Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism

Abstract: In this essay, we explore the intersections of rhetoric and feminism and the resulting transformations to both disciplines. Rhetoric offers feminism a vibrant process of inquiring, organizing, and thinking, as well as a theorized space to talk about effective communication; feminism offers rhetoric a reason to bridge differences, to include, and to empower, as well as a politicized space to discuss rhetorical values. The traditional rhetorical canons, with their enthymematic familiarity, mark the sections of this essay, for they emphasize the mutually heuristic nature of the border crossings between these two disciplines. Although the linearity of print demands that we treat the canons consecutively, they, nevertheless, have a tendency to overlap and interact. Our discussions of arrangement, style, and delivery, for instance, both assume and depend upon a rethinking of invention and memory—a rethinking that recognizes the role that both these canons play in current efforts to reconceptualize and reenact what it means to know, speak, and write. As our essay argues, such attention to what we speak about, and how and why we speak, urges all of us not only to continued exploration and interrogation but also to a renewed responsibility for our professional and personal discursive acts.

1 In addition to the many voices of rhetoricians and feminists that animate our text, we are particularly grateful to Danielle Mitchell, who graciously, expertly—and valiantly—helped us prepare this manuscript for publication. We also thank Jean Williams, Melissa Goldthwaithe, and Jennifer Cognard-Black for their heroic long-distance research. Finally, we thank Jon Olson for his careful and astute readings as this essay took shape.

Please note that the alphabetical listing of our names represents one attempt to resist the privileging of a "first" author and indicates the degree to which the thinking about and writing of this essay have been equally shared and thoroughly collaborative throughout.

One quality or action is nobler than another if it is that of a naturally finer being: thus a man's will be nobler than a woman's.

Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.9

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera 82

STANDING AT THE BORDER

Western rhetoric began, or so one predominant disciplinary narrative tells us, as a response to disputes regarding property, regarding borders. As language awareness became closely linked with the expedient workings of the newly democratic Syracuse, rhetoric flourished as a practical art, a vital part of civic life in this democracy fraught with a mass of litigation on property claims. Corax and Tisias, the heroes of this narrative, crossed borders to establish boundaries, pioneers armed only with an enchiridion of successful rhetorical practices.

After dedicating its early years to settling boundary disputes, rhetoric soon found itself submitting to the same kinds of

---


Jane Sutton, for example, counters this story with "a scene in history when the earth was young and the Amazon ruled, [allowing] no Tyrant to direct the affairs of society" ("The Taming of the Polos/Polis: Rhetoric as an Achievement without Woman," Southern Communication Journal 57 [Winter 1992]: 99-100). Sutton goes on to relate the Amazon story to Aphrodite and to link rhetoric's beginning to Aphrodite's female entourage, thus offering an intriguing parallel between the Amazonian myth and the story of Corax and Tisias, in both of which the hero(ine) slays the Tyrant.
boundarying. Unsettled by Plato's sound drubbing in the *Gorgias* and increasingly disarmed by philosophy's disvaluing, rhetoric has, for much of its history, been viewed as either the codification of and instruction in discursive, persuasive practices or as a sophisticated system of tropes. But even within these bounds, rhetoric contained and remembered its power. In his *In Defence of Rhetoric*, Brian Vickers joins other twentieth-century scholars as he works to release that power and reemphasize rhetoric's central role in public discourse. As Vickers argues, the "conception of rhetoric as public debate in a society guaranteeing free speech, a debate in which both sides of the case are heard and those qualified to vote come to a decision binding on all parties, has much more to offer us . . . than Plato's equation of it with cosmetics, cookery, and other more disreputable arts designed, according to him, to satisfy base pleasures rather than promote knowledge." Other scholars, such as Kenneth Burke, Samuel IJsseling, and Ernesto Grassi, have interrogated philosophy's traditional disvaluing of rhetoric, exposing the willed misreadings that support such a view, and thus they have rehabilitated rhetoric's epistemic status and heuristic value across the disciplines. Rhetoric may well border other studies, but it is not necessarily circumscribed by them.

Thanks to both broad and deep shifts in our contemporary epistemological assumptions and practices—shifts that call into question what Jane Flax terms western culture's "Enlightenment story"—rhetoric's boundaries are no longer so clearly delimited or contested. Indeed, as John Bender and David E. Wellbery note in

---

5In *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 30-31, Flax populates the "Enlightenment" story with "major themes and characters": (1) a coherent, stable self (the author); (2) a distinctive and privileged mode of story-telling—philosophy (the critic and judge)—and a particular notion of "truth" (the hero); (3) a distinctive political philosophy (the moral) that posits complex and necessary interconnections among reason, autonomy, and freedom; (4) a transparent medium of expression (language); (5) an optimistic and rationalist philosophy of human nature (character development); and (6) a philosophy of knowledge (an ideal form).
The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice, "rhetorical inquiry, as it is thought and practiced today, occurs in an interdisciplinary matrix that touches on such fields as philosophy, linguistics, communication studies, psychoanalysis, cognitive science, sociology, anthropology, and political theory." Each of us doubtless has his or her own response to Bender and Wellbery's list—and to the larger issue of appropriation that disciplinary border-crossing inevitably raises. As teachers of writing and scholars of rhetoric, we note, for instance, the absence from this catalogue of both classics and composition studies, two fields of disciplinary inquiry whose borders often intersect with those of rhetoric. In this essay, however, we wish to focus on another disciplinary field whose borders have upon occasion intersected with those of rhetoric, but which still remain largely at the margins of rhetorical inquiry: feminism. More specifically, we explore the intersections of rhetoric and feminism—intersections that Gloria Anzaldúa might refer to as "the Borderlands/La Frontera."

As a political movement—as resistance to patriarchal assumptions and practices—feminism is as old as, well, at least as old as Aphrodite. But as a self-conscious academic field of inquiry, feminism is more recent, its history having developed over the last thirty years. Although much feminist work is grounded in the humanities, considerable work in the social sciences and sciences has

7 Dwight Conquergood ("Rethinking Ethnography: Toward a Critical Cultural Politics," Communication Monographs 58 [June 1991]: 179-98) observes that boundaries and borderlands pose multiple possibilities, not all of which are positive. Using the situation of refugees as a trope for the multiple possibilities inherent in borders, he notes that "with displacement, upheaval, unmooring, come the terror and potentiality of flux, improvisation, and creative recombinations" (p. 185). We cite Conquergood's observations to acknowledge that the rhetorical "turn" in the humanities and social sciences brings potential dangers and losses, as well as opportunities.
8 As we crossed disciplinary borders in this essay, we appreciated the work (and implications thereof) of Gloria Anzaldúa. Her compelling Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987) brilliantly articulates the promises—and dangers—inherent in crossing borders: cultural, political, racial, ethnic, and sexual borders. Anzaldúa tells us that to survive the Borderlands, we must "live sin fronteras [without borders]" (p. 195). To be conscious of Borderlands is, according to Anzaldúa, to develop a new consciousness, a mestiza consciousness and tolerance of blurring, instability, struggle, contradictions, and ambiguity (pp. 77ff.)—the very fabric of full human consciousness itself.
taken place. Like rhetoric, feminism is both multidisciplinary—situated in multiple academic disciplines—and, in many instances at


least, also interdisciplinary. In spite of its multidisciplinarity and the inevitable accompanying methodological differences, the feminist project was, until the 1970s, marked by a strong degree of consensus. As Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips tell us in Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates, "1970s feminism assumed that one could specify a cause of women's oppression. Feminists differed substantially (and fiercely) as to what this cause might be . . . but did not really question the notion of a cause itself. Nor was there any difficulty with the idea of oppression, which seemed to have self-evident application."

Since that time, a number of factors have radically destabilized this consensus. African-American and third-world/postcolonial women writers have pointed out the extent to which feminism's claims for authority and representation rested upon racist and ethnocentric assumptions about women's nature and oppression; they have also charged feminism with ignoring the intersections of gender with race and class. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller explored and documented such Conflicts in Feminism in their 1990


10 For example, biologist Donna Haraway demonstrates the pandisciplinarity of feminist work in her Primate Visions.

collection: Mary Childers and bell hooks held a "Conversation about Race and Class"; Elizabeth Abel asked (and answered) some cogent questions about "Race, Class, and Psychoanalysis"; and Jane Gallop, Hirsch, and Nancy K. Miller "Criticiz[ed] Feminist Criticism." In addition, poststructuralist and postmodern theorists have also raised questions about many of feminism's traditional assumptions and practices. Theorists such as Carla Freccero, Amy Ling, Joan W. Scott, Elaine Showalter, and Gayatri Chakroverty Spivak have characterized feminism (or certain strains of feminism) as relying upon individualist, rationalist, and universalist assumptions. From such a perspective, feminism's traditional dream of freedom from oppression and equality for women appears complicitous with both Enlightenment and modernist narratives of individualism and progress.

As a result of such contemporary debates, those writing within feminism have increasingly been drawn to the term "feminisms," rather than "feminism," as a marker for their projects. For purely stylistic reasons, we have chosen to use the singular form throughout this essay, yet we wish to acknowledge the extent to which feminism—like rhetoric, for that matter—is not only a construction but a place of contest and difference. Although both feminism and rhetoric have at times been represented as having continuous traditions and innocent encounters with others

12The essays cited here are in Hirsch and Keller, Conflicts in Feminism, pp. 60-81, 184-204, and 349-69, respectively.
14Warhol and Herndl's 1991 Feminisms argues for the regular use of the term, which acknowledges the diversity of motivation, method, and experience among feminist academics. In their introduction, the editors tell us that from the outside, "feminism may appear monolithic, unified, or singularly definable. . . [But, actually, there is a] multiplicity of approaches and assumptions inside the movement. While this variety can lead to conflict and competition, it can also be the source of movement, vitality, and genuine learning. Such diversity—if fostered, as it has been in some feminist thought—can be a model for cultural heterogeneity."
(peoples, disciplines, cultures), their situations are, of course, much more complex.

In "Towards a Transactional View of Rhetorical and Feminist Theory," Barbara A. Biesecker calls for "putting into contact the genius of Rhetoric and the (very different) genius of feminism." In this essay, we attempt to respond to Biesecker's call as we inhabit and unsettle the conventionally understood borders between rhetoric and feminism. We hope that further engagement between these two disciplinary projects will be beneficial, but we cannot anticipate, much less predict, the consequences of ongoing dialogue—though we tend to agree with Biesecker, who suggests that the contact may "both uncramp the orthodoxy of rhetorical theory and advance the theory and practice of feminism." We, too, see our project as encouraging the kind of border crossings that might allow both feminists and rhetoricians to reflect upon, and possibly even to reconsider, their disciplinary projects.

Canonical Mappings

Aristotle may well have been the first cartographer of western rhetoric; in the fourth century BCE, he charted the canons of invention, arrangement, and style for the edification and ease of his students. Together, his Rhetoric and Anaximenes' Rhetorica ad Alexandrum serve as baseline maps for the author of Rhetorica ad Herennium as well as for Cicero and Quintilian, all of whom added the dimensions of memory and delivery. Throughout the ages, then, this map of rhetoric has evolved. All maps are cultural artifacts that reveal value, and the value of the canons of invention, memory, arrangement, style, and delivery has remained uncontested—regardless of deviations in their forms and influence in varying historical eras. Whether studied separately or in truncated form, the canons today retain their "tendency toward completeness, interaction, and interdependence."

---

16. Ibid.
As a result of their long history, the traditional rhetorical canons provide familiar guides for us as we attempt to explore the borderlands of rhetoric and feminism. We have chosen to use the canons to mark the sections of our essay not only because of their enthymematically familiar nature, but also in order to emphasize the mutually heuristic nature of the border crossing that we envision for rhetoric and feminism. Feminist theories and practices pose interesting questions and challenges for traditional understandings of the canons. But the canons also help illuminate how much is at stake in feminism's scholarly and performative enterprise, providing a fertile context for exploring the radical nature and significance of contemporary feminist efforts.

As Burkean terministic screens, then, the canons provide a framework that enables us to gain new perspectives on both rhetoric and feminism by inhabiting their borders. But as is the case with all terministic screens, our framework entails certain limitations. Although the linearity of print demands that we treat the canons consecutively, we wish to call attention at the outset to their tendency to overlap and interact. As Kathleen Welch writes, in this regard the canons represent "the aspects of composing which work together in a recursive, synergistic, mutually dependent relationship," one we find particularly apt for the collaborative process we have enjoyed in composing this essay.

ON INVENTION AND MEMORY

[Invention] is the most important of all the divisions, and above all is used in every kind of pleading.

Cicero, De inventione 1.7.9

Now let us turn ... to the custodian of all parts of rhetoric, memory.

Rhetorica ad Herennium 1.2.3

---

We begin our exploration by linking invention, the heart and soul of inquiry, with memory, the very substance of knowledge. Although these canons have, of course, traditionally been treated separately, with invention often relegated to the province of philosophy, and memory often ignored or deleted without comment, there seem to us to be compelling reasons for considering them together, not the least of which is the rich overlap between inquiring (inventio) and knowing (memoria), one that demonstrates interconnections and blurrings characteristic of all canonical boundaries. Sharon Crowley tells us that

until the modern period, memory held a central place within rhetorical theory . . . In ancient times even people who could write easily . . . relied on their memories, not merely as storage facilities for particulars, but as structured heuristic systems. In other words, memory was not only a system of recollection . . .; it was a means of invention.°

Even in the most traditional terms, then, the canon of invention leads the rhetor to search “in any given place [for] the available means of persuasion” and to use the topics and the pisteis to do so.°° But additionally, the rhetor must surely rely heavily, in all searches, on memoria, for where else would the ancients have stored their commonplaces, their topics? Cicero tells us that the “structure of memory, like a wax tablet, employs places [loci] and in these gathers together images.”°°° Thus memory ignites the process of invention. With the dominance of print over oral culture, however, memory became misremembered, and, eventually, associated not with the full powers of invention but with mere rote memorization.

Much important work of the last thirty-five years has sought to reclaim the canons of invention and memory for contemporary rhetoric. For invention, the work of James Kinneavy, Janice Lauer, Edward P. J. Corbett, Richard Young, Chaim Perelman and L.  

---

19"Modern Rhetoric and Memory," in Reynolds, Rhetorical Memory and Delivery, p. 35.
Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Burke has been particularly significant. For memory, similar reclamation has been carried out by Mary Carruthers, Brian Stock, Fred Reynolds, Sharon Crowley, and Welch. But even this contemporary work on invention and memory, though valuable, all too often focused on method, such as new ways of recovering information, locating topics, using heuristics, and building proofs, without acknowledging the degree to which these tools are themselves always situated within larger discursive and ideological systems that tend to valorize some methods while silently rejecting others.

From a postmodern perspective, invention and memory are hardly neutral methods but rather represent socially and historically constructed—and constructing—language games. Like other games, more is at stake in acts of invention and memory than might first seem apparent, for invention and memory constrain and shape both who can know and what can be known. Consider, for instance, the frequent references (including our own) to such ancient Greek city-states as Syracuse as democracies. In order to identify Syracuse as a democracy—to remember this “fact”


24The term “postmodern” is itself a contested construction, both broadly and within feminism. We have found Flax’s analysis of the central characteristics of postmodernism persuasive. Flax represents postmodern theorists as “masters of suspicion” (Thinking Fragments, p. 31) who argue that mind, reason, and truth are all effects of discourse; that discourses are “local, heterogeneous, and incommensurable” (p. 36), and thus caught up in issues of power, struggle, and hierarchy; and that such once-privileged narratives as philosophy and history can best be viewed as stories that are as rhetorically grounded and interested as any other story.
and to select it as an example and an “available means of persuasion”—the rhetor must accept as natural and commonsensical these city-states’ exclusion of slaves and women from civic participation. Feminist efforts not only to remember these exclusions, but also to employ them in contemporary arguments about the nature and significance of western democracies, aim to expose the political and ideological assumptions that inevitably inform any act of invention or memory.

Before they could engage in this act of memory, invention, and argumentation—or at least before they could claim a public space for this engagement—feminists had to recognize, remember, and challenge traditional understandings of the rhetor, for until recently, the figure of the rhetor has been assumed to be masculine, unified, stable, autonomous, and capable of acting rationally on the world through language. Those who did not fit this pattern—women, people of color, poorly educated workers, those judged to be overly emotional or unstable—those people stood outside of the rhetorical situation, for they were considered neither capable of nor in need of remembering and inventing arguments. From a feminist vantage point, however, it is impossible to take the subjectivity of the rhetor for granted, impossible not to locate that subjectivity within the larger context of personal, social, economic, cultural, and ideological forces, impossible not to notice not only the context itself, but also who is absent from this context as well as what exclusionary forces (regarding knowledge and argument, for example) are at work there.

Equally challenged by this perspective is what counts as knowledge. In this regard, feminist theory has consistently challenged any public/private distinction, arguing that knowledge based in the personal, in lived experience, be valued and accepted as important and significant. In describing her own way of speaking and writing, of inventing, hooks says she must “incorporate . . . a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. . . . When I say then that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name the location from which I came to voice.”25 Women have also sought to include the intuitive and paralogical, the thinking of the body, as valuable sources of

Knowing, as sites of invention. Lorde writes, "As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves."26

If in making these claims, contemporary feminists have implicitly sought to expand the canon of invention, they have often done so by linking it with memory, which Toni Morrison tells us is "a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was. . . . The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way," which, she insists, is the province of memoria.27 A brilliant example of Morrison's point about the relationship between invention and memory is readily available in the work of Isabel Allende, especially her House of Spirits. In this text, Allende weaves together past, present, and future events, resulting not in "individualistic autobiographical searchings [but in] revelations of traditions, re-collections of disseminated identities . . . [that] are a modern version of the Pythagorean arts of memory: retrospection to gain a vision for the future."28 Hooks also comments on this intricate connection in a discussion of works such as the film Freedom Charter (which portrays the anti-apartheid movement in Africa) and Gloria Naylor's novel Mama Day. She notes that in these and other works, "fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed . . . to move us into a different mode of articulation . . . [, a] remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present."29

As this discussion indicates, as human beings we are both limited and empowered by our individual and collective memory and invention. This recognition spurred our interest in working

29Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, p. 147.
collaboratively on this article, for we realized that any effort to inhabit the borderlands of feminism and rhetoric could only be enriched by such dialogue. We also quickly realized the centrality of invention and memory to conceptions of subjectivity and knowledge as well as to understandings of the other canons. We wish to emphasize, then, that the following discussions of arrangement, style, and delivery both assume and depend upon a rethinking of invention and memory—one that recognizes the role that both these canons play in current efforts to reconceptualize and reenact what it means to know, speak, and write.

**ON ARRANGEMENT**

A speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it.

*Aristotle, Rhetoric III.13*

Aristotle’s cryptic injunction to arrange discourse into “two parts” was elaborated into a powerful, seven-part architectonic for the creation of ideas (*inventio*). Indeed, Cicero’s adumbration and exploration of *exordium, narratio, partitio, confirmatio, reprehensio, digressio,* and *conclusio* established a highly flexible pattern for what Richard Enos calls “structuring compositions to the limits of the situation.”

This structure has, in many respects, stood the test of 2500 years. Certainly it has worked well to realize the traditional ends of rhetoric: to deploy, in Aristotle’s terms, “all the available means of persuasion,” or in Burke’s, to use “language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.” In short, if speakers/writers wanted to “state a case and prove it,” they would be hard pressed to find more effective ways of disposing their cases and proof than in this logical, linear chain aimed at persuasion.

---

31 *Rhetoric* 1.2.
32 *A Rhetoric of Motives,* p. 43.
Or so western writers have generally assumed. But what if what constitutes “your case” and “your proof” are not clear-cut, are instead themselves highly contested sites? And what if the traditional aim of persuasion, of winning over an audience, is also highly contested? What might such disruptions suggest for the venerable canon of arrangement? While few theorists of rhetoric or of feminism have addressed these questions directly and in quite these terms, many feminist scholars have approached them obliquely. In a widely-cited early article, for instance, Sally Miller Gearhart charges that rhetoric is based on a “conquest model” and that “any intent to persuade is an act of violence.” Over fifteen years later, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin elaborated Gearhart’s claim, tracing the ways in which rhetoric’s focus on winning has led to the dominance of several master narratives—of progress and exclusion, of subjection, of conversion. All of these narratives, Foss and Griffin insist, invoke patterns of arrangement aimed at winning, at control.

Other scholars have noted the ways in which patterns of control are inscribed in seemingly innocuous conventions related to the arrangement of discourse, such as those governing endnote/footnote and works cited lists, all of which are relegated to the margins, to the periphery or very end of discourse. The text exerts its own univocal control, taking center stage and pushing beyond its borders the voices of others. Many women writers, such as Tillie Olsen, have sought to open up this textual space, to allow for the sharing of space and authority. Perhaps no one on the contemporary scene has done so as consistently and

33“The Womanization of Rhetoric,” Women’s Studies International Quarterly 2 (1979): 195. Gearhart’s claims are echoed in the work of those who have lately focused our attention on what Elspeth Stuckey calls “the violence of literacy.” Writing itself is, as Derrida long ago observed, an act of dis-placement. Even the word itself is related etymologically to cutting/carving, to acts of violence.


35Olsen’s prose, with its frequent ellipses, fragments, and erasures, its insistent inclusion of other women’s words, calls attention not only to alternative forms of arrangement, of course, but to her methods of invention and even more to her style, demonstrating once again how the canons inevitably blur when put into practice. For a view of Olsen’s method and rationale for opening up textual space, see “One Out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in Our Century” (in Silences [New York: Delacorte, 1978], pp. 41-660), a revealing overview of twentieth-century women writers.
consciously, however, as hooks. Early in her career, hooks chose to eschew the use of footnotes and to open up her text and her style to multiple voices. She has done so out of her belief that such discursive conventions are exclusionary, that they mark discourse "for highly educated, academic audiences only." Hooks aims instead to reach out, sans footnotes, to a very broad audience, "to speak simply with language that is accessible to as many folks as possible"—even if such practices lead critics to label her "anti-intellectual" and "unprofessional."^36

But these narratives of control and exclusion, of subjection/winning, of conversion, no longer seem to encompass or to respond to many writers' goals. Consider the well-known case of literary critic Jane Tompkins, invited to contribute a critical response to the work of another scholar for the journal *New Literary History*. In traditional rhetorical terms, Tompkins' goal is clear: she should make her case, that the other scholar's essay is mistaken in its view of epistemology, and she should do so (as she puts it) by "using evidence, reasons, chains of inference, citations of authority, analogies, illustrations, and so on."^37 Tompkins does not want to do so, however, or to dispose her arguments in traditional form, for such a response ignores what she calls her "other voice," the one that is deeply in sympathy with the other scholar's goals, the one that wants to write about her feelings that the kind of academic discourse she is expected to write is a "straitjacket" she longs to throw off, the one that wants not to fight, not to "beat the other person down," not, in short, to win. In rejecting the master narrative of triumphing over an opponent, Tompkins also eschews traditional patterns of arrangement, suggesting, at least indirectly, that the aim and the means of realizing the aim are inextricably linked. Instead, Tompkins opts for an alternation, and a dissonant juxtaposition, of her "two voices," concluding not on a note of victory or of traditional closure but of rage: "I can't strap myself psychically into an apparatus that will produce the right gestures when I begin to move... This one time I've taken off the straitjacket, and it feels so good."^39

---

^38Ibid.
^39Ibid., p. 178.
Tompkins has not been alone in wishing to loosen the "straitjacket" of agonistic aims and patterns of discourse. Of the many feminists who have attempted to slip its holds (from Sappho to Mary Wollstonecraft and from Emily Dickinson to Lorde), we would like to call special attention to Margaret Fuller, the only woman admitted as an intellectual equal to the rarefied Transcendental Club of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and other highly educated and influential mid-nineteenth-century Bostonians. In a detailed reading of Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Annette Kolodny demonstrates the revolutionary nature of Fuller's rhetorical patterning. In particular, Kolodny responds to Fuller's contemporary critic Orestes Brownson, who archly assessed Fuller's book to be "no book, but a long talk.... It has neither beginning, middle, nor end, and may be read backwards as well as forwards, and from the center outwards each way, without affecting the continuity of the thought or the succession of ideas. We see no reason why it should stop where it does, or why the lady might not keep on talking in the same strain till doomsday, unless prevented by want of breath." Kolodny's essay demonstrates the epistemological and ideological grounds on which this judgment of incompetence rests. Fuller, herself thoroughly versed in classical and contemporary rhetoric and having developed a rhetoric class for women derived in part from a detailed and highly insightful reading of Richard Whately, was perfectly capable of producing the rhetorical forms Brownson values. Rather, Kolodny shows, Fuller rejected the "authoritarianism of coercion and the manipulative strategies [of traditional forms]...", endeavoring instead to create a collaborative process of assertion and response in which multiple voices could—and did—find a place." As Kolodny concludes, Fuller's use of a conversational and collaborative structural pattern, rather than one based on traditional ways of disposing an argument, led to her devaluation, one that still prevents our

41 Ibid., pp. 139-40.
hearing the brilliant rhetorical lessons she had to teach. If we view Fuller from the perspective gained by standing on the borderlands of rhetoric and feminism, however, we may read her refusal to order her discourse in conventional ways not as a failure at winning a traditional argument but instead as a striking success at conducting "the inclusive, collaborative, and open-ended conversations" she and many other women before and since have valued.

Learning to look anew at discourse that does not follow conventional patterns, that does not pursue a master narrative of subjection, can yield major insights for rhetoricians and theorists of rhetoric, as Kolodny has clearly shown. In the same way, we have much to gain by reexamining the traditional rhetorical drive toward closure, with its reliance on those structures that lead readers inevitably to an ending, that follow Aristotle's advice that discourse must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In this regard, we also have much to gain by crisscrossing the borders of rhetoric and feminism, particularly in terms of long-standing feminist attempts to disrupt the linear orderliness of prose, to contain contradictions and anomalies, to resist closure. These goals have been pursued vigorously by Hélène Cixous, whose attempts at "writing the body" introduce disruptive forms that push against traditional patterns of discourse and closure. Drawing on Cixous' work, Lynn Worsham argues that conventional standards of unity and coherence, standards that rely on linearity and closure, rest on a logic that is thoroughly masculine—but that alternative logics, those that value indeterminacy, nonclosure, and multiplicity of meanings, are also possible.

Julia Kristeva is another theorist who has written extensively of alternative discursive possibilities. In "Women's Time," for example, Kristeva invokes a discursive attitude that could allow for, indeed invite, "parallel existence[s] . . . in the same historical time or even . . . interwoven one with the other." This possibility

43"Margaret Fuller," p. 159.
46In Warhol and Herndl, Feminisms, p. 458.
of simultaneity and multiplicity offers, Suzanne Clark suggests, a "dialogic rhetoric," one based not on oppositions or conquest but on collaboration, relationality, and mutuality, one that "can interrupt the rigidities of language and open it to a subject in process, to the unsettling and nonlogical life of the body." Kristeva's project, which resists the domination of sameness and order by offering a way to transform language from within, aims to provide a pathway through the crisis of modernity and away from the "colonizing discourse of mastery." Ironically—especially in light of rhetoric's long association with democratic ideals—this discourse of mastery, so familiar to traditional rhetorical forms of arrangement and aim, is itself a great threat; in Kristeva's view, the future of political democracies will depend on their ability to include in material and practical as well as rhetorical ways all those within their borders. As Clark points out in a studied understatement, "There are high stakes involved in finding more inclusive forms of argument."

If Cixous' and Kristeva's attempts to enact and to theorize alternative discursive possibilities are perhaps best known in academic circles, particularly in North America and Europe, many other writers are currently working to embody and arrange language in nontraditional and more inclusive ways. Within our own limited frame of reference, for example, we think in this regard of Lorde's open letter to Mary Daly, in which she explicitly rejects traditional hierarchical, linear patterns of argument in attempting a critique that is open, dialogic, accepting and, indeed, loving. We also think of Patricia Williams' personalized and nonlinear analysis of the law in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights.* And we think of Nobel prize winner Toni Morrison's remarkable use of nonlinear and multiplicitous orderings, and her refusal of closure, in *Beloved*—and, more remarkably still, in her acceptance address for the Nobel award. Further examples abound,

48 Ibid., p. 308.
49 Ibid., p. 314.
50 Ibid., p. 305.
increasingly and importantly from third-world/postcolonial women writers such as Rigoberta Menchú, Mariá Lugones, and Tey Diana Rebolledo.

As we hope these examples suggest, the borderlands of feminism and rhetoric offer provocative signposts toward a reexamination of the canon of arrangement. Drawing on rhetoric's (potential) plasticity, its attention to context, and its goal of finding discursive forms to meet the needs of particular audiences; and drawing on feminism's insights regarding the ideological freight and exclusionary result of many influential contemporary forms—as well as on women's long-standing attempts to create alternative discursive patternings—we may find our way toward a reimagined *dispositio*, one we may both theorize and enact.

ON STYLE

The right thing in speaking really is that we should be satisfied not to annoy our hearers, without trying to delight them. . . . [N]evertheless the arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others: the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much as people think. All such arts are fanciful and meant to charm the hearer. Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.1

One has only to think of Aristotle's comments on style in the *Rhetoric* to be reminded of the extent to which style functions as a site of tension and contest within rhetoric. As readers will recall, in Book III Aristotle provides copious advice about style and delivery, but he does so with some ambivalence. For bordering Aristotle's emphasis on style—"it is not enough to know what we ought to say; we must also say it as we ought"—is an anxiety about the extent to which language can be used to obscure and mislead, to play upon the emotions of the audience. As Aristotle notes, the speaker "must disguise his art and give the impression of

---

54 *Rhetoric* III.1.
speaking naturally and not artificially” (our emphasis).55

Inscribed in Aristotle’s comments on style are a series of oppositions—between res and verba, reason and emotion, demonstration and persuasion, and fact and interpretation—that for centuries have troubled those working within the rhetorical tradition. An example from Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student provides a useful instance of one such difficulty. In this work, Corbett introduces his discussion of style by noting that “once arguments had been discovered, selected, and arranged, they had to be put into words. Words . . . serve as the medium of communication between speakers or writers and their audience.”56 Corbett’s definition of style is certainly conventional, but it nevertheless represents a potential dilemma for rhetoric. If ideas and arguments are separate from and prior to language, as Corbett’s definition seems to suggest, then they are epistemologically foundational, and rhetoric, however necessary and helpful, is open to the charge of being “mere outward show for pleasing the hearer.”57 Aware of this potential difficulty, Corbett quickly modifies his opening statement, commenting that “one notion about style that needs to be erased at the outset is that style is simply ‘the dress of thought’.”58

It is no accident, of course, that Corbett uses the derogatory—and gendered—phrase “dress of thought” to characterize undesirable views of rhetoric. As Susan Jarratt observes in Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured, “Both rhetoric and women . . . [have been] trivialized by identification with sensuality, costume, and color—all of which are supposed to be manipulated in attempts to persuade through deception.”59 The

55Ibid.
56p. 380.
57Aristotle, Rhetoric III.1.
58Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, p. 381.
59P. 65. Such “sensuality, costume, and color” have often found embodiment in a theory of figures and tropes as discursive excesses and linguistic means of manipulation, although another view holds tropes to be central to all language and meaning. (J. Hillis Miller is one prominent contemporary proponent of this view.) In any case, feminist theorists have begun to carry out further forays into tropology. Jane Sutton, for example, attempts a tropological argument that moves “metaphorically, metonymically, synecdochically, and ironically” to unseat traditional tropes that inscribe woman (“The Taming of the Polos/Polis,” p. 97). In
history of rhetoric as a scholarly and pedagogical discipline, as well as a performative tradition, is marked by recurring tensions and oscillations as both theorists and rhetors have negotiated the relation of rhetoric, poetics, and logic—and in so doing have often challenged the centrality, and at times even the validity, of attention to style. Think of Plato’s dismissal of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* as mere “pandering,” akin to “cookery” and “beauty-culture”⁶⁰, of Ramus’ bifurcation of invention and arrangement from style and delivery; and of the Royal Society’s effort, reported by Thomas Spratt, to “reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things, almost in an equal number of words.”⁶¹

As feminists have noted, the “primitive purity” that the rejection of style entails has generally necessitated the exclusion of women from the rhetorical scene, for how could women, with their inferior reason and their involvement in the stylish, the embodied, and the material, hope to attain such rigorous rationality? But not only women have been excluded: inherent in rhetoric’s internalized ambivalence about style is an anxiety about rhetoric’s relationship with audience in general, particularly popular audiences. (For instance, Plato handily forces Gorgias to agree that “a popular audience means an ignorant audience.”⁶²) In her study of modernism and its unsettled relationship with “sentimental” literature—literature that transgresses modernist values both in its gendering and in its identification with popular audiences—Clark exposes the extent to which “modernism is both caught in and stabilized by a system of gendered binaries.”⁶³ In such a situation,

---

another intriguing and nontraditional analysis, Foss and Griffin compare the rhetorics of Burke and feminist writer-activist Starhawk, noting the differing ways in which the two theorists use (and do not use) certain tropes (see “A Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries,” *Western Journal of Communication* 56 [Fall 1992]: 330-49).


⁶²*Gorgias*, p. 37.

Clark asks, "What kind of subject or ethos may function [in discourse] with authority? What kind of relationship to the audience—what pathos—may be seen as legitimate?"

Given rhetoric's own construction of (and construction within) similar binaries, these questions resonate with equal fullness for the rhetorical tradition, emphasizing that although rhetoric may desire to decenter style, style—as the material embodiment of the relationships among self, text, and world—resists such displacement. For though some writers (including a number of feminists) experience style primarily as technique, many others find that style raises powerful and difficult personal, political, and ethical issues. Acutely aware of the patriarchal nature of the western phallogocentric tradition, many feminist writers feel themselves to be in a double bind. In order to claim authority and agency, to function as subjects in the discursive arena and thus further feminism's emancipatory goals, some feminists choose (as we choose in this essay) to adhere to the stylistic conventions of traditional western discourse—conventions that sharply dichotomize the public and the private, that devalue personal experience in favor of "objective" facts, "rational" logic, and established authorities.

For many, however, Lorde's well-known dictum that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" powerfully evokes the potential limitations of such an approach. For even when women employ the style of traditional argumentation, gender-related concerns and questions can and often do influence both the immediate and subsequent reception of their work. Consider, for instance, the case of Emma Goldman, the Russian-born American anarchist, lecturer, writer, and editor who achieved great notoriety in the United States from the 1890s to 1917. Although Goldman's politics were radical (she was a passionate anarchist and argued [among other things] in favor of free love and birth control), her argumentative style in many ways resembled "standard American rhetoric." Nevertheless, Goldman often scandalized contemporary popular audiences, while intellectuals and critics—both then and now—have tended to dismiss her as sentimental and romantic.

Such a double bind was almost inevitable, Clark argues. As a

---

64Ibid., p. 3.
65Ibid., p. 52.
speaker, Goldman’s ethos and style of delivery violated the expectations of mass audiences, for Goldman “broke their most sacred codes of womanly behavior. She did not smile; she did not defer” as she uttered her passionately held and expressed ideas. Goldman’s more intellectual listeners and readers had different reservations; they found her lacking because her “language was not like the symbolist or modernist practice, not experimental.” In the “twentieth century . . . struggle over how emotion is to be regulated and distributed,” modernism came down on the side of a refined aestheticism that favored irony and restraint, not passion. Goldman resisted these (gendered) conventions, preferring to emulate such earlier American writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson—an unacceptable practice given modernism’s critique of American romanticism. As a consequence, from a modernist perspective, Goldman occupied “the impossible position of the passionate woman.”

Goldman did succeed in creating a space for her words and ideas in her own time; and if she stirred controversy and strong response (a response that eventually led to her deportation to Russia), she “generated not only antagonists but also adherents.” Goldman’s writing could not survive the critique of modernism, however, for her passion and her adherence to a once-revered Emersonian style was an embarrassment. Consequently, “under the regime of the new criticism, Goldman’s connections to literary history became unspeakable, and forgotten.”

Mindful of the fate of Goldman and of the previously discussed Fuller, “the most forgotten major literary figure of her own times,” a number of women have attempted to forge not only alternative styles but also alternative discourses. Perhaps one of the most radical such efforts is that of Daly, whose “co-conjured” Websters’ [sic] First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language represents an attempt to “conceive of language

---

66 Ibid., p. 55.
67 Ibid., p. 53.
68 Ibid., p. 31.
69 Ibid., p. 47.
70 Ibid., p. 54.
71 Ibid., p. 65.
72 Ibid., p. 45.
73 (Boston: Beacon, 1987).
itself as a fabric that was originally woven by women in conversation with one another."\textsuperscript{74} In so doing, Daly often reclaims earlier meanings of words, giving back to the term "spinster," for instance, its significance as "a woman whose occupation is to spin."\textsuperscript{75} Such projects are not without their own risks, however. After reading Daly's earlier *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,*\textsuperscript{76} Lorde wrote "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," which questioned the sources of Daly's alternative vision for feminism, asking, among other things, why Daly's "goddess-images [are] only white, western-european, judeo-christian."\textsuperscript{77} Lorde's letter is of interest not only for its suggestive treatment of arrangement, noted above, and its commentary on Daly's work, but also for its direct, dialogic, and invitational style. Rather than relying upon confrontational, agonistic strategies, Lorde employs personal disclosures, frequent addresses to readers, and questioning rather than critique or dismissal to convey her reservations about Daly's work. Lorde concludes her letter with these words:

We first met at the MLA [Modern Language Association] panel, "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action." Shortly before that date, I had decided never again to speak to white women about their racism. I felt it was wasted energy, because of their destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another, at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. This letter attempts to break this silence.

I would like not to have to destroy you in my consciousness. So as a sister Hag, I ask you to speak to my perceptions.

Whether or not you do, Mary, again I thank you for what I have learned from you.

This letter is in repayment.\textsuperscript{78}


\textsuperscript{75}Websters', p. 167.

\textsuperscript{76}(Boston: Beacon, 1978).

\textsuperscript{77}P. 67.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., p. 71.
In this closing passage, Lorde fuses the public and the private, the personal and the political, using direct address, many first- and second-person pronouns, and personal reminiscence to demonstrate her gratitude and make connections that unsettle the traditional borders between speaker and listener.

We have already discussed the work of Cixous and Kristeva, continental writers who resist traditional western stylistic conventions of unity, coherence, linearity, and closure and whose texts challenge traditional distinctions between poetry and prose. In "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire," Jamaican Michelle Cliff similarly composes a text that offers stylistic explorations while occupying the borderlands between poetry and prose. Her essay moves with poetic intensity from personal reflections to snatches of texts and remembered sayings, interweaving a sustained, though hardly traditional, critique of race relations in her country and abroad. In the closing paragraph, Cliff comments upon her writing and its relationship to her experience:

There is no ending to this piece of writing. There is no way to end it. As I read back over it, I see that we/they/I may become confused in the mind of the reader: but these pronouns have always co-existed in my mind. . . . I am Jamaica is who I am. No matter how far I travel—how deep the ambivalence I feel about ever returning. And Jamaica is a place in which we/they/I connect and disconnect—change place.

Other writers, such Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros, portray the various stylistic borderings they inhabit by blending English, Spanish, and "Spanglish" throughout their fiction and essays; in so doing, they not only portray the multiple realities through which they live and write, but also provide opportunities for others to experience such multiplicities.

A number of feminists in the United States have enacted yet another form of stylistic resistance to conventional expectations. These (largely academic—and tenured) writers compose what

80 Ibid., p. 81.
literary critic Miller terms "personal criticism," criticism that engages, rather than distances, the writer's experiences.\textsuperscript{82} Such criticism, Miller argues, represents an intervention into contemporary cultural and theoretical practices, and it does so at the level of style: "[B]y turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance. ... Personal writing opens an inquiry on the cost of writing—critical writing or Theory—and its effects."\textsuperscript{83}

Not all feminists agree with Miller's assessment of the value of the personal style or with Daly's effort to create a language free of patriarchal influence. In "Surviving to Speak New Language: Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich," Jane Hedley argues that Daly's efforts to construct a feminist discourse are ultimately totalizing, "self-contextualizing and autotelic to a quite remarkable degree."\textsuperscript{84} Many postmodern feminists are also suspicious of efforts to develop more personally grounded forms of criticism, believing that such efforts reinscribe the western tradition's emphasis on individualism and authenticity, while feminists of color such as hooks and Trinh T. Minh-ha challenge the ease with which many white feminists have felt comfortable representing (or, from hooks's and Trinh's perspectives, ignoring or misrepresenting) the experiences of others. Even recent attempts on the part of feminists to acknowledge the extent to which feminism has ignored race and class and to affirm what Rich terms a "politics of location" often have the effect, critics such as hooks argue, of "re-centering the white authorial presence."\textsuperscript{85}

For these and other reasons, in contemporary feminism, few issues are as contentious as issues of style. While some feminists engage in agonistic arguments about the disadvantages and advantages of experimental efforts such as those of Kristeva and Cixous and of personal criticism as practiced by Tompkins and Miller, others focus their inquiry on the difficulty of writing itself.


\textsuperscript{84}p. 47.

\textsuperscript{85}\textit{Yearning}, p. 21.
In Woman, Native, Other, for instance, Trinh calls for feminists to embrace “a practice of language which remains, through its signifying operations, a process constantly unsettling the identity of meaning and speaking/writing subject, a process never allowing I to fare without non-I.” In the context of such a practice, style marks the borderland where conflicting ideological, cultural, political, and other forces important to both rhetoric and feminism contend.

ON DELIVERY

[Delivery] is, essentially, a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions. . . . Those who bear [delivery] in mind . . . usually win prizes in the dramatic contests; and just as in drama . . ., so it is in the contests of public life, owing to the defects of our political institutions.

Aristotle, Rhetoric III.1

Aristotle’s barest outline of the canon of delivery emphasized “the three things—volume of sound, modulation of pitch, and rhythm—that a speaker bears in mind.” Fully aware of rhetoric as public display, as performance art, as the one-time demonstration before a judge and jury, Aristotle lamented rhetoric’s “unworthy” yet necessary concern with the delivery of “appearances.” After all, we should “fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts: nothing . . . should matter except the proof of these facts.” But “owing to the defects of our hearers” (that is, to the defects of our humanness), “we must pay attention to the subject of delivery . . . because we cannot do without it.”

Theophrastus, Aristotle’s successor as head of the Peripatetic School, later elaborated and codified this canon, dividing delivery into matters of voice and gesture—or action—and providing rules for each. His now-lost but influential On Delivery informed rhetoric throughout antiquity, as numerous texts attest. The

87Aristotle, Rhetoric III.1.
author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* details delivery's "exceptionally great usefulness,"88 for example, and Cicero addresses delivery in *De oratore* as "the dominant factor in oratory; without delivery the best speaker cannot be of any account at all, and a moderate speaker with a trained delivery can often outdo the best of them."89 Delivery is presented in *Brutus* as that element of rhetoric that "penetrates the mind, shapes, moulds, turns it,"90 and in the *Orator* as a "sort of language of the body."91 Quintilian notes that "the nature of the speech we have composed within our minds is not so important as the manner in which we produce it, since the emotion of each member of our audience will depend on the impression made upon his hearing."92 And both Cicero and Quintilian took apparent pleasure in recounting Demosthenes' memorable response when asked to list the three most important components of rhetoric: "Delivery, delivery, delivery."93

Delivery remains vital to rhetoric, given that it is, indeed, the culmination of the composing process, the combination and culmination of all five canons. Whether written, oral, or visual/aural (electronic), each rhetorical act culminates in delivery. Just as the ancient teachers went to great lengths to teach their students rhetorical effectiveness, so, too, have all students, from antiquity to this postmodern era, hoped to inhabit rhetorical power. In writing this essay, for example, we aimed throughout at effective delivery. Just a glance at the lengthy annotated footnotes, the copious examples (our artistic and nonartistic proofs), and our use of time-honored sources indicates how thoroughly we three academic women have attempted to embody the traditional delivery medium of the professional academic essay. Our introduction with its aims of establishing good will, common ground, and good sense; our presentation of topic and explanation of methodology; the very linearity of our argument, in which we

93Ibid., 11.3-6.
use the canons of rhetoric as organizing principles—all these strategies comprise the public performance, the appearance before and attention to a university-trained, international audience, all of whom have easy familiarity with the delivery system represented by an academic journal.94

But our ability to enter this arena of public academic discourse and to deliver our message is utterly dependent on one crucial item: access not only to the conventions regarding delivery but also to the system of delivery itself. Cicero conflates delivery with the "language of the body,"95 making us particularly conscious of the privilege we enjoy since, as Biesecker (among others) notes, "Rhetoric is a discipline whose distinctive characteristic is its focus on public address, a realm to which women as a class have historically been denied access."96 Indeed, for most of the history of rhetoric in the western world, women generally could not have entered the public arena as we have here. Most women have been closed out of a rhetorical tradition of vocal, public, and, therefore, privileged men, silenced by force and by means of their educations. Nevertheless, women have not been excluded entirely from effective communication.

Those whose work we will note here represent only a fraction of the largely as-yet unexplored number of women who have turned to alternative, often private, forms of delivery (in secondary

94 We have not, however, used only traditional strategies. For example, we have chosen to collaborate, a nontraditional academic way to write and publish, in order to share equally the work and the credit of this essay, following the feminist tradition of "connected knowing" recorded in Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule's Women's Ways of Knowing (New York: Basic, 1986) and expanded in Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's Scattered Hegemonies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). As Grewal and Kaplan note, "We must work collaboratively in order to formulate transnational feminist alliances" (p. 1). Nontraditionally, then, we deliver the third collaboratively written essay in Rhetorica (two earlier pieces, both on the rhetoric of science, were contributed by J. E. McGuire and Trevor Melia). In another nontraditional move, we use postmodern feminist examples and methodology, and we depend on a number of women writers and speakers who may not be familiar to our non-American readers.

sources, mystical visions, autobiographies, translations, letters, lists, prose-poems, teachings, humor, and recordings by educated males). First of all, these women had to gain access to a medium of delivery; then they most often found themselves altering that medium in whatever ways would allow them to speak (through the writings of others, for example), even if those voices reached no attentive audience for centuries. Other women reached a highly educated audience only by translating, filtering their erudition through the words of men. Still others, those who took hold of a system designed for men, shaped the traditionally masculine medium of oral delivery to their own advantage and pushed the boundaries of platform rhetoric to include a broader listening audience. Although largely ignored until very recently, the rhetorical deliveries of these women have ultimately proved as powerful and long-lasting as traditionally masculine displays.

By means of secondary sources, fifth-century BCE Aspasia of Miletus, for example, provides one of the earliest examples of women's use of alternative delivery methods: her work has been delivered to us by the way of men's writing, for none of Aspasia's work exists in primary sources. Aspasia's reputation as both a rhetorician and philosopher, as well as the text of her various speeches, have been preserved by men. Given the cultural constraints that limited her, Aspasia used the only media of

97Nor can we here explore the delivery of silence, a traditionally undervalued feminine mode, given the western tendency to valorize speech and language. Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Listening to Silences [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994]) have recently helped us understand the expressive, positive powers of silence when it denotes alertness and sensitivity, when it signifies attentiveness or stoicism, and particularly when it seeks out and listens to new voices. Such explorations remind us of how much more we may yet learn here.

98Throughout this essay, our examples have come from women using literate (print) delivery systems. In this section, we concentrate mostly on women's use of the oral medium of delivery. We do not speak to issues of facial and bodily gestures, nor will we comment on voice-timbre; except for our example of Ann Richards, we have no access to the actual physical delivery of these women.

99Nor, of course, does any of Socrates' work, but the historical tradition has readily accepted secondary accounts of his influence, teaching, and beliefs. The same cannot be said for any female counterpart.

100Discussions of Aspasia's intellectual activity can be found in the works of Plato (437-328 BCE), Xenophon (fl. 450 BCE), Cicero (100-43 BCE), Athenaeus (fl. AD 200), and Plutarch (AD 46-c.120).
delivery available—that is, media employed by men. The most important of her compositions may well be Pericles' Funeral Oration, a moving, patriotic epideictic that the Platonic Socrates recites from memory in the Menexenus. Although we have no access to her original text, the Platonic version (an exaggerated encomium abounding with historical misstatements and anachronisms) aligns well with the Platonic Aspasia's opinions on the efficacy of rhetoric: "It is by means of speech finely spoken that deeds nobly done gain for their doers from the hearers the meed of memory and renown." This version of Pericles' Funeral Oration also aligns with Aspasia's reputation as rhetorician, philosopher, and influential colleague in the Sophistic movement, a movement devoted to the analysis and creation of rhetoric—and of truth. Aspasia's oral text, delivered to us in the print medium of secondary sources, not only provides a compelling demonstration of rhetoric's potential to create belief, but perhaps just as important, her dispersed but still powerful text has at last reached an appreciative audience.

In old age, illiterate medieval mystic Margery Burnham Kempe (1373-1439) used the oral system of delivery to dictate the story of her life to scribes. The Book of Margery Kempe, left unidentified until five hundred years after it was written, recounts the trials and triumphs of her worldly and spiritual pilgrimages, gives voice to the silent, middle-class, uneducated woman, and appears to be the earliest extant autobiography in the English language. Despite her lack of formal literacy and training, Kempe located herself within the particular discourse of Franciscan affective piety, where she could self-consciously author and own the story of her life, create her self, record her spiritual development, and, most

---

102 Ibid., 236e.
103 For a thorough account of Aspasia's contributions to rhetoric, see Glenn's "sex, lies, and manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric," College Composition and Communication 45 (1994): 180-99.
104 In 1934, Hope Emily Allen identified and helped Sanford Brown Meech edit the unique manuscript, long the possession of the W. Butler-Bowden estate. (Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, eds. Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech [London: Oxford University Press, 1940].)
importantly, validate her life and her mystical visions. Kempe knew well the power of the written word, so she attached herself to the oral component of that written word, studying (listening to and memorizing) with a priest until she became literate—without being able to read and write (without being text-dependent). And her employment of an amanuensis enabled her to leave a written record of her oral deliveries, a written record intended, no doubt, for oral performance or delivery. Thus, her Book is Kempe's unique inscription of rhetorical practice and delivery. It demonstrates the way in which one woman, denied ready access to the print medium, refracted her oral discourse through a scribe and sent her message down to us.

Renaissance intellect Margaret More Roper (1504-44), daughter of Thomas More, delivers her rhetorical skill in her translation of Erasmus' Devout treatise upon the Pater noster (1524). Considered derivative, defective, and muted, the feminine art of translation posed no threat to the masculine art of composition—not even when the translation itself became a major intellectual influence. Roper's translation remains one of the earliest examples of the EngUshing of Erasmian piety; in addition, it broke new ground as part of a broad campaign directed at the English-reading public in that it domesticated and disseminated Erasmus' view of the devotional life. Translations provided Roper an outlet for her rhetorical skills and a measure of intellectual and religious influence—but only because she chose decorously to conceal her voice and identity as a writer in the work of a known and accepted author, only because she delivered her thoughts through the words of men, within the constraints of womanly modesty, piety, and humility.

Like Kempe, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) remained illiterate all her life, though she drew deep from the wellsprings of oral tradition, delivering her own words through her own body. This former slave commanded large audiences whenever she spoke to the two most crucial political and social issues of her day: slavery and suffrage. At a time when the science of voice, gesture, and elocution were all the rage in rhetorical circles, at a time when (white) women's presence at a pulpit, a podium, a platform, or the

105 See Glenn's "Reexamining The Book of Margery Kempe: A Rhetoric of Autobiography" (in Lunsford, Reclaiming Rhetorica, pp. 53-71) for a fuller argument regarding Kempe's significance as a rhetorician.
bar was often illegal (the presence of a black woman would have been unimaginable), Truth’s rhetoric of practicality shot through the fog of belletristic display. Like Kempe, she, too, appropriated the medium of oral delivery to her own end. Indeed, in contrast to most contemporary oral delivery, Truth made use of simple, straightforward language in an attempt to reach the broadest possible audience, fusing her simple style with her simple delivery. As Suzanne Pullon Fitch notes, Truth’s “use of the simple language of the uneducated, which she could weave into striking narrative and metaphors, her nearly six-foot frame that revealed the strength developed working as a farmhand and house maid, and her powerful low voice telling of her denied rights as a woman and an African-American made her one of the most forceful instruments of reform.” Truth’s physical bearing, enhanced by her use of simple language and memorable stories, helped her reach her goal, that of a more inclusive audience engagement and participation.

How different the “plain style” delivery of this woman was from the formal rhetorical delivery so common among nineteenth-century American public speakers, nearly all of whom were males. So memorable (and perhaps threatening) was this alternative rhetorical display—in terms of her style, her delivery, her arrangement, and her subject—that one pro-slavery newspaper wrote: “She is a crazy, ignorant, repelling negress, and her guardians would do a Christian act to restrict her entirely to private life.” Yet this “ignorant” woman continued in the public sphere, exhorting note-taking college students to “put their notes in their heads” and parlaying her illiteracy into stylized delivery: “You know, children, I don’t read such small stuff as letters, I read men and nations. I can see through a millstone, though I can’t see through a spelling-book. What a narrow idea a reading qualification is for a voter! I know and do what is right better than many big men who read.” On these and many other occasions, Truth clearly practiced Cicero’s dictum for delivery as

107Qtd. in ibid., 1:428.
the "language of the body." Still, hers was an alternative delivery, the only practice available for an illiterate, slave-class, black woman, particularly a woman who wanted to transform hostile and separatist audiences with a rhetoric of inclusion.

Truth is only one in a long tradition of women who have attempted to appropriate conventional oral delivery to their own ends. If we turn to contemporary America for another example, we might well point to the former governor of Texas, Ann Willis Richards, who, like Truth, uses oral delivery—valorized speech and language—to seek out, speak, and listen to new voices. In the United States, Richards, perhaps best known for her 1988 keynote address to the Democratic National Convention, participates fully in public, political, argumentative, powerful rhetoric—rhetoric in our most traditionally masculine sense.

But her participation is on her own terms, that of a woman, a feminist, who easily conflates the public with the private, inviting more and more people into her audience. If a commonplace in feminist theory is the link between where one stands—and delivers—in society and what one perceives, then feminist Richards self-consciously enters the political arena, perceiving with great clarity not only her own position but that of male privilege. Ever-mindful of her audience, Richards carefully avoids elitism, agonism, and paternalism, enacting, instead—in her platform delivery—a fierce "maternalism" that embraces her constituents. From the platform, she reads letters from the disempowered and downtrodden. From the platform, she testifies to the benefits of inclusion, cooperation, and connection, qualities often associated with the feminine. From the platform, she reaches out to all women who worry about their families and children, to all grandmothers who want life to promise steady improvements for their generations, to all feminists who join Richards in hoping that her granddaughter Lily may never believe "that there was a time when blacks could not drink from public water fountains, when Hispanic children were punished for speaking Spanish in the public schools and women couldn’t vote."110 She delivers all these messages with homely examples (a staple of platform rhetoric) and common sense (one of her favorite lines is, "Tell it so my Mama in

110Ibid., 2:649.
Waco can understand it”). As she fuses her style with her delivery, she transforms her politics through her female body, and she speaks from the borderlands of women in politics—all to the advantage of her rhetorical power.

In addition to providing us an example of (traditionally masculine) delivery informed by feminine/feminist ethics, Richards also exemplifies an oral delivery inscribed in and by different media. With (seemingly) full access to all systems of delivery, Richards speaks aloud from her written text to a “live” audience as well as to the audiences who hear her on the radio, watch and listen to her on television, and read excerpts from her speech in the newspaper—a merger of electronic, written, and oral media.

With this electronic delivery comes electronic writing, a new means of delivering text and graphics that offers another productive space within which rhetoric and feminism may work. At least some electronic media, such as hypertext, seem to allow for feminist concerns of inclusion, participation, and dialogue, and here we find the potential, at least, to allow full audience engagement in the establishment of the text itself. For example, in hypertext software designed for MacIntosh platforms, Deena Larsen offers *Marble Springs*, a hypothetical space in nineteenth-century Colorado populated by many women. Primarily a collection of poetry written by and about the women of Marble Springs and detailing their many contributions to the town’s history and development, the texts of *Marble Springs* can be rewritten, revised, and added to by the hypertext user. Thus like all hypertext, and electronic media in general, *Marble Springs* holds out the promise of an inclusionary rhetoric. But like all systems of delivery, electronic rhetoric also harbors the threat of exclusion, as George Landow’s dystopic vision of the fate of writers in such a world makes alarmingly clear. If the electronic medium establishes itself as the major delivery system of the next century, then rhetoricians and feminists together must continue to examine the power relations of its rhetorical situation: Who gets to speak/write? Who gets to listen? Who gets to rewrite? How many of us will have material access to the electronic media and to all their concomitant delivery systems?

Just as the history of rhetoric cannot be written from rhetoric books alone, neither can the canon of delivery be theorized beyond the point of successful practice. As we hope this discussion has revealed, border-crossings between rhetoric and feminism can help us better to appreciate the power of past practices. In looking to present and future practices, we have suggested that when rhetoric and feminism come together, as in this interrogation of the canon of delivery, both are transformed. Rhetoric, a vibrant process of inquiring, organizing, and thinking, offers a theorized space to talk about delivery. And feminism offers a reason to "bridge differences (rather than to create them), to include (rather than to exclude), and to empower (rather than to seek power or weakness)." So when our discussion of delivery includes theories and artifacts that represent both the traditions of agonism, confidence, and competitiveness as well as more recently embodied examples of inclusion, cooperation, and identification, and when we put these influential feminine voices in dialogue with traditionally masculine deliveries, we move beyond a rhetoric of masculine privilege to a transformed rhetorical practice. Standing on the borderlands of rhetoric and feminism allows us to imagine a much wider, much more inclusive range of successful deliveries and fruitful border-crossings.

CONCLUSION

The duty of rhetoric is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us.

Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.2

Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera 16

In taking this *excursus* among the rhetorical canons, we have been especially conscious of our central metaphor—the borderlands (*la frontera*) of rhetoric and feminism. For us, this metaphor has been most powerful in its nuanced indeterminacy, its quiet reminder that borderlands shift and overlap, that they are, as Anzaldúa notes, in “a constant state of transition.”\(^{114}\) Indeed, as our discussion of the rhetorical canons has demonstrated, their borders also inevitably blur. At one point in working on this essay, we found ourselves disagreeing, to cite just one instance, as to whether we should discuss as style or delivery the dissonance between Goldman’s presentation of public self (her refusal to smile, to defer) and the gendered expectations of her popular lecture audiences. How can it be possible to separate style from delivery, we wondered, when both are so intimately connected with the rhetor’s subjectivity and *ethos* and with the specifics of the particular rhetorical situation? We thus found relevant to our experience in composing this essay Trinh’s insight that “despite our desperate, eternal attempts to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.”\(^{115}\) Such leakage is, we believe, not only inevitable but helpful, for it reminds us that categories—and their boundaries and borderlands—are “sites of historicized struggles.”\(^{116}\)

In some of these historical moments, rhetoric and feminism have had few if any intersections. As the headnote from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* that begins this essay indicates, rhetoric was constituted as a patriarchal, exclusionary discipline, and it remained so for centuries. When Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Augustine considered the nature and province of rhetoric, they did not imagine that women—or those gendered feminine by their race, class, psychology, or other characteristics—might wish or be able to employ what Aristotle terms “the available means of persuasion” to communicate their ideas. As our discussion indicates, however, those whom rhetoric has gendered as “Other” have, nevertheless, employed strategies that those working within the rhetorical tradition have recognized as “rhetoric” to form, shape, and express their ideas.

In our contemporary historical moment, feminism and rhetoric

\(^{114}\) *Borderlands/La Frontera*, p. 3.

\(^{115}\) *Woman, Native, Other*, p. 94.

\(^{116}\) *Kaplan, French Lessons*, p. 149.
stand, along with a number of other disciplines, amid a rich and intricate landscape—a landscape that postmodern and poststructural critique has complicated with its skeptical probings. In such a landscape, congruences as well as dissimilarities between rhetoric and feminism appear. Both fields, for example, place high value on process, as the longevity and influence of the canons and feminism's persistent commitment to working through to an understanding rather than to (premature) closure both demonstrate. In both fields, this focus on process signals a larger commitment to linking theory with practice, to recognizing and valuing local and applied knowledges. And both fields share a long-standing concern for public values and the public good, for creating spaces within which human subjectivities, at least potentially, can be realized, celebrated, and expanded.

Both fields have also demonstrated, it goes without saying, that they are capable of both conscious and unconscious hierarchies and exclusions, that they are, as Burke so eloquently indicates, "rotten with perfection."\(^\text{117}\) We have already discussed feminism's belated recognition of the extent to which its scholarly and political project excludes women of color. As feminist theory has gained academic respectability—as scholars who viewed themselves as radical in the 1970s and 1980s have become tenured professors in the 1990s—a number of feminists, such as Kolodny, have become concerned that "Respectability Is Eroding the Revolutionary Potential of Feminist Criticism."\(^\text{118}\) And feminists have been forced to recognize that they can be as agonistic, as competitive, as the most traditionally masculinist academic. In Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller's "Criticizing Feminist Criticism," for instance, Miller describes a particular vehement public attack on her work and her resulting recognition that she had "learned to fear other women in a way [she] hadn't done until that point."\(^\text{119}\)

At the level of practice, then, feminists have become increasingly aware of the need to develop an ethics of communication. Such an ethics would also address an urgent theoretical question of concern to many contemporary feminists:


\(^{119}\)See Conflicts in Feminism, p. 352.
how to justify and forward feminism's scholarly and political project given postmodern and poststructural skepticism about traditional humanistic argumentation. Once aware, as Judith Butler notes, that "the subject who theorizes is constituted as a 'theorizing subject' by a set of exclusionary and selective procedures,"¹²⁰ feminists must acknowledge the interestedness and situatedness of their own discourse. As a consequence, they must address, rather than evade, the question of rhetoric.

In Thinking Fragments, for instance, Flax begins her last chapter with this statement:

> A fundamental and unresolved question pervading this book is how to justify—or even frame—theoretical and narrative choices (including my own) without recourse to 'truth' or domination. I am convinced we can and should justify our choices to ourselves and others, but what forms these justifications can meaningfully assume is not clear to me.¹²¹

As a tradition that has for centuries concerned itself with the question of how rhetors can and should justify their choices, rhetoric has, we believe, much to offer contemporary feminist theory and practice. For as our discussion of the canons has, we hope, indicated, rhetoric offers a rich conceptual framework and terminology that could prove heuristic as feminists attempt to probe and articulate these and other concerns. As Susan Brown Carlton notes, rhetoric could enable feminists to reconstruct what many have experienced as a contentious "philosophical impasse as a map of rhetorical options available for voicing the feminist stance."¹²²

Rhetoric would also benefit, we believe, if the borderlands between rhetoric and feminism were more fully explored. Mining the borders of feminism and rhetoric would seem to offer intriguing interconnections and new ratios among logos, pathos, and ethos, ones that would expand the province of rhetorical proof and hence speak to and with wider and more diverse audiences. In insisting on the value of the local, the personal, the private, the

¹²¹ P. 222.
mythic, for example, Anzaldúa's discourse embodies a set of proofs that transcends dualisms by embracing multiple understandings. The complex processes of knowing that Anzaldúa's work enacts (and invites) resituate proofs so that, as Lata Mani observes, "The relation between experience and knowledge is now seen to be not one of correspondence but one fraught with history, contingency, and struggle."123

In addition, sustaining a position on the borderlands of rhetoric and feminism holds promise of more complex and multiplicitous understandings of human communication, of how meanings arise and are inscribed. From this vantage point, the angles of the rhetorical triangle—speaker, hearer, text—become shape-shifters, three-dimensional and elastic points of contact, of location. Discussing this elasticity in another context, Michele Wallace describes the movement involved in this way of apprehending the world not as one of fixed stances (as writer or reader, for example), but as self-consciously "travelling from one position to another, thinking one's way from one position to another" and back again.124

Perhaps most importantly, Anzaldúa's mestiza borderland consciousness may create a space for public discourse that is inclusive, that accepts difference and Others, as Kristeva, Spivak, and hooks insist it must, without colonizing and also without shutting down exchange. Such an effort calls for considerable self-reflectiveness, a self-reflectiveness that requires rhetors to "become accountable for . . . [their] own investments in cultural metaphors and values," as well as a willingness to experiment, to take risks.125 It also calls, as hooks wisely observes, for the continuing recognition that "it is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak."126 As this essay has argued, from a perspective that borders rhetoric and feminism, attention to "what we speak about" and "how and why we speak" urges all of us not only to continued exploration and interrogation but also to a renewed responsibility for our professional and personal discursive acts.

125Kaplan, French Lessons, p. 139.
126Yearning, p. 151.