On Whether to Convert from a Rhetorical to a Psychoanalytic Pedagogy

Don J. Kraemer

ABSTRACT: *Like psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic pedagogy is a particular way of paying attention, a way of paying attention that deflects attention away from other pedagogies' means and goals. Looking for what psychoanalysis deems the "root cause" of writing problems—intrapsychic conflict—foregrounds that kind of conflict, relegating to the background other kinds of conflict, such as the rhetorical. Even more than relegating, looking psychoanalytically can transform rhetorical conflict from that which initiates and helps develop discourse into that which impairs it. The case this article will make is not that it is impossible to reconcile rhetoric and psychoanalysis, only that because they can (as forms of writing instruction) contradict each other, such reconciliation is not easy.*

KEYWORDS: *psychoanalysis; rhetoric; synthesis; basic writing; audience*

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The question is not whether rhetorical pedagogy and psychoanalytic pedagogy can or should be in dialogue with each other. They should be and have been.[1] As a teacher of writing, I routinely wonder how well I heard what a student was really saying, what undercurrents of feeling I missed in our class-wide discussion of a draft, why in the margins of drafts and in class exchanges I made one move rather than another. Why I do what I do (to them) can also cause students to question my motives, such as why so much of the writing I have them read is not just wordy but sneaky—or why I cannot, in plain English, just say what I mean.

If only to work ground my students and I have in common, then, I am receptive to Mark Bracher's recommendation, in *The Writing Cure: Psychoanalysis, Composition, and the Aims of Education*, that we "articulate more clearly the possible points of convergence between psychoanalysis and the teaching of writing" (11). The stakes are high, for unless the "fundamental aim of psychoanalysis as articulated by Lacan" is achieved—i.e., "to help the subject discover, acknowledge, and finally assume—that is, embrace and take

*Since 1991, **Don J. Kraemer** has taught in the English and Foreign Languages Department of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.*

responsibility for—his or her own unconscious desire" (5)—then a student's writing will be less effective because some of "the student's unconscious desires and gratifications" will "conflict with and oppose" his or her stated intentions (5): "Writing that is ineffective in any way is such because contrary impulses have interfered with the ego's conscious intention in some way" (61). Greater articulation between stated intentions and unconscious desire is significant because the deeply rooted fears and prejudices of unconscious desire can undermine a writer's overt aims, whether sizing up an audience or tightening the logic of an argument or crafting an appealing style (see Bracher 61). Attuned to the needs of writing students, then, Bracher's version of psychoanalytic pedagogy warrants special rhetorical consideration.[2]

Such consideration is further warranted because Bracher attends to the kind of civic discourse typically associated with rhetoric. Teachers of writing for the public will be interested in the psychoanalytic claim that when it comes to reducing social injustice and increasing social tolerance, psychoanalytic pedagogy is, in fact, "ultimately a more effective as well as more ethical intervention in social problems than either the more partisan and polemical pedagogies or the more 'objective' rhetorical hermeneutic approach" (Bracher 192). The former are pedagogies that explicitly teach just solutions to problems of social injustice—the latter, pedagogies that study how social conflicts get constructed and engaged (such as in my assignment 2, below). The aims of each, however, are in Bracher's view more effectively and ethically advanced by the psychoanalytic approach.

To change any writing teacher's mind about what is effective and ethical instruction will probably take some doing. Where effectiveness is concerned, I am thinking about the psychoanalytic claim that the "most successful pedagogy will be one that addresses the *root causes* of writing problems, and this means taking account of all the psychological factors involved" (Bracher 10, emphasis added). As we shall see, this reference to "the root causes of writing problems" emphasizes how prior experiences and meanings affect writing rather than how writing affects prior experiences and meanings (see Lu 32, 51). If what matters most exists prior to the act of writing, I will teach in a way quite different than if what most matters depends on acts of writing. What is effective for one may be ineffective, even wrong, for the other.

And here I am thinking of ethics, for wrong cannot be separated from effective, at least in a discipline that is about changing others' minds. A "truly psychoanalytic practice," Bracher says, "embodies the least coercive position possible for a practice that aims to change another person in important

ways" (7). Yet the rhetorical pedagogy I practice is full of the "incentives and demands" meant to help basic writers develop "their thinking through revision" (Coles 196). Such coercion no doubt creates difficulties, "a process of conflict and struggle" that Min-Zhan Lu has argued "is a source of pain but constructive as well" (Lu 31). Whether an assignment's constructive effects justify the pain of coercion is, like the question of effectiveness, another question on which rhetorical and psychoanalytic pedagogies are in conflict.

This conflict may indicate that the real pedagogical question between rhetoric and psychoanalysis is not whether to be in dialogue but whether to convert. Whether to convert to psychoanalytic pedagogy is also, for present purposes, the better question because the intensity of conversion imposes clarity, hauling to the surface our deepest preoccupations. Imagine making radical changes in one's teaching, even to a single assignment. An assignment I believe in, whose ends are honorable and whose benefits for students I have seen with my own eyes and whose design I have arrived at after much trial and error, after consultation with the student writers it affects—replacing this assignment with another, let alone the pedagogy it embodies with another, would not be simple.[3] If I am reluctant to change, if I seem entrenched, if I dig in my heels, it is because digging into the implications of a particular pedagogy has taken time, has been perhaps a labor of love, and is, therefore, invested with desire. If the question is conversion, the high-intensity conflict is not whether there are points of convergence and divergence between psychoanalytic pedagogy and the teaching of writing; the conflict is whether psychoanalytic pedagogy should uproot another pedagogical desire.

RHETORICAL PEDAGOGY

Conscious that it is contesting a monopoly held by teaching approaches more or less informed by rhetoric, psychoanalytic pedagogy claims the basic-writing classroom as its ideal forum:

> In fact, everyday prose—particularly that produced by writers who, like basic writing students, write more or less unselfconsciously, without the massive ego control and superego censorship present in more highly trained writers—offers what is perhaps the best forum available outside a clinical setting for a psychoanalytically informed teacher to observe intrapsychic conflict and respond to it in an effective and ethical manner. (Bracher 69)

We need not concede the claim that basic writers "write more or less un-selfconsciously"—a claim that defies experience and experimental studies (Shaughnessy, Perl)—to acknowledge that rhetorical pedagogy has not had much to say about "intrapsychic conflict," a kind of conflict which "[r]hetorical scholars, *especially*, oversimplify" (Alcorn 23, emphasis added). Such conflict is, furthermore, probably burdened rather than helped by labels such as "basic writers," a remedial designation that conflicts with a self-image grounded in the competence that got them into college—the conflict within the self who received high grades in high school language-arts classes but a poor score on a college placement exam, for example, as well as the more internalized conflict (common enough at the polytechnic institution where I work) within the advanced gamer with serious market-ready skills placed into a developmental class designed to teach basic pre-baccalaureate writing skills.

Add to this conflict the demands of what it takes, as Marilyn Sternglass puts it in her longitudinal study of college-level writing and learning,

> to get students started in understanding what the goals of writing should be: the ability to develop a purpose for writing, the ability to formulate ideas clearly and succinctly, the ability to develop and defend the most crucial points in the argument, the ability to analyze evidence, the ability to synthesize ideas, the ability to influence an audience, and the ability to express their points clearly. (*Time to Know Them* 141)

Getting students started down even such a basic rhetorical path involves demands that can exacerbate the conflict between individual and institution. More conflict comes with the kind of writing prompt typical of rhetorical pedagogy—usually on a public topic that divides opinion and unsettles the social order. Consider part of my instructions to basic writing students for paper 2, a rhetorical analysis of *Lake of Fire*, a documentary about abortion in the United States (the "They Say" and "I Say" below refer to Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*—a textbook that helps student writers "organize their thoughts" by providing them with templates that focus "attention not just on what is being said, but on the forms that structure what is being said" [xiii]):

- Use what "They Say" about abortion to set up what "You Say"; the "they" must include at least two distinct "They's" from *Lake of Fire*.

You may also, if it suits your purposes, grab a "They" from [Edward] Schiappa's "Analyzing Argumentative Discourse from a Rhetorical Perspective: Defining 'Person' and 'Human Life' in Constitutional Disputes over Abortion," as well as from other sources (including but not limited to family and friends). In this part of the essay, it would make sense to use lots of "quotation sandwiches" (see *They Say/I Say* 42-43).

- Analyze what is at stake for these various "They's," using questions such as "What are Their purposes in defining 'X'"? and "What interests and values are advanced by these competing definitions?" In this part of the essay, you will need to demonstrate the connections between their words and the claims you are making about their words.

- In light of these differences, clarify what is at stake for you (this is your "I Say"). You might make what is at stake clearer by reflecting further on what it might mean to your life if you were to identify with one set of interests vs. the others. Or you might explain why you would draw the lines around the issue differently than have the sets of interest you've articulated.

To be fair, this assignment can cause students some discomfort—not only because of its content but also because of the kind of analysis it calls for. And this discomfort will be defended against one way or another. Some defensiveness is evident in this excerpt from a response to the above instructions (a second-draft response, having already gone through a workshop), an excerpt that follows several paragraphs elucidating "each side's" positions:

> Now there are definitely some radical pro life people who it seems will stop at nothing to get their point across. Many have taken matters into their own hands by murdering abortion doctors and even bombing their buildings where they perform the procedures. One man shot an abortion doctor in the back when the doctor was on his way into his building. Even though the man pulled the trigger, the blame is being pushed on the man's pastor who was supposedly influencing him and pumping him up to do it. The pastor said that he did no such thing, the choice was that of the man's and he will have to face the consequences now, but he did what he thought was the right thing to do. Another doctor was reportedly shot outside his

home with his family nearby. The people committing these crimes feel like apparently killing one doctor will save hundreds of babies' lives, and so they have no problem doing it because they think it is the right thing to do. . . .

Another thing about that that seems odd to me is that the anti abortionists are willing to become murderers themselves. They are so against the idea of taking a human's life, yet they seem to have no problem with it if they think they are doing good. Unfortunately, when you kill someone for what you believe is a just cause, it can lead others who follow in the same path. The murderers are viewed as a sort of martyr because they know they are going to be punished but they feel it is ok because they are standing up for what they believe. The interesting thing is, is that extremists were for a while making a huge impact because many abortion doctors and workers were dropping out because they feared for their lives. . . .

What do we, as teachers, attend to in this writing, which defends against the pain of analyzing the perspective behind violent acts? How do we respond to this student, who instead of exploring the ethical complexity of "standing up for what they believe" skips ahead to its "interesting" efficacy? What more, if anything, do we ask her to do, and why?

I will return to these questions, as well as the student's next revision, after working through some of the pedagogical conflicts between psychoanalysis and rhetoric, but it will be instructive to bear in mind a basic antithesis: psychoanalysis will direct the writer *inward* toward a pre-existing conflict revealed by her writing; rhetoric will direct the writer *outward* toward a conflict with others that her writing defines and transforms. Writing about the problems in a student paper—problems "at all levels, from diction to syntax to organization"—Bracher concludes, "Insofar as the root cause of these many writing problems is intrapsychic conflict, the best way to help [the student] eliminate such problems and improve her writing would be to help her work through these intrapsychic conflicts" (123). This specific diagnosis, intrapsychic conflict as the root cause of writing problems, turns out to be general and predictable: an individual's unconscious conflicts produce writing problems. Where to go from here—inward or outward—is the conflict to which I now turn.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RHETORIC IN CONFLICT

What psychoanalysis has to say about intrapsychic conflict speaks to many of our everyday concerns as writing teachers. Consider the following:

> Unless students have recognized and assumed their own desire, this desire will be likely to operate unconsciously in their relations with external Others, distorting their perception of the Other and interfering with their transactions with the Other. To the extent that students recognize and assume their own previously unconscious desire, they reduce such distortion and interference. (Bracher 186)

Anything that would help reduce the defensive interference that distorts, if not demonizes, the Other; anything that would enrich the quality of the transaction between audience and writer—anything along these lines improves the quality of "transactions with the Other" (i.e., rhetorical exchange). Such awareness, furthermore, is highly ethical—not just serviceable in the short run but desirable in the long run. When psychoanalysis advocates "bringing the subject to recognize that his own desire is at least partially responsible for problems that he had previously attributed to forces that he was opposed to or that were beyond his control" (173), it is advocating the qualities of good faith, rational agency, and maturely intersubjective relations that characterize an ideal rhetorical situation. Nowhere does rhetorical pedagogy overlap more ideally with psychoanalysis than in its belief in irony's ameliorative magic, in particular the magic of lessening violence where there is conflict: "Recognizing that one's own desire plays a fundamental and self-contradictory role in writing can be an important step toward identifying that desire, working through it, and reducing its destructive effects" (Bracher 173; see also 128). In this fundamental commitment to non-violent and just resolution of conflict, psychoanalysis and rhetoric meet. The significance of this commitment means, among other things, that more convergence between rhetoric and psychoanalysis can be sought in earnest.

And yet, having begun this search, I find some not insignificant divergence. One fundamental point of divergence—a point from which others emerge—is the relations among language and identity. In psychoanalysis, for example, certain styles are interpreted as "corresponding to specific personality types" (Bracher 91). Formed by processes that precede the rhetorical

occasion, personality types such as "the hysterical, the obsessional, and the perverse" (91) bring about the styles to which they correspond.

To say "bring about" is stronger than "correspond"; the stronger version is necessary to keep more legible this significant divergence between psychoanalysis and rhetoric. The divergence is barely legible in passages like the following, in which Bracher's discussion acknowledges that a student may write

> in a way that is deemed by the Symbolic Other to embody a certain valued quality. If a piece of writing is perceived as elegant, the writer, too, partakes of that quality. The same is true of an austere style, a formal style, a professional style, and so on: each creates a particular type of persona for the writer, allowing her to be perceived as a particular sort of person and thus according her a particular identity. (90)

In this account, style/persona can be read as "ethos"—a kind of ethical appeal adapted to a particular audience. Wishing to be perceived in a certain way by a certain audience, the writer forms her character—her image, her voice—accordingly.

The key difference in this passage between the conventionally rhetorical reading I have made (in which ethos is a means to an end) and the passage's recalcitrant commitment to psychoanalytic interests is its emphasis on the writer's ego (in which the desire to be perceived a certain way is an end in itself). To see why this difference matters, let us return to part of the quotation above: "If a piece of writing is perceived as elegant, the writer, too, partakes of that quality." Psychoanalysis has its eyes on the writer as *person*—the writer of the text as a person who will become its beneficiary, as the historical being who exists after its writing and who was the historical being who wrote in ways that can be explained psychoanalytically. To be interested in the individual's history *in a certain way* is why psychoanalysis exists, and that interest can override the rhetorical situation: i.e.,

> whereas the hysteric's typical response to the conflict between her own desire and the Symbolic Other's desire is to repress the Other and enact her own desire in an effusion of feelings in language, the obsessional's typical strategy is to appear to capitulate to the Other by making her discourse conform with great precision to the rules of language and decorum and to the realities she is describing, rather than allowing it to enact or express her own feelings. (92)

Some writers can be reduced to a personality type, in other words. This personality type will predictably follow a given strategy, effusing or perhaps capitulating but not expressing. Nor is expression necessarily rhetorical, according to the logic of the passage above, for whether the writer's discourse is used to "conform . . . to the rules of language and decorum and to the realities she is describing" or is used to "enact or express her own feelings," the rules, the realities, the feelings *precede* the writing, exist without the writing, and in theory could continue unchanged through the writing, if what writing does is describe or enact their prior existence. From the psychoanalytic perspective, it is not simply the case, then, that realities can be described; realities can be described in a way that *conforms* to them, that represents and reflects them.

This psychoanalytic logic of temperamental priority does not obtain *only* in the case of ineffective writing by maladjusted types. The same logic is applied to effective writing by normally adjusted writer-types. If neither a hysteric nor an obsessional, a writer can allow language to "enact or express" feelings that are her own—to conform to those feelings. In this psychoanalytic paradigm, language is a code, a vehicle, an instrument, a means of communicating a pre-existing content from elsewhere or "an utterance that expresses the subject's own thoughts and (Real-register) feelings, as opposed to 'empty speech,' which is just mindless chatter, the conventional, clichéd, and alienated expression of the Symbolic Other's desire" (Bracher 126; see also 25-48).[4] In either effective or ineffective writing, then, thoughts and feelings precede discourse. Effective writing is distinguished from ineffective writing by ownership: ownership of what already exists, which a writer owns up to or assumes responsibility for.

Ethically conscientious such ownership may be; rhetorical it is not. This a-rhetorical positivism posits a stable, core identity that is gotten at through language—not performed in, complicated by, and reinvented through language:

> The key truth that Lacan maintains must be confronted before all others is the truth of one's own repressed desires. The more one's internal truth remains repressed rather than assumed, the more the truth of the external, "objective" world will be a subjective illusion, the product of projections and defenses resulting from the repressed subjective truth. (Bracher 212, note 4)

A person's internal truth is not just prior to the world it projects in ways more or less faithful to "the truth of the external, 'objective' world"; it has priority. A person's internal truth has priority, that is, over the exigencies of the rhetorical situation. Rhetorically, we co-create not with a real audience but with an audience whom—no matter how close and immediate, investigated and familiar—we've approximated, constructed, fictionalized (see Ong). The reality of the reader and any other realities to which this essay, for example, refers and responds are discursive realities, such as how I interpret what others have said and what I imagine might be said in response to what I say. But from the psychoanalytic perspective, it matters less how a writer frames the rhetorical situation than how a person's internal truth skews reality, perhaps causing the person to address others who are not, so to speak, there.

CONFLICT OVER "IDENTIFICATION" WITH AN "AUDIENCE"

To begin with a little more about psychoanalysis's candidate for "the real cause of incoherence—intrapsychic conflict" (Bracher 170), the "root cause of the writing problem" (173): psychoanalysis could be right. Intrapsychic conflict might indeed block rhetorical efficacy, just as dysfunctional classroom dynamics can block free discussion of interesting lines of inquiry. If so, and when that is the case, then psychoanalysis is a resource it would be irresponsible to resist (just as it could be irresponsible not to help a particular student with parts of speech, even if teaching parts of speech is not generally featured in our pedagogy).

But taking such a leap, however necessary, might well be a leap *away* from the rhetorical, a possibility I'd like to continue exploring. If underlying conflicts in the writer are named as the cause of writing problems, audience has also been named—named in a way that is strongly non-rhetorical. In psychoanalysis, audience is something to impress or contain: i.e., "the Other's desire," which often leads to "a defense motivated by the ego's attempt to defend its identity against its desire for recognition and validation from the Other" (Bracher 108). The term "defense" is a logically consistent ramification of audience as "the threatening element," "a disrupting fact or force that might derail the ego as it consolidates its identity by pursuing a particular desire or occupying a certain position through a discourse" (110-11). If "audience" is not so much the people one wishes to engage—to invite into participating in, and completing, the logic and plot and rhythms and roles of one's prose—as it is the Symbolic Other who threatens the fulfillment

of this wish, then one will relate to that understanding of audience not only in ways that pragmatically follow it but also in ways that terminologically develop it. Somewhat psychoanalytically put, the terms we select express our desires, including the desire to fulfill those terms—to achieve "consummation" (see Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* 78, 305).

The creative work it takes to consummate our terms can feel all-consuming, a feeling every teacher I know knows. Not just to know thoroughly but to know thoroughly one's way of knowing is integrity; integrity means commitment to the implications of one's premises. Psychoanalysis has premised much on the ego—e.g., "No matter what the situation is, the ego is continuously operating to maintain its sense of identity, either by defending against the incursion of otherness (internal and external) or by assimilating or accommodating the otherness" (Bracher 24). The ego's reliable operations give it a telling constancy—telling for composition, that is—for these operations precede situational, disciplinary, and generic variables. As Bracher explains, spelling out the clarifying attractions of psychoanalytic integrity,

> This psychoanalytic model allows us to see all writing (and all learning as well) as the product of two basic, conflicting types of intentions, no matter how great the number of specific intentions may be: first, the intention to reinforce and enhance the ego (our dominant sense of self, or identity), and second, the intention to express and hence to actualize other often unconscious *identifications*, desires, and enjoyments that contradict and thus threaten to destroy the ego's sense of unity and identity. (24-25, emphasis added)

Psychoanalytic integrity brings forth whatever threatens the ego. Contradictions are seen as threats, not as inventional opportunities. Audiences are not dialectical interlocutors but Others who may dominate, overwhelm, and end the writer's existence. Identifying with the audience can be dangerous.

The concept of "identification," common to both rhetoric and psychoanalysis, is an especially consequential way by which to consider how the integrity with which psychoanalysis explores the ego distances itself from rhetoric, whose integrity in exploring audience in turn distances itself from psychoanalysis. In the mid-twentieth century, rhetoric (most famously in the figure of Kenneth Burke) appropriated identification from Freud because rhetoric needed something to supplement persuasion, the discourse on which did not yet address that "intermediate area of expression that is not wholly deliberate, yet not wholly unconscious [, but which] lies midway

between aimless utterance and speech directly purposive" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* xiii). What is not "wholly deliberate" are "the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another" (xiv); the ways are rhetorical, however, as Burke emphasizes in the following passage:

> [A] speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. (46)

Granting that identification is not wholly conscious, Burke claims it is not wholly unconscious, either; it is not wholly unconscious because it is a necessary part of deliberate persuasion, as one of Burke's examples makes clear:

> [M]any purely formal patterns can readily awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us. For instance, imagine a passage built about a sense of oppositions ("*we* do *this*, but *they* on the other hand do *that*; *we* stay *here*, but *they* go *there*; *we* look *up*, but *they* look *down*," etc.). Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter. Formally, you will find yourself swinging along with the succession of antitheses, even though you may not agree with the proposition that is being presented in this form. . . . [I]n cases where a decision is still to be reached, a yielding to the form prepares for assent to the matter identified with it. (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 58)

On the one hand, then: That identification can be an affective proof, the audience helping to complete the form, or how such co-creation prepares for assent is something rhetoric studies. On the other, how such affective identifications can be psychically harmful or why a given individual resorts to polarizing projections of the world is something psychoanalysis studies. As psychoanalysis and rhetoric develop the implications of identification, in theory and on the ground, each enacts its own integrity—an integrity that illuminates their conflict, an integrity that brings on the conflict, a structural integrity without which their generative identities wouldn't be.

  A last look at identification will help illustrate the enabling stubbornness of this integrity. If the ego needs to conform to the Symbolic order for

"recognition and validation," then it needs as well to "acknowledge, express, and enact values (as well as desires and enjoyments) that a particular Symbolic Other, internalized or externalized, rejects" (Bracher 65). Despite its desire to conform, the ego reaches a point of conflict with its Other. This conflict, which rhetoric would call "stasis"—that point at which agreements between others and ourselves come to a standstill, that point at which we agree to disagree for the sake of more purposeful, dialectical inquiry—psychoanalysis calls a "crisis situation": "The act of writing places the subject directly in this crisis situation. Sometimes the ego identifies with the Symbolic Other against the subject's own identity, and other times the ego identifies with the subject's ideals or desire. In both instances, the Symbolic Other constitutes a threat to the subject's identity" (65). In this construction of crisis—a construction as real as any other, to be sure—something more psychoanalytic than rhetorical defines identification:

> Identification is the internalizing of another's ideas, feelings, or behavior as a way of addressing a perceived deficiency in oneself (such as conflict with the ideals of the Symbolic order), or avoiding conflict with another person or loss of this other. The most common defensive form of identification is identification with the aggressor—the "if you can't beat them, join them" defense. An instance of this defense found quite frequently in writing is self-criticism, which allows a writer to occupy a superior position in relation to his or her own discourse and to co-opt others from taking that position. (Bracher 77)

From a rhetorical perspective, one may identify with the other not to address a "deficiency in oneself" but to realize a potentiality in oneself, to enact a social instinct, to establish or reinforce common ground, to prepare the way for situational, behavioral, attitudinal adjustments. Similarly, acts of "self-criticism" are not so much about "avoiding conflict" as engaging it. Whereas in psychoanalysis "self criticism" is an instance of the "most common defensive form of identification," in which the writer "co-opt[s] others from taking that position," in rhetoric, self-criticism, even if it were intended to co-opt others, would be co-optation with a difference. The difference—and it is a big difference—is that self-criticism serves the stasis, which has brought self and audience together in a way that calls forth some qualities of our complex identities while displacing others. Responsiveness to the stasis means that self-criticism might well be a question of the writer's

guilt or innocence. Or it might be a question of concession, or a question of critical reflection, or a question of redirection. What it might be will depend—not so much on the self's unconscious desire as on the stasis the self is in with others.

EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL CONFLICT—IN PRINCIPLE

The Teacher

The Other whose position the student writer's self-criticism is said to co-opt is often the teacher, who in the psychoanalytic model must adhere to a particular protocol. If a therapist decides what is best for her patients, the "result will be that analysis will degenerate into a more or less thinly disguised process of developing the analysand's identifications with the analyst" (Bracher 210, note 1). Teachers who tell students what to do run the same risk. Teachers who would prevent the degeneration that identification with a teacher causes must do what psychotherapists do: "focus on the patient's language and respond to that rather than simply responding to their image of the patient and according to their own feelings" (181). If the student writer is to assume his own desire—to confront and take responsibility for it—the teacher must refuse, or redirect, identification:

> The teacher's desire in her responses, that is, will be for the students to explore their own unconscious desires further, so that insofar as a student identifies with the teacher as a subject supposed to know, the identification is with the teacher's desire for the student to recognize and assume responsibility for the student's own unconscious desire. (167)

Even as it makes sense to redirect a student's identification away from the teacher as the subject supposed to know, it is hard to imagine that a teacher should not be, or does not have to be, persuaded to take the student's writing seriously. It is hard to imagine that such persuasion would not be among a student writer's motives, harder still to imagine that a teacher might refuse to play the role of someone whose conviction is at stake, might fail both to ask questions about (not determine) a writer's claims (and all that supports them: experiences, hopes, passions, reasons, values) and to ask questions about how the writer thinks others will respond, if not assent, to these.

Psychoanalysis approaches this important dynamic—this dynamic between student writer and writing teacher—from another angle, "the desire for recognition,"

> the desire to be perceived in a positive light by the Symbolic Other, that ultimate authority (parents, peers, superiors, Society) from whom we seek the sense that we are somebody, that we matter, that we are okay, or simply that we are somehow taken into account—a message that is so vital that without it we cannot bear to exist, literally. (Bracher 175)

I can only agree—with these words as with those in the subsequent elaboration that "we—teachers as well as students—are often disappointed or angry when our writing fails to impress a particular Symbolic Other" (175). Something fundamentally rhetorical must be stressed, however: these authorities are often the very people who have to be impressed, and the reason they have to be impressed is not only that writers seek their recognition; writers also seek their assent.[5]

I am not saying that rhetoric complies and psychoanalysis resists, nor that a writing teacher who wishes to improve her student's writing cannot refuse the identifications a draft offers, nor that a teacher cannot question whether to participate in the completion of its form, nor that a teacher cannot be a good audience if she says no or interrupts the inevitable. But I am saying that to become an analyst—a person who by definition and discipline not only refuses to be convinced but also refuses to play the role of someone who must be convinced—a teacher would have to resist rhetorical exchange, a resistance that would risk silencing the rhetorical.

The Enthymeme

What is meant by "silencing the rhetorical" should become even more clear in the following presentation of the ego, in which the psychoanalytic version of the enthymeme renders it incompatible with its usual rhetorical function:

> Nonetheless, the ego's fundamental motive is always the consolidation of its own identity under a secure shelter of master signifiers and their accompanying knowledge/belief systems. This process is evident not only in the prominence and frequency with which

> certain signifiers are employed, but also in more indirect ways,
> such as in the use of enthymemes, where certain signifiers—ideals,
> values—govern thought without ever being uttered. (47)

The image of a "secure shelter" connotes protection rather than engagement: the writer's master signifiers are hidden from attack. The theme of protection is articulated with the subsequent claim that enthymemes "govern thought without ever being uttered," as if enthymemes did not depend on audience recognition of, as well as audience co-creation of, the implied ideals and values.

Yet this latter possibility is how rhetoric presents the enthymeme: "Although variously used in history, *enthymeme* generally refers to claims in arguments that are supported by probable premises assumed to be shared by the audience" (Gage 223). The signifiers emerge not just from the ego but from the ego and its audience, and while it could reasonably be said that the ego's signifiers represent the ego's projected sense of audience, psychoanalysis emphasizes the ego's unconscious workings that threaten to misconstrue the audience's objective reality. Not only does rhetoric emphasize something quite different (the ego's strategic collaborations with an audience whose reality must be made); the signifiers themselves are "probable premises," neither scientific truth nor widely accepted facts; this status means one's signifiers *have* to be established.

One effective way of establishing these premises is not stating them. In enthymematic reasoning, "most of the argument remains implicit. Such a proof can only work if the audience will provide the missing elements, and thereby both follow the reasoning and find it persuasive" (Johnstone 249). If it is the audience, not the author, who provides the premise that is only probable, that premise becomes more probable. For example, in an argument claiming that someone will make a good department chair because she is honest and compassionate, what go unstated are the propositions linking these attributes to the claim; the propositions linking honesty and compassion with chairing well "are precisely what the audience, out of its own beliefs, convictions, and opinions, must provide in order to complete the implicit chain of reasoning" (Johnstone 249), and insofar as the audience can readily do so, the claim is all the more reasonable.

It is important to restate that what psychoanalytic pedagogy sees as an omission or occlusion that blocks dialogue with an audience, rhetoric takes as a dialogic move: the audience is invited to complete the reasoning with its own contributions. Such completion makes comprehension and

persuasion more likely. The enthymeme engages the writer's audience in co-creation; its omissions are invitations, not necessarily deceptions. Deliberate deception is of course possible, but deliberate deception is not part of rhetorical pedagogy, which tries to help student writers make the best of uncertainty, a domain in which incompleteness and partiality and imperfection are inexact givens.

Policy Arguments

Uncertain situations (what to do), uncertain strategies (how to work with "strangers"), uncertain outcomes (what could happen, what else could happen, and what could happen as a result of these)—the stances psychoanalysis and rhetoric take toward such uncertainties divide them in a way it would be reckless to ignore. Consider the psychoanalytic critique of policy arguments—a major genre in any level of writing class. In policy arguments, the characteristic use of intransitive instead of transitive verbs and the "failure to identify the object (i.e., recipient or victim) or consequences of an action" exist "because either their uncertainty or their dire nature threatens the ego's sense of mastery and control" (Bracher 84). Having to act in the face of problematic uncertainty may indeed threaten "the ego's sense of mastery and control"; at the same time, having to so act may also help certain ego ideals rise to the occasion. No matter which way ego ideals are affected or mobilized, however, it would not make rhetorical sense to attribute the use of intransitive verbs and the omission of certain parties to problematic uncertainty. There would be no point in doing so because problematic uncertainty calls for some kind of timely, situational, artful response. Verbs are appropriate or inappropriate, omissions unnoticed or a deal-breaker, depending on audience and context.

In response to all the above, from page one on, a general qualification could be made: it is when rhetorical effectiveness is deficient that one looks for psychological causes to account for, and help rectify, that deficiency. This qualification makes perfect sense, yet it is complicated by psychoanalytic integrity—e.g., psychoanalysis's commitment to the claim that all language use defends the ego, an argument that goes something like this: defense mechanisms involve "transformations" of what is threatening into something less threatening (Bracher 76); in discourse, these transformations are tropes and figures (201, note 8); tropes and figures are language in use; therefore, language is defensive. This logic—which far from objectionable I find intriguingly suggestive—is evident in passages like the following:

> *Transformation of the object from one other to another other* is a common form of displacement. In writing, this may involve focusing on certain consequences of an action or event as a way of avoiding others. In disputes over land use, for example, developers tend to focus on positive economic consequences and repress negative environmental consequences, while environmentalists do the opposite. (Bracher 83)

If we allow that comprehensive focus is not humanly possible and that selective, emphatic focus may legitimately follow from a principled assessment of what is, on balance, preferable, then such displacement is at least as productive as defensive. To focus on the defensive, in fact, or to dismiss its inventional properties, can be counterproductive if such focus equates the advocacy that is typical of policy arguments with damning dissimulation, an unfortunate equation I see in the following:

> Transformation from individual to collective can serve to *disguise* the *true consequences* of one's actions, as when politicians *avoid* the Real and Imaginary dimensions of the human suffering that results from their policies and refer *instead* solely to the Symbolic dimension (e.g., statistics, such as the number of people deprived of food stamps through welfare reform). The inverse transformation of the object, from collective to individual, is also a way to *defend* against the Real dimensions of the consequences of one's positions or actions, such as when politicians *focus* on the individual "welfare queen" to justify a change in policy that results in depriving thousands of children of food. The transformations from concrete to abstract and abstract to concrete *can serve* the *defenses* of intellectualization and affectualization, respectively. Examples of the former include much medical, legal, and other technical discourse, while examples of the latter include various instances of *sensationalism* which *focus* on the Real and Imaginary elements in order to *avoid* issues of responsibility and action. (Bracher 84, emphasis added)

Although the auxiliary verb "can" suggests that the focus is on the potential for deception, other assertions are less qualified (e.g., "is also a way," as distinct from "can also be a way"). The two uses of "can" each precede "serve"; insofar as any utterance can serve, or be identified with, a wide

range of purposes, some of which can be antithetical with certain others, this qualification in the abstract has little utility. The qualification is beside the point, however, for the entire passage assumes a transparent, knowable, predictable reality; certain results—"true consequences"—are a given. Other words—"avoid" (twice), "defend," "defenses," "sensationalism"—call attention to the positivism of this variety of psychoanalysis, which imagines a clean cut between the real and the phony, the sincere and the fake, the explicit and the implicit, what something does and what something can do. Is it rhetorically reasonable to imagine an assertion of the real that some audience (possibly even one's intended audience) might not regard as ideal or deceptive, a declaration of the truth that cannot be construed as a self-serving fiction, an exposed and vulnerable expression of feeling that is not at the same time perceived as exquisitely defensive, a focus on one thing that does not blur something else—or, for all of these, the reverse: the phony as a "disguise" for the real, a fictive claim that won't be taken as autobiographical, a defensive gesture that strikes a blow, a blur of X that crystallizes Y? And so on.

A reasonable middle way between such absolute standards of the real and the phony, a way that takes seriously different standards of truth and fiction, in other words a way that takes "audience" seriously—and nonviolent persuasion seriously: psychoanalysis may call this a way of avoiding "issues of responsibility and action" (Bracher 84). But it is how rhetoric engages them.

Presence

The difference between psychoanalytic pedagogy and rhetorical pedagogy can now be put into plainer, stronger terms. The passage above frames "focus" so that all kinds of focus "avoid issues of responsibility and action." For rhetoric, however, "issues of responsibility and action" matter so much that focus is required; focus is in fact so synonymous with rhetoric that rhetoric has been defined as "an art of *emphasis* embodying an order of *desire*" (Weaver 1355, emphasis added). The aims of a policy argument may benefit from "presence" (Perelman 35-36)—the single focus on a specific case that brings faraway abstraction up close: "the individual 'welfare queen'" alluded to above, or a documentary on a child with a cleft palate (*Smile Pinki*), or an anecdote about a single child whose knee injury in Scotland led to universal health care in Canada (Reid 125-26). For rhetoric, "the art of emphasis embodying an order of desire" and "presence" are necessary

virtues that focus the attention on what matters—on the premises that matter most, the premises that must, that is, be made present in the audience's hearts and minds (Perelman 138).[6]

For psychoanalysis, rhetorical presence is not a legitimately motivated, reality-elaborating emphasis but a self-serving, reality-diminishing deflection. It is not just the case, moreover, that psychoanalysis knows "presence" as the insecure reduction of the Other; it is more tellingly the case that, in working out the implications of its premises, psychoanalysis performs this knowledge, moving away from rhetorical presence as an emphatic focus on what matters (which in turn, as knowledge that performs presence not as insecure reduction but as warrantable development, moves away from the psychoanalytical). If the basic psychoanalytic move is to construe effective language use as defensive—as a falsifying gesture that denies "true consequences"—then how compatible are psychoanalysis and rhetoric? They are, I think it now clear, not easily made compatible.

If it is fairly assumable that the vast majority of us struggle with intrapsychic conflict, that the vast majority of us have writing problems—have problematic relations to writing, all the more so the more we care about writing—and yet also fairly assumable that non-psychoanalytic pedagogies, such as the rhetorical, have helped writers become more effective and ethical, then there is no good reason to convert to the psychoanalytical, unless with respect to effectiveness and ethics in specific cases it is the better helpmate.

That there can be very good reason, however, to keep the dialogue going between rhetoric and psychoanalysis is suggested by my student's rhetorically guided revisions.

EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL CONFLICTS—IN PARTICULAR

In my response to the section of the student paper quoted above, in the rhetorical spirit of *They Say/I Say*, I suggested that in her revision the writer give more expression to what "they say"—not merely to what she imagined they might say but to what she had good reason to believe others had said and would say, based on her interpretation of the voices in the documentary, in the assigned readings, in class discussions, and elsewhere in her experience. In the excerpt that follows, what she deleted from her previous draft is crossed through; what she added is in boldface:

Now there are definitely some radical pro life ~~people~~ **advocates** who it seems will stop at nothing to get their point across. Many have taken matters into their own hands by murdering abortion doctors and even bombing their buildings where they perform the procedures. One man shot an abortion doctor in the back when the doctor was on his way into his building. Even though the man pulled the trigger, the blame is being pushed on the man's pastor who was supposedly influencing him and pumping him up to do it. The pastor said that he did no such thing, the choice was that of the man's and he will have to face the consequences now, but he did what he thought was the right thing to do. **Some may ask if the person encouraging this behavior is just as guilty as the person carrying out the crime? My answer to that question would be yes. Even though they are not physically killing that doctor, they are still encouraging it. It is like they want the abortion doctor dead but because they do not want to face the consequences themselves; they just influence someone else to carry out the deed.** Another *incident was when* a doctor was reportedly shot outside his home with his family nearby. The people committing these crimes feel like apparently killing one doctor will save hundreds of babies' lives, and so they have no problem doing it because they think it is the right thing to do. . . . .

~~Another thing about that that seems odd to me is that the~~ **Something that I can not seem to wrap my head around, is the fact that** anti abortionists are willing to become murderers themselves. They are so against the idea of taking a human's life, yet they seem to have no problem with it if they think they are doing good. Unfortunately, when you kill someone for what you believe is a just cause, it can lead others who follow in the same path. The murderers are viewed as a sort of martyr because they know they are going to be punished but they feel it is ~~ok~~ **okay** because they are standing up for what they believe. **Now I am not saying that standing up for what you believe and extreme behavior in all cases is bad. I am aware that people like Martin Luther King Jr. and others took extreme steps for a good cause. But to my knowledge none of those involved murdering opponents who supported or carried out what the other side stood for. I can understand that sometimes you are**

> **going to have to go against the law to get your voice heard but it is up to you how far you are willing to take it. In regards to abortion, the pro life people have the right to want justice but let the law handle the kind of justice that has to do with taking another persons life.** The interesting thing is, is that extremists were for a while making a huge impact because many abortion doctors and workers were dropping out because they feared for their lives. . . .

Is her enthymeme about guilt a denial of her own or an appeal to her audience? Is it unconscious conflict or a step toward greater sophistication that we see in "have to go against the law to get your voice heard" followed by "but let the law handle the kind of justice that has to do with taking another persons life"? Is the division of "justice" implicit in "the kind of justice" fragmentation or elaboration, evidence of a defensive equivocation or evidence of an improved (if awkward) "analytic stance" (Sternglass 296)? Is the insufficiently analytic stance toward the law's authority the result of the student's identification with the Symbolic Other to address a deficiency in herself or the result of an inexperienced identification with an academic audience?

These either-or questions may seem to embody false dilemmas, but if the case I have been making is at all persuasive, these questions will embody a meaningful choice full of consequence for teachers of writing—and the possibility of a synthesis that will not be simple. Yet if an easy synthesis of the two pedagogical approaches is not forthcoming, there is good reason for the dialogue between psychoanalysis and rhetoric to continue. The need for this continuing dialogue is illustrated by the example of a common agreement error that occurs in the student's revision:

> Some may ask if *the person* encouraging this behavior is just as guilty as the person carrying out the crime? My answer to that question would be yes. Even though *they* are not physically killing that doctor, *they* are still encouraging it. It is like *they* want the abortion doctor dead but because *they* do not want to face the consequences *themselves*; *they* just influence someone else to carry out the deed. (emphasis added)

The student uses plural pronouns ("they," "themselves") to refer to the singular antecedent, "the person." Because such faulty agreement is neither uncommon, especially in speech, nor usually harmful to meaning, my

assumption is that the student is writing what sounds right to her. But what if there is more to this slip, which symbolically moves the onus from a person to be held accountable—someone whose testimony could be consulted, whose life could be examined, whose individual words could join the dialogue—to a sloppily collectivized and distanced "they"? What if this everyday error on the student's part is a fairly significant defense, one that conveniently helps shut down inquiry? There are many such errors in student writing, and there may be much more to them, which would help explain why some errors resist instruction in conventions of usage and persist despite improvement elsewhere in audience awareness.

Simply being mindful of the relevance of psychoanalysis to writing instruction is enough to compel revision of the previous sentence: it is particular students who resist instruction with respect to certain error patterns; it is particular students who rhetorically improve in some ways but not others. While it may be too much, then, to ask rhetoric to convert to psychoanalysis, it is not too much to expect them to stay in touch, as they have, on a cautious but productive as-needed basis.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Although this essay will not cover the topic of writer's block, this topic continues to warrant psychoanalytic attention. Just as sometimes writers of all kinds are made "basic" by fear of the Symbolic Other, sometimes student writers are blocked by this fear of the Symbolic Other, whom the teacher may well unwittingly represent, if not wittingly reinforce. Meaningful engagements with an audience, and meaningful arguments, may never get made, if disabling fears, inhibitions, and constructions of writing are not worked through.
2. For the purposes of this inquiry, Bracher's book—a careful, sustained, aggressive pitch for psychoanalysis as a highly desirable composition pedagogy, a major contribution that synthesizes contemporary psycho-analysis and the dominant composition pedagogies—will be taken as

representative of psychoanalytic pedagogy. Bracher identifies with Lacanian psychoanalysis, a form of psychoanalysis that should allay writing teachers' fears: "The fundamental aim of analysis as articulated by Lacan is to help the subject discover, acknowledge, and finally assume—that is, embrace and take responsibility for—his or her own unconscious desire" (5). Psychoanalysis as composition studies mainly knows it, however (through its representation in special issues dedicated to it, such as College English 49.7 [November 1987]), is "unethical and ineffective—unethical because it ultimately involves getting the analysand to identify with the analyst's perspectives, ideals, or notion of reality, and ineffective because it leaves the analysand's own deepest unconscious desires and gratifications untouched" (5). If this distinction does not make writing teachers more receptive to the promise of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Bracher has a response: writing teachers "are confronted with powerful forces that are best dealt with by someone having psychoanalytic training. Eschewing psychoanalytic pedagogy does not allow us to escape these forces; it only deprives us of the best means we have of understanding them and operating more ethically and effectively with them" (8). Whether to dive into such training is the big question this essay tries to face.

3. Here, of course, is another compelling reason to be in dialogue with psychoanalytic pedagogy: its commitment to the relations between meaningful change and individuals' emotional investments.

4. Bracher refers to the three registers from Lacanian psychoanalysis: "Stated very succinctly, the Real is the realm of affects and visceral experience," the "Imaginary register manifests itself in images and in our visual/spatial orientation and our sense of bodily coherence and integrity," and the "Symbolic order is a function of verbal memory and its codes" (25).

5. To be recognized in a certain way has long been related to persuasive ends and was for Aristotle the most important of the appeals (On Rhetoric I.2 1356a, 4).

6. To get its audience to grasp and care about the daily abuses suffered by women worldwide, a recent book offers "moving individual narratives: forced prostitution, honor killing and maternal mortality" (Nussbaum C5).

Works Cited

Alcorn, Marshall W., Jr. *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Constructions of Desire.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. Print.

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse.* Trans. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

Bracher, Mark. *The Writing Cure: Psychoanalysis, Composition, and the Aims of Education.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. Print.

___. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1966. Print.

Coles, Nicholas. "Empowering Revision." *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course.* Ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1986. 167-98. Print.

Gage, John T. "Enthymeme." *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age.* Ed. Theresa Enos. New York: Garland, 1996. 223-25. Print.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing.* New York: Norton, 2006. Print.

Johnstone, Christopher Lyle. "Enthymeme." *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric.* Ed. Thomas O. Sloane. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2001. 247-50. Print.

Lu, Min-Zhan. "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing.* Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 30-55. Print.

Mylan, Megan (Producer and Director). 2008. *Smile Pinki.* United States: HBO Documentary Films. Film.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Seeing Women's Rights as Human Rights and a Key to Countries' Progress." Rev. of *Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. New York Times 8 Sept. 2009: C5. Print.

Ong, Walter. "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction." *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9-21. Print.

Perelman, Chaim. *The Realm of Rhetoric.* Trans. William Kluback. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1982. Print.

Perl, Sondra. "A Look at Basic Writers in the Process of Composing." *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Research, Administrators.* Ed. Laurence W. Kasen and Daniel R. Hoeber. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1980. 13-32. Print.

Reid, T. R. *The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care.* New York: Penguin, 2009. Print.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing.* New York: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Sternglass, Marilyn S. *Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997. Print.

Weaver, Richard. "Language Is Sermonic." *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. Ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 1351-60. Print.