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Rhetoric and the Gift: Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Contemporary Communication

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Rhetoric *and* the Gift

Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Contemporary Communication

Mari Lee Mifsud

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Introduction

If my desire is possible, it means the system is already letting something else through. All the poets know that: whatever is thinkable is real.
—*Hélène Cixous, "Sorties"*

On the *technē* of *exordia,* the "art of beginnings," Aristotle discerns from speeches, namely the speeches of the epic poems, that providing a sample of the subject allows the audience to know the subject beforehand, thereby preventing the creation of suspense in the audience's mind, for the undefined leads astray. Putting the beginning, so to say, in the hearer's hand enables the hearer, if holding fast to it, to follow the story (*Rhet.* 1415a.14–15). Aristotle then cites Homer's openings of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to exemplify this *technē* of *exordia*: "Sing the wrath, O Muse,... / Tell me of the man, O Muse" (1415a16). I keep this *technē* in mind as I attempt this beginning, so that you, my reader, will not be kept in suspense and can feel as if you have a hold of what I am trying to write.

But the call of this book ought not lead to capture. When capture is the outcome, brutalization—not communication—happens. In other words, having you take hold of me, or me of you, seems not so much of a good reason to begin.

Beyond the *technē* of *exordia* in Aristotle's citation of Homer, his citation of Homer's call is what calls my attention, acknowledging the call as the beginning of communication, bearing witness to this call as an offering to respond. In an interview, Calvin Schrag said, "The gift of the call makes giving possible."[1] The call signals that giving and communicating are in cahoots. John Durham Peters affirms this etymologically, by acknowledging *munus* (exchange) as the root of communication—exchanging with others.[2] Peters notes that *munus* as a Latin root "has to do with gifts or duties offered publicly—including gladiatorial shows, tributes, and rites to honor the dead."[3] Michael Hyde puts forth the first full-fledged theory of gift/giving in communication studies, theorizing rhetorical acknowledgment as a life-giving gift.[4]

The call to communicate signals a need for response, and Schrag also calls the response a gift, though he resists viewing call and response as exchanges in economic terms. Rather, to be ethical, the call and the response must be a kind of potlatch, an excessive expenditure, a scattering, without concern, regard, strategy, or expectation of return.[5] Schrag sees the response, too, as giving, not as a return. "It responds freely to the call, without command, without obligation. It is the impossible possibility of a giving not derived from the economy of exchange but nonetheless effectual within it."[6]

But how do we talk about being outside the exchange economy and talk about communication? Remember the root, *munus* and note the suffix, *-tion*, which indicates a system or process, and the prefix *com-*, which suggests a relation with others. This triad indicates an economy of exchange with others. A paradox lies at the heart of this project. This paradox is of key concern to Henry W. Johnstone Jr. as he explores the ethics of communication. Here's the paradox: As soon as rhetoric becomes a strategy of achieving desired ends, as soon as it becomes a form of technical rather than creative communication, as soon as it becomes an art of persuasion, and as soon as it becomes a call and response in economic terms, it gets on a path of brutalization;[7] yet, rhetoric is, in Johnstone's view, the only means other than physical intervention to harness attention. Rhetoric is a wedge, opening attention to stimuli as objects of consciousness; its expression as art comes after the fact; hence, it is secondary in being—perhaps one could say, inessential.[8]

Yet from another turn, being inessential does not best describe art but the call, this paradoxical figure of a prior rhetoric. Diane Davis hopes her work *Inessential Solidarity* "will testify to the saying's tortured rapport with the said, in which it barely hangs on."[9] Whereas poets and philosophers have tried to testify, Davis uses "rhetorical leverage to expose a preoriginary rhetoricity."[10] Davis works to expose and to return to a rhetoric of saying, despite the said desiring otherwise.

Attending to the paradox of trying to talk about a rhetoric prior to and in excess of *technē,* I joined Johnstone in a coauthored note to push on and to interrogate the theory of rhetoric as a wedge for, as this phrase "rhetoric as a wedge" becomes a sound bite for a rhetorical theory and a method for rhetorical criticism, it performs its own undoing as "rhetoric as a bridge." Rhetoric as a bridge performs something wholly other than rhetoric as a wedge.[11] This is not necessarily a bad thing, for rhetoric as a bridge has potentially positive effects.[12] But when all we know about rhetoric is its function to bridge, the wedging function is at best rendered invisible and at worst bypassed altogether. Davis shares these concerns and asks: How do we pull into focus "this always prior rhetoricity that is the condition for what is called the 'art' of rhetoric?"[13]

Yet, again a paradox confronts us: once this prior and excessive thing is pulled into focus, it is no longer "prior to and excessive" but captured by beginnings. When rhetoric is used other than freely (say, via totalizing signs, or perhaps through a *technē* that solidifies representation and signification), it becomes a rhetoric unrecognizable to its prior figure. Though even to call the prior figure a figure again displays the paradox of signification beyond exchangist terms. As David Lovekin writes: "Communication, in its ideal sense, involves the attempt to say what cannot be said. It at least involves the ability to do this, to recognize when it is being done, and to realize the need for such a function of language. Signs have their place in language and communication, but when all becomes a sign, there can be no communication."[14]

Rhetoric and the Gift explores rhetoric not only at the level of the artful response but at the level of the call and response, or said another way, at the level of the gift and rhetoric prior to and in excess of art, not as some rudimentary system of relating that awaits systematic and philosophical development but as some thing, some event, some moment, other than

> nor unavailable.... The calculus of the second item in each pair... is imperative for responsible action, always in view of this peculiarity.[23]

Spivak calls for us to find a preoriginary sense of responsibility, a human right, rather than mere responsibility, to give care to others. And we are all a bunch of others. No self/other binary can even begin in such a preoriginary right of care. She invites, "Imagine yourself and them—as both receivers and givers—not in a Master-Slave dialectic, but in a dialogic of accountability.... It is within this framework, thinking the world, not just the nation-state, that I say to all of us: let us imagine anew imperatives that structure all of us, as giver and taker, female and male, planetary human beings."[24]

Whereas Spivak attends to this preoriginary responsibility as practiced characteristically by precapitalist high cultures of the planet, I attend specifically to the Homeric pragma. In Homer, I see what Spivak calls the transcendental figuration of the origin of the imperative to care for others. And this vision of Homer emerges through a study of Homer in Aristotle's *Technē Rhetorikē*. As Aristotle continues to identify the art of beginnings—*exordia,* and how *exordia* can gain the audience's goodwill and similar states of mind—he again cites Homer: "And since it is rightly said, 'Grant that on reaching the Phaeakians I may find friendship and compassion'" (*Rhet.,* 1415b27; *Od.* 6.327).

Perhaps friendship and compassion are what we see in Rembrandt's imaginary portrait of Aristotle contemplating a bust of Homer (see fig. 1). In 1653, Rembrandt was commissioned by a Sicilian nobleman to paint a portrait of a philosopher. He accepted the commission and chose to paint a portrait of Aristotle gesturing on the head of a bust of Homer. He displays Aristotle as a contemporary Renaissance scholar of considerable material success, in his silken robe with billowing sleeves, a man of luxury who knows not labor, with his unambiguously expensive gold chain, said to be a gift from Alexander the Great, Aristotle's most powerful student, who had left Aristotle a fortune in return for his teaching, but whom the philosopher had failed to influence morally.[25] Rembrandt's portrayal of Aristotle's wealth brings Homer's meagerness into bold relief. Yet, this contrast is ironic, because the humble portrayal of Homer hides with material poverty

Fig. 1: Aristotle with a bust of Homer by Rembrandt, 1653.

immaterial wealth. Homer is the original giver, namely, of the abundant resources of poetic wisdom to the civic world.

Aristotle gazes slightly into the distance, beyond Homer. His eyes are strikingly like black holes in his face. The emptiness suggests a melancholy that most commentators notice. Perhaps, as one commentator suggests, Aristotle, like Rembrandt himself, might be melancholy.[26] Julius Held suggests that Rembrandt's characteristic melancholy arose from his own being in debt and having to paint commissioned works for a benefactor that were then ridiculed, as evidenced in a letter from Abraham Breughel to Rembrandt's patron Ruffo, dated January 24, 1670, remarking that "a truly great artist paints beautiful nude bodies, whereas an ignorant one tries to hide them in dark and ridiculous gowns."[27] Yet this painting was loved by its benefactor, and it brought the greatest amounts of money known in the art trade, along with great material success and fame to Rembrandt. I imagine, from Held's suggestion, that Aristotle's melancholy,

like Rembrandt's, arose from being in debt and feeling remorse over repayment that sacrifices the poetic sublime for civic success.

Aristotle's placing his right hand on the head of Homer's bust highlights his regard for Homer's wisdom, and perhaps his friendly recognition of what the blind bard has given him. But could Aristotle's gesture be a gesture of sacrifice? How do we know his gesture and expression are not ones of melancholy in sacrifice, over squandering the sublime for the trappings of power? How do we know he does not assuage his debt to Homer by sacrificing him? Placing one's hand before the offering of a sacrifice is said to "transmit" wrongs onto the sacrificed, or, in other interpretations, to transform the sacrifice into a fitting offering. Is there something about Aristotle's art that sacrifices the original giver by way of selling out *poiēsis* for power?[28] Is there something about what Homer gives to Aristotle that creates a legacy of debt, hence obligatory reciprocity? Perhaps Aristotle is pondering how best to reciprocate? How does one express gratitude for a benefactor? Perhaps the melancholy of Aristotle's expression, noted by many commentators, is for the sense of joy and loss in having been given and having sacrificed being given?[29]

Julie Kristeva penned melancholy this way: " [melancholy] conceals an aggressiveness toward the lost object, thus revealing the ambivalence of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning. 'I love that object,' is what that person seems to say about the lost object, 'but even more so I hate it; because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I embed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself.'"[30] In Butler's terms, melancholy permits the loss of the object precisely because it provides a way in which to preserve the object as part of the ego, "letting the object go means paradoxically, not full abandonment of the object but transferring the status of the object from external to internal."[31]

But what is being lost here? In the painting, we are confronted with the gift in the relationship between Aristotle and Homer, with Alexander dangling in between. If the gesture of Aristotle on Homer's head is one in honor of all that Homer has given him, it is certainly not the worldly goods and material success, for the moral failings of such success, as in producing Alexander the Great, must be evident to Aristotle. Rather, one could say Aristotle honors Homer for being the original giver. Aristotle accepts

Homer's gifts and honors him in return by way of circulating his *poiēsis* into the *polis*. Aristotle cites Homer more times than any other ancient author in his *Rhetoric*. Aristotle carries Homer's name and story forward, honoring the original giver as he theorizes a rhetoric for the *polis*. On nearly 50 occasions, Aristotle turns to Homer in the *Rhetoric*. A Homeric archive circulates primarily as *doxa*. *Doxa* can be considered the collection of given beliefs of a people. Studying this Homeric archive of *doxa* in Aristotle's rhetorical theory reveals a cultural strategy, economy, and rhetoric organized in and through ideas and practices of the gift. I write this book as a way of bringing out of the shadows these archaic, preoriginary resources of rhetoric and the gift, reimagining them for twenty-first century purposes.

I proceed in this study through two accounts of rhetoric, one the art, and one the figure prior to and in excess of art, which is not even a figure and is not amenable to figuration. In terms of the figure as art, we are given by Homer an elaborate rhetorical culture of the gift, where rules of giving, principles of gift practice, and public performances of hospitality and sacrifice abound. We might say that Aristotle accepts these gifts and continues to circulate them in the classical *polis* and in the rhetorical theory he fashions for this *polis*. In gift culture, the ideals of hospitality and honor order relations, and civic solidarity and political friendship are ideal outcomes. This book explores the Homeric *poiēsis* of the gift as it circulates still in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* for the *polis*.

This alone is a significant endeavor, to explore the yet unexplored resources of the Homeric gift in Aristotle's rhetoric. The Homeric archive offers a storehouse of supplies for Aristotle as he theorizes rhetoric. As Aristotle draws from this Homeric archive, we can imagine him relating with Homer in a gift economy, accepting the Homeric givens of *poiēsis* in order to generate civic discourse. Moreover, as Aristotle draws from a Homeric archive of gift culture, he circulates the remarkable energy of the gift in the classical *polis* via an art of rhetoric for political, judicial, and cultural discourses.

However, the relationship between Aristotle and Homer, with Alexander in between, calls to question the remedy of the gift. What role ought we to ascribe Aristotelian pedagogy in the education and training of a conqueror, an empire builder, a dominator and colonizer of others? Historical references suggest that Aristotle taught Alexander about Homer

and rhetoric.[32] Aristotle's offering of Homer to Alexander is at once an honoring and a sacrifice of *poiēsis* to politics, with politics being the *technē* of the *polis,* of which the *technē* of rhetoric is pivotal. Aristotle's philosophy was used to shape art out of the *polis* and the rhetor for his expressed purpose of orchestrating the good life, namely, securing the greatest good of happiness in the civic realm.[33] Yet, Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle, and he became one of the most successful conquerors of all time. It becomes problematic for narratives that Aristotle's philosophical approach to rhetoric, signaled as *technē,* advances the orchestration of a democratic *polis* for a free people.[34] As Paul Woodruff describes, at the end of the second hundred years of democracy in Athens, when Athens was being crushed by Macedon, suspicion of philosophy's role in shaping democracy was at a high: "Aristotle had been the teacher of Alexander the Great, and Alexander's successors destroyed Athenian freedoms."[35]

Yet, lurking in Aristotle's philosophical approach to rhetoric, his *technē,* stands something other: Homer and his *poiēsis.* We start by seeing that Aristotle acknowledges Homer as a great benefactor, as a giver of good things, things that are hard to come by, from which many good things can be made. We can discern from Aristotle's rhetorical theory a solidarity between Aristotle and Homer in the orchestration of a civic sphere that allows for security and happiness, the two greatest goods of speech and power affirmed by both. Yet, tracing this solidarity exposes the flip side of the gift, namely sacrifice. We find in this study how Aristotelian *technē* sacrifices Homeric *poiēsis* to achieve its apparatus of power, that is, efficiency and efficacy in authorizing judgment. We see, then, that *poiēsis,* the creative, generative energy of Homer, gets sacrificed to the *polis* for a *telos* and *technē* of judgment.

Judgment is not a bad thing. But there must be something in excess of judgment if tyranny is to be avoided. My desire in this book is to excavate the Homeric excesses lurking in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to help us see another end, this one we can call generosity. Generosity, a quintessential norm of archaic gift culture, is a different way to power, an exit if you will, what Hélène Cixous calls sortie, from the tyranny of a dominating logic eventuating in judgment. This exit is also an entrance to a power more generative, or generous, of possibilities, more democratic in its resources

for a free people. Such generous power always turns to otherness to display an array of possibilities.[36] When we excavate the gift in rhetoric and rhetoric in the gift, we discover resources for resisting tyranny. This is a creative project, one that involves critical work yet imagines something beyond critique. If Homer lurks in Aristotle, something other is already inside. While *technē* appropriates and sacrifices Homer's gifts, Homer's gifts circulate still. What can these Homeric excesses reveal about a rhetoric as gift/giving beyond a rhetoric of judgment producing? Might a creative exercise such as this offer a "giving rhetoric" in keeping with what Aristotle himself called happiness, Cixous, *jouissance,* Schrag, love, Spivak, care, and Johnstone, freedom?

What I offer in this book is a turn not only to study rhetoric and the gift but also to do so from within rhetoric and the gift. To complement the more common turn of turning out toward philosophy to appropriate ideas for rhetorical theory, I turn to rhetoric, its history and theory, and I do so with a creative orientation, what Johnstone would call an orientation of risk.[37] On the one hand, creativity risks prediction and control in the making, as no step in the creative process can be determined by the preceding or current steps; on the other hand, creativity takes risks in making, something a critical orientation does not risk.

As Johnstone theorizes, "a process is technological in the sense when it is a series of steps in which either a given step or the project as a whole determines the sequel to the given step, or else when the question whether the successor is fitting to its predecessors does not arise." In such a process, the means are determined by the end. A technological procedure is distinct from a creative process. A creative process consists of "a series of steps none of which is strictly determined either by the project that the steps contribute to or by the preceding steps in the series, but each of which, once taken, is seen to have been a fitting sequel to its predecessors." One salient feature of a creative process is "that two or more people are cooperating, taking turns to make the step that is retrospectively seen to have been appropriate."[38] A technological process fixes the relationships among the steps in advance and requires no cooperation between those involved in the process.

Johnstone writes that creative communication occurs only among persons, and persons require creative communication. "The only alternatives to creative communication are technological communication and no communication at all. And technological communication is in fact only an unstable phase of a transition that leads to no communication at all."[39] If I exclusively occupy myself with the procedures for winning a rhetorical position so that I simply manipulate my listener in order to win, I am no longer communicating with my listener. My listener stops being a person and becomes a commodity, a thing abstracted—better yet, robbed—from the listener for my benefit. The commodified listener becomes my fetish, rhetoric the procedure for feeding it, and brutalization the outcome. If I am surrounded by things, disconnected from persons, not only will I get no cooperation, but nothing calls for my own cooperation; there will be no occasion for me to exhibit my own humanity.[40] Johnstone writes of the probability that under such circumstances a person could not survive as a person: "His environment would sooner or later brutalize him. From the role of sole technological manipulator of things around him, he would pass to the final phase of his degradation; he would become a thing himself, a thing interacting with other things in a minuet of meaningless transfers of energy."[41] But we will see from excavations of Homeric rhetoric something other already resides within *technē.* I wish to call this something other the archaic rhetorical gift, and I wish to display it for you as I see it circulating in Aristotle's *Technē Rhetorikē.* My hope in doing so is to offer archaic and long-forgotten resources to resist the technologizing of communication that makes us less free, that makes us vulnerable to tyranny, whether as tyrants or tyrannized. My method and my subject are intersectional.

I write this book not only as an academic offering to the study of rhetoric, across the disciplines of rhetoric and communication, rhetoric and composition, English, political science, philosophy, classics, and women's studies but as a way of affirming humanistic offerings to twenty-first century problems. When I first read Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes towards History,* I was struck by his opening remarks, namely, that if we do not find more humanistic ways of orienting ourselves toward history, we will face the greatest tragedy:

> We refer to the invention of technical devices that would make the rapid obliteration of all human life an easily available possibility. Up to now, human stupidity could go to fantastic lengths of destructiveness, yet always mankind's hopes of recovery could be born anew. Indeed, had you reduced the world's population to but one surviving adult, in time all the continents could again be teeming with populaces, if that one hypothetical survivor were but fairly young, and pregnant with a male child. But now presumably a truly New Situation is with us, making it all the more imperative that we learn to cherish the mildly charitable ways of the comic discount. For by nothing less than such humanistic allowances can we hope to forestall (if it can be forestalled) the most idiotic tragedy conceivable: the willful ultimate poisoning of this lovely planet, in conformity with a mistaken heroics of war—and each day, as the sun still rises anew upon the still surviving plenitude, let us piously give thanks to Something or Other not of man's making.[42]

That Burke was writing at the dawning of the atom bomb informs the source of this destruction. We have now lived with the bomb as a threat for several decades, while new threats have entered the human theater. Even to these new threats, Burke's call ought to be heard, namely, that unless we find more humanistic ways to address our more serious threats, we have little hope of not poisoning our planet.

What are these new threats? Giambattista Vico describes the threat of the end of the age of reason as ironic dissolution through lawlessness. This is worth taking some time to consider. For Vico, the course of all nations cycles through the four master tropes, starting with metaphoric identification in the divine age in which men project upon gods their own sensed human attributes and thus live in fear of themselves. From metaphoric identification the ages move to metonymic reduction by which one part of society, the established class, is taken for the whole, hence for the agency of rule. The passage from this heroic age to the human is marked by a shift in perception to a synecdochic mode whereby the plebeians come to see themselves as part of a whole and claim for themselves those attributes originally ascribed to the gods and later claimed by the aristocracy. The course of nations and cultures culminates in ironic consciousness where the distinction between image and reality, and truth and representation, is

announced. Each of these tropical cultures moves from birth to growth, maturity, decadence, and dissolution. The dissolution phases are characterized through various barbarisms, like barbarism of the senses, which characterizes the dissolution of the metaphoric phase of human history, and the barbarism of reason, which characterizes the dissolutions of the ironic phase of human history. This tropical movement is analogous to transformations in social structure from the rule of the gods to dissolution in aristocracy, to the rule of the aristocrats reaching dissolution in the rule of the people reaching dissolution in a state of lawlessness.[43]

We might say human history and culture are presently in the limen of rule of the people and state of lawlessness, with irony as governing trope. Indeed that's what Vico said about the world he inhabited as it became defined by Cartesian rationalism and by criticism. But we might recognize that our contemporary time has accelerated the barbarism of reason, in Vichian terms, with "rule of the people" in nominal form only and lawlessness our new normal. The geopolitical world offers lawlessness aplenty in the ironic state of exception, in which a nation claims itself exempt from its own laws.[44] The cyber world, too, offers lawlessness aplenty in the ironic surveillance and collection by the U.S. National Security Agency of billions of informational data points on persons that can be used, exchanged, and traded upon in ways not yet known, let alone defined, let alone governed by law, despite fundamentally democratic rights of privacy at stake.

Can doing history and theory otherwise, of anything, but perhaps in particular of rhetoric, offer resources for cycling in new directions the "course of nations," so to speak in Vichian terms? Yes, of course. Despite the emphasis on STEM education to solve world problems, humanistic approaches to twenty-first century problem solving should not be trivialized, underestimated, or ignored. Humanistic theorizing matters, and this is a classical as well as a contemporary idea. Aristotle offers the idea that theorizing how a people judge civic affairs works to ensure that the true and the just can reign over their inferiors (1355a21–22). Burke advises that theorizing "humanistic allowances," for example, the comic attitude, offers the "hope to forestall (if it can be forestalled) the most idiotic tragedy conceivable: the willful ultimate poisoning of this lovely planet, in conformity with the mistaken heroics of war."[45] Unending war perhaps is the milita-

ristic avoidance of the atom bomb ending war, but Burke calls for another way, a humanistic way, through history and theory. I side with Burke. And I side with Cixous, who sides with the poets, who she says all know that "whatever is thinkable is real."[46] In other words, we can create our way out of problems, oppression, dehumanization, othering, and eradication by imagining an elsewhere and by writing ourselves out of our histories into new worlds and into new ways of relating. Moreover, I take inspiration from Cixous on writing, as in the act of writing this very book is its own performance of a new way: "There has to be somewhere else, I tell myself. And everyone knows that to go somewhere else there are routes, signs, 'maps'—for an exploration, a trip—That's what books are. Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds."[47]

The invention of new worlds via humanistic theory is, too, at the heart of Spivak's work, as can be seen across her 30 years of writing and speaking compiled and introduced in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization.* Across her extensive and eloquent work, Spivak calls for "re-imagining the planet," namely, the "subject as a planetary accident": "If we imagine ourselves as planetary accidents rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away."[48] She then goes on to emphasize that "we must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mind-set."[49] And this education she calls an aesthetic one, humanistic in character and training. For Spivak, humanistic education can do real work to create equitable and humanizing relationships in a state of globalization. Take as one of her examples how educating ourselves into an imaginative mind-set of being "planetary accidents" benefits our ability "to think the migrant as well as the recipient of foreign aid in the species of alterity, not simply as the white person's burden."[50] In turn after turn, she writes of the imperative of this aesthetic training of the imagination for epistemological performance of a different kind. And this performance of a different kind seems to be, in short, a performance of preoriginary

responsibility, a sense of giving as a human right not merely as a responsibility. And for Spivak, the way to achieve this mind-set is through rigorous and unending humanistic training. In her words: "I need to learn from you what you practice. I need it even if you didn't want to share a bit of my pie; but there's something I want to give you, which will make our shared practice flourish. You don't know, and I didn't know, that civility requires your practice of responsibility as pre-originary right."[51]

By way of preview, here is what I wish to give. In chapter 1, I review the traditional ways of relating Homer and Aristotle in rhetorical history and theory, all of which proceed without seeing the gift on either a material or a meta-level. I work to expose the lacunae or blind spots of existing traditions of history and theory writing. These lacunae give rise to the need for new ways of seeing, not to replace the old, for that just proliferates blind spots but, rather, to develop all the more ways of seeing. Of course, any new way of seeing will also have its blind spots that, if not critically and creatively explored, risk remaining. The task of rhetorical and creative history and theory writing then is to run-on, so to speak, to never rest, to be turning otherwise for becoming otherwise. By becoming otherwise, I mean not only becoming different but becoming wise about difference. Becoming otherwise performs the gift that keeps on giving. Reoriented rhetorically and creatively, I proceed in chapter 2 to explore otherwise various foundational assumptions and approaches to one particular dimension of this tradition, namely, the marginalization of Homer in the history of rhetoric. Chapter 2 offers other ways of recognizing Homer prior to and in excess of *technē*. In chapters 3–5, I work to explore how Aristotle appropriates Homer in his *technē* of rhetoric, and how a Homeric *poiēsis* of the gift circulates in Aristotle's rhetorical theory. When gathering the research that comprises chapters 3–5, I begin to see a politics of appropriation at play, namely, Aristotle makes particular choices about how to receive what Homer gives. I see these choices displaying a politics at work in which Homeric *poiēsis* of the gift is transfigured into the *technē* of the *polis*. In chapter 6, I explore this political display (and/or perhaps this display as political). In doing so, incommensurability, something that takes us beyond the possibility of exchange, can be seen between Homeric *poiēsis* and Aristotelian *technē*. We begin to see Homeric rhetoric as both prior

to and in excess of *technē*, though in ways that are at once *a*-teleological, *a*-representational, *a*-linear, and *a*-temporal. I use the alpha privative here, not the alpha negative. Whereas the negative sacrifices Homer for the purposes of developing the *polis*, I posit the idea that the privative can liberate Homer from appropriation and allow us to learn from his preoriginary pragma. In sum, in chapters 3–5 I explore Aristotle's circulation of Homer as a wellspring of resource for a *technē* of rhetoric designed to support the *polis*. In chapter 6 I expose the sacrifice of Homer in Aristotle's rhetoric and expose how this sacrifice serves *technē*, a hallmark apparatus of *polis* power, an apparatus neither always nor necessarily aligned with democratic power let alone freedom or relationality beyond representation and domination. In this exploration of Homer in Aristotle, I trace how *technē* sacrifices the gift, so that the gift we get on the other side of the gift's having gone through the technical apparatus is something quite different than the gift had been. Likewise, something about rhetoric is not reducible to *technē*, and the rhetoric we are given on the other side of rhetoric's having gone through its technical transfiguration is also different than the rhetoric prior to, or in excess of, *technē*.

In chapter 7, I explore how this ancient rhetorical theory of gift/giving can be brought to bear on contemporary communication. I exercise this history and theory of rhetoric and the gift on the question of ironic lawlessness in the state of exception. Drawing from Homeric and Aristotelian rhetorical resources, I see what can be offered by way of rhetoric, both the particular form of rhetoric's art and the universal form of the rhetorical gift, to generate justice. We will see even in states of exception, and perhaps especially so, how rhetoric and the gift can offer us a way to our free, just, and generous relations.

On the whole, I could describe this book in this way: I explore the problems and possibilities for a theory of rhetoric and as gift/giving created from the friction in *Technē Rhetorikē* between Aristotle and Homer, or, said another way, between *technē* and *poiēsis*, and still another way, between the *polis* and the gift. And I leverage this theory for creating, imagining, and offering humanistic resource to crisis conditions unique to our ironic age, especially in the dissolution phase of this age. As I write, I do so by way of offering a reflexive rhetoric of the gift, both critical and creative,

recognizing the impossibility of the gift, and communicating anyway for the love of giving and communicating. My desire is greater than my anxiety. And Georges Bataille insists anxiety be gone, from which I take assurance: "I insist on the fact that, to freedom of mind, the search for a solution is an exuberance, a superfluity, this gives it an incomparable force. To solve political problems becomes difficult for those who allow anxiety alone to pose them. It is necessary for anxiety to pose them. But their solution demands at a certain point the removal of this anxiety."[52]