and individualism, treating disability as an individual issue that must be individually solved, and failing to acknowledge inaccessible infrastructures" (36). This focus on neoliberal values of individualism is central to Hitt's argument, building on disability scholarship, that disabled people are expected to *overcome* disability to *earn* access to academic spaces. The ways in which educators *talk* about disabled students both shape and are shaped by institutional orientations toward disabilities.

As these disability scholars demonstrate through their critiques of institutional deployment of disability narratives, even *when and if* disabled people are granted access, disabled bodyminds are only granted *provisional* access inside academia. I refer to this provisional institutional orientation toward the people these institutions marginalize as *favor access*, an extractive process by which access is offered to a marginalized person (including

disabled people, but including other marginalized people as well), making the institution *appear* benevolent, though this access is ultimately granted *primarily to support institutional agendas*. Institutions frame favor access as a gift granted by an institution. The expectation is that acts of favor access will be seen as benevolence and marginalized people should respond graciously. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha describes this as "the model of charity and gratitude," that "connote[s] moral superiority of the giver over the receiver" (41). Favor access, importantly, reinforces the ideology of institutions rather than holding them accountable, following models of "consumptive access," which merely "allow[s] people to enter a space or a text" (Brewer et al. 153–54), rather than "transformative access," which would challenge the institutional logics that made a space inaccessible in the first place.

Favor access expects gratitude: that we should be thankful for partial access (or even inaccess) because the self-described benevolent institution *tried.* I write alongside sarah madoka currie, who argues that universities and colleges often prioritize the need to "appear accommodating" as a marketing tool (*Mad Manifesto* 17), which causes university access initiatives to prioritize access measures that are easier to quantify—often ignoring mental disability and other less apparent sites of access. Academic institutions need to be seen as an unwavering public good—partly to be able to rip us off and work for less than we're worth. Favor access is a manifestation of neoliberal diversity efforts that ultimately function as institutional public relations campaigns to sidestep change.

Though I articulate favor access from my own embodied experiences as a white, multiply disabled, neurodivergent, queer, nonbinary person, I understand that favor access isn't *just* born from a process of individualizing disability narratives for institutional-colonialist-capitalist ends, but operates in other neoliberal diversity initiatives, too, including those targeting race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexuality, and a range of other embodied experiences. In narrative accounts of academia from other marginalized and multiply marginalized folks, I hear favor access echoed back. As Ersula Ore, Kimberly Wieser, and Christina Cedillo argue:

> Because so few of us are granted even this version of supposed access, institutions can use the discourse of meritocracy to explain away the lack of BIPOC presence on campuses, in scholarly organizations, and in our disciplinary journals. The narrative is that only the "chosen few" are truly worthy of academic

inclusion. Yet counter-narratives prove just the opposite. Research reveals that white men are more likely to receive institutional support, allowing them to focus on career advancement. In contrast, BIPOC and many white women are forced to prove their worthiness constantly, forcing everyone who is not a white cis man to compete for what little space is designated for diversity. ("Diversity Is Not Enough" 208–09)

I witness, in this pushback against superficial diversity performances by institutions, interrogation of sanctioned institutional narratives, and offering of counternarratives, more resistance to favor access and its

Favor access, building on disability scholars' observations about institutional orientations toward disabilities, reinforces neoliberal logics of independence and the mythology of meritocracy.

limitations. Favor access, like many neoliberal diversity efforts, centers the logics and needs of *the institution* rather than the people seeking access. This is a feature of "diversity management," a neoliberal, capitalist, colonial understanding of diversity as "a way to manage and assimilate difference into existing systems, rather than to engage

it as a disruptive, dynamic, relational process" (Hubrig et al. 281; see also Ahmed; Ore et al., "Symposium" and "Diversity"). Rather than questioning the systematic inequalities that led to homogenous institutional spaces, favor access mirrors diversity measures in being a strategic deployment that sidesteps more meaningful accountability. This is what Dolmage has described as "abeyance structures," "perhaps allowing for access, but disallowing the possibility of action for change" (77). These moves allow institutions to gesture toward access without questioning how academic institutional values create inaccess to begin with.

The bottom line (and let's not play into the mythos of institutional benevolence: the bottom line is the focus of the education-as-commodity markets that sign our paychecks) is that disabled people and other marginalized people are expected to perform *as well as if not better than* our nondisabled or nonmarginalized peers to have earned that access by institutional logics, and this logic is inherently extractive in that it pushes marginalized people to do extra labor. Favor access, building on disability scholars' observations about institutional orientations toward disabilities, reinforces neoliberal logics of independence and the mythology of meritocracy. It is attractive to our institutions because it allows for the most shallow engagement with DEI "disability as diversity" measures (a viewpoint encapsulated by, as my

interviewer put it, *"A Cripple? Good for you"* mentality), while leaving universities' ableist, colonialist agendas intact.

Favor access gets institutions off the hook: if disability is a *personal shortcoming*, then institutions don't have to change their approach (Cedillo; Dolmage; Hitt). Favor access creates a feedback loop in which disability (and diversity more generally) is a "problem" that is "solved" because the institution says it is. Favor access reinforces academia's favorite story about itself: that academia is itself benevolent, well-meaning, and special—an extension of white colonizer mythology. In treating access as a favor, favor access is a manifestation of neoliberal values of individuality, self-sufficiency, and academia's devotion to the myth of meritocracy. In short, favor access, like much neoliberal diversity work, treats access as *charity*, a system that is inherently unequal, allowing institutions to discern who is worthy—and who isn't—of their assumed benevolence.

Beyond Favor Access: Constellating Community

If favor access is born from institutional values and agendas steeped in and in service to white supremacist colonialism, capitalism, and cisheteropatriarchy, what might more equitable, more radical access look like? I return, often, to Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau's call for "creating a culture of access," where they charged our field nearly a year ago to do better: "Our field too often remains attached to a vision of access that has more in common with helping the Other consume inaccessible texts than it does with radical transformation of the profession" (153). How does one create such a culture of access?

The problem with my question, of course, is that *one* doesn't do this (as Brewer et al. also establish throughout their writing). I realized that in my early thinking about access and attempts to create access in my own classroom and contexts, I was still caught within favor access and operating under institutional assumptions and the white, colonialist, capitalist "charity" framings favor access is rooted in. We only create a culture of access *in community*.

In thinking through what it means to create a culture of access, I write alongside a community of disability justice organizers, activists, and advocates and their vision for *collective access*. Before I describe these concepts as articulated by those engaged in the work of disability justice, I pause to honor the intellectual labor and currently unfolding history of

disability justice, which does not belong to academic institutions (Kafai; Piepzna-Samarsinha; Sins Invalid). Disability justice is a framework created by disabled BIPOC and disabled queer and trans people and continues to be led by disabled BIPOC and disabled queer and trans people toward a goal of collective liberation, "mov[ing] together as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the sexual spectrum, with a vision that leaves no bodymind behind" (Sins Invalid 26). Disability justice notes that

> Able-bodied supremacy has been formed in relation to other systems of domination and exploitation. The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, created in the context of colonial conquest and capitalist domination. One cannot look at the history of US slavery, the stealing of indigenous lands, and US imperialism without seeing the way that white supremacy uses ableism to create a lesser/"other" group of people that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable. A single issue civil rights framework is not enough to explain the full extent of ableism and how it operates in society. (Sins Invalid 18)

In writing alongside disability justice activists, I don't mean to water down these concepts, but to hold myself and other academics accountable to our communities (Hubrig, "Liberation") and note that disability justice makes abundantly clear that we cannot work to challenge ableism without addressing other forms of oppression.

While institutional iterations of favor access are rooted in individuality and independence in the name of meritocracy, disability justice seeks to center collective access, where we "share responsibility for our access needs" and "can balance autonomy while being in community" (Sins Invalid 26). As disabled oracle Alice Wong reminds us, "We all have the capacity to create access for one another. And while things still feel bleak, I have hope for the future, because we all have the potential to learn and grow if we close the distance together" (306). Collective access understands that we can't rely on our institutions to provide access when it's their very values that create inaccess and inequities. While favor access is rooted in academia's capitalist, colonialist values of independence, competition, and meritocracy, collective access centers interdependence, collaboration, and care.

Because disability justice's vision of collective access insists on seeing us as our whole selves, it means collective access sees access *holistically*. Sins

Invalid states as an organizing principle of disability justice, "All bodies are confined by ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state, religion, and more, and we cannot separate them" (19). Relatedly, collective access understands that we cannot work toward access while leaving parts of ourselves behind. We cannot work toward collective access while ignoring academia's abuses of people of color, of marginalized genders, of queer and trans folks, of Mad and neurodiverse people, of noncitizens, of undocumented folks, of the exploitation of teaching assistants and adjunct faculty, the underfunding of two-year colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges, and so many other sites of institutional marginalization, exclusion, and harm. Collective access must work to rectify the systems that push many out entirely, as well as those who were never allowed to grace its halls to begin with. Collective access means access for all, responsibility of all, and accountability to all. There is no saviorism, no institutional charity in collective access. There is community, and this work can *only happen* in community, happening in conversation with one another, in *relation* to our communities (Powell et al.) in and out of academic institutions.

Because collective access relies on the expertise of so many—the insights and labor and first-person experiences of oppression across contexts—I draw on the work of cultural rhetorics to imagine how we might create networks of knowledge that can make collective access possible. None of us have the whole picture, a full understanding of the work that needs to happen, or the capacity to do it all. I draw, here, from the work of cultural rhetorics, quoting Malea Powell, who insists on constellating and relationality as central practices of cultural rhetorics because a constellation "allows for all the meaning making practices and their relationships to matter. It allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships . . . to shift and change without holding the subject captive" (qtd. in Powell et al.). Collective access *requires* relationality, as Maier, Hsu, Cedillo, and Yergeau have observed in writing about trans and disabled coalitions:

> We find resonant conceptions of mutual socialities in cultural rhetorics, decolonial theory, crip communities and crip activism, and other communities maintained by people whose praxes are informed by theories in and of the flesh. . . . Across disciplines and perspectives, we create constellative knowledge(s) with our relations.

To work toward collective access, we honor each other's embodied experiences and expertise, centering—as disability justice demands—the most impacted.

Collective access means we leave no one behind *and no part of ourselves* behind. As Shayda Kafai explains this work, we must "Organize without exclusion," meaning we constellate community:

> In wholeness and in alignment with our bodyminds, our histories, and with the understanding that our identities intersect, we coordinate for a liberation that is genuine in its acknowledgement of our bodymind needs. We, in community, evolve. (174)

In working toward collective access, we see each other as our whole selves, not just the parts that can be commodified or that are useful in institutional narratives or public relations. I see scholars working across the field to work toward this goal; in recent special issues across our field (including this special issue of *CCC*), I write alongside scholars reimagining what it means to bring our whole selves into this

Creating community means we understand our own privileges and receive critique—especially from those more impacted—as a gift.

work, to create community, and I join them in this project of collective access.

But community means accountability. As Maria Novotny argues, we constellate our stories "in order to visibilize a web of relations. This web can help us intervene in the discipline by acknowledging our location within a set of dominant institutions within which we are complicit in colonialism" (in Powell et al.). In constellating our stories and working toward collective access, we also remember that "[e]ach identity we claim is a locus of our power, but such power also comes with constraints, considerations, and responsibilities. We must be cognizant of the ways that our manifestations, our deeds and discourse, may silence or alienate others" (Maier et al.). Creating community means we understand our own privileges and receive critique—especially from those more impacted—as a gift. While favor access might invite institutions and programs to pat themselves on their backs, collective access recognizes the shared responsibility of access is never completed.

Constellating among these kind humans means working toward collective access in various capacities. There are countless others (and a real

limitation of words; the Disability Rhetoric site maintained by the CCCC Disability Studies Standing Group highlights more of this scholarship). I offer this partial constellation to be illustrative of *possibilities* for collective access, but I also acknowledge how much of the work of constellative collective access we never get to witness because of citational practices that erase the work of multiply marginalized scholars, especially Black femmes and Black queer kin (see Pritchard), and because the privileging of publications belittles their community-building and community-maintaining work often invisibilized in academia (see Hubrig, "Crip Doulas"; Schalk). With those necessary disclaimers, I highlight just a few of the sites where I see scholars constellating community and working toward collective access in composition and rhetoric, while emphasizing the contributions of multiply marginalized scholars and cultural workers.

Collective Access in Classroom Spaces

I *joke* (I'm really quite serious, but others seem to think I am kidding) that mentioning working toward access in my classroom among other instructors is my litmus test for feeling out who I feel safe disclosing aspects of my identity with and who I do not. Too often, when I talk about access work as a junior faculty member, a senior faculty member will dismissively and quickly bring up the "Students with Disabilities" office and tell me "they take care of these things." This is meant to be the end of the discussion: they are unwilling to discuss access possibilities in our classrooms, and they fail my litmus test by demonstrating an unwillingness to engage in questions of access or to understand how this process works, noting the many drawbacks of this accommodation model that, at best, ignores student needs and, at worst, actively harms students who disclose disability (Hubrig "Emphasizing"; Kerschbaum et al.; Samuels). While accommodations sometimes help students, I *joke* (again, not a joke) that accommodations are for others more a snare than a support, demanding students have access to proper documentation before (maybe) awarding them supports that may have little to nothing to do with their actual classroom contexts or requests and often takes a toll in emotional labor from students requesting such access (Konrad).

At the same time, this knee-jerk response seems to imagine I am speaking strictly of *disability* when I speak of access. I *am* speaking of disability, of course, but collective access demands a more expansive approach: a place accessible to straight, white disabled people but hostile to BIPOC or

queer/trans or otherwise marginalized kin (disabled and not) is an inaccessible space, full stop. When my dreams of collective access are met with the-institutional-disability-office-will-take-care-of-it attitudes, the litmus test is also revealing an assumption that access is *strictly* a disability issue. Collective access challenges not *just* ableism, but other "normate assumptions" as well. As Cedillo has argued:

> If we continue to base our composition practices on normate assumptions rather than the embodied experiences of people most in need of access to voice and space, our praxes can and do become part of a racist, ableist apparatus that promotes other -isms, tools of "social hygiene."

Cedillo's scholarship here and across their work demonstrates the interconnectedness of ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression in our classrooms, echoing the way these issues are interconnected and inseparable as presented to us in disability justice. As I imagine what it means to work toward collective access in our classrooms (as much as possible within the colonialist, capitalist power structure of the university), I take as a central concept to doing collective access that these systems are always already interwoven and inseparable. I write alongside a constellation of scholars in composition and rhetoric who undertake the work of access from different pedagogical and embodied backgrounds—knowing that our pedagogies and embodiment are also interwoven and inseparable. There are so many doing necessary access work, and here I point to just a few luminous nodes in a burgeoning constellation.

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In locating access *not* as labor that happens "over there," but in our own classrooms, I highlight Anne-Marie Womack's "Accessible Syllabus Project" as a useful primer that invites readers to rethink accessibility primarily through a disability perspective. While focused on the syllabus itself (as the title suggests), this project addresses multiple registers of access, including tips for classroom instruction, which also includes our classroom policies, our due dates and assessment, and use of images and text. As I continue to work toward collective access, I continue to learn from and be inspired by Womack's work, particularly because it is *open-access*:

the materials for access work are made freely available so we are invited in to take on the work of access in our own spaces. I use Womack's work in my own attempts at building collective access: discussing my syllabus with students alongside Womack's resources and discussing how I can make it more accessible for them.

Collective Access in Our Field

Collective access means resisting not just the ableism of traditional classroom spaces but other sites of oppression too. In constellating community, I point to composition and rhetoric scholars tending to how racism is perpetuated in writing classrooms and contexts and offering antiracist praxis (Baker-Bell et al; Inoue; Inoue and Poe; Kynard; Powell et al.). While this work is happening in many different iterations, one example of how I see this work in action as collective access is discussed throughout Tieanna Graphenreed and Mya Poe's "Antiracist Genre Systems," where Graphenreed and Poe take up preventative care and harm reduction as antiracist, pedagogical praxis, pushing for creating a community where "instructors and white students must confront an understanding of the classroom as a historically white and colonial space" (72), decentering white embodiment and the white supremacist, colonialist assumptions traditionally centered in our pedagogical practices. Their antiracist praxis asks students and instructors alike to collaborate in creating community with shared responsibility in this work, a necessary element of collective access (see Hitt; Patterson).

And while much discourse on access in the past has responded to disability as mobility impairments, vision impairments, and D/deafness (though access in all of these areas certainly has so far to go), I am encouraged that conversations around disability in composition and rhetoric are considering what it means to be inclusive of mental disability, including neurodivergence and Madness (Cecil-Lemkin; currie et al.; Yergeau). In thinking how we might engage the work of constellating community toward collective access in the classroom, with careful attention to Madness and neurodiversity, my co-conspirator sarah madoka currie's work centers "community-first" approaches (currie et al.), where currie centers community-building across ability levels, strengths, and needs, allowing the writing to follow the work of community building. currie thoughtfully engages student well-being holistically, shifting expectations of student resiliency *from our students* to our course documents, offering community-

centered pedagogical experiments in access that ask students to co-create community (currie and Hubrig). I see currie's pro-Mad work in both of these cases as working toward an expanded notion of collective access, where not just currie but her class as a whole come together as a community to create access and care.

But building toward collective access in composition and rhetoric means creating access across contexts—not only in our classrooms. A useful case study is academic conferences—an understudied kairotic public space (Price)—and the construction of access guides. The work of creating access guides, with one of the first in the field of rhetoric and composition created for the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2011, was led by Margaret Price (see Osorio). The work of creating access guides is usually uncompensated, relying not on the organizations themselves but on volunteers who work in community to try and create access. Since that first access guide, many disabled scholars and allies have worked together to create access, with the 2023 guide including information on lactation rooms, quiet spaces, gender-neutral restrooms, food and alcohol, and other useful information about the space. As Ruth Osorio describes the roles of access guides, "by approaching access as a collective responsibility, the guide empowers its creators and interpreters to better observe access barriers and advocate for expansive access" (10).

> But building toward collective access in composition and rhetoric means creating access across contexts—not only in our classrooms. A useful case study is academic conferences—an understudied kairotic public space . . . and the construction of access guides.

Osorio's study of CCCC's access guides through her framework of *critical access literacies* highlights the tensions between disability justice and the capitalistic logics of professional, academic networks. Ossorio asserts the importance of these "activists' attempt to enact radical access and the institutional barriers to such transformation" (18). Despite these tensions and imperfections, I see the creation, collaboration, circulation, and critique of access guides as a site working *toward* collective access, challenging favor access ideology within the profession of composition and rhetoric, with CCCC's guide having inspired access (and access guides) across the field, including Computers and Writing, Feminisms and Rhetorics, the Conference on Community Writing, and others. While I am grateful for the work of the guide, I also take pause to voice concerns about *institutional*

responsibility: these guides are usually created by volunteer labor, and usually the volunteer labor of multiply marginalized disabled people. While the community-building work of these guides is important and necessary, the institutions hosting such events should themselves take a more active role (and financial responsibility) in providing access, and the guides themselves need to continue to work toward inclusion. At the same time, while I see the creation of these guides *working toward* collective access, I note that they don't address several sites of inaccess and layers of inequity, including how race is interwoven with access (see Hamraie; Jackson and Cedillo; Craig and Perryman-Clark; Hubrig & Osorio), and still developing with respect to mental disability/Madness.

I have touched on just two examples—the writing classroom and academic conferences—as sites where I see people working toward collective access in this essay. But this work is happening when graduate students are working together to push back against inequalities and shit working conditions. When writing program administrators (WPAs) work alongside others to address oppressions in their programs. When scholars push back against the ways academia actively causes harms, and, perhaps most importantly, when, as Eric Darnell Pritchard urges us, we take stock of how we contribute to those harms "individually (at first) and collectively finally get down to the business of assessing and evaluating how we have contributed to this toxic and harmful dynamic, regardless of intention. Collective access begins when we question and push back institutional logics, privileging community and collaboration over competition.

Coda: Collective Access

The dull glow of my cell phone illuminates the tent I've made for myself atop my hospital bed with a canopy of thin linen blankets. The nurse has already told me to quit working, but the group chat pings again and again. This will be my home for the coming weeks, recovering from having another several inches of small intestine and abdominal tissue removed.

I feel guilty because I know I should be resting, but if I rest, I feel guilty for the work I feel I should be doing. If this work is paused, even for a moment, people I care about face material harm. At this moment, multiply marginalized colleagues and I are organizing around a marginalized graduate student who is about to be evicted from an already tenuous housing situation and coordinating to make sure this thoughtful human will have food to eat this night.

Across my department, my college, my university, my professional organizations and conferences, and other institutional "units," I see the same patterns: multiply marginalized people are overburdened with service work. We juggle these tasks with a smile, because anything—even an honest sigh to communicate the pressures we face—is often treated as "uncollegial," as an act of hostility, because the self-proclaimed benevolent institutions and their managerial class seem to consider honest reflections on the material realities of our institutions to be threatening.

 And these honest reflections are quite dangerous, in the sense that they shatter the institutionally maintained illusions of favor access, these meager provisions we scrape together from hospitals or sick beds or time the institutions demand and steal from us because without an abundance of unpaid labor from us all with special exploitation of disabled, BIPOC, queer/trans, and other marginalized people's time and energy, this whole enterprise grinds to a halt.

I don't care about the halt itself, but I fear for who is going to be violently flung from the train when it goes off the rails. And so I organize in the group chat, trying to scrounge together resources to make up for institutional shortcomings once again, because despite it all this student is going to eat tonight and sleep in a warm bed.

Writing about the work of collective access as articulated by Patty Berne, Shayda Kafai notes that this work "requires that we understand our bodyminds not as problems but as openings, as entry points to our shared humanity" (174). This is where collective access succeeds and favor access ultimately fails: favor access relies on the same dehumanizing institutional logics that "often render access a seeming bonus measure that one must fight for at great personal cost" (Hubrig and Cedillo 2). Favor access treats us as disposable, as resources from which universities can extract value and position the institution as benevolent, and then has the gall to expect us to be grateful. Collective access has had it with that crap, and I work with many kind humans to build community that might realize a more accessible, more just future.

As I write, I feel the strain of trying to sustain myself in doing this work: I try to remind myself—and am reminded by those I am in community with—that we'll never "complete" the work of collective access, because everyone will always have needs that need to be met, and those will shift and change over time. As Stacey Milbern reminds us, access is not just outcome, but "the process," reminding us also that "disabled people are so

much more than our access needs . . . there is so much more still waiting for us collectively once we build this skillset of negotiating access needs with each other" (qtd. in Piepzna-Samarasinha 129).

But it's a difficult road ahead: collective access means buckling ourselves in for the long haul. We'll need to continually draw together multiple frameworks that articulate inaccessibility, exclusion, and other harms, even as institutional narratives gloss over them with favor access. We'll need to work in community toward ever-changing collective access strategies and center relational practices that look across institutional and academic silos. We'll need to be attentive to who is asked to take on the brunt of this labor and find ways to offer community support, understanding how easy it is to get burnt out doing this work. Collective access is a project of seeking, finding, becoming, and maintaining community.

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Stephen Kwame Dadugblor

Stories and/as Civic Pedagogies: Toward Participatory Knowledge-Making in Cultural Rhetorics

This essay argues for attention in cultural rhetorics scholarship to stories as effective civic pedagogical tools informed by participatory knowledge-making practices. Drawing on a multiyear "mobile cinema democracy project" based on the physical circulation across Africa, Europe, and North America of a successful African democratic story told in the multi-award-winning documentary *An African Election*, I attend to both the documentary and its larger contextual project, "A Political Safari: An African Adventure in Democracy Building." I demonstrate the ways that the African storytelling traditions of collaboration upon which this project rests offer us cultural rhetoricians key opportunities to reimagine inclusive knowledge-making practices in using stories as civic pedagogies. My analysis reveals how such knowledge-making practices might orient our work against the grain of hierarchical, exclusionary, colonial practices and toward decolonial approaches that are truly participatory and inclusive.

Introduction

In a now widely acclaimed 2009 TED Talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story," the celebrated Nigerian American novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes of the power of stories to shape and define. Drawing on her experiences living in Nigeria and the United States, Adichie recounts a remarkable list of reality-defining moments in her life pointing to the power of single stories, those that are incomplete and deny room for multiplicity and complexity. First, the British and American books she read informed some of the first stories she wrote as a child, stories in which characters' life experiences mirrored those of people not of her native Nigeria, but of Britain and the United States and only those two. Second, until she became familiar with the family of her own family's domestic worker, the only stories she knew of them were those of poverty, leaving no more room for her to recognize the ingenuity and artistry they too demonstrated. And third, as a visitor to Mexico from the United States, she came to quickly realize her own stories of Mexicans as abject immigrants were a product of the single narratives of Mexican immigration to the United States she had uncritically consumed from the media. Adichie's examples illustrate just how "impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of stories" (1:32) and highlight the power inherent in stories. She observes that there is a danger in holding on to single stories because they are often only incomplete and stereotypical, and that for both these reasons, we must consider important questions they raise: "How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, [and] how many stories are told" (9:25). These considerations enable a counterposition to single stories and pave the way for a multiplicity of stories with the capacity, as Adichie concludes, "to empower and to humanize" (17:24).

I draw on Adichie's talk to call attention to key considerations for those of us interested in the place of stories in cultural rhetorics scholarship. Stories hold immense knowledge-making capacities for a variety of communities, and this much has been acknowledged by recent cultural rhetorics scholarship (Cobos et al.; Martinez). That knowledge-making capacity of stories is rooted in the cultural rhetorics practice of constellating, wherein we find affinities between our stories and those of others (Hidalgo et al.). Research in cultural rhetorics has been attentive to the capacity of stories to define and create a people's realities, including the ways in which stories function to promote mutual inquiry among students in a classroom context (Yam), encourage re-membering of our rhetorical traditions with hitherto

excluded knowledges of Others (Osorio), and enact cultural rhetorics pedagogies more generally (Cedillo et al.).

Extending the conversation in this vein, my key aim in this essay is to call for a renewed scholarly attention to the place of stories in fashioning a civic pedagogical imperative—the capacity of stories to shape and mobilize what we believe and teach ourselves about how to further (our) communal values in a democratic society. By civic pedagogy, I refer here to lessons that motivate and shape citizens to act toward common democratic goals. Civic pedagogy functions to orient citizens toward the cultivation of habits and dispositions (Crick 75) that make them effective participants in their societies' democracies. I argue here for a renewed attention in cultural rhetorics scholarship to storytelling rooted in African traditions of participatory knowledge-making. Drawing on perspectives of African storytelling grounded in acknowledgment of the Other and for participatory knowledge-making, I illustrate this call for the civic pedagogical imperative of stories by following a multiyear "mobile cinema democracy project" based on the physical circulation across Africa, Europe, and North America of a successful African democratic story told in the multi-award-winning documentary, *An African Election*, a record of the final few weeks leading to historic national elections in Ghana in 2008. In the documentary, the stories unfold as a record of the experiences related by individuals, featuring the first-person narrations of multiple voices concerning democratic practice in Ghana. As ordinary citizens, politicians, and poll workers, these individuals constellate the larger story of the election by articulating their worldviews, aspirations, and concerns of the electoral process.

> African storytelling traditions . . . offer us cultural rhetoricians key opportunities to (re)imagine equitable access to knowledge-making that is less hierarchical, more participatory, and ultimately inclusive of hitherto excluded knowledges.

I attend to both the documentary and its larger contextual and material context dubbed "A Political Safari: An African Adventure in Democracy Building" to demonstrate the ways that the African storytelling traditions upon which this project rests offer us cultural rhetoricians key opportunities to (re)imagine equitable access to knowledge-making that is less hierarchical, more participatory, and ultimately inclusive of hitherto excluded knowledges. These African storytelling traditions are reflected in the communal participation of individuals in the making of the documentary (in

this case, in attention to the multiple individuals whose unique experiences constitute the larger story the documentary relates). The traditions are also, more importantly, evident in knowledge-making about democracy oriented toward a civic pedagogy, a handing down of sociopolitical and historical knowledge. Ultimately, my analysis reveals how such knowledge-making might enable us to rethink and work against the grain of exclusionary, colonial practices and toward decolonial approaches that are also civically pedagogical in their aims.

Our Stories, Other People's Stories, and Knowledge-Making

Stories and storytelling as a strategy share with cultural rhetorics scholarship important epistemological commitments: both are committed to the advancement of communities' knowledge-making. In her 2012 Chair's Address to the Conference of College Composition and Communication, Malea Powell observes the need to attend to such knowledge-making by paying attention to stories as modes of theorizing about communities. Powell suggests that stories are coterminous with theory in the ways in which they allow for inventiveness. Stories make theory-making possible because they are located within place and space, and the knowledges they enact are connected to those places and spaces we inhabit. Space and place bring together the present, past, and future "into conscious conversation" (Powell 388). For Powell, that conscious conversation has important decolonial potential, constituting an important first step toward upending long-held ideas about ourselves and our knowledge-making practices. The decolonial imperative of stories' rootedness in place and space means we ought to make a shift from Descartes's *cogito*, "I think therefore I am," to Walter Mignolo's "I am where I think and do" (qtd. in Powell 402). In other words, we move from *locating* our epistemological practices solely, and perhaps primarily, in our thinking practices and capacities to the material, to embodied environs, and to the spaces and places that make thinking possible in the first place. For African contexts, for example, locating stories within place and space privileges the recursivity and engagement at the heart of stories, one that emphasizes shared understanding and collaboration between participants in a storytelling context.

Recent scholarship in cultural rhetorics has pointed to the possibilities of such locatedness of stories in the service of communities. For example, Aja Martinez writes that the idea of counterstories can help us imagine

how we might situate stories. In Martinez's formulation, counterstories function as method and methodology, and they enable a grappling with issues of exclusion, racism, and justice. As a method, counterstories highlight "stories of those people whose experiences are not often told," while as a methodological approach, they "expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian stories" in order to foreground "traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance, and justice" (Martinez 26). The result is an epistemology that privileges excluded histories with the potential to transform our orthodoxies of exclusion. Those orthodoxies of exclusion are transformed when the stories we tell of ourselves and our field lead us to reimaginations (Hidalgo et al.). That transformation would be evident in not just how stories are *told* but, more importantly, how they are *used.* As cultural rhetorics scholars continue to pursue this path of locating our stories in the places and spaces we inhabit, there is the need to expand the analytical possibilities of our fields' commitments by considering especially those places and spaces oftentimes excluded from our theory-making. Doing so can help us engage anew the varied functions that stories can serve in furthering the cultural rhetorical work to which we are committed.

In our march toward decolonizing and expanding the canons, knowledges, and rhetorical practices of our field, we must recognize the intertwined historical fates . . . of African and Indigenous peoples as a generative space not only of convergence but also of particularity as we theorize from multiple locations.

In this regard, I call for attention to the *functions* of storytelling traditions—like civically pedagogical ones—rooted in African epistemologies in our cultural rhetorics scholarship. Much cultural rhetoric scholarship has thus far attended to Indigenous American traditions, and while this is important work, our field needs to expand globally to include other traditions, including African rhetorical traditions, as well. Such expansion is necessary if we are to avoid reifying the same silences and absences against which cultural rhetorics scholarship arose in the first place. In our march toward decolonizing and expanding the canons, knowledges, and rhetorical practices of our field, we must recognize the intertwined historical fates of (settler) colonization and mass murder of African and Indigenous peoples as a generative space not only of convergence but also of particularity as we theorize from multiple locations.

The Nigerian literary critic and author Isidore Okpewho observes that although colonialism robbed Africa of its cultural and intellectual resources and imposed colonial languages such as English and French on the continent, writers on the continent did not do away completely with their literary traditions ("Storytelling in the African World" 118). Instead, they resisted by pressing those traditions into service, using English and other European languages, in the words of the famed African novelist Chinua Achebe, "to carry the burden of . . . [their] peculiar experience" (347). Okpewho relies on storytelling as part of these traditions to argue for the importance of considering its place in the lives of cultures. Against the "old ethnological prejudice" ("The World of African Storytelling" 1) that stories and storytelling are primitive and unsophisticated, Okpewho offers them for their intellectual and artistic value. He highlights their capacity to treat "serious experiences in human life" (2), experiences concerning, for example, societal mores intended to teach and transform ways of life. Thus, the use of stories and storytelling for pedagogical purposes, specifically within African epistemologies, is powerfully evident. With the proliferation of digital technologies, these pedagogical purposes reach wider audiences as the work of stories manifest in mediums such as the digital archive (Cushman) and/or documentaries (Chattoo). I suggest that in *An African Election* the story works together with the material context of the mobile democracy project to further participatory knowledge-making practices aimed toward civic pedagogies. In the next section, I turn to the analysis of the documentary to examine how its stories functioned as modes of civic pedagogy.

Stories, Democratic Politics, and Civic Pedagogy

In 2008, Ghana conducted historic national elections that gained attention in international election circles. The polls that year were defining not just for the country but in some ways for the wider African continent. In Africa south of the Sahara, Ghana led political independence in 1957 and is often regarded as a stable and leading democracy in a continental region sometimes associated with a history of electoral challenges. In 2008, for the first time in the country's history, two major political parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP)—both of whom had taken turns at the reins of government for two four-year terms, vied for political power. As the incumbent government, the NPP was poised to maintain its hold on power, led in this effort by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, an attorney general and minister of justice who had won the party's

presidential candidacy bid the year before. For many observers of African politics, a successful election would signal the country's commitment to multi-party democracy in the aftermath of sporadic military interventions in politics in preceding decades. Election 2008 was hard-fought, and although anxieties about electoral violence dominated the foreign media in particular and the polls came close to disintegrating the country (Jockers et al.), it proved historic; it was peaceful, free, and fair, but also ultimately consolidated electoral politics in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi).

The relative success of the polls drew the world's attention to the need to circulate the story across the continent and beyond. *An African Election* addressed this need. Produced in 2010 by Jarreth Merz and Kevin Merz, acclaimed Switzerland-based documentary producers, the documentary is a record of the behind-the-scenes activities leading up to the election. Although the producers are not Africans, their positionality seems mitigated by both their collaboration with Ghanaians and their editorial decisions, such as the intentional choice to avoid the use of voiceovers that would occlude, misrepresent, or otherwise "speak for"

That collaborative dimension of the production process is itself emblematic of oral African storytelling traditions that emphasize the co-constitutive and egalitarian role of storytellers and listeners.

Ghanaian perspectives. Rather than the missionary zeal that underlines much knowledge-production on and about Africa, I suggest that the collaboration and the editorial decisions at the heart of the production of *An African Election* exemplify decolonial scholar Bagele Chilisa's call for a reimagination of research in and about previously colonized African societies. For Chilisa, that reimagination would include participatory elements that maximize the place and voice of the researched Other in "resolving challenges in their own communities" (290). That collaboration is evident in part through the production process—Ghanaian individuals' permissions on what could be included in the documentary, who could be filmed, where, and when. Indeed, that collaborative dimension of the production process is itself emblematic of oral African storytelling traditions that emphasize the co-constitutive and egalitarian role of storytellers and listeners. The producers saw a rhetorical moment to collaborate with and convey a crucial message about Africans' agency in determining the future of their own governance and asserting their own knowledge against prevailing, historically fraught ideas in the global imagination that say Africa has to be a student in regard to democracy, with Euro-America as its teacher.

To accomplish their goal, the producers of *An African Election* initiated the idea of a movie theater on wheels to tell this success story in what they called a *political safari*, "a journey through Africa to share a film and a vision of African democracy" (Political Safari). Consequently, in August 2012, ahead of Ghana's presidential and parliamentary elections that year, the mobile democracy project was launched to Ghanaian audiences to carry the message—and, by extension, African democracy and voter education—across the world. In the years that followed, the journey continued to at least nine other African nations, with partnerships between the producers and local organizers designed to bridge intra-country politico-ideological divisions and promote voter education and participation. These partnerships hinged on the assumption that local democracy, as Ralph Cintron reminds us, is best practiced as a territorialized activity rooted within the specific understandings of the people who practice it (9). The timing and rationale for this launch itself were crucially important. Specifically, democratic elections had been characterized by irregularities in a number of African countries, including Mali and Zimbabwe. With the story of *An African Election,* therefore, the political safari extended to these countries, proffering to the wider continent a good example of a relatively successful electoral democracy. It is important to recognize the fraught semantic valences of the term safari itself, especially as used for the project by the European documentary makers. Although contemporary uses of the term point simply to vacations embarked on especially by white people to African countries to experience wildlife and nature, the term also connotes the exoticism characteristic of such trips given their rootedness in European voyages to so-called unexplored African lands for the purposes of conquest. These connotations notwithstanding, the term denotes "journey" or "trip" in Swahili. Thus, the idea of political safari would suggest a political journey, and it is in this denotative sense that I propose we understand the use of the term vis-à-vis the project.

> **Through bypassing oftentimes technical framings of politics, the mobile democracy project brought translations of this documentary to African audiences in their own languages, informed by their own self-understandings, and oriented toward the capacity of the documentary to offer lessons for their democratic practice.**

The political safari highlighted the fact that issues of technological access could be meaningfully addressed through a recourse to modes of knowledge dissemination familiar—but not necessarily unique—to Afri-

cans with limited technological resources. Because modes of knowledge dissemination are effective when attentive to the realities of individuals and groups, an approach such as the mobile democracy project idea that carries the story of the election success to otherwise unreachable places works to fill one important gap in access to knowledge about successful electoral practices. The project was designed to carry the story of the election success to communities where especially youth, women, and marginalized people could gain access to it and be encouraged to participate in electoral processes successfully.

The story of *An African Election* is not a picture-perfect depiction of electoral contests on the continent, and indeed, elections in one African country do not suit all electoral purposes across Africa's fifty-four countries. However, the documentary highlights key ideas that anchor stories about the continent's representation in electoral matters. In doing so, it invites both African and non-African audiences to read against the grain of knowledge production and dissemination about the continent. The civic pedagogical imperative of the stories it tells pays attention to an ethos of inclusiveness. Through bypassing oftentimes technical framings of politics, the mobile democracy project brought translations of this documentary to African audiences in their own languages, informed by their own self-understandings, and oriented toward the capacity of the documentary to offer lessons for their democratic practice.

What story/stories, then, does *An African Election* tell for such civically pedagogical purpose? Consider three. First, the documentary articulates the idea that against prevailing negative perceptions of African ineptitude, Ghanaian democracy is a success that can be emulated. During a behind-the-scenes electioneering campaign, the leader of the NPP, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, calls on the citizenry to commit to the ideals of peace and order during the election process in order to protect Ghana's image as a model democracy on the continent. Akufo-Addo urges an avoidance of political violence often perceived to characterize African elections, stating that because "the eyes of the world are on us here in Ghana for this election," Ghanaians need to rally behind their values and avoid "what is happening on the rest of the continent"—the resurgence of military incursions into politics and the threat of political violence to democratic practice. This message would seem apt particularly with increased proactive peacebuilding initiatives on the continent aimed at consolidating democracy. Although his audience here is specifically Ghanaian voters, Akufo-Addo's acknowl-

edgment of the world at large extended his call beyond Ghana. In this way, he draws on domestic political values that regard Ghanaian democracy as exemplary on and for the continent.

Second, *An African Election* highlights the intricacies of knowledge production about Africa for both Africans and global audiences. Historically, Western institutions and colonial truth regimes produced knowledge about the continent. The Congolese historian and philosopher, V.Y. Mudimbe observes that from the fifteenth century onwards, European depictions of images of Africa(ns) in the global imagination cohered in a corpus of discourses, ideas, and epistemologies, all of which he calls the "colonial library" that would later provide dubious justifications for colonialism. The colonial library operates as an archive through which Africa's relationship to the world came to be—and is mostly still unfortunately—parsed. Mudimbe maintains that the colonial library "constructs stereotypes, allocates remarkable adjectives to Africans and other 'primitives,' and estab-

> **As a process that is constantly transformed, negotiated, and reconfigured to suit a variety of purposes across time and space, the civilizing mission unfolds in the image constructions of the West as Africa is pathologized as a counterfoil to a perceived superior West.**

lishes [Europe's] civilizing mission" (29). That mission did not end when colonialism formally ended. As a process that is constantly transformed, negotiated, and reconfigured to suit a variety of purposes across time and space, the civilizing mission unfolds in the image constructions of the West as Africa is pathologized as a counterfoil to a perceived superior West. The colonial library, then, persists today.

In electoral matters specifically, it is evident in the discourses, ideas, images, and epistemologies in Western media and institutions that essentialize, circulate, and exaggerate Africa's challenges with electoral processes as an inherent incapacity by Africans to govern themselves. The producers of *An African Election* tell a story that seeks to correct these perceptions by showcasing to the world African self-determination and success with electoral politics. As the Africanist filmmaker Manouchka Kelly Labouba argues, the film challenges long-standing depictions of African electoral realities, standing as a refreshing contradistinction to such well-worn stories of the fragility of African democratic practice in a long list of documentaries and movies such as *Echoes from a Somber Empire* (on the self-declared emperor of the Central African Republic, Jean-Bédel Bokassa) and *Mobutu, King of Zaire* (concerning Congo's dictator Mobutu Sese Seko) (233–34). In doing

so, *An African Election* articulates a formidable apologia for Africans not as victims, but rather as active determiners of their political destinies.

Third, and relatedly, *An African Election* relies on the Ghanaian electoral experience to valorize citizen agency as a necessary factor in the drive for Africans to sustain democratic practice. It puts forward ordinary Africans as heroes engaged in fashioning their own futures through active participation in the electoral process. For instance, as they fought for the right to vote—whether by standing in long queues that required, on average, ten hours of waiting or by their alertness to the possibility of ballot box theft—ordinary Ghanaians emerge in the documentary as heroes who take charge of their own political futures. Their resilience and agency testify to their abilities, and their ordinary efforts stand in opposition, again, to pathologizing narratives that too often situate corrupt politicians, rather than the work of ordinary Africans, at the center of the electoral process. While not by any means a perfect election, the producer Jareth Merz suggests that wherever the story of *An African Election* reached, especially on the continent, "Africans from all different countries would tell the film made them proud to be African. . . . [W]e touched a core feeling or sentiment about [their] identity" (Dunaway). Thus, like Adichie's admonition for a multiplicity of stories, *An African Election* tells one more story—that African political practice should not be considered solely, or even predominantly, through a single story of failure.

Participatory Knowledge-Making in Documentary Production and Dissemination

In many ways, the political safari accomplished through the mobile democracy project took these stories across the world in an effort to engage communities and dispel negative perceptions of African electoral failure. The political safari carried the story of the documentary to challenge universalizing narratives about Africans' own ways of practicing politics—with all the promises and perils those entail—and their ability to govern themselves and not be restricted by Euro-American standards. In doing so, the safari made it possible for the producers to engage communities in what would be familiar: participatory knowledge-making and discussion. Participatory knowledge-making in the production of the documentary took place through the collaboration between the producers and key Ghanaian stakeholders in the story that is told. In producing *An African Election*, the producers collaborated with Ghanaian stakeholders (civil society organizations, ordinary citizens, and politicians) to affirm citizens' sense of political

self and to foreground their heroic efforts. While the production of any documentary is necessarily an act of interpretation, with the final product often refracted through the prism of the documentarian's own perspectives, *An African Election* attempts to model a participatory approach to knowledge-making that mitigates the dangers of a single-authored story about Africa. The producers accomplished this in part by avoiding the use of voiceovers and allowing Ghanaians themselves, in the heat of the moment, to speak to the issues from start to finish. The producers and citizens collaborate on what processes were to be captured, who could contribute to the record, how they may do so, and to what uses the story of the election processes could be put. They co-produce the knowledge about Ghana's elections.

If we are to make space for participatory knowledge-making in cultural rhetorics scholarship, then we ought to reckon with who tells the stories, what those stories are, and how they function in the world to shape us.

But perhaps one of the most significant ways the participatory knowledge production manifests is in the afterlives of the documentary. An important feature of the African storytelling tradition as articulated by scholars such as Okpewho is one of recursivity and engagement in a process that emphasizes shared understanding and collaboration between storyteller and listener. Such an approach to story privileges collaboration and inclusivity of varying perspectives. As the story of *An African Election* was circulated via the mobile democracy project and audiences engaged it, they took charge of how the stories connected with their own political realities. For instance, in Madagascar, local stakeholders worked with the producers to translate the documentary into Malagasy for educational purposes, itself a cultural rhetoric practice of constellating stories. Similar local efforts and voter education initiatives took place in Kenya (2013), Comoros (2015), and Guinea (2015). As has been earlier articulated, this participatory knowledge-making—one that emphasizes collaboration between the producers and the African audiences in terms of content, dissemination approaches, and translation where applicable—ensured that audiences came to integrate key lessons in the documentary in ways appropriate to their own contexts and which furthered their own electoral aspirations.

If we are to make space for participatory knowledge-making in cultural rhetorics scholarship, then we ought to reckon with who tells the stories, what those stories are, and how they function in the world to shape us.

Stories build communities' sense of self and individuals' relations with others. The capacity of stories to define and promote ideas about ourselves is most crucial in contexts—like previously colonized African and Indigenous societies—where stories have operated as tools for the dehumanization of people and the denial of the relevance of their knowledges. For colonized African peoples, stories can help mobilize epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni), redirecting attention toward African peoples and contexts, which are viable sites for theorizing and rethinking the grounds of our knowledge-making practices. In making a shift toward a more participatory, inclusive, and equitable storytelling approach that serves as civic pedagogy, we must be alert to the tendency toward inclusion without equity, the practice of merely adding stories to collective, canonical narratives that neither changes the fundamental terms of debate of our field nor leads to meaningful change for communities whose stories we tell.

As Chilisa urges us, one way to accomplish the goal of decolonial knowledge-making is to emphasize participatory approaches that center the "voice and participation of the colonized Other" (271). The participatory knowledge-making that took the form of collaboration between the documentary producers and the stakeholders in different countries made it possible to carry the story to areas it would otherwise not have reached. Not only in terms of access but also in terms of inclusivity, participatory knowledge-making allows stakeholders to contribute to knowledge on electoral matters, voter education, and democratization in ways tailored to the needs of African audiences. For contexts like America and Europe where *An African Election* was screened to audiences in film festivals, schools, and community organizations, the pedagogical value of the stories manifested in the communication of Africa to the world, and their impact was in the epistemological diversity that the documentary created about Africa.

Conclusion

This essay began with Adichie's observation about the danger of a single story, and it has attended to the role stories can play in our civic pedagogical efforts. Stories not only can be effective teaching tools, but they can help refashion damaging colonial legacies and instill in citizens democratic dispositions toward more just futures. In the case of the *An African Election* documentary analyzed, the stories of the election success operate as a counter to the narrative that Africans are inept at self-government. The knowledge-making that results in the stories told and the mobile democ-

racy project that facilitates the dissemination of the stories point to the possibilities of an inclusive, participatory approach to knowledge about ourselves and others. For *An African Election*, the stories and the approach that facilitates the documentary are aimed at including knowledges about African governance in the global imagination for both Africans and the non-African audiences who would come to see it.

What implications, then, do stories as civic pedagogies hold for our cultural rhetorics scholarship? One of the key aims of cultural rhetorics scholarship is a rethinking of the modes, people, and places based on which knowledge-making occurs. In rooting our civic pedagogy-based stories in people and places that have previously been excluded, and in adopting inclusive approaches that make our stories reach those who otherwise won't be reached, we work toward participatory knowledge-making practices. Such knowledge-making requires the amplification of the stories that work against the grain of hierarchical, exclusionary, colonial library practices and toward decolonial ones that are not only participatory and inclusive but also civically pedagogical in their aims. If our stories are to contribute to destabilizing and rebuilding our field's canonical and exclusive knowledge-making practices, we need perspectives that force us to question who tells the stories, how they tell them, and to what functions those stories are put.

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Misty D. Fuller

Where I've Been and Where We're Going: Distant Differences in Academic Culture and the Work toward Inclusivity

Nancy Isenberg sums up fear of terms such as "white trash": "'white trash' remind[s] us of one of the American nation's uncomfortable truths: the poor are always with us." Understanding culture as a narrative formation, which "means that it cannot be regarded as an isolated, or isolable, entity" (Lindquist 5), places "the poor" directly in relation to American academic culture. Sande Cohen's true, yet much to be desired definition, "To say there is such a thing as 'academic culture' means that the processes of knowledge-production, socialization, labor distribution . . . and professionalization are in dispute," provides backdrop for discussion. Specifically, "dispute" leaves room for stories that encourage discussions about cultural rhetorics, or "embodied practices of the scholar," that connect "those who study it and those who live it," beyond acknowledgment. The goal is to foster a learning environment in which students recognize that "becoming a responsible language user demands an understanding of the ways language inscribes difference" (Jarratt). Ultimately, I aim to highlight where and how discussing cultural rhetorics can reveal weak spots in educational institutions that are trying to diversify by connecting my cultural experiences as both "the poor" and someone within the institution.

Cultural rhetorics that connect "those who study it *and* those who live it" carry the potential to unveil aspects of how we come to see ourselves as entering and working within academia (Bratta and Powell). "It," in this quote, being "the embodied practices of the scholar." Cultural rhetorics' theoretical lens stresses finding connections between cultures, such as relations and parallels that some individuals may assume are separate from academic culture. Further, cultural rhetorics employ "constellative practice," which "emphasizes the degree to which knowledge is *never* built by individuals but is, instead, accumulated through collective practices within specific communities" (Bratta and Powell). While "academic culture" can be a contested term, and it is questionable whether we can say there even is *one* academic culture or discernible community, collective practices within postsecondary institutions establish social expectations and rhetorical techniques that label and categorize individuals—rejecting some and accepting others. Thus, in this essay, "academic culture" is a commonplace I use that is deliberately contestable but that still regulates our behavior, making the academy a place that gives rise to—but also where I come to analyze—socially hierarchical terms like "white trash."

In the following pages, I constellate parts of my story, as someone from an impoverished background, in relation to academic culture and the idea that education is meant to be a great equalizer. My use of the word *constellate* not only invokes a primary methodological use of cultural rhetorics (Bratta and Powell; Powell et al.) but also allows me personally to develop and explain connections between seemingly disparate stories. I consider the academic community and how it is shaped in relation to my experiences of growing up as poor white trash. In other words, I will analyze parts of my story as someone immersed in academic culture and relate them to my experience as someone attached by others to that label. As is the nature of constellations, there are gaps between points, and my work here is to fill them. These stories are not only my own. I share them with people who come from backgrounds similar, or at least relatable, to mine. Moreover, scholars share ideas I connect with for different ends, from and for different perspectives. With this publication, these stories and citations will be deposited into what we call *The Discourse*. In regurgitating and reconfiguring them, I aim to highlight where and how discussing cultural rhetorics can reveal areas susceptible to being overlooked, or weak spots,

in postsecondary educational institutions when discussing inclusivity. By building connections between my own cultural experiences as "white trash" and as a scholar within the institution, I hope to define another way in which to become a "responsible language user," which "demands an understanding of the ways language inscribes difference" (Jarratt 317). Thus, I am calling attention to places where we can build concrete, stable bridges between what has been and what can be.

Where I've Been

When we're talking about cultural rhetorics, we're talking about stories (Powell et al.). Stories function in relation to identity, because identity itself is always a story—what we tell about ourselves and others, what we convey about history, our hopes for the future. A moment is witnessed or experienced and then repurposed to fit a context within a culture that then relates to the teller and the told. A good story affords connections. My own story, composed of anecdotes tarnished by both the nostalgia and the in-formative retrospect of time, depends on the context in which the actions, reactions, or inactions happened as well as the time and place in which I tell my story. Any story I tell also depends on the current narrative in which I find myself, or create myself, or the positioning of myself that I accept from others. In other words, my memories need a structure in cultural contexts (Academic, Class, Western, Indigenous, European, etc.) to make sense. As a result, the seemingly inescapable title of "white trash" follows me wherever I go and has provided much of the meaning to any story I could tell or any experience or identity I could find myself embodying.

White Trash

After off-and-on periods of homelessness during my first six years, I grew up poor, on a private dirt road, with mostly working-class neighbors. My family and I were a thing apart in this, or really any, neighborhood. My parents had caulked two trailers together to make a giant T-boned mess with flooring missing in some parts and linoleum peeling up in others. At one point we had hundreds of cats. Neighbors often complained about all the junk in our backyard. And my stepdad, as the kids at the bus stop liked to remind me, was "the neighborhood drunk." It was difficult to disagree with the label when he would pass out in our driveway and Mom would just lay a blanket over him until the morning. Even the poor and working

class—who were economically and culturally precarious, as symbolized by the dirt road they had to navigate to get home every night, many also living in trailers—had their limits, their boundaries. My family clearly resided on the opposite side of this line.

In *Not Quite White*, Matt Wray explains that "white trash" is "a disturbing liminality: a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of neither being one nor the other. [. . .] *White trash* names a people whose very existence seems to threaten the symbolic and social order" (2, emphasis in original). So, my neighbors may have been poor and white, and my family may have been poor and white, but my neighbors were decidedly not white trash. My family exemplified the precariousness of the neighborhood's social and economic positionality. Between the junk in the yard, the T-boned monstrosity, and the intoxicated man passing out in plain view, it was a precarity that we made difficult for them to deny.

Years and miles away from the dirt road, scholars who further investigate the social positioning of "white trash" offer sophisticated academic analyses of experiences like mine, arguing that the term "white trash" delineates social boundaries. These boundaries reveal anxiety and instability concerning inequities around race and class (Hinds; Filippello; Isenberg; and Wray). In such discussions, "white" diminishes the power of invisibility that comes with the conceptualization of whiteness. That is to say, combining "white" with "trash" as a label exposes anxieties about the precariousness of the socially constructed privilege of being white. Nakayama and Krizek explain that "in naming whiteness, we [. . .] reveal its invisible position" (292). That position is one of privilege. The invisibility of whiteness, as these authors explain it, exists in its unspoken rhetoric, meaning that there's no essential nature to it, but it is instead a lack of labels. Its supposed authority, then, derives from its established social and cultural practices that continually shore up its silent power and privilege. As a result, whiteness is erected by its seeming universality—the assumption that the white experience is the baseline for human experience (293). This means that its privileges are invisible and

> **The invisibility of whiteness, as these authors explain it, exists in its unspoken rhetoric, meaning that there's no essential nature to it, but it is instead a lack of labels. Its supposed authority, then, derives from its established social and cultural practices that continually shore up its silent power and privilege.**

taken as standard. "White," then, when paired with "trash," reveals that "trash" is never by default associated with "white" unless specifically stated. Coupling the two words exposes the construction of an identity that is only accessible by race; however, that action of pairing the words mitigates those assumptions when an individual is found too undeserving of privilege, and its power, to be considered "truly" white. Essentially, it boils down to an oxymoron that discloses the disassociation of "white" (privileged) and "trash" (undeserving of that privilege, or power) in the larger culture to assert that the so named achieve the impossible with their abhorrence. In this way, it also acts as a "distancing technique before it is an identity"—a term that distances the labeler and labeled; it also creates distance between the labeled individual and the privileges that "white," rhetorically, *should* provide (Hartigan 158–59). In theoretical terms, dissociation. Even if the paradox is not uttered within earshot of the so-called "white trash," distancing, both physical and ideological, based on race and class encodes the terminology. No one ever called me "white trash" to my face during the dirt road years. However, singling out my family's practices and behaviors served specifically to remove us from how others on the dirt road identified themselves. It distanced *us* from *them*.

To be clear, not every rhetorical distancing action is akin to that which gives the term "white trash" its power. Rather, the relations it signifies are based on the stories we have been told, experiences we have had, the relations we find ourselves in, and even the stories we tell ourselves in relation to race and class. Had differences, and the ensuing distances, not signaled my perceived shortcomings based on where I'm from, and by extension how I act, speak, and dress as a white person, I would never have known myself to be white trash in particular moments and contexts. Thus, my self-identification as white trash comes as a result of distancing. It is the cultural label of "get away from me" in relation to a specific context.

Consequently, by the time I was in undergraduate school, I'd taken to calling myself "white trash," particularly when I desired to do something others would consider uncouth, a rhetorical move that, in many ways, gave me license to do whatever I wanted. It was empowering because calling myself "white trash" made me already apart. I could distance myself before others had a chance to distance me—especially within academic contexts. What worse could they call me? Ironically, no one ever called me "white trash" until after I'd gotten my master's degree. The name-caller was upset

they'd lost a board game. My only response was to laugh and defend myself: "But I have a master's degree." This was my first time actively distancing myself from the label "white trash." In response, the disgruntled player said, "Yes and we are so proud of you!" Like magic, the marker disappeared. The distance erased, a blank space upon which I began to inscribe my own distance from "white trash."

To further my story's example of distancing, Nancy Isenberg states, "'white trash' remind[s] us of one of the American nation's uncomfortable truths: the poor are always with us" (xv). Terms like "hillbilly" or "redneck" may be deployed to identify poor white individuals and can signal distinct differences within a group of white people or *poor* white people. In comparison, an individual is relegated into the category of "white trash" because they display the negative behaviors that embody the epitome of what is often assumed about the poor, primarily how they completely ignore social standards and expectations. To treat a person as "white trash" is to suggest that they should be removed from both the privilege of whiteness and the current social situation; however, to remove a person as if they were actually trash is typically not a socially accepted action, aside from more formal social engagements where physical violence may ensue. So, then, the poor, the ones who are to be distanced from or to be removed, "are always with us" in academia. Behavior becoming of white trash alerts others to the poor's presence. So, white trash is, in fact, in academia, both the term and the people labeled with it. Though we may not utter the words "white trash," the reactions toward these individuals (including myself) reify the term's distancing function.

As an undergrad, I was different, no matter how many scholarships I earned, no matter how good my grades were, and I accepted it. School could not change where I was from, what interested me, or, because of these things, what I brought to a conversation when I participated in an academic social situation. Because what I inevitably brought was, and continues to be, a self, composed of my experiences and my stories beyond the middle-class college student narrative embodied by the images in culture and, it seemed to me, by my peers. I frequently ended up violating boundaries. To illustrate, a story:

As a recipient of the First-Generation Scholarship my senior year, I was required to attend a donor thank-you luncheon. While I was pleased to express my thanks in this way, I'd worked late the night before, so I was late. As I waded into the sea of beige, white, and black clothing during the keynote speaker's address, I felt waves of eyeballs as salt in the wound of my tardiness. Ever the sore thumb, even among my fellow first-gens, I stuck out. My lateness could have been forgiven if I'd not been so bold as to wear a white dress with pink polka-dots held up by a halter top (upper arm tattoo of a heart with the word "Boss" exposed). The only seat left was at a round table directly in front of the speaker's podium that looked out into the crowd. I could feel the burn in my cheeks accompanying my racing heartbeat as I awkwardly tried to negotiate between the uncomfortable position of contorting to look at the orator or face the eyes that could have potentially been watching me or the presenter. Hoping that the end of his address signaled more informal interactions, I dove into conversation with other first-generation scholars and people I later learned were the biggest donors of the scholarship program. "What do you enjoy doing?" the donors asked. Gleefully, I explained that I enjoyed walking down the street to the bar to read or write and hosting painting parties. More stares. Forget the dress. I might as well have been naked. Other scholars responded in the veins of volunteering (which I also enjoyed doing) and reading (I majored in English—of course I loved reading!).

> Paradoxically, the only way in which I belonged was as someone different, even among my peers. The sore thumb: a reminder of something gone painfully wrong but on a necessary appendage—that which distinguishes us from most animals.

There was still food to eat after the donors left, so I stayed to chat with other scholars at my table. They now seemed most interested in me, my favorite bars, and how painting parties worked. Feeling relieved to discuss and that I could fit in as an oddity, I happily explained the finer details of my stated interests. I remained, however, The Oddity™: the late girl who went to bars and had abnormal interests in comparison with them. Paradoxically, the only way in which I belonged was as someone different, even among my peers. The sore thumb: a reminder of something gone painfully wrong but on a necessary appendage—that which distinguishes us from most animals. A pain that is obligatory to remind us, in this case to remind *them*, that there is a difference. A difference that was supposed to be reformed,

distanced, or even erased by being an academic (with the help of the First-Generation Scholarship and its donors). But try as we or they might, the poor are always with us. Academic culture and discourse (my successful acquisition of a bachelor's degree) indicated that I was fully prepared to dress and answer questions appropriately. But I did not. And yet, there I was. Here I am. What exactly is it (or *was* it) the donors pay for? To forget? A "disturbing liminality" indeed.

PhD Program

Despite learning to dress the part, not having to work late anymore, and understanding what responses people expected to hear, the pursuit of my PhD only further confirmed my white trash status, the difference and distancing it implies, but in a new way. My master's, a smaller program with mostly local students, was comfortable, but in my PhD program I found myself surrounded by colleagues who proudly claimed they didn't have to go to community college, even if they grew up poor and were first-generation. Notwithstanding these variances, it seemed that we all worked to find common ground in terms of our backgrounds and current positioning, including participating in writing groups and even starting a labor union to combat the high fees and low pay that characterize many graduate stipends. It seemed as though the last thing any of us wanted to do was forget where we came from and how hard we'd worked to get into a doctoral program.

While this labor served a number of purposes, the one it forwarded the most was an idea of togetherness, as in "we're in this together." Emails were sent signed "in solidarity," people showed up with various chilis and dips for socials, and (probably once a week) we all sent texts to find out who would be in what Google Docs or Zoom call when. In many ways, this behavior is typical of graduate students, and so it is an aspect of academic culture: it's part of the "processes of knowledge-production, socialization, labor distribution, including symbolic labor, and professionalization" and, as Sande Cohen says, they are "in dispute" (6). "Dispute," beginning with the Latin root of "dis," meaning "to separate" or "apart." Similar to *dis*associate, *dis*cern, and—yes—*dis*tance. Of course, disputes existed in terms of what Cohen mentions, but also disputes between one another occasionally occurred. Sometimes purely professional disagreements and sometimes personal disputes leaked into professional situations and led to rhetorical distancing that felt, to me, similar to the intentions of labeling one as "white trash."

In particular, the dispute I'm addressing is the socialization. "Socialization," as in setting a precedent and tone for how one is to act within an academic context. This construction happens with each interaction and manifests in how we respond to one another.

The most striking aspect of these distancing moments is that they frequently arose during communal practices, such as meetings and electronic communications, that are intended to preserve and utilize the togetherness we graduate students worked so hard to maintain. Disagreements in these contexts can, and probably should, happen—conflict can be a great tool in strengthening relations and solving problems. In contrast to a healthy or productive conflict, however, the distancing techniques I saw employed felt all too familiar.

Ultimately, supporting these hierarchies constructs an understanding of academic culture in which punching down is encouraged as common practice.

My gut trembled connecting experiences in my educational ascent with experiences from my dirt road past. To associate the two seemed unthinkable, yet, to me, the constellation seemed unavoidable. Despite the fact we were all in the same position and had worked hard to get there, it appeared some of us belonged and some of us did not. Some should have the privilege of being an academic, some should not. Granted, there are some behaviors that we generally don't want to be associated with, such as racism, sexism, or (ironically) classicism, but the deeper relation occurs when the rhetorical techniques expose a hierarchy that creates distance. As I've reasoned, "white trash" creates a distance between both the labeler and the labeled *and* between the individual and privileges that "white," rhetorically, *should* provide. So, then, within the context of academia, the privileges of both "white" *and* an academic are denied—the implication being "get away from *academia*" in addition and in comparison to "get away from *me*." More essentially, these socialization practices relate to "white trash" as a category that reveals the precarity of a multitude of roles in academia. As graduate students, that anxiety could have easily stemmed from our backgrounds, our positioning in the academic hierarchy, or the uncertainty of our future careers in academia. To extend precarity further in academia, we could consider the financial instability of adjunct positions, the tumultuous tenure process, or even unpredictable course evaluations.

While not everyone reading this grew up on a dirt road, we all have our own versions of these disputes, these distances. They're the moments of

recognizing others may believe we shouldn't be here in academia. Imposter syndrome, prevalent in academia, may be one symptom—the fear that we do not belong. These distances happen because, simply, we hide or hide from the constellations, the from-there-to-here, of our positionings. We don't remember that they possess the potential to lead to another point, go someplace else. The points may be distant, but the poor, the nontraditional or first-generation academics, are always with us, as are the cultural relics of distancing based on stories about differences concerning race and class, which are rhetorically constructed. If one is white trash, then they are still white. If one is an academic who doesn't embody some perceived notion of academic culture, then they are still an academic. From this paradox, a question: Are individuals who perceive these differences less or more likely to assert the privilege of being white and/or an academic? I fear that asserting either or both of these privileges reinforces exclusionary distancing practices. Reifying these categories prospectively results in harming all but a select few. Ultimately, supporting these hierarchies constructs an understanding of academic culture in which punching down is encouraged as common practice. A possible outcome of these conventions would preserve a concept of academic culture that ignores, or actively hides from, the line of inquiry offered by labels such as "white trash" and academia's relation to them.

Where Academia Is Going

In order to make anything, including metaphorical bridges, into what something can be, we need to be aware of the materials and tools at our disposal. In terms of changing, or continuing to change, academic culture, scholars in composition and rhetoric and related fields have suggested a number of methods and different lenses through which to pedagogically approach composing texts. As far back as 1992, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles pointed out calls for "challenges to the traditional essay" (350). So, saying "let's write differently," while useful, is nothing new. Recognizing systematically marginalized groups at the foundation of our culture and discourse has also been a focal point: Stacey Waite outlines tactics for queer writing, Eric Darnell Pritchard explains restorative literacy to empower those pushed to the margins by normative literacies (particularly Black queers), Donna LeCourt emphasizes students recognizing their individual positionality and agency in the melee of discourses around them (including academic)

to construct new identities, and, of course, Paulo Freire calls upon recognizing the implicit oppression in privileging instructor experiences over student experiences. These theories, and many like them, are integral parts to academic culture's story. They signal a way we can go in order to improve our pedagogical approaches and how students see themselves fitting into academic discourse—how students can create space for themselves in academic culture as different, but not so distant. However, even with these tools, appeals for reimagining current academic culture do not go unchallenged.

Jill Lawrence argues that if there is "one mainstream academic discourse, operating within an unchanging, static, and consistent organizational context," then there are two overarching implications: (1) postsecondary institutions, "particularly in times where government policies are driven by liberal/individualist ideologies, are inherently conservative," resist examining "policies and attitudes as a first step in initiating changes that could serve to facilitate students' success" and (2) students who do not succeed carry the blame for their deficiencies (5). "Discourse carries power," so how can we add stories to the discourse in order to change academic culture? The exigency of this question is "especially important for weak or poorly prepared students—particularly students from poorer classes or those who are the first in their families to come to college" (Elbow 135). Further, how can we add them to the discourse in order to call attention not only to how "language inscribes difference" but also to how we call attention to the distance between differences?

Yes, there are differences among all of us, even if some forms are rendered invisible, and we should acknowledge them. But stopping at acknowledging often leads to an individual living with those tensions and being forced to negotiate their place within academic culture, positioning academic culture as a site of struggle—not unlike the "pain" and emotional discomfort Keith Gilyard experiences in choosing to code-switch as opposed to fighting in *Voices of the Self* (31). Cultural rhetorics intervenes in similar situations by stressing the embodied experience of an individual in relation to the larger context. Powell et al. talk "about how our discipline has trained us to demarcate and draw clear borders," so considering academic culture in discussion with other cultures goes beyond discussing the ways in which we research and expands to our motivations for research (Act III, Scene II). Recall how I believed at the time that earning a master's positioned me far from the label of white trash, and yet here I am writing about my experiences

as such. Scholarly publications about white trash and cultural rhetorics permit me to do so; however, the occasion to work through potential implications on a large platform hopefully incites recognition in my readers—their own times of distancing and times of togetherness within academic culture and what differences and similarities exist between those points.

But again, this recognition yields the possibility of leaving us to battle within ourselves. Of course, we tell ourselves stories, but the best stories are meant to be shared. Make the connections. Why must our bodies be quiet sites of tension between distancing and togetherness? If nothing else, stories call for examination, a dissection. We find in our hearts the desire for connection and disconnection—to be one thing or another, whether that's how we perceive "good" and "bad," "worthy" or "unworthy," "associated" or "disassociated," all based within definitions maintained in our culture(s). Comparing and questioning the relations that create and how they can build what we call academic culture leads us into possibilities for recognizing and improving it (if we so choose). Constellative practices emphasize the degree to which knowledge is never built by individuals, but is, instead, accumulated through collective practices within specific communities. We are academics, which means, whatever the content, our discourse demands that we deal in knowledge creation, and that includes our socialization. Our relations to this journal, our everyday lives, and what we do in them make up our identities and stories—"make" being the operative word here because we're never really finished. We upkeep. But what are we upkeeping? What cultural practices are we in the academy perpetuating, are they in service to an expectation of an academic culture, and who should embody it? If so, how much of these expectations are based on stories we've been told and that we tell ourselves?

Where we are heading could be similar to where we've been. A single article in an academic journal might not do much. But what it can do is make a difference because it is here. Barely noticeable in the overarching "culture" and our day-to-day interactions, but it is a difference. It is here making connections, teasing out "from-there-to-here," and tying those connections to how academic culture can be identified, even if it's only through my associations and perspective. This kind of presence is not meant to distance, but to include others within relational constellations. Sharing stories and seeking out the relationships they constellate solidify the messiness of terms like "academic culture" and the precarity of identifying with it.

Epilogue

The bridge is already here—a bridge of embodied experiences—people who have labored and negotiated themselves to be in academia. They have negotiated and worked through and within academic culture, creating their own paths to get here. And so, "becoming a responsible language user demands an understanding of the ways language inscribes difference" isn't just about how or what we write, it's also about what embodied experiences have brought us to write, to put it into written or spoken language (Jarratt 317). Language also asserts itself beyond what we put down on paper—it's how we act. We write bodies and embodied experiences into culture.

In my proposal and the introduction for this article, I promised I would call "attention to places where we can build concrete, stable bridges between what is and what can be." However, bridges are rigid and sturdy—meant to last for as long as possible. Relations, however, constellations, are apt to change and can be read and interpreted in a number of ways. One could say that it is in their nature to transform. And I don't think this story is at its end (see Powell et al. Act I Scene I). So, I invite these terms for thinking through story as they have added to mine: confusion, negotiation, distance, togetherness, terms still in the making.

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Misty D. Fuller

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Andrés C. López

Kemenik le Ch'o'b'oj / Tejiendo Historias / Weaving Histories/Stories: Creating a *Memoria Histórica* of Resistance through Maya Backstrap Weaving Rhetorics

In their report of the violences committed during the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996), the Commission for Historical Clarification stated that "historical memory, both individual and collective," is important for creating just conditions and providing reparations to the victims of violence perpetrated during this armed conflict (1998, 48). As a result, remembrance projects began to create a *memoria histórica* that historicizes the violences committed by the Guatemalan government. These remembrance projects and memories often imagine a heteronormative Guatemalan populace and, in turn, erase the existence of queer and trans Maya people also affected by violence and ongoing genocide.

In this article I argue that the practice of Maya backstrap weaving is a rhetorical mechanism for remembrance and maintenance of traditional practices. Using a Two Spirit critique, I articulate a Maya-centered queer/trans rhetorical methodology that points to how Western historiographic methodologies continue to be the norm in Guatemalan historicizing practices, but also within WGSS, queer and trans studies, and rhetoric and writing studies. My use of backstrap weaving is a type of storytelling and remembrance practice that centers cultural rhetorics, Indigenous sovereignty, and locally specific Indigenous paradigms and frameworks to stop the erasure of Indigenous peoples from collective consciousness and canons.

Kawaj kinb'ij
chiwech jun tzijonik
Che ri xna'taj chwech
nutom:

Chi le ixoq are xb'anow
le kaj ulew
Xub'an ruk jun mejlem,
xukulem

Xa k'u jeri'
Xukem le utikita'jik
le kaj ulew

Xujopij, xumak'ij
Le b'atz', le chij
Xuq'in le kaj ulew
Xub'an le q'o'b'al
Xub'an le xolb'al

Utelem k'u chirij le
loq'alaj uwachulew
Ma k'u kasb'yo'w taj
Ma k'u kaslob' laj

Quiero contarles una
historia
Que he oído y
recordado:

Fueron las mujeres
quienes hicieron el
mundo
Lo hicieron con una
ceremonia

Y fue así que
Tejieron el comienzo
del mundo

Separaron y
seleccionaron
El hilo, y la lana
Situaron la urdimbre
del mundo
E hicieron los diseños
Hicieron los colores de
acento

El cargo en sus
espaldas al jalar la cara
del mundo
Son las que proveen los
hilares
Son las que lo siguen
repitiendo

I want to tell you all a
story
One I have heard and
remembered:

It was women who
created the world
through ceremony

And it was so that
they wove the
beginning of the world

They separated, and
selected
the thread, the wool
They set up the warp of
the world
made the designs,
accented them with
colors

Their charge on their
backs as they pulled
together the face of the
world
They're the ones who
provide the stringing
They're the ones who
keep repeating this
process

I wrote this poem while participating in the Maya Language Institute through Tulane University. I was working on a mini-project that focused on gendered differences in weaving practices in Nawalja', Guatemala, the community where our small language group was staying for five weeks. Through the conversations I had with the handful of weavers I spoke with in Nawalja', I began to realize how weaving is central to Maya communities. Because of these conversations, I started to think through the ways in which gendered differences in weaving mark not just gendered separations in the practices of weaving but also the importance of roles and responsibilities given specifically to women within Maya K'iche' communities.

This short article is part of a larger *memoria histórica* of the Guatemalan Civil War that centers queer and trans Maya people in its imaginings.[1] By *memoria histórica*, I am referring to the common use of this phrase by Guatemalan radical activists to name the project of recovering collective historical memory of the civil war. To do this memory work, I turn to the Maya practice of backstrap weaving, a specific form of weaving primarily done by Maya women, where the loom is balanced on the weaver's back with a backstrap. Weaving helps me think about the various ways in which the histories I am reconstructing in this weaving project are all interconnected, just as all my identities are interconnected within my body. Throughout my larger work, I argue for a Maya-centered paradigm to shift the ways in which histories of the Guatemalan Civil War have been written by scholars and historiographers in Guatemala and abroad.

In Guatemala, struggles for Maya self-determination and survival are ongoing inheritances from the moment of contact, but they have intensified since the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996) (Afflitto and Jesilow). My family, like many Guatemalan families, chose to not talk about the civil war. I can only speculate that my family's piercing silence stems from the many reasons that other Guatemalan families choose to "not talk about that," or other unpleasant subjects like my queerness or transness: fear. The civil war was marked by numerous terror tactics used by the Guatemalan military and the Policía Nacional, both of whom performed countless massacres and murders against Maya communities as counterinsurgency strategies (Afflitto and Jesilow 21). This violence created a culture of fear among Guatemalans and helped to suppress larger resistances and organizing happening throughout the civil war. The fear of speaking—to name the violences that occurred—continues and for good reason. The military

continues to perpetrate violence toward those who seem to step outside cultural expectations of behavior—heterosexuality, binary gender presentations, silence regarding the civil war—and encourage not speaking about the war. This makes it hard to learn about what happened during the civil war, and it makes it hard to remember those who were affected by the government's terror tactics. Within this culture of silence and fear, choosing to tell the stories of what happened is an act of resistance that aims to heal collective trauma for multiple communities in Guatemala, the Guatemalan diaspora in the United States and México, and us as individuals affected by the unresolved broken histories and fragments left behind.

In their report of the violences committed during the civil war, the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) in Guatemala stated their belief that "historical memory, both individual and collective" is an important facet to creating just conditions and providing reparations to the victims of violence perpetrated during this armed conflict (48). The CEH states: "Remembrance of the victims is a fundamental aspect of this historical memory and permits the recovery of the values of, and the validity of the struggle for, human dignity" (48). Though peace accords were signed in 1996 and have theoretically ended this armed conflict, I am interested in the ways that the over 200,000 murdered and disappeared during this thirty-six-year struggle are being archived in remembrance projects used to historicize the civil war (Afflitto and Jesilow 29). These remembrance projects and memories often imagine a heteronormative Guatemalan populace and, in turn, erase the existence of queer and trans Maya people also affected by violence and ongoing genocide. This weaving project stems from my own experiences growing up in Guatemala and the United States; my family's migration back and forth between Guatemala, the United States, and Jamaica; and the backdrop of diasporic colonial violence and memory erasures my family and I have and continue to survive through. These relationships influence how I approach my historicizing and help me piece back together my own stolen and forgotten *memorias históricas*. My work and methodologies are also situated within a storytelling prac-

> **Within this culture of silence and fear, choosing to tell the stories of what happened is an act of resistance that aims to heal collective trauma for multiple communities in Guatemala, the Guatemalan diaspora in the United States and México, and us as individuals affected by the unresolved broken histories and fragments left behind.**

tice that is embedded within a Maya paradigm of relational memory and remembrance, a practice that emphasizes multiple layers of relationships in the process of recollection. Shawn Wilson defines paradigms as "labels that are used to identify sets of underlying beliefs or assumptions upon which research is based" (33). To center a Maya-specific paradigm, I use backstrap weaving as a storytelling methodology that holds together and interlocks multiple methodologies and stories. Backstrap weaving allows me to think about the material rhetorics that Maya women, the primary weavers in Maya communities, deploy as a mechanism for remembering and maintaining traditional knowledges. Backstrap weaving, then, is a Maya rhetoric that creates specific types of knowledges—those that remember roles and responsibilities to community—meant to maintain Maya histories and memories.

Backstrap weaving is how I am articulating my own responsibilities and roles within the weaving work of this article as a queer-trans-masculine person who learned to weave in Nawalja'. I center backstrap weaving in Maya cultural practices to articulate a Maya material rhetoric that creates cultural meaning and communal memory. I argue that backstrap weaving is a rhetorical mechanism that centers Maya paradigms and invokes gendered resistances to ongoing occupation and colonization.

My constellating methodology pulls together multiple centers to demonstrate how cultural rhetorics; women, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS); queer and trans studies; and Indigenous studies can grapple with mixed-race identities and complicated histories without continuing to center false binaries. I weave the multiple strands of story to create my own *ts'íib*, a Maya-centered "writing (understood as letters) and a multitude of other forms of recording knowledge [e.g., weaving, planting corn, poetry]," as Paul M. Worley and Rita M. Palacios articulate (5). As *ts'íib*, this article centers backstrap weaving as rhetorical knowledge-making for remembrance and the maintenance of traditional practices often imagined as forgotten and erased as contemporary colonial forms of storytelling replaced them.

Maya *Ts'íib*: Toward a Practice of Maya Rhetorics

In *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts'íib as Recorded Knowledge*, Worley and Palacios describe "ts'íib, as an Indigenous Maya way of reading and writing, . . . [with] culturally specific relationships between the person creating the text, the text itself, and the person deciphering the text" (14). Worley and

Palacios argue for using, reading, and interpreting *ts'íib*—Maya knowledge-making practices—as something akin to and different from literature. *Ts'íib* as Maya literature is important and necessary in disrupting assumptions and power dynamics of presumed dominance and centrality of western forms of literature.

Studies of Maya K'iche' rhetorics have focused extensively on surviving codices, "deciphering" glyphs to translate into "letters in the Roman alphabet" at specific archaeological locations, and understanding the *Popol Vuh* along with other writings by "Maya intellectual elites" (Mignolo 62, 216). While these are important and needed studies in Maya rhetorics, they are but a small portion of Maya knowledge-making practices. As Walter D. Mignolo outlines in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, Native knowledge-making does not privilege alphabetic text and functions both as a means to communicate and to develop community relationships (32). Mignolo's re-historicizing of frameworks put in place by colonial Spain to center *"la lengua castellana"* as a "civilizing process" is useful in thinking through how this "civilizing process" has centered alphabetic text as the only form of knowledge-making while simultaneously blurring the ways that other types of knowledge-making can take place (emphasis in original, 34). While Mignolo explains how other colonizing powers took their own languages and imposed them as the lingua franca, I focus on how other types of languages continued to survive through this imposition and how the emphasis on written language creates the conditions by which western knowledge practices are deemed superior to other forms of knowledge-making.

Studies in rhetorics have often centered western knowledge-making as the only form of rhetoric that counts.

Studies in rhetorics have often centered western knowledge-making as the only form of rhetoric that counts. In "Rhetoric," Malea Powell, Stacey Pigg, Kendall Leon, and Angela Haas provide a shortened history of rhetoric to address the contradictions created by only focusing on the Socrates-Plato-Aristotle lineage (4549–51). Powell et al. highlight how revisionist histories of western-centered rhetoric, those that look to include women, for instance, wind up re-creating the same systems that continue the erasure of Indigenous people. Powell et al. state: "Regardless of the feminists and other revisionist historiographers, the protagonists and the sites of rhetorical production in the story remain the same, stabilized as the origin from which

The digital practice of backstrap weaving is one that is embodied through gender experiences of Maya women, since they are the primary weavers in Maya communities, and thus the primary rhetoricians maintaining cultural knowledges and memories through their encoded weaving.

rhetoric studies proceeds" (4555). Thus, the problem with revisionist histories that look to add erased peoples to the origin story of rhetorics[2] is one based on the frameworks historians center in their historiographic practices. The call for a disruption to centering western theoretical frameworks is not a new move by scholars of color. My work joins other scholars of color in rhetorics and composition, who have called for a different center to rhetorics and insist on a shift in paradigms to make these challenges impactful to the specific communities we look to write into a multicentered canon.

I center weaving itself as a form of gendered *ts'íib,* or gendered Maya rhetorical practices, outside of alphabetic text that are always invested in the relationships they have with the weaver, culture, and the person who is reading the text, or in this case the woven material. I position backstrap weaving as a type of digital hypertext, "an interactive system of storing and retrieving images, texts, and other [knowledges] that allows users to directly link to relevant images, texts, sounds, and other data types in a nonlinear environment" (Haas, "Wampum as Hypertext" 82). In "Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice," Angela Haas argues that pictographs, petroglyphs, and wampum belts predate the conception of hypertexts as only relating to computerized systems ("Wampum as Hypertext" 82). My use of backstrap weaving as a hypertext names the digital material rhetorics practiced by weavers to acknowledge multiple forms of knowledge-making taking place when weaving. I take up "*digital* [as] refer[ring] to our fingers, our digits, one of the primary ways (along with our ears and eyes) through which we make sense of the world and with which we write into the world" (Haas, *A Rhetoric of Alliance* 59–60). Like Haas, I assert that "[a]ll writing is digital" and that digital refers to "*digitalis* in Latin, which means 'of or relating to the fingers or toes' or a 'coding of information'" (*A Rhetoric of Alliance* 59–60). Thus, when I suggest that Maya K'iche' backstrap weaving is a digital practice, I argue that this mode of knowledge production is embodied and coded with meaning. The digital practice of backstrap weaving is one that is embodied through gender experiences of Maya women, since they are the primary weavers in

Maya communities, and thus the primary rhetoricians maintaining cultural knowledges and memories through their encoded weaving.

Through the hypertextuality of backstrap weaving, I expand Worley and Palacios's definition of *ts'íib* as Maya literature to also understand Maya rhetorics. I define rhetoric here broadly as any mode or practice of knowledge-making. I understand rhetorics as The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab posits: "as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical." This emphasis on the relationship between rhetorics and culture is one that moves away from an implied western center. While this move to decenter western histories or rewrite them to include women or people of color in their storytelling is not new in rhetoric or in WGSS and queer and trans studies, these attempts tend to recenter western canons, pointing to the failures of additive models focused on including previously excluded or erased groups, rather than shift the frameworks used to theorize.

In "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian discusses "the academic world's general ignorance about the literature of black people, and women, whose work . . . has been discredited" (71). Christian outlines how "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic . . . our theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (68). While I also outline different forms of theorizing done by people of color, unlike Christian, I position these theorizing practices not as alternative forms to "Western form," but as stories that reveal what is missing, what has been forcibly erased and forgotten, from the "literature" written about Guatemala, queer, and trans Indigenous experiences in Guatemala, and me as a mixed-race queer and trans person living in the Guatemalan diaspora. Weaving together stories of queer and trans Guatemalans with stories of recuperated remembrances of the Guatemalan Civil War pieces back together the histories settler-colonialism has obscured and erased in Guatemala.

Subsequently, I am not just defining *ts'íib* as another rhetoric, but specifically positioning it in relationship to other forms of Indigenous rhetorics. The Indigenous rhetorics I am putting in relationship with my gendered *ts'íib* are a type of cultural rhetoric that emphasizes Indigenous "rhetorical sovereignty" and "survivance" (Lyons; Powell; Vizenor). Scott Richard Lyons articulates an Indigenous "rhetorical sovereignty" as "the inherent right and ability of [Indigenous] *peoples* to determine their own communicative

needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (emphasis in original, 449–50). Indigenous rhetorics are also rooted in Gerald Vizenor's work in "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice," as well as Malea Powell's bridging work in "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing." Vizenor

Ts'íib allows Maya people to create knowledge and resist continual occupation and genocide by centering relationality and Maya survivance using *k'anel*, *cholel*, and *cha'anil*, different forms of relationships that are articulated through Maya rhetorics.

articulates an "aesthetics of survivance" as a form and practice by which Native people have been able to maintain their communities in spite of active genocidal tactics that look to erase their knowledge bases (1). Vizenor positions the "native practice of survivance" as a type of "storied presence" where Indigenous scholars can and have imagined themselves into the future (2). "Survivance" for Vizenor is a verb, one that maintains Native cultural specificity and storying, rather than positioning the Native subject as a victim to whom violence has happened (10). Powell builds on this practice of imagining Native subjects outside of colonial impositions of Nativeness and articulates a "rhetoric of survivance" that is a "practice [of] tactical authenticity" (148). Together, "rhetorical sovereignty" and "survivance" shape my weaving. Gendered *ts'íib* is a Maya rhetoric that shapes and directs remembrance projects toward a Maya sovereignty of self-determination for futurity through its emphasis on specific Maya knowledge-making practices. It is a rhetoric that remembers how different gendered bodies create different types of *memorias históricas* (histories/stories), in this case, *memorias históricas* focused on queer and trans Maya subjects erased through western modes of historicizing.

Ts'íib allows Maya people to create knowledge and resist continual occupation and genocide by centering relationality and Maya survivance using *k'anel, cholel,* and *cha'anil*,[3] different forms of relationships that are articulated through Maya rhetorics. Each of these concepts point toward specific Maya ways of reading, interpreting, and performing *ts'íib*. *K'anel* focuses on the various ways in which an individual can be in relationship with themselves, other people, and the community at large (Worley and Palacios 23–24). *K'anel* points to how one's individual relationships to themselves and the community at large are mediated through gendered interactions as well as the gendered roles assigned to specific practices, thus troubling

colonial logics that suggest independent processes for writing, reading, and creating knowledge.

Worley and Palacios define *cholel* as "a physical space (the milpa [cornfield]) and a process associated with the space that involves the formation of a subject in relation to others and to its surroundings" (25). As an integral part of this process of becoming a subject within the community, *cholel* functions within ceremony as a pulling string, bringing past ceremonies and knowledges to the present through the act of doing ceremony (Worley and Palacios 25–26). Lastly, Worley and Palacios define *cha'anil* "as a Maya way of performing the act of reading" (31). This type of performing knowledge is one always mediated through the speakers' established relationships with themselves and community and how communities read the speaker through their own positionalities. *Ts'íib* centers Maya relationships with themselves, each other, and communities at large (*k'anel*), relationships with space and spaces created through ceremony (*cholel*), and relationships to how one performs storytelling or community readings of knowledge (*cha'anil*). *Ts'íib* models the importance of multidirectional relationships in scholars' theorizing and methodologies because it requires that scholars continue to center their relationships in all aspects of their work.

In *Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and Literacies in American Indian Studies,* Kimberly G. Wieser articulates a "Native eisegesis," or a Native-specific interpretation of texts from knowledge the reader might already possess. Native eisegesis describes how it's not just the weavers who are participating in the act of creating knowledge, but that weaving is a type of rhetoric that builds on relationships readers of the textile bring forth with their own memories of patterns woven together (7–8, 11–12). Wieser argues for an understanding of knowledge-making as one that is always interconnected with multiple actors (i.e., readers and creators). Similarly, in "Wampum as Hypertext," Haas argues that "Wampum records are maintained by regularly revisiting and re-'reading' them through community memory and performance, as wampum is a living rhetoric that communicates a mutual relationship between two or more parties" ("Wampum as Hypertext" 80–81). Like wampum, backstrap weaving is a "living rhetoric" that necessitates readers understand the different patterns woven, their spatial significance within the weaving itself, and their sense of place marking for the text to be read and understood.

Backstrap weaving thus opens other types of spaces outside of colonial logics to record *memorias históricas* and to archive these memories for the larger project of recuperating histories of genocide and violence that are actively being erased by the Guatemalan government.[4] This recording mechanism is one that is encoded so that a specific Maya audience is always at center because Maya-centered readings ask us to think about the overall pattern, the multiple strands that come together to create the pattern, and the intricacies of the pattern that mark it as belonging to a specific place and time.

When looking at the designs, or *q'o'oj*, that are added on top of weaving made specifically for traditional clothing pieces, specific patterns are coded to signal to others where one is from, or at least where that clothing item was made. Since the civil war in Guatemala, men have stopped using traditional clothing, as this has at times protected them from being identified as Indigenous, which sometimes spared them from discrimination and violence. This rejection of traditional clothing became operationalized because gender expectations for men have shifted to be more in line with Guatemalan Ladino culture, which applies western binary gender ideologies. As a result, women have primarily been the wearers of traditional clothing, which displays the specific patterns from their hometowns. Woven clothing carries within it further encoded meaning as both a signifier of Indigeneity and a marker of place. These patterns are only created through women's weaving and are not found in the mass-produced men's weaving, which uses *telares*, Spanish weaving machines, making backstrap weaving a specific type of gendered *ts'íib*, or a knowledge-making practice that primarily centers women in its making. This digital practice, where fingers quite literally count threads and insert other colors to form symmetrical patterns, functions as its own gendered language. Gendered *ts'íib* focuses on relationships on an individual level (*k'anel*), with place (*cholel*), and with those who wear the woven items or might read designs worn by other women (*cha'anil*).

> Gendered *ts'íib* focuses on relationships on an individual level (*k'anel*), with place (*cholel*), and with those who wear the woven items or might read designs worn by other women (*cha'anil*).

Backstrap weaving is a practice of *ts'íib* that has traditionally been defined as women's work and within women's role in Maya communities. If we understand *ts'íib* as a Maya knowledge-making practice, centered on Lyons's "rhetorical sovereignty" and Vizenor's and Powell's articulations

of "survivance," what does it mean that women are the ones in the role of maintaining community knowledge for future generations through their weaving? What worlds are Maya women creating for posterity? How does shifting our understanding of backstrap weaving as *ts'íib* change how scholars might understand Maya rhetorics as ongoing gendered forms of knowledge-making? How might this also change how Maya women see their own work as a maintenance of living cultural memory as they quite literally make the world on their backs?

Weaving Histories: Creating New Spaces to Weave Through

Backstrap weaving is a type of Maya rhetoric rooted in gendered *ts'íib*, relational knowledge-making practices that center gendered experiences in their making. Backstrap weaving is how different stories about struggles for land and resource redress, Maya K'iche' resistance, and survivance can and are articulated. Casie Cobos describes "[e]mbodied storying . . . [as the *active* and *continual*, flesh-and-bone *practicing* of stories—as both tellings and theorizing" (23). Cobos specifically focuses on reading the embodied storying within Chican@ rhetorics by emphasizing the body-mind split, which frames "the mind as immaterial and the body as unreliable—as a way to construct a single epistemology on all cultures [and] enacts an epistemic violence on *both* the body and the mind in communities and cultures that have always already practiced recognition of the body as conduit and necessary part of the mind" (29–30, emphasis in original). My embodied storying through backstrap weaving, a body-centered Maya knowledge-making practice, is how I recenter ongoing Maya K'iche' knowledge- and world-making because all weaving projects require that weavers balance the woven materials and tension applied to all the strings on their backs. Our bodies keep the loom in place and allow for the tension to ease or intensify if needed. Backstrap weaving is how, as Cobos describes, "[b]odies work to produce stories, and stories help produce embodied practices" (30). My weaving uses the body, my own body, the bodies of countless queer and trans ghosts, and the bodies of contemporary Maya people I am in community with to create stories that help to weave all these communities back into collective *memoria hist*órica.

I challenge dominant ways of historicizing the Guatemalan Civil War through the gendered *ts'íib* of my weaving. I call for rhetoric, WGSS, queer and trans studies, and Indigenous studies to complicate their historicizing practices and paradigms because doing so shifts the stories we tell and

changes the terms by which we understand history. Specifically, by center-ing Maya K'iche' backstrap weaving as a form of memory making, histories that imagine queer and trans Mayas can be remembered. It's through the practice of backstrap weaving that I see spaces opened by the *choko'y*, or heddle, where different threads can be incorporated into the main weave. The threads I pull through unweave and reframe assumed straight, cisgender, and normative subjects as the main participants in these histories. Rather than continue a static historicizing, the threads I am weaving together in this project are part of larger crossings and remembrances that shift and move as they become embodied through the act of weaving itself.

Backstrap weaving is a Maya practice of constellating *historias*, his-tories/stories, which allows for multiple moving centers to be present. As the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab argues, constellating allows for "multiple orientations and frameworks [to become] visible and heard." Constellating histories opens space for fuller types of histories, those that engage with contradicting pieces and complicate dominant culture's single version of history, to become visible by not assuming one overarching story holds true for all. Constellating imagines multiple centers, and in this case, my weaving pulls together those multiple centers to create different types of *historias*. Within the multiple centers of my historicizing, I pull together histories of queer and trans Guatemalans and weave them through the open spaces so that they can become visible in the larger weaving.

Different Threads to Weave Through: A Two Spirit Critique

The process of weaving begins with the creation of the *uk'u'x*, or central warp. The *uk'u'x* is the heart and center of the weave, and without it the whole project falls apart. *Uk'u'x* can literally be translated to heart, center, and soul, which makes the use of this word for warp in Maya K'iche' invoke other understandings of what weaving and setting up the *uk'u'x* are really doing. When weavers create the *uk'u'x*, they literally create the heart and soul of the entire project. They must imagine the future of the project, as the setup determines the size and width of the final weave, making this organiz-ing of the strings in the *uk'u'x* a futurist imagining. This future imagining is *memoria histórica* applied, as it requires that weavers remember previous patterns to reweave and record them once more. Constructing an *uk'u'x* for historiographic projects requires that we imagine what the *historias*, histo-ries/stories, we're remembering and bringing together will do. It requires that we imagine who is included in these *historias*, because this imagining

determines whether or not those we imagine will be present throughout and at the end of our woven historicizing practice.

Another way to think about the *uk'u'x* is as a crossing, where threads are crossing each other, marking several intersections as they create the space in which weaving will take place. The *choko'y*, or heddle, is used to push and pull different strings and create an opening for the weaving thread to be woven through. The *choko'y* gives the weaver control over the amount of space that gets created as the threads cross each other back and forth during the weaving process. Weaving can now begin by wrapping thread around the needle and passing the needle through the open space made by pulling the *choko'y* toward the body. Pushing on the *uk'u'x*, the warp of the weave, opens a different space where one can pass the *kemob'*, or beating stick. The pattern repeats while the weaver uses their body to hold the strings under tension, making the weaver's

The weaver's body is in relationship with the *historias* they weave back into existence through this gendered *ts'íib* memory practice.

body and their relationship to the loom as much a part of the overall weaving as the strings themselves (*cholel*). The weaver's body is in relationship with the *historias* they weave back into existence through this gendered *ts'íib* memory practice. Throughout the whole weaving process, the *uk'u'x* is the central component that keeps various sets of strings together through a cross-section of threads. These multiple crossings allow weaving to take place, and it's through these series of crossings that other spaces can be opened to push or pull new threads through the warp. M. Jaqui Alexander uses crossings as a central metaphor in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. For Alexander, "The Crossing," referring to the Middle Passage, is "also meant to evoke/invoke the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibility" (8). The crossings the *uk'u'x* (central warp) of this weaving project holds are also multilayered and based on my own conflicted positionalities. They help me piece together the ruptures and incomplete pieces of story dominant historiographic practices tend to create, ones where queer and trans Maya people are not remembered as belonging within the story. Maya-centered historicizing necessitates this same level of multicrossing threads so that new spaces can be opened to insert and constellate other types of stories to the history of Guatemala and Maya people, stories that address multiple crossings through migration, gender, sexuality, and racial identities.

The possibilities for liberation for Maya communities within backstrap

weaving are not just relegated to the spaces created through the relationships between weaver, reader, and the communities within which these texts are made or where they travel to (*k'anel, cholel,* and *cha'anil*). The maintenance of the *uk'u'x* points to other types of possible remembrances that can be articulated through backstrap weaving. The spaces that open between the interconnected crossings of threads the *uk'u'x* holds together as the weaver pushes and pulls create spaces where different threads telling stories of queer and trans Mayas can be woven in. As the *uk'u'x* is opened and new threads are woven in, multiple centers, those that hold the complexity of queer and trans Maya identity, can come together to tell stories that have become dormant in Maya cosmologies and imaginaries. Like Qwo-Li Driskill's work on doubleweaving, which draws on Cherokee basket weaving to look at ways in which a space in between the two walls of the baskets is formed, I'm pointing out that there is a space in between the threads in a woven work (73–74). However, while Driskill specifically points to the existence of this space, I point toward how other threads can be pulled through and woven into texts made through backstrap weaving. This is not to say that both material practices are the same, as they come from two different traditions. Rather, I'm drawing on doubleweaving to make methodological sense of how the space the *uk'u'x* creates generates possibilities for other types of stories to emerge. The new threads that are woven into the larger weaving pieces are those that help to constellate the histories of Maya resistance and survivance, not just by including queer and trans Mayas but by making them part of the whole story. Transforming the centers of stories is much more than including those missing from dominant stories, it is about a paradigm shift where different centers and epistemologies completely change the story. Weaving queer and trans Mayas into larger memory and historical projects shifts power dynamics that continue to erase us from existence and collective *memoria histórica* actively being rewritten after the civil war.

One of the threads I pull through the *uk'u'x* (central warp) of this project is shifting the idea that only women can do backstrap weaving. I have talked about Maya women's roles and responsibilities in weaving practices. I push the perception that only women can weave as someone who is trans identified and masculine of center, who learned to weave as an adult, and who continues to practice weaving as part of diasporic memory-making. I'm not bringing this point up to recenter masculinity within weaving practices, but instead to look to how my practice of weaving is part of a Two

Spirit critique in which gender norms and rules can, and are, bent because our responsibilities to our communities are different than those imposed through gender binaries (Driskill 72).

Driskill defines Two Spirit critiques as "diverg[ing] from other queer critiques because they root themselves in Native histories, politics, and decolonial struggles" (71). Like Driskill, I center Two Spirit critiques not as "an essentialist move but [instead as] an assertion that Indigenous gender and sexual identities are intimately connected to land, community, and history" (73). *Ts'íib*, Maya knowledge-making practices, points to relationality through relationships between an individual, the self, and community (*k'anel*); relationships to ceremonial spaces where knowledge-making is practiced (*cholel*); and relationships to the performance and reading of this knowledge-making (*cha'anil*). Two Spirit critiques have responsibilities to our relations at their center. In this case, relationality is one that is mediated and done despite active invisibilizing of Two Spirit identities within Maya communities. I choose to use "Two Spirit," even though it is a North American term, to describe the cross-gender responsibilities I center and practice in my

While Two Spirit might not necessarily come from my own traditional practices, as someone currently living in unceded Algonquin territory, I am also in relationship with North American discourses and traditions, which have merged with other traditions I carry with me as a Guatemalan diasporic subject.

own weaving. Recentering and articulating a crossing, or yet another set of threads to form the *uk'u'x*, of gender roles and responsibilities that are woven within this larger weaving project make them visible. I question ideas and notions from dominant trans studies that state I should only look to masculinity or masculine practices as those that make up my own understanding of myself and my genealogies. While Two Spirit might not necessarily come from my own traditional practices, as someone currently living in unceded Algonquin territory, I am also in relationship with North American discourses and traditions, which have merged with other traditions I carry with me as a Guatemalan diasporic subject.

Additionally, I'm weaving a thread that discusses histories and memories that have been forcefully forgotten and erased from other historical projects. I invoke a Two Spirit critique because the process of recovering and remembering words in Maya K'iche' contexts to talk about queer and trans subjects is still ongoing. These identities are not imagined within current remembrance and historicizing projects of the civil war. "Queer" and

"trans" are not the only formulations or centers for how we might consider talking about these experiences. I'm using these terms at this moment to name these experiences, even as I might not know how to name them in Maya K'iche'. They are a placeholder until we're able to remember our own words for ourselves once more. Similarly, C. Riley Snorton's work in *Black on Both Sides* addresses how Blackness is simultaneously present, while also imagined as nonpresent in the archive. Snorton addresses the seeming erasures of Blackness that wind up centering Blackness, albeit in sometimes problematic ways. In Guatemala, similar mechanisms of erasure and presence are at play with how Maya communities are imagined as extinct, while at the same time, "more extensive folklorization of Maya cultures and images of Maya women . . . [have] played a key role in accommodating the needs of the tourism industry," as Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj explains in "Transnationalism and Maya Dress" (527). While recovered histories of Maya K'iche' people and communities attempt to write against the problematic frameworks that imagine Maya communities as no longer present, the lack of references to queer or trans experiences is quite troubling. Queer and trans people continue to be present even if not visible within these recollections. Perhaps it's not that these experiences are not talked about or don't exist in a Maya K'iche' context, but rather that they have always already been present, and we've just forgotten how to code and read them on our own terms. My hope is that my own weaving practice can help in the remembrance of these experiences, and that, through them, I can code for another specific unknown audience the patterns needed to help remember our own histories and words. I hope that in my own balancing of heart and center in this *uk'u'x*, central warp, I can bring attention to the threads thought to be ripped from our consciousness but that continue to be there waiting for us to pull them together once more. I hope that in this weaving of threads we can create the world once more. I want to create a world that not just includes queer and trans Maya people but that centers the multitude of experiences and stories that have become dormant within our own imaginaries.

Continuing to Weave Stories

Throughout this article, I have defined and articulated Maya rhetorics through gendered *ts'íib*, relational Maya knowledge-making practices. Centering backstrap weaving, I argue that backstrap weaving in Maya K'iche' communities is a mechanism by which knowledge is created and passed

down through remembrance practices. In my own historicizing and weaving, I pull through strings that make queer and trans Mayas visible in the larger weaving of Maya histories. I discussed the various ways in which backstrap weaving, a type of gendered *ts'íib*, is a Maya methodology that guides my historicizing practice. By centering *ts'íib* as a mode for understanding Maya rhetorics, I also center relationality and communal knowledge-making. My weaving of various threads and stories is the paradigm shift to how cultural rhetorics, WGSS, queer and trans studies, and Indigenous studies can create historicizing projects that are specific to communities and do not recreate false binaries between "traditional" theorizing and historicizing and alternative modes of theorizing. My weaving is how I answer both the call to remember the violences perpetrated against Maya communities by the Guatemalan military and the multiple calls from women of color, feminist scholars, and queer and trans scholars of color to shift how we practice theorizing. I am joining this collective of scholars and activists because doing so makes the existence of queer and trans Guatemalans visible within the larger remembrance projects currently undertaken. Weaving is how I articulate specificity in my theorizing and methodologies and push against western forms of knowledge production. My weaving does not just center queer and trans Guatemalans in my future imaginings of the larger weaving of Maya histories, but answers the calls from Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Shawn Wilson for a responsibility-based approach to how to tell stories. It's a way to shift the center not just of the stories themselves but also of how resistance functions when not imagined as beginning in the West.

Notes

1. This piece is a portion of my forthcoming manuscript, *Kemenik Natajsaj Qach'ob'oj Chirij le Xib'inel / Weaving to Remember Our Ghost Stories: A Queer and Trans Memoria Histórica of the Guatemalan Civil War*, where I argue for a paradigm shift in historicizing methodologies.

2. I use rhetorics in the plural to join cultural rhetoricians in naming the multiple centers within rhetoric and composition.

3. It is important to note that Worley and Palacios's use of *k'anel*, *cholel*, and *cha'anil* is framed by Maya-Tsotsil language and a pan-Mayan articulation and imagining of shared principles. While I argue for specificity within methodological approaches for individual communities, in this case, the framing of *k'anel*, *cholel*, and *cha'anil* through a pan-Mayan framework further invokes a memory of larger relationships different Maya communities have with one another since

time immemorial. Wieser's use of "intertribalism" is useful here in that Wieser's call for a type of intertribalism that emphasizes "the condition of the culturally distinctive tribal nations and people who persist alongside mainstream culture despite ongoing colonialism" works to highlight the relationships among various Indigenous groups, rather than creating a pan-Indigenous cohesive grouping or lens by which to analyze all forms of Indigenous literature (197). Similarly, my use of *ts'íib* from a Maya-Tsotsil root highlights the larger relationships various Maya communities have beyond, and which predate, the shared experience of colonization. For instance, Worley and Palacios never say which Maya language *ts'íib* itself comes from, and even though Maya-K'iche' language does not have *ts'íib* as a word, the word *tz'ib'aj*, which means "to write" (and which I read in similar ways to *ts'íib*) does exist. As ergative-absolutive languages, those where "possessive markers are prefixes unlike in Spanish or English, in which they are independent words," and where subjects and objects are conjugated together, Maya languages emphasize relationships in all of their practices and forms (Sattler 19). Root words like *ts'íib* or *tz'ib'aj* can become other related verbs, nouns, full sentences, or even change their specific time and tense depending on what prefixes, suffixes, and markers are added to the root. Maya languages exist only through *ts'íib*, the knowledge-making practices performed to maintain various relationships shared by individuals and communities. *K'anel*, *cholel*, and *cha'anil*, as defined by Worley and Palacios, might not appear in Maya-K'iche' dictionaries or grammar books, but they do have shared root words.

In my larger project, I discuss the ways that woven materials can be read as a different form of archive that holds forgotten histories to offset the emphasis and reliance on archives of terror (e.g., the Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional) as the only places where *memoria histórica* can be historicized from.

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Engaging Assessment Counterstories through a Cultural Rhetorics Framework

Cultural rhetorics—as orientation, methodology, and practice—has made meaningful contributions to writing pedagogy (Brooks-Gillies et al.; Cedillo and Bratta; Baker-Bell; Cedillo et al.; Cobos et al.; Condon and Young; Powell). Despite these contributions, classroom teachers and writing program administrators can struggle to conceptualize assessment beyond bureaucratic practice and their role in assessment beyond standing in loco for the institution. To more fully realize the potential of cultural rhetorics in our classrooms and programs, the field needs assessment models that seek to uncover the counterstories of writing and meaning-making. Our work, at the intersections of queer rhetorics and writing assessment, provides a theoretical framework called Queer Validity Inquiry (QVI) that disrupts stock stories of success—a success that is always available to some at the expense of others. Through four diffractive lenses—failure, affectivity, identity, and materiality—QVI prompts us to determine what questions about student writers and their writing intrigue us, why we care about them, and whose interests are being served by those questions.

It's early 2023 and the trending topic of conversation in the field of writing studies involves students' use of artificial intelligence (AI), specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT (https://chat.openai.com/chat), to produce writing in response to a given prompt. Teachers at the K–12 and college levels seem stunned and unnerved by the texts that can be so quickly produced by ChatGPT (D'Agostino; Greene; Herman; Marche; Schatten). Unlike its more primitive predecessors, ChatGPT produces complex texts and cohesive arguments using common English diction and grammar. Even in its infancy, this machine-learning technology is producing writing that captivates both academic and public audiences. Recently, the *Boston Globe* reported that ChatGPT was "eerily good" at writing news stories about Beantown, even when prompted to produce stories about happenings that never happened. There is no doubt that AI is causing a moral panic among educators, a groundswell that might, in hindsight, mark the rise of the next new literacy crisis in America.

What this collective moral panic reveals for us is a continued reliance on students' written products as evidence of learning, engagement, and competency. Despite over fifty years of writing pedagogy that has valued and/or centered student writing processes, for the vast majority of faculty, programs, and institutions, the artifact to be assessed remains the finished—and fetishized—student essay. Most classroom teachers and writing program administrators struggle to conceptualize practices of assessment beyond bureaucratic red tape and their role in assessment beyond standing in as the voice of the institution. Teachers who resist this positioning by imagining assessment as a relational project have engaged alternative assessments such as contract grading, labor-based grading, and digital badging (Danielewicz and Elbow; Inoue; Kryger and Zimmerman; Shor; West-Puckett; West-Puckett et al.). Yet once the focus of assessment moves beyond the individual or the hyperlocal ecology of the classroom, these teachers have been gaslighted by programmatic and institutional assessment initiatives that require the submission of finished essays to attest to student achievement and teacher effectiveness. The finished products are the preferred currency of our institutional assessment ecologies, and the moral panic arises from our fears that AI bots will debase that currency. What happens, we worry, if the currency is counterfeit? What do we do when "good writing" cannot be used synecdochally for the "good writer"? What

is the point of assessment when correct, clear, focused, topical writing can be just as easily produced by machines as by undergraduates?

We contend that this hyperfocused attention on students' finished products says a great deal about our discipline's anxieties around assessing the more complex and nebulous work that occurs across time and spaces throughout writing processes. To speak back to our discipline's anxieties around assessment, we need a methodology that values processes over product. Cultural rhetorics—as orientation, methodology, and practice—has made meaningful contributions to writing pedagogy, providing ways to notice and account for the rich, relational, material, and embodied work of composing (Baker-Bell; Brooks-Gillies et al.; Cedillo and Bratta; Cedillo et al., Cobos et al.; Condon and Young; Powell et al.). For example, Brooks-Gillies et al. reorient themselves toward listening and sharing stories across multiple contexts and positionalities as a way to learn across contexts, build relationships, and frame writing center work. Similarly, Timothy Oleksiak's recent work on "slow peer review" represents another attempt that cultural rhetoricians are making to more fully engage the processes of writing and to honor the complex, interpersonal, identity-driven work of writing. We believe cultural rhetorics and methods like counterstory offer our discipline important ways to disrupt the fetishization of the student essay, methods that are much needed if our focus is really on learning. But we also recognize that in order for cultural rhetorics and counterstory methods to be taken up more comprehensively in our field, we may need an assessment methodology that validates cultural rhetorical practices so that they can speak back to institutional(ized) models of assessment.

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To that end, we offer in this essay an assessment method that is rooted in the ideological work of cultural rhetorics and utilizes the important practices of counterstory. In order to make that case, we examine the ideologies and practices of institutional positivism that constrain our current practices of assessment. We describe how learning outcome assessment privileges direct evidence and ultimately reproduces dominant narratives about students, teachers, and programs. Next, we introduce Queer Validity Inquiry (QVI) as a cultural rhetorics framework that can help us to liberate

ourselves from these constraints. QVI prompts us to collect and interpret other kinds of evidence, specifically indirect evidence, that capture the social and cultural work of composing in particular times and places. To illustrate QVI in action, we share an assessment project that Nikki and Will carried out using focus groups to unearth the complex composing experiences of gay male writers at their university. Much like Aja Y. Martinez's example of the composite story of Latinx graduate students navigating a graduate program not built with them in mind, Nikki and Will's assessment helped them to understand and articulate the invisible and differential labor of composing in heteronormative spaces, with the focus group producing counterstories that would not otherwise be available to themselves, their institution, or the field. To conclude, we turn again to the moral panic of the bots and welcome the ways in which their presence, ironically, could help us to refocus assessment on the bodies, identities, affects, and materiality of human writers.

Direct Evidence as the Gold Standard

In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, high school teacher Daniel Herman writes, "this [ChatGPT] may be the end of using writing as a benchmark for aptitude and intelligence." If he is correct, then this technology could undermine over a century's worth of writing instruction and assessment that originated at Harvard in the late 1800s and has held sway over the academy ever since. The basic premise that Herman articulates here is a belief in writing as a demonstration of learning. Writing to demonstrate is one of the most recognizable forms of classroom assessment, as it asks students to show what they know by responding to essay prompts, essay test questions, or constructed response questions, often in time-limited, on-demand situations. In a teaching and assessment context where the overwhelming number of practitioners may have little or no discipline-specific training in writing instruction and threshold concepts of writing, it's easy to imagine faculty who still assume that writing provides a reflective map of the brain and accurately documents learning in a neat and tidy space. These written assessment activities elide the act of writing as an inventive activity that occurs across cognitive, embodied, material, interpersonal, and affective domains.

Likewise, in the broader practice of student learning outcomes assessment (SLOA), writing to demonstrate is typically considered direct evidence

of learning, which is often privileged at institutions because discrete artifacts (essays) can be evaluated for what are assumed to be inherent properties. This sentiment is accurately captured in the following quote on DePaul University's collaborative teaching and learning website:

> Direct evidence of student learning is tangible, visible, and measurable and tends to be more compelling evidence of exactly what students have and have not learned. This is because you can directly look at students' work or performances to determine what they've learned.

This stance assumes a direct, one-to-one correlation between learning and performance that upholds institutional positivism in SLOAs. According to Heidtman et al., institutional positivism accounts for the ways that naturalistic observation has been appropriated in the social sciences. Institutional positivism affords social scientists the opportunity to claim rigor alongside their colleagues in the natural sciences by foregrounding systematic inquiry through quasi-experimental design, developing quantitative methods ripe for statistical analyses, refining scales and measurements, and emphasizing "operationalization and verification" (Zetterberg, as qtd. in Heidtman et al.). Institutional positivism is what turns the social into a social science and, for our purposes, what turns learning into learning science.

When student learning assessment adheres uncritically to the methods and methodologies of institutional positivism, the results are, at best, wooden. These assessments, designed to gauge the distance between the student and a learning objective, take a narrow view of success. They largely tell us what we already know or assume to be true about students, teachers, and programs; these are the stories of what students can't or don't do in their writing that have filled our journals and books for over a century detailing the many places they miss the mark (Connors; Daniels; Varnum). At their worst, they are debasing and oppressive, reducing human bodies and their social meaning-making activities to a set of scores that comes to represent the abilities of students outside of their hyperlocal and relational writing ecosystems. They tell a largely single story of students, one that students themselves often have had no role in creating nor any space in which to direct the narrative. In addition, these stories position teachers and program administrators as faceless bureaucrats whose job is to hold the measuring stick. The single story becomes a dominant narrative which serves to reinforce the stereotypes we (may) already hold about students.

The narrative technique of institutional positivism strangles other stories and other ways of knowing, doing, and being writers, writing teachers, and writing assessors.

The activity of evaluating one or more pieces of student writing to make arguments about the competencies of student writers is, for a majority of writing instructors and program administrators today, a commonplace. This allows us to play to our strengths of reading and evaluating student writing while using familiar rubrics that satisfy institutional demands for punctiliousness. As we are an adolescent discipline, writing studies and, by proxy, writing studies faculty can suffer from low disciplinary esteem. When those in charge of assessment at our institutions hail from the sciences or social sciences, direct evaluation of student writing can make us feel more secure—more like scientists and less like imposters. Using student writing as direct evidence of competency, however, was not always the case in the field. Until the mid-twentieth century, students' writing skills were commonly evaluated using multiple choice testing. Writers were asked to review passages; find errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling; and select the response that would fix those errors. It wasn't until the middle of the twentieth century that educational measurement scholars and writing teachers converged on the idea that student samples could be assessed in ways that were both reliable and valid (Braddock et al.; Diederich; Eley). While this change was regarded as highly positive because assessors were finally engaging with actual student writing rather than student writers' (in)abilities to correct other people's texts or to comment on other people's texts, at times, we seem to have exchanged one problem for another in establishing a new fetish object.

We would argue that direct evidence models of assessment work to fetishize the written product and continue to do so over and against our disciplinary knowledge about the complexities of writing processes and ecologies.

We would argue that direct evidence models of assessment work to fetishize the written product and continue to do so over and against our disciplinary knowledge about the complexities of writing processes and ecologies. These models make little or no space for the stories of composing, learning stories that show us where the gaps and fissures emerge, where learning stops and starts, where potential ripples out from moments of understanding and confusion alike (Carr; Drummond and Owens; Zhang). It rips artifacts from their contexts and the bodies of production to reinforce

Counterstory-as-methodology can disrupt our fetish for the normative object of writing studies: the polished essay, or the stock story.

notions of learning as quest narratives and monomyths, bootstrap projects wherein writing is part of a primarily meritocratic project. Which isn't to say that finished-for-now pieces of writing are not important or that final drafts of writing don't serve a purpose. But our over-reliance on these pieces tends to lead us to believe that they can tell us more about student learning than they actually do. At their worst they get in the way of our seeing and validating a host of important pieces in student learning experiences.

These are frameworks that dominate our thinking and shape what's possible. While traditional writing assessment is not the focus of Aja Y. Martinez's important chapter "A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story vs. Counterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra's 'Fit' in the Academy," we turn to it here as an example of what can happen when stock stories dominate an assessment moment, in this case, a moment where graduate committees determine if graduate students they have admitted to the program are meeting expectations and should be allowed to continue their studies. As much as any, this is a high-stakes testing moment, typically centered on written products that students submit. Martinez offers us a story that may be all too familiar to those of us who have worked with graduate students for a long time. This stock story, presented in dialogue format, shows faculty wrestling with questions about whether a Chicana student is a good "fit" for their program and, ultimately, in asking that, a good fit for our field.

Following that stock story, Martinez counters with a story told from a very different perspective, a story told from Alejandra's position in a conversation Martinez imagines Alejandra having with her mother. In this story, readers get a very different understanding of what's happened for Alejandra and her graduate courses, spaces where her learning and her experience were not valued because they did not show up in the stock stories told by the class and by the theorists that were valued in the classes. One thing that becomes clear by the way that Martinez juxtaposes these two divergent stories of the same space of assessment is that the stock story is, somewhat fundamentally, unable to provide a meaningful understanding of Alejandra's experience in the graduate program, or the courses that she took, or the ways that the field or discipline has shaped a narrative of the promising

graduate student. Alejandra's dialogue makes and holds space for stories that do not or cannot fit the frames that have already been constructed by the discipline. Martinez writes,

> Stock stories feign neutrality and at all costs avoid any blame or responsibility for societal inequality. Powerful because they are often repeated until canonized or normalized, those who tell stock stories insist that their version of events is indeed reality, and any stories that counter these standardized tellings are deemed biased, self-interested, and ultimately not credible. Counterstory, then, is a method of telling stories by people whose experiences are not often told. Counterstory as methodology thus serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance. (70)

We see Martinez's example of counterstory in this context of assessing a graduate student as an example of how counterstory-as-methodology can disrupt our fetish for the normative object of writing studies: the polished essay, or the stock story. Martinez's example is a clarion call for how we can engage counterstory and alternative assessment ecologies to better engage writers. In what follows, we argue that QVI offers one method for how writing studies can engage with and assess those stories of learning that finished essays tend to ignore or gloss over.

Toward a Queer Validity Framework

While ChatGPT was nowhere in our minds when we began looking around for alternative frameworks for assessment, it has reminded us how much we were seeing a context for student writing and the teaching of writing that was deeply overreliant on the myth that finished products were inherently the best spaces to look or the best types of evidence to marshal in order to assess student learning. Our own dissatisfaction with the fetishization of discrete pieces of student writing in various assessment contexts—from the classroom to the institution and beyond—led us to re-engage with more recent work in educational measurement, particularly work that was part of an emerging critical validity framework. For at least the last twenty years, educational measurement scholars have continually asserted that no form of evidence or assessment practice is inherently reliable or valid; instead, assessors must make arguments about evidence, its interpretation, and the use of both in making decisions about learners. This process is known as validity inquiry, or validation, and according to Mislevy et al.,

validity is the "cardinal virtue in assessment" (4). While theories of validity in educational measurement have evolved over the last century, specifically with regard to reliability as an integrated concern in validity, what holds fast is the notion that all forms of evidence and interpretation are inherently suspect. Therefore, it is incumbent on the assessors to establish validity each and every time an assessment is deployed. Validity inquiry requires that we demonstrate why particular sources and kinds of evidence are chosen, justify the frames and protocols for its interpretation, and clearly articulate how this evidence and interpretation will affect the participants in the assessment system, particularly students and teachers. This argument, then, serves to outline the theoretical and ethical underpinnings of an assessment and is essential to guiding assessment design.

By paying attention to the ways affect, identity, and materiality shape what and who is written (and why), we have a broader framework to engage the process of writing—a process that writing assessment has primarily ignored by focusing on the finished product.

What's interesting, paradoxical even, for those of us who want to do assessment differently is that validity inquiry, while intended as a methodological practice born out of institutional positivism, can nevertheless be harnessed as a means of divesting from that same institutional positivism. In fact, the theory and practices of QVI that we develop in *Failing Sideways: Queer Possibilities for Writing Assessment* provide both strategies and tactics for pursuing different kinds of evidence and sources in our assessment endeavors, activating critical interpretive frames, and designing assessments with the explicit goal of creating more equitable educational and societal outcomes. While writing assessment scholarship has previously focused on linear lines and directions, all pointing to the attainment of success, QVI is a method that embraces failure along with the entanglements of affect, identity, and materiality in the writing and learning process. QVI privileges the whole being that writers bring to writing contexts. By paying attention to the ways affect, identity, and materiality shape what and who is written (and why), we have a broader framework to engage the process of writing—a process that writing assessment has primarily ignored by focusing on the finished product. By drawing on the lenses of failure, affect, materiality, and identity to design and deliver assessment, assessment practitioners are afforded with new kinds of data and different stories that upend many of the dominant narratives operating in our field. In essence, QVI produces

counterstories that diversify our understandings of writers, writing, and the teaching and learning process.

QVI revels in the failure of institutional positivism and refuses the idea that writing to demonstrate is an empirical practice that automatically holds a mirror up to the learning, abilities, and capacity of writers. QVI disrupts the primacy of direct evidence and invites us to follow lateral or sideways lines of inquiry that become anfractuous, twisting and bending, perhaps dead-ending, in an attempt to follow the bodies of writers instead of the tried and true pathways toward learning objectives and other objects of success. In doing so, we reclaim the potentiality of indirect evidence and the counterstories that can spin off from it. Indirect evidence includes the kinds of self-reporting writing studies practitioners are familiar with, such as metacognitive reflection, course/project evaluations, and formal or informal student interviews and focus groups, particularly those that engage writers who occupy multiple marginalized subject positions. While writing assessment on both the classroom and programmatic levels has for some time collected indirect sources of evidence, they have primarily been used to supplement direct evidence. We argue that indirect evidence does not have to be supplemental. In fact, in an age when "good writing" can be produced by algorithms and machines, indirect evidence may be our best hope to learn more about the cyborg nature of contemporary writing and to really understand where learning is happening.

Using QVI, we may determine what questions about student writers and their writing intrigue us, why we care about them, and whose interests are being served by those questions. It challenges us to be transparent about our judgments, inclinations, intents, preferences, and motivations while also inviting others to engage in a dialogue with us to tease out and interrupt our social and cognitive biases. While *Failing Sideways* provides copious examples from classrooms, programs, and institutions, in the next section, we want to showcase one of the ways that QVI helped us to counter dominant narratives about writing success and work to create counter stories that more fully account for the impacts of writing assessment on historically marginalized groups of students.

Creating Counterstories with Indirect Evidence

Even before Will and Nikki's tenures as directors of the East Carolina University (ECU) Writing Program and the University Writing Center, respectively, the center had collected usage data that supported the usual success

stories we tell in the academy to prove our work. For instance, when they worked with the institution to relocate, redesign, and significantly expand the writing center space in 2013, they noticed that student use rose by 265 percent in the first three years of the new space being opened. The growth was exciting for them and various campus-wide stakeholders, but they also understood that these numbers only provided a partial picture of success. With that in mind, they sought to learn more about the student groups who made up those usage statistics, looking for what Mimi Ọnụọha refers to as "missing data sets" in traditionally data-rich contexts to uncover the stories of those students who weren't currently being served.

The writing center intake form, which had been in use for some time, asked for the standard student demographics, including year in school, race, gender, ethnicity, and major. The writing center student consultants, however, pointed out that the center had no idea what part, if any, sexual orientation may play in who did or did not make use of the writing center as they continued to engage questions about diversity and equity in their weekly staff meetings. Will and Nikki came to the realization that adding a question about sexuality to the writing center intake form, going beyond the male/female binary on the gender question already in use, and recognizing the need for better student pronoun acknowledgments were both ways to demonstrate their commitment to social justice on campus.

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The office for campus diversity and the legal counsel for the institution weren't as thrilled to see the addition. They argued that this demographic data wasn't pertinent to the center's work, forwarding a "don't ask, don't tell" approach to student services. As program directors and scholars committed to the work of assessment as a means of fostering social and educational justice, Will and Nikki continued to pursue their lines of inquiry. The then-provost eventually intervened to support the program and center directors because they are regarded as valuable administrators on campus, but suggested that they apply for institutional review board (IRB) approval and consider this data collection "research" rather than "assessment"—a troubled distinction, to say the least, but a move that placated the campus attorneys

and safeguarded their efforts to regularly collect and analyze this data. Despite the fact that the center would publish the data in aggregate, per its usual practice, the university push-back was directed at the fact that they intended to unsettle the fixed evaluation categories the university valued while also giving priority to LGBTQIA+ students whose experiences had not yet been considered.

Working in partnership with ECU's Jesse R. Peel LGBTQIA+ Center, Will and Nikki recruited participants for a survey in order to investigate how writing assessments and LGBTQIA+ lived experiences may or may not interact. Only gay male students ultimately agreed to take part, which served as a potent reminder of how and why underrepresented persons may reject participation in research if they question why their stories are being collected and are anxious about how those stories might be used to further marginalize them. As they moved forward with research, Will and Nikki discovered that they needed to talk to students to learn how to construct identity taxonomies and what data to collect before doing large-scale research concerning LGBTQIA+ students' grade point averages (GPAs) or how LGBTQIA+ persistence/retention corresponded with other demographic indicators. They questioned whether LGBTQIA+ was even the best set of qualifiers to use. The rapid speed with which individuals and groups adopt new and shifting verbal identifiers means that as researchers, we must be constantly checking in to see if the terms we use are the ones that the people we want to engage with see as representative of themselves.

Ultimately, five gay male students participated in two recorded IRB-approved focus groups (Caswell and Banks). Using a semi-structured inter-view format, Will and Nikki asked five guiding questions to prompt students to story their experiences about writing assessment in both curricular and para-curricular spaces. The focus groups consisted of cisgendered white and African American males from both graduate and undergraduate student populations. After the focus group sessions were transcribed, Will and Nikki analyzed the stories using inductive, emergent coding. Rather than approach the transcripts with preconceived notions of codes, they allowed the data to speak to them and show them what themes and codes were important to their participants. This method worked to keep the experience narratives intact and helped them to focus on the affective markers that emerged in those narratives. Minor codes related to students' affective experiences were identified, including teacher and classmates' signaling that they welcomed

LGBTQIA+ topics and experiences, the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQIA+ materials in the course syllabi and materials, and the decisions around whether one should out themselves as LGBTQIA+ in classroom contexts.

From these minor codes, Will and Nikki were able to focus on the key coding schema that writing assessment for LGBTQIA+ students is "emotionally risky" and involves a great deal of invisible labor associated with navigating their identities as gay students. The data revealed that

> For LGBTQ students, choosing to write about their personal experiences or an LGBTQ issue for a graded assignment becomes both a grade-based choice and a political choice, as well as one filtered through multiple issues around personal growth and development, and unfortunately, still involves concerns about personal and academic safety. (West-Puckett et al. 168)

One of the participants shared the story of writing two different but complete drafts in response to an assignment, one which disclosed that he identifies as gay and the other which didn't, so that he could compare and choose which one was safe to hand in. Because of this double-drafting in a class that spanned only five weeks during a short summer session, the student was penalized with point deductions for handing in the final project late and also fell behind in the course. He wondered if he should discuss the situation with his teacher; however, he was anxious that it would seem as if he were whining or "making up excuses" for the behavior. The classroom assessment itself provided no invitation to share this story and thus

It became clear . . . that no one had ever asked the students about the ways that classroom assessment might pose a threat to their safety and well-being, or about how negotiating the complexities of identity is essential to the work of composing.

no way for the teacher to understand, and perhaps account for, this student's affective work that is part and parcel of the practices of composing, particularly for minoritized students.

By designing this study to dig deeper into the impacts of assessment on our most vulnerable student groups, we were able to better understand the invisible labor that certain bodies have had to engage with in writing cultures that were not built with them in mind. It became clear in the broader focus group discussions that no one had ever asked the students about the ways that classroom assessment might pose a threat to their safety and well-being, or about how negotiating the complexities of identity is essential to the work

of composing because our systems rooted in institutional positivism simply do not care. There are few, if any, built-in systematic opportunities to unearth patriarchy, heteronormativity, white supremacy, and other hegemonic frameworks through assessment. By engaging QVI, we were able to fill in a small part of the missing dataset and construct data-driven narratives to articulate the affective responses some students must contend with in composing while gay in heteronormative ecologies. And while negotiating identity is one of the affective dimensions we focus on with this story, we also recognize that this story is also about the choices students make to honor and cultivate these identities in a system that places so much value on the success of a finished text. It is also about the materiality of writing in institutional cultures where a host of diverse bodies, assessment technologies, and assessment locations work together to constrain or enable what assessment can accomplish. Ideological and institutional systems born outside of our lived experiences and locations and those of the students we work with continue to privilege the products of composition instead of the *processes* and *experiences* of composing that are often prioritized in a cultural rhetorics framework.

Conclusion

While it might seem counterintuitive to our argument that we must humanize writing assessment through a cultural rhetorics approach, we are cautiously optimistic about the disruptions and hand-wringing that AI bots are prompting in the field of writing studies and beyond. If reinforcing genre conventions is the primary goal of our writing pedagogies and evaluating the abilities of students to mimic those genre conventions dominates our assessment practices, then, yes, the bots present an existential threat to our work. ChatGPT is really quite good at reproducing genres—from film scripts to speeches to press releases—and we need to keep in mind that such reproduction does not stop with genre. As Safiya Noble and Estee Beck remind us, algorithms are not neutral, and algorithmic technologies excel in reproducing dominant narratives and reifying the status quo *ad infinitum*.

If, on the other hand, we are ready to let go of our object fetish and commit to pursuing knowledge about the complex writing and learning ecologies we claim to value, as well as to argue for assessments that sustain those ecologies, we need not construct this moment as a techno-literacy crisis. We need human beings, human beings such as the writing consultants

that first questioned why their university didn't collect data on LGBTQIA+ students, to frame new questions and imagine new ways to continue filling in the missing datasets. We must embrace the messiness of learning, thinking, writing, synthesizing, and holding in syncretic tension the competing narratives that frame our understandings of the world, and this embrace must make room for the rough edges and fissures of meaning-making that are smoothed away by the bots. In other words, our job is not to orchestrate the production of beautiful texts, even though that's what others may want of us. Instead, our job as writing teachers, program administrators, and campus assessment leaders is to nurture and sustain the ecology of writing and learning through both pedagogy and assessment. Thus, we offer QVI as a set of practical and theoretical tools, drawn from rich work in cultural rhetorics, to help us do just that.

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Elliot Tetreault, Megan Faver Hartline, and
Sarah Cardwell

Community-Based Temporal Practices for Creating Change in Hostile Institutional Systems

This article, based on an interview study with community changemakers working within hostile systems of higher education and legislative politics, builds upon scholarship that names and challenges normative time by offering a cultural rhetorics analysis of activists' alternative, community-based temporal practices that are centered in relationships and prioritize participant needs over institutional mandates. We theorize community-based temporal practices based on the changemaking stories of our interview participants, especially moments when they encountered time-based obstacles and used community-based knowledges as workarounds. We constellate these stories about the material barriers of time, the way time is wielded by those in power, and how to prioritize relationships, thus illuminating temporal practices that can be used to challenge institutional systems.

W̲hen working toward social change, changemakers are regularly stalled, denied, and derailed by time—specifically, white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, colonialist time. Institutions control the pace of social change, and they hide this control by naturalizing institutional time as a valueless default. As Sarah Ahmed writes, "It is important that we do not

reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, institutions become given, as an effect of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces" (39). Specifically, such decisions made over time lead to "the institutionalization of whiteness" (Ahmed 39). When moving through or against institutions, changemakers encounter time-based constraints and stoppages. In her research with diversity practitioners, Ahmed found a common description of diversity work as "banging your head against a brick wall" (26). Institutions have vested interests in remaining immovable, setting a slow pace for change, or stopping change altogether, all while obscuring these processes by framing them as arhetorical. In this article, we detail specifics of these institutional temporal practices, illustrating how change is held up again and again by people and systems of power. But we also share specifics of how to push back on these temporal practices, using time to build coalitions and gather people to create change.

Our work builds upon that of scholars across fields who have theorized the relationship between time and social control through frameworks such as queer time, Black time, crip time, and Indigenous time (Bey; Carey; Cedillo; Cooper; Halberstam; Kafer; Rifkin). Rhetorical studies has seen an increased focus on the temporal as it intersects with politics and activism (Bjork and Buhre; Houdek and Phillips), driven by an interest, as Ersula Ore describes, in "how time's malleability and flexibility inform its rhetorical utility" (237). Part of this focus has involved theorizing changemakers' time-based rhetorical strategies for resistance. For example, Tamika L. Carey, drawing from Brittney Cooper's work on the racial politics of time, names white institutional control of time as "a system of temporal hegemony where ideological and material structures converge into a culture of hostility that pushes equity for a group further out of reach" (270). In response, activists develop creative strategies. Carey focuses on Black women's "rhetorics of impatience," or "performances of frustration or dismissal and time-based arguments that reflect or pursue haste for the purpose of discipline" that draw from Black feminist practices and cultural knowledge (270). Work such as Carey's amplifies culturally specific rhetorical practices for resisting temporal hegemony and doing the work of social change, a practice we continue in this article.

We illuminate temporal practices that can be used to challenge institutional systems using a cultural rhetorics methodology, framing the lived

experiences of changemakers as contributions to rhetorical theory about activist processes. As Angela Haas explains, cultural rhetorics scholarship is defined in part by "mak[ing] explicit the ways in which subjectivities, positionalities, and commitments to particular knowledge systems are interrelated and situated within networks of power and geopolitical land-bases" (Cobos et al. 145). Because normative time is a cultural value (Bratta and Powell; Cobos et al.) that often goes deliberately unnamed, we mark this in order to challenge it. We heed cultural rhetorics' call to treat "story as theory," using "constellative practices as a way to build community and understanding," and sustain "a practice of relationality" (Cox et al.). Toward that end, we theorize community-based temporal practices grounded in the changemaking stories of our interview participants, especially moments when they encountered time-based obstacles and used community-based knowledges as workarounds. We constellate these stories about the material barriers of time, arguing that centering community responsibilities and relationships allows changemakers to challenge the systems that aim to uphold current power structures.

Data Collection and Methods

This article derives from an interview study that Elliot and Megan began in summer 2020 about the barriers people face as they learn about community changemaking processes. This project resulted in thirteen hour-long interviews with community changemakers within systems ranging from universities and high schools to statewide legislatures, local branches of the Democratic Party, student groups, nonprofit organizations, and more. We use the term "changemakers" to refer to people working toward some form of change to make their communities more livable for marginalized people. In choosing this term over others, we also highlight how someone does not need to be in a formal activist or political role to work toward change on both small and large scales. In these interviews, we asked changemakers to talk about their entry into changemaking, barriers they have faced, stories of wins and challenges, the place of racial justice in their work, and relationships with other changemakers. Sarah joined our research team about halfway through the interview process and transcribed interviews before the three of us coded the data to look for themes. Transcripts were coded using a descriptive coding process, focused on key ideas (i.e., relationships, barriers, inciting events) that stood out from our review of existing literature

and from our initial notes on interviews, with room for in vivo coding that resulted in closer reading of the transcripts (i.e., time, education, whiteness) (Saldaña). Through closer analysis of these stakeholder interviews, we are able to get a sense of the systemic barriers to changemaking across sites. We saw, again and again, that time and the way people in power controlled it were a consistent challenge for changemakers. Conversely, relationships and mutual aid were repeatedly cited as important aspects of achieving change despite barriers.

In this article, we draw on these interviews to depict how normative time is used to hold up change and how culturally responsive temporal practices help move change forward. We foreground stories from the changemakers we interviewed to explain three time-based challenges that were discussed repeatedly: bureaucracy, people wielding time as power, and measurable outcomes. Within each of these challenges, changemakers across contexts discussed how normative time shaped their ability to create change, most often for the negative.

> **We foreground stories from the changemakers we interviewed to explain three time-based challenges that were discussed repeatedly: bureaucracy, people wielding time as power, and measurable outcomes.**

Institutions sustain control over time through subtle and overt ways: there is bureaucratic pace-setting that is woven so intricately into the fabric of institutional life that it becomes invisible and normalized, and there are also moments when those in power explicitly wield hierarchical, top-down decision making to create stoppages. We attend to both interconnected processes. In our changemakers' stories, bureaucracy meant that people were wasting time with small acts created to slow down potential shifts in power. People used hierarchical power by weaponizing time in such a way as to dictate *how* and *when* change might happen. And measurable outcomes were required for changemaking projects that often overshadowed the actual good work people were trying to do. But in each instance, changemakers noted the importance of coalition building to craft relationships that enabled groups to build the people power necessary to push back against normative time. In each section, we examine these three challenges, using changemakers' stories to identify what this challenge looks like in their work and how relationship building, what we name culturally responsive temporal practices, enables change work to happen.

This analysis serves as a starting point, as one set of stories about time and change, that we aim to use to shift our conversations around changemaking. Our research team is composed of a white nonbinary person and two white cis women within academia, and we aim to prioritize the voices of those most affected by social issues and who are at the forefront of changemaking work. In this cultural moment of right-wing campaigns to harm people of color; LGBTQIA+ people, particularly trans people; reproductive freedoms; and more, rhetorical scholars should be *listening* and *following* the lead of changemakers on the ground. Following a cultural rhetorics approach that privileges relationality (Riley-Mukavetz), the people we interviewed are those we are in relationship with, who we are striving to do good changemaking work with, and we want to listen as they point to the ways that time and relationships matter, that who has power matters and so does the positionality of who can push back and how.

Bureaucracy and False Scarcity; Prioritizing People as Response

One key time-based challenge is how institutions use bureaucratic proce-dures to lengthen the time needed to effect social change. One participant, Kit (participant names are pseudonyms), a genderqueer Arab writer and prison abolitionist, spoke about how institutions extract labor from people while denying them resources: institutions expect people to "donate their time . . . as long as you're not doing anything that reflects poorly on the insti-tution." Changemakers also encounter institutional control of time through one of its most effective tools: manufactured scarcity. Institutions force people to compete for resources by making decisions about what is valued and invested in and then obfuscating these decision-making processes. As V. Jo Hsu explains in a dialogue on cultural rhetorics methodologies, "Academic Time™ refuses to account for human bodyminds and community relations—and how discourses of scarcity and precarity are used to enforce exclusionary timelines" (Arellano et al.). Changemakers come against all these constraints, and institutions attempt to coerce them into thinking they are asking for too much, too fast. To resist this coercion, changemak-ers construct stories that highlight institutional scarcity *as* manufactured, denaturalizing it and imagining how it could be otherwise. Changemakers also make strategic moves about when not to "settle for less" despite strong institutional pressure.

One example of manufactured scarcity came from a story that Kit told about intersections of queerness and disability that occurred while they were co-chairing a queer graduate student organization. They spoke about how the gender and sexuality center on their campus was not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and relayed their thought process considering what to do: "That's not something that I can look at and say, okay, we need to get you a better resource, we're just going to crowbar out a wall . . . so instead I was like look, we have new construction that's going up on campus like everywhere, and we could ask for more gender-inclusive spaces." Their comment "we're just going to crowbar out a wall" reveals frustration at institutional slowness and a desire to just tackle the problem head on (recalling Ahmed's description of changemaking work as "banging your head against a brick wall"). It would feel good to "just crowbar out a wall," but in the absence of that possibility, changemakers need to think strategically about how to work within existing institutional routes. Further, the prevalence of construction on campus illustrates manufactured scarcity in action: money was clearly allocated for this, but according to the institution's limited priorities.

Changemakers construct stories that highlight institutional scarcity as manufactured, denaturalizing it and imagining how it could be otherwise.

Kit expresses institutional literacy, one method of pushing back against bureaucracy, by knowing about the new construction, which reveals a kairotic process: changemakers are always looking for existing processes to tack onto as a way of harnessing whatever movement is happening. Kit used this awareness to argue that the organization should advocate for gender-neutral *and* ADA-compliant restrooms to become a default during new campus construction: "Why don't we also ask for all of the bathrooms—because we're asking for gender-neutral bathrooms—why don't we make sure that those are ADA compliant, and not just, we have one installed?" However, they were immediately shut down by another organization member: "This other person in the room was like, we're not going to be able to get money for that, they're going to look at that and say that has nothing to do with your queer organization, we're not going to do that." This person's comment reflects how much they have internalized scarcity, automatically dismissing an idea not only because of an assumption that there will not be enough money but also because of a belief that advocating for issues that are in-

tersectional (queerness and disability) will fail because this will be seen as asking too much. Kit expressed frustration at the other person's response by saying, "I don't have time for this."

In this case, it is not only the institution dictating the pace of change but other changemakers' internalized sense of institutional time and scarcity, showing how powerful these concepts are. Kit continued: "Again, it becomes an issue of waste of time, but it's different than the waste of time of the person who I have to email fifty times. . . . To say look, your conception of activism is super narrow and you are fueling the bureaucracy. . . . You're telling me in advance that someone in whatever office we're going to ask for these resources is going to say no. Do you work in that office?" Kit is calling out the other person's assumptions as internalized bureaucracy, in the process denaturalizing those assumptions. They continue: "I didn't call this meeting together to ask about what we wouldn't be able to do. I asked all of us to get together because we need to ask for more than what we think they are willing to give us so then we get more than what we assume we're going to get to begin with." Here, Kit rhetorically shifts the terms of the exchange away from accepting manufactured scarcity and toward activist processes of making demands: not "what we [won't] be able to do" but "more than what we think they are willing to give us." Kit's ideas here are looking beyond the constraints of institutional bureaucracy to foreground the material needs of queer and disabled people on campus.

> Academic institutions do not extend any amount of leniency or understanding about unexpected events that come up and create a pause to planned activities. The expectation is that this type of work is purely mechanical and can be done without any outside hindrances.

Another example of focusing on people's needs while pushing back against institutional bureaucracy comes from Kristina, a Black woman assistant professor doing community-engaged work. Speaking about a grant-funded project with Black youth, Kristina narrates: "I got this grant, and this woman was riding me about a midterm report, and I was like, we're planning a protest, right now, because a child was shot in the street. I don't care about your grant report." Academic institutions do not extend any amount of leniency or understanding about unexpected events that come up and create a pause to planned activities. The expectation is that this type of work is purely mechanical and can be done without any outside hindrances. Resisting that, Kristina made a choice not to carry on business

as usual in the face of violence experienced by her community. Kristina explains, "I understood why she wanted the grant report, like I understood what we agreed to when I accepted the money. But that's not the reality of working with communities," demonstrating the mismatch between institutional pressures and experiential, embodied community needs. Kristina continues, "We took like a three-week break because these kids had just lost their friend, and they decided that they wanted to gather. Even after that was over, we still took two more weeks after that, because there was a funeral and then there was going back to school and it was awkward and nobody knew how to feel. They didn't know what to say, and so we would just get together and color or play games and just sit there." Kristina made the choice to resist institutional bureaucratic pressure (produce a midterm report to justify the use of funds) to honor community needs and respect the humanity of the youth she was working with, prioritizing their need to work through their grief in the face of violence. To do this, Kristina strategically employed gradual tactics of delay ("we took a three-week break," then "we still took two more weeks after that") and created deliberate empty space ("we would just get together and color and play games and just sit there")—rhetorical strategies that work to subtly manipulate time without setting off institutional alarm bells. Kristina had to make deliberate choices to create a temporary space outside of institutional time for the youth to take shelter, removing pressure to know "how to feel" or "what to say." From a cultural rhetorics perspective, Kristina engages in what Malea Powell highlights as an act of spatiotemporal *making*; Powell writes that a space is "a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversation with the present and where—through those practices of making—a future can be imagined" (388). In Kristina's case, the space she made—defined by the deliberate absence of action rather than measurable "progress"—was not definable on a midterm report but attended to the embodied experiences of the community.

In both of these stories, as Kristina explains, "the university has capitalized on production." Institutions often treat their bureaucratic practices as more important than any other factor. Complex processes must be followed to the letter. Resources are made more and more scarce while production is expected to stay the same. And grant reports must be made that align with the exact expectations of their timeline and outcomes for a project, rather

than the needs of the community. Kit and Kristina both show how to pause, take a moment, and prioritize the needs of community members in the face of bureaucratic challenges. For Kit, that involved asking for more than they imagined they could receive. For Kristina, it meant slowing down expected outcomes and shifting gears to meet the emotional and social needs of her community participants. Rhetorically shifting the terms in order to prioritize people, even amidst the complexities of institutional bureaucracies, is an important example of a culturally responsive temporal practice that can lead to more successful changemaking practices. These individual examples do not immediately change the larger institutional structures, but they create valuable openings in time and space for changemakers to attend to community needs in the moment and collectively imagine what larger changes they can work toward in the future.

Hierarchical Decision Makers as Barriers; Coalition Building as Response

Another important time-based challenge that changemakers have noted is needing to engage with the people who control how time is used. While earlier we were talking more about the bureaucratic processes that make people involved give a shrug, say they can't help, and state rigidly that this is just the process, here we are thinking more about the direct ways that people in power wield time hierarchically to slow down change and how changemakers push against these practices through coalition building. As Karma Chávez argues, coalition building is a rhetorical process, and "as activists begin to understand the interactions and intersection between their issues and identities and others, thereby creating coalitional subjectivities, activists have more resources for rhetorical invention" (149). As our participants narrate their coalition work, they describe not only organizational skills but also the negotiation and development of community-based rhetorical practices to work against hierarchical power.

One interview participant, Emily, a white woman reproductive justice activist and higher education program administrator, noted in her discussion of various barriers that "time in terms of years to build relationships and also hours in the day is a big barrier for people." Those who aim to slow or suffocate change so they can uphold white supremacist, patriarchal structures know that it takes time to build people power and to organize for change. By shutting that down as much as possible, they can maintain power

and continue to choose what kinds of change are allowed. For example, several college students we interviewed discussed an event where they were organizing against a thinly veiled white supremacist organization attempting to become an official student club on campus. Even after going through all the proper bureaucratic hoops to express their opinions and the student government association voting *against* the formation of the club, the administration used top-down power to override student decisions and make them a club anyway, so students protested. This whole process took an entire semester, and as student outrage grew, administration pushed meeting with them back and back—into the end of the semester, into finals week, and finally into the summer when very few students remained on campus. When classes resumed in the fall, the coalition building by students had fallen apart as students had graduated, taken on new roles, and moved on to new issues. The institution subtly works to portray this process as *arhetorical*—absent of intent or persuasion—when actually the opposite is true: a clear message is being communicated with specific effects that are especially legible to marginalized people. The administration was able to effectively squelch the student movement by running down the clock and hoping the summer would dissipate outrage. They were right.

The institution subtly works to portray this process as *arhetorical*—absent of intent or persuasion—when actually the opposite is true: a clear message is being communicated with specific effects that are especially legible to marginalized people.

Other participants discussed similar practices within state legislatures. Several changemakers pointed to the way a state legislature ran hearing processes and decided which bills to bring up to a vote at the end of session. Eleanor, a white queer sex educator and recent college graduate, discussed testifying in a public hearing at the state capitol for a bill centered on reproductive justice. She, a college student at the time, testified well after midnight, reading testimony from someone who had more direct experience but did not have the schedule flexibility to attend an hours-long hearing, waiting to be called. The act of reading testimony written by another already illustrates how activist rhetoric is never just a matter of composing meaningful words, but rather a kairotic process requiring the privilege to be in the "right place at the right time" *and* a coalitional process through which those who may not be able to be in that place have others to call upon. Knowing this, institutions do their best to prevent kairotic

intervention. The next year, Eleanor and Megan both attended a hearing for the same bill, planning to read testimony, but they ended up leaving around midnight, several hours after arriving, because they were still forty people or so from being called. It was not until two years after that second hearing that the bill finally passed, despite ostensibly having the votes each time. The bill failed to pass earlier because the Democratic majority held it to the end of the legislative session, when they are constantly under threat of an oppositional filibuster for "sensitive" bills and representatives only have a certain amount of time to finalize as many bills as possible, reifying white supremacist normative time. Time and again, Democratic leaders in the House and Senate choose to prioritize bills that would not make waves because they wouldn't receive as much vocal opposition and this would ultimately allow more bills to pass, creating a cover that they are actually making good use of time but not attending to the needs of marginalized groups represented in "more controversial" bills.

Claudine, a Black political organizer and leader in a statewide advocacy organization, explains this issue more thoroughly in her discussion of a bill that would end deceptive interrogation practices in the same state, where Democrats hold the majority:

> We had gotten [word that] the bill made it out of committee, the bill made it out of the Senate, and then it was on to the House, and the House ended up being the barrier: both the opposition and people who are supposed to be champions of the bill. The opposition was threatening to filibuster on the bill, which means they were threatening to just stand on the floor for 12 hours and talk about how police should be allowed to do whatever they want to because it's a means to an end, essentially. And legislators that were on our side were not willing to let them do that or run the clock because of other things that they were working on. So you know when the clock is counting down towards 11:59pm on the last day of session, you can kind of feel the balloon in the momentum deflate. And what's hard about that is as a changemaker, as an organizer, as a person that's leading other people through and getting them invested in something like that, to then have to go back and explain the political nuances or that it really wasn't because we didn't try hard enough, it wasn't because we didn't get enough people to care, it literally came down to two to three people making this internal decision to not pass a really good bill. I'd say that's a pretty specific and explicit and painful reality of a barrier of something that you just can't control, and all you can do is come back and try again the next year.

The problem is not that people do not care. The problem is not that the bill is not good. The problem is not about having the votes. The problem is *time* and how both oppositional (Republican) and potentially sympathetic (Democratic) parties use it to stall change. The Republicans directly imposed time limits from the top down by threatening to filibuster. The Democrats, despite holding control of the House and knowing of this threat, held this bill to the end of session where a filibuster would indeed edge out other important bills. Ultimately, the Democrats chose to adhere to the norms of the legislative timelines, sustaining the status quo by "not making waves."

In each of these cases, the opposition threatened to use time to run down the clock on the session through filibustering, effectively holding up all but a few bills, and supposedly sympathetic parties chose not to disrupt the traditional timeline, allowing those threats of filibuster to kill the bill. They prioritized the bills they knew they could pass rather than those that would bring justice and change

Everyone, no matter who they are or what they believe, can ultimately use time to uphold white supremacy, maintaining the insidious illusion that such uses of time are arhetorical and thus nonideological.

for those who are most marginalized and struggling and need more opportunities to thrive, or at least be less directly harmed by state systems. People who are supposedly sympathetic to justice and creating change but who do not show up or use their time wisely are, according to Claudine, one of the "hardest barriers to get around, rather than the opposition." In the case of the reproductive justice bill, changemakers were told directly by Democratic Party leadership that they should just be happy with the big bills that had already passed that year, including paid family leave—as if one justice-oriented bill per session should be enough. What we can see here is that, whatever their stated intentions or even their ideological beliefs, how people use time is deeply important to how change must happen. Everyone, no matter who they are or what they believe, can ultimately use time to uphold white supremacy, maintaining the insidious illusion that such uses of time are arhetorical and thus nonideological. Right now, as we are writing, we are seeing an example of a state politician in a more constrained, Republican-led state who is using time to stand against injustice: Senator Machaela Cavanaugh has been filibustering every bill in the state legislature, claiming she will "burn this session to the ground. . . . I have nothing but time, and I am going to use all of it" (Specter) to keep the

legislature from passing a bill that would ban transgender healthcare for people under eighteen. Unlike the representatives discussed earlier, she is using all temporal means available to work for equity, forcing the legislature to make a choice between moving forward with this bill or moving forward with zero bills all session.

For those outside of legislative bodies who want to address these challenges, interview participants pointed to coalition building again and again as the only way to fight against white supremacist uses of time. Community-based temporal practice, here, relies on building and deploying a community of people to wield power in such a way that they cannot be ignored. When discussing the Clean Slate bill, which passed in 2021, Claudine emphasized how important it was that they pulled together a coalition of folks across identity and issue areas: the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), reproductive rights organizers, faith-based community organizers, "well-to-do white folks," and many, many others showing up and putting in the time and energy to make their support visible. Because of the strong coalition, the state legislators could not try to push this back for another year because "it actually would look bad for them." Claudine described the moment the bill passed as "such a beautiful victory for everybody that had poured all of their hearts and souls into it, but also, it was a beautiful victory for the people that will directly benefit from the bill that were a part of the process of it passing." This was one instance where she was reminded that "people power is actually possible and it is good to just keep coming back and trying over and over again, because eventually they'll listen." No one rhetor can successfully challenge dominant power; the strength of activist rhetoric instead lies in the coalition.

> **Community-based temporal practice . . . relies on building and deploying a community of people to wield power in such a way that they cannot be ignored.**

Other stories about wins with legislative processes, pushing back on bad university policies, and otherwise creating change that matters to people all identify spending time building relationships and creating coalitions as necessary factors in these wins. Emily talked about a key moment in her work pushing for a local reproductive justice ordinance, where she saw the fruition of months of labor building up the relationships to form a coalition around this issue: "it was a heck of a lot of work to get to that hearing, and I gave my three minutes of testimony in the beginning, but then really sat

in the back and watched everyone else do what we had prepared for. There was just a lineup of amazing really on-point perfect testimony" from so many people across the city and region to speak in favor of this ordinance. In addition to the win that day, Emily notes that "people who showed up to testify for us really cared about the issue, but they also really trusted each other and trusted me. I had this feeling of like no matter what it is, if they call me to show up, I'll show up. When I call them, they show up. And that's how we get it done." Again, the rhetorical efficacy of the moment lies not only in the words composed (the testimony) but also in the successful coalition building that created a mass of people showing up.

Community-based temporal practices are intensely relational. They require us to use time to grow our understanding of others and build relationships with them. For change to happen, we have to be in coalition with one another. We also found that changemakers' positionalities shaped how resilient they were in pushing forward and how coalition can help build this resilience. White participants often had the choice about whether to push forward or step back, but people of color often did not have this option. It's important to note that several of the white participants talked about moments of not pushing forward with community action because they felt alone and "didn't see a way forward" or were being intimidated by others surrounding them. Emily explains, "one of the biggest barriers to doing anything is feeling like you're alone." When our interviewees talk about deciding to pull back and stop working toward a specific goal, it is often because they were isolated and felt alone. Emily reminds us that relationship building is long-term, difficult work, but it must be at the center of how we build coalitions if we want to get past the temporal barriers that people use to stall change. In the case of the white participants, seeing themselves as accountable to an intersectional coalition of people was also a motivator in continuing to advocate. They were not pushing toward change out of a problematic sense of white guilt, but instead because they saw their liberation as deeply connected to others' liberation and were willing to strategically use what privileges they had in service of the coalition.

Constrained Institutional Timelines; Relationship Building as Response

A time-based barrier that participants consistently discuss is the institutional need for defined timelines. Specifically in academic institutions,

changemakers cited the timelines that universities impose on projects and their need for tangible results within a quantifiably short period of time as a difficulty to creating long-lasting change. Speaking about how academic institutions create unrealistic timelines, Eleanor, as a high school senior, noted the lack of sex education at her private school and wanted to address this need so future students would have a better understanding of sexual health. However, despite conducting a "a year-long project on sex education curriculums and looking at what is effective, what is not effective, and why we need it" and "doing research into local organizations that teach sex education that we could bring to school . . . because we're not trying to re-create the wheel," Eleanor was unable to accomplish any changes because of the constraint of the academic year. She talks about how in order to even begin to lobby for changes to the curriculum, she had to go through the process of finding the right people to help her. The power to create change in an institution is a resource in and of itself, and people in positions of power are wary of extending it to others, even, or perhaps especially, when it can be the catalyst for change. Eleanor found out too late in the year who she would need to convince for her proposed changes to be implemented in the future, and she ultimately came to the conclusion that her end goal of putting this curriculum into place was an "unrealistic endeavor." Ultimately, she ran out of time because she graduated and left for college.

> The power to create change in an institution is a resource in and of itself, and people in positions of power are wary of extending it to others, even, or perhaps especially, when it can be the catalyst for change.

Eleanor also talked about how changemaking projects within university classes are confined even further—to the semester. When talking about the biggest barriers to staying involved in changemaking work, she notes that creating change within a classroom setting can feel "kind of superficial and fabricated" because the effectiveness of the change she and her classmates made as teaching assistants in a local public school was being judged on the university's grading scale. Thus, this community project she participated in felt like it was more beneficial to her than the young students. She explains that "the hardest part was leaving. . . . Having made those relationships the entire semester with the kids and with the teacher, and then we were just supposed to leave." Her experiences align with leading community engagement scholarship that cites this issue again and again (Mathieu).

The way strong relationship building was constrained by the semester is particularly important because across so many of the interviews, participants noted that good relationships are what open the door to creating change. Cultivating these relationships takes patience and, most importantly, time—but institutions control whether this time is granted. Faculty have to fulfill teaching, research, and service goals for each year, but "building relationships with community members" is not usually institutionally quantifiable under most tenure or promotion guidelines. Students, who are taking multiple classes and working and often in a new place, do not necessarily have the time or information needed to form strong changemaking relationships. Thus, changemaking goals are often sacrificed in order to stay within institutional time constraints and fulfill institutional, academic priorities.

The professional work week is already a constrained timeline in which to accomplish tasks, and organizations stall change even further by discouraging employees from fully utilizing their own time on the projects that produce the most material change for people.

Similarly to academic institutions, professional workplaces also enforce unrealistic timelines on changemakers. Speaking about her work in a public service office, Tia, a Black woman working in her first postcollege position, explains how her supervisors try to regulate how she prioritizes her time at work, namely suggesting that she spend less time on community member problem solving. Tia explains: "They would say little things like you know you only have to do that two days out of the week, you don't have to do that every day. Or like, you know, they already get help with this." But these views do not align with Tia's understanding of her position and *why* she wants to work in public service in the city where she grew up: "Those types of questions irritate me, like literally make my blood boil. Because if people didn't need the help, then they wouldn't ask for it." The professional work week is already a constrained timeline in which to accomplish tasks, and organizations stall change even further by discouraging employees from fully utilizing their own time on the projects that produce the most material change for people. Despite Tia's concerns about how her coworkers want her to prioritize her time, she also explained that their ultimate goal was for her to "slow down" to prevent herself from being "overworked." The tension here is that burnout and overwork are serious concerns that Tia does need to consider, but as a young Black woman with strong community relationships, the advice of her supervisors revealed conflicting understandings

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of the community they were serving. Tia maintains her commitments by continuing to focus on the community problem-solving aspects of her job while also "stopping at five o'clock if I don't have a [night-time] neighborhood meeting." Further, she mentions that she continues to make time for activities that sustain her: "I'm in that space for the whole eight hours, but I feel like the culture of a position like that is you work 24/7. I can't do that because I also write poetry. I'm a sister. I like to have fun. I like to go visit my friends. I like to relax. I like to listen to my jazz, light a candle." Suggestions to abide by mandated time, like those given by Tia's coworkers, frequently present internal conflicts for changemakers. Institutions limit their time and try to control how that limited time is spent, and for those who do not prioritize self-fulfilling and restorative activities like Tia discusses, burnout is inevitable. Public service offices like Tia's often just need more staff but are not given these resources, and instead a small staff is encouraged to manage their own burnout individualistically. Because of the way changemaking professions encourage that 24/7 commitment Tia mentions, many find it difficult to separate work from personal life, separate the changemaker from the actual person; eight of our thirteen participants spoke directly about burnout being a pressing concern for either themselves or others.

Institutional time mandates that changemaking needs to fit into a box: a semester, a forty-hour work week, 10 percent of a workload, or some other quantitative measure. These time mandates attempt to constrict changemaking to a small percentage of time that just does not align with the real needs of communities. Kristina's response to being told to contain her community work to ten hours of her work week illustrates this issue: "Have you ever worked with kids and families? Because you don't get to decide, like if tomorrow there's going to be a breakdown. Or if a kid just checks out or you know you just don't get to decide those things, and so you have to be prepared." When faced with institutional time, relationship building is a key community-based temporal practice because it enables changemakers to better understand the real needs of their communities, which they can use to better assert their temporal needs to the institution.

Conclusion

Bureaucracy, people in power, and institutionally mandated timelines all present significant barriers to changemaking as we saw again and again in our interviews. But what we also saw were the ways changemakers

prioritized *community responsibility* again and again. By working in coalition with others, they were able to make the felt needs of the community their priorities even when encountering temporal challenges. Building relationships and working in coalitions are the foundation of community-based temporal practices like slowing down university timelines (Kristina), bringing people from multiple communities together for a justice-oriented goal (Claudine), and pushing back on professional mandates of where to spend work time (Tia).

As we move forward with our scholarly work of teaching and researching rhetoric, particularly for those who assert that our work can have an impact during this key political moment, we want to point to the importance of listening and learning from community changemakers who are seeking and working toward justice. We ask rhetorical scholars: When stories are told about this current moment, whose voices will we have prioritized? How did we *act* to enable and contribute to changemaking around us? Did we disrupt time to speak truth to power, to be part of coalitions, and to make a stand for change? In the end, our analysis is nothing without material change in the world, so let's find ways to follow the lead of community members and be part of their changemaking processes.

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Brandon M. Erby

Imagining Freedom: Cultural Rhetorics, Digital Literacies, and Podcasting in Prison

This article examines how individuals experiencing incarceration inside jails and prisons use tenets of cultural rhetorics and digital literacies to reshape understandings about composition students and how they make knowledge to envision and practice freedom inside unconventional educational spaces. By primarily analyzing the prison podcast *Ear Hustle*, the author addresses how incarcerated people turn to podcasting not only to sharpen their composing skills but also to build literate communities inside demoralizing environments.

> "Imagination! *who can sing thy force?*"
> **—Phillis Wheatley, "On Imagination" (1773)**

> *"This a celly. That's a tool."*
> **—Childish Gambino, "This Is America" (2018)**

> *"Imagination has always been our gift."*
> **—Imani Perry, *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* (2019)**

In *We Still Here: Pandemic, Policing, Protest, and Possibility*, Marc Lamont Hill suggests that the United States is not the land of the free but the land of confinement (40) and argues that in institutions across the United States, the confinement of people—as both a concept and a daily practice—not only confiscates freedom(s) but also grossly disregards the humanity of the individuals being confined (41). While Hill mentions that illustrations of confinement in the United States are seen regularly in locations such as nursing homes and detention centers, perhaps the most glaring examples of confinement are exhibited in US jails and prisons. In many ways, confinement dominates as the language used to define and describe incarcerated individuals and their status as members of society. Public and popular discourses about individuals experiencing incarceration often center and embellish visuals of holding cells, narratives of an individual's criminal activity and need for a punishable sentence, or the baggy jumpsuits that tag incarcerated individuals as state property. Even the geographical landscape for where jails and prisons are placed, as Michelle Alexander contends in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, conveys a disturbing, and yet intentional, idea about how we should view and think about the individuals living in confinement there. These illustrations, accounts, and decisions work to construct our perceptions about the people inhabiting US jails and prisons: incarcerated people deserve to be locked away because they are dangerous threats to our communities, and they are relegated to the margins of society because their transgressions make them disposable beings who should be easily forgotten.

When stories of incarcerated people in the United States are given attention—via news media, television programs, or film productions—the narratives that often dominate rely on scenes and languages of violence that work to justify various means of captivity. It is easy for us to ignore (and therefore accept) the troubling and inhumane practices connected to prison culture when the discourses focus mostly on tropes like the dangerous super-predator who has committed murder or the drug dealer who has terrorized a local neighborhood. In instances such as these, an Us versus Them framework is constructed to reduce people to their bodily movements and see human beings as enemies who need to be punished. As discourses form and circulate, they also inform our understandings of who inhabits the prison space. What would happen, however, if instead of

viewing incarcerated individuals through a lens of criminality, captivity, and confinement, we acknowledge their humanity and value their voices and identities? How would our thoughts about the prison, who dwells there, and what types of practices are cultivated in the space change if we believe that people living behind bars are content creators and knowledge makers? These are the questions that I seek to address in this article.

Although much of the language that we use to describe incarcerated people focuses heavily on stripping away their humanity, livelihood, and freedoms, there is a rich rhetorical tradition of incarcerated people who have resisted notions and actions of confinement to engage in practices of freedom within prison walls. While rhetorics of confinement are used to narrate why certain people and bodies belong in prison and deserve to be condemned to the margins of society, rhetorics of freedom are used to speak truth to power, survive cruel conditions, demonstrate individuality, and maintain a sense of dignity, even when confinement is being experienced. Therefore, when discussing the lives of people who are experiencing incarceration, a cultural rhetorics lens separates itself from the dominant discourses that circulate about this population. Instead of defining and depicting people in prison in ways that prioritize their confinement at the hands of state power, cultural rhetorics considers the multiple epistemologies that are prevalent in US jails and prisons and how incarcerated people, despite their custody status, practice joy, self-care, and independence. Even when individuals are locked up by state institutions and locked out of society, they still carve out ways to express themselves, analyze global situations, and imagine future possibilities for themselves that may or may not be outside the prison gates. These are the narratives that we need to center when studying and learning from prison populations.

Reading Interdisciplinary Carceral Studies Scholarship with a Cultural Rhetorics Lens

There has been a consistent presence of scholarship in English, composition, and communication studies that has focused on the ways jails and prisons house multiliterate people and are sites of rhetorical activity. In *Reading Is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons*, Megan Sweeney highlights how diverse reading and language practices motivate incarcerated women to "reenvision and rescript their lives—to view their experiences in relation to broader social and historical contexts

and to glimpse different horizons as they engage with others' stories" (3). Lisa M. Corrigan's *Prison Power: How Prison Influenced the Movement for Black Liberation* argues that the incarceration of Black activists during the civil rights and Black Power eras played an important role in the struggle for racial equality and social justice. By examining the experiences of imprisoned individuals via "vernacular prison texts" like autobiographical writings, essays, poems, and letters, *Prison Power* reveals how incarceration was used strategically to abuse, criminalize, and confine Black people and depicts the ways incarcerated Black people converted jails and prisons into places of radical instruction and employed tenets of writing and rhetoric to engage in activism and challenge state oppression, surveillance, and control. Patrick W. Berry's *Doing Time, Writing Lives: Refiguring Literacy and Higher Education in Prison* blends narrative with analysis to illustrate how incarcerated students turn carceral spaces into educational ones and use their literacy skills to "remember and reimagine themselves within a population too often forgotten and neglected" (x). Each of these projects demonstrate that the work happening inside jails and prisons is not just rhetorical but also cultural. They center the histories and narratives of marginalized communities who, despite their ostracization, engage in meaningful forms of discourse and pedagogy to reshape, re-create, and better understand the worlds in which they live.

The work happening inside jails and prisons is not just rhetorical but also cultural.

For example, in the introductory chapter of *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life*, Ruha Benjamin notes that while new media and innovative technologies are invented and used supposedly to monitor criminal activities and create a sense of security in US communities, too much praise is placed on advancements in technology and not enough emphasis is made on how systemic inequities and social disparities drive the demand for technological use. For instance, when exploring the relationship between technology and the carceral state, Benjamin writes that "Technology is not just a bystander that happens to be at the scene of the crime; it actually aids and abets the process by which carcerality penetrates social life" (2). From the dashcam video technologies in police cruisers and the body cameras that law enforcement officers wear on their uniforms, to the mugshot images of perpetrators that flash across television screens during the evening

news and the surveillance technologies that agencies rely on to supervise public streets and state institutions, to the limited devices that incarcerated individuals must navigate to communicate with loved ones and legal counsel, technology is used consistently to inject logics of criminality, guilt, and retribution into both the incarcerated community and the public at large. Although these logics are infused with the circulating power needed to shape discourses and beliefs about people in prison, Benjamin argues in *Captivating Technology* that there are redemptive ways that technology can help us acknowledge and learn from people who are imprisoned. "If the carceral imagination captures and contains," Benjamin maintains, "then a liberatory imagination opens up possibilities and pathways, creates new templates, and builds on a black radical tradition that has continually developed insights and strategies grounded in justice" (12).

Furthermore, Benjamin D. Weber notes in "Anticarceral Internationalism: Rethinking Human Rights through the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition" that "the most incisive indictments of state violence and trenchant articulations of racial justice have emanated from within the harshest instrument of state repression, the prison itself" (708) and contends that there is a tradition of imprisoned Black radicals who have engaged in modes of resistance not only to expose the inhumane conditions of the prison system but also to "reenvision human flourishing" (712). Put differently, analyzing systems of confinement within the purview of a Black radical tradition upholds justice work that contests the callous ways of prison culture and showcases how incarcerated people redesign narratives about them in ways that legitimize their struggles, defend their humanity, and place value on their present and future lives.

This Black radical tradition includes compositions that are also both rhetorical and cultural. It contains the works and actions of Black interlocutors, writers, and activists who have turned to their available technologies of persuasion to compose and deliver messages on both imprisonment and freedom. Even when these rhetoricians have been incarcerated themselves, they have created texts that contribute to a rich tradition of Black resistance by demonstrating that even when the US penal system further marginalizes the people it incarcerates, it cannot silence them entirely.

Ultimately, this Black rhetorical tradition that I am describing provides us with examples of how viewing methods of confinement with a cultural

rhetorics lens helps us critique the systems and conditions of imprisonment *with* tools and technologies that can empower individuals experiencing incarceration. Using a cultural rhetorics lens permits us to serve as visionaries because we focus on the possibilities that arise when we imagine new orders for doing things and build a future world that is more just than the world we have presently. A cultural rhetorics lens also enables us to contest the powerful discourses that shape our current imaginations about prison populations. In other words, it decenters the controlling narratives about people in prison and their crimes, sentences, and confinement status to illuminate how incarcerated individuals, as rhetoric and writing scholar Aja Y. Martinez might put it, devise counterstories that oppose institutional powers and promote experiential knowledge in ways that are edifying rather than stereotypical (34).

A cultural rhetorics lens underscores how people living in confinement rely on tenets of writing, rhetoric, and technology to define themselves, create community with others, and survive repressive institutional environments.

Therefore, a cultural rhetorics lens underscores how people living in confinement rely on tenets of writing, rhetoric, and technology to define themselves, create community with others, and survive repressive institutional environments and builds on what rhetoric scholar David Coogan calls "prison paideia." Asserting that paideia "emerges when teachers and students invade subjects like writing or public speaking to take up 'social problems' that were created by 'changes in economic and political life' that arguably led both to crime and to the crisis of mass incarceration," Coogan contends that prison paideia "works against racism, misogyny, and other social practices and discourses that divide and dehumanize" (71–72). This process, then, exhibits how a cultural rhetorics lens leads to notions of restorative and transformative justice because it recognizes that incarcerated individuals, despite the various obstructions preventing them from forming and maintaining ethical, intellectual, and creative communities within prison walls (Coogan 76), are still capable of both imagining and actualizing practices of autonomy. "To invite the incarcerated to speak," Coogan writes, "is to inveigh against their status as prisoners" (79). By focusing on the rhetorical and composing strategies that people experiencing incarceration utilize to present alternative realities and perceptions about the prison population, we can see that even when

barriers intended to restrict practices of independence and individuality are in place, practices of literacy that demonstrate a passion for justice and freedom persist (Coogan 77, 79).

If people behind bars are to empower themselves, David Coogan declares in "Situating Agency in the Memoirs of Mass Incarceration," then they "simply need opportunities to invent" (40–41). And with a little imagination and a desire to reconceptualize our political, cultural, and social landscapes, Ruha Benjamin makes it clear that technological tools and media platforms are not only used to harm, restrict, and oppress but also to resist, educate, and "explore visions of fashioning the world in radically different ways" (4, 14). Benjamin also calls us to adopt science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler's concept of *radio imagination*, which "serves as a methodological touchstone for ethical engagement with technoscience, where the zeal for making new things is tempered by an ability to listen to the sounds and stories of people and things already made" (9). Using a radio imagination framework helps us take seriously the voices and identities of people experiencing incarceration because it urges us to locate the methods that these individuals use to speak for themselves and requires us to listen to their perspectives. These perspectives might cover the context of one's confinement status, but it is also likely that they will reveal testaments of pride, community, and survival. If we listen attentively *and* intentionally, then we will notice that technologies used to shape the narratives of people behind bars not only include the dominant ones that further criminalize but also the local ones that amplify and authenticate the literacies and knowledges of individuals serving time. Adhering to this process conveys a more just relationship between technology and carcerality; one that is not driven by tyrannizing ideals of crime and punishment but more ingenious practices of self-expression, storytelling, dreaming, and freedom (Benjamin 10). In recent years, the podcast has become arguably the most popular and effective technological tool that rhetors use to carry out this type of enterprise.

African American Rhetoric, Digital Literacies, and Podcasting in Prison

In *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, Adam J. Banks argues that "digital griots" are knowledgeable storytellers who—by relying on their cultural traditions and technological capabilities—rhetorically and creatively compose, express, and share meaningful content with

the audiences and communities they identify with or find valuable (25–26). In the same project, Banks uses the concept of the "back in the day" narrative to explain how African American rhetorical practices recall moments and events from the past to contend with the exigencies of our present and to reimagine navigable pathways for the future (87, 91). Similar arguments about the relationship between storytelling, technology, and African American rhetoric are made in Gilyard and Banks's *On African-American Rhetoric*. In their assertion that more scholarly attention must be given to the ways people compose in nonacademic settings, Gilyard and Banks also maintain that more research needs to be done that links the African American rhetorical tradition with effective uses of technology (123). Because technologies are used to demonstrate knowledge, construct identities, and amplify voices, the authors recommend that rhetoric and writing scholars consider not just the digital products created with technology but how technology is wielded to respond to different rhetorical situations (73).

Public perceptions of jail and prison life largely do not consider how incarcerated people challenge prevalent discourses about them, speak for themselves, and manufacture ways to experience autonomy while behind bars.

In these projects Banks and Gilyard offer a theoretical framework for how African American rhetoric, along with various technologies, can be used to tell truthful stories that help shape discourse in meaningful ways. Their insights are applicable for individuals experiencing incarceration, since the dominant narratives associated with people who are imprisoned often center depictions of criminality and violence (Cecil and Leitner), and the prevailing language used to label these individuals includes constrictive and dehumanizing terms such as "inmate," "felon," "prisoner," and "offender" to emphasize their marginal positions in society.[1] As a result, public perceptions of jail and prison life largely do not consider how incarcerated people challenge prevalent discourses about them, speak for themselves, and manufacture ways to experience autonomy while behind bars. Although "prisons and jails across the nation are arguably the biggest information and technological deserts in America," according to Martin Garcia, who manages "News Inside," the Marshall Project's news publication for incarcerated readers, imprisoned people continue to discover ways to use digital media and demonstrate their rhetorical expertise ("Let Them Tell It").

In this section, I highlight the ways that incarcerated individuals turn jails and prisons into composition classrooms to showcase their literacy skills and create content that is personal, serious, and inspiring. Using various rhetorical and theoretical approaches, I argue that people experiencing incarceration are avid storytellers who compose messages not only to bring attention to issues of mass incarceration but also to reimagine and practice notions of freedom. By primarily analyzing the prison podcast *Ear Hustle*, this section asserts that incarcerated individuals turn to podcasting not only to sharpen their composition skills but also to build a literate community inside an often inhumane and demoralizing environment. This article concludes by addressing the ways people in prison combine technology with rhetorical practice to reshape understandings of who composition students are and how they produce knowledge inside places that fall outside conventional views of a writing classroom.

The rhetorical competencies and digital literacies of people housed in jails and prisons have received considerable attention in recent years. Not only do people in prison use cell phones to communicate with their families, but they also take college-level courses on Zoom. Cognizant of their identities and surroundings, incarcerated students implement both rhetorical and digital strategies like blurring their backgrounds or altering their attire so that their professors and classmates are not aware of their incarceration status. Technology has allowed incarcerated people to virtually attend funeral services, play video games, and better prepare themselves for living in a digital age after their release. Despite the hefty price tag of using technology in prison (a video call on an institutional device can cost $1 per minute, and the latest iPhone on the black market can sell for about $3,500) as well as the steep consequences of being caught with content that is considered contraband (suspension of phone and/or visitation privileges), those who are incarcerated continue to take risks to digitally engage with the outside world and practice freedom (Anonymous and West).

Most importantly, perhaps, is how incarcerated individuals write in jails and prisons. People experiencing incarceration compose in a range of genres to develop and maintain relationships with others (including their young children, romantic partners, and the family members of those whom they have harmed), pursue their academic and creative interests, and express themselves as complex and multifaceted human beings (Smith-Pennick). According to Demetrius A. Buckley, a poet and fiction

writer incarcerated at Baraga Correctional Facility in Michigan, "writing is one of very few freedoms I have. . . . Writing is how I make sense of the muddiness within myself and this environment, and I love the ritual of honing my work on the tablet and sharing it with other writers. It's like a second chance at life" (Buckley). With the emergence of and reliance on social media platforms to create content and circulate messages, people experiencing incarceration have discovered ways to construct a digital presence that is respected by audiences both inside and outside institutional walls (Blakinger). From music performances posted on YouTube to TikTok reels about how to cook delectable meals inside a prison cell, incarcerated people

From music performances posted on YouTube to TikTok reels about how to cook delectable meals inside a prison cell, incarcerated people have demonstrated that their confinement status does not debilitate their identities as literate individuals.

have demonstrated that their confinement status does not debilitate their identities as literate individuals. In fact, their imprisonment often requires either the invention of rhetorical abilities or the deployment of established ones to survive. As Desmond Metcalf, an amateur rapper who was once incarcerated at South Carolina's Kershaw Correctional Institution, has admitted, "I never wrote anything down until I got to prison" (Metcalf and Chammah). In many ways, the structural and practical makeup of jails and prisons works to silence incarcerated individuals and inhibit them from gaining any semblance of power or independence. Therefore, practices of writing allow incarcerated people to circumvent the limitations placed on their bodies and cultivate their composing skills as thinkers, speakers, and storytellers. As a rhetorical genre that allows for a constellation of voices and perspectives to be heard and considered to channel discourse and shape perception, podcasting has increasingly become an effective digital writing tool that allows for this type of work to happen.

In *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*, Krista Ratcliffe offers rhetorical listening as a concept that recognizes how genuine engagement with our racial and gender identities can be used to facilitate cross-cultural communication about social issues (17). "Such listening," Ratcliffe argues, "may help people invent, interpret, and ultimately judge differently in that perhaps we *hear* things we cannot *see*" (25). Given the geographical landscapes of many jails and prisons, the strategic ways that we are spatially separated from the individuals being housed there, and

the disparaging rhetoric and language used to portray people behind bars, Ratcliffe's framing of rhetorical listening is particularly relevant to the plight of incarcerated populations. Because "no single identification solely defines a person's identity" (51) and rhetorical listening requires that we not only hear what we cannot see but also learn from what we hear, understand diverse perspectives, and participate in dialogue (34–39), it is important that we pay close attention to the voices and stories of people experiencing incarceration, especially when many media representations of them are inaccurate or incomplete and occasions to see them face-to-face are largely prohibited.

As a method for rhetorical listening, Ratcliffe proposes eavesdropping, or "purposeful overhearing" (104), because it allows us to discover, learn from, and consider new ways of living and being in the world, even as we are "careful not to overstep another's boundaries or interrupt the agency of another's discourse" (106). Interestingly, eavesdropping is also the inspiration behind the Pulitzer Prize–nominated podcast *Ear Hustle*, which is recorded inside a media lab at San Quentin State Prison in California.[2] "Ear hustle" is prison slang for eavesdrop, and, as a podcast, *Ear Hustle* amplifies the epistemologies of people who are currently and formerly incarcerated. As cohost and cofounder of *Ear Hustle*, Earlonne Woods, puts it: "We're human and regular people. Our story didn't end after conviction" ("Ear Hustle Co-host"). Although Woods was incarcerated in California state prisons for over twenty years, he now co-manages a podcast that showcases the multiple identities, styles, personalities, and languages of people in prison. *Ear Hustle* also applies rhetorical appeals to deliver messages that convince audiences to see imprisoned individuals as knowledgeable and trustworthy; tell stories that are memorable, sonically pleasing, and emotionally compelling; and present provocative perspectives in comprehensive ways. As a result, the *Ear Hustle* podcast captures how people who are imprisoned turn their lived experiences into teachable lessons, demonstrate their agency, and imagine and practice freedom behind bars. "I don't think people outside can imagine the depth and sophistication of some of the people inside the walls of a prison," former public information officer Lieutenant Sam Robinson proclaims in the January 26, 2023, edition of "The Lowdown," *Ear Hustle*'s biweekly newsletter ("Mayor").

Having begun in 2017, *Ear Hustle* is in its twelfth season at the time of this writing and has released nearly one hundred episodes. In giving in-

carcerated people a public platform to compose and narrate, the podcast prominently features incarcerated people expressing their thoughts about who they are, how they live in prison, and what they do to survive their imprisonment. In doing so, listeners of *Ear Hustle* hear curated stories that describe the rhetorical savviness and literacies of people in prison. For example, in "Stormy Monday," *Ear Hustle* focuses on how music becomes, as Earlonne Woods attests, "a way to create your own world around you." This episode, framed as "a mixtape of songs and stories," discusses how music transforms carceral spaces and how it shapes the individuals dwell-

ing in these locales. From playing traditional instruments like guitars, flutes, and violins in the prison yard to hitting walls, tables, and chairs to make rhythmic beats in the chow hall (cafeteria), "Stormy Monday" emphasizes how music provides incarcerated people with not only an outlet to spend their time but a mechanism to teach and learn, develop mentoring relationships, and form artistic communities in settings of confinement. For example, when a man named Bobby Gonz is interviewed for this episode, he explains that when he was convicted of murder and sentenced to twenty-five years to life at age sixteen, a counselor gifted

In discussing and writing about their traumas, confusions, and experiences with violence, centering music becomes a way for people incarcerated at San Quentin to operate as creative storytellers and composers as they reckon with their pasts, redefine themselves in the present, and envision possibilities for a better future.

him a notebook and pencil to strengthen his lyrical skills as not only a rapper but also a writer. Gonz also believes that writing is helping him heal as someone who was first incarcerated as a teenager. "I stayed writing . . . writing down thought, writing down notes, writing down rhymes. Not necessarily songs yet. But for the most part I was realizing that I was starting to come to some type of healing," Gonz asserts on the podcast. According to Earlonne Woods, Gonz imagines and invents "a whole 'notha world" via writing, something that other incarcerated individuals also do. "Some cats couldn't articulate in a conversation, but through their writings they could," Woods acknowledges. When Gonz starts a writing group with other amateur rappers, he notes that the process "wasn't just like talking about music or talking about songwriting; it was about what brings us to a point where we believe in music in such a way that it could free us from metal and concrete?" In discussing and writing about their traumas, confusions,

and experiences with violence, centering music becomes a way for people incarcerated at San Quentin to operate as creative storytellers and composers as they reckon with their pasts, redefine themselves in the present, and envision possibilities for a better future.

In highlighting how music, writing, and community building allow incarcerated people to imagine freedom, *Ear Hustle* affirms that creating and sustaining enriching relationships with others, especially for people from marginalized backgrounds who are inhabiting a toxic space, becomes a desired outcome for engaging in rhetorical expression. In "Yard of Dreams," listeners hear from Samantha Gordan, a transgender woman who has been incarcerated for over twenty-five years. Gordan shares her experiences with playing sports in prison and mentions the periods of discrimination and ostracization that she has faced because of her identity. After Gordan becomes a member of the prison's softball team, she tells listeners that playing sports restored her humanity because she is now part of a welcoming community that values her as a person. Moreover, in an *Ear Hustle* interview that is not featured in a regular episode, a transgender man named Miccal Martinez reveals that although he encountered discrimination "on the outside," he found freedom in the women's prison where he is currently incarcerated because he is allowed to express himself without restraint ("What We're Listening To").[3]

What makes *Ear Hustle* an appealing podcast (besides its well-executed rhythmic sound design) is its ability to portray incarcerated people as human beings with a wide set of experiences, viewpoints, and emotions.

What makes *Ear Hustle* an appealing podcast (besides its well-executed rhythmic sound design) is its ability to portray incarcerated people as human beings with a wide set of experiences, viewpoints, and emotions. In addition to learning about writing communities and sports teams, listeners also gain insight into romantic relationships and how individuals in prison love. To love while incarcerated is both a matter of rhetoric and resistance and is also an exercise of freedom. For example, fifteen-minute phone calls sustain romantic relationships with partners who are not incarcerated. During an allotted time over the phone, couples can watch television, eat a meal, or otherwise enjoy each other's company by reimagining their present circumstances or dreaming of a future where navigating someone's incarceration is not their reality ("15 Minutes"). And in "Boots and Max," *Ear Hustle* covers the experiences of individuals looking to date or develop a

romantic relationship with someone who is also incarcerated. In exploring the romance between Boots and Max, two gay men, the podcast discloses how affectionate relationships are cultivated in homophobic and violent settings. "I felt like I wasn't in prison," Boots declares throughout the episode about his relationship with Max. "He took me out of this place. . . . When you love somebody and when they love you back, you're not supposed to get that in prison. But we did." Max is now out on parole, and Boots only has the memory of how Max made him feel. He is left to dream about a wholesome relationship that once existed but is no longer available. As the episode concludes, cohost Earlonne Woods conveys the predicament of Boots with the following words: "Imagination is all you got in prison."

Conclusion

When I was an English graduate student at Penn State, I taught creative writing at a nearby state prison for one year. Once a week, I was escorted to the educational wing of the prison to teach incarcerated students about literacy narratives, short stories, poems, and other modes of written expression. In addition to the scholarly conversations that we had in class, someone always found a way to ask me a question about my personal life. One student joked that I needed to stop coming into the prison dressed like an H&M, Express, or Nordstrom model (this student was a pro at the Black rhetorical practice of signifyin'). Another asked why I decided to teach inside a prison. But one exchange exhibited the idea of freedom while incarcerated in an insightful way. When I returned to my prison classroom after almost a month of not meeting due to the university's spring break, CCCC 2018, and prison lockdowns, one student asked how I spent my extended time off. After I stated that I mostly rested and chilled at home, the student's response was that I had wasted my time doing that because I was *free*. As someone who is incarcerated and has to imagine freedom, this student's comments reminded me of *Ear Hustle*'s first episode of Season Eleven, titled "Dream On," which focuses exclusively on the dreams of incarcerated people. Several interviewees disclose that they associate dreaming with experiencing freedom because their dreams create alternative realities for themselves. Some dream about having opportunities to eat their favorite foods, shop, and relax on the beach. Others dream about spending time with family members or working a "normal" job. Most agree that dreaming is a requirement for evading the harsh conditions of the prison. As a man named Aaron states:

"I may rest here, I may sleep here, but this is not what I dream of." Another man, named Mike, utters something similar: "When I'm having a dream, I'm out in the world, I really believe I'm free in that dream." Another man, named Taylor, says this: "When I was dreaming, I wasn't in prison and there was always a thing I told my cellies. 'If I'm asleep, please don't wake me up because while I'm asleep, I'm not here. It's my only escape from prison.'" The student in my creative writing class seemed to question my actions as someone "on the outside" who arguably does not need to dream to conceive a life without restrictions and seemingly has the mobility, time, and opportunities to do other things and experience freedom with ease.

> Given our values as rhetoric, composition, literacy, and communication teacher-scholars and our commitments to social justice, we must not disregard the histories and structural forces that inform the lived experiences of all types of students, including those who are incarcerated.

In many ways, other things are what Adam Banks called us to envision and do in his 2015 CCCC Chair's Address, "Ain't No Walls behind the Sky, Baby! Funk, Flight, Freedom." As Banks closes his remarks, he says: "Let us be committed to creating free spaces for ourselves, and to standing with and learning from those who are engaged in freedom struggle, not in the past, but right here right now. Let us use that freedom we take for those who do not have our protections or our privileges, inside and outside the academy" (278). As Michelle Alexander notes in *The New Jim Crow*, if we truly care about justice work, then we must acknowledge the conditions of the approximately two million people who are currently confined in jails, prisons, detention centers, and mental health institutions across the United States (11). Given our values as rhetoric, composition, literacy, and communication teacher-scholars and our commitments to social justice, we must not disregard the histories and structural forces that inform the lived experiences of all types of students, including those who are incarcerated, and construct avenues for them to speak, write, invent, and build community. Freedom, therefore, is not just about the ability to move one's body or the resonance of one's voice; it is also about whose experiences are recognized and valued as human.

In the opening pages of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin D.G. Kelley recalls how his mother encouraged her children to use their "third eyes" to dream and see the world not for what it is but what it could be. As he puts it: "She wanted us to imagine a world free of patri-

archy, a world where gender and sexual relations could be reconstructed. She wanted us to see the poetic and prophetic in the richness of daily lives. She wanted us to visualize a more expansive, fluid, 'cosmos-politan' definition of blackness, to teach us that we are not merely inheritors of a culture but its makers" (2–3). While the children's "two eyes" could see with ease the "cops, drug dealers, social workers, the rusty tapwater, roaches and rodents, the urine-scented hallways, and the piles of garbage" that marked their sociopolitical and economic situations in New York City, third eyes "envision a different way of seeing" by using art, creativity, and what Kelley calls "poetic knowledge" to challenge mainstream accounts of subjugation and imagine better ways of living (9, 11). In considering the perspectives of those previously or presently imprisoned, let us activate our "third eyes" and implement strategies, programs, and services that make multimodal and multimedia writing accessible to all of our students so that they are enabled to communicate in various rhetorical and cultural modes of expression, resist dominant narratives and institutional powers, redefine societal norms, and believe in new possibilities to exemplify freedom.

Notes

1. See the Marshall Project's "Language Project" (https://www.themarshallproject.org/2021/04/12/the-language-project) and the Fortune Society's "Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language" (https://fortunesociety.org/wordsmatter/).

2. The cofounders of *Ear Hustle* are Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, and Antwan Williams. Woods and Williams were incarcerated when the podcast began. Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, who also was incarcerated at San Quentin, became a cohost in 2019.

3. To hear more *Ear Hustle* stories about the experiences of transgender, intersex, and nonbinary people in prison, check out the episode "Do You Know Who I am" in Season Eleven (https://www.earhustlesq.com/episodes/2023/4/12/do-you-know-who-i-am).

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CCCC News

Call for Manuscripts for *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty*: *Forum* is seeking articles that focus on the working conditions, professional life, activism, and perspectives of non-tenure-track faculty in college composition, writing, and communication. *Forum* is a peer-reviewed journal published twice annually (once as part of *College Composition and Communication* and once as part of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*) and **sponsored by the Conference on College Composition and Communication**. Faculty and scholars from all academic positions are welcome to contribute. Please send **submissions and queries** to the editor, Trace Daniels-Lerberg, at trace.daniels@utah.edu. More information is also available at the *Forum* website: https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/forum/write.

Announcements and Calls

Call for Participation: This Story Matters and the Rationale Database: The right to read is one of the foundations of a democratic society, and teachers need the freedom to support that right so their students can make informed decisions and be valuable contributors to our world. Book rationales are some of the strongest tools for educators to show why This Story Matters in their schools and classrooms. The This Story Matters project is an ongoing effort *by* NCTE members *for* NCTE members, and you are invited to

- access the rationale database to search and download available rationales,
- help expand the title selection by signing up to write a rationale,
- suggest titles to add to the database, and
- join the team to peer-review newly submitted rationales.

To access the database and learn more about ways to get involved, visit us at ThisStoryMatters.com.

Counterstory
The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory

Aja Y. Martinez

Humanities scholar Aja Y. Martinez makes a compelling case for counterstory as methodology in rhetoric and writing studies through the well-established framework of critical race theory (CRT), reviewing first the counterstory work of Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Patricia J. Williams, whom she terms counterstory exemplars.
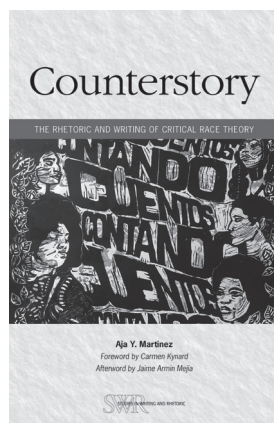
Delgado, Bell, and Williams, foundational critical race theorists working in the respective counterstory genres of narrated dialogue, fantasy/allegory, and autobiographic reflection, have set precedent for others who would research and compose with this method.

Arguing that counterstory provides opportunities for marginalized voices to contribute to conversations about dominant ideology, Martinez applies racial and feminist rhetorical criticism to the rich histories and theories established through counterstory genres, all the while demonstrating how CRT theories and methods can inform teaching, research, and writing/publishing of counterstory.

Counterstory

THE RHETORIC AND WRITING OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Aja Y. Martinez
Foreword by Carmen Kynard
Afterword by Jaime Armin Mejia

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