

EXPLORING OUR OPTIONS: COOPERATIVE RHETORICAL  
ALTERNATIVES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR  
TEACHING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the University of  
Tennessee at Chattanooga in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree of Master  
of Arts: English

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
Chattanooga, TN

May 2014

## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the range of rhetorical options presented to first-year composition students, primarily in textbooks and writing handbooks, is unnecessarily limited. Given the abundance and variety of discursive encounters students are likely to have, not only in college but especially as members of a highly diverse society, it is imperative that they be exposed to more than just the standard, thesis-driven, antagonistic model of discourse. To that end, this thesis discusses three cooperative rhetorical alternatives—Rogerian rhetoric, antilogic, and invitational listening—that can serve as a complement to the traditional approach. It also suggests ways that composition teachers might apply these approaches in the classroom.

## DEDICATION

To Jenny, whose own dedication literally made this project possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Jones for agreeing to work with me on this thesis, for helping me think it through, for offering both encouragement and critique, and for introducing me, as a first-year graduate student, to many of the theorists whose work would inform a large part of the project. Whatever merit it has, I share the credit with her.

Thank you to Dr. Lauren Ingraham for offering helpful feedback on the chapter about Rogerian rhetoric and for letting me write that chapter as part of an essay-writing class I took from her in my second-to-last semester.

Thank you to Dr. Verbie Prevost, as well as Dr. Ingraham, for agreeing to serve on my committee.

And thank you to Dr. Susan North, who, though not directly involved with my thesis, nevertheless deserves a formal expression of my gratitude for the consistent support she has provided throughout my career at UTC.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

“If public argument is bad, perhaps there is something wrong with the teaching of public argument.”

—Patricia Roberts-Miller

“In an era when there is no shortage of models for aggressive disputation and hostile debate, college students deserve to know that there are alternatives to the argumentative edge.”

—Barry M. Kroll

In late October of 2013, a transient street preacher named Angela Cummings began a weeks-long series of sermons on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where I teach and attend classes. Having applied for and received a permit to speak at the school, Cummings was allowed to preach from the university’s official free-speech area, a central location on campus known as Heritage Plaza (LaFave, “Her Cross”). As several news sources would later attest, and as can be seen by watching just a few minutes of her own footage—which she posted on her *YouTube* channel—Cummings’ homiletic style is loud and abrasive. The *Chattanooga Times Free Press* quoted her as referring to students as ““adulterers and adulteresses”” and calling out ““lesbo alert, lesbians are on this campus”” (Omarzu). Another story in the same newspaper reported that her “dooming hollers” occasionally registered more than 70 decibels, the same volume as a lawnmower (LaFave, “Her Cross”). And in her own video, which she recorded by setting up a small video camera on a tripod, she is shown belting

out repeatedly these words from the New Testament Book of James: “Cleanse your hands, you sinners!” (Cummings). Given the harshness of her rhetoric, it is hard to imagine that Cummings had any intention of actually winning over her audience. Even someone with the most basic rhetorical awareness would recognize the alienating form in which Cummings’ message was cast. Shouting curses and damnation at an unsuspecting group of students at a public university seems about the worst rhetorical strategy she could have chosen. Yet, by her own admission, she claimed she only wanted “to help [the students] through Jesus Christ.” Referencing the inevitable backlash she received from many of the students who experienced her preaching, she also said, “Why would I come back and put up with all this if I wasn't trying to offer hope” (LaFave, “Her Cross”).

If Cummings truly intended, as she claimed, to bring help and hope to the students of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, then we are left with a couple of questions: why did she choose to present her message in the way that she did? What other rhetorical options could she have chosen? At least one local Chattanooga writer seems to have wondered the same thing: “[w]hat if...Cummings had walked over to [Cole] Montalvo[, a student who was arrested after crossing into Cummings’ free-speech area to question her,]...and calmly answered his question? What if, after Montalvo had been restrained, she had used her powerful lungs to implore campus security to let [him] go” (Colrus). I would go even further and ask, what if, instead of condemning the supposed immorality of the students passing by on their way to class—or, occasionally, stopping to jeer or heckle—Cummings had simply shared her story, offered a personal testimony about what becoming a Christian had meant to her? What if she had used a microphone so she could speak in softer tones but still be heard? What if, rather than declaim

from a makeshift wooden podium, she had set up a roundtable, inviting students to join her in a discussion about Christianity, or the Bible, or religion in general, allowing the students to contribute equally to the discussion? What if, in a completely radical move, she had sat silently near a sign that asked students to share their own beliefs while she listened? How might students have responded to such non-combative rhetorical methods? While it's impossible to know what the outcome of these imaginary rhetorical alternatives would have been, it is important to note that they were available, that the shouting and condemning were not the only possibility.

### Rhetorical Alternatives in Rhetoric and Composition

The need for a greater awareness of constructive and cooperative ways of communicating with each other, as demonstrated in the above story, has not escaped the notice of rhetoric and communications scholars. Indeed, as early as 1936 I.A. Richards was questioning what he called “the combative impulse” of traditional rhetoric (24). More recently, Sharon Crowley has argued that a lack of respect amidst differences in belief has led to an “ideological impasse” that prevents genuine discussion (*Toward* 22-23). Josina Makau and Debian Marty addressed the need for cooperative rhetoric more directly in their 2001 book *Cooperative Argumentation*, which, in contrast to Crowley's study, is more of a handbook for those seeking to put the principles of cooperative rhetoric into practice. In 2004, Wayne Booth, author of the influential *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, published *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC*, which continued his decades-long project of helping rhetorical opponents find common ground. And Deborah Tannen, in her popular book *The Argument Culture*, argued that war metaphors

dominate our cultural conversations, causing unnecessary harm and excluding other, less antagonistic discursive possibilities (4). Examining some of these possibilities is the purpose of this thesis.

Despite much scholarly attention to the need for an expanded range of rhetorical options, such a concern has unfortunately failed to percolate through critical channels of composition instruction, especially textbooks and handbooks.<sup>1</sup> In her article “A Textbook Argument,” A. Abby Knoblauch argues that although some contemporary composition texts display a more nuanced conception of argument and may even include sections on specific alternatives to the traditional, adversarial model, “the processes by which [they] are ‘teaching’ argument are rarely as expansive” (245). By examining closely two well-known argument-focused composition texts—Lunsford, Ruskiewicz, and Walters’ *Everything’s an Argument* and Ramage, Bean, and Johnson’s *Writing Arguments*—Knoblauch demonstrates that beyond some laudatory gestures to expand the definition of argument to include more cooperative alternatives, such as invitational and Rogerian rhetoric, the authors of these texts ultimately reveal a strong preference for traditional, one-way argument.<sup>2</sup> For example, she notes that although they include a six-page section on Rogerian argument, a non-persuasive rhetorical alternative I discuss in Chapter Two, the authors of *Everything’s an Argument* ultimately minimize its alterity by framing it as a persuasion-based method. They do this, Knoblauch shows, by including an “example” of Rogerian argument for which they provide no questions or comments that address how the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Mendelson demonstrated the discrepancy between the concerns of scholarship and the content of textbooks nearly fifteen years ago in his article “The Absence of Dialogue.”

<sup>2</sup> Knoblauch relies on Nancy V. Wood, who has written several argument textbooks, to define “traditional argument” as that “in which ‘the object is to convince an audience that the claim is valid and that the arguer is right’” (245).

example is Rogerian; instead, the authors ask students to respond to the example by writing “an academic argument” that “may be factual, evaluative, or causal in nature” (qtd. in Knoblauch 254-255). Knoblauch goes on to point out that the authors of *Writing Arguments*, while they provide “a more nuanced understanding of Rogerian argument,” nevertheless revert to an emphasis on persuasion (260). When describing their Rogerian-based writing assignment, the authors ask students to “address a ‘highly resistant audience’ and [to] ‘persuade [their] audience toward [their] position or toward a conciliatory compromise’” (qtd. in Knoblauch 261). Knoblauch concludes by asserting that future argument-based textbooks should “includ[e] a variety of argumentative approaches,” thus “reflect[ing] the complexity of discourse and argument in our society” (264-265). Through her analysis, then, Knoblauch highlights the need to expand students’ conception of argument.

Unfortunately, the view of argument presented to students in writing handbooks, which most first-year composition students are required to purchase, appears to be just as narrow as that presented in textbooks. For example, *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*, a popular text now in its eighteenth edition, defines argument as “expressing a point of view and using logical reasoning... [to] invite a specific audience to adopt that point of view or engage in a particular course of action” (Glenn and Gray 394). The focus here is on traditional, thesis-driven persuasion; there is little or no space in this definition for alternatives to the standard model. Later, in their discussion of the importance of showing respect for “the beliefs, values, and expertise of [an] intended audience,” the authors do make an attempt, like the writers of the textbooks Knoblauch analyzed, to present a broader notion of argument, the purpose of which may be “to invite exchange, understanding, cooperation, joint decision making, agreement, or negotiation of

differences” (394-395). However, the effect of this broadening gesture is short-lived. Immediately following the above statement is this conflicting assertion about the purpose of argument: “an argument’s purpose has three basic and sometimes overlapping components: to analyze a complicated issue or question an established belief, *to express or defend a point of view*, and to invite an audience *to change a position or adopt a course of action*” (395, emphasis added). Perhaps by using a term like *invite* the authors are trying to reduce the emphasis on forceful persuasion; nevertheless, it is clear that the handbook’s notion of argument still “privileges change in the audience...over change in the rhetor” and therefore maintains a limited view of discursive options (Knoblauch 261).

Another popular text, Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers’ *The Bedford Handbook*, reflects the same restrictive notion of argument.<sup>3</sup> In an introductory section called “Constructing Reasonable Arguments,” the authors define argument as “tak[ing] a stand on a debatable issue,” a definition that seems to back away from persuasion—a rhetor could “take a stand” without convincing anyone of her position—but maintains its focus on the thesis-driven approach. Similar to the authors of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*, however, Hacker and Sommers move toward an expanded notion of argument by pointing out that the “goal is not simply to win or to have the last word” but rather “to explain [one’s] understanding of the truth about a subject or to propose the best solution available for solving a problem—without being needlessly combative.” They also write, invoking Kenneth Burke’s famous analogy, that creating an argument is akin to “join[ing] a conversation with other writers and readers.” Nevertheless, these moderately expansive gestures are curtailed by the section’s final sentence, in which students are told that

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<sup>3</sup> I am reviewing the eighth edition of this text. The ninth edition, published in 2014, does not differ substantially in its presentation of argument.

their “aim is convince readers to reconsider their opinions by offering new reasons to question an old viewpoint” (104). In defining argument, then, Hacker and Sommers, like Glenn and Gray, circumscribe their own attempts to increase rhetorical possibilities. In one way, though, *The Bedford Handbook* authors appear to go beyond Glenn and Gray by devoting a short section to finding common ground among rhetorical opponents. By advising students to “try to seek out one or two assumptions you might share with readers who do not initially agree with your views,” Hacker and Sommers suggest that they might be moving in this section toward an alternative purpose for argument. That suggestion, however, is quickly undermined by the sentence that follows: “If you can show that you share their concerns, your readers will be more likely to acknowledge the validity of your argument” (114). In this potentially expansive section of the handbook the purpose of finding common ground, a legitimate alternative to persuasion as an argumentative goal, becomes instead a means to a persuasive end.

I should make clear that I am not advocating an abandonment of traditional, thesis-driven argument; such an approach has its appropriate contexts. Hacker and Sommers suggest one such context—the courtroom—when they advise students to “view [their] audience as a panel of jurors” who “will make up their minds after listening to all sides of the argument” (106). Certainly the courtroom, and discursive contexts analogous to the courtroom, provides an appropriate setting in which to state a claim and support it with evidence. A judge and jury are prepared to hear this particular kind of argument and will decide, based on the relative strength of the opposing arguments, who wins the case. But does a jury, composed of relatively disinterested members who are constricted to choosing one of two responses (guilty/not guilty) to the arguments they hear, provide the best analogy for *all* audiences? What about committee

members discussing compensation and benefits for the adjuncts who teach a large chunk of a university's first-year writing courses? Is it reasonable to expect any participant in that conversation to be disinterested? Is it productive to think in terms of an either/or response to the perspectives offered? How else might this argumentative situation, and by extension the available rhetorical options, be defined? Unfortunately, Hacker and Sommers offer students no alternatives to the courtroom analogy, leaving them a narrow and impoverished rhetorical regime.

In his article "Broadening the Repertoire: Alternatives to the Argumentative Edge," Barry M. Kroll argues that "adversarial argument is often the *only* option that students know how to exercise when they address controversial issues, so that they adopt an argumentative edge by default, without considering its limitations or the value of alternatives" (24, emphasis in original). Kroll develops three such argumentative alternatives, which he calls conciliatory, deliberative, and integrative. Conciliatory rhetoric, Kroll claims, is particularly useful "when disagreements are so deep and hostile that more adversarial argument is likely to exacerbate distrust and increase polarization" (15). In such cases, rhetors need a "gesture" that seeks "to break the pattern of assertion and rebuttal, claim and support...a signal that someone is willing to defuse the hostility, ready to listen sympathetically" (12). The focus in conciliatory rhetoric, then, is on reducing the sense of threat and defensiveness that argumentative opponents often feel when discussing controversial issues so that all views may receive a fair hearing. Integrative rhetoric, according to Kroll, draws from the related but distinct fields of negotiation and mediation, both of which seek to shift the focus of a dispute from "conflicting positions" to "shared purposes" (16). Quoting feminist compositionist Catherine Lamb, Kroll notes that "the

goal of [integrative] argument...‘is no longer to win but to arrive at a solution in a just way that is acceptable to both sides’” (18). Finally, in deliberative rhetoric, which Kroll notes is “an ancient category” dating back to Aristotle, the ideal is a discussion-based approach that enacts or at least depicts “a process of ‘careful consideration before decision’” (19).<sup>4</sup> Though similar to the more common “delayed-thesis” method—in which a rhetor, to avoid putting off her audience at the outset, refrains from stating her position until the end of her argument—deliberative approaches, according to Kroll, can take multiple forms, including “advocating a synthesis of existing proposals,” enacting an “exploratory” method that considers multiple possibilities without advocating a particular one, and “reframing the problem in larger or more complex terms” (21-22). By discussing these various members of what he calls “the family of alternative approaches” to argument, Kroll hopes to “demonstrate the *options* that writers have at their disposal when they want to address controversial issues and disputed topics” (19; 12, emphasis added).

Following Kroll’s lead, I intend to discuss three other rhetorical methodologies that have the potential to serve as cooperative alternatives to the traditional approach: Rogerian rhetoric, antilogic (a form of sophistic rhetoric), and invitational rhetoric. Before giving an overview of these three additional alternatives, I want to say briefly what I mean by the term *cooperative*.<sup>5</sup> I understand *cooperative* to describe the kinds of argument that avoid the antagonism present in

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<sup>4</sup> Kroll acknowledges that his conception of deliberative rhetoric, in its discussion-based approach and its focus on “structural and strategic devices” rather than matters of public policy, differs from that of Aristotle (19).

<sup>5</sup> I briefly considered using the term *collaborative* rather than *cooperative*, but after comparing the dictionary definitions of the two terms, I discovered that, while the first sense given for both is virtually identical—it denotes “working together”—the third sense listed for *collaborate* means to betray one’s country by working with enemy forces (“Cooperate”; “Collaborate”). In an attempt to avoid any notion of betrayal—since part of the foundation of any cooperative rhetoric is mutual respect and trust—I chose *cooperative*.

much traditional rhetoric. By antagonism I mean not only verbal nastiness—*ad hominem* attacks, “dooming hollers,” sarcasm, deliberate misrepresentation of an opponent’s viewpoint—but also the actual argumentative structure, which in this case we might call “thesis-driven,” where the rhetor’s primary goal is to persuade her audience of an already established position. I do not argue, however, that persuasion itself is antithetical to cooperative rhetoric. Though two of the three approaches I discuss (Rogerian and invitational) repudiate direct persuasion—the intentional effort to change another person's mind—the third (antilogic) sees no problem with it as such. In other words, cooperative rhetoric (or cooperative argument) as I understand it may include, but does not necessarily include, attempts at persuasion, whereas traditional rhetoric, by definition, requires it. Further, even when cooperative rhetorics do include persuasion, it is rarely if ever a primary goal; instead, cooperative rhetorics tend to favor understanding and/or problem-solving as rhetorical ends.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the first of the cooperative rhetorical alternatives—what has come to be known as Rogerian rhetoric, or Rogerian argument. Developed from the “person-centered” therapeutic principles of Carl Rogers, a popular humanistic psychologist of the mid-twentieth century, this approach has stirred up a good deal of controversy in the field of rhetoric and composition. The heyday of this disciplinary debate, from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, was primarily concerned with whether rhetorical adaptations of Rogers’ principles, which were primarily dialogic and included empathic listening and client-directed change, were truly “Rogerian” and therefore constituted a New Rhetoric or whether they were simply a thinly disguised—and some would argue manipulative—version of traditional rhetoric. I argue that most adaptations—especially those that aim to persuade or that take place in a written context—

though they may be cooperative, cannot accurately be called Rogerian.<sup>6</sup> This is an important point because a misunderstanding and improper application of Rogers' principles, such as Knoblauch discovered in her textbook analysis, may preclude other useful extensions of his work that are based in a truly Rogerian context. After analyzing a couple of ostensibly Rogerian approaches to the invention stage of the writing process, I suggest three pedagogical sites in which those principles may be most usefully applied: peer review groups, student-teacher conferences, and writing center consultations—areas whose compatibility with a Rogerian approach has not, to my knowledge, been sufficiently explored.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the rhetorical practice of antilogic, an ancient discursive method that rhetorician Michael Mendelson argues originated with the sophist Protagoras (“Antilogical” 32). The practice assumes there are at least two perspectives on every issue and that the truth—which for antilogicians is always provisional—will be discovered during the process of deliberating on those perspectives (Mendelson, “Quintilian” 278). It is especially this emphasis on deliberation, or “tack[ing] back and forth among opposing positions,” that distinguishes antilogic from traditional rhetoric, which focuses instead on “the formal development of [the rhetor’s]...claim” (278).<sup>7</sup> However, the inherently oppositional nature of antilogic calls into question its validity as a *cooperative* rhetorical option, and so the bulk of my chapter on this approach is devoted to the claim that, upon closer examination, antilogic does indeed reflect

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<sup>6</sup> Kroll’s conciliatory rhetoric, which he identifies with Rogerian argument, is a perfect example of the kind approach that, because it ultimately privileges change in the audience over change in the rhetor, does not constitute a truly Rogerian approach. Kroll acknowledges this critique in a footnote (#3), but does not try to justify his position.

<sup>7</sup> I would argue that Kroll would find antilogic, an inherently discussion-based rhetoric, a more useful foundation for his deliberative approach than Aristotle, whose notion of deliberation Kroll had to redefine to fit his purposes (“Broadening” 19).

several cooperative traits. First, its purpose is cooperative because it emphasizes problem-solving over persuasion. Second, its method is cooperative because it values listening as much as speaking. Finally, its orientation is cooperative because it views the argumentative Other as an equal partner, rather than an inferior and passive audience. Having established that antilogic qualifies as a cooperative alternative to traditional rhetoric, I suggest ways to incorporate it into the composition classroom—as a pro/con writing assignment in which students must cogently argue two sides of a question; and, borrowing from Mendelson, as a form of role-playing intended to help students “enter into dialogue with another perspective” (“Quintilian” 289).

In Chapter 4, I take up one of the more fraught rhetorical alternatives: invitational rhetoric. According to Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, who developed this approach in their article “Beyond Persuasion,” invitational rhetoric is “built on the principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination rather than on the attempt to control others through persuasive strategies designed to effect change” (4-5). In my chapter, I address the contentious issue of rhetorical agency and whether it’s possible for an invitational rhetor to establish it, since this discursive method so strongly privileges understanding of and autonomy for the Other. My argument, a seemingly ironic one, is that invitational rhetors can create agency—or the “means to act”—through listening, an activity typically considered completely passive (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz 445). Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and feminist philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara, I contend that, though listening has in the rhetorical tradition of the West been considered inferior to speaking, it is in fact an active and necessary component of discursive

exchange that deserves equal theoretical and practical consideration.<sup>8</sup> Combining this revamped notion of listening with the theoretical work of invitational rhetoricians Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, I argue for what I call *invitational listening* as an active and at times even rebellious rhetorical alternative that grants rhetors agency in two ways: by helping rhetors create the condition of value for their audience, and by serving as a method of discursive re-sourcement. Finally, I borrow examples of classroom practice from Peter Elbow's *Believing Game* to demonstrate how invitational listening can be applied pedagogically.

As Abby Knoblauch, quoting Ramage, Bean, and Johnson, points out, expanding our rhetorical repertoire can help prevent “the ‘ossification’ of argument,” which takes place ““when one of many possibilities generated by a principle or insight is carried out to the detriment of other possibilities”” (263). It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to the elevation, not the detriment, of other argumentative possibilities.

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<sup>8</sup> Krista Ratcliffe argued for the importance of theorizing listening in her 1999 article “Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a ‘Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct.’”

CHAPTER 2  
ROGERIAN ALTERNATIVES: PERSON-CENTERED APPROACHES  
TO WRITING INSTRUCTION

The humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers inadvertently inspired a generation of rhetoricians and compositionists to apply his “person-centered” therapeutic principles to rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> The results of such disciplinary crossbreeding inspired in turn a wave of criticism that began to swell in the mid-1970s—beginning with Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike’s textbook *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*—and crested in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> While it is outside the scope of this paper to review the many insightful critiques from this period, I will discuss a particularly important critique, that of applying Rogerian principles to persuasive writing. This application has persisted into present pedagogy and has done the most to warp the original intentions of Rogers himself and, we might say, to ossify a potentially productive discussion of Rogerian rhetoric. Without an accurate understanding of Rogers’ person-centered principles, we will continue to see rhetorical strategies that have adopted the “Rogerian” label—such as those persuasion-based tactics that Abby Knoblauch discovered in her

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<sup>9</sup> In Rogers’ early career he labeled his approach “client-centered,” but as he and others began to apply his principles to work outside the therapeutic context, he broadened the term to “person-centered” (Rogers, *A Way of Being* 114-115).

<sup>10</sup> See also Lunsford, Mader, Ede, Pounds, Lassner, Brent (1991).

textbook analysis—but violate the Rogerian spirit. Such misguided applications of Rogers’ principles are especially problematic when we consider that other applications might be imagined, applications that truly represent alternatives to the persuasion-based, thesis-driven model of discourse. After discussing the many incompatibilities of Rogers’ principles with persuasive writing and attempting to establish the proper rhetorical context in which Rogers’ methods may be applied, I will examine one possibility which seems to have been too little explored in the scholarship of rhetoric and composition: using Rogerian principles as a method of invention. Finally, I will suggest three areas of composition pedagogy in which Rogers’ principles, correctly understood and applied, may be *most* useful: peer review groups, student-teacher conferences, and writing center consultations.

#### Carl Rogers and Person-Centered Counseling

Carl Rogers’ person-centered approach to therapy is based on the assumption that people “have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behavior.” For Rogers, the job of the therapist was to help a client access those inner resources by creating “a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes.” The first of these attitudes Rogers called *congruence*, a state in which “the therapist is openly being the feelings and attitudes that are flowing within at the moment.” By not erecting a “professional front or personal facade,” the therapist is in a better position to help the client grow (*A Way* 115). The second facilitative attitude a therapist needs to adopt is *acceptance*, or “unconditional positive regard.” Rogers claimed that complete acceptance of a client’s present state of being increased the likelihood of positive change. The final attitude of the

person-centered therapist, and the one that seemed most important to Rogers, is *empathic understanding*, in which a therapist seeks to grasp “the [client’s] feelings and personal meanings” and to convey that “understanding to the client.” A skilled therapist, practicing empathic understanding, can go beyond simply clarifying a client’s conscious feelings to help them become aware of feelings at the sub-conscious level (116). These three attitudes, carefully cultivated by the Rogerian therapist, are intended to produce similar attitudes within the client, thus “enabl[ing] the [client] to be a more effective growth-enhancer for himself or herself” (117).

I want to briefly highlight a key aspect of the attitude of empathic understanding—its non-directive nature. This is an aspect that Rogers himself found it necessary to clarify in the early formulation of his approach and is one that bears directly on my later discussion of the use of Rogers’ principles in persuasive rhetoric. In a 1946 article, “Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy,” Rogers pointed out that the therapist-client relationship was “more effective the more completely the counselor concentrate[d] upon trying to understand the client *as the client seems to himself*” (420, emphasis in original). If a therapist could do this, Rogers argued, the client “[could] do the rest” (421). Such faith in the client’s innate wisdom gradually shifted emphasis away from “the vestiges of subtle directiveness” that were present in early Rogerian therapy and toward the single purpose “of providing deep understanding and acceptance of the attitudes consciously held...by the client” (420-421). For Rogers, then, the therapist was purely a catalyst; the guiding force was the client.

Person-centered in philosophy, Rogers’ principles, when applied—both in the therapeutic and the communicative contexts—are thoroughly dialogic. The emphasis on dialogue—a term I use in the Bakhtinian sense of two actively responsive speakers participating in a communicative

exchange—is most clearly evident in what has come to be called the “restatement rule.” First formulated in Rogers’ article “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation,” in which Rogers suggests how his ideas might be applied to communication studies, the rule states that “[e]ach person can speak up for himself only *after* he has first restated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately, and to that speaker’s satisfaction” (85, emphasis in original). The situation imagined in this scenario is clearly a face-to-face, oral exchange. Doug Brent describes this exchange more explicitly in its therapeutic context: “Therapists continually repeat back their understanding of the client’s words in summary form to check their understanding of the client’s mental state” (“Ethical Growth” 75). Again, the immediacy of the verbal interaction is paramount.

#### Persuasive Writing and the Rogerian Context

The Rogerian discursive process entails a back-and-forth, real-time exchange that can only be enacted in a dialogic context. Written argument, however, makes such an exchange, if not impossible, then extremely difficult. How can a writer be assured that he has understood the position of his audience if they are not present to provide that assurance? How, sitting alone in front a computer, is he supposed to “say back” the thoughts and feelings of his readers before he builds his own argument? The solution offered by Young, Becker, and Pike, the originators of “Rogerian argument” via their textbook *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, is to take “especially great care...to state [the opponent’s] position well the first time” (qtd. in Kearney 172). However, considering that Rogers thought the task of empathic understanding was “one of the most difficult things” a person could attempt, the simplistic injunction to try harder the first time

seems almost comical (Rogers 85). Lisa Ede, in her critique of Young, Becker, and Pike, concurs: “Written communication, with its inevitable separation of writer and reader, seems to make genuine empathic understanding difficult” (46).

Julie Kearney offers two additional critiques of the application of Rogers’ principles to written argument in her article “Rogerian Principles and the Writing Classroom.” First, after noting the qualifications that “even the staunchest supporters of using Rogerian principles for writing” must make—namely, reserving instruction in written Rogerian argument to students who already understand the basics of rhetoric and are adept writers—she points out that even then the roles of the original Rogerian context and that of “Rogerian rhetoric” get confused (178). The writer, presumably the corollary to the Rogerian therapist—who enacts a receptive, listening stance—nevertheless adopts “the communicative role of the client” by crafting an argument to present to her audience (178). Such a confusion of roles, Kearney rightly suggests, demonstrates the incompatibility of Rogerian principles and written argument. Second, while she acknowledges that expressivist approaches to writing—which foreground the writer’s individual development and the cultivation of her unique voice—may be more in tune with Rogers’ therapeutic approach in regards to student/client self-actualization,<sup>11</sup> Kearney argues that such views neglect “the fundamental goal of any writing classroom:” to produce writing that can communicate to a remote audience (179).

In addition to emphasizing dialogue, Rogers also insisted—as I mentioned earlier—that the therapist only facilitated a client’s healing, which was ultimately accomplished and directed by the client herself. According to Rogers, “the individual has an enormous capacity for

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<sup>11</sup> Kay Halasek makes this argument in “The Fully Functioning Person, the Fully Functioning Writer,” pages 141-158 in Teich.

adaptation and for readjustment” and “[i]t is this strength within the individual, not the strength within the counselor, upon which we must rely” (qtd. in Kearney 170, emphasis in original). The Rogerian therapist, then, has no particular agenda for the client, no predetermined goal toward which she is guiding her patient.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, any attempt to use Rogerian strategies to persuade a reader or listener must be seen as, in Rogers’ own words, “a perversion of my thinking” (Teich, “Conversation” 155). Ede, in her critique of Young et al, quotes Rogers as an elaboration on this point: “*Client-centered counseling, if it is to be effective, cannot be a trick or a tool. It is not a subtle way of guiding the client while pretending to let him guide himself. To be effective, it must be genuine*” (44, emphasis Ede’s).

Despite Rogers’ insistence on non-direction, however, the use of his principles to teach persuasive writing strategies has persisted. Just a few years after Ede published “Is Rogerian Rhetoric Really Rogerian?,” Bonnie Devet published “Rewriting Classical Persuasion as Rogerian Argumentation,” in which she suggests using Maxine Hairston’s interpretation of Young, Becker, and Pike’s “Rogerian rhetoric” as a cooperative complement to traditional, Aristotelian persuasion. Though she describes the “Rogerian” approach as a way to “defuse...hostility and...arrive at a common ground of understanding,” Devet’s desired outcome, as expressed by the article’s title and the comments of Devet’s students, is still persuasion (9). Richard Coe, in “Classical and Rogerian Persuasion: An Archaeological/Ecological Explication,” provides a more thoughtful argument for using Rogerian strategies to persuade by discussing the different rhetorical contexts in which Aristotelian and Rogerian argument would be appropriate. The former, Coe argues, arose in the triadic context of the courtroom, where litigants do not

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<sup>12</sup> Diane Mader makes a strong case for this claim in “What Are They Doing to Carl Rogers?”

“expect to convince the defense attorney, just the judge and jury,” while the latter was created for the dyadic exchange between two partners in a therapeutic exercise (86-88). However, Coe’s argument gets flimsy when he asserts that one can safely separate Rogerian ends (client-directed change) from Rogerian strategies (empathic understanding) and use the latter to persuade (88-89). As Doug Brent points out in his response to critiques of Rogerian rhetoric, when it is viewed as mere technique, “like a rhetorical torque wrench,” it is “always open to the charge that it doesn’t always turn the nut or that it turns one that should not be turned” (85).<sup>13</sup> Finally, James T. Davis, in a recent short article, demonstrates, through an analysis of a website claiming to offer “Rogerian” essay-writing tips, that interpretations of Rogers’ principles have become so warped that there are now rhetorical models supposedly based on his ideas that in fact deceive their audience with a “hook framed in a facade of common ground” (330). Such a perversion was of course never the intention of compositionists like Hairston or Young, Becker, and Pike, but we can perhaps say that it was made possible by their formalization (ossification?) of Rogers’ methods and their attempt to apply them to written, persuasive argument.

## Rogers and Invention

It would seem, then, that only a non-directive, dialogic context would be appropriate for the application of Rogerian principles in teaching composition, and it is true that I plan to suggest three such contexts later in this chapter. First, though, I want to examine the argument for using these principles in a specific stage of the composing process: invention. This argument was

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<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Teich emphasizes this point in “Rogerian Problem-Solving and the Rhetoric of Argumentation” when he notes Rogers’ vehement opposition to the “labeling of his principles as strategies, techniques or steps to be abstracted from the specific therapeutic situation and applied formulaically” (60-61, footnote #8).

forwarded by at least two scholars—Doug Brent and Rebecca Stephens—in the 1990s, but seems to have failed to take hold. Stephens, in her article “Rogerian Principles and the Invention Process,” suggests that scholars have prevented fruitful exploration of Rogerian principles and their possible applications to composition pedagogy by focusing too much attention on the issue of persuasion and whether it constitutes a distortion of Rogers’ ideas (162). A better use of energy and research, she argues, would be to try applying those ideas at the invention stage of the writing process. Such an application would “provide a workable combination of flexibility and structure not possible in the later stages of arrangement,” which is where early adaptations of Rogerian principles were focused (162).<sup>14</sup> Claiming that the arrangement-focused models lacked emotional depth and specific guidelines, Stephens offers a “Rogerian Invention Heuristic,” a lengthy series of questions about a particular issue intended to help students develop “the depth of perception needed to bring about true empathic understanding” of that issue and the people involved in it (162). Her method, which she tried out on a class of first-year writers at the University of South Florida, entailed leading the students in a discussion to choose a topic to which they would apply the heuristic, then pairing them to answer each question. Stephens discourages students from doing research on the topic before using the heuristic, claiming the opinions of “experts” may unduly influence students’ “free thinking” (165). She encourages, however, any shifts in thinking that occur as a result of the in-class invention exercise, as changes in perspective are “in keeping with Rogerian principles” (165). After completing the heuristic, students may then apply the argument they have “invented” to a Rogerian framework à la Young, Becker, and Pike or to a “traditional Aristotelian approach” (165).

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<sup>14</sup> I.e., those of Hairston and Young, Becker, and Pike.

While I applaud Stephens' attempt to encourage depth of feeling and breadth of perspective in her students, I do not find her heuristic to be particularly Rogerian. Despite the specificity of the questions and their success in stimulating thoughtful discussion, a heuristic is not a human, and therefore no real dialogue is taking place. The heuristic does not confirm or deny the students' accurate understanding of the issue or the people involved. Indeed, the students are not even acting as "one side" of the discussion, as in typical Rogerian models; they are merely imagining a discussion between or among *other* people. For example, one of the questions from the heuristic asks, "[w]hat are the major points of view...on the issue?" Another asks, "[w]hat kinds of people or groups hold these views" (164). The level of detachment apparent in these and other questions from Stephens' heuristic reflect the method's non-Rogerian nature. Further, to discourage students from researching the topic they will discuss seems to guarantee they will misunderstand the issue's complexity and be forced to fall back on unexamined cultural and personal assumptions when responding to the heuristic. Though Stephens notes that when students began answering a particular question vaguely, others with more experience in that area were able to add concrete details to the issue, still the overall process seems to be mostly a guessing game.

I do not mean to denigrate Stephens' efforts to spark nuanced conversations about complex issues; certainly the heuristic she offers presents students with a way to think through a topic much more thoroughly than they would be likely to do on their own. I only mean to challenge her labeling the heuristic Rogerian since it does not involve actual dialogue with actual

people holding actual (and emotionally-charged) positions. For an invention exercise that to me more accurately represents the principles of Carl Rogers, we must turn to the work of Doug Brent.

In “Rogerian Rhetoric: Ethical Growth Through Alternative Forms of Argumentation,” Brent argues, like Stephens, that invention is the proper place to apply Rogerian principles; but the parallels the two scholars stop there. Brent recognizes that empathic understanding “does not come easily” and therefore recommends creating classroom conditions that allow students to “practice Rogerian reflection and the Rogerian attitude long enough for it to sink in” (78). One way to create such conditions, according to Brent, is to “set up a dialectical situation in which *students can practice on real, present people,*” thereby approximating the original Rogerian therapeutic context (78, my emphasis). Here Brent has made a significant departure from Stephens’ heuristic approach, which has students conversing not with each other in a live exchange but with an inert list of questions.<sup>15</sup>

Next, Brent describes his method for setting up these one-to-one Rogerian exchanges. Like Stephens, he allows the class to choose their own issue. However, he differs from Stephens in two important ways. First, he does not avoid, as Stephens does, issues to which students have a strong emotional attachment.<sup>16</sup> Though he acknowledges the reason some scholars sidestep explosive topics—namely, their tendency to “produce intractable positions”—Brent maintains, that such topics “are precisely the ones in which Rogerian rhetoric is most necessary” (92-93,

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<sup>15</sup> While it is true that Stephens puts her students in discussion groups during her invention exercise, their discussion centers on their responses to the heuristic, not on their own deeply held and possibly conflicting views on a particular issue.

<sup>16</sup> In her article, Stephens recommends subjects “in which students have a rational—not a deeply emotional—interest” (163).

footnote #3). Rogers himself would agree: “It is just when emotions are strongest that it is most difficult to achieve the frame of reference of the other person or group. Yet it is the time the attitude is most needed, if communication is to be established” (86). Second, Brent does not oppose students researching their topic prior to the in-class discussions. Although he typically relies on students’ prior knowledge, he encourages “more advanced classes...to research the topic beforehand” (79). By allowing, and in some cases encouraging, students to familiarize themselves with an issue before discussing it, Brent offers his students a better chance than Stephens’ to achieve real communication.

Once the students have a topic, they “identify themselves with one side or the other” (79). Brent then selects a volunteer from both groups “to engage in a public Rogerian discussion,” which is conducted according to Rogers’ “restatement rule.” Brent describes the process his class goes through:

Neither person can mention their own view until they have restated the other person’s *to that person’s satisfaction*. Thus the first “round” would consist of student A stating an argument, student B *restating* that argument in summary form, and student A either agreeing that the summary is accurate or attempting to correct it. This goes on until student A is happy with the summary; then student B gets a turn to state his or her own point of view (*not* to refute A) (79, emphasis in original).

Brent acknowledges that the process often devolves into heated argument and “more straw men begin flying about than in the monkey attack from the *The Wizard of Oz*” (79). However, he maintains that such breakdowns in communication are all part of the exercise, and he uses those “failures” to help students “see the difference between [antagonistic debate] and true Rogerian discussion” (79-80).

So what does this elaborate exercise have to do with invention? For Brent, the face-to-face oral dialogue is the first in a series of exercises that aim to prepare students for “the more difficult imaginative task of the distanced written conversation” (78).<sup>17</sup> The second phase of this series involves pairs of students writing down an argument, exchanging that argument with their partner, then attempting to write an accurate summary of their partner’s argument. As in the face-to-face exercise, students receive direct feedback (in writing this time) about the accuracy of their summary (80). Finally, Brent asks students to write a “Rogerian” response to an absent audience, often one that “embod[ies] worldviews that [the students] do not share” (81). Presumably, having gone through the first two exercises, students have grasped Rogerian principles well enough to apply them in an argument written to a remote reader.<sup>18</sup>

So we have returned to the problem of using Rogers’ ideas in the context of written argument, a feat that I have just argued is all but impossible. Brent also acknowledges the difficulty, pointing out that “[a] writer is in a much worse position than the therapist,” since “writing does not allow the back-and-forth movement of face-to-face conversation that makes possible the continual readjustment of the discourse” (78). He is confident, however, that with slightly relaxed standards students can still “learn how to apply a form of Rogerian principles in writing” (78). Their training with these principles involves two complimentary practices: “imagining with empathy” and “reading with empathy.” In the first, students must attempt to reconstruct and understand the worldview in which an opposing position would make sense, a

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<sup>17</sup> Brent takes care to note, however, that the oral exercise is no “mere warm-up” but is instead central to the process of Rogerian argument since it initiates students into “a process of mutual exploration” and “a way of seeing” that differ dramatically from that of traditional debate (79-80).

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed example of this final exercise, see pages 81-84 of Brent’s article.

task more complex and difficult than merely “imagining an isolated set of arguments” (78). Such “imaginative reconstruction” would presumably serve students in their effort to, as Rogers put it, “understand *with* a person, not *about* him” (Brent 78; “Communication” 85, emphasis in original). For “reading with empathy,” Brent asks students to “Rogerize” their research by placing the information they find “in the context of the arguments that support them” and by viewing “those arguments in the context of other worldviews” (78).<sup>19</sup> Brent illustrates this practice when he describes how he and his students painted an imaginary but informed and humane picture of newspaper columnist Catherine Ford, who wrote an essay to which the students would later respond (82).

Can these two practices bridge the contextual gap created by the attempt to adapt orally-based, therapeutic principles to written argumentative discourse? Does such discourse merit the label “Rogerian”? Certainly Brent’s approach comes much closer to the spirit of Rogers’ work than does Stephens’. His insistence on face-to-face dialogue, at least at the beginning of his assignment series; his encouragement of research embedded in an empathic context; and his willingness to let students discuss emotionally-charged issues show him to be keenly aware of and committed to Rogerian principles. By contrast, Stephens’ heuristic, with its “emotionally-neutral” topics, lack of background knowledge (for the student), and absence of dialogue clearly fails to earn that label. Nevertheless, we still must ask: is Brent’s approach truly Rogerian?

Part of the answer may come from Rogers himself. Although, as Julie Kearney points out, Rogers’ principles were developed for the therapist-client relationship—a relationship that Jim Corder rightly suggests is not analogous to the rhetor-audience relationship (21)—it is clear from

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<sup>19</sup> I take full credit (responsibility?) for the term “Rogerize.”

Rogers' later work and writings that he eventually began to experiment with the applicability of those principles to other contexts. One of the earliest of those new applications, and the one most directly concerned with the relation of Rogers' work to rhetoric, was to the field of communications. Rogers' short but highly influential article "Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation," originally published in 1951, was primarily an attempt to show how the approach to therapy he had developed could also be used for "improving or facilitating communication" (83). Despite his confidence in the applicability of his principles, he recognized that some would question his crossbreeding, and so he devoted the beginning of his article to establishing a link between psychotherapy and communications (83). That done, he laid out his hypothesis for establishing mutual communication between people in conflict—that "listen[ing] with understanding" provides a way to bypass the communicative barrier inherent in "our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person"—context not quite analogous to the therapeutic situation but nevertheless suited to his principles (84).

So Rogers has taken us from therapy to communication.<sup>20</sup> What about the leap from speaking to writing? Does Rogers offer any advice here? Yes and no. Rogers suggested, in a 1985 interview with Nathaniel Teich, that though such pursuits were not a "primary interest" of his, he believed his ideas could be applied in writing ("Conversation" 58). He even offered an example of how he tried to use his own principles in his correspondence:

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<sup>20</sup> Since this chapter deals with *rhetoric*, which some distinguish from communication, it is important here to note the definition of *rhetoric* I am working from. I have in mind Wayne Booth's "extremely broad" version: "the entire range of arts of communication, ranging from the production of misunderstanding or mere winning to the removal of *mis*understanding, repeating I.A. Richards's definition" ("Blind" 382, emphasis in original).

If I get a quite emotional letter, I go through it to try to figure out what this person is feeling. What are the strongest feelings? Then I write a letter in which I recognize and accept these feelings. I do not try to argue the feelings down, though sometimes I express my own quite different feelings. [...] I think that, by showing a nonjudgmental acceptance of their feelings, it makes them more able to read about my feelings, which may be quite different (59).

Though, as Kearney notes in her discussion of this passage, Rogers offers no concrete formula for using his principles in writing, that doesn't mean his example and the spirit that informs it cannot be used as a starting point for written Rogerian rhetoric (Kearney 179). Indeed, much of what Rogers describes above—the attempt to “figure out” and “recognize” the other person's feelings, followed by a statement of the author's own feelings—recalls Brent's “imaginative reconstruction” and “Rogerian argument.” Rogers even answers affirmatively Teich's question whether a writer would need to “try to create an imaginary empathic dialogue without...face-to-face oral feedback,” exactly the situation Brent describes for his composition assignment. The key difference, I would argue, is in the intent of the author. For Brent, the goal is persuasion. In the assignment where his students were to respond to a column by Catherine Ford, he instructs them to use “Rogerian strategies *to convince her to moderate her position*” (82, my emphasis). By contrast, Rogers is as adamant as ever that understanding is the only goal. “The so-called reflection of feeling or...restatement,” he says in response to a comment from Teich about his “restatement rule,” “has no value in itself except as a means of checking my understanding. If I'm really trying to understand you, then I need to check my understanding” (59). To emphasize, he adds that if someone told him his reflection of their feelings was inaccurate, he “would accept that immediately” since “the person with the feelings knows whether I'm right or wrong” (60). The only time Rogers mentions something that even comes close to persuasion is when he

admits to expressing his own feelings after acknowledging those of the other, and even then it's only "sometimes" and only to achieve understanding; he is only asking the other person to extend to him the same empathic understanding he himself has offered (59).

My conclusion, then, is that Brent's focus on persuasion ultimately makes his approach incompatible with Rogers' principles. Even though the approaches are alike in most respects, the fact that Rogers considered the use of his ideas for persuasive purposes a "perversion" and "the opposite of" his thinking cannot be ignored (55-56). However, if we stop short of Brent's final assignment (the persuasive letter to Catherine Ford), we have two classroom practices—the "public Rogerian discussion" and the dialogic writing exercise, both of which enact the "restatement rule"—that offer useful ways to implement Rogers' principles.

### Rogers on the Periphery

Since previous attempts to apply Rogerian principles to composition pedagogy have met with minimal success, I want to conclude by suggesting three areas in which Rogers' principles might be most useful: peer review groups, student-teacher conferences, and writing center consultations. These areas constitute what I am calling the "pedagogical periphery," sites of writing instruction that occupy the "edges" of the curriculum, at least from the instructor's perspective. First, the peer review group seems suited to the Rogerian approach. Kearney makes this connection in her discussion of Peter Elbow's *Believing Game*, noting that it is "designed for small groups in an oral setting," just the situation Rogers described in his 1951 article (Kearney 179; Rogers 86-87).<sup>21</sup> Kearney also asserts that the *Believing Game*'s "reciprocal nature...is at the

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<sup>21</sup> In Chapter 4, I discuss the *Believing Game* again in relation to invitational rhetoric.

heart of Rogers's principles for counseling" and concludes that the game's "oral, small-group, and arhetorical" context constitutes the "most appropriate home" for Rogers' principles in composition pedagogy (180).<sup>22</sup> The second context potentially well-suited to a Rogerian approach is the student-teacher conference. Kearney notes this possibility in passing, but it seems to bear further exploration (177). Many teachers, it seems, tend to use these conferences as a time to help students revise or edit their papers; however, with a non-directive dialogic approach, such interactions might offer students the chance to really explore ideas or concerns with those papers or with the class in general. Rather than come to the conference with an agenda, the teacher might allow the student to direct the conversation and focus instead on reflecting back the student's concerns and trying to "achieve the [student's] frame of reference" in regard to the assignment, the class, or even the teacher (Rogers, "Communication" 86).

The third and perhaps most promising arena of composition pedagogy that would benefit from Rogers' communicative insights is the writing center consultation. Muriel Harris, in her article "Talking in the Middle," asserts that a writing center's "primary responsibility" is "to work one-to-one with writers" (27). Further, she points out that because a tutor doesn't "take attendance, make assignments, set deadlines, deliver negative comments, give tests, or issue grades"—in other words, because a tutor doesn't *evaluate*, students perceive them more favorably than they do their teacher (28). Since Rogers insisted that "the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our...tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove," a context that seeks to avoid that evaluation, such as the writing center consultation, would be receptive to Rogerian principles (Rogers, "Communication" 84). Lastly, and most importantly in

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<sup>22</sup> Doug Brent provides a strong critique of the possibility of "arhetorical" language in his article "Young, Becker, and Pike's 'Rogerian' Rhetoric: A Twenty-Year Reassessment" (458-459).

terms of paralleling Rogerian concepts, tutoring sessions make use of what Douglas Barnes calls “exploratory talk,” in which students can “represent to themselves what they currently understand and then *if necessary*...criticize and change it” (qtd. in Harris 31, emphasis added). The student-directed nature of this kind of discussion, along with its non-evaluative orientation, makes the writing center consultation singularly suited to the principles of Carl Rogers.

I offer these pedagogical fliers in hope that others will explore them further. Though many scholars appear to have abandoned Rogerian principles to what Abby Knoblauch has shown to be their truncated—and in many cases, warped—treatment in contemporary composition textbooks, I am not convinced that we have exhausted their possibilities. We may not be able to use Rogers’ ideas to craft a persuasive argument, but that does not mean all pedagogical applications of his approach are off the table. If we look beyond the composing phase of the writing process to the pedagogical periphery, we will find possibilities for applying Rogerian principles that so far have been largely unexplored. It is not until we have correctly understood the Rogerian approach that we can begin to explore its most fruitful uses for rhetoric and composition; once clarified, however, Rogers’ principles have the potential to produce multiple rhetorical alternatives that promote understanding and cooperation.

CHAPTER 3  
COMPOSITION, COOPERATION, AND ANTILOGIC: A SOPHISTICAL  
ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL ARGUMENT

“[A]rgument...is always a relationship.”  
—Michael Mendelson

“Even when thinking privately, ‘I’ can never escape the other selves which I have taken in to make ‘myself,’ and my thought will thus always be a dialogue.”  
—Wayne Booth

“After all, our thought itself...is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought...”  
--Mikhail Bakhtin

Although Rogerian rhetoric precludes any attempt to persuade, that does not mean that persuasion is forbidden as a rule in cooperative alternatives to traditional rhetoric. Though never a primary goal of cooperative rhetorics, the intentional effort to change another person’s mind may nevertheless be present, provided that other conditions are met. One rhetorical alternative that features persuasion yet maintains a cooperative focus is the ancient sophistic practice of antilogic. Antilogic refers to the practice of placing one argument in direct opposition to another or in recognizing and pointing out such opposition (Kerferd 63). The concept and practice of this approach to argument likely originated with Protagoras, the fifth-century B.C.E. Greek sophist who is perhaps most famous for his assertion that “[o]f all things the measure is [humanity], of

things that are that they are, of things that are not that they are not” (qtd. in Mendelson, *Many Sides* 3).<sup>23</sup> The specific Protagorean dictum responsible for the development of antilogic—“on every issue there are two arguments...opposed to each other on everything”—suggests further that opposition is in fact inherent in every claim, not merely something created by a rhetor or her opponent (qtd. in Mendelson, *Many Sides* 47). Many scholars infer that Protagoras drew his insight about the reality of inherently opposed arguments from an older cultural notion that suggested that reality itself was defined by opposition (Mendelson, *Many Sides* 48; Donovan 42).<sup>24</sup>

It might be asked how an approach to argument that implies innate opposition not only in arguments but in the phenomenal world itself can serve as a *cooperative* rhetorical alternative to the traditional model. In other words, how does a rhetorical approach qualify as “cooperative”? I have identified three questions to which cooperative rhetorics provide similar responses.

Question 1: what is the purpose of rhetoric? Question 2: what is the rhetorical role of listening?

Question 3: what is the status of the discursive Other? Traditional rhetoric would answer that the purpose of rhetoric is for the rhetor to persuade his or her audience, the role of listening is to help the audience receive the rhetor’s persuasive message, and the status of the Other is that of a passive, less-informed recipient of that message. Cooperative rhetorics, by contrast, would say that rhetoric’s purpose is to increase understanding or solve a problem, that the role of listening

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<sup>23</sup> The substitution of “humanity” for “man” in the quote from Protagoras is Mendelson’s.

<sup>24</sup> Kerferd notes that Plato held this view of the contradictory nature of the phenomenal world as well and that this belief drove him to dialectic, by which he pursued a reality that was unchanging and eternal. That Protagoras and the sophists who came after him appeared content to concern themselves only with the impermanent phenomenal world, Kerferd suggests, engendered Plato’s distrust of them (66-67).

is to facilitate such understanding among and within *all* discursive participants, and that the status of the Other is that of an equally contributing partner in the rhetorical pursuit. Having established criteria by which to judge whether a rhetorical method is cooperative, I will now apply that criteria to antilogic. Following my analysis, I will suggest ways in which antilogic can be introduced into composition pedagogy as a cooperative alternative to the thesis-driven approach.

Concerning the purpose of rhetoric, antilogic aims in short at problem solving. While it might seem as though antilogic's insistence on contradiction would result in endless bickering or pointless speculation, rhetorician Michael Mendelson claims that a "practical demand for workable solutions" keeps this possibility in check ("Quintilian" 287). As Mendelson notes in his article "The Antilogical Alternative," the tradition of antilogic "presents a well-established pedagogical framework that...seeks to employ rhetorical education as a means for cultivating the ability to find solutions to problems between people" (34). Elsewhere, Mendelson claims that the goal of antilogic is the "resolution of the common good" (*Many Sides* 103). And Nathan Crick argues that "the method of invention known as *dissoi logoi*," or contrasting arguments—a close rhetorical relative of antilogic—proposes that those who disagree are capable of producing "a new hypothesis that might satisfy both parties if tested in cooperative action" (36). There is a clear emphasis in the above statements on working together, co-operating, to discover mutually beneficial solutions. Such pragmatic cooperation stands in stark contrast to other, more conventional rhetorical forms such as dialectic, which "compels assent through force of reasoning" (Mendelson, "Quintilian" 278).

It might be argued that Aristotle's rhetoric, which I do not consider cooperative, includes problem solving as one of its goals. Certainly the aim of deliberative rhetoric, if not of epideictic or forensic rhetoric, is to decide how to handle practical matters of governance. It might be further suggested that Aristotle even makes room for a kind of antilogic when he writes that "one should be able to argue persuasively on either side of a question" (34). However, the full statement from Aristotle reveals his reason for urging orators to develop this ability: they should do so "in order that it may not escape [their] notice what the real state of the case is and that [they]...may be able to refute if another person uses speech unjustly" (34). For Aristotle, then, there is always already a "right" or at least "best possible" side to every argument, and part of the rhetor's job is to know the "wrong" side well enough to recognize and refute it if her opponent tries to put it forward, not to entertain it as a viable perspective. By contrast, antilogic postpones judgment of right/wrong, better/worse until *after* a discussion has taken place, following its assumption "that the 'truth' *will reveal itself* in mixed form as a provisional agreement among the parties involved" (Mendelson, "Quintilian" 278, my emphasis). Therefore, Aristotle's rhetoric, because it assumes the rhetor has already committed to a claim before presenting it to her audience, is not geared toward cooperative problem-solving.

Next is the role and practice of listening in antilogic. Listening did not receive much attention in the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric; energy and effort were instead given to probing Truth and conveying that Truth to those who, it was assumed, lacked the capacity to perceive it on their own (I.ii.12).<sup>25</sup> In antilogic, however, listening does have a rhetorical part to play. It is worth noting that Protagoras himself was praised by none other than Socrates for being

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<sup>25</sup> I explore the absence of listening in traditional rhetoric further in Chapter 4.

“perfectly capable,” after asking a question, “of waiting and listening to the answer—a rare accomplishment” (qtd. in Mendelson, *Many Sides* 114). This skill is one that, as Mendelson points out, Socrates seemed to lack, or at least not to practice in his own “dialogues,” in which he was often the only questioner, had already determined the goal of the conversation, and allowed other voices that were “most often foils for...himself” (114). The purpose of listening in antilogic, then, is to allow space for *all* perspectives to be voiced and heard so that “the fullest possible understanding of the subject” under discussion may be achieved (114-115). As sophistic rhetoric scholar John Poulakos puts it, “in order to understand an issue, one must be prepared to listen to at least two contrary sides” (*Sophistical Rhetoric* 58). Mendelson acknowledges, however, that although antilogic emphasizes the right for every argument to “receive fair hearing,” not every argument contributes equally “to enhanced understanding,” and “[i]t is the work of practical judgment” to discern the appropriate course of action among multiple perspectives (115). Nevertheless, the rationale for an emphasis on listening remains: any perspective “may possess the germ of an idea that leads to better understanding” (115).

Undergirding this insistence on the importance of listening is the concept of the partiality of any single perspective. As Mendelson explains, “no argument on its own is more than partial; no claim, regardless of how dominant, more than probable.” Consequently, a “single argument standing by itself is a false synecdoche, a part pretending to be the whole” (113). What follows from this is the notion that every “position, stand or logos in any argument...always exists in relationship with others” (113). As a result of this relational aspect of argument, an antilogical rhetor must first acknowledge the incompleteness of his own perspective as well as the corollary fact that there is more to be said on the subject, then he must listen to those divergent and

conflicting perspectives in order to begin to understand the problem in its fullness. A traditional rhetor, by contrast, “thinks through” the issue and constructs a solution prior to dialogical engagement and then spends his energy defending that solution against perspectives that, because of the “many-sided” nature of argument, are already an implied part of his own one-sided position. Were he to acknowledge the partiality of his argument and open himself to other perspectives, he would be risking having to change his mind, either by abandoning or at least altering his original position (cf. Mendelson, “Quintilian” 288). For the traditional rhetor, operating under the assumptions of “the Argument Culture” (Tannen), such a change of mind would be tantamount to “losing,” whereas the antilogical rhetor would consider it merely part of the collaborative and relational process of many-sided debate.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly in making a case for the cooperative potential of antilogic, we must look at the role of the argumentative Other. For if, as in traditional rhetoric, the Other plays the role of combatant, against whom we will “win” or “lose,” or mere recipient, to whom we impart “truth,” there can be no *co*-operation.<sup>27</sup> A cooperative rhetoric, however,

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<sup>26</sup> The willingness of the rhetor to change her own mind is a principle that each of the rhetorical alternatives I discuss in this thesis share. Rogers points out that if a person is “willing to enter [another’s] private world and see the way life appears to him...[he] runs the risk of being changed [himself]” (“Communication” 86). And Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin identify the “willingness to yield” as a key attitude of the practitioner of invitational rhetoric, noting that rhetors who “assume such a stance” display “a willingness to call into question the beliefs they consider most inviolate and to relax their grip on those beliefs” (7-8).

<sup>27</sup> The prefix “co-” can mean “in or to the same degree” as well as “having a...lesser share of duty or responsibility” (“Co-,” def. 2; def. 3b). It can also denote “with” or “together” (def. 1). An argumentative other participating as a “recipient,” then, could be said to be “cooperating” in the sense of definitions 1 and 3b, but not in the sense of definition 2. A “combatant” could “cooperate” in the sense of definition 2, but not in the sense of definitions 1 or 3b. The kind of cooperating I mean, and which I believe is implied in antilogical argument, is that in which the other works “with” the rhetor “in or to the same degree;” in other words, a combination of definitions 1 and 2.

presents an image of the Other as an equal participant in the argumentative encounter. How does antilogic view this Other? Sharon Crowley offers a clue in her discussion of sophistic pedagogy, a methodology that includes more than just antilogic but that is still grounded in Protagorean principles. In addition to requiring students to imitate their speeches, Crowley explains, sophistic teachers “engaged their students in conversation, in a *mutual give-and-take* which was intended, unlike Platonic dialogue, to allow both learner and teacher to achieve new insights” (“Plea” 329, emphasis mine). While we might debate whether there can ever be true equality between teacher and student, since the teacher has evaluative power that the student lacks, it is nevertheless true that the situation Crowley describes represents at least an effort to achieve equality between rhetors, and one that, even by contemporary standards, seems radical. In her rehabilitative study of the sophists, Susan Jarratt confirms Crowley’s assertion that, in sophistic pedagogy, the Other was equal. Quoting Eric Havelock, Jarratt writes, “[t]he sophist ‘did not seek to place the pupil at an intellectual disadvantage as compared with the teacher,’ waiting instead to hear a response which the teacher would take into serious consideration toward the outcome of the discussion” (106). There is clear emphasis here on the Other working “with” the rhetor “in or to the same degree,” i.e., equally, in the argumentative exchange (see footnote #27).

The above examples describe the perspective of sophistic pedagogy generally. What about antilogic in particular? First, there is the terminology Mendelson uses to denote the Other. He calls them “partners in controversy” (“The Antilogical” 33). *Partner* is a word rich in suggestive meanings. It can denote “either of two persons who dance together” (def. 2b), a meaning that calls to mind Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By*. In the book, after demonstrating the pervasiveness of the argument-as-war metaphor in Western culture, the

authors contemplate the conceptual ramifications of imagining and talking about argument not as war, but as a dance (4-5). While one could argue that in war the rivals might well consider each other equals, since to think of the other as “less-than” might prove a fatal underestimation, certainly there is in no sense a cooperative element in that encounter. In dance, by contrast, not only are the partners presumably equal in skill, but they also must work together to achieve their goal of a fluid and beautiful performance. Another definition of *partner* is “one of two or more persons who play together in a game against an opposing side” (def. 2c). Again, as in the previous sense, the element of working together is explicit. What is new is the notion of working together *against an opponent*, an idea with important implications for an antilogical understanding of argument. For traditional rhetors, the Other *is* the opponent—the one to be defeated, convinced, or at least defended against. With antilogic, however, there is an important shift: the Other joins forces with the rhetor, leaving a vacancy in the “opponent position,” a vacancy filled by the problem that the “partners in controversy” seek to solve. As Mendelson puts it, “[a]ntilogic insists on difference in order to get things done through discourse, to solve problems; but the problem exists for both participants, so one’s opponent in debate becomes an ally in the search for understanding” (*Many Sides* 122). Similar in meaning to *partner*, *ally* adds the sense of being “a helper,” which connotes giving direct aid rather than merely being “on the same team” (def. 3). Also, the sense of “being associated with another by treaty or league” suggests a pact or formal commitment to work together against the opposition (def. 1).

Since antilogic “insists on difference,” it is necessary to have a principle in place to keep discussion from becoming too discordant. Mendelson argues that in Plato’s *Protagoras*, the sophist supplies such a principle—*aidos*, or “respect”—when recounting his “Great Myth”

(*Many Sides* 121). According to Protagoras, *aidos* was a god-given gift intended to bring humans together in social harmony and enable them found cities and defend themselves (121).

Mendelson connects the Protagorean myth with the Protagorean practice of antilogic to suggest that respect for others (*aidos*) plays an important role in both (121). He then offers an example from the *Protagoras*, in which the discussion between Socrates and the sophist has escalated emotionally to the point that Socrates is ready to abandon it. Before that happens, however, Prodicus pleads with the two to continue their conversation as a “discussion, not a dispute,” the former being “carried on among friends with good will” (121). In this way Mendelson establishes respect for the Other as a necessary and conciliatory feature of antilogic.

Antilogic, then, demonstrates its cooperative potential in each of the three areas examined above. It emphasizes problem-solving, which necessitates that the parties involved work together. It foregrounds listening, a habit largely absent from traditional conceptions of rhetoric and one that, in antilogic, ensures all perspectives, partial though they are, will be heard for what they might contribute to understanding of the problem at hand. Finally, antilogic views the argumentative Other as a respected equal, partner, and ally with whom to address a commonly shared problem.

### Antilogic in the Composition Classroom

One way to incorporate the Protagorean method of argument is to assign a “pro/con” essay, in which students must choose a polarized issue and make an argument for both sides of the debate.<sup>28</sup> It will be important to explain to students that they need to do more than just

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<sup>28</sup> Though Mendelson repeatedly (and rightly) acknowledges, and the title of his book *Many Sides* makes clear, that most contentious issues have more than two sides, it seems most

*present* opposing viewpoints; they will need to actually make a case for them, as though they themselves agreed with each perspective. In a sense, this assignment asks students to role play, since at least one of the perspectives they argue for will be one with which they do not identify. And, as Mendelson notes in his discussion of antilogical pedagogy, role playing “allows students to distance themselves from the grip of dogmatic assumptions and explore unexamined partialities” (“Quintilian” 289). There are pitfalls, however, that teachers should watch out for when assigning this kind of pro/con essay. One is that students may misunderstand the injunction to argue both sides and simply summarize them instead, taking no position rather than two. To avoid this outcome, teachers might discuss with their class the differences between summary and argument prior to assigning the pro/con essay. A second possible difficulty is students resisting the requirement to argue for something they disagree with. One instructor I know encountered this problem with a student who chose to write about abortion but did not make an argument for the side of the debate he opposed. Consequently, he received a poor grade, which upset him greatly (North). Though the instructor said this was an isolated incident, it nevertheless bears mentioning as a caution to teachers considering this type of assignment.<sup>29</sup>

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practical, given the space and time limitations of a first-year writing paper, to have students address only two prominent positions.

<sup>29</sup> Nathaniel Teich, in “Rogerian Problem-Solving and the Rhetoric of Argumentation,” encourages his students to choose only pro/con topics about which they can compose a “balanced...essay” (57). As a result, “students tend to avoid arguing about such potentially loaded topics as abortion, gun control, nuclear power, world disarmament, religious preferences, and political partisanship” (57-58). I think avoiding such topics, however, robs students of the opportunity to learn to navigate deeply emotional conflicts cooperatively.

To incorporate the oral component that, as in Rogerian rhetoric, is central to antilogic, Mendelson suggests bringing role playing into the classroom, i.e., having students act out the role/viewpoint of another as part of an in-class exercise. Part of the intended effect of such an exercise is to help students “see arguments in context as extensions of the people who make them and the circumstantial details that locate those people in history” (“Quintilian” 289). In other words, role playing “humanize[s] argument by transcending the disembodied appeal to reason alone,” an appeal made by traditional methods of argument (289). Mendelson praises role playing for its ability to encourage tolerance, claiming it has “done more than any other technique to loosen the grip of ingrained opinion [in his students] and prompt an appreciation for the many-sidedness of argument” (289).

Though linked by an emphasis on dialogue, Rogerian rhetoric and antilogic differ in their goals. Since it is oriented toward problem solving, antilogic must evaluate all claims and eventually choose one that seems best suited to the situation at hand. By contrast, Rogerian rhetoric—being geared more toward understanding—seeks to avoid evaluation and focus instead on reflecting back the other person’s thoughts and, especially, feelings. I would argue, however, that these differences are useful to rhetoric and composition instructors. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Rogerian principles are most productively applied in pedagogically peripheral contexts in which instruction is not likely to focus as much on the development or evaluation of an argumentative claim. Antilogic, by contrast, offers a cooperative way to develop and evaluate such claims, making it a promising possibility for teachers who value argumentative instruction but want to avoid or supplement the traditional, thesis-driven approach.

## Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how antilogic, though grounded in a worldview that places opposition at the heart of not only argument but the phenomenal world itself, nevertheless exhibits the characteristics of a cooperative rhetoric; that is, it emphasizes problem solving, listening, and respect for an equally valued Other. I have also suggested, briefly, how antilogic might be used in the composition classroom, both orally and in writing. Unlike Rogerian rhetoric, which, being grounded in a theory of non-directive therapy, does not lend itself to a pedagogy of argument but might be quite useful in the non-persuasive contexts of a writing center consultation or peer review workshop, antilogic is rooted in rhetoric and therefore fits naturally in an argument-based curriculum that includes persuasion. In my next chapter, however, I return to an anti-persuasion approach, this one grounded in feminist principles. Invitational rhetoric, in addition to its repudiation of persuasive tactics, leans more toward understanding than problem solving as a rhetorical goal. Whereas antilogic seeks “the resolution of the common good,” a phrase that suggests consensus or compromise, invitational rhetors are content to let conflicting perspectives remain unresolved, both because they value each person’s ability to choose what is right for themselves and because they seek the creation of “understanding by all participants of the issue *and of one another*” (Foss and Griffin 6, emphasis added). One obvious method for promoting such understanding is listening, a key feature of cooperative rhetorics, and it is to this important aspect of invitational rhetoric that I now turn.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SUBJECT IS LISTENING: DISCOVERING ALTERNATIVE AGENCIES IN INVITATIONAL RHETORIC

“[I]n the tradition of western thought we are...faced with a system of knowledge that tends to ignore listening processes.”

—Gemma Corradi Fiumara

“The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning...of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it.”

—Mikhail Bakhtin

“[T]he listener has come into her own.”

—Sally Miller Gearhart

In *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, Krista Ratcliffe begins with this epigraph from Jacqueline Jones Royster: “How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response” (1). Similarly, at the end of her 2010 article “Listening, Thinking, Being,” Lisbeth Lipari asked, “what happens when critical, cultural, and organizational theorists turn their attention to listening as forms of action and enactments of agency” (359). These may seem like odd questions. Listening as action? Hearing as agency? As feminist philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara argues in *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, the history of Western thinking about speech does not prepare us to

consider listening as an active component of language (1). Indeed, as Shari Stenberg puts it, for Western rationalists, “when listening is considered at all, it is deemed speech’s passive subordinate, its unequal partner” (252).

In this chapter, I examine the role of listening in invitational rhetoric. Foss and Griffin define invitational rhetoric as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (5). For an invitational rhetor, developing and maintaining respectful relationships among discursive partners is just as important as contributing to the “understanding of an issue” (5). Though they offer their perspectives in rhetorical exchange, invitational rhetors do not seek to change or persuade others, since the attempt to persuade reveals a patriarchal “desire for control and domination” (3). A relatively recent addition to the ever-growing body of cooperative rhetorical alternatives, invitational rhetoric bears strong resemblance in some ways to Rogerian rhetoric, especially in its resistance to trying to change others and its emphasis on not just hearing but *realizing* the point of view of the other.<sup>30</sup> Although invitational rhetoric has received heavy criticism for its supposed lack of agency, I argue that listening, as understood and practiced by invitational rhetors, does grant a kind of alternative agency. Drawing on Jennifer Bone, Cindy Griffin, and Linda Scholz’s work in redefining agency from an invitational perspective, I discuss two ways that listening can create agency: by creating the condition of value for the rhetor; and by serving as a method of “re-sourcement” as defined by invitational rhetoricians Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin. I then suggest some pedagogical applications for invitational listening as an alternative to traditional rhetoric. But first, I address the supposed subordinate position of listening itself.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Foss and Foss pages 10-11, where the authors quote Rogers on this very topic.

## Listening and Understanding

In the twentieth century, the West's "reduced-by-half" view of language has encountered serious scrutiny (Fiumara 2). One of the most notable theorists to challenge the notion of listening as merely passive was Mikhail Bakhtin. In "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin criticizes views of language that consider only the standpoint of the speaker, "as if there were only *one* speaker who does not have any *necessary* relation to *other* participants in speech communication" (67, emphasis in original). Similar to Stenberg, Bakhtin notes that any mention of the listener in such formulations of language presents her as "understand[ing] the speaker only passively," a view that, beyond its limited usefulness as a sort of schematic for talking about language abstractly, Bakhtin finds highly problematic (68). In reality, he argues, the listener's role is one of active responsiveness in which she or he "agrees or disagrees with [the speaker's meaning] (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on" (68). Further, for Bakhtin there is ultimately no distinction between listener/speaker, since "[a]ny understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (68). In this view, that is to say, everyone is always simultaneously listener *and* speaker, each utterance (to use Bakhtin's term) arising in response to, and only possible because of, the heard and understood utterance of another.

But while Bakhtin takes listening from a passive reception of speech to an active response to it, thereby placing listening on equal footing with speaking, he seems to downplay an important stage in the communication process: understanding. He asserts: "all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes *nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response*" (69, emphasis added). If "real" understanding always assumes an active

response, and “passive” understanding is at best a convenient way to schematize the phenomenon of speech, no room is left for what we might call *active understanding*—the effort to grasp a speaker’s meaning without immediately forming a response (*effort* being the operative word).<sup>31</sup> It cannot be assumed, as Bakhtin seems to do, that an understanding of the speaker’s meaning will be automatic and that all the work of the listener will be in forming a response to that meaning. Indeed, I.A. Richards argued in 1936 that the discipline of rhetoric should devote itself to “the study of misunderstanding and its remedies,” clearly implying the difficulty of mutual communication (3). And Wayne Booth, invoking Richards nearly seventy years later, urges students as well as teachers of rhetoric to “move...toward rhetorical practice that...reduces misunderstanding,” and his suggested method for accomplishing this goal is listening (“Blind” 385-87). Given the difficulty of achieving understanding, it stands to reason that we should, as Ratcliffe puts it, “carve out a space for listening” (“Rhetorical” 201). It is my purpose in this chapter to expand such a space in invitational rhetoric.

## Listening and Agency

One of the many critiques leveled at invitational rhetoric, according to Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, is that it provides the rhetor no agency (445). Richard Fulkerson seems to offer such a critique when he writes that, in invitational rhetoric, perspectives are “shared, exchanged, understood, and respected, but *no action is taken*” (n.p., emphasis added). Similarly, Michaela Meyer, arguing in 2007 that much contemporary feminist scholarship relies on theories of rhetoric that “rob women of agency,” cited invitational rhetoric as a prime example of such a

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<sup>31</sup> In the *OED*, sense 2a for *listen* denotes “to *give attention* with the ear” and “to *make an effort* to hear something” (Dictionary, my emphasis).

theory because it uses terms for rhetorical action—“invitation” and “offering”—that are often seen as “passive” (10). Responding to this criticism, Bone, Griffin, and Scholz challenge the apparent assumption of some scholars that agency must be tied to the “*effort to change others;*” instead, they explain, quoting Foss and Griffin, agency for the invitational rhetor has to do with the ““effort to understand”” others (445, emphasis in original). This effort, they write, “includes establishing an invitational environment built on the principles of safety...value...and freedom,” the same three principles that Foss and Griffin, in their initial description of invitational rhetoric, claimed were essential in order to create an atmosphere in which invitational rhetoric could occur (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz 445; Foss and Griffin 10). Bone, Griffin, and Scholz add that changing others, though not a goal of invitational rhetoric, may nevertheless be the result of the effort to understand that provides rhetors their agency (446).<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, the authors argue, the question of agency hinges on the direction in which rhetorical effort is focused: for persuasive rhetoric, it is the effort to change; for invitational rhetoric, it is the effort to understand (446). And that is where listening comes in.

### *Creating the Condition of Value*

In “Beyond Persuasion,” the article in which Foss and Griffin first outlined the structure and function of invitational rhetoric, the authors name two practices that a rhetor could use to promote understanding: offering a perspective and creating external conditions to welcome the perspective of another. The first practice, offering, they define as “the giving of expression to a

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<sup>32</sup> Recently, Griffin seems to have moved toward more direct efforts at changing others. See, for

perspective without advocating its support or seeking its acceptance” (7).<sup>33</sup> Though it may seem paradoxical that listening could function as the offering of a viewpoint, there is one sense in which I believe it does. But more on that later. The second practice, creating external conditions, is realized when a rhetor establishes an atmosphere of safety, value, and freedom “in which audience members’ perspectives also can be offered” (10). Foss and Griffin define the “condition of *value*” as “the acknowledgment that audience members have intrinsic or immanent worth” (11, emphasis in original). This worth, they argue, quoting Margaret Walker, is based on the fact that audiences are composed of “unrepeatable individuals” whose “identities are not forced upon them or chosen for them by rhetors” (11). In fact, invitational rhetors should “celebrate” the fundamental uniqueness of their audience members (11).<sup>34</sup> To convey their welcoming attitude toward difference, rhetors should, according to Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, express their willingness to “step outside their own standpoint” in an effort to understand that of another (437). Ultimately, the goal of creating a welcoming atmosphere for all perspectives is “comprehensive understanding” of an issue (Foss and Foss, *Inviting* 44).

One method that Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, as well as Foss and Griffin, recommend for creating the condition of value, and thereby enacting rhetorical agency, is listening—a practice they take pains to define in order to distinguish it from traditional understandings of the word.

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example, Chávez and Griffin. Foss, on the other hand, has moved perhaps even further away from trying to change others. See, for example, the two articles by Foss and Foss.

<sup>33</sup> While this sort of neutrality regarding the acceptance of one’s viewpoint may seem far-fetched, it is at least imaginable in the context of a rhetoric that aims at understanding, both of the issue under discussion and of the participants in the discussion.

<sup>34</sup> See Ryan “Exploring” for an insightful discussion of the problematic implications of assuming the other to be fundamentally distinct from the self.

Using phrases from, respectively, Eugene Gendlin, Nelle Morton, and Sonia Johnson, Foss and Griffin refer to ““*absolute listening*,” ““hearing to speech,”” and ““hearing into being,”” all in an effort to name the process wherein “listeners do not interrupt, comfort, or insert anything of their own as others tell of their experiences” (11, emphasis in original). Such listening, because the listener does not “insert [herself] into the talk,” affords speakers a chance “to discover their own perspectives” (11). The value conveyed in invitational listening is perhaps best expressed in the story Nelle Morton tells in *The Journey is Home* about a woman whom Morton “heard to...speech” (205). “You went down all the way with me,” the woman tells Morton. “Then you didn’t smother me. You gave it space to shape itself. You gave it time to come full circle” (205). By not interrupting the woman’s sharing, even to comfort or encourage her, Morton silently expressed to the woman that her thoughts and words, her story and her perspective, had value.

Obviously, this kind of listening, in which the rhetor attempts to withhold her ““advice, reactions, encouragements, reassurances, and well-intentioned comments,”” is seldom easy (Gendlin, qtd. in Foss and Griffin 11). Feminist and communications scholar Sally Miller Gearhart, whose ideas about rhetoric serve as a major intellectual source for invitational rhetoric, emphasized how hard such listening can be: “[w]hen all we’ve done for centuries is to penetrate the environment with the truth...then it is difficult to enjoy just being a listener, just a co-creator of an atmosphere” (201).<sup>35</sup> Likewise Foss and Foss, in their textbook on invitational rhetoric, point out to student-readers that the kind of listening they are used to—what the authors call “listening to win”—will differ from the kind they will learn from the book, implying that a

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<sup>35</sup> I interpret Gearhart’s use of the word *just* as implying not inferiority but rather a different state of being. Where the first sense is denoted, however unjustly, by a phrase such as “he’s *just* a janitor,” the second would more likely show up in the phrase “*just* hear me out.” It’s the second sense I take Gearhart to mean.

certain amount of effort will be necessary to change their habit (*Inviting* 11). Working from the definition of agency as the *effort* to understand, then, it is clear that invitational listening represents, to use Lipari's phrase, an enactment of agency. In other words, an invitational rhetor expresses her agency by her effort to listen without judgment, or even—to contradict Bakhtin—without response. And it is this non-judgmental listening that creates an atmosphere of value in which an Other might comfortably speak.

### *Listening as Re-sourcement*

A second option for enacting agency in invitational rhetoric is through re-sourcement. Drawing on the work of Gearhart, Foss and Griffin describe re-sourcement as a kind offering that may be useful “in a hostile situation or when a dominant perspective is very different from the one held by the rhetor” (9). It may be useful to quote their definition at length:

Re-sourcement is a response made by a rhetor according to a framework, assumptions, or principles other than those suggested in the precipitating message. In using re-sourcement, the rhetor deliberately draws energy from a new source—a source other than the individual or system that provided the initial frame for the issue. It is a means, then, of communicating a perspective that is different from that of the individual who produced the message to which the rhetor is responding (9).

The authors follow this definition with two examples that show re-sourcement at work. One is a story from the activist and writer Starhawk, in which she and a group of women narrowly escaped being beaten by guards during a protest at California's Livermore Weapons Lab. As the guards prepared to beat the women, Foss and Griffin write, “one woman sat down and began to chant” (10). The other women joined in, and the guards didn't know how to respond. Eventually, they backed off. Starhawk's interpretation of the event was that the guards' “power of

domination and control met something outside its comprehension, *a power rooted in another source*” (qtd. in Foss and Griffin 10, emphasis added). The second example is of a cop who ran into trouble with an angry crowd while giving someone a traffic ticket. As the mob converged on him, he “announce[d] in a loud voice: ‘You have just witnessed the issuance of a traffic ticket by a member of your Oakland Police Department’” (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, qtd. in Foss and Griffin 10). As in Starhawk’s story, the aggressors were puzzled by such unexpected and discordant behavior, and the cop was able to get away safely. In both cases, Foss and Griffin explain, “the initial message...was framed in the context of opposition and hostility,” while the responses were framed, in the case of Starhawk, by “nonviolence and connection,” and in the case of the police officer, by “simple explanation, cooperation, and respect” (10). Both Starhawk and the cop were able to “draw[...] energy from a new source” and so disarm a system they could not fight on its own terms (9).

To discover how listening can function as a type of re-sourcement, I turn to the work of Gemma Corradi Fiumara. In *The Other Side of Language*, Fiumara describes the “tradition of western [sic] thought” as “a *system of knowledge* that tends to ignore listening processes” (1, emphasis added). Echoing Bakhtin’s critique of speech theorists, she asserts that in Western culture “[l]anguage is taken to be expression, and vice versa” (2). She adds later that this culture has always produced “a vast profusion of scholarly works focussing [sic] on expressive activity and very few, almost none by comparison, devoted to the study of listening” (5).<sup>36</sup> She even goes so far as to argue that the focus on “‘saying without listening,’” which she refers to as “an

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<sup>36</sup> Ratcliffe makes a similar critique when she writes that “the dominant scholarly trend in rhetoric and composition studies has been to...naturalize listening, that is, assume it to be something that everyone does but no one needs study” (*Rhetorical* 18).

essential principle of our culture,” represents a “form of domination and control” (2). Other terms she uses to describe the West’s conception of language include “assertive” and “logocratic” (7). It is clear, then, that Fiumara views the prevailing Western attitude toward discourse as, to quote Foss and Griffin, “a dominant perspective...very different from” her own, one perhaps requiring the use of re-sourcement as a means of disarming that perspective (9). Indeed, Fiumara herself seems to recognize the need for a kind of “listening re-sourcement” when she writes that instead of “competing in [the] same style” of the assertive culture, those who wish to challenge it might better “train [themselves] in detecting those ways of thinking that are able to parody the values of hominization and yet are unable to develop them” (10).<sup>37</sup> Through such awareness, she explains, dissenters “could...remain indifferent to those ‘rules of good manners’ set up by the all-powerful tradition,” and by implication, could respond to that tradition with, to quote Starhawk, a “power rooted in another source” (Fiumara 10; Starhawk qtd. in Foss and Griffin 10). In other words, by the very act of listening—studying it, teaching it, practicing it—we might challenge our culture’s “pre-established dismissal” of it with “a force of silence that does not arise from astonished dumbfoundedness, but from serious, unyielding attention” (Fiumara 11). Listening thus becomes a source of power—of agency.

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<sup>37</sup> The *OED* defines hominization as “[t]he evolutionary development of characteristics, esp. mental or spiritual ones, that are held to distinguish man from other animals.” Fiumara seems to be arguing that a recovery of listening as essential to a full understanding language will move humanity closer to deserving that title.

## Invitational Listening in the Classroom

In his essay “Toward a Post-Process Composition,” Gary Olson seems to echo Fiumara when he calls on fellow composition scholars to challenge the discipline’s prevailing “rhetoric of assertion” (Kent 9). Composing, he writes, has “always seemed to be associated with asserting something to be true,” a paradigm that Olson finds particularly intractable, noting that in spite of some scholars’ attempts to move away from thesis-driven, Aristotelian discourse, “the Western, rationalist tradition of assertion...is so entrenched in our epistemology and ways of understanding what ‘good’ writing and ‘thinking’ are that [it]...defies even our most concerted efforts to subvert it” (9). Nevertheless, he argues, compositionists must continue to challenge the rhetoric of assertion, seeking to replace it with an approach to discourse that is “more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, [and] nonassertive” (14)—in short, one that acknowledges the importance of listening. Invoking the postmodern theorist Jean-François Lyotard, Olson claims that such an approach would feature “the ability to *wait* patiently, not for answers or solutions, but simply to wait—to remain in a state of perpetual receptiveness,” a state reminiscent not only of that recommended by Fiumara but also Gearhart, who called for a rhetoric that moved away from a focus on the “speaker/conqueror to an interest in atmosphere, in *listening*, in receiving, in a collective rather in a competitive mode” (Kent 13, emphasis in original; Gearhart 200-01, emphasis added). Olson stops short, however, of making specific suggestions for incorporating nonassertive rhetoric into a composition pedagogy. For that, we will turn to the work of Peter Elbow.

In a 2005 article titled “Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent and the Believing Game Together—and Into the Classroom,” Elbow offers several practices “that can help students learn better to  *dwell in, enter in, or experience* a multiplicity of views...even views that seem uncongenial or contradictory” (394, emphasis in original). Each of these practices—part of a methodology Elbow calls the Believing Game, a cognitive strategy that is distinct from the now largely disfavored expressivism he is most often associated with—focuses on getting students “to stop talking and listen” (395). The first practice, which he calls the three- or five-minute rule, offers any student who thinks her perspective is not being considered a set time (three or five minutes) in which to speak her views while the rest of the class listens quietly (395). The second practice, which Elbow terms “allies only,” allows only those students who understand and support a “minority view” to speak; those who object must, temporarily, remain silent (395). The final listening practice—“testimony”—asks a student to share stories of how he came to have a particular perspective and “to describe what it’s like having or living with this view” (395).<sup>38</sup> For this exercise, the teacher and other students must remain silent not only while the speaker is sharing, but even after he has finished (395).

The parallels between Elbow’s classroom practices and the kind of invitational listening—or, to use Olson’s broader term, “nonassertive” rhetoric—that Foss and Griffin describe are clear. First, the purpose of the practices is to “*give extended floor time* to the minority view” (395, emphasis in original). Certainly it is not a stretch to suggest that invitational rhetoric, with its concern for acknowledging and even celebrating difference, seeks to make space for

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<sup>38</sup> Earlier in the article, Elbow points out the usefulness of narrative in helping an audience “dwell in a view” (395). Walter Fisher’s claim that “[t]he operative principle of narrative rationality is *identification* rather than deliberation” underscores this point (Fisher 66, emphasis in original).

marginalized voices. Second, the method of both the three-minute rule and the “testimony” practice closely resembles that of invitational listening, in which listeners pay close attention to the speaker but do not respond. Finally, the “allies only” practice calls to mind a sort of extension of invitational listening: the effort to “try to think from [other] perspectives” (Foss and Griffin 372). Elbow elaborates on the method: “[o]thers may speak—*but only* those who are having more success believing or entering into or assenting to the minority view” (395, emphasis in original). The point of the exercise seems to be to help the class as a whole to “reverse perspectives and...reason from the standpoint of others” (Foss and Griffin 372-73).<sup>39</sup>

Another method Elbow suggests for incorporating invitational listening is practiced during peer review. After a writer has read her work to her peer review group, the reviewers offer their feedback, which, Elbow notes, “might well involve disagreement with the text” (396). Nevertheless, the writer does not respond, nor do the reviewers respond to each other’s reactions to the text. The rule is to “[j]ust listen” (396). Elbow argues that asking students to refrain from debating over peer review feedback forces all participants “*to enter into one another’s understandings of the text*” (396, emphasis in original). However, while this practice seems likely to have value in a group where excessive arguing about feedback is common or where one or two students tend to dominate the conversation, I wonder how helpful it would be in groups with the opposite problem, where no one talks about the texts or the comments are brief and cursory. How does one balance the need to get students talking with the need to teach them to listen? Elbow does not address this possibility in his essay.

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<sup>39</sup> On the point of reasoning from another’s perspective, both Foss and Griffin and Elbow seem to echo Carl Rogers’ “restatement rule.” Indeed, Elbow explicitly acknowledges Rogers’ influence, calling him “an important figure for rhetoric and thinking” and urging scholars to pay more attention to his work (Elbow 394).

Though Elbow doesn't explicitly identify it as an outcome or goal of his pedagogy, it is clear that he is working to create the condition of value for his students' viewpoints. What he does state explicitly, and what lines his approach up even more closely with invitational rhetoric, is that "the goal [in his classroom practices] is safety," the first of the three key invitational conditions (395). Yet there is an interesting difference in emphasis: whereas Foss and Griffin focus on the importance of the audience's sense of safety as conveyed by the rhetor, Elbow emphasizes the rhetor's safety as conveyed by the audience (himself and the other students) (Foss and Griffin 10; Elbow 395). Elbow does not, however, neglect the importance of audience safety. Though his practices are intended to put the rhetor at ease, he nevertheless notes that

we need safety just as much for listeners who, after all, are trying to learn to be more skilled at in-dwelling or believing. It's *difficult* for most of us to enter into a view we want to quarrel with or feel threatened by; it's safer for us to do so if we have permission simply not to talk about it any more for a while. Let the words we resist just sink in for a while with no comment (396, emphasis in original).

By allowing his students to dwell—through listening—in diverse perspectives, without requiring them either to defend themselves or to fully accept the new ideas, Elbow attempts to create an invitational atmosphere in the classroom.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I asked what other rhetorical strategies the abrasive street preacher Angela Cummings could have employed to accomplish her goal of bringing help and hope to the students of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I did not, however, question the rhetorical moves of the students who responded to her. Many of them, as can be seen in Cummings' own footage, mocked or booed her (Cummings). Others, as the *Chattanooga*

*Times Free Press* reported, “circled around [her], laughing, taunting, shouting, [and] asking irreverent questions” (Omarzu). Still others, as in the case of biochemistry major Cole Montalvo, tried to engage her more directly. Cummings’ video footage shows Montalvo approaching Cummings on his bike, a move that got him arrested for trespassing in the designated free-speech area, but not before he delivered his message: “Hey ma’am. If you’re trying to spread the good word, maybe you shouldn’t be telling everyone they’re sinners. Maybe you shouldn’t be yelling at everyone, okay” (Cummings). While Montalvo said his piece, as the video shows, in a fairly calm tone of voice and did not mock or jeer as other students had done, he nevertheless conveyed aggression—riding his bike into Cummings’ clearly marked safety zone—and the overarching desire to get his point across, two frequent characteristics of the kind of rhetoric to which I have tried to offer alternatives in this thesis.<sup>40</sup> It would seem, then, given the harsh and unproductive rhetoric that came from both sides of this encounter, that having knowledge of and access to more cooperative alternatives would have been helpful.

Indeed, some students did show admirable rhetorical resourcefulness as Cummings’ stay wore on, enacting the kind of cooperative rhetoric from which both students and teachers can learn. I saw one student in particular, standing near the front of the crowd that surrounded the free-speech area where Cummings was preaching, pull from his backpack a large rainbow-colored flag—a common symbol of support for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities—and hold it up while silently facing Cummings. Many in the crowd cheered at the student’s display, but as long as I watched, he himself never spoke. Though from

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<sup>40</sup> Another student, as Montalvo was being arrested, shouted at Cummings: “There’s a special place in the non-existent hell for you.” To which Cummings responded: “God’s got your number, too, sinner” (Omarzu).

where I stood it was hard to see his face clearly, he appeared to be quite composed, perhaps smiling slightly. Cummings' response—pacing around the encircled area, nodding her head up and down, not speaking—suggested she was at least temporarily perplexed by the student's actions. After a few minutes I quit watching, and when I looked back a little later, the student had left and Cummings had resumed her preaching.

This student's response—which, I would argue, was an instance of re-sourcement, though not the kind of “listening re-sourcement” I discussed earlier in this chapter—stands out to me as a brave and powerful example of the potential of cooperative alternatives to traditional rhetoric. By refusing to battle verbally with Cummings, either by shouting or by engaging in hermeneutic wrangling over biblical texts, he demonstrated that there are more effective ways to engage conflicting views in contentious contexts than the typical, thesis-driven model. I wonder what would have been the result if everyone in the crowd circling Cummings that day, rather than cheering the student who brought the flag, had instead produced their own symbolic object—representing their support for whatever of their beliefs or lifestyle Cummings had condemned—and silently faced her with composure and respect. What if this silent but respectful response had taken place day after day as she showed up to preach? How long could Cummings have maintained the fever pitch of her hostility in the face of such calm resistance?

Teachers of rhetoric and composition cannot be expected to coach first-year students in the kind of public activism displayed by the student in the above story. Their proper concern is with the *writing* their students produce—its cohesiveness, clarity, and cogency. Nevertheless, as these teachers, as well writing program administrators and writing tutors, begin to incorporate some of the strategies presented in this thesis—Rogerian writing center consultations, antilogical

role playing, invitational class discussions—into their pedagogies, they will be teaching students cooperative “habits of mind” that will endure beyond the first-year writing course.<sup>41</sup> Having learned—through reading, writing, and discussion—that there are multiple options, many of them non-antagonistic, for approaching an argumentative exchange, students will be better prepared to navigate their diverse and often conflictual society.

In her textbook analysis, Abby Knoblauch applauds Ramage, Bean, and Johnson—authors of *Writing Arguments*—for including in their text, which largely presents the traditional, thesis-driven approach, one example of cooperative student rhetoric (261-262). She rightly concludes, however, that “one student example...is not enough to tip the scales of traditional argument” (262). I would say the same in the case of the rhetoric of the student I described above. His example, heartening though it is, is but one instance in a dominant system that still privileges the traditional approach. It will take the concerted efforts of rhetoric and composition teachers, tutors, textbook writers and publishers, and writing program administrators to make available to students, nearly all of whom must take the first-year writing course, the cooperative alternatives that will enable them to appropriately address varying rhetorical encounters.

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<sup>41</sup> I borrow the phrase “habits of mind” from Michael Mendelson, who in turn borrowed it from the ancient Roman rhetorician Cicero (*Many Sides* 228).

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