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A LIMINAL EXAMINATION OF ALWAYS ALREADY MEANING
WITHIN LANGUAGE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
James Richard Starr, Jr.

June 2007

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A Thesis
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June 2007

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ABSTRACT

This thesis juxtaposes Plato's allegory of the cave with Jacques Derrida's concept of the always already aspect of meaning, a concept derived from Ferdinand de Saussure's work. This theoretical investigation will allow me to examine the implications of universal Signified forms of word meanings for postmodern composition theory. The discussion includes deep theoretical as well as contemporary considerations for a liminal space in which postmodernism and Platonism might interact for composition studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

LIST OF FIGURES vii

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

 Introduction 1

 Plato's Cave Allegory 4

 The Freed Prisoner 15

 Plato's Allegory through Derrida 21

 Innate Objective Forms Debate. 25

 Conclusion 36

CHAPTER TWO: SIGNIFIED MEANING

 Introduction 39

 Always Already Connection through Kristeva 40

 Always Already Cycle and its Attending
 Discourse 44

 Ontological Innateness and Epistemological
 Relativity 54

 Conclusion 63

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPORARY RELATION

 Introduction 65

 Always Already Signified Forms for
 Contemporary Composition 65

 Social Context 67

The Open System.	74
Loss of Abstraction and Exclusion.	77
Atomistic Self-Refutation.	82
Collaboration.	83
Conclusion	85
WORKS CITED	87

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. From Ferdinand de Saussure 23

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Perspectives vary on how meaning occurs, especially when those views are juxtaposed with views on meaning's relationship to language. On this question, one of the primary oppositions in composition studies concerns the infinite or finite approach to meaning-making. That is, compositionists tend to perceive meaning in language as existing either outside (infinite approach) or inside (finite approach) a social context. In many ways, this opposition in rhetoric and composition has to do with a postmodern field's resistance to Platonic ideals that still hold sway in much scholarship.

Historically, Plato describes an individual's encounter with Signified forms that somehow inspire recall of transcendental meanings and names that appear to be innate yet always already a challenge to recall in the mind. Signs, often in texts, are endowed with meaning although their completeness is in question. More recently, postmodernists like Jacques Derrida problematize Platonic theory's applicability for modern times. In composition

studies, postmodernists typically reject Platonic theories of meaning-making (and accept a sort of Derridean theory of the same) because they interpret Plato's work as denying the act of composing in absolutist and elitist terms. My thesis challenges the postmodern view; specifically, I show how Platonic theory is applicable to composition studies, where writing encompasses the act of meaning-making, the compositionist, and the reader when creating an essay in the composition classroom.

Perhaps the best example of postmodern composition's attempts to deal with Plato is Jasper Neel's Plato, Derrida, and Writing. In this work, Neel addresses this debate by identifying what is at stake for composition studies in two uncertainties: (1) who is privileged to make meaning, and (2) what counts as thinking (5). These two concerns are the core of the Derrida-Plato conflict in composition studies because they underscore the concern in the field with those who are denied a contributing voice in the "scholarly conversation." Neel provides both an attack and defense of Platonic and Derridian theory through a sophistic approach. I define sophism as the art of persuading in the moment and tailored for a specific audience, with disregard for "truth" and Signified

universal forms because sophists "are concerned primarily with practical rhetoric and skeptical of humanity's ability to discover and communicate truth" (Neel 8). Essentially, Neel reads Plato and Derrida together in order to exemplify a sophistic approach to the question of meaning-making. Neel constructs this approach in order to promote sophistry's relevance for modern composition studies as well as to deemphasize Plato and Derrida's impact. Neel's interpretation is both postmodern and sophistic, and therefore should be addressed within the liminal space of this analysis.

Bluntly put, postmodernists reject Platonic theory because it asserts universals, and postmodernism denies universal meaning in all forms. In composition studies, a largely postmodern field, this rejection of Platonic theory serves as an assertion of a particular relationship between meaning, language (especially written language), and origin. In this thesis, I read Plato's famous cave allegory in conjunction with Derridean theory in order to challenge this assertion; that is, I read against Neel's juxtaposition of Plato and Derrida in order to reconsider Platonic theory's applicability to current composition studies.

Specifically, it is my claim that each element of the cave allegory represents Plato's preference of meaning-making in language through universal Signified forms. By juxtaposing Plato's allegory of the cave with Derrida's postmodern concept of the always already aspect of meaning-making (a concept derived from Ferdinand de Saussure's work), I will examine the implications of universal Signified forms of word meanings for postmodern composition theory. In this approach, I will likely find relation between Plato and Derrida that will allow compositionists to recognize the possibility of both universal Signifieds as well as the decenteredness of meaning-making in language.

Plato's Cave Allegory

Plato's cave allegory is within the ten books of The Republic. Prior to using this allegory, Plato explains his concepts through a series of allegorical situations within his version of the perfect city-state with various social groups. However, in Book VII, he changes the setting of the allegory to a cave. He shrinks the setting and social groups, as if attempting to eliminate as many distractions as possible. Prior to the cave allegory, other Republic

speakers constantly interrupt Plato's main speaker, Socrates, in order to clarify various distracting details that are present in the larger setting of the city-state. This microcosmic structure, combined with the use of allegory, is Plato's attempt to relate a complex theory as simply as possible.

The theory? The allegory of the cave presents an image of a person's nature in education, including a desire to learn and comprehension of things learned. This allegory implies, through simple imagery, that a person can recover a certain amount of transcendental knowledge despite the competing and powerful voices of society. Those competing social voices make judgments constantly about physical objects and abstract concepts.

According to the generally accepted view by modern theorists, including postmodernists, Plato's cave allegory shows how the uneducated person is at the mercy of finite sense impressions. The uneducated create impressions from shadows and echoes, thereby assuming these perceptions are the only reality (Bloom, White, and Borrowman 138). Plato suggests the uneducated mob creates "false" meaning-making by relying on socially constructed meaning instead of searching for universal meanings in language. The shadows

represent written language for Plato. In the allegory, Plato divides the process of "true" meaning-making in language, or reality that consists of timeless Signified forms, from "false" meaning-making, or reality that relies solely on socially constructed meaning in language.

A detailed description of the cave allegory is necessary before analyzing the possibility of Platonic and postmodern theory both applying to composition studies. Basically, the allegory shows one shackled prisoner, identified only as a male by Plato, becoming released from his bindings at the bottom of a cave. A whole society of shackled prisoners resides at the bottom where they make meaning out of shadowy images projected on the wall. Another society, those overseeing the puppet show that projects shadows on the cave wall below, subject the freed prisoner to face the incompleteness of what he previously knew. The freed prisoner journeys to the world outside the cave. He encounters actual objects for the first time, instead of imitation shadowy images or puppets. The allegory ends with the freed prisoner considering his next destination in the journey: reentering the cave to teach the shackled prisoner society about the actual objects, or

continue learning from other actual objects that can be encountered on the surface world outside the cave.

In the beginning of the cave allegory, Plato introduces the first group of people dwelling in the lowest part of a cave. They are part of a society, albeit an imprisoned one. The position of their shackled bodies only allows them to see toward the back of the cave. Since childhood, they have been in bonds at the bottom of the cave with only shadowy images to educate them.

The cave's population relies on images forced onto them because of their limited ability to move and see anything else. Furthermore, the prisoners only construct meaning based on the limited variety of images projected on the cave wall. So far, the most visual aspect is a double physical imprisonment of those at the bottom of the cave.

The first physical imprisonment, the cave, denies interaction between the world above and the collective society of prisoners. The dark, subterranean nature of the cave depicts a place of abandonment as well as imprisonment because the prisoners appear to be left there without much goodwill by the rest of society. Its darkness conceals all peripheral stimuli except for selective sounds and shadowy images made by "puppet-handlers," or overseers, that Plato

assigns a higher social function within the allegory, to be discussed later (The Republic 7.514b). The cave serves to inhibit meaning-making at the societal level, with only one ascending tunnel behind the prisoners where images and sounds travel from, out of sight of those chained.

The second physical imprisonment, the shackles, severely restricts individual sensory experiences that might build knowledge between prisoners. Plato uses the shackles to represent the restraint of meaning-making by the individual. Specifically, no permanent records are allowed; knowledge must be reconstructed by each generation of prisoners through the oral tradition. Also, shackles are necessary because they are external conditioners. Therefore, the prisoners are not to blame for internal weaknesses.

Throughout the allegory, the overseers provide limited stimuli for meaning-making by perpetuating a puppet show in the form of shadowy images projected on the cave wall. During this endless puppet show, shackled prisoners attempt to construct knowledge creatively by relying on empirical observations on the shadowy images, which are taken as the only reality by those prisoners. Here, the prisoners attempt a degree of social creativity among themselves in

order to codify the shadowy images. The construction of meaning seems proportional to relationships the prisoners construct between previous visual images seen, speculation about what future images will appear, and oral arguments about the current images seen. Through collaborative relationships, the prisoners are "able to discuss things with one another" and believe they are correctly "naming these things going by before them that they see" (The Republic 7.515b). Hence, two factors allow for authority among these prisoners: recall and dialectic. Authority includes power in the prisoner society as well as authorship of their socially constructed language.

Among the prisoners, competition would be linked with meaning-making through oratory skills, which become the only aspect of their lives that they can control. In this oral tradition, memory recall serves best of all because accolades are bestowed on the person:

... who is sharpest at making out the things that go by, and most remembers which of them are accustomed to pass before, which after, and which at the same time as others, and who is thereby most able to divine what is going to come. (The Republic 7.516c-d)

The voices of those with the keenest memory dominate the ongoing conversation as well as making the meaning that the entire society abides by while witnessing the shadowy images. The previous passage also illustrates the cyclic nature of meaning-making through images shown to the prisoners. Like successive generations of oral meaning-making, the shadowy images repeat themselves. The prisoners' socially reliant language always already constructs itself by the act of repetition; the prisoners repeat their labeling of the images on the cave wall.

The audio-visual images (the projected sounds and images from the overseers) reinforce a certain kind of memory recall that Plato abhors because the naming and predicting of the shadowy images represents opining without reference to any universal, and therefore substantial, origin. For Plato, people should desire "to undergo anything whatsoever rather than to opine those things and live that way" (The Republic 7.516d). Plato's preference indicates a superiority of searching for meanings that are distinct regardless of social construction. His preference acknowledges the positive nature of visual cues, like written language or shadowy images, only insofar as those cues direct a person to consider meaning-making in itself

and apart from social-construction. Plato seems to warn against taking society's opinion for the "true" nature of meaning.

The prisoners' act of recall becomes a matter of remembering shadowy images based on reappearance and sequence. The rote act of socially constructed meaning-making correlates closely with postmodernism's version of composition. Postmodernism views nearly all interpretations as valid regardless of etymological roots connected with origin and authorship. Postmodernism's meaning-making seems to depend on the same shadowy set of images without any added insight or collection of information to better inform perspectives on the images.

A sophistic prisoner reigns in the social group of shackled prisoners. This happens because the occasions for speaking are equally as hollow as the previous times, without additional insight or further discussion. Platonic meaning-making opposes the sophistic approach and suggests a more justified form of learning beyond the shadowy images that serve as reminders. In contrast to Plato's preference for meaning-making, prisoners vie for the honor of speaking for speaking's sake, with appearance of images being the

only context. Likewise, the speakers do not provide insight into any connection with universal forms.

For the prisoners, dialectic is the method by which people argue to construct knowledge. They see and hear the shadowy images pass across the cave wall and begin "to compete" among the other "perpetual prisoners in forming judgments about those shadows" (The Republic 7.516e).

Competition for naming (and renaming) of shadowy images occurs solely through dialectic. Oral knowledge construction of meaning-making is the sole method because the prisoners' hands are bound; they cannot write or carve a permanent record for themselves and future generations.

However, the prisoners' arguments and judgments about the shadowy images help construct names based on the visual images. Those prisoners who speak seek to gain authority. Likewise, the speaking prisoners learn from each other in conjunction with the images seen on the wall as they attempt remembrance and judgment on the shadowy images. The shadowy images are similar to words on a page that remind a reader of socially constructed meaning attached to that word-image. Likewise, those who listen also learn from the imprisoned orators but only with the aid of the shadowy visual cues.

For instance, the prisoners attempt to codify names by connecting sounds with images that occur simultaneously. The newly defined names refer "only to those passing shadows which they saw" (The Republic 7.515b). An image of a dog, shown simultaneously when an overseer coughs, causes prisoners to believe the two events collectively represent "dogness." Ideals such as "truth," collaboratively constructed, remain incomplete and inaccurate because "truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" that the prisoners perpetually decide on arbitrarily (The Republic 7.515c). To this point, the presence of pain during the learning process can represent the struggle every student undergoes when learning from professional educators instead of laypersons. I associate professional educators with Plato's overseers. Plato would likely describe the overseers as philosopher-teachers because he seems to esteem them above others in the social world of The Republic.

Here, the importance of a visual cue requires elaboration because of its significance to Plato as well as to composition studies. He could have described a cave allegory without images. The prisoners could have shouted in complete darkness without the aid of shadowy images but

this would alter the allegory away from a Plato's judgment about writing and visual language.

If there is only darkness in the cave, then meaning-making becomes based on orators who speak knowledge into existence by voice alone. Plato cannot write an allegory in which the cave is void of visual language because that would weaken Plato's stance against writing. He praises orators in other texts because the philosophers of his time were orators who relied on speeches and memorization instead of written cues. The inclusion of visual images occurs in stages within Plato's allegory, just as he constructs meaning slowly so the reader can digest what is being stated. Most importantly for Plato is the distinction between naming images by incomplete shadowy information, or with Signified forms.

How does Plato distinguish naming visual cues incompletely and completely? In the allegory, the shadowy images are the projections from puppets moving in front of firelight, which casts the shadow against the back of the cave for the prisoners to see. The fire and puppets are the constructions of overseers. These collaborative constructions of meaning-making are misinterpreted by the prisoners because the shackles limit prisoners' ability to

look behind and recognize the nature of fire, puppets and overseers.

The Freed Prisoner

During the allegory, one of the prisoners becomes free for unexplained reasons. Once liberated, the overseers engage in a series of progressive dialectical exchanges with the freed prisoner. This dialectic is different than the freed prisoner's prior mimetic experiences. The overseers discuss the puppet show's trickery. They explain "while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly" in order to lead him toward an understanding of the universal aspect of meaning-making (The Republic 7.515d). Through this dialectic with the overseers, the freed prisoner must consider the shadowy images of puppets as less real than the puppets themselves in the construction of language and meaning-making. The beginning of the freed prisoner's learning process with the overseers causes him to recognize the concept of imitation.

For Plato, dialectic in teacher-student relationships opens the possibility toward completeness in a Signified universal context. However, the freed prisoner does not

comprehend universal symbolic forms yet. The puppets are symbols of his learning, revealing more information as he inspects them clearly by the light of the fire. The overseers must still urge the freed prisoner onward toward a path of greater learning because this didactic experience requires a focus that his socially constructed experience opposes because of its foreignness.

The initial learning process brings about a somewhat forced mental application. He is "dragged away from there by force ... into the light of the sun" that causes temporary pain as his vision—the key to understanding visual language—acclimates to the open landscape beyond the cave (The Republic 7.515e-516a). Part of the pain surely comes from the realization of how little he knew prior to becoming freed. The imitations, still parading across the firelight for those still shackled below, would mock the freed prisoner painfully because he would perceive the images as false and incomplete. He would face the puppet show and remember how devoutly he once believed in social construction of the images, and this would likely lead to a self-image that is as false and incomplete as opined, socially constructed language.

The first stage of greater understanding for Plato concerns the painful acknowledgment of previous concepts as incomplete imitations. Within this discovery, Plato infers one of the dangers of empirical meaning-making by asserting the prisoners collaborate to create improper connections between pieces of information. These improper connections indicate a body of knowledge that is painfully worse than incomplete – it is inaccurate.

Plato does not explain in the allegory why this particular prisoner is freed. Is the shackling random or selection-based? Not everyone would be able to cope with the pain of this educational process. It seems likely that the unshackling is not random but selection-based because not everyone would be able to cope with this education process since it does involve a degree of pain. The freed prisoner suffers realization of how little he and the other prisoners know when the overseers force him to confront the puppets. Plato insinuates that greater suffering leads to greater comprehension of names and knowledge, as the freed prisoner journeys the rest of the way out of the cave and into direct sunlight.

In the outside world, the overseers no longer use force to teach the freed prisoner. Realization of the

imitations in the cave causes the freed prisoners to desire the real forms. Similarly, a growing child hungers for more substantial food instead of subsisting only on milk.

Instead of the imitations seen on the cave wall or the puppets that cause the imitations, the outside world contains "the things themselves" (The Republic 7.516a).

Gazing at genuine forms—those visual symbols of the outside world—is a direct act motivated by the freed prisoner without coercion from the overseers. Desire to learn genuine, not imitation knowledge becomes the primary method of meaning-making but this final step would not be possible without the socially constructed actions by the society of overseers, or teachers of the ignorant slave populace.

The freed prisoner learns over time to make inferences based on those original artifacts. The ability to infer comes, in part, from the freed prisoner's use of innate knowledge and does not depend upon educators like the overseers because:

... this power is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns ... must be turned around from that which is coming into being together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which is and the

brightest part of that which is." (The Republic
7.518c)

Plato uses the unshackled person's revelation of the genuine objects, contrasted with projected imitations in the cave, to explain the existence of certain knowledge as innate and predating any socially constructed meaning-making. The revelation is a new awareness of innate knowledge.

The authentic objects serve as catalysts for the remembrance of inherent knowledge. The shadowy images correlate with the puppets, which correlate with the authentic forms seen in the world beyond the cave. Here, Plato suggests a mental bridge develops for the freed prisoner between what always already is and what becomes prescribed over time, especially through visual images.

The mental bridge enacts a play of knowledge learning between innate and socially sanctioned language. This bridge occurs between the intelligible (always already universal forms) and the solely visible (images, projections, and reflections). Furthermore, Plato situates this playful distinction of learning through argument. He uses a select group of overseers as knowledge builders. These overseers help build the bridge using dialectic; they

bring forth connections between the freed prisoner and innate knowledge. Further into the freed prisoner's learning journey, Plato employs a play of knowledge through an internal debate with himself.

The freed prisoner's education and freedom occur because of a select group of overseers. They represent good intentioned educators, as opposed to bad overseers whom Plato likens to sophists and animal keepers of the image-fixated general public (The Republic 6.493a-494a). The sophistic group of overseers, who are "wage earners" as educators of the shackled cave prisoners "in nothing other than these convictions of the many, which they opine when they are gathered together, and he calls this wisdom" (The Republic 6.493a).

In the book immediately preceding the cave allegory, Plato delineates good versus bad educators. A division between sophistic overseers and those intending goodwill through dialectic establishes the complicated roles present in the cave allegory. Hence, the cave allegory represents the culmination of concepts expressed in the previous books of The Republic, especially Book 6.

Plato's Allegory through Derrida

Like a machine that functions off a series of gears, the cave allegory operates off the preceding books of The Republic. Allegory itself plays with the complex language preceding it in an uncomplicated manner in order to be more approachable to those attempting to understand Plato's concepts. Allegory becomes Plato's bridge to the readers of The Republic. Consequently, allegory itself becomes a useful connection between Plato and Derrida because the playful use of language is necessary for an allegory to clearly express the intended meaning.

Derrida's sense of "freeplay," much like a car steering wheel's loose, vacillating movement, works in connection with the language used to create and construct an allegory. For Derrida, language works within freeplay, which is "a field of infinite substitutions" that is "permitted by the lack ... of a center" (Writing and Difference 289). It seems all language might be allegorical, if Derrida's view is correct. Infinite freeplay in meaning-making corresponds to Derrida's concept of the always already aspect of meaning. This concept derives from Ferdinand de Saussure's work, especially Course in General Linguistics.

Saussure, whose semiotic theory forms the basis of much postmodern theory, argues that language is a system of binaries called Signs that contain both the material world expression (the Signifier) and the concept to which it refers (the Signified). While the Signified remains the same over time despite name changes, the Signifier is the written or spoken expression that is susceptible to generational change (Bressler 81). Hence, the Sign itself remains intact over time even if the name applied to that Sign (the Signifier) shifts. Figure 1, by Saussure, depicts the Sign as represented by Signified forms on the left and Signifier words on the right.

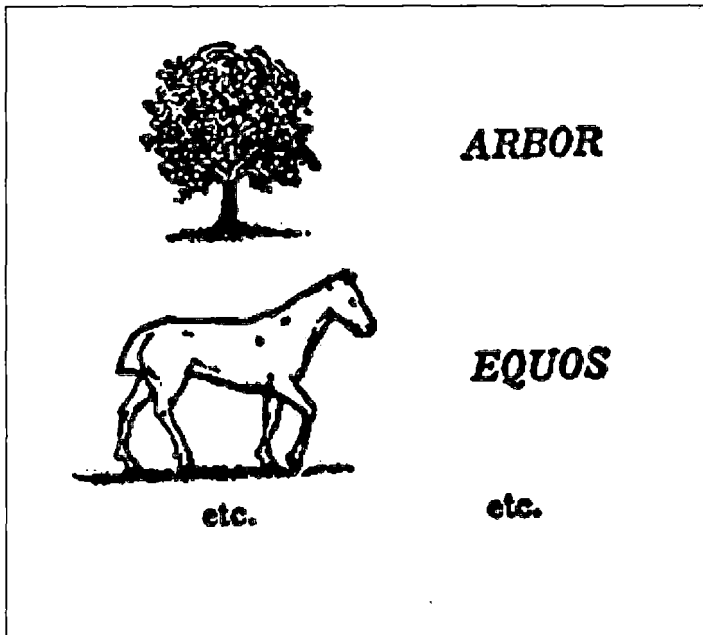


Figure 1. From Ferdinand de Saussure.

(Course in General Linguistics. Ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Reidlinger. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959. 65.)

In postmodernist terms, the Sign and its system of relations predetermine any meaning that can be made from its use. It is in this sense that universal Signified forms of word meanings and names within the cave allegory connect with postmodern composition theory. For Derrida and other postmodern theorists, the writer is forever attempting to reclaim meaning that is always already fading from an unredeemable transcendental Signified. Here, always already is significant as a liminal space that can link certain

aspects of Platonic theory present in the cave allegory to postmodern views of composition theory.

To return to the freed prisoner with Derrida's concept of freeplay in mind, one key question requires pursuit: can/does the freed prisoner attain complete knowledge, completing the journey of remembrance and comprehension? In Dissemination, Derrida characterizes "always already" as a vehicle of memory that already possesses outside knowledge itself, "always therefore already needs [S]igns in order to recall the non-present, with which it is necessarily in relation" (109). This statement evokes Plato's consideration of discourse as a perpetual journey to reach universal forms of meaning and not an attainable destination since:

... that which argument itself grasp with the power of dialectic, making the hypotheses not beginnings but really hypotheses—that is, steppingstones and springboards—in order to reach what is free from hypothesis at the beginning of the whole. (The Republic 6.511b)

The freed prisoner progresses in education only to reach the beginning of that journey in an always already circle of re-remembrance wherein:

... argument now depends on that which depends on this beginning and in such fashion goes back down again to an end; making no use of anything sensed in any way, but using forms themselves, going through forms to forms, it ends in forms too" in a transcendental yet endless circle. (The Republic 6.511b-c)

The process of learning through forms – through symbolic yet transcendental forms—allows the freed prisoner to accomplish two complicated operations related to composition. First, he can read a language of meaning that always already makes itself appear for further interpretation within a body of symbols (of a composed language). Second, he can mentally write that language in a unique yet form-inspired pattern. Plato's claim that words exist in order to name ideas and not things seems like a theoretical precursor of postmodern ideas of language and meaning.

Innate Objective Forms Debate

Plato proposes a circular pattern of meaning-making within a dialogic in which argument becomes dependent on nuanced repetition from the beginning to end and back again

(The Republic 6.511b-c). Yet, within the cave allegory, the freed prisoner seems to attain the highest level of intelligibility. This attainment transpires with transcendental forms when he is at last able to look directly at the sun, which epitomizes the source of time, a "steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing" (The Republic 7.516b-c).

How does Platonic logic progress beyond this absolutist statement, especially when he posits, "What then?" and considers the ramifications of the enlightened freed prisoner returning to the bottom of the cave out of pity for the remaining mob's sophistic unintelligibility? Is it reconcilable with the previous statement of an endless circle of meaning-making through dialectic? Likewise, how does Derrida's view of innateness and objective forms engage this complication?

Because meaning-endowed Signified forms are never fully complete within the meaning-making paradigm, Derridian flexibility, or nonlinear representation, can be compared to the Platonic absoluteness of language and meaning-making. What is the Derridian flexibility? Derrida cites an event that occurs in the structure of any meaning-

making, defined as a "rupture and a redoubling" that leads to a center or a gravitational endpoint that "does not belong to the totality" because "the totality has its center elsewhere" (Writing and Difference 278). Certain lesser dramatic events typically occur prior to the dramatic rupture within this Derridian concept, like tremors occur before a great earthquake to decentralize stability.

To return to Plato: before gazing directly at the sun and recognizing innate knowledge through inference, the freed prisoner improves his understanding of meaning-making through dialectic. Initially, this improvement occurs with other prisoners. Inevitably, the dialectic continues for him with overseers. This scaffolding of meaning-making causes pain and the substitution of previously held opinions that Derrida would classify as a "series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center" (Writing and Difference 279).

Specifically, every time the freed prisoner learns more, the new meanings decentralize his understanding as well as the infinite connections that can be inferred from each understanding. These movements "are always taken from a history of meaning ... whose origin may always be

reawakened or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence" (Writing and Difference 279). The new meanings could represent variations of Signifiers toward an innate yet mobile Signified origin. The mobile shift of the Signified for any named Sign translates to a pliable structure. The pliability is the process of expanded meaning as it occurs in the freed prisoner's archaeology.

At the moment of the freed prisoner's seemingly full development of Signifieds (upon gazing directly at the sun), the fullness of that development ruptures. This happens because it "has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute" (Writing and Difference 280). By looking directly at the sun, the freed prisoner completes a mental composition of meaning-making. All the symbols previously studied, from the shadowy images to the sun itself, stack together like an essay. The body of the paper is complete and the conclusion paragraph seems to finish.

However, the essential nature of the conclusion is to destabilize an ending and to return to the introduction paragraph, to always already begin anew before the last period silences the composition absolutely. Likewise, the freed prisoner's thoughts have always already turned toward

another beginning after gazing at the seemingly completeness of the sun. The inherent desire for intelligibility always already leads toward a new center. In turn, this intelligibility leans toward reciprocating with society to improve their wellbeing. The Signifieds always already become unstable without a composition to express them in nuanced discourses of Signifiers, of names and shadowy images.

The freed prisoner seeks a new center, an audience for his composition. Plato's freed prisoner, acting out of desire and pity, returns back to the bottom of the cave in order to express the knowledge of language "which has somehow existed before it" (Writing and Difference 280). He returns where the shackled prisoners still reside in sophistic ignorance in order to relate what he has learned, just as some of the overseers did for him (The Republic 7.516c). Here at the rupture, where admission of incompleteness occurs, the social construction of knowledge becomes possible for Derrida, the other postmodernists, and Plato.

Derridian flexibility becomes possible in Platonic allegory. Through Derrida's explanation, the innateness of knowledge categorizes:

... a system in which the central [S]ignified, the original or transcendental [S]ignified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental [S]ignified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (Writing and Difference 280)

Like conjoined twins who share an essential organ but are unique from the other, Derrida and Plato share innateness through this flexibility of rupture. The rupture seems innate within the always already uncenteredness of the Signifier-Signified relationship in language.

As a social being, the freed prisoner desires to compose, to share, with others what he has learned because of the inherent nature of the human experience that "has always already begun to proclaim itself and begun to work" (Writing and Difference 280). Transcendental Signified forms are never an endpoint in meaning-making for Plato or Derrida, just as the language learning process is never wholly centralized within a single individual. Likewise, social construction is not the whole of language learning because a degree of subjective individuality is what always already decentralizes the objective language of Signifiers.

Here, freeplay sustains the objective language and the subjective language learner in play within a Sign-laden environment, in texts and in the social world.

For freeplay to always already exist in language, it enacts the compound process of deferring and differing from any centeredness or final presence. This deferring and differing process is what Derrida would label collectively as "différance" (Writing and Difference 293, Dissemination 168). Derrida selects différance because this French word means to defer as well as to differ. This precise word choice allows Derrida to play with his own language and remain purposefully imprecise. He creates a pun within his theory through différance, decentering a singular meaning to his language.

Despite the aforementioned correlations between Derrida and Plato, Derrida contends Platonic theory opposes his perception of composition regarding the democratic nature of meaning-making. For Derrida, "[d]emocracy is orgy, debauchery, flea market, fair, 'a bazaar ... of constitutions where one can choose the one to make one's own'" (Dissemination 145). Plato regards the democratic arrangement, those where meaning is regulated by the many, as the second-worst type for a society.

Therefore, one of Derrida's primary criticisms of Plato's negative depiction of writing as "[u]prooted, anonymous, unattached to any house or country, this almost insignificant signifier is at everyone's disposal" and therefore democratically attuned (Dissemination 144). Writing is connected to the nature of writing as an always already visual tool that the masses can pick up and read for themselves without a schooled orator's interpretation. Derrida posits the masses gain the ability to find Signifieds through writing because it is available for all to both read and write as well as to digest and construct.

Plato illustrates the cave allegory's shackled prisoners in a bazaar-like state where they behave chaotically, shouting contrived names for shadowy images in a competitive atmosphere. Meaning-making is without philosophic or schooled expertise to guide the prisoners (The Republic 8.544e). This allegory forms one of Plato's critiques of writing, namely, that non-philosophical, non-schooled writers are like deceptive sophists, who rely on assumptions of "probability" rather than "truth."

The sophists are the shouting unschooled prisoners at the bottom of the cave. They attempt to persuade themselves and the shackled masses by a version of dialectic that

lacks Signified-based truth (Phaedrus 164). Just as the shackled prisoners rely on shadowy, incomplete representations of objects, so also the meaning they make relies on an unjust imitation of what only seems to be the truth (Phaedrus 156). The naming process by the unschooled shackled prisoners becomes a corrupted approximation of Signified-endowed objects.

The meaning made by the masses becomes incorrect and immoral through Plato's interpretation of the shackled prisoners as engaging in sophistry that imitates the truth but without a Signified form. (Likewise, Plato's Phaedrus represents Derrida's target because of the distinction between bad and good writing, segregated by the relative absence or presence of meaning made through opinions by uneducated masses.) The shackled prisoners possess an uneducated agency to construct meaning without the approval or screening of professionally trained writers/orators to enlighten the masses in a regulated format. For Plato and Derrida, the nature of the shackled prisoners is both democratic and sophistic.

Plato disdains the democratic nature of the prisoners, and the sophistic way they opine with each other. Derrida ridicules Plato's sophistic writing style because the Greek

scholar clearly writes, throughout The Republic and other texts, about the dangers of sophism as false wisdom (opinion). Plato presents the shackled prisoners as sophists who transform the shadowy images into what Derrida would label "simulacr[a]," or copies of shadowy copies that are void of Signified origins and "'mime absolute knowledge'" (Dissemination 108,138). For Plato, meaning-making from a copy of a copy is the farthest point away from authentic knowledge and truth itself.

Derrida clarifies Plato's condemnation of writing as an act of différance. This decentered writing possesses shadowy images-as-simulacra that are a kind of textual Sign that "has no essence or value of its own, whether positive or negative. It plays within the simulacrum. It is in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc" (Dissemination 105-106). The democratic mob, shackled and shouting at the bottom of the cave, appropriates the chance of meaning-making to every common person without regard to the true Signified forms to the images named.

Derrida insists Plato intends meaning-making to be an internal and universal experience within the individual because:

... the conclusion of the Phaedrus is less a condemnation of writing in the name of present speech than a preference for one sort of writing over another ... for a seed that engenders because it is planted inside over a seed scattered wastefully outside: at the risk of dissemination" by nonprofessionals.

(Dissemination 149)

Since this type of meaning-making lacks the filtering approval of a professional educator, the meaning is artificial and sophistic. The meaning appeals to the audience based on probability of acceptance rather than on Signified substantiation.

The Signified forms remain absent because the shackled mob does not possess a traditional education that epitomizes the freed prisoner. Initially, overseers educate the freed prisoner in a traditional sense. Thereafter, the freed prisoner improves the foundation of that traditional education through self-actualized introspection of innate knowledge. In this bazaar model, meaning becomes made in a format relative to mere shadowy images without connection to Signified forms or professionally educated overseers.

Conclusion

For Neel, sophistry embodies a pliable, liminal space where compositionists might position their perspectives between Plato and Derrida by remaining purely rhetoricians. Here, Neel's rhetorician-writer must deny the Platonic view of idealistic universals such as closure and truth, as well as the Derridian view of philosophically-oriented composition studies (Plato, Derrida, and Writing 203-204). Unfortunately, Neel cripples the neutrality of his analysis early in the text by admitting to a preference for Derridian-style deconstruction and postmodernism (xii). In this way, Neel steers his sophistic reasoning away from liminal objectivity. Perhaps this is Neel's attempt to admit a natural human subjectivity. Regardless, his stance should have been written in a way that sustains an impartial authorial presence.

As it is currently written, Neel's strong authorial presence from the beginning of the text invalidates his promotion of sophist-centric rhetoric for composition studies. He deconstructs himself. Furthermore, Neel's sophistic close reading of Plato's Phaedrus and Derrida's Dissemination does not inaugurate a new movement in future composition studies, as he purports to do at the

beginning(x). Instead, Neel attempts to erase the Platonic and Derridian past simultaneously through sophistic and Derridian tools.

This text answers what Neel does not desire for compositionists more than it answers what he does desire, just as Derrida describes différance by consistently "explaining what it is not" and denying the existence of an origin (Plato, Derrida, and Writing 157,200). Neel also employs close reading to suggest Plato and Derrida are both relevant today because they comprise symbiotic yet cannibalistic theories. These two theories are always already enablers of writing and rhetoric for composition studies wherein Plato settles "for nothing less than truth, cancels Derrida, who in turn cancels Plato by writing so as to show the impossibility of other writers" (204). Attempts by critics such as Neel reveal the complexity of attempting separate criticism of Plato and Derrida within a liminal space.

My overview of The Republic and its allegory of the cave serves to ground this thesis historically; further, it establishes allegory itself as a useful connection between Plato and Derrida. Derrida's critique of innateness and objective forms integrates postmodernism into a site of

analysis with the cave allegory. Within this integration, a correlation between Plato and Derrida in an always already conceptual framework might be possible in composition studies.

CHAPTER TWO
SIGNIFIED MEANING

Introduction

The nuances of always already take on more emphasis as this discussion underscores commonalities between Plato and Derrida within the Signified aspect of meaning. Julia Kristeva's Revolution in Poetic Language will serve to foreground the liminal spaces that Plato and postmodernists like Derrida might both occupy, since Kristeva's terminology bridges the concepts. Bridging appears critical because of Derrida's criticism against Platonic theory, especially for an understanding of always already in meaning-making. Using Kristeva's perspective on meaning-making, we can more clearly consider how the concepts of ontological innateness and epistemological relativity might interact with always already. This interaction will include how Plato and Derrida's perspectives on those two concepts might enact a common representation that has not been considered previously.

Always Already Connection through Kristeva

Connecting the Signified as a transcendental liminal aspect of meaning-making in language between Plato and Derrida requires consideration of the signifying aspect of language. In Revolution in Poetic Language, Julia Kristeva approaches language from a mainly psychological perspective and considers the liminal signification of language as a phenomenon of desire. Kristeva defines a transcendental ego through a Freud-Lacan amalgamation that essentially recognizes meaning-making through a psychoanalytical lens. This definition comprises a naming ("thetic") and predicating ("synthesizing") part, which posits logical acts among people enacting communication that "judges or speaks and, simultaneously, brackets all that is heterogeneous to its consciousness" (Kristeva 30,31-32).

Furthermore, Kristeva explains a "necessity of positing an ego as the single, unique constraint which is constitutive of all linguistic acts as well as all trans-linguistic practice" (32). For Kristeva, the transcendental aspect of the ego is always already present in meaning-making, thereby denying a transcendental attribution to an external "linguistic universe" (32). Perception and experience, although logical acts, are not proofs of a

transcendental attribute of meaning-making because those two aspects of human living are empirically driven whereas the ego is internal.

Kristeva's perspective of the transcendental ego at first seems to contradict Plato's perspective of meaning-making because external factors, which inspire a degree of meaning-making, temper the freed prisoner's journey to the sun. The freed prisoner's journey of learning is one of recognition of things always already in play with the transcendental ego. In addition, the freed prisoner's learning process always already concerns dialectic: first with the overseers, and last with an internalized dialectic. In all its stages, dialectic is language in the conversational occasion. In dialectic, an audience comprehends intended meaning-making only through language that uses named Signifiers capable of inspiring transcendental recognition of the Signifieds that the Signifiers represent. The transcendental ego of the freed prisoner constrains or tailors the dialectically-modeled language, and, accordingly, provides direction and focus during specific occasions.

Simultaneously, the transcendental ego correlates to Derrida's decentering principle of meaning-making because Kristeva views:

... the subject in language as decentering the transcendental ego, cutting through it, and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely a liminary movement of the process, which is itself always acted upon by the relation to the other dominated by the death drive and its productive reiteration of the '[S]ignifier.' (30)

Perhaps the transcendental ego can only enact meaning-making in language through commonly recognizable signification. This enactment occurs by interaction with others (such as the freed prisoner and overseers) or by conversation with the self (as is the case when the freed prisoner ponders the sun and the surface world). The transcendental ego acts as the catalyst for the freed prisoner's agency in meaning-making with a correlation of Signified-endowed Signs.

The act of making meaning in language occurs through desire, as regulated by a transcendental ego. Plato reiterates the role of desire to his original audience,

Glaucon, by stating the "going up and the seeing of what's above to the soul's journey up to the intelligible place, you'll not mistake my expectation, since you desire to hear it" (The Republic 7.517b). Here, Plato suggests Glaucon desires to be told how to gain wisdom and gain intelligibility.

Initially, the overseers engage in dialectic by their own freewill with the freed prisoner. The freed prisoner does not cooperate without coercion because the change is startling and difficult. The repetitious viewing of puppets and forms seen by the freed prisoner (and all others) insinuates the essential weakness when people attempt to make meaning through language. The weakness is the mind's finite nature. This nature requires repetition of Signs in order to always already combat forgetfulness.

The always already remembrance-forgetfulness cycle requires external Signs with transcendental Signifieds. This requirement exists in order to reconnect the meaning-making process in language. As stated earlier, Kristeva's transcendental ego is the only internal measure that allows the freed prisoner to re-engage into this cycle of always already remembrance-forgetfulness. The ego limits the transcendental aspect. The inability of people to retain

absolute knowledge without error or forgetfulness also restricts the transcendental aspect.

Always Already Cycle and its Attending Discourse

This cycle is an instance, or Kristeva's "hyle," that always already deviates from closure because of the synthesizing nature of the transcendental ego wherein a moment is lost as soon as it is posited, but it is nonexistent without the positing (32). Kristeva's hyle corresponds to Plato's "chora" or "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases," which operates as a substitution-creating receptacle and not as a Sign itself (Kristeva 25). Kristeva extends her definition of Plato's chora as:

... not unified in an ordered whole because deity is absent from it. Though deprived of unity, identity, or deity, the chora is nevertheless subject to a regulating process ... which is different from that of symbolic law but nevertheless effectuates discontinuities by temporarily articulating them and then starting over, again and again" in an always already cycle

of remembrance and forgetfulness in attempt to
make meaning in language. (26)

The temporary articulation of discontinuities is freeplay
in motion. This freeplay needs Signs to recollect meaning-
making's connection.

Derrida explains this recollective freeplay through an
interpretation of Plato's discussion of writing and memory
in passage 7.533b from The Republic:

The space of writing, space as writing, is opened
up in the violent movement of this
surrogation.... The outside is already within the
work of memory.... A limitless memory would in
any event be not memory but infinite self-
presence. Memory always therefore already needs
[S]igns in order to recall the non-present, with
which it is necessarily in relation.... But what
Plato dreams of is a memory with no [S]ign.

(Dissemination 109)

Derrida suggests writing becomes "the doubling of a [S]ign,
the [S]ign of a [S]ign" in order to vacillate between the
overly simplistic alternative of presence/absence
representation in language (Dissemination 109-110).

Kristeva's hyle and Plato's chora compares to Derrida's "différance," which is the "disappearance of any originary presence, is at once the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility..." of Signified meaning-making in language (Dissemination 168). Derrida complicates the freeplay relationship between the line, Signifier and Signified. Those Sign aspects (line, Signifier and Signified) also represent presence/absence, or a relationship of difference. This relationship represents "a question of repetition" that is "systematically inseparable from that difference (Dissemination 111-112). The line between Signifier and Signified is always already at play with the two elements of the Sign. The line is the cyclic force.

Derrida explains that "writing estranges itself immensely from the truth of the thing itself [transcendental form], from the truth of speech, from the truth that is open to speech," whether composed as a printed copy or mentally because the meaning-making defers the whole of its intent (Dissemination 137). Simultaneously, this meaning-making differs its original intent during the writing/reading process.

As his journey continues toward the surface world and the authentic forms present there, the freed prisoner begins to behave with desire to make meaning out of those Signs. The Signs initiate those thoughts because the hyle-chora-différance enacts displacement within the transcendental ego. Desire is the linking activity that causes the freed prisoner to construct a receptacle of substitutions through language. Desire also expresses the always already fading substitutions within the receptacle of mind and hardcopy. The substitutions are recollections of forms and other intelligible Signs that the writer renders.

Through Kristeva, the liminal space that Plato and postmodernists like Derrida might both occupy becomes clearer through an always already nuance. In shades of always already, "there exists only one signification ... which contains the object as well as the proposition, and the complicity between them" (Kristeva 44). Although this signification contains similarity in meaning-making, the texts themselves, as productions of language, remain imperceptible forever because they are interpretations of transcendental forms (Dissemination 63). The dialectical conversation that builds meaning is an intention of the

forms and not the forms themselves. This occurs because a person's mind is incapable of divine perfection of memory. Dialectics intends on truth and nobility when communicating translatable meaning, and can only do so through referent Signs.

Kristeva's complicity between object and proposition concerns the function of writing as pointing to an essential aspect of the semiotic. She defines this semiotic aspect as "a modality of the signifying process with an eye to the subject posited (but posited as absent) by the symbolic" in which the drives that form the foundation of structural dichotomies in language are always already removed (Kristeva 41,43). The removal occurs because the signifying process is a complication of judgments or positions orchestrated by the transcendental ego.

For Kristeva, the threshold of language represents the rupture point in which the freed prisoner creates meaning through language, thereby removing himself from reduction into the process of signification (44-45). The freed prisoner's breakthrough, or rupture, in language causing meaning to be in attendance (albeit temporarily) occurs through awareness of the linking line between Signifier and Signified. This awareness is an "opening up toward every

desire but also every act" that is an "always split unification that is produced by a rupture and is impossible without it" (Kristeva 47). As the rupture occurs in language, the cycle of meaning-making divides from itself before it is stable. Meaning shifts as it occurs during thought and visual writing but it seems to retain a trace element of meaning from its Signified form.

Kristeva's rupture correlates with Derrida's rupture, which occurs "when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated" (Writing and Difference 279). This correlation of rupture within meaning-making should not be surprising because Derrida credits Freud, whom Kristeva relies on considerably, for identifying the occurrence of a rupture "most closely to its most radical formulation" (280). Similar to Kristeva's perspective of meaning-making, Derrida's notion of meaning-making through language is "not a fixed locus but a function ... in which an infinite number of Sign-substitutions came into play" when enacted by the freed prisoner after temporarily recollecting the significance of the Signified forms (280).

The moment of rupture seems to be the instance of making meaning through language when its fluid nature is most evident, when:

... in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse ... [when] a system in which the central [S]ignified, the original or transcendental [S]ignified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental [S]ignified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (280)

The instability of the Signified ruptures creates opportunity for an expansion of meaning.

The freed prisoner acts out desire for a connection with the attending society. Hence, individualized (while pondering Signified forms) and socialized (while endeavoring to relate meaning through language with peers) learning occurs simultaneously. Like Saussure, Kristeva views the social realm as a symbolic structural device. In this apparatus, people confer with each other through a structure. This structure is "merely a play of images" that exists because individuals enact a degree of individual agency to "absorb 'the integrity of the [S]ignifier' that

is constituted once and for all, by finding corresponding [S]ignifieds," which is Plato's journey toward intelligibility and Signified forms (Kristeva 73, 76). Plato constitutes this social symbolism most clearly when the shackled prisoners debate meaning-making during the procession of shadowy images. The social unit seems to exist to retain structural relations with always already Signs.

During the procession of shadowy images, the individuals develop floating or "drifting [S]ignifiers" to continue the always already nature of meaning-making. Kristeva's drifting Signifiers correlate to Plato's dialectical depiction of meaning-making in the cave as well as Derrida's sense of freeplay that allows for a decentered and mobile meaning-making experience (Kristeva 74, 98). To make meaning through language, the individual attempts a temporary synthesis of the Signifier and Signified in order to play with this designation in society until agency becomes socialized enough to be "we" or "anonymous" (Kristeva 94-95). Different social systems rely on varied discourses or versions of Signs. Social systems, such as the shackled prisoner society and the overseer society, use variations of discourse particular to them because their

unique access to the Signified forms affects the social structures that support the Signs.

Inevitably, the freed prisoner, as individual, attempts to share meaning through language with the societies he encounters. His effort transitions from a singular "I" discourse of meaning to a "we" discourse that attempt to moderate meaning as well as socially-recognizable semiotic rules into a unified "attending discourse" (Dissemination 324-330). Illuminating the attending discourse accentuates the liminal space between Plato and Derrida. Through attending discourse, both Plato and Derrida acknowledge how the freed prisoner interprets previous knowledge with others. The individual uses freeplay within language to arrange the best sequence of named words (the most agreed upon drifting Signifiers). The best sequence can be defined as the exchange of language wherein the audience recognizes his series of Signified-laden words in the most appealing arrangement.

Perhaps the attending discourse is the phase in which meaning-making in language begins its cycle of re-dislocation. This cycle partly initiates from an individual's original intention. An audience's unique perception of those Signified intentions follows. Language

always already changes in the process of exchanging this attending discourse.

Derrida's attending discourse conflicts with Plato's perspective on the transactional mediums used to make meaning. Plato denies that written texts can sustain independent meaning-making in intelligible language. Indeed, he views written texts as devices for those needing memory aides or desiring to read opinions (here, distinguished from intelligible information).

While Derrida might classify Plato's view of texts as simulacra, C. Jan Swearingen furthers this categorization of Platonic reasoning. Swearingen explains the act of writing as a singular operation of binding language outside its original expression and context (76). From Swearingen's perspective on composing, a writer disengages the original meaning and extracts all elements of context, which encompass "intention and understanding that shaped its original expression" (76). Through Swearingen's explanation, Plato's perspective on written language requires a voiceless text that cannot possess agency. This happens because the written simulacrum lacks a degree of dialectic that only oral language retains. As time moves

forward, the original intent and context of the writing separates from the articulated.

However, Plato seems to acknowledge that the meaning made in all forms of language fades in the always already continuum of time. Only the presence of Signified forms can recapture the intelligibility of those meanings, regardless of their original form (oral or written). Perhaps this is why Plato uses the cave allegory to depict an upward journey of the soul and not a destination with a finite endpoint. The journey resides somewhere in the paradox of always already, without endpoint or center.

Ontological Innateness and Epistemological Relativity

Linked to this Platonic perspective of the voiceless, unintelligible written text is consideration of Plato's purpose for the cave allegory: "a study to draw the soul from becoming to being" (The Republic 7.521d). Plato's allegorical study distinguishes between epistemology, or how a person comes to know, and ontology, or how objects and concepts come to be. This allegorical division is central to understanding his perception of the nature of meaning-making. Plato seems to suggest the ontological

nature of meaning-making in the act of writing is an overtly persuasive, somewhat forceful action because the study draws or urges the reader to progress.

The Platonic journey of meaning-making within the ontological structure occurs for the freed prisoner only as he can endure it, and not without loss and pain. For instance, the freed prisoner suffers when the overseers force him to progress beyond the sophistic meaning-making of those shackled. An overseer advances the freed prisoner's learning toward the surface world only after spending time learning from those around the fire and puppet show.

During this learning process, information previously thought valuable for someone attempting to make meaning becomes discarded or restructured. This occurs as the freed prisoner ponders the true/false nature of his learning. Restructuring of previous information becomes part of the cycle of always already attending discourse. This restructuring occurs in many formats such as subjugation and addition. Foundational information also shifts in placement. This shift becomes evident in writing as more sophisticated words and writing styles reveal a writer's learning progression. The freed prisoner builds

intelligible conclusions and inferences with new information, as Plato explains about the learning process:

... this power is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns ... must be turned around from that which is coming into being together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which is and the brightest part of that which is. (The Republic 7.518c)

Perhaps the power within the soul is the ability to recognize and recapture Signified forms, or to be intelligible and not rely on opinions for meaning-making. The ability to infer might be the instrument with which each learns to use that intelligibility with self and society. The learning process seems incomplete until the freed prisoner can face the Signified forms that the overseers have referenced during their instruction.

The innateness of meaning-making is integral to the freed prisoner because desire for education causes him to seek out that which has been incomplete. Furthermore, innateness of meaning-making also applies to the Signified forms, which are always already both external and internal, present and absent. Writers mentally digest the Signified

forms as a result of the always already inference of them in language use in any society. Although, writers always already struggle with comprehending appropriate Signified forms because of the imperfect nature of incomplete Signs and sophistic persuasion in daily language use.

The shadowy images begin the journey of meaning-making in language because they are always already at play within the learning paradigm of Signified forms. The freed prisoner's presence and use of the Signified forms allow them to reappear and perpetuate. Otherwise, naming and meaning-making would become too inconsistent over time for societies and individuals to be able to infer or share knowledge.

Ontological innateness of Platonic meaning-making in language seems to be a symbiotic, cyclic relationship between student and form. Within this relationship of student and form, both always already enter and fade out of conditions of actualization of meaning-making. As the essay builds toward completion, the student as compositionist struggles within the always already continuum of placing the most applicable series of words in order to make meaning. This continuum is the writer's internal conversation at play, entering and fading out of a search

for the most appropriate Signified forms upon which to build the essay. Within this possibility, Derridian logic interacts with ontological innateness by opening the possibility of including epistemological relativity within the cave allegory.

Derrida asserts a site of collaboration between innateness and relativity. He insists "[o]ne cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the [S]ign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a supplement" (Writing and Difference 289). The liminal space between innateness and relativity is possible because the freed prisoner's interactions within the learning paradigm are unique as he continues his journey. His interactions are unique because of a degree of agency he possesses. The dialectic nature of meaning-making inspires variations of old Signs as well as the construction of new Signs. Commonly recognized Signified forms serve as the foundation for intelligibility in this dialectic nature.

The individual's agency coexists with intelligibility and inference within a tension/suspension of Derridian freeplay wherein history and presence are in flux (Writing

and Difference 290-292). This playful tension on the journey of meaning-making produces unique utterances of language. These unique utterances make and alter meaning but sustain Signifieds because of tension that is always already loose but never wholly severed. The danger of not including Derridian logic as an integral part of my analysis would acknowledge dependency on Platonic Signifiers (the shadowy images and puppets) as mere milestones on a finite destination to Signified forms (Writing and Difference 290). Epistemological relativity exists inside the cave allegory because the freed prisoner's learning process is proportional to the unique ways in which he constructs meaning as an individual. The unique construction of compositions occurs with a degree of agency within the socialized realm of meaning-making.

Intelligibility is not a spontaneous and whole action within the freed prisoner. He must spend time deliberating with overseers and himself. The freed prisoner begins to conclude (and does not instantly conclude) and decides in a way how Signified forms interact, as with the sun and other Signified forms. Here, Plato insinuates that even at the closest point of ontological connection with the forms themselves, the freed prisoner can digest the knowledge

relative to how he can grapple with its complexity. His learning process does not replicate the ontological enlightenment exactly as those before him learned, although all seem to possess a common degree of remembrance because of the always already nature of Signified forms. His perceptual experience combines with an ability to make advanced inferences and unique utterances while making meaning in language.

This epistemological-ontological combination originates from Derrida's assertion that "[b]eing must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around" (Writing and Difference 292). The play is within the freed prisoner's unique approach to the meanings that he contends with internally and externally. The uniqueness correlates to the nature of human experience, which plays at meaning-making that appropriates social as well as personalized influences in order to build a composition. Kristeva explains this meaning-making phenomenon by claiming "Individuals ... confer upon each other, upon themselves, and upon those things they hold dear, the whole strength of society" to reveal a conglomeration of socially symbolic issues (76). Within that conglomeration, the tension of

freeplay interacts with inferences and decisions toward the words a writer finally composes in an essay. The things held dear are personal preferences or recognizable through Signs that will vary from person to person, thereby making meaning in various ways.

The freed prisoner purposes to absorb what he experiences on the meaning-making journey. Kristeva's "genotext" serves as language's underlying foundation to encompass the absorption process in which "the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories: semantic and categorical fields" (86). Kristeva's meaning-involving emergence seems to correspond to Derrida's supplementary meaning-making nature when play in language causes rupture. Additionally, Kristeva's genotext serves to classify the innate process of the freed prisoner while attempting to build intelligibility from Signs. It is in the genotext that the freed prisoner functions increasingly with an ontological nature of meaning-making. Consequently, Signifieds become meaning in a more foundational ephemerally non-signifying manner.

The genotext seems to function as an internal dialectic within the freed prisoner. The internal dialectic

purposes to provide him with a "phenotext" that "obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee" (Kristeva 87). The phenotext denotes the need for language use with what has recently become intelligible. The phenotext seems to operate on the understanding that the freed prisoner will desire to communicate with others. Desire operates within the freed prisoner to externalize the dialectically established meanings he resolves to extend to others, like a thesis-driven essay. This established meaning happens temporarily before forgetfulness begins the always already cycle of play in language. He must transcribe this meaning before it fades from memory. Besides communicating orally with others, the freed prisoner could transcribe his resolved meaning as a composition.

Throughout the intertwined onto-epistemological process of meaning-making, the freed prisoner engages in Kristeva's psychotic economies. Contemplation and text-drafting practice are ways toward self-actualized psychotic economies. While contemplation and text-practice seem overtly internal, dialectic compels them socially. It is the social aspect that enables the always already cycle of remembrance with Signified forms.

Especially in the phenotext phase, the freed prisoner considers how to relate Signifieds to others. Seen this way, discourse is a type of Signifier-endowed text that an audience must read correctly enough to comprehend the intended meaning. Both contemplation and text-practice work to provide the freed prisoner with the best means of authorship. Epistemological relativity seems to occur during the phenotext stage as the freed prisoner transforms the intelligible genotext into something communicable.

Conclusion

At the end of the cave allegory, the ability to communicate the phenotext requires the freed prisoner to contemplate how to relate what he learns to the shackled prisoners still at the bottom of the cave. He desires to communicate it in the best way relative to his ability to express meaning through language. Since he is always already in the cycle of meaning-in-flux, the freed prisoner is also readable as an incomplete text. The freed prisoner as an incomplete text consists of attempted but never completed meanings that struggle to assert themselves based on desire and occasion. It is the freed prisoner's incompleteness that inevitably negates the possibility of

an entirely ontologically-based meaning-making experience in language.

Kristeva provides a deeper entry point for considering the complications of a liminal space for postmodernism and Platonic theory to interact in composition studies.

Kristeva's terminology serves to define as well as unite Derridian and Platonic motives in theory toward a common understanding of always already and the attending discourse that sustains a cycle of meaning-making in motion.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY RELATION

Introduction

To complete this discussion, I will focus this chapter on the implications of always already as a universal Signified (ideal form) for contemporary composition studies. The postmodern emphasis on the arbitrariness of meaning informs much contemporary composition theory and therefore could also inform a Platonic perspective within a liminal space. In this chapter, I seek to open a conversation that considers the possible significance of text construction through individual agency in conjunction with societal influences. This exploration will reassess the field's pedagogical approach to agency and essay creation through a postmodern critical lens.

Always Already Signified Forms for Contemporary Composition

Postmodernist compositionists propose that meaning-making in writing results from writers enacting their role as overtly social beings. This view corresponds with David Bartholomae's perspective that knowledge is "situated in

the discourse that constitutes 'knowledge' in a particular discourse community, rather than as situated in mental 'knowledge sites'" (599). For these compositionists, texts represent a forcefully persuasive society that influences and even determines meaning in writing. As in the case of much postmodern thought, there is little room for individual resistance. Platonic and Derridian perspectives rely on a flexibility in meaning that might create avenues for acknowledging individual meaning-making within the social.

In an effort to substantiate postmodernism, postmodernists like Karen Burke LeFevre define the role of language and rhetorical invention as socially dependent and collaborative (117). This social definition of composition relies more on what postmodernism is not rather than what it is. Postmodernists seem to define themselves in opposition to Platonic theory instead of classifying themselves through analysis that is independent of opposition. This method of defining postmodernism through an opposite appears to be an acknowledgement of the influence of Platonic theory in composition and the field of English studies over time.

A necessary extension of analysis for always already meaning-making in language must articulate how postmodernism and Platonism interact. The core of this analysis projects through the postmodern lens of the cave allegory. Other Platonic works must be included in order to accentuate particular fixations in conjunction with postmodernism. For LeFevre, postmodern compositionists' opposition to Platonic theory relies on five key points, which hereafter will comprise the route of exploration.

Social Context

First, postmodernists assert Platonic invention in composition favors individualistic research and neglects analysis of writers in social contexts (LeFevre 23). As explained previously, Plato's cave allegory clearly includes social contexts for invention. The freed prisoner, who seeks greater understanding in order to further the journey of meaning-making, represents the model for Platonic composition throughout the allegory and not merely the end. The composition process appears even at the beginning of the allegory before the freed prisoner is free. The pre-freed prisoner is a template for the novice writer. This pre-freed prisoner begins to experiment with

the social influences of the shackled society, and how his own assertions interact to make meaning with the Signs that pass across the cave wall.

At the beginning of the allegory, the pre-freed prisoner engages in dialectic with the other shackled prisoners to make meaning out of the shadowy images seen on the cave wall. The invention process occurs through a joint process of social and individual effort, much like a student builds an essay through peer reviews and personal effort. The social aspect of meaning-making transpires through dialectic with fellow prisoners. The individual characteristic involves the pre-freed prisoner attempting to invent judgments about the shadowy images to compete with the rest of the shackled society (The Republic 7.516e). I suggest the freed prisoner's individual judgments can be thought of as thoughts. The reason for this classification is to depict the judgments in terms of how the individual is making meaning.

This thought process through judgment involves the development of mental Signs that represent individual judgments for single images seen on the cave wall. These Signs simultaneously represent previous socially-

constructed regurgitations as well as independently unique constructions, since memory is not perfect.

The presence of competition between those in the shackled society suggests degrees of difference between the pre-freed prisoner's judgments and what others attempt to claim. The play of difference in meaning-making between prisoners endorses a degree of individualism in the invention process toward a final socially acceptable name assigned to the shadowy images.

The shackled prisoners invoke creative judgments to express meanings they attempt to make with each other while shadowy images pass across the cave wall. Creative invention of names for the images becomes important in this instance, especially since the shackled prisoners generate assessments on shadowy Signs, which contain the least amount of empirical information. It is empirical creativity that most describes these novice meaning-makers. The invention expressed by these prisoners within this social unit always already changes. This occurs because the authors rely on competition and the absence of any recorded history, except Signs remembered from their fallible minds. It is thus that the beginning of Plato's allegory might represent a developing writer.

Once unshackled, the freed prisoner interacts with the overseers to make sense of the images projected on the cave wall. As in the beginning of the allegory, the freed prisoner participates in a social context of meaning-making. In this setting, the overseers rely on dialectic to educate the novice writer. The use of dialectic challenges the postmodern claim of a lack of social context in Platonic theory. Plato creates the cave allegory but this should not detract from its meaning for postmodernists as an allegory contextually linked to real society. The freed prisoner learns by answering questions. He concludes individually but with leading questions from the overseers-as-educators.

However, the overseers admit their puppets are not transcendental Signified forms. They clarify the puppets as Signifiers that help construct meaning because they are similar to Signified forms from the surface world. To further the freed prisoner's journey of education, the overseers help him glimpse the Signified forms out of the cave. The overseers fulfill their roles as dialectical educators that engage the individual in a social context.

When faced with Signified forms, the freed prisoner seems guilty by the postmodern view of anti-social

learning. Postmodernists assert a stage of meaning-making that denies collaboration and social interaction. It is here that ontology makes its unwelcome presence to postmodernists in the form of transcendental Signified forms. Yet, the social context of postmodernism's first defining point is at issue in relation to this part of the allegory as well as Plato's Phaedrus, which is commonly considered the central adversary to postmodern compositionists.

Postmodern critics such as Derrida (in Dissemination) and Neel (in Plato, Derrida, and Writing) rely on Plato's Phaedrus as the primary locus for his theories of writing. However, Phaedrus distinguishes between "good" and "bad" writing/speaking as it correlates to "good" and "bad" rhetoric, wherein every discourse must be organized or fitted in relation to each other as well as the whole (Phaedrus 156, 159). Through the character Socrates in Phaedrus, Plato praises writing speeches, which to me seem to include academic writing as well because this form of expression adheres to Plato's insistence that all effort be productive for the improvement of citizens.

Academic writing characterizes textual speech that carries Signifieds within typed Signifiers on a page.

Derrida clarifies this characterization as deferring speech that generates desire for what now can be recognized as absent (Neel 117). Academic writing divides from other types of writing such as technical writing because it is written "in the narrow sense" to inscribe speech as a mere visual system of oral communication (Neel 112). Academic writing seems to be Derrida's "writing in the general" sense because it is the operation of difference and is absent of many things, including transcendental Signified forms (Neel 112). The distinction of academic writing indicates a visual system of Signs that replace transcendental Signifieds. The system of Signs always already appears and vanishes for the compositionist and reader.

The simultaneous nature of Signs appearing and vanishing occurs because the compositionist and reader both desire the social connection of relation capable through Signified forms. It is a yearning for understanding between people. Furthermore, academic writing appears to be a type of dialectic that "always awaits the response of the other, a response that then requires a new speaking and then generates a new response and so on" (Neel 82). Essays

respond to prompts that always already become a response. In turn, essays invite readers to respond.

Rhetorically sound academic papers should contain Signified elements of truth within the Signs present in the typed text. These Platonic truths can only occur through social dialectic. This dialectic becomes writing exemplified as the absence of truth by revealing truth as the one thing beyond closure (Neel 82).

Plato might be said to acknowledge différance in the "noble" version of rhetoric's possibility, although never witnessed by readers (Gorgias 122). The différance within noble rhetoric corresponds to Derrida's sense of writing in the general sense because Signs always already replace the elusive transcendental Signified forms (Neel 112). The social context during the writing and reading of an essay temporarily fuses Signifiers with Signifieds into Signs. These fusions are recognizable enough for a writer to attempt a bridge of meaning-making relation with a reader.

These attempts remain always already inadequate because of the finite space on the page to represent precise meaning. The inadequacy exists because of the finite ability of the writer to express whole Signs. Texts especially by novice writers become a kind of textual

puppet, with sentences that proceed across the pages like shadowy images of their original intention. Phaedrus mirrors the assertion of socially imbued meaning-making, as in the cave allegory, because an awareness of relation between texts naturally leads to recognition of relation between audiences. Audiences are social recipients of the texts.

The Open System

LeFevre's second defining point for postmodernism accuses Platonic theory of depicting invention as a "closed, one-way system" (24). As previously discussed, social relation using Platonic theory becomes a textual bridge that recognizes and distinguishes between external relations. The ability to recognize and distinguish requires knowledge of a body of influences that inevitably shape a textual draft.

The freed prisoner engages with many influences. Some are external: shadowy images and voices of other prisoners, puppets and overseers, as well as Signified forms. Others are internal: his thoughts interacting with previous judgments. The body of influences is always already at play in the invention process of the writer.

The cave allegory also denies LeFevre's interpretation of Platonic one-way meaning-making. The freed prisoner continually reevaluates what he learns. The freed prisoner transforms knowledge into language to express to others. The freed prisoner's invention process, in an always already cycle of restructuring itself in a decentered learning process, calls into question the nature of the writer with society. The freed prisoner also represents decenteredness. When he learns something new, it causes pain at first and repetitive periods of acclimation as he readdresses the Sign-filled world around him. The readdressals are outward representations of decenteredness in the freed prisoner.

After learning more about the puppet Signifiers that the overseers parade before firelight, an overseer leads the freed prisoner upward to the surface world. There, the freed prisoner gazes at his first Signified form. It is light from a sun but not the sun itself because the learning process requires acclimation from the shocking pain of brightness.

Initially, the freed prisoner engages in dialectic to discuss this form with the overseer in order to more accurately validate nuances of truths and lies. Here, the

distinction is more about degrees and less about absolutes since previous knowledge from shadowy Signs would cause him to be "at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown" (The Republic 7.515d).

Meaning transfers externally as language, between people in the face of Signified forms.

At this point, postmodernists like Neel prefer the less-than-absolute nature that seems to exist in this exchange. Postmodernists such as Derrida and Neel prefer a focus on Signifier/freeplay instead of a Signified/absolute relationship (Neel 103). The freed prisoner as writer is in a decentered state while making meaning through language with the overseer about the Signified forms.

During this dialectical learning about the Signified forms, the freed prisoner's meaning-making transitions into an internal state that does not enlist the help of external sources such as an overseer (The Republic 7.516a-b). It is here that postmodernists have the greatest challenge accepting Platonic theory for composition. Here, the freed prisoner rewrites the meaning-making paradigm by solitary contemplation of the Signified forms. Although he does not engage in vocal conversation with others, the freed prisoner considers the ontological state of Signified

forms. This consideration happens from a foundation of knowledge that originates out of social construction (overseers and shackled prisoners) as well as his uniquely creative contemplations.

He builds upon, corrects and makes new meaning based on recognition of innate knowledge that signifies the Signified forms. He infers and extrapolates from an internal conversation. This internal conversation recognizes innateness through commonly understood Signs learned over the course of his journey of learning. The commonly understood Signs refer to Signifieds he now witnesses.

Loss of Abstraction and Exclusion

At the most intimate point of recognition of Signified forms, the freed prisoner is his most internal self. The freed prisoner in this state seems to be a kind of abstraction from society, which is LeFevre's third point of postmodern judgment against Platonic theory (25). At a certain point, the freed prisoner relies on Signified forms and his internal self to sort out all he has digested over time to make meaning. It is a cataloguing of the mind.

The mental cataloguing becomes subverted once again in the same instant that it happens as a Derridian rupture occurs in the learning cycle. The freed prisoner engages in an internalized social dialogue with himself while considering his next decision. Should he return to his former station and interact with the shackled prisoners using the knowledge he has gained? Or should he stay on the surface world and interact with the others he sees living there?

Either way, the freed prisoner faces an audience for the language he always already constructs mentally. If a person interrupts his decision making process, the freed prisoner would likely state, "Quiet. I can't hear myself think while you're speaking." Here again is the *différance* of dialectic in meaning-making because one voice (external) must temporarily be silent while another voice (internal) speaks. The internal speaking voice is one of remembrance. It is one of innateness that is always already in a cycle of needing Signs and forms as catalysts to recall itself to the finite mind of the compositionist.

To return to the cave is the noblest yet deadliest option the freed prisoner can choose. Choice is an act of agency as an individual without the coercion of social

forces like the overseers, who previously forced him forward on his journey of learning. The freed prisoner acquires enough knowledge to begin relying less on social constraints. He relies more on himself yet not wholly out of a social context when determining how to make meaning for himself as a more advanced compositionist.

Like Socrates, who chose as an individual not to flee from a society that charged him with a crime of teaching controversial meaning-making, the freed prisoner must decide how to react with a similar society of elitists. Albeit shackled, those elitist prisoners, whose shackles perhaps represent their own errant freeplay, would refuse to believe the freed prisoner. They would likely attempt to murder him before he completes a displacement of their meaning-making monopolies in the cave world (The Republic 7.517a). If the freed prisoner chooses to return to the bottom of the cave, then he becomes the polar opposite of an abstraction with the society of shackled prisoners. He becomes a very concrete threat in the Platonic sense of a writer facing an audience that becomes hostile because of the message of his language.

Postmodernists might assert that the freed prisoner-as-writer becomes an abstraction because the meaning he

makes is too foreign to the social audience of shackled prisoners. If this is the postmodern view, then it is likely a misconstrued conclusion of one of two issues: either the audience obstinately refuses to listen because those in power do not pre-approve his language speaking rights, or the freed prisoner-as-writer fails to use rhetorical methods that appeal to that particular audience.

For Plato, noble rhetoric proposes to expose injustice in order to help people become better citizens. Noble rhetoric persistently states what is best, regardless if the audience considers it pleasant to hear (Gorgias 122-123). Nobility of purpose toward an audience, regardless of the consequences, represents a summary of the first half of Plato's Phaedrus, which details the divine madness of the lover to the beloved, or the writer to the audience (148). Divine madness contains a desire to relate meaning through language. This desire seeks to accomplish the relation of text to a reader in order to share the remembrance of Signified forms and extend the bridges of reasoning in general.

To share a remembrance of Signified forms can be an act of writing and reading an essay. During this process, recognition of those Signified forms represents a kind of

remembrance that seats emotion in a kindred spirit. It seems the writer shares this kindred spirit when attempting to write with an audience in mind, as if reaching out with a degree of love for the intended message but also the intended audience. As Plato states, to be in love is like remembering heaven (Phaedrus 151). Writing for an audience—regardless of the audience’s approachability—is to have the best intentions for that audience. Best intentions encompass a desire to share the remembrance of essential meaning through a text. To consider what is best for an audience, regardless of the democratically mob-like state of a society, is to internalize an engagement of meaning-making with that society.

The freed prisoner’s actions cannot be an abstract. His concern for the society of shackled prisoners is a central aspect of how he desires to relate language to the shackled prisoners. Although Plato considers this noble form of rhetoric possible, he has never witnessed it (Gorgias 123). Plato reveals the always already elusive nature of rhetoric at play with the author. The nature of Platonic rhetorical invention endeavors to engage with the social. However, Plato cautions this endeavor is likely to fail before the intended meaning is made.

The real world implication is that the freed prisoner, acting as an advanced writer and having witnessed the Signified forms, likely would become abstracted prior to the audience receiving it as intended. This spontaneous abstraction would occur because the nobility of the rhetoric in the freed prisoner's text always already fades before the readers comprehend the whole of his original meaning.

Atomistic Self-Refutation

In the fourth postmodern point against Platonic theory, the inventor of texts is an atomistic self (LeFevre 26). An atomistic self as the smallest unit insinuates the writer is not a social artifact but undivided by social influences. The combination of inventor with atomistic reinforces the postmodern view of the writer as sole inventor of a text, which this thesis seeks to complicate. Classifying a Platonic writer as atomistic misleads composition studies.

Regardless of the experience level, a writer always already engages in a complex series of decisions about the occasioned language to use. This engagement transpires in order to bridge writer, text, and audience. The triangular

perspective on writing lends a description that is neither solely isolated nor social.

As postmodernists theorize how meaning occurs in language, they seem to want all or nothing when considering always already and the nature of agency in the writer. The analysis here presents Platonic theory in conjunction with Derrida as flexible within an always already fluctuating language system of Signs. Although imperfectly, these Signs allow people to forever glimpse Signified forms. This brief look opens an opportunity for recollection of a transcendental thread that bridges Signifiers and Signified forms within meaning-making over time and across social groups.

Collaboration

The fifth and last of LeFevre's postmodern criticisms defines Platonic theory as denying collaboration with invention (29). As previously discussed, the freed prisoner engages with collaboration internally and externally throughout the journey of learning. The internal voice is a speaking voice that engages in collaboration with a decision-making self.

Externally, the overseers help the freed prisoner develop stronger connections and strategies for writing through dialectic. Dialectic is a form of collaboration with an emphasis on teacher-student relation. The relation opens a liminal space for broadening understanding with text creation and revision.

Prior to leading the freed prisoner out into the sun where the genuine Signified forms are present, the overseers engage in a collaborative dialectic with the freed prisoner by using the only common element available: puppets that remind him of shadowy images. Teaching through commonalities represents scaffolding between the known and the unknown. The puppets become the common element for discussing how former knowledge transforms into various complications. They exchange words common to his understanding in order to help the learning journey. This understanding requires a degree of selected invention, as in a writing process; the overseers are careful with the invention of their dialectic in order to create a conversation that the freed prisoner can have the best opportunity to grasp. Otherwise, the freed prisoner would be incapable of learning because their dialectic would be similar to a foreign language.

Conclusion

This shared space of communication represents a visual language that is liminally applicable for postmodernism as well as Platonism in composition studies. Among other things, collaborative dialectic is "an innovative and powerful instructional device" for professors and students (Golden 36). Dialectic cannot occur without mutual understanding of Signs through language. This mutual understanding is recollection of transcendentals that bridge meanings made over time and across social groups.

The always already instability allows both writer and reader to coexist in a Platonic construct wherein meaning makes itself apparent through individual as well as social means to bridge language over time. Application of this dialectic in composition allows for professors to enhance their explanations of how meaning is made to students in order to provide a framework for postmodernists as well as those who do not ascribe to postmodernism.

Regardless of a person's perspective on postmodernism, the realization of meaning-making in an always already framework enables students to recognize the importance of perspective and diversity. Recognition of Signified-laden texts as always already in a state of bridging meaning-

making will enable professors and students to consider how common understandings arise between writer, reader and text.

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