AWAKENING STUDENTS TO RHETORICAL PROCESS: AUDIENCE, ETHOS AND ANONYMITY IN JOURNAL CORRESPONDENCE

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As most freshman composition teachers know, students are often distressingly inactive in rhetorical situations; thus, the reflective and interactive purpose of reading and writing is often negated by their assumption that repetition of information is the prime objective of learning. Perhaps our students have been encouraged to be "natural Hirschians" who "come to us asking for initiation, not self-realization" (Smith 25). Or perhaps their unwillingness to actively engage with and, where necessary, question the ideas and values presented in various works is merely another symptom of a consumerist society which applauds passivity and equates resistance with defiance or recalcitrance. Whatever the reasons behind students' public reluctance to attempt any gradation, judgment or identification of conflicts and compromises, we observed that within the security of one-to-one conferences they were often

encouraged to challenge authority and accuracy. As one student explained during a discussion in our office:

> I'm only a freshman and I don't think I should or can disagree with famous writers and thinkers . . . Yes, I disagree with this idea, but I would have trouble explaining why, and I'm probably wrong, anyway.

Although she thought the work was important to her, she was disinclined to articulate her criticism before her peers. Given a non-threatening opportunity, she was capable of engaging the works we assigned, interpreting and decontextualizing various viewpoints, even rejecting many as unacceptable; but outside the supportive conference environment she would not attempt to present and defend any position she held. Rather she chose merely to summarize the work. Except in this realm of teacher and student, where she could gain immediate approval for identifying what she saw as potential problem areas, she was unwilling openly to present any objections she had. Similarly, the suggestion that she express her position in writing seemed equally as intimidating since all our class work was subject to peer review and evaluation.

To create an environment that would encourage the rhetorical process, a process requiring active collaboration rather than passive consumption, we instituted two semester-long anonymous correspondences between unacquainted students in separate sections of freshman composition. We provided a shared body of information inasmuch as we used identical texts, assignments and heuristics, and we held classroom discussions on the same material at similar times in the semester. We asked students to use a pseudonym when writing to their partners in the other class hoping that anonymity would increase their willingness to question, defend or reassess positions. In addition, the structure of the assignment (get to know your correspondent through written discussion of course readings) promised to remove the possibility of visual or oral assessment thus encouraging students to examine and use language as the major indicator of audience and ethos. We hoped that as a result of their participation in this project our students would actively engage others' language more often and show a willingness to evaluate ideas and to articulate any misgivings or disagreements more readily. In other words, our objective was to assist our students in recognizing rhetorical situations and in being willing to participate actively in them. We wanted our students

to practice a different approach to reading and responding; we hoped that the scenario created by this assignment would encourage their discrimination and the idea of refining and clarifying a given point; we wanted to awaken them to their power, as users of language, both to intervene in the expression of ideas unacceptable to them and to reinforce ideas they could support. Rather than showing only that they understood a reading, we wanted them also to involve themselves rhetorically in the way defined by Lloyd Bitzer:

> a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. (3-4)

The first step, however, was stimulating students' active engagement in the rhetorical act itself—an occupation requiring acknowledgment of their own valid judgment of not only their peers' views, but the beliefs and assertion of professional writers. In order to foster such decision-making and accountable behavior in our students, we encouraged them to take the world as problematic, to question, and to resist the notion of the written word as irrefutable. And, to assist them in such a task—which they viewed as a monumental and dangerous undertaking—we practiced various heuristics in class, the most successful of which was a simplified version of the Toulmin model. Using this method of analysis, students learned how to identify claims and evidence, how to assess the writer's presentation method, and how to evaluate the validity of any given position. Once students had mastered this heuristic, we then asked them to try to build a contradictory claim based on the same evidence or, failing this, use different evidence to better support a weak claim.

After introducing and practicing such heuristics, we began our correspondence journal project. The project included four essential features: first, we assigned a primary audience to each student—a peer in another section of freshman English—with whom they exchanged a notebook every two weeks. Second, we provided what we believed might be the essential feature required to encourage free expression of genuine viewpoints: anonymity.

By asking them to assume pseudonyms for this project and instructing them to use only these names in their correspondence, we ensured that among the correspondents if not with us there would be more likelihood of dissent. Third, we restricted the range of allowable writing, specifying that each entry comment on the assigned reading and their partner's writing. We explained that penalty awaited the student who simply detailed the party she had attended last weekend, while reward and applause would greet the student who knit this party experience into her analysis and assessment of the readings. And, finally and very importantly, we arranged the course syllabus so that the journal project unified other class activities: active reading, critical thinking, class discussion, in-class writing, and major papers.

By making the correspondence journal an integral part of the general class topics, we created a forum in which we believed the students would be more interested in writing, because they were writing to someone their own ages; would feel less threatened about presenting unusual or nonconformist views, because they wrote anonymously; would experience the assignment as structured to elicit rhetorical—as opposed to summative or descriptive—writing; and would perceive the interactive nature of reading, writing, and analysis. Our intention was to provide a situation in which students could use language rather than be used by it and, as Bakhtin says, learn to "populate [it] with [their] own intentions, [their] own accent . . . adapting [language] to [their] own semantic and expressive intention" (293). We wanted to provide a community for our students where dialogue could more easily be transformed into dialectic; in order to create such a community, we provided an environment which included a contemporary correspondent, anonymity for the individual writer, and a structured assignment relating directly to the context of supporting activities.

Within these confines, we were pleased to see argumentative activity soon develop between various correspondents. The first of these were two students who named themselves Hobbs and Max. As the semester began, Hobbs and Max's correspondence resembled polite chit-chat; excerpts from their work typify the tendency we hoped to alter: an unwillingness to disagree with someone else's ideas and to debate them. Hobbs and Max at first evaded taking positions in which they might feel uncomfortably exposed; instead they reiterated or summarized the issues rather than assessing or analyzing them. For example, the first assign-

ment, under a general heading of "All in the Family," asked students to read two short views, one by Mary Wollstonecraft on parents demanding slavish bondage from their children, and the other by Arthur C. Clarke on the disadvantages of single-child families. The students were asked to interact critically with one of the sections. Where the students concurred with the author's views, they were to explain why Wollstonecraft's or Clarke's ideas were in agreement with their own, further developing the author's thesis and giving additional support for the original assertion. Where the students disagreed, they were to show how the author's idea was different from theirs, explaining what the writer failed to consider or questioning an aspect of the issue the author overlooked. In each case, they were to be specific about their position and show where it fitted into, or departed from, the author's views.

In response to this assignment, Hobbs began his correspondence to Max in this way:

> In reading the two small essays by Clarke and Wollstonecraft, one could find many things to agree or disagree, depending upon his or her beliefs in the family. . . . Let us ponder a moment on the writing of Arthur C. Clarke.[1]

Aside from Hobbs' problem with inflated language, he clearly limits his interaction with the text to an acknowledgment of the diversity of the subject. He neatly sidesteps his assigned responsibility to enter into the debate himself and to evaluate the writer's thesis based on his own experiences.

Hobbs' correspondent, Max, outdid Hobbs' performance by out-agreeing him. He, too, remains outside the debate, capitulating not only to Wollstonecraft but also to Hobbs. He writes:

> After reviewing your thoughts and considering the essays and the family life, I agree that there are many views of agreeing and disagreeing that you could side with.

Max's heavy reliance on generalization in this letter aids him in avoiding commitment. He writes:

> Family life is important and few would argue this point. Many views, ideas and approaches can [be] used to achieve a solid family atmosphere. In writing on a subject like family life, there needs to be some flexibility. Each individual family represents different types of people. Each family reacts to

different stimuli and each will reach these at different times. . . .

Composition teachers are all too familiar with flagrant use of overgeneralization and the sweeping platitude as avoidance maneuvers, but we felt that the particular conditions we had arranged for our students writing—anonymity and a common reading list—would in time make them more willing to take risks as they began to question or defend positions that they had defined as their own.

In spite of our commentary urging them to assess rather than reiterate, for the next two journal exchanges Hobbs and Max continued to place agreeableness uppermost. They were content to swallow whole the other's comments; for instance, Max writes in response to Hobbs' evasion: "After reading your paper I have nothing to say other than I agree with you." And Hobbs returns with: "I really admire your views on your father. That's cool." However, later in this same journal entry while discussing the new topic of "Food, Clothing and Shelter," Hobbs presents a viewpoint that is clearly his own: He writes:

> I was reading over the [assignment] and found this quote—"The more I think of it, the more it appears to me that dress is the foundation of society" . . . This really seems to fit our school quite well; . . . It amazes me how the students here are so very judgmental of a person because of their clothes . . . This is the kind of attitude that almost embarasses me about this school. I have a wide variety of friends with their wild varieties of dress and backgrounds. They often come to see me and feel awkward around this area . . . the attitude of several of the people around here could be checked out.

Another mode of contact was beginning; immediately noticeable is that in addition to the disappearance of Hobbs' inflated language is the fact he is owning this stance as his. Furthermore, he develops the text by applying to the writer's commentary his own experience, showing how placing undue emphasis on clothes encourages people to lose sight of the personality beneath the clothing. He illustrates his point by relating the issue to members of the student body, a context with which both he and his correspondent are familiar. But, best of all, his willingness to reveal some part of

himself to his journal partner elicited in Max the willingness to debate, as can be seen from Max's next entry:

> Dear Hobbs,
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> Your views on people and their attitude towards others solely because of their clothes is strange to me. I'm not saying that you are incorrect in your analysis; it's just that I have not noticed this in people here. Many people worry about how they look or what they are going to wear, but I've never seen anyone harass or embarrass someone because they looked different or stood out some in public. . . . People shouldn't be classified by their clothes at all, but everyone is guilty at one time or another. How many times have you seen a bum or street person, and remarked about their clothing? Few people can say that they have never judged someone by their clothes. Even if you feel sorry for someone, you still aren't going to go up to a bum and invite him over for dinner . . .
>
> Sincerely, Max.

In response to Max's refutation, Hobbs went on not only to reiterate his former stance but also to address the fact that he still disagreed with Max. This discourse about their discourse was a phenomenon that we found often accompanied argumentative entries. It may be that their meta-language reassured them that they were not going too far with their disagreeableness. At any rate, Hobbs wrote: "I don't want you to think I'm trying to be an ass, because I only write this for my English grade." But then he proceeded to reiterate his earlier statement, writing: "The things which I wrote were true. I am not saying that everyone is this way; but if you believe that this type of stuff does not exist around here, then our atmospheres here at school must be different."

Max and Hobbs' next topic was education: they attempted to hammer out a definition of education and to determine its relative worth. When Max wrote "People are only worth as much as their educations," Hobbs returned with:

> I strongly disagree with this because—an education does not make a man or especially his/her worthyness. If a man has very little education and happens to save you from drowning,—is he worthy?

In Max's response, he once again refers to the *way* in which they were corresponding; he then turned to his statement that Hobbs had disagreed with and defended it.

> Dear Hobbs: Once again I greet you in an argumentative way. . . . I feel strongly about education, period. That means education at all times and from every angle possible. I said plainly that "education comes from much more than classes and books." I never meant to stress "schooling," but rather, education by experience . . .

The journal of Hobbs and Max reveals the development of their rhetorical—as opposed to summative—abilities. From the polite and non-controversial correspondence they began with, they moved to a stance of grappling with issues. In addition, they developed a facility for meta-discourse, their discussion of being willing to debate with each other in the first place.

However, other students did not fare so well. Even when their correspondent or the assigned readings challenged long or closely held convictions, we found that some remained reluctant to disagree. In these instances we noticed that even when they discovered a controversial, prejudiced, or down-right distorted viewpoint, they were willing to ignore the matter completely. When they did eventually take issue with comments they disagreed with, these occasions were often marked by considerable stress. The following excerpt from a correspondence between Donald Trump and Blackie illustrates the level of anxiety our students sometimes felt in this project.

We were four weeks into the semester when the following contretemps arose:

> Dear friend,
>
> I've read so many reports on AIDS from the past year . . .
>
> The big fuss has been: should people with AIDS be put away since they have this fatal disease because it may be contagious . . . AIDS victims should be given the same rights as normal people unless they may somehow be jeopardizing other people's lives. . . .
>
> Yours truly, Donald Trump

His journal partner returned with what seems more like an unconnected reply than a true response, indicating a common prob-

lem we found early in the semester. Blackie reveals his feelings on the subject, but shows little awareness of audience. Donald Trump seemed such a disembodied entity to Blackie that he hardly earned even a salutation or a closure, much less the acknowledgment or recognition of his ideological position. Blackie's entry following Donald Trump's commentary on AIDS read:

> Dear Correspondent:
> In today's society Aids is a big problem. With sex being as open as it is the disease is spreading real fast. I find this especially disturbing because I could come down with this disease.
>
> I personally do not want to die this slow and painfull death. Therefor I think things should become separate between those who do have the disease and those who don't. I don't however think they should be condemned. I think maybe they should be made to wear a band or something to signify that they have aids. Thus each person could make his or her mind up wheather to come in contact with them.
> Blackie

After receiving the journal with this reply, a very distressed Donald Trump came to our office asking for help. His concern was the direct confrontation he could imagine ahead of him; he disagreed with Blackie, but he also was not sure if and how to respond to him. We emphasized the need for him to engage in the debate by presenting a coherent, evidenced counter-argument. The following journal entry was the result of our discussion:

> Dear Blackie,
>
> I understand your point about AIDS, but you do sound like your a bit prejudice. Would you like to wear a band around your arm telling people what kind of person you are. I think wearing a band around someone's arm is completely absurd. I think AIDS is disease which should remain in the privacy of the holder.
> Your friend, Donald Trump

We were pleased to see the difference in the subsequent entry from Blackie. For one thing, he uses Donald's name in the salutation and ends with a closure for the first time; for another, he assesses his former position through the eyes of someone besides himself.

Dear Donald,

I agree with you I did sound prejudice and I try very hard to be an open minded person. It really would be very unfair to make someone wear a band because they might not have gotten their disease through a homosexual act.
Your friend, Blackie

Neither Donald Trump nor Blackie were willing to address the issue of homophobia that appears so blatantly in the entry from Blackie. Although Donald visited his instructor a second time concerning this issue, he could not overcome his fear of unfavorable attention by taking Blackie to task over homosexual bias. Perhaps Donald had reached the limits of his willingness to draw attention to oppression, or perhaps he was a bit prejudiced himself on this issue. At any rate, here was a rhetorical situation that matured and died for lack of attention if not lack of interest.

The exchange between Donald Trump and Blackie underscored for us the importance of class discussions about the illogical nature of prejudice. We began to be more conscious of our roles in questioning underlying assumptions whenever we detected them; our major concern was not that our students agree with our views but that implied premises be recognized whenever they added shape to the argument.

Once students began articulating their stances and testing their theories, we began to highlight the complexities of argument. We encouraged them to make discriminatory micro analyses of pieces of writing, to resist universal agreement when there were minor, but significant, points of contention. Analysis of assumptions and redefinition of key terms in passages otherwise acceptable thus became our next focus in class discussions. We were pleased to see then the following negotiation of terms developing in the correspondence between Cal and Kristi. The topic being discussed was once again education, or "Teaching and Learning." Cal and Kristi had read a piece by Paul B. Diederich in which he alluded to the effects of punishment as a learning incentive. Diederich quotes Chekhov and refers to the misguided actions of teachers that result, not in improved, but in worsened student attitudes; however, he never once uses the terms "negative stimuli" or "positive reinforcement." Cal and Kristi, on the other hand, relate the work to their personal experiences and invest it with contemporary terminology:

Cal,

Thanks for the great . . . feedback . . . Although I agree with your discussion on Paul B. Diederich, I somewhat disagree with the explanation given with it. Negative stimuli is often good for people. It is not a form of punishment either. Negative stimuli is when you take away something annoying—when a teacher corrects and adjusts your paper she/he is only improving your writing skills for future assignments—taking away the known error and causing your grade to increase with your next assignment . . .
Sincerely, Kristi

Cal responds:

Kristi,

My critique about negative stimuli was a little general. I agree with you about teachers . . . but if you look at it as I do that in itself could be seen as positive stimuli, you are bettered by them [the teachers] making an effort to help you. . . . Some negative stimuli can help a person, I guess, but positive stimuli (rewards) are, in my opinion, more effective. . . .
Until next time,
Sincerely, Cal

Or, compare these two students' comments on Ralph Waldo Emerson's statement that "Politeness ruins conversations." One student, calling himself Horned Frogs, writes:

Some people are too polite when they speak. There were some people in my high school who were too polite. Everybody always thought they were so, fake. You can't ever tell. I like people who are polite but not all the time.

Horned Frog exhibits the tendency to reiterate. His correspondent, who took the pseudonym Joanie Warren, assumes a critical stance, however:

I can't say I agree with Emerson . . . He could have better said "Excessive politeness ruins conversations." I think politeness is necessary, otherwise people get careless of other people's feelings.

Joanie Warren makes the partial criticism, an argumentative ap-

proach that requires a degree of sophistication freshmen often have not yet acquired.

Some of our more interesting findings were those that we had not anticipated. For example, we noticed that many of our students constructed layers of identity in their journals; that is, they gave out descriptions of themselves that were at odds with other elements in their self-presentation, verifying rather vividly the extent to which meaning is woven of disparate strands. For instance, we found a strong trace of anti-intellectualism in Jane Doe's directive, following his sophisticated discussion of religious deities, to "look at all those big words. I almost sound like I know what I'm talking about."

Axl Rose, a particularly intriguing instance of identity construction, exhibited behavior which, as Robert Brooke suggests in his "Underlife and Writing Instruction," is "normally seen as misbehavior," but when examined in a writing classroom where resistance is valued, appears as "exactly this sort of constructive, individual stance-taking" (144). We did in fact often think of misbehavior in connection with Axl Rose, for his usual classroom posture emanated boredom, lack of attention and interest, while his attitude towards reading and writing was one of barely concealed hostility. However, we were immediately struck by this young man's interpretation skills when, following a lengthy class discussion of the term "allegory" and Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Axl Rose assessed the work's meaning and intention in his journal in a highly creative and unorthodox way. He writes:

> I can't see how they were tied up to only look straight ahead. It must have been a pretty weird looking leash. It seems from the writing that they had never seen what a human looks like. What were they born on the spot and thrown into a leash? It seems like they had to have seen someone at one time or another. They could at least stick out their tongues or look down at their feet to see that the shadows on the wall were different than them. They had color, flesh and mass. The shadows were two dimentional flat objects with none of the previous characteristics. How could they compare themselves with these things?

This student's very dislike of English class may have been the instrument of his resistant writing; indeed, perhaps it was his rejection of the "good student" role that provided the energy for his

radical re-shaping of the questions we normally ask of Plato's allegory.

Students' constructed identities sometimes brought about an ironic twist, as we found in the correspondence between Caballero del Norte and Alison Jane. Caballero del Norte, a young man from an upper-middle-class family, was concerned with the plight of immigrant farm workers; in fact, in his general attention to issues of social inequities, his interest in the farm workers marked only one of the banners he had chosen to carry on behalf of the less fortunate. He had met many illegal immigrant workers misused by unscrupulous employers; like his family, he was eager to draw attention to the injustices of society, and this predilection showed through in many of his journal entries. At the end of the semester, we asked our classes to describe to us their journal partner, using as a basis their semester-long correspondence. Caballero's correspondent described him this way:

> Caballero del Norte, as far as I can tell, is from the lower-middle class, a male, and brought up by customs slightly different than the normal 'American.' Caballero revealed negative feelings toward the upper-class citizens and I feel like he has a hostile attitude toward people with alot of money, nice clothes, etc. I got the feeling . . . that he is insecure about his position in society, because he was *so* negative toward the upper classes. I think he works hard for his money—as does his family—thus, he criticizes those people who do nothing for their money.

Caballero's portrayals and descriptions were so vivid that Alison Jane became convinced that it was he who was victimized. Cabellero's constructed identity both heightened and obscured the potential for communication in this instance; while he clearly projected the plight of the under-privileged, he failed to evoke the response he desired because Alison Jane perceived him to be an example of, rather than an advocate for, the disenfranchised.

In another case, a woman who called herself Barrie rigorously criticized her partner all semester; unfortunately, her focus remained entirely on grammatical and mechanical errors. In response to our final assignment calling for a description of her correspondent, Barried assessed herself instead of her partner. She wrote:

> First and foremost I tried to be straightforward and sincere. My thoughts were bravely communicated because I knew I would be subjecting myself to harsh criticism. My former reticent attitude, full of fear, has been overcome by a new sense of feeling worthy enough to say just what I mean and not feel the need to 'play games' with people. I hope I can sustain the courage to not succumb to apathy and/or fear and regress to an attitude of needing to maintain superficial, safe discourse.

Ironically, Barrie's claim to have risen above "superficial, safe discourse" was only partially realized. Her persistently negative focus on grammar suggests a remarkable lack of interest in what her correspondent had to say; ultimately, she failed to find an alternative for the superficial perspective she recognized in her earlier writing.

Another student whose constructed identity suggested a paradox was John Smith, a young man who wrote mostly about himself but who felt that he exhibited a circumspect thoughtfulness of others. "My correspondent," he wrote, "did not reveal anything about herself—well, not enough to write about." About himself, however, there was lots to say. He wrote: "The picture I painted for myself to Fern was much like 'op-art'; it bothered the eyes to look at and was ambiguous as hell." Although he went on to point out that he was "intellectual, with a good power of thought," a sense of humor, and "quite sensitive," his insensitivity to Fern's revealed personality bespoke less ambiguity and more self-centeredness than perhaps he intended or realized.

As observers and evaluators of the principals in this otherwise anonymous project, we as teachers also received a share of attention. We found that the journals contained notes to us, direct and indirect messages that let us know either to what heights they aspired or to what depths we had fallen in their estimation. Ophelia was an optimistic young woman who wrote: "My grades aren't so hot. I'm stressing in a major way! I've taken 3 tests and only passed one, my Religion, w/a 62, but I think I can get an 'A' in aerobics and maybe a 'B' in English." In case this specification of her expectations at grade time didn't work by itself, she added: "I love the class, the teacher and the people in it."

We received messages as well from Axl Rose, indicating that

he was not fighting his battles alone and that his father was as unhappy with his son's English class as he was. He wrote:

> I hope that you can read my writing. Im not used to writing this big, but my teacher counted off because of the 'smallness" of my writing and I didn't fill the 2 pages. I also didn't say 'Dear Person' at the top. My father raged when he heard but there wasn't anything I could do.

We realized, with some pleasure, that Axl Rose was not confining his creative energies only to Plato's writing; our marginalia also was subjected to his critical reinterpretation.

On the whole, this project became a favorite of both the students and the instructors. In their teaching evaluations at semester's end, the students consistently referred to the journal project as a part of the class they looked forward to and learned from. The enjoyment and satisfactions of this project for us were not only in watching our students' vital responses to this assignment but also in the variety and range of the journal entries; reading these books proved interesting and informative for us. Perhaps most importantly, though, was our feeling that many of our students became—at least in this one place and time—critics, analysts, persuaders, defenders, and lively thinkers. A significant factor in these results may have been that assigned readings provided a range of related articles on topics that confront most people daily: the family, learning and teaching, enemies and rivals, etc., because it is in the ordinary, everyday event or situation that the fate of rhetorical situations is decided; the situations are either not recognized, recognized and allowed to go unaddressed, or recognized and addressed. The range of the readings, from traditional and canonical pieces such as Abraham Lincoln's "Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery" to such contemporary and non-conventional works as Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson," perhaps also helped to generate responses.

We learned a lot by conducting the project over a two-semester period, and we made many adjustments over this period of time, particularly in the practical considerations of classroom operations. For instance, when the correspondence was not taken seriously enough in the first semester or when we discovered the problems created when students returned their books late, thus interrupting the schedule of their partners and themselves, we increased the

value of the project in relation to the semester's work and placed a higher penalty on late returns. Theoretical results were of two kinds, both positive: those we hoped to achieve—greater sensitivity to the rhetorical situations one faces daily and the possibilities inherent in rhetorical strategies—and those we did not expect but which nonetheless added to the success of our project. The latter included students' construction of identity, the awakening of resistance, and the employment of meta-language. In the first of these, our students' attempts at construction of identity, we detected manipulation of ethos, whether conscious or unconscious. Thus, John Smith's assessment of himself as "quite sensitive" suffered the inevitable backlash of his assertion that he found little of interest in his correspondent: "not enough to write about," at least. Like Barrie, who perceived herself as searching for the real correspondent while finding only comma splices, John Smith's self-professed identity of a sensitive person was defeated by an insidious one of self-absorption. Similarly, Caballero del Norte exercised the privilege of his anonymity to the extent that miscommunication occurred. He distanced himself so effectively from the oppressors of immigrant farm workers that Alison Jane mistook him for one of the oppressed.

Unanswerable questions arose from the plurality of our students' constructed identities. What does Donald Trump and Blackie's determined avoidance of the issue of homosexuality reveal about the young writers? What events in Jane Doe's life have made it important for him to use his linguistic ability to at once suggest and deny a high level of intelligence? Although we can speculate, we cannot know; these issues must remain rhetorical. As we observed in our students' journals during the complex process by which identities are at the same moment made and unmade, we re-learned our own lesson: that meaning, created by the interaction of one mind with another, proclaims its own stereographic irreducibility.

In the second of these unexpected results, the awakening of resistance, we were reminded of what resistance can be when it is directed against a process we ourselves value. Axl Rose, for example, embodied for us the reluctant student; his every movement advertised his unhappiness over being in English class. His insistence that we examine Plato's work literally, rather than in the symbolic fashion revered through the ages, constitutes the very resistance we wished to inculcate. However disconcerting, we had

to recognize and applaud his willingness to address the rhetorical situation inherent not only in the journal project but also in the educational system as well.

And from the third unexpected result of our project—our students' use of meta-language—we were reminded of, and became more sensitive to, the essential methods people use to soften the sting of criticism. Our students instinctively knew that in a sustained critical exchange participants must be aware that a critical posture is required. So when Max writes, "Once again I greet you in an argumentative way," he is reminding Hobbs that these are the ground rules of the project. In their discourse about the discourse of criticism, our students articulated their recognition of what Jim Corder calls "competing rhetorics" of expansion and contraction: by assessing and choosing, we give shape to ourselves at the same time that we unmake others. Our students were searching for that "cool place"—the one in which composition textbooks often say that argument takes place. The way in which they created such an atmosphere for themselves was similar to that practiced and enjoyed by academics. Since we, as outsiders to their community, could not supply the "cool place" for them, they asked for and bestowed consent upon each other for the required critical attitudes.

Interestingly, the authority of the voices discovered in the correspondences did not always carry over into the formal papers. Students who wrote articulately and passionately in their journals often reverted to stilted jargon in their other assignments, a finding that encourages us to integrate the journal project into the other course requirements even more fully next semester. Although we linked the journal project to class discussions, papers, and in-class writing, thereby encouraging persuasive skills and providing practice for critical thinking and analytical examination *in the journals*, perhaps the correspondence project benefitted from this integration more than did the other course work; it was in the journals themselves that a forum was provided for more clearly expressing the ideas, more carefully testing the theories, and more persuasively presenting the opinions that had been discovered and tried in class discussions and formal papers. It seems that the other course elements affected the correspondence rather than the reverse; we hope to be able to rectify this by incorporating revisions such as directly linking individual paper assignments to correspondence discussions in our next classes. We also intend to more closely examine other ways in which authorial power once

found and used in one rhetorical situation can be carried over to the demands of the next. We suspect that more students who have once participated in the rhetorical process, even if to a great extent anonymously, will find the second venture less threatening, even when undertaken without the cover of a pseudonym.

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