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Un/Composing (Visual) Rhetorics: A (Strange) Comic(s) View of Writing in the Age of New Media

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Un/Composing (Visual) Rhetorics:
A (Strange) Comic(s) View of Writing
in the Age of New Media

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation finds its exigency in "The 9/11 Commission Report," and specifically its claim that "a failure of imagination" that dismisses possibilities relates to the work currently in focus within rhetoric and composition studies as it relates to writing (with) new media. My argument relies on the underdeveloped concept of 'imagination' in composition as a way to argue for an alternate theoretical framework for addressing what writing (with) new media entails as a growing form of art. As such, I take up Geoff Sirc's invitation to 'remake' his *English Composition as a Happening* with all of its references to avant-garde art as conceptualized in Allan Kaprow's figure of the *unartist* and Dick Higgins calls for *intermedia* practices. Both of these concepts appear in the *unart* of comics – an 'art' for artists who have left their 'homes' in disciplinary iterations of art (*unart*) and for artists who are more concerned with working between media than they are within a specific medium (*intermedia*). Comics, as I use the term, does not refer to a specific medium, but works as a form of thought in the Deleuzian sense: a sort of intuition exercised by imagination engaged in the continuous discovery of possibilities.

Building on 'post-pedagogical' theories of invention—Italo Calvino, Byron Hawk, Cynthia Haynes, Gregory Ulmer—avant-garde writing and art practices (as it relates to new media)—Maurice Blanchot, Andre Breton, Friedrich Kittler, Jean-

Francois Lyotard—and institutional rhetorics—Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Bill Readings, Thomas Rickert—I propose a 'strange' manner of writing that foregoes the demands of argumentative writing in favor of a playful writing that attunes itself to imaginative possibilities of discovery. To write strangely connotes an unconventional approach to composition that would offer us the opportunities to think about 'the coming composition' as we invent new forms and ways of thinking according to methods invented for the occasion. In inventing new forms by thinking in terms of intermedia, we can realize the goal of Lyotard's postmodern writer: to present (allusions to) the unpresentable. If we are to address the 'failure of imagination' in institutional practice and in 'the scene of teaching,' we need to be willing to be nomadic as both artists AND writers. Comics 'artists,' or those who I refere to as *unartists*, are adept at demonstrating ways in which this work can proceed, especially if we think of comics in terms of Haynes' slash-technology that cuts through the divisions between media. In this dissertation, comics function as a form of thought that extends 'multimodal composition' and 'art' to their limits in order to suggest a strangely imaginative composition capable of attending to the disast(e)rous 'failure of imagination.'

DEDICATION

The word *dedication* means to 'give of oneself to some purpose.' No one has taught me the meaning of giving of oneself with the utmost patience, kindness, and love as my father, Antonio da Conceiçáo Figueiredo. Without him, this work would not have been possible. Com saudades, dedico esta dissertação em sua memória.

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Imagining the Coming Composition

"Give 'em the boot, the roots, the radicals/
Give 'em the boot, you know I'm a radical..."

~ Rancid, "Roots Radicals"

"At a time when wise men peered/through glass tubes
toward the sky/the heavens changed in predictable
ways/and one man was able to find/that he had
thought he found the answer/and he was quick to
write his revelation/but as they were scrutinized/in his
colleagues eyes/he soon became a mockery/don't tell
me about the answer/'cause then another one will come
along soon/I don't believe you have the answer/I've got
ideas too/but if you've got enough naïveté/and you've
got conviction/then the answer is perfect for you..."

~ Bad Religion, "The Answer"

I *would prefer not to write 'purely.'*[1] The predictability of such writing holds little interest and even less activity by providing (revelatory) answers with conviction, coded as acceptable. As Maurice Blanchot points out in a reading of Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," 'pure' writing "can only be that of the copyist (rewriting)" (*Writing* 145). And yet, it is Bartleby's refusal to write purely that disrupts the *unnamed* narrator's refusal to write at all, contented to direct other *scriveners* to write and correct their errors. It is this refusal that I

look to affirm – a passive, passionate, patient writing that precedes, and therefore exceeds, any criterion of acceptable writing, anything that falls outside of the *reproduction* of essays (pure writing) that we have seen so often. And Bartleby's refusal prompts the *unnamed* narrator to take up a quill and write for the first time, waiving "the biographies of all other scriveners, for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener, the strangest one I ever saw, or heard of. While, of other law-copyists, I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done" – 'a few passages' (aphorisms) that jeopardize his conviction that the "easiest way of life is the best" (*Melville* 39-40). For the unnamed narrator, the easiest way of life is to maintain the letter of the law, to write full biographies word-for-word, to maintain his *conviction* toward the 'easiest way of life is best' and remain a *convict* of 'pure writing.' Even in writing Bartleby's "little narrative," the narrator continues writing purely, copying what he observes, describing it in detail, attempting to give a clear picture of his former scrivener. In concluding, the narrator explains his purpose for writing: "if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify" (*Melville* 73). Unable to gratify his curiosity, he writes, in an attempt to make sense of Bartleby's (excessive) refusal.

David Bartholomae tells us of a similar project in "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum" when he discusses Quentin Pierce's essay for an assignment about Jean-Paul Sartre. As Bartholomae reports, "I knew from the first week that I was going to fail them; in fact, I knew I was going to preside over a curriculum that spent 14 weeks slowly and inevitably demonstrating their failures" (*Writing* 313). He was not prepared to receive Quentin's essay, he did not know how to respond to it, he could only ignore it even though it was the "only memorable paper [he] received from that class" (*Writing* 314). Like Bartleby's

unnamed narrator (henceforth, Bartleby), Bartholomae's initial criterion of what was acceptable ("normal") writing had been exceeded. Quentin *preferred not to write purely*, and wrote according this preference, producing an essay that left Bartholomae curious and unsure about what he was doing teaching *basic writing*. This is not to say that Bartholomae did not sense that Quentin's essay demonstrated a level of "skillful performance in words" (Writing 314); indeed, Bartholomae recognized that the "paper was a written document of some considerable skill and force – more skill and force, for example, than I saw in many of the 'normal' and acceptable papers I read" (*Writing* 314). While Bartholomae deals specifically with 'basic writing,' his perspectives apply to general education writing courses that attempt to produce writers who can make *effective* arguments and, in effect, normalize students with pedagogical methods that emphasize skills, courses that postpone "'real' reading and writing" that enforce "the very cultural divisions that [stand] as the defining markers of the problem with education and its teachers" (*Writing* 315). And despite current trends toward avant-garde writing pedagogies, institutional and disciplinary demands remain focused on offering students a set of skills that they will *need* when they begin 'real' reading and writing – reading and writing that will begin only after they learn how to perpetuate what they learn in university writing courses.[2] In other words, a skills-based pedagogical approach – such as the one detailed by the current Council of Writing Program Administrator's (CWPA), which includes writing multiple drafts, focusing on a purpose, and developing effective arguments – churns out copyists (scriveners) by seeking to "to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition" since helping "students demonstrate these outcomes requires expert understanding of how students actually learn to write" (CWPA). Thinking that "experts" understand how students "actually learn to write" better than students themselves is (actually) to keep students from learning to write in their own ways. Its *as if* teaching these writers to write to the letter of the law could *the*

answer to a *disaster* that has no (single) answer (e.g., an answer to the question concerning how to avoid another terrorist attack the likes of which we saw on September 11, 2001).[3] Pedagogically, regularizing the outcomes for student writing implicates pedagogues in the regulation of thought as manifested through writing.

Commenting on Bartholomae's essay, Thomas Rickert explains some the implications for traditional writing pedagogy: "It is not so much that pedagogy fails as that pedagogy is implicated at every turn in the structures that contribute to Pierce's nihilism and daily humiliation. Pierce knows all too well that 'effective communication' is a trap for him" (*Acts* 192). But it would be a mistake to see Quentin's work – and Bartleby's refusal – as something to replace the accepted writing (practices) lest the excessive displaces and replaces current assessment standards and procedures. Instead, Rickert chooses to see Quentin's essay as a performative (singular) act (moment) that reflects "his ability to cut through [his servitude to the institution], to refuse to believe in a fantasy of writing for the university as being somehow liberating, empowering, or even meaningful" (*Acts* 194). This, however, does not mean that Rickert's pedagogical manner is devoid of meaning; rather, he sees the act of writing as meaning in itself, as an inventive moment; or, to stretch Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," Quentin invents the university by writing *strangely* with his refusal to write in service to/for the university, and "to learn to speak our language" (*Writing* 60). He doesn't believe that Bartholomae (or the university) has ~~the~~ answers because he has ideas too; he's not naïve, but he asserts his failure by performing in such an excessive manner that Bartholomae is left to his own devices to find meaning in Quentin's essay, as if he were looking at an avant-garde art*work*. Quentin's refusal, like Bartleby's, appears in 'a few passages,' as aphoristic performances (as in the styles of Nietzsche and Benjamin), which Bartholomae then applies to his own pedagogical perspective(s). And Rickert also looks at the essay to provide an alternate

perspective, one that he recognizes may be misread: "[H]e sets out the possibility for a writing that would be otherwise, that would not display in each grammatically correct line, in each thesis proved and supported, in each ending skillfully reached and concluded, the utter slavishness and impoverishment of what counts as 'good' writing in the academy" (*Acts* 195). Bartholomae and Rickert share a common perspective on what Quentin's essay presents: that institutional and disciplinary demands have become so fixed that the dominant pedagogical methods currently in play have turned writing into basic writing, demanding that students write purely (re/produce writing) according institutionally defined standards.[4]

Unlike Bartholomae, Rickert suggests a pedagogy imbued with risk, one that he finds within Geoffrey Sirc's DIY (do-it-yourself) 'punk pedagogy. Punk, as a state of mind, does not merely refuse the answer(s) that a writing discipline offers its disciples, but thrusts off any answers that have been proceduralized. Instead, like Quentin, a punk pedagogy pays no heed to the authorized forms of writing – in favor of standard or against those standards – proposed by institutionalized or academic standards, but attempts to exceed those demands to present the *unpresentable* (Lyotard). Sirc recognizes this element of Quentin's essay when he writes: "Quentin, then, is the excess that our pedagogy cannot process, the poison in our human machine. But Quentin is also the flower in our dustbin, one whose seed lay not-so-dormant (*the only memorable paper*) for eighteen years until it blossomed in 'The Tidy House'" (*English* 261). And Rickert notes "Sirc's pun on 'process' as a statement on the limits of process pedagogy" (*Acts* 192). A pedagogy that risks would extend the limits of what we can process by allowing students to develop ever-changing processes in their writing. What Quentin produced was more than a mere refusal of the institution; it was also a commentary on the limitations of a Modernist (generalizable) pedagogy, which Sirc describes as being "all about limits" and suggests that these "may be limits we no longer want to define our

composition" (*English* 36). Quentin, in exceeding the limits of institutional acceptability, refuses "to enable the ritual" of 'pure' writing any "further" (Sirc, *English* 260), and he becomes Lyotard's *postmodern writer:*

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the texts he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*: hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. Post modern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*). (Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition* 81)

Indeed, as Bartholomae writes, he was not prepared for Quentin's essay; it had come too soon, too soon for not only his ability to manage the essay and too soon for what pedagogy was prepared to address. By the time that he wrote "The Tidy House," Bartholomae was already recognizing some of the faults in disciplinary perspectives of 'basic writing' programs, particularly that "a provisional position has become fixed, naturalized" (*Writing* 325) – what Blanchot calls *pure writing*.

Sirc's conceptualization of English Composition as a Happening and 'punk pedagogy' provides a way out of the fixed position with his preference not to allow composition to be defined by those limits. Moreover, Quentin's essay risks failure according to a determining judgment, but that risk positions him as a *postmodern*

writer, a risk that Bartholomae, Rickert and Sirc bear witness to as a common obstruction of English Composition, and one where students serve institutions and their (ir)respective practices (cf. CWPA). Like Sirc, I would prefer to allow inhabitants of writing "a sense of the sublime" and "offer compelling environments in which to inhabit situations of writing instruction" (*English* 1-2). However, what follows is not a mere reiteration of Sirc's work – that would be to write purely. Instead, I receive[4] his "salute" for "the next remake of *English Composition as a Happening*" (*English* 294) and write (of) the disaster[6] – simultaneously the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and composition's continued focus on skills-based pedagogy – and write strangely.[7] Indeed, this imaginative manner of writing promotes "writing Acts that shift control of the dominant loci of contention from teacher to student [...] that refuses to mirror the society of control with a pedagogy of control" (Rickert, *Acts* 163). Such a radically passive writing (pedagogy) does not propose "an effort to construct a 'new' ethic" or "to produce any 'new' values," but to allow "*another* ethic" to "enter our conversations" (Haynes, "The Ethico-Political Agon" 304). In other words, Rickert suggests a *postpedagogy* that does not attempt "a reversal of valuation (as in a binary reversal or negative deconstruction) achieved through oppositional strategies, but [as] a transvaluation (in the Nietzschean sense[8]) achieved through production" (*Acts* 173).

Versus its mis/re/presentation by folks suspicious of postmodernist critiques, *postpedagogy* does not resist meaning per se, but espouses a proliferation of meanings. In this sense, *postpedagogy* does not suggest that pedagogy is at its end; rather, it recognizes recognition that we are always already in a pedagogical state of being, that we are never finished learning. *Postpedagogy*, then, aims to exceed the Modernist limits that Sirc finds have defined institutionally appropriate writing in order to 'formulate the rules of *what will have been done*' through a productive imagination.[9] Byron Hawk explains that the "problem with excluding this larger

role of the imagination is that it reduces thinking to generic inventional strategies that are then plugged into a linear and acontextual model of the composing process" and that the appeal of the imagination is that it does not "determine the path of inquiry," but "continually sets that inquiry in motion" (*Counterhistory* 102), similar to Gregory Ulmer's concepts of *conduction* and *heuretics*.[10]

Hawk's view echoes what William A. Covino suggests in *Magic Rhetoric, and Literacy*: "What human imagination can maintain, perhaps, is an appreciation for 'absolute refusal' that is our only hope" (108). Again, Bartleby's refusal rears its head – to refuse to write purely is to refuse, as Quentin does, *the answer* in favor of inventing the composition(s) to come. As Lyotard explains in *The Postmodern Condition*, the imagination "allows one either to make a new move or to change the rules of the game" (52) – the same rules that would 'slowly and inevitably' work to demonstrate 'Quentin's failure.' Quentin's refusal to write purely, as well as Bartleby's, is perhaps the production of the coming composition[11] that invents new rules for writing as it acts out the practices of writing. If current trends are any sign, writing will take form as both image and text: comics.[12] However, before continuing with a discussion of comics, I want to focus on what is at stake in this call for revitalizing the imagination for rhetoric and composition.

"A Failure of Imagination"

These are the words of former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz to former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, reported by the 9/11 Commission; it was, they write, "a mind-set that dismissed possibilities" (National Commission 336). This is precisely the sort of mindset that Hawk challenges in his discussion of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's secondary imagination, and

that *postpedagogical manners*[13] offer. "Such a view of creative invention and proliferation," Hawk tells us, "not only opens method to the moment but also means that method is not something that pre-exists and then mediates subject and object as a third term [the excessive]" (*Counterhistory* 109). In part, the failure that Wolfowitz describes is one that ignores the third (excessive) term Hawk finds absent in current writing pedagogy, and one that can have disastrous consequences. Chapter 11 of the Commissions report ("Foresight—And Hindsight") explains:

> In composing this narrative, we have tried to remember that we write with the benefit and handicap of hindsight. Hindsight can sometimes see the past clearly—with 20/20 vision. But the path of what happened is so brightly lit that it places everything else more deeply into shadow. Commenting on Pearl Harbor, Roberta Wohlstetter found it "much easier *after* the event to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant signals. After the event, of course, a signal is always crystal clear; we can now see what disaster it was signaling since the disaster has occurred. But before the event it is obscure and pregnant with conflicting meanings" (National Commission 339)

The lack of foresight, the (in)ability to imagine possibilities. What the Commission acknowledges here in the handicap of hindsight, what 'this narrative' indicates, is not the need to learn from the past, but to bear witness to what the imagination offers ('free play'), and to work without (a pre-determined) criteria (which is not to say "no criteria") to formulate *what will have been* since "the limits of what people then could reasonably have known or done" (National Commission 339)

lacked the sufficient foresight. Even more telling is the Commission's use of the "reasonable," for what constitutes reason failed to defer the disaster. Likewise, reason, and reasonable writing, being able to focus on a purpose in order to develop effective arguments, contains no risk (and therefore, the utmost risk[14]) and dismisses the possibilities of writing otherwise.

Again, Blanchot aphorizes:

Fragmentary writing is risk, it would seem: risk itself. It is not based on any theory, nor does it introduce a practice one could define as *interruption.* Interrupted, it goes on. Interrogating itself, it does not co-opt the question but suspends it (without maintaining it) as nonresponse. Thus, if it claims that its time comes only when the whole—at least ideally—is realized, this is because that time is never sure, but is the absence of time, absence in a nonnegative sense, time anterior to all past-present, as well as posterior to every possibility of a present yet to come. (*Writing* 59-60)

Blanchot performs the risk of *aphorism*, but a risk with the power of the refusals that Bartleby and Quentin pose – a 'nonresponse' – and in doing so becomes the *postmodern writer* (a refugee from reason) that Lyotard adopts. The risk of refusal to write reasonably, as Covino suggests, may be the hope of an imaginative approach the 9/11 Commission finds necessary. And yet, even as the Commission's report critiques institutional bureaucracy for a lack of imagination, they also propose the paradoxical solution of finding "a way of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination" (National Commission 344), which would merely position imagination in the service of institutional standards and, therefore, lose its risk.

Imagining the Coming Composition

The imagination cannot be applied in any tradition/al way – which would be a form a critique[15] – but may be produced without a pre-established valuation system. In his discussion of the Berlin Wall and of the 'Gulf situation' in1990, Lyotard explains that critique develops "in the empty interior space that the system maintains and protects within itself"; yet, even within those systems "some 'blanks' always remain in the 'text,' whatever text it is" (*Political Writings* 120). For the 9/11 Commission, these blanks are "the resource[s] of critique" (Lyotard, *Political Writings* 120) that they recognize in Wolfowitz's phrase: "a failure of imagination." But the failure was not of imagination, but the lack of imagination, an approach that focuses more on critique and assessment than on potentialities of writing (i.e., a capacity for coming into being through writing),[16] perhaps as a method to protect itself. Still, if there is one lesson that can be garnered from the report and the events of 9/11, it is that *the system's methods do not suffice*. The same 'blanks' that institutions use as a "resource of critique" allow for "something besides critique: imagination" (Lyotard, *Political Writings* 120), a *productive* and provocative imagination. Integrating the imagination into the political, which the Commission suggests is necessary, only positions it as a part of the letter of the law that 'dismissed possibilities.'

Instead, Lyotard's *postmodern writer*, in his ability to work without pre-established rules, works beyond the limits of what is acceptable in order to affirm alternate possibilities. As a "philosopher," the *postmodern writer* takes up Friedrich Nietzsche's demand to "take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment *beneath* himself. This demand follows from an insight which I was first to formulate: that *there are altogether no moral facts*" (Portable 501). Even in its desire to integrate the imagination in the service of institutional practices, the Commission positions itself against what it recognizes as 'evil' – terrorism – but the imagination occupies *no place* within this distinction, it takes *no-thing* for granted.

Nietzsche explains: "Moral judgments […] belong to a stage of ignorance at which the very concept of the real and the distinction between what is real and imaginary, are still lacking; thus 'truth,' at this stage, designates all sorts of things which we today call 'imaginings' (*Portable* 501).[17] At this point, the *postmodern writer's* desire to write *what will have been*, writing to invent or discover the rules of additional potentialities of writing, exceeds the values of institutional practices in order to invent valuations for what functions beyond institutional practices, which is precisely what the Commission recommends despite their call to appropriate the imagination as a part of the system:

> The men and women of the World War II generation rose to the challenges of the 1940s and 1950s. They restructured the government so that it could protect the country. That is now the job of the generation that experienced 9/11. Those attacks showed, emphatically, that ways of doing business rooted in a different era are not just good enough. Americans should not settle for incremental, ad hoc adjustments to a system designed generations ago for a world that no longer exists. (National Commission 399)

This sounds remarkably like a call for a *post-modern* politics, in the Lyotardian sense. The presented, the presentable, has not worked to defer the *disaster* and the *disaster* is always approaching, and the fixed letter of the law has not gone far enough. Adjustments to a system *rooted* in the rhetorical practices, thinking and assessment appear to have been stripped of their power, laid bare by Lyotard's *ephemeral skin* – the excessive potential of the figural (image).[18] And, "it is necessary that we strengthen our imagination, our palpative potential [*puissance*] until – rather than to think, we are not thinkers – until a producer-body, determines it; the idea of a passage over nothing, which produces, its passage" (Lyotard, *Libidinal* 16). Put simply, the imagination does not think (itself), but cuts

through oppositional forces with "ephemeral explosions or libidinal intensities" (Lyotard, *Libidinal* 18) not to record, but to write other/wise.[19]

Toward a (Post)Pedagogical Writing

So, what has this to do with composition (pedagogy)? Everything! The pedagogical imperative to provide students with what they *need* to succeed in the university and postponing the 'real' writing that they will be required to complete later still remains a way of enforcing "the very cultural divisions that [stand] as the defining markers of the problem with education and its teachers" (Bartholomae, *Writing* 315), the same problems that the 9/11 Commission acknowledges as a 'failure of imagination.'[20] As pedagogues, we occupy a political position, one, if current pedagogical theory is any sign, that remains grounded within institutional perspectives of being able to provide students with the *necessary skills* to succeed in the perpetuation of institutional practices. Diane Davis explains as much when she writes, "[James] Berlin's article ["Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class"] exposed the extent to which politics is always driving any/every rhetoric of composition and its corresponding pedagogy, the extent to which power/knowledge in the classroom is ideologically saturated" (*Breaking* 209; cf. Berlin, *Rhetoric* 189). Davis continues: "Even the teaching of composition, as Berlin suggests, is the teaching of a world view: it assumes and then propagates a particular relationship among the writer, the reader, language, and 'reality,' and from there it peddles assumptions about what is, what ought to be, and what can be changed. *This is a seriously political business*" (*Breaking* 209-10; original emphasis). A post (future) writing would leave these assumptions at the center of (current) traditional composition pedagogy and move to the wayside, the gutter[21] where thought can open up possibilities of "thinking the unthought" (Davis, *Breaking* 208).

The gutter here is a direct reference to the space between panels in comics, the space where Scott McCloud observes that readers and writers insert themselves to make links between panels. It is no coincidence that comics seem to fit the *postmodern writer* so well since they incorporate both word and image (hybrid works), as I alluded to earlier. As McCloud observes, "in the **limbo** of the gutter, **human imagination** takes two separate images and **transforms** them into a single idea" (*Understanding* 66). 'Limbo' seems a fitting word in the current setting, indicating a state of uncertainty, a third position that Hawk and Davis offer writing. Moreover, the transformation that McCloud imagines takes place in the excluded excess (an abyss? perhaps an abysmal space?[22]), that which has yet to be thought. Unknowingly, McCloud taps into the necessity to *link* that Lyotard describes in *The Differend*[23] (can you see the linkages here?). But the 'imagination' that McCloud points to is not governed by an 'ought,' but a necessity – Lyotard cautions us to not "confuse necessity with obligation. If there is a *must (Il faut)*, it is not a *You ought to (Vous devez)*" (*Differend* 80). These linkages, then, become imaginatively inventive, exploring potentialities that have yet to be thought or written, through unexpected arrangements. The preference *not to write purely* opens up what would otherwise be *dismissed possibilities* given that linking "is necessary," but not "a particular linkage" (Lyotard, *Differend* 134; cf. Vitanza, "Three Countertheses"), and to which McCloud makes no claim. Even an inspectional reading of *Understanding Comics* suggests that McCloud sees his analysis of, and the medium of, comics as contingent: "It's only through **wandering** that any of us ever get a solid sense of where we want to go. And no matter how many worthwhile destinations have been visited by earlier generations -- there's always a chance that **yours** doesn't exist on **any map** yet, because it has yet to be **discovered**" (*Understanding* 238; original emphasis). However, what comics offer rhetoric and composition extends beyond the gutter, an 'idiom' that has so often been addressed; rather, comics engages the available means of production that Lyotard

associates with *postmodern writing: discourse* (word) AND *figure* (image) – each of which have found their ways into the composition classroom as 'multimodal' writing.

Still, approaches to multimodal writing remain focused on critique or argumentation, which offers a set of possible (worthwhile) directions, but does not take into account the chances of finding unthought possibilities that fall outside (between) that set. Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón provide an example of the former with their 'graphic adaptation' of the 9/11 Commission Report. The adaptation, as Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton write in the foreword, affords the 9/11 Commission "the opportunity to bring the work of the 9/11 Commission to the attention of a new set of readers. We commend the talented graphic artists of this edition for their close adherence to the findings, recommendation, spirit, and tone of the original Commission Report" (ix). Here, the opportunities that multimodal writing affords writers takes a back seat to ~~re~~presenting a truncated version of the original report, closely adhering to institutional recommendations even while the report implores readers to think the unthought, and to allow a free play of the imagination to take alternate routes.[24] For Walter Ong, comics present an avant-garde approach to writing, one that "is often genuinely *avant-garde*—representing (with understandable inaccuracy and exaggeration) the sensibilities everybody is on the way to developing, only well ahead of the mass of people" (Heer 100). In Ong's estimation of comics, the adaptation of the 9/11 Commission report does little to foresee the possibilities of multimodal writing in its contentment to directly represent the original. Indeed, Ong sees the potential of comics to write strangely and with inaccuracy to see what may arise out of the imagination. Ong continues:

For the back of the hostility which, in many semi-educated circles, still cripples an intelligent approach to the problems of the modern artist, lies the supposition (in part an heritage from Rousseau, who may be followed in face where he is disowned in principle) that the common man is always right in his attitudes and instincts and that it is high time effete "modern" artists and writers returned to him and his point of view, whatever that is. But there seems to be signs that the common man, in his own instinctive way, has perhaps vague symptoms of the disease supposed to be the prerogative of the decadent intellectual. Popular art—and if there was ever popular art, it is the comic strip—is like the thing most opposed to. (Heer 101)

If we are to believe Ong, comics present themselves as a way to popularize a *postmodern writing* that takes into account that which has led to the 'decay' of dialogue, from "the art of discourse to the art of reason" as he details in *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. Whether 'decadent intellectuals' recognize the current effects of Ramism on how institutions function, there exists a focus, a rootedness, on what 'students' *need* as institutionally mandated by the pre-established criteria and curricula that handicaps the ability of imagination to wander, explore, and experiment at, within, and across excluded possibilities.

In a reading of Ong's *Ramus*, Haynes explains that the problem for composition lies at the heart of pedagogy where "reason is perfected in pedagogy, for pedagogy, by pedagogues" ("Writing Offshore" 673), which locates writing in (the service of) institutions. One suggestion that Haynes proposes is akin to the 9/11 Commission's desire to be more imaginative: "We must be (t)reasonous. We must be intensive and hospitable; we must be without way" (711). However, while the Commission seeks an imaginative *method in*

the service of institutional stability, imagination pays no heed to (any single) *method* or *service*, but plays in an ungrounded sliver (perhaps a *slash*). Moreover, an imaginative postpedagogy would discard "whys" in favor of intensive performances that may be productively (t)reasonous, "as a site where strange explorations are appreciated, where aesthetic criteria still come into play, but criteria not merely cribbed off an endless, formalist tape-loop" (Sirc, *English* 32; qtd. in Haynes, "Writing Offshore" 710). Building on Vitanza's "Three Counterthesis," Haynes suggests that we turn to writing nomadically, an ungrounded (non)position that detaches itself from institutionally accepted practices as a way to wander through writing, "*testing contradictions*" instead of "taking a position" ("Writing Offshore" 715). Such is the "art consciousness to daily life" that Sirc proposes in "Box Logic," an approach geared toward "attempts to use technology to infuse contemporary composition instruction with a spirit of the neo-avant-garde" (146). Such is Marshall McLuhan's perspective that "comics provide a useful approach to understanding the TV image [digital media]" (*Understanding* 164) that may remind "us of all the life and faculty that we have omitted from our daily lives" (*Understanding* 167). Such is Allan Kaprow's *unartist*, "who is engaged in changing jobs" (*Understanding* 102). Such is the task of Lyotard's *philosopher* – a postmodern writer and artist exceeding pre-established criteria in order to continually formulate the rules of what will have been. And perhaps, such a pedagogical manner would have us *uncomposition* ourselves from institutional demands to write purely so that we may explore what other possibilities present themselves in Acts of writing. Comics provide such a way to begin thinking about writing as postmoderns. McCloud's six steps – (1) Idea, (2) Form, (3) Idiom, (4) Structure, (5) Craft, (6) Surface – of creating such work gestures toward such a writing, including the progression of this dissertation.

While I use McCloud's six steps as a framework for this dissertation, the manifestations of the chapters do not (always) directly correlate to the descriptions that he provides for each step. The six steps, or chapters, are subdivided through three parts: knowing, doing, and making. The first three chapters constitute the 'knowing,' while the last two chapters comprise the 'doing,' and the 'making' consists of the design, writing, and production of this dissertation. To explain how I use McCloud's six steps, the following chapter descriptions offer a brief introduction into how I am using comics in this dissertation. Put simply, I do not mean to use comics as such to discuss rhetoric and composition's current move toward digital technology; instead, comics suggest something else, and what they suggest is similar to why Duchamp interests Sirc: "showing how alternative technologies and strategies can change fundamental compositional questions" (*English* 35).

In addition, I will also be designing the dissertation in such a way to perform the work that I propose. As you've probably already noticed, the 'tabs' on the side of each page will indicate a color associated with each chapter. The rationale for this color scheme comes from the Department of Homeland Security's *advisory system*: (1) Red (step 1), (2) Orange (step 2), (3) Yellow (step 3), (4) Blue (step 4), and (5) Green (steps 5 and 6). For the purpose of this dissertation, I had to add an additional color (violet) in order to be able to offer

Homeland Security Advisory System:
Color-coded Threat Level

a color for each chapter.

In *Chapter I* – idea (concept behind the idea): "There's a Stranger in My Composition" – I work through a survey, a sort of literature review, of what has already been said in relation to *postpedagogies*, highlighting ways in which composition theorists have discussed comics with specific examples of how these theory-heads have thought of *postmodern writing*. These current theoretical approaches to rhetoric and composition have begun to do away with the prerogatives of what Ong calls 'decadent intellectuals' in attempts to affirm students' own ways of knowing. The link between how these theorists explain *postpedagogy* enters the mix through Italo Calvino's personal tale of how he began writing stories through the images in comics. Lyotard emerges as one key figure in discussing how a *postmodern writer* addresses the problems posed by the rise of technologies that enforce a proceduralized system of thinking, and how this strange writing allows for an imaginative *pro-duction* that has significant implications for writing in the 21st century, including the relationship both see between the work of (another kind of) art (*unart*) and politics.

Chapter II – form (shape of the work): "In the Shadow of Image/Text" – takes its task as addressing three of the major conversations addressing comics as a medium – defining the media, comparing comics to other media – particularly cinema – and how comics begin to enact the sort of teaching that *postpedagogy* proposes we take on. Since McCloud's *Understanding Comics* was released, various critics have attempted to dismantle his project in order to develop a more precise definition that would account for other iterations. In part, these critics, specifically Thierry Groensteen, have attempted to solidify a system that would be able to integrate the various combinations of image and text that they see as the essence of a comics medium. Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* brings an alternate perspective to the work of comics that fraternizes with avant-garde 'art'

outlooks. His keynote talk at the 2006 Thomas R. Watson Conference in Louisville, KY works as a conceptual starting point for a view of comics as a form well-suited for thinking of the ways in which digital technologies afford us opportunities to think with the logics of electronic media (Ulmer's *conductive logic*) rather than attempting to directly translate print logics into electronic environments.

Chapter III – idiom ('school' of art): "Art Interrupted" – attempts to break away from what, in current trends toward multimodal composition, has been generally discussed in terms of 'mixed media.' Two major concepts inform this chapter: (1) intermedia and (2) *unart*. "Intermedia" shares Lyotard's view that image and text are not separate but always already interrelated, superimposed on one another. The shape of the work, of the elements involved in producing comics, extends beyond traditional forms of art even though they begin with those forms. For McCloud, "form" includes a variety of different elements – ink, paint, speech, etc. – and methods. In this chapter, I begin to tackle the generally unrecognized significance of comics for rhetoric and composition, and specifically that rhetorical approaches to art are more akin to comics than to Art proper; that is, to what Kaprow calls *unart*. The term unart was coined in order to indicate a move away from the more generalizable, more easily recognizable forms of Art that have been situated under specified categories. As Kaprow explains, unart has more to do with *intermedia*, combining media in a way that cannot be divided or assessed as separate, than with 'mixed media,' where each medium has been used on its own terms. To expose how comics provide such an approach, I discuss Spiegelman's surrealist project *The Narrative Corpse* throughout as an example of the different forms, perspectives, and methods that comics offer.

Chapter IV – structure (nuts-and-bolts): "Uncomposing (Visual) Rhetorics" – turns to a discussion of what it would mean for us to begin uncomposing ourselves.

The title of this chapter, simultaneously the title of this dissertation, implies a variety of meanings taken up as the focus of this chapter. Taking my cue from Allan Kaprow's term unart, I suggest that what we find in the figural – what rhetoricians generally refer to as 'visual rhetorics' – exceeds the desire for persuasion. As such, the figural offers itself as an interruption of Aristotelian rhetoric, of the 'art(s) of persuasion.' This interruption of rhetoric as persuasion would exact a refusal, in Bartleby's and Quentin's senses, to recode, or invert, power relations (Readings, University 163). Building on Chapter 3, if comics can be thought of as a stranger surrealist project – which Blanchot sees as the experience of experience of thought itself – then, we can better recognize comics in terms of Bill Readings' view of thought as an in(ter)vention that does "not resolve arguments; it does not provide a metalanguage that can translate all other idioms into its own so that their dispute can be settled, their claims arranged and evaluated on a homogenous scale"; rather, comics would throw "those who participate in pedagogy back into a reflection upon the ungroundedness of their situation: their obligation to each other and to a name that hails them as addressees, before they can think about it" (Readings, University 161). If we think of this in terms of criteria – and Lyotard's desire to work without criteria – this would mean to allow writing to be thought of in terms of exploration without intent, without assuming a single standard of evaluation that would hinder a strangely imaginative writing.

Chapter V – craft (skills of producing the work) and surface (finishing touches): "Traitorous Hospitality: An Aphoristic (Composition) Pedagogy" – returns to Haynes' concept of 'hospitality' in "Writing Offshore" as it relates to comics' relationship to art, and with how it offers us a way to think about how we might begin to *uncomposition* ourselves. As most of the comics 'artists' cited in this dissertation began in art and became disaffected by the inability to produce work that related more to life than to Art, rhetoric and composition has yet to learn

the lessons it has seemed to support from the avant-garde: breaking away from categories of acceptability in favor of new, innovative, and imaginative work. Having left home – the discipline of art – comics 'artists' become witnesses to the disaster (of art); "the witness," according to Lyotard, "is a traitor" (*Inhuman* 204). The traitor to art and composition here becomes open to occasions for writing and thinking that fall beyond even their own beliefs and values by testing those contradictions. Put briefly, the traitorous writer is hospitable to even the most monstorous of thoughts.

This chapter concludes this dissertation with a Nietzschean turn toward fragmentary writing. In this chapter, I build on Chris Ware's view of comics production to suggest we update Nietzsche's ambition of writing and 'art.' In an interview, as we will see, Ware explains that his 'drawing' is more like typography than 'real drawing.' If we take Ware's approach to writing and compare it to the fragmentary writing currently taking place in electronic (digital/online) environments – specifically on Twitter – we find that Nietzsche's aphorisms provide us with a way of understanding how art and writing may develop in the 21st century. To clarify: my ambition is not to "say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book – what everyone else does *not* say in a book" (Nietzsche, *Potable* 556). No! My ambition is to say in 140-characters what Nietzsche would say in 'ten sentences,' to be a 140-Artist, to be a 140-unartist. The singularity of such writing offers us the ability to speak of life as the artist speaks of and to Art.

Ah, writing! Ah, humanity![25] I present this dissertation as an act of love (in the Nietzschean sense).[26]

Chapter 1

There's a Stranger in My Composition

There's a Stranger in My Composition

> "The suppliant and the stranger are one; both are cut off from the whole, being deprived of the right that founds all others and alone establishes one's belonging to the home."
>
> ~ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

It's no secret: in the past decade technology and the visual have transformed the teaching of composition. To understand how and why they have radicalized composition instruction and moved the *figural* into the forefront of writing, this chapter provides a stasis (theory) for today's composition pedagogy in the avant-garde ambit of transformation. Why and how this move is occurring requires that I work through a string of examples to mark how 'new media' (from video/games to cinema to music, etc.) has opened the fields of rhetoric and composition to new modes of thought and creation. In essence, this chapter consolidates what scholars and practitioners have said on the subjects of new media and *postpedagogy* in order to situate how I see the future of composition studies developing in the wake of these new theories, methods, and instructional practices.

To that end, I use the figure of the 'Stranger,' and specifically, the Plato/nic Stranger, as described in *The Sophist.* In the course of my research, however, Maurice Blanchot's work has become a significant influence in how I have come to think about why the Stranger appeals to me, and how Blanchot's writings on the

stranger have altered and clarified the importance of the Strange(r) in the way I think of composition pedagogy and rhetorical practice. An endnote in *The Infinite Conversation*, more than any other reflection, has brought the Stranger's (non) purpose together for me:

> …a stranger to the strangeness of the Castle, a stranger to the strangeness of the village, and a stranger to himself [Franz Kafka's 'foreigner' in *The Castle*] since, in an incomprehensible manner, he decides to break with his own familiarity, as though pulled ahead toward these sites nonetheless without allure by an exigency he is unable to account for. (463)

Like this 'stranger,' I'm not sure that I can account for the exigency of this project, but I can say that the 'Castle' Blanchot refers to here appears to correlate to the *unbuilt hacienda* Geoff Sirc continues working on (Sirc, *English* 1-32).

There are other references in Blanchot's passage that relate to other areas of interest. For example, 'the strangeness of the village' relates, at least through an aleatory (chance) logic, to McLuhan's 'global village' – approaches to 'new media' that 'make[s] the world smaller,' but that continue to separate us from our own ways of *being* in the world. The Stranger, at least in this sense, is meant to indicate a figure that can put us closer to our own ways of *being*, including our own ways of *being* with language, writing, and 'art' in a world that continues – indirectly – trying to distance us from our own ways of knowing. As we will see, the Stranger in Plato's *Sophist* is not strange enough to address how we may be in the world according to our own devices. In rhetoric and composition, a good deal of how we address new media has little, if anything, to do with how we may *be* in a world where new media has been working our thinking and writing over in new ways. That is, if there is any way to provide an exigency for this project, it is to say that

we have yet to find ways in which writing and art can take place (*happen/ings*) with new media. If we remain content to merely translate the 'literacy,' or writing processes, or what have you, from the time of print to the time of new media, we exclude ways of thinking that offer us (imaginative) in/sights into our own *being*.

As I've tried to explain in the introduction, I am drawn toward comics in an 'incomprehensible manner.' In part because I have been reading comics for the better part of a decade now, and I continue to be surprised, I continue to 'break with my own familiarity' with not only the form, but with the ways in which comics imply another way of writing and creating art. If I must provide a reason, an exigency, for this project, it would have to be that what I see in comics exceeds how Scott McCloud and Will Eisner, among other practitioners and scholars that have discussed *Comics*, have attempted to describe and define the form as a medium. In my estimation, *comics* offer the strange(rs) with/in us a way to write and create art in a variety of ways that link with current perspectives on composition pedagogy, and offer us a way to begin thinking about what 'the coming composition' might look like, what *forms* our *unbuilt haciendas* may take with the coming generation of pedagogues well-versed in using 'new media' to write and create art. The exigency for writing (with) new media would remains 'incomprehensible,' 'unaccountable,' and strange(ly) imaginative since we have yet to grasp how the call for writing with/in new media has yet to be fully realized on their own terms.[1] If we don't begin allowing the strangers with/in us to teach us how to be imaginative, we will not only lose our ability to be effective pedagogues, but we will also remain part of the 'old guard' instead of an

DELEUZE

The *form* of comics has nothing to do with the *medium* of comics. As Gilles Deleuze when reflecting on *form*: "Aesthetic form [...] is merged with the reflection of the object in the imagination" ("The Idea of Genesis..." 61). The *form of comics*, then, has to do with a sort of intuition exercised by imagination.

(inventive) avant-garde – the coming composition (*postpedagogy*).

When I speak of 'the coming composition,' what I am referring to is analogous to Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* – a community that we have yet to experience and that we are constantly trying to achieve. This is not the sort of community that has appeared in composition pedagogy, the sort that seeks to create an enclosed community within a classroom, and that hope to create communal knowledge. Rather, 'the coming composition' is the composition of the Stranger(s) with/in us, that which we exclude because we have no way of communicating our (ways of) thinking. 'The coming composition,' like Agamben's view of 'the coming community,' is a composition of singularities that "communicate[s] online the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity" (Agamben, *Coming* 11). The Stranger does not work as a 'model' for this sort of composition, but like "[t]ricksters or fakes, assistants or 'toons" (Agamben, *Coming* 11), the Stranger is an exemplar of the coming composition.

While Agamben does not directly make this claim, the Stranger who brings about the *coming community* will appear as Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "...at last a change came over his heart, and one morning he rose with the dawn, stepped before the sun..." (*Portable 121*). The Stranger teaches us the *ubermench*-- the overman; the "overman," who would then occupy an empty space of *the coming community*, would be that being for whom Being is of utmost concern, and would have us move beyond the criteria of "good" and "bad."

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog by Caspar David Friedrich

So....this dude is Zarathustra?

THE STRANGE(RS) WITH/IN US

"How did reason come into the world? As is fitting, in an irrational manner, by accident. One will have to guess at it as at a riddle."

~ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn*

The Stranger in Plato's *Sophist* is appointed by Socrates to be a guest lecturer on the subject of *sophistry* with a student of his [the Stranger's] choosing: Theaetetus. Another colleague, Theodorus, explains that this Stranger "is more reasonable than those who devote themselves to disputation" (267), which is emphasized when the Stranger tells Theaetetus to "follow your own devices […] as the discussion proceeds" (271) on "the art of imitation" (275). Using Socrates' method of division and definition, the Stranger separates imitation into *likeness-making* and *appearance-making* (also called 'phantastic art'). According to our Stranger, *likeness-making* (the first *sophist/ic*) "produces the imitation by following the proportions of the original in length, breadth, and depth, and giving, besides, the appropriate colours to each part" (333). In a word: copies.[2] Institutional practices geared toward producing students who can succeed in professional contexts are in the habit of working to produce these sorts of likenesses.

After exploring *likeness-making*, the Stranger turns to *appearance-making*, dividing it in two once again. The first of this new division (the second sophist/ic) concerns "easily [taking] advantage of our poverty of terms to make a counter attack, twisting our words to the opposite meaning" (347) in order to deceive – this "is an art of deception" that attempts to mislead others to "hold a false opinion" (351). This form of appearance-making correlates to Geoff Sirc's view of traditional composition where we

…erect temples to language, in which we relive the rites of text-production for the nth time, despite the sad truth that the gods have fled so long ago that no one is even sure that they were ever there in the first place (in Composition, the gods are called, variously, *power, authentic voice, discourse, critical consciousness, versatility, style, disciplinarity, purpose,* etc.). (*English* 2)

To make the link clear, Sirc's view of composition does not mean that we are in the habit of teaching students how to twist words in order to deceive, at least not explicitly, but that teaching through the defined structures of what it means to write keeps students at a distance from their own ways of knowing, of writing with their own devices. When Sirc questions whether the 'gods' were ever there in the first place, the connection becomes clear that we have been teaching in such a way that we have been deceiving ourselves by thinking that we have the answers to show students how to write, and that through our teaching we can provide students with the power to assert their own needs.

The first *sophist/ic* addresses the *possible*, while the second *sophist/ic* constructs limits by detailing the *impossible*, creating a "binary of possible/impossible" (Vitanza, *Negation* 245). The second form of *appearance-making* (the third *sophist/ic*), however, discards this binary in order to work at *slashing* through it, cutting through the divisions that separate writers/artists from their 'own devices,' "by employing [one's] own person as [an] instrument" (453) – 'instrument' does not mean a 'tool' in the Heideggerian sense. However, the Stranger was so exhausted after working through the first two forms of sophistry that he beseeched Theaetetus to "be so self-indulgent as to let it go and leave it for someone else to unify and name appropriately" (453).[3]

It wasn't until Murray Bundy's 1922 article "Plato's View of the Imagination"

that the second form of *appearance-making* (the third *sophist/ic*) was 'named appropriately.' Bundy finds that this second form of appearance-making has to do with 'the imagination,' which traces through Plato's corpus of writings, including *The Sophist,* in order to illustrate Plato's thinking on art and aesthetics. Bundy associates Plato's view of art with one's own (productive) imagination, in similar fashion to how the Stranger describes the third *sophist/ic* as the work made of an individual's own body and mind, including public speech and performance. For Bundy, the second order of *appearance-making* relates to the abstraction that arises out of one's own imaginative capabilities, which suggests "that the highest human creation involves an act of 'imagination'" (386). As Bundy explains, the imagination is concerned with "the connecting link *between* the real and the ideal, between the realm of ideas and that of material objects" (386; emphasis added). Or to use Lyotard's terms about "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" (*Postmodern* xxiii), abstraction/imagination attempts to link the presentable and the unpresentable through creative acts that "impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (*Postmodern* 81). The continued calls for an avant-garde pedagogy ask that we move beyond *likeness-making* (the first *sophist/ ic*) and the first form of *appearance-making* (the second *sophist/ic*) in order to affirm students' own ways of knowing (read: using their own devices).

Similarly, Cynthia Haynes questions the need for argumentative writing in "Writing Offshore" before calling for a pedagogy of abstraction encouraging students to direct their own education in order to "enact the necessary detachment (*abstractus*) that would unhinge the link between reason and pedagogy, and dissemble the assembly line model of education in whose grip we have been since Ramus so cleanly paired discourse and logic" ("Writing" 673). Rather than asking students to use previous works as models of acceptable writing, a pedagogy of abstraction would not require students to take a stance, but would allow students write without purpose or

intention and discover their own ways of writing and art-ing. In order to clarify the need for such a pedagogy, I will briefly survey current concerns about multimodal composition before examining rhetoric and composition's move to the *figural* in the age of new media and some ways in which this move has begun to alter pedagogical goals within the university. In order to frame why there is a need to offer students ways to address their own needs and knowledge, we turn to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its relation to rhetoric and composition.

THE (CURIOUSLY) STRANGE CASE OF (NEW MEDIA) PEDAGOGY

> "Still, as in those photographs from which the distant but excessively close face of a stranger stares out at us, something in this infamy demands [esige] its proper name, testifying to itself beyond any expression and beyond any memory."
>
> ~ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*

Freire's goal in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was not to liberate the "peasant workers" of Brazil, but to teach them how to write with the most accessible medium of the time – printed text – so that they could address their own political and personal needs and concerns – not to teach them what he thought they needed. It is in this sense that Friere describes a pedagogy *of* the oppressed, and not a pedagogy *for* the oppressed. In Marxist fashion, Freire saw that these workers were being treated as cogs in the wheels of industry, workers that could be replaced at will and had no recourse to assert their own human needs; this production, however, was "a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (*Pedagogy* 44). In attempting to teach them the dominant mode of discourse – reading and writing – Friere presented them with a way assert their own needs. He was teaching them how print media worked to convey meaning, but not how to

use the medium for a specific intent/purpose. He was teaching them the available means of "striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world" (Pedagogy 45).[4] Freire clearly explains that the desire is not to teach these workers, simultaneously students, what to think, but to have the ability to engage in the dominant discourse so that they may transform their world. Indeed, the political struggles that rhetoric and composition have attempted to address since the late 60s have not yet begun on "a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity," especially when considering that pedagogical practices (or 'best practices') remain focused on 'what students need' instead of looking to develop a pedagogy that "will be made and remade" (*Pedagogy* 48) – the work of *postpedagogies*, including the 'salute' from Sirc out of which this project develops.

A decade later, Lyotard took on a similar project directed at highly developed, industrialized countries – minus Freire's Marxist perspectives – with his treatise on scientific/technological thinking in *The Postmodern Condition*. In this report to the Conseil of Universitiés in Quebec, Lyotard makes an effort to analyze and transform education from what he calls 'grand narratives' (generalizations) into 'little narratives' (singularities) as "the quintessential form of imaginative invention," where writers and artists allude to the unknown/unpresentable (*Postmodern* 60; 78). For Lyotard, grand narratives correlate to scientific knowledge that seeks to define the bounds of accepted/acceptable knowledge (or argumentation and Reason) that implies a duty to verification.[5] However, Lyotard problematizes the scientific and technological approach to knowledge as reductive due to its systematized approach that privileges its "own interests and point of view" (*Postmodern* 16). With the rise of technology, Lyotard fears that education

and thought would be weakened by technological thinking that reduces the limits of knowledge to only what is presentable and excludes what does not fit within the system. One of Lyotard's contemporaries, Gilles Deleuze, explains that this process will move us from Michel Foucault's *disciplinary societies* to the new *societies of control* whose function is to "keep people employed until the installation of the new forces knocking at the door" ("Postscript" 4) will inevitably deliver "the school over to the corporation" ("Postscript" 5) – which is precisely what Freire was attempting to subvert with a pedagogy *of* the oppressed.

Put differently, technological – code(d) – thinking/writing/arting restricts what can be known by discarding what does not have a place in that system – what can be exchanged within the market structures that corporations perpetuate in their own interests. This is not to say that technology[6] itself restricts the ability to address the unpresentable, but that systematizing how we go about addressing knowledge may exclude other ways of knowing,[7] and in doing so, contributes to the perpetuation of 'societies of control.' For Lyotard, little narratives – the writings of the 'illiterate' workers in Freire's Brazil, as well as the knowledge that students in 'the most advanced societies' can bring to institutions and institutional practices – work to break apart systematized ways of knowing, doing, and making that (~~in~~directly) support corporate-schools with alternate, excluded practices and methods.

Lyotard saw how this move would position knowledge in educational institutions and worldwide:

Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major – perhaps the major – stake in worldwide competition for power. It is conceivable that the

George Orwell would be displeased.

nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled

in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to

and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor. (*Postmodern* 5)

Lawrence Lessig gives credence to Lyotard's observation when he explains that

the current state of technology is leading us toward systematized thought and

regulated, owned meaning. In *Free Culture*, Lessig addresses what he calls our

"information society" and current trends toward a feudal society where such power

is the "power of control [over] the uses of culture" (*Free* 28), instead of a free culture

that "supports and protects creators […] to guarantee that follow-on creators

and innovators remain *as free as possible* from the control of the past" (*Free* xiv).

One such example is Apple iTunes and its coding model that limits individuals'

ability to distribute and re-purpose (i.e., *remix*) information by commodifying

and centralizing power over cultural artifacts and their uses. In *Remix*, Lessig

differentiates this control, which he names Read-Only (RO) culture, with a Read-

Write (RW) culture that allows "citizens" to "create and re-create the culture

around them" by "using the same tools the professional uses" and those "given to

them by nature" (*Remix* 28), analogous to the second order of appearance-making.

A RW culture might look like Jacques Derrida's 'analysis' of Philippe Sollers'

novels at the end of *Dissemination* – Derrida uses the Sollers' *Numbers* to "critique"

the work itself, using the techniques of collage and montage to re-arrange the

work in a new way.[8] Translating such a method into digital culture, including

multimodal composition, has proven much more difficult since the code exercises

much more control over works and the corporation-/institutional friendly laws

that fight for control over information, which, in so doing, restrict the production

of imaginative and transformative works. In this sense, Lessig's view of remix

correlates to current perspectives of writing across media since it "is just the

same sort of stuff that we've always done with words," which succeed "when they show others something new; they fail when they are trite or derivative. […] It is great writing without words. It is creativity supported by a new technology," at least "until the law effectively blocks it" (*Remix* 82-83) – effectively blocking the imaginative, transformative work they call "fellow citizens to study, reflect—and act" upon (National Commission xviii).

A Strange(r's) Writing

> "Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation."
>
> ~ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

Alexander Galloway traces the development of code in relation to the move beyond centralized control over meaning in his book *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, taking his cue from Deleuze's article on *societies of control* – related to the feudal control of writing that Lessig fears will restrict writers and artists from producing new work. Throughout the book, Galloway describes the protocological essence of technology: code, which is "the only executable language" that "does what it says" (*Protocol* 165-66). Programming code may be thought of analogously to the art style of "caricature" (see my chapter 2) in that it is infused with predetermined meaning with little, if any, wiggle room. Building on Friedrich Kittler's work on media technologies, Galloway's project seeks to explain how the language of computers and computer networks function, which he claims are at the base of understanding contemporary culture – a perspective that excludes possibilities in favor of standardization. For our purposes,

this claim signifies a change in traditional writing and in writing (with) new media, including how our ways of writing and thinking are altered by code. The goal of composition pedagogy, if it takes on the political need for *a third sophist/ ic* imaginative approach, would necessitate a way of working with new media as the avant-garde artists we continually refer to (e.g., Duchamp) worked – without intention or purpose. But this would not be the sort of 'art practice' that Galloway espouses, it would not refer "to any type of artistic practice within the global Internet, be it the World Wide Web, email, telnet, or any other such protocological technology" (*Protocol* 211). To (only) work with the protocols already coded into these technologies would do nothing to help us better understand our ways of *being* with language, writing and art in the age of new media. The "tactical" definition of the "Internet art" that Galloway proposes serves, in his own words, "an aesthetic defined by its oppositional position vis-à-vis previous, often inadequate, forms of cultural production" (212). Being 'oppositional,' Galloway's form of a 'tactical Internet art' positions itself as a part of the *second sophist/ic* meant to deceive us of how protocols (codes) keep us at an arms-length from our own ways of imagining alternate ways of writing/art-ing (with) new media, of *conducting* (in the Ulmerian sense of the word *conduction*[9]) our/selves as Strangers.

Ian Bogost provides further explanation in his book *Persuasive Games* when he coins the term *procedural rhetoric* to "define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operations of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organizational systems" (*Persuasive* 3). In part, the procedure becomes a method of making arguments with computers and the coded software, "persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular" (*Persuasive* 3) – the particular, however, remains a function (in a computational sense) of the generalized process (cf. my earlier discussion of Lyotard's 'grand narratives'). While Bogost perceives this (rhetorical)

method as productive for "making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created" (*Persuasive* 3), Galloway remains skeptical[10] about encouraging procedures and protocols, and calls us to become viral, to infect these systems with unexpected methods, even though his "viral" methods remain a part of the protocols he critiques. For example, when he addresses (video)games in his book *Gaming*, Galloway defines his goal as "hinder[ing] gameplay, not advanc[ing] it" (*Gaming* 125). While it may not be his intention, such a perspective supports the argumentative structures that he finds in protocols and games. While they come to technology from different perspectives, both Bogost's *procedural rhetoric(s)* and Galloway's "going viral" and countergaming methods do little to offer us a way to give voice to the Strangers with/in us since they – perhaps unintentionally – maintain binary (both 010101 and 1/2) approaches to writing (with) new media.

Rather than attempting to focus on working to hinder this brand of control, Martin Heidegger offers us a way to think about technology apart from protocols and procedures. In an attempt to ascertain the essence of technology in "The Question Concerning Technology" – written before the digital technology that we know today – Heidegger explains that this essence "is by no means anything technological" (*Basic Writings* 311), but "is a way of revealing" (*Basic Writings* 318) by "unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about" (*Basic Writings* 322); or, in contemporary cultural terms, remixing. However, Heidegger shares Lessig's fear that *technological/protocological* thinking may become *the* mode of understanding and making sense of the world while closing out other potentialities – capacities for coming into being – of knowing. If writing is only done mechanically, as Galloway and Bogost suggest, writing unfolds as a restricted practice, similar to Freire's critique of the *banking* method that perpetuates the exclusion of other ways of knowing and to the programming codes that Lessig

Heidegger thinks you're a tool.

fears will lead to a *feudal* culture. For Heidegger, technological thinking becomes a means to an end – equivalent to students' pleas for instructors to tell them how to fix their writing so that they may 'write to the test' (here, the test is, dis/respectfully, the vague criteria of 'excellence'[11]). In addition, he also warns of seeing technology as a neutral tool. As an alternative, Heidegger suggests that we approach technology by returning to the Greek word *techne* from which the terms "technology" and "art" derive; he claims that "reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it" – "such a realm is art" (*Basic Writings* 340). The kind of art that Heidegger refers to here, however, is not the kind of art that takes place in 'the discipline of art,' but unfolds through one's own devices.

This unfolding,[12] however, suggests an additional manner exceeding deduction (*conclusion*), induction (*rule*), and abduction (*precondition*) that comics artist Chris Ware calls *pro-duction*[13] – this form of production shares Derrida's view that "*Productive* force is also called imagination" (*Archeology* 76) – which he finds, in part, in the techniques of collage/montage that avant-garde artists en-act in producing *experiment-al* work.[14] Here, *pro-duction* derives from the Latin *producere*, simultaneously meaning to 'bring forth' (*pro*: forth; *ducere*: to bring, lead) and 'bring into being,' in the sense of performance(s) (such as a theatrical performance; cf. Artaud). Taking our cue from Antonin Artaud, this unfolding realizes itself "by a return to the primitive Myths" and "giving them their *immediacy*" in such a manner that they are "sensed and experienced directly by the mind" (*Theater and Its Double* 123-24). The immediacy of these experiences, as well as the productions that they give rise to, obscure the distinctions between "the reality of imagination and dreams" so that they "appear there on equal footing with life" (Artaud, *Theater and Its Double* 123). In this manner, a proliferation of mixes

A nation of the image, perhaps?

would come about since the original mix only presents one mix among a variety of other possible mixes. While Heidegger's claim that 'art' can provide us a way out of procedural thinking/writing that has come about in the 21st century, this claim rests on seeing art as a form of being rather than as category or discipline.

In contrast to the *banking* method of instruction that defines an aggregate of linkages, this *pro-ductive*, *experiment-al* manner offers students what Sirc claims is

> an easy entré into composition, a compelling medium and genre in which to *re-arrange* textual materials – both original and appropriated – in order to have those materials speak the student's own voice and concerns, allowing them to come up with something obscure, perhaps, yet promising illumination. ("Box-Logic" 113; emphasis added)

Re-arrangement here approaches a manner of invention that *unfolds* through alternate mixes – or, to use the colloquial term, to *re-mix* – which George Kennedy finds analogous to Aristotle's approach to invention.[15] By focusing on invention, post-pedagogy does not advocate for any single process, but supports a perpetual invention of methods appropriate for the 'scene of writing.'[16] Such an approach would de-center the educational process by keeping "the question of meaning open as a locus of debate" (Readings, *University* 165). This does not mean that meaning has no place in education, but that it lingers, that *meaning* remains contingent and singular rather than generalizable.

Similarly, Sirc looks to move beyond the view that students cannot produce significant work unless given models of 'good' writing on which to base their own work. *In English Composition as a Happening*, he outlines what a do-it-yourself (DIY) pedagogy might look like in the composition classroom based in Kaprow's

work on *Happenings* art – a term referring to the avant-garde art movement during the 1960s where artists and spectators were involved in creating performance art that could not be duplicated (*English* 63). For those teachers fearful of what this means for instructional practices, there's no need to panic about what your roles will consist of in the classroom; all that a DIY, *happenings* pedagogy asks of you is that you take part in what you teach, to *practice what you teach*. Following Kaprow's lead, Sirc proposes an approach to the composition classroom centered on blurring the divisions between new media, art, composition and life that avoids seeing instructors as the bearers of knowledge so that we may affirm students' experiences with writing, art and technology in hopes of making composition more relevant for them. For Kaprow, as for Sirc, *Happenings* are performative, unrehearsed, and require an active engagement with the world, intervening in, rather than merely reflecting on, 'reality.'[17] Instead of following a strict curriculum, composition would become a way of *producing* something new rather than a reproduction.

In other words, art (practices) have entered composition in order to intervene in the technological/protocological/procedural thinking that has turned classrooms into assembly lines that offer students a place to develop their own forms of knowledge. But, even as 'Art' has entered pedagogical discussion of *just* education(s), the way in which Art has been discussed leaves much to be desired. It is here that Kaprow's *unart*, as "play without intention" (*Essays* 113) intersects with current pedagogical theories of writing that 'err on the side of life' rather than on bureaucratic demands for 'correctness.'[18]

> Here comes another blank sequel cause words are not working, they are not equal
> And baby, isn't it boring to always talk in the same old clichés
> Right now can't be bothered with thinking cause rational reasons, they keep us sinking
> And you know that no syllable will make us feel more real...
>
> THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY

We Are the Strange(rs)

> "The artist's imagination is a world of potentialities that no work will succeed in realizing. What we experience by living another world, answering to other forms of order and disorder."
>
> ~ Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

As Sirc tells us, postpedagogy does not *require* students to become artists, which would only have us teach another iteration of the 'banking' method, but works to bring an "art consciousness to daily life" ("Box-Logic" 117), to think apart from the structures that demand we follow protocols and procedures. Postpedagogy acknowledges the avant-garde as a starting point that invites students to intervene in accepted models of writing as a way to think of their own ways of knowing, offering them "what they want: an invitation to *become*" (Sirc, *English* 294; emphasis added). In addition, such a manner would take on the task of popularizing education[19] already under way in the digital technologies students use every day – the difference would be that we shift from perceiving these technologies as *mere tools* for the production of written texts in the service of the institutions that dictate *what students need* instead of letting them discover it through producing their devices. Sirc uses the example of rap to ask students to see their writing

> as *strange*-d, made curious, something interesting to consider, an object of intellectual fascination as much as emotional possession. It's the writer not only as collector, but as a dissatisfied collector, one impatiently seeking pleasure […] composition as a craving; teaching students to feel desire and lack. ("Box-Logic" 117; emphasis added)

In (un)common parlance, composition becomes the presence of an absence that we are unequipped to quell for our students, making our work into the playful collection of art-ifacts that we share with students to "offer them new possibilities for" writing with an "associational logic of linkages" that "foster a personal aesthetic among our students" (Sirc, "Box-Logic" 123).

One of the artists most often cited in the avant-garde movement has been Marcel Duchamp for his critique of Art at the turn of the 20th century. In "The Euretics of Alice's Valise," Ulmer adopts Duchamp's method of creating something new from a set of 'readymade' objects that students collect by unpacking items from a valise and re-arranging them at random (Sirc's box-logic proposes a similar method). As Ulmer describes this process, the method of re-arranging items in unexpected ways produces "results that surprise the instructors as much as the students" (3), and he calls this moment of surprise an instance of discovery, a eureka moment "synonymous with thinking as a discovery rather than as interpretation" (4) – invention rather than critique: "a cognitive practice coming into formation as an alternative to (not opposed to, but supplementing) hermeneutics and critique" (4) – as a way to generate new pedagogical and art practices.[20] This method is not meant to indicate that *postpedagogy* is an 'anything goes' approach to composing, but to begin students on their own paths to intervening in the world around them, or as Ulmer writes in an earlier essay, "not to reflect but to change reality" ("Object of Post-Criticism" 86). Approaches like the one that Sirc and Ulmer suggest are meant to offer us opportunities to drift like nomads in our writing and art, letting the imaginative linkages that arise at any given moment direct our ways of composing.[21] The invention of these alternate arrangements – *remixes* perhaps – are products of bringing an art consciousness to daily life, of forging new linkages at the time of creation, creating links by drifting in the scene of writing, and perpetually re-inventing performances with our

Seriously guys...I was done with this approach, like, 80 years ago. You got nothing else? Really?

audiences – spectators and students become co-creators of a new style of writing and producing art.[22]

In these *post-pedagogical* approaches, the preferred outcomes in other pedagogies – teaching students how to write by copying the style and structure of established texts – give way to new and unexpected outcomes from the students' creative practices invented for the moment. Italo Calvino refers to this as "some possible pedagogy of the imagination […] that we can only exercise upon ourselves, according to the methods invented for the occasion and with unpredictable results" that heads off "the danger we run in losing a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page, and in fact of *thinking* in terms of images" (*Six Memos* 92). Rather than teaching what he calls the *icastic*, self-sufficient form, Calvino conceives of "*phantasmic* and oneiric transfigurations, the figurative world as it is transmitted by a culture at its various levels, and a process of abstraction, condensation, and interiorization of sense experience, a matter of prime importance to both the visualization and verbalization of thought" (*Six Memos* 95).[23] In this manner of writing (and teaching), we write to tell our own stories (Lyotard's 'little narratives'), beginning with images "that have made an impact" (*Six Memos* 94) and spurring *pro-ductive* variants.

Calvino provides an example of this sort of imaginative *pro-duction* (reading and writing) through comics. As a child, before he learned to read, he directed his attention toward comics, spending "hours following the cartoons of each series from one issue to another, while in [his] mind [he] told [himself] stories, interpreting the scenes in different ways" (*Six Memos* 93)[24] – making linkages from what he was

presented with, similar to the concepts of *remix*, collage, and montage that have popularized *experiment*-al approaches to education. Even after he had learned to read, Calvino explains, "the advantage [he] gained was minimal. […] it was evident that the rhymster had no idea of what might have been in the balloons of the original," preferring "to ignore the written lines and to continue with [his] favorite occupation of daydreaming *within* the pictures and their sequence" (*Six Memos* 93-94). For Calvino, there is no one correct way to reason through the sequences, but a variety of possible linkages. Beginning his own stories in this way, Calvino treated the comics images as readymade that could be seen in a way not dictated by the writers. Taken a step further, Calvino could have cut out the comics panels to reorder them as way to create further presentations and possible readings. While altering the arrangement of the panels in those comics he was reading, as he did with his alternate readings, Calvino would be experimenting with the possibility of additional mini-narratives. We can see examples of these phantasmic transfigurations in Roland Barthes' experimental writings about (and with) photography and film.

Throughout "The Third Meaning" Barthes speaks of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and the filmic still image that "forces itself upon me" (*Image* 56) even though he does not know why they attract him. The meaning of these images, the *obtuse meaning*, occupies a third space between its presentation and its description, suspended between meanings that do "not copy anything" and exists outside of articulated language – "what the obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism)" (*Image* 61). In *The Rhetoric of Cool*, Jeff Rice finds that the use of images in current composition courses does not allow for the inarticulate meaning that Barthes describes – an attempt to domesticate images rather than looking at the unpresentable meanings they open up. Instead, writing means that "[s]tudents write *about* images, but not with image. Students 'see' images but don't use them for generating new experience. Students observe images but are

not asked to find correlations between an image-based experience and their own" (Rice, *Cool* 140) despite popular (culture) evidence that this is already underway, and in "the age of new media" excluding these alternate writing practices would mean that pedagogy "remain insular" (*Cool* 145), ensuring its own irrelevance. Requiring that students appropriate the dominant discourse provided them in our classrooms means to validate the 'metalanguage' that Barthes speak of, to become critics rather than producers. However, as Barthes describes it, the *obtuse meaning* requires a "diegetic horizon" that allows for alternative combinations – it is not present in a stand-alone image whether photographic or painted (*Image* 66).

Throughout *Camera Lucida*, Barthes begins to sketch out how an additional third meaning arises out of stand-alone images that are not placed within a narrative arc, exploring ways in which images can engender thought. In his own terms, his concern is not with the *studium* – "a kind of education (knowledge and civility, 'politeness') which allows me to discover the *Operator*, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them 'in reverse,' according to my will as a Spectator" (*Camera* 28) – but with the *punctum* – an "accident which pricks me" (*Camera* 27), showing "no preference for morality or good taste: the punctum can be ill-bred" (*Camera* 43) with "a power of expansion" (*Camera* 45). Still, the *studium* is not separate from the punctum; where the *punctum* appears, the *studium* is also present. The *punctum*, "whether or not it is triggered, is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there" (*Camera* 55). A pedagogy of imagination would take Bathes' *punctum* to its *productive* limit, bringing forth an addition(al) from one's own devices.

Adding Lyotard, we can say that Barthes creates little narratives through the third meanings he finds in both film and photography through a process of

imaginative linking. What *postpedagogy* finds in the *figural,* as Barthes does, is not a customary one-size-fits-all pedagogical model, but a way to encourage students to think abstractly and imaginatively. An avant-garde approach of finding new methods of making art that de-stabilizes *fixed* meaning provides a way to begin the work of thinking in abstractions. Haynes brings this move to rhetoric and composition in "Writing Offshore," explaining it as one that places learning in students' hands and one that requires a move from argumentation to abstraction. Such a pedagogical method would be infused with an element of play that does not dictate meaning, but allows students to assert their own ways to knowing, doing and making, and that do not always correspond to established methods. As a pedagogical method, postpedagogy seeks to avoid the totalization of meaning that requires one to take a stance in place of finding alternate ways of understanding, thinking, and writing. Lyotard, like Haynes, Sirc and Ulmer after him, refers to Duchamp's readymades as an example of the writing to come, of looking again to see other possible linkages with a method found in the practice of an imaginative writing unconcerned with an imposed criterion. The playful methods of avant-garde artists, methods that comics artists adapted to their own work, provide us with the opportunity to enact the abstract pedagogy that Haynes calls for, one in which we open up our pedagogical spaces so that we can learn as much, if not more, from our students as they learn from us.

In "The Creative Act," Duchamp speaks to this method of creation from an artist's perspective, claiming that in creating a work of art, artists go "from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions" as a "series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane" (*Duchamp's Writings* 139). Here, we can see a gap between the artist's intention and his ability to realize it; Duchamp's manner of describing art offers a way of thinking about the task of

Lyotard's *postmodern artist/writer*: to present (allusions to) the unpresentable. However, this *pro-ductive* manner only presents a fraction of the creative act that grows exponentially when a "spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (*Duchamp's Writings* 140). Lyotard tells us as much when he discusses the presentable and the unpresentable, where the role of art is to find that some things cannot be made visible, and the artist presents this inability to understand.[25] To do this, he implies, we need what the avant-gardes provide: abstraction – to make us see by making it impossible to see. This is what Haynes' asks of us when she calls for a pedagogy of *abstraction*: not to create meaning for students, but to break with the logic that holds students apart from their own creative acts with a refusal "to examine the rules of art" in order to "pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating, by means of the 'correct rules,' the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it" (Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition* 75). For those "who question the rules of plastic and narrative arts," Lyotard writes, "they are destined to have little credibility in the eyes of those concerned with 'reality' and 'identity': they have no guarantee of an audience" (*Postmodern Condition* 75). We, the strange, take this as our manner, not to argue, but to detach ourselves from the dialogue that requires us to take a (reason-able) stance.[26]

The future of composition studies in the wake of post-pedagogical methods of invention is currently moving toward a role similar to the avant-garde artists (or better yet, of Kaprow's *unartists*) as a way to avoid keeping students separated from their ways of being active in their own learning. Rickert tells us that postpedagogy makes an effort to interrupt the accepted methods of writing, just as avant-garde artists do for Art when a 'school of art' begins to stabilize – a problem that comics artists have tended to avoid since they are constantly looking for new

ways of writing and art-ing. Comics offer us a way to think about this 'playfulness' since they work by way of linkages, enacting a practice that tries to rewrite its environment, rather than *write purely*. More importantly, comics artists, like the avant-garde artists of the 60s and 70s, show us a (singular) way to think about the playful use of art and art techniques for writing across media in such a way that we "err on the side of life" ("Box-Logic" 113) rather than on the side of the university. The integration of the figural, as a form of abstraction, infuses a sense of how to live in a technological age that attempts to proceduralize the available means of writing (with) new media. Unlike the other 'arts' mentioned in this chapter, comics have a (still continuing) history of being an un-credited 'art,' an 'art' that remains beyond the margins of art (history/disciplines/movements) despite all the well-meaning attempts at normalization – the province of chapter 2.

For rhetoric and composition, the figural fills a similar gap, asking us (and students) to be cautious of standardized writing practices – composition as a service course, institutionally defined and institutionalizing students to accepted modes of writing. But the similar problems exist in writing (with) new media if the methods used in this process are merely technological and/or protocological. For Kaprow, the playful use of technology favors continuous inventive practices, experimentations that can lead to surprising results.

Chapter 2

In the Shadow of Image/Text

In the S h a d o w (s) of Image/Text

"…my mind kept wandering. I found no solace in [poetry or] music of any kind […] it seemed too obscenely exquisite. The only cultural artifacts that could get past my defenses to flood my eyes and brain with something other than images of burning towers were old comic strips; vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the twentieth century."

~ Art Spiegelman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*

It was
moment of my
college course (composition),
from home and to college-life, when
the television on to show the burning
classroom, the students were in shock,
happening just a few hours drive away
living in the surrounding areas. After
the television off to start us on our own
the syllabus, the assignments and the
not help but think about the burning
an exercise I practiced on my own; to
semester I would ask myself how the
us to drift through writing to make sense

the strangest
life, sitting in my first
still adjusting to being away
the instructor came in and turned
North tower. Looking around the
trying to make sense of what was
in New York – some of us had family
a few minutes, the instructor turned
composition work. As we went over
grading procedures/criteria, I could
tower. Up to this point, writing was
distill my thoughts throughout the
material in this course would allow
of the event that would mark my

time as an undergraduate student. As the debris was cleared over the next few months and the victims of the attacks were tallied, the event would lead to personal accounts – someone we knew was in one of the towers or in the surrounding areas, and tales of where we were when it happened. In my own account: no one I knew was in either tower or in the immediate surrounding areas. However, throughout the semester, the work we were assigned in this first-year composition course did not allow us [students] to explore our own ways of making sense of the event; rather, it required us to take a stance and write the same stale standard academic argumentative essays we've always been assigned as a part of a standard curriculum. Something was missing from this sort of writing, something that we [the students in this FYC course] desperately needed in order to make sense of the devastation.

During the October 2006 Thomas R. Watson Conference in Louisville, KY, I finally found what was missing during Art Spiegelman's keynote talk on his then-recent publication, *In The Shadow of No Towers* – a comic a comic book about the repercussions of the World Trade Center (WTC) attacks. Spiegelman was living (and still does live) in New York city when the planes hit the two towers. He tells readers of his experience – while not generally good at coping with high-stress situations he explains that he was very cogent in the aftermath. As soon as the first tower was hit, Spiegelman and his wife ran into the streets to find their daughter who was also at her first day of (elementary) school when they first heard and felt the thundering explosion of the North tower. The initial explosion brought memories of his father's stories of Auschwitz[1] and the

advice he received from his father to always keep a bag packed in case such malice ever happened again: Spiegelman considered leaving the city as quickly as possible to get away from the mayhem. A narrative analysis of the book might suggest that Spiegelman's experience during the attacks represented one generalized example of what others (may have) experienced, both directly and indirectly affected. 'Spiegelman lends his voice and art,' they might say, 'to the millions of people still reeling from the aftershocks.' However, Spiegelman asks that the audience consider the book an attempt to make sense of his own (initial) reactions, not an expression of a stable understanding.

Lately, what has been happening in discussions of comics and the interplay between image and text tends to ignore alternate readings that take into account Spiegelman's use of comics as a form of writing abstractly, thinking *through* writing and the figural. Reading and visualizing the work in comics tends to ignore the thinking that produced the work itself and the thinking that it calls us to perform as a part of the creative act Marcel Duchamp so effectively uncovers in "The Creative Act." That is, what we lose by positioning writing and art as "skills" used for a given purpose, is the way in which both change the ways in which we think and see the world around us. The importance of this work correlates to Spiegelman's attempt to make sense of his reactions to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the WTC with an imaginative comics approach; I'll also be referring to what others have been doing to expand the use of comics as an abstract form of writing. While the 'definitional' and 'cinematic' approaches have revitalized the medium in popular culture and have brought comics into academic conversations, they have yet to explore the potential of the form for theoretical and pedagogical thought. In other words, I see in comics a way of reading and writing that Lyotard describes as *postmodern* and that Byron Hawk refers to as *hyperrhetorical*[2] – which sets out to discover a method of invention while inventing it.[3]

At first, being able to define the field of study creates a niche, a legitimized position from which to argue for the integration and use of a specific idea. Thierry Groensteen's oft-anthologized essay "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?" sets up the perceived problem for the medium of comics when he claims that they "suffer from a considerable lack of legitimacy" and "it is curious that the legitimizing authorities (universities, museums, the media) still regularly charge it with being infantile, vulgar, or insignificant" ("Why" 3). However, while Groensteen sees this lack of legitimization as a problem, it may be more of a benefit for comics than he recognizes, and it is one well suited to a *postmodern writer/artist* since it works across various media.[4] To begin setting out on this project, three anchors must be retracted:

<div align="center">

(1)

the

first

attempts

to fix comics

as a medium,

(2) the second attempts

to legitimize comics through

comparisons to film, specifically

addressing why comics are

primordial to the various

</div>

cinematic   arts, and (3) the third   attempts

    to make comics   into   a teachable

      discipline –   it is in   this section

        that I begin to work at finding some of the

       ways that we might think of

a comics form (not *medium*) rhetorically. For example, when a comic book (or graphic novel) attracts wide public attention, the medium is not always the primary factor, but its new take on a topic or how it approaches (or remediates) thinking and writing in unique ways (e.g. Alan Moore's graphic novel *Watchmen*). While Groensteen celebrates this (non)legitimization by challenging the modernist "ideology of purification that has led contemporary art to a dead end" ("Why" 9), he does so by developing an alternate system that "defines an ideal" (*System* 20). In a postmodern age weary of notions of 'purity' and 'ideals,' the absence of an 'ideal' form of comics offers us an easy entre to say that they are well suited to explore ideas of other ways of practicing writing/art excluded from institutional ways of knowing (definition), doing (cinematic), and making (producing).

Groensteen's larger project – defining *the* system of comics – has deeper issues at play that rely on narrative elements of the medium. In *The System of Comics*, he goes on to discuss a complex network that compels an associative logic that can be extended to current work in new media and art criticism scholarship, such as a post-hermeneutic method that extends beyond interpretation alone.[5] Groensteen explains in his introduction that he is setting out to develop "a conceptual frame in which all of the actualizations of the 'ninth art' can find their place and be thought of in relation to each other, taking into account their differences and their commonalities *within* the same medium" in order to advance "the fundamental concept of solidarity" (*System* 20). However well-intentioned, this objective begins to exclude those forms of comics that fall outside of his classifications, a criticism that he has also pinned on Scott McCloud. Such categorizations that can lead to an us/them relationship of conflict[6] centered on guarding accepted manifestations as if there were some semblance of control over the development of the medium (and its compositions) – projects like Frank Miller's *300*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, or Andrei Molotui's

Abstract Comics would continue fall beyond the scope of Groensteen's system. In order to sketch out how comics present *postmodern writers / artists* with an instance of writing imaginatively, we need to move beyond notions of comics as inherently sequential and as a dominantly print medium so that we may see how they may function in 'the arts' and in rhetoric/composition; this requires that we first turn to the 'definitional project' in order to offer a (non)definition of comics as a form.

SLASHING THROUGH IMAGE/TEXT: THE DEFINITIONAL PROJECT

> "One way to perceive the disjunction is to view the slash as a technology. In other words, the difference between rhetoric and composition is in how they each define and employ techné."
>
> ~Cynthia Haynes, "Rhetoric/Slash/Composition"

Groensteen's definitional project correlates to current concerns in writing instruction and the various problematics of legitimized knowledge and writing practices – or what I have called 'pure' writing. While well-informed, defining parameters in terms of formal categories, such as the "spatio-topical" system Groensteen describes, reduces image/text relationships gives one mediation preference over the other, creating a hierarchy meant to move toward legitimization. In contrast to Groensteen's view of comics as medium – designating the limits of this 'art' form by providing a stance, or what in rhetorical terms is called stasis theory – Kenneth Burke's "paradox of substance" offers a better approximation of the comics form. As Burk writes, "though used to designate something within the thing, intrinsic to it, [substance] etymologically refers to something outside the thing, extrinsic to it," it would be "something that the thing is not" (Grammar 23).[7] For comics, this sub-stance

lies outside formal/systematic conceptualizations and, has a context beyond traditional

form(ulation)s (sequentiality).[8]

As such,

most attempts

at defining comics

as a medium are

unnecessary and

generally unproductive,

perhaps even self-serving

to the point of ignoring

the larger context of

comics – as intermedial

form (for more on

intermedia, see

chapter 3). A more

productive approach

appears in a method

Greg Ulmer and Hawk

call *hyperrhetoric* –

which inserts 'art'

directly into rhetoric

and composition.

What I suggest is

that current perspectives on comics (art) would be better achieved through a (non)

category than with a formal/istic classifications. Here I take my cue from Cynthia

Haynes' "Rhetoric/Slash/Composition," Lisa Trahair's reading of Lyotard's *Discours,*

figure in *The Comedy of Philosophy* and James Kochalka's suggestion that art

is a way of understanding and condensing life's experiences (*Cute Manifesto*). To put it briefly, as I hope to show, because comics are a form associated with both image and text, because they exist at the intersections between media, they would be better thought of as a technology in the sense that Haynes uses the term *slash* between rhetoric and composition. If "the *and* between computers and writing [is] already utterly unnecessary" ("Rhetoric/Slash/Composition"; emphasis added), per Haynes' rhetorical question, it isn't a far stretch to say that writing in the form of comics – as image and text – would need little discussion to dismiss another unnecessary and between 'computers and [comics]. As we'll see, from both Groensteen and Lyotard, *writing* always already involves both image and text.

Groensteen reminds us that the Greeks used "a single word, *graphien*" to refer to writing and painting, which, when "our alphabetical culture quickly became logocentrism," subordinated "visual forms of expression to language" since "philosophers continually repeat that the image tricks and troubles us, acting on our senses and exciting our emotions, and that reason is on the side of the word" ("Why" 8; emphasis added). Building on Michel Foucault's

This is Not a Pipe, Groensteen attempts to expose the opposition between image and text, claiming that the opposition between looking and reading has been long fought and continues to value the written text over the visual. This conversation is nothing new to those of us involved in rhetoric and composition's current focus on 'multimedia, but what I want to

point to here has to do with Groensteen's attempts to position comics as an art
that leans more toward the visual than the textual. The problem with the way
that he frames comics here, and in the way he discusses text, is that he does
not give the written word the (ambiguous) credit it de-serves – "reason is on the
side of the word" – despite a history of postmodern scholarship to the contrary;
here I am specifically thinking of Derrida's work on language and writing in *Of
Grammatology*. In other words, Groensteen fails to realize that the interplay of
image and text lays bare the ambiguities of each and that both are always already
presented together.

To elucidate this claim more fully, we turn to Trahair's reading of Lyotard.
Through a reading of Lyotards' *Discourse, figure*, Trahair suggests that each mode
(discourse, figure) is not an order of knowing separated from the other, but that
both realms "inhabit [each] other," that both image and text are always already
given together (*Comedy* 171). Evaluating these two modes of expression as Trahair
explains provides current multimodal composing processes in popular culture
(remix) with some alternate ways of thinking about what it means to write in an
age of new media. Where remix tends to work with a logic of association in the form
of collage/montage,[9] the thought-practices that Lyotard proposes brings us back to
the Greek word *graphien*, not as a separation, but as the superimposition of image
and text, each occupying the same space, just as stills in a film occupy the space
on a screen. This superimposition blurs the distinction between image and text
by breaking with the perspective that in "some instances of 'textual production,'
discourse will dominate; in others, the figure takes hold of the text" (Trahair,
Comedy 171).[10] Reading and writing in this way presents a logic of invention that
returns "texts" to conceptual starting places (*tropes*) that exceed methods of reading
and writing categorically (*topos*).

As it relates to traditional views of comics, *topoi* (commonplaces) can be misused if the goal is to illustrate some known idea or represent some preconceived knowledge, such as caricature(s). In response to one of the most outrageous ('causing outrage') examples of this misuse, the 2005 Danish political cartoons of the Muslim prophet Mohammed, Spiegelman echoes the problems that rhetoric and composition have been addressing over the last thirty years – specifically, the desire to control meaning, language, writing and the teaching of rhetoric and composition. For Spiegelman, these caricatures symbolize a symptom, not the cause of a larger problem: the desire to canonize or curate. "Caricature," Spiegelman writes, "is by definition a charged or loaded image: its wit lies in the visual concision of using a few deft strokes to make its point" by "deploying a handful of visual symbols and clichés" that use "the discredited pseudo-scientific principles of physiognomy to portray character through a few physical attributes and facial expressions" ("Drawing Blood" 45). As a representational form (*mimesis*) of thought, caricature plays on accepted icons already present in the public consciousness. When Sirc details how composition builds classrooms as

"peculiar

sorts of cultural

temples in which students

are 'invited' in to sample

the best that has been thought

and expressed in *our language* and maybe even, like the art students

we see poised in art galleries with their sketchbooks and charcoals,

to learn to produce the master's craft" (*English* 2), the issue lies with

caricature – we 'invite' students into classrooms in

order that they can create caricatures of *our*

language with tasks geared toward making

them write purely, to reproduce the models of

'the best that has been thought and expressed.'

Un/Composing (Visual) Rhetorics

What comics offer us goes beyond *caricature* – a form that allows writers and artists to compose without the requirement of a model or master copies hanging over their heads.

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* offers an alternate perspective that begins to blur the division between theory and practice – a blurring not too distant from Haynes' virgule, the slash (/), between rhetoric and composition ("Rhetoric/ Slash/Composition") or the hesitating comma in Lyotard's *Discours, figure*. While McCloud has been widely criticized for his attempt to define the medium of comics – either it is too limiting (Meskin) or too broad (Cohn) depending on the critic – his performative exploration of comics suggests an intersection between Duchamp's creative act in art and craft, a place of invention – and "object" that goes beyond criticism and actually performs the work that it discusses, or what Ulmer would call an "object of post-criticism." McCloud's content aside, the book acts out the sort of practices that comics offer rhetoric/ composition pedagogy, a field continually concerned with verbal language and visual inscriptions. That is, comics present a hesitating intervention, which is precisely what McCloud attempts to accomplish with *Understanding Comics*: he hesitates to *fix* a definition of comics while examining the current state of the medium, even claiming that the definition is only a way to set out on the work he does throughout the rest of the book. As far as the content is concerned, he bookends the entire project with two claims: (1) "[O]ur attempts to define comics are an on-going process which won't end anytime soon" (*Understanding* 23), and (2) "I've learned a lot about comics since beginning this project and I know I have a lot left to learn. I hope you'll all consider exploring—or continuing to explore—comics on your own" (*Understanding* 215). McCloud has no illusions of creating a *fixed* definition, and he welcomes an inventive approach to comics that falls outside of his own project's purview.

If we learn to look at comics as McCloud does, we have the terrain to think of comics as a technology, as *techné*, that defines and employs images and text in different ways, ways that welcome experimental arrangements. Here we see comics' connection to the current move in multimodal composition pedagogy away from interpretation and toward stimulating thought to create something new through generative practices that alters how we think and write how we experience 'reality'.[11] The purpose of such an experimental approach is not to engage in cultural criticism, but to become productive writers, and to tackle the "insecurity over our status as a valid academic field [that] led us to entrench ourselves firmly in professionalism" (Sirc, *English* 6) in such a way that 'our profession' has less to do with institutions (and institutional demands) and more to do with how we experience the world.

Still, some of the concepts that he introduces through the book are problematic if read as the only application and approach that writers/artists take toward the comics. Most notably, the initial definition he provides – "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud, *Understanding* 7-9) – relies on a linearity that implies a grammatical structure, like the one that Kress and Van Leeuwen propose in *Readings Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. This is where the Lyotardian superimposition turns up – instead of arranging image/text, image/image, text/image, text/text sequentially, conceptualizing this division as an already interrelated and inter-active employment of technè presents a way of breaking up the division between the textual, allowing how we think of the figural to become a *hyperrhetorical* manner of invention. In addition to avoiding the concern of "amplification through simplification" (McCloud, *Understanding* 30) present in the concept of *caricature*, thinking of this combination as method of superimposition allows us to think

about how comics create complex networks of meaning by looking at how various media combine (more on the combination of media in chapter 3) to elicit a singular aesthetic response rather than a general/ized response. If we take our cue from Lyotard, the interaction of image and text would take shape as a Moebius strip where there are no longer two separate sides, and the aesthetic response arising out of these combinations "is not at all closed in the sense of a volume, it is infinite, and contrary to the representative cube, intensities run in it without meeting a terminus, without ever crashing into the wall of an absence, into a limit which would be the mark of a lack," but "[i]t invests without condition," without "rule and knowledge" (*Libidinal* 4).

The problems with 'understanding' comics as a language, rather than as an alternate form of thought, appears in Neil Cohn's work on *visual language* in the field of linguistics. In "Un-Defining 'Comics,'" Cohn tries to develop a theoretical

model of comics that   focuses on a grammar

of visual images comparable   to the Frankfurt School's

view of aesthetics, which   parallels the grammar

he sees at the center of   acquisition – what in

rhetorical studies may   fall under the canon of

style. Cohn's *visual language* model, though,

relies on a constructionist method of

reading that does not take into account the

aleatory/associative   procedures found in

theoretical and   philosophical work

over the last century,   beginning as early as

Marcel Duchamp. In   his own words, Cohn

claims that comics   "can only be understood

as sociological, literary,   and cultural artifacts,

independent from the internal structures comprising them," and he proposes that a more productive approach would study its "visual language" and "visual linguistics" (with all of its grammatical and syntactical connotations), which would be akin to taking "x-rays of it to understand how it works" ("Un-Defining" 246). While he claims that language "places no restrictions on how it is utilized" and could lead to "a boom of diverse content" ("Un-Defining" 247), he seems to suggest that 'understanding' the logic of a comics language can help us better grasp how to handle the form in order to give voice to what other fields of study have already been working on developing. If this is the case, the importance of comics would become diminished as just another way of saying what has already been said in another domain.

Aaron Meskin's "Defining Comics?" suggests that Cohn's project is misdirected when he questions any (and all) attempts at defining comics: "we are typically most interested in features whose absence tends to preclude a work from falling into a category, not ones that are *required* for category membership" ("Defining" 376). Here, Meskin acknowledges that any standardized features of comics are inherently limiting and unnecessary for any art, and it would seem "improbable that a definition of comics – even if it were forthcoming – would be of much help in giving us critical and interpretive guidance" ("Defining" 376). In essence, Meskin finds that the definitional project is misguided since any definition excludes more than it incorporates; an alternative would be to think of comics tropologically – not as a medium (category) in itself, but as the superimposition of media that allows, even invites, the proliferation of meaning beyond representation/reproduction (*mimesis*) in the formulation of new, perhaps unexpected, linkages. As it happens,[12] the relevance of comics has to do with how they address the ordinary, the everyday where "random chronology overcomes logic, and the idea of causality gives way to the contingency and arbitrariness of everyday life" (Schneider, "Comics and Everyday Life" 41), where the Strange(r) writes and thinks without regard for categorical memberships.

A Hesitating In(ter)vention: The Cinematic (Arts) Project

"…it ought to be obvious that I accept completely the notion that there is a prescriptive function to the idea of paganism. I believe that one should move in the direction that it proposes. But I am struck by the fact that prescriptives, taken seriously, are never grounded: one can never reach the just by a conclusion."

~ Lyotard, *Just Gaming*

If we begin to
think of comics as an art on
its own merits, as Meskin suggests,
instead of systematically, as Cohn
and Groensteen seem to propose,
some headway can be made
in seeing comics as
a *hyperrhetorical*
form of writing
and thinking.
To consider
comics as a
form that links
art to the everyday,
some of the
concerns

that Groensteen

raises in "Why Are Comics Still

In Search Of Cultural Legitimization?"

need to be addressed. As a genre of art,

Groensteen claims   that comics endure a

s u b o r d i n a t e   position to other arts,

including cinema,   due to its hybridity

(combining image   and text), its (erroneous)

association with   an inferior art

(caricature), and

its position as a

medium lacking

any link to serious

work (9-11) – although

I'm not sure what could

be more serious than

how we think about

our everyday lives,

the "'home of the

bizarre and mysterious',

the place where the

exceptional

and marvelous reside"

(Schneider, "Comics and

Everyday Life" 43).

When

Groensteen places comics and cinema in conversation in *The System of Comics*, he asserts that for "its part, film has other assets, and comics have theirs also, a fact that is demonstrated by its [comics] continuing popularity after a century and a half of existence, despite the competition of cinema and of all the new things born of what Regis Debreay calls the 'videosphere'" (8). However, Groensteen relies on scholarship within cinematic studies that does not reflect the differences in media, but that equates cinema and comics – a problematic link for various reasons. The most prominent example he uses is Roland Barthes' *obtuse meaning*, which he by unquestioningly associates with comics even though Barthes identified the *obtuse* as a cinema-specific meaning that produces an abstract examination of a film.[13] While Barthes mentions that comics may offer "a new signifier," it would be one "*related* to the obtuse meaning" since it contains a narrative that allows for counter-narratives ("The Third Meaning" 66). By applying a term to comics that Barthes assigns to film, even as he attempts to differentiate comics from film, Groensteen stumbles upon some of the ambiguous differences between both and how comics present an alternate form of thinking and writing: in fragments (aphorisms – see my chapter 6) where we explore and invent with a rigor beyond a unified system that closes upon itself.[14]

Toward the end of his assessment of the 'system,' he seems to have discovered the difference: while film tends to work with logics of the cut (montage/collage), traditional comics[15] produce networks that stimulate logics of association un/cut from how they appear in random, contingent and arbitrary chronologies. While Groensteen's project has been a welcome addition to comics scholarship, his study parallels that of McCloud's *Understanding Comics*[16] and tends to position comics in opposition to cinema, rather than exploring the ways in which comics present a form of *technè* that can be thought of as a technology (in Haynes' sense of the word). For example, he "objects to" the term "*editing (montage)*" since this sort of "operation […] consists of

an intervention on a material that has already been elaborated" (*System* 101) even while he supports the juxtapositions that montage produces throughout his 'spatio-topical' system.[17] But the intervention that comics provide needs to be elaborated as an intervention in traditional understandings of comics that breaks apart discussions that continue to persist speaking at cross-purposes.

The underlying concern for Groensteen remains prominent for comics: that comics are considered a secondhand version of cinema. Yet, discarding terms due to their relationship with film can limit the development and potentialities of what comics present: a manner of thinking and writing in an age of new media denoting "the presence of an active and playful imagination trying to rewrite and redress its own environment and process" (Ellis, *Do Anything* 15). Alan Moore, one of the most prominent critics of film from within comics, acknowledges that cinematic techniques "can advance the standards of comic art and writing," but if they rely on cinematic techniques for innovative practices, comics will restrict emselves from the possibilities of artistic works not available to 'other cinematic arts' (*Writing* 3). David Carrier agrees with Moore and expresses a common observation from a comics perspective: when watching a film, the motion arises out of a projector, whereas the motion in comics takes place when "the successive images are connected" by the reader (*Aesthetics* 56), which correlates to McCloud's discussion of the gutter between panels in a conventional comic book. All of this to say that comics and cinema are already interrelated, but that the ways in which the two have been discussed along side each other leaves a lot to be desired. So while Groensteen dismisses montage as a technique for comics, his perspective does not reflect that of how 'artists' working with comics write and think – trans-disciplinarily; that is, with techniques and methods that extend beyond merely joining images and text to say in another way what has already been said in a different form, like Jacobson and Colón did with their graphic adaptation of the "National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States."

The most commonly discussed connection between comics and film has to do with how they employ narrative structures; if this remains the most significant factor of differentiating these two forms of thought, comics will continue to get the short end of the stick. For example, Hans-Christian Christiansen investigates the differences between comics and cinema in his article "Comics and Film," where he claims that "the systems common to both media and the systems unique to each medium" can help us "to understand the meaning of the signs in each text" (107). Where this *systematic* approach falters is in its dual reliance on *systematic* methods and its need to differentiate both the two as distinct media in order to construct a specific field of study that would allow us to better understand how the meanings in each are erected.

Let me state the obvious first: what such approaches ignore has to do with the current cultural and media theories of *remix* that work at breaking apart these *systematized* narratives in order to say something else. If taken to their (tempered) extreme, the methods used to break apart cinematic narratives necessitate turning films into what could, for all intents and purposes, be called traditional comics – a sequence of still images that forms a narrative. And if we see *remix* as merely an alternative mix of the mixes we have been presented, cinema and comics become modes of thinking that suggest, as Ulmer writes of video, "an alternative means of gathering

information into sets, for the purpose not of proving or testing an idea, but of a having a thought, of inventing both in the rhetorical sense of finding something to say and in the creative sense of innovation" ("One Video Theory" 268).

Hawk's method of remotivating the figural into a new context (through the rhetorical canons of memory and arrangement) presents such an alternative approach called *hyperrhetoric*, which comics scholars/hip has yet to adopt. *Hyperrhetoric*, as Hawk explains while working out of Ulmer, runs antithetical to a "method of controlling something in advance (or producing a generalization

that can

then control something in advance" that

"is a part of the ideology of science (induction and

deduction)" ("Hyperrhetoric" 77); in its place, *hyperrhetoric*

is "no longer shackled to   the seriousness of the literate text,"

but "is free to roam *nomadically*   through the world of words and images

and let style be the engine of   hir[18] delivery" ("Hyperrhetoric" 88;

emphasis added).[19] This method   helps us to make headway in

breaking apart the customary   linear panel-to-panel reading

comics – a process that has been   represented as a mechanism

for effective reading, including   the common reversion

of thinking about how 'readers'   fill in the gaps between panels.

Integrating *hyperrhetoric* into   the ways we think and write (about)

comics provides a way to   reverse the narrative association

with cinema that also   emphasizes traditional definitions

of comics. The example   I started with, Spiegelman's *In The*

Shadow of No Towers, presents what such a method

offers: a moment of emergence during the

play of *hyper / mediated*

inventive practices (to *hyper/mediate* here means to employ various media to invent allusions to the imaginable that remains inaccessible to a single medium). My use of cinematic theories of invention is not meant to suggest that comics are subordinate to other cinematic arts; the main reason I rely on theories coming out of cinema has to do with the dearth of work on how a comics form of thinking and writing can acclimate us to imaginative approaches to writing (with) new media.

While the playful work that comics have engaged in over the past two decades provides such approaches, how these approaches have been addressed remains entrenched in 'the literate text,' even though the *figural* provokes us to think abstractly. Victor Burgin's *The Remembered Film* disrupts the differentiations between comics and cinema that continues to be a source of conflict. In particular, when Burgin writes that the "film *we* saw is never the film *I* remember" (110), we find a corresponding example in Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* when he presents one way of 'making sense' of his experiences during the WTC attacks, and even the way he remembers those experiences are *unfixed*. Spiegelman's approach to this work puts into practice that inventive method that relies on what Hawk practices with the film *The Fifth Element*: unbinding the linear narrative to produce a conceptual starting place. As Spiegelman writes, what he was looking for was a way "to sort out the fragments of what [he'd] experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what [he] actually saw, and the collagelike nature of a newspaper page encourages [his] impulse to juxtapose [his] fragmentary thoughts in different styles" (*Shadow* iv). The way Spiegelman frames this project underscores how we can think of comics as a technology that provides us with a way of thinking in fragments and creating collages through a process of linking those fragments into new assemblages. Instead of relying on formal, narrative analysis, this approach to thinking and writing would have us insert a slash between comics and cinema – comics/cinema – to consider how practices of

creating and viewing change across media.[20] Both are technologies of the *slash*,
and the importance of each is not the differences between them, but in how they
each define and employ *techné*.

Asbjørn Grønstad has already proposed a similar concept for film studies
that he calls *theory film*, which "provides us with a metadiscursive concept that
condenses a host of inter-related ideas that all seem to converge in the perception
that aesthetic texts themselves may be constitutive of theoretical thought" (14).
From within comics, Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean visualize what such a
process might consist of in *Signal to Noise*. In the narrative, a (fictive) prominent
director has only months to live, but feels compelled to write his last project about
the end of the world, to be completed posthumously. He begins to imagine the
film, assembling the sets, actors, and shots, but not writing any of it. There is no
purpose, he tells himself. It will not be completed, the world is ending for him, but
eventually something pierces him about this project and he is compelled to write.
There is a world of potentialities building in his mind, "where the real films are"
(*Signal* 3), what Burgin might refer to as 'internal memory,' manifested as an
arrangement from "fragments [that] go adrift and enter into new combinations,
more or less transitory" (Burgin, *Remembered* 68), until he puts "them out of
their misery" (Gaiman, *Signal* 3) by writing. In his final moments, the director
finds what he sees as an appropriate title for this transitory work: *apocatastases*,
meaning a "return to a previous condition" (Gaiman, *Signal* 50), which could be
explained as a place where writers and artists work without (predetermined)
criteria for a playful inventiveness that works with collected fragments, and
produces a *collagelike* work in different styles (or media/tions).

But none of this is really new. McCloud notices this move in the sequel to
Understanding Comics – Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology

are Revolutionizing an Art Form. After all, what I'm suggesting is how comics work as a form that can teach us how to work imaginatively with technology by inventing a way of thinking about comics as a form of thought rather than as a *unique medium.* For this re-invention, McCloud asks that we begin to think of comics as multimedia instead of thinking about "comics and multimedia in collaboration," which he explains would be merely transfer the printed page into digital environments (*Reinventing* 208). At the heart of this manner of thinking is the ability to consider the "*ideas that traditional media* harbor" escaping "the *shells* of the technologies that brought them into being, until the irreducible *essence* of each has emerged" so that "*new forms* [can] grow in their *new environments.* Comics is such an idea, and most of its checkered history has been the *shell*" (Reinventing 233). And it is this idea that continues to be ignored in favor of rehashing the same old arguments about the *uniqueness* of the medium rather than thinking about the idea of a (new) comics form, a form that suggests a way of writing and thinking imaginatively with the logics of digital media (e.g., linking, hypermedia/tion, montage/collage, etc.), what Ulmer calls *electracy* – a method of learning closer to invention than authentication. Part of the goal for the remainder of this project will be to find ways in which we can think about how comics offer an imaginative way of thinking and writing in digital environments.

Electracy, the early years: Nietzsche doing graphic design.

SIFTING THROUGH THE MADNESS:
WRITING IMAGINATIVELY

"if it doesn't come bursting out of you/in spite of everything,/ don't do it. unless it comes unmasked out of your/heart and your mind and your mouth/and your gut,/ don't do it."

~ Charles Bukowski, "so you want to be a writer?"

Fluidity and play guide this inventive process at the intersections of comics and cinema as an additional way of thinking about the image/text relationship and the relationship between print and digital writing. Hyperrhetoric, as Hawk describes it, entails an element of playful inventiveness with a re-arrangement of memory toward transformative production. Hawk tells us that a component of hyperrhetoric is to give an example since this method attempts to blur the line between theory and practice. For our purposes, an example presents itself in Marcel Duchamp's remix *L.H.O.O.Q.* An initial "reading" could suggest that this re/viewing of Leonardo de Vinci's[21] *Mona Lisa* is a single artwork that stands on its own. However, we know that Duchamp was questioning the meaning of Art by drawing/painting in a mustache and goatee. In this instance, Duchamp's piece also comments on the *work* of art, which, if his writings are an indication, he would say is never finished – similarly, a saying from composition courses puts this point explicitly: "the essay is not finished, but it is due." However, for institutional writing, due, more often than not, means complete.

Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* has become an accepted work of Art, and one that rhetoric/composition scholars, when looking to art for guidance, see as an inspiration or as a model of what the rhetorical turn to the *figural* might look like.

L.H.O.O.Q. resonates with current popular art trends toward *remix,* in the sense that it inserts a discrepancy and interrupts the expectations of spectators, at least when it was first made public. However, this remix does not only use the montage/collage techniques found in cinema and music, but superimposes one image over another to create something new. Let me provide a manifestation of playful work using a now-antiquated technology: the overhead projector. On this projector we have a duplicate of de Vinci's *Mona Lisa* shown on the screen behind us.

Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and Duchamp's L.H.O.O.Q.

A traditional art-criticism course, like the one I took while an undergraduate, would begin by contextualizing the image and providing some description and/or interpretation of the image – the slight, coy smile indicates a hidden secret. But this is not a traditional course. In this course, we have two blank transparencies. The first includes a mustache and a goatee that, when placed over our copy, mimics Duchamp's remix – *Mona Lisa* has a mustache and goatee. We let this sit; we discuss the painting and what we would add. On the second transparency, students have decided that they would like to dye her hair pink and stretch her ear-piercings to a double-zero gauge (about an inch in diameter). We lay this transparency over Duchamp's rendering of the Mona Lisa. What we have now resembles something akin to a portrait of a "punk" created through a playful approach to art, to writing and the figural while performing a critique from within the medium:[22]

Re/Mix of Duchamp's L.H.O.O.Q.

Still, the fear that this approach becomes "art for art's sake" cannot be ignored since in most traditional writing courses "writing for writing's sake" seems to be a common perception among writing students. For the writing classroom that continues to focus on traditional academic essays, a practice still common in most writing instruction, rhetoric and composition has little (obvious) personal and professional relevance and does not (always) address the changing environments in which writing takes place. The research paper assignment is due and therefore complete. Conversely, many (theorists) have recognized that writing takes many forms and is a cyclical process of theory/practice. To write a research paper by trilogy ("thesis, antithesis, synthesis") serves as a way to continue the method of acceptable/accepted writing (*topoi*), of argument, and modes of writing that do not account for alternate forms of writing open by new media. Re-imagined, writing might look like Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* continued with a superimposition: invention accompanied by a sense of play, like the playful revisions of both *Mona Lisa's* portraits.

Allan Kaprow argues for such an approach to "art" when he left the *happenings* behind, calling it *unart* (), which would step toward laughter[23] by avoiding "all esthetic roles, give up all references to being artists of any kind whatever[24] [and existing] only fleetingly as the nonartist, for when the profession of art is discarded, the art category is meaningless, or at least antique" (103-104). Discarding art as a category has been a motivation for the work that comics 'artists' have been developing since becoming disillusioned with the formal

It's time to move past Duchamp's critique of art.

elements involved while learning to become artists – and so they've become *unartists* unconcerned with aesthetic roles and categories. As it applies to rhetoric/ composition, James Kochalka offers us a clue to how comics (as a form) conduct this work when he explains that "art is not a way of conveying information, it's a way of understanding information. That is, creating art is a means we have of making sense of the world, focusing to make it clearer, not a way of communicating some understanding of the world that we already hold" (Cute 121), and it should "be accompanied by a sense of play," which "is a heightened state of *imaginative awareness* that allows us *to enter new realms of discovery* […]. Play *is* our most important way of processing the information of experience […]. Play and art are the same thing!" (*Cute* 100-102; emphasis added). Here, Kochalka sees comics (form) as a way to address the "constant blinking techno vibrations that we bombard our senses" with in order to tune us in "with the cacophony of the instant" (*Cute* 40), by "feeling the rhythm within the cacophony" (*Cute* 41) and writing within that state.

To re-begin, Spiegelman was able to make sense of his experiences on the day the WTC was attacked as he wrote/drew *In the Shadow of No Towers*. However, he may hesitate to say that that work accurately portrays how he felt and how he has continued to make sense of the attacks. Writing and art became ways of making sense of those events, but one that continues every time he remembers and re-arranges that event. *In the Shadow of No Towers* might look much different if Spiegelman were to attempt it a decade later instead of the three years he took to complete the project following the attacks. Spiegelman's approach to comics presents a way of thinking and writing strangely by engaging (all) the available means of production. Comics can re-orient us to the division between image/text (and comics/cinema), all the while making differences apparent and inventive. Such an approach proposes an inventive view of comics that takes into account the superimposition of the figural and the textual toward postmodern writing

practices similar to the one that Italo Calvino describes "as the tendency to make ironic use of the stock images of the mass [new/digital] media, or to inject the taste for the marvelous inherited from literary tradition into narrative mechanisms that accentuate its alienation" (*Six Memos* 95); this (non)method corresponds "to what in philosophy is nonsystematic thought, which proceeds by aphorisms, by sudden, discontinuous flashes of light" (*Six Memos* 118). Calvino identifies this position as one involving internal memory, a sort of 'mental cinema'[25] at work in comics. He even works hyperrhetorically, inventing through difference in the midst of both image and text. Writing of his 'reading' as a small child, he refers to the images in comics that spurred stories before he could read the text. Even when he learned to read, "the advantage was minimal," often "stabs in the dark [at meaning] like my own" (*Six Memos* 93) – a claim that breaks away from traditional views of comics as merely 'visual novels.' Instead, he adopted an "occupation of daydreaming *within* the pictures" (*Six Memos* 93-94) that allowed for "a process of abstraction, condensation, and interiorization of sense experience"[26] (*Six Memos* 95) – an associational logic of assembling fragmentary thoughts in new formations. Pedagogically, Calvino's (non)method parallels Hawk's *hyperrhetorical* method, invented for the occasion with unpredictable outcomes, and returning us to a *sophistic ethos* (Haynes) that would have us write as Plato's sophist speaks: as Sophist(ic)s, as Strangers.

Haynes appraises this pedagogical footpath as

"[t]eaching the value of exploring something in the abstract, without practical purpose or intention, would return composition to its sophistic ethos (I dare not say roots). In other words, finding new touchstones means leaving touchstones behind. It mean plumbing the depths of abstraction. It means ob/literating the ground" ("Writing Offshore" 715).

Sophistic ethos in this sense would unhinge itself from institutional grounds (with the various connotations, including the physical space and justification – "on these grounds, I argue"). When pedagogy becomes postpedagogy, it returns itself to its mobile (ped: foot – walking) origins by extracting itself from the fixed space/place of institutions. The term itself comes to us from the Greek word paidagogeo, where agogos means 'to lead,' and comes to the Greeks from the Sanskrit word ajati, meaning 'drives, moving, active.' In other words, postpedagogy walks the walk, talks the talk, and writes writing. It would be sophist(ic) in the Socratic sense: walking alongside each other as whatever singularities in order 'to be such that it always matters'.[27]

CHAPTER 3
ART INTERRUPTED

ART INTERRUPTED[1]

"...Surrealism saw in it the means of obtaining, most often
under conditions of complete relaxation of the mind rather
than complete concentration, certain incandescent flashes
linking two elements of reality belonging to categories that
are so far removed from each other that reason would fail to
connect them and that require a momentary suspension of the
critical attitude in order for them to be brought together."

~ Andre Breton, "On Surrealism in its Living Works"

There may be no better "art" to illustrate our Stranger's (comic/s) writing than Surrealism, a 'movement' whose participants took it upon themselves to speak without an authoritative voice, bearing witness to the strange occurrence of everyday life with the chance logic of dream-work.[2] Beyond the denotative link between the two terms, the Stranger and Surrealism share a common bond in their desires to let the imagination run free, to manifest the un-manifested, as exemplified by Andre Breton's perpetual revisions of a "Manifesto of Surrealism" (cf. *Manifestos of Surrealism*). The chance logics of this dream-work remain uncommon practice with new media, a part of how technology has been affecting the ways in which we think despite the moves we've been making toward 'multimodal' composition. A new way of thinking about how to compose with the

available means new media provide presents itself in Blanchot's view of surrealism, and specifically with how it connects with Kaprow's (non)method called *unart* and its connection to Dick Higgins' idiom of *intermedia*. To begin, Blanchot's view of surrealism:

> The surrealist experience [*expérience*] is the experience of experience, whether it seeks itself in a theoretical or practical form: an experience that deranges and deranges itself, disarranges as it unfolds and, in unfolding, interrupts itself. It is in this that surrealism – poetry itself – is the experience of thought itself. (*Infinite* 412)

The interruption Blanchot brings up here has to do with interrupting the totality of thought similar to the interruption of myths, as detailed by Jean-Luc Nancy, spoken and written as singularities exposing the limits of such totalities (*The Inoperative Community*). Surrealism, like the means offered in new media, attempts to affirm the experience of thought as life rather than as institutional. For example, Breton's manifestations of surrealism were in continual flux having "nothing to do with any aesthetic criterion" (*Manifestos* 297), a move that Kaprow terms unart to indicate a move away from institutional perspectives on art. As Kaprow writes, the *unartist* "is the offspring of high art who has left home" (*Essays* 230), and as such is engaged in the interruption of Art and the categories therein. I tend to sympathize with Kaprow's *unart* due to its (indirect) link to rhetorical theory concerning writing with new media, and its reliance on what can now be called common art theories and practices – something I have also been guilty of proposing when speaking of comics.

However, what comics suggests take a much different route, one much more closely related to *unart* than to art. As I'll explain, like surrealism, *unart* has no
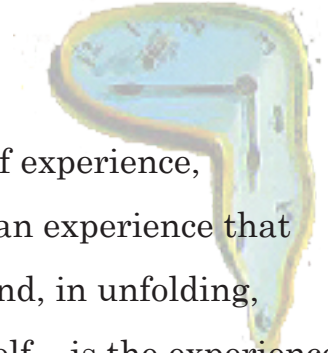
concern for art categories or 'aesthetic criteria' of any sort, and those individuals we call 'comics artists' have (perhaps unknowingly) engaged in the unarting of art. One example comes from Chris Ware, a 'comics artist' famed for his experimental graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, among other works. Speaking of his personal and professional relationship to art (in third person), he taps into a common perspective among many of today's well-known 'comics artists': "Though admittedly trained as an 'artist,' he never felt entirely at home in the generally approved setting, fashion, and didactic charter of that particular industry" (*Acme Novelty Library* 17, copyright page). Like Kaprow, Ware feels much more 'at home' in the strangeness of everyday life, in the surreal experience of thought itself, as it happens. However, in order to avoid a *syllogistic fallacy* – (1) Ware was disillusioned with his training as an 'artist'; (2) Ware is a 'comics artist'; (3) All 'Comics artist' are disillusioned with their training as 'artists' – this chapter works toward the view of a 'comics form' whose idiom ('school of art') is *unart* rather than Art – and therefore closer to the work rhetoric and composition engages with in terms of new media and multimedia. Toward this goal, I begin with an example coming out of Spiegelman's alternative comics magazine *RAW* called *The Narrative Corpse* (*TNC*), a project that attempted to enact a surrealist parlor game – *les corps exquisite* – through comics.

THE NARRATIVE CORPSE: IT'S ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE![3]

"The surreal may well seek to constitute for itself imaginary
objects, indicate itself in the margins, discover itself close
to the unwonted through what is stunning and fascinating.
These indications still have no more than a distancing value:
reminders of the unseemly whose law is not only to disorder
the order of the appropriate, but also to be unable to suit itself,
concern itself, or conform to itself by assuming a form."

~ Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

Over the course of five years, 69 'comics artists' collaborated on *TNC* in response
to a prompt by Spiegelman asking all involved to break out of their routine
methods of producing comics. This experimental practice asked that artists draw
three comics panels building on the previous three panels, but without seeing
any of the panels that came beforehand. The project, as Spiegelman[4] conceived of
it, aimed to break "free from the constraints of rational thought" (2), a common
trait among 'comics artists.' By emulating,[5] and transforming, this surrealist
parlor game,[6] Spiegelman and friends extend Breton's 'surrealist manifestos' into
a method of invention that relies on chance arrangements, but with one rule: the
main protagonist, a stick figure with a black head, will unify the narrative. But
if we understand this stick figure as a metaphor for comics, what we find is a
stranger's work with a strange logic, the sort of logic that Derrida explains can be
seen "*as if* […] the stranger could save the master and liberate the power of his
host; it's *as if* the master, *qua* master, were prisoner to his place and his power, of
his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage)" (*Of Hospitality* 123). By
requiring each 'comics artist' to use the stick figure, he [the stick figure] works as
a way to implore each of his hosts – which Derrida also translates as 'strangers'

– to work beyond their normal context(s) – building a full narrative through an uninterrupted progression ('sequential art').

What is particularly interesting about this practice, and how Spiegelman conceives it, is that this method attempts to break apart tendencies to work toward some aim that would limit what can be thought and written; in its place, the game unfolds as an interruption of a totalizing narrative by singular 'voices.' Brian Boyd, commenting on *TNC*, explains this method as a practice of "chance instead of design, caprice instead of rationality, crazy disjunction instead of continuity" ("Art and Evolution" 35) in which Spiegelman "deliberately chooses to entangle and interrogate intention when he denies the contributors […] access to any shared aim" ("Art and Evolution" 53). Surrealism appeals to Spiegelman for its strange way of writing, an attunement to the strange part of everyday life that allows writers *and* artists to release themselves from what Ware sees as the paradox of comics' history of Art, including misdirected attempts to "insert comics into that dominant narrative" (Roeder, "Chris Ware" 65). Comics in general, and *TNC* in particular, are particularly interesting for their lack of concern for that dominant narrative – this lack of concern does not mean that they directly confront Art (history), but that they are much more like refugees from reason and Art. The surrealist approach to comics presented in TNC illustrates how this strange form of writing may be manifested under the conditions of a relaxed imagination (cf. Breton, *Manifestos*).

When thought of as a game, *the narrative corpse* gestures[7] toward a manner of thinking and writing that attempts to strip itself of the rational and narrative logic of sequence and linearity – we can see this in Spiegelman's editing notes that the editors of the work " eventually cut the Savage Pencil strand after Jayr Pulga's panels (which do not end the story on page 19), and used the Mark Beyer panels,

which followed those, to start our story" (2) – to point to other processes involved in writing strangely. In the first manifestation of Surrealism, Breton explains the purpose as an imaginative way of working that "offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake" (*Manifestos* 5). This last claim ('without fear of making a mistake') resonates with the guiding idea we find in *the narrative corpse* game, but that also appears in the work of 'comics artists' in general – this lack of fear also being a lack of concern for the demands of Art disciplines and their values.[8] While it may seem odd that comics become linked with a now-recognized art movement, at least when viewing comics as a move away from art *as such*, this strangeness dissipates when we look to the underlying motivations of *surrealist* works to be surprised with the unexpected, which is another way of saying to proceed with a 'playful imagination.'

Dali Atomicus by Salvador Dali (1948)

Art Interrupted

Much like the *surrealist* concern for life over art, comics' move away from Art is much more attuned to Kaprow's call for artists to *unart* themselves, "to give up any references to being artists of any kind whatever" (103), a task that has been underway within comics and *surrealism* since their inceptions, but one that has been absent from many of the avant-garde theories in rhetoric and composition concerning multimedia writing – a problematic term in itself. *Unart* and its association with Dick Higgins' concept of *intermedia* seems to be much more attuned to the work of rhetoric and composition for reasons that should become apparent throughout this chapter. Like 'comics artists' – those trained as artists, but who have left their 'homes' – the practice of *unarting* ourselves asks us to blur the boundaries between art and life by working in the "playground for experimental art [called] ordinary life" in such a way that it does not "possess a secret artistry in deep disguise," but is found in "not knowing what to call it at any time" (Kaprow, *Essays* 248-249). The experience of this surrealist work, as Blanchot describes it, is the experience of thought itself as the *productive* force of imagination,[9] a method of chance. Comics fit Kaprow's *unart* remarkably well considering the lack of a *fixed definition* of what constitutes a comic, but also because it offers up a form of proceeding with the chance operations – most visible in *TNC* – always already present in everyday life. And for rhetoric and composition, comics offer a way of thinking about how to proceed in developing a strange and imaginative writing with/in new media (digital) environments as avant-garde artists proceed to something else when a form of Art becomes fixed, especially considering our lack of formal Art training.
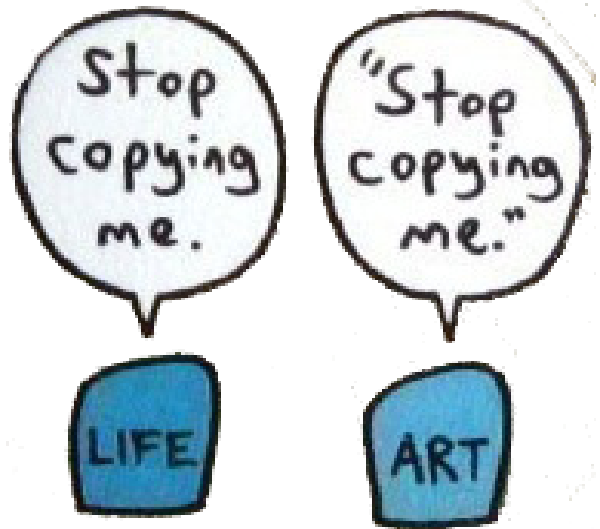
But this lack of training in Art has not stopped rhetorical theories and practices from incorporating these alternate methods and processes of writing into what is now being called *postpedagogy* – in essence, a pedagogy with avant-garde sensibilities. What we can learn from the methods of the avant-garde methods taking hold in rhetoric and composition is a desire to attend to daily life in the sense of Kaprow's *unart*[10] and in Lyotard's desire for a writing stripped of determining criteria. *Unart* would interrupt rhetoric and composition's use of Art to move closer to the sort of 'art' that Nietzsche petitions for in *The Gay Science*: "if we convalescents still need art, it is *another kind* of art – a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a pure flame, licks into unclouded skies! […] Oh, how we now learn to forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing, as artists" (37) so that we may become "the poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters" (240). Stripped of the categorical identifications with other 'arts,' the comics form presents us with this *other kind of art*, this *unart*, precisely because the 'artists' who have taken up the form were more concerned with 'ordinary life' than with the training they received in the categories of Art. To put it briefly, when *unartists* leave their 'homes,' they leave in order to walk through life as strangers, writing and producing imaginative artifacts that may or may not be 'art' – there's no way to know since the criteria for making such judgments have not yet been formed. As it relates to comics, *TNC* demonstrates the versatility of comics and 'artists' that have left their homes in order to produce artifacts whose identity as art is uncertain due to its surreality (its strangeness). In what remains of this chapter, I work to explicate the ways in which the *unart* of comics performs this strange writing and how it relates to writing (with) new media.

Un/Arting Comics

"Reality, however, is not story-shaped, and the eruptions
of the odd into our lives are not story-shaped either. They
do not end in entirely satisfactory ways. Recounting the
strange is like telling one's dreams: one can communicate
the events of a dream but not the emotional content, the
way that a dream can color one's entire day."

~ Neil Gaiman, "The Flints of Memory Lane"

Chris Ware once wrote: "Artists, it is well known, are strange people" (*Acme Novelty Library* 18). And there is no stranger artist than those who work with the comics form. I mean, what other sort of artist would take such a strange surreal parlor game as *the exquisite corpse* and try to make it stranger? Only a 'comics artist' attempting to break the form out of its complacency as a *fixed medium* could conceive of this a project, the experience of performing such a project extending beyond traditional conceptualizations of what it means to be a 'comics artist.' The link between a surrealism contented to do whatever it is that they 'do' and a comics form that engages in the experience of thought itself as it puts that thought to work in producing what could only be called a 'mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled' art gives rise to the view that "'their work is their reward,' and that excessive capital pollutes its purity, or something like that" (Ware, *Acme Novelty Library* 18). But this 'purity' is only 'pure' to the extent that it is strange – the 'something like that' – and that this work, untroubled by excessive politics, allows *the productive force called imagination* (cf. Derrida, *Archeology* 76) to exceed a politics lacking in foresight.

Speaking of *TNC*, Brian Boyd acknowledges the strangeness of comics as a playful form and that "Spiegelman plays with multiple patterns, dramatic, visual,

verbal: with verbal allusion, and with repetition, anaphora, syntactic parallelism, metaphor, cliché, antithesis and pun" ("Art and Evolution" 47).[11] Of the elements that Boyd notes in TNC, the most important one for addressing writing as strangely imaginative is the 'pun,' the joke or witticism that breaks from the patterns of sequentiality – beyond (conscious) reasoning[12] – because it [the pun] incorporates each of the other elements. Gregory Ulmer explains it thus:

> The pun, which simulates in writing the effect of intuition (the convergence of emotional sets), may be visual as well as verbal. As Ronald Schleiffer reminds us, the pun is one of the most basic linguistic units for creating redundancies, the condition that gives rise in experience to a feeling of eureka. (*Heuretics* 228)

For comics, the pun simulates the effect of intuition through the interrelatedness of the visual and verbal, and in writing this simulated-intuition the pun moves us into the practices of everyday life characterized as an imaginative 'politics' rather than as an 'art.'[13] In addition to simulating in writing the effect of intuition, the pun functions as a device for interrupting the closure of linear (or sequentiality, if you prefer) reasoning by fragmenting the cohesive narration of the work.[14] Like Allan Kaprow's *unart*, the pun in comics works by a process where "we add, by imagination and interpretation, to what we do" to render "meaning" variable, unfixed, and inventive (*Essays* 239).

For example, the internet meme *LOLcats* has been popularized by its effective use of the *pun,* including misspellings.

Applying such a method to Rhetoric and Composition, and art could be shown by playing on Steve Katz's name and his interest in the Rhetorics of Science. Like Schrödinger's cat, you never know what you'll see when you open up an article by Katz.

But this aspect of *punning* presents itself in more than just the *works* that 'comics artists' produce; it also appears in the methods these strange writers take on in their daily lives. Ware details this ~~post-~~process in a roundabout way when he writes of 'comics artists' in the third-person singular:

> …his job complete at one locale, he would immediately move on to the next outlet, asking only for a bit of bread, or a bowl of broth, or some such 'non-polluting' recompense. Also, this artist could really have not charged much of anything at all, otherwise his work would not have been so faultlessly universal…. (*Acme Novelty Library* 18)

Let me attempt clarity: the 'faultless universality' of the (art)work that the 'comics artist' produces is performed as life. And the performance of life here does not exist in a single medium, but with a variety of media – hence, 'moving on to the next outlet.' The interruption of 'Art' that 'comics' artists' put into practice implies a lack of *fixity* in what constitutes writing, but also in the modes of imaginative production employed in making those artifacts.

At this point, the link between 'comics artists' to *unartists* opens up explicitly through the fleeting employ-ment of various media all at once. As Kaprow defines it, an *unartist* is "one who is engaged in changing jobs, in modernizing" (*Essays* 104), proceeding fluidly across – no! – between media (*intermedia*) with a "simultaneity of roles" that thinks "all at once, or nonhierarchically" as "the *intermedialist* does" naturally (*Essays* 105); the *unartist's* approach to media – that is, digital technology – is that of the pun, of the playful use of technology. Like the comics artist, the intermedialist plays between established media, or art traditional disciplines, in order to suggest other ways of writing that remain unconcerned with formal categories of what constitutes 'acceptable' work. In doing away with

categories, *unart* also leads to a re-thinking of current trends toward multimodal composition, where "multi" indicates a combination of media ("mixed media") rather than how we may play between media forms.

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This license has been awarded in good faith to:

Name _____   Date _____

This license entitles the above named holder of certificate to practice the use of "Artistic License" whenever the need may arise. This allows holder to make completely arbitrary decisions regarding, but not in *any way* limited to, the following: paint finishes, details, marking schemes and color fidelity, paint patterns, miscellaneous small details, actual prototypical structural manufacturing methods & materials, panel line and rivet location, etc.

While in possession of this document, and for perpetuity, Mister _____ may basically do whatever he sees fit to accomplish his particular modeling goals without fear of criticism, as this certificate authorizes complete freedom of expression, that shall not be impugned by anyone, ever.

Writing for *The Institute of the Future of the Book*, Dan Visel presents the (unimaginative) problem of 'multimedia' composition:

> "Multimedia" is something that comes up all the time when we're talking about what computers do to reading. The concept is simple: you take a book & you add pictures and sound clips and movies. To me it's always suggested an assemblage of different kinds of media with a rubber band – the computer program or the webpage – around them, an assemblage that usually doesn't work as a whole because the elements comprising it are too disparate. ("multimedia vs intermedia")

Let me rephrase Visel's comments as it relates to this project: 'mulitmedia' does nothing to interrupt the categories constituting established media or art disciplines since it merely presents them in juxtaposition rather than integrating them in a Lyotardian approach to writing by *superimposition*. Instead, Visel suggests something more akin to the work that comics and *unartists* produce in the idiom of *intermedia*:

Dick Higgins's (incomplete) *intermedia* chart. The "?"'s imply that there is still a lot to learn about the *unartists* approach to working with new media to create innovative forms of writing and 'art.'
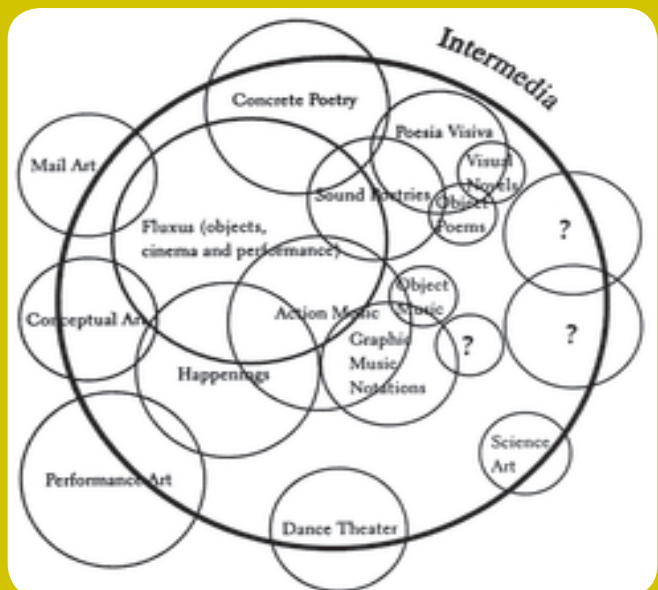
[Dick] Higgins's intermedia is a more appealing idea: something that falls
in between forms is more likely to bear scrutiny as a unified object than a
collection of objects. The simple equation *text + pictures* (the simplest and
most common way we think about multimedia) is less interesting to me than
a unified whole that falls *between* text and pictures. When you have *text +
pictures*, it's all too easy to criticize the text and pictures separately: this
picture compared to all other possible pictures invariably suffered, just as
this text compared to all other possible texts must suffer. Put in other terms,
it's a design failure. ("multimedia vs intermedia")

To put it simply, the idiom of intermedia finds a correlation to the work that 'comics
artists' find in their ways of fusing media into a whole that, through these links,
interrupts understanding where a single medium *seems* to exist as an autonomous
paradigm of possibilities. The conceptual fusing of two or more media into an
intermedial work also implies the simultaneity of roles *unartists* engage when
writing in imaginative ways – a writer is no longer one who only produces essays,
but essays and images, (graphic) designs and (video) games, music and videos. Put
in Visel's 'other terms,' *intermedia* works to undo the design failures of 'multimodal'
work that relies on fixed categories. In part, this is why the *image/text binary* – or
better yet, reduction – of comics fails to emerge as anything more than another
iteration of previously written texts. The *idea* of comics, at least as conceived in this
project, can be better understood as *the fusion of media* into (strangely) imaginative
works, especially if we can understand the ~~post-~~process of a 'comics artists' as an
oscillation between forms of media fused with a propensity for life rather than Art.

Craig Saper's framing of *intermedia* may better elucidate the relevance for
rhetoric and composition, at least insofar as rhetoric has to do with 'the available means,'
including the available means of interrupting persuasion. He writes: "[u]nlike all the

other arts, including film and literature, this new art, intensified by access to the Internet, is not defined by any medium's form. It is not a thing like a painting, printed poem, or film. *It is a situation*: networked art" (*Networked Art* ix; emphasis added). While Saper is not directly speaking of *intermedia*, the situation of the work he presents as 'networked art' underlies an *intermedial* approach that echoes one of the guiding theories in Breton's *surrealism*: "linking two elements of reality belonging to categories that are so far removed from each other that *reason* would fail to connect them" (*Manifestos* 302). Where reason fails, imagination succeeds. Like Lyotard's *phrases in dispute*,[15] *intermedia* acknowledges the need to link media, but how to link is contingent. This "how" is the home of reason, but the *unartists* usually referred to as 'comics artists' have left this home, preferring instead to add new links by an imaginative interpretation – what Friedrich Kittler calls *post-hermeneutics*.

The *Philosoraptor*, the philosophical genus of the velociraptor (from such hits at Jurraisic Park (parts 1-3)), ponders questions concerning life, the universe, and everything (according to unsubstantiated rumors, Douglas Adams stole the title from the Philosophator). With his aggresive debate (argumentative) stlye, the Philosophator offers us quick rhetorical questions and answers.

POST-HERMENEUTICS

"Artists regularly cross the supposed boundaries between media and even the link of 'appropriateness' for art. Even museum art no longer attempts to encourage catharsis or transcendence, nor does it permit easy classification as painting, sculpture, or theater."

~ Craig Saper, Networked Art

Rather than thinking as usual, the Stranger's *surrealist* writing has no direct interest in producing a unified whole; thinking and writing strangely, the Stranger affirms a proliferation of meanings and understandings that may or may not be contradictory as thoughts 'happen' before he can think about them.[16] Blanchot puts it well:
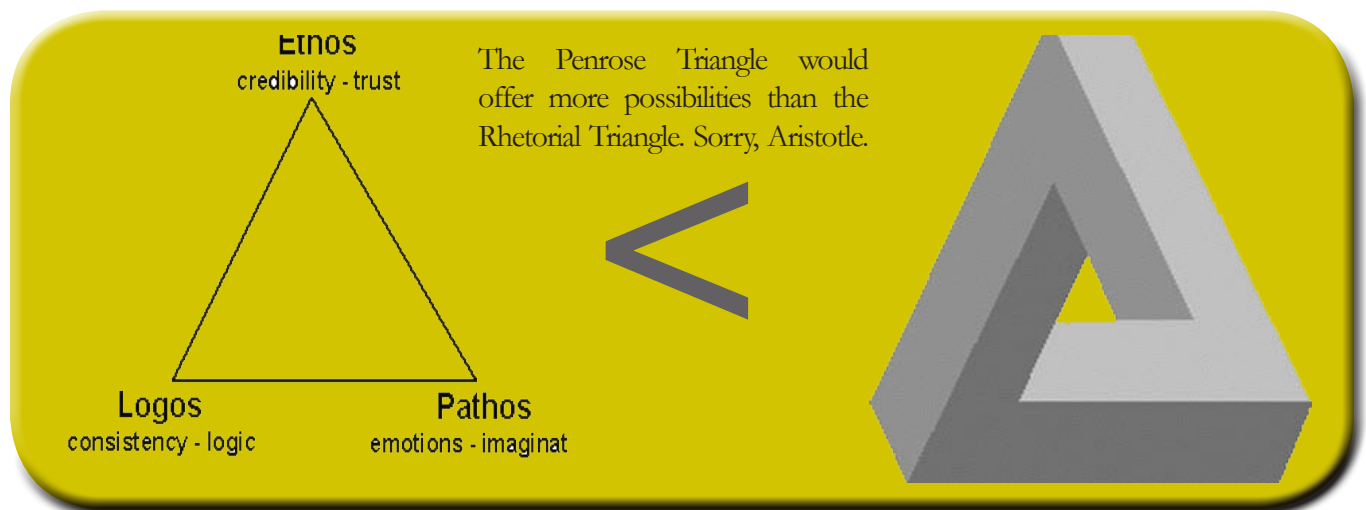
> Surrealism – *"it should come as no surprise"* – thus encounters writing, and through this encounter denies itself. But this is a writing of another kind. That the first "purely surrealist" attestation was produced in a kind of anonymous fashion through a double movement of writing that has no other aim than a freeing of the space (*the magnetic field*) that was affirmed by so-called automatic writing [...]. Automatic writing, a writing freed from the logic of logos, refusing everything that puts it to work and that makes it available to a work, is the very proximity of thought [...]. (*Infinite* 410)

Logos, in the way Blanchot uses the term, has to do with *the logic of reason*, of interpretations that propose a unified whole, while this *other kind of writing*, with its *double movement*, opens a space to affirm *other*, perhaps *contradictory*, interpretations that happen before they are able to be reasoned – that is, deduced or induced. This is an interpretation, a hermeneutics, of another kind. It is a

loosening of the constraints imposed by a hermeneutics that looks to systematize how interpretation proceeds,[17] and in this loosening, a post-hermeneutics happens intuitively (e.g., as a *pun*, as an interruption).

In the "Foreword" to *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, David Wellbery summarizes Kittler's post-hermeneutic readings as an abandonment of "the language game and form of life defined by the hermeneutic canons of justification and enters into domains of inquiry inaccessible to acts of appropriative understanding. Post-hermeneutic criticism, to put the matter briefly, stops making sense" (ix). Yet, in the interruption of *making sense*, post-hermeneutics opens the potentialities and possibilities in the sense of *nonsense*, at least in the sense that its logic knows no exclusion – it makes it own sense. That is, the sense of nonsense, like intuitive and imaginative work, keeps its manner of making sense mysterious – simultaneously *unknown* and *strange*.[18] How this *nonsense* abandons the canons of justification – argumentation – can be found in the associational logics of *puns* that see methods of linking as always already contingent. In a nutshell, the post-hermeneutic abandonment of the hermeneutic canons of justification emerges not as an elimination of interpretation – even if it were possible to do so[19] – but as what, in Surrealism, Blanchot calls "a strange plurality" (*Infinite* 408), an affirmation perpetually plural and multiple" (*Infinite* 409).

Ethos
credibility - trust

The Penrose Triangle would offer more possibilities than the Rhetorial Triangle. Sorry, Aristotle.

Logos
consistency - logic

Pathos
emotions - imaginat

To a certain extent, post-hermeneutics correlates to what John Caputo calls "radical hermeneutics" in his book by the same name. The link I see between Caputo's "radical hermeneutics" and Wellbery's post-hermeneutics can elucidate the necessity of abandoning the justification-game in light of the "National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States" report addressing the events of September 11, 2001. As Caputo writes, radical hermeneutics arises "at the point of the breakdown and loss of meaning, the withdrawal and dissemination of meaning" and it deals "with this loss of meaning by confronting the meaning of the loss, of the withdrawal, of the *lethe* itself" – here, Caputo defines *lethe* as "the concealed heart of *a-letheia*, the mystery which withdraws, which never hands itself over in a form we can trust" (*Radical* 271). If there is anything that "The 9/11 Commission Report" teaches us, it is that we are in need of confronting the breakdowns and losses of meaning more than we are in need of confronting the stabilization of meaning in forms we cannot trust. In militaristic terms, we need to stop 'sticking to our guns,' to our firm convictions about meaning(s), and to the canons of justification, since that will only serve to put us in "greater danger" and threaten the play of imagination.

By moving away from desires to justify and build meaning, post-hermeneutics encounter what Bill Readings, working out of Lyotard, calls a *sublime politics* that attempts "to subject politics to the radical indeterminacy" ("Sublime Politics" 411), that has us speak even though "we do not know exactly why or to whom" ("Sublime Politics" 420). This *sublime politics* would be akin to the needs for an imaginative politics, but one that would avoid its bureaucratization. The desire to bureaucratize the imagination would be more akin to 'a politics of the sublime' that "could only be terror" (Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained* 71). Politicizing the sublime, subjecting it to a uniform law, remains suspect in a *sublime politics* because such laws attempt to identify and define appropriat(iv)e understandings of totalizing thought, of a

representative determinacy. Put another way, a *sublime politics* proposes that
fixed rules and criteria (hermeneutics), and those who perpetuate them, are
always suspect since any attempt to fix these rules and criteria can only lead to
terror, "insofar as the political theorist, the state, or society claims to determine
what justice is, to derive political prescriptions in reference to a describable
state of affairs" (Readings, *Introducing* 113). In place of what Thomas Kent calls
hermeneutical terror,[20] a *sublime politics* dispenses with the desire for consensus
(a 'master narrative') – a feature of argumentative writing – and espouses a *post-
hermeneutics* of dissensus, of strange pluralities and multiplicities of thought and
meaning.

To see how this works in relation to comics, as conceived in this project,
the idiom – the term McCloud uses to indicate a "school of art" – of *intermedia*
discussed earlier provides a clue. Higgins' move toward *intermedia* and Kaprow's
toward *unart* highlight the move beyond hermeneutics in a way that can address
the troubling 'failure of imagination' in today's institutions and institutional
practices. Like Readings and Kent, Higgins and Kaprow are more concerned
with opening new media to realms of *becoming* (dissensus) rather than identity
(consensus).[21] By way of explanation, Higgins argues:

> Through developing our own hermeneutic concepts, we can find ourselves
> in history and other areas of culture as well as art, can tune into the shifts
> to which we can *become* more sensitive by balancing our focus on our own
> horizons, those from the past and any others we can find in the middle.
> (*Modernism* 21; emphasis added)

Hermeneutics, in this sense, communicates dubiously. It is *a process, a becoming*
of interpretation that communicates with the unknown by throwing a message out

into the void.[22] The indeterminacy of this sort of *process* offers opportunities for imaginative inventions that open up in the production of its works. To be blunt, *imagination* is both the *process* by which these imaginative works emerge and the idiom of *unart* called *intermedia*.

This is perhaps one of the least underdeveloped aspects of postmodernist writing – the role of imagination as sublime art, or unart. From Kant, Derrida lays out this claim emphatically: "the imagination was already in itself an 'art,' was art itself […]. It is art, certainly, but a 'hidden art' that cannot be 'revealed to the eyes'" and it "is the freedom that reveals itself only in its works" even though they "do not exist within nature, but neither do they inhabit a world other than ours" (Writing and Difference 7). The place of this unart, if there is such a place, then reveals itself through associational logics that have always already abandoned the language-games of justification in favor of intuitive linkages that then become ways of writing and invention through assemblage – in some way associated with a rhetorical canon of organization, but without any intentions to develop a consensus concerning meaning. And with these assemblages, imagination reveals itself in the assemblages that would otherwise remain hidden by setting out to find meanings not found in the image itself.[23]

SINCE WRITING ON TOILET WALLS IS DONE NEITHER FOR CRITICAL ACCLAIM, NOR FINANCIAL REWARDS, IT IS THE PUREST FORM OF ART — DISCUSS.

I found this fragment on a bathroom wall, a place where a variety of different images and writings are assembled without regard for justification. A "form of art" that has no concern for justification, but is thrown out into the void.

How any of this relates to comics can be found in the work of another 'comics artist' involved in *TNC*: Robert Crumb. In an interview with Ted Widner for *The Paris Review*, Crumb illustrates how such a post-hermeneutic manner of writing may begin with "…an idea for a story based on one drawing in a sketchbook—sometimes a story, or a character, or an idea starts as a mood, an atmosphere, a feeling" that works itself out "intuitively" ("The Art of Comics" 55). And for those familiar with the documentary *Crumb*, we know that these moods, atmospheres, feelings *happen* while he wanders around Paris (and elsewhere) – *à la* Walter Benjamin[24] – and attends to those elements of (daily) life that often go unnoticed. The stories he spins, the moods worked out intuitively, attempt to sort out the breakdowns of meaning through a strange and mysterious process that can only be *figured out* – revealed – through its works. In addition, since these works unfold intuitively by way of a mood, an atmosphere, a feeling, they are not subjected to any hermeneutic paradigm; as such, they are also not determined to any specific medium, but allow the possibilities of working between media and hermeneutic paradigms since no need exists to "have a deep, profound meaning" (Crumb, "The Art of Comics" 55). As such, comics can be thought of as *bricolage* (cf. Derrida; Lévi-Strauss) – work produced with whatever happens to be at-hand and with indeterminate associational logics. In other words, a comic(s) form of writing, like that of post-hermeneutics, *unart*, and *intermedia*, emerges as a fragmentary writing that proceeds in a manner similar to the (strange) surrealist (non)method of *automatic writing* free from the *logos of reason* – an intuitive writing of the *pun*, of the *interruption*. An *automatic writing* that presents itself as a *figmentation* – a portmanteau of "figment" and "imagination" indicating a ~~mere~~ product-tion of imagination – as *fragments* of thought.
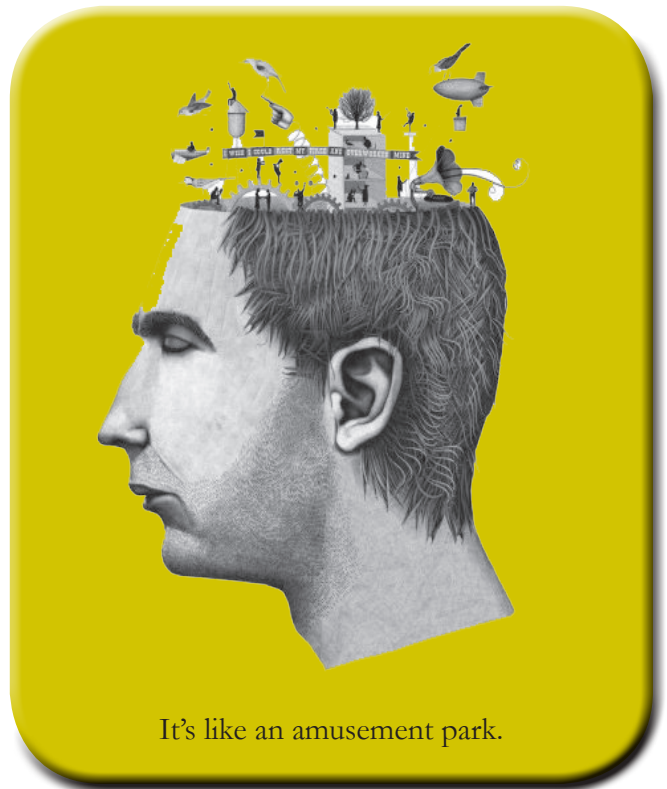
It's like an amusement park.

FRAGMENTARY WRITING: WRITING OF THE FIGMENT(S)

"The imagination creates another nature, which has to do not with thinking by concept but with the derivatives connected with the concepts […] the constituent elements of which are not attributed to it logically, but are nevertheless '(aesthetic) attributes.'"

~ Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*

Fragmentary writing, as Blanchot characterizes it, is a game of chance. The parlor games that the surreal *(un)artists* referenced earlier – Breton, Crumb, Higgins, Kaprow, Spiegelman, and Ware – are found in *interruptions* that open themselves to pluralities of thought. The future of surrealism, as found in comics, approaches what Blanchot explains as an "exigency of plurality escaping unification and extending beyond the whole (while at the same time presupposing it, demanding its realization), untiringly maintaining, in the face of the Unique, contradiction and rupture" (*Infinite* 409). Dissensus rather than consensus: contradicting and rupturing the unification that, as Blanchot's estimation of the *disaster*, ruins meaning while leaving it intact. The fragmentary, as seen here, plays a game without rules. The game: *the interruption of the incessant*, where affirming the *interruption* offers an opening that breaks from unity. So, when Blanchot writes that fragmentary writing is "risk itself" (*Writing* 21; 59), it's a risk of a thought without unity or rules, thought estranged[25] from the unity of appropriat(iv)e understanding(s) that it interrupts. Fragmentary writing, like surrealism, would then also "seek to constitute for itself imaginary objects, indicate itself in the margins" (*Infinite* 418-419). In other words, the risk of fragmentary writing is the opening of *potentiality* itself, the inherent possibility for its coming into being as presented through an intuitive ~~post-~~process of *figmentation*.

Yet, it would be a mistake to think of fragmentary writing as a categorical genre of writing – Blanchot has no concern for categories of genres. Part of the risk involved in the fragmentary has to do with venturing into the unknown, the unimaginable that needs to be imagined, with *'unworking'* the work of unification. Fragmentary writing, then, as Blanchot explains, can be thought of as "the insane game, the indeterminacy that lies between reason and unreason" (*Infinite* 424). Much like Kaprow's *unart*, the *unworking* of the Work – the "absolute of voice and of writing" – encounters a "double game: necessity, chance" (Blanchot, *Infinite* 428). To write this *unworking* would not be to fragment the Work – to critique the Work – but rather to address those aspects of the work that remain set aside in the demand for unity. The idea here has to do with thinking in terms of context rather than in terms of category, specifically where context escapes reproducibility, and instead offers "fragments for the future to puzzle over" (Beitchman, "Fragmentary Word" 59). It is this puzzlement that we need to foster through a writing of chance.

We can see the fragmentary at work in *TNC* in each 3-panel set and through the stick figure – endearingly named "Sticky" – who appears in each set as a 'spark' for imaginative production. And it is this spark that correlates to what Breton saw as

…the means of obtaining, most often under the conditions of a complete relaxation of the mind rather than complete concentration, certain incandescent *flashes* of linking two elements of reality belonging to categories that are so far removed from each other that reason would fail to connect them and that require a *momentary* suspension of the critical attitude in order for them to be brought together. (*Manifestos* 302; emphasis added)

These *flash moments*[26] of linking 'often' take place within imaginative realms of thought that have no need for categories to explore the possibilities of linking. For *TNC*, Sticky

works as the means for these flashes, a fragment that sparks each 'comics artist's' imagination to produce another fragment in the margins of the whole. For comics in general, the means that spark these *flashes* open up in moods, atmospheres and feelings of the unexpected and offered as exigencies[27] for productions of the imagination.

Like Sticky, and *TNC* as a (non)whole, this *fragmentary writing* produces novelties – something new that excites imagination only for a short time – which Ware also recognizes as the roles of comics (novelties), as we see in his mock business: The Acme Novelty Library. As the play of novelties, *fragmentary writing* (as seen in comics) moves us toward unart and a process of *un-arting* ourselves as a play of limits that has no limitation (e.g., the limitation of argumentative writing). Speaking along similar lines of thought about art as Blanchot, Kaprow, and Lyotard, art historian/critic Jerzy Ludwinski explains that "*novelty* in art is the measure of the artist's imagination" (*Notes* 110). But this measure is not in inches, feet, yards, or miles (or seconds, minutes, hours, days or years); rather, the measure is the one that Cynthia Haynes has told me about: it's the length of string that depends upon the size of the package that needs to be wrapped. The form and style of this package has no bearing on the length of string since "it [the package] is a whole complex of artistic phenomenon seen in their variety" (Ludwinski, *Notes* 117).

The webcomic *XKCD* offers a summary of a possible 'string theory.'

URL: http://xkcd.com/171/

Art Interrupted

Given as a gift, we open this package and discover its contents: comics. Opened, comics remain open: *unart*. For Ludwinski, "the art of the future [is] unexpectedly simple: art of the future [is] every art imaginable, both traditional and the most current art" (*Notes* 115). And Strangely enough, he discusses this 'future' in the "form of a comic strip" (*Notes* 115). Comics, as a gift, are given as a fragmentary forms hospitable to all of the varieties of artistic experience as they are presented through the imagination. While comics work with 'every art imaginable,' they have no commitment to any singe form, but are configured in a plurality of 'fragmentations' that play at the limits of art without limitation. This is, after all, how Spiegelman was able to make sense of the events of September 11, 2001 through comics. As he writes:

> Each of the strips was a condensed journal entry of my month in the shadow of
> no towers and I allowed the shape to be whatever it was going to take. But I did
> acknowledge that the work had urgency without thinking of the work as making any
> bid for posterity. The strips were made in the spirit of the work that takes place in
> the second part of the book, the early comics. They weren't made for some ostensible
> future. They were made for a specific moment. ("A Novel Graphic" 110)

The specific moment, the exigency, presents itself as an unknown future that fragmentary writing allows us to discover, and the shape of the work cannot be known as a whole. For Spiegelman, the fragmentary appears when nothing is left to say, but that maintains an urgency for thinking in relation to the moment of thinking, allowing it to take form as needed – 'without thinking in terms of posterity.' The early comics he refers to, appearing in daily newspapers, were ephemeral artifacts offered as fragments, addressing the uncertainty of the future.

In each moment, the fragmentary adapts itself as necessary to the available means, but without the intention of persuasion; rather, it interrupts persuasive

intentions. Blanchot put it best when he wrote that the "fragmentary expresses itself best […] in a language that does not recognize it. Fragmentary: meaning neither the fragment, part of the whole, nor the fragmentary in itself" (*Step Not Beyond* 43). After the whole (of art) has been written, the fragmentary takes place in the *beyond* (of art) – the (unexpectedly) simple form that integrates 'any art imaginable.' Comics, as such a form, present the fragmentary since the "terrible explosion took place" and "the model of art ceased to exist" (Ludwinski, *Notes* 90). But the explosion of *the* 'model of art' reveals something else: that there exists a plurality in art (*sans* art (*unart*)). In Blanchot's words, the fragmentary "would never be 'pure,' but, on the contrary, profoundly altered, with an alteration that could not be defined (arrested) in regard to a norm" (*Step Not Beyond* 42). Writing, then, is not conferred a position of authority, but risks its own legitimacy in relation to the whole since it does not recognize the law (of art) – definition – as its guiding principle.[28] Without a definition in regard to a norm, the fragmentary breaks from the whole of art by giving up those references in their entireties, and it "will need," as Kaprow writes, "an updated language to refer to what is going on" (Essays 107) since the current language does not recognize the work of the fragmentary.[29] Much like the readymade, the fragmentary abandons itself to the impossibility of conforming to the law and language of art.[30]

Banksy illustrates Sticky's move away from "Art" authorities.

This impossibility opens a space where the interruption of the *unartist* begins, imprinted with another way of thinking, writing, and producing art-ifacts. The *unartist* puts the fragmentary to work

> …as the seeking of a new form of writing that would render the finished work problematic. Problematic not because it refuses accomplishment, but because it explores with an inexorable rigor – beyond the conception of the work as something unified and closed upon itself, as organizing and dominating the values transmitted by a traditional already established and attained – the infinite space of the work, though with a new postulate: namely, that the relations of this space will not necessarily satisfy the concepts of unity, totality, or continuity. The problem the work of the fragment poses is a problem of extreme maturity: first of the artist, and also of society." (Blanchot, *Infinite* 348)

A new form of writing sought in the *unworking*[31] posed by the fragmentary: *intermedia*. And it is this *unworking* that we see at work in *TNC* – particularly, the *unworking* of (comics) art as unified, total, and continuous, which indicates a move not only beyond Art, but also beyond the conception of the work of (comics) art as something closed upon itself. The rigorous exploration that characterizes the fragmentary, with an "I prefer not to" refusal of accomplishment, writing would no longer concern itself with argument, unity, or totality, approaches that close upon themselves. This writing would not be that of composing a work, but of the interruption of *unworking composition* (*un/composing*) that would render impossibilities possible.[32]

A Trilogy of Collages
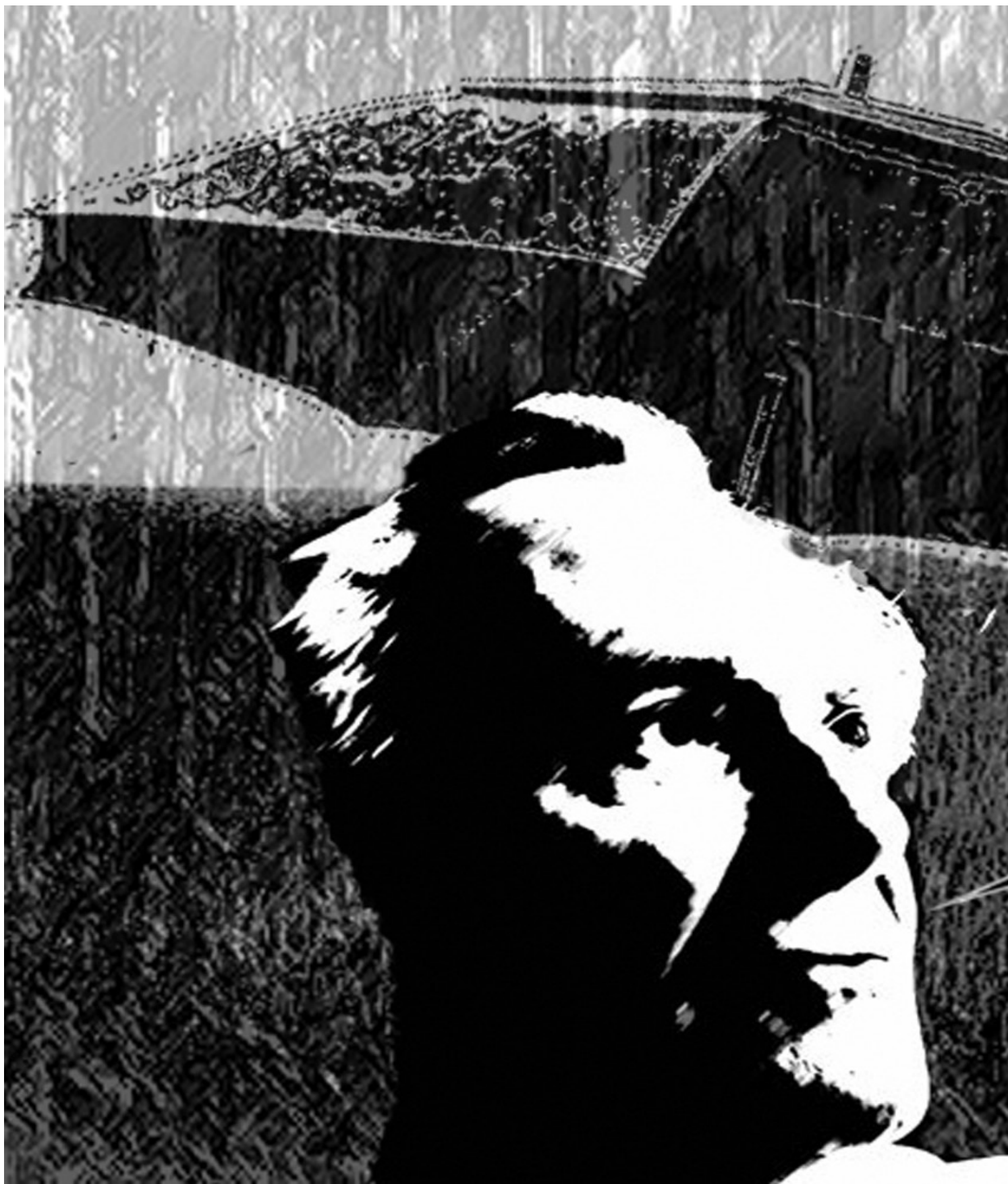
Lyotard Friends Heidegger
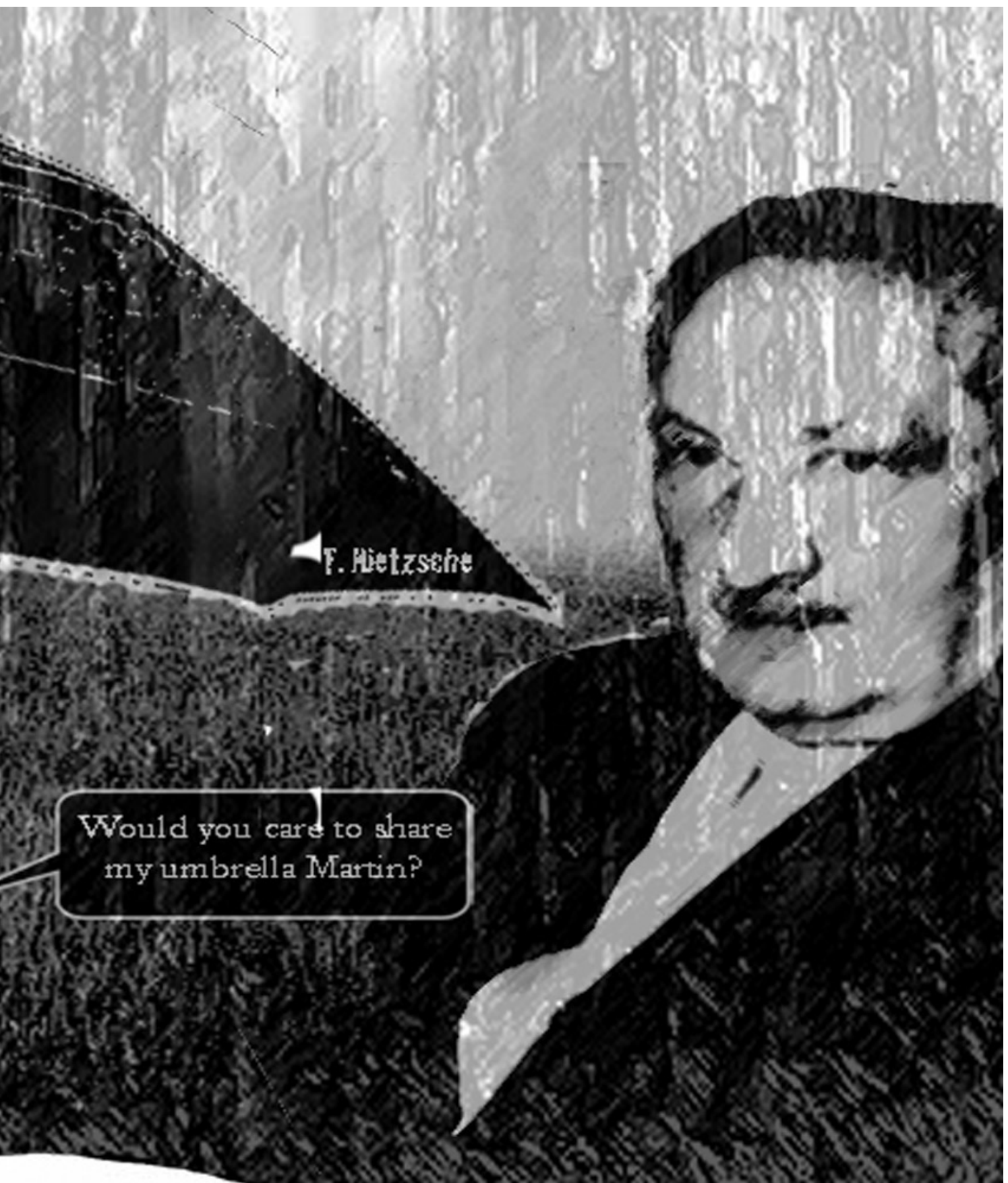
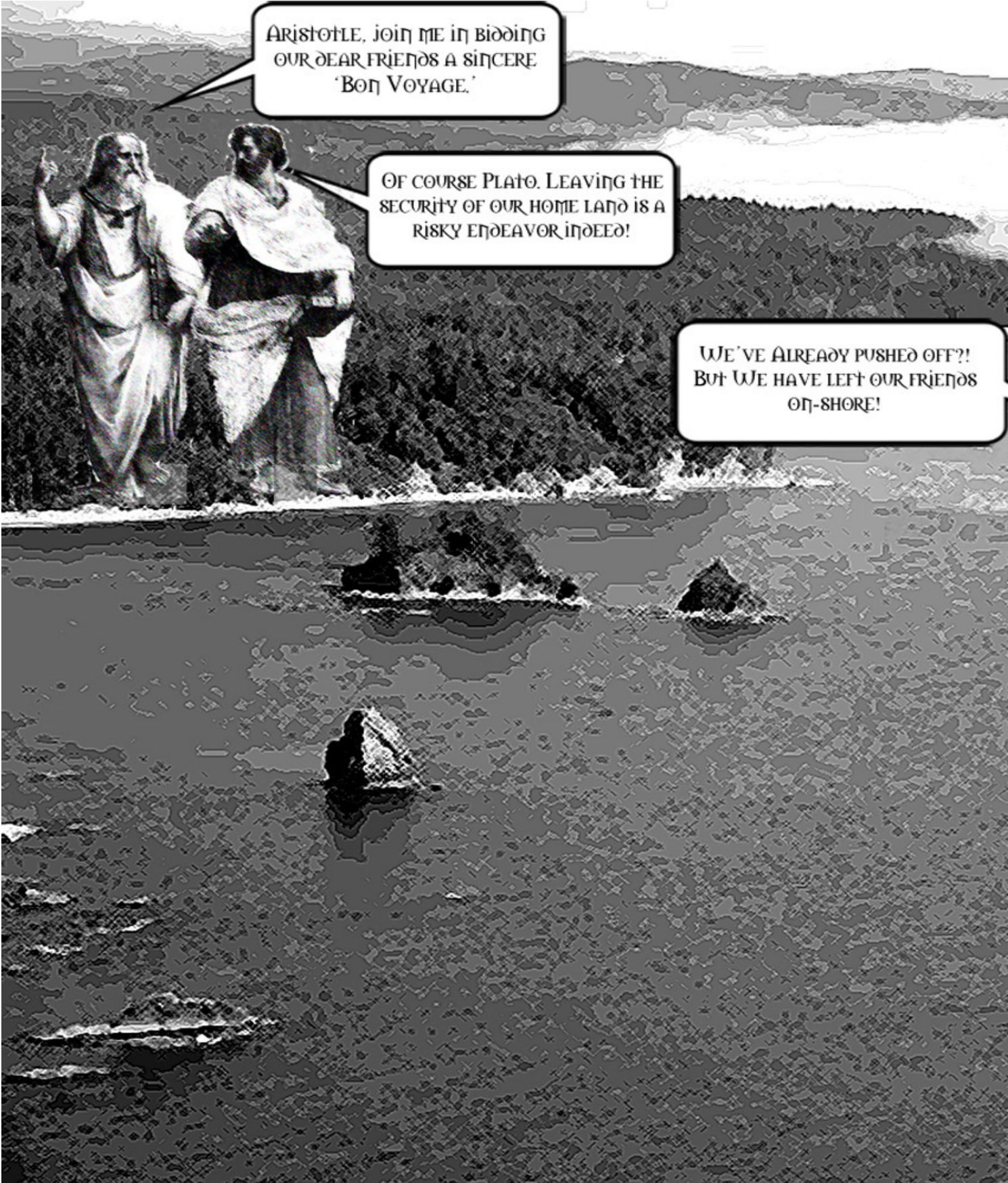with Nietzsche's Umbrella

You're telling me! I've been trying to build this **hacienda** for years now. It's taking forever!
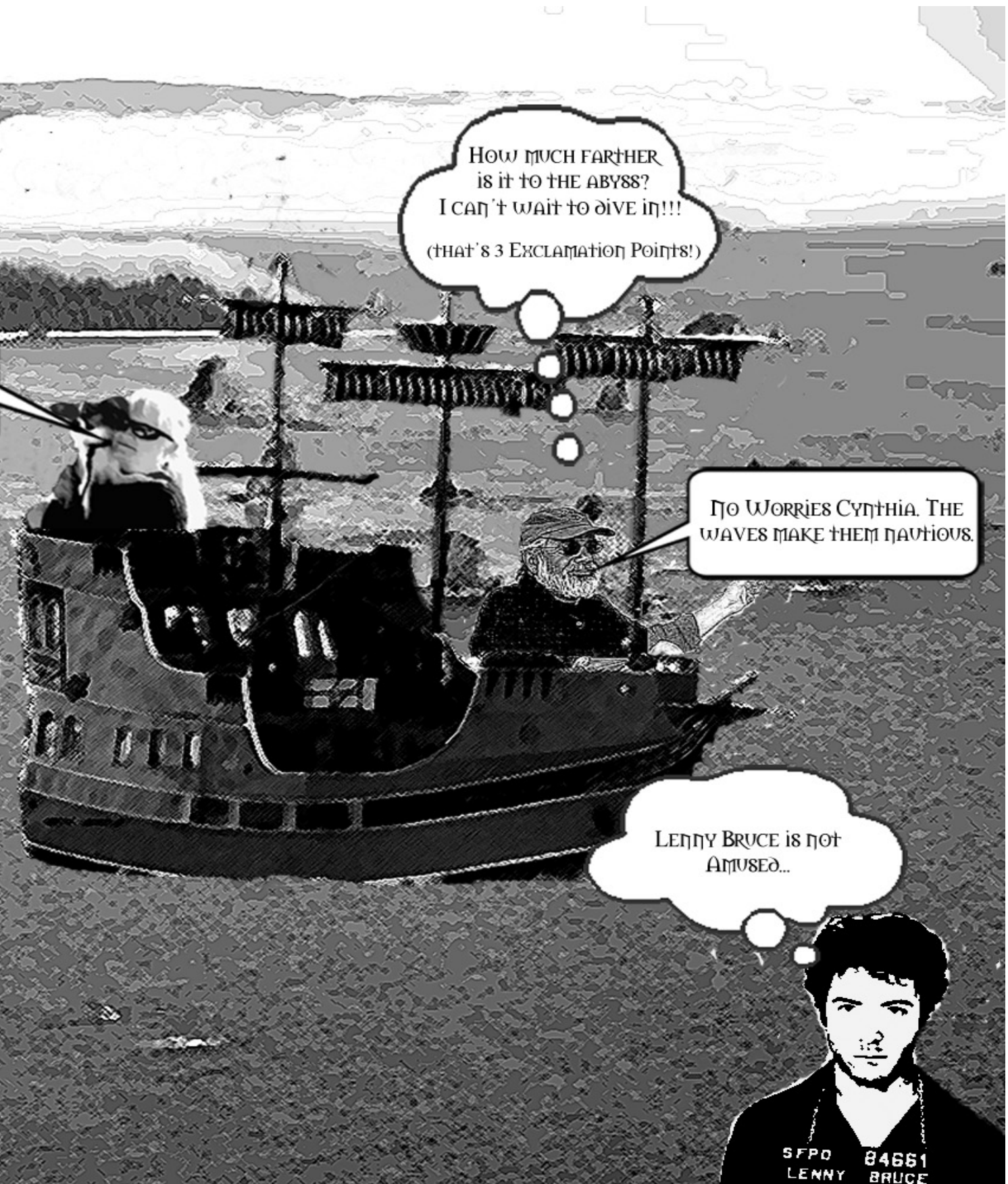
I think building a dwelling looks tough!

lding a Hacienda

Waving Bon Voyage

CHAPTER 4

Un/Composing (Visual) Rhetorics

Un/Composing (Visual) Rhetorics

"To write is to produce the absence of the work (worklessness, unworking [désoeuvrement]). Or again: writing is the absence of the work as it *produces itself* through the work, traversing it throughout. Writing as unworking (in the active sense of the word) is the insane game, the indeterminacy that lies between reason and unreason."

~ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

Between reason and unreason is where we now find our Stranger, and his strange approach to writing that incorporates any and all of the available media, regardless of the traditional divisions separating those media. He begins by un/working writing through the performance of composing, begetting the infancy of writing *as if* it were only coming into being at the very moment of writing. In composing this work by a singular process of unworking, he can begin to make sense of all the nonsense surrounding him and his environment. His *logos* is not made in his own image since he does not yet know that image; it is through composing that image that he comes to discover his own fleeting place. It is in this image that we can begin to see the un/working of composition's perspective of a given rhetorical situation.[1] To un/compose would be to write without intention in order to subvert the bureaucratization of the imagination that writes by way of argument/ation. Carrying out one possibility at the expense of exploring others, as Kenneth Burke informs us, is to be positioned in the "realities

of a social texture, in all the complexity of language and habits, in the property relationships, the methods of government, production and distribution, and in the development of rituals that re-enforce the same emphasis" (*Attitudes* 225); as an alternate "formula," Burke suggests that we use a conceptual methodology he calls "perspective by incongruity" (*Attitudes* 228).[2] Through this methodology, we can begin to un/compose our approaches to doing the work of rhetoric and composition, or what Blanchot refers to as the unwork that takes place between reason and unreason.

Building on the discussion of *puns* in the previous chapter, Burke describes his "perspective by incongruity" methodology as carrying "the same kind of enterprise in linking hitherto unlinked words by rational criteria instead of tonal criteria" (*Attitudes* 309). However, unlike Burke, the focus of this chapter addresses how this methodology can be extended to the figural and to composition's turn toward intermedial composition. A key concept in Burke's methodology is that of the casuistic stretch, of un/composing words (and now images) from their "'constitutional' setting" (*Attitudes* 309). Both of these concepts (when re-framed from Burke's Chapter title "Dictionary of Pivotal Terms") translate to ways of *seeing strangely*, and specifically to how the digital age has moved us into a theory of civic discourse that departs from common readings of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. In essence, linking tones and words not normally linked presents us with something of a quandary—an uncertainty of how these strange links are produced and what they *mean* in whatever contexts they arise. It is this uncertainty of our Stranger(s)— and their strange ways of seeing—that remains unknown, and that must remain in unknown if it is to confront the bureaucratization of the imagination, opening our archive(s) to the infinite possibilities of linking. Without such an archive, we subject ourselves to the sort of bureaucracy that will keep us from realizing our potential and the potentialities of knowing, doing, and making artifacts apart

from the "business as usual" model that remains central to contemporary civic discourse.[3]

How un/artists are connected to civic discourse can be found in some of the opening remarks that Aristotle makes in *On Rhetoric*: "…rhetoric is a certain kind of offshoot [*paraphues*] of dialectic and of ethical studies (which is just to call politics)" (39). For the purposes of this chapter, *offshoot* is the key word, implying that a rhetorician has been trained in dialectical methods, and in theories and practices of ethics/politics, but has departed from those discourses. However, to draw a direct connection between rhetoric and persuasion may not be the best approach to thinking (and writing) in the *polis*. As an *offshoot*, rhetoric exceeds traditional argument (persuasion) and ethics/politics while engaging with each in other arenas and by other (available) means. The most significant element that makes un/artists *offshoots* is that they abandon the discourse (science) of civics in favor of taking an active part in creating a strange(r) citizenship that points out the incongruities they've observed in assembling their art/ifacts. These observations occur through one's own devices regardless of conventional use, and suggest that there are other, imaginative ways of composing the *polis*. Aristotle echoes this point in Book 3 of *On Rhetoric* when he writes that to "deviate [from prevailing usage] makes language seem more elevated; for people feel the same in regard to word usage as they do in regard to strangers compared to citizens. As a result, one should make the language unfamiliar; for people are admirers of what is far off, and what is marvelous is sweet" (198). Where Aristotle's citizen thinks that it "is strange if we think we do not have to obey laws whenever they are not rightly framed and those who made them erred" (*Rhetoric* 107), our Stranger has no qualms about disobeying these laws and working outside the law.[4] Still, the Stranger need not always be strange; sometimes "truth" is stranger than fiction.[5]

STRANGE FIGURATIONS

"The eye is ready for the pictorial gesture, prepared for what cannot be anticipated: the event. This is not because the gesture would erupt unexpectedly. On the contrary, it would have been expected and ardently wished for. But it is an event in that the subject giving birth to it does not know, cannot analyse and does not control."

~Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Anamnesis of the Visible"

It is not my wish to con-figure or re-con-figure the un-working of composition and/or rhetoric; rather, I prefer to un/configure this work, exploring the meanings of the immediate without concern for reality.[6] Lyotard tells us how avant-garde artists accomplish this goal in "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde": "[t]he arts, whatever their materials, pressed forward by the aesthetics of the sublime in search of intense effects, can and must give up the imitation of models that are merely beautiful, and try out surprising, strange, shocking combinations" because this is what presents "evidence of (something) *happening*, rather than nothing" (*Inhuman* 100). Unlike other 'figurative arts,' this strange figuration implodes representative forms.[7] Diane Davis echoes this point in *Inessential Solidarity*: "…figuration gives world by giving meaning; it is the very condition for knowing, and without it, there would be no-thing, nothing to know and nothing to understand—not even a 'you' or an 'I'" (38). The meanings given by figuration, however, cannot always be analyzed or controlled; sometimes, these meanings are (too) strange to be known or understood through representative compositions. At these times, citizens become displaced by the strange, and become strangers who unwork familiar configurations lest they be left with no-thing, no options for composing those events that escape reason. The ability of unartists[8] to present us with evidence that something is happening enacts the strange figuration necessary for an un/

composing rhetoric that deviates from "politics as usual" (civic discourses).

Trying to *figure out* how to address a given (political) event occasionally requires a dis/figuration of common understandings so that others may become available. This is part of what Davis means when she writes that dis/figuration

> involves the spontaneous unworking of the work of the figure, which touches off an interruption in the movement of comprehension; it describes a depropriative instant in which a figure is suddenly divested of the meaning it is charged with transporting, leaving a shattered sur-face that reveals the tropological structure grounding all knowledge, including self-knowledge. (*Inessential Solidarity* 50)

As described here, dis/figuration sheds light on the strange figuration of un/composing rhetorics with its disruptive change of direction that shocks. For Davis, there are two prominent responses to this shock: to speak or to kill.[9] To kill would be the refusal to listen and to retain the complacency of the norm-al. On the other hand, to speak (that is, to write) un/composes the homogeneity embodied in the *kill switch* response.[10] In its place, strange figurations produce "heterogeneous, disruptive, open, pleasurable, *and* political" works that "make *meaning* possible and our pleasure in it unpurloined" (Kelly, *Imaging Desire* 113).

How these works come into being comprises the work of un/composing (visual) rhetorics performed by un/artists. The act of writing produces meaning, imaginative possibilities, and pleasure of working without the stress of some external appropriative understanding. The gift of writing, "by its detours, its decisions, and its interruptions, knows itself always responsible for a latent knowledge, as it knows itself responding to another possibility; a possibility that is the other of all knowledge and whose attraction carries the act of writing"

that introduces the un/artist to "the *play* of the absence of (the) work" (Blanchot, *Infinite* 421). This *play*: the absence of the game of argumentative writing where the unknown presents itself in the act of writing. The meaning that would then develop from these artifacts would not be one in which a reader/viewer critiques or analyzes, but would arise from the writing that those artifacts motivate— to appropriate Burke's phrasing, the importance of visual rhetorics is the un/composing of motives and our quests for "perfection."

Like Nietzsche, the un/artist and un/composing writer "deny that anything can be done perfectly as long as it is still done consciously" (Nietzsche, *Portable* 581). By allowing the work to play out unconsciously in the act of writing, the idea that perfection is possible begins dismantling. The criterion for the un/composing work has no place in the Stranger's process; rather, it enters the work within the play of composing the event. Strange figurations offer us the opportunity to escape "the nature of language as motive," the "desire to name something by its 'proper' name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways" that "is intrinsically 'perfectionist'" and that has made us "'rotten' with perfection" (Burke, *Language* 16, 18). The idea of perfection is one in which we find the danger of violence (i.e., terrorism) and the (unimaginative) acts of compulsion carried out by conclusive-reason. In the unconscious we are given a respite from the implications of perfection,[11] and the corresponding motives of carrying them out. Without the demands for a conclusion found in the implications of perfection, an un/artist resists the temptation to (re)con-figure events with the criteria of perfection— Burke calls this "the completely done" (*Language* 26) and associates it with Death. When all is said and done, our Stranger steps in and re-introduces us to (the unperfected) life. Nietzsche's view of representation summarizes the importance of strange figurations for an un/composing (visual) rhetoric: "One is not finished with one's passion because one represents it: rather, one is finished with it when

one represents it" (*Portable* 458). To delay perfection, to instill the importance of delaying perfection: this is the play[12] accomplished by speaking otherwise.

Un/Composing (in) the Digital Event

"The future promise of digital aesthetics is its enhanced zone of 'interactivity' through which the users' entry into the circuit of artistic presentation simulates or projects their own virtualizations, fantasies, and memories in consort with the artwork."

~ Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque*

Working out of Nietzsche's "Morality as a Problem," Avital Ronell writes that

The experimental imagination is exceptional in several ways. Taking risks but also exercising prudence—practicing, in Nietzsche's famous sense, the art of living dangerously—the experimental cast of being does not so much preview the advent of a tech-nobody (equipped with the antennae of cold, curious thought) but, in the first place, reflects a vitality that disrupts sedimented concepts and social values. Such a force of disruption goes against the grain of what has been understood as praiseworthy. Promoting meanings that have been left in cold storage for centuries, society values unchangeability and dependability.

("Nietzsche Loves You" 163)

For composition and rhetoric, the meanings that have been left in the cold, trickling down[13] from our focus on Platonic and Aristotelian rhetorics (of persuasion) keeps us from engaging with the changing ways and means of production in the digital

age. To disrupt these rhetorics of perfecting an argument in an age when morality has become even more dangerous (e.g., fundamentalism, in all its forms, including terrorism) demands[14] an experimental imagination rather than a bureaucratized imagination. Without the risk of disrupting this bureaucratization, we accept the sedimented concepts that atrophy the possibilities of social changes (e.g., civics), like the death found in perfecting an argument. What the digital opens for us is a way to diverge from these concepts by discovering—not necessarily synonymous with *inventing*—new ways of playing with meaning that do not require persuasive motivations. The 'digital event' indicates a way of linking "experimentation with the development of improv techniques," where discovery is not simply "'invention,' but, under certain conditions, as a way of discovering what was already there," inhabited in "an event, an experiment, a unique stage for representing discovery without invention" (Ronell, "Nietzsche Loves You" 174). In the digital event, we are called into the act of composing improvisationally.

The improvisational event that takes place in digital spaces takes an alternate route from what continues to be taught in the composition classroom, first-year composition or otherwise. Blanchot describes the process of the latter as one where one writes "according to the rules of strict composition; then of a more complex demand: to write in a rigorously premeditated way in harmony with the control of the mind and to assure its full development" that attempts to "suppress chance" (*Book to Come* 225). The experimental imagination that Ronell sees as a key element of composing the former would constitute the *un/composing* of these strict rules (laws) of composition. Our Stranger, positioned between reason and unreason, has realized that controlling any composition subverts the vibrancy of chance and subdues it by claiming jurisdiction over the discovery of meaning(s). The digital offers us opportunities to compose by chance if we were only willing to be open to the logics already in play in those spaces[15] instead of adhering to what

Blanchot might call 'the book of the past.'

In the *book to come*, we would see writers who, as Blanchot claims, become "involved in politics, with an energy that displeases the experts" and "he is not yet involved with politics but only with this new, difficult-to-see relationship that literature and language awaken in contact with public presence" (*Book to Come* 248). Those Strangers who compose would play with the (improvisational) logics awakening in digital spaces and engage in a performative civics instead of discourses concerning civics—that is, they actively play in this composing space without feeling the need to analyze or critique the artifacts they (and others) produce. While this may seem dis/connected to politics, it is precisely this lack of concern for political policy that opens the imagination to creative play and the unwork that can lead to discovery, postponing the *kill switch* response in the Work. You see, the digital event presents us with "the evidence of a particular silence [that] reaches us like a surprise that is not always a repose: a perceptible silence, sometimes masterly, sometimes proudly indifferent, sometimes agitated, animated and joyful"[16] (Blanchot, *Book to Come* 220). And in this silence, we are given the opportunity to explore the potentialities of a silence that is not silent,[17] but speaks beyond the capacity of words, of arguments, to (clearly) articulate.

This silence presents us with an absence of sense (as in, sensation) that

> …opens another set of possibilities whereby imagination can be thought of
> as reordering the objects of sense, or taking them apart and imagining them
> in new combinations (such as centaurs) that do not themselves derive from
> sensory experience. It can thus become "creative," and even visionary things
> forever closed to sense, as with the language of the mystic, who would express
> his intuitions in images meant to transcend imagery. (Burke, *Rhetoric of*

Motives 79)

In Burke's 'sense' of the word, the 'imagination' would be a silent refusal to resolve arguments, and un/artists are thrown into the void of the digital.[18] In this void we are abandoned by the rules[19] of composition and the orderly arrangement of arguments meant to establish sensible meaning(s). The digital does not subscribe to the demands of the rhetorical tradition or composition; rather, those who espouse each are maintaining the criteria of earlier media because it's all they know. In the digital void, "there is no longer law or duty" and "a good or bad conscience brings neither consolation nor remorse. In every age there has been implicitly recognized by those who have something to do with the strangeness of literary language an ambiguous status, a certain playfulness with regard to common laws" (Blanchot, *Book to Come* 28). Un/composing within the digital event is the recognition of such a strange playfulness (comical) for our age. However, like Blanchot's writers of the book to come,[20] un/artists are aware that they are not free of consequences, consequences that shut down imagination in favor of (irresponsible) patriotic acts. *Un/composing the digital event*: an invitation to imagine possibilities that oscillate between reason and unreason, and to accept the consequences for the resulting artifacts.

Comic(al) Interventions into the Digital

> "At electric speed, all forms are pushed
> to the limits of their potential."
>
> ~ Marshall McLuhan, *Laws of Media*

Instead of adapting to the digital, the un/artists comics forms are "an active logos or utterance of the human mind or body that transforms the user and his ground" (McLuhan, *Laws of Media* 99).[21] This active logos constitutes the *putting-into-action* of civics rather than the more passive discourse approach that contents itself with writing policy and law. Additionally, as the human mind (imagination) transforms un/artists and their ground(s), evidence turns into an unreasonable request. McLuhan tells as much in *Laws of Media*:

> Since electronic man lives in a world of simultaneous information, he finds himself increasingly excluded from this traditional (visual) world, in which space and reason seem to be uniform, connected and stable. Instead, Western (visual and left-hemisphere) man now finds himself habitually relating to information structures that are simultaneous, discontinuous, and dynamic. (102)

In the void of the digital, the un/artist[22] thrives in the simultaneity of forms and the ambiguity of the disconnected. The un/artist's intervention into the digital is to discover some meaning in this ambiguity by relating to the information through imaginative approaches of linking forms and content rather than merely adapting tradition. But this intervention and discovery do not constitute a goal; un/artists have ambivalent relationships to digital work.[23]

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Ambivalence returns us to our Stranger's position between reason and unreason, composing the uncertainty of the situation or event that has thrown him or her into the (digital) void. Blanchot helps us understand the political relevance of this work: "…the strangest demand: that through it speak that which is without power, that starting from that point speech show itself as the absence of power, this nakedness, powerlessness, but also impossibility, which is the first impulse of communication" (*Book to Come* 32). This form of communicative ambivalence disrupts the assertive power of arguments to propose uniform and stable solutions that inform the bureaucratization of the imagination. This sort of ambivalent intervention into the digital subverts the need for identification at the heart of argumentative theory; rather, an ambivalent composition—un/composition—is a complex search for alternate perspectives that "attempts to address the complexity of our current cultural situations" (Hawk, "Toward a Rhetoric" 149). Ambivalence, as it is used here, correlates to the Greek *dissoi logoi* approach of arguing both sides of a question; the difference is that an ambivalent approach to composition is not situated in terms of argument (and it has no question to answer), but as an approach to dis-covery. In other words, ambivalence has no opponent or opposing perspective; rather, it allows us to "grasp again in the literary work the place where language is still a relationship without power, a language of naked relation, foreign to all mastery and all servitude, a language that speaks only to whoever does not speak in order to possess and have power, to know and have, to become master and to master oneself" (Blanchot, *Book to Come* 33). At this point, comics enter to address the Stranger's ambivalence: his mixed feelings (intuitions) take form in mixed media tangled up into an unfinished whole. The strange thoughts that arise in these comics un/compositions tap into the unknowable, but speak-able, moments.

Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer explain how the comics form

slips into the space between reason and unreason in *Between Witness and Testimony* through an analysis of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. As they write, Spiegelman's 'text' marks "a locus of meaning" as something that is not "resolvable or knowable. But it is transmissible; we can recognize—bear witness to—the horrors within representation itself" (73). Beyond *Maus*, comics artists are adept at signaling the moments that escape representation across various media seamlessly. It is this ability that allows them to speak the unrepresentable meanings of an event; they are witnesses capable of intervening in the ways we compose within a given space.[24] And if we recognize the digital as a virtual space, a sort of single-panel that integrates a variety of media, the comics un/artist can teach us how to compose visually complex and seamless artifacts.[25] Hillary Chute recognizes the affordances of thinking about comics as "informed by postmodern politics" that "adopts a rhetoric of space—of location, multiplicity, borderlands, and […] boundary crossings" (342). Intervening in the digital by learning to be(come) a (comics) un/artist throws us into this space: the (rhetorical) void. Composing in this space demands that we bear witness to these media by attempting to transmit that which remains in the unresolvable locus of meaning called the digital. Without resolve, (comics) un/artists are the hospitable traitors of visual rhetoric(s) seeking only to gesture toward those unknowable parts within themselves, those parts that allow their imagination(s) to wander aimlessly, like a strange traveler interested only in discovering a refuge from the *kill switch* of argument.

CHAPTER 5

TRAITOROUS HOSPITALITY: AN APHORISTIC (COMPOSITION) PEDAGOGY

TRAITOROUS HOSPITALITY: AN APHORISTIC (COMPOSITION) PEDAGOGY

"The witness of the wrongs and the suffering engendered by thinking's *differend* with what it does not manage to think, the witness, the writer, the megalopolis is quite happy to have him or her, his or her witnessing may come in useful. Attested, suffering and the untameable are as if already destroyed. I mean that in witnessing, one also exterminates. The witness is a traitor."

~ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "*Domus* and the Megalopolis"

More than a witness, our Stranger is also a traitor who acts out of an undetermined love—of understanding, of just/ice, of individuals, of life! He needs no rule-of-law for the illusion of a stable *domus*[1] since his sublime works arises outside of the law. Where the witness writes testimonies that "must provide […] a written record of the hesitations involved when bridging the gap between witness and testimony that in oral testimonies register as silence, the shrug, and the retreat into the litany of numbers" (Bernard-Donals 62), the traitor, which is similar to what Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer find in Art Spiegelman, "presents us with a means of defining witnessing in terms of a movement of meaning that resists knowing—a recognition of the swallowing up of the knowable, a recognition that is itself recognizable" (69). This is the strange traitor's approach to writing in the age of new media: to move in the

abyss of meaning, not to resist knowing, but to explore the possibilities within the imagination.[2] Paradoxically, this traitor appears in the work of the un/artist before the witness has been able to form (through his testimony); that is, before witnessing becomes possible, the traitor must produce a finished artifact. As an antecedent to the witnessing patriot,[3] our traitor—like the comics un/artist—only witnesses what comes into being through his playful approach to imaginative productions. It is this attitude (of ambivalence) that opens the traitor's *domus* to a hospitality for the most monstrous of thoughts that witnesses and patriots (in the bureaucratic sense) exclude from their compositions.

Friedrich Nietzsche makes the distinction thus:

All thought, poetry, painting, compositions, even buildings and sculptures, belong either to monological art or to art before witnesses. […] I do not know of any more profound difference in the whole orientation of an artist than this, whether he looks at his work in progress (at "himself") from the point of view of the witness, or whether he "has forgotten the world," which is the essential feature of all monological art: it is based *on forgetting*, it is the music of forgetting. (*Gay Science* 324)

It is this monological art that we find in the work of comics un/artists; they have no concern for their audience because they have forgotten the whole enterprise of art and the need to make a direct commentary on a given issue. I realize how odd a suggestion this may be, but when what we do must have a function in relation to others, we lose something of ourselves. Cultivating this *forgetting* in our pedagogical practices sows the seeds of creativity in students who "might perhaps eventually produce works *that far excel [their] own judgment*, so that [they] utter stupidities about [their works] and [themselves]" (*Gay Science* 327). These stupidities, exceeding judgments, open up

possibilities for the realization of the sublime works of the imagination.[4] To produce something that exceeds judgment—and witnessing—is at the heart of monological art, and the creative work of the imagination. The traitorous hospitality of the Stranger, then, comes from the ability to forget the world and his relations to others—without such a perspective, un/artists remain constrained, and constrain their imaginations. After producing their artifacts, they let others—those who refuse to forget the world— bear witness, exercising judgments or developing other criteria for judging the artifacts they produce.

Maurice Blanchot might refer to this sort of traitor as a "man without horizon" who does not affirm "himself on the basis of a horizon—in a sense a being without being, a presence without a present, thus foreign to everything visible and to everything invisible—he is what comes to me as speech when to speak is not to see" (*Infinite* 69). What he (indirectly) confronts is the "frightened, ignorant, and servile" that "are unable to fulfill their civic duties, having lost all sense of liberty" (Blanchot, *Infinite* 217-18). The concept of a being without being, however, seems rather confusing until we recognize that Blanchot uses this phrasing to indicate a being that remains separate from the existence of a given position,[5] and retains the sense(s) of liberty— in the sense of going beyond the boundaries of propriety—that allow this being to engage in an imaginative civics. In this sense, the traitor, like the (comics) un/artist, embodies the origin(s) of thought before a witness provides a testimony; in other words, the traitor explores that which does not yet have a being with ungrounded resiliency. And this is precisely what is needed when addressing the ways in which new media, or what is currently being called *digital humanities*, are engaging in political, cultural, and social issues of public policy and education.[6] The concept of traitorous hospitality, as with un/art/ists, opens a space for an art that "cannot be, must not be, *purely* artistic" since "as soon as art becomes culture, is the means, the instrument of a culture, it can no longer belong to itself; it falls prey to travesties and servitudes: the

wheel of values and knowledge" (Blanchot, *Friendship* 28) that restricts imagination; for the digital humanities, this concept involves re/thinking, re/doing, and re/making the our ways of composing with new media.

A TRAITOROUS (WRITING IMAGINATION)

> "…*imaginary* is the reference to a man without myth, as is *imaginary* the reference to the man dispossessed of himself, free of all determination, deprived of all 'value,' and alienated to the point where he is nothing but the acting consciousness of this nothing, the essential man of point zero…"

> ~ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*

Where the witness composes "by testifying, by attempting to be faithful to what *happened*," the traitor let's himself "be led by the unknown that happened then, by what is unpredictable and *invisible* in the event" (Lyotard, "Anamnesis of the Visible 2" 22). In the unknown, there's nothing to know, but we can discover this nothing through an *imaginary* stripped of the myth of the law, of the 'law(s)' of composition as determined by *governing* bodies.[7] This would be akin to performing what Aristotle calls deliberative rhetoric that looks to (convalesce[8]) the future rather than epideictic rhetoric, which looks to the past and is at the heart of argumentative writing. The stakes of each are not the same; the witness's argumentative writing takes place when one feels the work as indispensable, whereas traitor's imaginary composition has no delusions of having satisfied the (unknown) demand of the lingering event. The traitor, as a digital un/artist,

resonates with Lyotard's painter: "The painter is not someone who sees better than others, but one who no longer sees anything at all, and wants to see and make seen this nothing" ("Anamnesis of the Visible 2" 29). It is this ability to see nothing (and make seen this nothing) that we are called to by the imaginary—to dispense with our customary ways of witnessing and composing since these testimonies may betray the purposes with which they began.

Within digital environments, it is the un/artist's fragmentary intervention that can help us to see this nothing. Marshall and Eric McLuhan explain as much in *Laws of Media*: "Without the artist's intervention man merely *adapts* to his technologies and become their servo-mechanism" since "the role of art is to liberate man from the robot status imposed by 'adjusting' to technologies" (98). In other words, the traitorous un/artist is released from the value(s) of argumentative writing in order to begin again. This intervention opens an empty space where we may imagine what writing might be,[9] *what will have been* writing in the digital age.[10] There is a sort of ease in this type of composition, one that Bradley Dilger describes as a preference for "a simple, pragmatic approach which doesn't involve the complication of complete understanding," but involves "learning new technologies and questioning one's relationship with technology" ("Ease and Electracy" 109-10). A relationship of ease with technology offers a sort of comfort and effortlessness necessary for the imaginative to flourish by releasing oneself from the complications of critique and/or procedure.[11] This, however, doesn't mean that the compositions that arise out of this approach to technology are reductive, simplistic, or uncomplicated; rather, it means to write within a state of ease that can point un/artists (or have un/artists point us) toward those aspects of digital thought that remain hidden during our 'adjustment period.' For rhetoric and composition, one of the traitor's approaches to writing in digital environments spawns an event: a writing process for the digital based on our ways of processing writing—the ease of writing spurred by an event that belongs only to itself.

An (everyday) event that belongs only to itself becomes suspect since it sits outside of the law of the whole. For Blanchot, it is this everyday 'speech' that is most difficult to find and, as such, "the everyday must be thought as the suspect (and oblique) that always escapes the clear decision of the law, even when the law seeks by way of suspicion to track down every indeterminate manner of being: everyday indifference. (The suspect: anyone and everyone, guilty of not being able to be guilty)" (*Infinite* 239). If, as the 9/11 Commission reports, what we need is a way to create opportunities for the imagination to flourish, it is through these indeterminate manners that remain suspect that we may find our way to composing as imaginative traitors, not through the law or an adherence to the law as such. As the antithesis of a patriot, the traitor places no value (in the Nietzschean sense) in the law or its justifications; rather, the traitor is guilty of *nothing* (thought of as the (immaterial) imaginary) and becomes dis/possessed of the law. But this law is not only imposed by the political and judicial (law); it also comes from oneself. To open students to the everyday, we need to also break down their defenses (make them *uncomfortable*, as Nietzsche says[12]), to be traitor-friends.

As traitor-friends, our pedagogical goals would have less to do with teaching some set material; we would be teaching students to be thinkers—and writers—that are self-observant. The major hindrance to the imagination has nothing to do with the law, but with the defenses that stop the thinking process. Nietzsche observes:

> Man is very well defended against himself, against being reconnoitered and besieged by himself, he is usually able to perceive of himself only his outer walls. The actual fortress is inaccessible, even invisible to him, unless his friends and enemies play the traitor and conduct him in by a secret path" (*Human* 179-80)

The role of this strange (comic) approach to writing has to do with finding these secret paths and breaking down the fortress-walls that impede the ability for the imagination write on those walls,[13] and testing how well these walls (values/defenses) hold up against the hospitality of the (defenseless) traitor. In order to get to a place that allows us—students—to engage the imaginary with/in the digital, "we *have* to become traitors, be unfaithful, again and again abandon our ideals" (Nietzsche, *Human* 199) of composing criterion, especially when we are faced with the incongruous manners of un/artists in these spaces.

DIGITAL HOSPITALITY

> "One recognizes those hearts which are capable of *noble* hospitality by the many draped windows and closed shutters: they keep their best rooms empty. Why? Because they expect guests with whom one does not 'put up.'"
>
> ~ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

The digital presents us with an open space, a space that we may design for ourselves, and it invites us to reside in these rooms as guests, wanderers, nomads. What we find in the digital is the hospitality of an un/formed space that asks us to create our own forms of knowing, doing, and making imaginative artifacts. To think of the digital as this kind of hospitable friend would allow us to enter into "this relation without dependence [where] all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to speak to them" (Blanchot, *Friendship* 291).

Speaking of the digital only distances us from the invitation it offers—by way of analysis, critique, and argument[14]—but in speaking to the digital, by accepting its invitation, what separates us from the it puts us in relation to the digital. In this relation to the digital, the traitor wanders through the digital void, connecting disparate elements without committing to a single relation; rather, the traitor develops a *whatever*[15] relation to the digital, a relation that does not seek control to control thought, but unfolds through imaginative link(age)s.

Entering into the empty room(s) the digital offers us, we are given a *chance* to (eternally) return the favor by allowing the hospitality to remain a silent subject; to return the favor, we speak to the digital in our own ways without trying to re-construct these rooms in the image of an/other, which is what we should aspire to in our class/rooms—not to put up with guests, but to offer them a place to write their own writing. Alexander Reid explains this as some of the affordances that new media provides: "Writing and new media offer means of pursuing the coming community and the university without conditions. […] One writes into a space of writing that is produced through writing, just as one thinks into a space of thought that is produced through thought" (*Two Virtuals* 194). Writing into these digital spaces without condition becomes an event that offers new possibilities for thinking and ways of writing, and this composes the digital's hospitality, a hospitality that opens the digital to ways of thinking and forms of composing that helps us pursue the coming community.[16] This sort of hospitality has the ability to put us at ease with one another and to open up the empty space where we can compose our hospitality.

To accept this hospitality, we also have to be hospitable to the ways in which the digital changes how we think. We cannot merely tolerate the digital, but we have to learn to love the digital as a friend who helps us to learn (to love) the

strange. In return, as Nietzsche writes of hospitality, "we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fair-mindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality. Even those who love themselves have learned it in this way" (*Gay Science* 262). In other words, the mutual hospitality of composing in the digital unveils itself in the *play* of learning to love the strangeness of the digital void (empty space) that puts us back into a relation that transforms each. Through these transformations we are given over to the strangeness of the imagination that de-familiarizes itself with the distance of human relations encapsulated in the witness's testimony. Nietzsche makes a similar distinction regarding works of art: "All thought, poetry, painting, compositions, even buildings and sculptures, belong either to monological art or to art before witnesses" (*Gay Science* 324). The witness, then, would be an *untimely* figure in the digital age whose testimonies come only after the traitor's playful compositions in (and of) the empty space of digital hospitality.

This hospitality is the condition for composing in a digital age: to think along a secret path that we can only discover by composing the events of our imagination. The traitor—as nomad, wanderer, stranger—creates a path to the unknown (compositions) since even the 'less travelled' paths have already been worn down. Inevitably, in treading a new path, we traitors will fall in(to) the digital void, and the imagination then "comes to help us fill the void in which we fall, by establishing a certain beginning, a certain starting point, that lead[s] us to hope for a certain point of arrival" (Blanchot, *Friendship* 207). Arriving at the digital, accepting its hospitality, the imagination takes us on a detour toward a relation of thinking (and writing) without dependence that characterizes the traitor not as an enemy, but as a friend that *delivers*[17] us the gift of the empty space of the digital. This gift, however, remains obscure, "where rules abandon us, where morality is silent,

where there is no longer law or duty" (Blanchot, *Book to Come* 27-28). In thinking of the digital as a gift of an empty space that holds us in no obligation to write, or in how to write, we are afforded the possibility of (perpetually) re-beginning the call to compose: the *thought of composition* that does not close upon itself.[18]

Aphoristic Composition

"Whatever its sophistication, style has always something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention, and, as it were, a vertical and lonely dimension of thought. […] Indifferent to society and transparent to it, a closed personal process, it is in no way the product of a choice or of a reflection on Literature. […] style resides outside art, that is, outside the pact which binds the writer to society."

~ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*

The time has come to re-think about the digital's influence on composition and the ways we think. Friedrich Kittler provides us with one instance of how technology influences an individual's compositions when he notices that Nietzsche's writing changed "from arguments to aphorisms, from thoughts to puns, from rhetoric to telegram style" after purchasing (and writing with) a typewriter (*Gramophone* 203). This short, pithy, and un/artistic style of Nietzsche's later writings offers us a way to think about and perform a pedagogy appropriate for new media, and that would allow us to overcome Literature as un/artists overcome art.[19] The implication of Kittler's statement is a common one: the technologies we interact with work-over the ways we think and write. In response to Kittler's

observation, Nietzsche anachronistically answers: "it is my ambition to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book—what everyone else does not say in a book" (*Portable* 556). But our ambitions must go beyond Nietzsche if we are to address composition in digital environments; after all, in the digital age, we are moving far more quickly than Nietzsche did with a typewriter. If the goal is to inject imagination into the ways we compose within the digital void, we must recognize the ways our thoughts are being worked over, particularly the immediacy and surprise of our thinking. I propose the following ambition for digital composition: to "say" in 140 characters[20] what Nietzsche wants to "say" in 10 sentences. To compose in such a manner would be to develop our own joyful wisdom, our own gay science, where we become "the poets of our [lives]—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters" (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* 240). To use a cheap analogy, this manner would have us write the *gutters*[21] of our lives instead of moments consciously selected.

Aphorisms are a part of everyday life. If we need evidence to justify this claim, we need only look to Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which Geoff Sirc refers to as "notational jottings" that are "a desperately important compositional skill" and which can be found in "interesting little bits of the everyday" ("Box Logic" 122-23). Moreover, such a method of composing is open to experimental ways of thinking that typifies the digital humanities and their interdisciplinary approaches to the pedagogical event. To turn toward experimental approaches to the pedagogical event—based on un/art practices rather than process-oriented ones[22]—enables a condition of tremulous excitement (a *twitter*) exposed in the surprise of an observation that sparks the deep thought of an aphorism's pithiness—a terse form of writing achieved in a only a few words (or characters/images). The aphorism is an (experimental) art of exegesis that links thought to composition im-mediately and that refuses to be elaborated, but that invites traitorous thoughts to take up

residence in the yet unbuilt rooms of the digital.

Gilles Deleuze explains as much when he speaks of Nietzsche writing: "an aphorism is present as a *fragment*; it is the form of pluralist thought; in its content it claims to articulate and formulate a *sense*. The sense of a being, an action, a thing—these are the object of the aphorism. […] only the aphorism is capable of articulating sense, the aphorism is interpretation and the art of interpreting" (*Nietzsche* 31). Yet, this interpretation remains open to other interpretations; it is not the interpretation of rhetorical argument, but of ruminating within the space of pluralist thought presented in the digital, like the play of the un/artist, since it stands apart from any grand narrative; the aphorism presents us with the little narratives that Lyotard sees as the ambition of avant-garde art, and which Kaprow and Ludwinski extend in the move to un/art. As the *thought of composition*, aphorisms make sense and change senses in relation to the thought(s) they compose apart from the narratives in which they were built. For Nietzsche, the aphorism becomes a composition of the post-modern, interested in ruminating thought rather than the fully-formed and explicated forms of knowledge that restrict imagination.[23] Composing aphoristically would then allow the *thought of composition* to become a form in and of itself, the composition of an 'art' of pluralistic interpretations (potentialities).

The potentialities of writing aphoristically return us (eternally?) to the possibility of writing strangely. Agamben explains the writing of this potentiality as a place where

> [t]he trace is nothing other than the most rigorous attempt to reconsider—against the primacy of actuality and form—the Aristotlian paradox of potentiality, the gesture of the scribe who dips his pen in thought and writes

solely with his potentiality (not to write). The trace,[24] writing 'without presence or absence, without history, without cause, without *arkhë*, without *telos*,' is not a form, nor is it the passage from potentiality to actuality; rather, it is a potentiality that is *capable* and that experiences itself, a writing tablet that suffers not the impression of a form but the imprint of its own passivity, its own formlessness. (*Potentialities* 216)

Thinking in terms 'characters' rather than merely image and/or text offers a *capability* of experiencing the formlessness of such a writing, and it is one that is opened in the relation to the (traitorous) hospitality of the digital. In terms of digital composition, a character is a mark that marks the *capability* of composing aphoristically by imprinting a form that remains formless in its potentiality not to write (purely). In Derridean terms, a character corresponds to the written grapheme, not as its equivalent, but as an analogue whose reference opens a (third) relation that has no central argument—it has no center at all. The political significance of writing this third relation is how it is *capable* of addressing the points-of-contention in the 'bureaucratization of the imagination' by refusing to become bureaucratized (centered).

Extending Nietzsche's ambition of writing aphoristically presents such a refusal; where the witness's testimony (c)enters what can be said, the traitor's aphoristic composition presents us with intuitions, movements of 'writing' where thought escapes bureaucratization (law). At certain moments, we must refuse to (c)enter testimonies and enter into "an infinite task that risks condemning the writer to a didactic, pedagogic role, and, in so doing, of excluding the demand [the (committed) writer)[25]] carries within him and that constrains him to lack a place, a name, a role, and an identity, that is, never yet to be a writer" (*Political* 118). The formlessness of aphorisms presents us with such a risk, a risk supplemented by the

hospitality of the digital, an invitation to compose ourselves into a space that lacks place—the ones we carry within ourselves and that open us into the potentialities of pluralist thought. Accepting the digital's hospitality in our pedagogy would have us affirm the part(s) it takes in forming thought from the formlessness of the refusal to *write purely*.

A (Comic) Pedagogy of (Twittering) Aphorisms

"Philosophical writing is ahead of where it is supposed to be. Like a child, it is premature and insubstantial. We recommence, but we cannot rely on it getting to the thought itself, there, at the end. For the thought is here, muddled up in the unthought, trying to make sense of the impertinent chatter of childhood."

~ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Subject of the Course of Philosophy"

(I)
Of Nietzsche's Beyond *(and Composition)*
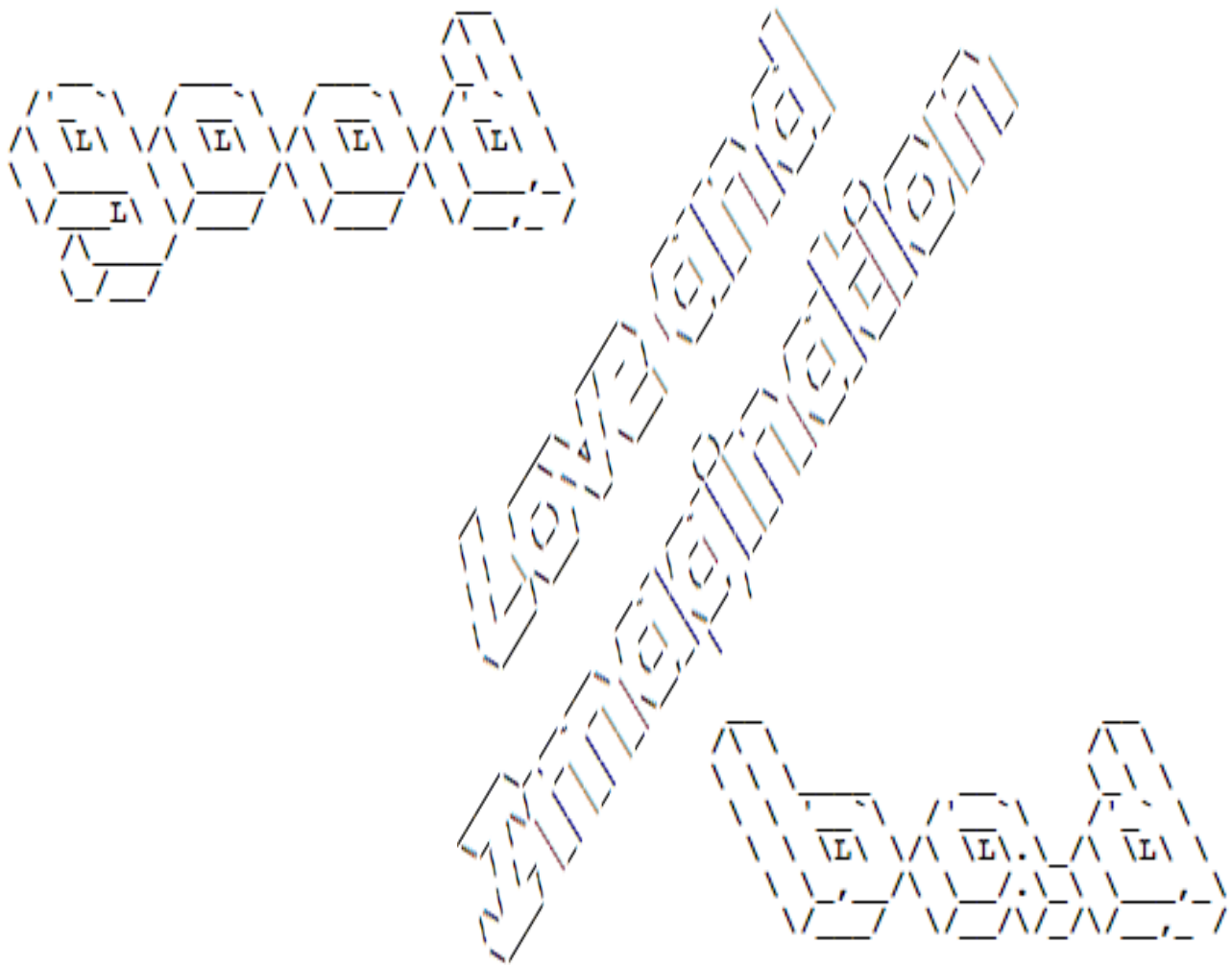
(II)
Empty Rooms of the Digital[26]

(III)
A Digital (Comic) Traitor[27]
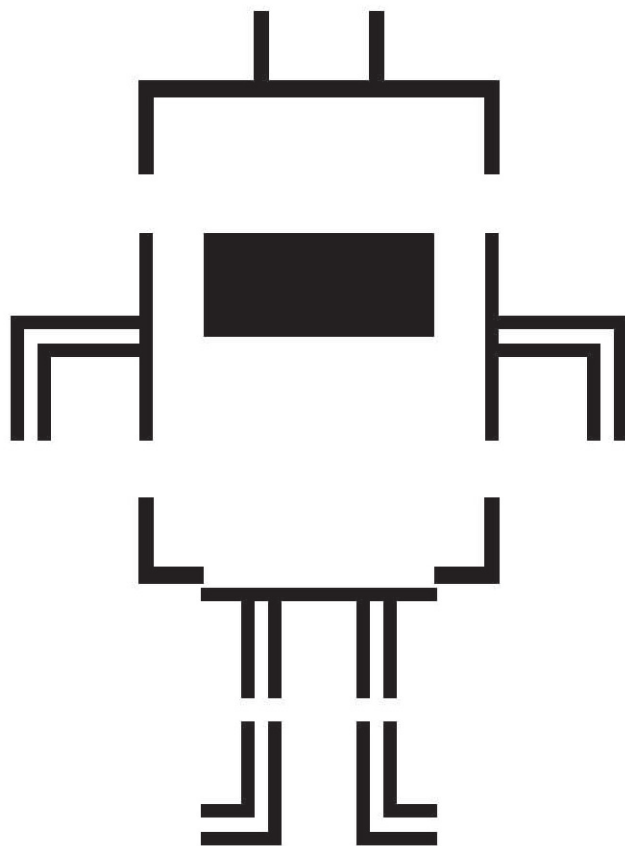
(IV)
Please Come In...[28]
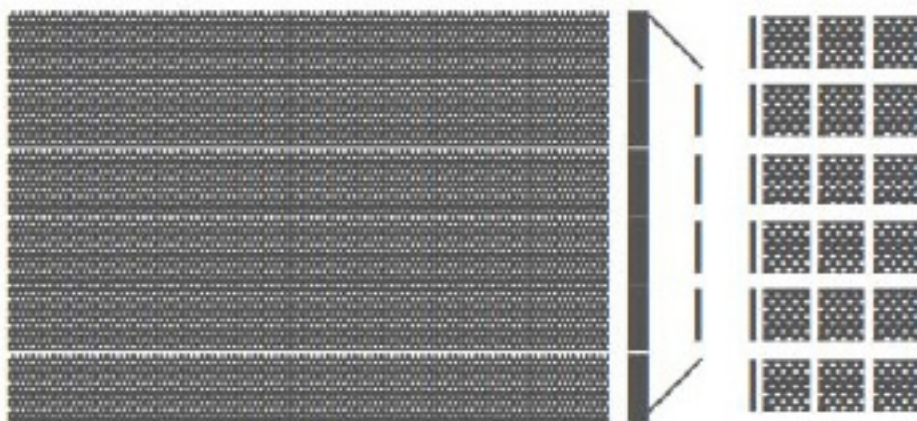
(V)
Welcome[29]
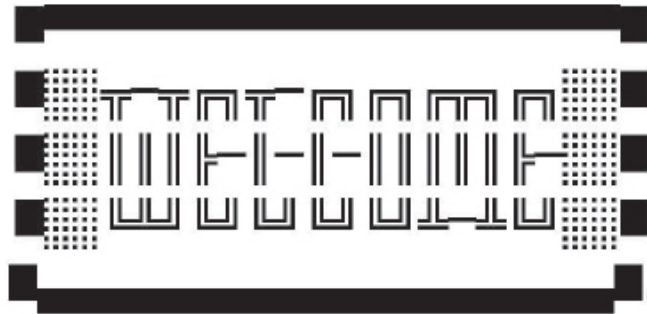
(VI)
Wonderbot Powers Activate! Form a Tweet![30]
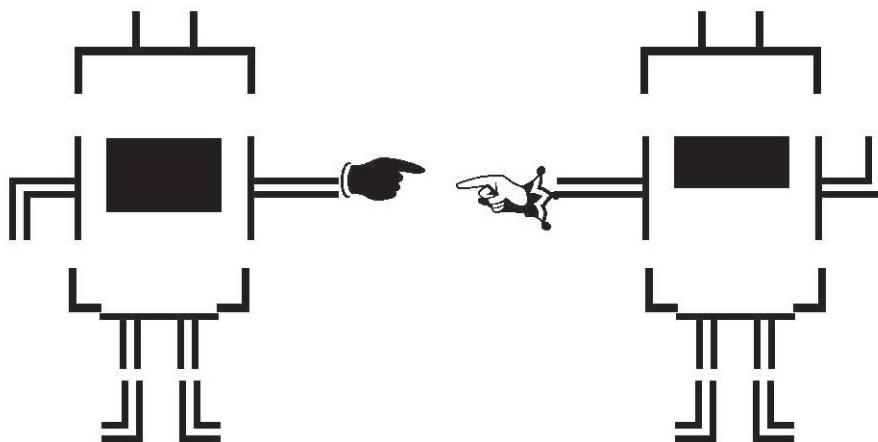
(VII)
A Leaf Falls[31]

(a
  le
    af
    fa
   ll
  s)

(VIII)
Circle Poetry, pt. 1[32]

—————————————— r ——— c ——— i ——————————————

———————— i ———————————————————— e ————————

———— c ———————————————————————— p ————————

———— a ——————————————————————— e ——

Circle Poetry, pt. 2

——— s ———————————————————— e ——

——— i ———————————————————— m ———

——— e ———————————————— i ———

——— e ————————————— n ———

——————— w ——— i ——— 2 ————————

(IX)
The Traitor's Over/Coming Super/Power[33]

P E R P O W E R ≡ I S ≡ A L T E R
U   N
S   A
⫴   T
Y   E
M ≡ ≡ ≡ ≡ ≡ S R E T C A R A H C ▫

(X)
And Brevity[34]

(XI)
Tweeting Without Bound(arie)s[35]
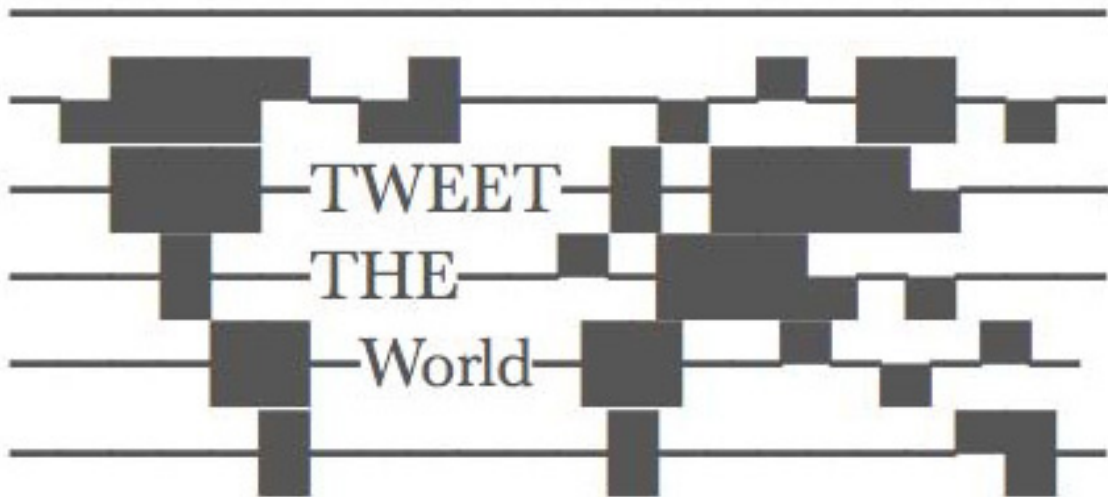
(XII)
Composing with a Hammer[36]
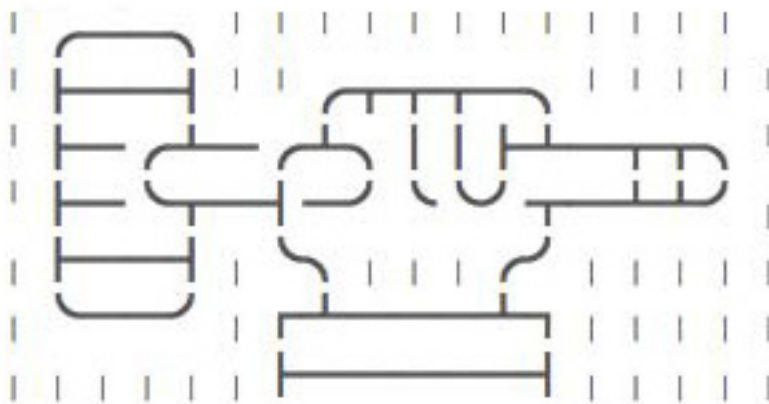
(XIII)
140 Characters at a Time[37]

SPEED LIMIT 140
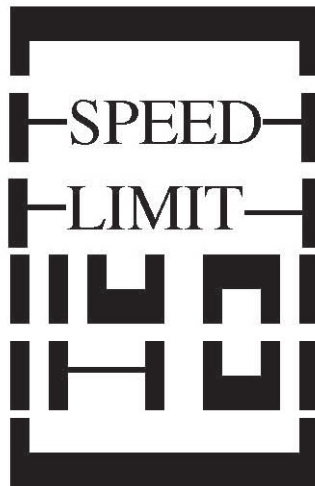
(XIV)
A Twittering Art of Love[38]

(XV)
A Vigilante Literature[39]

Vigilante Literature
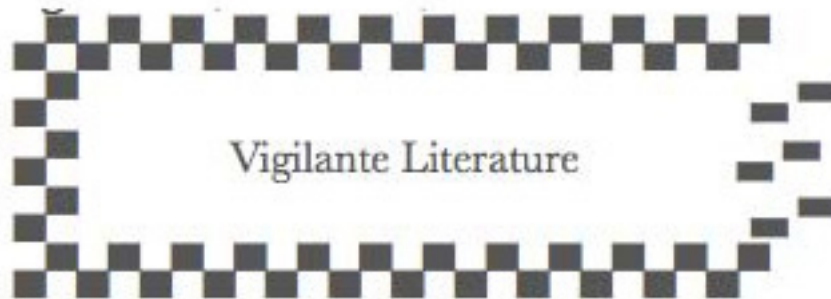
(XVI)
Thank You All[40]

(XVII)
How About a Glass of Wine[41]
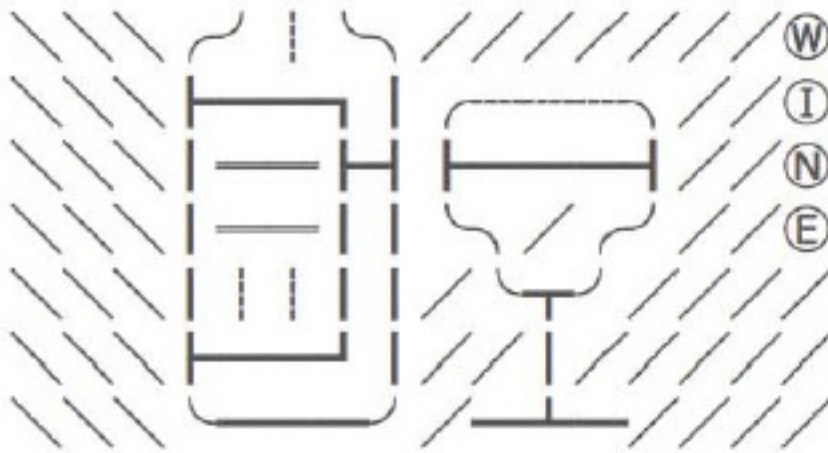
Endnotes

1. A reference to Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" and Maurice Blanchot's reading of 'Bartleby' in *The Writing of the Disaster* (145), which appears in the form of aphorisms.

2. Also see Cynthia Selfe's article "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing." She writes: The stakes for students are no less significant—they involve fundamental issues of rhetorical sovereignty3: the rights and responsibilities that students have to identify their own communicative needs and to represent their own identities, to select the right tools for the communicative contexts within which they operate, and to think critically and carefully about the meaning that they and others compose. When we insist on print as the primary, and most formally acceptable, modality for composing knowledge, we usurp these rights and responsibilities on several important intellectual and social dimensions, and, unwittingly, limit students' sense of rhetorical agency to the bandwidth of our own interests and imaginations" (618).

3. As Blanchot writes, "The disaster does not put me into question, but annuls the questions, makes it disappear – as if along with the question, "I" too disappeared in the disaster which never appears" (*Writing* 28). Questions, in this sense, assume and demand answers, reasons, justifications that take "place after having taken place" (Blanchot, *Writing* 28).

4. See Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins* and Stanley Aronowitz's *The Knowledge Factory* for more detailed accounts of the problem facing universities focused on 'training' students "in knowledges that constitute an occupation or a particular set of skills" (Aronowitz, *Knowledge Factory* 1). Instead, Readings conceives of the University as a space "where thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity. Thought beside itself perhaps. The University's ruins offer us an institution in which the incomplete and interminable nature of the pedagogic relation can remind us that "thinking together" is a dissensual process" (*University* 192).

5. In *Networked Art*, Craig Saper begins with Barthes' notion of "receivable texts," claiming that this term alludes to "a network of relationships linked by sending and receiving texts in the mail or as a part of a network of participants" and which "suspends traditional norms of judgment" (4).

6. "I will not say that the disaster is absolute; on the contrary, it disorients the absolute" (Blanchot, *Writing* 4).

7. Here, I take my cue from Geoffrey Sirc: ""[o]ur texts are conventional in every sense of the word; they write themselves. They are wholly determined by the texts that have gone before; a radical break with the conventions of a form or genre […] would perplex." (*English* 10). Also, see Victor Vitanza's article entitled "Abandoned to Writing: Notes Toward Several Provocations" for a *radically passive* performance. Vitanza writes:

> "What writing or composition wants is a writer! To invite someone to become a writer! What rhetoric wants is a body that comes to expressing itselphs. A writer. A body filled with tics that cannot but (not) write! Twitchings.

"Writing, however, is not | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | (barcodes) nor is it /////////////
(slashing of value). Only writers spawned by institutions write in this manner!"

8. Here, transvaluation refers to what that which has no pre-determined criteria and
    would be, in the Nietzschean sense, a valuation of love, which Nietzsche finds to go
    beyond good (acceptable) and evil (unacceptable) (cf. *Beyond Good and Evil; The Will to
    Power: A Transvaluation of All Values*).

9. See Byron Hawk's *A Counter-History of Composition* (100-104).

10. In *Internet Invention*, Ulmer defines conductive logic thus: "Conductive logic subsumes
    the inductive, deductive, and abductive inferences of the interrogation. In conduction
    the inference path moves from material thing to another thing, from signifier to
    signifier, without recourse to the abstractions of rules" (156). To clarify Ulmer's
    thinking, conductive logic can be figured as a *pun*, a logic similar to the one Derrida
    builds with his concepts of deconstruction and *differance*, a logic of *wordplay* that
    can also extend into image realms – an image spurs another image, perhaps directly
    related, perhaps indirectly related. *Heuretics*, according to Ulmer, "contributes to what
    Barthes referred to as 'the return of the politician'—one who is concerned with how a
    work is made" (*Heuretics* 4), and it indicates a process of using "the method that I am
    inventing while I am inventing it" (*Heuretics* 17). Such a process does not determine
    'the paths of inquiry,' but 'continually sets the inquiry in motion.'

11. This phrasing is a reference to Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*. He writes
    in a 'chapter' titled Bartleby: "The perfect act of writing comes not from a power to
    write, but from an impotence that turns back on itself and in this way comes to itself
    as a pure act […]. Bartleby, a scribe who does not simply cease writing, but 'prefers
    not to,' is the extreme image of this angel that writes nothing but its potentiality to

not-write" (37). Earlier, he explains 'impotence': "It is neither apathy nor promiscuity nor resignation. These pure singularities communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity, they are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging itself, the sign □. Tricksters or fakes, assistants or 'toons, they are the exemplars of the coming community" (*Coming* 11). Quentin was a trickster for Bartholomae, one that performed his writing, turning back on himself ("I lose again"), and coming to himself through the Act of writing. It was his "Fuck You" essay (cf. Bartholomae, "The Tidy House" and Sirc's *English Composition*) that brought Bartholomae to question the field of Basic Writing almost 20 years later. The essay comes too late for Bartholomae even as the realization of that essay came too soon (cf. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 81).

12. Later, I will refer to Warren Ellis' *Do Anything*, where he quotes Harvey Pekar saying: "Comics are words and pictures. You can do anything with words and pictures" (5). On Stan Lee, apparently a *postmodern writer/artist*: "The artist would go away – with or without a supporting document, it seems – and draw out the story in pencil. Stan would then generate all the dialogue" (12).

13. See *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (226) and Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (6).

14. Nicholas Lemann explains why reason comprises so much risk in "Terrorism Studies: Social scientists do counterinsurgency":

> In the world of terrorism studies, the rhetoric of righteousness gives way to equilibrium equations. Nobody is good and nobody is evil. Terrorists, even suicide bombers, are not psychotics or fanatics; they're rational actors—that is, what they do is explicable in terms of their beliefs and desires—who respond to the set of

incentives that they find before them. The tools of analysis are realism, rational choice, game theory, decision theory: clinical and bloodless modes of thinking. (73).

In essence, Lemann argues that the tools of argumentation, Logic, Reason, and rationality are the same tools that allowed the justification of disastrous actions on September 11, 2001. Also, Lester Faigley's writes in *Fragments of Rationality*:

> …a major source of contradictions in writing pedagogy results from the dogmatic teaching of a truncated conception of coherence, which supports bureaucratic rationality where reason is restricted to narrow channels of expertise and questions of ethics are suppressed. Even the champion of Enlightenment rationality, Jûrgen Habermas, critiques 'instrumental rationality' that supports bureaucracies by providing their justification and controlling mechanisms, and he argues instead for a 'communicative rationality' that would integrate the discourses of the arts, science, and morality. (133)

Given the subtitle of Faigley's book (*Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*), it appears that Rickert's book (subtitle: *Rhetoric, Zizek, and the Return of the Subject*) works in a similar vein. *Postpedagogy*, perhaps, is a manifestation of the problematics Faigley detects in (composition) pedagogy – work that Rickert, among others, continuously attempt to flesh out, and the work that this project attempts to supplement.

15. See Gregory Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism."

16. As Byron Hawk explains, "Potentiality is there first and then when it encounters the right circumstances, the right constellation of bodies and forces, it is put in motion and becomes possibility. In short, potentiality is the 'condition for possibility" (282-83, n15).

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17. Gilles Deleuze explains as much when he writes of Nietzsche's 'concept of genealogy': "Evaluations, in essence, are not values but ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge" (1).

18. As explained in the Glossary of *Libidinal Economy*:

    The Great Ephemeral Skin: this is in many ways the more provocative figure in *Libidinal Economy*. It highlights the disruptive potential of the figure, a concern which occupied Lyotard […] Freud's elaboration of the 'dream-work' (cf. *The Interpretation of Dreams*) provides Lyotard with an articulation of the connivance of the figural and the libidinal: the dream-work (condensation, displacement, secondary revision and considerations of representability) distorts figural materials (words, signs and ideas). In *Discours, figure*, Lyotard draws out the implications of the figural unconscious' plastic invasion into the realm of the conceptual conscious, the result of which invasion is not merely to demonstrated the inevitable confusion of the two realms, but to highlight difference in their respective organizations. Whereas the conceptual relies on rigid opposition, the figural works differences: concepts, in other words, utilize negation (the 'this' and the 'not-this' in the language of *Libidinal Economy*), isolating unit(ie)s as opposed entities, whereas figural difference, like the unconscious whose work it is, knows no negation. […] The great ephemeral skin is the libidinal materialist (dis) solution of figural difference and conceptual opposition as polymorphous (hence 'ephemeral'), material (hence 'skin') intensity. (*Libidinal* xiv)

19. Vitanza writes in "Abandoned to Writing: Notes Toward Several Provocations": "'We' may never write 'writing,' but 'we' must start letting *writing* write. Such a writing cannot, should not, take place, and will not, unless under the most radical, still

unthinkable, conditions…take place…*in* the university (or the schools). It is simply *not safe* for students to write 'in' or 'at' the university. Any university. What is taught at the university is not-writing."

20. Also, see Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, specifically Chapter 10 entitled "The Politics of Composition" where she writes: "No matter how nurturant the teacher, the so-called community classroom is rife with the ideological differences that students and teachers bring with them to class. These differences will inevitably be put on the table, as they might not be in a history or biology class, because liberal composition pedagogy insists that students' identities are the subject of composition. Within the context of the universal requirement, which forces people to take and teach the class, this seems to me to be a recipe for pain" (227). In general, Crowley's perspective reminds us that we are a highly political field, but that we rarely acknowledge the ideological differences in the classroom in hopes of 'keeping the peace.' The problem here is that once students leave the classroom, they continue to maintain their identities, which is enforced when we require them to learn how to argue well instead of learning that arguments, and therefore identities, are contingent singularities, forcing a rethinking both of politics, self, and the act or event of writing.

21. See Joshua C. Hilst's forthcoming article in *JAC*, "Gutter Talk: An Other Idiom of Rhetoric."

22. Here, I use the word "abysmal" as an indication of the additional Catholic (church) meaning of 'limbo,' which refers to a border-space between Heaven and Hell (cf. Harper, "Online"). Could it be, perhaps, that this is the space that exists *beyond* good and evil? It certainly appears so considering the theoretical suggestions. Could that mean that, in part, Nietzsche would have liked to read some comics? And Lyotard?

What we do know, however, is that Roland Barthes thought comics has some theoretically interesting potentialities (see Chapter 1).

23. Again, Lyotard finds this necessity in the work of Kant, whose discussion of the "sublime" in the "Appendix" of *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* is akin to what is now being termed *postpedagogy*.

24. Kant links his idea of 'free art' with the field of rhetoric, claiming, "*Rhetoric* is the art of transacting a serious business of the understanding as if it were a free play of the imagination" (284) and that the rhetorician gives "an entertaining play of the imagination" (*Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* 185). In addition, U.S. Army Commander, Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus suggests that large-scale conventional tactics "may be of limited utility or even counterproductive in COIN [counterinsurgency] operations" (ix) and that "successful counterinsurgency campaigns require a flexible, adaptive force led by agile, well-informed, culturally astute leaders" (n.p.). If the work of rhetoric/composition is indeed to prepare students for academic and professional work, it stands to reason that successful students will be "flexible," "adaptive," and "astute" – that is, to be able to work beyond "conventional" practices in order to formulate the rules of the "unconventional" (cf. Petraeus; Lyotard, *Postmodern*).

25. A reference to the concluding lines of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" (74).

26. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes, "What is done out of love always occurs beyond good and evil" (*Portable* 444; aphorism 153). Quentin's refusal to *write purely* could also be an Act of love in this sense…

Chapter One Endnotes

1. Ulmer has proposed "terms" for writing (with) new media, calling this a move 'from literacy to electracy' in *Internet Invention*. Electracy, according to Ulmer, "is to digital media what literacy is to print" (xi), and it "adds to orality and literacy the possibility of writing the unconscious (and hence of writing with what we do not know—with our stupidity and with our trust" (163).

2. See Jean Baudrillard various works, but specifically *Simulations*.

3. In part, this series of divisions mimics Plato's own series of dialogues in this sequence: *The Sophist, The Statesman,* and *The Philosopher*, where each of the dialogues correlates to each of the forms of *imitation*. In our own time, this estimation seems appropriate, if we consider current brands of *sophistry* as attempts to accurately represent knowledge in the service of professionalism and institutions, statesmen are commonly framed as deceptive in order to maintain their own *will to power*, and philosophers are excluded for attempting to think the unthought to cut through both, at least in Lyotard's view of the *philosopher*. Plato's *The Philosopher* was not written (or uncovered, whichever your preference), and there seems to be little corroborating evidence to assume a definition of the *philosopher* by Plato.

4. This would be analogous to Diane Davis' *feminism* in the sense that it "anticipates laughing itself out of a job" (*Breaking* 208).

5. Cf. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* for further explanation.

6. Lyotard vaguely observes that "it is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-process machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an effect on the circulation of learning as did advancements in human circulation (transportation systems) and alter, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media)" (4) at the outset of *The Postmodern Condition*. The vagueness in this statement suggests that Lyotard does not see technology negatively, but as a potential to provides ways of thinking systematically and non-systematically. That is, playing with these technologies can lead us to new ways of knowing (theoretical knowledge), doing (practical knowledge) and making (productive knowledge).

7. As we learn from Kenneth Burke in *Permanence and Change*, and Victor Vitanza in "Seeing in Third Sophistic Ways," among others, a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.

8. See Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism" for more on these techniques and how they relate to the current trends of art practices in composing otherwise.

9. See Ulmer's *Teletheory*, pp. 64-104.

10. Galloway concludes by saying: "People often ask me if I think protocol is good or bad. But I'm not sure this is the best question to ask. It is important to remember first that the technical is always political, that network *architecture is politics*. So protocol necessarily involves a complex interrelation of political questions, some progressive, some reactionary. In many ways protocol is a dramatic move forward, but in other

ways it reinstates systems of social and technical control that are deserving of critical analysis" (*Protocol* 245-46).

11. Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins* effectively discusses and dismantles the criteria of excellence.

12. See Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold*, pp. 22, 66, 158, and 181. He writes: "Unfolding sometimes means that I am developing – that I am undoing – infinite tiny folds that are forever agitating the background, with the goal of drawing a great fold on the side whence forms appear […] I am forever unfolding between two folds, and if to perceive means to unfold, then I am forever perceiving within the folds" (93).

13. The use of this term comes from Chris Ware's *The Acme Novelty Date Book, Volume One*: "To create a fine line-up of brilliantly pro-duced and rendered <u>moving comic pictures</u> ~ all by the original creators" (41).

14. Gregory Ulmer has worked to develop such a manner since as early as 1983 when his article "The Object of Post-Criticism" was released in Hal Foster's *Anti-Aesthetics*. Ulmer then develops this method more fully in *Teletheory* and *Heuretics*, calling this additional logic "conduction." However, the conductive reasoning that he describes is meant to deal directly with electronic (digital) media. Also, at the base of this term, as Ulmer writes, are "the features of the electronic terms (conduction and transduction)" (Teletheory 86). In trans-disciplinary and trans-medial fashion, I am using the term *pro-duction* as a way to address the gap that these 'electronic terms' exclude, specifically what Ulmer calls "a movement directly between things (unconscious thought), instead of "the established movements of inference between things and ideas (abduction, deduction, induction)" (*Heuretics* 127).

15. See Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, pp. 229-230.

16. See Ulmer's *Applied Grammatology*, pp. 78-79.

17. See also, Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 86.

18. Jeff Rice explains that this sort of work is already under way in popular culture when he writes that such work has "occurred without 'further study'" (*Rhetoric of Cool* 144).

19. As Ulmer notes in *Applied Grammatology* and in "The Object of Post-Criticism," post-pedagogy supports the popularization of education already present in the digital technologies students use every day. The turn to the figural in composition studies is not an outright rejection of traditional forms of writing; instead, post-pedagogy aims to challenge the desire to fix meaning in order to explore what has been excluded.

20. Similarly, in the introduction to Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, David Wellerby refers to a practice called "post-hermeneutics" in which the interpretive methods called hermeneutics are supplemented with additional readings that push interpretation to its limits until it becomes generative. As it applies in Ulmer's work, post-hermeneutics petitions us to see readymade objects as conceptual starting places that spur abstract, theoretical thinking and approaches to research.

21. Also, these nomadic drifts share a kinship with Vitanza's paganism in "Three Countertheses" – a process of continually finding new ways of understanding and making sense of the world around us.

22. Warren Ellis, speaking of jazz musician Anthony Braxton, writes that Braxton "makes up a name for every new 'style' he creates – even though his honking free-jazz almost-

musical experiments are so dissonant, random and alien as to be almost indivisible from each other" (*Do Anything* 15).

23. See Cynthia Haynes' "Writing Offshore," p. 715. Such a "condensation" leads Haynes' to write: "Writing in the abstract also suggests learning the rhetorical device of brevity and the rhetorical power of the *aphorism*" (715).

24. Calvino speaks of this as a time of inspiration that sparked his desire for literature, but also has deep relevance to rhetoric and composition. Perhaps such a method could bridge the gap between the between the cultures of literature and composition that Peter Elbow so effectively traces out in his opinion piece "The Cultures of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other."

25. For more on Lyotard on Duchamp, see Lyotard's *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*. He (Lyotard) writes: "In what you say about Duchamp, the aim would be not to try to understand and to show what you've understood, but rather the opposite, to try not to understand and to show that you haven't understood. No, not what you think, not a commentary on incomprehensibility in general or in particular, the seven hundred and twenty-eighth modern text on modernity as the experience of Nothing. No, to be good and conscientious and phrasey, to stick to the motif, to be technical if necessary, and at the same time to let the inconsistency of the commentary and its object be felt, by Yours Truly and Monsieur Marcel, and by the one with the other, but a conquered inconsistency, you see, not received in disappointment, not exhibited as a cardinal virtue of martyrdom, on the contrary, nonsense as the most precious treasure" (12).

26. Christopher Bracken also discusses similar concepts in *Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy* as the convocation of "forbidden possibilities of discourse" (1).

CHAPTER TWO ENDNOTES

1. See *Maus I* and *Maus II.*

2. Hawk builds on Gregory Ulmer's work in *Heuretics*, a term that he uses to describe an/ other logic of invention that "appropriates the history of the avant-garde as a liberal mode of research and experimentation" (xii) and addresses what has been excluded from "a review of the history of the arts [indicating] that the criticism that has been written and the art works that have been created are only a fraction of the kinds of things that could have been developed" (3). A *postmodern writer/artist*, in writing *what will have been*, address the fragments left excluded.

3. In inventing a method while inventing it, the criteria for developing such a method would be formulated after the fact.

4. This, of course, presents a paradox – in addressing its illegitimate position as a benefit, I could also be seen as attempting to legitimate comics in the service of institutions. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate, comics do not merely represent one form that needs be legitimated; rather, comics are in a position to explore a perpetual combination of media (both print and digital).

5. See David Wellerby's introduction to Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900.*

6. C ynthia Haynes currently has an article entitled "Post-Conflict Pedagogy," slated to be published as a book chapter in *Beyond Post-Process* (eds. Sidney Dobrin, Jeff Rice, and Michael Vastola), that takes its task as destabilizing "the stabilizing momentum of any pedagogy that re-iterates conflict in the name of writing" (from the unpublished book proposal/abstract). What I see in a comics form is a way of enacting Haynes' *post-conflict pedagogy* within rhetoric's and composition's move toward new media and the *figural*.

7. Kenneth Burke explores the "paradox of substance" in Chapter 2 of *A Grammar of Motives*, titled "Antinomies of Definition," explaining, "etymologically 'substance' is a scenic work. Literally, a person's or a thing's sub-stance would be something that stands beneath or supports the person or thing" (22).

8. "Context" also comes from Burke's discussion of *sub-stance* whose origins etymologically "refer to an attribute of a thing's *context*, since that which supposrts or underlies a thing would be a part of thing's context. And a thing's context, being outside or beyond the thing, would be something that the thing is *not*" (*Grammar* 23).

9. See also Gregory Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism and *Applied Grammatology*.

10. Trahair builds on Mary Lydon's article "Veduta on *Discours, figure*" in Yale French Studies 99:

    …discourse and figure are given together. Not sequentially, not in juxtaposition, but together at once, one on top of the other like two superimposed photographic images, or like the representations of the unconscious. This is a spatial relationship that language in its linearity does not permit, hence the imperative to write "Discours, figure," where the comma […] represents graphically, but mutely,

as a pause, a blank, a hesitation, one might say, that which cannot be verbalized. (24)

Earlier she (Trahair) also writes of *Discours, figure*, when Lyotard distinguished between vision and seeing, that it "is not possible to establish a relationship of simple epistemological exteriority between the text and the image" (20). Comics present a way of thinking about this relationship, and a way of thinking about how other hybrid media – I use cinema as a synecdoche for digital media in this dissertation – may be thought of in a similar manner.

11. See Gregory Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism," p. 86.

12. Pun intended. :)

13. Barthes writes in "The Third Meaning" (where "meaning" is translated from the French sens, which means "meaning," "sense," "direction," "tenor," "wits," among others) that the *obtuse meaning* indicates "a theory of the supplementary meaning" (55) and "what the obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism)" (61); in doing so, it also disturbs attempts at mounting meta-narratives in favor of alternate directions spurring from sensation. Here we may find a link to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*.

14. This phrasing of "fragmentary work" comes from Blanchot's *The Infinite Conversation*. He writes that fragments are

problematic not because [they] refuse accomplishment, but because it explores with an inexorable rigor – beyond the conception of the work as something unified and closed upon itself, as organizing and dominating the values transmitted by

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a traditional already established and attained – the infinite space of the work, though with a new postulate: namely, that the relations of this space will not necessarily satisfy the concepts of unity, totality, or continuity. The problem the work of the fragment poses is a problem of extreme maturity: first of the artist, and also of society. (348)

If thought of in this way, the fragmentary writing that comics suggest would subvert Barthes' claim that comics are "derisory, vulgar, foolish, dialogical forms of consumer subculture" (66n1), but rather, present a way of thinking and writing in their prime manifestations

15. See McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*.

16. Groensteen only acknowledges McCloud's work twice in *The System of Comics*, even while his (Groensteen) project has a great deal in common with McCloud's earlier analysis. Yet, McCloud appears to be a bit more flexible with his view of comics than Groensteen's system allows for.

17. In part, this conceptualization of montage appears a bit narrow. A more productive view of montage comes to use from Walter Benjamin in "The Author as Producer: "I am speaking of the process of *montage*: the element which is superimposed breaks into the situation on which it is imposed" (*Reflections* 234). Gregory Ulmer also discusses such a process in "The Object of Post-Criticism" that moves beyond critique into a productive process of in(ter)vention.

18. In the second endnote, Hawk explains that he uses "'hir' to denote a conflation between her and his. Aside from the practical reasons, it is also emblematic of the gender problematic I see in *The Fifth Element*" (89).

19. Umberto Eco echoes a similar manner in "A Reading of Steve Canyon," offering an active means of reading/visualizing comics as a collaborative moment of creation with and apart from the writer/artist. Eco describes an experiment at the end of this article that finds readings had inserted images that were not present in the original sequence – creating an alternate narrative.

20. In Vitanza's terms, this would be "a Rhetoric that not only is without the philosophical pretensions of adjudicating 'philosophical knowledge claims' but also (and more importantly) *is without the philosophical-Rhetorical pretensions of adjudicating 'hermeneutical understandings.'* It is, in other words, not concerned either with attempting to resolve rhetorical, interpretive differences or with even accounting for them. Instead, it identifies, detonates, and exploits the differences" ("Critical Sub/Versions" 42).

21. Italo Calvino on da Vinci: "And not just in science but also in philosophy, he was confident he could communicate better by means of painting and drawing. Still he also felt an incessant need to write, to use writing to investigate the world in all its polymorphous manifestations and secrets, and also to give shape to his fantasies, emotions, and rancors – as when he inveighs against men of letters, who were able only to repeat what they had read in the books of others, unlike those who were among 'inventors and interpreters between nature and men'" (*Six Memos* 79).

22. See Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism" in which he looks to move beyond critique toward production. Post-criticism, then, would be "to think the consequences for critical representation of the new mechanical means of reproduction (film and magnetic tape – technologies which require collage/montage)" (91).

23. See Diane Davis' *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter*.

24. In *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben writes of the term *whatever*: "Whatever is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities" (67), and that *"Whatever is singularity insofar as it relates not (only) to the concept, but (also) to the idea"* (76). Here, "whatever singularity" is that which has an "inessential commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence" (17-18). It should also be noted that his understanding of "whatever" does not indicate indifference, but is etymologically based on the Latin translation of "being such that it always matters" (1) – which is precisely what Kaprow looks for in *unart*.

25. Calvino: "In the cinema the image we see on the screen has also passed through the stage of a written text, has then been 'visualized' in the mind of the director, then physically reconstructed on the set, and finally fixed in the frames of the film itself. A film is therefore the outcome of a succession of phases, both material and otherwise, in the course of which the images acquire form. During this process, the 'mental cinema' of the imagination has a function no less important than that of the actual creation of the sequences as they will be recorded by the camera and then put together on the moviola. This mental cinema is always at work in each one of us, and it always has been, even before the invention of the cinema. Nor does it ever stop projecting images before our mind's eye" (*Six Memos* 83).

26. This concept correlates to Cynthia Haynes' desire for writing instruction to move away from 'argument' and toward more nomadic and inventive approaches in "Writing Offshore."

27. See Agamben's *The Coming Community*, p. 1.

CHAPTER THREE ENDNOTES

1. The title is a reference to Jean-Luc Nancy's "Myth Interrupted" in *The Inoperative Community*.

2. The phrase "dream-work" comes from Lyotard's article "The Dream-Work Does Not Think" where he writes that the dream-work "does not think, calculate, or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form" (*Reader* 20). Surrealism works with such logics and 'restrictions.'

3. As a *Frankenstein* reference, this subtitle is very appropriate considering that the project is a mish-mash of parts from a variety of 'comics artists.'

4. I work with Spiegelman's work again, primarily because he has been (consistently recognized as) one of the leading *avant-gardists* working within comics.

5. See Gregory Ulmer's *Heuretics*, p. 5.

6. Compare with Kenneth Burke's "Unending Conversation" in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* 110-111.

7. Here, I use the word "gesture" as Giorgio Agamben does in *Means Without Ends*: "*The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means*

visible as such" (58). Spiegelman even addresses this in the introductory remarks when he acknowledges that the surrealist exercise was not very effective as a work in itself, but it worked well as an exercise in thinking about the process of making and experimenting with comics.

8. See James Elkins' *Why Art Cannot be Taught* and *What Happened to Art Criticism*.

9. See Derrida's *The Archeology of the Frivolous*, p. 76.

10. This is also a key trajectory of Ulmer's "Electracy" project. Jeff Rice and Marcel O'Gorman concisely explain the use of avant-garde art methods in new media practices in the "Introduction" to *New Media/New Methods: The Academic Turn from Literacy to Electracy* as "…about making methods and not art (as Greg Ulmer reminds his students on a regular basis)" since "avant-garde artists serve as ideal exemplars in the invention of new modes of discourse" (9).

11. Boyd's article is the only article that explores the importance of *TNC* for comics, at least that I could find. Also, to clarify his use of the word "pattern," he writes: "If all art plays with pattern, the best art plays best with pattern" ("Art and Evolution" 47).

12. See Ulmer, *Heuretics*, p. 228: "Chorography continues the speculative circulation of meaning through equivocal words but introduces a different style of linkage (hence a different 'method')—one that is 'punceptual' rather than conceptual—in which conduction (passing from thing to thing in the real, 'external' to my conscious reasoning) reorganizes abduction, deduction, and induction."

13. In Ulmer's "method" CATTt, he defines the "t" (target) as "the immediate domain of application" in which "Breton also intended to change the status of art itself, constituting it as

a practice of daily life better characterized as 'politics' than 'art' (*Heuretics* 11). While Ulmer seems to be interested in 'methods' of how we may think of media processes, the methods I work with here have already been put into practice.

14. For more on Puns, see Jonathan Culler's edited collection *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*. For a specific reference to my thinking on the pun as an interruption, see R. A. Shoaf's article "The Play of Puns in Late Middle English Poetry: Concerning Juxtology" in Culler's collection.

15. This phrasing comes from Lyotard's *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, but it is also a common phrase throughout his writings. Rather than quote a specific instance, I felt it more appropriate to paraphrase with references to his work on *language games* – hence, *phrases*.

16. See Readings' *The University in Ruins*, p. 161.

17. See John Caputo's *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 55.

18. For a most extensive discussion of sense and nonsense, see Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*.

19. See Diane Davis' "Addressing Alterity" for a fuller discussion on this 'impossibility.'

20. Thomas Kent's phrase, *hermeneutical terror*, appears in his 1992 article entitled "Hermeneutical Terror and the Myth of Interpretive Consensus" in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25.2. Kent defines the phrase as "the silencing of voices with discourse communities through an appeal to interpretive consensus" (135). While argumentation does not necessarily require that 'silencing of voices,' many attempts to argue for a specific

point of view is done with creating a consensus – and we have seen the dangers of such interpretive consensuses with World War II and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

21. See Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, p. 19.

22. This sentence is a patchwork consisting of Blanchot and Lyotard. Blanchot writes: "Communication—to employ this dubious word—is communication with the unknown. But communicating with the unknown requires plurality" (*Infinite* 409). And Lyotard writes in "Tomb of the Intellectual" about "the responsibility of artists, writers, or philosophers": "Their addressee is not the public and, I would say, is not even the 'community' of artists, writers, and so forth. To tell the truth, they do not know who their addressee is, and this is what it is to be an artist, writer, and so forth: to throw a 'message' out into the void" (*Political* 4).

23. In relation to 'cartoons and comic strips,' Barthes explains that the *relay* advances "the action by setting out, in the sequence of message, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself" (*Image* 41).

24. See *The Arcades Projects* where Benjamin collects fragments of writings and observations while wandering about Paris.

25. *Estrangement*, as an *interruption*, Blanchot explains as a commitment "to unfolding in various modes of experience" (Blanchot, *Infinite* 128).

26. In Ulmer's forthcoming book *Avatar Emergency*, he writes of "flash reason," a concept intimately connected to Breton's "incandescent flashes." As Ulmer writes, flash reason is "a practice for deliberative reason, for public policy formation, making democratically

informed decisions in a moment, at light speed" (3). The role of comics, as a stranger sort of surrealism, takes on the role of such a practice.

27. For more on this aspect of Surrealism, see David Cunningham's "The Futures of Surrealism: Hegelianism, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde," where he writes of Blanchot's view of Surrealism: "As such, surrealism, in its most radical manifestation as a temporal modality of *experience*, calls forth neither an immanent end nor a utopianist projection, but an 'exigency' that comes from the 'unexpected' itself. The future as 'unknown,' 'ever exterior to the horizon against which it seems to stand out'" (58).

28. This sentence parallels a paragraph in Jean-Luc Nancy's discussion of interrupted myths. He writes: "The gift or the right to speak (and to speak of gifts and rights) is no longer the same gift or the same right, and it is perhaps no longer either a gift or a right. No more is the mythic legitimacy that myth conferred upon its own narrator. Writing is seen rather as illegitimate, never authorized, risked, exposed to the limit. But this is not a complacent anarchy. For it is in this way that writing obeys the law—the law of community" (*Inoperative* 70).

29. De Duve offers an indication for why this is the case in *Kant After Duchamp*: "…art is not the order of seeing and knowing but rather of that of judging, not the order of the descriptive but of the prescriptive. Misinterpreted conditionally and immanently, the modern imperative prescribed: do whatever in art, but do it in art only" (347).

30. For more on this claim, see de Duve's *Kant After Duchamp*, where he writes that creativity "also abandons the thing to its absolute impossibility of being determined as underdetermined, that is, to its impossibility of conforming to the law of the necessity of a universal whatever. And it's precisely thanks to this abandonment that *the readymade*—and not the readymades—conforms to the universal of this impossibility" (358-59).

31. Later in *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot writes that 'the work of *unworking*' is "a practice of life and of writing in which we thought we recognized one of the characteristic traits of the surrealist project" (417).

32. In Blanchot's discussion of "interruption," he summarizes his thinking similarly:

> Let us go no further and summarize. We have, first of all, two important distinctions: one corresponding to a dialectical, the other to a non-dialectical exigency of speech: the pause permits exchange, the wait that measures infinite distance. But in waiting it is not simply the delicate rupture preparing the poetic act that declares itself, but also, and at the same time, other forms of arrest that are very profound, very perverse, more and more perverse, and always such that if one distinguishes them, the distinction does not avert but rather postulates ambiguity. We have "distinguished" in this way three of them: one wherein emptiness becomes work; another where in emptiness is fatigue, affliction; and the other, the ultimate, the hyperbolic, wherein worklessness (perhaps thought) indicates itself. To interrupt oneself for the sake of understanding. To understand in order to speak. Speaking, finally, only to interrupt oneself and to render possible the impossible interruption. (*Infinite* 79)

This impossible interruption would also be the interruption of art by *unartists* (or 'comics artist').

Chapter Four Endnotes

1. Unlike Lloyd Bitzer's article title "The Rhetorical Situation," the focus of this Stranger's does not deal with a question (cf. Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation" 5-6), nor does he suggest that an answer is possible. Rather, he merely wants to discover the available means of being in the world, of living, and therefore, of writing with significance.

2. Later in his discussion of "perspective by incongruity," Burke also refers to this method as a "planned incongruity" (*Attitudes* 309).

3. Here, I use the term *civic discourse* to mean an engagement in what Aristotle called deliberative rhetoric: "The important subjects on which people deliberate and on which deliberative orators give advice in public are mostly five in number, and these are finances, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and the framing of laws" (*Rhetoric* 53). The role of the un/artist in civic discourse is to present artifacts that inform these deliberations, often indirectly. Additionally, it would also be necessary for these deliberators to engage in Burke's "perspective by incongruity" methodology to link these artifacts to the topics being deliberated.

4. Here we could also continue with a discussion of *pirates* and the ways in which they work outside of the law to enact some change in social, cultural, and political

proceedings that ignore their interests and input. Perhaps we could learn to un/compose ourselves via Captain Jack Sparrow of the Black Pearl (cf. the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies). Also, in *Permanence and Change*, Burke discusses the Nietzschean theories of decadence and eternal recurrence as devices for working outside the law, which he claims offers opportunities for "uniting under one head movements which were generally considered in complete isolation from one another" (89).

5. This phrasing, in part, comes from Bad Religion's song, "Stranger than Fiction," from the album *Stranger Than Fiction*.

6. Parts of this phrasing are reminiscent of Lyotard's "Anamnesis of the Visible" (108).

7. Lyotard makes a similar comment when discussing 'landscape arts' in "Scapeland": "…the estrangement that landscape procures does not result from the transfer of a sensorial organization into another sensorium, such as the transfer of the fragrance of scents into the flagrance of colours or into the light of timbres. This estrangement is absolute; it is the implosion of forms themselves, and forms are mind" (*Inhuman* 189).

8. If it is not clear yet, I am using Allan Kaprow's term *un-artist* from here on out as a reference to 'comics artist' since both share the common trait of leaving Art in favor of doing something more interesting (without the constraints of art-istic forms or conventions).

9. In the second chapter ("Figuration") of *Inessential Solidarity*, Davis includes a sub-section called "To Speak or to Kill" where she explicates this in more detail.

10. A *kill switch*, in current technological cultures, refers to a system put in place to shut down an unwanted response (communication—usually between software and

hardware) that cannot be stopped in the normal manner. *Kill switches* usually shut down communication at all costs.

11. For more on this, see Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action*, pp. 16-20.

12. I use *play* rather than *work* purposefully here.

13. This phrasing comes from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Administration's (1980-1988) economic policy of "trickle-down economics," a concept that proposed a standard tax for all US citizens. Like this economic policy, *persuasion* provides those with the resources more opportunities for success than those without the resources.

14. Here, I use *demand* as a verb meaning to require some action in order to function effectively.

15. Gregory Ulmer discusses these logics in terms of *linking* and *play* throughout his work, particularly in *Heuretics, Teletheory,* and *Internet Invention.*

16. Blanchot makes this claim in reference to the plastic arts, but my claim is that it is also applicable to the *un/artist* imaginative play and the digital event.

17. For more on silence, and an explication of rhetorics of silence, see Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence.*

18. This sentence refers to the Bill Readings quote in the introduction (chapter 4 description): Thought as an in(ter)vention that does "not resolve arguments; it does not provide a metalanguage that can translate all other idioms into its own so that their dispute can be settled, their claims arranged and evaluated on a homogenous

scale"; rather, comics would throw "those who participate in pedagogy back into a reflection upon the ungroundedness of their situation: their obligation to each other and to a name that hails them as addressees, before they can think about it" (Readings, *University* 161).

19. In part, this phrasing comes from Nietzsche's famous aphorism: "If you stare into the abyss long enough, the abyss stares back at you" (*Beyond Good* 89).

20. Blanchot writes that writers who play the strange game of literary language do not

> …have the right to escape the consequences. Whoever has killed out of passion cannot alter the passion by invoking it as an excuse. Whoever comes up against, when writing, a truth that writing could not address is perhaps irresponsible, but must answer all the more for this irresponsibility; he must answer for it without calling it into question, without betraying it—that is the very secret about himself: the innocence that saves him is not his own; it is that of the place he occupies, and occupies by mistake, and with which he does not coincide" (*Book to Come* 28).

The digital is one of the places that un/artists occupy, and they do not coincide with it, which is why they write with all the means and media available to them: to discover this new game of literary language.

21. McLuhan makes this claim in reference to a *tetrad form* of the laws of media as he sees them. However, the artifacts we have seen composed in the early 21st century do not always adhere to these laws.

22. Recall my discussion of the un/artists in chapter 3—the connection to McLuhan's *electronic man* should be clear.

23. Blanchot makes a similar claim about the work of the writer in relation to the book to come: "The work demands much more: that one not worry about it, that one not seek it out as a goal, that one have with it the most profound relationship of carelessness and neglect" (*Book to Come* 30). Also, the term *ambivalence* here is being used in the sense of 'uncertainty' and a mixture of 'perspectives' that have not yet been untangled.

24. Franny Howes sees this potential in comics when she explores a "multiplicity of visual rhetorical traditions," claiming that such a theory offers ways of composing "across genre and form" that explores relationships "in a similar location, or within a similar culture or discourse community" ("Imagining a Multiplicity…").

25. This addresse the problem that Jeff Rice sees for digital writing: "…the problem of digital writing is how to write visually in a complex but seamless fashion" (138).

Chapter Five Endnotes

1.   Lyotard has a major influence on this chapter, and the framework for this chapter comes from his article "*Domus* and the Megalopolis" where he writes: "It is impossible to think or write without some façade of a house at least rising up, a phantom, to receive and to make a work of our peregrinations. Lost behind our thoughts, the *domus* is also a mirage in front, the impossible dwelling" (198). The one who writes in this illusion of a *domus* still rising is a (traitorous) stranger aware of the impossibility of completing this dwelling (references to Heidegger should not be lost here).

2.   In "Book 5" of *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche has a similar view of the importance of 'picking the stick up from the other end' (to use a Vitanzian phrase) of what is generally accepted as "good": "Even genius does not compensate for such a deficiency, however much it may deceive people about it. This becomes clear to anyone who has ever watched our most gifted painters and musicians from nearby. All of them, with scarcely any exception, know how to use cunning inventions of manners, of makeshift devices, and even of principles to give themselves after the event an artificial *semblance* of such probity, of such solidity of training and culture—without, of course, managing to deceive themselves, without silencing their own bad conscious. For you surely know that all great modern artists suffer from a guilty conscience" (323-24).

3.   This is a reference to the USA PATRIOT Act—which stands for "Uniting and Strengthening American by Providing the Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept

and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001"—passed in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. One of the most important parts of this act, if you've read through it, is that it introduced "electronic communication" into the United States' surveillance laws. We've all heard the criticisms—which are, at times, driven by paranoia—but it's an important part of the 'legality' of composing within digital environments.

Blanchot defines *patriotism* as "the most prodigious power of integration, being that which, in the intimacy of thought, in everyday practice, in political movement, is at work to reconcile everything—works, men, classes—to prevent all class struggle, to found unity in the name of values that particularize (national particularism promoted as universal), and to set aside the necessary division of an infinite destruction" (*Political* 92)—World War II offers us one example of such a power that desired to reconcile everything.

4. This sublime work of the imagination seems akin to Sigmund Freud's dream-work, and Lyotard's further development of this concept throughout his works, particularly in *The Libidinal Economy* and "The Dream-Work Does Not Think" (which can be found in *The Lyotard Reader*, edited by Andrew E. Benjamin).

5. For a further explanation of this concept, see Gerald L. Bruns' book, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy,* pp. 138-39.

6. Matthew Kirshenbaum situates *digital humanities* similarly in the context of scholarship: "Whatever else it might be then, the digital humanities today is about a scholarship (and a pedagogy) that is publicly visible in ways to which we are generally unaccustomed, a scholarship and pedagogy that are bound up with infrastructure in ways that are deeper and more explicit than we are generally accustomed to, a scholarship and pedagogy that are collaborative and depend on networks of people and

that live an active 24/7 life online" ("What is Digital Humanities…" 6).

7.   This is a double reference to the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the political bodies that set policy for education, knowledge, and domestic and international relations.

8.   This is a reference to Nietzsche's call for "another kind of art" that relies on the ability to forget, to forget the past, to forget the world.

9.   This is a reference to Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*, which he offers us as "no more than an Introduction to what a History of Writing might be" (6).

10. This is an extension of Lyotard's description of the postmodern in *The Postmodern Condition* cited/referenced earlier.

11. Dilger explains these concepts: "With *comfort*, the first widespread concept of ease relied on two other qualities: *effortlessness*, the reduction or elimination of physical labor and intensive activity; and perhaps the most important, *transparency*, or freedom from concern with complications or unnecessary attention to details and procedures" ("Ease and Electracy" 110).

12. Nietzsche notes in 1875: "To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task" (*Portable* 50).

13. While not a direct reference, Cynthia Haynes speaks of a similar approach to Writing Center pedagogy in "'Hanging Your Alias on Their Scene': Writing Centers, Graffiti, and Style." As she writes: "graffiti serves as a sign for expressing anger without violence in assigned writing" (120). This, I think, is what composition/rhetoric should

aspire to in the digital age, writing on the networked walls.

14. Bruno Latour echoes a similar point in the first plank in his composition manifesto: "In a first meaning, compositionism could stand as an alternative to *critique* […]. With critique, you may debunk, reveal, unveil, but only as long as you establish, through this process of creative destruction, a privileged access to the world of reality beyond the veils of appearances. Critique, in other words, has all the limits of utopia: it relies on the certainty of the world *beyond* this world. By contrast, for compositionism, there is no world of beyond. It is all about *immanence*" ("An Attempt…" 475).

15. The concept of *whatever*, as stated earlier, comes from Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*.

16. As stated in chapter 1, this way of composing, in Agamben's view, is one that communicates "online the empty space of the example, without being tied to any common property, by any identity" (*Coming* 11).

17. Etymologically, *traitor* stems from the Latin *traditorem*, literally meaning "one who delivers."

18. Jean Baudrillard uses this phrasing when explicating the etymology of the term *aphorism* (as an aphorism): "'*Aphorizein*' (from which we get the word 'aphorism') means to retreat to such a distance that a horizon of thought is formed which never again closes on itself" (*Cool Memories* V 31).

19. This is not to say the end of literature, but of another kind of literature resonating with Katherine Hayles' *Electronic Literature,* and beyond. Barthes also comments on what may occur beyond Literature: "It is at this moment that the modes of writing

begin to multiply. Each one, henceforth, be it the highly wrought, populist, neutral or colloquial, sets itself up as the initial act whereby the writer acknowledges or repudiates his bourgeois condition. Each one is an attempt to find a solution to this Orphean problematics of modern Form: writers without Literature" (*Writing Degree Zero* 61).

20. This is a direct reference to Twitter, a social networking platform that works with the Short Message System (SMS) for mobile technologies. While SMS limits messages to 160 characters, Twitter shortened this limit to 140 so that "usernames" would be able to be included before the message. Also, a "character" in a digital environment would be the smallest "read-able" mark, not necessarily an alphabetic letter.

21. This term comes from McCloud's *Understanding Comics,* but Hillary Chute's description of *gutters* is more helpful in this context: "…gutters, the rich empty spaces between the selected moments that direct our interpretation" ("History and Graphic…" 342).

22. In *The Two Virtuals*, Alexander Reid explains how this is possible with the advent of new media pedagogy: "New media pedagogy, because it still remains largely uncharted and *undisciplined*, offers a number of such experimental opportunities. […] though the means for teaching new media, and the particular contents of such courses, remain fairly open, such courses quickly become a site for re-enacting some of the oldest concerns in rhetorical instruction, particularly this concern that courses in new media sacrifice humanistic content in the name of career preparation. This concern is essentially a reincarnation of a debate between rhetoric as a set of skills and rhetoric/philosophy as a mode of intellectual investigation that goes back to Plato's arguments against rhetoric in *Gorgias and Phaedrus*" (170-71).

23. At the end of the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes that the aphorism "is necessary above all to practice reading as an art in this way, something that has been unlearned most thoroughly nowadays—and therefore it will be some time before my writings are 'readable'—something for which one has almost to be a cow and in any case *not* a 'modern man': *rumination*" (23).

24. The 'trace' that Agamben refers to here is a reference to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin—within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the trace. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary nontrace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace. […] *The (pure) trace is differance*. It does not depend on any sensible plentitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plentitude." (61-62). A character, in this sense, would be such an originary empirical mark for the condition of potentialities.

25. "The (committed) writer," for Blanchot, saves "the place of the one who will come, to preserve absence from all usurpation" (*Political* 118).

26. Courtesy of @l_I__I_l (renamed).

27. Courtesy of @tw1tt3rart (renamed). Unless otherwise noted, these designs can be found on the individual artists' pages on www.twitter.com.

28. Courtesy of @MargaR1da (renamed).

29. Courtesy of @mightymegadon.

30. Courtesy of @TwitComicStrip.

31. Courtesy of @KatCutler. Very e.e. cummings, don't you think?

32. Courtesy of @VisuellePoesie (renamed).

33. Courtesy of @hg47 (renamed).

34. Courtesy of @aggregart.

35. Courtesy of @followingfuture (renamed).

36. Courtesy of @aggregart (renamed, with a reference to Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*).

37. Courtesy of @paintedtweets (renamed).

38. Courtesy of @140artist (renamed).

39. Courtesy of @hg47.

40. Courtesy of @MargaR1da.

41. Courtesy of @riv7art (renamed).

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