MULTIPLE TEXTS

COMPOSING THROUGH THE PERFORMATIVE SCREEN: TRANSLATING PERFORMANCE STUDIES INTO WRITING PEDAGOGY

Project Runway, The Bachelor, Survivor, Extreme Makeover—these are the names of only a few of the “reality shows” that now saturate television culture. The popularity of this trend bewilders many and provokes, for some, questions about our search for sincerity and authenticity—a desire so strong that we seek it out in the most artificial of places. Despite their moniker “reality,” these television programs are filtered through the apparatus of producers, camera operators, editors, and, of course, the ratings and advertising machine before they ever even hit the airwaves. Post-production work leaves very little “reality” intact, and most reality programs do not mirror any reality at all; they, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms, “[bear] no relation to any reality whatever,” for reality T.V. “is its own pure simulacrum” (170).

While these programs simulate various mediated versions of “reality,” they do have one common denominator—the main “characters” are not formally trained actors tied to a fixed script. Yet there is little doubt that many of these participants are terrific performers. In some programs, such as Big Brother (CBS) and The Real World (MTV), the spectator is privy to “confessions,” moments when a participant looks directly into a camera and, supposedly, reveals her or his “true” feelings. Likewise, spectators also see the behavior of the participants change as they interact with different people or face new challenges. Participants in reality television programs, in fact, audition for the roles, and are often handpicked by program producers because they seem to fit a stock character like the “nice guy,” “overbearing bitch,” “sweet innocent,” “quiet conniver,” or “arrogant jock.” As the individuals work toward the coveted prize, they often create high drama and intensely entertaining television. Whether participants are redecorating a room, spearing fish in a tropical lagoon, vying for an engagement ring, or competing for the chance to work for a multi-million dollar company, their interaction serves as a concrete example of the prevalence of performance in our everyday lives.

The performative feature of reality television has become more apparent as networks tweak and re-release new iterations of successful reality television premises. NBC, for example, wrapped its sixth season of Donald Trump’s The Apprentice last spring and Survivor China (the fifteenth season for CBS) premiered in fall 2007. When The Real World debuted in 1992, television viewers accepted the
authenticity of the players, and no one thought much about how editors worked to shape the reality into entertainment. As today’s viewers see programs reiterated, however—and as contestants on the programs draw from their own spectator knowledge to manipulate the circumstances and their fellow contestants—it becomes more and more difficult for viewers to accept the authenticity of the participants’ performances and the premise of “reality” altogether. This contrivance is also becoming clearer to the generation of students sitting in our classes who enjoy reality television. This is a generation who by osmosis actually may grasp the concept of everyday performance and performativity in a (dare I say?) real way. Our students, who make up a huge portion of the reality-loving audience, may adore this programming, but they are savvy enough to understand that the participants are not necessarily giving sincere, unfiltered, authentic performances.

These programs may be so successful because they satisfy a desire to tap into the inner lives of people—to see people being sincere, raw persons. This trend, albeit in a less dramatic fashion, is also manifesting itself in Composition Studies. Reality television provides a cultural backdrop for concurrent discussions in Composition Studies that praise the subjectivity of writing, encourage a more personal type of academic writing, and advocate teaching methods that challenge traditional academic discourse through alternative discourses. In January 2003, College English devoted an issue to creative nonfiction, and in both 2001 and 2003 College English published special issues on personal writing. Furthermore, a December 2006 College Composition and Communication included a piece by Paul Heilker on the essay. In recent years, several books have revived the personal, including Barbara Kamler’s Relocating the Personal: A Critical Writing Pedagogy (2001). Deborah Holdstein and David Bleich’s collection Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing (2001), and Karen Surman Paley’s I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing (2001). Paul Kameen, in the September 1999 issue of College English, reviewed books by Thomas Newkirk, Donna Quailley, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Christian Knoeller, arguing that these works address “a set of terms that might on first take seem retrograde self, voice, experience, the personal: all bulwark terms of ‘70s expressivism” (100). Kameen speculates that these texts indicate a “general unease with the extent to which those keystone terms of expressivist approaches to teaching writing have been exiled from our disciplinary discussions for too long” (101), and he wonders if they signify a turn to the “next and new” in Composition Studies (102). In short, these shifts suggest a renewed interest in the role of the writer in the rhetorical situation; now we need new theories and methodologies to make these trends matter in the lives of our students.

Many of us teach writing with one version or another of the rhetorical triangle, a tool that is also helpful in reading currents in composition and rhetoric. It could be said that expressivists leaned too heavily on the “writer” point of the triangle, and, in reaction, social constructionists focused the gaze on the other two points of purpose and audience. If, however, the rhetorical stance (to use Wayne

12 Composition Studies
Booth’s term), which balances the writer’s personality and agenda with the needs and expectations of an audience is a necessary component of successful communication, then we can have no discussion of writing that does not fully theorize all three points of that triangle (Booth 27). Purpose and audience have been given their due attention in the last two decades, but after expressivism was so vehemently critiqued, scholars did not develop a methodology to account for the writer in the rhetorical situation in a balanced way. Roz Ivanič argues a similar point, noting that in much composition research

the discoursal construction of writer identity is implicated but not foregrounded. . . .Yet writers are so important to writing. Writer identity is, surely, a central concern for any theory of writing in two senses: what writers bring to the act of writing, and how they construct their identities through the act of writing itself. Why has there not been more attention paid to these specific issues? (93-94)

I am most interested in Ivanič’s second concern, the construction of identity to create the “discoursal self” or the “writer-as-character” (25).

In the remainder of this essay, I suggest that performance studies offers theories and methodologies for writing teachers to use to help students construct discoursal identities. At the moment, there are lively conversations about constructing that identity through writing that is more personal; I am interested in addressing the construction of that writerly character in all types of writing. And I believe that performance studies may be particularly attractive to the next generation of students, who—as spectators of reality television and participants in interactive games, web communities, and blogs—have an innate understanding of the performativity of everyday life.

PERFORMING AN ANTIDISCIPLINE

Performance studies, a large and varied body of work that takes the fluidity of self and the relationship between word and action as its central concepts, can help us step away from more traditional constructs of the discoursal self and toward more complicated, fluid, and socially responsible writerly characters. The field of performance studies is built upon the work of Kenneth Burke, J. L. Austin, Erving Goffman, Victor Turner, Richard Scheckner, and other dramatists and theatre scholars (McKenzie 12, 33). To get an sense of the breadth of work included in performance studies, one only has to glance at the table of contents of books such as The Performance Studies Reader, edited by Henry Bial, which includes the names of performance artists, philosophers, anthropologists, and professors of education, English, and theology, to name a few. Many who are writing about performance today treat performance studies as a kind of “interpretive grid laid upon the process of study itself, and indeed upon almost any sort of human activity”
(Carlson 190). Thus performance may be thought of as a type of terministic screen or what I call a “performative screen” that we can use to view the construction of identity in writing.²

Performance has recently gained more attention and credence in academe, and Jon McKenzie explains in his book Perform or Else that since World War II, the term performance has been seeping through disciplinary boundaries, around traditional academic subjects, and into public discourse; it is, as Richard Schechner remarks, like a tricky sidewinder snake and “[w]herever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there” (357). Despite its inclusiveness, those working in the field of performance studies reject its labeling as an “interdisciplinary” field and prefer to think of it as an “antidiscipline” (Carlson 188-89). Some also refer to performance studies as a “new discipline” that brings together ideas from areas such as sociology, queer theory, anthropology, and theatre. However, McKenzie emphasizes the reinvention of performance as a larger idea: “No, the term ‘performance’ has not been coined in the past half-century. Rather, it has been radically reinscribed, reinstalled, and redeployed in uncanny and powerful ways” (13). It is true that the terms performative and performativity, like the field of “performance studies” or “performance theory,” have been transmogrified and picked up in numerous scholarly contexts. For example, literary studies has seized upon theories of performance to examine antitheatrical prejudice in literature (Barish), performance and Athenian democracy (Goldhill and Osborne), masculinity and Roman rhetorical performance (Gunderson), and the significance of performance in Mark Twain’s work (Knoper).

McKenzie teases out how performance studies has been employed in various contexts, and concludes that performance is the new paradigm and “will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth” (176). The discourses of performance (including theory from all over the scholarly landscape) and the ways of thinking they provide, claims McKenzie, will recreate our perceptions of everything from identity to economics, desire to media. For example, discipline favored book learning, but performance pushes learning out of traditional academic boundaries, as knowledge is created and disseminated outside and off of the traditional classroom stage (184-85). Due to changes in technology, in particular, “life becomes one long continuing ed program” (185). Additionally, adopting the mindset of performance requires us to “consider things as provisional, in-process, existing and changing over time, in rehearsal, as it were” (Schechner 361). Performance studies challenges Composition Studies to refocus its attention away from fixing the discipline to stretching it, opening the definition of “composing,” and requiring us to be open to periods of indecision and flux. Overall, performance’s project is to challenge, to “go the limit, play the margin, be the other” (McKenzie 189).

The challenge of performance has already been accepted, to some degree, in Composition Studies. For example, Karen Kopelson published a piece in College English (2002) about the uses of performativity, and Jenn Fishman, Andrea
Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye discuss the benefits of performance studies in *College Composition and Communication* (2005). J. L. Austin and Judith Butler, in particular, are two figures from performance studies frequently cited in composition scholarship. Austin stands as one of the most influential of performance theorists, arguing that language—and individual utterances specifically—should not be assessed in terms of their truth or falsity but upon whether or not they achieve their intended aim. In *How to Do Things with Words*, he proposes that words do not merely describe, that they are not constative, but that words actually do and are thus performative (6-10). Attention is shifted, as Della Pollock puts it, from asking if a statement is true to asking “‘What does it do?’” (21). Despite the fact that performance studies is based, in part, on language philosophy, this body of work has had surprisingly little influence on composition scholarship, a fact noted by Kopelson. She writes, “Performativity remains most conspicuously absent, perhaps, from composition scholarship that is expressly pedagogical in focus” (18). Performativity, as articulated by Judith Butler, emphasizes the fact that gender is not natural and is instead a result of a series of performed actions (12); by extension, identity then is always under construction, a product of both individual performances and the normalizing institutional structures that dictate which identities will be seen and counted as legitimate. “Queer and performative pedagogues, then,” writes Kopelson, “often take up Butler’s call to risk the incoherence of identity. Perhaps more to the point, they are not only ‘willing to risk’ but actually *work to compose* identities that are inscrutable, troubling, outside the realm of what can be known” (23). Kopelson emphasizes the important role of the teacher who risks this incoherence, who refuses to be fixed and then, by extension, refuses to fix identity norms based on sex, sexual orientation, gender, class, race, and any other number of factors of her or his students. Like Kopelson, I am excited about the possibilities of performance theory for Composition Studies. While I believe that Austin’s and Butler’s work might have further implications for the field, it may also be time to examine other figures to see what their work offers our students.

Although the performative screen offers us several different perspectives that could enhance our teaching of writing, this essay focuses on three figures who have the potential to influence the way we approach issues of identity in the writing classroom. These three thinkers deal directly with performance as an act: Erving Goffman looks at social interaction in terms of theatre, Bertolt Brecht insists on using theatre to shed light on our social performances, and Anna Deavere Smith reminds us of our capacity to learn about ourselves and others through performing multiple roles. Thus, they all come from that portion of the performative screen or performance stratum focused on identity. McKenzie claims that the performance stratum will produce subjects different from those produced by discipline. Rather than the “highly centered, unified subjects” produced by discipline, the performance stratum “constructs and proliferates decentered subjectivities” (179) and from it “hybrid, hyphenated subjects rapidly emerge and immerse, passing through a variety of subject positions” (McKenzie 180).
These three figures from performance studies then offer us new lenses focusing on social performance, social action, and the critical consideration of the distance between the character and actor that are immediately useful to our work teaching writing. If students can see their already-developed performativity, we might then be able to help them harness this performative power and emphasize the social nature of our characters, the responsibility that comes with all performances, and the creativity that we exercise each day as we move from world to world, adjusting our linguistic and physical performances through word choice, tone, organization, dress, and style of all kinds.

In order to perform my conviction that theoretical discussions of performance must be accompanied by performative practice, I have interspersed writing assignments throughout this essay in text boxes, signifying the reciprocal relationship between the theory I discuss and its enactment in the classroom. These assignments are written to a student audience and are meant to be flexible and transferable across writing courses. Some of these assignments may work together as a short writing sequence; all may be used separately in various writing courses, from first-year writing to more advanced courses in writing in the disciplines. As they stand here, most of these are shorter writing assignments, but they could certainly be expanded into larger projects. For ease of reading, I recommend reading the text of the essay before reading the text boxes on that page.

**Everyday Characters**

The first step in helping students construct discoursal selves is to facilitate their vision of themselves as performers. Therefore, I will focus here on explicating how students might come to better understand the performances they give in their everyday lives and illustrating how they might develop and perform discoursal selves that displace the construct of “authentic writer.” Just as Paulo Freire emphasized the generative possibilities of language, inviting students to draw from the language of their lives, writing instructors might invite students to draw from the characters they play on their everyday stages.

Erving Goffman stands as a foundational figure in performance studies, a sociologist who framed social interaction as a series of performances and was “one of the first (among many) social scientists to turn to the theater for a framework with which to interpret non-theatrical behavior” (Bial 57). Goffman’s theory of social performance attempts to account for the fact that a person can, in one day, be a sister, a student, a mentor, and a lifeguard or be a part of a religious community, an ethnic community, or a political community and play all of these parts well. Life situations shift constantly, and we shift along with them in our performances, often very gracefully and effortlessly. The audience, our fellow performers, the setting, the scene, the goal—each of these factors influences our performances of selves. With certain people or within certain situations we may
feel that we are not performing at all, but other circumstances require more of an effort and force us to attend consciously to our facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, or even our posture or stance. Goffman suggests that an actor (read individual) assesses each social situation in order to present a self that will be acceptable by the audience. This construction of self has less to do with *who the actor really is* and more to do with how to *make the most effectual connection* in a particular situation with a particular audience. Recently Goffman has been quoted by compositionists to enhance connections between linguistic performance and self-performance, and here I’d like to make a more explicit link between students’ various performances and how helping them see those performances might make them more rhetorically agile and confident writers.²

Students come to our classrooms knowing how to perform. One way to raise awareness about these various linguistic performances might be to help them see how they are already performing multiple roles in their writing. Richard Courage, in a 1993 *College Composition and Communication* article, notes that what the writing students do outside of class, in their “private” lives, may, with reflection, enable them to see themselves as writers with rhetorical skills. He writes, “Although their daily lives involved writing in many forms (letters, notes, lists, diaries) and for many purposes (to maintain relationships, to exchange information, to remember things, to help their children, to secure entitlements), [students] saw school writing with its particular forms and conventions as an alien activity” (486). In other words, students may see the writing they do outside of class as functional and maybe even “natural.” It’s the academic writing that feels like the “put on” performance. To encourage his students and help them develop more confidence in their abilities to write for school, Courage suggests that we invite students to “identify their nonschool literacies and reflect on the resources hidden there and their relation to academic literacy . . . [by] giving assignments that challenge students to become researchers into their own patterns of language use” (494).

In my first-year and advanced writing courses I use an assignment based on Courage’s work that asks students to collect all of their writing for one week, talk about their work with others, and then write a short reflection on their writerly characters. After this exercise, students usually recognize that they are already adept at performing multiple textual characters. I often give the assignment early in the semester, as I begin to introduce students to the relationship among audience, writer, and purpose. After completing the paper, students are excited by the amount of writing they already do in their lives and have a more tangible understanding of the way that writerly character is shaped by social factors. This project underscores the performative agility that these writers already exercise, an important skill that we discuss as being transferable to the writing they will do in school, at work, and for their own personal pleasure (if they so choose). Most students are delighted to see how far along they already are in adapting writing from context to context.

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² COMPOSING THROUGH THE PERFORMATIVE SCREEN 17
PERFORMING MULTIPLE CHARACTERS

However, instructors should also emphasize to students that even in writing that seems “natural,” they are actually performing some sophisticated rhetorical negotiations. A next step toward developing and enacting textual characters should give students practice in bringing together their different characters and deliberately writing in characters they are performing in their lives. One way of doing this would be for students to write an argument, not from one point of view, but from the many different positions they already inhabit. The early expressivists, in their desire to assist students in expressing their beliefs, asked students to “find voice.” Now, in an era when authenticity and the belief in a stable selfhood have been challenged, those of us invested in helping students to express themselves and articulate their beliefs in sophisticated, compelling ways, must phrase our assignments differently. I propose, in alignment with the work of poststructuralist feminist theorists, that “perform your selves” might be a better directive for writing students. For, if it is theoretically, materially, and pedagogically suspect to require a student to “find” or “express” an “authentic” voice, we must not ignore the discoursal self but find new ways to articulate the role of the writer in her writing. Many feminist thinkers have challenged the notion of a fixed identity, suggesting instead that there are many identities within each of us that we might try to better understand and perform. Particularly, the work of Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Gloria Anzaldúa provide theoretical foundations for multiple performances, and recently published texts that perform multiple voices provide examples of how this might be done.

This alternative approach to argument has been included in scholarly journals for quite some time, but there has been little work devoted to methodologies for teaching students to write in multiple characters. “Making Writing Matter: Using ‘the Personal’ to Recover[y] an Essential[ist] Tension in Academic Discourse” by Jane Hindman appears in the September 2001 issue of College English, one of the special issues of the journal dedicated to personal writing. The piece begins as

WORKING LOG ASSIGNMENT: YOUR MANY ROLES

Sociologist Erving Goffman has suggested that we are all actors and that we are always playing multiple roles depending on the situations we encounter. I’d like for us to start thinking about the different characters we play in our writing. For one week, keep track of your writing. Collect every e-mail you compose, every IM, note, letter, response, paper, memo, shopping list, etc. Bring these with you to class, and, in groups, we will sort through one another’s repertoires. Then write a short paper (2-3 pages) reflecting on how your writing differs from character to character. Include quotes from your collected writings.
any typical academic essay might. Hindman situates her argument within the field and states her purpose. But, on the third page, the text changes drastically, and, through alterations in typeface and font size, Hindman begins to alternate between three characters—her “professional” character with whom she started the piece (in a traditional Roman font), a character that is commenting upon and supplementing the text voiced by the first character (italicized), and the “JaneE and I’m an alcoholic” character (in an Arial typeface).

Hindman is arguing that there is a way to “embody the tension between social constructionist and expressivist perspectives of the nature of writing and the writing Self,” but she also argues and performs that argument through writing in these different characters (101). Hindman remarks,

That interruption [with other characters], however, is not essential; nor is it necessarily more sincere, compelling, or genuine than the former gesture. I am not compelled by some “true self,” or “authentic voice” to interrupt my academic or professional self with an italicized “real” voice telling me to get more clear. I could revise the time and type of interruption if I wanted to: after all, I constructed it. (102)

I want students to feel this same kind of control over their writing and rhetorical choices.

Another example of writing in multiple characters is found in Peggy Phelan’s introduction to The Ends of Performance. Here Phelan presents herself not as a unitary author, but as selves in conversation with one another. In this essay, organized according to the traditional dramatic form of “acts,” Phelan offers her readers a history of performance studies. Rather than take the traditional voice of the academy, Phelan allows her reader to see the seams in her thinking and gives examples of her different characters who are in conflict with one another. “Peggy, the worrier” is anxious about the possibility of organizing a conference about performance studies; “Peggy, the querulous” is insistent that Peggy live up to the ideals she preaches to her students; “Peggy, the dreamer” reminds her of hopes for the field and the project; and then “Peggy, the worrier” resurfaces (2). In this essay, Phelan is many different selves, presenting the kind of openly conflicted, multi-positional writing that may be a source of encouragement for students who are struggling with articulating how they feel about issues at a time when they are also trying to figure out who they are.

**Acting the Character**

Performance as seen through the lens of sociology can shed some light on our everyday behavior and help students see the writerly characters they perform. The experimental work of Hindman and Phelan draw attention to the discoursal characters we present and repress in print. However, on the stage of
Complicating Argument with Multiple Characters

In class we have talked about constructing arguments, and you have written a short paper identifying an issue that is important to you, one that you feel conflicted about. Rather than writing a standard persuasive essay in which you present research and argue one stance on your issue, you will write a paper in which you enact some of the public characters you perform in your life.

As you are writing, think about how your life characters influence how you feel about this topic. Does part of your opinion come from your position as an African-American? Do you feel conflicted on the issues due to your character as a mother? You may indicate the performance of characters through using different fonts to perform your character (as Hindman does) or by indenting portions preceded by “As a student” or “As a mother.”

You may also write the argument through a series of monologues enacting your different characters. You may find that there is some overlap in your characters—that’s fine. Indicate that through hyphenating them.

academic writing, students may need other concrete strategies to create characters that seem less familiar, and for this we might turn to work in performance studies that is most directly connected to the theatre. In America, most are familiar with acting methods firmly based in realism. Phillip Zarrelli remarks that “Actors trained in the American method often approach characterization by ‘living the role,’ that is, erasing distinctions between ‘self’/‘the real’ and the fictional role” (18). Of course, even the most realistic portrayal “is just as conventionalized as any other acting style; conversely, other acting styles, including historical ones, are just as emotional and ‘real’ as realism” (Hornby 214). Like early expressivist approaches to writing, an approach to acting that favors realism often relies on the search for the real, true, or authentic self, suggesting, first of all, that that self is reachable, and secondly, that it can be re-presented by the actor. However, in performance studies there is a move away from this emphasis on authenticity. Acting theorist Michael Kirby suggests that “there has, within the last ten years, been a shift toward the not-acting end of the scale” (53). More modern approaches to performance are less focused on imitating life; therefore, a definition of acting need not entail the process of looking inward to find emotions or experiences to project a character that is “real” because it is drawn from the real experiences of the actor.

This idea might be applied to writing as well. Focusing on the writer in the writing classroom does not necessarily have to follow the path of
personal or confessional writing. Every rhetorical situation calls for a discoursal self, and these performative theories of character construction can help us have more productive conversations about how writing in the university, all writing in fact, requires careful construction and attention not only to audience, but to the character in writing. Students should then be instructed in writing performance, trained to understand and act as different characters in their writing.

German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) stands as one of the most influential thinkers in acting. In contrast with more realistic approaches to acting in which the actor is required to merge seamlessly with the character, Brecht suggested that actors focus on how both they and the character fit into society as whole. Aggravated by the under-use of theatre as a means of persuasion and as a tool for revolution, Brecht proposed an alternative to the Aristotelian theatrical formula. He was interested in more than catharsis and insisted that "the one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are a grown up at seventeen. I appeal to the reason" (Brecht, "Conversation" 14). Brecht was committed to drawing the spectator out of the slumber induced by stage productions that create a realistic, emotional portrayal of people and events. In short, Brecht’s Epic theatre shattered the illusions of reality and bourgeois theatre, alerting the spectator to her or his position as spectator, thus creating a critical political subject who could experience emotion and be moved to action. Brecht then stands as another figure in performance studies who refigured identity and performance as intimately related to larger society and action. As Henry Bial remarks, "If we recognize that virtually all human behavior involves performing, then we can think of the theater as a kind of laboratory where actors and directors stage experiments to help us better understand ourselves" (183).

For many students, the position of college writer resembles a spectator position. Even when invited to write “open-ended” papers, many students, understandably, are capable of identifying what is required of them and performing accordingly in order to survive, make the grade, move through the often-intimidating composition sequence. Brecht’s attitude toward the spectator can provide a new lens through which we see the student writer. Most composition instructors would agree that the best writing is the product of an author who is active and deeply interested in the creation of that work. In Brecht’s vision

[the spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play. The production took the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems “the most obvious thing in the world” it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up. (“Theatre” 71)
While watching the events of college life unfold before them, students are anxious to fit in, both socially and academically. Writing is one of those sites in college that seems to exacerbate insecurity. Students might benefit from alienation in order to move from the role of spectator-writer to actor-writer. Teaching academic language and academic writerly characters as though they were "the most obvious thing in the world" makes critical engagement with those conventions impossible, limiting students to the position of spectators who can merely look on as the conventions are written for them, passively stepping in to write within them. They are confined by the theatre of the academy to the seats, watching the "experts" perform roles that later they will be expected to imitate. Many students, when they enter the university, have a notion about how to "perform the student," or "invent the university," as David Bartholomae puts it. In these performances, students try to approximate the language, attitude, and forms that they think we want. This might mean that they organize the paper according to the suggestions or questions that we list on the assignment sheet; or it might mean that they use the thesaurus, assuming that these words will mark their performances authentically collegiate. They are performing; they are conscious of the fact that they are not trying to "be themselves" in their writing, but they are "performing the student." 4 As instructors, instead of reading this student as lazy or lacking in creativity, we could also read that student as attempting to perform the "thorough" or "quality" student who can follow directions and turn out a product up to specifications. Many students know how to reiterate the role of student. What they need help with, what we should be teaching these students, is acting. Performing a writerly character is not a result of looking deep within and "finding" a quality to bring to the page. It's not magic, nor something that some people can "just do." But in order to do this work, students must leave the spectator position behind and learn how to perform effective characters that will enable them to connect with various audiences across the disciplines. As Ivanič suggests, "I have come to see every act of academic writing as, among other things, the writer's struggle to create a discoursal self which resolves the tension between their autobiographical self and the possibilities for self-hood available in the academic community" (336).

Brecht suggested that the spectators of drama be drawn out, incited to take a stand, and maybe even be moved to enact change. A Brechtian approach to writing pedagogy would help alleviate fears of expulsion or imposture that students might feel when writing at school. Students would be encouraged to see themselves as actors, as conscious beings, in the larger social sphere, acting within characters as they invent, and writing characters rather than passively taking on characters they see performed within discourse. They would, in McKenzie's terms, push the limits of their identities rather than discipline them to fit the mold of the academy. Brecht explains his vision for acting as follows:

The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik; he shows them. He reproduces their remarks

22 Composition Studies
as authentically as he can; he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men; but he never tries to persuade himself (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. ("Short" 137)

Brecht supplements actors’ self-exploration with social exploration, insisting that his actors approach their characters with their eyes and conscious minds open, and requiring that his actors explore the world around them, acting as historians and socially aware citizens before acting on the stage. Therefore, students writing in the Brechtian method would carefully study the roles they are asked to inhabit. In the absence of a script with lines, stage directions, and background information, students could engage in a series of assignments inviting them to research their character and gain an understanding of what role that person plays in the larger society. They could then think about the character in relation to the audience(s) and also consider what kind of person/character they would be in relationship with their knowledge, audience, and social responsibility. Brecht provides writing and rhetoric with a lens that sees performance as relational and not completely submissive to any force, be it internal or external. Instead, the Brechtian performance includes actors who work on “keeping the character at some distance from herself and showing it to the audience” (Auslander 54). It may be said that the actor will “withhold presence from the character she plays in order to comment on it” (Auslander 58) or “quote the character” (Brecht, “Alienation” 94). In other words, Brecht expected character to be the product of a dialogue among the actor, the world, other people, and the actor’s reflection on those relationships.

Quoting the Disciplinary Character

Explore some documents written by professionals in your chosen field of study. For example, if you aspire to be a Director of Marketing, locate some documents written by such people. It’s important that you also do some more general research in order to fully understand what these professionals do on the job and how they fit into the hierarchy of industry.

After you have read the documents and understand the larger context of that work, you must consider how you will “quote the character” of this professional, thinking about the type of Director of Marketing (or whatever profession) you want to be. Reflect in writing on the following questions: What type of work ethic would I have? What would my goals be? What would I do to maintain goodwill and morale? What attitude will be required of me?
In order to “quote the character,” of course, students need to understand that there is a difference between the selves that they normally write in (most likely for school writing, as “student”) and the most effective and persuasive writerly identity for a particular rhetorical occasion. Even in the theatre, Brechtian acting practices are often very subtle, and most productions use deliberate breaks in the theatrical apparatus to create distance between the actor and character. For example, actors might directly address the audience as actor rather than character, the stage might include backdrops or multi-media presentations to call attention to the constructedness of the performance, or elaborate costumes may be omitted, leaving the actor looking more like the actor than the character she/he is performing. But in the process of creating character in writing, the quoting of a character may be enacted in short writings, freewritings, and in writer’s memos accompanying papers written by students in other characters. In such reflective pieces, students can articulate the social position of their character in the larger world or in a smaller institutional context and articulate how that character’s languages and positions work with or against the identities students bring with them to the classroom.

**WRITING AS ME, NOT ME, AND NOT NOT ME**

The Brechtian approach to acting draws attention to the artificiality of stage performance, disrupting the smooth lines of linear narrative and one-on-one alignment of actor and character. Brecht’s commitment to social change has appealed to feminists, and materialist feminists in particular have taken up his philosophy and techniques to direct specific attention to the constructedness of identity in performance (Dolan 108). Jill Dolan writes that “[t]he materialist feminist project, then, becomes to disrupt the narrative of gender ideology, to denaturalize gender as representation, and to demystify the workings of the gendered representational apparatus itself” (101). Additionally, feminist theatre criticism works “to unmask the naturalized ideology of the dominant culture most theatre and performance represents” (17).

The commitment to social change and the unmasking of both gender and ideological constraints is central to the work of Anna Deavere Smith, a contemporary theatre artist who overturns the formal structures of the theatre by going through an intense process in which she “search[es] for American character” in order to create multi-voiced, multi-layered, non-linear, one person performances (Smith, *Talk* 12). Clearly influenced by Brecht, Smith also refuses a seamless identification with the characters she performs, preferring instead to display the differences and find the performed character through an interrogation of the space between character and actor. Smith gained a reputation in the 1990s as a serious theatre artist with her one-woman shows that enacted what Victor Turner termed “social dramas,” or breaches in the social fabric, one of the ideas that contributed to the foundational work in performance studies (Turner 11). Smith’s method is to talk to people who have experienced a social drama, recording her interviews and
listening to the tapes numerous times to develop a performance piece in which she performs these “American characters” on stage. Smith’s work shows the social drama through the voices of the community and acts as part of the redressive machinery that helps to mend the breach in the social fabric. Turner explains that theatre can act as a redressive force, as “a public way of assessing our social behavior” and “portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known “world”” (11).

Students might read Smith’s Twilight, Los Angeles or Fires in the Mirror (or view the film versions) to get a clear picture of the painstaking care she takes in transcribing the interviews and to understand how a multi-vocal collection on one issue enhances the complications of falling on “one side” or another. This is, however, different from writing a paper from one’s own repertoire of characters. A classroom enactment of Anna Deavere Smith would entail reflecting on the self and reflecting on the characters met, understanding the difference between the two, and spending time delineating what makes one character one entity and the writer another. Somewhere in between is a character that can be performed, a character that neither cancels out the identity of the writer nor represents an authentic writerly self. Smith always emphasizes that she is very aware of the fact that when she performs one of these real people onstage she is not getting

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**Writing as Me, Not Me, and Not Not Me**

Anna Deavere Smith talks about creating distance between the character and the character performed. Think about a discourse community you are interested in joining or one that you are anxious about entering into (a disciplinary field, a club on campus, a church). You will interview someone in that area, read some of their writing, and then read other work by professionals in that field. I want you to understand how one person performs this writerly identity, how others perform it, and then consider how you will perform it. Think about how these writers sound in these texts—what words contribute to their characterization? How do they frame their writing? What values do they seem to hold? How do they address their audience? What do they reveal about themselves? After creating a character sketch of this writerly character, think about your characters. What is the difference between you and these various characters in this community? Will you have to shift any of your values in order to join this community? What will be the most challenging thing about adopting this character? How can you play this character differently and still be a part of the discourse community?
them quite right. In the introduction to *Fires in the Mirror*, she remarks that she
does not see the self as the “ultimate home” of the character but that “the search
for the character is constantly in motion. It is a quest that moves back and forth
between the self and the other” (xxvi-xxvii), and she locates character “in the
obvious gap between the real person and my attempt to seem like them. I try to
close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us” (xxxvii-xxxviii).
Smith strives “to really inhabit the words of those around me” (xxv) through a
“reenactment, or the reiteration of a person’s words. . . [traveling] from the self
to the other” (xxvi), not to become that person or gain a “real” understanding of
that American character but to “learn about the spirit, the imagination, and the
challenges of my own time” (xxv).

In her interviews, she carefully attends to her participants’ spoken and
body language:

I can learn to know who somebody is, not from what they tell me, but
from how they tell me. This will make an impression on my body and
eventually on my psyche. . . . I’ve emphasized to my students that
acting is becoming the other. To acknowledge the other, you have to
acknowledge yourself. . . . I don’t want to own the character and endow
the character with my own experience. It’s the opposite of that. What has
to exist in order to try and allow the other to be is separation between
the actor’s self and the other. (qtd. in Martin 52)

Smith refers to Schechner’s work, claiming that her character is “not me” and “not
not me” to suggest that the actor and the character remain two separate entities.
The performed character emerges from the gap between the actor (Smith, in this
case) and the character on the page (or the person interviewed).

Thinking about composition as performance in a more theatrical sense
based on Smith’s ideas can help students better understand their everyday perfo-
rmances, give them a critical sense of what it means to be a character in another
discipline, and can even foster a greater understanding of how our characters
are in dialogue with others in a community. But it is also important to mark
the transgressive nature of performance. If we value the ability of students to
construct discoursal identities that will help them in their professions, we must
also help them, on the road to becoming writers, become adept at performing
characters who may not be traditionally found in the academy. We must also
provide opportunities to explore, develop, and perform non-academic characters.
Some students might want to write an article for a third-wave feminist zine like
*Bitch: A Feminist Response to Popular Culture* or BUST. Others might want to
work on a blog to play the role of film critic or another role that does not fit with
“college writing” but that might open doors for them to think about writing as
an activity relevant to their lives beyond the academy.

26 *Composition Studies*
REHEARSING THROUGH COMPOSING

Asking students to try on different roles, to write in voices that seem vastly different from the ones they use with their friends or at home, requires a great deal of patience on our part. We must make room for and think of this kind of practice as simply a rehearsal. The suggestions for writing included throughout this essay provide opportunities for such rehearsals. Inviting students to consider the popular culture phenomenon of reality television and the scripted nature of these "realities" can open the door for discussions about writing as performance. Students in any writing course could benefit from the "Writing Log," "Quoting the Character," "Writing as Me, Not Me, and Not Not Me" assignments, as all writers gain from reflecting on their writerly positions as they relate to other characters they will be challenged to perform. However, students might also gain from completing the "Writing Log" assignment just prior to working on the "Complicating Argument" paper. The "Complicating Argument" and "Understanding the Social Drama" assignments provide writing opportunities for students in argument courses or more advanced composition courses, settings in which students might feel more agile and confident in their abilities to move in and out of various characters. Assignments such as these represent a first step, an initial foray into cracking into the performance stratum in Composition Studies.

Looking at composing through the performative screen entails character development on our part as well, a shifting from the role as evaluator to the role of the audience member that our students have in mind for their work. Mike Rose reminds us that as students write for the academy, they will "miss the mark a thousand miles along the way. The botched performances, though, are part of it all" (54). The first-year writing classroom, in particular, is a space where students who may be unfamiliar with college discourse can try it on and move around in it. They can also begin to investigate the discourse communities they may want to be a part of outside of their schoolwork and professions. In fact, they should be engaging in multiple performances and the investigation of multiple academic discourses. After all, you cannot play a role if you don't know the part.

Ann Berthoff has said, "Composing involves the writer in making choices all along the way and thus has social and political implications: we aren't free unless we know how to choose" (22). Viewed through the performative screen, the classroom is a stage where students play with their identities, consider the artifice of genres and language, and make choices about their deliberate performances. Students do not have to choose whether they will "be themselves" or whether they will achieve their goals of participating in new discourse communities. Teachers do not have to limit their writing assignments to either personal writing or traditional academic discourse. As scholars in composition and rhetoric and writing instructors, we need to turn our gaze toward the performative screen, bring our students and their writing center stage in our classrooms, and see the choices and the possibilities made visible through acknowledging the performative nature of our language and our lives.6

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COMPOSING THROUGH THE PERFORMATIVE SCREEN 27

Notes
1 We can assume that most have seen earlier versions of the program they auditioned for.
2 Kenneth Burke is a fitting figure to invoke at the start of a discussion about performance, as his dramatism is one of the early connections between performance and contemporary rhetorical studies.
3 See Ivanić’s Writing and Identity, Newkirk’s The Performance of Self in Student Writing, Gilyard’s Voices of the Self: A Study in Language Competence, and Gray-Rosendale’s Rethinking Basic Writing: Exploring Identity, Politics, and Community in Interaction.
4 See Newkirk’s The Performance of Self in Student Writing for a thorough discussion of how students read the classroom situation and attempt to perform the characters they think we want.
5 The “Understanding the Social Drama” assignment is originally from Brenda Helmbrecht’s English 112 course and Katie Johnson’s English 495 course, both at Miami University, Ohio.
6 I would like to thank Beth Burmester, Christy Friend, and Brad Lucas for their helpful suggestions on this article. I would also like to express my appreciation to Kate Ronald and Katie Johnson for their insights and comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Additionally, I would like to thank my colleagues Beckie Flannagan and Jennifer Kunka at FMU for their feedback.

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28 Composition Studies


