

SYMPOSIUM: How I Have Changed My Mind

Editor's Note: Like any long-established organization, NCTE has grappled during its ten decades of life with recurring issues. After all, teachers of English are bound to face common and chronic challenges. But disciplinary history wouldn't be history if it were entirely static. Besides continuity, it involves change, both in the discipline's individual members and in the field as a whole. Indeed, personal shifts often reflect and contribute to larger professional ones. For NCTE's centennial, then, I asked several veterans of English studies to write briefly about how they have changed *their* minds. As you will see, their responses vary in topic and approach.

Chris Anson

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Spring 1981, Bloomington, Indiana

CERTAINTY: Oh, don't start in again

about numbers and statistics—I'm really into the awesome power of qualitative inquiry. It's so . . . cool. And besides, you know how stultifying those sections are in *Research in the Teaching of English* and the *American Educational Research Journal*. I can't believe we have to read that stuff!

DOUBT: Look, you didn't even know qualitative inquiry existed a year ago. I'm just not sure . . . there's also something compelling about statistics in some of the research we've been assigned to read. Look at that fascinating study by James Britton and his colleagues. How about Sondra Perl? Matsuhashi? People are counting things. Many phenomena in the process of writing can be measured in some sense. And even if we—you and I—haven't learned how to do so, we should at least be able and willing to read the work of those who do. By the way, should we stop now? It's been almost four miles, and the left knee is hurting. And it's getting dark.

CERTAINTY: The jog is five miles—8,000 yards, and not a yard less. Stop whining. And besides, do you really know what a chi square is, or how to do regression analysis? Those methods sections in the articles . . . mind-boggling. We both know that we skip those and

jump to the conclusions.

DOUBT: Well, we should learn.

CERTAINTY: I didn't sign up for a doctorate in numbers, my friend. Besides, this field is like a land rush. There are plenty of wide-open spaces for pursuing ethnographies and other kinds of richly descriptive work. Wouldn't you rather see writing the way anthropologists see culture, instead of studying students in controlled experiments as if they were lab rats? And some of our mentors, and prominent people like Guba—remember their argument that these are epistemological paradigms that exist in different universes and can never be reconciled. And they say the quantitative is also masculinist, the positivism implying—

DOUBT: I'm not sure it's that simple . . . but if we stop, I'll agree.

CERTAINTY: Almost home . . . 326 yards to go from this tree. Don't give up!

Spring 1985, CCCC Convention,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CERTAINTY: Wow! A minute ago we were in another state! And more naïve.

DOUBT: But full of ourselves—so steeped in our graduate work. How did we get here?

CERTAINTY: Beats me. Time, I guess. More precisely, 1,478 days.

DOUBT: Things have changed a bit for us—is that what *warped* means?

CERTAINTY: Not really. Same field, same conundrums, same territory.

DOUBT: But I feel . . . stronger. There's been so much interesting quantitative research on writing processes. And that last session . . . Hillocks . . . a meta-analysis. We've struggled so hard to argue that certain approaches to

teaching writing are preferable, but it's all been speculative and intuitive. Now we have some statistical evidence to back up our claims.

CERTAINTY: Look, you've continued to work your will against our belief that qualitative inquiry offers us the most appropriate set of methods for studying the kinds of questions we're interested in, far more suitable than number crunching. I'm not sure I'm willing to compromise at this point. But I do have to admit that I was impressed with Hillocks's findings.

DOUBT: That's a pretty disparaging term, don't you think? *Crunching*?

CERTAINTY: What would you call it, then? *Ingestion*?

DOUBT: Well, *research*. But consider the implications of these findings. No one on the outside is going to listen to your loosey-goosey ethnographic mumbo jumbo (or so they see it) about student-centered learning and all that. If you want to stop the tyranny of sentence diagramming and other regressive kinds of writing instruction, you're gonna have to stick them with numbers. Big, uncontestable numbers. Meta-numbers.

CERTAINTY: Okay, I admit that this can be politically powerful. But what about the integrity of the research? Can you really "control" for so many human variables? Now, a good ethnography—

DOUBT: Sorry for interrupting, but you seem to think that anything traditionally empirical is worthless. Every morning you put an English muffin in the toaster on the highest setting, knowing that after it pops up, you need to put it back down for exactly thirty-four more seconds to get it just right. Did you interview the muffins? Did you analyze the toaster's self-reports of its identity construction? Were you a participant-observer, sandwiched between those

wavy little red-hot elements? Did you do a thick description of the toaster in its complex, late-night interactions with the microwave and the coffeemaker?

CERTAINTY: Sure! It's an environment! I did watch, and I learned.

DOUBT: Come on! You reached an empirically verifiable conclusion based on the average of a series of statistical notations and calculations.

CERTAINTY: Ouch. Okay, I'll give you that numbers are useful in many contexts. But we're talking about *students*. They don't behave predictably, popping up with just the right degree of learning. And isn't this just playing their game? The evil regressive educational critics, I mean? We should try harder to convince the public, and these think tanks and partisan groups, that education is complicated, that it can't all be reduced to statistics. If we don't, eventually we'll end up mired in endless testing in our schools, reducing students and teachers to statistics.

DOUBT: You have to use the best strategy to persuade your audience.

CERTAINTY: Well, I'd rather not whore around capitulating to a bunch of number crunch—um, people who cherry-pick statistics to advocate bottom-up, reductivist, skill-drill kinds of curricula. Let's give them actual *stories* of what works.

Spring 2011, Raleigh, North Carolina

CERTAINTY: Wow, another warp. Decades, this time. And look at us!

DOUBT: I don't *feel* old, though.

CERTAINTY: But so much has changed. What were we thinking about? Oh yes, the perils of the quantitative. Our predictions about testing came true,

didn't they?

DOUBT: With a vengeance. And it's *all* about numbers, isn't it? Perelman tells us—

CERTAINTY: I know, I know. We've done our own share of number cr . . . statistically based research over the years, haven't we? Eventually, you were very persuasive.

DOUBT: How much has it helped, though? Hasn't the qualitative stuff been at least as useful?

CERTAINTY: I used to think that more strongly. But the paradigms *have* been reconciled, yes?

DOUBT: How so?

CERTAINTY: Mixed methods! We can have it both ways.

DOUBT: Is that *au courant*?

CERTAINTY: It just makes sense.

DOUBT: I thought you were into integrity?

CERTAINTY: Precisely. Each kind of data can inform the other. Read Cresswell, read Johnson, read Haswell, read—

DOUBT: I have, and I think I do see your point. Some things can be counted and some can't. Counting things can be useful sometimes and sometimes not, and sometimes some counting can be done amidst some non-counting, and sometimes some non-counting can be informed nicely by some counting. Still, there's another part of me that . . .

CERTAINTY: Speak for yourself!

Marilyn Cooper

Marilyn M. Cooper is professor of humanities at Michigan Technological University. Her first publication to appear in College English was "The Ecology of Writing" (1986).

Geoff Sirc wrote:

[T]he effect of serial style—short, well-chosen bricks of meaning combining to form a rich whole—means we do not need to value brevity at the expense of that complexity of meaning traditionally thought to be available only through the studiously inflected part-to-whole thematized exposition of essayist prose. (70)

Well, yes. Poetry and all that. Visual collages. Mix tapes. I get it. But.

In graduate school my essayist prose was highly praised by my professors for its tightly constructed arguments and clear exposition of theory. I was careful to expound all the steps in my thinking, to choose words carefully, to pay attention to nuances and differences among ideas. I loved constructing multi-clausal sentences that enabled me to connect, subordinate, and qualify ideas. I had learned these things in my five years of work as an editor before I returned to graduate school. I insist on these qualities in the writing of graduate students that I work with now.

Cindy Selfe urged me to come to DMAC, her digital media workshop at Ohio State. I learned a bunch of technical stuff and used Sophie to compose a multimodal academic essay in which I suggested that writing is a phronetic *techne*. I learned that instead of creating an extended prose text—quoting Heidegger on how bridges organize places, explicating my understanding of his point, extending it by adding animals to the category of

mortals, and suggesting that such extension helps us understand *techne* as an embodied practice—I could juxtapose a piece of text—

Directed by dwelling, building brings forth things—a bridge, a boardwalk—as locations. A boardwalk is not an isolated structure but gathers the river and the wetland into a landscape and escorts mortals on their way. The building that comes from dwelling is a craft, a *techne*, that designs “the character of [our] journey through time” (Heidegger 158)

—to a video of my border collie, standing on a boardwalk in a wetland, sniffing the air, then turning to trot along the boardwalk, and add in Gordon Bok singing his “Woodworker’s Litany,” which concludes, “Is there no change from dying to living, save the wearing of tool on beam? From formless to form, from taking to giving, dream to question, question to answer, and dream to dream.”*

Kate Latterell, in her keynote speech at the first Writing across the Peninsula conference in Houghton, Michigan, in 2010, said that the thesis-driven college essay has seen its day, and that writing is about making connections. In her textbook *Remix*, she asks students to create a “dialogue essay” using quotes from readings (416) and to annotate a technological object (717). The dialogue essay requires students to look at readings differently, to look for specific connections and contradictions and arrange quotes in a way that complicates ideas. The annotation requires them to think about where the

technology comes from, why it has the features it has, and what those histories and features imply, and then to present a diagrammatic array of text blocks linked to an image of the technology (at least that's the way such texts have been presented in *Harper's* magazine).

Expository prose makes explicit connections between ideas; it imposes the writer's understandings on the reader. It implies that the connections made by the writer are comprehensive, that this *is* the way the ideas fit together. Serial style instead invites the reader to make connections between rich "bricks of meaning," to move back and forth between them, to couple them into a dynamic system that mobilizes affective as well as logical meanings. Through its fragmentary, nonlinear construction, it implies that there are more connections than the composer can wrap into a neat package for delivery.

I still like writing (and reading) broad swathes of uninterrupted print; I like leading the reader (or following the writer) down paths and detours in thinking about an issue of concern. But now I also like juxtaposing bricks of meaning (texts and other semiotic objects) in order to invite readers to do some thinking on their own, albeit in directions I assiduously endeavor to indicate.

* "Woodworker's Litany," © 1985 Gordon Bok, BMI; used by permission. Recorded on the album *A Rogue's Gallery of Songs for 12-String*, © 1999, Folk-Legacy.

Gaurav Desai

Gaurav Desai is associate professor of English at Tulane University. Author of Subject to Colonialism: African Self-fashioning and the Colonial Library, he has recently edited a volume of essays on Teaching the African Novel (MLA, 2009).

Old habits die hard. When I was asked to write for this forum, I instinctively went into research mode. How had other scholars changed their minds? And how did they describe that change? This kind of mind-changing material is hard to detect on the shelves of traditional libraries unless, of course, you are an "insider" in a field who has followed the intricate shifts in the thought of a particular scholar. So it was particularly enlightening when the website www.edge.org decided to have a forum on, shall we say, the true confessions of scientists, much like this special forum in *College English*. For the most part, the scientists changed their minds on how the brain works, or on the biological basis of "racial" difference, or on the nature of the "posthuman." The short pieces make for fascinating reading, especially for those of us in the humanities, because they show that the best scientific expertise is that which is accompanied by doubt, and a willingness to shed oft-cherished views.

I am afraid I cannot report a radical paradigm shift in any of my own positions, but I do find that I have moved over time from what seemed to me to be pretty solid and identifiable positions—especially in the realm of politics and world affairs—to those that seem

messier. Fifteen years ago, I would easily have identified a position or person as a “liberal” or a “conservative” and known exactly which side I was on. But over time, I have found that in actual practice, neither ideologies nor persons are so consistent. Just as the politicians who preach family values the loudest are often the ones who are caught amidst the worst sex scandals, often those who voice an ideology with the utmost zest are also those who fail to live up to the basic tenets of their belief systems. We need, of course, to be wary of such ideologues on either end of the political spectrum, but it also pays to remember that most people and positions cannot be so easily pinned down.

For those of us who teach literary texts, none of this should be news—after all, literary texts often present us with scenarios of ideological dissonance, pulling us apart in several directions at once, asking us to make moral and ethical judgments and then forcing us to question the certitude with which we make those very judgments. Over the years, I have found that travel also allows for such an experience of dissonance, where a particular conjunction of political priorities which makes perfect sense in one sociocultural location does not even cohere as a workable assemblage in another. Here, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s early insight that the anthropologist is one who is positioned to be a radical vis-à-vis his or her own culture, but a conservative vis-à-vis the culture (s)he studies, does not go far enough to grant that the value system that we generally associate with

“conservatism” or “radicalism” might not always make sense as a coherent system in a culturally different context.

I initially began to think about these issues when I was working on my first book. I was looking at a figure like Malinowski, who, by most contemporary definitions, would be thought of as a liberal. And yet, his letters show that he was not beyond having racist tendencies. Others (most famously Chinua Achebe) have seen similar contradictions in the thinking of Joseph Conrad. Uday Mehta, in his book on liberalism and empire, has similarly shown how Edmund Burke, the self-professed conservative, spoke up more vigorously against British atrocities in colonial India than did the liberal J. S. Mill, who penned a famous treatise on liberty. Yet, we need not go to some of these luminaries to grasp the basic fact that not only do we often inhabit our ideologies in discomfiting ways, but also the coherence that we ascribe to ideological formations may in fact be more contingent than we would like to believe.

More than reading, it is travel that has helped me think through some of these issues. Visiting with Hawaiian nationalists and hearing their claims for indigeneity made me rethink the alleged “postcoloniality” of our historical moment. Discussing the politics of the language of literature in sub-Saharan Africa with colleagues in Quito, Ecuador, made me think about how different political activists decide on the arena of political struggle that is most relevant to them. Lecturing on the politics of race in the recent U.S. presidential elections to

an audience of business school students in China, who, on their own initiative had read President Obama's memoir in advance of my visit, yet again confirmed for me the differences between our (as in U.S.) knowledge of the world, and the world's knowledge of us. Hearing a passionate argument for genetically modified food made by a member of the Kenyan Trade Commission, during a conversation at Bellagio, Italy, where we were both visitors, made me think of how agricultural policies that we might question in the West are read differently by others with different resources and needs. The list could go on, but the lesson I have learned, along with the scientists, is the importance of being open to conversation, to intellectual disagreement, and to the possibility that some of the fundamental things that I have believed in may have to be rethought.

The study of literature and the pursuit of travel have been ideal vehicles for precisely such engagement. When students approach me about career advice today, I invariably tell them, spend time in the library and in the archives, but don't underestimate the power of what you might learn from just traveling to unfamiliar places and talking with others.

Anne Ruggles Gere

Anne Ruggles Gere is Arthur F. Thurnau Professor and Gertrude Buck Collegiate Professor at the University of Michigan, where she co-chairs the PhD Joint Program in English and Education and serves as director of the Sweetland Center for Writing (SCW). She is currently engaged in several research

projects focused on assessing student writing.

In 1980 (!) I wrote an article titled "Written Composition: Toward a Theory of Evaluation" in which I argued that the field needed a theoretical basis upon which to make decisions about levels of quality in writing. I claimed that the pressure to assess writing had led to various measures of student writing—including analytic scales, holistic scoring, readability criteria, primary trait evaluation, and syntactic maturity—but that none gave sufficient attention to meaning. Drawing on P. F. Strawson's distinction between "formal semantics," which separates structure and meaning from use, and "communication intention," which posits meaning as emerging from the way sentences are used, I urged that compositionists develop a theory of evaluation that put meaning at the center. I recommended Michael Halliday's functional view of language—ideational, interpersonal and textual—as a way to begin, and I commended the work of James Moffett, William Perry, James Britton, Willis Pitkin, and Richard Larson for attending to some of these functions.

After publishing that article, I became increasingly disenchanted with the topic of evaluating writing. The ongoing dominance of the statistically based psychometric model led to a focus on issues of reliability and validity that pushed issues of meaning aside. I could see no way to forward the questions that mattered to me, so I turned my attention elsewhere, investigating writing in the extracurriculum, first in writing groups and later in women's clubs. I decided

that it wasn't worthwhile to focus on the evaluation of writing; I didn't want to spend any more time on it.

Flash forward thirty years, and I have changed my mind: the evaluation of writing preoccupies me. I recently published an article in *Assessing Writing* and am working on several more. I'm teaching a graduate seminar titled "What Makes Writing Good?" I am participating in the Inter/National Coalition of Electronic Portfolio Research, and I have launched a couple of research initiatives focused on developing more effective ways to evaluate students' development as writers. I look forward to conversations about assessment.

Some of this is a result of becoming the director of the Sweetland Center for Writing at the University of Michigan in 2008. Because SCW is responsible for, among other things, helping students place themselves in first-year writing courses, I confronted—and modified—the system of directed self-placement that existed when I assumed the directorship. That, in turn, led me to questions about how SCW could do a better job of evaluating student writing across time. But these administrative concerns do not fully explain why I have become someone who chooses to read in the assessment literature, who seeks out opportunities to discuss the evaluation of writing with students and with colleagues, who has developed a research agenda focused on the very topic she walked away from thirty years ago.

The fact is, things changed dramatically while I was preoccupied with other

questions. These days, many discussions of writing evaluation are framed in rhetorical terms. As Brian Huot puts it, writing assessment should "adhere to recognizable and supportable rhetorical principles integral to the thoughtful expression and reflective interpretation of texts" (Huot 171). The local context receives increased attention as theorists such as Bob Broad, Richard Haswell, and Susanmarie Harrington demonstrate how evaluation can be integrally related to writing instruction. New genre studies, as articulated by Anis Bawarshi and Amy Devitt among others, offers ways of evaluating how meaning emerges from the way language is constructed and used. Halliday's terms have been codified into Systemic Functional Linguistics, an approach that informs evaluation. The tools of corpus linguistics add new dimensions to analysis of student writing. My 1980 concerns about the role of meaning in the evaluation of writing do not seem unusual in this intellectual climate.

The domain of writing assessment has become a very different space, one I'm delighted to (re)join.

Pamela K. Gilbert

Pamela K. Gilbert is Albert Brick Professor of English at the University of Florida, where she has also chaired the English department. Her books include Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels, Mapping the Victorian Social Body, The Citizen's Body, and Cholera and Nation. Her most recent project is as editor of the Blackwell Companion to Sensation Fiction, forthcoming in 2011.

News flash! Dissertations are hard to write. Our presence on a graduate faculty usually means we have, however, managed to write them, and usually a fair number of other things besides. We have “succeeded.” And perhaps that is why many of us tend to think that our own training worked, and to replicate it in our own graduate mentoring to some degree.

There are actually many reasons that, in my experience, some of us tend to apply fewer innovations to our graduate training than to our undergraduate teaching. We have relatively few graduate students by comparison, and a very long learning curve with each. Instead of sixteen weeks to see what our teaching has wrought, the feedback loop is extended for several years, and we often don’t have many different students to compare. Finally, we receive little training in graduate mentoring and so tend to fall back on our own experience—either replicating it in the faith that it worked, or rejecting it because we feel we overcame in spite of its flaws. And let us not forget that those who mentored us labored under the same disadvantages.

A good deal of evidence shows that our most serious attrition occurs in the ABD phase, or just out of course work. Students have spent years perfecting their course performance and rhythm, but we suddenly throw them into the deep end of the pool—or the abyss. Now is the time, we think, for them to learn to work alone, to set their own goals, and to find an independent work process. After all, they’ll be doing it for the rest of their

lives. A certain amount of disorientation, panic, and loneliness is an inescapable part of the process. Or something like that. Many of us found our way through such a process and discovered the joys of solitary scholarship on the other end, and assume it is a necessary part of the hard journey to scholarly independence.

I don’t mean to say that we all would agree with that (I think I see some of my writing studies friends turning purple). We know that scholarship is about “joining a conversation,” and we know that people work better in a supportive community. We say it all the time. And yet, I look around and see the same panic in dissertating grads’ eyes, and I hear the familiar story: “Once I was out of course work, I took a while to find my sense of structure. Then I didn’t see the people I knew anymore and I had no one to talk to but my dissertation director, and I can’t see him/her all the time. Then I got behind and was ashamed. Then I started to wonder if what I was writing about mattered, or even made sense. Then . . . I found my feet. Or not. But either way, it was hard.”

Maybe harder than it needed to be. Several years ago, I saw students having trouble and trying to motivate each other to write. The dissertation buddy system helped, but still often degenerated into uncertainty and more depression. So I started a dissertation writing group. I assumed it might work for a while, get people over some sort of hump. Each month, two of them circulate their work—up to twenty-five pages—by email

a week in advance, and then we all write comments, which we deliver and discuss in person in a long group meeting. We also report our general progress over the prior month, and celebrate and commiserate as needed. Several years later, I lead that group once a month. I fold all my upcoming students into it as soon as they finish course work, and have people attending at several stages from pre-exam to, in some periods, post-PhD. And what I initially conceived as mostly a motivator for students paid some unexpected dividends: students provide a wider and more appropriate audience for each other, sometimes catching problems that I have become too familiar with the individual projects to see. They model the next stage of the process for each other and mentor each other in ways that are beyond me. They offer the scholarly community for each other that we all enter this profession for and few ever get, and those ties have often continued long after graduation. And my workload is actually easier, because I have at least one update per month on everyone's progress, and people tend to give me other work they want me to look at around the same time, so I can plan a work rhythm of my own better as well. Who knew that all that stuff about writing communities we all said we believed in was, well, true?

But that is not what I changed my mind about. I had always thought in theory that writing groups were a fine idea. But having never been in one myself, I thought I was one of those people who really was better off—or well enough

off—working alone. That model, after all, had worked for me, right?

It took me a number of years to see not only how my PhD students' work has grown in the writing group, but how my own has. Even though I rarely share work—after all, the group is their time, not mine—I see the practical effects on my own work of thinking about specifically scholarly writing in a disciplined, coordinated way with a group of emerging specialists in my field. And I think back to my own flailing, unhappy, early attempts to write, first my dissertation, then early articles and the first book, with the encouragement of my very good director, but not a lot of other feedback. I have now had many very different graduate students, and I can say that every single one of them has benefitted, though often in very different amounts and ways, from our working group. And I now wonder how much better, happier work I could have done had I just figured this out sooner.

Yes, writing is hard. But—news flash!—it really doesn't have to be as hard as we make it, on our students or ourselves.

Keith Gilyard

Keith Gilyard is Distinguished Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University and President-Elect of NCTE. His latest book is True to the Language Game: African American Discourse, Cultural Politics, and Pedagogy (Routledge, 2011).

A few months ago, I imagined that if I gained access to a print forum, I would

comment severely on Kenneth Warren's controversial *What Was African American Literature?* given my initial sense that he belittles traditions of African American literature and literary scholarship. I have since changed my mind. I still think his criticism of contemporary writers and scholars is mostly wide of the mark as he argues, "Those who write it, and those who write about it, need it to distinguish the personal odysseys they undertake to reach personal success from similar endeavors by their white class peers" (139). The charge is critical hucksterism by African American academics, though Warren knows that there are white African Americanists and, of course, he must be aware how ironic it is that the height of his present profile is due directly to the furor he can stir up about "not-African American literature." As Aretha might ask, who's zooming whom?

Whatever the case, a close read of Warren's book reveals that it is less a demeaning of the African American literary tradition and more the framing of an important interrogation. Warren's central point is this: there exists an extensive and notable body of African American literature that can be fruitfully characterized as a response to the sociopolitical reality of *de jure* Jim Crow America, from Emancipation to the major civil rights legislation of the 1960s, and subsequent work by African American writers necessarily differs in certain ways from previous black literary production. The premise is a benign one. Indeed, had he titled his book *African American Literature: Retrospect and Prospect*, it would not have caused much

of a stir. But things have become heated because Warren argues that only work of the Jim Crow period can rightfully be considered African American literature. He thus unsettles folks who are invested in notions of pre-Emancipation and post-1965 African American literature. By his account, scholars who claim to work in the field of contemporary African American literature engage in folly because African American literature no longer exists.

We do not have to accept Warren's terminology to grasp the plausibility of the distinctions that he draws. We need not read hostilely as he prods us to "understand better where we are and how we got here" (148). My only wish at this juncture, as I read Warren in a negotiating manner, is that he had argued his case better, exploring more fully the logical contours of his suggestions. For example, he claims that writings by Phillis Wheatley and others are not African American literature but can only be reinterpreted as such (6–7). But does not reinterpretation of an extant body of literature prove that it existed as perhaps misinterpreted gestures? This question is particularly germane because Warren relies on assessment by arbiters of American letters, not on reckoning with the motives of writers. Later in the book, he begins to discuss how African American writers may attempt to express black cultural difference, but then, following George Schuyler, he criticizes the idea that a black citizenry had achieved moral and psychological depth unavailable to white society (27–28). But the

point was literary experimentation, not psycho-ethical manifestations by general populaces. Not surprisingly, Warren underplays the issue of black cultural difference throughout. In reporting on the 1950 *Phylon* special issue on African American literature, Warren accurately captures the prevailing opinion: “the willingness of its various contributors to contemplate without horror the future of an American literature without a special category for black literature” (46–47). But there was vibrant opposition to that position articulated in that same volume by Nick Aaron Ford, and soon after by Lloyd Brown in *Masses and Mainstream*. In other words, the midcentury conversation was more diverse and lively, and the projects of black literature more diffuse, than Warren reveals.

Despite what I consider to be flaws in reasoning and presentation, I admire how Warren concludes. He embraces the concept that current creative writing by African Americans could have some part to play in a drive toward social justice. I sense that he is itching to say more about the critical endeavor. In any event, he will remain provocative. Of that I am sure.

Joseph Harris

Joseph Harris is associate professor of English at Duke University, where he directed the Thompson Writing Program from 1999 to 2009. He recently co-edited Teaching with Student Texts: Essays toward an Informed Practice (Utah State UP, 2010).

The first piece I wrote that gained much notice in our field was “The Idea of Com-

munity in the Study of Writing,” which was published in *CCC* in 1989. In the years after I wrote that essay, I was often asked if I was “doing any more work on community,” which I thought was kind of odd, because my aim had been to question the usefulness of the term. I’d argued that thinking of disciplines as discourse communities downplayed the conflicts that drove much of the work that went on in them, and that imagining classrooms and departments as communities glossed over the many inequities of such workplaces. I was trying to get rid of a term whose warm and fuzzy connotations I distrusted. Instead, I had somehow become associated with it.

But I also suspect that there was something to such questions, because the fact is that I’ve struggled with notions of community throughout my working life as an academic. Part of what drove the writing of my original essay was an ambivalence about the situation I had then found myself in. I felt I had come to an academic job from a very different place than had most of my colleagues, and frankly I wasn’t sure that theirs was a club I wanted to join. I liked intellectual work, and thought I was pretty good at it, but most of my family and friends had little or no connection to the academy, and I had little desire to enter what I saw as a snobbish university milieu. Or to put it another way, I had a chip on my shoulder. Give me a contract and a set of courses to teach, I remember thinking, and I can take care of the community stuff on my own.

Of course I was wrong. The appeal

of academic work comes from a sense of belonging to a collective project. We want our classes to fit into a curriculum, our essays and books to speak to other scholars, our work with students to resonate beyond the walls of our classrooms. Even if I hesitated to enter into the academic scene, I wanted to contribute to the work of a field, a program, a group. So I can see why we can't seem to get past terms like *community*. It names something that we want to work toward.

The problem is that we tend to use *community* to refer to a received state of affairs—a set of norms to which others must assimilate. And so, for instance, the academic discourse community gets imagined as something that students must learn the ways of, or the department or program community as something to which new faculty must adapt. The role of the teacher—or chair or director—becomes that of the host who welcomes guests to the table, who invites them to come learn our ways. But I think the gesture of community needs to be more than a welcoming in; it also needs to be a reaching out. We need to ask what the students in our classes and the teachers in our programs can tell us about the work we do together.

This was a lesson I learned as the director of an interdisciplinary writing program. Almost all of the faculty in this program held PhDs outside of English. They didn't want to join the community of composition studies; they wanted to learn how to make stronger use of writing in teaching their own fields. To help them do that, I had to learn as

much about their values and practices as scholars and writers as they did about things like responding toward revision or composing open-ended assignments. For a few years, then, in this reciprocal way, we held an ongoing conversation about teaching and writing that felt more like an intellectual community than anything else I've been part of. It was not utopia. None of the faculty in the program held tenure-track positions, so all of them had to worry about where they might be headed next. But I think most of us felt, while we were there, teaching and talking with the rest of our colleagues, that we were part of something bigger, something that nobody owned but everybody contributed to. And that seems to me an idea of community worth working toward.

Valerie Lee

Valerie Lee is Vice Provost and Chief Diversity Officer at The Ohio State University, where from 2002 to 2009 she chaired the Department of English. Her books include The Prentice Hall Anthology of African American Women's Literature (2006) and Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings (Routledge, 1996).

At twenty-six years old and fresh out of graduate school, I did not think that my job as a teacher of African American and multicultural literatures would be easy, but I did think that all educated, reasonable people would have logical and ethical reasons for wanting diversity in the curriculum and a diverse student

and faculty body. I clearly remember storming out of a faculty meeting after a white senior colleague proclaimed that he would be willing to hire competent blacks *if he could find one*. I thought that my dramatic protest and logical arguments would temper his concerns, honestly believing that a truly educated person could not be a bigot. I had not imagined that some people thought they had a copyright on knowledge production, determining what counted as “smarts.” When I became a full professor, I challenged this arrogance by presenting an inaugural promotion lecture titled “Smarts: A Cautionary Tale.”

Perhaps my early naïveté was fueled by those memorable and intimidating consciousness-raising events—the ones where the speaker locked participants in a room, and no one could leave without a cultural conversion. Or perhaps multicultural tricksters did the fueling. In the late 1970s, I attended events where individuals would pass for and claim one identity, denigrate another identity, then, in jack-in-the box fashion, disclose that they were really the identity they were denigrating. Though these events were designed to generate “aha” moments and rational epiphanies, they left attendees angry about the deception. These speakers were trickster figures more sly than any I had met in African American folklore.

As years passed, I came to see that classrooms are not pews, and that appealing to some sense of social justice assumes shared values. Hoping for any type of one-to-one transformative mo-

ment with each student or peer depleted my energy and optimism. I became a strong proponent of structural change. My goal became getting myself in a position where *I* could make structural and systemic changes. (I am trying hard to avoid saying “be the change you want to see.”) At this stage in my career, I am not really interested in how many people believe that a diverse student body or professoriate is good. For diversity to work, it need not be a belief; it’s an action, a resource, a complicated negotiation between uneven terrains of power. My move from faculty ranks to chair to vice provost parallels a growing awareness that enacting diversity is an act of the will of someone empowered within a bureaucracy with the courage to push policy. If I am committed to diversity as a principle, then I need to be in a position to reallocate resources in that direction, to make it happen and reward it when it does. Faculty who never theorized or appreciated difference as an intellectual value will readily apply for diversity research grants—if that is where funding is available. Area groups that never thought about hiring a faculty of color are eager to do so if that is where hiring dollars are. Faculty who never cared about the retention of faculty of color change overnight when diversity is a category on their annual performance reviews.

Administrations change; diversity action plans change; buzzwords for multiculturalism change. Someone writes the rules while others are left to react to those rules. As a senior professor who walked through what my colleagues view as that

dark tunnel of higher administration, I now effect change more promptly and across greater numbers than the class-by-class, student-by-student approach I relished in my younger years. I now get to write the rules. I may no longer have the kind of spontaneous passion to storm out of a faculty meeting, but I have developed enough sense to use passion as a stepping-stone to make policy. There is the administrative pleasure of actually getting things done. It is not nearly the same joy as reading a Toni Morrison novel, nor is it as provocative an experience as discussing the future of the humanities. What high-level administration provides is the opportunity to revise the rules, reclaim what and who has been marginalized, and renegotiate terms of engagement.

Susan Miller

Susan Miller is professor of English (emeritus), the University of Utah. Her latest books are Trust in Texts: A Different History of Rhetoric (2008) and The Norton Book of Composition Studies (2009).

I have so often expressed a change of mind that I may appear very consistent, always explaining why we might look at things a bit differently. I confess this view results from an enforced change: some senses of self and trust in the results of my perceptions evaporated when a death-defying car accident erased my binocular depth perception, perfect hearing, and good guesses about how I look. Received with a coma and concussion, all made me edgy about life itself, yet unquestionably

cured of procrastination. And in the light of then-emerging theories that fit my new certainty that stable meanings are a fiction, if a necessary and useful one, I also experienced the absurdity of assuming that laws, governments, institutions, and human sources of orderly power fix meanings without reference to their own exigencies and contexts. I found it more intriguing to recognize the situations that fix interpretations and evaluations of any *X* than to pursue the obvious frailty of *understanding* any *X* itself. Put simply, I gained a liberating mistrust of predictions, foundational principles, and firm inferences, not only my own. I am a sliding signifier, I said, for me a realistic, hard-earned identity that I comfortably inhabit, no matter how vividly I recall its contextualized sources. But its sum has been a persisting habit of thinking at just that moment when I might finish any thought, “What if that (idea, suggestion, plan, interpretation, inference from evidence, belief *in* evidence) is wrong?”

Until recently, I’ve luckily situated what have seemed to me urgent answers to that question in the polite goodwill of generous colleagues. My changed minds have consistently done penance for my ignorance and its concomitant certainties, but in changing ways: by rethinking the cultural motives for required postsecondary composition courses, by exploring the emergence of American identities through ordinary writing across class and gender boundaries, and by placing our field’s theory and practices in educational history, but not a history of a Harvard course elevated by constricting

New England biases. Yet my lost belief in the narrative we monolingual Americans tell about the history of rhetoric hasn't turned out so well.

That is, I asked, "What if that's wrong?" about my repetitive classroom narrations of the "rhetoric" defined by U.S. graduate education. Thomas Kuhn would say that I saw too many anomalies to sustain its plausibility—my paradigm wore out. As I first learned it, this history supports a cultural origin story that must depend on pre-Greek cultures being nothing as literate as recent excavations and translations of cuneiform demonstrate. It is a story that also variously notes the personal delivery to Athens of probability theory and five-part argumentation by Sicilian diplomats Corax and Tisius, legendary identities doubted by many. Despite calling this story a "legend," its telling reveals a disposition to anchor rhetoric in accomplished individualism, not in complicated migrations of discursive models begun at least as early as Sumerian writing. It also forgets the sparse corpus left us by ten Attic orators and the seventeen preserved fourth-century speeches that are mostly forensic examples, not the deliberation Aristotle deems most important to learn. It imagines Athenian people and oratory apart from festivals and their theatrical contests, as unaware of vase painting, as without lyric or song. And the American profession rhetoric originates has been self-portrayed as a "losing battle" against dread philosophy, a complaint that sets aside rhetoric's obvious success as a source in America of arguments for

democratic governance, against slavery, for daring to colonize a continent, for almost everything any of us takes to be an American norm. Yet among such examples, most telling was that the documents I taught were presented as *theory*, but clearly were school lessons—procedures, typologies, and well-elaborated definitions.

I began to wonder what "rhetorical theory" before its nineteenth- and twentieth-century benchmarks might be, and to experience the texts I taught as disembodied floaters across their standard historical narrations. Thus when minority and women graduate students noted that I assigned representations of speeches and letters by their counterparts, but not texts that they counted as "theory," my paradigm broke. I wondered what sort of cultural work this American standard story of rhetoric is doing.

Despite my resulting attempt to answer that question in a different sort of history, I think we are still in the early stages of "What if that is wrong?" about a history of rhetoric. In the United States, we have burdened it with the creation and maintenance of governance through argumentation that is consistently portrayed as a pro/con, for/against, always conflicted encounter. I won't be changing my mind soon about the dangerously patriarchal and positivist right/wrong subtext of that emphasis. It sets aside a possible "What if that is right?": a different history and theory of the productive engagement with others that Aristotle's preference for deliberations would realize.

Peter Mortensen

Peter Mortensen is associate provost for academic affairs and associate professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Most recently, with Ben Daniell he edited Women and Literacy: Local and Global Inquiries for a New Century (2007).

In the fall of 1989, I had the good fortune of beginning my academic career at the University of Kentucky. The gently rolling hills of Lexington seemed a world away from seaside La Jolla, California, my home for a decade as I completed undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of California–San Diego. My arrival was eased by good neighbors, most memorably my new colleagues on the thirteenth floor of Patterson Office Tower.

Recalling that time, one ritual stands out: explaining “my work” to the colleagues who would appear, welcoming and curious, outside my open office door. I had been hired without giving a formal job talk, and it seemed that not everyone had been able to read my writing sample. So it was with genuine interest that my neighbors pressed their inquiries. Describing my work, I led with the facts that I had earned a PhD in English and American literature, and that my committee had included the venerable Americanist Roy Harvey Pearce. This made me legible, or so I believed. Then I would add that I had completed my degree with what was formally called a “specialty in composition theory and research” (Brown, Meyer, and Enos 265).

What did this mean? It meant, I would say, that “my work” involved studying writing and its teaching. Specifically, it entailed research on how writers claim authority for themselves, and how they assert it to move their readers from ignorance to knowledge, from doubt to certainty. The writers in question? Any writers, even—and especially—student writers. My next project? I would continue to specialize, to learn (with rigor, deep and narrow) more than anyone about how authority functioned in writing, this at a moment when authority’s traditional foundations had apparently buckled under the accumulated weight of two decades of post-structuralist critique.

I cannot recall the particular day I had this conversation with my neighbor one door to the northwest. I do, however, have a lingering sense of the surprise (or was it dismay?) he expressed as I enumerated the virtues of building a career, project by project, by means of increasing specialization. My conviction was strong. His, as it turned out, was stronger—and quite opposite to mine.

By the time we were neighbors, Wendell Berry had become something of a specialist in the critique of specialization. Beginning with “Discipline and Hope” (1972), and subsequently in “The Specialization of Poetry” (1974) and “The Ecological Crisis as a Crisis in Character” (1977), Berry was unequivocal in maintaining, as he did in the third essay, that the singular “disease of the modern character is specialization” (“Ecological” 19). In “Standing by Words” (1979), he focused on how spe-

cialization depends upon corruption of our common language, and thus obscures who is truly accountable for the destruction of land, people, and community. And in “The Loss of the University” (1984), Berry indicted higher education, its commitment to specialization realized in the cultivation and celebration of expertise, as an obliging partner in the creation of an industrial economy inimical to the well-being of humanity.

My first Thanksgiving in Lexington, I drove east to visit friends in the Washington, D.C., area. En route through eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, I glimpsed a despoiled landscape that, at least in part, had provoked Berry’s anger and warranted his argument. Still, I could not see how academic specialization was implicated, how *my* specialization was implicated, in diminishing anyone’s quality of life. To the contrary, I thought: I and those in my burgeoning field could discern how critical literacy might be mobilized to create a better life for all precisely because we were possessed of expertise in the study of writing. About this—the value of a purely disciplined expertise—I have changed my mind.

Twenty years on. At Northern Kentucky University’s spring commencement in 2009, Berry told graduates that it was not too late to major in “Homecoming,” no doubt startling words for the assembled women and men who had just finished majoring in something else (“Major” 32). In the homecoming major’s curriculum, Berry explained, students must confront hard questions that are often avoided in “Upward Mobility”

majors (32), perhaps the most difficult one being, “What are the limits: Of the nature of this place? Of our intelligence and ability?” (35). Then he offered these words, familiar from his earlier writing: “Obviously, these questions cannot be answered—and they are not likely to be asked—by a specialist, or by many specialists working in isolation. They *can* be asked, and eventually answered to a significant extent, by a conversation across the disciplinary boundaries” (35).

Today I react to this suggestion much differently than I did two decades ago. I have seen at my current institution, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the value of enabling faculty and graduate students to range broadly, but responsibly, across the intellectual terrain of many disciplines. As we have done so, we have, for the most part, managed to sustain conversations that are responsive to, as Berry puts it, “revelations of ignorance,” conversations that are open to “necessary refinements or changes in the agenda of questions.” Whether our conversations will eventually “collapse the rigidly departmented structure of our present academic and professional system into a vital, wakeful society of local communities elegantly adapted to local ecosystems” (“Major” 35), I cannot say.

What I can say, however, is that Berry’s words about departmental structure are worth pausing over, as some of us in the field contemplate what might be gained by establishing independent departments of writing studies. Can such units be vital and wakeful and locally

adapted? Can they promote homecoming? I surely hope so. But I fear signs to the contrary. So, mindful of an old neighbor's advice, I seek better ways to do "my work"—to do "our work"—ways less dependent on the fencing (noun and verb) required to define and defend the boundary that divides what we know from what we don't, and always will.

David Shumway

David Shumway is professor of English and director of the Humanities Center at Carnegie Mellon University. His book John Sayles will be published next year by University of Illinois Press.

In the early 1980s, I helped to found GRIP, the Group for Research into the Institutionalization and Professionalization of Literary Studies (later, "literary studies" was changed to "knowledge production"), as a project of the Society for Critical Exchange. The key theoretical text for GRIP was *Discipline and Punish*, which we read as explaining the character of academic disciplines in terms of the larger phenomenon of discipline. GRIP was born out of a sense that authority in the profession of literary studies was not rooted in legitimate intellectual judgments, but in hierarchies of status rooted in prejudice, tradition, and fear of change. We saw disciplines as instances of such hierarchy, which functioned mainly to perpetuate the status quo by punishing those who deviated from it and rewarding those who reproduced it. Interdisciplinary enterprises, such as American studies or women's studies,

didn't seem to me any better, because they continued to make use of the same techniques and strategies as the traditional disciplines.

As a result, those of us who founded GRIP tried to imagine something beyond the disciplines, a postdisciplinary form of knowledge production. One such conception, articulated in "The Need for Cultural Studies" (Giroux et al.) was a vision of quasi-academic units that would unite activists, communities, and professors in knowledge production aimed at progressive social change. Our inspiration was the emergence of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies out of Raymond Williams's and Richard Hoggart's work in adult education. The utopian character of this vision did not occur to us at the time, perhaps because we had just lived through an era in which progressive politics produced (however inadequately) new academic units such as women's studies and black studies. In retrospect, it seems odd that people who had been subjecting the current academic arrangements to such rigorous analysis could not see the problem with expecting universities, state or private, to sponsor radical political organizing. Moreover, even though in the early 1980s we had just lived through a moment of retrenchment in the academy, we had grown up with a rapidly expanding university system, and we took continued expansion for granted. We did not foresee the causalization of academic labor or other assaults on the status, value, and social role of academic knowledge.

By the late 1990s, I had decided that academic disciplines needed to be defended rather than attacked. The postdisciplinary no longer looked like a utopia of committed knowledges, but a dystopia of knowledge created by and for corporations. The idea that universities were essentially not-for-profit institutions devoted to the public good seemed increasingly like an artifact of a bygone era. How could this tendency be resisted? As it turned out, academic disciplines were for most academics the only form of social organization available for this purpose. Unionization would be a more effective form of organization for this purpose, but most academics—and especially those at major research institutions, where disciplines are strongest—are not unionized. Disciplines provide us with some means to resist the increasingly instrumentalist vision of the university favored by administrators and legislators. The commitment of disciplines to disinterested knowledge in all its forms I now saw as a major advantage in the struggle against the tendency to regard knowledge as a commodity called “information.”

As a good Foucauldian, I had always been willing to acknowledge that disciplines both constrained and enabled, but I had focused on constraint. I still recognize that disciplines restrict research in unfortunate ways, but I now more fully appreciate their productive dimension. Such productivity previously seemed to me to be both coerced and wasteful. Who needed all of those readings of *Moby Dick* that critics had to churn out to keep their jobs? I would still agree that disciplines,

like capitalism, are overproductive, but I now think that, rather than being wasteful, they are the best method we have for producing knowledge that is broad and life-affirming. As Paul Feyerabend argued, we cannot know in advance what research strategy will yield the knowledge we seek, and disciplines historically have enabled many more such strategies than any other regime of knowledge production. I remain a critic of the limitations that disciplines impose on their members, especially on their tendency to discourage us from writing for audiences beyond the academy. But without disciplines, we academics would have nothing distinctive to say to those audiences, leaving us in the position of freelance journalists, a fate that now certainly should give us pause.

Nancy Sommers

Nancy Sommers teaches at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, where she leads a Teachers as Writers initiative, and mentors new writing teachers. For twenty years, she led Harvard's Expository Writing Program, directing the first-year writing program and establishing Harvard's writing-across-the-curriculum program.

It is how we started the semester back then, asking students to write about their most memorable experiences or their favorite people or place. It seemed like a sensible way to launch a writing course, moving students from narration to description and marching them through the rhetorical modes of comparison/contrast, causal analysis, and, finally, to argument. Students never seemed to be

at a loss to describe their favorite places, most often a bedroom or kitchen, or their favorite person, usually a grandparent, as well as their not-so-favorites, most often a step-mom or quarrelsome boss. It made so much sense, or so we thought, to start a college writing class by asking students to write about their personal lives, something familiar and available, an easy warm-up on the road to exposition.

We called it personal writing, even though what we received came off as oddly impersonal, too often a set of sentimental clichés about loving grandmothers, or rehearsed conventions about the life lessons of various adolescent rites of passage. Yet I loved reading about the grandmothers and kitchens, gaining a glimpse into students' lives, the steaming *golonka*—pork knuckles cooked with vegetables—and the dotting and selfless *babka* who spent her days cooking in service of her family. At some point, though, I started to wonder about how to respond and grade such personal essays, especially when I found myself posing questions in the margins of drafts—"Why do you think your step-mom didn't include you?"—or asking for vivid details to "show, not tell" why that first fight or prom date was memorable. I often worried that I crossed boundaries and responded more as a therapist than a writing teacher, especially when it became clear that the abundant clichés created useful barriers, to distance students from the fullness of experiences they weren't ready to understand.

These days, such personal assignments seem rather quaint, artifacts from a

former era. We understand that personal writing is more complicated than it first seems, especially for college students not inclined toward reflection and introspection, and that writing about grandmothers, unless as an anthropological analysis of a culture's kinship structure, will not prepare students as academic writers. Personal experience isn't sufficient as evidence; students need to go beyond the "merely personal" to analyze, synthesize, and cite sources, as they engage the views of others, argue positions, and enter academic debates. In a college writing course, we have a full plate of twenty-first-century literacy skills to teach, and the *babkas* no longer have a starring role.

Recently, though, I have become uneasy about the multiple ways in which students disappear behind the weight and permanence of their sources, allowing sources to speak for them, unquestioned and unexamined. Academic writing is much more complicated than it may first appear: conversing with sources and knowing what roles sources should play, especially when students aren't sure how to question or engage with a source, often results more in ventriloquism than thoughtful prose. Many of my students, for instance, write academic arguments about "The Diet Industry," or "International Adoptions," filling pages with the words of authorities, and leaving their own perspectives unspoken, as if their experiences with diets or adoptions could not possibly inform their positions. And students choose topics without any personal connection, as if such connections must be banished in a college paper.

Thus, I've been seeking assignments, especially at the beginning of the semester, designed to help students become *both* personal and academic. One assignment asks students to choose an ordinary, but evocative object—a rock, a recipe, a bus ticket—the unpretentious quotidian. The more they look at the chosen object, the more they see; and the more they see, the stranger, less familiar the object becomes. No sources have written about their particular objects; no preordained theses limit their interpretations. As students begin to think about their objects, they practice one of the most important lessons for college writers—to ask a question to which they don't have an answer, and to start from *not knowing*, rather than from *knowing*. And as they begin to analyze their objects, students move outward to interdisciplinary inquiries because they suddenly need to consult sources to learn about the origins of a johnnycake recipe, for instance, or why some persons prefer bus travel. Quickly and naturally, the student writing about a recipe practices the methods of cultural history; the student writing about a bus ticket becomes an ethnographer. Thinking about objects leads students to interpretations that matter to them, showing them what is worth writing about, and *why*.

There are no easy warm-ups to becoming effective college writers, but learning two lessons may help students: sources enrich and complicate ideas, and students' own experiences and interests are valid sources, too, places from which ideas originate. College writing is a mat-

ter of being personal *and* academic by questioning and testing sources against one's own rich and abundant life lessons. Being personal requires students to bring judgment and interpretation to bear on what they read and write, learning that they needn't leave themselves behind when writing an academic essay—imagining that they, too, will become sources from which readers will draw inspiration.

Victor J. Vitanza

Victor J. Vitanza is professor of English and rhetorics and director of the doctoral program in Rhetorics, Communication and Information Design at Clemson University. He is also the Jean-François Lyotard Chair at the European Graduate School, Switzerland. His latest book is Sexual Violence in Western Thought and Writing: Chaste Rape (Palgrave, 2011).

This question “How I Have Changed My Mind” is a theological-philosophical as well as a political question. For me, however, the question is an *impossible* one without a question, much less with answers. At best, John has given us an *assignment* that I can only turn into an *assignation*. After all, I am an *amateur*. So I cannot but wrestle with this question-assignment, taking on less an angel and more so an obtuse angle.

I have relied, therefore, more on drifting (/\/\) rather than making decisions (cuts). Following my desires when offered invitations.

For me, John's question begs for a genre that would be without generic *qualities* as well as without *content*. There-

fore, any question based on *stasis* must be debased on *ex-stasis*. (Recently, I have offered several seminars on “drifting from stasis theory toward ex-stasis spectacles.” Requiring: Being-besides “ourselves.” Being-impertinent.)

This is not to say, however, that I do not live lives of deliberation. Deliberately.

Given the invitation of this question of “How I Have Changed My Mind as Well as My Guts,” “I” think of Ulrich, the so-called exemplary *man without qualities*, about whom Robert Musil writes: “There was something in Ulrich’s nature that worked in a haphazard, paralyzing, disarming manner against logical systematization, against the one-track will [. . .] and it was also connected with his chosen expression, ‘Essayism’” (300). Ulrich-Musil “have gone out on an adventure and lost their way” (301; cf. Agamben). In endless explorations!

This “my,” therefore, perversely disengages in a careering off and then back and yet again off&on the road—if on the road. Recovering itself by waYvES of an ampersand, while refusing to decide what is or can be. And yet, here I am—in reference to Ulrich-Musil—dis/engaging in self-satyrization!

This “I” is a being-t.here *aCademically adrift* (cf. Arum and Roksa).

“My” performance composed of makings&markings of minds&guts: Make-mix, therefore, whatever you will with the following chronic drifts&riffs with my *flow of academic affects*:

Spent early years listening to jazz. Formed an R&R group called *The Fla-*

mingos. We were hot in high school! /\ /\ Attended Sam Houston State University, Huntsville: Played with the *Houstonians* and the Jerry Coker quartet. First composition lessons with Peter Phillips, writing-orchestrating music for small and large ensembles. Played a concert at Goree Prison, where Candy Barr was incarcerated. /\ /\ Attended the Berklee School of Music, Boston: Writing lessons with Herb Pomeroy and drum lessons with Al Dawson. /\ /\ Attended North Texas University: drummed with the 2 o’clock band. Never attended classes. On the road with Sammy Incardona and his orchestra, playing at NCO clubs, criss-crossing Texas. /\ /\ End of semester, returned home: Enrolled at University of Houston, majoring in art history. /\ /\ Year later, changed major to English literature. Had an extended gig in the house band of the Petroleum Club, Shamrock Hilton. /\ /\ Completed BA in English. /\ /\ MA in English. /\ /\ Eventual PhD in English, Northern Illinois University (NIU). While studying for exams taught at the Université de Nantes, France. Published my first articles in literature in *Etudes Anglaises* (Paris) and *Emerson Society Quarterly*. Returned to NIU, took exams, wrote dissertation on “The Dialectics of Perverseness in the works of E. A. Poe.” /\ /\ Began to shift toward style studies and rhetorics. Read Derrida’s “Structure, Sign, and Play.” /\ /\ Assistant professor, Eastern Illinois University (EIU), 1975. (Watched *Saturday Night Live*.) /\ /\ Awarded nine-month NEH Fellowship at Carnegie Mellon University, seminar in rhetorical invention,

with Richard Young, 1978. First met Jim Berlin, Lisa Ede, Charles Kneupper, etc., in seminar. /\ Presented at first CCCC, 1979. Published first article on composition in *CCC*. Returned to EIU. Started *PRE/TEXT*, 1980. /\ Associate professor at University of Texas–Arlington, coordinator, PhD program in humanities, rhetoric and composition track, 1982. Helped Kneupper start the Rhetoric Society of America conference. /\ Attended the European Graduate School (EGS), Switzerland, 2001. Taught a seminar with Giorgio Agamben on *the coming community*. Wrote “Chaste Rape” (committee: Wolfgang Schirmacher, Alain Badiou, Agamben). Awarded second PhD, or Habilitation, in communication and media philosophy, 2003. /\ Became core faculty member at EGS, as Jean-François Lyotard Chair. /\ Thereafter, professor at Clemson University, director of PhD transdisciplinary program in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, 2005–. And thus, thereafter, hereafter, transwhatevers . . .

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