

Offshore with Cynthia Haynes: Transcript

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1DERRIDA&PLAY*

Derrida talks about the difference between engineered play and a Nietzschean kind of play, where engineered play, as he says in that essay, [Structure, Sign and Play](#), is really designed to end play. . . And a Nietzschean play is an acknowledgement that play never ends, no matter what you do, and it is how language operates, it is how life operates, it is how being operates and we are not in control. It's not a comforting message. Again, rhetoric doesn't give us comfort or solutions [thought] it can help us mediate these rhetorical dilemmas and paradoxes, aporias, impasses, deadness, whatever.

2SLASH*

I have to make things playful—full of play—for me, so I played and riffed on the idea of the slash as a technology. It is a way to use diacritical marks and punctuation that can benefit the theory or the thinking, so in a sense it is conjunctive. It is rhetoric and composition, the slash works that way. It is also disjunctive in that it can be a divider, the undecidable part, was that as a technology the slash can work as and i and i invoked the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible [Genesis 22] and the beginning of the scapegoat mechanism. The slash is the draw of the knife [and] the undecidable is whether he is going to have to sacrifice his son, and the scapegoat is on the other side [of the scene in the story of Abraham and Isaac]. So, that introduced, for me, a way to talk about the power of a line that is angled this [diagonal] way. Now, interestingly later, I find that there are many other ways that that has happened, like Ulmer does it in his [apparatus theory in electracy](#), where you have the true/false, right/wrong axis; he does the pain/pleasure axis this way, so it is an axis in a way that cuts across our traditional grid of syntagmatic/paradigmatic, true/false, right/wrong kind of thing, and the slash is a way to interrupt those binary dichotomies. I hyphenate sometimes for a reason. I use slashes for reason and as a technology. I had to respond and answer to my copy editor when my book was in production because she was constantly asking me sometimes "you do this with a hyphen, sometimes you italicize part of the word, and sometimes you use a slash—why? and can we not be consistent?" I said "Okay, here's my answer: sometimes I hyphenate a word because I want to slow us down; when we say it in our head, I want the reader to say transdisciplinary, and hyphenated, or sometimes I will italicize part of the word because I want to highlight [it]. I want you to hear it differently or [for] emphasis. And the slash is a technology to show an etymological origin that you have forgotten about...[as in] the sort of abstract. The Latin origins of the word abstract . . . abstraction is

about distancing yourself, about pulling away from something and that was the original, the ab and the stract, so the hyphen and italicization and the slashes are working in ways that I want the reader to slow down, hear something differently, or see an origin that has been forgotten. And I'm going to be firm about that I'm not going to give in.

3RHETORIC&PLAY*

It is a rhetorical strategy to stick with playing.

4DRIFTING*

The drifting is...um... there is an ethical responsibility I want to talk about first, because while I might write that way I don't feel that I can give students the freedom to, in their assignments, write in a personal or mystorical way, talking about Ulmer's genre of the Mystory; much of my writing is Mystorical, in that it is a combination of personal, scholarly, historical. The genre of the scholarly article for me is important to teach students how to do, and we're going to be focusing on that next semester in the course I'm teaching for RCID; but I feel conflicted about the fact that I write in a way [in a] particular kind of drifting way about drifting. I don't feel that ... I just want to be self-aware and transparent with students [so] that, much like what happened with me when I took a Deconstruction course in the late 80s with Dr. [Victor] Vitanza, when I wrote and tried to experiment and write my paper like Derrida; it didn't work. I got the only B I got in graduate school [that] I had ever gotten, because I misunderstood the assignment. I wasn't supposed to be Derrida and write like Derrida, I was supposed to be learning how to do the academic thing, in order to publish [and] in order to get a job. And so I don't want to preclude the possibility that students write in the manner that I write, or that they drift in their own way, but I also want to make sure that they can do...that they can play the game. You know what I'm saying?

5GLITCH*

Actually, I think rhetoric functions as a glitch. If you think of the rhetorical...rhetoric. If you go back to Plato and Aristotle, and they talked about the daemon, that sort of little spirit that Socrates listened to or felt intervened in or—it's not a muse—it's a little trickster figure in a way, the daemon. And that's what rhetoric is. It's a daemon, it's a glitch, it's that noise in the system that's troubling the waters so to speak of language, of the production of meaning.

6ADDRESS*

Rhetoric is not good or bad. It is both and, and it is the site of violence in addition to the site of mediation, it is a form of mediating, it is both and, that is not a comforting thought. It is not a message that is going to comfort people.

7INSIGHT*

If you look at current politics in this country, for example, the field of rhetoric is now under attack because humanism is under attack and humanities and liberal arts are under attack. So what rhetoric does before...it you know...sinks from favor again, because of its repression is...it's fighting to, to keep the production of meaning as a goal in learning and the arts in general.

8DANCE&MOO*

I had a dancer [in my class] who wanted to do a project, an interpretive project of a poem, so I thought "how are we going to capture this?" So, we all went into the theater. She was on stage and she was Japanese, and she had this beautiful kimono on and she did this dance interpreting a poem that she pasted into the [MOO](#) that I set, and we all had our laptops with us and sitting and facing her, and then we were responding to what was happening, typing into the MOO as the poem was being delivered in the MOO. We could talk, interspersed to that, log it all. I was taking photos and stills and creating; and then, a space in the MOO later for that, [which became] an event as an event. It wasn't a filming of it, but it was a way to capture her project. She just came to me with the idea—"I want to do an interpretive dance to this poem how are we gonna do this?" So we, we brainstormed, we came up with something like that.

9IMPULSE*

What compelled me [to begin thinking about my [book](#)] was when I got the phonebook when my father died. The 1941 phonebook. I had an idea for an article; it wasn't a book [at that time], it was an idea for an article, but the more I thought about it, and the structure of that chapter, it became a way to tie in a bunch of things that seemed in my head to all tie together. So then I felt excited because I had work that could go in the book [as a] new work that had not been written yet...um...and find a way to package it into one thing—even though all the chapters are all different and stand-alone essays. It's not a standard book in that sense of a monograph, it's a collection of essays. So what impelled me was the thought that "oh, I have a structure now; oh I already have quite a bit already written; oh, I have this new set of chapters that are exciting me [so] now I'll do that then: revise the previous work and tie it all up in a nice little package.

10THRESHOLD*

The key message in the first chapter... for me... centers on the idea of rhetoric as a threshold. At that threshold is both good and evil. It's not beyond or...um... and that's why, in the first chapter, I write the story about Abraham Buschke and his wife [a Jewish dentist and his wife, living in Berlin, Germany in 1941]. It's that moment when they cross

the threshold, when they're being deported, that I imagined over and over every time I read of a person in the phonebook, and followed [up] and went and found them in the [Archive of the Holocaust Database](#), and [learn] what happened to them—and it would say 'transported to [Theresienstadt](#) November 9th 1942', Status: died. If [the database] doesn't know the date, or [if] it would say 'fate unknown'—but you know they don't leave Theresienstadt, so you know what that means. Or [the database results would say] 'died in Auschwitz' or whatever. So as I was following the stories, every time, in my mind, I pictured this family or that family leaving their home and I thought "what would I do when I had to cross my [threshold], when I had to walk out my front door for the last time—but I don't know it's the last time, because I've been told I can only take one suitcase and [that] we're just going not far, [and] we don't know for how long, because we're not told"...um...so, that threshold marks a moment. It also marks a place, and then, as soon as I walk out that door and I'm taken away, somebody else comes in and occupies that address, so the ghosts of both Germans and Jews occupy these spaces, and the threshold marks that movement that back and forth.

11 PROPAGANDA*

Now that the [The Homesick Phonebook] book has come out, I've wanted to continue working on some things I wasn't able to include in the book that had to do with...I was going to do just a chapter on this, but I think it's gonna turn into a whole series of essays that will form the basis of a new book. Um, it has to do with the Nuremberg rallies and space and people in big spaces and the architectural, the architecture of people in those spaces and mass rhetoric so there's a combination that I'm trying to pull together of the examples from the [Nuremberg Nazi Party Rallies](#) in [19]33 and [19]34, in particular—and the ones that were filmed in [The Triumph of the Will](#) by Leni Riefenstahl, and our current modern day President's rallies—and the issue of truth and propaganda, and the people in those spaces as a language, as an architectural [element], as part of the architectural structure of this propaganda. Okay and it was in Germany—they were part of it—um...and it's still happening now. So, what I'm trying to do is think through the idea of the architecture of space, violence, [and] propaganda, starting with the Nuremberg rallies and studying those and the filming of them.

12 FOOTNOTE*

It's almost too tempting to just do a book about Trump. I don't really want to give him that space in my head, or time, okay. I just don't but...um...it's also as, I mentioned in that talk [to a colloquium of students at Clemson University in April, 2018] and it will be in the introduction of this book [that I'm ideating]. That [is that] I don't think it's ill-advised or unwise to make comparisons between Trump and Hitler, and that will need to be a part of the leap that I'm making. Or the connection to a relevant contemporary term, but I'm not quite sure how to do it and to what degree it might just warrant a footnote. I'm hoping this moment in history becomes a footnote soon...I'm looking right at the camera now.

13PURPOSE*

Rhetoric's primary task in the 21st century is to mediate...um... competing discourses, as a...you know...that is one way that we can not only not become obsolete as academics, but it's an important thing. I think, what is the most important way to bring about peace in the world? That sounds really cliché-ish and utopian, but I've always been the mediator in my family; I don't like conflict. Oddly enough, I ended up in rhetoric and understanding how conflicts work. In naming the book [*Addressing Rhetorics*] *In The Age of Perpetual Conflict*, and addressing rhetorics in the age of perpetual conflicts the subtitle has to do with my feeling that conflict never ends; conflict is how we operate, it is part of the Logos, it is the original meaning of logos. The word polemic [originally,] polemos, goes back to Heraclitus and the idea of the conflict built into nature. It's the smashing of atoms together, it's unavoidable, so what could rhetoric do more effectively and how could we educate ourselves and the public to use language more effectively? And that is to mediate conflict.

14FUTURE*

Rhetorical studies as a discipline, I guess, you could...um...bracket off a segment [of] its rhetorical history and studies as a discipline, and say it has turned in certain ways, in big ways, in different turns, and where it's going. The turn seems to be, now, to material rhetorics, to...um...posthumanism, you know...um... but I don't think that's something that we can predict. Rhetorical tropes are just ways of turning. Metaphor is a turn in language, you know, it turns us from one thing to another. One idea [is that] it substitutes for another. Irony is a turning, and the word 'trope', of course, originates from the Greek. I always think of a sunflower that, you know, turns toward the sun. If you have indoor plants, then you know all you have to do is turn them [away from the sun] and they start troping back toward the light. So it's (rhetoric) part of the world it's part of language and we can make it not turn.