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 Independent Study
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Independent Study Synthesis

I. Exigence for my Professional Paper

*"...we call foul on moves that do not find internal unity, coherence, and consistency in data from any entity we take to be a text."
 Susan Miller, Textual Carnivals*

I began this project with a strong interest in the two specific binaries: the division of literary and rhetorical/composition studies in the English field, and as a distillation of those individual studies: the boundary between what our culture perceives as creative and critical writing. My motives for examining the cultural genealogy constructing each of these categories derived from personal indecision to find one discipline or one type of writing as mutually exclusive to the other. Perhaps this is obvious, but when I began my research I noticed quickly my interest wasn't even lodged in the connotations of words we have arbitrarily assigned to (mis)represent a discipline or style of writing. Rather, I kept circling back to a semiotic question: how are we able to engage in a cycle of interpretation of symbolic codes that has the power to alter our consciousness—the ambiguity, the diversity, the uncertainty—from which we somehow create enough meaning to communicate on a daily basis? This observation alone would take great care to unravel, and I intend to try. However, subsequent to this initial question, I observed an even more intriguing connection, which I also intend to dedicate significant energy toward in my professional paper: the gaps inherent to symbolism and meaning transfer are also what allow us to constantly reposition the subject (thank you, Foucault)—by which I refer to the student and student's content—in the composition classroom. And more specifically, how we as a hyper-rationalist culture have relied on language to be the primary heuristic to interpret and expose gaps for agency. In concert with my reflection of cultural genealogy, I would also like to conduct an analysis of how the current

Comment [DD1]: I almost get this but not quite. Which is un-ideal since it's central. Are you wondering at how this endless circulation of symbolism that actually shapes our thinking somehow simultaneously resolves to meaning-sharing. You mean (??) that a thing can simultaneously shape what we want to mean (destabilizing us) and yet be stable enough to create common ground and shared meaning?u

Comment [DD2]: The value of which is ... ? (In other words, what other terms can we use arrange this in to express the potentials this ability to reposition creates?)

Comment [DD3]: This sentence was expected until this. How many times have I thought the first part of this sentence but not made this final turn / connection. Damn.

status of Rhetoric and Composition **may be *contingent* on language activity in the form of metacognition.**

Linguistic practices in the form of metacognition are tremendously responsible for a current repositioning of the subject in rhetorical and composition studies. Access to the knowledge of metacognition, to the habit of metacognition, is available to a more diverse population of students than ever before. While it seems counterintuitive to claim a *habit* of mind can be taught, we now have data that suggests exactly this in MSU freshman writing courses, for example. In fact, any school using a WAW approach is immersed in metacognitive exercises, though comp pedagogy is certainly not limited to this one approach to use metacognition (as I witnessed at the 2014 WPA conference). Students have been moved (in many composition classrooms) into the primary position of meaning-makers through a sophisticated dance between language, reflection, and interrogation—the precursors for which were set by semiotic theorists like deSaussure and critical pedagogues like Paulo Freire. Strangely enough, in a contemporary Literary History course, it is likely that course may open with critical questions about the position of the author as a meaning-maker. While attention may be taken away from the student here, the role of authorship is still under scrutiny, which is also quite transparently our concern as composition instructors.

As one brief example, creative and critical authors can be determined and defined by putative construction of extremes like the transcendental/impersonal subject. Divine impregnation of ideas versus the careful observation and reflection of the world (detached but informed) are two typical casts we assign the creative and critical writer in Western culture. But when we examine these casts diachronically, each of these depictions is applied to *all* authorship, at least in Western cultures, at one point or another. This is a perfect example of time-space collapse (not to mention, definitional collapse) and how despite human desire for the narrative of continuity, **time has irrelevant linearity when it comes to meaning making.** It is of little surprise that as Literary studies currently reevaluates the

Comment [DD4]: Oh, geez, how the hell did you just do that?

Which is to say, simultaneously,
 1) This is obviously a very cool idea
 2) It's such a leap I don't know how you got there, so fill some stuff in eventually (maybe you do next paragraph), and
 3) Pretty sure this is the fourth project you just listed in about 8 lines. Are we having fun yet? ;-)

Comment [DD5]: Masterfully written paragraph. I admit I lost the thread of "linguistic practices" that it opened with, somewhere in here.

Comment [DD6]: Hrrmmm. I appreciate the hedonistic wildness of the broad strokes of your pen in drawing these depictions ... the trouble is, I think, how quickly a number of them break. It seems impossible, for example, for time, characterized in part by linearity (as language is a sequential phenomenon and thus grounded in linear time), to ever be irrelevant—that breaks the constraint of kairos.

So, then, following that example, I'm left uncertain what to make of your insights other than to realize that perhaps their attractiveness lies in paradox or quantum indeterminacy (both/and)?

position of the author in relation to a text and “the need to (re)situate subjectivity” (Burke, *Authorship*) in general, that Rhetoric and Composition is simultaneously reevaluating the position of the student and teacher (both, presumably authors of composition) in the contemporary classroom—a counterhegemonic reaction to the practices of literature departments (Miller, *Textual Carnivals*). And yet we are arguing for similar re-conceptions. Our sister disciplines under one roof are making moves that are, upon close scrutiny, not so different after all. But to even draw this type of connection requires a reductive capacity of the mind that also squelches divergent capacity, which is not my intention; this awareness, again, circles back to my initial inquiry about the holes between words, definitions, and cultural genealogies that assisted in constructing a current code of academic activity.

II. A Closer Look at Binaries and Reductionism

*“All constructed truths are made possible
by powerful ‘lies’ of exclusion and rhetoric.”*
Joseph Clifford

Susan Miller highlights in her work *Textual Carnivals* that ancient rhetoric was not theoretically unified, despite our naïve impulse to view modern rhetoric and composition as a continuum of the once prominent fine art (42). Miller takes the first chapter of *Textual Carnivals* to trace back the human impulse to create significance and in the particular case of rhetoric and composition studies, to associate it with universal implications or patterns—patterns that have been around since the ancient Greeks, at least. She highlights that perhaps we draw on Composition’s current status in the university as inseparable from rhetoric simply because we feed on the grandiose narrative of continuity. There is a spiritual impulse at work here, she suggests. A spiritual longing to feel connected to some grander design, besides the tangible evidence that would suggest an otherwise logical pattern: rhetoric was originally an oral art, and composition didn’t reach its status as a study until about 1850 in Western education. How could the two possibly be so related that we have come to name an entire field in

Comment [DD7]: Well ... I’m less ecumenical, but I welcome a fresh, possibly unpolluted perspective that is willing to see these concerns much more as fellow-travelers than I have ever been able to.

Comment [DD8]: Do you mean that seeking convergence is inherently inimical to creative divergence? I can see how, yes, sometimes (this is roughly the entire point of LDS culture, for example), but then I remember too that in creative circles, divergence lies in finding improbable convergence—that is, the highest-wattage creativity lies in pulling off the most improbable leaps that form connections between things nobody had imagined connected.

I like how it winds up serving as an example of your original conundrum, though, that’s slick.

Comment [DD9]: You draw this line of critique beautifully.

academia as a Burger King combo of their disciplines (is it commodity? Is it efficiency? Is it lack of understanding of what our field actually does so far?)?

The genealogy she traces by pointing out the human urge for religiosity, despite movements to secularize education, makes perfect sense to me. Religions were forged from an impulse to believe, not the other way around. How does that impulse, apparently inherent to the creative patterns in the mind, simply go away when you remove an institution or symbolic code that allowed you to worship and acknowledge that impulse? It would still be there because it preceded the institutions and codes—the impulse to make meaning and significance is inherent to human life, at least a happy life, many philosophers would suggest. Those who see through the arbitrary nature of religious institutions may turn their energy toward “secular” pursuits, but the impulse to give significance to the new curiosity may still be so strong that the best words we have to describe it at that point are still *spiritual callings* or *divine interventions*—a grander design, inexplicable connectivity.

Miller is concerned with the unity of Rhetoric and Composition as a field, and therefore, each component’s individual abilities to unify. But then the paradoxes step in. Rhetoric can unify communication by bringing a rhetor and an audience to agreement. But rhetoric can just as easily fragment consciousness. As Miller quotes Rosenfield:

As Western thought became ever more schizoid in its efforts to fragment self and social consciousness, it was no accident that rhetoric, lying at a strategically important juncture linking the two, should suffer exceptional damage in its attempts to maintain its integrity. (38)

Well what does Composition unify? What does it fragment? Composition is an art that allows us to collect our thought in a concrete way— a coherent production. Except, not really; it can just easily send messages that antagonize or confuse the reader...but this is obviously rhetorical, too. I don’t have

Comment [DD10]: For what it’s worth, it’s a historical artifact of the attempt to shut down the worst kind of formalist composition instruction by attempting to build content back in.

More politically and thus realistically, it’s also a raw grab at status. We have this narrative—created, not coincidentally, by people trained as literary scholars—that no work in the university is respectable if it is not visibly *theorized*, and it has been thought, in various times and quarters of the field, that more open and aggressive theorization would win us an academic status long denied. Get me drunk and I’ll tell you what I really think of that.

Comment [DD11]: Yes, *and* ... religions were simultaneously (I think?) formed from an impulse to *control*, so is there a way that fits into this construct too?

Comment [DD12]: I’m more given to thinking about the power dynamics of religion in culture, which are less hopeful than this ... so I appreciate the reminder.

Comment [DD13]: Your next stop is Burke. His thinking on magic, religion, and science (and how they’re all the same thing, in the sense of powerful discourses of a time) is kinda cool. (I’m more given to understatement as the clock ticks down to morning....)

qualms with uniting the two as a field, but I don't know if that's Miller's point either. It seems like what she is really intrigued by is the fact that we dance away an endless midsummer's eve between coherence and chaos, a dialectic that gives our field as much critical insight as it deserves. All the ways composition and rhetoric can work together, but also how we would be naïve to use them interchangeably. This isn't much different than where my original intention for my professional paper derived. I am intrigued by the subtle balance of cultural forces that construct definitions which ultimately provide enough ambiguity that re-interpretation is inevitable.

How do we get to such ambiguous language? Reduction and the urge to classify. For example, I have a mindful tendency to reduce *anything* to the simplest equations I can perceive. Perhaps this comes from always perceiving the universe as a vastly complex network of phenomena, and wanting to make sense of it in a way that is comforting to me. If all you ever see is complexity and diversity, it can be hard to find lucid meaning in that. Every time I face a binary, dichotomy, dialectic, or opposing viewpoints, I invariably try to find the origin of diffusing threads to make a simpler picture of the universe. I remember being very young and perceiving war as the most complex, frightening, and confusing phenomena a human can engage in...how could anyone ever possibly *want* to end the life of another human being? I just didn't get it and resigned to the notion it must be something that was so complex I would never understand. But as I grew up I realized it wasn't as complicated as I initially perceived it at all. *War is conflicting ideology with brute force*. Whether wars are fought for land, power, religious cause, money, it all comes down to (at least) two minds having a difference in opinion. Now don't get me wrong: the causes will be as diverse as life itself, but it is also possible to reduce the complications into a simple equation: disagreement. How was I able to make this equation, and what does it do for me as a young woman who still doesn't truly understand how someone could bring themselves to kill another person? Perhaps I just haven't been put in the right *experience*. But in the meantime, I think I made this equation to make the nonsense more accessible as an observer, and even

Comment [DD14]: I don't feel like I can speak for Susan on this point—I don't know that I ever really got clarity on where she wanted to take this point—but I can maybe offer some further distinctions. Remember that she'll be defining composition a couple different ways—one, the activity; two, the schooled pursuit. As an activity, composition inevitably "reflects" rhetoric in that it is (I believe she would maintain) an inherently rhetorical activity. As a schooled pursuit, she might say (returning to the bifurcation between sophistic and Socratic rhetorics) that composition poorly reflects rhetoric or engages a caricature of rhetoric.

And then, here are a couple things I would say. First, composition as a discursive activity is rhetorical in nature, but composition is not rhetoric, and rhetoric isn't necessarily composition. Second, *as we now practice them* in the academy—mostly in English departments—I would assert (perhaps already have, to you, in one conversation or another) that the Rhet / Comp binary replicates the binary between Lit and Rhet/Comp. That is, inside "rhet/comp," Rhetoric is High (theory) and Composition is low (practice), in the same way that in English depts. Lit is High and rhet/comp is low.

I don't know that Susan would have agreed with me on that, though I think she would be intrigued and allow the discussion.

And I don't know what if anything any of this does for your inquiry. I'd like to talk it out further with you.

Comment [DD15]: Rhetorical situation? ;-)

But no, it's not really just this. Always always always go to *values*: you can't imagine / make sense of taking another life because of your foundational assumptions about the nature of life, its value, and a few other things (including self-determination and the nature of brutality). Someone who's okay with taking human life – or thinks they are – starts from a different value set, where some things are simply more important than human life. And it's fairly amazing (for good or ill) what we can do when a "shallower" value has to be set aside to prioritize a deeper value.

All of which is to say: it's all still rhetorical.

as a critic. How can I talk about why I don't like war if I don't understand its causes? And then I realize, I have just done exactly what my colleagues and teachers do by creating total categories to engulf pedagogy and disciplines in completely separate rooms under one roof: English studies. A reductionism that mystifies the possibilities of divergence.

I wonder if the impulse to reduce complexity is not just a very basic function of human consciousness, perhaps even a rhetorical one to make the world more comfortable, more meaningful.

Why do great minds like Einstein and Thoreau insist that simplicity is elegance, and why did they dedicate their entire lives to pursuing simplicity; Thoreau practically living as a pauper to prove economic and socio-political, even spiritual points. Einstein pursuing the most simplistic physical equations possible to describe the universe. Why do so many Eastern philosophies emphasize simplicity as a way of being: Taoism, Buddhism, etc. Perhaps this is unrelated, but I find it fascinating too that Hydrogen is the most abundant atom in our observable universe, and it is also the simplest. Everything that exists in our universe can be reduced to a set of atoms, which can again be reduced to parts that are identically occurring, just in different numbers per atom. It's as if the universal blueprint, despite its complexity, bows to the simplest of designs. Reductive thought allows us to search for, though not necessarily find, the closest thing to an origin, a unity, a coherence that we crave as conscious beings that create meaning, even if we know language won't give us a direct access to meaning. Harold Bloom paradoxically explains, "meaning...cleaves more closely to origins the more intensively it strives to distance itself from origins" (xvi *Authorship*).

III. Linguistic and Pedagogical Implications

"The air is full of invisible bolts."
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

*"...for the mind in creation is as a fading coal
which some invisible influence, Like a constant wind,
awakens to a transitory brightness..."*
Percy Bysshe Shelly, "A Defence of Poetry"

Comment [DD16]: I would bet on it.

How the fuck else is a human brain supposed to handle irreducible complexity? But, more importantly (and now you need to read Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*), it has to do with how brains do what brains do. They are abstracting, pattern-recognition machines. There *might* be other ways to do what we do with our minds besides 1) establishing patterns, 2) abstracting the greatest common denominators from them, and 3) creating a network of those simplifications which give us near instant recognition of new instances of the pattern, plus memory as we know it, plus linguistic processing—it's all schemata and gestalt, every last bit. Take that away and in terms of brain function we're somewhere south of a gorilla.

Comment [DD17]: Oh, but there's a difference between *simplicity* and *simplification*. They're completely different. And I don't think the word "simplistic" (with the cultural overtones we give it) goes equally well with both. Simplistic almost always means *simplified*, not *simplicity*, right?

Comment [DD18]: That's entropy. It takes a great deal more energy to organize more complex atoms, and since we live in an entropic universe, it's vastly easier for hydrogen (1) to exist than, say, einsteinium (99). Hell, to get enough energy to get cobalt as an element, you have to blow up a star. Three times. So when the universe favors simplicity, it has something to do with conservation of energy, which seems like a pretty big deal / important observation. I like that your mind went here.

Comment [DD19]: Still, though, I want to hear varying valences of "reductive." To my ear, its first meaning is still negative—we don't usually use "reductive" in a good sense, but in a "you shouldn't have" sense. I'm wondering if we have a better word for its good sense ... I think so, and just can't think of it.

I see rhetoric as essential to meaning making. It's like the unseen force that generates the paradox of chaos and unity at once; it can simply be diffracted in different ways depending on the context, like sunlight through a prism producing violet, red, and green. But rhetoric isn't essential to our meanings only because we are linguistic beings—although we may have never figured that out without language. Rhetorical cognition exists without language, too. When a toddler models the facial movements of their parent's, they do so without a linguistic instruction. And yet, there is a rhetorical message from the parent: a smile (likely) indicates a wish for positive energy to be transferred from one being to the next—an affective radiance. I find the analogy to sunlight here quite useful, as rhetoric seems to be essential to our evolution as cognizant beings, and the sun obviously generates the energy that sustains life on our earth. Where the sun takes care of our physical needs, rhetorical nature allows us to nurture and cultivate emotional, psychological, and other mental growth. Even more so, as we become conscious of ourselves and our thought by metacognition, rhetoric allows us to interpret our exigencies, and those of other beings, perhaps without ever being explicitly told by another party. That is the power of rhetorical consciousness: it is practically mind-reading.

Comment [DD20]: Yes ... what is essential to rhetoric is *symbol* (fundamentally human/brain-functional). To the extent rhetoric works on/in language, it's simply because language is one symbol system. Clothing is another. Faces are another.

Comment [DD21]: Hmm. I like it. It makes me think about rhetoric then as an *energy input*. Which is ... interesting. I need to think that through farther. I mean, you might be on crack with this, but it's all-the-way worth pondering.

Comment [DD22]: ☺

I do believe, though, that as soon as we engage in metacognition we *need* language to generate meaning, and perhaps this is one of the very unique things about being human. Language is what unlocked metacognition to us. How does that shift occur? If a baby smiles because her mom smiles, moving the muscles in her face is caused by visual interpretation, and therefore, motor activity in the brain—language isn't essential to brain function in that process. But is consciousness? Well, that baby isn't going to be self-conscious yet if she is under about a year, but there still has to be a consciousness present if she is awake and interacting with the world, it's just not a double-consciousness, not a reflective or mindful consciousness, yet.

Comment [DD23]: Your thought experiment here leads us to ask, simply (hah!), Can there be metacognition without internal dialogue, and can there be self-dialogue without language? And, how much self-dialogue is necessary for "awareness"? Other clues: babies are obviously self-aware enough to cry when hungry, wet, or at the wrong temperature, among other things. Is it self-awareness? Or is it involuntary, in the same way that I make all kinds of noise and exclamation (now linguistic, though possibly still with tears accompanying the involuntarily vocalization) when I, say, shut my hand in a car door – or whack my funny bone.

So could we actually *think about our thoughts* without a more abstract system of interpretation than visual cues and a "single consciousness"? With language we have a symbolic system that allows us

Comment [DD24]: I'm at "no."

to generate a double-consciousness by reflecting on a symbolic system that is already an arbitrary mediation (once-removed) from the core of whatever we are attempting to describe—not that we really know what that core *is*. Being conscious of thought is like diving through at least two layers of symbolic presentation of an unreachable origin. But a paradox arises when I want to define metacognition (a double-consciousness using language) as more elusive communication than a reflection of smiles. What’s interesting here is that it is easy to assume as long as we have an unarticulated consciousness about something, that message isn’t transferred to anyone, and therefore, still in the abstract—very elusive. On the other hand, if we use language to communicate a simple message, it should be relatively transparent what our intent was, and therefore the other person has processed the once isolated abstraction into their own interpretation: a new abstraction processed through a concrete speech act—usually, not so elusive. The language-less scenario seems to be the more **unreliable** meaning transfer. But is a smile from a mother to her baby to a random observer **really so ambiguous?** What about language? We say “I like your shirt” to someone, but use a snarky tone, that message could be interpreted in several ways. So which is the more unidentifiable message? In this thought experiment I would assert the language over the language-less scenario, assuming that both are still rhetorical; both have an effect.

In other words, the language that is supposed to let us **easily** transfer consciousness from one being to the next *can* be more mystifying than rhetorical **consciousness transfer** sans language. This makes sense, though, because with language we are using a more abstract system to transfer meaning. You could view the baby-mother scenario as a **physical transferring of happiness**. But as soon as you start to *describe* happiness to someone else, they may agree, disagree, etc. To sum this up, at least one “layer” of consciousness is essential to the baby’s cognition of her mother’s facial expression, so consciousness relays rhetorical messages without language, too. Rhetoric is inherent to consciousness, but language isn’t, though language can make consciousness **even more sophisticated**. And ultimately,

Comment [DD25]: You might want to think of it in terms of more-constricted, or higher-slippage. Language is far from a perfect constrictor of meaning, but it looks like a positive lock-down of meaning compared to an unmediated image. What happens is that language calls for a relatively specific focus. In those cases where we find language to be ambiguous or polyvalent, what we’re really saying is something like “well, this word could mean three or five things, so you can take this sentence a few different ways.” Which seems bad to us, but what if I show you a picture of the same subject matter? ☺ It’s several orders of magnitude less constricted—higher slippage—than language.

Comment [DD26]: No, but by the same token, if it’s not ambiguous, there’s only a tiny range of meanings it can express. That image can in some special cases be quite clear while language in many more cases can be quite ambiguous, doesn’t let us walk away from general nature of the one as more constrictive (and thus more conducive to communication) than the other.

Music is another interesting example. For an extremely narrow range of meanings—usually expression of emotion—music is vastly superior to language (at least, with the proper cultural training, but then the same is true of language!—both require some serious cribs to make meaning of). But the number of meanings music can tightly—thus reliably—express is an awfully short list. Music might in fact be “the universal language,” but it only has a 10-word vocabulary, in terms of *reliable* communication.

Really, though, doesn’t all this just call into question the nature of “communication” itself? It feels like a very loaded word, stacking the deck in favor of language by nature of what it dictates is valuable. (“Clarity,” “efficiency,” “directness.”)

Comment [DD27]: Speaking of loaded values for “communication.” I’m pretty sure the only time language is easy is when it’s superfluous / doesn’t matter to begin with!

Comment [DD28]: Well, that’s a big gaping subject. Now I’m thinking about drugs, too. (Seriously: doesn’t consciousness transfer get a little easier with an intoxicant?)

Comment [DD29]: Yes. Nice. And we should more: embodiment is hugely significant, much more than we historically (patriarchally) have credited it.

Comment [DD30]: Interesting descriptor. More layered? More complicated? More ... sonorous? ;-)

despite this rare paradox of a situation, it still seems for the most part language is what allows us to transfer meaning most effortlessly in human society.

Why does this all matter? Well, for one I believe that claiming a status for language that it is more transferable or reliable communication than consciousness transfer without language is one pre-determined by a hyper-rationalist culture. Eastern ways of knowing wouldn't hesitate for a moment to profess knowledge, data, and meaning can be transferred without language. Is it not an uber-reductionist move of our culture, a way of getting a comfortable grasp on the phenomena of message transfer, to claim a language is the most stable way to do this? That's just one way of perceiving knowledge—it is one way of knowing. Granted, my claims here are basically the consideration of the reliability of telepathy, and that may be considered a mystic belief, let alone taboo for this culture. But what were x-rays, sound waves, and light waves in the mind of humans who intuitively envisioned them, before we had the technology and empirical evidence to “prove” those invisible bolts all around us existed? Taboo. Mysticism. Were they any less real as an abstract image in the mind of a genius than when we diagrammed and labeled them with language as an attempt to rationalize and familiarize ourselves with the phenomena? Nope. But when we reduce a once mystical phenomenon into a coded symbolism, suddenly we feel comfortable with its legitimacy. We predominately do not, as a Western culture, trust that we can simply *feel into* knowledge without language.

I guess the irony for me as an English major who advocates of both intuitive and logical ways of knowing—especially being raised in a Western culture—is that language is a big fat mess. It is an almost clumsy attempt to reduce and codify the inexplicable in order to communicate. But misinterpretation, ambiguity, and subjectivity are inevitable, and that is nowhere more obvious than in the disciplines of English studies. Rhetoric and Composition evolved as a field in attempt to portray itself as the counterhegemonic, or more the rationalized, branch of the English field, mainly as a reaction to elitist measurements of tasteful writing in the literary departments (Miller). No one should have been better

Comment [DD31]: Now I need you to think about meaning-making as an interpretive act. “Transfer” is a lovely metaphor but is just fundamentally inaccurate, of course. As soon as we remind ourselves that meanings are *never* transferred (or “translated,” either, in the literal, physical sense), but rather always instantiated from some blueprint—*itself also* not transferred, and now we’re in an endless recursive loop—so that meaning is always constructed through interpretive acts—then the importance of constrictive and less constrictive symbol systems gets crucial. Because that constrictivity is a major determinant in *how* the interpretation will go.

Comment [DD32]: Concur, which is why radical postmodernism is so paradoxically hilarious. Here’s this ideology devoted to the takedown of hyper-rationalist culture, and it’s drawn the conclusion that reality is mostly or entirely constituted in language. *Oops*.

Comment [DD33]: Eh, well, now you’re changing terms. Where did this “stability” business come from. Do you mean that it’s the most repeatable or the most likely to come up with a shared meaning (or the closest thing to it) most often? Sure, I can see that.

Comment [DD34]: But but but but but. Here’s my roadblock, and it has nothing to do with whether telepathy exists. (It would be weird if it didn’t, actually.) Let’s say that with telepathy you can share a non-linguistic meaning with my mind – an image, say. Isn’t the problem actually with *what follows*? Which is, what am I supposed to *do* with this image? *Why* did you share it? What did you want me to understand *about* it? I’m pretty sure such questions put us back up to your discussion about layers of meaning and consciousness. If you supposed you could share *that* knowledge with me—what *matters about* the image you shared—how would you share that knowledge non-linguistically? Wouldn’t it have to be a kind of gut-knowledge? A conviction, felt in the bones?

Which gets me to the word I think is most crucial here and I’d encourage you to start using more as you pursue rhetoric further, and that is, exactly, *embodiment*. Bodies bodies bodies. Mind-as-body body-as-mind. Watch for this hardcore in Kate’s class, because she’s going to have y’all thinking about rhetoric *as* (not *of*) *place*, and what happens when we understand body as place and mind as body?

Comment [DD35]: Yes. Because only women do that, and as everyone knows, they are the seat of all things base, impure, hysterical (literally, in the Greek), irrational, and contaminated. Back to the enlightenment-back-to-classical binaries that associate women with body with low/animal and mean with mind with high/god. Sometime we need to have that talk. ☺

Comment [DD36]: Thank goodness! Otherwise Locke would have made our world very, very bad.

arbiters of language than the lit professors, and yet their use of language was not enough to hold onto their demesne in academia.

Rhetoric and Composition is also quickly rising to become one of the most relevant and practical fields to modern society from the Liberal Arts College. Curiously enough, one of the field's catalysts was the tyrannical mishandling of language by literature professors: elitist evaluations, a student that wasn't the subject of the study, and a teacher-student power dynamic of knowledge: ignorance, when it came to beautiful language. Now we have a field that genuinely engages the student as an arbiter of not just language but meaning. We encourage metacognition and allow the students to generate content from their own consciousness in the assignment. Discourse—imbued with the Foucauldian notion of ubiquitous power—is accessible more now than it ever has been. And it educates our society, indeed. But which power structures are we perpetuating with this ability to edify through language? An ability to abuse symbolism as the only true way of transferring knowledge, when Semiotics shows us the word will always only be arbitrary to the core of what we are describing anyway. Our students completely take for granted, as they use a clever metaphor in their creative writing class, that the language itself is a metaphor for something we cannot explain. It is reductionism of a much more complex process of coding and translation—it is an arrogant way of knowing if it is not coupled with a broader awareness that sensing and feeling is knowledge generative, as well.

Again, I do not mean to discount language's uses or power to communicate, and I think it is fascinating that metacognition is available to us *through* language. But I do see a need in our field to understand more "esoteric" ways of knowing, and to advocate those ways of knowing to our students, if we are truly going to be reactive to an elitist handling of language. Communicating without language is only esoteric because it is unfamiliar to our culture, but why would that even be relevant to composition studies if we are looking for concrete documents with language on them? It is about invention, not the document.

Comment [DD37]: I have never seen this word used in a sentence. I had to fucking look it up. Which I think is a nice proof of the point. 😊

More urgently: misinterpretation and ambiguity are inevitable, and *this is good*. Sure, it causes the occasional catastrophic plane crash, but I'm pretty sure it might be what enables love, too. I mean, without the slippage of meaning-construction-via-symbol-systems, we'd have an awfully mechanical world, and I don't think there would be much romance in it at all. I don't think it would much feel like we think *life* feels. Can you imagine being in the most beautiful nature scene and feeling as if you could completely express what you're seeing and experiencing? It would be a radically different and I think impoverished experience.

Which I think you know, of course, and I say all that only to emphasize the paradox: we cannot be ourselves without our greatest frustration.

Comment [DD38]: Beauty. Let's give credit where due: *specifically*, lit professors *trying to scientize literature*. From John "can we please get a literal language" Locke through the new criticism of the 1950s, the attempt to mathematicise language is the common thread (I first wrote "denominator," like a boss) in the tyranny. *Measuring* poetry!

And of course those fuckers lost. It was a stupid project on many levels, one fostered by the least humane among us. Which, back to your paradox, makes it even cooler that they called themselves humanists. 😊

Comment [DD39]: Yeah ... fuck arbitrary. (Apologies. One of my hidden hot buttons is semantics v pragmatics. There aren't many rhetorical semanticists, for a reason.)

Really. What's one serious, actual *consequence* of arbitrariness? Arbitrary is only meaningful *until* language is in use, and then "arbitrary" is *conventional*, and conventions are never "arbitrary" in the semiotic, "random" sense of the word. Conventions are always and everywhere *motivated* and *situated*—that is, they are rhetorical. Something that semiotics typically ignores.

Saussure (the arbitrariness of the sign) is not wrong about the building blocks of language, but he is at every other turn wrong about the implications of that little tidbit. So what, that linguistic sign systems are arbitrary? They're not, as soon as we *use* them, and what even is the point about talking about unused language? That's not language.

The world is in fact NOT arbitrary in virtually any way, and so any theory that leads to that assertion isn't paying attention to lived, embodied experience. Which is generally my beef with semiotics and its offspring semantics.

Comment [DD40]: Concur. And, again, rhetoric. Because it's sufficiently capacious to have understood this before Plato took it over.

Our field has lost the classical emphasis of rhetorical invention, and this happened somewhere between the transformation of rhetoric as an oral art to a written practice. When meaning was not written down, but spoken from stream-of-consciousness, did we have a greater capacity to trust a gut-reaction of how knowledge should be articulated next? Is there something stifling about having a document to immediately concretely reflect on not just the meaning, but aesthetics of our words? Think about how self-conscious human beings are about their bodies; why would a concrete account of their thoughts be any different? It is a manifestation of diversity that allows us to see more clearly how different we are from everyone else. If we were just a bunch of transparent souls floating around without bodies, we would lose a lesson of diversity; there would be less self-consciousness about connecting with something so empirically different than us. It is the same with thought in the abstract or in a concrete form. Anxiety is stifling. But thought can roam and evolve freely in the abstract without immediate fear of judgment.

We live in such a materialistic culture. The product matters. Aesthetics matter. Miller shows us that by moving from the product to the process paradigm all we have really done is emphasized a new product. She also points out our attempts to escape hegemony in a subjective field has only turned us into a (on the surface) more empirical and rational study of composition, though the paradox is we have generated space for even greater amounts of subjectivity. We want written composition because it is relevant and practical to modern society, but what did we lose when we moved from an oral culture to a written culture, despite significant gains of global communication? Somehow we are even less likely to admit we can intuitively connect with humans across the globe, because we need "proof" first.

Our students don't believe they have anything to invent because they have been raised in a culture that values credentials and publications before authority is appropriate. They can't even share ideas without being called out for plagiarism. I believe the use of metacognition has restored attention to an innate gift of intuitive (wordless) signals that allow the student to generate meaning eventually in

Comment [DD41]: Well... as in most other things rhetoric, we settled for the Aristotelian account of invention, which is itself already impoverished.

Comment [DD42]: Blame Peter Ramus.

Comment [DD43]: Something to this, yes... But, complexify: Plato believed in revelation, but unfortunately he believed that only philosophers were eligible for it. The sophists believed in whatever fit the moment, but lacked, perhaps, the conviction then to defend non-rational knowledge when their backs were against the wall post-Socrates. Aristotle, being the technician that he was, did not help. (Look what pathos turns into in his system.)

In other words – what I'm pushing on here – is that epistemology gets reduced as the sophists lose and the Platonists win, even though the Platonists attacked the Sophists on the basis of the very epistemology they then seemed to disavow.

Comment [DD44]: This really nails it.

Actually, I am simultaneously self-conscious about my tubbier-than-I'd-like midsection *and* the characteristic flabbiness of my language. So I think I already contain the psychosis to which you point?

Comment [DD45]: Is it possible you're rambling now? What your saying is all true, to me, but is it necessary?

Comment [DD46]: Memory, and time. ☺

Comment [DD47]: I'm wondering about "voice" here.

a written, concrete form. The careful work they do to trace genealogy of their thought in metacognitive exercises familiarizes them with identifying information that *feels right* to translate—not what they were *told* to communicate. It is a stage in creation of which “the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or departure,” as Percy Shelly wrote on the nature of authorship.

Metacognition expands the toolbox of heuristics from authoritative facts, empirical evidence, and logical proof to include experience, emotional triggers, and personal reflection, which also generate meaning. Invention, both in the classic rhetorical sense and the general ability to create something new, is an effect of the marriage between creative and critical thought, as embodied in the heuristics listed above. Metacognition *amplifies* the students’ capacity for invention. And of course we use words to transfer the fecund meanings from these heuristics in a composition classroom, but with metacognition we are practicing a sightless faith in our students to generate meaning from *invisible* information, too—a terrifying prospect in a materialistic, hyper-rationalist culture. Language has given us a paradoxical gift to rediscover ways of knowing that are non-rational and even non-linguistic, even in Western academic culture.

Comment [DD48]: I’ll want to talk about this more with you. I’m not sure where that line of thought draws from.

Comment [DD49]: Scientists who are really hot on their game (and mathematicians, also) sometimes report “seeing” a thing before they can say *why* the thing should be so. Watson and Crick say they intuited the double helix DNA before they could see the *reasons* it should be so. Stretching it, they have said that their belief in their vision for it was what helped them know where/how to look for it.

So it gets really fascinating to trace where the “flash of insight” (love that metaphor) sources from.

Comment [DD50]: ☹

Comment [DD51]: Because, from Plato on, the whole joke is that the thing they denounce is the thing they’re using to maintain power over those they denounce for using the same thing.