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Introduction

METHODICALLY RE/MEMBERING THEORY

Crowleyan Invention(s)

Andrea Alden, Kendall Gerdes, Judy Holiday, and Ryan Skinnell

Any theoretical discourse that is entitled to be called “rhetoric” must at minimum conceive of rhetoric as an art of invention.

—Sharon Crowley,
“Composition Is Not Rhetoric” (2003)

In fall 2007, this collection’s four editors enrolled in Sharon Crowley’s penultimate graduate seminar, “Rhetorics of American Feminisms,” at Arizona State University. Toward the beginning of the semester, as she did in many of her courses, Dr. Crowley introduced us to an etymological understanding of “theory,” which derives from the Ancient Greek verb *theorein*: “to observe from afar.” As she explained, during officially sanctioned events in the Agora—performances, trials, deliberations—a representative would be sent to the highest row of the theater to observe and record the entire proceedings, including, for instance, attendance patterns, speakers’ performances, and audience reactions. The idea was that a more encompassing view of the situation was vital for understanding the event and its potential significance.

Details of that long-ago class have faded, but fortunately Dr. Crowley recorded her thoughts about the importance of the ancient notion of *theorein* in her book *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*. She writes that in Aristotle’s Greece, “A theorist is the spectator who is most distant from the scene being enacted on stage and whose body is thus in one sense the least involved in the production but who nonetheless affects and is affected by it” (2006, 27). For Crowley, the point of introducing her students and readers to the ancient sense of *theorein* was to encourage us to think about theory in different ways than we may

have been accustomed to. If it is common in the contemporary moment to define theory as abstract, detached, elitist, and impractical, the etymology suggests something like the reverse—theory is situated, temporal, quotidian, and performative. Theory is an embodied practice, even if the topmost theater seats are very far from the main event. Moreover, doing theory is a contingent and continual process indispensable for understanding situations and their potential significance—and, perhaps most especially, for discovering the available means of persuasion.

In Crowley's formulation, theory is a basic building block of rhetoric. When introducing the etymology of theory, she writes, "Another way to put this is to say that theories are rhetorical inventions: depictions or assessments produced by and within specific times and locations as a means of opening other ways of believing or acting" (2006, 28). Doing theory is the practice of surveying the common sense of the community (*doxa*) and discovering the available means of persuasion. The ultimate goal of doing theory in this etymological sense is not to prescribe certain actions (it is not *praxis* in the familiar sense). Rather, it is to ascertain what options exist for rhetors to shape the world around them. Theory is a crucial element of the invention work necessary for rhetors to see the world differently, to discover new possibilities for thought and action, and to thereby effect change.

Crowley's capacious sense of theory and its relationship to rhetorical possibility marks her numerous interventions into the field of rhetoric and composition. When she began studying and writing about poststructuralism in the 1970s, for instance, she believed it could help writing teachers confront the "poverty of current-traditional rhetoric" in very real ways (1979, 279). "Of Gorgias and Grammatology," published in 1979 in *College Composition and Communication*, just three years after the publication of Gayatri Spivak's English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, represents one of Crowley's earliest efforts to intervene in the pedagogical common sense that pervaded composition at the time. She argued that poststructuralism gave composition teachers a powerful, theoretical justification for trying "to implant in our students a Gorgianic respect for the power and magic of language" and for "imagining the teaching and learning of writing as a fun thing to do" (284). "Of Gorgias and Grammatology" was an attempt to see the world of composition pedagogy differently and intervene productively in the daily practices of writing teachers. It was also one of the earliest attempts to align the insights of poststructuralism more generally with work in rhetoric and composition in order to discover new possibilities for thought and action. She expanded these efforts in her first book,

A Teacher's Introduction to Deconstruction (1989), which was intended as a brief and lucid introduction to poststructuralism for English and language arts teachers at all levels—a marrying of so-called high theory with the daily work of English teachers that exemplifies theory's situated, temporal, quotidian, performative, and embodied possibilities.

A practicable orientation to theory, invention, and rhetoric is a common thread that animated Sharon Crowley's work as a teacher, scholar, mentor, and colleague over her forty-year career in rhetoric and composition across an impossibly diverse set of professional interests. She wrote expertly about poststructuralism, post-Enlightenment rhetorical invention, ancient rhetorical theory, composition history and pedagogy, intellectual labor conditions, abolishing the universal first-year composition requirement, material and bodily rhetorics, classical liberalism, Christian fundamentalism, American politics, and ideology—and that's to name only the major themes in her books. She taught a wide range of students at universities across the country how to be rhetors and rhetoricians, writers, scholars, thinkers, and members of many different communities. For those of us who cared to pay attention, she also taught us how to be better feminists, antiracists, and antiheterosexists. And in her spare time, among other things, she traveled the country, visiting writing teachers in their offices to try to understand the vast array of labor conditions that characterized the profession so that she could petition chairs, deans, and provosts (as well as dominant stakeholders in the field) to make teachers' lives better. In other words, she did theory in real material ways and tried to teach other people what she was learning in the process.

Throughout her books, articles, book chapters, and position statements; her teaching and mentorship; and her wide professional and institutional service, Crowley has consistently forced us to think about what it means to be a teacher, a writer, a rhetorician, a member of the field, a denizen of our local communities, and an able participant in global contexts. Sometimes she has pushed us hard in the face of (our) strong resistance, and doing so has earned her a reputation in the field as a "consistent contrarian" ("CCCC Exemplar Award Winner" 2015) and something of a polemicist—though, as she makes clear in a recent interview, she does not necessarily accept or feel comfortable with these characterizations (Crowley et al. 2017). Yet, her ethos as a critic is due in no small part to her capacity for "observing from afar" in ways that have repeatedly forced people in the field to see the world differently and to act differently in it.

We could go on, but notwithstanding the previous few paragraphs, the goal of this (re)collection is not primarily to sing Sharon Crowley's

praises nor to exhaustively catalog her contributions to the field, were it even possible to do so. Rather, it is to take her notion of theory as an invitation and her practice of observing the field from afar as a provocation. As Diane Davis argues, the task of rhetorical theory “is provocation rather than explanation” (2015, 284). Theory’s destinations cannot be prescribed in advance, Davis continues, because “theory that is not given the right or the freedom to veer off unexpectedly . . . is no longer active; it becomes applied theory, sleepwalking theory.” What Crowley demonstrated throughout her career, and what Davis helps to elucidate (as does Horner in his foreword to this collection), is that theory must be continually refreshed, redirected, and reinvented if it is to continue to allow us to see, think, and act in new and inventive ways.

The field is more vigorous and more varied for Crowley’s theoretical contributions, but rhetoric and writing studies still needs the aeration that reinventing (with) theory can provide. In the years since we left Crowley’s classes, her etymological understanding of theory has remained critical for the four of us. It is a commonplace to which we have all returned regularly in our own work to try to discover new possibilities across a range of diverse interests. It is a working commonplace that we believe can help teachers and scholars periodically reinvent the field of rhetoric and writing studies “as a means of opening other ways of believing or acting.” And it is the common thread that ties the elements of this book together.

In this book, therefore, we invited contributors to take up the practice of theory that informed Crowley’s work. Note that this is not a collection of responses or correctives to Sharon Crowley, nor again is it a collection of encomia, nor is it even a collection of studies that explicitly extend her research. Rather, we asked contributors to take up her inventive *methods* by asking them:

How might we step back productively and see new directions in the field?
 How might theory help rhetoric and/or writing studies veer unexpectedly? What other ways of believing or acting are potentially available?

In other words, without prescribing an end goal beyond opening new paths, we asked our contributors to do theory. The editors and contributors to this volume seek to observe from afar (though still affecting and affected by our scenes) in order to consider how we might see the field differently, discover new possibilities for thought and action, and potentially effect change in the field and beyond. Our contributors addressed an unpredictable assortment of issues and responded in a wide range of styles and tones that we believe illustrate the variety of ways rhetoric

and writing scholars (can) engage with theory. This book moves in some unexpected—maybe even uncomfortable—directions. Bearing in mind the goals at hand, we consider that one of its chief merits.

The collection is bookended by a foreword and afterword, written by Bruce Horner and Debra Hawhee, respectively, that help frame the inventive possibilities opened by the work collected here. We have included some other supplementary materials that give shape and sense to the book as a whole, including some original content (described below) and a supplementary (and hopefully comprehensive) bibliography of Crowley's scholarship. The bulk of the book, of course, is the sixteen chapters that seek new inventive means in rhetoric and writing studies.

Based on the contributions we received, we organized the book into five parts. It should be noted that while many of the chapters could readily fit in multiple categories, we tried to arrange them kairotically, creating a space for each inventive contribution to resonate with related work and with readers.

The first part features just two items. The first is a manifesto on "The Remains of Theory" in which Diane Davis contends that theory is a never-ending pursuit of an ever-shifting horizon: theory invents by "destroy[ing] its 'own' borders." The inclusion of this manifesto reinforces some of the notions of theory we discuss in this introduction, and it points us forward by demonstrating the inventive operation that it also describes—it reads as a guided deconstruction and a deconstruction guide. The second item is an interview with Sharon Crowley that illustrates the practice of rhetorical invention—she (re)invents the itinerary of her career and gives readers an insider's look at some of the significant events, texts, and people that helped shape the field with and around her.

The chapters in part II engage ancient rhetorical concepts in some way or another to analyze contemporary rhetorical problems. Dawn Penich-Thacker takes us back to Greece in order to bring us forward. She looks at how ancient philosophical constructions of "reason" (*logos*) are codified in America's founding documents and continue to underwrite institutionally sanctioned racist, sexist, and homophobic violence. Judy Holiday traces the logic of identity to Aristotelian theories of logic (categories vs. predicables) to explain how identity constructs an epistemology that induces violence. Ryan Skinnell examines the long relationship of rhetoric to institutions and charts paths for (re)inventing institutional rhetorics. William B. Lalicker, James C. McDonald, and Susan Wyche conclude this section by theorizing a practice of sophistic

mentoring based on what they learned, tacitly and overtly, from their encounters with Sharon Crowley throughout their careers.

Part III brings together chapters that examine the variety of disciplinary forms that rhetoric and writing studies take in contemporary composition programs and practices. Rhetoric and writing's sub/versive court jester, Victor J. Vitanza, plays around at the edges of one of the field's most cherished rhetorical concepts—audience—to imagine its limitations. Joshua Daniel-Wariya taxonomizes various theories of play at work in the field to imagine ways that they might strengthen and inflect what we know about rhetoric and writing theories. Joshua C. Hilst and Rebecca Disrud recall readers to ideological encounters that structure students' attendance in writing centers, where academic knowledge-making and pedagogical practices often confront the non- and extra-academic values students bring to writing centers. Kirsti Cole investigates how university writing programs are compelled to adopt, and also willingly adopt, institutional value systems that systematically exploit “disposable faculty” and exacerbate unethical labor conditions, despite pervasive disciplinary knowledge about the practices at hand.

Part IV includes chapters that speak to the materiality of theory and to theories of materiality. In her chapter, Jennifer Lin LeMesurier reinvents (at) the complex intersections of emotion and feeling, bodily movement, and rhetorical aims as they are enacted through dance training. J. Blake Scott and Catherine C. Gouge argue for theory building as a methodology for studying the rhetoric of health and medicine. Jason Barrett-Fox and Geoffrey Clegg link two posthumanist topoi—bioinformational and ecological—to rethink the ethics of invention. Bre Garrett investigates the rhetorical action of proximal bodies—in her case, through the lenses of disability studies and multimodal composing—as sites of multidimensional invention and rhetorical delivery.

In the fifth and final part, our contributors rework the nexus between futurity and survival. Kendall Gerdes begins the work of building a rhetorical theory of desire, extending the groundbreaking work of queer theorists to imagine what future(s) desire may make available. Picking up on future orientations, David G. Holmes elaborates the radical prophetic work—“not in the mystical sense of foretelling but in the material sense of forthright telling”—of African American rhetors, scholars, and preachers that allows us to imagine a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future. Timothy Oleksiak theorizes “reading someone to filth” and “throwing shade” as queer listening practices, in which queer rhetors and audiences confront each other, and teach each other how to survive,

through insult and laughter. And in the closing chapter, Matthew Heard ruminates on the need to make *weaker* theoretical systems that will allow us, as rhetoricians and humans, to encounter other humans more flexibly on their own terms and in relation to their own needs.

We realize and accept that the choices from which this book developed are partial and limited. Or maybe it is better to describe them as situated, temporal, quotidian, and performative. There are many more available means to be discovered, now and in the future. That is, of course, the promise of Crowleyan theory-making—the task never ends. What we hope for this collection is that it spurs new directions in the field—new ways of thinking and acting for rhetoricians and writing teachers, scholars and students and administrators, and practitioners and theorists that help us see and engage an ever-changing set of situated ideological, material, and rhetorical circumstances. If we are successful, we will open new paths for thought and action, and, in so doing, we will honor Sharon Crowley and celebrate her contributions to the field and to the lives of countless people working within it.

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