

STUDENT WRITING, POLITICS, AND STYLE, 1962-1979

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Student Writing, Politics, and Style, 1962-1979 examines personal writings composed by American college students during the 1960s and 70s, a period that corresponds to important developments in U.S. postwar university student activism and in the modern disciplinary history of composition studies. I contend that students' experimentation with multiple genres of personal writing during this period disturbs a dominant historical narrative in composition and rhetoric that characterizes the theories and pedagogies of personal writing widely circulating in the sixties as "expressive." Looking closely at student-produced memoirs, journals, personal essays, and commencement orations, I argue that students in the sixties approached personal writing not simply to determine the meaning of their experiences as individuals. Rather, the student writers I examine understood personal writing genres as useful for reflecting on the possibility of meaning and for thinking about their complex identities as both individuals and members of collectives. The dissertation offers a way of reading student writing in relation to its historical context and furthermore shows how students work both with and against expectations to construct identities in writing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Student Writing, Politics, and Style, 1962-1979 examines personal writings composed by American college students during the 1960s and 70s, a period that corresponds to important developments in U.S. postwar university student activism and in the modern disciplinary history of composition studies. I contend that students' experimentation with multiple genres of personal writing during this period disturbs a dominant historical narrative in composition and rhetoric that characterizes the theories and pedagogies of personal writing widely circulating in the sixties as "expressive." Looking closely at student-produced memoirs, journals, personal essays, and commencement orations, I argue that students in the sixties approached personal writing not simply to determine the meaning of their experiences as individuals. Rather, the student writers I examine understood personal writing genres as useful for reflecting on the possibility of meaning and for thinking about their complex identities as both individuals and members of collectives. The dissertation offers a way of reading student writing in relation to its historical context and furthermore shows how students work both with and against expectations to construct identities in writing.

The historical period this dissertation focuses on is marked at its beginning by the publication in 1962 of *The Port Huron Statement*, the organizational manifesto for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) that became a foundational document of the student New Left. This period also marks the emergence of modern composition studies, which, though it had been a university course subject since the mid-nineteenth century, did not achieve its contemporary

disciplinary status until the early sixties, with the growth of professional scholarship on the writing process, and the founding of Ph.D. programs in the seventies. By the end of the 1970s, activism in the streets and in the classroom wanes due to various forces, most importantly the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam in 1973. In composition, in particular, the so-called “Back to Basics” movement signals a shift away from pedagogical experimentation aimed at making the writing classroom more relevant toward instruction in basic writing skills such as grammar and organization. I will suggest that this shift in thinking was by no means totalizing or simple.

In the dissertation, I analyze a wide range of student writing from the 1960s and 70s, including commercially published student memoirs, journals and newsletters composed by students in an alternative learning program at the University of Pittsburgh, and commencement orations delivered by seniors at Brown University. These different texts are linked by student writers’ interest in the personal: students take pleasure in and work at exploring the many facets of their identities. Both in and out of school, young people in the sixties and seventies composed journals, personal essays, autobiographies, and public performances like commencement addresses in which they discussed their experiences as activists, writers, and students. I argue that these texts differ from the kind of personal writing many instructors and theorists in composition expect students to write. Apart from composing narratives of getting busted at campus demonstrations, students tend not to write about traumatic episodes in their lives; they do not write about the deaths of grandmothers or beloved family pets, topics often caricatured in criticisms of personal writing. When performing their selves on paper and aloud, students from the sixties approach experience as ambiguous, refusing to pin down with absolute certainty, or with moral clarity, the significance of some pretty extraordinary experiences—like

demonstrating at Columbia, starting the Liberation News Service, or visiting alternative educational sites across the Northeastern U.S. Although students occasionally admit to being changed, rarely do they describe writing itself as therapeutic. Finally, they do not approach experience solely in terms of individual experience; rather, students write at length about how their individual experiences connect to those shared by other students and the student movement in general.

I contend that this type of experimentation with the personal in different types of writing disturbs a dominant historical narrative in composition and rhetoric that characterizes the theories and pedagogies of personal writing widely circulating in the sixties as “expressive.” The term “expressive” is first invoked by James Kinneavy and James Britton in the 1970s, both of whom use it to describe ways of writing and speaking that focus on individual self-expression—a fundamental component of language learning, according to both scholars.¹ Almost a decade later, James Berlin extends Kinneavy and Britton’s sense of the term by turning it into a historical category a decade later, using “expressivism” to characterize a school of thought popular in the sixties that promoted personal writing in the classroom.

In his two histories of writing instruction—*Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (1984) and *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987)—Berlin identifies three broad theories of rhetoric that persist across time and that correspond to particular pedagogies. Objective theories of rhetoric, according to Berlin’s

¹ For instance, Kinneavy in *A Theory of Discourse* (1971) argues that “expressive discourse is...psychologically prior to all the other uses of language” (396). He further states that the campus disturbances of the sixties and seventies can be partially explained by the lack of attention paid to self-expression in university classrooms: “[I]gnoring the study of expression begets rebellion, sometimes justified, sometimes irresponsible. A democracy which ignores expression has forgotten its own roots” (396). Kinneavy’s comments here suggest that the student writers I look at might have been drawn to personal writing, in part, because they were unable to write personal experience texts elsewhere in the curriculum.

taxonomy, adopt an empirical approach toward language and reality, a theory that manifests itself in so-called “current-traditional” pedagogy, which compartmentalizes discourse into particular modes and breaks the writing process down into discrete steps (*Rhetoric and Reality* 7-11). Transactional theories of rhetoric view truth and language as dialogic, an approach realized in classical rhetoric and in pedagogies and theories of writing informed by poststructuralist theory (*Rhetoric and Reality* 15-17). Finally, subjective theories of rhetoric see truth and language as individually constructed. Berlin contends that such an approach toward truth and language is promoted in “expressive” pedagogies, which are distinguished from other forms of writing instruction based on the emphasis they place on personal writing. According to the tenets of this pedagogy—which, Berlin claims, reached prominence in the 1960s and 1970s—a personal form of writing like the journal “is important because it encourages the individual to record her observations of the world in her own unique way. Studying these observations, however, is designed not to promote learning about the external world, but to get the student to see the way she perceives and structures her experience” (*Rhetoric and Reality* 14).

As becomes clear in the final sentence of the above passage, Berlin remains critical of expressivism because it inadequately addresses the important political and social issues that surround discourse and identity, despite the fact that many “expressionists” saw themselves as having the political goal of empowering students. Berlin’s skepticism toward expressive theories of rhetoric and pedagogy becomes even clearer in his discussion of “expressionists” working in the sixties and seventies such as Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, William Coles, Jr., and Donald Murray. According to Berlin, these “expressionists” create “a teaching environment [that] has at its center the cultivation of the singular vision and voice of the student” (*Rhetoric and Reality* 152). Berlin sees this focus on individual voice as problematic because it dilutes any radical

possibility expressionists see themselves having; as Berlin puts it: “expressionistic rhetoric is easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces it opposes. After all, this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 487).

Berlin’s taxonomy of rhetoric and pedagogy is almost twenty years old, but his influence persists. In describing what he sees as a dearth of archival histories on 20th century writing instruction, David R. Russell observes that Berlin’s “book remains the most-cited treatment of the 20th century” (258). Critics and historians as diverse as Lester Faigley, Robin Varnum, and Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz cite Berlin, and his findings about 19th and 20th century writing instruction continue to be debated in histories of the field.² Grace Surman Paley offers some insight into why Berlin’s ideas gained purchase in the field.

According to her, the fact that Berlin articulates his criticism of personal writing at the time that many in composition studies were turning to poststructuralism and cultural studies helps explain its popularity (22). But it should also be recognized that, no matter how faulty, Berlin offers a definite version of the field, one with heroes and villains, which it could be argued the field needed at that moment in time when it was trying to legitimate itself as an academic discipline.

In some quarters of composition studies, though, Berlin’s framework has been adopted uncritically. For some in composition studies, Berlin’s characterization of the history of writing

²Faigley, for example, applies Berlin’s categories to discuss competing notions of process and subjectivity at stake in the discipline in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (17-20). Varnum adopts a more critical stance, acknowledging her indebtedness to Berlin but recognizing as well the limitations of his approach. For her, Berlin “deflects attention from the ways that politics and policies outside the classroom often determine what teachers do in class” (8). Carr, Carr, and Schultz express a similar sentiment; they credit Berlin with provoking scholars to probe further into composition’s history, although they suggest that this “interest...was more fully realized by John Brereton, Sharon Crowley, Nan Johnson, and many others” (3).

instruction as a contest among three broad theories of rhetoric remains a dominant way of thinking about *the* history of writing instruction. A diverse range of scholars, both amenable to and critical of personal writing, rely on Berlin's categories of rhetoric and pedagogy, using a term like expressivism as a kind of historical shorthand that, for them, encapsulates the range of writing practices and habits of mind shared by teachers and students at a given moment in time. For example, Stephen Parks, in his study of 1960s debates concerning bilingualism and writing instruction, *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students' Right to Their Own Language* (2000), indicates that Berlin's categories, which he says "have been extensively discussed within composition studies," give researchers "a taxonomy through which to read the history of composition studies" (9). Richard Fulkerson draws extensively on Berlin's tripartite classification of composition in his recent assessment of the field, "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century" (2005). Sounding as anxious as Berlin in his critique of expressivism, Fulkerson concludes "that expressivism, despite numerous poundings by the cannons of postmodernism and resulting eulogies, is, in fact, quietly expanding its region of command" (655). Even staunch defenders of personal writing rely on the term "expressivism" to characterize personal writing, despite disagreeing with Berlin over its political nature. Recognizing that students' uses of the personal still presents teachers with problems, Candace Spigelman rehashes the debate between expressivists and so-called social constructionists who, in Spigelman's words, "caution that expressive approaches to writing tend to valorize an asocial, noncollective individual" (23).

My issue with Berlin's analysis, and its subsequent reiteration by numerous composition scholars over the last twenty years, comes from his reliance on textbooks and published research to reach his conclusions about expressive pedagogy and its effects on student writing and

thinking. Paley aims directly at this problematic methodology in her critique of Berlin; according to her, “It is unfortunate that Berlin, despite the fact that he disseminated his views over a fourteen-year period, does not seem to have tested his theoretical conclusions against actual ‘expressionist’ classroom practice. If he had, he might have seen a range of pedagogies, some more overtly sociopolitical than others, depending on the comfort level and belief system of the teacher” (22). One feature of actual classroom practice glaringly absent from Berlin’s research is student writing; nowhere in his research does he offer evidence of how students interacted with the epistemologies and pedagogies he believes dominated the field in the sixties.

In the preface to his archival history on the nineteenth century beginnings of composition, *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* (1995), John Brereton gently criticizes earlier histories of the field such as Berlin’s (although he doesn’t cite Berlin specifically) for focusing on textbooks and published research while virtually ignoring student papers: “The lack of these papers in the histories is something of a scandal,” he writes (xv). Brereton concedes that student writing from this period would not deliver the historical equivalent of Casaubon’s *Key to All Mythologies*, yet “it seems crucial to know what students were writing, what examples of student prose nineteenth-century scholars and administrators were discussing, and how the writing itself was represented to contemporary eyes” (xv). While many subsequent histories of composition instruction before World War II attempt to fill this gap in the archives (see, for example, Fitzgerald, Gold, Hollis), it appears that Brereton’s critique has yet to be heard by chroniclers of composition’s more recent history, the period in the 1960s and 70s when the field came together as a discipline with the attendant professional associations, published research, and Ph.D.-granting programs. When reading the archives compiled by Berlin, Stephen North, Geoffrey Sirc, and numerous other scholars of sixties-era composition,

one notices that they, too, pay scant attention to what students themselves actually wrote.³ This lack can be partially explained by the fact that student papers from the sixties are just as ephemeral and elusive as examples of nineteenth-century student writing (perhaps even more so), requiring of scholars the tedious and often frustrating (yet ultimately rewarding) work of sifting through boxes and files in university libraries whose well-intentioned archivists rarely think of student papers as materials worth preserving and cataloging—let alone researching. I'm aware that this image of the archival historian stooped over long-forgotten, dusty artifacts is an idealized one, but I want to play with it to underscore the more important idea that the field of composition, not to be too maudlin about it, is currently undergoing a generation-shift and that historians' opportunities to recover the syllabi, assignments, and student papers kept by the generation entering the field in the sixties grows scarcer with each passing year. The sixties isn't ancient history, though, which makes the absence of student writing even more scandalous.

This dissertation takes up Brereton's plea and quixotically attempts to begin filling in the gaps in the archive on sixties-era writing instruction by examining how specific archives of student writing from the sixties and seventies complicate the understanding of personal writing as "expressive," with all of the baggage concerning the naïve sense of individualism that such a term connotes. In looking closely at actual examples of student writing, I argue that students in the sixties approached personal writing not simply to determine the meaning of their experiences as individuals. Rather, the student writers I examine invoked the personal in forms of familiar

³Several more recent discussions of 1960s pedagogy appear to follow Geoffrey Sirc's tendency to use allegory as a way of examining the past. Whereas Sirc draws his conclusions by comparing the composition classroom with the museum space, Rebecca Brittenham tries to get at sixties-era radical pedagogy by analyzing representations of teaching on television (see "Goodbye, Mr. Hip"), and Jeff Rice examines earlier instances of what he calls "hip-hop pedagogy" by closely reading compositional practices used by photographers, happening artists, and musicians (see "The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine").

writing (such as memoirs, personal essays, and journals) and other writing genres (such as commencement orations and newsletters) to reflect on the possibility of meaning and to think about their complex identities as both individuals and members of collectives—objectives that run counter to those presumed to be at the heart of personal writing according to those who characterize such writing as “expressive.”⁴

As should be clear, this study participates in the conversation within composition studies about the history of writing and writing instruction in general, as well as the formation of composition studies more specifically. Readers will recognize allegiances to, and points of departure from, influential composition and rhetoric histories, including Lester Faigley’s *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (1992); Stephen Parks’ *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students’ Right to their Own Language* (2000); Sharon Crowley’s *Composition in the University* (1998); Joseph Harris’ *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* (1997); Robert Connors’ *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997); and Thomas P. Miller’s *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (1997). Perhaps more important to this study, though, are the recent number of composition and literacy histories that focus on the sixties and

⁴ It should be emphasized that diaries, personal essays, and memoirs are different genres of personal writing that can make different demands on writers and readers. Anne Ruggles Gere observes that, despite these differences, these genres get collapsed under the murky rubric of personal writing. I would add that this murkiness, at least in terms of personal writing composed in schools, arises from the fact that this writing is read and evaluated by teachers. Some teachers, like Peter Elbow, draw a distinction between personal writing forms like the journal and the personal essay based on audience: journals are private whereas personal essays and memoirs are public. However, such a distinction is complicated in the classroom because, even in their class journals, students are expected to perform analysis, something they may not see themselves compelled to do in their own private writings. Not surprisingly, student texts from the sixties and seventies complicate the public/private distinction often used to distinguish forms of personal writing, because, as I will discuss later, they often wrote journals or diaries meant to be read by others, sometimes by fellow classmates and sometimes by larger reading publics.

seventies. Notable examples are: Geoffrey Sirc's *English Composition as a Happening* (2002); Lisa Ede's *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location* (2004); and Kathryn Flannery's *Feminist Literacies, 1968-1975* (2005)—works that to varying degrees offer more complex narratives on avant-garde theories of writing and art, the writing-as-process “movement,” and radical feminism.

A great deal has changed in the way we tell the history of writing and writing instruction since Albert Kitzhaber wrote his influential dissertation *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900* in 1950, with archival history becoming more of a presence in composition studies. Traditional histories written by Berlin, Connors, Miller, and others following in the footsteps of Kitzhaber survey the field by investigating exemplary theories and textbooks, which they assume provide a glimpse into how writing and rhetoric has been taught and theorized.⁵ Archival historians, on the other hand, recognize the material conditions that complicate how teachers and students put ideas about writing and rhetoric into practice. Archival histories may look closely at specific programs or departments, as Robin Varnum does in her study of Amherst's writing program under Theodore Baird, *Fencing with Words* (1996), or Karyn Hollis does with Bryn Mawr in *Liberating Voices: Writing at the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers* (2004). Other historians, as David Gold does in his examination of Melvin B. Tolson, seek through archival inquiry to recover the work of teachers and theorists whose ideas may speak to current debates in the field (see ““Nothing Educates Us”). This dissertation borrows from the

⁵ However, recent research by Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen Carr, and Lucille Shultz has begun to question the field's understanding of how rhetorics and school texts circulated in the nineteenth century (see *Archives of Instruction*).

archival methods used by Varnum, Hollis, Gold, and other historians, although it also attempts to look at materials that extend beyond one particular department, program, or teacher.⁶

This study also intervenes in recent discussions in composition studies concerning personal writing. There has been a recent explosion in research on personal writing and its complex location within academic discourse communities. Recent studies by Candace Spigelman, Grace Surman Paley, Deborah Holdstein and David Bleich, and Barbara Kamler have all productively explored the rich array of rhetorical strategies that personal writing presents to students, and I hope my inquiry into students' personal writing from the sixties extends this line of thinking.

Finally, this study participates in the field's renewed interest in student writing, evidenced especially by longitudinal studies of student writing such as Marilyn Sternglass' *Time to Know Them* (1997) and the ongoing research done by Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz at

⁶When planning how I would go about doing archival research for this study, I decided that I would focus on developments happening at my home institution, the University of Pittsburgh, and corroborate these findings by looking at student papers from a different university. To start, I read through histories of Pitt to see what curricular debates and changes were taking place in the sixties and seventies. I then searched the university archive's catalog for materials pertaining to curricular issues, eventually locating the school's archival holdings on the Alternative Curriculum. I initially became interested in this program because it was not discussed in any of the histories I read of Pitt, which I speculate has something to do with the fact that the archive at Pitt contains only a fraction of the paperwork the program generated. (Phil Wion, a former director of the Alternative Curriculum, informed me that the program kept on file a copy of every student project so that faculty could respond to the administration's concerns about student performance.) To learn more about the program I consulted the records officially housed in the university's archives, interviewed former faculty and students in the program, and reviewed documents found in personal collections.

To expand my research beyond Pitt, I consulted the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, an online database of university and other public archival holdings across the country. Using search terms like "student writing," "student themes," and "student essays," I identified several relevant archives, finally choosing Brown University's "Student Essays and Orations" collection because of its historical breadth.

Harvard University, and Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford at Stanford University.⁷ Although I choose not to rely on case history or longitudinal methodologies, I share these researchers' concerns that the field needs a better understanding of how students write in and beyond the first-year writing classroom. I would add that we need a historical understanding of how students write, and put in its simplest terms, this is the dissertation's aim: to explore some of what students were writing in the Vietnam-era.

Before I detail how I will look at students' personal writing in this study, I want to offer my own personal narrative that helps explain the impetus and goals of this research. Like many narratives, the story behind my research into sixties-era college student writing has multiple origins. The first story opens with me, several years ago, trying to figure out a research topic for what at Pitt we call the Ph.D. Project Paper, which is our version of the Ph.D. comprehensive exams. In my graduate coursework up to this point, I had become extremely interested in studying the history of college writing instruction, and I had taken an array of courses that focused primarily on this history from the perspective of the nineteenth century. I had thought long and hard about my interest in cultural studies—especially history of the book studies such as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *The Coming of the Book* (1976), Elizabeth

⁷ In the Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing the research team surveyed over 400 students and focused more extensively on the writing done by 65 of these students throughout the span of their college careers (Sommers and Saltz 126). According to Sommers and Saltz in their article "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year" (2004), this research has so far shown that for students to succeed as writers in the university they must think of themselves as novices in their freshman year and find personally relevant reasons for writing. For more information on the Harvard study see the website <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/>>, which has links to two films produced in conjunction with this research, *Shaped by Writing* and *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback*.

Based on interviews and materials collected from 189 undergraduates, Fishman, Lunsford and other researchers at Stanford conclude that performance plays a key role in students' understanding of their writing, which leads Fishman and Lunsford to propose teaching strategies that "bring purposeful talk back to the center of the classroom" (244).

Eisenstein's *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1983), and Cathy Davidson's edited collection *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (1989)—and I wondered how the materialist interpretive framework these studies offered could be applied to the work of composition. I also wanted to find a way to bring my interest in political activism into my research. At that time I was active in the now-defunct organization Pittsburgh Professors for Peace and Justice, working as one of the group's media coordinators, and I wanted to think about how writing instructors' politics both shape and are shaped by the classroom. Because of this interest in political activism, I decided to focus on the 1960s origins of composition and examine how the political attitudes of the moment were inflected in writing and pedagogy.

To begin this work, I looked through back issues of *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*, paying close attention to the journals' "extra-textual" materials (the tables of contents, conference announcements, and textbook advertisements) to see what they revealed about debates shaping the field at that moment. I eventually came across an advertisement that piqued my interest; it was for a 1969 textbook called *The Literary Artist as Social Critic*, which the ad boasted as presenting a whole new—and in the lexicon of the day, relevant—approach toward teaching literature, writing, and rhetoric. I began to see more and more advertisements like this one, eventually finding a textbook called *Student Voices: One* (1971) that collects essays, editorials, autobiographical writings, fliers, and other texts written by students. Reading *Student Voices* helped me realize that textbooks could only tell me so much about the sixties. If I wanted to gain a greater understanding of this period, and know more about what students were learning and writing, I would need to find additional examples of student writing from the sixties and examine the work young people were doing in the texts they composed in the classroom and for other publics.

The other origin for this research is the classroom, specifically an Advanced Composition course I taught last spring. When designing the assignments for the course I decided to take a different approach: I decided that I would invite students to write imitative essays that explored the stylistic workings of essayists such as Virginia Woolf, Joan Didion, Zadie Smith, and others. Unlike courses I had taught previously, in this one I decided that I would not prescribe content; for each essay students could write on whatever topic or issue they found compelling. Somewhat to my surprise, I found that the majority of the class consistently wrote pieces that variously fall under the rubric of the personal essay. Students wrote about their experiences dealing with the injuries and/or deaths of classmates, with the everyday frustrations of being a student, with the challenges of being a soldier, a parent, or a worker. When commenting on such essays I found myself frustrated that the writers oftentimes had trouble making a point through their narratives, and I variously suggested that one way they might earn their readers' attention was through explaining the significance of these experiences—explaining what critical insight these experiences gave them about a particular issue beyond themselves. Not surprisingly, students resisted, handing in revisions that, to my eyes, seemed to lack critical weight.

As I was reading these essays, I was also reading student writing from the sixties, and I began to see that, like the students in my Advanced Composition course, many of these writers tended to compose personal writings that, from the perspective of my training in composition theory and pedagogy, lacked sufficient critical insight. In their first drafts, and even in their revisions, many students did not pause to explain the significance behind the stories they told in their essays; they did not connect their experiences to issues beyond themselves.

This observation led me to ask two different types of questions in my dissertation. On the one hand, I ask questions important to thinking about the history of composition instruction.

How, for instance, might we describe college student writing from the sixties? The canon of literature on composition history, from the work of James Berlin to Geoffrey Sirc, offers valuable ways of understanding how textbooks, published researchers, and teachers in the sixties theorized writing and writing instruction. But how, I wondered, were students themselves theorizing writing in the texts they wrote for class, for campus newspapers, for publication? In other words, what can we learn about 1960s-era composition by looking at student writing from the period?

The second set of questions I ask has to do with the pedagogical implications raised by this historical inquiry into student writing, particularly as they concern personal writing and its status within composition and rhetoric. Critics such as Karen Surman Paley and Candace Spigelman have begun to examine in more depth the complex relationship between personal writing and academic discourse. Spigelman especially argues on behalf of what she calls “personal academic discourse,” what she sees as a “blended approach [that] creates useful contradictions, contributes more complicated meanings, and so may provoke greater insights than reading or writing either experiential or academic modes separately” (3). Following these and other critics, I ask: What is the place of personal writing in the first-year composition classroom, whose objective, as I see it, is to introduce students to academic forms of thinking and writing? How should we evaluate personal writing that, like the essays written by my students and by many students in the sixties, on the surface seems to be simply descriptive?

Each of the chapters that follow looks into these questions by examining different representations of the student writer. I begin with textbooks and observe how in these books teachers and editors seek to construct a student writer who is part social rebel and part good,

well-mannered pupil. I then turn to commercially published memoirs by student radicals, written for audiences that extended well beyond the classroom. These books circulated in a complex commercial environment that made student writers' ideas available to a larger reading public at the same time that it potentially compromised these students' radical ideas about politics and writing. Next I look at students writing to other students and teachers in journals composed as part of an experimental learning program at the University of Pittsburgh. Finally, I examine students speaking publicly in orations delivered by undergraduates at Brown University. These speeches depart from the other texts I examine, in that they were orally delivered and embodied, although as I will discuss later in this chapter, these orations complicate distinctions made between oral and written texts because, in addition to being read aloud, they were also written to be read.

In Chapter 1 I examine how personal writing was implicitly taught in a genre of textbooks known as "Radical Readers," anthologies that saw themselves giving students the opportunity to read contemporary, and thus "relevant," fiction and nonfiction as a way to investigate contemporary problems such as racism, the Vietnam War, and the student New Left. I argue that these textbooks appropriate the work of a writer like Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver to argue on behalf of a traditional approach toward personal essay writing, thus ignoring more experimental writing by personal essayists like Joan Didion, who I argue offers an alternative way of thinking about personal writing.

In Chapter 2, I explore further the traditional and alternative theories of personal writing offered by essayists such as Cleaver and Didion. Looking at commercially published memoirs written by young radicals in the late sixties and seventies as well as student essays collected in William Coles and James Vopat's *What Makes Writing Good* (1985), I define these theories of

personal writing as “transformative” and “revisionist,” and I show how sixties student memoirs can be aligned with the “revisionist” theory of personal writing exemplified by Didion and others.

I follow up this analysis of sixties student memoirs by investigating in Chapter 3 how journals and other personal writings composed by students in the Alternative Curriculum, an experimental learning program at the University of Pittsburgh that ran in the 1970s, can be seen as additional examples of revisionist personal writing. The Alternative Curriculum proves an interesting case study because it took place at a time when, nationally, most other experimental university programs and free universities were dwindling. Although the late seventies is often remembered as the era of “back to basics,” the Alternative Curriculum program at Pitt, which eventually shut down in 1979, shows that the retreat from the pedagogical advances made in the sixties was not as totalizing as commonly believed. These journals written by students in the Alternative Curriculum, I argue, do not perform one of the characteristic features of the transformative personal essay—what Thomas Newkirk calls “the reflexive turn” (*Performance of Self* 12-13). I conclude this chapter by briefly considering what implications this type of writing, which at first glance might appear evasive and uncritical, may have on debates about the place of personal writing in the first-year writing class.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I look at how the strategies and values of the transformative personal essay appear in commencement addresses written and delivered by graduating seniors at Brown University between 1960 and 1980. I focus on Brown because in the sixties and seventies it trained students to think about what it means to be a student in general and a student of a discipline, curricular ideals that undergraduates themselves helped institute in their work proposing and implementing a widespread revision of the school’s general education

requirements—a revision that came to be called the “New Curriculum.” Although the orations students delivered at Brown are not personal writings *per se*, they do rely heavily on personal experience to craft their arguments. These orations are important, I argue, because they suggest that the range of attitudes expressed by revisionist personal writing may be part of what Raymond Williams calls a “structure of feeling”—which gives further credence to my argument that the predominant idea of students’ personal writing as “expressive” is inadequate for understanding the array of strategies students, in the sixties and potentially today, perform in their personal writing.

In theorizing what I call “revisionist” personal writing, I am not trying to name a style of writing that I believe teachers ought to present to students so their classrooms can become more critical or political. Rather, my aim is more *exploratory* than prescriptive. In bringing to light specific instances of student writing from the sixties and seventies, I want to show that the characterization of students’ personal writing made by those critics who label such writing “expressive” does not necessarily align with what students actually write in journals, memoirs, and other autobiographical texts. Students sometimes have a different set of expectations than teachers imagine, and in the case of personal writing from the sixties and seventies, students show that they understand the personal in complex ways that conform to as well as challenge dominant beliefs in the field about identity and writing.

2. “UNDUE ELOQUENCE”: RADICAL READERS, ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, JOAN DIDION, AND THE TEACHING OF PERSONAL WRITING

It has to be stressed that the uncontradicted evidence presented to this Court indicated that the petitioner had been a model parolee. The peril to his parole status stemmed from no failure of personal rehabilitation, but from his undue eloquence in pursuing political goals, goals which were offensive to many of his contemporaries.

– from California Superior Court Judge Raymond Jay Sherman’s decision to grant Eldridge Cleaver’s request for a *writ of habeas corpus*, June 12, 1968 (qtd. in Lockwood 3)

In this chapter I look at how the figure of the student writer was constructed in a genre of 1960s textbooks known as “radical readers,” anthologies that published fiction and nonfiction addressing the Vietnam War, student activism, civil rights, and other “relevant” issues of the day. These textbooks were billed as revolutionary, as radically different from the anthologies typically used in college classrooms. Part of this perception had to do with the kinds of authors and texts anthologized in these textbooks. Focusing specifically on how radical readers published the work of Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, I argue that the introduction of Cleaver and other New Left authorities into writing and literature classrooms was less than radical. More specifically, I contend that the editors of radical readers selected Cleaver—and excluded the work of a more experimental essayist like Joan Didion—to teach students a

traditional approach toward personal writing, one in which writing about the self is seen as an act of self-transformation and self-salvation. This appropriation of Cleaver allowed teachers to legitimate the study of writing to students skeptical of the relevance of writing instruction, and it additionally enabled teachers to envision the writing classroom as a place that could potentially transform students from unruly radicals unaware of proper decorum to social critics skilled in proper rhetorical behavior.

During the decades that witnessed campus unrest at Berkeley, Columbia, Kent State, and numerous other institutions, social commentators prolifically ruminated on the subject of the American student. Predominately cast as white, middle-class, and male, students were imagined as awakening from the apathetic slumber cast by McCarthyism and forging for themselves a radical consciousness that they were willing to practice through their political activism, their hairstyles, their choice of music, and other means. “Old Left” intellectuals, moderate liberals, and conservative pundits alike—among them the literary critic Irving Howe, historian and Kennedy scholar Arthur Schlesinger, and *New York Times* journalist and editor James Reston—viewed recent actions on the part of students as a cause of concern. They worried that students were applying their newly found power incorrectly, charging that student rebels lacked a sufficient understanding of history, that they failed to adequately theorize the power structures they sought to overturn. Other voices that came to be associated with the New Left, including Kenneth Rexroth, Charles Reich, and Eldridge Cleaver, declared that the elements of student behavior that so alarmed critics, like rejection of authority and spontaneity, were instead reasons why the student movement would succeed. Still another set of commentators, particularly researchers in Sociology and Psychology, sought to identify and analyze the political, social,

cultural, and sexual proclivities of *studentus americanus*. Perhaps no other student has been so thoroughly anatomized.⁸

This anxiety about students, their concerns, and their conduct made its way into composition as well; but whereas social critics wrote page after page on the cultural influences and political tendencies of students, critics in composition focused on the ways in which students' writing and argumentative style was affected by changes in the political and cultural landscape. In his famous essay "The Rhetoric of the Open Hand and the Rhetoric of the Closed Fist," Edward P.J. Corbett describes the illogical and combative style of rhetoric taken up by student protestors, who, in Corbett's view, have all-too-readily abandoned the logical and civil style of rhetoric championed by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and other classical rhetoricians. Corbett laments that these figures, "who devoted most of their attention in the classroom and in their texts to instruction in the strategies of logical appeal, would be appalled at this development in contemporary rhetoric. This retreat from reason may be a part of the shift to the primacy of emotional appeal. God help us all" (294). Donald Murray likewise notes the combative situation writing teachers face from closed-fisted students: "Student power is no longer an issue, it is a fact. The war is being won—or lost—depending on your viewpoint, and one of the major weapons in the war is rhetoric that is crude, vigorous, usually uninformed, frequently obscene,

⁸ For criticism on the political naiveté of students that spans the ideological spectrum, see Irving Howe, "'The New 'Confrontation Politics' Is a Dangerous Game" (1968); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Politics of Violence" (1968); and James Reston, "The Clichés of Radical Students" (1969). Texts that offer a counterpoint to such criticisms include "The Students Take Over" (1960) by poet and Beat ancestor Kenneth Rexroth; *The Greening of America* (1970) by Yale law professor Charles A. Reich; and "The White Race and Its Heroes" (1968) by Black Panther celebrity Eldridge Cleaver. For a survey of psychological and sociological studies attempting to define and understand student "rebels," a valuable resource is Kenneth Kenniston's *Radicals and Militants: An Annotated Bibliography of Empirical Research on Campus Unrest* (1973). Kenniston is remarkably critical of much of this research, whose "level of methodological and theoretical sophistication is not very high" in his estimation (ix).

and often threatening” (118). In *Uptaught* (1970), Ken Macrorie’s *Bildungsroman* describing how he arrived at the knowledge that “professors are failing, every day, every hour,” Macrorie sees such misbehavior as a welcome relief from the turgid, rote prose offered up by most students, or what he labels “Engfish.”

Composition’s anxiety and interest in the rebellious Vietnam-era student is well documented. James Berlin, Stephen Parks, Geoffrey Sirc, and others illuminate how this concern about students and their changing styles and attitudes gets expressed in a range of discursive arenas—e.g., monographs, journal articles, and organizational materials such as *The Students’ Right to Their Own Language*.⁹ What has remained largely unexamined, though, is how this discourse on students and student writing circulated in textbooks of the period.

In this chapter I will examine one way the personal essay is modeled in a genre of textbooks known as “radical readers,” 1960s and 70s-era anthologies that responded to students’ and others’ cries for “relevance” by reproducing essays, articles, poems, short stories, songs, and other types of writing on “contemporary” or “relevant” issues such as the Vietnam War, civil rights, university reform, and a host of other topics. I focus on these textbooks, in part, because—along with student-centered pedagogy, the process movement, composition-as-a-happening, and the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*—they functioned as part of a tradition of reform that took place during the Vietnam era, a tradition whose effects we continue

⁹ Whereas Berlin traces what he identifies as the broad rhetorical worldviews in play during this period within composition’s professional discourse, Sirc is more interested in what avant-garde theories of art from the sixties (and other periods) can teach us about the material conditions of writing instruction. (See Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987) and Sirc, *Composition as a Happening* (2002).) Adopting less of a bird’s-eye approach is Parks, whose archival research on the composition of CCC’s 1974 *Students’ Right to Their Own Language*, the organization’s policy statement affirming the place of multidialecticism within the teaching of writing, illuminates the very real interconnections between progressive and educational organizations. (See Parks, *Class Politics: The Movement Behind the Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (2000).)

to come to grips with today.¹⁰ In addition, “radical readers” symbolize the tension that occurs whenever pedagogies confront change. Rather than being simply understood as innovations, or as liberation, pedagogical reforms, like those that took place in the sixties and seventies, may perhaps be better understood as a dynamic process, as a simultaneous opening and closing of possibilities, as both liberation and control.

Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate how this dynamic process plays out in the approach toward personal writing exhibited in “radical readers.” To do this work I have broken down the chapter into several sections. In the section that follows I trace the general characteristics shared by radical readers, locate them in relation to other textbooks of the period, and discuss the prose models they present to students. In the second section I further sketch these textbooks’ reception histories and argue, contrary to current critical discourse, that they may be understood not as a fad but as part of a textbook tradition that carries over into our contemporary moment. In the third and final section I examine what radical readers teach students about personal writing. More specifically, I focus on how radical readers appropriate Eldridge Cleaver, who is among the most reprinted authors found in radical readers, to defend a traditional approach toward the personal essay, one in which writers reflect on the self-knowledge gleaned from transformative events in their lives. Finally, in the last section, I examine these textbooks’ exclusion of the work of journalist and essayist Joan Didion, whose essay “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” (1967) presents students with an alternative model of personal writing, in which writers question the very possibility of self-discovery and meaning.

¹⁰ While student-centered and process pedagogies have become woven into the fabric of composition instruction, the idea of composition-as-a-happening, first worked out by Charles Deemer, who, in “English Composition as a Happening” (1967), applied “happenings” artists’ revisions of museum space to the writing classroom, remains an oft-cited historical oddity, although its legacy has been more seriously reexamined in the recent work of Geoffrey Sirc.

2.1. Radical Readers

The one book which makes a lousy gift is the Freshman Reader. No one gives a Freshman Reader away as a present, indicative of the difficulty with Freshman Readers. No one would really want one, if he had a choice. Yet they are the most popular type of book encountered in the course.

--Leonard A. Greenbaum and Rudolf B. Schmerl, *Course X: A Left Field Guide to Freshman English* (54)

Radical readers can be broadly defined as textbook anthologies produced in the 1960s and 1970s that collect a range of writing genres in addition to the expository essay that explicitly focus on, or are broadly relevant to, the political, cultural, and economic issues confronting post-war America. More specifically, radical readers present students with a steady staple of literary texts, but also a fair share of journalistic pieces, political documents, and popular cultural forms, that wrestle with such “contemporary” problems as militarism and the Vietnam War, university education and student rebellion, civil rights and Black Power, second-wave feminism and the New Left.

While all radical readers share an interest in examining controversial issues, like any other textbook genre, they represent and ask students to work with these issues in multiple, and sometimes opposing, ways. In his oft-cited critique of 1960s and 70s-era composition textbooks, Richard Ohmann observes that, given the diverse and competitive nature of the textbook market, wide differences exist among similarly intentioned readers, rhetorics, and other types of textbooks. Referring specifically to 1960s calls for “relevance” and the relative proliferation of textbooks that rushed to answer this call, he writes, “Both publishing houses and professors are

quick to exploit new doctrines and new slogans, so that each new model of textbook is exemplified by trashy as well as honorable instances” (140). Putting the issue of quality aside, Ohmann’s point about the heterogeneity of textbook genres can be applied to radical readers, though Ohmann surprisingly never directly refers to this “new model of textbook.” Although reviewers and other critics discussed radical readers as if they were a stable category of textbooks, they may perhaps be better understood as a group of textbooks that share certain assumptions and goals while approaching these ends through multiple means.

In fact, the very term used to identify these textbooks—“radical reader”—is itself slippery and difficult to pin down. Aside from one example, these textbooks do not name themselves “radical readers,” nor does this label appear to be a marketing term utilized by publishers, for unlike “relevance” the term “radical” is not widely used in textbook advertisements and other publicity materials from the period. Instead, the moniker “radical readers” likely comes from instructors, as suggested by Helen P. Scroggins in her 1971 *College Composition and Communication* review article simply entitled “‘Radical’ Readers”: “Reflecting on the rapidity of change and setting and following publishing trends are several so-called ‘radical readers’ which are now available; and more are forthcoming” (57). The first reference to the term “radical reader” that I can determine is a 1970 textbook, *The American Experience: A Radical Reader*, edited by Harold Jaffe and John Tytell. And although many of the radical readers I have looked at spend a great deal of energy thinking about the term “radical” and what it means to practice radicalism, this is the only book I have located that refers to itself as a radical reader *per se*.

Radical readers were designed for literature and composition classrooms, but they could also be used in other introductory-level courses—like political science, sociology, and newly

created courses in women's studies—that investigated social, political, and economic issues. In their radical reader *Hard Rains: Conflict and Conscience in America* (1970), editors Robert Disch and Barry N. Schwartz suggest that, although they believe their reader is valuable for a writing course, the book could be seen to work equally as well in courses other than freshman English:

But why in freshman English? Why not in sociology? Or economics? Or political science? Or in technical courses? In the opinion of the editors, the purpose of freshman English—to create better writing—is best achieved when the students care about the material they are asked to engage. Since *Hard Rains* brings the issues discussed in the cafeteria, the dormitory room, and the protest march into the classroom, the editors feel that the students will be sincerely involved and that better writing will be the end result. (vi)

Two years earlier, Robert H. Woodward and James J. Clark likewise imagine their textbook, *The Social Rebel in American Literature*, fulfilling the curricular needs of various classes. They tell students and teachers in their preface, “We have kept editorial additions to the minimum necessary for effective use of the volume in courses in American civilization, American history, American literature, and English composition” (viii).

One of the reasons why radical readers could function in other areas of the curriculum has to do with them being *readers* and not *rhetorics*. Rather than containing prescriptive rules about writing and sections devoted to argument, organization, and diction, as rhetorics tend to do, a reader collects essays and other writings, oftentimes writings that are seen to be somehow exemplary. To put it briefly, a reader is an anthology that teaches reading and writing through models rather than precepts. In this sense, radical readers—with their selections from

contemporary writers like Eldridge Cleaver, Herbert Marcuse, and other figures associated with the New Left, as well as older figures like Emerson, Thoreau, and Swift—belong more to the tradition of *McGuffey's Eclectic Readers* than they do to the rhetorics of George Campbell and Richard Whately. So while radical readers competed with rhetorics like James McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose* (whose fourth edition and fifth editions appeared, respectively, in 1967 and 1972) and Sheridan Baker's *The Practical Stylist* (whose second and third editions were published in 1969 and 1973), they approached writing in different ways. Rhetorics like McCrimmon's and Baker's give explicit advice on how to compose expository prose; for instance, the table of contents to the second edition of Baker's *The Practical Stylist* reads almost like a list of rules—some of the subsections in chapter one include “Find your thesis,” “Sharpen your thesis,” and “Believe in your thesis” (xiii). Radical readers' relationship to writing is less apparent; editors like Disch and Schwartz assert that their goal is to improve student writing, which they state in the quote above, but they offer no direct instruction in writing. Radical readers emphasize ideas, for editors assume that controversial ideas stimulate good student writing. And one of the reasons why these ideas-centered readers found their way into freshman composition had to do with the course's lack of a clearly defined subject matter. To borrow a phrase from Richard Ohmann, radical readers saw freshman composition's “thinness [as] socially useful” (160).

Radical readers can be compared to several experimental rhetorics of the day that similarly attempted to refashion the university classroom so that it could become more relevant to students' political concerns. One such experimental rhetoric is Dick Friedrich's and David Kuester's *It's Mine and I'll Write It That Way* (1972), which Richard Ohmann and Steve Parks

both discuss.¹¹ Parks describes *It's Mine* as one of several “process movement textbooks that attempted to connect a students’ language to leftist social politics” (81). This political agenda, according to Parks, is evident in the book’s references to New Left figures like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin and its approach towards language: “While the book echoes a respect for, and use of, student language in the classroom, its message is overtly political. It states that ‘language is a common property, and it’s up to students to redefine what it means’” (81). Radical readers similarly adopt “overtly political” positions, and writings by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin frequently appear in a number of radical readers; but they refrain from offering explicit rules about writing, even open-ended rules like the ones that can be found in *It's Mine*. For example, in their “Preface to Students,” Friedrich and Kuester ask students to analyze Kuester’s acknowledgements, which begin like most acknowledgements, with a list of colleagues and helpful editors, but which go on to thank “Lysol, Aerosol, parasol, the Lady who Came to Dinner, diners, chili con carne, *Mondo Cane*,” and so on” (xi). After reading this list, the student is asked to consider the connections between the words in the list and to try out such a list on their own. “Let your mind roll on with the flow of words as they pop into your head,” the editors advise. “Put them on paper. If ‘nurse’ makes you think of ‘purse’—fine. [...] There aren’t any rights or wrongs here, and no rules. Just your mind letting words suggest other words and your pen putting them down on paper as fast as possible, trying to keep up with the stream” (xiii-xiv). No such rules or guidelines, even ones that give advice on how to freewrite, appear in radical readers.

The only self-professed radical reader I have located, *The American Experience: A Radical Reader* (1970), edited by Harold Jaffe and John Tytell, captures many of the general

¹¹ See *English in America*, p. 140, and *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students’ Right to Their Own Language*, pp. 81-86.

characteristics shared by this genre of textbook anthologies. In their preface the editors explain what makes their textbook radical, and in these comments they map out many of the qualities shared by other radical readers as well. Jaffe and Tytell define their text's radicalness this way:

The American Experience is a “radical” reader in this sense: it employs a variety of unconventional forms (manifestoes, speeches, interviews, a symposium, poetry, rock-lyrics, and scenarios), in addition to the essay, to speak directly to—not down to—students about life in contemporary America. Why this emphasis on form and manner of presentation in a college reader? The question should rather be, Why has such a method of compilation not been used before? (xi, original emphasis)

The editors claim that their textbook differs from others in at least three ways: 1) it addresses contemporary issues, 2) it establishes a non-authoritarian relationship with students, and 3) it collects forms of writing beyond the expository essay. Other radical readers attempt to achieve similar goals, and, before going into a more thorough analysis of specific examples and how they deal with the personal essay, I want to discuss these three characteristics in more detail and show how they appear in a number of other radical readers.

First, radical readers are marked by the way they compile materials that address the explosive issues pervading American culture and society in the 1960s and 70s. Jaffe and Tytell state elsewhere in the preface that their reader “*attempts to document the conflicts of the 1960s while anticipating the directions of the 1970s*” (xiii, original emphasis), and much the same could be said for the majority of radical readers. Writings anthologized in radical readers predominately address such conflicts and topics as the Vietnam War and militarism in general; the student movement and university education reform; civil rights and race relations; new trends

in art, literature, and popular culture; environmentalism; and, in a few cases, feminism and women's rights.¹² Most radical readers are organized into chapters or units, each covering a separate issue—so when you turn to the table of contents in most radical readers you can generally expect to find a unit on university education and/or the student movement, a unit on cultural trends, a unit on race, and so on. *The American Experience*, for instance, has seven units: “Legacy of the Beat Generation,” “Black Consciousness,” “New Politics and the University,” “New Life Styles,” “New Directions in the Arts,” “The Literature,” and “Whither.” A similar kind of categorization, minus the Beat Generation history lesson, is used in *The Way It Is: Readings in Contemporary American Prose* (1970), which is divided into sections entitled “the individual and his values,” “the troubled society,” “blacks,” “politics,” “youth,” “the university,” “science,” “religion,” and “art and artifice.”

A small number of radical readers are organized differently, focusing on a single issue or event rather than touching on a number of different, yet perhaps interrelated, topics. For example, *Female Liberation: History and Current Politics* (1972) collects materials focusing on past and present versions of feminism and the women's movement, as the title makes clear. *Beyond Berkeley: A Sourcebook in Student Values* (1966), which is the earliest radical reader that I've found, compiles writings that contextualize and analyze the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964. Radical readers such as these overlap with the genre of sourcebooks, textbooks that compile materials pertaining to a single topic, sometimes used by instructors to develop curricula.

¹² The majority of radical readers do not include selections that explicitly discuss feminism or gender, nor do they design separate units on these issues. Typically, gender gets addressed in textbooks, like Adams and Briscoe's *Up Against the Wall Mother* (1971) and Roberta Salper's *Female Liberation: History and Current Politics* (1972), that focus solely on feminist theory and politics. This relegation of gender to separate casebooks is characteristic of the student New Left's dismissal of feminist issues.

Radical readers further signal their interest in the contemporary moment by anthologizing in large part the work of contemporary writers. The most anthologized contemporary writer is Eldridge Cleaver, whose work gets reprinted in at least seven different radical readers: his essay “The White Race and Its Heroes” (from the 1968 volume *Soul on Ice*) appears in five of the textbooks that comprise my sample, making it the most anthologized essay. (Remarkably, only one of the textbooks that includes this essay excerpts it. The editors of *Hard Rains* (1970) cut out the essay’s epigraph as well as Cleaver’s brief discussion of Kerouac’s novel *On the Road*.) Other contemporary writers who frequently appear in radical readers include Marlene Dixon, Martin Duberman, Paul Goodman, Abbie Hoffman, Irving Howe, Langston Hughes, Le Roi Jones, Martin Luther King, Jr., Norman Mailer, Malcolm X, Herbert Marcuse, and Marshall McLuhan—all of whose work is collected in at least three different readers.

If we compare this list of writers with those included in a well-known anthology such as the revised edition of *The Norton Reader* (1969), whose various editions Lynn Z. Bloom describes as being “the industry point of reference” (412), we see that only three writers appear on both lists—King, Mailer, and McLuhan.¹³ The revised edition of *The Norton Reader* does collect the work of other contemporary writers, but older, more canonical authors dominate the table of contents—among them Samuel Johnson, John Donne, and Francis Bacon. Nevertheless, general editor Arthur M. Eastman adopts a somewhat defensive posture toward the beginning of the book’s preface: “The reader who compares this edition with the first will discover that we have not redefined our standards of excellence. Still we call on such great writers of the past as

¹³ First published in 1965, and revised four years later, *The Norton Reader* was a massive project that involved faculty from the University of Michigan, the University of Toronto, and the University of Pennsylvania. Comments General Editor Arthur M. Eastman makes in the preface to the 1969 edition suggest that this revision was undertaken, in part, to adapt to the changing textbook market. Sounding similar to editors of radical readers, Eastman defends both editions of *The Norton Reader* for their “relevance to the lives of today’s students” (xix, my emphasis).

Ascham, Bacon, Donne, Erasmus, Hopkins, Jefferson, La Rochefoucauld, Lincoln, Machiavelli, Matthew, and Plato” (xix). Here Eastman alludes to his concern that some readers, upon scanning the table of contents and noticing pieces by Mailer, McLuhan, and other “contemporaries” or “newcomers” (Eastman’s words), will feel that the anthology’s “standards of excellence” have been compromised and that the editors have sacrificed an essay like Ruskin’s “Traffic” in the name of relevance. (Eastman explicitly refers to the excision of this essay in his preface.)

Radical readers exhibit no such fear, although several editors do suggest concerns that their textbooks, and the writings included in them, will be viewed as not sufficiently literary. Robert Disch and Barry Schwartz, editors of *Hard Rains: Conflict and Conscience in America* (1970), anticipate this criticism and try to preempt it by describing their collection’s literary value, which they formulate this way: “The literary quality of most of these essays is extremely high, not as a result of the authors’ preoccupation with formal rhetoric, but because of the commitment they bring to the investigation of their subject” (vi). Other editors, like Leo Hamalian and Frederick R. Karl, imply that they are unconcerned about literary value, although they share Disch and Schwartz’ concern with the vague concept of “commitment.” They write of the authors in their textbook, *The Radical Vision* (1970),

These writers do not limit themselves to the safety of a specialty, nor do they always speak as sages who advocate balance and rationality. Their inspiration is intuition, and in spirit they are often more like Hotspur than Socrates. They have in common the courage, the insight, and the breadth of perception that permits them to range widely over the subject at hand, exposing spurious values, false

standards, and the decline of imagination that have brought us, in their eyes, to the brink of disaster both in our personal lives and in our public affairs. (xiii)

This is not to suggest that only work done by contemporary writers can be found in radical readers. In fact, Jonathan Swift and Henry David Thoreau are among the most frequently collected authors—Swift appears in at least four radical readers, Thoreau in ten. Other authors whose texts are compiled in at least two different readers include Aristophanes, Aristotle, William Blake, Thomas Carlyle, Frederick Douglass, Henrik Ibsen, Thomas Paine, Plato, Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mark Twain, and Mary Wolstonecraft. In most cases, editors use texts by these authors to contextualize a particular issue, or to offer readers a historical perspective on radicalism and/or revolution. For example, in *Beyond Berkeley* (1966), a reader that attempts to understand the recent disturbances on the California university campus, editors Christopher G. Katope and Paul G. Zolbrod excerpt pieces from Plato, Aristotle, Edmund Burke, and John Stuart Mill, authors who, in their words, “have established, defined and clarified some of the issues that were invoked by the Berkeley students and their opponents alike, issues...that will certainly be invoked again and again in the future” (xviii).

Radical readers are similar to one another in terms of how they address students—and this is the second feature that I want to observe briefly. Textbooks are frequently criticized, by critics and defenders alike, as conservative and overly authoritarian. David Bleich supports such a view when he states that “most textbooks...retain one feature in common: the presentation takes place in the *discourse of direct instruction*. A textbook is assumed to *tell* students what is the case, what they should do when they have to write essays or other kinds of papers” (16). Many radical readers, however, attempt to avoid this authoritarian “discourse of direct

instruction” through various means. One way editors try to achieve this is by limiting the textbook’s apparatus. In fact, well over half of the radical readers I studied do not include discussion and/or essay questions. These textbooks contain very little apparatus beyond a preface, brief chapter introductions, and scant biographical sketches of each author. Another way radical readers try to destabilize textbook-discourse-as-usual is by focusing on matters students presumably find relevant. One particularly unique textbook, *Student Voices* (1971), goes so far as to compile writing done solely by students, much of it gathered from various campus newspapers. Editors Christopher R. Reaske and Robert F. Willson, Jr. contend that their textbook “is a logical culmination of the trend toward ‘relevant’ readers for composition courses” (vii).

The third characteristic radical readers share is their tendency to anthologize forms of writing in addition to the essay. Besides collecting the literature and essays of a variety of political thinkers and activists, radical readers also compile examples of public writing and other public literacy artifacts. The range of materials is expansive: radical readers reprint organizational manifestoes and statements, leaflets, letters, cartoons, song lyrics, and labor statistics—and they excerpt interviews and legal testimony as well. Among the texts included in *Student Voices* (1971) are a statement of purpose from Students for a Democratic Society and various flyers, one from the Student Mobilization Committee, another from the Black Action Movement at the University of Michigan, and other protest flyers that one of the editors picked up at the 1970 rally in Washington protesting the killings at Kent State. *The Rhetoric of Revolution* (1970) reprints excerpts from an anonymous pamphlet produced during the French Revolution, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the 1968 “Nanterre Manifesto.” *The American*

Experience contains a statement on the student movement from the New University Conference and song lyrics from Tom Paxton, Grace Slick, and Chet Powers.

The editors of radical readers cite different reasons for anthologizing materials such as these in their textbooks. Some editors explain that radical ideas require unconventional forms. Hamalian and Karl echo this idea in their preface to *The Radical Vision*, in which they write,

The radical visionary is willing to experiment, to risk failure, rather than to play it tidy with acceptable forms and conventions. In keeping with the principle that unifies this book, we have chosen forms of writing that do not ordinarily appear in collections of expository prose—the interview, the dialogue, the open essay, which is like a memoir or diary. If the message is radical—that is, searching for the roots—then the form cannot always be the familiar and tried. (xii)

Other editors, like Jaffe and Tytell, argue that, due to the influence of technology and mass culture, essays are no longer an important form of writing for most young people, who they claim “respond to the visual, the aural, the tactile, and the kinetic more readily than to the ‘rationally’ organized essay, based as it is on traditional attitudes which often do not seem especially relevant” (xi).

By anthologizing examples of public writing like manifestoes, interviews, leaflets, and other types of documents, radical readers attempt to bring the so-called “real world” into the university writing classroom, thus responding to students’ and critics’ demands that the university become more relevant and involve itself in the world beyond its gates. Several editors further suggest that they designed their textbooks for audiences outside the university environment as well. In *The American Experience* Jaffe and Tytell write, “*Because our anthology is exceptionally readable, as well as uncompromisingly relevant, we like to think of it*

as a paracollege reader intended primarily, though not exclusively, for the college student, since anyone interested in understanding contemporary America would benefit from reading the selections” (xiii, original emphasis). Douglas A. Hughes states that his composition textbook *The Way It Is* (1970) “is really for the general reader, for anyone concerned with—even dissatisfied with—the way life is in America today” (vii).

So what prose models do radical readers offer students and Hughes’ “general reader”? Like many of the anthologies with which they compete, radical readers, especially those with a professed interest in rhetoric, frequently provide a separate rhetorical table of contents, listing the different modes of discourse and the pieces that fit under each category. Such a table of contents can be found in Paul J. Dolan and Edward Quinn’s *The Sense of the 70s: A Rhetorical Reader* (1978), which groups its selections under the headings of description, exposition, argumentation, and narration (xii-xv). Conn McAuliffe’s *Counterpoint: Dialogue for the 70s* (1970) operates from a slightly different set of categories: argument by reason and evidence, analysis and process, description, definition, comparison and contrast, example, and satire (ix-x). This atomization of writing may lead to the conclusion that, like most of their competition, radical readers encourage students to practice the various elements that make up the “belletristic” prose of, say, an E.B. White. But such a conclusion would overstate the case.

Although certainly concerned with the aesthetic qualities of prose, most radical readers appear to be more interested in the range of prose models available to students, rather than defending a unitary ideal of writing. For example, Edward Quinn and Paul J. Dolan state in their textbook *The Sense of The Sixties* (1968): “Our purpose is to show students their world interpreted in a variety of prose styles which they might emulate,” a desire brought on, in part, due to the futility of “present[ing] a unified or even representative sample of the age’s thoughts,

aspirations and preoccupations (vii). Thus, it is not surprising to find within the covers of a book such as *The Sense of the Sixties* tightly focused political analyses composed of dense, yet lucid sentences next to the hectic, novelistic writing of New Journalists. Nor is it surprising to find pieces, like Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp,'" a text that avowedly departs from the essay form, "with its claim to a linear, consecutive argument," as Sontag has it (90). Sontag's experimentalism is debatable (after all, many of the fragmentary notes that make up her piece are arranged in a linear manner), but more important to my point is that such texts are the exception, rather than the rule, in radical readers, which as a whole reprint a tremendous amount of popular magazine and newspaper articles, as well as pieces culled from the pages of intellectual journals such as the socialist quarterly *Dissent*. Although this journalistic and academic prose, which ranges from Mike Royko to Irving Howe, can't be distilled into an ideal prose form, such a predominance of popular and literary journalism suggests an interest in clarity, regardless of the form such clarity takes. This impulse is explicit in *The Sense of the Seventies*, in which students are told in the preface,

Since this book is a book designed to help beginning writers, our emphasis has been on good writing. Earthy, personal and direct the writer of the seventies represents a new presence on the American scene. [...] The dirtiest word of the decade was "cover-up." The term describes not only a political crime but dishonest use of the language, and the writers collected here, regardless of their political persuasion, are united in their detestation of what was to become known as the "language of Watergate." (xvii)

In this passage, Quinn and Dolan revise the problem of clarity from being simply a matter of mechanics to one of ethics. And as I will illustrate later, this issue of moral clarity emerges as well in radical readers' constructions of personal writing.

2.2. Anthologies Like Kamikazes? The Reception of Radical Readers

While many reviewers who surveyed radical readers for *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, and other publications characterized them as a fad or trend, the history of these textbooks appears more complicated on closer inspection. The reception of the radical reader *Counter-Tradition* (1971) tells an interesting story, one worth looking at in some detail. Edited by Sheila Delany, this textbook received scant attention from academic publications. Unlike most of the Readers that make up this study, it was not reviewed by major composition journals such as *CCC* and *College English*. The only academic review article on it appears in *Boundary 2*, a journal not typically recognized as one specializing in freshman writing instruction. In this article Ben Jones describes *Counter-Tradition* and another textbook, *The Discontinuous Universe: Selected Writings in Contemporary Consciousness*, as “serious attempts to enliven and extend the idea of literary study” (616). What praise Jones has for Delany’s textbook quickly fades. He questions the literary “excellence” of the selections from Milton, Carlyle, and Shelley, and ultimately declares that the textbook remains vague about just what constitutes good writing, thus making *Counter-Tradition*, in his mind, an unattractive writing textbook. Jones writes, “I would not wish to use it [*Counter-Tradition*] for instruction in the art of writing, not because it is without examples of excellence, but because it is indiscriminate about what excellence is” (617).

Despite flying under the radar of academic journals, *Counter-Tradition* gained the attention of the popular press. Unfortunately, much of this material echoes Jones's criticism. In a remarkably sarcastic *Vancouver Sun* article entitled "Doomsday delicatessen," Rod Morgan quips that Delany's textbook illustrates how "At last the supermarket mentality hits the intellectual counter culture." By this Morgan means that *Counter-Tradition* offers readers a one-stop shopping experience to satisfy their rebellious curiosity: "Here, in only 366 pages, you can hop like a globe-trotting ghoul through 44 cultures and meet 44 of their heroic martyrs, critics and revolutionaries, with informed guide and ready reference—all for only \$5.95!" What Morgan finds even more troubling than the textbook's supposed field-guide approach is its position that destinations once recognized as tourist traps have now become all the rage for this year's radicals and revolutionaries. He jokes,

Yes, now to your list of up-to-date revolutionaries such as John Lennon, Tomothy [sic] Leary and Huey Newton you can add some *real* heavies—get this: Did you know *Plutarch* was a rebel? And *Lucius Annaeus Florus*? Do you think your friends have ever heard of *Bernard of Fontcaude*? Or the *Swabian Peasants*? Even *John Milton* was part of the counter-culture!

Robert Kiely adopts a less sardonic attitude in his 1971 review article, which appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*—a remarkable achievement for a Freshman Reader.¹⁴ Kiely, who directed Harvard's freshman English program during the mid- to late-1960s, writes an

¹⁴ As far as I have been able to determine, *Counter-Tradition* is the only radical reader to have been reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review*. Two other anthologies are listed in the "New Books" section of the newspaper, however. *Hard Rains* is listed in the June 6, 1970, edition; *Up Against the Wall, Mother...* is listed in the May 7, 1970, edition, another sign of these textbooks' appeal to readers other than students.

article that is part elegy for the expository essay, part rant against textbooks attempting to cash in on the death of said essay, and part critique of Delany's textbook—or, to be more precise, a critique of its introduction and Louis Kampf's foreword. Kiely opens his review by reminiscing about the experience one used to get writing a college essay: "It was once thought that an educated person should be able to write an essay. With proper schooling, one's pulse would quicken at the sight of a topic sentence and the adrenalin would flow at the thought of a smooth transition. Give a bright pupil a subject, any subject—death, summer, pigeons, the Alps—and within an hour he would produce a network of declarative, interrogative, compound and simple sentences miraculously connected to a single theme" (4). Presumably the chimerical Harvard students Kiely imagines here find their blood pumping due to excitement rather than trepidation, so much so that, for Kiely, the college essay is as much a part of the idyllic college experience as football games and freshman mixers: "It is difficult to imagine school and college without the essay"; like the proverbial poor, "The phenomenon [of the essay] seems always to have been with us" (4). This phenomenon is currently in danger, though, ever since the revelation on the part of publishers, instructors, and students "that essays did not have to deal with stagecoaches and blue china; they could be about war and poverty and race relations and ecology" (4). Besides eschewing traditional themes, new-fangled essays "did not have to have the things the old rule books used to say, like grammar and coherence. Indeed, they could be any five pages excerpted from any three hundred pages" (4).

Enter *Counter-Tradition*, or what Kiely refers to as a "new product" fit for the new decade. Kiely finds no fault with Delany's selections; indeed, he believes that "One would not be sorry to have a student read all of them" (4). What raises Kiely's ire is what he sees to be Delany's argument that her textbook, by presenting students with voices seldom encountered in

freshman English classes, upsets the dominant goal of composition instruction, which is, as Kiely characterizes it, to reinforce “the ‘ideological uniformity’ and the ‘official values’ of the current political and social Establishment” (4). Throughout the remainder of the article Kiely points to two flaws in this argument: 1) it vastly overestimates the influence of freshman anthologies, and 2) the selections that Delany claims sets her book apart are not quite that daring. “It is true that Mrs. Delany is in British Columbia,” Kiely writes, “and things may be different there, but large numbers of American freshmen would be unimpressed by her claims simply because they would have read Malcolm X’s autobiography and Che’s diaries, to say nothing of bits of Eldridge Cleaver and Herbert Marcuse, before coming to college” (4). (Perhaps this view is valid if referring to the freshman class entering Harvard, but it seems to stretch the truth to claim that most students nationwide had read these texts.) Given these “flaws,” Kiely concludes, “One begins to wonder whether the aim of this new brand of freshman anthology is to discourage knowledge in depth” (10).

What Kiely and Morgan miss in their criticisms of *Counter-Tradition* is that its presentation of excerpts to students, a feature that is by no means unique to Delany’s textbook, can be seen as a political as well as pedagogical or editing decision. That is, besides making such texts as Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, and Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero* (all of which are excerpted in *Counter-Tradition*) more digestible for the classroom, excerpting a range of texts allows students to make the kinds of connections described by a Berkeley student in *Beyond Berkeley*. As this unnamed student tells the textbook’s editors, his “real” education came during the student strike. When pressed to elaborate on this comment, he replies: “Everybody was talking about civil disobedience so I read Thoreau. There was a lot of talk about the Bill of Rights and I got to understand that pretty

thoroughly. [...] The people who run this university seem to have forgotten about it all. About the Bill of Rights, I mean, and about Thoreau. They're only interested in running this place as smoothly as possible" (xvi). What the student touches on here is a process of reading widely rather than intensively (although there exists room for intensive reading as suggested by his comment regarding the Bill of Rights), a process of reading across a range of texts and drawing connections between those texts and lived political experiences. It is precisely this type of politicized reading process that the excerpting of texts in radical readers seeks in part to create.

Taken together these reviews further suggest that *Counter-Tradition* was being condemned less for its merits as a freshman anthology and more for the critical position Delany and Kampf adopt in the book's prefatory materials. On the one hand, this approach on the part of reviewers is laudable, for in paying great attention to Delany and Kampf's intellectual positions, they respect the textbook as a piece of scholarship. On the other hand, the persistent sarcasm in these reviews, particularly Morgan's and Kiely's, hints that *Counter-Tradition* was being made a scapegoat, as if absorbing all of the negative energy being directed at radical readers as a whole. Comments Sheila Delany made to me during an email interview elaborate on this point. When I asked her about the book's circulation she told me, "It was a flop! My editor, Erwin Gilkes at Basic Books, was puzzled and disappointed, as their pre-publication surveys indicated that this would sell very well. But apparently the vogue for radical readers peaked sooner than they expected, so the book had a 'success d'estime' but not a big sales success." *Counter-Tradition's* less-than-expected sales, combined with the sense that Morgan's and Kiely's reviews hold the textbook accountable for the "sins" of radical readers in general, suggest that radical readers may have topped out, at least in terms of commercial success, in 1970 or 1971 despite being published for several years afterwards.

Commercial success remains only part of the equation for determining these textbooks' influence, though. While radical readers *per se* seem to disappear toward the end of the 1970s, other readers, including ones in Political Science, African-American Studies, and Women's Studies, continue their project. Put differently, radical readers gathered together the energy of a variety of movements, and by the end of the seventies this energy is dispersed to different areas of the curriculum. For example, Adams and Briscoe's *Up Against the Wall Mother* (1971) and Roberta Salper's *Female Liberation* (1972) continued to circulate in Women's Studies for a number of years after their publication. Both readers were reviewed by Carol Ohmann in *Female Studies IV* (1971), a collection of essays and resources on teaching about women. (Earlier volumes of *Female Studies* include sample syllabi, including some from Adams, Briscoe, and Salper.) Both readers are listed in *Women's Studies: A Recommended Core Bibliography* (1979), which Esther Stineman, the primary compiler, describes as a collection of "essential items that should be available to users" (11). *Up Against the Wall* surfaces as a reference in the first edition of Sheila Ruth's popular textbook *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies* (1980).¹⁵ Ruth's textbook contains an appendix that recommends further reading for students, and *Up Against the Wall* is one of the books named as a useful resource for learning more about the multiple images of women (577-8).

The kind of work performed by radical readers in the sixties is even reappearing in textbooks published today, like Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer's recently published

¹⁵ For a brief discussion of Ruth's textbook see Marilyn Jacoby Boxer's history of Women's Studies, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (1998) (see p. 31). Boxer also footnotes *Up Against the Wall* in reference to its reprinting of Naomi Weisstein's essay "Psychology Constructs the Female, or the Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist" (284).

composition reader *The New Humanities Reader* (2003). Echoing the sentiment of radical readers generally, the advertisement on the back cover of the book boasts:

New Humanities sets out to reinvent composition as the one place in the curriculum where students—and their instructors—can draw on multiple disciplines to explore the most pressing issues of our time: globalization, the widening gap between rich and poor, biotechnology, the information revolution, the shifting terrain of identity, and the world-wide resurgence of religious belief.

While some of the topics that students are asked to explore have changed, and while Miller and Spellmeyer choose not to organize selections according to topic, *New Humanities* resembles radical readers in its centripetal impulse, in its attempt to gather within its covers for classroom examination the problems of the day. In their preface, Miller and Spellmeyer contend that increased academic specialization has prevented students from being able to adequately reflect on the meaning and consequences of what they learn. Hence, they seek to counter this model with their concept of the New Humanities, which invites students to traverse institutional and disciplinary boundaries and to draw connections so that they may consider “the human dimension of *all* knowledge” (ix). The New Humanities that Miller and Spellmeyer imagine “reinventing” composition by making it a space committed to interdisciplinary inquiry with “real-world” application echoes to a degree the spirit of radical readers.

In his *New York Times Book Review* article on *Counter-Tradition*, Robert Kiely colorfully describes the demise of radical readers and other textbooks of their kind. According to him the growing irrelevance of the traditional expository essay prompted publishing houses to release “anthologies like kamikazes ready to dive into oblivion after a glorious moment of pure relevance.” Yet closer examination yields a more complex picture of the crash site. Instead of

evaporating into thin air, as Kiely suggests, the wreckage left by radical readers was reassembled to serve different purposes in different areas of the curriculum.

2.3. Eldridge Cleaver, Student Writer

In November of 1968, just a short time after the publication of his now-classic memoir *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver defied the California Adult Authority's order to turn himself over to prison authorities due to supposed parole violations stemming from a shootout in Oakland during which a fellow Black Panther, Bobby Hutton, was shot and killed by police. With his refusal to return to prison Cleaver became a fugitive, thus beginning a seven-year period of exile spent in Havana, Algiers, Pyongyang, Paris and elsewhere around the world. In December of 1968 an FBI wanted poster of Cleaver appeared. Underneath various mugshots of the activist and writer the poster warns citizens: "CLEAVER ALLEGEDLY HAS ENGAGED POLICE OFFICERS IN GUN BATTLE IN THE PAST. CONSIDER ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS."

Interestingly enough, if you want to view a copy of this poster today you need only turn to a 1972 rhetoric textbook entitled *Writing for Real*, written by Daniel Knapp and John Dennis. This textbook consists of a variety of exercises that ask students to examine visual images and draw connections between these images and texts. In one of these exercises, which the editors label "takes," students are presented with the text of a "Resolution passed at the Conference for Black Power, 1967" and the FBI wanted poster depicting Cleaver. Prefacing their questions with a summary of the turbulence resulting from Vietnam and Black Power, the editors pose these questions regarding Cleaver:

1. What additional information can you add to Wanted Flyer #447 describing Eldridge Cleaver?
2. Cleaver's book SOUL ON ICE has sold many thousands of copies and made him prosperous. How can one justify criticism of the establishment while taking money from it? (61)

The editors assume that students already have a familiarity with Cleaver, presumably given his memoir's commercial success, and from this students are asked to begin examining the broad ethical question of whether it is appropriate for an individual to engage with capitalism while critiquing it.

This complex representation of Cleaver as an armed and dangerous fugitive, and as an idea safely analyzed within the covers of a textbook, appears in radical readers as well. However, interest in Cleaver extends beyond radical readers, for one sees Cleaver being invoked in a number of articles and position pieces on the teaching of composition and literature in the 1960s. In this section I want to look closely at this treatment of Cleaver, both in radical readers and in other areas of composition and literary discourse, paying particular attention to what these appropriations of the Black Panther leader imply concerning personal writing and the teaching of personal writing. I argue that radical readers specifically, and composition and literary discourse in general, appropriate Cleaver and his accompanying revolutionary aura in order to appear alternative while in reality promoting a relatively traditional model of personal writing. Within radical readers, and other discursive arenas, Cleaver becomes both a revolutionary leader *and* the ideal student writer.

I focus specifically on Cleaver, in part, because of his frequent appearance in radical readers and elsewhere in English Studies. Cleaver's work is published in seven radical readers.

Of the textbooks I have sampled for this study, five reproduce “The White Race and Its Heroes.” These include: *The American Experience* (1970), edited by Harold Jaffe and John Tytell; *Hard Rains: Conflict and Conscience in America* (1970), edited by Robert Disch and Barry N. Schwartz; *The Way It Is: Readings in Contemporary American Prose* (1970), edited by Douglas A. Hughes; *Grooving the Symbol* (1970), edited by Richard W. Lid; and *Counterculture and Revolution* (1972), edited by David Horowitz, Michael P. Lerner, and Craig Pyes. Two other radical readers include additional articles and essays by Cleaver: *The Rhetoric of Revolution* (1970) anthologizes “Notes on a Native Son,” Cleaver’s critique of James Baldwin from *Soul on Ice*; *Divided We Stand* (1970) reprints his 1969 *Ramparts* article “Three Notes from Exile.” (This textbook also includes the article “Concerning My Husband,” written by Cleaver’s former attorney and wife Kathleen.) As this list indicates, the majority of these textbooks appear in 1970, roughly one-to-two years following the publication of *Soul on Ice* and Cleaver’s exile, which suggests that Cleaver was being anthologized most frequently during the height of his fame or infamy, depending on your point of view.

Most radical readers include Cleaver’s “The White Race and Its Heroes” in a separate unit or chapter that focuses on racism and civil rights, and the essay is frequently framed as one that depicts the so-called “black experience.” We see such a characterization of Cleaver’s essay in *The American Experience*, for instance, whose editors place it in a section entitled “Black Consciousness,” which also includes pieces by Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Le Roi Jones. In the preface to this section, Jaffe and Tytell say that it contains “some of the most respected voices in the black community [that] describe the difficulties of living in white America, and [that] point to the paths which would lead to total equality for the Negro” (31). This description is telling for the way in which it focuses on the narrative aspects of these

selections, even though not all of them are personal experience writings—such as Malcolm X’s speech “The Ballot or the Bullet.”

Not all of the radical readers that reprint Cleaver’s essay frame it in these terms, though. Horowitz, Lerner, and Pyes in *Counterculture and Revolution* summarize Cleaver’s essay not in terms of what it has to say about “black consciousness” but as a text that sheds light on the psychological and political effects of racism on whites.¹⁶ The headnote to the essay states, “It is one of the earliest statements on the significance of the breakdown of culture heroes among white youth. Cleaver points to the political consequences of what might be viewed as simply a marginal cultural fact—that young people are no longer holding in high esteem the models that they have been taught to esteem” (1). Hughes, too, focuses on Cleaver’s argument about white youth in his preface to the section “Blacks” found in *The Way It Is*:

Eldridge Cleaver, the articulate spokesman for the Black Panthers, suggests that white America has begun to face many ugly truths about itself. “The white youth of today,” he writes, “are coming to see, intuitively, that to escape the onus of the history their fathers made they must face and admit the moral truth concerning the works of their fathers. (110)

Another common thread that appears across different textbooks is the sense, voiced by editors, that the civil rights movement, both in terms of its discourse and its tactics, is undergoing a significant philosophical and rhetorical shift and that Cleaver’s essay is somehow emblematic of this. Jaffe and Tytell characterize the changes this way: “Suddenly, in the past few years,

¹⁶ *Counterculture and Revolution* differs from the other radical readers that reprint Cleaver’s essay in that it includes the essay in a section that doesn’t focus exclusively on race and racism. Instead, Cleaver’s piece is the lead essay in a unit entitled, “songs of innocence,” which, according to the textbook’s introduction, “includes selections written by those who saw the counterculture as the embodiment of a new and profound revolutionary message” (xi).

black leaders commenced to articulate the plight of their people with an unprecedented vigor and urgency. Confronting the resistance of those who were wary of yielding privileges, the black movement became more self-conscious, more aggressive, less compromising” (31). Hughes goes one step further than this in *The Way It Is*, proclaiming, “[A]lmost every American knows that gradualism is dead” (109). The introduction to the section “Racism: Affliction and Ordeal” in *Hard Rains* expresses an even more emphatic note of alarm:

As the battle lines between the “two nations” are being drawn, the dangerous inaction of the present—ignoring causes, while turning the police and National Guard into an army of domestic occupation—can lead only to more violence. White Americans must gain greater awareness of the dimensions of the present crisis, for only understanding will lead to meaningful action. If not, the expectations of the Commission [i.e., the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*] will indeed be grievously fulfilled: “In the summer of 1967, we have seen in our cities a chain reaction of racial violence. If we are heedless, we shall none of us escape the consequences. (219)

The different editors declare that as the scene on the ground has become more violently charged so has the style of protest, which has become more direct, more combative, more introspective. Thus Cleaver’s essay, which is part self-reflection and, at times, an antagonistic form of cultural criticism, appears to stand as an example of this change in attitude and rhetoric, as do the other selections on racism and civil rights in these textbooks.¹⁷ But as we will soon see, because of

¹⁷ For example, Jaffe and Tytell suggest that the writings on race and civil rights in *The American Experience* agree that violence is an acceptable, if not necessary, means of action: “In this section, some of the most respected voices in the black community describe the difficulties of living in white America, and point to the paths which would lead to total equality for the Negro. James Baldwin...anticipates more violent responses in his admission that the black

how Cleaver is read as a personal essayist, Cleaver additionally becomes the solution to this divisive rhetoric.

Perhaps more odd is the way in which several critics identify Cleaver with the typical student. One such critic is John F. Fleischauer, who, in a 1975 *CCC* article on the application of stylistics to the teaching of composition, compares James Baldwin's style to Cleaver's.

Fleischauer finds that Cleaver writes shorter sentences and paragraphs than Baldwin, whose prose Fleischauer claims is "typical of standard American intellectual prose" (142).¹⁸

Presumably, Cleaver's style falls outside of this standard, although Fleischauer chooses not to say so outright. Instead, he makes a potentially more damning claim—specifically, that Cleaver's prose style is more akin to that of his ideological and real-life antagonist, J. Edgar Hoover:

Just in terms of paragraph statistics, Hoover and Cleaver are closer together in style than are Cleaver and Baldwin. The reason is that Baldwin develops his ideas in more detail, amplifying, and re-examining, whereas both Hoover and Cleaver tend to be more simple and direct in their expression. While Baldwin refines his ideas, the other writers are satisfied with their initial statements and move on. (142).

moderate approach has largely failed to heal the racial wounds in our society. [...] LeRoi Jones attempts to demonstrate how theater can be used to provoke "necessary" violence in the black viewer (31).

¹⁸ Fleischauer's statistics are pretty much accurate from what I have been able to determine. He states that Cleaver in *Soul on Ice* averages 24 words per sentence and four-and-a-half sentences per paragraph, whereas Baldwin averages 25 words per sentence and seven sentences per paragraph (142). Counting the sentences and words in the first six paragraphs of "The White Race and Its Heroes," I found that Cleaver averaged almost 29 words per sentence and four-and-a-half sentences per paragraph.

Fleischauer goes on to suggest that Cleaver's and Hoover's sentences and paragraphs more closely resemble those written by most students in introductory English courses: "Beginning freshmen often write shorter sentences than most published writers and shorter paragraphs than even Hoover" (142).

While Fleischauer constructs Cleaver as a student who lacks the ability to craft more nuanced sentences, other critics who comment on Cleaver's work portray him as more of an *ideal* student writer. Leo Hamalian, who coincidentally edited the radical reader *The Radical Vision*, argues that "Much bad prose written by students sounds as though it had been ground out by a sausage machine or produced with labor pains. On the other hand, good prose almost always contains something that Father Walter Ong...calls 'the personal voice.' [...] And few voices are more personal than that of Eldridge Cleaver expressing rage over the injustices of our society" (227). To "prove" his argument that Black English is not a valid language for intellectual work, J. Mitchell Morse cites Cleaver's and other African American writers' use of standard English. According to Morse, Cleaver and other writers find standard English a more powerful vehicle for perspicuity and precision: "Because it [i.e., Black English] is not a satisfactory medium for the communication of precise information or the development of clear ideas, Literate Black leaders...spoke and wrote eloquent standard English" (838).

Still other critics identify a comment Cleaver makes in the opening essay of *Soul on Ice*, "On Becoming," as being a powerful articulation of why writers write. After recounting his almost pathological attraction to white women (whom he refers to collectively as "The Ogre"), Cleaver confesses to readers his career as a rapist, a crime that lands him back in jail, the horror of which causes him to question his motivations. To do so he turns to writing. He tells readers, "That is why I started to write. To save myself" (34). According to James Vopat, W. Ross

Winterowd in *Contemporary Rhetoric* quotes these sentences “as an especially eloquent model of self-expressive writing” (45). Former NCTE president James E. Miller, Jr., goes one step further than all of these critics when he proclaims that “Cleaver’s remarkable program [i.e., his process toward self-education, which he describes in “On Becoming”], brilliantly motivated, might well serve as a model for the new English curriculum” (731).

It’s this sense of Cleaver as the ideal personal essayist—as an “eloquent model of self-expressive writing,” as a writer with a strong “personal voice,” as “a model for the new English curriculum”—that interests me here. According to critics like Winterowd and Miller, Cleaver represents the personal essays *par excellence* for the way in which he is able to eloquently describe his self-motivated struggle to overcome his ignorance about whites and about himself. And most importantly, Cleaver identifies writing as the primary means toward this salvation.

I want to turn to Cleaver’s essay “The White Race and Its Heroes” and examine how it does and does not conform to this model of personal writing, paying close attention to diction and persona, two of the essay’s most important stylistic components. Cleaver, I argue, is hyper-aware of these components and how they help establish the authority upon which his argument is based. And while “The White Race and Its Heroes” potentially offers students complex strategies for writing about experience, I argue that because of the way Cleaver is read by critics like Winterowd and Miller, it is likely he was presented to students as modeling a rather traditional type of personal experience writing in which students were encouraged to focus on the self-knowledge generated from life-altering events.

I admit it might seem somewhat odd to read “The White Race and Its Heroes” as a personal essay because it is not explicitly oriented around a narrative of self-discovery as “On Becoming” is. But I would argue that the essay does, underneath its analysis of the student

movement, subtly portray a mind undergoing self-discovery and self-transformation, similar in ways to “On Becoming.” In fact, Cleaver opens the essay talking about himself, or at least the persona he’s created of an “Ofay Watcher.” He writes:

Right from the go, let me make one thing absolutely clear: I am not now, nor have I ever been, a white man. Nor, I hasten to add, am I now a Black Muslim—although I used to be. But I *am* an Ofay Watcher, a member of that unchartered, amorphous league which has members on all continents and the islands of the seas. Ofay Watchers Anonymous, we might be called, because we exist concealed in the shadows wherever colored people have known oppression by whites, by white enslavers, colonizers, imperialists, and neo-colonialists. (87, original emphasis)

This passage contains two cryptic denials: Cleaver denies being a white man (either now or at any moment in the past) and he states that he does not currently belong to the Nation of Islam. Encountering these sentences in class, students aware of Cleaver and his political activities may have very well wondered why he is claiming to have never been white, especially since the headnotes in radical readers make his race abundantly clear. These sentences would likely sound an alarm to readers of *Soul on Ice* as well since they come almost one hundred pages into the book, well after readers have learned about Cleaver’s history up to this point in his life and what his time in prison has taught him about black masculinity. Cleaver denying being white is cryptic, indeed.

We might read this opening statement, in part, as an ironic comment, which allows Cleaver to establish his speaker as a sort of trickster figure. However, when we read his further assertion regarding the Black Muslims an additional motivation for this opening sentence

becomes clearer. By denying any current relationship with either white males or Black Muslims Cleaver rejects the only immediately recognizable positions of authority from which to base his analysis of the white race, as the essay's title promises. Occupying neither of the traditionally-sanctioned critical positions from which to analyze white consciousness—that of being a white male, like Norman Mailer *a la* “The White Negro,” or that of being a Black Muslim, like pre-Mecca Malcolm X—Cleaver realizes he is in a precarious position, so he chooses one of the few options available to him: he turns the issue on its head and creates a new position of authority, that of the “Ofay Watcher.”

Interesting to note here as well is the way in which Cleaver begins by insulting his audience, referring to readers as “ofays” and a host of other names. (*The Underground Dictionary*, one of numerous attempts to pin down the language of beats, freaks, and radicals, defines *ofay* as a black idiom used as a “Derogatory term for a white person. **a.k.a.** fay, peckawood” (141).) Cleaver arranges the names at the end of the first paragraph hierarchically, from most to least insulting, from least to most acceptable. In the very next paragraph Cleaver calls attention to his various characterizations of whites and their arrangement, addressing his readers directly. “Did it irritate you, compatriot, for me to string those epithets out like that?” he asks. He continues, “Tolerate me. My intention was not necessarily to sprinkle salt over anyone’s wounds. I did it primarily to relieve a certain pressure on my brain. Do you cop that? If not, then we’re in trouble, because we Ofay Watchers have a pronounced tendency to slip into that mood” (88-89). Here Cleaver characterizes the Ofay Watcher as an individual under enormous psychic tension, as an individual fluctuating between an outright hatred of “white enslavers” and a more digestible criticism of whites as “neo-colonialists.” The very terms he uses to name whites come from and alleviate this psychic tension. Finally, the tension Cleaver

describes here is perhaps best expressed in the word he uses to address his readers—“compatriot.” In something of an ironic turn, Cleaver suggests he and his readers are equals, which further implies that Cleaver and his white readers share a similar psychic conflict, a condition he explores throughout the remainder of the essay.

Thus, in this very brief span of the essay, Cleaver, at the level of style, very subtly suggests that he’s undergone a transformation, becoming someone who no longer thinks of whites as “peckerwoods” but as someone who can think of them as equals, despite his continued skepticism. Cleaver sums up the transformation this way: “I have tried a compromise by adopting a select vocabulary, so that now when I see the whites of *their* eyes, instead of saying ‘devil’ or ‘beast’ I say ‘imperialist’ or ‘colonialist,’ and everyone seems to be happier” (88). By saying that he now uses more acceptable terms like “imperialist” or “colonialist” to voice his outrage, Cleaver implies that he has learned a proper sense of decorum. He suggests that he now possesses the good manners, evidenced by a specific shift in his language, that will allow him to be rhetorically effective (“everyone seems to be happier”) in certain situations (“when I see the whites of *their* eyes”). It is this kind of transformation that partially explains Cleaver’s appeal to critics like Winterrowd, Miller, and the editors of radical readers, who worried about the indecorous, invective-filled language of student radicals.

From this point in the essay Cleaver launches into what might be considered a more traditional academic analysis of the contemporary cultural and political terrain as it applies to white youth. He leaves off narrating the complex consciousness of the Ofay Watcher and describes how the white student movement, which connects with third world liberation efforts, grew out of the non-violent activism initiated by black college students in the South. As part of this argument he offers a cursory history of racism and resistance to racism in the U.S., and he

discusses the assaults made on this racist tradition by white youth, who have rejected their inherited Enlightenment value system and have turned to a revolutionary tradition more aligned with American blacks and third-world revolutionary leaders:

In the world revolution now under way, the initiative rests with people of color. That growing numbers of white youth are repudiating their heritage of blood and taking people of color as their heroes and models is a tribute not only to their insight but to the resilience of the human spirit. For today the heroes of the initiative are people not usually thought of as white: Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Kwame Nkrumah, Mao Tse-tung, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X, Ben Bella, John Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Parris, Moses, Ho Chi Minh, Stokely Carmichael, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Forman, Chou En-lai. (104-5)

Cleaver either alludes to or directly quotes several literary figures to develop his argument—James Baldwin, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to name a few. He also cites important political documents and events—the 1941 Atlantic Charter, the Battle of Selma, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. He even draws upon pop cultural sources, including James Bond films. In other words, Cleaver’s essay demonstrates a wide-ranging cultural and historical knowledge, which he relies upon to both support his claims and complicate the kind of authority position he constructs at the beginning of the essay. This kind of approach, moreover, embodies one of the most important practices that writing instructors want to instill in students—drawing on outside authorities.

Thus, the essay’s structure as a whole reflects the tension embodied in the *Ofay Watcher* and his diction: the essay is part internal monologue externalized and part conventional historical

and cultural analysis. And while Cleaver's analysis for the most part relies on a remarkably angry, yet controlled voice, this tone breaks down toward the end of the essay so that the text seems to have come full circle from the beginning. Compare, for example, these two passages:

The separate-but-equal doctrine was promulgated by the Supreme Court in 1896. It had the same purpose domestically as the Open Door Policy toward China in the international arena: to stabilize a situation and subordinate a non-white population so that racist exploiters could manipulate those people according to their own selfish interests. These doctrines were foisted off as *the epitome of enlightened justice, the highest expression of morality*. Sanctified by religion, justified by philosophy and legalized by the Supreme Court, separate-but-equal was enforced by day by agencies of the law, and by the KKK & Co. under cover of night. (102, original emphasis)

The white youth of today have begun to react to the fact that the "American Way of Life" is a fossil of history. What do they care if their old baldheaded and crew-cut elders don't dig their caveman mops? They couldn't care less about the old, stiffassed honkies who don't like their new dances: Frug, Monkey, Jerk, Swim, Watusi. All they know is that it feels good to swing to way-out body-rhythms instead of dragassing across the dance floor like zombies to the dead beat of mind-smothered Mickey Mouse music. (105)

The differences between these passages are striking. In the first passage the anger expressed over enforced segregation, evident in Cleaver's use of italics to emphasize the corrupt morality behind such laws and the amplification in the passage's final sentence, is tempered somewhat by

the formal diction (i.e., “promulgated,” “foisted”) and complex syntax Cleaver employs. The latter passage is much more direct in its anger, its more confrontational language (i.e., “stiffassed honkies”) accompanying slang (“Frug,” “Monkey,” “Watusi”) and less complex sentence structures. Taken together, these passages illustrate the tension Cleaver’s *O’fay Watcher* describes, and they suggest that writers may play with this tension at both a structural and syntactical level.

But this tension, this lapse back into the invective that he opens the essay with, gets overlooked in representations of Cleaver as the ideal figure to save the English curriculum. The version of Cleaver that frequently gets cited is not the Cleaver who delivered a profanity-filled screed against Ronald Reagan at Berkeley or the Cleaver who made fun of James Baldwin’s sexuality in *Soul on Ice*. If the sanitizing of Cleaver that appears in the attempts by Miller, Hamalian, Winterowd, and others to make him into a classroom figure is indicative of how his work was approached through radical readers, this suggests that Cleaver’s essay may have likely been reduced to a narrative about redemption, salvation, and self-transformation, similar to that offered in “On Becoming.” Because the radical readers that reprint Cleaver’s essay do not contain reading and/or discussion questions, it is difficult to say for sure if this was actually the case.¹⁹ But these textbooks also reveal a lot about their approach toward personal writing in what they decide not to anthologize.

¹⁹ This decision to minimize the textbook’s apparatus was a conscious decision of some editors of radical readers. For instance, Sheila Delany told me that she decided not to include discussion and/or writing questions in *Counter-Tradition* so that students and teachers weren’t bound by the textbook’s presentation of the materials: “I didn’t want to preempt the teacher’s or the student’s engagement with the texts. The headnotes do this a little already, and, I thought, sufficiently” (E-mail Interview).

2.4. Joan Didion and the Problem of Meaning in the Personal Essay

Joan Didion appears in only two of the radical readers I have been able to survey. Her essay “On Being Unchosen by the College of One’s Choice” (1968), an odd piece that contains the sense of doom and failure that pervades much of Didion’s work, but that eventually ends up making a somewhat conventional argument against the pressures placed on children, appears in the developmental writing textbook *Encounter*. “On Morality” (1965), originally published in *The American Scholar* and eventually included in her 1968 collection of essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, is reprinted in *Comment and Controversy* (1972), edited by Gerald A. Bryant, Jr. Despite the essay’s conventional title and its echo of Montaigne, in it Didion puts forth a carefully reasoned argument against abstract blanket notions of morality, saying, “You see I want to be quite obstinate about insisting that we have no way of knowing—beyond that fundamental loyalty to the social code—what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong,’ what is ‘good’ and what ‘evil’” (*Slouching* 162).

This sense of contingency and well-mannered contrarianism runs throughout Didion’s nonfiction—and this, combined with her growing literary stature in the late sixties²⁰, make me think twice when considering her relative absence from the radical readers I examined. There are, of course, several possible explanations as to why Didion’s work doesn’t widely appear in radical readers. For one thing, in the sixties she wasn’t seen as having the kind of politics that would identify her as radical or even edgy. One sign of this was the fact that she frequently wrote for the mainstream *Saturday Evening Post*, a periodical not widely cited (at least unironically) in New Left circles. In addition, Didion at the time wasn’t recognized as feminist, at

²⁰ Evan Carton charts this aspect of Didion’s career in his essay “Joan Didion’s Dreampolitics of the Self” (1986).

least not in the same way that writers like Marlene Dixon and Dana Densmore were, which would prevent her from being included among the writings on feminism and women's liberation, which is primarily how most women authors circulated in radical readers.²¹

Yet I want to argue that it is also possible Didion does not appear frequently because her ideas about writing and about the personal essay do not provide teachers of writing with an easy answer to the question "Why Write?" in the same way that a writer like Eldridge Cleaver does. Whereas Cleaver tells readers he saved himself through the act of writing, an idea no doubt attractive to writing teachers eager to respond to students' criticisms that reading and writing prove irrelevant, Didion repeatedly tells readers that sometimes writing does not matter, that the answers we think we find in writing are more artful constructions than truth. As she famously writes in "The White Album" (1979), an essay published too late to be included in any radical reader,

We tell ourselves stories in order to live. [...] We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, *especially if we are writers*, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience. (47, my emphasis)

²¹ Of the 1353 readings in the 29 radical readers I examined, only 150 (around 11%) are authored or co-authored by women. Of these 150 pieces, just over half are included in feminist readers and/or explicitly focus on sexual politics. Among the selections by women that are not strictly pieces about feminism and women's rights are humorous pieces by Erma Bombeck and Nora Ephron; film criticism by Pauline Kael; cultural criticism by Hannah Arendt, Susan Sontag, June Jordan, and Marya Mannes; literary selections from Emily Dickinson and Harriet Beecher Stowe; and journalistic pieces by Marry Merryfield, Ellen Willis, Linda Hunt, and Nancy Scheper.

This is one of the most endearing, and also vexing, ironies of Didion's work: at the same time that her prose is often seen as the epitome of clarity, beyond the sentence she reflects on the ruins of clarity, or what happens when her own (as well as her readers') notions of clarity and certainty have been dismantled.

This idea is at the center (no pun intended) of perhaps her most famous essay, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," originally published as "Hippies: Slouching Towards Bethlehem" in the September 23rd, 1967, edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Its title taken from Yeats' "The Second Coming," which appears as an epigraph to her collection *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, the essay ostensibly is a report on the growing Haight-Ashbury scene in San Francisco and the place of this movement within the larger atmosphere of cultural dislocation that Didion sees happening in 1967. In another sense, though, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" is a personal narrative about Didion's own failed attempt to find some sort of meaning in the counterculture represented by Haight-Ashbury.

Toward the beginning of the essay, Didion lets us in on the origins of her interest in the hippies. She says, "[B]ecause nothing else seemed relevant I decided to go to San Francisco. San Francisco was where the social hemorrhaging was showing up. San Francisco was where the missing children were gathering and calling themselves 'hippies.' When I first went to San Francisco in that cold late spring of 1967 I did not know what I wanted to find out, and so I just stayed around awhile, and made a few friends" (85). The flippancy at the end of this last sentence is ironic, for Didion does more than befriend a few hippies and hang out; like the runaways who flock to the district looking for some sort of larger purpose or meaning, whether it be through LSD or a "groovy religious group" like "Teenage Evangelism" started by a hippy

named Deadeye (87), Didion too seeks out some larger meaning in the counterculture only to find there is none.

Didion recreates this disorder and disintegration in her prose style. She composes the essay in fragments, some of which could connect to one another as paragraphs and others that culminate in an arresting image, like this one in a fragment about the young groupies who hang around the Grateful Dead:

The one [groupie] who just sort of knows the Dead starts cutting up a loaf of French bread on the piano bench. The boys take a break and one of them talks about playing the Los Angeles Cheetah, which is in the old Aragon Ballroom.

“We were up there drinking beer where Lawrence Welk used to sit,” Jerry Garcia says.

The little girl who was dancing by herself giggles. “Too much,” she says softly. Her eyes are still closed.

The last paragraph of this passage is not ambiguous: embedded in Didion’s observation of the young girl is a stern critique that she, and the mass of other runaways in the district, are living in a dream world, their “eyes...still closed.”

Didion’s critique paradoxically becomes more and less apparent in those moments where she inserts herself into the narrative she writes. In one of these instances, Didion writes about the time she met Debbie and Jeff, two teenage runaways who tell Didion that they left home not because of some high-minded ideal, but because of routine gripes most children have with their parents. For instance, Didion quotes Jeff as saying that his “mother was just a genuine all-American bitch.... She was really troublesome about hair. Also she didn’t like boots. It was really weird” (91). Later into their conversation, Didion says that “something has been

bothering me and as I fiddle with the ignition I finally ask it. I ask them to think back to when they were children, to tell me what they had wanted to be when they were grown up, how they had seen the future then” (92). The kids tell her that they hadn’t really thought about the future, or if they did they had abandoned whatever aspirations they did have. Curiously, Didion doesn’t comment on Jeff and Debbie’s responses, nor does she ever explain exactly what bothered her enough to ask them the question in the first place.

Elsewhere she’s less ambiguous about aspects of the counterculture that trouble her, like when she discusses Barbara, a young woman she’s befriended, who works to support her man Tom and another couple—something she calls a “woman’s trip.” Didion writes, “Whenever I hear about the woman’s trip, which is often, I think a lot about nothin’-says-lovin’-like-something-from-the-oven and the Feminine Mystique and how it is possible for people to be unconscious instruments of values they would strenuously reject on a conscious level, but I do not mention this to Barbara” (113).

There is a push and pull in Didion’s essay between, on the one hand, certainty, like we see in the critique leveled against the hippies in this passage about Barbara, and, on the other hand, uncertainty, captured in the following passage:

Steve is troubled by a lot of things. He is twenty-three, was raised in Virginia, and has the idea that California is the beginning of the end. “I feel it’s insane,” he says, and his voice drops. “This chick tells me there’s no meaning to life but it doesn’t matter, we’ll just flow right out. There’ve been times I felt like packing up and taking off for the East Coast again, at least there I had a *target*. At least there you expect that it’s going to *happen*.” He lights a cigarette for me and his hands shake. “Here you know it’s not going to.”

I ask what it is that is supposed to happen.

“I don’t know,” he says. “Something. Anything.” (98)

In some ways, Steve’s predicament resembles that of Didion’s readers. To paraphrase what one student once told me about the essay: we, too, wait for something, anything to happen. There are moments where she seems to stake out a firm position, a clear answer that will help her understand the counterculture and its attraction and possibilities: its members are simply ignorant, as she seems to say about the young Grateful Dead groupie. But then there are other moments when Didion calls the certainty of her experience into question, where, as in the case of Steve, she seems to point to some vast, un-nameable motivation that she can’t quite put her finger on; or, as she does with Barbara, where she chooses not to voice her convictions.

Writing about her experiences among the hippies of Haight-Ashbury doesn’t seem to have resolved any of Didion’s anxieties; in fact, it seems to have only increased her sense of dread, as she ends the essay on something of an apocalyptic note, describing how Michael, a three-year-old boy she became close to, almost burned down the apartment he and a number of other people lived in. The severity of the episode was lost on others around the boy, who, as Didion tells us, “were in the kitchen trying to retrieve some very good Moroccan hash which had dropped down through a floorboard damaged in the fire” (128). Contrary to the model offered by Cleaver, Didion offers us no consolation that writing about our experiences can lead us to some essential truth about experience.

In this chapter I have tried to show how radical readers and other institutions within composition and literature appropriated New Left figures such as Eldridge Cleaver to promote a traditional approach toward personal writing. Overlooked were approaches like that taken by Joan Didion,

who experiments with the personal essay as a way to reflect on the potential meaninglessness of experience and writing. In the next chapter I will explore this alternative model of personal writing further by examining commercially published memoirs written by student radicals in the sixties and seventies, which I argue perform work similar to that Didion does in “Slouching Towards Bethlehem.” In these autobiographies, students address a broader reading public and perform selves, reflective of a larger cultural skepticism toward authority, that differ from the unified self imagined by the editors of radical readers.

3. SIXTIES STUDENT MEMOIRS AND REVISIONIST PERSONAL WRITING

Please don't try to learn anything from it [i.e., the book], for there is no message. Try to enjoy it, as I have (at least much of the time) enjoyed putting it down for you. Take it slow, don't try to read it in one sitting, by all means get distracted from time to time. Read it stoned, read it straight, give up and never finish it, it's all the same between friends.

– Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (1970)

I learned a lot from this experience. I learned that my father was a man. He fell off the pedestal I held him on, because he was a man. A man succeeds and a man fails. Ultimately his failures are what killed him and his death was a failure in and of itself. That is something that he had to deal with. The family he left behind is his legacy of success. In the end I took more from my father than I gave to him. He taught me the world and in his death he taught me how to be a man. I will always love him and in time I will forgive him for his mistake. Time heals all wounds.

– Student pseudonymously identified as Robert, quoted in Jeffrey Berman, *Risky Writing: Self-Disclosure and Self-Transformation in the Classroom* (2001)

So far I have discussed how “radical readers” and other instruments of sixties-era writing pedagogy, in an attempt to absorb the energy of the counterculture and student movement (and thereby convince students of the relevance of writing and writing instruction), appropriated elements of the cultural and political New Left to add legitimacy to a transformative model of education and personal writing. In this chapter I turn my attention to actual examples of student writing, specifically showing how published student radicals of the period, writing to a broader reading public, constructed a model of the personal essay counter to the transformative model privileged in textbooks such as “radical readers.” In this counter-model of the personal essay—or what I call the “revisionist personal essay”—experience is not represented simply in terms of life-altering or transformative episodes, at least in any positive sense of these terms. Rather, experience in the revisionist personal essay is not hierarchized, so that seemingly banal events (such as practicing a sport or performing a routine errand) appear alongside moments that take on historical importance (like sit-ins and mass public demonstrations) without any explanation. Most importantly, though, the revisionist personal essay, unlike its counterpart, the transformative personal essay, fails to come to a resolution, or at least a resolution that readers would consider conclusive. Instead of professing to resolve a dilemma or learn a lesson, the speaker in the revisionist personal essay submits to the ambiguity and uncertainty of experience by suspending judgment concerning the significance of episodes in her life and by incorporating multiple voices and perspectives into her (self-)analysis.

In this chapter, then, I set out to define the revisionist and transformative models of personal writing and show how both genres were practiced by Vietnam-era student writers as well as current-day students. To do this work, I draw from literary criticism on the *Bildungsroman*, a novelistic form whose attention to youth, maturity, and development is, in

some respects, thematically and ideologically analogous to the kind of personal writing students are asked to perform in a number of different school settings.

We see in our own current moment that, despite the aversion to personal narrative in some quarters of the academy, the personal is deeply interwoven into the fabric of American college life, especially when it comes to students' first-year college experiences. Even today many colleges and universities in their mission statements stress the personal stakes of learning. According to the mission statement on its website, Gonzaga University "encourages its students to develop certain personal qualities: self-knowledge, self-acceptance, a restless curiosity, a desire for truth, a mature concern for others, and a thirst for justice" ("Mission Statement"). Cornell University places the personal consequences of learning first when, in their mission statement, they inform students, "[O]ur community fosters personal discovery and growth, nurtures scholarship and creativity across a broad range of common knowledge, and engages men and women from every segment of society in this quest" ("The Cornell University Mission").

Another genre of college writing that relies on the personal is the admission essay, which is largely an exercise in self-definition and self-representation. Or, as EssayEdge.com, an online editing service, tells college applicants, the application essay must "paint a vivid picture of your personality and character, one that compels a busy admissions officer to accept you" ("College Application Essay Services"). On its website, the College Board offers advice to students on how to approach their admissions essays and gives examples of essay prompts, like these, that

variously ask students to prove that they have the self-knowledge necessary to enter the academy:

How would you describe yourself as a human being? What quality do you like best in yourself and what do you like least? What quality would you most like to see flourish and which would you like to see wither? (Bates College)

Describe the most challenging obstacle you have had to overcome; discuss its impact and tell what you have learned from the experience. (Guilford College)
("Sample College Essay Questions")

Prompts such as these underscore the fact that students, when writing entrance essays, must construct themselves as individuals who have the potential to grow as a result of their entering the academy. To prove this potential they must show signs of growth already achieved and answer the question of how they expect the university to change them; in short, they must show signs of being a reflective person, someone who has thought seriously about changes in their lives.

A similar rhetoric of the personal, in which the personal is framed in terms of life-altering changes and obstacles overcome, surfaces in numerous strands of composition theory and pedagogy. "Transformation" is a keyword frequently invoked in discussions concerning literacy narratives, journals, autobiographical essays, and other forms of personal writing practiced in composition classrooms. Morris Young, for instance, argues that literacy narratives, especially those written by racially and ethnically marginalized individuals, are predominately "read as stories about becoming American, about the *transformation* from cultural Other into legitimate

American subjects” (29, emphasis added).²² Defending what he calls “risky writing,” or personal essays in which students recall traumatic (and frequently suppressed) experiences, Jeffrey Berman insists that such writing holds therapeutic benefits for writers and readers. In risky writing, “Students who engage painful subjects write from the point of view of a survivor rather than a victim; their writing is not confessional but *transformational*. Readers may find themselves transformed in the process, bearing witness to another’s pain and later testifying to the healing power of language” (20, emphasis added).

This belief in the transformative potential of personal writing also appears in criticism by contemporary essayists and memoirists, who likewise discuss the form in terms of change and transformation. For essayist Joseph Epstein, “The personal essay is...a form of discovery. What one discovers in writing such essays is where one stands on complex issues, problems, questions, subjects. In writing the essay, one tests one’s feelings, instincts, thoughts in the crucible of composition” (15). Similar characterizations by Phillip Lopate and others present the personal essay as a vehicle for depicting an individual’s growth or development, which is often achieved through the self-knowledge this individual gains by reflecting on a pivotal moment (or moments)

²² In proposing what he calls “minor re/vision,” a practice through which writers draw on the genre of the literacy narrative to call into question established ideologies and write themselves into cultural debates, Young seeks to destabilize this conventional reading of literacy narratives. Despite this critique, Young nonetheless sees the literacy narrative as essentially transformative. In his theory of the literacy narrative, Young envisions the subjects of these narratives not as individuals who transform from cultural Others into citizens, but as individuals who transform themselves and others by entering language. He writes, “Through their stories about becoming and being literate and developing a sense of self in relationship to the community, minor and minority writers use language and literacy into insert themselves into American culture” (53). Through the literacy narrative, Young suggests, writers move from being outside culture to residing (however uncomfortably) within it. Young’s position is similar to those in classical rhetoric who see language instruction as a primary tool in the creation of citizens. And although citizenship is among the identities and practices at stake in transformative writing, as it is theorized by many in composition, I’m not able to adequately examine this connection due to my decision to focus on the idea of transformation more generally.

in her life. And to be sure, there exist numerous examples of this essay type—from George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant” (1936) to Eldridge Cleaver’s “On Becoming” (1968). But there exists another, and I would argue under-theorized, canon of personal essays—from John McPhee’s “The Search for Marvin Gardens” (1975) to Joan Didion’s “The White Album” (1979)—in which the speaker, simply put, remains unable to tie the loose ends of experience together, where no clear signs of growth or development can be detected.

Student memoirists in the sixties worked in this latter tradition of personal writing, what I define as revisionist personal writing, and here I want to situate this version of personal writing in relation to its counterpart, the transformative personal essay. As the epigraph to this chapter dramatizes, sixties student writers like Raymond Mungo playfully resist the impulse to assign some underlying message to their personal narratives, unlike the student in Jeffrey Berman’s class does when he claims to have learned a set of definable lessons in the wake of his father’s tragic suicide. In pointing out this distinction, I don’t mean to belittle the very real importance of trying to understand and draw meaning from painful, incomprehensible events in our lives; nor do I wish to demean the human effort Berman’s student Robert makes to overcome the loss of his father. At the same time, though, I cannot help but notice that the conclusions Robert draws from this tragedy appear conventional, as he explains that he’s learned how to be man, that all men fail, and that time heals all wounds. One way to read Robert’s paper would be to critique this conclusion and claim that it illustrates students’ inability to move beyond conventionalized discourses. But Robert’s conclusion could also be read more generously, as evidence that Robert, like many other students, clearly understands the generic demands of the transformative personal essay, with its insistence (echoed by Berman, Lopate, Epstein, and countless others)

that the narrator should grow as a result of reflecting on experience and that the narrator's growth should correspond to predictable generic patterns.

I suspect that Robert, unlike Mungo, was not aware that he had other choices available to him when writing his personal narrative. And this, I argue, is the chief importance of revisionist personal writing: that it gives students options as writers, especially when examining problems and events whose meanings can't be readily determined. In making this claim I am not arguing that the transformative personal essay should somehow be purged from the writing classroom and the university more widely, nor am I interested in prescribing a set of rules that students must follow to produce "revisionist" writing. Rather, I want to call attention to the transformative personal essay's affinities to the *Bildungsroman*, a factor that helps explain its attraction among teachers and students, and more importantly argue for the validity of its generic Other, the revisionist personal essay that I argue was widely practiced by student essayists and memoirists in the sixties.

I begin this chapter by examining student memoirs published in the sixties before moving on to discuss more fully the transformative personal essay and its formal affinities to the *Bildungsroman*. In the concluding section, I examine the revisionist personal essay and its pedagogical significance through a reading of James Simon Kunen's 1969 memoir of his experiences taking part in the 1968 student strike at Columbia, *The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary*.

3.1. Published Young Radicals

In a rush to capitalize on (and perhaps create) the American public's uneasy fascination with young radicals and the counterculture, publishers throughout the late-sixties and early-seventies released a number of memoirs and analytical studies written by students that offered an insider's view of the youth movement and tried to explain its tactics and goals to an older generation of readers. These texts had become so much a part of the sixties publishing landscape by 1970 that *New York Times* book critic John Leonard would remark, "Just as each publisher must have his sex book, his sports book and his Vietnam book, so each publisher must also have his autobiography of a young radical. Autobiographies of young radicals arrive these days in dozens, like cartons of eggs" (38).

Many of these autobiographies have a tabloid-like quality to them, or were at least marketed to readers in such a way. William Divale (with the help of professional ghostwriter James Joseph) describes his work as an FBI informant who infiltrated SDS, the Communist Party, and a local chapter of a W.E.B. Du Bois Club in a book whose title, *I Lived Inside the Campus Revolution* (1970), sounds like a pulp novel from the era. In *I Ain't Marchin' Anymore!* (1969), whose title comes from Phil Ochs' song of the same name, Dotson Rader recalls for readers the downward spiral of events, both personal and political, that lead him to call the student movement a failure and a "community of the victims" (179). The advertising copy on the cover of the book glosses over any apocalyptic message Rader has to offer and instead promises that the book will give readers a voyeuristic look into "life among the disaffected young—their violence, politics, and sex."

Memoirs and autobiographies weren't the only types of student writing to hit bookstores in the sixties, though. Publishers released edited collections of student writing for the classroom

and for a larger reading public. *Student Voices* (1971), edited by Christopher Reaske and Robert F. Willson, Jr., was a textbook that compiled op-eds from college newspapers, fliers and other materials distributed at political rallies, excerpts from published student memoirs, and position statements from organizations like SDS and the Black Action Movement at the University of Michigan. The editors explain the rationale for the book by saying, “We believe that students (both men and women, both black and white, and from both large universities and small colleges) have a great deal to say and we *know* (having read the writing of students from all over the country) that they have the ability to say it *well*” (vii, original emphases). Reaske and Willson back up this belief by including writers occupying a range of positions: from feminists arguing on behalf of a radical women’s movement, to African American students arguing for Black Studies programs, to anti-war activists explaining their skepticism of SDS and its professed leadership position in the student New Left.

In the same vein as *Student Voices* was a collection of high-school student writing entitled *Our Time Is Now: Notes from the High School Underground* (1970), which collects pieces from underground student newspapers like *The American Revelation* in Elgin, Illinois; *Mine* in Tuscon, Arizona; *Freethinker* in La Puente, California; and *The Gilded Bare* in Columbus, Ohio. *Our Time*’s editor, John Birmingham, was a seventeen-year old recent high-school graduate who himself worked as an editor for an underground student paper, *Smuff* in Hackensack, New Jersey. Speaking about the necessity for a collection of underground student writing, Birmingham says, “It isn’t that I don’t like writers over eighteen or that I don’t believe that anyone over eighteen could have any important ideas about the high school underground. I just think that it is important that the students tell the story from their point of view for once” (xi). Writers in Birmingham’s collection offer their points of view on issues particular to high

school—like dress codes, school suspensions, and censorship—as well as broader cultural issues like racism, war, political dissent, and educational reform. Students write eloquent analyses of Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968), give impassioned defenses of teachers under fire for being too political, and put together interviews with African American students so that they can better understand the tension among different New Left factions.

The growth of such collections of student writing in the late sixties²³ can be partially explained by the larger cultural trend, often mocked by younger people, commonly labeled the “generation gap,” a subject taken up in op-ed pages and textbooks, and epitomized in the slogan “don’t trust anyone over thirty.” Rock critic Richard Goldstein attempted to tap into this phenomenon when in 1969 he launched, in partnership with Bantam Books, *Us*, a paperback magazine that generally published comics, poetry, journalism, essays, and fiction by writers under thirty. Included among widely known journalists, critics, cartoonists, and poets such as Jim Morrison, Richard Kostelanetz, Robert Crumb, Katherine Dunn, and Nikki Giovanni were pieces by students such as Jon Landau, an undergraduate at Brandeis University who laments the school’s gradual transformation into a secular institution, and Perry Brandston, a seventh-grader who reports on younger students’ attitudes and the progressive changes occurring at his school, IS 320 in Brooklyn.²⁴ Despite the anticipation surrounding the magazine—*The New York Times*

²³ See Appendix A for a more exhaustive listing of sixties-era student publications.

²⁴ See Landau, “The Baptism of Brandeis U,” and Brandston, “My School: A Composition.” Sounding remarkably pessimistic, Brandston sums up his apathy toward the future this way at the end of his essay:

When I’m twenty, I think I will look all tucked in, but I won’t be super-conservative. I definitely will not wear ties or sports jackets, because I feel uncomfortable in them. What I’m most afraid of now is the hydrogen bomb, but by the time I’m twenty, I can’t really say what I’ll be afraid of, because of all the things that could happen between now and then.

I think America will probably be something like a totalitarian society then, because it’s drifting that way now. If that came true, I wouldn’t pay much

in May of 1969 reported on its publication, indicating that the magazine had a print run of 130,000 copies (see “Young Writers”)—it lasted only a year, releasing three issues.

Throughout its short lifespan the magazine, like a stereotypical teenager, wore its idiosyncracies and its youth on its sleeve. In the first issue, for instance, each contributing author’s age was listed prominently in his or her biographical note. A short poem included at the beginning of the first issue boasted of the magazine’s youthful difference this way:

One generation’s meat is another’s bullion cube.

Welcome to—the broth.

This magazine boils at farenheit 451. Let it simmer over a low flame for 15 minutes or until the type is tender. Then garnish with grace notes and serve high.

Generation soup. (2)

As suggested in this poem’s reference to Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *Us*’s editors were aware of the controversial nature of the writing they published. In fact, looking over the magazine’s three issues, one gets the sense that the editors’ goal was in part to provoke controversy. For instance, the cover to the second issue, entitled the “Back to School Issue,” pictures seven youths holding rifles staring menacingly at viewers. Upon turning the page readers are confronted with another picture, one that depicts a very young child smoking a joint, with the caption of the following quote from William Blake: “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.” The magazine also saw itself pushing the boundaries of language, particularly concerning obscenity, which the editors tended to emphasize. For example, the opening pages of the first issue excerpted quotes from pieces included in the issue, along with

attention to it. I would do what I felt like, unless it was going to hurt me in the end. (73)

other witticisms concerning youth, and many seem deliberately provocative. One reads in its entirety, "...because sometimes I'd be sucking his cock and he'd whisper 'What's all this I hear about the anarchist conspiracy?'" (3). Another gives this reaction to Bobby Kennedy's assassination: "'My shrink says I couldn't fuck after Robert Kennedy was shot because I identified him with my manhood'" (5). *The New York Times* took stock of the magazine's outrageousness, especially in its connection to gonzo journalism, but characterized the magazine's tenor in more measured terms: "The central focus in U.S. [sic] appears to be on a kind of personal journalism that blends fact and fiction and is written in hypertense style. The tone, even the beat, of the writing is very much rock 'n' roll" ("Young Writers").²⁵

Not all published student writing of the period aimed for the outrageousness and rock n' roll attitude captured by the writers collected in *US*. Alongside analytical studies of the youth movement written by academics, like Charles Reich's best-selling *The Greening of America* (1970), appeared quasi-sociological studies about the youth movement written by young people themselves. Perhaps the most well known book of this type is Mark Gerzon's *The Whole World Is Watching* (1969), written when Gerzon was a sophomore at Harvard. Throughout the book, Gerzon uncritically adopts the tone used by academic commentators of the youth movement, sounding as if he observes the young people of his generation without being one himself. Witness, for example, this passage, where Gerzon rehearses the oft-repeated generational debate concerning objectivity versus involvement:

²⁵ This is not to say that the magazine lacked serious writing, though. One particularly interesting essay is "Young Writers Say They Don't Read" by Michael Lydon, who criticizes the *Times* article of the same name for its problematic characterization of under-thirty writers as non-readers. To defuse this argument—which is mocked in the essay's title page that reproduces and revises the original article—Lydon writes a literacy narrative about his love of Charles Dickens.

Both in their personal and in their academic lives, Western young people have felt the impact of the age of analysis. In college, cold, academic, and critical rationality is demanded of students. The more often I encounter this clash in the lives of other students, the more often I witness this conflict between wanting to be involved and committed and the cultural priorities placed on detachment and dispassion, the more forceful it becomes. (46)

Seemingly unaware of the irony, Gerzon talks about his generation as if from above. He speaks of “Western young people” in general, and discusses the conflict between critical rationality and personal involvement from the point of view of someone who has only observed this tension play out in others’ experiences. Painting himself as an almost omnipotent witness, Gerzon takes on, apparently without conflict, the detached position of the cold academic about whom he says his peers remain skeptical.

Student memoirists tend to write without the kind of objectivity used by Gerzon, deciding instead to examine the ways in which their lives mirror the twists and turns occurring in the larger student movement and counterculture. Many student memoirs from the period tell a similar story, one that describes the young protagonist’s disenchantment with establishment society and growing frustration concerning the inefficacy of political change. In the eyes of the young writers, this narrative echoes that of the student New Left more generally and its turn to confrontational politics and violence—witnessed, for instance, in groups such as the Weatherman Underground.

This nexus between the personal and political is a major theme in Raymond Mungo’s memoir *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with Liberation News Service* (1970), which chronicles Mungo’s experiences co-founding and working on the Liberation News Service

(LNS), a kind of alternative Associated Press organization that supplied reports on the Vietnam War, campus disturbances, and other events to New Left and mainstream media outlets. He recounts the rise and fall of the organization as its operations were taken over by the “Vulgar Marxists” in the group, as Mungo calls them—an event that leads Mungo and other members to give up the organization and start a commune in Vermont. As Mungo tells it, the takeover of LNS mirrors the hijacking of the movement as a whole by its more radical fringe, a connection signaled in his opening sentences about LNS’s demise. He writes, “We are reliving the last days of the movement; we are watching the movement die. Don’t be alarmed—every winter has its spring. What we called ‘the movement,’ which started out as a peace-living opposition to slavery, racism, and war, has become an enslaving, racist, civil war of its own” (69). But lest readers try to read too much into the significance of the story behind LNS, Mungo gives us the following advice on how to read the book: “Please don’t try to learn anything from it, for there is no message. Try to enjoy it, as I have (at least much of the time) enjoyed putting it down for you. Take it slow, don’t try to read it in one sitting, by all means get distracted from time to time. Read it stoned, read it straight, give up and never finish it, it’s all the same between friends” (4).

The seemingly dismissive tone Mungo adopts here, it should be noted, is rhetorical, a gesture whose traces appear in such cultural catchphrases as Timothy Leary’s “turn on, tune in, drop out”; *Mad* magazine icon Alfred E. Neuman’s “What, me worry?”; and later on Kurt Vonnegut’s “So it goes” from *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1968). The apparent indifference articulated in these and other slogans resonates with a larger cultural attitude expressed in such concepts as *cool*, *hip*, and *camp*, each being performances of artful apathy, so to speak. To be cool, for instance, is to be involved without appearing involved, to be in fashion while seeming to care

less about fashion, to be of the world while seemingly beyond it. This is at once a defiant attitude, similar to the resistance signaled by colloquial usage of the word *whatever*, a term whose theoretical possibilities Jeff Rice explores in his recent article on the uses of sampling in the composition classroom, “The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip-Hop Pedagogy as Composition.”²⁶ At the same time, though, this posture is ironic, for coolness and hip are alternative forms of commitment: in declaring that readers can make whatever they want to of his book, for example, Mungo can be read as inviting readers into his meaning-making process, a move that Marshall McLuhan would refer to as “cool,” given his definition of a “cool medium” (television, the telephone, and the cartoon being some of the examples McLuhan cites) as one that is “high in participation or completion by the audience” (36).

The idea of participation evoked in McLuhan’s notion of “cool” was also a strong part of the sixties zeitgeist, with SDS’s ideal of “participatory democracy” being an important embodiment of this. Richard Rosenkranz writes his memoir *Across the Barricades* (1971) with this spirit of collectivity in mind. He formally registers his connection with other activists by writing a collective memoir that attempts to capture the multitude of emotions and experiences behind the 1968 uprising at Columbia and the formation of the Avery Commune, the name students who liberated Avery Hall used to identify themselves. Rosenkranz distances his book

²⁶ In his article, Rice examines how teachers might draw on students’ knowledge of hip-hop, particularly the practice of sampling, to teach argumentative writing. Rice’s theory of what he calls “hip-hop pedagogy” rests on the notion of “whatever,” a concept he argues is important to sampling, a process whereby artists and DJs use, according to Rice, whatever cultural texts are at their disposal. “Whatever” also represents an oppositional stance in Rice’s view: “*Whatever* is best understood as a popular, everyday term used heavily by youth culture when an experience or reaction can’t be named. The response, ‘whatever,’ evokes not so much a lack of response but either a sense that something has eluded the meaning of the response or of defiance, dismissal, and opposition” (455). Rice ultimately argues that both of these senses of “whatever” can serve as a powerful heuristic for students to produce collage-like critical writings that create new meanings through a range of other texts.

from other accounts of Columbia, promising that he won't bore readers with the facts: "Essentially this is a book of thoughts. It's not a fact-filled chronological record, like a battle report from Vietnam, because the facts of the demonstration are important only as the background for the thoughts and feelings of my people" (2). Somewhat as Truman Capote does in *In Cold Blood* (1965), Rosenkranz achieves this effect by placing his own narration alongside other individuals' accounts and impressions collected from tape-recorded interviews he conducted. Here, for example, is one such dialogic passage where Rosenkranz gives a portrait of a reluctant student activist; it begins with Rosenkranz's narration and then presents the student's recollection, formatted in smaller type as it is in the book:

Erbin Feldon was sitting outside on the fifth-floor ledge. The meeting had started again, but he was one of the few who hadn't gone back. He said he needed to be alone, that he couldn't listen to anyone else's arguments, much less offer his own, until he had time to think more clearly.

Erbin Feldon: 20 years old; single; junior at Columbia College, majoring in chemistry; Father, doctor; Mother, psychologist; Los Angeles, Calif.

ERBIN FELDON: I kept turning it over in my mind, looking at it from angles as if it were a cubist painting, trying to figure out whether I was right to be here, whether any of us was right. I was scared. That was one of the few things I was sure of. Scared of reprisals from the administration, scared of being beaten by a cop, and most of all very scared that this was wasted, that it was a useless, senseless gesture, an absurd move in a bad play. We had this fairy-tale confrontation set up, with us as the forces of right, standing against Kirk and Johnson and the forces of wrong, and our forces were supposed to be trespassing, which meant we were breaking a civil law, but we told ourselves we had to do that in order to stop the other forces from committing greater crimes, moral crimes. And I wasn't sure any of it meant anything. (118)

Rosenkranz uses individuals' own dialogue, as he does with Feldon here, to depict the complex thought processes that many students (including himself) went through as they determined whether and how far they would commit to the protest at Columbia. Through this dialogic approach Rosenkranz shows that the bulk of protestors, contrary to stories in the popular media, were neither rabble-rousing SDS members nor crazed students giving way to a bacchanalian orgy celebrating the rites of spring, but were instead committed thinkers who felt themselves propelled to action despite their initial reluctance.

Many of the young radicals who saw their autobiographies and memoirs published cannot be considered students in the strict sense of the term. That is, they were not writing as, or from the vantage point, of college undergraduates. Some, like Dotson Rader and Raymond Mungo, had already graduated from college, and others, like William Divale and Richard Rosenkranz, were older graduate students. But as Stephen Parks reminds us, the term *student* in the 1960s was as much a political identification as it was an educational one. Analyzing pamphlets and other materials disseminated by political organization such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the New University Conference (NUC), Parks concludes “that rather than simply being a term which exists within our classrooms, the student has also served as a tool for political activism” (60).

One such use of the student is evident in a 1968 SDS pamphlet entitled “The New Radicals and the Multiversity,” written by Carl Davidson, which argues that the student movement, if it is to have any revolutionary potential, must draw connections between the problems on university campuses and those in the larger society. According to this document, then, any attempt to radically alter the university must also envision how similar changes can be made elsewhere in American society:

The lesson to be drawn is that any attempt to build a student movement based on “on-campus” issues only is inherently conservative and ultimately reactionary. Every attempt should be made to connect campus issues with off-campus issues. For example, the question of ranking and university complicity with the Selective Service System needs to be tied to a general anti-draft and “No Draft for Vietnam” movement. [...] Furthermore, the student movement must actively seek to join off-campus struggles in the surrounding community. For example, strikes by local unions should be supported if possible. (324)

Other texts were written by actual students. Perhaps the most well-known published student writer of the sixties was James Simon Kunen, who penned a first-person account of the 1968 student rebellion at Columbia in his book *The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary* (1969). Kunen’s wry observations about the drama at Columbia and its key players, like SDS leaders Mark Rudd and Tom Hayden and university president Grayson Kirk, first appeared pseudonymously in *New York* magazine in the weeks following the spring riots.²⁷ These writings, along with others reflecting on the riots’ aftermath, are collected in *The Strawberry Statement*, published when Kunen was a junior.²⁸ The book quickly became a bestseller, garnering reviews from Kurt Vonnegut and Martin Duberman, and made Kunen something of a famous figure. His book spawned a counter-response entitled *The Kumquat Statement: Anarchy in the Groves of Academe* (1970), a right-wing critique of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley written by John Coyne, who was a teaching assistant in English at

²⁷ See Simon James, “The Diary of a Revolutionist” (1968).

²⁸ Perhaps anxious to prove Kunen isn’t a ghostwriter or CIA plant, Random House reproduces a copy of his student ID on the back jacket, as if to verify Kunen’s student status.

Berkeley before becoming a writer and eventually Associate Editor for the *National Review*. In 1970, MGM produced a strikingly melodramatic film version of *The Strawberry Statement*, which premiered at no less than the Cannes Film Festival and was one of two winners for that year's Jury Prize.²⁹ *The New York Times* featured Kunen's film recommendations, which span from Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* to Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, alongside other picks by Rex Reed, Julius Lester, and Kurt Vonnegut, in a capsule headlined "Notables Pick Their Favorites of '69." Despite this sudden fame, Kunen wasn't a one-hit-wonder: he went on to contribute pieces to *New York* magazine, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times Magazine* and wrote another book, *Standard Operating Procedure* (1971), reporting on the 1970 National Veterans' Inquiry hearings in Washington.³⁰

From our vantage point today, this response to Kunen's book—indeed, any piece of student writing—seems remarkable. However, it also reminds us that students' writing can reach (and has reached) beyond the classroom to make an impact on larger reading publics, one of the ideals many in composition and rhetoric put forth when students ask why their writing matters. Student writers like Kunen, Mungo, Rosenkranz, and others were acutely aware of how they and their generation were caricatured by the media, their teachers, and their parents, and they used the memoir as an instrument to challenge the simplistic assumptions shared by their critics. At the same time, though, these student memoirists weren't naïve about the liberatory power of their

²⁹ The film version of Kunen's memoir was directed by Stuart Hagmann (who primarily worked in television, directing episodes of *Mission Impossible* and *Mannix*) and written by playwright and screenwriter Israel Horovitz (whose other film credits include the 1982 Al Pacino comedy *Author! Author!*). Bruce Davison, a long-time film and television character actor perhaps best known for his starring role in the 1971 horror film *Willard*, played the part of Kunen.

³⁰ See, for example, Kunen's essays "Why We're Against the Biggies" (1968), "Son of Strawberry Statement" (1970), and "The Rebels of '70: Confessions of a Middle-Class Drifter" (1973).

writing, for they also recognized how the same corporations and media interests that they were critical of also made it possible for their voices to be heard. Kunen takes stock of this contradiction in an article he writes for *New York* magazine about the filming of his book: “I left California for the March on Washington, pondering the irony of \$1.9 million being spent to make a movie about a protest against the works of capitalism, and pondering the morality of my involvement with the film. I had opened a fortune cookie in California and it read, ‘You are in the presence of an evil influence. Do not be entrapped’” (“Son of Strawberry Statement” 47). Kunen offers no easy solution out of this dilemma other than to say that a real protest is virtually indistinguishable from one simulated for the purposes of a film because both are theatrical. According to Kunen’s logic, “If a radical plays the role of someone throwing a rock through a window, he may be aware on one level that he is not in reality a rock-thrower, but the window breaks all the same” (“Son of Strawberry Statement” 47).

It would be unfair to claim that Hollywood and major New York publishers simply co-opted student voices as part of their commodification of the counterculture in general; although it can be argued that commercial forces could dilute the radical message underlying student texts, as was the case with the film version of *The Strawberry Statement*, which changed Kunen’s story from one about his growing (although never finalized) radicalization to a conventionalized, syrupy love story. But despite their relative commercial success, Kunen and his cohorts withstood the homogenizing forces of commercialization by insisting on the multiple identities of the American college student, by asserting that they and their fellow students, their politics, and their motivations are more complex than commonly believed—a point Richard Rosenkranz underscores in the opening pages of his memoir. He writes, “I’m not offering any easily remembered definitions of the youthful rebel, pat stereotypes to be used on the cocktail party

circuit. Instead I'm offering a collection of individuals, a reconstruction of our thoughts at the moment when we decided, whether rightly or wrongly, to get involved" (2).

3.2. The *Bildungsroman* and Transformative Personal Writing

Rosenkranz's invocation of multiplicity in the above passage resonates with what I'm calling revisionist personal writing, a genre of familiar writing that I argue complicates how many contemporary theorists and teachers in composition and rhetoric approach the question of the personal. Before moving on to discuss the traits of revisionist personal writing and how they appear in student memoirs from the sixties, especially in Kunen's *The Strawberry Statement*, I want to explain more fully what I see as the predominant version of personal writing presented in scholarly discussions on the topic. Following Thomas Newkirk, I label this genre as the transformative personal essay, whose features may be described through an examination of its loose fictional counterpart, the *Bildungsroman*.³¹ To be sure, there exist vast differences between the *Bildungsroman* and the transformative personal essay, especially when we consider

³¹ In "The Dogma of Transformation," Newkirk discusses how varying composition pedagogies, including so-called expressivist and cultural studies approaches, stress the importance of student transformation, whether it be in the form of political transformation (as in liberatory pedagogies whose goals are to politically empower students through an awareness of critical consciousness) or personal transformation (as in so-called expressivist pedagogies that invite students to examine their development as individuals). Newkirk aptly illustrates how these different perspectives "share a deeply anxious view of the student writer and a belief that a writing course can be transformative" (266). I second Newkirk's criticism that this ideology of transformation underestimates students' critical abilities while overestimating the goals of first-year writing courses. However, I question Newkirk's solution to this dilemma, which is to promote largely observational writing in the composition classroom, an approach that implicitly constructs a binary opposition between transformative and observational writing, and that ultimately rehearses the usual distinctions made between personal and critical forms of writing. In pointing to what I call transformative and revisionist personal writing, I attempt to break down this binary and illustrate the critical potential of writing that appears hesitant, inconclusive, or even dismissive.

the *Bildungsroman*'s development within the specific context of eighteenth-century Germany and its location within novelistic literary theory—a location and context very far removed from contemporary American composition classrooms, although *Bildungsromane* such as Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1937), Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and numerous others consistently find their way into school syllabi and summer reading lists. However, the *Bildungsroman*'s engagement with issues such as selfhood, education, and the individual's accommodation to a larger social order provides a useful framework for thinking about the form and ideology of the transformative personal essay as it is learned and taught in contemporary writing classrooms.

Broadly defined as the “novel of development,” “novel of education,” or “novel of youth,” the *Bildungsroman* has a long and complex history in European and American literature. The genre's beginnings go back to eighteenth-century Germany, with Wieland's *Agathon* (1766-7) and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-6) conventionally recognized as the form's progenitors. In German literature the *Bildungsroman* is one among several related genres that engage with the themes of development and self-cultivation—others include the *Erziehungsroman*, which tells of a character's formal schooling, and the *Kunstlerroman*, which narrates a youth's development as an artist.

Such literary interest in the idea of an individual's development corresponds to a larger ideology in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany concerning self-culture and education that was reflected in the concept of *Bildung*, a term difficult to pin down given that it has no exact English equivalent. *Bildung* can be broadly translated as “formation” or “creation,” although it more narrowly refers to the self-creating processes of education or enculturation. The complex idea of self-culture behind *Bildung* originated in theology, referring to an individual's

spiritual development, and it becomes an important component in the seventeenth-century religious school of thought known as Pietism, a counter-movement within Lutheranism that rejected what it saw as the detached ritualism of orthodox Lutheranism and in turn stressed the individual's personal communion with God, practiced through Bible study and awareness of the emotionality behind prayer. This interest in *Bildung* occurs alongside the institutionalization of compulsory schooling in Prussia and Germany starting in the early eighteenth century.

Throughout the nineteenth century, with the growing industrialization and political reorganization of Germany, the notion of *Bildung* increasingly took on an aesthetic meaning, even as it was translated throughout other parts of Europe by Carlyle, Coleridge, Arnold and others who saw the philosophy of self-culture embodied in *Bildung* as a powerful response to the materialism brought on by growing industrialization (Bruford viii). Novelist Thomas Mann speaks to the complex ideology behind *Bildung* when he describes the *Bildungsroman* as “an autobiography, a confession. The inwardness, the culture...of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening, and perfecting of one's own personality or, in religious terms, for the salvation and justification of one's own life; subjectivism in the things of the mind” (qtd. in Bruford vii).

The *Bildungsroman* is more loosely defined in English and American literary criticism as a novelistic form that depicts an individual's (often painful) transition from youth to maturity. In *Season of Youth* (1974), Jerome Buckley suggests that the *Bildungsroman* may be thought of in thematic terms as a novelistic form that addresses the issues of youth, generational conflict, education, and the clash between individual and society (18). Like Mann, Buckley furthermore sees a strong connection between the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography; “the typical novel of

youth,” Buckley notes, “is strongly autobiographical and therefore subject at any time to intrusions from areas of the author’s experience beyond the dramatic limits of the fiction” (23-4). However, Buckley complicates the connection Mann draws between the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography when he contends that the *Bildungsroman* has a stronger fictive element to it than does autobiography, a point he emphasizes citing comments W. Somerset Maugham made on the composition of his 1915 coming-of-age novel *Of Human Bondage*: “It is not an autobiography, but an autobiographical novel; fact and fiction are inextricably mingled; the emotions are my own, but not all the incidents are related as they happened and some of them are transferred to my hero not from my own life but from that of persons with whom I was intimate” (qtd. in Buckley 24).

The *Bildungsroman*’s alignment with autobiographical fiction can be partially explained by its focus on the individual’s self-development. Buckley describes the ideal *Bildungsroman* as a coming-of-age quest narrative in which the youthful protagonist, spurred on by an intellectually constricting, and often rural, home environment, travels to the city, where he encounters people and experiences that force him to reconsider his earlier ideas and convictions (17-18). While most critics speak of development in the *Bildungsroman* more generally, as Buckley does here, Bakhtin identifies at least five different types of “novels of emergence” based on the character of self-development represented in the novel. Novels like *Tom Jones* (1749) and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), for instance, represent for Bakhtin the biographical (or autobiographical) “novel of emergence,” where characters fulfill their particular destiny; Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) represents a different type, “the didactic-pedagogical novel,” in which characters develop according to “a specific pedagogical ideal” (22). But for Bakhtin the most pivotal type of *Bildungsroman* is one, like Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, in which both the protagonist and the world around him change.

According to Bakhtin, in such a novel the protagonist “emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him” (23, original emphasis). In this type of *Bildungsroman* the transformation of the individual doesn’t take place against a static background; the individual’s development instead figuratively represents a larger historical transformation that “is accomplished in him and through him.”

Another issue that reappears in discussions on the *Bildungsroman*, one that seems to stand in opposition to the dynamic kind of development that Bakhtin theorizes, is the idea of the individual’s accommodation to the dominant social order. Marianne Hirsch defines the *Bildungsroman*—or the “novel of formation,” as she refers to it—as a novelistic form that focuses on “a representative individual’s *growth and development* within the context of a defined social order” (296, original emphasis). The idea of a “defined social order” is pivotal in Hirsch’s definition, for as she sees it, the *Bildungsroman*’s “*projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society*” (298, original emphasis). As Hirsch makes clear, this accommodation doesn’t necessarily entail the protagonist’s acceptance of this social order; nevertheless, the *Bildungsroman* concludes with the protagonist positioning himself in relation to this social order, which essentially remains unchanged. Similarly, Buckley sees the individual’s accommodation to the society occupying a crucial moment in the plot development of the prototypical *Bildungsroman*. In the coming-of-age narrative, Buckley notes, the protagonist achieves maturity at that precise moment when he figures out his place in the larger social order: “By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity” (17-18).

Indeed, Franco Moretti centers his theory of the *Bildungsroman* on such claims regarding the individual's accommodation to society when he contends that the *Bildungsroman* has historically functioned as a literary form that mediates the tension within modernity between individualization and socialization (3-13).

Concerns important to the *Bildungsroman*—youth, development, the self and its accommodation to the larger society—can be found in students' personal writing as well. Given their relatively young age, traditional students' personal narratives tend to focus on formative events in their childhood or adolescence: their parents' divorce, the death of a relative or best friend, their initial experiences experimenting with the adult behaviors of drinking, having sex, or taking drugs. This far from complete list suggests the intimate nature of many students' personal writings and calls to mind Mann's reference to the *Bildungsroman* as a confession and *Bildung*'s association with the cultivation of the soul, an idea powerfully invoked in the novel-within-the-novel in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul." Indeed, *confessional* is often used as a synonym for the personal in critical essays on the subject, especially in books and articles that critique personal writing pedagogy,³² which fear the apocryphal "my dog/grandmother/best friend died" essay in part because it positions the teacher as the priest or analyst who must evaluate the soul or psyche expressed through the act of confessing.

Even though this type of personal essay is frequently ridiculed in English departments, it ironically corresponds to the vision of self-development that lies at the heart of the ideal *Bildungsroman*, a novelistic form very much in favor within English Studies and other reading publics. According to Wilhelm Dilthey, in the *Bildungsroman* "A lawlike development is

³² See for example Lester Faigley, who critiques what he calls, following Foucault, the "technologies of confession" present in the teaching of personal writing (129-31).

discerned in the individual's life; each of its levels has intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher level. Life's dissonances and conflicts appear as necessary transitions to be withstood by the individual on his way towards maturity and harmony" (336). Dilthey theorizes self-development as a series of progressive trials that idealistically culminate with the individual achieving a unified self; maturity is the result of conflicts that if properly reflected upon enlighten the individual and thereby propel his journey from disunity to unity—or, put differently, from adolescence to maturity. Lester Faigley identifies a similar ideology underlying students' personal essays where writers present "selves that achieve rationality and unity by characterizing former selves as objects for analysis" (129). Taken together, Faigley and Dilthey describe the essence of the transformative personal essay, where the past exists as a series of ordeals that the writer resolves through the mature actions of representation and reflection, where a supposedly unified and mature self looks back at and determines the meaning behind the actions and emotions of past selves.

Just as any previous selves are incorporated into the mature, unified self, so too the now unified self is incorporated into the larger social body. Dilthey tellingly equates maturity with harmony in his formula of self-development, which Buckley, Hirsch, and Moretti extend in their analyses of the *Bildungsroman* and its emphasis on social accommodation. But Faigley speaks even more strongly to how the narrating self in the personal essay, like the protagonist in the *Bildungsroman*, habituates itself to a larger social order. Faigley argues that when students are asked to write honestly about themselves it comes as "no wonder...that the selves many students try to appropriate in their writing are voices of moral authority, and when they exhaust their resources of analysis, they revert to moral lessons—adopting...a parental voice making clichéd pronouncements where we expect ideas to be extended" (128). We can apply what Faigley says

here to the transformative personal essay specifically, for in the transformative personal essay students attempt to prove their maturity by showing how their interpretations of experience reinforce commonplace norms and values, to the point where they repeat commonplace adages when declaring the significance of the experience under investigation.

To demonstrate more concretely the connections I am drawing between the *Bildungsroman* and the transformative personal essay, I want to turn to a student essay that appears in William Coles and James Vopat's *What Makes Writing Good* (1985). Even though this book is over fifteen years old, it offers a vivid glimpse into the different uses of personal writing in composition classrooms, as Coles and Vopat asked over 40 nationally known teachers and scholars in composition and rhetoric, with a wide range of pedagogical and scholarly approaches, to select one of the best student papers they've ever received. Included before each student paper is the assignment to which the paper responds and, afterwards, a brief commentary written by the teacher that explains what he or she finds exemplary about the paper. One telling feature of the book noticed by critics is the prevalence of personal writing selected by contributors to represent their ideals of "good writing."³³

Norma Bennett's essay "At the Beach," written for a class taught by Erika Lindemann, is one personal experience essay that exemplifies the characteristics of the transformative personal

³³ Faigley, for instance, concludes that more than half of the essays—at least 30 out of 48, to be exact—could be considered "personal experience essays" (120). He includes under this rather broad category "autobiographical narratives" and essays that include "writing about the writer" (120). However, a closer look at students' essays suggests that the type of personal experience writing collected in the book exceeds these two definitions. Students in the book do compose metadiscourses and reflective autobiographical essays, similar to the piece by Norma Bennett that I will soon examine, but they also draw on personal experience to 1) theorize complex issues such as learning, reading, and writing (see essays by Heise, Wayshak, Shields, and Humphrey); 2) to analyze literary texts (see Barkema, Fisher, Chafee, and Bloxam); 3) to critique commonplace assumptions (Nizzo, Canlon, and Paul); and 4) to research a question or topic deemed personally relevant (Nerio).

essay as I have been characterizing it so far. In her essay Bennett compares the two different beach vacations she spends with her recently separated parents and examines what this experience has taught her about herself. To do this work, Bennett skillfully organizes the paper into two parts: in the first half she recalls the vacation with her deeply religious and seemingly depressed mother at Emerald Isle; in the second half she describes the vacation she spends at Hilton Head with her borderline alcoholic father, his much younger exhibitionist girlfriend, and the girlfriend's spoiled six-year-old son. This structure, although accomplished, is largely determined by the standards of the assignment, for Lindemann advises students that

This assignment asks you to write an essay that is primarily descriptive but that makes its point by comparison and contrast. For example, you might describe one scene under different circumstances, contrasting a football stadium when it is full of people with the same stadium after the fans have gone home. Or, you could describe a person, comparing your initial impression with one you developed later after you had gotten to know the individual better. Or, you could describe an object from two contrasting perspectives, a high school English classroom, for example, as seen by a high school senior and then by a college freshman returning home to visit the school. (158)

In crafting an essay that ultimately takes on the weighty issues of divorce, parental responsibility, and morality, Bennett goes well beyond the potential topics Lindemann raises in the text of the assignment. The situations that Lindemann imagines students might write about—reporting on the atmosphere in a football stadium or nostalgically remembering their high school English classrooms—seem remarkably trivial when compared to what Bennett reveals in her piece.

Bennett begins the essay by situating the personal narrative that follows within the larger context of her parents' separation, letting readers know that the summer vacation she writes about is not the one typically recounted in the "What I Did on Summer Vacation" genre:

Every summer, my parents and I spend a couple of weeks at the beach together, but this year is different. Because my parents are separated, my mom is staying in our condominium on Emerald Isle, and my dad is spending his vacation with his girlfriend and her son at Hilton Head Island. I'm staying with my mom until she goes back to Raleigh and then going to Hilton Head to see my dad. (158)

In the next large paragraph Bennett gives a character sketch of her mother, taking readers through her actions on a typical day during their vacation together and letting readers in on the emotional toll the separation has taken on her mother. In constructing this scene, Bennett draws on fictional narrative strategies as she describes actions and settings about which she presumably has no direct knowledge.

At 5:00 each morning my mom's alarm clock goes off. She gets up, puts on her jeans, a tee-shirt, and her PTL [Praise the Lord] jacket, grabs her camera and her Bible, and walks out onto the beach to take pictures of the sunrise and "Praise the Lord." As she walks across the sand, she sees a pretty, white coquina shell, picks it up, and slips it into the pocket of her blue wind-breaker. By the time she walks up to the pier...her pockets sag from the weight of the shells she picks up along the way. She turns and looks out at the ocean. The sky is pinkish-orange, and the sun shines in a yellow ball, rising higher and higher over the ocean—above the soaring seagulls and away from the crashing waves. My mom, a forty-nine year old woman with streaks of gray peaking out from under the last

coloring she had put in her hair, takes her camera from around her neck, praises God for his magnificent creation, and photographs her favorite sanctuary. (158-9)

In using the present tense to describe her mother's solitary walk, which is represented as part morning prayer session and part beachcombing expedition, Bennett creates empathy for her mother, giving us the impression that she's trying to see what it's like walking in her mother's shoes and that she wants readers to do likewise. This passage is additionally remarkable for its level of intimacy, as Bennett lets readers peek in on her mother's morning ceremony and exposes personal information such as her mother's age and the fact that she has her graying hair colored.

The empathy and intimacy evident in this passage lays the groundwork for the next part of the narrative, where Bennett relates what happened when her mother comes back from the beach. Bennett meets her mother when she arrives back at the condominium, and in describing this scene she ventures to explain her mother's emotional state, although she shows some deference by not exploring the ramifications behind some of her mother's actions.

When she gets back, I hear the sliding glass door open and the seashells clink in her pocket as she walks through the den and into the kitchen to wash her shells and lay them out to dry on paper towels. I stumble down the stairs to say good morning and help fix breakfast. Her eyes are watery, her cheeks are red, and her nose is runny. I'm not sure if it's because of the cold wind outside or if she's crying about my dad again or if she's been overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord. Maybe it's all three. [...] My mom won't go out on the beach in the middle of the day. She goes back to bed while I go lie out with my friends. (159)

Bennett either overlooks or refuses to engage the connection she implicitly draws here between her mother's apparent tears and her tendency to stay in bed throughout the afternoon, behavior

that seems to suggest that she understandably remains depressed about the family's breakup. Instead of exploring this complicated aspect of her mother's character, Bennett dives into the central theme of the essay, which she articulates using the metaphor of building sandcastles, something she and her mother regularly do every evening.

Like a couple of kids, we sink down in the sand and start building a castle. My mom won't build it near the shoreline. She makes me go down to the water and bring wet sand up on the powdery beach. This year, for the first time, I realize why she won't build our castle nearer to the water. My mom doesn't want it to wash away; her life is a castle on a solid foundation, and she's trying to teach me to build my castle so it will never wash away. When I think of my dad, I realize why my mom comes back from her walks with tears in her eyes. It's high tide for my dad, and his castle is dangerously near the shoreline. (159)

These sentences act as part moral posturing and part transitional device. They provide Bennett with a way to safely explain her mother's behavior, for rather than seeing her mother's tears resulting from loneliness, depression, or any other likely cause, Bennett emphatically claims they stem from her moral discipline, a value she believes her mother implicitly teaches her in their time together on the beach.

As is obvious with the last sentence of this passage, Bennett's father also imparts this same lesson, but in a much different way. Bennett transitions into a paragraph where she compares the mornings at her father's condominium with those she shares with her mother. The morning in Hilton Head opens with the screams of David, the son of Bennett's father's girlfriend, whose pleas of going to the beach are stifled when Bennett's father tells the boy "to shut up or else he'll get a spanking" (159). The differences between the mother's home

environment and the father's grow more pronounced as Bennett goes on to describe what her typical day with her father and his new family looks like.

It's about 10:00, so I'm up and getting ready to go out on the beach. I walk into the kitchen just in time to see my father pouring rum into a glass and adding Coke. I try not to act surprised. Before long, Susan, my dad's girlfriend, comes prancing down the stairs in a skimpy black night gown. I don't do a good job of hiding that I'm shocked to see her dressed like that because my dad notices and tells her to go put some clothes on. [...] By noon my dad is drunk again.

Whereas Bennett declares her mother to be someone with a strong sense of moral purpose, she presents her father and his coterie as morally rudderless souls: the father drinks without being aware that his daughter might be alarmed by this (although he interestingly addresses her concern about Susan's relative state of undress), the young boy David appears overindulged, while Susan publicly flaunts her body.

Indeed, Bennett emphasizes these characters' lack of moral guidance by emphasizing their physical appearance, a strategy that differs widely from the one she uses to characterize her mother, whose graying hair is the sole physical trait Bennett mentions. Compare this to the following passage depicting the father and Susan:

He and Susan come out on the beach and lie out underneath their giant umbrella. Dad's stomach hangs over the top of his madras swimming trunks, and his white legs blister quickly in the sun. He covers his bald head with a Hilton Head Golf Club baseball cap, and his gray beard shades his face. He's fifty years old, and he still doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up. Susan is twenty-five, and she catches the attention of everyone walking by, but her only goal is to keep

my dad's attention turned away from my mom and me. She wears a white string bikini and pulls her long brown hair back with a pink bandana head-band. (160).

The father's almost grotesque appearance works as a metaphor to represent his lack of direction; his paunch and blistering legs suggest that he's as unaware of his body as he is of his goals in life. Susan, on the other hand, appears all too conscious of her body, using it, Bennett hypothesizes, as one more instrument to keep the father's "attention turned away from my mom and me."

Bennett's day grows progressively worse as her father and Susan grow progressively drunker, eventually passing out and thus leaving Bennett to take care of Susan's unruly son. To appease the boy, Bennett attempts to build sandcastles with him, like she does with her mother, but he resists. She writes, "I convince David to come out of the water and help me build a sand castle. I head up to the soft sand, but David screams at me. He says that he doesn't like carrying sand that far, and his mom never makes him do it that way. I try to tell him that it will wash away, but he starts crying, and I give in" (160). Later in the evening, Bennett returns to the beach to observe, not surprisingly, that the sand castle, like the hopes she had for her father, has crumbled:

Later, when I walk back out on the beach, I notice the castle is being washed away as the tide comes in. The sky is bright red, and the sun sets across the sound. The waves crash against the castle until it's finally level with the sand. My dad yells and says for me to look after David; they'll be back late. Tears come to my eyes. Dad has lost his sobriety, his family, and his God. I wonder how long it will be before his foundation is washed away, and his castle is level with the sand. (160)

In the final paragraph of the essay, Bennett compares the moral paths presented by these two episodes and concludes that, although she cares for and understands her father, her own path will be informed by the philosophy quietly instilled in her by her mother: “I love my mom and dad both. My dad has many friends and many good times, but he is too miserable to enjoy them. My mom is a loner. She has quiet times and peace of mind. As I look back at my own life, I search for a castle—up high, away from the shoreline—far away from the destruction of the tide” (160).

Bennett’s essay embodies the characteristics of the transformative personal essay and illustrates the connections this form of experiential writing has with the *Bildungsroman*. Like *Wilhelm Meister* or *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Bennett’s essay can be read as a coming-of-age narrative in which the young protagonist undergoes a series of trials on her way toward maturity and self-development. The separate vacations Bennett spends with her parents present her with two different moral philosophies to choose from as she figures out her own sense of self. And as Bennett’s final sentence makes clear, this sense of self is at the heart of her thinking, for the essay ends up being more about Bennett’s self-formation than it is about her parents’ separation, which exists as an occasion for Bennett to reflect on her developing sense of self.

This maturity is further signaled in the overall message Bennett leaves readers with, which, in the parental voice Faigley believes surfaces in many students’ personal writings, repeats the vague yet commonplace idea that a solid moral foundation is important to building a strong character. In choosing to live according to the standards set by her mother, as opposed to those practiced by her father, Bennett upholds normalized conventions regarding modesty, character, and responsibility, thus showing herself to be an adult whose beliefs conform to those shared by a larger social order. And finally, Bennett demonstrates her supposed maturity by resolving any conflict that existed prior to her self-realization and ending with the declaration of

a unified self. Whereas earlier in the essay Bennett, for instance, appeared divided about the rationale behind her mother's behavior—wondering whether her tears were caused by thinking about her husband, praying to the Lord, or some combination—by the end of the paper Bennett claims she knows it stems from the mother's anxiety about her husband's broken moral compass. Whereas Bennett never before knew why her mother built sandcastles far from shore, she now says, "This year, for the first time, I realize why she won't build our castle nearer to the water. My mom doesn't want it to wash away; her life is a castle on a solid foundation, and she's trying to teach me to build my castle so it will never wash away" (159). Where once existed doubt, there now exists moral certainty.

In her comments on Bennett's paper, Erika Lindemann states that Bennett's essay represents good writing for her because "Good writing is most effective when we tell the truth about who we are and what we think" (161). Calling Bennett "honest," Lindemann goes on to praise the paper for its transformative power and for the distance Bennett achieves, saying that the separation of Bennett's parents has "certainly changed her life, [and] she has responded to the experience by deciding what kind of person she would like to be. She has been watching herself grow up and wants to tell you what she has learned about herself" (161). Although Lindemann stresses that Bennett's essay should be applauded for its truthfulness and courage, in this comment she suggests that what is noteworthy is in fact Bennett's maturity, reflected in her ability to look back upon her past objectively and to draw self-knowledge from this process.

As many critics of *What Makes Writing Good* have discussed, Lindemann's idea that good writing involves an honest expression of self and self-transformation is not isolated.³⁴

³⁴ For example, in their review essay, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg contend that "the teacher commentary typically takes the form of an apology for the students' writing on grounds that whatever minor flaws may be present in the stylistic execution, the emotional content does

According to Frank D'Angelo, who chose as his best student essay one in which the writer describes his experience touring Auschwitz, "Good writing represents a process of self-discovery and a search for meaning. [...] It organizes experience into a meaningful sequence, and it evokes in the reader a profound emotional response. It is a way of fulfilling universal emotional needs and resolving universal human problems" (86). In her comments on a paper in which the writer says that he now knows what real writing is, Janet Kotler claims that "it's...impossible to be deaf to the voice, or to be blind to Courtney's serious effort to come to terms with his own experience" (24).

What is problematic about Coles and Vopat's collection is not that the students chosen for the book write personal essays but that the teachers, in their comments, defend a monolithic version of the personal essay, one that does not recognize students' complex experimentation with autobiographical writing. For example, the study questions often ask readers to consider comments other students have made about the essays and evaluations in the book. One of the questions after the essay from Janet Kotler's student presents the following comment from another student:

Why isn't this just another way of "sleazing through an assignment"? This student must have known what his teacher liked and wanted from him, so that's what he gives her. All that stuff about the bad background and his trouble with learning and the parents who don't seem to understand him, and what dopes all his other teachers are, is a bid for sympathy really, another kind of con. (27)

authentically represent the universal human values that are the *sine qua non* of good writing" (245).

This student touches on the idea that the selves students perform in their writing are rhetorical. From this students' perspective, personal writing is less an issue about the honest presentation of self than it is one about creating a self that effectively responds to the teacher's expectations.

This rhetorical sense of self goes unexamined in the transformative personal essay, in which the writer is seen as arresting experience, assigning it some stabilized meaning according to a normative set of themes and values. As Lindemann says of Bennett's "At the Beach": "Although Norma may not accept all of her mother's values, they will serve Norma better in difficult situations than her father's values will" (162-3). Part of the problem with this move is that it overlooks potential complications and additional lines of inquiry; nowhere in her comments does Lindemann suggest that she asked Bennett to think further about how the conclusions she makes about her mother's "peace of mind" are complicated by the behavior she observes. The transformational personal essay is further problematic because the constructed nature of experience is not acknowledged. Bennett's essay is remarkably crafted—the situations she compares seem too perfectly analogous to one another, for example—yet Lindemann ignores whatever fictive intentions Bennett may have had when she applauds the writer's honesty.

And perhaps it is at this point where the transformative personal essay and the *Bildungsroman* diverge. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is, after all, a highly ironic novel. Throughout the text Goethe pokes fun of Wilhelm's naïveté, ridiculing him most importantly for never noticing that the events in his life were not the product of fate, as Wilhelm himself believed, but the direct intervention of a secret organization, the Society of the Tower, who directed every step of Wilhelm's journey. Just as Wilhelm fails to recognize that his life story has been plotted by others, so too the transformative personal essay fails to exhibit the idea that experience, and the self that emerges from experience, is also a product of other discourses.

3.3. *The Strawberry Statement* and Revisionist Personal Writing

A different understanding of the personal takes place in the revisionist personal essay. Drawing on James Simon Kunen's memoir *The Strawberry Statement*, I argue that revisionist personal writing collapses the false distinction between personal and critical writing as the writer 1) reflects on a "politics of location," opening up to examination the multiple subject positions she inhabits and how these multiple and sometimes opposing positions factor into interpretation; 2) demonstrates a critical awareness of experience as textual; and 3) resists interpreting experience so that its meaning reinforces commonplace narratives about individuality and morality.

Even though *The Strawberry Statement* is generally remembered for Kunen's account of the Columbia riots, it is more than a historical document that gives one insider's view of what happened in the turbulent spring of 1968. Kunen devotes most of the book to his impressions of the sit-ins, demonstrations, and strikes at Columbia—activities which he himself participated in and for which he was arrested—but he also lets readers know his thoughts about baseball (he's an avid Red Sox fan), Eugene McCarthy (he's ambivalent toward his candidacy), commercial radio (he suggests it represents the evils of commercial cultural in general), hair (he believes men wearing their hair long is an appropriate political response to militarism and conformism), and a plethora of other issues both great and small. Recognizing that some people might see the book as lacking focus, Kunen warns readers early on "that a great deal of this book simply relates little things I've done and thought. It may seem completely irrelevant to Columbia. That's the way it goes" (7).

While the book might at first glance appear incoherent given the range of topics Kunen takes on, and while Kunen's attitude toward readers here might seem like that of a careless writer, I would argue that this apparent incoherence and apathy is part of a carefully constructed

pose, one whose echoes can be heard in the calculated randomness of John Cage's experimental musical compositions and the ironic detachment inherent in important countercultural texts such as Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *Mad* magazine. The vexed persona Kunen creates of someone deeply committed while also being resigned to the likely meaninglessness of his writing sounds similar to characters we might find within the pages of postwar American novelists like John Barth, Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut, whom Kunen cites elsewhere as an influence.³⁵ Mark Gerzon, when analyzing his generation's interest in existential philosophy, explains the interconnection between this broader cultural worldview and young people's attitudes this way: "The arts have broken with tradition because they found the limitations on style and structure unnecessary and artificial, i.e., absurd. Since today's young people are surrounded by these new forms of expression, it is not surprising that they find the themes of existentialism familiar before they have read any philosophy" (24). In addition, Kunen wields this persona to accomplish his larger critical agenda: to humanize the student radical and thereby dispel the stereotype, circulated by the popular media, that students were either bacchants simply blowing off steam or SDS drones unconsciously toeing the group's vulgar Marxist party line.

In the first section of the book, which is made up of four separate introductions, Kunen spends a great deal of time establishing his character, approximating what Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie call, following Adrienne Rich, a "politics of location" as he acknowledges the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, subject positions he inhabits and further reflects on the consequences these positions have on the analysis that follows. Kunen, for instance, poses the

³⁵ Kunen confesses to *The New York Times* that he doesn't possess the most rigorous reading habits, although he says that Vonnegut is "the one writer I've read more than one book of... 'Mother Night' is my favorite. It's him at his best. It very strongly stresses the blurriness of good and evil and the gratuitousness of how things come about" ("Young Writers").

question “What sort of man gets busted at Columbia?” and answers by divulging his personal likes and dislikes:

I...strongly support trees (and, in the larger sense, forests), flowers, mountains and hills, also valleys, the ocean, wiliness (when used for good), good, little children, people, tremendous record-setting snow storms, hurricanes, swimming underwater, nice policemen, unicorns, extra-inning ball games up to twelve innings, pneumatic jackhammers (when they’re not too close), the dunes in North Truro on Cape Cod, liberalized abortion laws, and Raggedy Ann dolls, among other things.

I do not like Texas, people who go to the zoo to be arty, the Defense Department, the name “Defense Department,” the fly buzzing around me as I write this, protective tariffs, little snowstorms that turn to slush, the short days of winter, extra-inning ball games over twelve innings, calling people consumers, pneumatic jackhammers immediately next to the window, and G.I. Joe Dolls. Also racism, poverty and war. The latter three I’m trying to do something about.

(4)

With this lengthy and at times ironic inventory of his personal preferences, Kunen indicates that he can’t be defined according to his political ideals; in fact, by placing his hatred of racism, poverty, and war at the end of the list, he seems to insist that these beliefs are somehow secondary in terms of how he defines himself, even though he actively works to advance these beliefs. Kunen admits that he’s among the student rebels arrested at Columbia, but he refuses to concede that this makes him an overzealous revolutionary who sees all authorities as “fascists,”

“imperialists,” or “pigs”; to the contrary, he tells us that he likes “nice policemen” and enjoys the supposedly bourgeois pastime of baseball.

Kunen clearly imagines his book entering a broader cultural debate about sixties youth, and in situating himself within this debate Kunen does more than distinguish himself individually from the stereotypical young radical. Besides defining himself individually, Kunen, in an introduction entitled “Who We Are,” also defines himself as part of a youth movement, and at times he casts himself as a spokesperson for his compatriots, who he argues are more complex than their critics claim.

People want to know who we are, and some think they know who we are. Some think we’re a bunch of snot-nosed brats. It’s difficult to say really who we are. We don’t have snot on our noses. What we do have is hopes and fears, or ups and downs, as they are called.

A lot of the time we are very unhappy, and we try to cheer ourselves up by thinking. We think how lucky we are to be able to go to school, to have nice clothes and fine things and to eat well and have money and be healthy. How lucky we are really. But we remain unhappy. Then we attack ourselves for self-pity, and become more unhappy, and still more unhappy over being sad. (4-5)

Here Kunen explores the complex motivations behind recent rebellions on college campuses, and in doing so he acknowledges his own as well as his peers’ privileged class positions, which he suggests might be one potential rationale for the revolt among college students. But Kunen doesn’t end his analysis here, resting on class as the sole motivation behind the riots. The middle-class make up of college revolutionaries, and the guilt that Kunen claims comes with such status, doesn’t completely explain college students’ behavior, which Kunen believes also

stems from political disenchantment and good old teen angst: “We’re unhappy because of the war, and because of poverty and the hopelessness of politics, but also because we sometimes get put down by girls or boys, as the case may be, or feel lonely and alone and lost” (5). Rather than casting an either/or argument—contending, for example, that the riots on American campuses stemmed from either politics or emotions—Kunen disrupts this simple binary and suggests that the reasons for students’ rebelliousness are just as multiple and fractured as the students themselves.

Kunen explores the grounds of his experience even further, going beyond an examination of his individuality, his generational affinities, and his class values, by exploring how even geography informs his experience. In the introduction “Who We Are,” Kunen goes on to explain that the “we” he speaks for refers not only to his fellow college students but to his fellow New Yorkers as well. “And who we are is people in New York City,” he writes (5). The city in Kunen’s mind produces a “loneliness as can exist only in the midst of numbers and numbers of people who don’t know you, who don’t care about you, who won’t let you care about them” (5). And this isolation filters into the climate at Columbia as well, for in Kunen’s estimation “Columbia is New York. Leaving the school or its city really doesn’t help. Once you live in New York you are locked in the city, and the city is locked in you” (6).

In addition to reflecting on the “politics of location” that inform the essayist’s interpretation of experience, the revisionist personal essay further destabilizes the idea, assumed in the transformative personal essay, that personal experience is somehow ontologically authentic or true by recognizing the constructed nature of writing. That is, in the revisionist personal essay, the writer demonstrates an awareness of writing as performance, of experience as text. Kunen demonstrates such knowledge in the numerous remarks he makes throughout the

book about its composition. For example, he entitles one of his introductions “How the Book was Written,” and in it he describes what appears to be the haphazard and spontaneous manner in which the book was composed:

Writing a book is a lot like having a baby; they both involve bringing something into the world that wasn't there before, and they're both a pain in the ass.

This book was written on napkins and cigarette packs and hitchhiking signs. It was spread all over, but so is my mind. I exhibit a marked tendency to forget things. I can remember only three things at a time. If I think of a fourth thing, I forget the first. Like a cigarette machine. You take one pack out—all the rest fall down a notch. Exactly analogous in every salient detail. (6)

Kunen goes on to explain that for readers to truly grasp this compositional method they should “rip it [the book] up and throw the scraps all over the house. Then, later, should you come across a piece, read it, or don't read it, depending upon how you feel. Or, better, save it until four o'clock in the morning when you would rather do almost anything else, and read it then. Above all, don't spend too much time reading it because I didn't spend much time writing it” (6-7).

Despite this and other statements Kunen makes about the onerous nature of writing and his own spontaneous writing process, his writing shows signs of remarkable craft and polish. For instance, Kunen's choice to design the book as a diary that begins the summer before he enters Columbia in 1966 and ends abruptly two years later rhetorically supports Kunen's desire to look spontaneous and unpolished, an approach that ironically adds to his authority as a writer.³⁶ But the journal entries themselves betray evidence of careful thought and revision.

³⁶ Kunen adopts the pose of someone who thinks a lot about his authority as a writer, an issue he addresses in the very first sentences of the book: “My question is a simple one: who am I to write a book? I don't know. I'm just writing it. You're just reading it. Let's not worry about it”

These entries resemble what Winston Weathers calls *crots*, a prose style first touched upon by Thomas Wolfe, who saw them as a dominant feature in New Journalism. A crot is an organizational device similar to a paragraph, in that it is made up of a series of related sentences; but unlike a paragraph, which uses transitional sentences and phrases to connect to other paragraphs, a crot is designed to disrupt a reader's expectation of linearity, like a fragment of a collage. According to Weathers, "In its most intense form, it [the crot] is characterized by a certain abruptness in its termination: 'As each crot breaks off,' Tom Wolfe says, 'it tends to make one's mind search for some point that must have just been made—*presque vu!*—almost seen! In the hands of a writer who really understands the device, it will have you making crazy leaps of logic, leaps you never dreamed of before'" (14). Suggesting that writers' uses of crots are in part due to the growing influence of electronic media, Weathers likens crots to snapshots that present arresting yet ambiguous images.

Although he doesn't compose crots in the same way that a writer like Susan Griffin does in "Our Secret" (1992), forcing readers to draw connections among seemingly disparate ideas, Kunen composes crot-like journal entries that variously work as snapshots capturing ambiguous images that characterize the confusion and absurdity behind the events at Columbia. And rather than transitioning neatly from point to point, Kunen punctuates his narrative using images that open up questions he lets drop. Here, for example, is a passage in which Kunen describes the negotiations that occurred when students occupied President Grayson Kirk's office:

(3). Kunen makes other comments that similarly suggest he wants to avoid the question of writerly authority altogether, like when he asks, "Why should only book writers write books? Who cares about them? They're not where it's at. Let everybody write so that no one is a writer" (79). But in an interview with *The New York Times*, Kunen seems to backpedal from this comment, hinting that young writers have an authority that allows them wide (and perhaps too much) stylistic license. Kunen tells the interviewer that if a writer is under thirty, "You somehow have a license not to organize, not to work out a strict coherency, to splatter yourself across the paper" ("Young Writers").

In through the window like Batman climbs Professor Orest Ranum, liberal, his academic robes billowing in the wind. We laugh at his appearance. He tells us that our action will precipitate a massive right-wing reaction in the faculty. [...] We'll all be arrested, he says, and we'll all be expelled. He urges us to leave. We say no. One of us points out that Sorel said only violent action changes things. Ranum says that Sorel is dead. [...] Ranum leaves. Someone comes in to take pictures. We all cover our faces with different photographs of Grayson Kirk. (24)

Kunen never goes on to explain beyond these simple sentences what he explicitly feels about this encounter with Ranum; instead, he seems to let the final image of him and his fellow demonstrators posing with the photographs of the Columbia president suggest that absurdity is the only appropriate response to Ranum's similarly absurd gesture. Kunen has an eye for absurdity, as a great deal of the book focuses less on pivotal moments and key players in the tension at Columbia and instead describes some of the more bizarre, less historic, occurrences, like this scene Kunen saw when standing guard outside Low Hall:

I volunteer for jock-watch from 2:00 to 3:00 but do not wake up the next man and stay out on the entrance window ledge until five. I am to let no one in as we now have a population of 150 and we want a stable commune—no tourists. We even consider a Stalinist purge to reduce the mouths to feed. Only tonight does my roommate decide to occupy a building. I have about seven degrees of disdain and contempt for him, but he got in before my watch. I stamp "Rush" on the hand of anyone who leaves. This allows them to get back in.

During my watch five guys in black cowls come by dragging a coffin and murmuring in Latin. (32)

Barbara Kamler has recently argued that if personal writing is to play a part in critical inquiry writers must recognize the narrative nature of experience, the ways in which their lives become text when inscribed on the page. For this reason, Kamler proposes that teachers steer away from discussing personal writing in terms of voice—as in the idea that personal writing encourages students to find their authentic voices—and instead rely on discussing it in terms of story. According to Kamler, “Metaphorically, story allows a more textual orientation than voice, a closer attention to what is written (rather than she who has written)—to the actual text—and the contexts in which it is produced. [...] Metaphors of story...can be used to disrupt the links between the personal and the authentic” (45). Kunen illustrates such an understanding of the personal as text through the many meta-discursive passages in the book where he talks about his writing process and the choices he makes as a writer. In fact, Kunen ends his narrative on just such a moment, where he writes: “Here, arbitrarily, the Book ends” (145).

Perhaps most importantly, though, the primary difference between transformative and revisionist personal writing comes in how the writer makes meaning of her experience. Although Norma Bennett’s essay “At the Beach,” discussed in the previous section, can’t completely represent the complex form of the transformative personal essay, it suggests that the writer in the transformative essay resolves whatever tensions existed in her narrative and arrives at an interpretation that determines once and for all the meaning or significance behind a particular event. In the revisionist personal essay, the writer resists this temptation and instead offers multiple, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations.

One particular entry where we see Kunen demonstrate this understanding comes in an entry dated June 4, 1968, which opens with an account of the counter-commencement and other demonstrations happening on graduation day at Columbia. Kunen describes the apparent success

of these demonstrations as, in his judgment, at least 300 graduates walk out of graduation in protest. He then turns to psychologist Erich Fromm's lecture at the counter-commencement, in which Fromm makes the case that responding emotionally to the war, poverty, racism, and other social ills, as many students saw themselves doing, is a healthier reaction than coldly rationalizing such problems.

Kunen subtly applies this reading of Fromm in the very next paragraph, where he discusses his reaction to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy:

A lot of other things happen, but I really don't want to talk about them, because I am actually writing this at 4 A.M. Wednesday, June 5, and I just heard over the radio that Kennedy has been shot. Again. This is really no novelty, you know, because people get shot every day, and bombed and burned and blown up. But no one cares about that. I mean they don't really mind, because it's a question of flags and things and anyway, people aren't really shot; fire is directed at their positions. And they're not really people; they're troops. There aren't even dead men; only body counts. And the degree of deadness isn't always too bad; sometimes it's light or moderate instead of heavy. (55)

Sounding like George Orwell in "Politics and the English Language," Kunen uses Kennedy's assassination to reflect on the ways in which language is used to abstract the horrific reality of the war and ultimately dilute public reaction. In terms of content, this accords with Fromm's criticism of the hierarchy between rationality and emotionality in Cold War American society; but this passage takes up Fromm's argument in its style as well. Sounding extremely emotional, Kunen adopts an angry tone in his short sentences, in his repeated use of antithesis, and in the increasingly invective diction he uses at the end of the entry, especially when describing the

advertisements following the evening news that depict, as he says, “some broad telling you how groovy some gasoline is and how you can get laid practically as much as you want if you use it” (55).

Such moves on Kunen’s part become doubly interesting when we compare them to an essay like “At the Beach” by Norma Bennett. Recall, for example, that one of the essay’s qualities, according to Erika Lindemann, is Bennett’s ability to remain objective, to rein in her emotions. “By the time she tackled the subject again as a first-semester freshman in college,” Lindemann says of Bennett’s writing process, “she had not only thought it through carefully, but she had also given herself enough distance from it to avoid being sentimental or full of self-pity” (161).

But Bennett and Kunen also differ from one another in terms of how they each draw meaning from their experiences. Kunen sees meaning in Kennedy’s assassination, but it’s not the kind of life- or generation-altering meaning invoked in the transformative personal essay. There’s no before-and-after moment in Kunen’s diary entry from June 4th. His perspective hasn’t been transformed by Kennedy’s death; if anything, it’s only confirmed what he already believed about the importance of involvement and the bankruptcy of intellectual detachment. For Kunen, there is no one single lesson to draw from Kennedy’s death or from Columbia, for that matter. Like Raymond Mungo in his memoir *Famous Long Ago*, Kunen early on warns readers that his book contains no larger meaning they can readily take away, and he ends with a postscript that reinforces this point. In it, he writes:

I can assure you that the Columbia action cannot be dismissed as an overgrown panty raid, a manifestation of the vernal urge. It lasted too long;

participants endured hardships, and worse, boredom, conditions through which collegiate fetishistic folly could never sustain itself.

Beyond defining what it wasn't, it is very difficult to say with certainty what anything meant. But everything must have a meaning, and everyone is free to say what meanings are. (150)

In the revisionist model of personal writing, as it's represented in Kunen's passage here and in other examples of sixties-era student writing, the writer approaches experience as an open-ended process whose meaning—or, more precisely, meanings—isn't fixed for all time, as is the case with the transformative model. Experience is seen as a subject of inquiry continually open to reinterpretation and revision, an approach that disturbs the notion that students' personal writings can't be as critical as their expository or analytical ones. In her now canonical essay from 1972 "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," Adrienne Rich illuminates this idea when she speaks to the qualities of writing I argue should be valued in revisionist personal writing. For Rich, the act of writing is important for its transformative potential, but not in the closed-off sense of the transformative personal essay as I have characterized it. Rich asserts that

to write poetry, or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. [...] Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too

sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is renaming. (635)

However, the “imaginative transformation of reality” spoken of here by Rich is not a simple matter, not a simple generic performance like the “reflexive turn,” for as Rich says later in the essay, “The awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier—one step and you are in another country” (639). What Rich stresses about revisionary writing is its power to inquire without simplifying, to honor (and indeed create) multiple rigorous perspectives. Here Rich articulates in more theoretical language a skeptical, although committed, approach toward experience, one expressed by student writers like Kunen as well, who construct experience as a site of meaning continuously open to interpretation and reinterpretation.

Instead of being simply something to move students away from, the personal, as it’s invoked in revisionist personal writing like Kunen’s and others’, may help introduce students to the multiple angles of vision required in academic forms of writing. One of the greatest challenges many students face when writing analytical essays is the tendency to come to judgment too hastily, to cherry-pick those passages or pieces of evidence that hold up a narrow yet definitive argument. Often our job as teachers when commenting on students’ writing is to bring to their attention passages and evidence that complicate their readings so that they may see how academic writers address multiple perspectives on an issue, including those contrary to their own, in order to build a more complicated and nuanced critical stance.

Student memoirists in the sixties and seventies worked with an alternative model of the personal essay that offered writers strategies for thinking about individual experience as constructed, contingent, and social—a very different picture of personal writing than the one constructed by

critics of personal, or so-called “expressive,” writing, whose ideas I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter. Based on the work young people were doing in published student memoirs of the period, it would be tempting to say that students were discovering this type of personal writing on their own, that they were somehow resisting the writing they were being taught in school and forging on their own a more relevant approach toward personal writing. But this picture is complicated if one looks at personal writing students were doing in school. In the next chapter I turn to look how students *and* teachers in one specific alternative learning program experimented further with the social nature of personal writing by composing journals that attempted to represent their collective interpretations of experience.

4. “20 DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING AT ONE THING”: JOURNAL WRITING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH’S ALTERNATIVE CURRICULUM

From any point of view other than my own, or Catherine’s, all we did was go to a Tai Chi lesson. To me it was my greatest experience with total, all inclusive, mind-upheaval. I am at a loss to tell you why; however, I need not tell you just that; why-But! If you’d like to talk about it, get in touch.

–Anonymous Alternative Curriculum student, 1975

The strategies that students took in their revisionist personal writing did not come about by accident; they were, in some senses, learned. One way to observe this is to see what students were writing to teachers and to other students in school. In this chapter, I focus on personal writing composed by students and faculty who were part of an experimental learning program at the University of Pittsburgh known as the Alternative Curriculum, which ran from 1973 to 1979. Materials found in the program’s archives suggest that teachers encouraged students to see journal writing, often caricatured as a tool students can use to get in touch with their innermost thoughts and feelings, as a way to think about their collective identities as individuals and as members of social groups.

The piece of writing quoted in the epigraph above comes from a community journal written by students and faculty who participated in the program. I have chosen it to begin this chapter because the student who writes it explicitly refuses to engage in the type of work many of us who teach writing ask students to do in the personal essays we typically assign in our courses. Rather than describing in vivid detail why she felt the Tai Chi lesson to be so transformative, the unnamed writer of this passage tells readers that she is at a loss for words. In

fact, she seems to take pleasure in not revealing to readers the significance of this event: “I need not tell you just that,” she says about her puzzlement, as if she knows exactly why she found the lesson so momentous and decides to keep it to herself. At least in writing, that is, because she informs readers that they can “get in touch” with her if they want to learn more.

I am interested in this text, as well as other texts found in the University of Pittsburgh’s archive on the Alternative Curriculum, because they conform and pose a challenge to the metaphor of transformation that lies at the center of personal writing as it is theorized and taught throughout Composition Studies. In his recent *College Composition and Communication* article, “The Dogma of Transformation,” Thomas Newkirk has shown that for many composition teachers and theorists, the value of students’ personal writing—whether it is a literacy narrative, a personal essay, or a journal—rests on the writer’s convincing display of transformation, whereby the student dramatizes how, often through the acts of reading and writing, she has reached a higher state of critical and personal understanding. In such transformative essays, students describe how, for instance, they have come to see that institutional forces shape their ideas and attitudes and thus have become politically empowered in ways they weren’t before. Or, in a slightly less political version, students write about an event from their past—frequently traumatic episodes such as their parents’ divorce or the death of a loved one—and examine its thematic repercussions, explaining the knowledge they have gleaned concerning death, the transition to adulthood, and other weighty topics.

Drawing on Newkirk’s recent work on personal writing, particularly his idea of the “reflexive turn,” I argue that the personal writing composed by Alternative Curriculum students does not perform these transformative gestures. Students in this program endlessly write about their experiences, thoughts, and emotions, but in their personal writing they tend to shy away

from depicting their experiences as life altering, or, when they do confess to being changed, they resist explaining the significance of such change. Rather than reading this as a deficiency, as most current theories of personal writing would suggest teachers do, I believe that the absence of transformation in these texts should be seen as generative.

More specifically, I contend that students' personal writing from Alternative Curriculum has several consequences for contemporary writing pedagogy. It offers teachers an alternative representation of the student writer and potentially gives students a way of seeing personal writing assignments like journals as something other than an invasion of privacy, which is especially important to those students naturally reluctant to write about sensitive aspects of their lives. The figure of the student that emerges in the personal writing from the Alternative Curriculum differs from that of the student found in much of the personal writing valued throughout Composition Studies. Simply put, a dominant version of the student emphasized in current and past debates about personal writing is that of the victim—the student who has been abused, for example, or who has been the target of racism, or who is the unwitting pawn of corporate media. Coles and Vopat's *What Makes Writing Good*, which has often been the target of criticisms about personal writing, contains a number of such narratives, but so do more recent studies. In her examination of the political dimensions of personal writing, Karen Surman Paley focuses her attention on personal essays in which students discuss an alcoholic father, an abusive mother, and an episode of racism. Anne Ruggles Gere points to the idea that some narratives carry more value than others within Composition Studies:

Personal writing introduces a leveling force into the classroom—after all, everyone has a life to narrate—but it sometimes accords higher prestige to certain narratives. Students can quickly begin to feel that they haven't had the right

experiences, haven't had the right lives, to produce writing that will be highly valued by their teachers. [...] In a classroom that privileges personal writing, the story of a rape may carry a great deal more cultural capital than one about babysitting a younger brother. (207)

The stories students tell of themselves in the Alternative Curriculum do not focus on the kinds of traumatic experiences at the center of so much personal writing as defined by the field, and listening closely to these stories, I believe, can help writing instructors imagine alternative student subjectivities worth exploring in personal writing.

Furthermore, students' personal writing from the Alternative Curriculum enables teachers interested in personal writing to avoid the critical and ethical dilemmas this genre of writing raises in the classroom. Critics frequently complain that personal writing assignments, implicitly and explicitly, promote the cult of individualism and encourage students to reduce experience to commonplace life-lessons (i.e., "making the soccer team has taught me the value of hard work"). The personal writing found in the Alternative Curriculum archives disturbs this line of thinking and demonstrates that students' writing about experience may also promote collaboration and dialogue, values important to many across Composition Studies. Other critics have expressed an additional concern about teachers' ethical responsibilities when confronting transgressive personal narratives in which students depict actions that could be construed as racist, sexist, homophobic, or criminal (see Morgan and Miller, for example). By opening up additional topics for personal writing assignments, student writing from the Alternative Curriculum can help teachers devise strategies for encouraging personal writing while also steering away from the vexing ethical problems it raises.

In posing these questions about personal writing pedagogy, I do not wish to suggest that I somehow remain free from the problems posed by assigning personal writing. In fact, the questions I raise about transformation and personal writing emerge from my pedagogy, specifically my own tendency to highly value those personal essays in which students vividly capture the transformative process sparked by an apparently meaningful event in their lives. This approach toward personal writing in my teaching derives, I suspect, from my *attraction to* and *suspicion of* personal writing, my belief that writing about personal experience can be a powerful heuristic, but that it needs to be in the service of the supposedly “higher” academic values of criticism and analysis. After reading work from Alternative Curriculum students, I am beginning to question this line of thought.

Before moving on to the substance of the essay, I want to finally say a few words about the elusive term *personal writing* and briefly characterize the work of the Alternative Curriculum (hereafter referred to as AC). First, personal writing. Definitively naming what counts as personal writing is a difficult task, as Gere notes. “*Personal writing* has become so all-encompassing,” she writes, “that it evades a single meaning or, even, one signifier. Terms like *personal narrative*, *personal experience_essay*, and *autobiographical writing* are often used interchangeably with *personal writing*” (204, original emphases). Gere concedes that despite this confusing terminology, “there is general agreement that personal writing is prose that gives significant attention to the writer’s experiences and feelings” (204). Many of the writings included in the archival records of the AC resemble personal writing in precisely this way—that is, in their concentrated focus on personal experience. And while students in the AC wrote personal narratives, autobiographies, self-evaluations, and other types of personal writing, one of the most popular forms students used was the journal. Then as now the journal has often been

understood as a quasi-public form of writing positioned somewhere between the diary and the personal essay. Its value is in part its efficiency: assigning regular journal writings that are only collected three times a term and cursorily commented upon dramatically eases the burden of labor placed on instructors—a point not missed on such advocates of journal writing as Thomas Buell, who, in a 1969 article entitled “Notes on Keeping a Journal,” asserts that regular journal exercises will get students to the point of writing well enough that teachers can finally go on to discuss what “really” interests them: in Buell’s case, literature. Students and teachers in the AC frequently thought of the journal in less provisional terms, instead understanding it to be a useful form of writing that could stand on its own.

The journal’s popularity among students and faculty comes as no surprise given the AC’s focus on the whole individual and on learning. Emerging out of the campus disturbances of the late-sixties, the AC sought to answer students’ critiques of the multiversity and its atomization of learning by presenting freshmen and sophomores with an open and interdisciplinary learning environment that would encourage them to reflect on the learning process and envision strategies for succeeding in the general university curriculum. Participants were chosen on a first-come, first-serve basis and assigned to “core groups,” consisting of fifteen students and one faculty member, that served a dual purpose: they met regularly to discuss students’ progress in the program and they chaired weekly general meetings, in which participants would discuss issues concerning the program as a whole—including budgetary matters and organizational problems. In the first four-to-five weeks of the term, students did not have a regular schedule of classes; they instead attended what were called “offerings,” lectures given by non-affiliated faculty and community members who spoke on their area of interest or expertise. These offerings, which covered such topics as “Women’s History,” “Mass Media and the First Amendment,” “Genetics

and Sickle Cell Anemia” and “How I Learned to Make a Movie from Scratch,” were intended to raise questions, issues, and/or methods that students could pursue in their work throughout the term.

Students were responsible for completing four “learning projects” each semester, and these projects could take the form of a group workshop (led by either a faculty member or another student), an independent study, or fieldwork. Students did fieldwork at local public radio stations, area hospitals, and daycare centers; they conducted independent studies on “Labor History,” “Basic Calculus,” and “Drawing and Design”; they undertook workshops addressing prison reform, children’s literature, and writing. Students did not receive letter grades for these learning projects; instead, by enrolling in the program students agreed to take a block of up to fifteen credits each semester on a “credit/no entry” basis. In consultation with a faculty member, students drew up a learning contract in which they outlined the purpose and shape of their particular learning project, and the corresponding faculty member would comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

The AC proves an interesting study, in part, because it started when other experimental university programs across the country were closing down in the early- to mid-seventies, a phenomenon AC members discussed in their journals, newsletters, and other texts. The fact that such a program existed at Pitt is even something of a surprise. According to comments made to me by Phil Wion, a former director of the AC, the University of Pittsburgh at that time was increasingly professionalizing and revising its tenure policies to reflect a greater emphasis on research, changes motivated by the university’s effort to join the Association of American Universities. The AC—with its (sometimes) radical politics, interdisciplinary nature and

experiential approach toward learning—did not fit the vision of the university as it was imagined by the administration at that time.

In an email message, former AC faculty member Dan Tannacito characterized the program's overall goal this way: "One could say that the program set out to let students define how to envision an alternative way of life within but opposed to the dominant cultural and educational model." Writing played a vital role in students' attempts to imagine the "alternative way of life" spoken of by Tannacito. According to Tannacito, "Students wanted to learn how literature and writing were an asset in their lives. They had experienced them as an imposition, via schooling." Students in the program did not write themes, as they might be expected to do in other first-year writing courses, but they did learn traditional genres of academic writing, like lab reports, research papers and literary criticism. However, faculty in the program also allowed students room to explore alternative forms of writing. Tannacito explained, for instance, how he regularly assigned forms of writing other than the essay. "The main forms of writing that I asked of students," he told me, "were journaling, note-taking, and creative writing. Sometimes, we asked people to write letters and arguments related to public issues that were being debated or in the local news. There were also community-based writing tasks."

Tannacito's comments suggest that the AC anticipated the "public turn" that has animated Composition Studies for over a decade.³⁷ As I hope this chapter illustrates, this

³⁷ I take the term "public turn" from Paula Mathieu's recent book, *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* (2005). Although more of a useful primer on how to responsibly engage with public writing in the composition classroom than it is a thorough examination of the field's most recent interest in publics and public writing, Mathieu's book offers a brief history of the different ways, in addition to service learning, composition teachers have incorporated public issues and public writing into their classrooms (1-15).

approach toward composition, especially the composition of personal writing, carries further implications for contemporary writing pedagogy.

4.1. The Archive and Its Questions

The student writing that I examine comes from two sources: 1) an archive collection entitled “Alternative Curriculum Records, 1973-1979,” housed in Pittsburgh’s University Archives, and 2) materials donated to me by Gloria Rudolf, a former head of the program whom I spoke with in February 2005.³⁸ Aside from gathering various bureaucratic documents (i.e., proposals, reports, and correspondences) and course materials (i.e., syllabi and course announcements), these two sources collect a wide range of student texts. Among the most plentiful resources are newsletters produced by the student-run newsletter committee, which, on a weekly basis, published information relevant to the program as well as book reviews, political commentary, and poetry. Also included are various program documents composed by students, such as a letter that a group of students wrote advertising the AC to all incoming freshmen. In addition to these materials, I examined excerpts from student journals produced for a class on journal writing, several literary magazines, self-evaluations, a group journal written as part of field research done on alternative education, even an AC songbook.

Throughout the course of my research, the material conditions of these archives presented me with several productive difficulties and questions. The first of these has to do with the

³⁸ I interviewed several other individuals associated with the program—including faculty, students, and administrators—and in this chapter I frequently draw on their comments to elaborate on and extend the issues and questions raised by students’ writing. Additionally, I’d like to thank the staff at the Archives Service Center for their assistance, especially University Archivist Marianne Kasica, who granted me permission to cite and reproduce the documents discussed in this chapter.

composition of the archive itself. All archives are constructed, but as far as I have been able to determine, the selection process used to determine what to include (and what not to include) in the archive is unknown. Several individuals I spoke with informed me that program administrators kept thorough records, including duplicate copies of student work, because of the university's persistent scrutiny of the program.³⁹ Totalling sixty-odd file folders, the official archive housed at Pitt contains only a small fraction of the memos, course materials, and student writing produced over the seven years of AC's existence. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the program and the university administration's hostility toward it, it's not surprising that the bulk of the program's records, apart those items kept by individual faculty and students, have disappeared.⁴⁰ In fact, Pitt's archive on the AC seems to have been donated by an anonymous individual, not collected as part of any university record-keeping procedures, as the inventory

³⁹ After four years of intense debate and revision, the AC was approved in January 1972 as one component of a newly instituted Freshman Studies Program. Critics of AC viewed the program as anti-intellectual, as a carryover from the sixties, as an unnecessary expenditure taking resources away from more important curricular areas such as Honors programs. Former Dean of Arts and Sciences Robert Marshall told me in a conversation we had in August 2005 that he struggled to keep the AC and other curricular initiatives from the late-sixties afloat. According to Marshall, "Through the late sixties and early seventies there was a lot of change going on at Pitt and I was very actively involved in a lot of it and that's what led me to be appointed dean. But to tell you the truth, I always kid that it's not far from the truth that the pendulum of change started returning about a half-hour after I became dean. And so I spent five years desperately trying to hold on to the changes that had been made and the principles behind those changes, and it was pretty much a losing battle. It was like holding back that pendulum and holding it back and holding it back, and after five years giving up."

⁴⁰ The main architects of AC were David Bramhall and David Houston, both Economics professors, and John Townsend, a professor in Physics. Bramhall, Houston, and Townsend were deeply committed to undergraduate education reform, participating in the Pittsburgh Free University, which opened in 1967, and other projects. Among the core faculty of AC were individuals from English, Math, Anthropology, Speech, Black Studies, Life Sciences, Linguistics, Sociology, and Music.

sheet indicates that the university received the collection from an unknown source in 1990, a full ten years after the program's cancellation.

Because of the archive's relatively small size, as well as its apparent randomness, it would be erroneous to claim that the work found in it is representative of students' writing across the program, thus making it difficult to pose theories about the program based on the types of material found *and not found* in the archive. For instance, the archive contains virtually no examples of traditional academic discourse genres such as literary-interpretive essays, research papers, or lab reports, yet to say that the omission of these types of writing indicates a disavowal of academic discourse in the program generally would vastly oversimplify matters. While it appears to be the case that students were free to experiment with their writing, based on the available evidence, it would also be accurate to say that students practiced traditional academic genres of writing as well, even though no actual examples appear in the archive.⁴¹

Another interesting problem raised by the archive concerns authorship. It's not uncommon to come across anonymous texts, with the author choosing not to identify herself or, as is the case with students' self-evaluations, with an author's name being withheld in order to protect privacy. Sometimes authorship is explicitly collective, as in the case of program newsletters, which were the responsibility of students in the newsletter workshop. Other texts in the archive are co-written by students and faculty, making it difficult to determine whether or not, or to what degree, a text is indeed student-authored. For instance, in 1975, several AC faculty and students traveled to various alternative educational centers in New England and wrote up their research in a group journal that they pieced together from different individually

⁴¹ Student evaluations, which were written by both students and faculty and collected as part of each students' portfolio of work for a given semester, indicate that many students chose to write research papers, lab reports, bibliographies, and interpretive essays to satisfy course requirements.

written entries, none of which name an author. As I read through this journal, entitled “Total Bus,” I determined student authorship based on contextual clues found in each entry. For example, in one entry that describes the group’s visit to the University of Connecticut’s Inner College, the writer compares the two programs and recalls the political climate on Pitt’s campus in the late-sixties from which the AC emerged:

The inspiration for A.C. also came during a time when Pitt students and faculty were demonstrating (demanding) control of their education (the famous sit-in in the computer center was the 1st spark). After working for several years exploring possibilities and writing proposals the freshman program Alternative Curriculum came to be. We don’t believe it is a fluke, a passing trend (fad?) in education.⁴²

Although AC students would have been aware of the program’s early history, the writer here and elsewhere speaks as someone who witnessed firsthand these and other events that happened seven years ago, which suggests that this passage was likely penned by a faculty member and not a student. The overall style of the entry further suggests that a faculty member wrote it. The entry, dated April 22, has a title, “Inner College at U. Conn.” It runs over a single-spaced page, with clearly delineated paragraphs. The entry as a whole follows a tight and nuanced narrative structure, beginning with the group’s drive into campus and initial encounter with the Inner College. The writer, attuned to the metaphoric significance of the program’s setting, lays out this scene this way:

⁴² The “famous sit-in” mentioned here refers to one held in 1969 by Pitt’s Black Action Society (BAS). Growing increasingly dissatisfied with the administration’s slow response to their demands that the university institute a black studies program and increase the recruitment and enrollment of African American students and faculty, BAS members and sympathizers organized a sit-in in the University’s Computer Center.

We drove around the impressive rural campus of red brick buildings separated by stretches of green, thinking: “so this is what ‘campus’ means.” We asked directions to the Inner College and were told to go up a cinder hill (away from the main part of campus) that leads to a parking lot, the Inner College was on the left. Their space consists of two trailers. The space and location we later found to be indicative of alternative programs at large Universities.

The writer then shifts his focus to the Inner Program’s organization and the group’s conversations with students and teachers, where they learn that the program will shut down soon, causing the writer to “wonder if this would be us in a few years.” With this realization, the writer ends the piece by recalling the early history of AC and comparing it to the Inner College program. “I.C. had problems,” the writer says, “like we have problems. From talking to people and from reading the magazine they put out...I see that I.C. accomplished many tremendous things.”

Other entries convey less of an essayistic quality, such as one dated April 29th that similarly narrates the events of one day, but does so in one paragraph. “An intense, exciting day,” the author begins. She continues,

I saw New Words Bookstore and I spent about \$15.00 on a stack of stimulating Women’s literature, and I saw much more that looked appealing. And coincidentally tonight we were talking about sexual/social relations and what steps are necessary for overcoming sexism. Dave J. and Catherine had an amazing session. Then Bill Oliver and Jane talked about sexist singers—Joni Mitchell. [...] More—we went to Italian for dinner (we took over the restaurant). Then we went to a most amazing evening of Native Americans for Wounded

Knee. Then we danced to the drums and clapped to the rhythms, and could have sung all night with Perriwinkle.

What strikes me about this passage, especially when compared to the one on the Inner College, is the writer's decision not to develop the various points she raises. What exactly was so stimulating about the books she picked up? I find myself wondering. What was so amazing about Dave J and Catherine's session? Why, according to Bill and Jane, should Joni Mitchell be considered a sexist singer? Who is Perriwinkle? These gaps point to someone less practiced in writing narrative, which leads me to conclude that this passage, and others like it, was composed by a student. Unlike the writer of the Inner College passage, the writer here never pauses to reflect on what she observes; instead, she seems more concerned with keeping a passing record of the events that happened that day and preserving her initial reactions.

Finally, many of the writings found in the archive appear out of context, leaving very few clues that would shed light on the occasion for which a particular piece was written. No assignments are found in the archive, and only a handful of syllabi survive that broadly spell out the type of writing students will be asked to do in a given course. Because of this, it is difficult to determine the motivation behind a piece of writing, to conclude whether it was assigned or whether it was written to satisfy a student's personal and/or political need. Early on, when I first encountered the "Total Bus" journal mentioned above, I assumed that students were the driving force behind it. However, when I interviewed Stephanie Flom, a former AC student and undergraduate teaching assistant, I learned that it was instead started by Dan Tannacito, a faculty member in the program, and that students were frequently assigned entries to write. Flom recalls, for instance, that Physics professor Julia Thompson assigned her an entry, which she remembers writing some time afterwards, although she told me other students wrote their entries

during the trip. According to Flom, “She [Thompson] thought we needed a processing, especially the women on the trip.”

Despite these and other complexities, the student writing found in these archives reveals several stylistic patterns that offer a glimpse into students’ attitudes toward language and writing.

4.2. Writing Together Honestly

Students’ writing in the AC reflects a concern with intertextuality, collaboration, and honesty, values that were reinforced in the workshops, offerings, fieldwork, and other projects carried out by students in the program. To illustrate this, I want to briefly look at some of these writing projects before turning to specific examples of students’ personal writing. Some of these projects take on aspects of personal writing, including the use of first-person narration and a concern with features of everyday life, although they don’t fit neatly into the category of personal writing. They do, however, offer a glimpse into how students engaged with writing practices such as intertextuality, collaboration, and honesty, and, through this, reveal students’ complex attitudes toward language and writing.

The first example comes from a program newsletter published around 1977 (see Appendix B, Fig. 1). This cover page is not personal in the same way that a diary entry is personal; for instance, it lacks a first-person perspective. However, students in the AC would have understood the newsletter as personal in the sense that it acts as a community journal recording the thoughts and activities of AC members. Many AC students and faculty were attracted to the community journal, as suggested by the following passage from an October 1974 bulletin:

One suggestion is to print up personal, individual articles on impressions of AC, along with art, photography, and creative literature. This would result in a magazine format. The other idea calls for a community journal in which people, workshops, offering presentors can contribute on a day to day level. We may choose to keep the journal in epic form (a continuous ‘poem’ or story of experiences). (1)⁴³

The writer, echoing claims made by compositionists who advocate journaling in the first-year college writing class, goes on to state that the value of such a project comes from the perspective it potentially offers students: “We would begin to use retrospection. So very much is happening all the time. If we take some time out to write/think about it, somehow it all begins to make sense.”⁴⁴

The cover page from a 1977 AC newsletter vividly illustrates students’ interest in composing collages and other types of writing that are highly intertextual. The compiler of this page cuts, pastes, and revises several fragments from *The New York Times*, juxtaposing them with illustrations that add another layer of intertextuality. For instance, the image of the royal banquet at the bottom of the page refers to the patron saint of writers and supposed writer of the *Book of Revelation*, St. John the Divine, whose feast day falls on December 27th, one month prior to the newsletter publication. The writer seems to be making several different points with

⁴³ The newsletter workshop was regularly offered over the seven years of the program’s existence. Students in this workshop published weekly newsletters containing announcements, policy statements, workshop proposals, editorials, book reviews, poems, newspaper clippings, random thoughts, and jokes. The titles of these newsletters, which changed on a weekly basis, reflect students’ seriousness and humor—“Antfarm,” “Finding Our Way!?” and “AC & Nues Vews and Bliews” being just a few of the titles students came up with.

⁴⁴ Toby Fulwiler, for instance, argues that journals show “writers becoming conscious of who they are, what they stand for, how and why they differ from others” (3).

his citation of popular journalism, presidential speech, and religious/historical imagery. One of these has to do with the AC itself. By including the masthead from *The New York Times*, the writer subtly compares it to the more humble AC newsletter, suggesting a broader reach for the newsletter, the program, and its ideas—a desire announced more explicitly in the handwritten command “Go national!” in the left-hand margin. It is as if the writer is urging his colleagues to think of the program in the broader scope of national political and educational reform.

Another argument concerns honesty, a theme expressed in the headline at the top of the page and in the quotes from former President Ford. The headline raises the idea of acting, of playing a role, a position Ford disavows in his comments about trust. Sounding like a proponent of “plain English,” the former President declares, “Trust is not cleverly shading words so that each separate audience can hear what it wants to hear, but saying plainly and simply what you mean, and meaning what you say.” Here Ford gives voice to an ethical approach toward language, one that history and the subsequent quotes tell us he never remotely lived up to. Ford’s lies about running for President and pardoning Richard Nixon sound all that more damning coming on the heels of Jimmy Carter’s inauguration, a public display of power alluded to in the drawing at the bottom of the page, just a week earlier.

Thus, embedded in this criticism of Ford is an argument about approaching language honestly, an idea especially relevant in the wake of Watergate and the political machinations that followed. Honesty, of course, is a controversial term often associated with personal writing. Defenders of personal writing spanning from Ken Macrorie to Jeffrey Berman confess that determining whether a piece of writing is honest is an impossible task, and they further admit that personal essays are highly constructed, presenting readers with a selective, far from honest, version of the self. Nevertheless, both teachers build a pedagogy that provokes students to at

least strive toward telling truths. Berman, in elaborating on his approach toward honesty in the classroom, quotes Macrorie's suggestion that teachers "Tell students: 'No one speaks truth always. We all lie, consciously and unconsciously. I ask you to try for truths. I am going to try. You will be astonished by the difference that is made by the constant effort to raise the level of truth in this room'" (qtd. in Berman 283). In addition to being associated (although not necessarily equated) with truthfulness, honesty is frequently linked with authenticity, particularly by skeptics of personal writing, who, like James Berlin, criticize the assumption made by so-called "expressivists" like Macrorie, Peter Elbow, and others, that the work of personal writing is "to secure an authentic identity and voice" (153).

The debate about honesty as it relates to a supposed authentic self has a long and drawn out history in Composition, especially concerning the issue of "expressive" rhetoric and pedagogy. However, this debate does not add to a reading of the cover page from the AC newsletter because the type of honesty it invokes centers less on authenticity than it does truthfulness, political truthfulness particularly. The writer of this page confirms George Orwell's belief that "political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible" and condemns Ford's and other politicians' manipulation of language to achieve political objectives ("Politics" 172-3). Read in more positive terms, the writer uses Ford's quotes against him to make the very serious point that language is something to experiment with, as the writer demonstrates by composing a collage, but that writing and speaking dishonestly can have serious consequences, as it did for Ford.

Other writings by students convey a similar attitude toward language and experimentation. One example is an essay entitled "I Got the Munchies for Your Love by Bootsie's Rubber Band," originally published in an undated newsletter carrying the title "Hey

Buddy, Got a Minute? If You Want Ralph's Life Spared Send Money to Art" (see Appendix B, Fig. 2). Like the cover page from the newsletter discussed above, this prose piece is intertextual, its title referring specifically to "Got the Munchies for Your Love," a song co-written by R&B/funk artists Bootsy Collins, George Clinton, and other members of the band P. Funk for Collins' 1977 solo LP *Ahh...The Name Is Bootsy, Baby!* The song is packed full of double entendres, evident here in part of its chorus:

Your love is a kind of special treat
Oh, personal stash
And I'm selfish with your love you see
Your love is kinda sweet, sweet enough to eat
I'm hooked on you chocolate stuff, I've got the
munchies for your love

The title bears little relation to the rest of the essay, which lists the meaningless information individuals accumulate daily. The piece is filled with scenes of literacy and education—lecture halls and time spent reading magazines or listening to the news—that yield only trivia, which the writer frequently identifies as personal information concerning public figures. For example, knowing Richard Nixon's unsavory opinion of Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau is trivial, as is the birth of Jimmy Carter's grandson.

However, the most apparent stylistic feature of this essay is the writer's decision to change the point of view, to move from the first-person perspective in the first sentence to the second-person perspective beginning with "While brushing your teeth," which begins the third paragraph. The essay starts as a personal, day-in-the-life piece whose first sentence promises readers an account of Gale's thoughts on trivia, that eventually becomes, in Gale's shift to

second-person narration, a subtle and uncontroversial argument about the trivial nature of American politics and culture. In using the second person, Gale assumes readers will identify with the anonymous college student whose day she describes. Like the anonymous newsletter cover page, Gale's essay reflects a dual attitude towards language: on the one hand, language is used in ways to obscure truth or prevent communication (as in the case of trivia, for instance); on the other hand, it can be creatively deployed (through collage, intertextuality, and inconsistent point of view) to open up dialogue.

One way students engaged in this type of dialogue was through collaborative writing projects. Students' interest in collaborative writing that explored the tension between the individual and the social made sense in a program that encouraged students to think about how their individual beliefs and knowledges could be further explored in the academy. Faculty explicitly encouraged students to see their individual experiences in social terms. Ed Ochester, an English faculty member who occasionally taught the AC writing workshop, expresses this idea in comments he made on one students' project. Student evaluations were consistently a problem in the AC, and concerns faculty had about how student work would be assessed prevented the program from being established until 1973. To ease students' concerns about evaluations, an October 1973 program newsletter reprinted Ochester's assessment of one student's collection of poems. Besides suggesting that the poems rely less on poetic diction, Ochester says to the student in his own colloquial language, "I'm also interested in the fact that a lot of these don't make connections between yr life & the social life. How can that be? I'm saying this tongue-in-cheek but I still mean it: how can a radical write ego-poems? that is, how come I don't see radical analyses? (Not slogans, analyses.)" Here Ochester refrains from telling the student to choose either the personal *or* the political; instead, he asks the poet to further

explore the connections between the personal and the political. According to Ochester, investigating experience can be one way to engage in radical analysis, so long as one does not resort to slogans or navel-gazing.

One specific collaborative project was published in the same newsletter as “I Got the Munchies for Your Love” (see Appendix B, Fig. 3). As the preface to the poem makes clear, members of the writing workshop collaborated on a single poem in which “One person wrote a few lines and the next person wrote a few more, having only seen the last line written by the previous person.” If approached in terms of content, the poem that follows is largely a disappointing string of clichés that add up to the idea that existence is not without meaning, which it’s the task of each individual to provide. “People make their own future,” the poets write. “Struggle causes change.”

Read within the context of its collaborative production, though, the poem comes across as ironic. There appears to be little, if any, plan guiding the composition of the poem—each writer only saw the lines written by the previous person—which runs counter to the sentiment expressed throughout much of the poem. However, the poem takes a turn toward the end, where it moves away from repeating clichés and begins to think in very abstract terms about collaboration:

my purpose to blend so
well, that we function together smoothly
me using you at the time I can’t use myself.
I need that backing to pick me up
and go foreward balancing between your motions
while you go forward or Backward Depending

on your point of view or Position
or your Lack of it (3)

These lines bring readers back to the poem's composition, in which writers performed the kind of negotiation described here, picking up on and extending what each member of the workshop had to say. From this angle, the commonplace sentiment of the poem becomes unimportant; what seems most important for these writers is *process*, specifically the collaborative process behind the poem's production.

Finally, and this is a point especially relevant to the larger argument of this chapter, the writers of this poem decide to postpone meaning, focusing on performance instead. They admit that they leave the poem unedited, something they could seem to care less about; they furthermore declare, in a similarly resigned, almost boastful fashion, that the poem "might not make very much sense." This decision to bracket off meaning and focus instead on performance, I argue, is characteristic of students' personal writings as well. As I will go on to demonstrate, in their personal writings students typically refuse to represent their experiences so that they conform to recognizable themes or morals, a tactic that puts this writing at odds with the model of personal writing taught throughout contemporary writing classrooms.

4.3. Transformation and the Reflexive Turn

Thomas Newkirk's idea of the "reflexive turn" is useful for understanding the transformational imperative at work in the version of personal writing taught in many composition classrooms. Newkirk identifies the "reflexive turn" as a distinguishing feature of the personal essay, a genre whose persuasiveness depends not on a writer's certainty, as in many forms of argumentative

writing, but on her vulnerability. According to Newkirk, “The personal essay dramatizes thought by showing the writer as someone open to the potentially transforming effects of a life sensitively encountered” (*Performance of Self* 13). To create this persona, personal essayists frequently expose the innermost, often physical, details of their lives to readers. Seneca, for instance, tells readers about his asthma, Jorge Luis Borges ruminates on his blindness, Joan Didion divulges her psychological history.

Coupled with this impulse to expose one’s secrets and flaws is the personal essayist’s tendency to draw meaning from these experiences, to show what knowledge she has gleaned from experience and what readers may in turn take away. As Newkirk puts it, “Even confessions of inadequacy, insensitivity, and cruelty are redeemed by those reflexive turns that show the writer has—often, it seems, through the act of writing itself—achieved a measure of self-understanding and moral growth” (*Performance of Self* 13). The essayist Phillip Lopate, whose work Newkirk draws on, offers a more sinister portrayal: “The personal essayist is a Houdini who, having confessed his sins and peccadilloes and submitted voluntarily to the reader’s censoring handcuffs, suddenly slips them off with the malicious ease by claiming, *I am more than the perpetrator of that shameful act; I am the knower and commentator as well*” (xviii, original emphasis).

The “reflexive turn” marks that place in an essay where the writer moves from confessing to interpreting, where, as Newkirk puts it, the writer “shifts from rendering to reflection” (*Performance of Self* 12). He quotes this passage from George Orwell’s canonical essay “Shooting an Elephant” as an example:

And it was at that moment, as I stood there, with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility, of the white man’s dominion in the East.

Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leader of the piece; but in reality I was only the absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. (qtd. in *Performance of Self* 13)

Early in the essay, in a passage Newkirk doesn't deal with, Orwell makes clear to readers that he detested British imperialism before this event, although he wasn't yet able to say why. "I could get nothing into perspective," he writes. "I was young and ill-educated and I had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East" (155). To hear Orwell tell it, this silence is shattered as he stands between the Burmese villagers and the elephant and apprehends, as if in the blink of an eye, the perspective on imperialism he lacked in the beginning of the essay. Seemingly no longer young, Orwell transforms at this moment into someone conscious and critical of his own thoughts and actions.

Teachers demand that students perform similar transformations in personal writing assignments, which often ask writers to ponder the significance of pivotal moments in their young lives. Looking back over assignments I designed for basic and introductory writing courses, I come across passages like this one that makes such a demand on students:

For your first exercise, I'd like you to try something similar to what Mike Rose does in his book *Lives on the Boundary*. That is, I'd like you to remember a particular moment from your own experience as a student. This moment should be one that you think is important. It could be a time when you were excited by something that happened in class—or puzzled, upset, whatever. Thoroughly describe this moment and interpret it. What makes this moment interesting to

you? When you look back at this moment, what insight does it give you about school or about yourself as a student?

Such an assignment, especially in its final question, presumes that students will write a narrative of development that illustrates how, through their reading and writing, they have reached a more critical understanding of their education. I expect students, like Orwell, to gain perspective where they presumably had none before.

Newkirk would respond by saying that an assignment such as this one unrealistically presumes that students have at their disposal a collection of life-altering experiences to write about. In addition, it privileges seriousness over pleasure, significance over triviality, interpretation over sensation, and therefore ignores an alternative tradition of essay writing rooted in the arts of observation. Tracing this tradition back to Joseph Addison's and Richard Steele's work in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, and continuing on into E.B. White's and others' "Notes and Comments" in *The New Yorker*, Newkirk proposes that this genre, in which the writer's "goal is often nothing more than an ironic bemused delight in the diversity of human experience," has a place in college writing classrooms ("The Dogma of Transformation" 259). In the observational essay the writer adopts the position of the idler or *flaneur*, the leisured gentleman who concerns himself less with analyzing the world around him and more with capturing it into his gaze. Not surprisingly, Newkirk finds that numerous themes written by students at Harvard in the 1880s and at the University of New Hampshire in the 1930s follow this genre. Here is an excerpt from one, written by a student at New Hampshire in 1935, that Newkirk cites:

There's a window full of good looking pipes. Say, there're some beauties in there. Mmmm—that one in the center—it would be a pleasure to smoke yourself

to death with a pipe like that. No sudden mouthfuls of hellish-tasting juice; no rank and soggy heels to assault your nose, mouth, throat and cause nice people to cast wry meaningful looks in your direction. (qtd. in “The Dogma of Transformation” 259).

The value of such essays, for Newkirk and, he claims, for the instructors who taught them, comes from the extent to which the writer captures an experience in language, a practice that pays dividends in the classroom: it “help[s] students claim lived experience by sharpening perception and stressing skills of description that help take writers beyond and beneath the habitual and taken-for-granted” (“The Dogma of Transformation” 266). As the student above makes clear, especially in his comment that he prefers the pipe whose smoothness will not cause people to look his way, the imperative of observational essays is aesthetic and not political: he aims not to disturb the status quo, but to render experience in such a way that readers may share it with him.

However, Newkirk fails to address several important questions concerning observational writing: What criteria should teachers use to judge whether an essay has thoroughly captured an experience? How can teachers draw on the observational genre to introduce students to forms of writing valued across the university curriculum? In addition, the observational essay may open up alternative possibilities for students’ personal writing, but it also potentially reproduces the problems many students face concerning writerly authority, the very issue Newkirk seeks to address. While nuanced description is an important step in a writer’s development, Newkirk’s version of the observational essay figures students as bystanders, a role many students already problematically take on when entering the writing classroom. Some students may be able to pull off the critical ironic detachment the observational genre calls for, but others will likely see this

genre as an invitation to fall back on familiar writing strategies that encourage the kind of objectivity Newkirk seems to affirm but that reinforce a rule-governed approach toward writing (i.e., “Is it okay to use ‘I’ in my papers?”). Far too many students already believe their writing has little or no value within and beyond the classroom walls, and a writing pedagogy centered on observational vignettes may further confirm this belief. In other words, Newkirk replaces one extreme, the transformational essay and its commitment to critical scrutiny, with another extreme, that of the observational essay and its potential lack of engagement.

Students’ personal writing in the AC, I argue, falls between these two extremes: students typically resist the urge to generalize or draw moral lessons from their experiences, as the transformational genre calls for, and they construct themselves as actors rather than passive observers.

4.4. Journal Writing in the Alternative Curriculum

Reflective forms of writing like the journal played an important role in the program’s focus on the whole individual. In part, journals served a bureaucratic function—specifically, they provided students a space in which to monitor their learning, an idea made clear in a handout to students explaining evaluations: “You’ll be encouraged to keep a file of things you do, comments by faculty members, self-evaluations or journals, lists of books you’ve read, and so on.” But journals also functioned as way for students to generate ideas for more finalized projects. Among the projects completed in the first year of the program were several that explicitly relied upon journaling as a heuristic practice. Some of these included projects entitled “Self-evaluation; discussions, journals and essay,” “Working for the *University Times*; a journal

and essay,” and “Becoming a volunteer fireman, a journal and a presentation.” Each of these titles suggests that journals existed as one part of a larger research and writing project.

There existed other areas in the AC curriculum where journal writing served more than a heuristic purpose. For instance, David Bramhall, one of the founders of the program, led a workshop entitled “On Keeping a Journal.” A radical political economist who was deeply committed to university education reform, Bramhall was the public face of the program, often appearing in campus newspaper articles profiling the AC (see Oswalt, for example). Bramhall’s description of the journal writing class begins by connecting the work students will do in the workshop with the goals of the AC as a whole and alludes to the importance self-reflective forms of writing like journals play in the program:

We’ve probably already urged this [keeping a journal] on you—Why? Because in a sense this is your continuing dialogue with yourself—that’s the purpose and you won’t make it if you try to write it for anyone else—a teacher, posterity, or even a loved one. If you do decide to show parts of it to someone later, that’s like telling someone your thoughts—that’s fine, but you didn’t think them in the first place for the purpose of telling. And since A-C is partly about getting in touch with yourself, it’s very appropriate.

The description goes on to describe the course readings, which include the chapter “Keeping a Journal” from Ken Macrorie’s composition textbook *Telling Writing* (1970); excerpts from Henry David Thoreau’s and Simone de Beauvoir’s published journals; a student journal originally printed in a 1970 issue of *Change* magazine, “The Education of Kate Haracz: Journal of an Undergraduate”; and portions of journals written by AC students from the previous year.

Of course, journals, diaries, and daybooks served heuristic and reflective functions in composition and literature classrooms beyond the AC, but in terms of composition theory, journal writing is most frequently associated with so-called “expressive” rhetoric and pedagogy. To understand more thoroughly Bramhall’s approach toward journal writing, we might turn to two figures long connected to journal writing, Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie, both of whose works were taught in the AC. (Macrorie’s ideas on journal writing, you’ll recall, were assigned reading in Bramhall’s workshop, and, according to an announcement made in an AC newsletter, a separate workshop based on Elbow’s idea of the “teacherless writing class,” which he outlines in his 1973 book *Writing without Teachers*, took place in 1976).

In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow envisions journaling as one practice enabling individuals to overcome their anxiety about writing and thereby gain control over the writing process. He writes,

If you are serious about wanting to improve your writing, the most useful thing you can do is keep a freewriting diary. Just ten minutes a day. Not a complete account of your day; just a brief mind sample for each day. You don’t have to think hard or prepare or be in the mood: without stopping, just write whatever words come out—whether or not you are thinking or in the mood. (9)

For Elbow, the freewriting diary becomes a place for writers to find and try out ideas before incorporating them into a more finalized piece of writing. He cautions readers that if they follow his method they “will have piles of rubble, but you will probably also have a lot of words, phrases, and sentences that seem important. Pick out these good bits. Strip away the rubble” (10).

Macrorie takes a different tack than Elbow. Labeling diaries as an essentially immature and feminine form of writing, which Cinthia Gannett identifies as a characteristic criticism of diaries, Macrorie too sees the journal as an essential tool for writers.⁴⁵ He states, “The man who dreams of becoming a writer spends his time dreaming of becoming a writer. The man who intends to become a writer keeps a journal and works the mine” (123). But whereas Elbow’s diary exists as a means for writers to talk to themselves, Macrorie’s journal carries with it a public dimension: “All good journals observe one fundamental: they do not speak privately. They can be read with profit by other persons than the writer. They may be personal and even intimate, but if the writer wants an entry to be seen by others, it will be such that they can understand, enjoy, be moved by” (123). For Macrorie, the writings kept in a journal are provisional, reserved so that they may eventually be incorporated into more substantial works, but they are not scribbles; at their best they retain the attributes of good writing in general, like the following entry written by a student, which Macrorie explains “records telling facts which take the reader through the door into some essences”:

I have drained six cartons of lemonade and twelve glasses of tap water since this afternoon, and two quarts of milk. I have a fever but am on my feet, slushing off to class—reading, writing, and I get paid today. (qtd. in Macrorie 123)

Bramhall’s approach toward journaling has similarities to both Elbow’s and Macrorie’s models. Like Elbow, he sees journal writing as an essentially private activity. He tells students that they may share their entries with others, “but you didn’t think them in the first place for the purpose of telling”; instead, keeping a journal is “about getting in touch with yourself.” Because

⁴⁵ Gannett notes “the proliferation of overlapping names we use to describe different journal-writing practices, with criticisms of the journal clustering around the seemingly synonymous, but vaguely feminine, or ‘feminized,’ term diary, which has somehow become a magnet for nebulous, negative perceptions” (100-1).

of this, journal writers need not pay attention to audience, insofar as that audience exceeds themselves, a point Bramhall reiterates when explaining why he selected the course readings: “The other journal excerpts show some very different human beings speaking honestly to themselves about their lives.” He also seems to agree with Macrorie’s belief that journal keepers should strive to record “telling facts”; in the course description, Bramhall tells students that “the main thing stressed in the Macrorie chapter included here is to write concretely—and to write thoughts and feelings rather than mainly a record of actions.”

Yet Bramhall’s approach toward journal writing also differs from Elbow’s and Macrorie’s methods, specifically concerning the relationship of journaling to other forms of writing. Whereas Elbow and Macrorie perceive journaling as a pre-writing exercise that increases the power and efficiency of students’ formal writing, Bramhall suggests that journals can stand by themselves as serious pieces of writing. It’s telling, for instance, that Bramhall includes several commercially published journals on the workshop’s reading list, including “The Education of Kate Haracz: Journal of an Undergraduate,” which he admits affected him: “The last entry is still a real shocker to me.” Bramhall nowhere states that the journals students will write should somehow feed into the writing they perform elsewhere in the curriculum, nor does he adopt the moralistic tone taken by Elbow and Macrorie. Here, for example, is the final paragraph of the course description:

So try it. Don’t feel you have to write every day, but when you have an idea, an impression, an experience, a new way of seeing something (or yourself), write it down in a real paragraph so you can recapture it later. Argue with yourself when you feel yourself divided about something. You can always rethink and write new feelings about a past entry—you’re not committed forever

to a first impression. But let go some, be honest with yourself, and have fun with it!

Throughout this passage Bramhall brings up the idea of change: he encourages students to look for conflict in their own thinking and to continually rethink their attitudes and emotions. Yet he stops short of envisioning change in terms of transformation, for his comments suggest that change is ongoing and never complete. No matter where students end up in their thinking, they “can always rethink and write new feelings about a past entry.”

Included in the file on Bramhall’s journal-writing workshop are photocopies of three anonymous student journals, ones that he presumably included among the course readings. Bramhall’s decision to include these journals with the other class texts suggests that they fit his standards on journal writing; therefore, I want to turn to one of these journals to show how Bramhall’s pedagogy may have translated into students’ writing.

Looked at as a whole, the collection of entries that make up this journal tell the story of one student’s gradual acceptance of the AC and open education. In the very first entry, dated September 9th, the student voices his skepticism toward journal writing and wonders how it will affect his educational and career ambitions, a concern shared by many AC students. The entry begins,

So far this journal is being kept. But for how long.

This is suppose to be the new modern way of learning and I do wish to learn for 2 grand I better grasp all I can.

It’s not that difficult but what happens when I decide to transfer. Would I have actually attained any type of education. Well for my first year what the _____. I’ll get over.

The mixture of skepticism and resignation the journal writer expresses here finds its way into other entries as well, especially one that covers his experience at a group meeting:

Core group meeting. Well for one I maintained to keep my guard up.

Very defensive.

Everyone watched and appeared to tear me away with their eyes. But it was cool.

I'll survive this ordeal for one semester. I pray.

The writer's description of himself at the meeting corresponds to the attitude he adopts in his prose; cold and aloof, he acts as if he's not bothered by the hostility he feels. In his next entry, he strikes a similar note of sarcasm, although he suggests that his attitude toward journal writing has changed somewhat: "September and one month of this liberated program is over. I made it through this one and I feel I'll make it through the next. My journal is not like I wished it to be."

This change in attitude becomes more apparent in the next excerpt, which discusses a moment in Bramhall's journal workshop:

To day Dave passed out a paper titled "Introduction."

I would think it would be profitable if all students were permitted to read the thoughts, ideas and beliefs these six students had. With a little more writing of this type maybe the college today would not be filled with people whom should not be there.

(Not because of their potential to succeed in college, but for the mere fact of trying to make life pleasant for themselves and others. Over burdened with *knowledge* and *not education*"). (Original emphasis)

This entry represents the most pivotal moment in the journal because here, for the very first time, the student demonstrates his membership in the group. Unlike in previous entries, where he positions himself as a detached observer, here he seems to adopt a position on learning, one that aligns closely with the perspective of many in the program. Sounding very much like an insider, and echoing a popular distinction made by defenders of alternative education, including those in the AC, he criticizes the majority of his college classmates for being “Over burdened with *knowledge and not education.*”⁴⁶

Latter entries of the journal temper the enthusiasm of this passage, and it ends leaving readers to wonder how the student will adjust to the traditional curriculum. In the final passages, the writer assesses his reading from the semester, a lengthy list of books that includes Thoreau’s *Walden* as well as *Walden II* by B.F. Skinner, and African-American autobiographies such as Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968), Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* (1945), and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964). He admits that he “was able to read and enjoy them because I was not forced to read them,” and goes so far as to say that had they been required he likely wouldn’t have read them at all: “I do not feel and in all honesty, know that if I had been forced to complete and read the preceding books I would have in some way tried to find a way out. Knowing myself I would have.”

Although the student represents himself as having changed over the course of the workshop, he resists declaring that some sort of revelatory transformation occurred in his thinking and learning. In other words, he stops short of performing the “reflexive turn” that Newkirk identifies as a generic characteristic of the personal essay; for instance, he hesitates to

⁴⁶ The student’s distinction between knowledge and education echoes similar categories invoked by open educational theorist John Holt, whose texts were assigned reading in the AC. In *Freedom and Beyond* (1972), Holt declares, “True education doesn’t quiet things down; it stirs them up. It awakens consciousness” (235).

announce that the AC has turned him into the ideal student who now, after having gone through the program, devours every book set before him, whether assigned or not. And even though he seems to have found some acceptance among his fellow AC students, he chooses not to pause and reflect on what this process says about him as an individual. Indeed, if his journal is any indication, he doesn't leave the program with a new sense of purpose about his education, but he does begin to draw some conclusions about his habits as a student and a learner, which, for him, seems to be satisfactory.

This absence of the “reflexive turn” appears in other student texts from the program, including community journals that resulted from the collaboration between students and faculty.

4.5. “A Moving Ghetto of Nomadic Education Junkies”

In addition to writing individual journals, students and faculty in the AC were attracted to the idea of the community journal as a way to capture the group dynamic that played such a large role in the program. One community journal that survives records the experiences of twenty-four AC students and faculty members who, in the spring of 1975, took their inquiry into alternative education one step further, chartered a bus, and for twenty-six days toured New England area alternative educational sites, women's centers, co-ops, and communes. On what simply came to be known as “the bus trip,” the travelers met with the potter and philosopher M.C. Richards at Juniata College; they shared ideas on alternative education with students and teachers at the Inner College at the University of Connecticut, the Boston Community School, Franconia College, Goddard College, and other institutions; they attended political lectures and teach-ins at Brandeis University and U Conn. Referring to themselves as a “moving ghetto of

nomadic education junkies,” the travelers recorded these and other experiences in a forty-nine-page journal that faculty member Dan Tannacito collected from separate individual journal entries, some of which students were assigned to write. The title of the journal, as it’s presented on the cover page, syntactically and formally resembles a poem, which contains visual elements as well—including small hand-drawn images of a bus and ivy (see Appendix B, Fig. 4). The title/poem brings together language from popular culture, like the trademarked term “Kleenex,” and literature—specifically “jaunces,” an obsolete word that appears in several of Shakespeare’s plays and metaphorically compares the bus to a prancing horse.⁴⁷ Yet it declares that the vague “new concept” experienced by trip members, as well as the communication of this concept, exceeds rhetoric. The word that most often gets repeated, of course, is “shared,” an idea that the emphasizes by having the word frequently disrupt the syntax of a particular phrasing, as is the case especially with the “shared” that falls below “beyond.” A rhetorical move, indeed, despite the writer’s claims to the contrary, because one of the themes that develops throughout the journal is that of the trip members’ relationships with one another—specifically, how they come together to debate and make sense of the experiences they share to themselves and to others.

Like most journals, the one produced by bus trip members presents certain difficulties for readers. Totalling thirty-odd entries that sometimes offer readers no contextual clues, or that sometimes fall out of chronological order, the journal and its narrative is made more opaque, yet also more interesting, due to the fact that its authorship, unlike most journals, is expressly collective. Each entry is anonymous, and no one perspective appears to be privileged in the text. An “Afterword” attached at the end of the journal, which lists everyone who took part in the trip,

⁴⁷ According to the *OED*, “jaunce,” which is believed by some textual critics to be an erroneous term for “jaunt,” appears in *Richard II* and the second quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*.

clarifies this. According to it, “This book is a kaleidoscopic impression of that trip. Many individuals contributed, but no authorship is explicitly identified—we lived it together, we let our thoughts flow together here.” This “kaleidoscopic” perspective is reinforced in the journal’s title, with its suggestion that the report attempts to capture the conceptual totality of the Ken Kesey-esque experience.⁴⁸

The writings collected in the journal serve different purposes, as well as offer multiple perspectives. Some entries provide a space for self-reflection, like this one written during the group’s visit to Boston College, shortly after they had taken on an additional passenger, Adrian, whom they had met at a commune called Shiloh House:

Adrian from Shiloh House is gone. I’ve had to let go of him too quickly. No control. The bus is repaired and things that have been pulling us apart are helping us to come together. Dave has left and I am a bit more on my own, now. I feel almost emotionless, cold, insensitive—a reaction?

Other entries focus less on self-analysis and instead report on an event that took place or on a location the group visited. For instance, the very first entry in the journal, dated April 19th, is a page-long quote from M.C. Richards—a potter and philosopher who wrote *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (1962), a book many in the program had read—taken from a conversation she had with the group. Later passages report on the different women’s centers the group visited, relaying information about these institutions’ finances, structures, agendas, and daily operations. Often times, writers quote from brochures or fliers gathered as part of their research, like this entry on the New Haven Women’s Liberation Center:

⁴⁸ It’s no coincidence that the Alternative Curriculum bus trip stirs up associations with Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Dan Tannacito describes the trip as his “brainchild, probably influenced by Ken Kesey who used to visit my house in Eugene with his Merry Pranksters when I was taking my doctorates at UO from 1965-72.”

The center has been in existence for about 5 years. It is not a Yale organization and most women that come to the center now are not Yale students. “The New Haven Women’s Liberation Center developed out of small meetings between friends working on political issues in New Haven in 1968-69. These meetings soon grew and attracted 30-60 women every Sunday evening, including a number of Yale graduate and undergraduate women.” (NHWLC) The center is funded by donations monthly pledges, \$5.00 fees from women joining the Connecticut Feminist Federal Credit Union and a current \$2,000 NIMH grant.

Passages like these, which present the group’s research, suggest that the writers imagined the journal to serve public, as well as private, needs. The research trip members conducted and wrote about in the journal—research that could take the form of a conversation the group had with someone involved in alternative education, as well as hard data collected by students scouring through other institutions’ promotional materials—could be used by leaders in the Alternative Curriculum and in other institutions across the campus, especially Pitt’s Women’s Center, to evaluate their organizations and generate new ideas.

In another type of entry found in the journal, writers attempt to represent their experiences by means other than research, reportage, or analysis. These more cryptic entries focus on intergroup politics, in essence dramatizing the open communicative practice that was seen as a hallmark of the program and its larger agenda. One example is a May 13th entry that gives a fragmented account of an “inward meeting” held by trip members at one student’s home in Philadelphia toward the end of the trip. The scattered and at times playful remarks, which run up to five pages, are “comprised of thoughts from the tape we made of that meeting,” according to the writer (or writers). “After our usual meeting about food and plans for the next day we

decided *this* time to stay up, tired or not and talk about: What affected us most? How did we feel? How did we work together—for each other and our goals? How did we lack? What would we change?”

What follows these opening remarks are a snippets of conversation that bring to light the group’s ideological differences with one another, and, going back to the “kaleidoscopic” perspective invoked in the journal’s “Afterword,” that bring together these perspectives as members collectively attempt to make sense of their experiences and their effects. As can be seen in one series of fragments from this entry, trip members share a range of emotions and experiences with one another (see Appendix B, Fig. 5). Juxtaposed alongside such humorous comments as “Why don’t we do an all nighter and cut out the middle” are other moments where participants discuss more weighty matters, such as criticisms of the trip (“I want feedback. Places I visited were so good for me. So many people doing so many things”) and emotional realizations (“A sense of oneness—touching. I feel the unity of this group and its affect on who we come in contact with”). One thread that runs throughout these comments, though, is the relationship between the individual and the group, as in this passage where one student declares that she has come to a new understanding of the group and her place in it:

There are very heavy things going on in the group. I have a tendency to stay on the fringe of groups—I dislike groups. I’ve become very absorbed in the group. Something that I needed at the time. I’ve studied each one of you people very much—I’ve really increased my understanding of each one of you. I’ve hated you all at least once or twice, but I’ve loved all of you much more than I even wanted to, I feel very good about the trip.

While this student seems to resolve the differences she had with the group, another student, on the very next page of the entry, declares that, for him, such differences are far from resolved. “Stopped talking about theoretical politics,” this student says. “We realized differences in the group we just got too one sided in our attempts to bring each other to enlightenment.” Rather than presenting this comment as an example of the group’s failure to come to a consensus, the compiler of this entry, in the fragment after this one, seems to say that this realization marks a sign of the trip’s success: “The whole trip’s been a gas,” this fragment reports one student as saying.

If this entry seems chaotic, that seems to be the point. In the words of one participant at the meeting, “20 different ways of looking at one thing—it’s much more beautiful.” The sense of chaos and, at times, failure that emerges from these fragments, which from our vantage point might appear to be counter-productive, corresponds to a particular approach toward experience, one that runs counter to the perspective called for in the “reflexive turn.” In the “reflexive turn,” the writer seeks to arrest experience, to assign it some stabilized meaning according to a normative set of themes and values: “This is what I’ve learned about imperialism,” to use Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant” as an example. In this entry, however, individual students do attempt such “reflexive turns” but no single viewpoint on the bus trip is dominant. What readers get instead are multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives; no single lesson seems to be learned.

4.6. Pedagogical Consequences

It would be easy to discount the writings students in the AC left behind; after all, they do not share many of the values writing instructors hold dear. Students wrote spontaneously and hastily, frequently deciding to leave their prose unedited. Going off into digressions, students' writing often lacks a central position or claim backed up by accepted forms of textual evidence. Students commonly tell readers how they *felt* about an experience, not how they *analyzed* it, which is what most of us as writing instructors prod students toward doing. Despite these problems, AC students' writing holds several potential lessons for teachers.

One of the charges levied against the teaching of personal writing is that it encourages students to draw shallow connections between their experience and critical thought, to equate, for instance, minor setbacks they have experienced in their young lives with larger social injustices, such as racism, illiteracy, and poverty. In my experiences working with students, I have learned that such problematic connections, when they do occur, largely result from the pressure students feel to link their experience to significant social themes. (I also want to make clear, however, that a great deal of students' writing does not deal with social injustices superficially, as too many of our students do unfortunately experience episodes of discrimination and violence.) As Newkirk helps make clear, students implicitly learn this tactic through their instructors' tacit reinforcement of literary idealizations of the personal essay embodied in the "reflexive turn." Students' personal writing in the AC, however, strays from this idealization and, instead of generalizing experience according to established moral and thematic categories, puts forward multiple and competing interpretations. Encouraging students to consider such multiple and competing interpretations of experience in their writing, to view experience from a variety of angles within a single essay, can provide students with a strategy for exploring in more

complex terms the associations (and disassociations) between their experiences and the experiences of others.

Another related issue concerns teachers' ethical responsibilities toward students' personal writing, particularly in cases where students confess to actions, which may or may not be true, that the teacher finds morally repugnant. To avoid this conflict, many teachers simply ban personal writing from their classrooms, as Dan Morgan discusses: "Here is a more radical solution, seriously contemplated by one of my colleagues: eliminate the personal narrative altogether" (323). Another solution, proposed by Richard Miller is to make such essays "teachable objects," whereby potentially inflammatory writing, instead of being censored, becomes the occasion to discuss the effects and consequences of language. Miller writes,

But for those courses that take as their subject how language works in the world, the central concern should be to provide students with moments taken from their own writing as well as from the writing collected in published texts where the written word is powerful. In such classrooms, "teaching the conflicts" is not simply an empty slogan plastered over a practice that means "business as usual," but an actual set of practices whereby the conflicts that capture and construct both the students and their teachers become the proper subject of study for the course.

(396)

Student writing from the AC, however, shows that student autobiographical writing need not be so confessional as to be avoided, that personal writing can be engaging without the author confessing to some reprehensible behavior from their past. Confession, after all, could be considered one strategy students adopt to resist the invasion of privacy they sometimes see in personal writing assignments. Students often adopt the role of the penitent, sometimes

confessing to utterly fictional actions, because they think that is what teachers want to hear, not because they are interested in revealing their “true” inner selves to teachers.

In this chapter I have shown how teachers and students in the Alternative Curriculum experimented with journal writing, seeing in it an opportunity to speak collectively to one another and to readers outside the program as well. I examine this concept of student collectivity further in the next chapter, where I look at senior orations delivered by students at Brown University commencement exercises in the sixties and seventies. In delivering these addresses as part of a tremendously ritualized public event, students occupied the difficult position of representing both the ideal student speaking on behalf of the university and the ideal *radical* student speaking on behalf of the student movement—competing identities, each carrying a different set of rhetorical expectations, that students navigate in their oral and written performances.

5. **“BUT AT LEAST I HAVE LEARNED THE INADEQUACY OF ORATORY”:
COMMENCEMENT ORATIONS AT BROWN UNIVERSITY**

Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

In this hope I accept the topic which not only usage but the nature of our association seem to prescribe to this day, —the AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Year by year we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what light new days and events have thrown on his character and his hopes.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (1837)

I must talk about protest, student protest. Moral and intellectual criticism of our society is increasingly focused in the university—the administration, alumni, faculty, and students. I shall say a few words only about the last, the student, as social critic. The student: consumer for advertisers, worry for parents, question mark for teachers, acne for doctors, pest for politicians, fodder for armies, —the student.

—Scott Russell Sanders, “In Defense of Diatribes Against Practically Everything, or, Why We Shouldn’t Just Hang Everyone Between Fifteen and Twenty-Five and Start Over” (1967)

This chapter departs from previous aspects of this study into sixties-era student writing, in that it does not focus primarily on students' autobiographical writing. Instead, it examines how the ideals of revisionist personal writing, as I have theorized it so far, were expressed—as well as challenged—in another genre of student performance, specifically commencement orations delivered by undergraduates at Brown University between 1962 and 1979.

These orations differ from the other student texts I have looked at so far because they were orally performed as well as written. But rather than perceiving these addresses as strictly oral, it would be more accurate to characterize them as instances of what Walter Ong would call “secondary orality,” or utterances influenced by the patterns of thought associated with literate behaviors. Writing in 1967, Ong claims that “The present orality is post-typographical, incorporating an individualized self-consciousness developed with the aid of writing and print and possessed of more reflectiveness, historical sense, and organized purposefulness than was possible in preliterate oral cultures” (301-2). While the so-called Great Divide theory of writing articulated by Ong, Havelock, Goody and Watt and others has been challenged by many critics in literacy studies, Ong's notion of secondary orality usefully complicates the distinction between print and orality, at least when thinking in terms of contemporary uses of language.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁹ Studies often associated with Great Divide theories include Ong's *The Presence of the Word* (1967) and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963), and Jack Goody and Ian Watt's “The Consequences of Literacy” (1963)—each of which argue, in varying ways, that the development of writing and print carries tremendous intellectual, political, and social consequences. Ethnographic research by scholars such as Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, John Szwed, and Brian Street, who argue that literacy should be thought of as a complex range of behaviors, complicates the idea that sharp distinctions exist between oral and print cultures. *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Ellen Cushman et al., offers a useful introduction to this debate.

the case of students' orations at Brown, these performances were both typographical and oral because there is evidence that suggests students' oral performances were also published.⁵⁰

I contend that the resistance toward closure, the recognition of contingency, and the destabilization of “authentic” experience found in revisionist personal writing occur as well in students' commencement orations at Brown. This attitude toward meaning, truth, and self is at odds with the genre of the commencement oration as students at Brown generally understood it, and it could be said that students at Brown in the sixties and seventies—similar to what James Kunen and other student writers of the period tried to do with the memoir—attempted to revise this genre to accommodate their political agendas. Students were not completely successful in their attempts to rewrite the genre of the commencement oration, for, as this chapter will show in more detail, the sense of didacticism that lies at the heart of the genre frequently bleeds through the text despite students' best efforts to the contrary. Most importantly, though, undergraduate orations from Brown—as is the case with the student memoirs and journals that I look at in previous chapters—show students experimenting with genre in productive ways.

Commencement addresses can take many forms, from policy speeches delivered by state officials reiterating or clarifying domestic and international policies, to political critiques from contrarians dismantling those official state policies, to exhortations given by scholars, celebrities, or politicians who impart sage advice and remind graduates of their responsibilities and potential. This array of purposes can be seen in *The New York Times*' recap of speeches delivered at 2006 graduation ceremonies across the country. Actor Jodie Foster instructed students at the University of Pennsylvania to be ever mindful of the course their lives take, telling graduates,

⁵⁰ Printed at the bottom of several orations is the symbol “-30-”, a printer's mark that indicates that orations were prepared for publication.

“Your path is your character defining itself more and more every day, like a photograph coming into focus” (qtd. in Dillon). In her speech at the University of North Carolina, Teach for America founder Wendy Kopp recounted her naiveté establishing the teacher recruitment organization, drawing on this experience to let students know that they, too, should seek to do the unthinkable. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld told graduates at Virginia Military Institute that it falls on them as military strategists to help the American public see the War on Terror as a success. Historian John Hope Franklin reminded students at Duke that racism persists and that they can do something about this: “What better way for you to take on your role as responsible, mature citizens than to insist that the American ideal of equality of race, sex, religion, and ethnic groups be adhered to because that ideal was bought and paid for by all Americans, regardless of race” (qtd. in Dillon). Any subject is up for grabs in the commencement address, as law professor and commencement speaker Judith Resnik informed graduates at Bryn Mawr. She combed through 100 years of commencement orations, and from this research she “found that these talks gave me utter license to talk about whatever I wanted, from chemistry to health care, from wars to Social Security and beyond, to ballooning” (qtd. in Dillon). Because of its amorphous nature, the commencement address can potentially be about almost anything at all or it can end up being nothing but a laundry list of vacuous life lessons similar to those given by Jodie Foster and countless other well-meaning commencement speakers each spring across America.

Commencement after all marks that transitional moment when students celebrate the end of one chapter in their lives and the beginning of another, or, as John Hope Franklin’s comments specify, that moment when students cease being students and become “responsible, mature citizens.” It is a ritual in which students get the opportunity to reflect on their college

experiences and think about the significance these experiences may have for their lives beyond the university. As such, the commencement address can be similar to the transformative personal essay in that it attempts to look back at experience, ascertain the meaning of that experience, and apply that meaning to future experience. Like the writer of the transformative personal essay, commencement speakers may wade into didacticism and propose firm solutions to complex problems, telling their audiences, for example, what the ideal university looks like, what exact responsibilities scholars have to the rest of society, how war can be stopped and human community achieved. The commencement speech represents the last lesson students will get *as students* before they leave the university. In the case of student orations, the student performs the role of the teacher and the exemplary student, who speaks both to and for the student body.

Student orators at Brown and elsewhere faced a difficult task speaking at commencement in the sixties and seventies. On the one hand, orators were chosen to represent, and indeed embody, the ideal student. They were expected to perform the role of the good student in front of dignitaries, faculty, administration officials, parents, and other students. On the other hand, many student orators at Brown saw themselves speaking on behalf of the student movement more generally, which put them at odds with some of the groups to whom they spoke. In criticizing the American establishment, students had to occasionally face prominent members of that establishment. For example, Ira Magaziner, in his 1969 oration, takes aim at the Vietnam War and its architects, including Henry Kissinger, who attended Brown's graduation to receive an honorary doctorate.

The student orations collected in Brown's archives suggest that students at Brown in the sixties and seventies often understood the situation in similar terms. This understanding comes

through in the metadiscursive comments many senior orators make about the tasks they face in attempting to address their fellow graduates. For instance, George C. S. Strachan runs through the different ideas he almost wrote about in his 1965 address, “Reflections on the Two Knowledges,” and in doing so he subtly criticizes the saccharine calls to arms typically sanctioned by the university: “The list [of topics] began with ‘The Lethargy of the American woman,’ followed by ‘The Lethargy of the American Male,’ and then, ‘The Lethargy of the American University.’ All of these suggestions were discarded—not by the University of course, for the University approves of long speeches about lethargy and lack of initiative” (1). Mary Jean Matthews, who also spoke at the 1965 commencement, characterizes the typical commencement address in more explicit terms:

The typical Commencement oration provides the speaker with an opportunity to pass on to his captive audience his definitive analysis of the present state of the world and its multitudinous problems and to exhort his classmates to face the uncertainty of the future with courage and fortitude. Although my four years at Brown have undoubtedly qualified me both to solve the problems of the world and to predict the future, I would prefer to limit myself to a topic which is of far less significance, but which nevertheless is near and dear to all our hearts on this occasion. (1)

A similar irony about the scope and reach of stereotypical commencement address runs throughout orations students delivered in the sixties and seventies, and this skepticism of pat interpretations and solutions exemplifies one connection these addresses have to revisionist writing.

Students at Brown in the Vietnam era attempted to replace this kind of commencement address with one that looked inward at the student movement and corrected the mischaracterizations of it circulated by the popular media and other critical outlets. One way students went about this work was to write in general about the figure of the student, whom they frequently constructed as a figure embodying both the contradictions and aspirations of the nation. Focusing on the student, and constructing the student in this way, is by no means new, as the epigraph from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar" (1837) at the beginning of this chapter illustrates.⁵¹ Although not a commencement oration *per se*, Emerson's address casts the student as both the problem and solution to America's cultural dependence. Scholarship presently conceived, Emerson argues, produces atomization and careerism; but the creation of the true student, or "Man Thinking" (83), is the first step toward that moment when "A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men" (100).

Using slightly less elevated language, student orators at Brown in the sixties and seventies similarly perceived the student as that figure best positioned to identify and work on those problems at the heart of the cultural and political conflicts of the sixties. As Scott Russell Sanders argues in his quote that makes up the second part of the epigraph above, students are "social critics," despite their parents', teachers', and politicians' claims to the contrary. "[I]nvolvement in social and political issues is at the very heart of education," Sanders goes on to say in his address. "Our learning means nothing if we cannot integrate it into the chaos of problems that confronts us even while in the relative calm of this place" (2). Yet even though

⁵¹ Emerson's presence can be directly seen in several commencement orations at Brown. In fact, Emerson himself is the stated topic of at least one address, Franklin Davenport Elmer's 1895 speech "Emerson, the American."

they asserted their central position in social critique and change, many—but not all—students refrained from declaring that they had all the answers, a gesture often called for in the advice form of the commencement address. Sanders ends his speech by saying that he and his cohorts will continue to challenge injustices wherever they see them, although he tempers this by recognizing the fallibility of the movement: “In that struggle we ask understanding of our motivations, respect for our ideas, tolerance for our mistakes, and sympathy for our flannel-tongued efforts to speak” (6).

This work on the part of students at Brown to alter the genre of the commencement address to suit their needs underscores the main contention of this study, which is that it is problematic, to say the least, to characterize student writing as the inevitable result of a particular genre, pedagogy, or theory of writing. As I hope to have demonstrated in my examination of student memoirs and journal writings from the Alternative Curriculum, it is problematic to claim that self-indulged, apolitical personal narratives inevitably result from so-called “expressive” writing pedagogies and theories. It would be similarly problematic, I believe, to assert that the generic constraints posed by the commencement oration determines the form actual student orations will take. As the orations written by Brown students show, genre plays a part in the decisions students make, but students exert agency as well in their attempts to bend the commencement address so that it serves as a vehicle to discuss concerns relevant to their activism.

One final note before I delve into the orations themselves. This research into student orations delivered at Brown has several limitations, as I will discuss in more detail later, but I intend for it to be a starting point for a more exhaustive investigation of undergraduate writing, both in the pivotal decades of the sixties and seventies, and in other eras. So in addition to

offering a framework for reading the materials found in Brown’s archive on student orations, and explaining how it substantiates my thesis regarding students’ revisionist writing, this chapter will pose questions future histories of student writing might pursue and identify useful resources for further inquiry. The archive of student writing at Brown differs from the student materials found in Pitt’s archive on the Alternative Curriculum (see Chapter 3) in terms of the status it grants students’ writing. Student writing is not something university archivists generally recognize as worth preserving unless, like the student materials held in the Alternative Curriculum archives, it is collected alongside syllabi and other materials documenting the work of a particular class or program, won an award, was published in an official student publication, or appended to reports outlining curricular initiatives. Because of the low status of student writing, it’s rare to come across an archival collection comprised solely of student writing.⁵² In fact, Brown’s “Student Essays and Orations” collection is among a handful of named archives on college student writing. Undoubtedly, more archives remain to be organized and documented, and hopefully this study can encourage further work in this direction.

5.1. Political and Stylistic Trends in Brown Commencement Orations

The orations that I look at in this chapter come from the “Student Essays and Orations” collection housed in Brown University’s archives. The collection contains over two hundred orations delivered between 1827 and 2001, with the bulk of the orations dated from 1894 on. In

⁵² A search of two extensive archive directories—the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections and ArchiveGrid—using the search terms “student essays” and “student writings,” reveals only seven general collections of student writing. It also identifies at least four archives that contain sixties-era student work relevant to a particular class or program. See Appendix A.

my research, I concentrated on orations written between 1960 and 1980. Several trends are worth noting in students' addresses during this period, and before moving on to discuss selected orations in more depth, I want to highlight some of the patterns that emerge in students' orations during this twenty-year time frame.

One of the first things that become apparent when reading through these orations is that they overwhelmingly address political issues, both at the national level and at the local, university level. One of the commonplace narratives told about the sixties generation—voiced by social critics, university administrators, faculty, legislators, and even students themselves—is that youth in the “Age of Aquarius” were more politically aware than earlier generations, particularly those unfortunate enough to grow up during Eisenhower’s administration, when quietism was supposedly the order of the day. A listing of the commencement orations delivered at Brown since the late-nineteenth century suggests, however, that this grand narrative oversimplifies students’ political attitudes. Or, at the very least, it suggests that students throughout Brown’s history have overwhelmingly understood the commencement oration as a genre that, in terms of its content, engages with topical issues. Students at Brown have consistently offered their judgment on political issues in their graduation-day speeches, and it doesn’t appear that students in the sixties were more likely to discuss political matters than commencement speakers in previous decades (although they did arguably put their politics into action in ways that earlier student classes may have found unimaginable, as in the case of sit-ins and student strikes).

For instance, students in the late-nineteenth century wrote about international affairs, local institutions, church-state relations, and socialism. Reading through the archive’s finding aid, one comes across orations with titles like “The Destiny of Africa” (1894) by Harold

Hazeltine; “The Health Department of the City of Providence” (1894) by David Pike; “The Monroe Doctrine Today” (1895) by Richard Vaughan; “Two Causes of Social Discontent” (1895) by William Gardner; “Greece and the Cretan Struggle for Liberty” (1897) by Wilbur Scott; and “The Socialist Movement of the Nineteenth Century” (1899) by Joseph Bigelow. A similar concern with current issues can be seen throughout the following decades of the twentieth century, as graduating seniors offered their appraisals of political, social, and professional developments. Communism, American isolationism before World War II, civil liberties, and the increasing specialization of the university and the workplace were all topics that came under students’ scrutiny. Among the orations whose titles reflect such concerns are: William Ross’s “The Place of Science in a Liberal Education” (1907); Clifton Walcott’s “Modern Communism” (1910); Charles Ives’s “Culture or Vocation” (1925); Frank Licht’s “America Must Choose” (1938); Howard Rice’s “Democracy and an Enduring Peace” (1941); George Bray’s “Democracy Is on Trial” (1953); and David Ellenhorn’s “Civil Liberties in the Post-McCarthy Era” (1958).

On the minds of seniors at Brown in the sixties and seventies were those problems and events that dominated the student movement more generally: the Bomb, the Vietnam War, civil rights, the university, feminism and women’s education, and—the most often-discussed topic—student protest. For instance, the apocalyptic fear caused by the Cuban Missile Crisis informs Joel Israel Cohen’s 1963 oration, “The Burden of the Future,” in which Cohen gloomily informs readers that he “consider[s] it very unlikely, given the present course of public events, that my children will survive to maturity. I expect them to be killed in an atomic war. And it is quite possible that I myself, as well as you my fellow graduates, will live to see the day in the near future when mankind finally commits collective suicide” (1). Jerry Allen Hausman prefaces his

1968 address, "The Abdication of Responsibility," in which he calls on university faculty and administrators to take a leadership role in solving the nation's ills, with a statement explaining the anti-war protests occurring on campus. He says that he and other protestors

object to those moral values implied by the priority given to the Vietnam war over crucial domestic issues. This priority allows the continuation of intolerable injustices against the black population. The same destructive forces which underlie the war in Vietnam and which nourish racism in the United States, threaten to deprive members of our class of their right to moral choice in the coming months. (1)

In addition to discussing the political issues of the day in general terms, as Hausman does in the passage above, students reference specific flash points of the sixties and seventies.

Deborah Van Vechten, in "Student Machines?" (1969), recalls the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley five years earlier, claiming that it stemmed from "students' feeling that they were being used as the raw materials of the assembly-line knowledge factory that the multiversity represents" (3). That same year, Ira Charles Magaziner discusses the 1968 Kerner Commission report on urban riots, the CIA infiltration of the National Student Association, the U.S. bombing of Laos, and the American involvement in Latin America in "The Necessity for the Cultural Revolution in the United States" (1969). In "Between Past and Future" (1972), Jeffrey L. Stout alludes to some of the important events during his class's four years at Brown, including the killing of students at Jackson State in 1970 and the prisoner uprising and subsequent state police takeover at Attica in 1971 (3). The narrowly averted nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island becomes the occasion for John Youklis, in "On the Difference between the 60s and the 70s" (1979), to discuss how "we are inundated by central authorities, governmental and corporate,

who are themselves puzzled about technological questions concerning the safety of our machines” (4).

The content of these speeches, and the key moments to which they refer, suggest that the senior orators at Brown were very much plugged into and highly knowledgeable of current events; and, as some of the passages cited so far suggest, they incorporate, and sometimes extend, several of the key terms that circulated in debates about the war, university education, and civil rights—although not to a degree that would suggest that students were merely parroting the rhetoric of their New Left heroes, as critics like James Reston charged.⁵³ Students talked about *the multiversity*, *cultural revolution*, *the establishment*, and *relevance* without coming across as caricatured student protestors whose political and cultural theories consist solely of catchphrases. This impression comes through strongly in Magaziner’s “The Necessity for the Cultural Revolution” (1969), a speech that thoroughly dissects the need, consequences, and importance of such a revolution. Magaziner defines *cultural revolution* as

a basic re-evaluation of the cultural values within our society. Structural changes can help stimulate this, but it’s not in itself, sufficient. The problem goes much deeper than political or economic reforms. We must re-define our realities and re-find our values and not deviate from them. We must give this equal stead with the successful individual pursuit of our lives. If we don’t, we’re going to find that the

⁵³ In “The Clichés of Radical Students” (1969), Reston dramatizes a hypothetical meeting of the fictional organization RRS (Revolutionaries for a Radical Society). Written in a catechistic format, the article paints student protestors as naïve revolutionaries whose leaders force-feed them clichés (whose meanings they remain ignorant of) instead of rigorous political theory. Here, for example, is a portion of the fictional dialogue:

Q—Who participates in participatory democracy?

A—Everybody participates in participatory democracy: it is the tribune of the people, the foe of the imperialist machine, the scourge of the military-industrial complex, the enemy of.... (42)

individual success of our life is worth little in what will be a very corrupt and violent society. (8)

Important to note is how Magaziner avoids using other catchphrases to articulate his concept of cultural revolution; he avoids reducing his idea into a simple slogan advocating, for example, communalism over individualism (as in “all power to the people”) or vice-versa (as in “tune in, drop out”).

Reading through the orations chronologically one can detect changes in the tone and language students use, although these changes are by no means simple or linear. A number of senior orators, especially among those writing before 1965, appear to fall victim to the solemnity of the occasion and rely on commonplaces, abstractions, and elevated diction in crafting their speeches. Enid Hester Rhodes adopts such an approach in her 1964 address, “The Challenge Still Unmet,” which she composes in blank verse. In her address Rhodes contends that the atomic age, and its accompanying threat of mutually assured destruction, presents her generation with the opportunity to create a “brotherhood of men throughout the world,” a vision of the world previous generations were unable to fulfill (2). Each generation has a destiny to fulfill, Rhodes believes, and she describes this struggle in similarly epic terms:

As is the way of parents, dearly loved
And deeply loving though they are, at times
They underestimate the toughness of
Youth’s mind, the stoutness of its heart, the sinews
Of its soul. Each generation must
Adapt itself—and always has—to the
Specific ambiance, the climate of

Its age. Each generation is unique
In one respect: the special mission here
On earth awaiting it, just as the sword
Excalibur, imbedded in the rock,
Awaited Arthur's destined hand and might. (1-2)

These and other lapses into purple prose—evident especially in such alliterative phrases as “stoutness of heart” and “sinews of its soul”—might lead to the conclusion that this text is that of an inexperienced writer simply unaware that her audience might find such poetic exaggeration hyperbolic and syrupy. However, Rhodes demonstrates that she's hyper-conscious of the choices she makes as a writer. Immediately after her reference to Arthurian legend, for example, Rhodes tells her audience not to read too much into the imagery: “Please note: this simile does not suggest / The use of warlike weaponry” (2).

Another oration that employs similar language is “The Promethean Gift” (1961) by Joyce Ann Reed. In a sermon-like address that instructs her fellow graduates to remain ever optimistic, Reed casts her message in even more general terms than Rhodes does, as evidenced in this passage that encapsulates the overall moral of her talk:

But if we are to live lives of fruitfulness and satisfaction we must take the oath of the artist, and commit ourselves to the principle of blind hope. Our rationality and our objective comprehension may tell us daily, and constantly, of man's finite nature, of his position in a constricting universe, a position of insignificance and feebleness; but we must confront and attempt to conquer this reality by our commitment and devotion to the illusion of hope. For Aeschylus recognized that man possesses the capacity for hope—a capacity which is a greater gift than fire.

We must receive this gift. We must accept its responsibility. We must live lives of commitment, affirmation, and action. (3-4)

Again, this passage shows signs of a writer conscious of what she is doing: note her skilled use of repetition and rhythm to emphasize her point at the end of the passage. Yet Reed's use of abstractions (i.e., "the oath of the artist") and essentialist, sexist language (i.e., "man's finite nature" and "man possesses the capacity for hope") also give one the sense that Reed, like Rhodes, understands the commencement oration as a genre that calls for didacticism, high-minded abstractions, and formal language.

As the sixties wear on, students' diction becomes somewhat less formal, and one detects an increase in the amount of colloquial language and slang in students' speeches. This tonal shift mirrors the trend in campuses across the country in the late-sixties and early-seventies to make graduation ceremonies themselves more casual, which was often a political statement as much as a stylistic one. As *Life* magazine observed in a photo-essay on 1970 college graduation ceremonies at Brandeis, the University of Massachusetts, Syracuse, Brown, and Tufts, "Academic pageantry sometimes gave way to mocking parody. Caps and gowns were often abandoned and money for renting them donated to help pro-peace politicians or war orphans" ("70 Stages" 21).

This increased casualness can be seen in a 1971 oration by Monte Bailey, "Change," which makes grand claims similar to those made by Rhodes and Reed in their addresses, but in a different stylistic register and with a different set of cultural references. As promised in the title of his speech, Bailey focuses on the general idea of change as well as several of the more specific changes experienced by his generation and his class at Brown. Bailey's sentences are in general shorter than those written by Rhodes and Reed, and he incorporates slang into his speech

at several moments, as in this passage, where he discusses the resistance toward change in some quarters of American society:

But all Americans are not in touch with reality. Dig this:

“(because of their historical consistency)...the reputation of white liberals in the Negro community is at an all-time low.... What characterizes a white liberal, above all, is his inability to live the words he mouths....the liberal believes something should be done, but not too soon, and not here. He is all negation...he is all ceremony...He wants results without risks, freedom without danger, love without hate. He affirms tomorrow, denies yesterday, and evades today. He is all...words—and no substance.” Lerone Bennet [sic],

The Negro Mood

Bailey quotes more extensively than any other writer I looked at, and he frequently introduces quotations using colloquial language like the “Dig this” in the passage above. “[I]t will only take an ounce of perception to know what I’m talking about; the examples will fly at you,” he writes elsewhere before an unidentified quote on the necessity of maintaining skepticism toward governmental and professional institutions (5).

As these moments from Bailey’s oration illustrate, he draws on a different set of cultural references than Rhodes and Reed, who mainly cite or allude to classical literary and nonfiction texts. Among Rhodes’ allusions are Arthurian legend, Sophocles, *The Song of Roland*, and the heroic tale of Leonidas of Sparta (presumably from Herodotus’s *The Histories*); Reed cites Aeschylus and Mark Van Doren’s 1949 biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Bailey instead

draws from television and film, as well as cultural criticism and popular business manuals.

Besides quoting a lengthy passage from *The Negro Mood* (1964) by Lerone Bennett, who was the author of several books on African-American history and executive editor at *Ebony* magazine, Bailey also cites Robert Townsend's management advice book *Up the Organization* (1970). He draws extensively from popular culture, referencing Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Dick Cavett, Johnny Carson, and movie stars:

People often talk about change. Change is a natural process. We have seen how little girls who are all pigtails and knock-knees change into young women so full of Elizabeth Taylor until Richard Burton is coming out of their ears.....we have seen how boys who were all Band-Aids and dirty faces change into young men who look like carbon copies of Peter Fonda and gesture like Steve McQueen. (1)

Similar moments can be found in other senior orations. Allusions to classical Greek myth and tragedy seem to be replaced by philosophers and critics frequently cited in New Left and countercultural literature. Mary Jean Matthews, in a 1965 address entitled "An Education and an Attitude," draws on the work of André Gide and Jean-Paul Sartre (3-4); in "The Extended Campus," her 1968 senior oration, Ellen Louise Bouchard quotes Alfred North Whitehead's 1929 *The Aims of Education*, a text frequently cited in numerous arguments, like Bouchard's, that advocate experiential and experimental education.

Perhaps most interesting, though, is that students on occasion allude to the work of previous senior orators. Just one year after Ira Magaziner delivered his address "The Necessity for the Cultural Revolution in the United States," Susan Yvonne Freidman implicitly refers to Magaziner's talk in her oration "Passivity Reaction and Action" (1970). Speaking of the limits imposed on her talk by the escalation of violence across college campuses, Friedman writes, "I

can't speak of the need for a cultural revolution and the American utopia. I can't do this; not because I'm afraid of limiting my audience, but because it would be ridiculously optimistic to dream about a counter-culture when our basic rights and freedoms are being slowly melted away" (1). David Riemer sounds more cynical and sarcastic in his 1980 speech, "On the 'Real' World Outside of Brown," when he alludes to the commencement speeches of the sixties and seventies:

I've been speaking at graduations since I was old enough to shoplift animal crackers, and each speech has been characterized by a heartfelt social conscience. At my nursery school commencement in '63, I spoke on civil rights under the title, "The Sneetches: Perspectives on Starbelly Segregation." Later, at my sixth grade graduation, the subject turned to socialism under the heading, "Batman and Robin: A Marxist Approach." And when I graduated from high school in 1976, I attacked blind patriotism under the banner, "Bicentennial Schmicentennial." (1)

Yet even as these alterations in tone and cultural references suggest that students at Brown were beginning to see commencement in a different light starting in the mid-sixties, these changes weren't totalizing, for many students continued to sound moralistic, didactic themes in their speeches, although they often balanced this didacticism with a strong dose of irony (witnessed especially in the passage from Youklis above). In other words, students' orations at Brown can be seen, in one respect, as complex, multi-vocal texts that straddle the fine line between didacticism and criticism, a tension that can perhaps be explained by the precarious position of graduating seniors, who symbolically occupy that liminal space between the university and the so-called real world. Jeffrey L. Stout's 1972 address, aptly entitled "Between Past and Future" describes this conflict in more eloquent terms: "We find ourselves between

past and future. And it is this experience of timefulness that captures us in this moment. We are caught up in the double movement of looking backward and looking forward, of reminiscence and expectation. Joy and sorry, hope and despair are all mixed in one pulse” (1).

This tension comes through in Scott Russell Sanders’ comically titled 1967 address, “In Defense of Diatribes Against Practically Everything, or Why We Shouldn’t Just Hang Everyone Between Fifteen and Twenty-Five and Start Over.” Sanders continues the irony of his title in the opening of his speech, in which he discusses what he really wanted to say in his talk:

The easiest, most cowardly way to introduce what you are going to talk about is to tell what you wanted to talk about but for various dubious reasons could not. I wanted to read a story about a one-eyed, full-blooded Choctaw Indian who sat wrapped in carnival-colored pony blankets in the dusty, musty corners of county jails in Northern Mississippi, looking quite stoical, and protesting everything from discrimination against Indians to the forfeit of forty-three barrels of corn whiskey owed his tribe by the United States Cavalry. But I shipped that story home, and had neither the wit nor the time to write it over. So I must say bald-faced what I fictionalized in my one-eyed Indian. I must talk about protest, student protest. (1)

Sanders says that he’s chosen not to give his story about the Choctaw Indian because he “had neither the wit nor the time,” but in reading his speech further, one gets the impression that Sanders chooses not to pursue his fictitious, yet symbolic, story because he is aware that the occasion of commencement and the genre of the commencement address do not call for this kind of work. The remainder of Sanders’ speech is largely expository, explaining the motivations of student protestors, whom Sanders believes have been grossly miscast by their critics as either

“blowhards” or “gutsy rebels who simply reject established values, laws, policies, or actions”

(2). He concludes by considering what direction student protest might take in the future, and he offers these lessons for his compatriots:

What must student activists learn if they are to play a more constructive role in the criticism and reform of our society? First they must discipline themselves. That is, they must thoroughly educate themselves in the issues they discuss so eagerly; they must maintain a human perspective, must not lose sight of the individual in the fervor of hell-or-high-water attacks upon institutions; they must learn how already-existing systems operate and what provisions exist for change. Second they must recognize the influences operating on the persons or groups to whom criticism and suggestions are offered. [...] Third they must avoid the arrogance of ignoring the fact that decisions and reforms and opinions are made on many levels in American society, and that the students occupy only one stratum in that constellation. (4-5)

Whereas at the beginning of his address, Sanders comes across as an iconoclast poking fun of the decorum behind graduation ceremonies, here he sounds like the wise elder who now that he is about to pass through the college gates one last time can instruct a younger generation on responsible activism. Earlier he includes himself among the student protestors—saying, for example, that “*we* are occasionally rude, ribald, or simply mischievous”—but here he distances himself from them, discussing them in the third person (2, emphasis added). In this move he performs the kind of transition figured in the graduation ceremony: he transforms from a student into an expert, or at least someone qualified enough to dispense advice for living.

Sanders' transformation isn't complete, however, as he ends his speech by emphatically listing how his generation will continue to struggle for change, again placing himself among the Movement. "*We* will continue to invade intellectual ghettos, where well-worn ideas crowd one upon the other like decaying brownstones," he writes (5-6, emphasis added). This complex positioning, where the orator speaks as both a representative student and an expert, appears throughout the commencement speeches collected in Brown's archives—and indeed, this dialogism could be considered a generic feature of student commencement speeches in general.

Finally, a third trend that appears in students' orations concerns the use of the personal. Students' speeches are not personal in the same way that autobiographical essays are—that is, they do not predominately narrate an individual's lived experiences—but they do exhibit some of the characteristics of the personal essay. For one thing, they are generally reflective, a feature several students explicitly acknowledge in their speeches. Bertrice Yvonne Wood, in her 1972 address "Reflections," explains the important function reflection plays in transitional moments such as commencement:

There is a need to understand the experiences we have had here and to find the meaning in these four years of time and effort. Most of us have not gotten the glorious jobs that television commercials assured us would be ours if we had a college education. But exactly what has a Brown education meant? Perhaps through my eyes, I can relate the life of one student here and hope that my thoughts speak to the types of experiences that are part of everyone's reflections.

(1)

In the last sentence of this passage, Wood succinctly expresses one of the primary ways that the personal functions in students' orations at Brown: the speaker's personal experiences are also

meant to be representative of students' experiences in general. Besides reflecting on individual experience, speakers reflect on what they see as their collective lives as students, attempting to write a kind of personal essay on not just the Brown student, but the American college student.

Numerous orations at Brown during the sixties and seventies focus on the figure of the college student. In her address "An Education and an Attitude," Mary Jean Matthews tells the audience at the 1965 commencement, for instance, that the college student "is a subject on which I feel particularly well-qualified to speak, since I have not only had extensive personal experience in the field, but I have also inescapably been exposed to a wide variety of books, articles, newspaper headlines, parents and college administrators which have treated the subject at some length" (1). Drawing from this range of experience, both personal and textual, Matthews isolates two types of college students: those who are so inquisitive and open-minded that they remain uncommitted and those who are so engaged that they become dogmatic. Matthews describes each of these student types as if they are specific individuals with whom she and her classmates are readily familiar. According to her, the inquisitive yet uncommitted student

entered Brown firmly committed to the conventional and, of course, somewhat old-fashioned values which he had learned at his mother's knee. It only took one year of exposure to Philosophy D1, Political Science D1, Psychology D1, and all the other D1 courses to thoroughly destroy his former beliefs and ideals and to leave him in a state of utter chaos and confusion. (1)

The involved yet dogmatic student "joined the SPU, the SDS, the NSM, the UCA, the SGA, the Young Republicans and the Conservative League. Dissatisfied with mere contemplation, he devoted less and less time to thought and channeled his energies into organized demonstrations, picketing University Hall, and writing inflammatory editorials for the Brown Daily Herald" (2).

Aware that she's painting with broad brushstrokes that ultimately oversimplify each type of student, Matthews eventually explains that the two students she describes really embody two attitudes that make up every young person's character. She writes, "I and the great majority of my actual classmates have, at some time or another, participated in the lives of both of these stereotyped students, and I believe that their widely divergent attitudes are illustrative of a conflict—I will call it the conflict between the desire for unlimited freedom and the need for commitment" (3). Thus, Matthews' speech moves from the perspective of "the life of one student here," as she says in the beginning of her address, to that of college students in general.

Taking a similar tack is Magaziner in "The Necessity for the Cultural Revolution" (1969). He, too, tries to explain the hearts and minds of student protestors, and to do this he "explain[s], in somewhat of a personal history, some of the reasons why I believe society has lost its sense of values and its vitality" (2). In telling this personal history, Magaziner recounts his civil rights activism in the early sixties, his membership in and resignation from the National Student Association, his friendships with those in the civil rights movement who have turned to more violent forms of agitation, and his work on behalf of pacifism and as a spokesperson for students at Brown. Magaziner constructs his personal history so that it mirrors that of the student movement in general. Just as the student New Left was born out of the civil rights movement in the early sixties, so, too, was Magaziner's activism initiated; just as the student New Left has struggled with the question of violence, so too has Magaziner struggled. Through explaining his own experiences, Magaziner intends to explain the larger student movement to which he belongs, its conflicts, and its future.

Not all student orators framed their personal experiences as representative of students' experiences or the student movement in general, though. For instance, Ellen Louise Bouchard,

in her 1968 address “The Extended Campus,” writes extensively about her experience tutoring in the Fox Point Community School, located in a Providence neighborhood made up mostly of Portuguese immigrants. She does see herself speaking on behalf of other students like her who have recently sought ways to integrate their social concerns with their education. According to Bouchard, “Many students at Brown feel that their education is not solely contained in courses. In order to broaden their perspectives and to serve the community, they have extended their campus beyond Bowen and George Streets” (1). But rather than serving as a rationale for the sit-ins, campus strikes, and protests among those in the student movement, Bouchard’s experience becomes an argument on the value of experiential learning. Through her work in the Fox Point Community School, Bouchard claims that she’s been able to see the relevance of her coursework and research in linguistics, which has encouraged her to write a thesis exploring the English literacy practices of Portuguese children in the Fox Point School. This work leads her to conclude “that the University is not losing its soul by allowing and, indeed, encouraging students and faculty to consider practical problems from their theoretical standpoints, but actually it may attain a new peak in scholarship and relevance” (3). Bouchard ultimately uses the authority she claims from her experience in what we would now call service learning to propose several curricular initiatives at Brown, including a formal internship programs for students interested in teaching at Fox Point and the creation of a Portuguese Studies Department, which could work toward building connections with the Portuguese communities in Providence.

While the student orations written between 1960 and 1980 certainly contain complex patterns of thought not elaborated here, they show that students at Brown largely understood the student commencement oration as a genre in which writers rely more on personal, rather than textual, evidence to support their claims. Furthermore, this sample of texts shows that students

understood the genre as multivocal, as form of address that calls on its soon-to-be adult writers to demonstrate their responsibility by offering their judgment on important events of the day. It remains unclear how students learned to understand the genre in this way—whether it was through the direct or indirect instruction of the faculty on the selection committee, or through their examination of previous student orations, or some combination of these and other factors. The archive at Brown, similar to archives in general, contains absences that necessarily affect how readers interpret the texts that make up the archive. In the next section, I turn to questions concerning the materiality of Brown’s archive and what impact this materiality has on the critical interpretation of Brown commencement orations.

5.2. The Promise and Limits of Brown’s Archive

Focusing on orations produced at an elite institution such as Brown poses certain problems and limitations. By concentrating on Brown I run the danger of reinscribing a bias toward elite Northeastern US universities that runs throughout much historical work in Composition, a methodological problem that recent histories by David Gold, Karyn Hollis, Kathryn Fitzgerald, and others have gone a long way toward complicating (and one that I hope my study problematizes as well). Arguing that composition has its roots in the English A course at Harvard in the nineteenth century might arguably add to the disciplinary legitimacy of Composition (especially to those outside the field who remain skeptical of its supposed skills orientation), and create an authorized genealogy complete with founding fathers (i.e., Charles W. Eliot, Adams Sherman Hill, and Barrett Wendell), but such a perspective potentially diminishes

the important disciplinary contributions made by students, teachers, and scholars beyond the Ivy pale.

However, Brown proves an interesting case study, in part, because of its complex relationship to other elite schools such as Harvard and Yale. While Brown has many of the same trappings as its Ivy brethren—among them a highly select student body and vast financial resources—it also differentiates itself from its peer institutions, particularly in terms of its approach toward undergraduate education. For instance, students were instrumental in the creation of what was called the “New Curriculum” in 1969—a program of study that encouraged interdisciplinary learning by doing away with such things as mandatory letter grades and general education requirements, and by creating an interdisciplinary freshman and sophomore program known as “Modes of Thought.” The 1970-1971 *Bulletin of Brown University* describes a Modes of Thought course as one that “should place major emphasis on the methods, concepts and value systems required in approaching an understanding of a specific problem, topic or issue in a particular field of inquiry. The how and why of studying a given field should pervade the entire structure of the course” (317-18). It additionally stipulates that a Modes of Thought course should have personal relevance for both students and faculty: “It being recognized that an atmosphere of excitement and interest is a most important factor in the learning process, the Modes of Thought course should be viewed as highly personal. It should have its justification for existence in the individuals serving as faculty and students” (318). Toward this end, “self-expression through written work should...be encouraged in a manner consistent with the aims of the specific course,” according to the university bulletin (319). Specific Modes of Thought courses offered during the 1969-1970 academic year include: “How Mathematicians Think”; “Self Versus Establishment in Biography and Autobiography”; “Genetics and Man: The

Development of a Scientific Discipline and its Influence on Modern Society”; and “The Development of Mechanics” (319-20).

One of the catalysts behind the “New Curriculum” and the Modes of Thought courses was a 1968 report written by undergraduates Ira Magaziner and Elliot Maxwell that called for changes such as those introduced in the New Curriculum. (Magaziner, you’ll recall, delivered one of the senior orations during the 1969 commencement, which I discuss more extensively in the preceding section.) In *Brown University: A Short History* (2000), Janet Phillips traces Magaziner and Maxwell’s interest in an interdisciplinary program focused on questions around learning back to an undergraduate course they took called “Modes of Experience: Science, History, Philosophy, and the Arts,” originally developed by Professor George Morgan in 1958-9 (85-6). The example of Magaziner and Maxwell thus illustrates that students were not naively agitating for curricular change at the university; instead, it shows that some student initiatives, like the interdisciplinary program that eventually became Modes of Thought, were actually rooted in earlier, more localized, pedagogical experiments.

Brown is an important school to look at, I would argue, because of changes like these, because it underwent a significant amount of student-initiated change and thus put into practice, at least at the curricular level, elements behind the philosophy of student-centered pedagogy in the sixties and seventies. To be more specific, curricular initiatives like the Modes of Thought courses, similar to those offered in the University of Pittsburgh’s Alternative Curriculum and elsewhere, ideally encouraged students to investigate the nature of learning and disciplinarity in a personally meaningful context.

However, my rationale for examining materials written and delivered at Brown also stems from more practical considerations—namely, the accessibility of its archive. Countless

schools likely have student compositions and orations somewhere in their special collection holdings—perhaps attached to reports on curricular initiatives or buried within folders detailing the activities of student organizations—but Brown is among a handful of schools that have put together a specific archive of student writings, or in this case orations.⁵⁴

There are several reasons for this, perhaps first and foremost being that senior orations have played prominently in graduation ceremonies at Brown (or Rhode Island College, as it was known up until 1804). As Brown historian Phillips points out, “The earliest Commencements...required all graduates to have a speaking part—and the seniors were assessed fees in proportion to the magnitude of their parts, to pay for Commencement expenses. As public speaking gradually slipped from its central position in the Brown curriculum, the number of student orations was trimmed accordingly” (13). Despite the diminishment of oratorical education in the school curriculum, seniors have regularly delivered orations up through current-day graduation ceremonies, and commencement continues to represent that occasion when the university and the local community can come together, when “town” and “gown” converge—often unpredictably, as Phillips suggests in her characterization of Brown’s early commencement exercises. “Although much of it was conducted in Latin or Greek and was over the audience’s heads,” she writes, “it drew a large, mixed, and often boisterous crowd, the more respectable

⁵⁴ Perhaps the most extensive *organized* archives on Composition are The National Archives of Composition and Rhetoric (NACR), housed jointly at the University of New Hampshire and the University of Rhode Island. The NACR might best be described as both a physical archive and an ideal one. The collection includes textbooks, rhetorics, and papers donated by prominent writing instructors and theorists (see “The National Archives”). However, the NACR also operates as a Special Interest Group within CCCC, and at the most recent meeting in Chicago, board members spoke of how the NACR is still a work in progress, both physically and ideally. Archivists and scholars at New Hampshire, for instance, have begun collecting materials pertinent to the creation and development of the school’s writing program, and members of the NACR Special Interest Group have shared ideas on how the organization can make archival resources accessible to more scholars and therefore contribute to the field’s growing interest in archival history.

ones dressed to the nines and the rowdier ones ready to get drunk” (12). (Phillips adds that since 1790 the Providence County Sheriff has patrolled the graduation ceremony to keep the peace, although his presence today is largely symbolic.) Brown’s archive of student orations can be seen in one respect, then, as a body of materials that document this important (and very public) aspect of the school’s history.

The university additionally maintains the archive as a resource for students interested in delivering commencement addresses. Archivists informed me during my visit to campus that undergraduates are the primary audience for the collection, especially those interested in speaking at graduation.⁵⁵ The process used to select senior orators has changed throughout Brown’s history. Initially, because of the small class sizes, all seniors delivered orations, but starting in the late 1880s, orations were chosen through a complex procedure in which the school’s professor of rhetoric collected submissions from a group of ranked students, with the finalists being chosen by the rhetoric professor, the president, and an elected faculty member. Only a few years later, the competition was opened up to all graduating students (“Commencement 2006”). In the 1960s, as is the case today, a faculty committee reviewed submissions from all interested students and selected two seniors to deliver addresses at commencement, typically (but not always) a young man who would represent the university and a young woman who would represent Pembroke, the university’s Women’s College, which

⁵⁵ This idea that current undergraduates are the primary readers of the archive finds support in a press release advertising the upcoming 2006 commencement activities at Brown. According to the release, graduating senior Ari Savitsky will deliver one of the orations, entitled “Save the Oration (for Tomorrow),” which “will explain the interesting evolution of the Commencement speech at Brown and in Rhode Island, and how important a milestone it really is” (“Greta Pemberton and Ari Savitsky to Deliver Senior Orations”).

officially merged with the University in 1971.⁵⁶ Laura S. Geller discusses the merger in her 1971 address, “Chantilly Lace and a Pretty Face,” in which she contends that the merger has failed to deliver on its promise of equal education for women:

Those of us who supported the merger of Pembroke and Brown did so in the hope that by becoming students of one institution instead of students peripherally involved in two institutions, women would have more power in controlling their own lives and in making decisions that affected them within the university. But all we have to do is look around us to see that the goals behind the merger have not been realized. Here we are, women at Brown, being educated to take an active part in the creation of our society, yet even our alma mater does not seem to want to employ us. Look at how few women have tenured positions on the faculty, how few women hold high positions in the administration. (2-3)

Orations such as Geller’s point to the archive’s potential value of offering researchers a glimpse into students’ concerns and the impact curricular and institutional changes may have had on them. Moreover, the collection as a whole provides writing researchers with a relatively large body of materials that could reveal trends in students’ writing across time. Researchers might ask, for example: What did “good writing” look like at Brown? How did ideas of “good writing” change across time? How did these changes correspond to developments in the university’s growth as a research institution and developments relevant to the modern professionalization of composition and rhetoric?

⁵⁶ Women were first admitted to Brown in 1841, where they enrolled in courses similar to those taken by male students. They were not, however, permitted in the same classrooms with their male counterparts, so they took courses separately in the University Grammar School and elsewhere throughout campus. Pembroke Hall, which became the name for the Women’s College, was eventually built in 1897 (Phillips 61).

However, the material conditions of the Brown archive, as well as the writings contained in it, present certain difficulties that prohibit researchers from fully answering these questions or from drawing wide-sweeping conclusions based on evidence found in the archives. Brown's archives, in other words, exhibit the problems of archives in general, in that they contain gaps or fissures that limit the knowledge researchers can draw from them. Largely absent from Brown's archives are essays written by "ordinary" students, for lack of a better word, those students whose work is deemed average or below average. What's privileged instead is prize-winning work (for instance, Brown's archive preserves the essays awarded the Preston Gurney Literary Prize, honoring excellence in student literary criticism) or the writing of exemplary students, as is the case with commencement orations. Brown's archives ultimately contain a miniscule sample of student writing that privileges the work of exemplary students, mostly seniors, which makes it impossible to claim that the writing located in Brown's archives is representative of undergraduate work more generally.

Other gaps in the archive pose additional complications. As I mentioned earlier, student orations at Brown were subject to varied selection processes throughout the school's history, a detail that, if focused on, could yield insight into how writing was evaluated at an institution like Brown and how the standards for judging writing likely changed as the institution itself developed into an elite research school, and as composition grew into a discipline. The archive, however, does not preserve committee rosters, correspondences, announcements, memos, or any other documents relevant to the faculty committee charged with selecting senior orators. Therefore, it's unclear what standards were used to judge students' work; nor is it clear whether these addresses were chosen by English faculty, and thus indicative of the department's approach toward writing, or whether these orations are more representative of attitudes toward writing held

by faculty in other departments such as History, Chemistry, or Education. (This information would ironically be easier to pin down with pre-twentieth-century orations since they were either delivered by all graduating seniors or chosen by the school's president, professor of rhetoric, and one at-large faculty member—the first two individuals being easier to identify by consulting faculty and administrative records.)

Yet these very limitations also point to the value of Brown's archive—and other archives, for that matter. The gaps in the archive that prompt one to consider the materiality of the archive and the effects of that materiality on interpretation can remind us, as teachers and researchers, of the materiality of the classroom and its importance on how we interpret pedagogy or read student writing. In other words, the absence from the archive of syllabi, writing prompts, faculty rosters, and other materials that could tell us more about students' composing processes highlights the important part these materials can play in the teaching and learning of writing. Bruce Horner critiques the tendency in composition scholarship to construct an overarching pedagogy that can be applied to all classrooms everywhere. "Often framed in terms of 'what works' or 'worked,'" Horner writes, "we isolate specific pedagogical techniques from the immediate material circumstances of their use, locating our work (and that of our students) not in the social, historical material process but in commodifications for that work" (19). The very absence of pedagogical materials in Brown's archive—which, in their absence, bring to mind the effects the everyday events of the classroom can have on students' writing—may ironically help us resist the type of commodification Horner speaks of here.

In addition, the archive encourages us, in our representations of students and their work, to refrain from essentializing students, a problem Marguerite Helmers identifies through her examination of classroom narratives published in the now defunct "Staffroom Interchange"

section of *College Composition and Communication*. According to Helmers, in these narratives students generally “enter the text as if they simple *are*, and frequent appeals to shared experience with deviant students among teachers indicates a widespread assumption that there is an essential, transhistorical student” (2, original emphasis). Such essentialism overlooks the fact that students and student writing are historical, that the term *student* denotes a heterogeneous group of individuals whose attitudes, motivations, and influences vary widely in and across time. As I suggest above in my discussion of the political content of students’ orations, archival research into actual student writing disturbs such essentializing claims as: “Students in the sixties were more political than previous generations” or “Students today are not as politically informed as they were in the past.” Instead, what my tentative research into Brown’s archives has revealed, and what additional archival research into student writing may perhaps further reveal, is that it is more accurate to think of students’ politics as variable and shifting rather than to claim that students simply are or aren’t political.

5.3. Revisionist Writing and the Anti-oration

Although student orations at Brown in the sixties and seventies differ from the personal writings found in the Alternative Curriculum archives and the memoirs written by student radicals, they oftentimes express a similar sense of skepticism, open-endedness, and simultaneous assertiveness. This is noteworthy, in part, because it disturbs the notion, held by numerous critics of the student movement (including, as we will see below, those in composition and rhetoric), who monolithically characterized protestors as doctrinaire, dogmatic, and utterly opposed to rational means of persuasion. In addition, the repetition of what we might call a

revisionist attitude that can be seen in Brown orations suggests that this attitude may be a sign of a larger “structure of feeling,” what Raymond Williams refers to as an active set of cultural values and practices that stand in varying relationship to dominant cultural ideas and beliefs (132-5). That is, the kind of assertive skepticism found across a range of student-produced texts (at Brown, at the University of Pittsburgh, and in published memoirs), which appears as well in other areas of literary production (see the examination of Joan Didion’s work in Chapter 1), may perhaps be thought of as a burgeoning, not yet firmly entrenched, habit of thought concerning writing, and the efficacy of writing, at odds with the ideological view of writing as redemptive—an ideology performed, in at least one example, through the material form of the transformative personal essay.

In the remainder of this section, I will look closely at two orations that exhibit attitudes prevalent in what I’m calling revisionist writing, paying particular attention to how these attitudes surface in students’ arguments concerning the value of writing and rhetoric. Each of these orations, in different ways, express doubts about the transformative power of writing and rhetoric; moreover, they maintain this skepticism without proposing inaction or mere relativism. In other words, they reject to varying degrees the idea that writing and rhetoric can effect change while at the same time defending the value of community, inquiry, and dialogue—ideals that many English professionals, both then and now, would place at the ideological heart of writing instruction.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Joseph Harris argues that the critical concept of *community* remains undertheorized in 1980s composition theory, even though it plays prominently in important theories regarding discourse communities or interpretive communities (see “The Idea of Community.”) As a result, the notion of community becomes so vague, according to Harris, that conflicts and differences within groups get overlooked. I tend to agree with Harris’ assessment, and I would argue that the kinds of community students at Brown imagine in their orations are similarly abstract and free of conflict.

George C. S. Strachan offers perhaps the most explicit criticism of rhetoric in “Reflections on the Two Knowledges,” a senior oration he delivered at Brown University’s 1965 commencement (see Appendix C, Fig. 6). In the opening of his speech, Strachan shows that he is aware of the rhetorical demands this occasion places on him, and he alludes to the university’s preference for moralistic sermons on state of the America and the American university. However, Strachan tells listeners that he will deviate from the traditional role of the orator—who in his mind “promises more than the poet and offers less” (1)—and instead deliver what he calls an “anti-oration,” a form of expression he aligns with other counter-genres such as “the anti-drama, the anti-poem and the anti-hero—those common touchstones of modern literature and life” (1). In the remainder of his talk, Strachan demonstrates this idea of the anti-oration, drawing on the distinction Yeats (whom he curiously doesn’t identify as a poet) makes between rhetoric and poetry, and the opposition Valéry (whom he assumes is readily known to his listeners) establishes between poetry and prose.

From these two poets, Strachan gives listeners this more concrete definition of anti-oratory:

If I were to eschew oratory—or Yeats’ rhetoric and Valéry’s prose, I must then begin by declining to argue with you. That is to say, I must not attempt by any lucid, well-reasoned process to bring you to any specific point of view. This is not to say that I have no point of view. It is simply an admission that my point of view is irrational in a narrow sense, and based on images rather than ideas. (2)

According to Strachan’s formulation, then, anti-oratory means giving up the idea that your aim as a speaker is to convince interlocutors of your position; it means recognizing that your position is one among many, formed through imagistic, rather than rational, thought.

Over the next few pages, Strachan develops this argument through the images he draws of Prospect Park and the abandoned beer bottles left behind Faunce House, home to the university's student services. Prospect Park is the image of prose and rhetoric: linear, orderly, and rational; its placement and arrangement provide viewers with a way to read the city that lies below, which itself takes on a geometric order similar to that of the park. Yet even though the park is "geometrically aligned" (2)—a phrase Strachan repeats twice—Strachan gives us the sense that it's running down, no longer what it once was: "The British are gone; the sidewalks and glamourless metal guard-rails are of WPA vintage; the lumbering stone statue of Roger Williams leans precariously backward in its severe frame" (2).

According to Strachan, just below the park lies a supposedly empty lot that isn't empty at all. Whereas the park is depicted as virtually empty and abandoned (apart from a few strollers), the lot below is cast as a place of tremendous activity and creation: "Children often play in the lot—noisily, sometimes violently—amid a reasonable quantity of filth. Sometimes, in the evening, fragments of trumpet or guitar music waft up to the promenours [sic] who come to watch the sun set proudly behind the capitol dome. Yet it is doubtful whether they hear or see much of what lies directly below them" (2-3). For Strachan, the empty lot represents the poetry, or excess of meaning, that rhetoric, with its sense of order, ignores—an idea Strachan complements with the second image he draws of the refuse pile behind Faunce Hall, which is an "inevitable" (3) part of the university, although it, too, goes unrecognized. Chaotic, playful, and potentially violent, the poetic is misunderstood as meaningless, vacant.

From the juxtaposition of these images, Strachan concludes that rhetoric alone fails to produce the kind of knowledge relevant to contemporary problems. As he puts it, "Whatever I have tried to tell you can be found much more vividly, much more urgently in Joyce, Eliot,

Hemmingway [sic], or in another Brown graduate Nathaniel West. But at least I have learned the inadequacy of oratory” (3). In Strachan’s estimation, students at Brown leave the university well versed in rhetoric—“rich in the knowledge of persuasion, rich in purposeful knowledge,” he claims—although they remain less knowledgeable of “the raging inarticulated vacancy,” that exceeds rhetoric (3). Understanding the disorder unaccounted for by rhetoric is of paramount importance, for according to Strachan, “From this vacancy, we have helped create one of the most grotesque of the great civilizations” (3-4).

The dichotomy Strachan draws between rhetoric and poetry echoes the distinction made between rhetoric and intimacy in the cover page to the *Alternative Curriculum* journal discussed in Chapter 3 (see page 133). However, this simple binary falls apart toward the end of Strachan’s address, as it does in the *Alternative Curriculum* text. Strachan realizes that he has a bit of the orator in him yet, that in trying to make his point about the importance of poetic knowledge he has overstated the differences between poetry and rhetoric—and ultimately the inadequacy of oratory. Strachan eventually collapses the binary he establishes earlier in the speech when he concludes that individuals aren’t simply orators or artists, and that the university doesn’t remain completely isolated from the community that surrounds it. Even more, Strachan leaves his audience with the kind of grand gesture he sees in oratory, as he instructs his fellow students to embrace both rhetoric and poetry, to be both “strong and perceptive, purposeful and beautiful” (4).

Strachan’s critique of rhetoric becomes even more interesting when we recall that, in terms of the disciplinary history of composition and rhetoric, the sixties—in addition to being seen as a time of rampant (and sometimes naïve) pedagogical experimentation—is also remembered for its so-called “revival” of rhetoric, with the 1963 CCCC in Los Angeles

frequently cited as a pivotal episode in this storyline.⁵⁸ Less acknowledged in disciplinary histories is the fact that this revival of rhetoric was taking place against the backdrop of student protest across American college campuses, and that many architects of rhetoric's so-called recovery were greatly concerned with what they saw as the student New Left's skepticism and outright disdain of rhetoric.

For example, Edward P. J. Corbett in 1969 worries that the confrontational atmosphere created by student protestors has led them to abandon the faith in logic that stands at the heart of classical rhetoric and democracy, a situation he sees as apocalyptic for rhetoric and rhetoricians ("The Rhetoric of the Open Hand" 294). Wayne Booth expresses a similar anxiety in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974) when he claims that the rigid ideologies, emotionalism, and anti-authoritarianism of the sixties give rise to what he calls a "rhetorical crisis." In Booth's words, "Arguments for our beliefs or actions have become 'mere rhetoric' or propaganda or rationalization. Passionate commitment has lost its connection with the provision of good reasons. And reason has been reduced to logical calculation and proof about whatever does not matter enough to engage commitment" (xi).

Other pleas on behalf of a "New Rhetoric" in the sixties and seventies frequently cited the contentious atmosphere of the times as one reason why such a new rhetoric was needed.

Writing in the late sixties, Francis Lee Utley contends that the field's growing interest in the

⁵⁸ In his assessment of the field, "Teaching Composition: Where We've Been and Where We're Going" (1987), Edward P.J. Corbett says that he has "always dated the emergence of rhetoric as the rationale for the teaching of composition from the spring of 1963, when the Conference on College Composition and Communication held its annual convention in Los Angeles" (445). Robert Connors, Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford second Corbett's chronology, claiming that the conference represented a seismic shift in the field: "All who attended the convention felt the galvanic charge in the air, the exciting sense of intellectual rebirth. Within the next five years the spirit which had been born at the convention began to transform the teaching of writing" (10).

New Rhetoric, and its concomitant turn away from linguistics as a central method for teaching writing, stems largely from the increasing professionalization of composition and rhetoric. However, she also explains that advocates of the New Rhetoric see in it an answer not only to problems in the first-year writing classroom, but a response to a crisis in the humanities in general. Utley writes, “A renewed sense of history may give psychological reinforcement in our despair at a world torn by riots and undeclared wars, which the panaceas of science and sociology seem to have intensified rather than quelled. There is a general belief that we had better examine once more our human and humane roots, among which rhetoric is so fertile a generating principle” (119). This sense that a New Rhetoric which stresses community, cooperation, and true dialogue can save such a world “torn by riots and undeclared wars” is captured in Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike’s *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (1970), in which the editors contend,

Truth has become increasingly elusive and men are driven to embrace conflicting ideologies. Ours is an age of isms. As a result of rapid and mass means of communication and transportation, our world is becoming smaller, and all of us are learning to become citizens of the world, confronting people whose beliefs are radically different from our own and with whom we must learn to live. It has become imperative to develop a rhetoric that has as its goal not skillful verbal coercion but discussion and exchange of ideas. (8)

These and other comments about the student New Left’s assault on rhetoric provide some insight into the ideological underpinnings of the postwar revival of rhetoric; however, they also oversimplify students’ attitudes toward rhetoric in the Vietnam era, at least as suggested by the materials collected in Brown’s archives. Examining student orations from Brown reveals that

students like Strachan did indeed question the value of rhetoric and rational argumentation, although writing in these archives additionally suggests that students' skepticism wasn't as totalizing as Corbett, Booth, and other rhetoricians claimed. In fact, a closer look at actual examples of senior orations from Brown suggests that students voiced a belief in discourse and community similar to that held by their critics even as they disagreed with these critics over the shape and relevance of rhetoric. To an extent Strachan's skepticism toward rhetoric corresponds to the sense that Corbett and Booth have concerning students' dissatisfaction with rational argumentation as a pivotal component of political activity. Yet Strachan's piece further suggests that students and rhetoricians of the era were perhaps not as divided as critics believed. Students like Strachan reaffirm a belief in community, dialogue, and inquiry even while they doubt rhetoric's and writing's ability to effect change. (Strachan after all ends his speech with a piece of advice from Sir Francis Bacon in which Bacon counsels individuals to engage in life-long inquiry not just to achieve some measure of self-knowledge but to contribute to the community's knowledge as well.) And even though students like Strachan appeal to their audiences through means in addition to logic (see, for example, Strachan's use of metaphor to make his point) they don't simply resort to emotional appeals, as Booth and Corbett fear.

Further proof of this can be found in Ira Magaziner's 1969 address "The Necessity for the Cultural Revolution in the United States." I've discussed this oration elsewhere in this chapter, but one of the most provocative aspects of his speech, which I haven't touched on so far, is the way in which it articulates precisely this tension I see whereby a pessimistic view of writing and rhetoric exists simultaneously with an optimistic and idealistic vision of human community.

Magaziner begins in a minor key, letting his audience in on the general skepticism he has toward his speech and any potential it has to make a difference on anyone's thinking. In fact, he

explicitly says that he'll reiterate an argument he's heard over and over again, one that his audience has likely heard as well, so that whatever rhetorical impact his speech achieves will result from its accumulation and repetition of other ideas and arguments rather than any particular individual eloquence.

It took me a long time to try to think about exactly how I was going to say what I wanted to say because basically the speech that I am going to give has been given a number of times. I've heard it in a number of sermons that have been given, I've heard it on a number of tv programs, and in a number of other places. But somehow it doesn't seem to have done any good previously and I have not illusions that it'll do any good now but I felt that I would try again nevertheless.

(1)

The doubt Magaziner voices here carries through in other moments of his speech, in which he largely describes his own and his generation's growing disillusionment with American society and skepticism that peaceful protest makes any difference. Speaking for other students, Magaziner initially characterizes this quandary in general terms: "We don't believe in the use of violence, and yet we feel that the type of work that we do in trying to peacefully change the society fails. And so it leaves us in a dilemma as to what to do" (2).

From this general statement, Magaziner proceeds to list specific instances in his own personal history that led him to this pessimistic state. As a civil rights activist, for instance, Magaziner noticed the hypocrisy of other activists who balked when confronted with addressing racial inequalities in the North: "They called Southerners rednecks and bigots because of their external racism, but when topics of slum-lordism, discrimination in hiring and housing, and exploitation of black communities by whites in the North were brought up, they began using the

same excuses we heard in the South” (2). Magaziner calls such knowledge “devastating” (2). After learning that the CIA compromised the National Student Association, Magaziner says that this knowledge “led me into a whole new awareness of the nature of the CIA and its activities and began to take away my trust in the United States government” (2). This trust further erodes, according to Magaziner, when he learns that the U.S. bombed Laos after denying it for over three years. The weight of this disillusionment has taught protestors “that the only way to move forces...is to fight them with political, economic, and military power, because that they will understand. The only way to wake up people who are asleep is to jar them awake and disrupt their sleep rather than trying to whisper to them while they snore” (7). Thus, violence rather than rhetoric appears to be a more suitable weapon for political struggle.

But instead of concluding that this impossible situation should lead him to simply stop speaking, Magaziner goes on to discuss the one hope he does have, which is that a larger “cultural revolution” can potentially stave off further violence. According to Magaziner, this revolution involves a collective examination and commitment to cultural values deemed ethically important. Most importantly, though, this revolution involves a respect for other equally valid ethics: “When I’m talking about a personal ethic I don’t believe that I have to lay out an absolute ethic which I then would try to force on everyone else,” Magaziner says (9).

Despite this personal assertiveness, Magaziner once again comes back to skepticism he voices at the beginning of his speech. He concludes, “I’m pessimistic that this speech, as well as all the others that have been made on this same topic, are going to go deaf as soon as the applause is finished.... You’re going to go about your business as usual, and this is going to be a tragedy in American society, the tragedy that’s going to bring us into a state of doing more to perpetuate evil in the world than to try to solve it” (13). Here Magaziner casts himself as

speaking into the wind, stoically resolved to the fact that his words can stop the tragedy he sees as inevitable.

But it is not just this skepticism and doubt to which I want to call attention. Instead, what I find important in Magaziner's, Strachan's, and others' speeches at Brown is that this lack of faith in the power of writing and rhetoric does not prevent students from doing interesting intellectual work. In the face of such overwhelming skepticism, Magaziner nevertheless builds a vision of cultural revolution that in his eyes seems to be the only critical response to escalating violence; similarly, Strachan uses metaphor to theorize rhetoric, poetry, and the relevance these discursive forms have for student activists. It is customary to come across in published research in composition and rhetoric calls to arms demanding that our primary goal as teachers should be to instill in students the idea that writing and rhetoric contain enormous transformative possibilities—for democracy and for the self. Such pleas seem to suggest that students' critical abilities rest on this assumption about writing and rhetoric; however, students such as Magaziner, Strachan, and the other writers I explore in this dissertation disturb this ideology by demonstrating the not very radical idea that intellectual work need not proceed from a belief in the transformative potential of writing and rhetoric.

CODA

The value of an archival history comes not only through its attempt to revise commonplace understandings of the past but also in its effort to reimagine the future. Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to show that the presumptions historians have made about student writing in the sixties and seventies do not adequately explain what students themselves were writing. Although students' writing practices are no doubt affected by what goes on in the classroom, these archives suggest that it is problematic to predict with certainty what students will write based on the epistemological assumptions underlying any particular pedagogy or theory of writing. This gap between epistemological assumptions and actual writing suggests that the version of the past recalled by the term "expressivism"—in which teachers and students presumably interrogated the contours of the self by writing diaries, journals, and other autobiographical texts that eventually conveyed their authors' true, authentic identities—oversimplifies what students and teachers in the sixties tried to accomplish in their writing. But what value do these archives have for teachers and scholars working in composition and rhetoric today? How might this revised understanding of student writing in the sixties add to an understanding of student writing or the work of composition in the twenty-first century?

This writing from the sixties is valuable for understanding the work students do in their personal writing and how we as teachers respond to that work. The student texts discussed in this dissertation underscore the importance of seeing the selves students present in their essays as performances. The idea that the self is a construct has become a truism in the field, yet it is often forgotten when teachers confront students' personal narratives. Students who write about seemingly trivial life episodes, like getting cut from a sports team or falling in love are

caricatured as shallow and inexperienced, dupes of a consumer culture that has overloaded them with cultural commonplaces. Students who do not adequately explain what self-knowledge they were able to glean from an event are seen as critically naïve. Even though the field has come a long way in terms of how students and their writing are discussed, these and other criticisms are uttered as if the self that comes through on paper can be equated with its writer. Criticism of students' writing being solipsistic and naïve and critically unaware also comes across as criticism of the student writers themselves possessing such apparently unseemly qualities.

Personal writing is often characterized as a basic writing skill, an idea students themselves casually reinforce when they declare that they find personal essays easier to write. But I would argue that many students' claims about the apparent ease of personal writing are more complex. Young people no doubt take great pleasure in experimenting with their identities, but students are also responding according to teachers' expectations because (at least) twelve years of schooling have made them aware that, on one level, their teachers enjoy a particularly revelatory type of autobiographical essay, in part, because it elevates writing to the art of self-salvation. When students write personal narratives in which they confess to being irrevocably changed by an experience, they are partially responding to what they think teachers want to hear. Such essays can be appealing to teachers because writing becomes a means toward saving oneself through knowledge, and the teaching of writing, according to this definition, takes on epic importance.

Of course, on another level teachers are uncomfortable with students' personal writing, especially when students write about particularly revealing experiences or when they do not connect their experiences to issues beyond themselves. "Sincere," "authentic," and "truthful" are a few of the adjectives used to describe good writing, according to those who see personal

writing as an important component of the first-year composition course, and they are also used to condemn personal writing, according to those who see personal writing as critically insufficient for today's students. While many pages have been written about this debate, it becomes more complex when we consider that students do not necessarily view the issue of personal writing in similar terms. Students may well have a different set of expectations than teachers do about their autobiographical writing. For them, writing from a personal perspective may be more about finding a way to take pleasure in writing academic essays than it is a quest to uncover their most true inner selves.

Young people's engagement with the self is serious play, though, and more remains to be discovered about how students today fashion themselves in writing and what they hope to accomplish through this work. In blogs, chat rooms, fan fiction sites, and collective websites such as MySpace.com and Friendster, students today, like those I look at from the sixties and seventies, actively experiment with their identities in front of different audiences. They explore the range of subjectivities available to them through web cam self-portraiture, screen names, and lists detailing the musical artists and films they find especially formative. More work needs to be done examining young writers' extracurricular composition in electronic environments, investigating what kind of work they do in these arenas and what they say about the value of this work. Such research could also compare what young people do in blogs and other electronic genres heavily invested in the personal with what teachers expect of students' autobiographical writing in the first-year classroom. How do students theorize writing about the personal in comments they make on online message boards and blogs? What debates are young people having online about the purposes of blogging and other self-fashioning activities? What key

terms emerge in these discussions? How do these terms and debates compare to those circulating in composition and rhetoric over the last thirty years?

These questions could be examined with students in the first-year classroom as well. Students likely find much of the language used to describe personal writing mystifying at best; telling students to be more honest, for instance, does not give an accurate picture of what they need to do for revision. Part of what this means is that we, as teachers, need to be upfront with students about what we specifically value in personal writing and what we look for when reading students' autobiographical texts. It would furthermore be productive to talk with students about how they respond to personal writing assignments. How do they decide what kinds of experiences to write about? What factors do they consider when constructing their identities in writing? What aspects of their lives do they reveal to readers? What do they choose to conceal? How does the fact that their autobiographical texts will be evaluated by teachers factor into the decisions they make? Through such discussions students and teachers could work locally to develop a critical language to talk about personal writing.

These and other strategies could extend what students already know about the performative aspects of identity and contribute to other types of writing frequently assigned in composition classrooms. If framed as performative, personal writing may paradoxically help students approach their writing objectively. Students' problems with critical thinking, revision, and grammar are often blamed on a lack of objectivity or on students' inability to achieve the critical distance necessary to see their writing as text that can be edited and revised. One way to introduce students to this kind of objectivity or critical distance would be to encourage them to thoroughly analyze how they construct the selves they present in their autobiographical writings. Thus, writing from experience is not a detour on the way to something else, an activity students

are asked to do at the beginning of a semester only so they may be disabused of their supposedly naïve assumptions about self and identity. Rather than being a hindrance or something to be overcome, writing from experience is an activity central to the first-year composition course and its work of preparing students to be writers—not *Writers* in the sense of published authors or empowered citizens, but *writers* in the sense of individuals conscious of the choices they make in writing and how those choices affect readers.

This last statement begs further explanation, and again student writing from the sixties and seventies offers a starting point for discussion. Writing is important work, and it is furthermore important that as teachers we show students both the play and seriousness of writing. But lately the discipline is oversaturated with articles, monographs, and textbooks emphasizing the latter over the former, making the case that writing empowers individuals to subvert dominant ideologies, to realize the goals of democracy, and to transcend personal trauma. Yet these pleas on behalf of the transformative powers of writing may be counterproductive if one looks at this issue from the perspective of students. The skepticism students in the sixties had toward grand meanings that could explain the changes going on in their lives is likely just as strong with today's undergraduates, perhaps even more so given the political cynicism that has become more palpable in the wake of *Bush v. Gore*, the second Iraq War, and Hurricane Katrina. (Some enterprising researchers have even tried to give a name to this cynicism: “The Daily Show Effect,” a term used in an East Carolina University study that argues the popular cable fake-news program erodes young people's confidence in public institutions.) If we in composition continue to tell students that the first-year writing class can change their lives by transforming them into critical citizens or that writing about personal trauma can help them transcend such experiences, many students will likely see this as

overblown rhetoric. Emphasizing to students the radical potential of writing does not give them a complete picture of why writing matters, and even if it did, I am confident (and hopeful) that students could change our minds.

APPENDIX A

Archival Materials

This appendix, which is still very much in process, is a cursory listing of archival information important to research on 1960s student writing. Please note that I have not yet been able to verify all the materials listed here, especially the different archival collections listed below.

Radical Readers

Textbook and Year of Publication

	Editor(s)
<i>America, Changing...(1968)</i>	Gleeson
<i>American Experience: A Radical Reader (1970)</i>	Jaffe and Tytell
<i>Beyond Berkeley: A Sourcebook in Student Values (1966)</i>	Katope and Zolbrod
<i>Comment and Controversy (1972)</i>	Bryant
<i>Counterculture and Revolution (1972)</i>	Horowitz, Lerner, and Pyes
<i>Counterpoint: Dialogue for the Seventies (1970)</i>	McAuliffe
<i>Counter-Tradition (1971)</i>	Delany
<i>Destination Tomorrow (1972)</i>	Carpenter
<i>Divided We Stand (1970)</i>	Editors of Ramparts
<i>Eco-Catastrophe (1970)</i>	Editors of Ramparts
<i>Encounter: Readings for Thinking/Talking/Writing (1970)</i>	Roloff
<i>Female Liberation: History and Current Politics (1972)</i>	Salper
<i>Grooving the Symbol (1970)</i>	Lid
<i>Hard Rains: Conflict and Conscience in America (1970)</i>	Disch and Schwartz
<i>In Pursuit of Awareness (1967)</i>	Kronovet and Shirk
<i>Literary Artist as Social Critic (1969)</i>	Kakonis and Desmarais
<i>New Prometheans (1973)</i>	Lambert

<i>Now: Essays and Articles</i> (1969)	Sutton, Puckett, Copps
<i>Radical Vision: Essays for the Seventies</i> (1970)	Hamalian and Karl
<i>Readings from Left to Right</i> (1970)	Amend and Hendrick
<i>Rhetoric of Revolution</i> (1970)	Katope and Zolbrod
<i>Search for Self: A Freshman Reader</i> (1968)	Major
<i>Sense of the Seventies</i> (1978)	Dolan and Quinn
<i>Sense of the Sixties</i> (1968)	Quinn and Dolan
<i>Social Rebel in American Literature</i> (1968)	Woodward and Clark
<i>Student Voices/One</i> (1971)	Reaske and Willson, Jr.
<i>Up Against the Wall, Mother...</i> (1971)	Adams and Briscoe
<i>Way It Is</i> (1970)	Hughes
<i>Student Speaks Out</i> (1972)	Lindsey and Donart

Student Memoirs

<i>Generations: A Collage on Youthcult</i> (1972)	Adelman, Clifford
<i>My Life Inside the Campus Revolution</i>	Divale, William Tulio
<i>The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary</i>	Kunen, James Simon
<i>Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times with the Liberation News Service</i>	Mungo, Raymond
<i>I Ain't Marchin' Anymore!</i>	Rader, Dotson
<i>Across the Barricades</i>	Rosenkranz, Richard
<i>The Wedding Within the War</i> (1971)	Rossman, Michael
<i>May Day at Yale: A Case Study in Student Radicalism</i> (1976)	Taft, John

Archives of Student Writing

Alternative Curriculum Records, 1973-1979. Archives Service Center, University Archives, University of Pittsburgh.

Freshman Student Papers, #14/12/1981. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Libraries.

Gordon J. Cummings. Student Papers on Activism, #21/33/1796. Department of Manuscript and University Archives, Cornell University Libraries.

Great Issues. Records, 1946-1974. Dartmouth College.

Linda Gordon, Student Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

Radcliffe College Student Course Materials Collection, 1892-1988. Radcliffe College Archives.

Student Essays and Orations. University Library Archives, Brown University.

Student Theses, 1898-1983. Frederick W. Crumb Memorial Library, Archives, State University College at Potsdam.

Student Writing and Publications, 1943-1995. University Library, Virginia Union Library.

United States Army Armor School Student Papers, 1947-1975. United States Army Armor School Library.

Appendix B

Examples of Alternative Curriculum Student Writing

The New York Times

20 CENTS

A.C. Newsletter / Vol 1 no 3 / January 27 - February 3, [1977]

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

A sexy 60-year-old?
'That would be the
easiest acting I ever did.'

CITY EDITION

Weather: Rain continuing th-
rough tonight. Cloudy, warmer tomorrow.
Temperature range: today 65-76;
Thursday 67-72. Details, page D15.

Go national!

Trust is not having to guess what a candidate means. Trust is leveling with the people before the election about what you're going to do after the election. Trust is not being all things to all people. Trust is not cleverly shading words so that each separate audience can hear what it wants to hear, but saying plainly and simply what you mean, and meaning what you say.

—Gerald Ford, Sept. 15, 1976

I declare as emphatically and as strongly as I can, I have no intention of being a candidate for any office, President, Vice President or anything else in 1976.

—Gerald Ford, Oct. 13, 1973

I don't think the public would stand for [a Presidential pardon of Richard Nixon].

—Gerald Ford, November 1973



Figure 1: Cover of "A.C. Newsletter," vol. 1, no. 3, January 27-February 3, 1977. Courtesy of Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

I GOT THE MUNCHIES FOR YOUR LOVE by Bootsie's Rubber Band

I have always been amazed at the amount of trivia we are exposed to in our daily lives. It seems to bombard us from every direction and from a multitude of sources.

A typical day of trivia goes like this. Waking up to the clock radio, the newscaster is announcing the birth of James Earl Carter III, Jimmy Carter's grandson. The fast-breaking story reveals that Jimmy Carter Jr. was present at his son's birth and remained at the hospital most of the night.

While brushing your teeth, the maid begins a conversation about the girls in Room 518 who don't want maid service and she doesn't understand why. On the way to class, you are informed by a passing friend that today is Charlie Chaplin's birthday and you should be wearing your Chaplin T-shirt!

Even lecture halls are susceptible to trivia. While discussing foreign relations between the U.S. and Canada, the poli science professor slips in a comment on Nixon's opinion of Prime Minister Trudeau. The Watergate Tapes revealed on numerous occasions that Nixon referred to Trudeau as an asshole.

As you sit at lunch, your best friend runs up, breathlessly gasping that David Essex was voted the number one rock musician in Britain.

Looking for an escape, you return to your room, pick up People magazine, only to read about Chiquinho Scarpa, the Brazilian Cassanova, who claimed Princess Caroline of Monaco was one of his many lovers, is now involved in a \$4 million law suit with her father, Prince Rainier. Is there no end?

You call your mother to ask for money to buy a new pair of jeans and she begins babbling about the street department making your block a one-way street. No, don't give up yet. It's 2 a.m. and after a long day, you're drifting off to sleep when the DJ announces New York's most exclusive nightclub, Regina's, has been replaced by The Putz, located at 42nd and Broadway. As WROT, Boise, Idaho, signs off the air, you turn off the light, put the pillow over your head and prepare for another day's attack of TRIVIA.

Gale

AC READING

AC READING: FRIDAY BONZAI
MARCH 11, 4 pm

Everybody welcome, come drink, come read, come listen...AC people will be reading their work that's me and Todd and Ed. and Peter O. and Felice and Bob W. and Gayle and Ralph and Chauncy and Janet and Rebecca and Chris and have I forgotten anybody--you.

-2-

Figure 2: "I Got the Munchies for Your Love by Bootsie's Rubber Band." From AC newsletter entitled "Hey Buddy, Got a Minute? If You Want Ralph's Life Spared Send Money to Art" (n.d.). Courtesy of Gloria Rudolf.

Usually, the newsletter contains some stuff written by whoever is reading here on Friday. The whole bunch of us are reading this Friday so the writing workshop turned out a group poem. One person wrote a few lines and the next person wrote a few more, having only seen the last line written by the previous person. It might not make very much sense (it's unedited) but:

Life can have no meaning,
without direction
there must be reasons for existence
not just a biological mishap or
evolutionary accident
But it's really no accident
Nature makes no mistakes
People make their own future
Struggle causes change,
nature is the mere circumstance
of my existence to overcome its
boundaries my purpose to blend so
well, that we function together smoothly
me using you at the times I can't use myself.
I need that barking to pick me up
and go forward balancing between your motions
while you go forward or Backward Depending
on your point of view or Position
or your Lack of it

-3-

Figure 3: Poem written by members of AC writing workshop. From AC newsletter entitled "Hey Buddy, Got a Minute? If You Want Ralph's Life Spared Send Money to Art" (n.d.). Courtesy of Gloria Rudolf.

Total BUS

A NEW Concept
IS SHARED

TAUGHT in

BEYOND PHYSICAL INTIMACY
AND Rhetoric BOUNDS

SHARED

A THOUSAND JAUNCES
ENGINE ROARS
Kleenex® ear plugs.

SHARED

quiet talks
sound

FILTERING

through

coming

clean

Figure 4: Cover page to "Total Bus" community journal. Courtesy of Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

My lowest point was when Adrian left; my highest point was the commune which was an unbelievable experience and only a few of us shared.

My level of energy increased and I am so amazed at how interesting life is and just how much joy there is to be found and I'm still doing. No matter how long life is there is so much to do.

I want feedback. Places I visited were so good for me. So many people doing so many things.

How to say things to people. A whole great awareness of people as a group. Acting like they didn't have any relatives, people are conscious that what they do affects other people. A sense of community with the world -- everyone is your relative -- take care of everywhere you go. Community is a world of mutual benevolence. If I ignore that there are problems nothing happens. If you take care of your relatives and they take care of you -- you get more time to enjoy life.

I don't know how people feel about this and it is 12:30 and it's time for schlof city for me.

Why don't we do an all nighter and cut out the middle.

There are very heavy things going on in the group. I have a tendence to stay on the fringe of groups -- I dislike groups. I've become very absorbed in the group. Something that I needed at the time. I've studied each one of you people very much -- I've really increased my understanding of each one of you. I've hated you all at least once or twice, but I've loved all of you much more than I even wanted to, I feel very good about the trip.

There's someone who is not getting hung up with all this.

A sense of oneness -- touching. I feel the unity of this group and its affect on who we come in contact with.

The individual always affects the whole. Come in touch with how the group affects the individual.

20 different ways of looking at one thing -- it's much more beautiful.

Constructive criticism we all have to work on.

The first week of the trip I thought you were so ... abominable.

Sitting in the same seat having a friendly conversation .. SOMETHING must have changed.

I went out and took a break -- played "I Shot the Sheriff".

Trying to think of an impression of the trip that would be consistant with the whole experience. Great expectations for the second half. Always keeping the group in mind.

Figure 5: Entry from "Total Bus" community journal. Courtesy of Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

APPENDIX C

“Reflections on the Two Knowledges” by George C.S. Strachan

George C. S. Strachan

Reflections on the Two Knowledges

June 7, 1965

Some time ago I was asked to submit a number of topics for this speech. The list began with "The Lethargy of the American woman," followed by "The Lethargy of the American Male," and then, "The Lethargy of the American University." All these suggestions were discarded--not by the University of course, for the University approves of long speeches about lethargy and lack of initiative--but by my own seldom exercised powers of discretion. And so I now find myself reduced to the apparently less-pressing, uncontroversial, somewhat boring topic: "Reflections on the Two Knowledges," or tendentiously, "The Unneedables: A Short Documentary on American Artists and Writers," or tangentially, as some of us are wont to ask on occasions such as this: "What does it all mean anyhow?"

Having set the tone for this brief vagabondage, we may now turn our attention to the key phrase. The key phrase is this: The orator promises more than the poet and offers less. Since I am not a poet, I have relatively little to offer; but since I am not an orator, I am promising even less. In fact, I should like to deliver the first anti-oration--to set along side the anti-drama, the anti-poem and the anti-hero--those common touchstones of modern literature and life.

Disregarding for the moment, touchstones, modernity, literature and life, there occur to me two inexact quotations which will help clarify precisely for what effect the anti-oration should strive. The first is by William Butler Yeats--a rather articulate spokesman for self-determination in emerging nations, and the brother of an obscure Irish portraitist. The second is by

Figure 6: "Reflections on the Two Knowledges" by George C.S. Strachan (1965). Courtesy of University Library Archives, Brown University.

Paul Valery whose name, I will assume, is familiar to you all. Yeats said that from our arguments with others we make rhetoric, from those with ourselves poetry. Valery said that prose is like walking and poetry like the dance, because prose always has an exterior goal.

If I would eschew oratory--or Yeats' rhetoric and Valery's prose, I must then begin by declining to argue with you. That is to say, I must not attempt by any lucid, well-reasoned process to bring you to any specific point of view. This is not to say that I have no point of view. It is simply an admission that my point of view is irrational in a narrow sense, and based on images rather than ideas.

I have created two images for you today, both of which have their place on this hill. The first of these is Prospect Park. I have taken Prospect Park as an image for Brown itself. It is a somewhat haughty place---on top of a hill--geometrically aligned--looking out over the city. And, indeed, from Prospect Park, the city itself seems geometrically aligned.

Prospect Park has a certain tradition. It was once the site of a beacon built to warn against the approach of the English. But it carries its tradition awkwardly. The British are gone; the sidewalks and glamourless metal guard-rails are of WPA vintage; the lumbering stone statue of Roger Williams leans precariously backward in its severe frame.

The most fascinating aspect of Prospect Park is the contrast it offers: The park itself seems an extension of the humorless East-Side houses which front on it. Yet directly below after a sheer stone drop of some thirty feet lies an unkempt vacant lot and a cluster of nondescript asbestos-roofed tenements. Children often play in the lot--noisily, sometimes violently--amid a reasonable

quantity of filth. Sometimes, in the evening, fragments of trumpet or guitar music waft up to the promenours who come to watch the sun set proudly behind the capitol dome. Yet it is doubtful whether they hear or see much of what lies directly below them.

The second image is also of Brown, and it complements, in a sense, the severity of the first. This image was lying behind Faunce House several nights ago. From a distance, it took the shape of a ghastly automobile accident. Heaps of shattered glass and twisted metal were strewn over the street and sidewalk. But this image was hardly accidental, and on reflection, it seems almost inevitable. The glass and bent metal were nothing more than a truckload of beer bottles and cans that some learned society saw fit to deposit there by moonlight. I have heard no more of this "accident". Somehow it must have slipped back into the narrow vest-pocket of the University image--which, unfortunately, is closer to Prospect Park than to the supposedly vacant lot below.

I suppose all of us have learned something during the last four years at Brown. But I am genuinly horrified by what some of us have learned. I have admitted to you my insufficiency as an artist. Whatever I have tried to tell you can be found much more vividly, much more urgently in Joyce, Eliot, Hemmingway, or in another Brown graduate Nathaniel West. But at least I have learned the inadequacy of oratory. Since September of 1961 we have listened to and given out a great deal of rhetoric and prose. There has certainly been little poetry. We are a University rich in the knowledge of persuasion, rich in purposeful knowledge. But we have not that knowledge of the dance--the aimless--beautiful knowledge. Beyond the strict geometric lines, there is all too often a raging inarticulated vacancy. From this vacancy, we have helped create one

of the most grotesque of the great civilizations.

Of course, I have been unjust. Despite all my machinations, I have fallen into the trap awaiting all senior orators--and taken myself and you and the occasion a trifle too seriously. We are far from being a lethargic people; most of us have some inkling of the need for an artist's voice; and significantly enough, we have marched down the hill to a community place in order to hold these exercises. This class, this 200 year old university, this young awkward nation remain the hope--albeit the flickering hope--of a darkening aging world. Let us hope we will have the courage to bear within us the tradition of great men and great ideas--the knowledge which can make us at once strong and perceptive, purposeful and beautiful.

I should like to close with some of the greatest words of one of the greatest men, from Sir Francis Bacon's Great Instauration:

Lastly, I would address one general admonition to all: that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity. For it was from lust of power that the angels fell, from lust of knowledge that man fell; but of charity there can be no excess, neither did angel or man ever come in danger by it.

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