

MAKING AN AVANT-GARDE COMPOSITION: INTERSECTIONS OF
COMPOSITION THEORY AND INNOVATIVE POETICS

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ABSTRACT

The Making of an Avant-Garde Composition: Intersections of Composition Theory and Innovative Poetics explores how current discussions in the field of Composition and Rhetoric intersect with the theories and practices of select members of the avant-garde poetry community, focusing on the issues of genre, identity, and language. As I examine each of these issues, I juxtapose discussions of leading Composition and Rhetoric scholars with creative and critical work of avant-garde poets, identifying common concerns and describing diverse approaches to creating innovative writing practices. I demonstrate the connections between Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's multilingual text, *DICTEE*, and recent scholarship by Min-Zhan Lu and A. Suresh Canagarajah on multilingual student writers in order to argue for more discussion of language politics and linguistic awareness in the composition classroom. I also outline the connections between Harryette Mullen's creative and critical work and scholarship by Donna LeCourt and Roz Ivanic on writer identity to explore new approaches to interpreting and responding to student texts. Finally, I read Susan Howe's *The Midnight* in conversation with leading genre theorists such as Amy Devitt and compositionists such as Robert Davis and Mark Shadle who argue for assigning multigenre papers.

As avant-garde poetics and Composition and Rhetoric often focus on writing practices that rest at the margins of academic conventions, these disciplines should work together to explore and experiment with generic and linguistic conventions and to expand possibilities for academic inquiry. I argue that we can use such cross-disciplinary conversations to consider possibilities for creating models for avant-garde composition, where writers are encouraged to investigate across a variety of discourses and genres.

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I dedicate this work to the loves of my life—Holly, James, Kathy, Lily, Nina, Popsicle, and Rascal—and to the memory of my father, Thomas Edward Maloy, the original outlaw poet.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MAKING AN AVANT-GARDE COMPOSITION

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition. (Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation”)

In figuring out our place among the disciplines, we have made the notion of disciplines paramount—what we talk about when we talk about writing is writing-in-the-academy or “real world” writing that reflects (legitimizes) academic departments. The streamlining of the previously disparate narratives of Composition means that less and less do our genres represent a kind of expressivist or art-writing, a writing for non-academic (or non-ideological) goals, that “first step toward poetry.” (Geoffrey Sirc, *English Composition as a Happening*)

In “Composition as Explanation,” Stein defines “composition” as any active process of creating. Her discussion is useful in understanding the qualities of a single composition, i.e. a piece of writing or art, as well as the overall process of composing. By referring to “a composition” rather than merely “composition” as a general category, she suggests that the possibilities for composition are always multiple, possibly infinite, and that “a composition” changes according to “what is seen” and “how everybody is doing everything.” While “nothing changes from generation to generation,” what we see and how we do things does change, and articulating the lived experience of the present, in all its complexity and (undisciplined) confusion, is what “makes a composition.” What we see and how we do things in the world we live in are changing at such a rate, Stein suggests, that any attempt to classify or legitimate or turn composition into a discipline

cannot keep up with the act of “creating modern composition.” Thus, “the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between and it is really too bad very much too bad for the enjoyer, they all really would enjoy the created so much better just after it has been made” (521). Stein claims we always are a few steps behind in our attempts to classify an act of writing as a composition, and it often takes us a while to recognize a work of art or writing (or “art-writing” as Sirc calls it) as “a composition.” Often we do not see the value in a composition that doesn’t follow the rules until the rules have changed to find such a composition acceptable.

I believe that Stein, often considered the mother of the avant-garde,¹ is a great composition theorist, not so much for her ability to classify the discipline of Composition but for her ability to push us to question who and what we define as “classic” and who and what we identify as “outlaw” as we “make” Composition.² In addition, she pushes us to consider *why* we deem one act of composing classic and another act of composing outlaw: Do we praise a composition for its ability to represent what has already been accepted as ideology and convention, what has already been legitimated within an

¹ While “avant-garde” is a contested term in literary criticism, avant-garde scholars and poets such as Charles Bernstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Lyn Hejinian, Ming-Qian Ma, Marjorie Perloff, Peter Quatermain, Joan Retallack, and Susan Vanderborg position Gertrude Stein at the center of avant-garde and innovative writing movements of the twentieth century and often classify avant-garde poets as writing in a Steinian tradition. As she is often described as one of the pre-eminent avant-garde writers of the twentieth century who has inspired subsequent generations of innovative and experimental writers, I refer to her here as the “mother” of avant-garde poetics.

² I am not the first to appropriate Stein’s work and theories into the field of Composition. In his 1994 book, *Resisting Writings (and the Boundaries of Composition)*, Derek Owens describes Stein as “far and away the most important composition theorist of [the twentieth] century” and also refers to “Composition as Explanation” in his work (180).

academic discipline or has already been established as a representation of the “real world”? If so, what do we do with the outlaw whose composition, while not conforming to academic convention or hegemonic values, may be expressing the “irritating” and “stimulating” beauty of “the way life is conducted,” if I may piece together some phrases of Stein (522-3)? These questions become particularly pressing in the field of Composition in relation to student writers, for we must ask ourselves, what happens when students don’t reproduce “classic” compositions, and how we should respond to “outlaw” texts that, although confusing and undisciplined, may articulate “the way life is conducted,” in all of its messiness? For it would be “too bad very much too bad” if we enjoyers/instructors only recognize the beauty in those outlaw creations after our students are long gone.

This dissertation argues for making an avant-garde composition, one that is outlaw and innovative, that exists on the margins of what is “classic” Composition, and that encourages students to take a “first step toward poetry,” to compose the “way life is conducted” in a variety of forms and languages. Such an avant-garde approach requires composition instructors to become the enjoyers of student compositions that describe “what is seen as it is seen” as well as the supporters of student compositions that explore the many possibilities for how experience can be investigated through language and form. First and foremost, I argue that creating an avant-garde composition classroom involves an exploration of the work of avant-garde writers, many of whom are part of innovative and experimental poetry movements and who write in the tradition of Stein. Likewise, I also argue for an exploration of avant-garde theories of composition in order to

understand how and why the avant-garde challenges artistic, literary, and academic conventions and to question how and why it could be useful for us to envision how we could implement some of this innovation in our composition theory and writing pedagogy.³

My dissertation explores in depth the works of three contemporary avant-garde poets (or art-writers, to borrow a term from Sirc), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Harryette Mullen, and Susan Howe,⁴ in order to demonstrate the ways in which their practices and theories of writing intersect with current discussions in the field of Composition and help us to construct possibilities for avant-garde composition. The innovative poets I have chosen to discuss address issues of language, form and genre, as well as identity and

³ I define *avant-garde* poetry for the purposes of my project as formally and linguistically experimental works written in a Steinian tradition often associated with Language and other innovative poetics movements of the latter 20th century. For discussion of the history of the avant-garde and its connections to Italian and Russian Futurism, Imagism, and Vorticism, see Marjorie Perloff's *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* and Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. Rainey and Susan Vanderborg, author of *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry Since 1950*, also discuss the goals of early avant-garde movements to create community and to integrate poetry into everyday life.

⁴ Howe and Mullen often are associated with the Language school of poetry, which began in the late seventies and which arose from the works of poets such as Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, and Lyn Hejinian published in the literary magazine, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. Early on, Language poets generally wrote outside of the academy, merging poetry and theory, and challenging prevailing academic poetry that was lyrical and dominated by an "I" figure and that was assessed based on New Critical standards in creative writing workshops. Language poetry often politically disrupts the status quo as it creates new poetic forms, posits language as the medium through which experience is created and shared, and envisions a new interactive relationship between writers and readers who work together to make meaning. Many contemporary avant-garde poets who were not part of the original literary magazine and group of poets still are associated with Language poetry and enact a similar innovative poetics. For more extended discussion of Language poetry, see Bruce Andrew and Charles Bernstein's *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, Daniel Kane's *What is Poetry: Conversations with the American Avant-Garde*, Hank Lazer's *Opposing Poetics*, Peter Quatrain's *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*, Bob Perelman's *The Marginalization of Poetry*, and Marjorie Perloff's *Differentials: Poetry, Politics, Pedagogy*.

voice, in ways that interact with similar concerns in Composition, and that furthermore allow us to explore the tensions that exist in these areas between “outlaw” approaches and academic conventions. By reading their works as pedagogical texts, as texts that enact and describe new methods of composing, I investigate their underlying compositional theories and consider the ways in which their compositional approaches speak to (or against) current methods in Composition. Ultimately, I argue these texts provide us with avant-garde methods of composing that articulate the multilingual and multimodal world in which we and our students live as well as the multiple identities we enact within this world. I believe these should inform, and hopefully inspire and alter, our Composition theory and practice, particularly as it relates to issues of genre, identity, and language.

I begin my dissertation with a discussion of Gertrude Stein as well as a quote from Geoffrey Sirc because I believe they both have something important to say about composition, as an act and as a field. Both Sirc and Stein show us that which is accepted as a classic is always in tension with that which is outlaw—innovative, at the margins, or avant-garde. This tension is often left out of historical narratives that present a cohesive account of changes from generation to generation within a discipline. However, the “disparate narratives” of the avant-garde and the outlaw are crucial to the making of a discipline because of their ability to disrupt convention and articulate “what is seen as it is seen.” Stein shows us that often those who most intricately compose how life is lived in the present moment are those whose compositions don’t make sense within practiced rules and conventions. Sirc’s work dovetails with Stein’s theory of composition as it

presents moments in the making of the field of Composition where compositionists saw their students as outlaw composers capable of creating avant-garde works that articulated the complexities of their lived experiences. Both of these compositionists offer us a glimpse of a “disparate” avant-garde composition, one in which the “outlaw” writing of students works to challenge, question, disrupt, juxtapose, and possibly merge with academic/classic Composition.

As Sirc argues in his 2002 book *English Composition as a Happening*, the push for legitimacy as an academic discipline often has required compositionists to focus their efforts on classifying the conventions of *the* field of Composition at the cost of allowing multiple possibilities for composing to exist. The way compositionists have gone about this, Sirc says, is by “streamlining” the disparate narratives of the early days of Composition, weeding out stories of what Sirc calls art-writing or “the first step toward poetry” (a phrase Sirc appropriates from Charles Deemer, a compositionist Sirc admires for his experimental composition pedagogy). According to Sirc, the disparate narratives of Composition include avant-garde writing pedagogies of the sixties and early seventies that encouraged students to compose (Steinian) “irritating” and “stimulating” art-writing that articulated “the way life is conducted.” They were Steinian “outlaw” pedagogies as they encouraged students to explore “what is seen as it is seen” and to express “how everybody is doing everything.” During this time, compositionists presented conference papers and published articles about how to engage in imagination and “non-traditional style” and “knock a few institutional walls down,” and writing instructors asked their

students to write about their lives and the world around them in the language they use everyday (136, 140).

In his book, Sirc connects the pedagogies of sixties compositionists like Deemer, William Coles, Jerry Farber, William Lutz, and Ken Macrorie to contemporaneous avant-garde art movements such as Action Painting and Happenings (performance art events of the sixties), tracing a sort of “outlaw” lineage of Composition that serves as a counternarrative to official historical narratives of the field. These early composition pedagogies asked students to meditate, to write while listening to rock and roll and sitting on beanbag chairs, and to participate in performance pieces. As Sirc describes them, these “were pedagogies of the everyday, of simple human truths (or short fabulous realities) expressed in a kind of American Plainspeak.” They were experimental and avant-garde since they sought to encourage students to explore through and with writing in order to compose their lived experiences rather than reproduce academic conventions and mimic academic jargon that Macrorie famously terms *Engfish* (148). Sirc asks us to re-examine the pedagogies of these outlaws (some, like Macrorie and Coles, who made it into the historical narrative of Composition, and others, like Deemer and Farber, who are not so well known) in order to encourage us to imagine the possibilities for a “happening” composition classroom because

It speaks...to the place of art in our curriculum, to how willing we are (or how strongly we feel the need) to take that next step towards stirring, deeply affective poetry, or how comfortable we are with a curriculum that seeks only to have

students ‘appreciate the varieties and excellences of academic discourse’

(Lindemann 311), actively banishing the poetic. (175)

Ultimately, Sirc asks each of his composition readers whether they are satisfied with the classic or whether they want to explore the outlaw and try to understand it and investigate it with their students.

Sirc shows us that some of these early (counter)narratives posit composition as “happening,” as akin to the performance art of the sixties that used this term to describe its work as active, generative, and creative in a way that is quite similar to twentieth century art movements such as action painting, Fluxus, and punk rock. While Sirc sees many similarities between avant-garde art and the composition theory and pedagogy presented in the sixties, he argues that these similarities dwindled by the late seventies as the field of Composition attempted to gain legitimacy as a discipline (6). Sirc contends that the more the field of Composition has attempted to be recognized as a discipline, the more we have exchanged “art-writing” and creative expression for “canonicity, scientism, empiricism, formalism, high theory, axioms, arrogance, and acceptance of the standard university department-divisions” (7). In Stein’s terms, compositionists have focused on *classifying* Composition often at the cost of exploring the outlaw compositions that challenge those conventions, as we did in the late sixties and early seventies. While many in Composition may read Sirc’s critique as excessively harsh and/or simplistic, Sirc uses this argument in his book to urge those of us who have become too comfortable in our professionalization and disciplinarity to reappropriate the “disparate narratives” of Composition’s outlaws. Through the historical comparisons he makes between early

compositionists and the avant-garde, he demonstrates the important role that outlaws play in questioning hegemonic ideology and practice. He argues that compositionists should consider avant-garde art movements viable models for the field of Composition studies and the composition classroom. What is more, Sirc tempts his readers to envision an avant-garde composition, one wherein “the possibilities of an avant-garde [are] in permanent tension with the academic” (14). Ultimately, he encourages his readers to rethink the spatial, social, and political organization of the current composition classroom, urging us to consider a “Writing Classroom as A&P Parking Lot” (as he titles one of his chapters), to consider how rap music and chat rooms, i.e. “the way life is conducted” in the present, can make a composition.

Utilizing the definition of avant-garde as that which challenges and pushes boundaries, we can see that a good deal of recent scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric works to envision a sort of avant-garde composition. Even though Composition and Rhetoric scholars may not use the term “avant-garde” to describe their work, those who write and research about and at the boundaries and margins of the field are, I believe, contributing to the construction of avant-garde composition. Many Composition and Rhetoric scholars have used the terms “alternative,” “border,” “margin,” and “boundary” to describe their research methods and subjects that are, in Sirc’s terms, “in permanent tension” with the academic disciplinarity that defines Composition and Rhetoric. In the past ten years, many scholars have written about the alternative discourses and rhetorics of those who traditionally have written and conversed outside of the academy. One example is the collection, *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourses and the*

Academy, edited by Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell with essays by Malea Powell, Jacqueline Jones Royster, carmen kynard, and Paul Kei Matsuda.

Similar is Laura Gray-Rosendale and Sibylle Gruber's 2001 edited collection *Alternative Rhetorics: Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition*, which explores alternative rhetorics of women, immigrant, and activist groups in conversation with the academy as well as alternative rhetorics displayed in works of literature and online. Another very recent example is David Wallace's article, "Alternative Rhetoric and Morality: Writing from the Margins," in which he argues that Composition and Rhetoric should examine works such as Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* as well as the queer theory of Jose Esteban Munoz to expand possibilities for rhetorical agency in the academy and to bring "voices and concepts from the margins into substantive interaction with the discourses of power" (23).

As Wallace's article reveals, "alternative," "margin," and "border" often are interrelated when compositionists write about innovative research and "outlaw" writing practices. The discussion of borders—of border rhetoric and border discourse—that exists at the edge of (and between) discourses of power has played an important role in exploring physical borders such as the Mexican-American border: it is described in Wallace's article, Mark Noe's 2009 article "The Corrido: A Border Rhetoric," about Mexican-American students and their relationship to academic writing, and Candace Mitchell's 2008 article "Writing on the Margins: Narrative as a Border Discourse," which analyzes a narrative by one of her Puerto Rican students in order to demonstrate the rhetorical and political moves her student makes within a text written for an academic

audience. Likewise, Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu refer to “border pedagogy” in their book, *Representing the “Other.”* While David Bartholomae’s use of the term in the title of his canonical collection *Writing on the Margins: Essays on Composition and Teaching* is a bit perplexing since it is very clearly located within the center of the field, there are other uses of the term that position a scholar’s work and subject matter at the edge of the field, disrupting boundaries and challenging the limits of Composition and Rhetoric. These uses of the term “margin” often describe the writing and speaking practices of those who have not gained complete access into the academy, in particular English Language Learners and basic writers.⁵

Compositionists similarly employ the concept of “boundary” to disrupt and reframe disciplinary borders. It has been used by Mary Ann Cain to investigate and challenge the disciplinary boundaries of Composition and creative writing, as well as by Deborah Journet and Julie Thompson Klein to explore genre boundaries and interdisciplinary writing. Lu also sees her work on language politics as “boundary work” that challenges the limits of academic discourse. In her article “An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism,” she observes, “Whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, we take part in this struggle through every decision we make on which english to use and how to use it. Composition is

⁵ Recent selected examples of such articles that use this term in discussing ELL students are “Meeting in the Margins: Effects of the Teacher-Student Relationship on Revision Processes of EFL College Students Taking a Composition Course” by Given Lee and Diane L. Schallert in *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(3) Sep 2008 and “From the Margin to the Center” by Vivian Zamel in *Enriching ESOL Pedagogy: Readings and Activities for Engagement, Reflection, and Inquiry*. Examples that discuss basic writing students are “On the Academic Margins: Basic Writing Pedagogy” by Deborah Mutnick in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* and well as “Moving the Margins” by Marti Singer in *Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access*.

boundary work. How we go about using English matters” (24). Here Lu suggests that the struggle to define, disrupt, adjust, blur, or complicate boundaries of English is at the heart of the work of Composition as a field (possibly because it is a field with marginal status, as Sirc argues). As Lu challenges monolingualism and works against “Fast Capitalism,” she innovates, much like the other compositionists I mention here, and challenges what is possible and acceptable within—and at—disciplinary limits.

As this discussion and dissertation suggests, Composition does have an avant-garde, even though the compositionists I consider part of this group may use other terms—alternative, border, margin, boundary—to describe their scholarship. The goal of this dissertation is to identify an avant-garde thread within composition and demonstrate how its conversations about the discourse of the poetic avant-garde when we theorize genre (and multigenre texts), multilingualism, and (multiple) identity construction. I believe that highlighting the similar composition concerns of innovative compositionists and innovative poets will generate new possibilities for creating avant-garde writing theories and practices in Composition.

Currently, compositionists’ engagement with the poetic avant-garde is limited. As the previous pages make clear, Sirc discusses connections between composition theory and visual and musical avant-garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, John Cage, and the Sex Pistols. However, the only book-length work that explicitly addresses the connections between avant-garde *poetics* and Composition is Derek Owens’s *Resisting Writings (and the Boundaries of Composition)*. Owens first defines composition as “an investigation of nothing less than how human perception is

communicated through the composing of language, both oral and scribal, performative and textual” (8-9). This definition of the study of Composition thus transcends the freshman research paper or the thesis statement, including “the study of how writers of cross-cultural, feminist, and experimentalist outlooks make and share texts.” Owens argues that “the discrepancy between the study of composition theory in its global sense and the more confined understanding of composition as practiced in most colleges is too glaring to go unnoticed” (9), and contends that it is important to expose students to both conventional and experimental texts by diverse writers in order for them to see many possible forms of composing and for them to be aware that “traditional distinctions” of genre and conventions of language are often challenged in contemporary writing in important and valuable ways (15).

Owens proceeds to contextualize the work of avant-garde writers such as David Antin, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Lyn Hejinian, Susan Howe, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams in relation to discussions within the field of Composition regarding the genre of the essay, standardized English, and feminist composition. Throughout his work, he argues that composition instructors should read a variety of texts that challenge what we deem “acceptable” forms and discourses, whether these are “spoken essays” by Antin or the oral works of Zuni Indian poets that promote invention rather than conformity in the genre of the essay. He also challenges the conventions of the “academic language canon” by connecting discussions of discourse theory by Geneva Smitherman to discussions of literary work by African-American, South African, and Negritude writers. And in his chapter “When Male Means Marginal,” he juxtaposes excerpts from avant-

garde texts by Mina Loy, Howe, and DuPlessis with the masculinist language of Peter Elbow, William Coles (Sirc's *Happening* pioneer), and Donald Murray to demonstrate the ways in which academic discourse and the work of academic critique and analysis is gendered masculine—strong, forceful, tough—and in opposition to feminine writing that is, by default, weak, soft, and pointless.

In the latter half of his book, Owens argues that works of contemporary avant-garde writers describe “contemporary options” for Composition by outlining new possibilities for multigenre composition, active reading, rejection of closure, multiple perspectives of time and space, and experimentation with constraints in their work. Owens effectively stresses the importance of these options:

Readers might find these experiments tremendously liberating, intolerably annoying, or simply boring; but whatever our reaction, our understanding of composition theory will lack depth of field if these ends of the spectrum remain ignored—especially if it's simply because they don't fit neatly into our most familiar pedagogical frames. (171)

For Owens, outlaw and avant-garde methods of composition are important to explore. The innovation and experimentation of form and language that is inherent in these approaches of composition is essential for a deep understanding of composition theory, one that moves beyond the “classic” and its accepted “pedagogical frames.” In his last chapter, “Implications for Practice,” Owens envisions an avant-garde composition curriculum that alters how Composition is taught by replacing basic composition courses with more upper-level writing-intensive courses, offering courses that explore multiple

and alternative theories and practices of Composition, and rethinking the traditional division of creative and academic writing in the curriculum. Overall, Owens's work provides a persuasive argument for the incorporation of avant-garde poetics into the field of composition at a theoretical and curricular level.

While my dissertation builds upon this strong foundation, it differs from Owens and Sirc by tackling these conversations at a closer level, tracing in each chapter the compositional methods of an individual poet within an individual text and exploring in depth the connections and deviations between the avant-garde poet's compositional approach and issues in current composition theory. Such an in-depth investigation of an avant-garde poet's compositional methods reveals the ways in which she enacts theory through innovation of genre, hybrid subject positions, and language, merging her creative and critical pursuits and blurring the line between her personal views and experiences and her academic endeavors. I argue that attention to these issues can expand current composition theory and, most importantly, lay the groundwork for building avant-garde composition theories and practices.

Defining Avant-Garde

Generally, the term "avant-garde" refers to a group of innovators or pioneers within a particular historical moment. However, there has been much scholarly debate about how the term "avant-garde" is used and defined within various visual and literary arts movements. With this in mind, I would like to point to some discussions of the avant-garde in literary criticism to frame my project.

First, many avant-garde poets of the twentieth century are interested in teaching their readers about their compositional methods and their ideas about writing. In her work *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry since 1950*, Susan Vanderborg describes the explanatory essays and notes that many avant-garde writers use in order to teach their readers about their writing processes. She defines “the highly creative essays, notes, prefaces, and source documents that [many avant-garde] authors provide with their experimental poetry” as “paratexts” (5). Paratexts—be they manifestos, supplementary essays, introductions to poems, or notes and documents—are essential to avant-garde poetry because avant-garde work is often considered difficult and incomprehensible without explanation and because avant-garde poets desire to discuss their methods of composing with a community of active, investigative readers. Vanderborg also demonstrates that “paratextual discussions of theory and politics [try] to engage—or educate—an audience and to define poetry’s public role” (15). Thus, it is the paratextual element, which fuses creative writing with critical thinking, that adds a pedagogical dimension to the avant-garde and that can be useful to building an avant-garde composition that can be enacted in the writing classroom.

Avant-garde poetry also often teaches us new ways to read that can highlight a writer’s complex relationships to language and identity in her work. Juliana Spahr’s work, *Everybody’s Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*, explores the participatory reading practices that she argues are encouraged in the avant-garde works of Cha and Mullen as well as Bruce Andrews, Lyn Hejinian, and Gertrude Stein. In her book, she shows us the ways in which all of these avant-garde poets enact—and teach—

active and participatory reading practices that literature and creative writing instructors should discuss and adopt in their classrooms. Spahr argues the benefits of reading avant-garde poetry: such work actively and politically challenges standards of language and identity, promotes new intercultural and multilingual ways of reading, and builds communities of readers. Spahr's work helps us to see the pedagogical implications in avant-garde texts and effectively argues the importance of reading such work in the literature classroom. I will draw upon her work in my chapters on Cha and Mullen, but I also want to use it here to suggest that avant-garde poets often teach us how to explore texts in ways that can be useful to the literature or creative writing classroom *as well as* to the composition classroom. We can use what we learn to read texts differently, as Spahr contends, and, in addition, as my project shows, we can use what we learn in these avant-garde texts to compose differently, to write (and teach writing) in ways that represent the complexities of our linguistic and cultural experiences.

We also can use the category of "avant-garde" to connect many writing practices that challenge current categories or genres of writing. In their recent reader, *Poetry and Cultural Studies*, Maria Damon and Ira Livingston argue that poetry should be a part of cultural studies because so many examples of poetry exist in our everyday lives, from orations to song lyrics. Integral to their argument is a consideration of the term avant-garde. They state,

We want to push the term *avant-garde* away from the historical avant-gardes of the earlier century and toward a more general experimentalism. Such experimentalism might well include an attitude and style that deliberately breaks

with the contemplative and forces the reader or listener/participant to ask ‘Is this poetry too?’ and to arrive at a conclusion that expands the definition of poetry without domesticating the otherness of the provocative artifact. (9)

For the purposes of envisioning an avant-garde composition classroom, I think that Damon and Livingston’s open definition of avant-garde can be helpful as we ask “Is this composition too?”, thereby expanding the possibilities for writing that takes place in the composition classroom. This open definition bridges “the distance between art and everyday life” and highlights “the value of experience as experiment and as creative process/praxis that characterizes vanguard endeavors” (10). As many compositionists aim to bridge the distance between Composition and everyday life and teach “experience as experiment and as creative process/praxis,” I believe we would do well to consider the work of the avant-garde—and the limits of what avant-garde can be— as we envision new possibilities for the composition classroom. Likewise, Damon and Livingston’s definition of the avant-garde as a sort of poetics of the everyday can encourage those who consider themselves to be avant-garde poets and literature instructors to consider how their reading *and* writing pedagogies support avant-garde practices.

Last, and most important for my project, is the feminist nature of many avant-garde projects. Joan Retallack aligns avant-garde poetry with a feminist/feminine literary trajectory that exists outside of “the masculinist bias of establishment literary traditions” (113). In her essay, “RE:THINKING:LITERARY:FEMINISM,” Retallack connects avant-garde poetics to a feminine experimental writing lineage she traces back to Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and which includes Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein,

Cha, Anne Tardos, and Tina Darragh as well as John Cage, Futurists and Dadaists, and David Antin. This avant-garde writing opposes a masculinist literary establishment by exploring (and exploding) traditional conventions of genre, language, and identity, as well as the divide between the reader and writer of poetry. The objectives of such poetry are “creating not just a self but language games and forms of life that draw on public knowledge and exploration of otherness, thereby reforming by their very *active* presence the public sphere in which they operate” (115-6). The experimental works that Retallack describes reform the public sphere not only by challenging conventions of form and language, but by creating new poetic (or “poethic” as Retallack terms them) forms and genres as well as by articulating that which has been silenced or deemed unintelligible speech. Retallack also classifies this work by describing the role of the reader as active “in the construction of a living aesthetic event” of reading and making meaning of a text (123-4). Such descriptions of Retallack’s experimental feminine provide an important framework for the work of contemporary avant-garde poets who share priorities of enacting new possibilities for language, form, identity, and generative reading in their work.

In my research for this project, I have often returned to Retallack’s conception of enacting a feminist poethic sphere through writing, one in tension with masculinist conventions of disciplinarity, language, form, and identity. I have chosen three diverse female poets—Cha, Howe, and Mullen—not only because I believe their works make meaningful contributions to building an avant-garde composition but also because they are innovative female poets who articulate their lived cultural, linguistic, and gendered

experiences in ways that challenge and disrupt literary traditions, academic conventions, and discourses of power—all of which they gender male in their works. These women share the priorities of the experimental feminine, working to articulate “(women’s) silence,” a silence that Retallack defines in her work as “nothing more or less than what lies outside the radius of interest and comprehension at any given time,” and one that is “not at all empty at all but densely, richly, disturbingly full” (111). Each of these poets uses her work to compose “the active textual project of entertaining multiple, complex possibilities/improbabilities/unintelligibilities in our languages and lives” (132). Their writing enacts new models for multilingual, multigenre, and multiliterate compositions that are concerned with articulating that which is often deemed unintelligible within disciplines and discourses of power, that which is often experienced by those who exist outside those disciplines and are not fluent in discourses of power—traditionally women as well as those who belong to cultural, racial/ethnic, and sexual minorities. My own project follows this feminist and avant-garde trajectory because I, like many of the compositionists I discuss, believe many student writers also are silenced within the discipline of Composition, as their writing is read as lacking or unintelligible, and I believe that the work of Cha, Howe, and Mullen may provide us with new innovative ideas that help us to rethink possibilities for engaging student writers in an avant-garde composition classroom.

Making an Avant-Garde Composition, Beginning Again and Again

I aim to demonstrate the many ways in which avant-garde poets *teach* methods of composing in their work and to argue that these methods cross generic and disciplinary boundaries in a way that is useful to composition theory. Both implicitly and explicitly, in form and content, in poetry and in critical essays, the poets I have chosen outline a writing pedagogy, a process of composing concerned with those particular issues of genre, identity, and discourse that so concern compositionists today. My goal is to encourage compositionists to learn from these pedagogical texts and to use them to imagine an avant-garde composition classroom, one in which students are encouraged to compose multilingual, multigenre realities that articulate their multiple identities within and outside of the academy. Within this avant-garde composition classroom, students would think critically about the intersections of ideologies inside and outside of the academy and create compositions that juxtapose, and possibly merge, discourses and forms. Students could think dialogically across discourse communities rather than working to master only one set of conventions. Inevitably, the personal and the academic would be blurred because students' linguistic and cultural experiences would guide their investigations and they would use their writing to work through multiple possibilities of meaning-making, based on the experiences and knowledge they bring to the classroom.

The first step in creating avant-garde composition, I believe, is to present avant-garde works as integral to and in current composition theory, which is what the first three chapters of my dissertation do. In each of these chapters, I focus on one avant-garde poet, reading her work as with a compositionist's eye and attempting to articulate what I see as

a composition pedagogy within each poet's work. I argue that inherent in the work of each of these poets are important theories and practices of composing that should be examined seriously by those in the field of Composition. In order to demonstrate the extent to which these poets' texts can be seen as composition pedagogies, I relate the poet's theories and practices of writing to a specific issue in current composition theory. I point to particular nodes of intersection—language, identity, and form— I see within each poet's work and the field of Composition.

My first chapter, "I write you. Daily. From here': Composing a Generation 1.5 Space in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*," explores Cha's book-length work, which challenges the methods through which language is taught and perpetuated by national, religious, and educational institutions. Cha's work is composed primarily in English and French but also includes Japanese, Latin, Chinese, and Korean languages, and it uses photographs, letters, and multiple genres in order to contemplate issues of nation, language, immigration, education, and religion. *DICTEE* is informed by Cha's own experience as a Korean-American who moved to the United States and attended Catholic school as a child as well as her experience as a scholar of French literature. In my chapter, I explore the ways in which Cha critiques—both explicitly and implicitly a language pedagogy of standardization. Cha includes grammar and translation exercises, those that we often see in traditional language classrooms, in order to show how this type of pedagogy perpetuates an imperialist ideology and how (multilingual) subjects within it are able to challenge it through their use of "incorrect" translation, "broken" English, and silence. By articulating such deviance by the speakers within her text, *DICTEE* enacts a

pedagogy that privileges the multilingual writer and reader as it demonstrates the political and artistic power that such acts of disruption have. I argue that Cha's text is an important contribution to Composition and E.S.L. scholarship because it has the power to teach and model how such a pedagogy of disruption can—and should—function within language and writing classrooms.

Chapter Two, "Harryette Mullen's Syncretic Literacy: Practices for Composing Multiple Identities," discusses the creative and critical texts of Harryette Mullen and the way in which she constructs a praxis of syncretic literacy within her work. Mullen belongs to multiple poetry communities—an experimental community as well as a community of African-American poets—that do not always overlap in their discussions of poetics. As a poet who identifies with both of these communities that at times are in direct opposition with one another, Mullen composes poetry that enacts these tensions by merging the divergent discourses, forms, and ideologies of these communities. In my chapter, I argue that this ultimately presents a model of syncretic literacy, an approach to reading and writing that juxtaposes—and even fuses—conflicting ideologies. Mullen merges genres, chooses words with double meanings or suggestive associative identifications for a variety of readers, and incorporates various voices and languages into her poetry, exemplifying how a writer may articulate her various identities while creating new subject positions from which it is possible to speak. Specifically, Mullen uses cultural markers that represent multiple identities—female, American, African-American, and even avant-garde poet—while disrupting formal expectations of lyric, free verse, and prose poem. Through this process, Mullen creates an innovative, female, black poetics,

where all facets of her identities come together without being compromised. I believe this model can be incorporated into Composition discussions of identity and student agency.

My third chapter, “Composing Multigenre Awareness in Susan Howe’s *The Midnight: Academic Inquiry as Patchwriting and Patchworking*,” examines poet Susan Howe’s approach to composing a multigenre research project in her book-length work, *The Midnight*, published in 2003. Specifically, I explore the ways in which she merges and juxtaposes multiple genres as part of her documentary poetics as well as how she opens up possibilities for the academic genre of the documentary essay by redefining what counts as evidence in her investigation. *The Midnight* is a multigenre text that actively engages and challenges a variety of genre conventions as it critically explores historical, cultural, intellectual, and personal issues in conversation with one another. Within her text Howe presents an innovative model for academic inquiry that posits a process of what Rebecca Moore Howard calls “patchwriting” through source documents to make connective meaning as well as an approach to research writing as a patchwork of genres and sources. In my chapter, I also examine how Howe assembles a collage of poetry, photos, autobiography, literary and historical analysis, drawings, and copies of book pages as her sources to create a multigenre approach to research. I connect her process of composition to discussions of genre in Composition by theorists such as Amy Devitt and Anis Bawarshi in order to consider how Howe’s text might be used by compositionists to consider new multigenre approaches to research and academic inquiry in the composition classroom.

Chapter Four, “Avant-Garde Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom: Innovations in Practice,” considers the practical implications of the first three chapters of my dissertation by providing an overview of current writing pedagogy—creative and critical—within English studies that encourages innovative and avant-garde writing practices. I then describe avant-garde writing activities I have incorporated in my basic writing, composition, and advanced composition classrooms in attempts to build avant-garde composition(s).

There are many benefits of exploring the creative and critical works of avant-garde poets to envision an avant-garde composition classroom. Avant-garde poetry presents models of writing that connect the creative and the critical, resist closure and fixed meaning, consider the possibilities and uses of language beyond articulating what has already been standardized and defined, encourage the reader to actively participate in the construction of a text’s meaning(s), and challenge hierarchical social structures and static notions of self through experimentation with style and form. Each element within the lengthy list above has been a recent topic of discussion in *Composition*, as I will show throughout my dissertation, and, for that reason alone, we should look at avant-garde texts that explore such topics. In addition to challenging the conventions of the composition classroom (in a way that Sirc argues is much needed), the work of the avant-garde speaks to the field of *Composition*’s investment in exploring postmodern notions of identity, language diversity, and the compositional forms and genres of disparate writing communities.

Working from the margins of the academy, avant-garde poets disrupt the disciplinary divisions by merging creative writing and critical analysis, challenging the generic conventions of the poem and the essay, and urging readers to see that both the personal and the academic are political. These disruptions are important, I believe, because the disciplinary division between Composition and creative writing often limits possibilities for student writing across English studies, relegating the academic and the critical to the composition without allowing much space for personal engagement or creative thinking. By examining the work of avant-garde poet-critics, composition instructors can explore possibilities for disrupting the boundaries between the creative and critical and begin to think of ways to present to students composition—that is, an *act of composing*—that merges academic writing with art-writing that articulates the language, cultures, and forms of their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 2

“I WRITE YOU. DAILY. FROM HERE”: ENACTING MULTILINGUAL WRITING
PEDAGOGY IN THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA’S *DICTEE*

In their 2007 article, “Resisting Monolingualism in ‘English’: Reading and Writing the Politics of Language,” Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner argue that the field of Composition should rethink its position on standardized English in the classroom and take a more multilingual approach to teaching language. Horner and Lu argue that, because of its identification with English studies in the university, the field of Composition has tacitly taken an English-Only position, even though many individual scholars’ theories about language posit a multilingual approach to teaching writing.⁶ Our alliance with an English-Only stance in the classroom necessitates an accommodationist approach to teaching academic English, Horner and Lu contend, and such an approach positions English as a language of power in the classroom and the culture that must be mastered by each student in order to ensure her academic success. While this approach acknowledges that students may come to the classroom with knowledge of other languages, they are instructed to learn how to translate those other languages into Standard English (144). Horner and Lu believe that this approach ultimately supports an English-Only stance in the classroom and propose that compositionists move to actively align their classrooms with a multilingual approach to sociolinguistics, one in which code-meshing, hybridity, and interaction between and within languages is explored and privileged. “The multilingual approach,” they state, “rejects the stability, legitimacy, as well as the inherent value of commodity of Standard English,” and repositions English in

⁶ One example of this is the *CCCC* position on Students’ Right to Their Own Language.

terms of what they call “Living English,” an ever-changing in-flux ecosystem that is constantly evolving according to its speakers’ creative use of the language (150).

In order to practice “Living English” in our classrooms, Lu and Horner, drawing upon the work of A. Suresh Canagarajah who explores the globalization of English and its relationship to cultural imperialism, imagine a multilingual classroom within which the blurring and meshing of language and genre are promoted and explored in students’ writing and reading. Students should read multilingual works that experiment with language and genre, Horner and Lu argue, in order to ask “questions of what is gained by writers’ use or deviation from standard conventions in their texts (literary or otherwise), and how readers might account for their own responses of ease or unease in encountering such practices: what and who is subjected to what through what use of ‘English’” (152). They also argue instructors of writing courses should begin to see grammatical deviation not as error but rather as a choice that demonstrates creativity, an active design in which a writer has drawn upon all her linguistic knowledge to compose. Horner and Lu link their multilingual approaches to other discussions of hybridity by Patricia Bizzell and Sidney Dobrin in the work *ALT DIS*, although they caution against standardizing hybrid forms because this reifies the notions of privileged academic discourse. Instead, Horner and Lu argue that instructors should present to their students heterogeneous writings that explore language and genre in a variety of unique ways.

Lu and Horner’s call for composition instructors to practice “Living English” requires many of us in the field of Composition to reframe discussions of student error and to rethink the meaning—and creative intentions— of students’ deviations from

standardized language. What is more, as our student populations become increasingly diverse both culturally and linguistically, it is imperative for us to think about how to take such a multilingual approach to our composition and basic writing classrooms. These approaches encourage students to explore their home languages as well as a “Living English” that is constantly evolving and influenced by diverse speakers across the globe, and they empower students to resist the ideological forces that underlie the teaching of standardized English as *the* language of the academy and that require students, particularly multilingual students, to choose between mastering standardized English and representing the lived linguistic and cultural realities that are read as deviations within this discourse community.

While a multilingual approach requires compositionists to devise new ways of talking about language and to design new types of writing assignments that promote discussions and enactments of many languages and discourses, an essential part of practicing “Living English” and fostering multilingualism in the classroom is incorporating new multilingual texts into the theoretical and practical landscape of the field of Composition. Many compositionists have incorporated the work of Amy Tan (Harklau “Representations,” Zamel and Spack) and Gloria Anzaldua (Horner and Lu *Representing*, Wallace, Wiederhold) to explore possibilities for discussing and approaching multilingualism in the composition classroom. In order to promote a multilingual approach to composition, though, more writers who represent linguistic diversity in their work and that challenge the linguistic and cultural hegemony of standardized English through hybrid genres and languages need to be included in current

discussions of multilingualism in Composition. As some composition scholars have shown with the work of Tan and Anzaldua, multilingual writers' critiques of their own linguistic education, their approaches to composing, and their multicultural experiences can inform discussions in Composition and provide insight as compositionists map out new possibilities for creating and supporting multilingual learners in writing classrooms.

One contemporary work that has not been discussed in the field of Composition but that provides important insights into the composing process of a multilingual writer is Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*. Cha, experimental writer and film maker, draws upon her linguistic and cultural experiences as a Korean-American in *DICTEE*, which was published in 1982, just a few weeks after Cha died in New York City. The book, a juxtaposition of images, poetry, narrative, and historical document that is written in English, French, Chinese, and Korean, is described by critics as an autobiography, a work of fiction, a book of experimental poetry, and even a multi-media collage. Many readers of Cha's text become frustrated with its apparent inaccessibility, its experimental style, fragmentary narratives, multiple speakers, and multiple languages; however, these formal and stylistic innovations serve an important function, particularly for compositionists who want to take a multilingual approach in their writing classroom.

DICTEE provides important insight into issues of language acquisition and identity for a member of Generation 1.5, someone who has immigrated to the United States at some point during her primary or secondary schooling and who possesses unique and hybrid knowledge of her mother tongue as well as English. It explores Cha's (as well as the other Generation 1.5 speakers') connection to and separation from the

culture and the language of her motherland and enacts the painful and frustrating experience of acquiring another language at the behest of a dominant national, or academic, culture. Cha's own experiences acquiring English, learning French language and literature, and investigating Korean history and folklore filter into this multigenred work and provide us glimpses into the ways in which Cha's theories of language and writing are informed by her experiences as a Generation 1.5 English Language Learner. Through reading and reflecting upon Cha's work, we are introduced to an approach to language that interrogates discourses of power as those discourses are used as agents of nationalization, oppression, and imposed silence. The structure of Cha's work, which at times mimics grammar books and language exercises, challenges the possibility of direct translation between languages by representing textual transgressions and errors in this process; likewise, it also challenges the belief that one could acquire the language of a dominating power without the pressure or force to take on the ideology of this dominant power.

DICTEE is divided into nine sections, each section named after a Greek muse. While multiple voices and genres are represented in each section, the parts of this text are held together by themes of language acquisition, Korean history, translation exercises, and exploration of the concepts of motherland and mother tongue. Cha's experience as a Korean-American growing up and attending school in multiple countries is mirrored in the speaker(s) of her text, and by piecing the text together, we learn about the life of Cha's mother and Cha herself, as well as the powerful role that language acquisition plays in the formation of cultural and national identity/identities. Ultimately, these

sections of fragmented text track the literacy development(s) of a mother and a daughter as they migrate across national boundaries and are educated by a variety of authorities—Japanese imperialists, teachers, and priests—as well as by a variety of stories and folktales that are often silenced or forgotten by those who dictate national language and history. At times we may not know who is speaking in the text, but Cha shows us the development of her own hybrid literacy/literacies as she lets this variety of voices exist within her text and as she pieces them together to make new meaning. This chapter argues that compositionists can use this work to further develop our understanding of the Generation 1.5 experience as well as our approach to promoting multilingual composition classrooms. Cha’s text challenges a pedagogy of standardized language that sees multilingual students’ writing and speaking as erroneous or lacking. Ultimately, it enacts a multilingual pedagogy of resistance and creates a model of hybridized literacy from which a Generation 1.5 writer—and furthermore any writer who uses multiple discourses— is able to compose lived multilingual and multicultural experiences.

Working with Generation 1.5 and Multilingual Students: Obstacles and Possible Solutions in Current Theory

DICTEE explores the processes of acculturation that often seem inherent in learning a new language and the ways in which this acculturation is reinforced and perpetuated through dominant pedagogical models. It also elucidates possibilities for challenging and changing the pedagogy of language acquisition as well as the

possibilities for composing in multiple languages. Each of these issues is reflected in recent discussions of multilingual students, and Generation 1.5 students in particular, in the fields of Composition and Applied Linguistics. This section provides a short overview of recent discussions in Composition of standardized English, the prevalence of Generation 1.5 students in composition classrooms, and the particular struggles these students may face when they begin to write in the academy.

Although composition instructors often do not intend to alienate non-native speakers linguistically and intellectually, many of us unintentionally subscribe to what Paul Kei Matsuda refers to as “the myth of linguistic hegemony” in an article written for *College English* in 2006. Expanding upon Bruce Horner and John Trimbur’s argument in their article “English Only and U.S. College Composition” that claims composition instructors have accepted an English-Only policy in their classrooms as the ideal, Matsuda says that instructors also assume by default that all of their students are monolingual English speakers to begin with. We have an image, Matsuda says, of our students as being native speakers and belonging to privileged English-only discourse communities that may come with being white and middle-class. He also claims that “implicit in most teacher’s definitions of ‘writing well’ is the ability to produce English that is unmarked in the eyes of teachers who are custodians of privileged varieties of English or, in more socially situated pedagogies, of an audience of native English speakers who would judge the writer’s credibility or even intelligence on the basis of grammaticality” (460). Thus, even if we know that some of our students are not native speakers of English, we believe that their success in the composition classroom relies

upon their ability to learn how to pass for native speakers of English as much as possible. We want to teach students to “write well,” meaning that we want to teach students how to write the way a privileged native English speaker writes.

The problem with this pedagogical paradigm is that more and more students who enter basic writing and required composition courses are not privileged native English speakers. Matsuda refers to statistics from Linda Harklau, Kay M. Losey, and Meryl Siegel, which indicate that 150,000 to 225,000 English language learners graduate from high school each year. When we combine this with increasing populations of bilingual and international students enrolled in American universities, we see that “the myth of linguistic homogeneity—the assumption that college students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English—is seriously out of sync with the sociolinguistic reality of today’s U.S. higher education as well as of U.S. society at large” (Matsuda 641). This manifests itself in curricula, in both basic writing and college composition courses, that are not designed to reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the students enrolled in these classes, as well as in instructors who are not necessarily prepared for working with non-native speakers of English.

According to Harklau, Losey, and Siegel’s *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S.- Educated Learners of ESL*, there is much debate over how to work in the writing classroom with multilingual students who possess varying experiences with English as well as their home language(s). Even classifying such diverse students into groups such as “non-native,” “English Language Learner,” and “English as a Second Language” is problematic because multilingual

students come to the composition classroom with such a wide range of speaking and writing levels in a wide range of languages. The term “Generation 1.5” is one such debated—and yet important—classification of particular types of multilingual students. Ruben Rumbaut and Kenji Ima define Generation 1.5 individuals as those who were born in other countries but immigrate to the United States when they are children or young adults. Such “U.S.-educated English language learners,” as Harklau, Siegal, and Losey describe them, exist in an in-between space of first-generation and second-generation immigrants. The drawback of using this term, however, as Harklau, et al. point out, is that “[such] a generational term definition fails us in considering the case of students from Puerto Rico and other parts of the United States where English is not the community language” (4). There are important overlaps in the experiences of these types of students and Generation 1.5 students, they argue, and we may to a certain extent consider these groups of students together in thinking about incorporating the experiences of Generation 1.5 speakers into the composition classroom. Because Generation 1.5 students each have a unique background with English, varying in length and level of proficiency, it is often difficult to assess what is beneficial for this “generation” to prepare them for college. Harklau et al. also state that some students may have wide-ranging and extensive knowledge of American culture and English, while others may not have assimilated to the same degree. Another difficulty in working with Generation 1.5 students is that, although this group is largely composed of immigrants from other countries, Generation 1.5 students do not necessarily self-identify, nor are they necessarily identified by writing assessments, as ESL students (Harklau et al.). What is more, they may not necessarily

benefit from being placed in ESL courses, which are largely geared towards international students who have an exposure to English in a formal educational setting and benefit from learning explicit grammatical concepts and structures.

As Harklau points out in her research on English language learners and Generation 1.5 students, writing instructors need to think carefully about how what they are teaching in their courses fits into ELL and Generation 1.5 students' lives both inside of the university and beyond. In English-as-a-Second-Language courses, an instructor's goal often is to work with students to produce texts that demonstrate a mastery over standardized English (the ideas within those texts becoming secondary), encouraging multilingual students to view grammatical correctness as somewhat exclusive from and privileged before perspective and critical thinking. In her article, "The Role of Writing in Second Language Acquisition," Harklau points out that many researchers in the fields of ESL and Applied Linguistics examine writing as a tool that students use to obtain language skills and do not consider the way in which writing shapes a student's experience with language. She states "few L2 writing researchers seem to explicitly relate their work to the question of how students use writing *to learn a second language*, tending instead to address the issue of how students *learn to write* in a second language" (342). Rather than view writing as integral to attaining fluency in English and critical thinking, this approach considers writing to be a somewhat decontextualized exercise in which students demonstrate their knowledge of correct grammar and key vocabulary words. The result of this is that there is more of a focus on the product of students' writing than there is on the process through which English language learners experience

and learn from writing in English. If scholarship focuses on results, students will learn to focus on results as well. Thus in order to move beyond these “remedial” courses that often don’t count as the work of legitimate college students, fulfilling no credit requirements towards graduation, students need to show in their writing that they can construct sentences and recognize surface level errors in standardized English. They also are rarely asked to *use* their writing to articulate critical thinking skills or complex ideas.

Recent research on Generation 1.5 students also has explored the ways in which these students are blamed for their failure by being categorized as deficient within composition programs. In her article, “Representations of Immigrant Language Minorities in US Higher Education,” Harklau discusses the ways in which Generation 1.5 and other immigrant English language learners are accepted into universities on the condition that they enter into programs for “underprepared” or “disadvantaged” students. Institutions of higher education

enroll students from ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds removed from the Euro-American middle class on the principle of diversifying the academy while at the same time tending to single such students out as in particular need of intensive and explicit socialization into their practices and ethos. (259)

By filtering Generation 1.5 and other underrepresented students into intensive programs that are geared to teach students how to succeed in college, programs such as the Educational Opportunity Program and ESL programs lump students together. This occurs without much consideration of individual students’ linguistic or cultural backgrounds—whether they were born in the United States, whether they were international students,

whether they were immigrants—to socialize and acculturate them into the conventions and the language of the academy. Such programs present the guise of diversity, Harklau claims, engaging students in multicultural readings by writers such as Amy Tan who describes experiences outside of middle class America. At times, Harklau sees this multicultural approach as positive when students were able to identify with writers from a various cultural backgrounds; however, she points out that this attempt at diversity often is accompanied by the instruction of the values of the academy, which are derived from Enlightenment values of what it means to be educated (265). Students are “socialized” into the academic environment, which at times means acquainting students with study skills and test-taking techniques, but at other times this means instructing students on more abstract qualities such as responsibility, initiative, and reasoning (266). Harklau also points out that the ESL program she researched, like many ESL programs on college campuses, marginalizes and isolates ESL students and creates an ongoing dualism of America and “your country” or “your culture” in writing and reading assignments (271).

While Harklau acknowledges that these intensive programs generally help students to develop the writing, reading, and critical thinking skills they are asked to use in other college courses, she points out numerous ways in which these courses promote middle-class Euro-American values and conventions in a way that often asks students to relinquish cultural ties in order to “succeed” in college as well as to silence the “other” languages and identities they bring to the academy. This is particularly difficult, Harklau states, for students who do not see themselves as the Other in contrast to being American: “Students with multiple and fragmentary cultural affiliations could be significantly

penalized if they could not conform to the dualizing representation [of American or Other]” (274). For students who move between languages in their everyday experiences, the EOP and ESL classroom gives them very little space to explore their multicultural and multilingual identities in any real way that reflects their lived experiences. Rather, students are often asked to indicate clear divisions between American and “other” culture just as they clearly have to distinguish in their writing and speaking between standard academic English and their “other” languages. In the programs that Harklau discusses, Generation 1.5 students, who exist, as we will see from Cha’s text, in a space between and within the multiple cultures with which they identify, would have very little opportunity to reflect on the complexity—and even potential advantages—of their multiple and hybridized linguistic identities within the programs that Harklau discusses. Thus within these programs their unique approaches to language are not seen as sources of potential creativity but rather as something that is outside—and in opposition to—academic culture.

Matsuda similarly demonstrates the lack of space in writing programs for Generation 1.5 students to represent their experiences. In a way similar to the one that Harklau outlines in her study, Matsuda shows that this group of students exist within an in-between space in the division between basic writing courses, courses generally designed for native speakers who may be unprepared for the reading and writing they will be asked to do at college, and ESL courses, courses often designed for international students. In his article, “Basic Writing and Second Language Writers: Toward an Inclusive Definition,” Matsuda articulates the difficulties that Generation 1.5 students

often face when entering their first writing courses at the university. While many ESL courses do not serve the needs of Generation 1.5 students, who are often “ear” learners and may not benefit from explicit instruction of English grammar, there has been little research done to understand the experiences of Generation 1.5 students in basic writing courses designed for native speakers (69). Because of a disciplinary divide in many institutions between ESL and basic writing, Matsuda argues, there is presently a lack of “cross-talk” between these fields (77). It seems only in the past ten years has there been an increased discussion by scholars such as Matsuda, Harklau, Horner, and Lu about the ways in which ESL and writing programs can work together to ensure that students, particularly Generation 1.5 students who exist in this in-between space, will receive the writing instruction they need to be successful in college. Matsuda states his solution to issues of ESL and basic writing, which he culls from scholarship by basic writing researchers such as Linda Adler-Kassner, Gregory Glau, Mike Rose, and Glynda Hull, at the end of his article:

Given the increasing diversity of students who come to basic writing classrooms, it is no longer possible to define basic writers in terms of abstract and ultimately unreliable criteria such as their writing placement test scores, language backgrounds, or immigration status. Rather, the general definition of basic writers needs to include all students who are subject to the disciplinary and pedagogical practices of basic writing. (84)

The criteria which writing instructors and researchers have used to assess basic writing divides students into categories that often do not work for the linguistically and culturally

diverse students in our classrooms. Rather than try to separate out those students whom we identify as ESL, as “other” in their linguistic and cultural experience, composition programs should design more interdisciplinary basic writing courses. These courses should encourage, Matsuda argues, compositionists and ESL practitioners to work together to envision basic writing courses that support all students who have been designated as needing additional preparation for academic work and not exile those designated as ESL to an “other” basic writing course that will ensure they master standardized English.

Rather than exile to “other” status, compositionists need to create writing classrooms where multilingual writers are given the space to explore their linguistic and cultural realities as part of academic work. If we are able to construct a sort of in-between space in our classroom and encourage students to write from a 1.5 space where cultures and languages connect, conflict, or hybridize, we can work with our students to reposition multilingualism as a source of creativity and knowledge rather than a source of interruption or lack in writing within the academy. In his essay, “Towards a Writing Pedagogy of Shuffling between Languages: Learning from Multilingual Writers,” A. Suresh Canagarajah describes the composing process of a bilingual scholar, claiming that bilingual writers do not merely translate from one language to another in their work depending on their given rhetorical situation; instead, they generate hybridized rhetorics and display a “bilingual competence [that] integrates knowledge of two languages and is thus qualitatively different from monolingual competence” (591). He also goes on to claim that multilingual writers have a unique agency:

They are not linguistically or culturally conditioned to write only in one particular way; rather, they can be rhetorically creative. In fact, it is their very multilingualism that may account for their creativity. They are endowed with that mysterious ‘double vision’ that enables them to understand the possibilities and constraints of competing traditions of writing, and carve out a space for themselves within conflicting discourses. The realization also should show the limitations of imagining writers as coming to writing with homogenous identities. Multilingual writers, like everyone else, come with multiple identities. What they choose to display varies according to diverse contexts in order to achieve their interests. (601-2)

Here Canagarajah highlights the creativity and choice made in the writing of multilingual writers and demonstrates how these qualities are a direct result of their multilingualism. Even though Canagarajah discusses the writing of a scholar and not a student, he argues that his research can be used by writing instructors to consider how they may envision a writing pedagogy that does not view “all textual or linguistic difference as error” (602) and that “treats the first language and culture as a resource, not a problem” (603). Ultimately, compositionists wishing to take a multilingual approach in their writing classrooms should hold this as their goal: we should provide students—particularly multilingual students—a space such as the one Cha creates in her text, a space from which students can compose the realities of their varied linguistic and cultural experiences and generate new, creative hybridized knowledge.

Cha's *DICTEE* addresses many of the concerns that Generation 1.5 scholars have outlined in recent years and exemplifies the creative and hybridized knowledge that arises from multilingual, particularly Generation 1.5, writers. Her text documents the process through which a multilingual in-between space can be created and the new hybridized understandings of language and form that are generated within and from this space. In much of her work—written and video—Cha focused on issues of multiple languages and “hybridized cultural experiences” informed by her experiences of dislocation, immigration, and language acquisition (Rinder 18). Many of her pieces merge explorations of Korean culture, language, and multimedia art, capturing the dislocation of the immigrant experience as well as what Cha herself called a “consciously imposed detachment” from English (Rinder19). Cha enacts this “consciously imposed detachment” in *DICTEE* by creating and writing from a hybridized space that interrogates the forceful acculturation that often accompanies language acquisition, challenges the pedagogy that produces and perpetuates such acculturation, and voices her silenced and exiled mother tongue.

They Take from You Your Tongue: The Linguistic Struggles of *DICTEE*'s Speakers

The objective of Cha's text is for the Generation 1.5 daughter-speakers of *DICTEE* to recover the matrilinear traditions and experiences of language that are repressed and silenced by institutions of domination, and the first step of these Generation 1.5 speakers is to articulate the pain of language acquisition imposed on the mother tongue, the language of the mother, of the motherland, of the oppressed. We see

time and time again throughout *DICTEE* that the speaker(‘)s(‘) negotiation of identities—Korean, American, and even scholar of French—is embodied in acquisitions of language. As a multilingual text, *DICTEE* provides many instances in which the reader is forced to enact learning a new language, revealing the ways in which language is often used as a means to ensure institutional control as well as the ways in which language can be manipulated and subverted by the language learner. Indeed, Cha opens *DICTEE* by confirming the experiences of many English language learners as she demonstrates the ways in which learning a language is both a physical and mental process, one that can expose the learner to both physical and psychological trauma as it acculturates the learner and requires the learner to accept a new ideology in addition to vocabulary and syntax. As Lisa Lowe states in her essay, “Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictee*,” “Throughout *Dictee* it is often the physical body which bears the traces of colonial disfiguring and mutilation, and the literal and figural site from which different, often fragmented, speech is uttered in resistance to the imposed competency in the colonizer’s language” (47). Those in control in *DICTEE*—the imperialist, the teacher, the priest—attempt to inscribe their dominant language into the body and mind of those without agency—the colonized language learner, in Cha’s case always a female—forcing the learner to ingest and regurgitate words—and by extension ideology—upon command. The content of the work describes this (often painful) process: “*Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say*” (3). As we see in many places in *DICTEE*, this acquisition of language is emotionally, mentally, and even physically painful for the subject. A dominated speaker experiences pain when she

mimics or repeats, when she submits to the dominator's demands, and when she remains silent, resisting the dominant authority and yet left without a voice.

In the preface section of *DICTEE* that precedes the nine main sections of text, Cha conflates images of religion, education, language acquisition, and sex in order to reveal their similar relationships of oppression and gender inequity. Within each of these images the female is presented as the passive receiver while the male is in the position of power, enculturating the female by giving her the linguistic exercises and lessons she needs in order to be accepted into a dominant institution. While in church, our female character follows her directive: "Close eyes and as the lids flutter, push out the tongue." There is no subject doing any of these actions; rather, these acts become something automatic and rote, something programmed in the church-goers who cease to be the agents of these movements. The text goes on to demonstrate the process of a female receiving communion as she ingests Christ, the word of God made physical: "The Host Wafer (His Body. His Blood.) His. Dissolving in the mouth to the liquid tongue saliva (Wine to Blood. Bread to Flesh.) His...In waiting. To receive. Him" (13). This exemplifies the way in which male figures come to embody the power of language throughout Cha's text in order to maintain the institutions of state, religion, and education that they represent. The female figures, here represented by the "women kneeling on the left side" of the church, wait to receive this power from men through a process of physical ingestion and penetration. As we see in the above example, these women are not subjects with agency; rather, they wait to take what is given. They open their mouths, stick out their tongues, and wait for the male figure to hand down to them their

knowledge. They physically ingest the body of Christ, the word of God, just as they physically ingest the language that is given to them in the church and in the classroom—which they are expected to repeat when called upon. Thus the language of the female—closely associated throughout Cha’s text with the mother-tongue, the tongue of the mother and the motherland—is repressed into silence as the language of the patriarchy—in its variety of imperial, religious, and education forms—is physically and mentally imposed on the female figures in the early sections of this work.

Cha articulates the struggle of the mother tongue to acquire hegemonic language by presenting tangible images of the physical body in the act of acquiring and receiving language. At various points, Cha juxtaposes the process of speaking with suggestive sexual undertones in order to reveal the mutual violation of each act when it involves inequitable power relations among participants. We see this in the first few pages of her text, as her section entitled “DISEUSE” begins “She mimicks the speaking.” It then continues: “She allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full. Make swarm. All barren cavities to make swollen. The others each occupying her. Tumorous layers, expel all excesses until in all cavities she is flesh” (3-4). Here the woman’s physical body is occupied and filled by those “others” who dominate her. While we know that this section of Cha’s text is describing the process of acquiring language with its many references to speech, the tongue, breath, pitch, and even punctuation, the image of this process is one of sexual violation, an act in which the female protagonist opens herself to receive what those in a position of power desire to give her. She awaits being filled with words and knowledge that belong to those who occupy her. While the woman in this

section does possess some agency within the passage, the only two actions she accomplishes in this passage are to “take” and to “allow,” both actions that require an acceptance of something that has been given by another more dominant subject.

Throughout *DICTEE*, the tongue functions as a metonymic representation of an individual’s linguistic agency. The tongue can be taken, stolen, and tied in acts of domination. It is an object that can be classified and defined in the role it plays in language acquisition, as we see in the linguistic diagrams Cha includes in her work (74). And finally, it is an object that represents the mental and physical pain of being forced to speak the language of a dominant power while surrendering the tongue of the mother and the motherland. The tongue is the word made flesh:

It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech to say. Larger still.

Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void. (3)

The mother tongue festers here as it has been wounded and silenced by linguistic oppression. It murmurs in an attempt to articulate its own pain, and yet it does not speak, even though it knows it must in order to be heard. Here the mother tongue is bound and tied, and the more it attempts to articulate its pain, the more it suffers. At other times in Cha’s text, the figures inflict pain on themselves in attempts to submit to linguistic authority. Cha’s third section, “URANIA: ASTRONOMY,” juxtaposes a (somewhat inexact) translation exercise of a French poem into English, where one side of the page presents the French version of the poem and the other presents the English version, with scientific labeled diagrams of the throat and chest. The poem addresses issues of

language in its content as well as through the process of translation. One stanza of the poem reads:

To bite the tongue.
 Swallow. Deep Deeper.
 Swallow. Again even more.
 Just until there would be no more of organ.
 Organ no more.
 Cries. (69)

This self-inflicted silence shows the way in which the dominated speaker begins to internalize the silence that is necessary to maintain order of the oppressor. Linguistic oppression causes bodily pain: “Into the mouth the wound the entry is reverse and back each organ artery gland pace element, implanted, housed skin upon skin” (57). Cha’s project is to articulate the bodily pain of oppression, to articulate the pain of the mother tongue as it is “implanted” with the language of another. Cha documents the acquisition of a language of power as a process that takes place on a cellular level, where the ideology of the dominant power is implanted into the organs, arteries, and glands of the dominated body, and where the suppression—physically and psychically—of the mother tongue is the bodily manifestation of this process.

While we may read the physical pain of the tongue symbolically in Cha’s text, it resembles the very physical—and very real—tongue surgeries described by Min-Zhan Lu as taking place in South Korea and the People’s Republic of China so that individuals are able to speak English with less of an accent. In her essay, “Living-English Work,” Lu

documents these surgeries, which involve the snipping of tissue that connects the tongue to the mouth as “a glimpse of the global spread of U.S. English-only projections” (605). Individuals willing to undergo this painful surgery desire to possess not only the metaphorical but also a physical English. As the prevalence of English spreads across the world and, more and more, English becomes the language used for people with diverse nationalities to communicate with one another across other language barriers, English functions as a language of power. While Lu’s tongue example places choice and agency in those undergoing this surgery and Cha’s tongue example demonstrates an oppressed people devoid of agency, Lu also points out that this type of surgery “impl[ies] a consensus among all users of English that only one way of using English counts as accent-free and, thus, proper or good.” Therefore, if individuals desire to speak the language of power, they believe it is essential to mimic the “proper” English of those who possess the most power within this system—native Western speakers of English. In Lu’s estimation, U.S. speakers of language perpetuate the understanding that the particular discourse of the educated American is *the* “proper and good” English, and anyone who does not speak this particular English should do whatever it takes to assimilate if they want to succeed in a global U.S. dominated world. “Given the currency of [educational policies and theories that suggest learning proper English skills is the only way to succeed in a global economy] in the current day United States,” Lu argues, “all of us in English studies need to wrestle with our charge to produce only bodies (with a particular length of frenulum) and affects (such as tongue-ties or tongue-loose feelings)” that mesh with the English of a global economy (607).

In essence, when we read *DICTEE* through the framework created by composition scholars, like Lu as well as Matsuda, Horner and Trimbur, all of whom ponder the effects of our English-Only stance in the classroom, we must ask ourselves the extent to which our approach to composition promotes the same sorts of pain and trauma to the mother tongue that Cha documents in her text. Subscribing to the “myth of linguistic hegemony” (Matsuda 460) and placing English language learners in a position where they feel they need to learn “proper” English through any means necessary in many ways positions students in spaces very similar to those in which Cha’s speakers and female figures find themselves trapped. In this linguistically hegemonic classroom, ELL students attempt to speak the dominant discourse of the U.S. academy in forms of “broken” English, tongue-tied and yet always on the verge of *almost* speaking. And this “broken” work, which we often read as riddled with errors and inadequacies, is the physical manifestation of the psychological workings of this process (and its effects on the mother tongue). English language learners often demonstrate traces of this “brokenness” in their writing. The notion of “proper and good” English is “implanted” into the academic experience of these students as they are punished for their “errors” and their “broken” language and often required, by being assigned very prescriptive writing assignments and grammar exercises, to silence the linguistic experiences and knowledge that are not recognized as a valid part of academic discourse. Students often bite their mother tongue in order to mimic the accent-free language that their instructors require, eventually implanting dominant discourse into their every “organ” and “artery.”

As we read *DICTEE*, we experience the struggles of many speakers who find themselves tongue-tied, their language “broken,” and their mother tongue bitten “until there would be no more of an organ” in very similar ways that our ELL and Generation 1.5 students may find themselves as they enter the college composition classroom and encounter academic discourse. Composition scholarship has documented how and why this occurs and has often presented convincing arguments for why this *must* occur for students to be accepted into the academy (Bartholomae and Petrosky, *Bizzell Academic*). However, reading Cha’s work reinforces the costs of believing that being successful in dominant institutions such as the academy or global economy rely upon mastering an accent-free version of these discourses. As readers of Cha’s text, we are put into positions of unfamiliarity, asked to fill in gaps of cultural meaning, listen to speakers we cannot identify, read languages we may not understand. If we are willing to take the time and effort to understand Cha’s text, we are forced to enact the confusion, struggles, and frustrations of the many speakers and female figures in *DICTEE* who have been required to silence their mother tongue by figures of authority and also to come to hear the forgotten voices that Cha includes in her text. Reading—enacting—these experiences of occupation and brokenness demand that readers consider the extent to which their own reading, writing, and teaching practices silence those voices that cannot speak dominant discourses without the accent of their mother tongue. Tuning her readers into such painful linguistic struggles, forcing her readers of English to enact the position of non-native speaker through the process of reading the text, is an integral part of creating a multilingual pedagogy of resistance. As Cha puts readers in the position of dominated

speaker, she also encourages us to resist such linguistic dominance. Throughout the text, Cha's Generation 1.5 daughter-speakers articulate a multilingual resistance to forces of linguistic domination, in effect resurrecting the experiences of the mother tongue from silence into a Generation 1.5 space that exists within and between the dominant discourse community and speaker's home community.

Unfaithful to the Original: Resisting Pedagogies of Dictation and Translation

Cha's text provides us with an alternative to the types of pedagogies and genres that often force students to submit to the conventions of standardized English and academic discourse while sacrificing their other linguistic experiences. Both Lisa Lowe and Juliana Spahr have written about Cha's use of dictation and translation to explore and challenge the role that these practices play in linguistic and cultural domination, as I will describe in more detail in this section. Within *DICTEE*, Cha establishes a pedagogy of translation and dictation, only to resist and subvert this type of traditional language pedagogy and to teach her readers to enact a new multilingual pedagogy, similar to the one that Lu and Horner outline in "Resisting Monolingualism in 'English.'" Much like Lu and Horner's multilingual pedagogy, Cha's multilingual pedagogy reconsiders "error" as creativity, encourages reading across and within multiple languages to make meaning, and creates a hybrid space from which writers may compose their multiple linguistic and cultural realities.

As we may glean from the title of *DICTEE*—the word itself a "broken" articulation of the French *dictée*—exploring dictation and translation is at the heart of

Cha's work. Indeed, the first page following the table of contents is a dictation exercise—"Aller `a la ligne" (1). In her preface, Cha juxtaposes articulations of the physical pain and "brokenness" in language acquisition (3-5) with examples of a pedagogy of dictation and direct translation in the form of French-English grammar exercises, thereby demonstrating the ways in which such traditional pedagogies reinforce notions of linguistic hegemony:

Traduire en francais:

1. I want you to speak.
2. I wanted him to speak.
3. I shall want you to speak.
4. Are you afraid he will speak?
5. Were you afraid they would speak?
6. It will be better for him to speak to us.
7. Was it necessary for you to write?
8. Wait till I write.
9. Why didn't you wait so that I could write you?

(Cha 8-9)

Here we see that literally and theoretically enmeshed in this translation exercise are questions and statements of linguistic agency and writerly authority. Cha encourages us to consider which subjects are in the position within this structure to speak and/or write. She raises notions of desire, fear, necessity, regret ("why didn't you wait"), and even a

mix of urging and threat (“wait till I write”) in speech and writing within the pedagogy of translation.

Spahr also discusses the above example in her book of literary criticism, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*, claiming, “These exercises work doubly. They are both language textbook and a parodic form of cultural mediation.” Spahr goes on to state that Cha’s use of these language exercises resist prevailing notions of “standardized language practice” and demonstrate the impossibility of any type of translation free from “socioeconomic or cultural forces” (132-3). Spahr’s argument about Cha’s text dovetails with the argument that compositionists working with multilingual students make about teaching English language learners: it affirms that language cannot be acquired in isolation from ideology. She argues that Cha’s “use of ‘mistakes’ [in her translation exercises] is strategic rather than unintentional” and that, furthermore, Cha challenges the construction of a “native speaker” in ways similar to linguists Braj B. Kachru, Thomas M. Paikedy, and Larry Smith (131).

As Cha explores the act of dictation in various sections of her work, as her speakers translate from English to French and back again, we see the multifaceted role that this type of linguistic reproduction plays in the acquisition of a new language (and its accompanying ideology). Lowe discusses Cha’s use of dictation in her essay, “Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictee*,” stating, “Dictation is at once a sign for the authority of language in the formation into a subject of discourse through the repetition of form, genre, and example, and a metaphor for the many regulating reproductions to which the narrator is subject in spheres other than the educational” (39). The type of

learning that dictation requires removes the agency from the learner as it requires rote memorization and insists on equivalence in the translation between languages whereby each word in one language has a direct equivalent in another language. Cha's presentation of dictation reveals the many ways in which internalizing a language requires the internalization of a dominant culture's ideology and values, and it also dictates and limits interpretive possibilities by narrowly defining how we should read and understand a text. The type of pedagogy that Cha critiques is similar to the ESL pedagogies that Harklau identifies in "The Role of Writing in Second Language Acquisition," in which students are not expected to engage actively or think critically within a language until they have acquired fluency or mastery of the language through "remedial" courses that ask them to memorize vocabulary and learn grammar through repetitive "skill and drill" exercises.

As soon as Cha outlines the hegemonic pedagogy of dictation and translation, she simultaneously enacts a multilingual pedagogy of resistance, one in which a variety of discourses exist in conversation, where active deviance is generative and not erroneous, and where academic investigation is rooted in personal inquiries and multiplicities of language, identity, and culture. Lowe claims that Cha's subjects set out to resist the "pedagogical mandate" of dictation (38), the process through which a student internalizes a language by faithfully repeating what she hears in her writing. Cha's subjects, as Lowe points out, are often "unfaithful to the original" (taken from Cha), altering words, phrases, and even whole sections in their translations from one language to another. These moments of being "unfaithful to the original" are particularly prominent in both

the introduction to her work as well as the “URANIA: ASTRONOMGY” section, in which Cha re-enacts a French-English translation which increasingly deviates between languages.

As Cha includes dictations and translations between English and French that are not correct, nor even equivalent, she challenges such an approach to education that demands passive mimicry and reproduction of the original. Cha calls into question the possibility that any learner of a language is ever able to internalize this language without internalizing the political, cultural, and religious values that underlie a language. Within the classroom spaces that Cha presents in her work, the language of the dominant culture is always enforced at the expense of maintaining the mother tongue. The cost of this is particularly high, it seems, for Generation 1.5 students such as Cha herself who must exist within more than one culture, who often must speak more than one language in their daily life, and who often create hybrid languages and identities as a result of their presence within multiple cultures. As Lowe points out, Cha provides us with examples of people who speak the language of the hegemonic culture within the classroom but speak other home languages only outside of the classroom (46). While Lowe provides us with the example of the Koreans in Cha’s text being forced to speak Japanese in the classroom, Cha provides us with other examples of this in her work in the French-English dictation exercises as well as the translation of poems she includes in her text (where French becomes the school language). In “URANIA: ASTRONOMY,” on the left side of the page is a poem in French and the right side is a translation of the poem in English:

La. Des annees après

Impossible de distinguer la Pluie.

Cygnés. Paroles souvenus. Deja dit.

Vient de dire. Va dire.

Souvenu mal entendu. Pas certain. (66)

As we can see from the English “translation” on the page to the right, the speaker has made changes from the French version:

There. Years after

no more possible to distinguish the rain.

No more. Which was heard.

Swans. Speech. Memory. Already said.

Will just say. Having just said.

Remembered not quite heard. Not certain.

Heard, not at all. (67)

While there are sentences that seem to deviate from a direct translation—for example, “Paroles souvenus” or “remembered words” differs from “Speech” and “Memory” which exist as separate entities in the English version—more striking than this are the multiple lines of text that are included in the English version and not the French. There are two additional lines in the English version: “No more. Which was heard.” and “Heard, not at all.” Here the material addition of these two lines is a striking deviation from the French version. What is more, though, is that when we consider the meaning of the two lines added, we see that through deviant translation, the writer represents the inaudible, that which is “Heard, not at all” or silent, in the “original” French version. Thus, by enacting

multilingual resistance to traditional language pedagogy, Cha teaches her readers that the process of being “unfaithful to the original” generates new meaning and significance that would otherwise be read—or ignored—as silence. As she articulates that which is deviant from the original, she teaches her audience to read *for* error because, as we can see from the above example, these sorts of “mistakes” and deviations—particularly for a multilingual writer who is trying to represent complex linguistic and cultural realities—reveal that which is suppressed, ignored, or deleted in hegemonic language.

Cha’s audience learns how to read multilingually while resisting hegemonic educational practices as we experience the multilingual pedagogy of resistance within her text. As Spahr and Lowe discuss, Cha creates a text in which readers must relinquish their belief in linguistic standardization and monolingualism and instead use inter- and intra-cultural experience in order both to generate new meaning within the gaps of the text as well as to allow those gaps in comprehension to exist. Thus, *DICTEE* enacts a multilingual resistance similar to what Canagarajah describes in much of his work, within which writers use code meshing (the juxtaposition of discourses), create hybrid texts, develop negotiation between languages, and present “textual difference” as “a strategic and creative choice by the author to attain his or her rhetorical objectives” (“Toward a Writing Pedagogy” 591).

Cha’s exploration of multiple identities and linguistic identification connects to Min-Zhan Lu’s discussion of how compositionists should approach writing in a world where most individuals have multiple linguistic and cultural identifications. In her article, “An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English Against the Order of Fast

Capitalism,” Lu calls for compositionists to explore what it means to teach English “responsively and responsibly” (18) in order to acknowledge and document the ways in which our students live and use English. While English is unstable and evolutionary, compositionists often teach English as if it were stable and standardized, much in the same way that teaching language is documented in Cha’s work through translation exercises, throat diagrams, and dictation. We compositionists, Lu warns, need to be very aware of the ways in which we become dictators of English in the classroom and reframe the learning of and working in language as a process of choice and design within which individual speakers draw upon multiple discourses and identities:

Attention to the interplay between and across one's language expertise, affiliation, and inheritance, along with attention to individual writers' understandings of different aspects of their selves and lives, can help us interpret and depict one another's discursive resources (and by extension, language needs) in terms of not only the “actual” (lived experiences) but also the “possible” (possibilities and prospects) and the “imagined” (desire, hope, aspiration), so that we may represent one another's actions as grounded in the realities of our lives but never predetermined by them. (36)

Instead of viewing variations and deviations of English as “error,” Lu proposes a model for Composition that in many ways closely resembles Cha’s work and her vision of language in that it treats deviation as a space in which new possible meaning may be made. This occurs when we attempt to understand student writers’ work as a unique design of multiple discourses and articulations of self that warrant close reading and

exploration. Performing this sort of work in Composition seems particularly important when working with Generation 1.5 students who stand in a unique position within and across languages and cultures and are able to articulate a hybrid space of multicultural understanding. Likewise, it also promotes multilingual and multicultural understanding in any composition classroom, encouraging all student writers to question what is considered “erroneous” and to resist hegemonic language conventions and, instead, strive to practice the hybrid literacies that anyone who belongs to more than one discourse community should draw upon in their writing.

Appropriating Cultural and Linguistic Exile to Create a Model of Generation 1.5

Literacy

Cha uses *DICTEE* to work through multiple languages, histories, and cultures and to generate hybridities of language that represent her lived realities as a member of Generation 1.5. While Cha’s main objective in her text is not to tell her own authentic story as a Korean American, she uses her text to create a space within which experiences of Korean, Korean American, and multiple language learners can be explored, connected, and contrasted. By exploring these multilingual realities in her text, Cha carves out a space in her work that uniquely privileges the sorts of literacy practices that are required of multilingual speakers who “shuttle” between languages and cultures in their everyday lives. I argue that in addition to enacting a pedagogy of multilingual resistance, Cha also provides her readers with a model of hybrid literacy that draws upon multiple linguistic and cultural communities and that is recognized within existing frameworks but that

simultaneously exists in a unique space between these binaries. Such a space is one within which Generation 1.5 speakers naturally, although often conflictingly, inhabit as they identify to varying degrees with both first and second-generation immigrants. As we know from Harklau et al.'s discussion of Generation 1.5 students at the beginning of this chapter and Canagarajah's discussion of multilingual students to follow, members of Generation 1.5 possess unique hybridized literacies that reflect aspects of their home language or "mother tongue" and the standardized English they learn in the American education system. What is more, though, is that these hybridized literacies also reflect a sort of hybrid knowledge that arises from Generation 1.5's position of in-betweenness.

Cha creates a multilingual hybrid space that documents the experiences of Generation 1.5 daughter-speakers and women who compose the (silenced) histories of the Korean-American experiences. She accomplishes what Canagarajah outlines in his essay, "Multilingual Writers and the Academic Community: Towards a Critical Relationship," as the goal of many multilingual students he has worked with: finding a way to negotiate multiple identities and discourses in conversation with dominant discourse. In this essay, Canagarajah reflects on his previous research and claims that his students were well aware of the unequal power of different discourses and knew that the powerful discourse of the academy stood in opposition to their discourses of home. In a time when "hybrid identities" are "taken for granted," Canagarajah states that our students still are being asked to take on the discourse of the academy as if it were another discourse they could learn without having to consider the issues of power and politics that go hand in hand with learning a dominant language:

What my students seemed to want was to take their identities, values, and interests with them as they communicate in the academy. It appeared to me (although they didn't articulate it explicitly) that students would like to creatively complicate the academic discourse by adopting a "multivocal" approach that fuses their native discourses with the conventions valued by the academy.

("Multilingual" 37)

Canagarajah goes on in this essay to claim that "It is not crossing over into the academy but shuttling between communities that might be ideologically desirable for students" (41). In a more recent article, Canagarajah describes this sort of "shuttling" as "hybrid literacies" that are exemplified in Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of contact zones as well as Anzaldua's work which "display immense creativity as the subalterns negotiate competing literacies to construct new genres and codes that speak to their own interests" ("The Place" 601).⁷ Cha's text serves as such a model of hybrid literacy as it juxtaposes, blends, and blurs generic as well as linguistic boundaries and presents new methods of reading and writing multilingually.

In her essay, "Living-English Work," Lu remarks on a similar theme as she describes the way in which students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds are often encouraged to imitate rather than use English in an educational system that sides, even unconsciously, with a (hegemonic) English-Only stance (610). Cha also speaks to this issue as she argues that even the most passive repetition, the most passive

⁷ Horner and Lu also appropriate the work of Pratt and Anzaldua in their discussion of "border pedagogy" in the composition classroom. For an extended discussion, see *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*.

“pretending” and “try[ing] on images,” is always “unfaithful to the original” (15). No matter how much we try to rid ourselves of our mother tongue, to mimic and repeat so as to blend in with the oppressor, Cha demonstrates the impossibility of such conformity. Every time someone who is multilingual speaks the dominant language—the language of colonization or oppression—she still speaks with a knowledge of her past linguistic and cultural experiences. She may try to forget, she may try to remain silent, but there will always be traces of this in her speech. The goal of the Generation 1.5 writer, and multilingual writers in general, is to respond to and resist the language of domination by using her unique multilingual position. Her goal is to unearth the forgotten speech of the past that demonstrates the way in which silence, “broken” speech, and hybridization of languages reflect the complexities of our lives and histories. Her goal is to create a new model of 1.5 literacy in her writing, where she continues to be acknowledged by both communities of standardized English as well as her mother tongue community but also exists in a unique space between these communities, a space that allows her to articulate her 1.5 experiences to both communities as well as to discourse communities that exist outside of this binary.

Cha’s Generation 1.5 daughter-speakers compose from this space, “shuttling” between the culture of exile of their Korean mothers and the dominant culture of the English-only United States. While Cha’s text articulates various forms of exile—the physical exile of the mother as well as the feelings of exile the daughter-speaker experiences when she returns to her motherland, the daughter-speaker is able to exist within and negotiate between these spaces of exile as well as spaces of dominant culture

such as the classroom. Cha's daughter-speakers thus write and speak from a 1.5 space to express experiences of cultural exile *and* simultaneously to be heard by an audience that speaks the language of domination. From this in-between space, one of Cha's Generation 1.5 speakers is able to articulate her mother's exile, as she writes to her mother, "You knew it would not be in vain. The thirty six years of exile" (80). And this exile is not in vain because the speaker is able to document it within her 1.5 space: "*From another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations*" (81). Because of her unique hybrid position inside and outside of multiple cultures and languages, the speaker is able to articulate the "missing narrative" of her mother's exile as well as the "multitude of narratives" that are silenced in official histories. From her Generation 1.5 position, the daughter-speaker is able to generate "another epic" to speak in dialogue with the historical epics of dominant culture.

Cha complicates official histories by infusing those histories with the voices and experiences of those who are so often silenced in hegemonic and imperial discourse. To a large extent, *DICTEE* "refuses to be representative" of the experience of a particular minority group or a particular subject, even Cha herself, and seems to "call[] the very notion of authenticity into question" (Duncan 130). As we read, we may try to piece fragments of text together to form a cohesive narrative that connects the disparate sections of *DICTEE*, but we will not know for sure whether these pieces compose one cohesive Korean-American autobiography. However, the gaps, silences, and fragmentations in language and the misrepresentation of historic sources possess the

possibility of representing a sort of inter-and multi- cultural experience that is not necessarily indicative of *the* Korean-American experience but that, I would argue, points to the possibilities for Generation 1.5 and other multilingual writers to represent the multiplicity of their experience in a sort of (anti)narrative. Patti Duncan sees Cha creating an “in-between” space in her text in order to “invoke silence” (164):

Cha claims ...so-called contradictory spaces [of the American and Korean subject] through memory and discourse, making meaning of silence through the ‘in-between,’ the interstitial and ‘outlaw’ spaces that force recognition of the fissures within dominant and totalizing narratives. Cha’s juxtaposition of her own specific histories with national, totalizing histories of both Korea and the United States suggests the instability of hegemonic narratives to contain the unofficial stories that continue to ‘bleed’ through. (169)

Here, Duncan describes Cha’s project as one in which she “force[s] recognition” of outlaw (or exile) space within dominant discourse that has ignored these spaces in its “totalizing narratives.” Cha disrupts the hegemonic force of a totalizing narrative in her own text by both leaving the subjects of her speakers ambiguous as well as by fragmenting and eroding her text. Through these processes, Cha demonstrates the multiplicity of language and identity in addition to the inevitable incompleteness at any attempt of documentation, calling into question the authenticity of any document that attempts to historicize lived experience.

From the first few sentences of “CALLIOPE: EPIC POETRY,” Cha begins to challenge basic assumptions of identity, as it is revealed that the mother in this section

identifies as Korean even though she was born and raised in China. Here the specific experience of the mother documents the dispossession of so many Koreans in the time of Japanese occupation:

Mother, you are eighteen years old. You were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live. You are not Chinese. You are Korean. But your family moved here to escape the Japanese occupation... You live in a village where the other Koreans live. Same as you. Refugees. Immigrants. Exiles. Farther away from the land that is not your own. Not your own any longer.

As we learn in this section, the mother is forbidden from speaking her own mother tongue—Korean—and is forced to speak “the tongue the mandatory language like the others.” She only speaks her mother tongue, her “refuge,” in secret, when she is alone (45). As Cha’s daughter-speaker talks directly to her mother, she attempts to reclaim the mother tongue by telling the story of her mother’s *tongue*, of her experiences with and acquisitions of language in historical and cultural context. Here the mother tongue, not geographic location, not imperial domination, defines the mother’s identity, as well as the daughter’s attempts to write the undocumented history of her mother’s tongue. The mother has been “sentence[d] to exile” not merely because she lives in Manchuria but more importantly because she is forced to speak in the sentences—the language—of her oppressor. She is forced to enact her exile again and again each time she utters the sentences of her oppressor.

Cha’s daughter-speaker reclaims the linguistic and cultural experiences of her mother not only to preserve a matrilinear history but also to understand her own identities

as a Generation 1.5 immigrant and her position of in-betweenness. As we can see from the preceding paragraphs, the mother tongue is not only the first—or original—language of a speaker; it also seems to possess the secrets to unearthing a speaker’s identity/ies: “Mother, my first sound. The first utter. The first concept” (50). It is through exploring the first concept—of language and identity—that a speaker may begin to understand her cultural and linguistic experiences. The speaker, the daughter, seems to conflate the experience of acculturation of herself and her mother:

I have the documents. Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Pass port. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signatures their seals. Their own image. And you learn the executive branch the legislative branch and the third. Justice. Judicial branch. It makes the difference. The rest is past. (56)

The speaker in “CALLIOPE: EPIC POETRY” refers to her mother as “you” throughout this section of *DICTEE*, and we can read the “you” in the above passage as the mother who has had to relinquish her identity as Korean in order to become American.

However, we can also read the “you” as second person general, representing any immigrant who has had her identity “taken” from her in the process of acquiring citizenship. Cha presents a model of reading and writing—of literacy—that encourages the reader to see the distinction between “I” and “you” as an individual’s split between two identities, demonstrating the fragmentation, as well as the hybridity, that occurs in

the identities of members of Generation 1.5. In the above passage, the “you” is someone else, someone the speaker no longer sees as part of herself: “my identity” is gone and replaced with “their photograph,” “the other one.” Here, one day you are you, and the next day “you are American.” This type of national identification, in which an individual can adopt a new national identity by raising the right hand and receiving a passport, denies the multiple and hybridized identities of the lived experience of a member of Generation 1.5.

The alternative to imposed national identity that Cha models in her text is one in which identity is composed actively through a process of compiling pieces of history, culture, and language:

I write. I write you. Daily. From here. If I am not writing, I am thinking about writing. I am composing. Recording movements. You are here I raise the voice. Particles bits of sound and noise gathered pick up lint, dust. They might scatter and become invisible....Not hollow not empty. (56)

Here the composition of “you,” who could be the mother or a general “you,” is an active process of assembling particles of voices and past events that risk silence or invisibility if not recorded. Here Cha seems to redefine the epic, the narrative poetry of a nation, as the forgotten fragments, the whispers of the secret mother tongue, the fractured and impartial identities we take on of the anti-narrative she creates.

While the speaker of the “CALLIOPE: EPIC POETRY” may or may not be Cha herself, we still can identify the autobiographical similarities that exist between Cha and her speaker, the daughter, as well as some of her other speakers and see how the parts of

Cha's text can be read as her own document of hybrid literacies. Here, through the voices of a variety of speakers in her text, Cha documents and contextualizes her linguistic and educational experiences as a member of Generation 1.5. The fragmentary nature of the subjects and characters within Cha's text is reflective of the fragmentary nature of the Generation 1.5 experience: while a subject may be confined by a national institution to a particular prescribed identity, the lived experience of that subject will always require the subject to exist within multiple communities, to enact multiple identities, to take on a variety of voices, and, hopefully, to create new possibilities for hybridized identities that more accurately represent the Generation 1.5 experience. Here the ambiguities of subjects—I, you, she—as well as the juxtaposition of languages and genres articulate the lived experiences of a writer who participates in multiple linguistic and cultural communities simultaneously. Cha documents these hybridities of language and identity in her writing, asking her readers to interpret her work in a way that seeks out these hybridities and attempts to understand silences imposed by national—and educational—dictation.

Cha's project for the Generation 1.5 daughter-speaker is to recover the language and culture of her mother (tongue) and to use it to articulate the experiences of those who are dislocated, silenced, and buried in official documents of the Korean-American experience.

Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in Time's memory. Unemployed.

Unspoken. History. Past. Let the one who is disease, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is disease,

one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth.

The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all. (130)

Cha's goal, as we can see from the passage above, is to restore the memory of the mother, to make audible and legible the dead words and tongue of the mother who has largely gone silent in the annals of history. The figure that comes to represent this restoration of what has remained silent in the documented version of history is the *disease*, a French term for a female who recites monologues. In this passage, the daughter, the agent who is able to "restore spring," to cultivate new beginnings with her presence, becomes the *disease* who is able to generate stories and text that have previously died of "disuse."

As Stella Oh writes in her article, "The Enunciation of the Tenth Muse in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*,"

In the case of *DICTEE*, the *disease* becomes the subject of the enunciation through her utterance and renders a voice to those silenced by the discourses of colonialism and patriarchy. Through the performative act of utterance, Cha attempts to resurrect the "dead words" by challenging the myths of classical antiquity and Christianity that have shaped hegemonic discourse of western ideology. (6)

While Oh focuses her discussion on one *disease* within *DICTEE*, whom she identifies as *the* postcolonial subject within the text, I believe we can see multiple *disease* figures within *DICTEE*. Each daughter-speaker we come to identify within *DICTEE* functions as *disease* as she attempts to "voice" the experiences of her mother and mother tongue.

Through the process of the daughter restoring her mother's memory, the experiences of her mother that have been the victim of disuse, buried and forgotten in history, re-emerge through the daughter's active storytelling. Indeed, Cha's text seems to argue that there is an important transference of knowledge and language that must take place from the mother, who is dislocated, oppressed, forgotten from her home language and culture, and the daughter, who, possessing a hybrid of languages and cultures, serves as the agent who is capable of revitalizing her mother in the daughter's new/other language and culture (in the case of the text, this is usually English). As a member of Generation 1.5, the daughter is positioned across cultures, able to articulate the multiple and often contradictory discourse communities to which she belongs. She is the only one, it seems, who is able to resurrect her mother('s) tongue and life experiences from the silence of history and the fog of memory and, as *disease*, to document them through textual performance and enactment. She is able to act an agent between the world of the living and the world of the dead as a direct result of her close relationship to her mother.

We see the figure of the *disease* appearing throughout *DICTEE* in the form of various daughter-speakers who often address the mother figure and resurrect the mother figure's broken words and tongue. Throughout Cha's text, the *disease* documents the experiences of her mother in fragments of narrative as well as the broken language that represents the mother's linguistic and cultural oppression and silence. We see this at the beginning of Cha's text, where one of the translation assignments included in the "DISEUSE" section is written in the "broken English" often spoken by immigrants, such as her mother, who struggle to learn English: "She call she believe she calling to she

has calling because there no response she believe she calling and the other end must hear...she writes hidden the essential words must be pretended invented she try on different images essential invisible” (15). As a response to a classroom translation exercise, this text documents the “broken” English that often is regarded as incomprehensible or, at best, limited; however, the “broken” English also reveals to us the struggle to be heard. Here “she,” the mother, calls but hears no response: her voice is not acknowledged by her audience, even though she believes that the “other end must hear” what she is trying to articulate. This oppressed “she” also knows that she must hide “the essential words,” the words most important and vital to her identity, instead pretending and “try[ing] on different images” for her oppressor in order to be recognized by him. Instead of speaking her language in the words that would provide her with her own agency, her only option is to try to remain “invisible,” to play the role her oppressor requires of her and mimic, as best as she can, the words the oppressor asks her to repeat. And yet, the mother calls out to her daughter, the *diseuse*, to hear her and to document her experiences that she herself is unable to articulate.

Ultimately, the daughter-speaker *does* hear the call of her silenced mother. In “THALIA: COMEDY,” the daughter-speaker “decides to take the call” from her exile mother. While the mother’s voice is “in a barely audible whisper with either coughing or choking at the throat” and at times “inaudible,” the daughter-speaker documents the voice of her mother, with “no more rehearsals. No more memorization” (139-40). By using her own hybrid literacy practices that Cha articulates throughout *DICTEE*, the Generation 1.5 daughter is able to take the call from her mother, to hear her mother and document the

“broken” experiences and silenced knowledge of the mother tongue within a dominant discourse of English.

Pedagogical Implications of *DICTEE* for the Basic Writing and Composition

Classroom

The cyclical structure of Cha’s text, with its gaps, white space, “errors,” and “broken” English, does, in the end, produce a rigorous exploration of Korean-American identity, Korean history, and theory of language acquisition, and it is a model of exploration that composition instructors could adopt, in a variety of forms, if they are willing to redefine what counts as academic inquiry and English “proficiency” and if they are willing to support and encourage their students’ hybrid literacies. *DICTEE* teaches its readers a new way of reading Generation 1.5 students’ writing, of appreciating their writing as an articulation of multilingual and multicultural experiences of individual students. Cha’s text demonstrates the extent to which Generation 1.5 writers possess the unique ability to generate multilingual and multicultural knowledge. Rather than see Generation 1.5 writing, and the writing of English language learners or any student entering the academy without a foundational knowledge of its discourse, as broken or erroneous, composition instructors can view their work as attempts at creativity and hybridity and that call into question what Composition considers successful writing and academic inquiry.

In my basic writing courses, what I have learned from Cha’s text has manifested itself in my design of a course that focuses on the many discourses students bring to the

classroom in the form of mother tongues as well as their experiences with vernaculars, online communication, and specialized work vocabulary. Rather than “exile” students who speak languages other than Standard English in this classroom, designating them as the Other in relation to American academic culture, I try to create a space where it is believed that everyone comes to the classroom with knowledge of multiple discourses and cultures. Cha’s text has taught me the importance of articulating linguistic experiences, even when they are painful, in order to bring the knowledge of those experiences into dialogue with beliefs of standardization, dictation, translation, and acculturation inherent in conventional writing pedagogy. I ask students to investigate controversial words or words that maintain different meanings in different social contexts, and I ask students to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of multilingualism and language standardization.

In their readings and writing assignments, students are asked to consider the extent to which English is “Living-English,” whether it should be—or can be—standardized and the benefits and drawbacks of evolutionary language. This question quickly becomes complicated in a classroom with diverse language speakers, and I find fervent supporters on both sides—and on the in-between—of English-Only debates. These diverging viewpoints do not divide easily along the lines of “native” and “non-native” speakers, for many students in basic writing already have been acculturated within the American education system to the extent that they believe in the pedagogy of standardization, dictation, and translation as well as their designation of “failure” within this pedagogical system. Rather, students draw upon their own linguistic and educational

experiences as well as deeply held ideological beliefs about language, raising difficult—and incredibly generative—questions about the extent to which a standard should be maintained within a language, who is authorized or empowered to change a language, how a language evolves, and what the costs—social, political, psychological—and benefits may be in the evolution of a language. When asked to argue the benefits or disadvantages of bilingualism, some students used their writing to argue the importance of learning and maintaining standardized English in academic writing, while other students used their writing to explore their multilingualism. Some wrote parts of their introductions in Spanish, and others supported their arguments about language with examples from the languages they spoke at home. In a writing assignment that asked students to think about the evolution of words and to research the etymology of some of the words they use in everyday speech, many students included terms from languages other than English (which they creatively translated for their English-speaking audience).

In a creative non-fiction workshop, which I taught as a sort of creative advanced composition course, I read *DICTEE* with students at the end of the semester. We took time, as Spahr does when she reads *DICTEE* with her students, to map out the different sections to find connecting themes and discussions (129). In class and in the form of a book review, students discussed the cyclical organization of *DICTEE* as well as its use of multiple languages and fragmentation. Some students, a few of the “good readers” and “good writers” felt betrayed by Cha’s deviate use of genre and language. Rather than see her multilingualism as a possibility for them to create new genres and approaches to language in their own writing, they viewed the text as trick that was played on them

because they were not able to easily decode the meanings in Cha's text. Other students, however, experimented with ideas of organization, genre, historical documentation, and language that were raised in Cha's text. While those students who experimented with Cha's ideas had varying relationships to the intellectual and compositional work of the academy, and while many of them were "native" English speakers, they were able to learn from Cha's text the possibilities for investigating linguistic and generic conventions in their writing.

Regardless of how and the extent to which composition instructors use Cha's text in classroom, *DICTEE* proves itself to be an important pedagogical text for compositionists and their students in the creation of multilingual, hybrid writing spaces. While it is certainly possible to teach Cha's text as part of any writing course, it is also possible for compositionists to incorporate Cha's text in other more indirect ways that address the previously mentioned concerns of composition scholars in teaching diverse language learners in the writing classroom. *DICTEE* encourages composition instructors to explore our own experiences and reactions to a text that presents fragments of narrative and multiple meanings that do not easily fit into our analytical matrix and that, in many ways, resemble the writing produced by Generation 1.5 students in our classrooms. Such writing disrupts static construction of genre, standardized language, and definitions of critical thinking and academic inquiry. Cha's text allows multiple languages to exist and even flourish with possibilities for new hybrid meanings, it privileges multi-cultural dialogue over translation of ideas and concepts into dominant languages, and it introduces a form that connects personal meaning to historical investigation. These are all

qualities that Generation 1.5 students and English language learners demonstrate in nascent forms in their writing and that we should encourage students to cultivate, so they may have some space and authority in their writing to articulate their multilingual experiences and multiple identities.

CHAPTER 3

HARRYETTE MULLEN'S SYNCRETIC LITERACY: PRACTICES FOR
COMPOSING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

As a discipline, then, we must take up the task of educating ourselves about how to bring voices and concepts from the margins into substantive interaction with the discourses of power, not with the goal to simply add some ethnic spice to the multicultural stew but to transform existing values and rhetorical practices. (23)

--David Wallace

Much work has been done in the discipline of Composition and Rhetoric to explore the impact that acquiring academy literacy has on students whose other literacies are in conflict with the values, identities, and practices of this discourse of power. We have debated the costs and benefits of requiring students to master academic conventions, and we have reconsidered how we teach and discuss these conventions in the writing classroom. We have investigated the underlying ideology of the academy and the extent to which students must adopt that ideology to ensure their academic success, and we have devised ways to bridge students' multiple literacies with academic literacy by devising new types of assignments that encourage students to articulate their multiple identities in their writing. All of this effort certainly has broadened the possibilities for the work that can be accomplished in the composition classroom. However, as David Wallace argues in his recent essay, "Alternative Rhetoric and Morality: Writing from the Margins," there remains a pressing need in our discipline to continue finding new ways for the academy to acknowledge and support the literacy practices of those who have been traditionally pushed to the margins of this discourse community.

Wallace writes about Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in order to demonstrate how this multigenre and multilingual work represents the

complexity of the author's multiple racial, gender, class, and sexual identities and serves as a model for an alternative rhetoric that challenges the standards and conventions of academic discourse. Wallace argues that in her text, "Anzaldua seeks to shift the very grounds on which arguments can be made and, in doing so, proposes a more complex understanding of literacy as well as an explicitly intersectional notion of identity" (26). Ultimately, Wallace contends, Anzaldua redefines language, literacy, and identity by demonstrating the complex inter-relation of these concepts and the ways in which those who have been marginalized by discourse communities of power can use their own literacy practices—languages, rhetorics, and subject positions—to speak to, disrupt, and transform the hegemonic literacy practices that have marginalized them in the past. Wallace goes on to argue that those in the discipline of Composition and Rhetoric need to use texts such as Anzaldua's to investigate social inequities and the construction of ideological values and morals that perpetuate oppression of our marginalized students. "We have been insightful in our theories of difference and language," he states of compositionists, "but slow to see the need to address our own privilege within discourses of power and quick to fall back on the assumption that assimilation to those discourses is ultimately in the best interest of our students" (34). For us to begin to effectively address issues of social inequity and privilege and the relation of these issues to language, literacy, and identity, Wallace argues that we need to develop a pedagogy that actively seeks to discuss and transform these issues by teaching and creating alternative rhetorics that enact new possibilities for hybrid identities and multiple discourses.

How do we as teachers and scholars of Composition and Rhetoric enact such change and create such pedagogies? I agree wholeheartedly with Wallace that this depends upon us identifying, teaching, and creating texts that model alternative rhetorics and literacy practices, as well as encouraging our students to compose innovative texts that articulate their lived experience within multiple discourse communities—communities of (with) power as well as communities that have been marginalized by those in (with) power. Indeed, in this chapter, I argue that compositionists should continue to envision new ways to encourage students to use their academic writing to explore and construct identities by examining the creative and critical works of Harryette Mullen. As an experimental African-American poet and a scholar of African-American literature, Mullen explores the multiplicity of identity as well as possibilities for reading and writing practices that articulate this multiplicity and the complexity inherent in belonging to varied—and sometimes conflicting—discourse communities. A close examination of Mullen’s composing practices and her conception of literacy provides composition scholars with new possibilities for understanding how students construct their identities as writers within their texts and how we might respond to such attempts in order to promote identity exploration in the academic writing we teach.

The combination of Mullen’s critical and creative work discusses identity in ways that can contribute to current issues in Composition and Rhetoric. In much of her work, Mullen outlines her own conception of “syncretic” literacy, a literacy that articulates the multiple identities a writer possesses within any given text. This conception of literacy conceives of textual spaces within which a writer can speak from a hybrid subject

position that articulates multiple voices and identities without privileging one over another, and which encourage readers to investigate this subject position by closely exploring choices of language and patterns of meaning. Mullen's conception of syncretic literacy contributes to the field of Composition and Rhetoric as it encourages us to create spaces from which student writers can articulate the realities of their experience and work through conflicting constructions of identity while participating in academic work.

(Multiple) Writing Identities in the Composition Classroom: An Overview of Recent Scholarship

While writing instructors may at times see their students as struggling to enact an identity as an academic writer in their texts and lacking authorial control over their own texts, we also know that students make linguistic, structural, and rhetorical choices in their writing, and that analyzing these choices often reveals the ways in which student writers use their writing to negotiate their identities within and between multiple discourse communities.⁸ Many compositionists argue that what writing instructors may read as erroneous, confusing, or contradictory within student texts often articulates a student writer's attempts to represent multiple—and at times conflicting—identities in her text. As the following short overview demonstrates, many composition scholars have

⁸ Here I discuss a selection of these Composition and Rhetoric scholars that posit identity as multiple and see students making choices about their writing. Two other scholars, A. Suresh Canagarajah and Min-Zhan Lu, also write about this in relation to multilingual learners. For a detailed discussion of these compositionists and their theories on multilingual student writers, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation, ““I write you. Daily. From here”: Composing a Generation 1.5 Space in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*.”

written about students enacting, struggling between, and negotiating among multiple identities. Here I trace a genealogy of such scholarship over the past twenty years, citing select early examples and concluding with Donna LeCourt's recent research on identity formation(s) in student writing to demonstrate the importance of this thread of scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric.

Robert E. Brooke's 1991 work, *Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops*, is one work of composition scholarship that helps us to understand the complexities of identity that often arise in student writing. Brooke believes that human beings are in a constant state of trying to understand and articulate their identity: they negotiate between different constructs of identity offered to them and between different aspects of identity they may accept or reject. "The term *identity negotiations*...highlights the development of the self within a complex arena of competing social forces," he states. "From such a perspective, individual identity (at any point in time) is best seen as a dynamic construct which comes into being through mitigation or compromise with the social definition of self surrounding the individual" (12). Some see identity as "some inviolate core at the center of the organism, as a fixed consciousness that never changes," but even those who do not believe that we possess or enact multiple socially-constructed identities can agree, according to Brooke, that "the self as experienced—as it comes to expression, value, and meaning—is a function of cultural interaction" (15). Thus our ability to adopt or reject a particular identity, or facet of identity if we see identity as singular, is predicated upon the types of roles that are offered to us in our lives. Our position in society and among various cultures and

discourse communities determines the possibilities for identity/identities that are available to us.

There are instances, however, when an individual moves into a discourse community whose literacy practices are so incongruous with previously encountered communities that an individual may find it psychologically damaging to adopt a new identity within this community. A work that powerfully illuminates this issue is Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*, also published in 1991, in which he discusses his experiences in school and theorizes the sort of split-self that results in his attempts to succeed in two different communities: the African-American community of his neighborhood in New York City and the white-dominated world of school. In this work Gilyard recalls the process of learning, as a child, his native tongue—Black English—while learning Standard English for communication with those outside of his family and neighborhood community. From the moment Gilyard learns the sociality of language, he learns the importance, and dangers, of code-switching, of moving between two discourses: “I have often chosen to switch,” he says of his bi-dialectism, “rather than fight, but the routine hasn’t always implied any emotional ease” (31). While code-switching between Black English and Standard English is a skill that Gilyard learns and uses as he moves from home to school, he shows us the more he is schooled in Standard English, the more psychologically and socially difficult it becomes for him to successfully code-switch from Black English to Standard English. Ultimately, by the time he is in high school, Gilyard finds it difficult to enact different identities inside and outside of school—a hip teenager in the neighborhood, a poet, a “serious” student mastering the language and

ideology of school—and ultimately feels as though he must choose an identity. The end of the book dramatically chronicles the point at which Gilyard had to choose between a heroin habit and college.

While choosing a “primary” identity is not always as drastic a choice as choosing between heroin or higher education, it does demonstrate the ways in which trying to exist in two communities, enacting the available identities within them and speaking in voices that represent their dominant languages, becomes next to impossible for Gilyard as a young man. Gilyard, as a composition scholar, sees voice as multiple and believes that it is possible to enact multiple identities within different discourse communities; however, he demonstrates the ways in which voice is intertwined in identity. He shows us that appropriating a voice ultimately means appropriating an identity within the discourse community to which that voice belongs. Gilyard is concerned with the process through which African-American students such as himself, who identify with and see themselves as belonging to a Black English discourse community, come to learn Standard English competence in public schools and the “psychic costs” (11) they pay to succeed in school. As he tells his story of being torn between two cultures, two possible identities he could occupy, he demonstrates the ways in which language acquisition goes hand in hand with other forms of social assimilation. Gilyard’s work demonstrates that while many students find it easy enough to assimilate an academic identity of student in school, others, whose primary identities are significantly different from the identity offered to them as students, may find themselves in a position where the multiple identities they possess are

incompatible and where they are forced to choose the community to which they will belong because they cannot, psychologically or socially, belong to both.

In recent years, many composition scholars have tried to address the crucial problem that Gilyard identifies of students' attempts to enact multiple conflicting identities. These composition scholars often have attempted to do this by complicating theories of identity, challenging not only those who believe that each individual possess an authentic, unique identity but also those who believe that identities are social constructs that we perform, as they consider a crucial question: if we believe that a student possesses and enacts multiple socially-constructed identities and represents these identities through multiple voices, what happens when one identity a student enacts is in direct opposition to another identity the student possesses? Specifically, what happens when the identity we ask a student to enact in the composition classroom is so far from the other identities a student enacts outside of the classroom that the student feels like she has to choose between identities?

In her 1997 book, *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*, Ivanic argues that students struggle to articulate their identity in their writing, particularly when the academic identity they are being asked to adopt in the writing classroom is somehow at odds socio-economically or culturally with their identities outside of the classroom. According to Ivanic, there are four aspects of writerly identity that we should consider when thinking about the relationship between student writing and identity: we should consider a student's autobiographical self, i.e. the identity that a writer brings to her text based on lived experience and conception of self;

discoursal self, i.e. “the impression—often multiple, sometimes contradictory—which [writers] consciously or unconsciously convey[] of themselves in a particular written text”; the self as author, which varies according to the level of authority a particular writer feels comfortable claiming within a particular text; and overall “writer identity” which are “prototypical possibilities for self-hood which are available to writers in the social context of writing” (25, 27). As they write, students work through each of these aspects of identity, negotiating how they see themselves inside and outside of the academic writing classroom as well as how they are able to write these selves within the subject positions available to them in the conventions of academic writing.

Throughout her book, Ivanic provides us with examples of students who rhetorically and linguistically negotiate multiple identities within their writing, particularly when the content or argument they want to make in their writing does not fit into academic conventions. Even when some of these interviewed students know that their academic reader will interpret their text to be erroneous or awkward, students made choices about context, language, and argument in order to at times distance themselves from academic ideology or conventions or to ensure that the voices and experiences of their lives outside of the writing classroom would be represented in their writing. What is particularly noteworthy in Ivanic’s discussion is how seeming contradictions and/or ambivalence in student writing often reflects students’ attempts to articulate their multiple identities in their writing. Students’ conceptions and anticipations of their academic reader also factor into the choices they make in their writing. Ivanic argues,

In this environment of power relations and uncertainty about expectations, student writers set about writing. The result is a discursal web of subjectivities, partly owned and partly disowned, designed to create a good impression on the reader without compromising the writer's integrity. (244)

According to Ivanic, student writers have a sense of their writing instructors' expectations, even though they at times are unsure about how to meet such expectations in their writing; however, student writers often struggle between their desire to meet academic expectations and to resist those conventions that conflict with their identities outside of the academy that they want to document in their writing. Examples of this include students' use of quotation marks to distance themselves from academic language and ideology, their discussion of the "protective practices" they use in their writing to "save face" and convey a particular impression of themselves in the mind of their reader (245), their frustration with academic writing that "uses a lot of jargon" and "doesn't connect to reality" (230), as well as their considerations of word choice and tone to indicate the extent to which they do or do not accept the academic content they write about.

Whether we see our identity/identities as capable of accommodating the role of student, writer, and/or academic determines whether or not we are able to see ourselves as occupying one or all of those subject positions, and ultimately whether we will succeed or fail in academic writing. If we feel that one (or all) of those roles is compatible with our sense of who we are, we have the ability to succeed. If our conception of identity is too far removed from these roles, we may not be able to adopt an

identity of student, writer, or academic because it conflicts with our core sense of self, as Gilyard discusses in his work. As Ivanic demonstrates in her research, student writers often feel conflicted as they learn to enact an identity as an academic writer: while they believe that it is important to their academic success to enact this identity in their writing, they still attempt to articulate their other identities in their writing and to find a way to critique aspects of academic identity that may come into conflict with the identities they enact outside of the classroom.

Donna LeCourt is an example of a composition scholar who complicates theories of identity in her work in order to further consider the effects that learning academic writing has on students, particularly those students who are marginalized in the classroom because they have not been socialized and schooled to easily adopt an academic identity. In her recent work, *Identity Matters: Schooling the Student Body in Academic Discourse*, LeCourt urges compositionists to consider the important role that embodied experience plays in a person's understanding of self. LeCourt's goal is "to put the material, embodied experience of culture into constant conversation with our discursively influenced theories about identity and how it is experienced/enacted" (11). While LeCourt believes that identity is indeed multiple, she argues that many identities a person possesses are experienced as a part of their authentic cohesive identity. "We may theorize identities as multiple," she claims, "but our students do not live only in our classrooms. Rather, any attempt to locate agency in difference will be continually affected by our students' interactions in culture as it is *lived* in material interactions with others that may not always be accounted for in our approaches" (20).

Even if instructors have the best intentions to respect difference within the composition classroom and to encourage students to explore their multiple identities in their writing, we still face the problem that it is quite difficult to develop a critical distance from those identities that we embody in our everyday lives, or even those identities that we enact in the classroom. LeCourt poses a problem quite similar to the one that Gilyard poses in his work: even if we attempt to respect the variety of identities that students bring to the classroom and their writing, we cannot escape the fact that some of the identities students possess cannot be accounted for in the classroom. Students cannot exist in the classroom as members of an academic discourse community at the same time that they exist as members of other discourse communities because some of the identities they embody cannot be contained or expressed within the confines of academic discourse and do not possess equal power or agency.

The literacy narrative of one of LeCourt's students, Stephanie, demonstrates the ways in which students struggle in their writing to represent their multiple identities to an academic audience, even when that academic audience is respectful of the diverse identities students possess. LeCourt values literacy narratives because they offer insight into the ways in which various discourses inscribe identity upon our material bodies, just as we use discourses to define our identity/identities. Literacy narratives are particularly effective, LeCourt claims, at points in which students are struggling to incorporate a new discourse, a new voice, into their repertoire. She argues:

When writers approach a new manifestation of discourse, or when difficulties with using a discourse's language arise, they become aware of a discourse that is

exterior to their sense of self. This awareness allows the writers more insight into the ways in which academic discourse may be seeking, or has sought, to act upon them. (9)

In writing about the development of various types of literacy through narratives, students are able to think critically about the multiple identities they enact while simultaneously considering the effects of learning an academic discourse, of learning to speak in an academic voice and enact an academic identity.

We see this in the literacy narrative written by one of LeCourt's students named Stephanie. In her narrative, Stephanie attempts to speak from a position of hybridity, one in which she represents her identity as a member of an academic discourse community as well as a woman who has been in a long-term abusive relationship. While she attempts to engage in feminist discussions of abuse and sexual victimization, her own lived experience of being complicit in her sadomasochist relationship is in direct opposition to what she knows of academic feminist discussions of this issue. As she tries to capture her experience in an academic paper, Stephanie begins to feel like her experience of such a relationship is "discounted," and ultimately re-titles her paper, "My Face, Your Face: Selected Diary Entries of an Illiterate." When LeCourt asks Stephanie why she decides to identify as an illiterate, she says, "*Because trying to talk about the problems I was having from the position of someone who really was supposed to be able to talk the discourse was completely unproductive because I found myself unable to say a lot of things*" (200, original emphasis). LeCourt's understanding of this is that

Stephanie's assumption of 'illiteracy' serves as a way to explain the literacy she does possess from experiences literally 'written' on her body (her narrative mentions continually the kinds of scars she still carries). She uses her alternative 'literacy' to put forth another 'truth' not recognized as such by academic discourse. (201)

Even though Stephanie is encouraged in her academic writing to explore her own lived experiences, she still feels pressure to conform to academic conventions in her description of this identity. She identifies herself as "illiterate" in order to distance herself from the identity of "literate" academic because she does not believe she is able to hybridize her identities as academic and masochist girlfriend. While Stephanie identifies as both a member of academic discourse as well as a woman in an abusive relationship, she is unable in her writing to represent both of these experiences in her narrative.

LeCourt sees Stephanie's work as an example of how literacy narratives can enact resistance to the limitations of academic writing and explore possibilities of articulating a "hybrid subject," a subject who is composed from multiple, sometimes conflicting and often socially unequal, identities. LeCourt borrows the concept of hybridity from postcolonial theorists in order to provide a model of a new type of subjectivity that students can enact in their academic writing in order to voice their multiple identities instead of privileging one identity over another. While speaking as a hybrid subject is a difficult process, it is one that we should work towards in our composition classroom in order to encourage a space where students are articulating their multiple identities:

Simply allowing diverse cultural experiences and literacies into the classroom without a consideration of the identities associated with academic discourse [can lead] to students reimposing the self/Other relation they've learned so well in other cultural arenas (and implicitly know exists in our classroom space as well). By maintaining the transparency of academic discourse in suggesting it is *not* associated with the most powerful identities in our culture, composition pedagogy can unwittingly reinvoke colonial relations while seemingly expressing diversity. (127)

LeCourt is keenly aware of students' split identities that make acquiring academic discourse difficult for many students. She sees in her students the same fissure of identities that Gilyard sees in his own literacy autobiography, and, like Gilyard, LeCourt believes that exploring literacy—reading, writing, and rhetorical practices of discourse communities—helps us to see the ways in which we can explore cultural and social identities we possess as we also explore the identity/identities that speaking in an academic voice require us to adopt. What is important to LeCourt is that we find a method for composition that produces possibilities for articulating new hybrid subjectivities that reflect the multiple identities we possess without privileging some of those identities over others. When we privilege one voice—be it cultural or academic—over another, we limit a student's possibilities for speaking from a position of hybridity and fully articulating their understanding of the world. Thus to support such hybridity and to extend LeCourt and Gilyard's discussions about students' constructions of identity in their academic writing, compositionists need to explore texts that successfully articulate

multiple voices and identities in order to consider what such texts might look like and how we might identify and encourage such articulations in student writing.

Mullen's Critical and Creative Composition of Syncretic Literacy

As we have seen in discussions of identity in the composition classroom, scholars have conflicting views on how, and the extent to which, students should become literate in academic discourse. They also differ on the types and extent of the consequences that this literacy has on students' senses of self when the ideology underlying academic literacy conflicts with the identities students possess in communities outside of academia. Gilyard and LeCourt's accounts demonstrate the struggles students sometimes endure as they attempt to speak from a position between—or among—multiple discourse communities. Harryette Mullen's work, however, manages to speak from a hybrid subject position wherein her multiple discourses and identities co-exist. Looking closely at how Mullen constructs this type of space within her poetry and her critical work, I argue, can help us to envision possibilities for how we might create hybrid spaces in our composition classrooms and the writing assignments we give students, and how we might change our own readings of student texts to account for and encourage such multiplicity. Mullen's oeuvre presents an outline for her conception of literacy as well as models of how this syncretic literacy can be enacted in both creative and critical work in the composition classroom.

Much discussion about Mullen's poetry centers on the multiple identities she possesses as a black, female, experimental poet, and critics as well as Mullen herself

attempt to create a narrative of the evolution of her poetics that tries to bridge the gap between the community of black poets and the community of experimental poets within which Mullen exists. Because Mullen's body of work is so complex, and because much of it does not fit neatly into conventions of African-American poetry *or* experimental poetry, critics often use Mullen's work as an example of a type of poetry that can unite poetry communities, display multiplicity, and serve as an important narrative of how a poet can be read by multiple poetry communities. Depending on the reader's experiences and identities, the reader may relate to each word differently than another reader with a different set of experiences and identities. As a woman, a black American, a middle-class consumer, an academic, and an experimental poet, Mullen engages the discourses of multiple communities and uses her experiences in all of them in her writing. Ultimately, as a reader becomes familiar with the multiplicities that exist within Mullen's texts, and learns to enact syncretic literacy, she is able to interpret Mullen's work in a way that accounts for and maps multiple systems of meaning simultaneously.

In her book, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*, Juliana Spahr describes the ways in which Mullen's work speaks to multiple communities of readers and details how Mullen explores constructions of literacy and illiteracy in dominant American culture as well as African-American literary history. Spahr defines literacy in terms of reading practices and argues that Mullen is keenly interested in the politics of reading and that she proposes "alternative literacies, alternative reading practices. These ways of reading, with their emphasis on language's slippages," Spahr states, "are not pursuing correctness or standards. Instead, they are aligned with the

impudence and flexibility of talk, orality, and resistance” (104). Spahr sees Mullen’s work as “investigat[ing] the privileges of education and the relationship between her work and the dominant canon she was taught” and discusses Mullen’s interest in the role that reading played in defining, and limiting, African-American experience. She documents how, in her creative and critical work, Mullen identifies important places in African-American history where literacy—and illiteracy—is fundamental to understanding the position of African-Americans within larger American society (100). Spahr locates places in Mullen’s creative and critical work where she examines the ways in which African-Americans were condemned to a position of illiteracy (defined by Spahr as lacking reading and critical reading abilities) as well as the ways in which African-Americans empowered themselves within dominant white culture by acquiring literacy. She argues that Mullen “figures reading as a reply to the authority of subjectivity, grammar, and overly reductive identity narratives. Mullen’s emphasis is on reading as a communal act of resistance, a utopian, dissident space” (110). While Spahr focuses her discussion of literacy in Mullen’s work exclusively on habits of reading, I would like to argue that when we define literacy as a process of acquiring a language, of reading *and* writing within a language, we begin to see how all of Mullen’s work comes together to envision new reading and writing practices that articulate multiple discourses and voices and account for a subject’s multiple identities.

In her creative and critical work, Mullen presents readers with a model of syncretic literacy—reading, writing, and rhetorical practices that blend multiple discourses without privileging one over the other (as LeCourt warns us against).

Throughout Mullen's work, an individual becomes literate when she is able to represent in multiple voices and multiple genres the many identities she possesses and to present this representation to multiple communities of readers. Many readers see this as innovative, as Mullen says in an unpublished interview quoted by Deborah Mix:

To the extent that my work has been innovative, it has to do with my own sense of being in between discourses, in between cultures, in between communities, with the possibility of movement back and forth between these different arenas and discourses, so that the poetry comes out of the resistance, the conflict, the struggle, the difficulty, the discomfort or awkwardness of the position. (62)

Mullen sees her work as existing in a hybrid space between discourses, cultures, and communities. Mullen's poetry, as well as her literary criticism, teaches us very important lessons about identity and its relationship to literacy as it responds to, and has the possibility to alleviate, some of the problems that Gilyard and LeCourt raise in their work because she is able to use this hybrid space not only to resist static constructions of language and culture but also to innovate and change through this resistance. In her critical work, Mullen envisions a conception of syncretic literacy that promotes reading and writing practices that highlight hybrid subject positions and multiple discourses within a text. She then implements this syncretic literacy in her creative work, particularly in *S*PeRM**K*T* and *Muse & Drudge*, as she creates a poetics in which wordplay allows for words and phrases to simultaneously represent multiple discourse communities and possess multiple referents.

When we examine Mullen's critical work about writers such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Ralph Ellison, Alison Mills, and Ntozake Shange, we see how Mullen composes an African-American tradition of syncretic literacy in her literary criticism. Just as Mullen herself writes for multiple audiences who live within multiple discourse communities, Mullen describes the accounts of other writers who she sees as working through similar issues in their writing and highlights the places in these writers' texts where they achieve syncretic literacy, engaging multiple discourse communities while representing their multiple identities, the many voices they possess, and the communities to which they belong without privileging one over others. As she does this, she is actively composing a tradition of syncretic literacy among writers of color whose work demonstrates the multiplicity of identities, languages, and literacies that an individual can access in her writing. While not all of the writers that Mullen writes about enact this type of literacy within each composition, Mullen shows how these writers create works that demonstrate syncretic literacy within and across genres.

In her article entitled, "When he is least himself": Dunbar and Double Consciousness in African American Poetry," Mullen demonstrates the ways in which Paul Lawrence Dunbar "juxtapose[s] standard and nonstandard dialects not only for comic effect, or to demonstrate multicultural fluency, but also to underscore social inequities that maintain hierarchies of power" (278). Mullen claims that Dunbar achieves the type of "double consciousness" that W. E. Du Bois discusses as Dunbar incorporates a variety of voices into his poetry and writes in a variety of genres, demonstrating his ability to speak from a variety of subject positions. While Dunbar does not necessarily

merge genres or voices within one piece of writing, he does merge genres and voices within the books that he publishes. In her article, Mullen highlights the elements of Dunbar's writing that demonstrate the ways in which Dunbar is a part of Mullen's tradition of innovative African-American writers who use their writing to explore the inequities of various subject positions within literature and larger society while demonstrating their ability to inhabit more than one subject position within a work or book of literature.

Likewise, Mullen also posits Alison Mills and Ntozake Shange, two black women writers associated with the Black Arts Movement, in her tradition of innovative African-American writers who present the multiple identities a person possesses in complex—and sometimes conflicting—relation to one another and who use their writing to work through these complexities and contradictions. In her article, "Artistic Expression was Flowing Everywhere:" Alison Mills and Ntozake Shange, black bohemian feminists of the 1970s," Mullen describes how both of these writers' fictionalized autobiographies of the 1970s demonstrate the ways in which black bohemian feminists struggled to reconcile their desire to be strong independent women, their rejection of middle class values, and their dedication to remaining loyal to a black aesthetics that was dominated by men. Her ultimate argument is this: "These authors examine the heart of the Black Arts movement as participant observers, showing that African-American women were committed yet critical partners in the conception of black aesthetics" (205). While these works might not be formally innovative, the female protagonists these writers document, protagonists loosely based on the writers themselves, demonstrate their desire to create, even within

the domestic sphere, as strong female artists as well as their loyalty to black nationalism that often positioned black women in subservient and traditional female roles. Both Mills and Shange, as Mullen demonstrates, create female characters that ultimately come to a place in their lives where they can speak as black feminists, a place where they have hybridized these two somewhat conflicting identities without compromising one for the other.

During the summer of 1996, the year after she published her book of poetry, *Muse & Drudge*, Mullen published two articles that discuss literacy, particularly the literacy of women of color, who must combat accepted institutionalized conceptions of literacy and illiteracy by creating an alternative to these concepts that so often are defined along lines of color, gender, and class. In her article, "African Signs and Spirit Writing," Mullen refutes views of scholars who define African-American literature by its privileging of orality or what she calls "speech based poetics" because it "impoverish[es]...tradition" and does not acknowledge the role that written texts have played in African-American history (670-1). Here she considers the role that written and/or visual texts have played in slave narratives, religious traditions, and quilting in African-American literary tradition.

Defining the African-American literary tradition as one that privileges orality, Mullen argues, does not acknowledge the institutionalized illiteracy that African-Americans suffered when forced into slavery. What is more, much evidence exists that visual and written literacies originating in Africa do become part of African-American folk and literary tradition, if they only exist as somewhat incomplete remnants:

certainly the persistence of such ‘Africanisms’ [i.e. elements in African-American art that seems reminiscent of Africa] in the work of Southern folk artists suggests that African cultural systems were not utterly destroyed by slavery, but rather survived in fragmentary, dispersed, and marginalized forms that continue to exist alongside dominant cultural traditions that also significantly influence African-American production. (677)

Mullen describes the best example of this fragmentary tradition to be quilts made by African-American women:

This syncretic, or creolized, tradition [that retains fragmented African images and motifs] is manifested in a most visually striking way in the work of African-American quilters. The narrative quilts of Harriet Powers offer a fascinating example of artifacts that incorporate African techniques and design elements, while also expressing the spiritual preoccupations of an artistically gifted individual. Powers, who could neither read nor write, was born into slavery in 1837 and died in 1911. (676)

Mullen’s discussion of female quilters who maintain narratives, images, and symbolism in their quilts despite their position as “illiterate” within American culture is not only a powerful contribution to disrupting a conventional understanding of the African-American literary tradition: it is also a powerful contribution to validating her poetics of syncretic literacy. Existing in fragments and marginalized forms, these quilts made by innovative black women artists maintain a multiplicity of images and voices without privileging one of these voices or images over another. The creators of these quilts, like

Mullen, re-define literacy in a way that negates institutionalized illiteracy drawn along lines of gender, class, and color, and that leaves black women in the most “illiterate” position. By hybridizing or creolizing the literacies that they know as African-American Christian women, these quilters, much like Mullen, define new realms of creation and meaning making. In this article, Mullen generates a black, female, experimental tradition within which her own poetry fits nicely.

In her other article from the summer of 1996 entitled “ ‘A Silence Between Us Like a Language’: The Untranslatability of Experience in Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek*,” Mullen further articulates her definition of syncretic literacy as part of a discussion of Cisneros’s multilingual text. She begins her article by describing the potential for redefining literature—and literacy—in bilingual works such as *Woman Hollering Creek*:

From this ideologically contested space of linguistic difference, error, mutual incomprehension and antagonism, these bilingual authors have the potential to construct what might be regarded as a third language, accessible to those whose linguistic experience, combined with their formal education, has produced a new emancipatory literacy. This new literacy, with its syncretic aesthetic, embraces elements excluded by the dominant standardized languages used in Mexico and the U.S....it frequently incorporates...what is often excluded from dictionaries because it is generally excluded from written, as opposed to spoken, discourses.

(5)

As we can see, Mullen's celebration of the possibilities for Cisneros's work mirrors those same possibilities that Mullen explores in her own creative work. The most important possibility, for our purposes, is the possibility of creating a new syncretic literacy that allows for the equal existence of more than one language existing in "what might be regarded as a third language," or a hybridized language that allows for the co-existence of many voices and discourses.

This new syncretic literacy transcends traditional conceptions of literacy and illiteracy because it accounts not only for dominant discourses but also the fragmented, marginalized everyday colloquialisms, images, and symbols that stand outside of the domain of dominant discourse. Mullen borrows the term "experience of the other" from Paulo Freire to describe that which is located outside of dominant discourse: "The discourse of the other includes illiteracy and orality, superstition and folk culture, ignorance and resistance" (6). Within Mullen's syncretic literacy, what we traditionally define as literacy and illiteracy merge and generate new ways of writing, reading, and making meaning. For our purposes of understanding Mullen's syncretic literacy in the context of the composition classroom, it is important for us to keep in mind that the ultimate goal of this type of literacy is to be academically literate while also incorporating that which is viewed as "illiterate" by dominant discourse communities. If we think back to LeCourt's student, Stephanie, we can see how Mullen's conception of literacy speaks to such an individual who identifies as "illiterate" because her lived experiences do not fit into academic literacy, i.e. the conventions of academic discourse. While LeCourt is only able to create a composition classroom where Stephanie identifies her illiteracy within a

literacy narrative, Mullen expands beyond this type of narrative in which a writer can identify with but not represent various subject positions within the confines of the genre. Instead, Mullen outlines a syncretic literacy in which writers compose within a “third language” that reflects the complexity and multiplicity of their identities, their voices, and their languages as being literate.

In her essay, “Imagining the Unimagined Reader: Writing to the Unborn and Including the Excluded,” Mullen reveals her intimate connection to those who identify as “illiterate” when she states, “A future reader I imagine for my work is the offspring of an illiterate woman. A significant percentage of the world population remains illiterate, the majority of them girls and women.” Thus Mullen’s future reader is one whose mother is currently illiterate and disenfranchised from dominant discourse. This future reader will be intimate with what it means to be illiterate, will understand that “what constitutes literacy has always been determined by the powerful, while illiteracy persists as an attribute of the disempowered. Economic and social policies in the U.S. that widen the gap between the haves and have-nots inevitably deepen the divide between the literate and the illiterate” (199). Mullen’s future reader will be empowered to understand this, but at the same time she will not forget her mother’s illiteracy. Instead, she will learn from Mullen of a tradition of syncretic literacy that articulates the knowledge of both the literate and the “illiterate” within the texts this future reader creates.

When we look at Mullen’s creative texts, particularly *S*PeRM**K*T* and *Muse & Drudge*, it is clear that Mullen is able to enact the poetics of hybridity that she discusses in her critical work. Mullen merges genres, chooses words with double meanings or

suggestive associative identifications for a variety of readers, and incorporates various voices and languages into her poetry in order to exemplify a model of syncretic literacy where the speaker articulates her various identities while creating new subject positions from which it is possible to speak. As an innovative black female poet, Mullen creates in her poetry a space where all of these facets of her identity come together without being compromised as they create new possible subjectivities.

A discussion of Mullen as a poet is often prefaced by an accompanying narrative or her evolution as a poet, which functions much like the type of literacy narratives Gilyard and LeCourt include in their work. Critics and even Mullen herself in interviews use this sort of literacy narrative in order to describe the writing and reading practices that Mullen develops in her texts and to demonstrate the ways in which Mullen articulates multiple identities and voices in her poetry. Mullen's first book of poetry, *Tree Tall Woman*, published in 1981, which was written in what Allison Cummings describes as a "somewhat coherent 'black voice'" (6), fits nicely into a post-Black Arts Movement poetics that privileges a tradition of orality and the expression of racial identity. As Cynthia Hogue describes it, this work is written "beyond" a "frame of whiteness" that we see in Mullen's more recent work: "[*Tree Tall Woman*] explores in part [Mullen's] experience of growing up in a middle class, single-parent, devout home in a '99.9% black neighborhood' in Texas." Hogue goes on to say that the work of poetry spoke to a "general audience" because of "its adherence to a poetics of accessibility" (83). As numerous critics point out, Mullen's first book of poetry was well received by this audience with its stable "I" that possesses a strong racial and cultural identification.

Within these early poems, Hogue sees Mullen “playfully reclaim and positively revalue stereotypes of blacks in dominant culture as signs of ‘illicit sexuality’ or ‘obsequious subservience’” that reveal the “roots” of the poetic concerns we see in Mullen’s later more experimental work (84).

The next part of the narrative focuses on Mullen’s shift from poetry that expresses an “authentic black voice” to more experimental poetry that Mullen herself describes as “multi-voiced” and “mongrel” (Hogue 84). In the nineties, as she pursued a career in academia, Mullen became interested in more experimental poetry written by Language poets, and the poetry in the next two books she published—*Trimnings* in 1991 and *S*PeRM**K*T* in 1992—were well received by this audience. Both of these projects are described as feminist works that interrogate the sexualization and misuse of women’s bodies in America society. *Trimnings* explores the domestic space of femininity with prose poems that explore clothing, fabric, notions, cooking, and the stuff of other domestic work. Written as a rereading and response to Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, *Trimnings* complicates the intimate feminine world that Stein creates in the home she shared with her lover, Alice B. Toklas. Mullen adds an exploration of race into this world in order to challenge the racism inherent in much of Stein’s writing while reappropriating Stein’s work for her own poetics.

Mullen’s next work, *S*PeRM**K*T*, continues Mullen’s interest in how female experience can be articulated in the world of poetry as it explores the world of consumption, specifically within the 20th century domestic space of the supermarket. In the supermarket, where women shop for their families as an expression of their domestic

duty, “commodification, desire, and identity are rigidly interpolated,” as Deborah Mix writes in her work entitled *A Vocabulary of Thinking: Gertrude Stein and Contemporary North American Women’s Innovative Writing* (51). Mix goes on to describe Mullen’s attempts in *S*PeRM**K*T* to build “a bridge between varieties of consumption—two kinds of meat markets, the grocery store and a patriarchal system that renders women commodities—and the tricks of the trade that keep them operating” (56). In prose poems that resemble those in *Trimmings*, Mullen demonstrates the way in which women’s bodies often function in similar ways to the pieces of meat we purchase at a grocery store: both types of flesh must be clean, sanitized, and contained or they are discarded and rejected from their economic systems. If this flesh meets requirements of cleanliness then it is packaged and advertised for sale, its value set at the market rate controlled by patriarchal institutions.

Critics who are interested in innovative poetics, critics who primarily are white and academic, have praised *Trimmings* and *S*PeRM**K*T* for their formal experimentation and their contribution to a Steinian poetic tradition. However, these books of poetry were not necessarily seen as part of an African-American literary canon that is often described as privileging orality and “authentic black voice.” Mullen became disillusioned by the lack of interaction between these two disparate poetry audiences, particularly when she realized that when she read her more experimental work, she would look around the audience and realize she was the only black person in the room. She then decided she was going to try to reconcile the split of consciousness she was experiencing by identifying as a black woman poet as well as an experimental poet.

Her 1995 work, *Muse & Drudge*, was an attempt to unite the two poetry communities to which Mullen belongs. In numerous interviews, Mullen has stated the following, which I quote from Cumming's article, "Public Subjects: Race and the Critical Reception of Gwendolyn Brooks, Erica Hunt, and Harryette Mullen." "I tried to write [*Muse & Drudge*] so that [both] audiences could sit in the same room together. They might not hear it in the same way, but they would all get something that they could relate to" (26). Mullen identifies as both a black female poet and an innovative poet, and the narrative of her work tells the story of one writer attempting to compose in a way in which she can communicate to more than one audience and exist simultaneously within two frames of identity. She attempts to articulate her embodied experiences of being a black female experimental poet who has been influenced by black poetry communities, experimental poetry communities, academic communities, and the communities in California, New York, New Mexico, and Texas where she has lived and studied.

The result of this effort is that Mullen accomplishes her goal of uniting audiences as she writes for each of them in *Muse & Drudge*. She does this by creating a long lyrical poem that merges fragmented references to Sappho, Bessie Smith, Greek mythology, the blues, contemporary American culture, and many disparate female voices. Mullen describes her technique as creating "overlapping boundaries" for various groups of readers (Frost, "Ruses" 472). Each reader of the poem will bring her own experience as a member of multiple communities to her reading of the text in which Mullen has left room for multiple, even overlapping, possibilities for interpretation. Mullen appropriates the lyric form, which is often associated with a strong, stable "I," and then she disrupts this

genre by allowing many “I’s,” many voices, to exist in her text. Likewise, she plays upon the musicality of lyric by exploring its connections to the traditional African-American musical forms of jazz and blues while challenging the brevity often associated with lyric by sustaining the fragments of her poem for eighty pages.

While the prevailing narrative about Mullen and her poetry often focuses on *Muse & Drudge* to demonstrate the way in which Mullen’s work is able to engage members of a variety of discourse communities, Mullen’s other creative works also enact her model of syncretic literacy. Like *Muse & Drudge*, *S*PeRM**K*T* provides each reader with an opportunity to read into Mullen’s work by using their own linguistic and lived experiences to make meaning from her text. While many argue that the lyrical, musical qualities of *Muse & Drudge* attract a larger audience than some of Mullen’s more “experimental” works, I would argue that Mullen’s interrogation of consumer culture, of the images and objects that we experience in the supermarket, uses words, images, and phrases with which any reader who has been grocery shopping can identify.

*S*PeRM**K*T* successfully merges references to Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, the feminized language of the domestic realm, allusions to the lived experience of white and black female bodies, as well as the language of middle-class American consumer culture.

While *S*PeRM**K*T* may be read primarily by audiences of experimental poetry, it is important to stress, I think, the potential for this work, as well as Mullen’s *Trimmings*, to speak across experimental poetry communities, African-American and other minority poetry communities, as well as any community whose members’ embodied realities are effected by and implicated in American consumerism. As Spahr

discusses in her book, all of Mullen's experimental works teach us new ways of reading which, "with their emphasis on language's slippages, are not pursuing correctness or standards. Instead, they are aligned with the impudence and flexibility of talk, orality, and resistance" (104). While members of experimental poetry communities may read *S*PeRM**K*T* as a conversation with Stein that is complicated by modern experiences of race and consumerism, Mullen creates a work within which any reader familiar with American consumerism can make meaning for herself from the words, phrases, and images that Mullen presents to us. While Mullen's work might require audiences outside of experimental poetry communities to learn to read poetry differently, once readers are familiarized with this way of reading, it will be very easy for them to see the ways in which Mullen's experiences as a female black American necessitate this type of poetic innovation. Thus by writing syncretically, Mullen teaches her diverse audiences syncretic reading practices which they can in turn use to create their *own* syncretic writing practices which articulate their multiple identities within a variety of discourse communities.

The complexity of Mullen's lived experiences is represented in a poetry where every word possesses multiple possibilities of meaning because Mullen's speaker is writing from a hybrid subject position and speaking in the sort of third discourse that Mullen identifies in Cisneros's work. Within almost every line in *S*PeRM**K*T* we can read this type of "third discourse" in which each word is infused with multiple possibilities of meaning. A short example reads: "A body with an interior rolls out sleek waxed shiny hard enameled. It takes her away, that seductive new smell, in fourteen

flavors. She's cherry, just driving off the lot" (87). Here we see the ways in which the language of female sexuality is conflated with the language of advertising and car washes. The sleek shininess of a hard enameled body is contrasted against an undefined and unimportant interior. It is difficult in these lines to distinguish where the "she" in the poem is located, where "she" begins and the car ends. Can "she" be distinguished from the sleek waxed body of the car? Within this third discourse, "she" is the car: "she's cherry, just driving off the lot." Whether this is a personification whereby an attractive car takes on the characteristics of a sexy woman who is "ripe" for the picking, or whether this is a synecdoche in which the woman in the car comes to represent the car itself, Mullen's language calls for a syncretic reading in which both interpretations contribute to a reading of this poem. In fact, only in a syncretic reading of this poem are we able to comprehend the sexual and social costs of a world in which women and cars are sexualized objects to be dominated and controlled by men.

The main way that Mullen furthers her project of syncretic literacy in both *Muse & Drudge* and *S*PeRM**K*T* is through punning and using homonyms and anagrams. Mitchum Huehls describes this aspect of Mullen's work in "Spun Puns (and Anagrams): Exchange Economies, Subjectivity, and History in Harryette Mullen's *Muse and Drudge*." Huehls describes Mullen's hybrid poetic as the creation of "a referential excess that challenges the constraints of each 'world'" within which Mullen writes (19). He goes on to state, "Mullen conjures up a host of linguistic devices that enact a formal simultaneity, requiring readers to imagine that the text's multiple meanings occur simultaneously" (21). By using puns, by playing with and manipulating the words within

her poetry, Mullen provides her readers with the ability to read as members of multiple discourse communities and use the knowledge they bring from these diverse experiences in order to transform the excess that could be considered waste into potential new ways of reading and understanding.

Although *Muse & Drudge* may possess a more lyrical quality that makes it more familiar and accessible as poetry for a larger audience, the work that Mullen produces is similar to *S*PeRM**K*T*, as well as *Trimnings*, in the way it speaks from hybrid subject positions and encourages a reading that draws upon the many sources of knowledge and discourses that readers possess. The form of the poem, in a series of neat quatrains, draws upon ballad tradition and slant rhymes that are accessible to a wider audience of readers compared to the other works of Mullen that are written in the somewhat disorienting poetics of a Steinian tradition. The work of Mullen in *S*PeRM**K*T*, however, is the same in *Muse & Drudge* as it is in her other works: she writes in the innovative minority poetic tradition that she documents in her critical work. Her message, to challenge social inequities and systems of power through the practice of syncretic literacy, is the same here in *Muse & Drudge*, if not more overt. While elements of this poetry—the short rhythmic lines divided into quatrains—are more easily recognized by larger audiences as the stuff of poetry, Mullen requires her readers to practice the same type of active reading here that she requires in her other work. As in *S*PeRM**K*T*, each word counts and must be considered from multiple discursive frames.

Just as in the poems from *S*PeRM**K*T* that we examined, *Muse & Drudge* requires us to think about containment and excess.

my skin but not my kin
 my race but not my taste
 my state and not my fate
 my country not my kunk (108)

Here the word “kin” is contained within “skin.” The words “race” and “taste,” “state” and “fate,” and “country” and “kunk” contain the same vowel sounds. While in *S*PeRM**K*T* Mullen encourages us to consider the many connotations and associations that common words possess within different discourse communities, in *Muse & Drudge* Mullen also encourages her readers to consider the limits of words as well as their excess. While Huehls talks about the “formal simultaneity” he sees in this work (21), it is also important for us to examine the limits of exchange that take place in linguistic play (23). While we should read multiply, we should read cautiously as well, for there is a difference between hybridity and ambiguity, and reading from and within a hybrid subjectivity requires both an openness to connection as well as an attention to disconnection. If we consider the above passage, difference is just as important as sameness. Even though the word “kin” is linguistically contained within “skin,” Mullen explores the distinction between “skin” and “kin:” we cannot control our skin color, and even though we share it with many other humans, that does not mean that all those who share our skin color are kin. In other words, our “kin” is not contained in our “skin,” nor can “kin” be exchanged for “skin.” While our skin is physical marker of identification, kin is an emotional and familial marker of identification.

In the above passage Mullen teaches us a linguistic lesson on the relationship between sound and definition, but she also overtly discusses identity in many passages of *Muse & Drudge*. In this quatrain in particular, Mullen begins each line with large categories of identification: skin, race, state, and country. Beginning locally and physically, Mullen's categories become larger and more abstract. In each line Mullen begins with a category with which the speaker identifies by showing possession with the word "my," and yet the speaker clarifies that identification with a negation. If we look at the first line, we see this very clearly: while Mullen's speaker claims ownership to her skin, she rejects the associations—of sound, spelling, and meaning—that the word "skin" might have to "kin." This process of simultaneous acceptance and negation demonstrates the hybrid subject position in which Mullen's speaker(s) is (/are) located. Her speaker has the ability to identify with multiple communities, and she also has the ability to distinguish the limits and conditions of those multiple identifications. While she may identify with a particular race, that race does not determine her own taste, which is a reflection of the many identities she possesses and the experiences she has had. Likewise, while her speaker may belong to a state, to a predefined political, social, and even psychological space, her fate, her ability to envision and pursue her personal goals and desires, is not confined by that current state. The last line in the quatrain seems to be the most telling and provocative of such resistance as Mullen's speaker identifies with her country but rejects the "kunk" inside of it. "Kunk" sounds like "junk" and conjures images of excess and dirtiness and also merges the sexual slang of a male's "junk" and a female's "cunt." We also hear "cunt" in the word "country" included in the same line.

While Mullen's speaker may identify with "country," she does not identify with the excessive waste associated with (as well as the derogatory sexual slur in the first syllable of) her "country."

Here we very clearly see the reading and writing practices of syncretic literacy in action, as Mullen composes a work that speaks to (and with) multiple communities as it creates "overlapping boundaries," multi-vocality, and the possibility for many different interpretations and references. Mullen and other critics such as Elisabeth Frost, Hogue, Spahr, and Cummings elevate *Muse & Drudge* for its ability to speak to many different discourse communities without privileging one discourse community over another. While each reader might not come to the same interpretation of words, phrases, or sections of Mullen's poem, her poetics is accessible to many different audiences. In an interview with Frost, Mullen states,

What I really love, when I read this poem, or when someone else reads it and tells me about their experience, is that different people get different things. If I am in a room with an audience, sometimes the young people are laughing and the old people just stare. And vice versa-the old people will hear things that they know that the young people don't know. Black people get certain things particularly, and Spanish speakers get certain other things. There are people who recognize Sappho lines or Bessie Smith lines. (Frost 407)

Much like LeCourt's student, Stephanie, who attempts to write an essay that represents her identity as an academic feminist as well as her identity within a sadomasochistic and abusive relationship, Mullen creates a work of poetry that represents her identity within

two poetry communities, and in larger terms, the cultural and racial discourse communities within which these communities of poetry exist. She speaks from a hybrid subject position, which possesses agency within her syncretic system of literacy.

Mullen's discussion of identity is tied to voice and self-representation in her text. As we have seen in our examination of identity in Composition scholarship, our ability to represent the multiple identities we possess is modified by the voices and subject positions we are able to use within the frames of particular discourse communities. As *Muse & Drudge* attempts to explore the possibilities and limitations of poetry's ability to articulate a hybrid subject position, Mullen focuses parts of her text for explicit discussions of identity and voice:

elaborate trash
 disparaged rags
 if I had my rage
 I'd tear the blueprint up

chained thus together
 voice held me hostage
 divided our separate ways
 with a knife against my throat (111)

In the first stanza, Mullen seems to present us with a speaker who is somehow disassociated from her ability to enact rage. She is somehow dispossessed—possibly because she is associated with the “elaborate trash” or the “disparaged rags” she sees—

and is unable to channel her anger into action. If she were in a position of agency, she would destroy the “blueprint,” the very design which dictates her position of powerlessness. In the next stanza we are provided with a bit more information regarding this situation: in her position of dispossession, she is chained, and by extension, united with those who also share in positions of disempowerment, even though the blueprint that divides along lines of skin or race does not take into account the “kin” or the “taste” of those individuals it classifies. Instead, Mullen’s speaker is held hostage; more specifically, voice, and the limitations and constructs it demands, holds this speaker hostage. When we are threatened with a knife at our throat, a knife that cuts and divides and dissects, we are likely to end up in pieces unless we act accordingly. In moments where we are dominated by any sort of hierarchical power, be it a person or a system, which is ready to divide and classify us according to hierarchical rules of power, we must speak only in the voice we are allowed to use, and it is this single subject position that holds us hostage. We do not have the agency to represent a complexity of voices (and identities): we are dictated by the knife at our throat, ready to divide us into easy categories.

When we speak in a monolithic voice we limit all of the possibilities for hybridity we have as members of multiple discourse communities. Mullen shows us time and again the cost of choosing one voice over another, one identity over another, and one interpretation over another. Mullen also shows us in her critical and creative writing just how rare it is for an innovative female minority poet to exist within multiple poetry communities, let alone exist at all. As LeCourt discusses in her call for more of such

work in student papers, it is difficult to accomplish writing a work that speaks from a hybrid subject position, one that articulates the embodied realities of identifying with more than one community, especially when those communities have conflicting ideologies that keep them from communicating with one another. However, Mullen shows us possibilities for reading and writing in a way that allows us to speak from a position of hybridity so we may articulate the complexities of our experience. Specifically, as I argue in the concluding section of this chapter, Mullen's syncretic literacy can teach us a new way of reading student texts and encourage us to re-envision how we interpret and respond to student writing in order to understand how students are composing and articulating multiple identities and literacies within their writing.

Using Mullen's Syncretic Literacy to Rethink Student Texts in the Composition

Classroom

Well bread ain't refined of coarse dark textures never enriched a doughty peasant.
 The rich finely powdered with soft white flours. Then poor got pasty pale and
 pure blands ingrained imbred. Roll out dough we need so what bread fortifies
 their minimum daily sandwich. Here's a dry wry toast for a rough age when
 darker richer upper crust, flourishing, out priced the staff with moral fiber. Brown
 and serve, a slice of life whose side's your butter on.

—Harryette Mullen, *S*PeRM**K*T*

All in all, vegetarianism has proven to be a practice that brings about more problems than benefits. Practicing vegetarianism is a fad that must not be condoned by any except people with spiritual and moral priorities. Becoming a vegan for weight loss reasons has been shown to bring about even more health risks that can harm the dieter. Eating meat is in no way harming the environment but the mass production of commercial standard meat is. People have to practice better dieting habits and support the growth of the organic industry if they wish to help the environment. Countless studies have proved over and over again that practicing a vegetarian lifestyle can be extremely harmful to one's health and can disrupt children's growth and learning abilities. This problem can be minimized

by society's encouragement to educate the masses about proper diet and how people can strive to be healthy without taking drastic measures that are in fact counterproductive
—First-Year Writing Student

In this section, I would like to pair the two texts above—one by a student writer enrolled in my freshman composition course and the other by Mullen, from her 1992 work, *S*PeRM**K*T*—in order to consider how we interpret and respond to these two distinct yet “challenging” or “difficult” texts. While a student paper arguing against vegetarianism and a prose poem by an innovative poet are distinct—and even incongruous—for many reasons, I want to argue that both of these texts may be considered challenging or difficult because they disrupt expectations for or conventions of their genre and also because both possess a great deal of potential for seeing new perspectives and making new meaning if we take the time to interpret the texts using syncretic literacy practices. Considering these two challenging texts side by side helps writing instructors to think more about the reading strategies we use to interpret a challenging text such as Mullen's and how we might be able to apply some of those same strategies to reading and responding to student texts in order to support students using their writing to investigate multiple identities and discourses.

If we look closely at Mullen's prose poem above, we can see patterns of ideas, map the themes, try to find possible arguments in the text, and think about the extent to which this text challenges or complicates a more standard reading of a poem that abides by generic conventions of form, language, rhyme, and voice. We can see the ways in which Mullen fuses the language of the marketplace and the hyper-sexualized language

used in American culture to describe women's bodies, and we see her blending of discourses in order to provide a cultural critique of class, race, and consumerism. Mullen's work elicits multiple interpretations and associations of words and encourages readers to draw upon the many discursive communities to which we belong to make sense of the multiple meanings in her poem. In essence, we read this text *syncretically*, working to connect multiple connotations of individual words, to compare and contrast the multiple possibilities for making meaning within the poem, and to explore how and why Mullen might try to disrupt generic conventions or challenge prevailing cultural assumptions to present larger meanings or lessons to her reader.

Upon an initial reading, this work may be read as a fairly straightforward discussion of the bread we might make or find on our supermarket shelf: it is made of flour, which can be refined or coarse; it is enriched and sometimes fortified; its dough is rolled out and kneaded; and it can be toasted or browned and served with butter. As we examined the multiple possibilities that each word possesses, though, we were able to see how Mullen's poem infuses the language of the supermarket with markers of class and race. The "dark textures" of a "doughty [dowdy] peasant" do not "enrich" her with money or knowledge. She may breed well but she "ain't refined," of course. As we begin to read each word of Mullen's poem with a keen attention to the connotations, associations, meanings, rhymes, and images it conjures, we see what Mullen has defined in her critical work as "syncretic literacy" in action, where each word and idea exists simultaneously within multiple frames of reference and discourse.

Throughout this poem, Mullen plays and puns with words that represent much more than bread, the staple of most meals in America. Bread is food, “of course,” but it represents our basic sustenance in more ways than one. “Bread” and “dough” are both slang for money, and Mullen plays with bread as currency throughout the poem, mentioning the “upper crust,” those who represent the wealthiest in society, and distinguishing between the pasty poor and the rich. Just as Mullen plays with the connotations of wealth and poverty associated with bread, she also plays upon the religious and spiritual associations of bread in Christianity, a fundamental institution of American society. “Their minimum daily sandwich” is reminiscent of the line from the Our Father prayer, “give us this day, our daily bread,” where bread stands as a metaphor for life within this system. Moreover, the “body of Christ” is substantiated in the bread that is shared with parishioners when they take their communion; it is the piece of daily salvation, their daily “slice of life,” given to them from God. The addition of the word “minimum” to the phrase “daily sandwich” suggests minimum wage, the least amount of bread or dough that meets a worker’s basic requirements for livelihood, and again reinforces the multiple meanings of daily salvation in American culture.

What is more, Mullen demonstrates the underlying racial implications in economies of bread, economies that define American culture, by using language that divides light from dark and evaluates white and black. At the beginning of her poem, Mullen presents us the American desire to whiten and “refine.” We see this process in the production of bread, where the most valuable bread is that which is “finely powdered with soft white flours.” The making of bread is emblematic of many other social

processes within which the softer and whiter are considered more refined, more pure and more esteemed, and therefore are judged as more valuable in our economy. The process of refining flour to make it more pure and white, however, removes essential nutrients, such as fiber, vitamins, and minerals, from the wheat grain. Whitened, refined flour, then, must then be “enriched” with such nutrients after it has been refined. It is through this discussion of the economy of dark and light that Mullen demonstrates the ways in which the symbols and associations of bread are “ingrained” into the “moral” and economic “fiber” of our society. The whitening of the flour we use to make bread extracts the most essential nutrients of wheat, compromising our health and vitality in the process, yet our cultural compulsion to value that which is whiter over that which is darker, coarser, grainier, and, indeed, healthier, is “ingrained” in so many of our social customs.

Mullen’s poem ends, however, with the possibility of rethinking the economies of light and dark in our society, as her speaker proposes a “dry wry [rye] toast” to the possibility of reconfiguring these economies. This toast, which can be read as both a speech act as well as a form of bread that has been hardened and browned, is for a “rough age when darker richer upper crust, flourishing, out priced the staff with moral fiber.” This one sentence in Mullen’s poem elevates dark over light and imagines a point in which the “rough,” the unsmooth, impure, overgrown, difficult, and coarse becomes privileged over the refined, soft, white, pure, and bland. The brown and coarse of the bread economy would be viewed as the “richer upper crust” and would “out price” (i.e. possess more worth than) the “staff,” which here represents an economy in which some rule over many others. The darker upper crust would out price the staff, those who work

for the ruler or the weapon, with “moral fiber,” with the standards and truths embodied not in whitened flour devoid of nutrients but in fiber, in the part of the grain that, although coarse and dark and difficult, possesses nutrition for the soul as well as society. The toast in Mullen’s poem, however, is by no means a solution to the divisiveness of American economies; rather, it is a call for a new possibility of distribution of worth and wealth through the disruption of cultural binaries. In the end, though, the reader must consider “whose side” her “butter [is] on.” While we are given the directive “brown and serve,” we are left to understand what these instructions mean for us and American consumerism.

The student text that I include in this section likewise discusses food from multiple frames of reference. Although I only include the concluding paragraph here, this student’s draft was about five pages long and critiqued cultural assumptions we often make about vegetarianism, drawing upon issues related to class, consumerism, gender, and religion, as we see from the excerpted conclusion. I want to argue here that we can use the same interpretive techniques we use when reading Mullen’s text—finding patterns, mapping themes, and exploring possible arguments—to understand this student’s text: we can pull out recurring themes in this text, examine the student writer’s word choices, and try to piece together an argument. As we read, we can map recurring discussions of gender and body image, class and conceptions of nutrition, consumerism and corporate power, and religious practices of food, just as we do in Mullen’s poem.

As is apparent in the concluding paragraph I have juxtaposed with Mullen’s text, this student writer has many interesting threads of thought in his essay, although his

presentation of these ideas at times may disrupt generic expectations for an argumentative essay, may juxtapose multiple discourses, and may seem to present multiple perspectives on vegetarianism that come from different positions. Reading this text syncretically, though, we can actively consider why this student writer decides to approach the topic of vegetarianism from such multiple perspectives, and we can contemplate the rhetorical moves we see him making throughout his essay. As his conclusion reflects, the student writer tries to approach the topic of vegetarianism from a religious, cultural, and consumerist point of view at different points in his paper as he also tries to position himself against what he sees as a popular liberal belief that vegetarianism provides significant nutritional, health, and aesthetic benefits by offering multiple definitions of health. Likewise, just as we do when discerning Mullen's connotations and word puns, at times we can carefully contemplate the student writer's word choices and language, working to consider possible meanings and ideas the student writer is trying to convey, as well as how the writer's lived experience may inform his positions.

Reading and responding to a student's text syncretically allows us to encourage a student to build upon his ideas, to think more about his word choices, and to consider how and why he made the writerly choices he made. In the case of the sample student paper from which I quote in this section, a syncretic reading would focus on places in the text where the student seems to be negotiating the beliefs of multiple religious, political, and socio-economic communities in his discussion of vegetarianism while simultaneously constructing a discursal self that reflects his identities as a male, a

carnivore, and an American as well as someone who is religious, health conscious, and critical of consumer culture. By mapping ideas, discourses, and subject positions within the student's text as Mullen's syncretic text encourages us to do, we are able to see the ways in which this student is negotiating among his multiple identities and discourse communities and making rhetorical and linguistic choices that articulate such complexities to an academic discourse community.

My argument here is that we can use similar interpretive techniques in reading student papers as we do in reading Mullen's text (syncretically) to make sense of what is in a student's draft and to think about how we might use this process of interpretation to respond to the student's paper in written feedback for the draft. Treating a student text as a challenging or difficult text that we read carefully and actively helps us to reframe how we respond to student texts, putting the focus of this response on trying to map and make sense of the ideas and language in student papers rather than focusing on deficiencies and errors we see in a text that may seem to deviate from generic and academic conventions. Furthermore, experimental texts such as Mullen's encourage readers to explore difficulty as part of interpretation, even an instructor's interpretation of a student text. Such experimental texts have the potential to teach readers how to work through their initial confusions or frustrations with a text that may not at first meet their expectations, how to examine multiple possibilities of meaning in a text, how to actively consider the meanings that words and ideas possess within multiple discourse communities, how to investigate a text for articulations of a writer's multiple identities and discourses, and how to contemplate approaches to language or formal structures that challenge or disrupt

linguistic and generic conventions. We may use all of these active reading strategies to understand and decode difficult student texts with the goals of understanding underlying rhetorical strategies that students make to articulate their lived experiences outside of the academy and empowering students to see themselves as writers who make choices about words, ideas, structures, and arguments in their texts.

Some writing instructors, however, may question possibilities for any interpretive commonalities in reading a text by an innovative poet and a draft by a student writer. Mullen chooses each of her words and ideas carefully, some may argue, while student writers don't intentionally make such writerly choices. Some may claim that Mullen is authorized to deviate from standards in a way that challenges readers because she is a professional poet who has proven herself to be knowledgeable about poetry and literary criticism. A student writer, on the other hand, may not know what he is doing and is still learning the rules of writing an academic paper, so what is the point, some may argue, in trying to interpret the logic or motivations behind his word choice or organization or rhetorical moves? What good does it do, some may argue, to try to make sense of a student writer's discursal self if his draft is "messy," full of grammatical errors, disorganized, and/or lacking an argument? Furthermore, some may want to know, what is the point of juxtaposing a prose poem with an academic essay when these two genres have completely different goals, forms, and audiences?

Such questions and objections about the effectiveness or relevance of considering creative and critical genres as well as "professional" and "student" writers in relation to one another raise important topics of discussion regarding authorial intention; a writer's

ability and agency to challenge conventions; the extent to which different genres of writing possess formal, structural, or linguistic commonalities; and the advantages and disadvantages of encouraging student writers to deviate from accepted standards or to see themselves as authorized to make choices in their academic writing that may represent the religious, socio-economic, racial, cultural, or sexual identities they enact outside of the writing classroom. However, such questions and objections also, I believe, hinge upon issues regarding the role that the expression or representation of a student's identity/identities and voice(s) should play in students' academic writing. Ultimately, this begs the question whether students should see themselves as writers making choices in their academic writing and whether students should be encouraged to use their academic writing to practice academic conventions as they enact an identity of an academic writer or whether students should use their academic writing to explore and articulate the multiple identities and voices they possess within and beyond the writing classroom.

The answer to this question is *yes*: students should use their writing in the composition classroom—as well as other writing classrooms—to articulate the multiple identities they enact inside and outside of the classroom and to actively investigate how and why discourse communities possess unequal power within the academy as well as in society at large. Moreover, students *do* make rhetorical choices and explore their relationship to academic discourse in their writing. The student who wrote the quoted excerpt was exploring multiple perspectives—many informed by his own experiences—on vegetarianism, and he was challenging his academic readers to see the multiple—and at times conflicting—discussions of vegetarianism in American culture. The student

negotiated making an academic argument about vegetarianism, as the prompt instructed him to do, with his desire to consider this topic from multiple perspectives. While the conventions of an argumentative paper would not necessarily prohibit looking at an issue from multiple perspectives, this student does push the limits of what can be contained within a claim-based argument that can be paraphrased in one or two sentences. By reading his essay syncretically, we become more attuned to places in his text where he is making choices to challenge or question limits, and we respond to his work in a way that encourages him to challenge and question in his essay and to explore what he is trying to accomplish or express through this.

By practicing syncretic literacy in our writing classrooms, we can expose our students to texts—by Mullen and the many writers she researches in her critical work—that express wider ranges of lived experience. We can expose our students to writers who document their struggles between and negotiations of multiple discourse communities and their attempts to represent their multiple identities, teaching our students to develop syncretic reading practices. Enacting syncretic literacy in the writing classroom also requires instructors to design writing assignments—autobiographical, critical, and creative—that enable students to think about the reading, writing, rhetorical, and social practices of the communities to which they belong and to explore the connections and disconnections across these communities. Most importantly, though, syncretic literacy in the writing classroom relies upon instructors who read and respond to their students' writing syncretically. Writing instructors must see their students as writers constructing discursal selves and making rhetorical moves in their texts. We may find it challenging,

or difficult, or even frustrating to try to make sense of the discursal selves and rhetorical moves in our students' texts, but in order to support them as writers who exist within multiple discourse communities, we must reinforce syncretic literacy practices by encouraging students to explore their multiple identities in their writing and to focus their attention on the linguistic and rhetorical choices they can make in their texts, and how different groups of readers may interpret these choices in different ways.

As Jacqueline Jones Royster argues in her article, "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," Composition as a discipline needs to position subjectivity—the exploration of voice, identity, and agency—at the center of our studies of literacy and rhetoric in order to investigate fully the role that language plays in people's lives:

Using subject position as a terministic screen in cross-boundary discourse permits analysis to operate kaleidoscopically, thereby permitting interpretation to be richly informed by the converging of dialectical perspectives. Subjectivity as a defining value pays attention dynamically to context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experience, and by doing so it has a consequent potential to deepen, broaden, and enrich our interpretive views in dynamic ways as well. (29)

By using Mullen's conception of syncretic literacy to analyze our students' texts and respond to those texts in ways that promote "cross-boundary discourse" and "dialogic perspectives," we can encourage our students to see their writing in the composition classroom as a space where they can negotiate—and articulate—their multiple subjectivities and make choices about how they want to use multiple sets of discourse conventions and what the effects of these choices may be on a variety of readers. Rather

than fall back on assimilationist stances when working with our students (as Wallace warns us against), we can work to identify moments in our students' writing where they are composing syncretically and encourage, rather than admonish, writing that works to speak to multiple communities and articulate multiple voices, identities, and discourses in order to "deepen, broaden, and enrich" possibilities for literacy practices in our classrooms.

Using syncretic literacy practices to interpret and respond to student writing, I argue, encourages us to understand students' work with a close eye on how they negotiate and create hybrid subject positions, how they rhetorically structure their papers to represent multiple perspectives, and where they use academic discourse and where other voices enter into their texts. Reading for and responding to these aspects in a student's paper in turn supports syncretic writing practices, encouraging students to think about the rhetorical and linguistic choices they are making and to consider how the multiple identities they enact come into dialogic conversation with one another (possibly even hybridizing) in their academic essays. Rather than responding to students' texts by pointing out places where they erroneously deviate from academic conventions, we can respond by encouraging them to think about the discursive selves they are trying to develop in their writing and the possibilities for speaking from multiple subject positions within their work to articulate multiple socio-economic, cultural, religious, and gender identities.

CHAPTER 4

COMPOSING MULTIGENRE AWARENESS IN SUSAN HOWE'S *THE MIDNIGHT*:
ACADEMIC INQUIRY AS PATCHWRITING AND PATCHWORKING

This chapter argues for a new approach to defining what counts as academic inquiry in the composition classroom, an approach that continues the work of composition scholars who call for revising (and designing) academic (multi)genres in ways that allow room for students to express their experiences, make connections across and within texts, and explore their subjectivities. I argue that compositionists should look towards innovative poet Susan Howe's most recent work, *The Midnight*, to contemplate possibilities for creating multigenre research texts in the composition classroom. Howe, a poet often associated with Language poetry and experimental poetics, creates a book-length work that contributes to current discussions in genre theory and provides composition scholars with an innovative approach to teaching academic inquiry through juxtaposing and connecting genres as well as interacting with and writing through source texts. By presenting a textual model that demonstrates the intricate interlacing of a writer's identities—as a daughter, a poet, an artist, an Irish-American, a mother, a wife, a historian—with her scholarly and writerly pursuits, Howe provides the field of Composition with possibilities for changing the way we teach academic inquiry in the writing classroom. Specifically, Howe enacts an investigative approach to research and documenting sources that challenges the conventions of academic genres such as the research paper and argumentative essay and extends recent composition scholarship on multigenre writing and patchwriting. I argue that we should share Howe's work with

composition students as a model of investigative research writing that cultivates (multi)genre awareness and connects the personal and academic.

The Midnight, published in 2003, is a collage of poetry, photos, autobiography, literary and historical analysis, drawings, and copies of book pages, much of which centers around the figure of Howe's mother, Mary Manning, who died four years before the book's publication. Divided into five sections—"Bed Hangings I," "Scare Quotes I," "Bed Hangings II," "Scare Quotes II," and "Kidnapped"—the work juxtaposes various genres of writing while overarching themes such as memory, dreaming, beds, and historical documentation serve as threads that connect the pieces of these texts. In both "Scare Quotes" sections, Howe works through memories of and memorabilia from her mother while she investigates the lives of key figures in her academic research on early American history, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Jonathan Edwards; documents the history of bed hangings, which she comes across in her research on 18th century America; and explores her own memories of family members. The other sections in her work, "Bed Hangings" and "Kidnapped," are revisions of earlier chapbooks of poetry Howe published in 2001 and 2002 that have been repositioned within this longer work to be understood in a larger social, historical, and personal context. When pieced together, Howe's project, like many of her past projects, is a work of revisionist historical research, a multigenre text that encourages readers to make connections across genres, histories, and subjects. *The Midnight* functions as a successful patchwork text that persuades the reader to question "official" documentation, to understand that the personal and the

political are always intricately connected, and to use multigenre writing and revision as a process of learning and thinking with and through sources.

Cultivating Genre Awareness as the Work of Composition

Juxtaposing poetry, photos, primary sources, and autobiography, Howe investigates a series of events and issues—the life and death of her mother, the Great Awakening, Irish theater, her bed hangings poetry— and attempts to re-envision possibilities of connection that extend beyond what has been written by others as well as herself in earlier pieces. She works across and within numerous genres to explore multiple paths for her research on 18th century New England and Irish culture as well as her family’s role within larger historical moments. Through her multigenre composition, Howe expands possibilities for academic inquiry beyond historical preservation and documented research as she writes through her source texts in poems; composes narratives of her research into moments in early American history and their relation to her own life; and inserts dictionary definitions of *bed*, *curtain*, and *hanging*. What is more, she cultivates a genre awareness in her readers by asking them to explore with her the boundaries—and possibilities—of particular genres to document lived realities as well as of using multiple genres to explore the multidimensionality of those lived realities. By using poetry to research source texts on domestic arts and argue for greater recognition of the work often done by nameless female workers—and by connecting this with prose that narrativizes her processes of inquiry as well as personal memories— she simultaneously

explores and challenges generic conventions in ways that contribute to current discussions of genre theory and that can foster genre awareness in the writing classroom.

Genre functions as an important part of maintaining—and equally importantly changing—standards within a discourse community. Genre theorist Carolyn Miller defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (159). Likewise, in her essay, “Writing Within (and Between) Disciplinary Genres: The ‘Adaptive Landscape’ as a Case Study in Interdisciplinary Rhetoric,” Debra Journet argues that if compositionists really want to understand the composing processes of expert or novice writers, they examine genre as “socially constructed categories of rhetorical action and response” (96). Instead of conceptualizing a genre as a form that a novice or student writer must master in order to be accepted into an academic discourse community, recent discussion in genre theory lays the foundation for a composition classroom wherein students are able to investigate the ways in which writers appropriate, manipulate, and transform a given genre for a particular audience and a particular purpose. As Amy Devitt and Journet confirm in their essays from the collection *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives*, genres are created and revised by members of discourse communities. Just as discourses are fluid and always changing, genres are always changing because writers within discourse communities write within and at the boundaries of genres, refining them, blending them, and disrupting them. Members of a discourse community use genres to communicate with one another and to challenge one another through subversion of these forms; likewise, those wanting to be accepted or heard by a particular discourse community use its genres to prove they are worth being

heard. As Charles Bazerman argues, “genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action...They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact” (19). Genres define what is possible for a writer within a discourse community; they set the limits of possibility for social action, for what is and is not acceptable for a participating subject. Members of discourse communities can create new ways of being through the creation of new genres; likewise, members of discourse communities can inhibit ways of being by restricting possibilities within a genre.

While many composition scholars agree on the complexity and malleability of genre conventions, they differ in their approach to teaching these conventions in the composition classroom. In his book, *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Anis Bawarshi posits genre as a type of rhetorical ecosystem which “maintain[s] rhetorical conditions that sustain certain forms of life—ways of discursively and materially organizing, knowing, experiencing, acting, and relating in the world” (9). Genres are dynamic systems that are constantly in flux while maintaining the potential to organize information and classify possibilities for rhetorical action. Bawarshi states, “although genres exert influence over situations and individuals’ desires to act within them, there is still room for their users as agents to enact slightly different intentions or even resist the ideological pull of genres in certain circumstances” (92). A writer using a genre of a particular discourse community has the ability to work within its confines to revise the genre. Once a writer has a general knowledge of a genre, Bawarshi claims, this writer can then deviate from convention within this genre to adjust or reframe its conventions.

Conversely, though, just as subjects write genres, genres write subjects. In his book, Bawarshi argues that a genre possesses rules and limits of what is possible for its writing subject, and a writer must enact a subject position that is acceptable within a given genre. While an individual can enact multiple subject positions in her writing, even simultaneously, an individual is limited by genres and through genres to enact only those subject positions that are not in conflict with the subject positions acceptable within a given genre. Thus any subject who desires to work within or revise a genre must first be able to speak from a subject position that will be heard and acknowledged within a particular discourse community. Bawarshi looks specifically at how student writers in the first-year writing classroom negotiate the subject positions they are asked to enact when writing in the academic genres of the first-year writing classroom. He comes to the conclusion to which many other composition scholars come: if a student's experiences and identities are in conflict with the ideology of the subject position that a student is asked to enact in the critical essays they write in the composition classroom, the student may be unsuccessful in mastering the conventions, rhetorical moves, and subjective positioning of basic academic genres that allow them to progress in their college education.

Bawarshi shows that if students possess identities that are in conflict with the ideological assumptions a genre requires, they often cannot gain acceptance into an academic discourse community. And if students are being taught that the only way they can succeed in the academy is to understand and mimic its genre conventions, then the composition classroom does not provide any room for experimentation and exploration

with subject positions or conventions as students learn academic genres such as the research paper and the argumentative essay. This all but guarantees that those students who try to experiment and challenge the conventions of academic genres by articulating their experiences through a variety of perspectives and voices they bring to the classroom will not be acknowledged as innovators; rather, they more than likely will be ignored for their efforts and rejected from our academic discourse community for failing to conform to the conventions of academic genres.

If genres are too far removed from students' experiences and subjectivities, students will not be able to successfully negotiate and appropriate the subject positions required of them in academic genres such as the critical essay we often ask students to write in the composition classroom. As John Clifford states in his essay, "The Subject is Discourse," "form is...an attitude toward reality; it is rhetorical power, a way to shape experience, and as such it constructs subjects who assume that knowledge can be demonstrated merely by asserting a strong thesis and supporting it with three concrete points" (43). When we consider the socio-political forces embedded in a genre, it becomes clear that student writers may have limited ability to negotiate subject positions within traditional forms of the critical essay which presents a thesis and then "objectively" "proves" this thesis through a close examination of "evidence." As Clifford discusses in his essay, the genre most common to students in beginning writing classes—the five-paragraph argumentative essay—creates the illusion of choice for the writer.

However, this form ignores the reality of unequal positions of race, class, gender, and sexuality and assumes that all students have the ability to speak, or learn to speak,

from a position of objective authority. If students have not appropriated—and internalized—the subject position this genre of writing often requires, if they aren't able to understand the foundations of the genre because these foundations conflict with their own understanding of the world, they have limited ability to contribute to—and change—academic genres. As Amy Devitt points out, “the goals of teaching genre awareness are for students to understand the intricate connections between contexts and forms, to perceive potential ideological effects of genres, and to discern both constraints and choices that genres make possible” (197). She argues throughout her work, *Writing Genres*, the importance of cultivating an awareness of “both rhetorical purposes and ideological effects of generic forms” (192). Students should learn about a variety of genres, Devitt contends, and as they learn about each genre, they should be exposed to a variety of examples of this genre in order to explore its generic limits as well as the creative choices available to writers within the genre. Teaching genre awareness as a study of ideology and form, of creativity and constraint, of a wide variety of genres, encourages students to consider how genres may be adapted to meet the needs of new rhetorical situations, how they may negotiate between genres in their own writing, and what new genres they may be able to create from their knowledge of existing genres. Devitt provides an effective justification for teaching genre awareness and positing genre not merely as a harness of constraints but also as a space for experimenting with creativity and choice. I believe her work also supports the teaching of multigenre writing as a way not only of building genre awareness but also of offering innovative approaches to academic inquiry by asking students to explore the possibilities for making new

meaning and investigating important questions that exist both within and across various genres.

Possibilities in Current Composition Theory for Using Multigenre Writing to Promote Genre Awareness

Promoting genre awareness by asking students to explore existing genres, merge genres, and create new (multi)genres expands the limits of the what counts as academic inquiry and offers students more possibilities of subject positions from which they are able to compose. Recently, Composition and Rhetoric scholars such as Patricia Bizzell have called for exploring hybrid or alternative forms,⁹ opening up new possibilities for academic genres. As my review of recent scholarship will show, many compositionists are moving in a similar direction as Bizzell, discussing in their work the possibilities for rethinking what we consider academic genre(s) in order to allow for more diverse voices and experience and to broaden definitions of research within our academic discourse community. Recent work that discusses genre in Composition seems to fall into three categories: work that considers how students can develop subjectivities as writers as they explore various genres; work that encourages combining academic and personal genres; and work that encourages new experimental genres that intertwine the conventions of established genres.

⁹ For more of Patricia Bizzell's discussion of alternative or hybrid genres, see her essay, "The Intellectual Work of 'Mixed' Forms of Academic Discourses" in *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*, edited by Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell.

In their essay, “Genre in Writing Workshops: Identity Negotiation and Student-Centered Writing,” Robert Brooke and Dale Jacobs argue that instructors should ask their students to write in a variety of genres including those that require personal experience so that students may have the opportunity in their writing workshop to explore the social contexts of their personal experience and the role of the writer. In their essay, Brooke and Jacobs reflect the views of many other compositionists—Wendy Bishop, Hans Ostrom, Tom Romano, and Peter Elbow, to name a few—who often describe themselves as expressivists and believe that the work of composition should encourage students to use both more personal genres like the autobiography and the personal narrative in addition to academic genres such as the critical essay and research paper. When students write personal narratives, Brooke and Jacobs argue, they are introduced to “a way to both inhabit and step back from the roles that comprise our lives, narrating a self as other and evaluating the self as they perceive others evaluating them” (221). The writers argue that through the genre of personal narrative, students learn to think critically about their personal experiences, to work through their complications and contradictions, and to order them in a way that encourages the student to consider the social constructions of our personal narratives.

Asking students to write in more than one genre over the course of the semester may encourage them to think about genre conventions and to negotiate their personal experiences with the requirements of various genres. On the other hand, this pedagogical strategy, while demonstrating the critical thinking involved in composing a personal narrative and encouraging students to negotiate their notions of self with the role of the

writer, still maintains the belief that students need to learn to fit themselves as student writers into already established genres rather than actively engaging in a discussion of the limits—and limitations—of genre. While students might write in a few different genres in Brooke and Jacobs's classroom, and while they work to see themselves as writers, it is questionable whether these students are learning about the social constructions of genres as a whole while being given the authority to question and possibly even change these constructions.

Julie Jung, in her book *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*, argues the advantages of juxtaposing academic essays with fiction, autobiography, and poetry in writing portfolio projects (33). She claims that using such multigenre texts in the composition classroom disrupts disciplinary boundaries and produces a feminist practice of listening and what she calls “revisionary rhetoric” in both scholarly and pedagogical work. This type of text, she argues, creates a multivocality of discourses that articulates students' sociopolitical subject positions more effectively than other more traditional forms of the academic essay. It also, Jung suggests, encourages writers and readers to think about the connections between pieces of writing written in different genres and for different purposes, establishing a practice of actively listening to the white spaces between pieces of writing as well as revising the rhetorical possibilities for connection and disconnection among genres.

Jung positions her work as a scholar and an instructor in composition as well as a feminist trajectory of work that writes from positions of marginality, figuratively and literally in marginal spaces in order to enact creative change within the academic and its

generic conventions. In her chapter entitled “Putting the Wrong Words Together: Disrupting Narratives in English Studies,” Jung describes the writing assignments she has created for her own courses with an intent to promote the composition of multigenre texts and revisionary rhetoric. The first assignment she describes is a “multigenre reflective essay” for a Senior Seminar final portfolio project: senior English majors were asked to assemble their work from various classes throughout their college career and examine the connections—and disconnections—in their work and then write an essay that combines critical examinations of their texts with personal reflection. The two student examples she discusses in her book demonstrate the effectiveness of this reflective essay and final portfolio in encouraging students to think critically about the different genres in which they have composed as English majors; to see connections and disconnections in the themes, inquiries, and voices among these works; and to link their experiences of writing and thinking inside and outside of the classroom. From what she describes in her book, however, it seems as though the “multigenre reflective essay” that Jung requires of her students in her Senior Seminar is one that asks students to put together a portfolio of the writing they have done in many of their English classes and then reflect on writing in a variety of genres over their college careers.

While the portfolios as a whole could be seen as multigenre chapbooks— in which students assemble poems, fiction, essays, and drama from their previous English classes— the multigenre reflective essays as texts do not really reflect experimentation within or across multiple genres. Rather, they reflect on a student’s study of the many genres of writing that are part of the discipline of English and promote a connection of

these genres taught in school with genres and forms of learning the student might engage in and outside of school. While this reflective practice can help students to link the academic with the personal and to interrogate the subject positions they adopt within a variety of genres, it does so retroactively. By the time students piece together their writing as seniors about ready to graduate, they have already proven, for most time and time again, that they can succeed in an academic discourse community and that they can appropriate its genres and use its discourse. Thus Jung's students are not necessarily taught to think critically about how to negotiate within and between genres *as* they learn the genres; rather, they learn to reflect upon the genres—and possibly the ideologies—they have been taught as students. While a student in Jung's course may be able to think about the *person* they have become or the genres they learned while in college, they do not have the ability to think critically about how those genres shaped—and possibly—limited what they were able to learn and who they were able to become within their academic career.

Rather than see experimentation with genre as something students are encouraged to do after they have mastered the genres required in their academic courses, we should begin in the composition classroom to present experimentation in writing as an integral part of learning. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, in her 1992 essay entitled "Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing within the Academy," justifies what she terms experimental writing, writing that explores various genres and combines these genres in new ways, by arguing that this type of writing enacts a multi-dimensional and pluralistic way of being. "Old patterns of argument, based on revealing a single truth (thesis), using

all the available means of persuasion, run counter to new theories of socially constructed knowledge and social change,” she states (4). Bridwell-Bowles’s essays on experimental writing posit this experimentation and linguistic play as a feminist method to write outside of patriarchal writing structures, subverting dominant class, language, gender, and genre conventions. She gives examples of the work that her students produce in such classes: some write personal narratives and literacy autobiographies while others experiment with genre and voice. The examples of the work of Bowles’s students that seem to most successfully enact the multi-dimensionality and pluralism that Bowles promotes are those that play with genre, that disrupt cohesive notions of identity and form: one male student in Bowles’s class chooses to write an essay of questions as he attempts to challenge the genre of argumentative essay, and one female student writes a two-columned essay entitled “Of Why Patriarchal Language is Inadequate” where each column resembles a poem while the two simultaneously exist in dialogue as parts of an essay.

Bridwell-Bowles presents us with powerful justification for and examples of student work that successfully experiment with the boundaries and blurring of genre as an enactment of academic inquiry that articulates the dynamic, complex realities in which we live. She warns us, though, that our students may be reluctant to experiment in the classroom. Because students want to be accepted into an academic discourse community, they often feel that experiments involving multiple or alternative genres do not help them to be successful in the academy, and, what is more, that they run the risk of other academic writers interpreting their work as “writing jibberish” (15). However, as Davis

and Shadle point out in their 2007 book, *Teaching Multiwriting: Researching and Composing with Multiple Genres, Media, Disciplines, and Cultures*, we exist in our current society within a “revolution of multiplicity” that requires us to create new ways of teaching writing that allow for students to articulate multiplicities of identities, cultures, and ways of perceiving the world.

As we rethink the boundaries of academic inquiry and re-envision the genres we use to teach it, alternatives such as those that Davis and Shadle outline in their work prove themselves to be increasingly necessary because they promote research as an activity that takes place across genres and disciplines and also teach genre awareness rather than generic conformity. The research genres that Davis and Shadle argue for promote such genre awareness and encourage students to see how writing can be used to explore complex questions and ideas, work through sources and question the validity and usefulness as part of research, and to connect disparate experiences and perspectives to make new meaning. Davis and Shadle argue for new “open methods” of composing that allow students to “take more conscious control of their own creations” as they merge the personal and the academic as they explore the utility of a variety of genres, media, and disciplines in different rhetorical situations.

For Davis and Shadle, this form of writing, which they call “multiwriting,” posits “questions at the center of student experience and giving students choices about how to research, write, and present their discourses in complicated relations to their subjects, purposes, audiences, and occasions” (3). While those who argue for teaching more traditional genres of academic writing might consider this approach “writing jibberish,”

Davis and Shadle contend that multiwriting benefits students by teaching them strategies for negotiating multiple genres and discourses and connecting the personal to the academic. “The most successful students,” they argue, “are often those who cut against the grain to mix discourses in intelligent ways...while those who struggle cannot find voices [to articulate their ideas] despite, or because of, being told how they should sound [in more prescriptive academic genres]” (31). Thus Davis and Shadle teach multiple genres and discourses in tandem in the classroom, asking students to explore and investigate possibilities for academic inquiry within and across boundaries. Their models for multiwriting assignments include research papers that present academic inquiry as wandering or traveling (sometimes asking students to research and describe a “dream trip”) as well as an essay “as cabinet of wonder,” in which students compose an essay as a collection of pieces of writing and/or objects, challenging our conceptions of what counts as academic evidence.

Using Susan Howe’s *The Midnight* to Teach Multigenre Awareness

In the spirit of Davis and Shadle, I argue that *The Midnight* be viewed as a possible model for academic inquiry in the composition classroom. In this multigenred work, poet and scholar Susan Howe demonstrates the ways in which what is defined as deviance or jibberish often contains inquisitiveness, creativity, and academic rigor if only those who do the defining are willing to rethink their definitions. Howe works through the scraps of memories and materials her mother has left her as well as the scraps of (multiple genres of) text she creates and researches in the years after her mother passes

away. She pieces together her academic work in Irish theater, early American history, and female voices—such as those belonging to the anonymous women who created 18th century bed hangings displayed in museums—with her creative works of poetry, and with her personal reflections of her family. She composes this multigenred project by stitching together these pieces of academic, autobiographic, and poetic writing with common threads, common ideas related to memory, artistry, and women in history. Her work, like the work of the women mentioned in *The Midnight*—Penelope, Philomela, Mary Manning, and “refugee weavers” who were untrained but still produced beautiful embroidery (102)—enacts a process of researching history by arranging pieces of material as well as a process of making meaning through the stitching together of scraps that come in a variety of shapes and sizes and genres. The result of this work is a persuasive, intellectually complicated multigenre text that can inspire composition scholars to think about expanding possibilities for academic inquiry in the writing classroom and to imagine new multigenre research texts students might produce in which they can critically and interactively “piece” together the personal and the public.

We see Howe’s approach to academic inquiry from the first few pages of “Bed Hangings I,” where she challenges generic boundaries, disrupts conventions of source documentation, and enacts a revisionist approach to research. Here, she revises a historical book, *Bed Hangings: A Treatise on Fabrics and Styles in the Curtaining of Beds 1650-1850* published in 1969 by Abbott Lowell Cummings, and documents it in the form of a poem:

Alapeen Paper Patch Muslin

Calico Camlet Dimity Fustian

Serge linsey-woolsey say

A wainscot bedsted & Curtans

& vallains & iron Rodds

Many bedsteds were roped

“Bedsted...& bed Rope

(4)

While we read the above as a poem because of generic markers such as line and stanza, the above excerpt can be considered a multigenre composition as it is also entirely borrowed from a non-fiction source text. Indeed, each word included in the excerpt above is taken from the section “Fabrics and Documentary Sources” of Cummings’s *Bed Hangings*. Howe works through this source text and revises it by reordering words and phrases, tweaking punctuation and spelling, and presenting it in a form that visually suggests verse. For example, she pulls fragments from the first page and assigns them to the second stanza, changing the original spelling of “Curtins” to “Curtans,” altering “Curtins and vallians & Iron Rodds” to “Curtans /& vallains & iron Rodds.” In the first stanza, Howe juxtaposes various materials used in the making of bed curtains but orders them in a way that does not reflect the chronological listing of materials on page fourteen of the source text or the alphabetical list of materials, accompanied with definitions, that begins on page fifteen. This use of a source text challenges a traditional concept of historical documentation: it is unfaithful to the original as it reorders and manipulates

words from the historical document. However, as it challenges conventions of documenting research, it unearths new possibilities for investigating the history of bed hangings by rewriting source texts. Likewise, the fact that Howe published an earlier version of “Bed Hangings” in 2001 in collaboration with visual artist Susan Bee adds another level of revision to this work, presenting the above two stanzas as a revision of *two* source texts—Howe and Bee’s earlier version of *Bed Hangings* as well as Cummings’ *Bed Hangings*, which in itself is a compilation of documentary sources. On the page opposite such revisionist work, Howe provides a sort of argument for her multigenre composition process, in part appropriated from the same source:

Revisionist work in
 historic interiors spread
 from House to Museum

Other documentary evidence
 Friends who wish to
 remain anonymous

(5)

Here again, Howe pieces together words and phrases in her source text to make new meaning, in this case, new meaning that challenges conventions in historic documentation—such as inventories, classifications, definitions, and cataloguing—that does not recognize or acknowledge silent contributors. Howe changes the original phrase, “for the quality of reproductions in this publication we are indebted to the generosity of

three friends of the Society who wish to remain anonymous” (Cummings vi) to “Other documentary evidence/ Friends who wish to/ remain anonymous.” Through this revision, she places these anonymous “Friends” outside of The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiques, the Society responsible for publishing the original *Bed Hangings* that preserves bed hangings through classification and cataloguing. And yet, she also argues for acknowledging and documenting such “anonymous” work by referring to it—and appropriating it—in her poem.

In “Bed Hangings,” Howe situates the reader in a space where the work of the domestic—particularly the weaving, arranging, embroidering, lace-making, designing, cutting, and stitching involved in the making of bed hangings in 18th century New England, often by “friends who wish to remain anonymous”—is being enacted through the connecting and arranging of catalogued names of fabrics and sewing terms in Howe’s text. Here lightweight dimity, sturdy linsey-woolsey, and paper are arranged on Howe’s canvas to mimic and extend the work of the anonymous embroiderer of bed hangings. Howe also points here to a moment when the generic conventions of historical documentation are being altered: history has placed these hangings behind ropes in museums, removing them from the home, and disregarding the “other documentary evidence,” namely that there were contributors, mostly women, whose role in this production has been erased from the records. Howe suggests that there is always “other documentary evidence” in historic preservation that is ignored, does not meet research criteria, and therefore is not included in the official record. However, Howe’s process of composition enacts a revisionist history and expands what is considered “good” research

as she deviates from research writing conventions of proper source documentation and “stitches” the anonymous, the silenced, and the material into historical record. She identifies and inscribes into her composition the work of those “Friends who wish to/ remain anonymous” and other women whose creative expressions have been silenced in the documentation of history, and as she enacts the domestic practices of piecing and stitching in her text, Howe challenges the conventions of historical documentation by including that “other documentary evidence” or what she calls “other/additional/simultaneous” texts in her own form of multigenred historical research.

Howe’s research method is to work with sources across genres—from historical catalogue to visual-poetic collaboration to multigenre book—as an active investigation of how a variety of genres contain and construct a particular subject (in this case, bed hangings) and to revise—and complicate—any attempt to document a subject. While there are many poetic and historical lessons to be learned from reading *The Midnight*, Howe uses two composition techniques that are particularly important for compositionists to consider when creating writing pedagogy that cultivates multigenre awareness: Howe “patchwrites” through source texts in a way that essentially revises—and rewrites—documents across genres, and she “patchworks” her multigenre research in a way that expands possibilities for academic inquiry by merging the academic and the personal.

Howe’s Investigatory Patchwriting: Research as Borrowing, Weaving, and Interrogating Source Texts

Within Howe's text, it is difficult to discern what was written by Howe herself and what has been "borrowed" from a variety of other sources that often are not mentioned in Howe's text. Ironically, Howe does include an index of illustrations at the end of *The Midnight*, which identifies the figures within photos as well as photos of particular pages from works such as *Ballantrae* and *The Story Books of Little Gidding Being The Religious Dialogues Recited in the Great Room*. However, when it comes to source texts, Howe does not include an index or bibliography. Instead, she borrows freely from a variety of sources throughout her work. She draws heavily and extensively on numerous historical and literary source texts, rearranging words and phrases from these sources and weaving them into her own writing as well as other sources, often without any citation and without—or with deviant—quotation. As she borrows from and actively writes through her sources across genres, Howe raises an awareness of the gaps in official documentation and effectively argues for an active investigation of historical records, by both the writer and readers of her text.

Literary critics such as Michael Davidson, Catherine Martin, and Susan Vanderborg have written about the palimpsestic nature of Howe's work as it "retains vestiges of prior inscriptions out of which it emerges. Or, more accurately, it is the still-visible record of its responses to those earlier writings" (Davidson 68). Both Martin and Perloff describe the palimpsestic qualities of *The Midnight* as it presents layers of text and, as Perloff states, Howe presents transparent "tissues of citation," where the reader is able to see the multiple revisions of a source text within her work (227). While such "borrowing" would be considered deviant and possibly even a form of stealing by

conventional academic research practices, I argue that Howe's approach to research and citation provides a fruitful alternative model of investigation that can help students develop innovative research methods across genres and consciously consider how they may construct arguments using source texts. The palimpsestual qualities of *The Midnight*, as well as Howe's disruption of citation conventions, force readers to question our dedication to accepted functions of authority, originality, quotation, and documentation in academic inquiry. Likewise, this investigative approach to research encourages readers to interact with and to think critically about Howe's sources as she writes through these documents and uses them to construct a poem rather than presenting them objectively as historical or public records.

Howe presents us with a framework for academic inquiry that envisions composition as a process of "read[ing] and weav[ing] at once" (163), positing the writer simultaneously as researcher and weaver, one who reads a variety of documents related to her research topic(s) and then works to weave multiple sources related to this topic into her overall composition as she engages in dialogue with and critique of her sources. Howe demonstrates how the writer works intimately with her source texts, appropriating in her composition selected phrases, words, or fragments that she deems relevant to her project and deleting and/or manipulating those pieces that do not work with the weave of her textual tapestry. Rather than using her sources to document the knowledge of others, Howe uses these sources to investigate and interrogate the official records of a variety of subjects. What is more, Howe seems to suggest that we come to understand such source

texts within our compositions as we weave sources together in our writing and explore them through a variety of genres.

In her recent article, “‘The Rattle of Statistical Traffic’: Citation and Found Text in Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*,” Marjorie Perloff explores Howe’s approach to research by tracing what she refers to as “threads” –what we can think of as research topics or subjects—that Howe documents throughout her text. Perloff describes Howe’s overall process of research and documentation as follows:

...a given reference in *The Midnight* points both *outside* the text to the countless memoirs, biographies, and gossip about this or that Irish writer, actor, or relative who had anything to do with the poet’s maternal background, and *inside* its covers to the diverse and contradictory clues that are woven together to create the book’s “factual telepathy”—its layered double portrait of mother and daughter, Mary Manning and Susan Howe. In the poet’s own words, ‘The relational space is the thing that’s alive with something from somewhere else.’ (212)

Howe’s multigenre research writing works to connect source texts within and across genres to create what Perloff calls a “documentary” “poetic lexicon” within which the writer takes on the “the language of the library and the database—the language of facts, dates, historical ledger, map, dictionary, biographical entry, literary quotation” to create what Perloff deems a “new poetic sphere” (227). Howe transposes generic conventions of academic research into this poetic sphere, thereby reframing generic possibilities for her poetry by appropriating research and documentation into the work of the poetic. She

challenges the generic limits of poetry to document history.¹⁰ I argue, though, that Howe also creates a multigenre research sphere, one where, as Perloff states above, threads of (within) sources are woven across genres and into one another, creating a web of “relational space” that represents a writer’s process of personal and academic investigation and where pieces of source texts also encourage the reader to look outward towards “other documentary evidence” and make her own forms of new meaning from the text (Howe 5).

Howe’s poetic investigation of subjects such as her mother’s life, 18th century American history, Irish folklore and literature, and the Japanese Noh represent an alternative approach to academic inquiry that recognizes the communal creation and perpetuation of texts and that asks readers to enact a process of documentary investigation—of Howe’s own text as well as the sources she borrows within her text—as they work to connect ideas and make meaning across genres and sources. Howe “borrows” this approach, in part, from Ralph Waldo Emerson, as she reveals in the section, “Scare Quotes II”:

“Scare Quotes”

“Every book is a quotation; and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone quarries; and every man is a quotation from all his

¹⁰ For an extended discussion of documentary or investigatory poetics, see Kristin Prevallet’s “Investigating the Procedure: Poetry and the Source” in *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, Eds. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks and Jena Osman’s “Gumshoe Poetry” in *Poetry and Pedagogy: The Challenge of the Contemporary*, Eds. Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr.

ancestors.” This is the epigraph to the Riverside edition of Emerson’s essay, “Quotation and Originality.”

On the same page of *The Midnight*, Howe includes a footnote from this edition by Emerson’s son, who quotes his father’s biographer, Dr. Holmes: “[Emerson] believed in quotation, and borrowed from everybody and every book. Not in any stealthy or shamefaced way, but proudly, as a king borrows from one of his attendants the coin that bears his own image and superscription” (116). The above excerpts are interesting not only because they reveal an alternative research tradition of borrowing in which all texts are “quotations,” are assemblages of that which has already been uttered or written and are available to be borrowed without stealth or shame. It also supports Howe’s project of exploring her matrilinear inheritance of poetry as Howe borrows from Emerson the idea that every woman is the “quotation from all [her] ancestors,” composed from/with/by her ancestors. Just as Emerson’s son provides the footnotes to his father’s work, Howe uses her text to explain, contextualize, and quote from the creative work and life of her mother.

Howe’s job as daughter is to carry on the work of her (the) mother, the work of the poet, the embroiderer, the liar: “She loved to embroider facts,” she says of her mother. “Facts were cloth to her. Maybe lying is how she knew she was alive because she felt trapped by something ruthless in her environment and had to beat the odds” (76). Howe’s mother cultivates in Howe the work of embroidering facts, of taking that which is presented as truth and reworking it, embellishing it with new textures and colors. This becomes the work of “lying” in that it deviates from and disrupts what has been accepted

as fact. Howe sees this as a form of creation, creation that often has been ignored by the official records and genres of history and literature, and/or, by extension, deemed unintelligible, nonsensical, and unclear or unclean. This type of “deviant” approach to intellectual inquiry is posited by Howe as a sort of matriarchal tradition that exists outside of accepted genre and gender conventions. Howe appropriates that which is considered deviant, untrue, silenced, or manic within the confines of academic disciplines and presents these as possibilities for making new meaning, of broadening our understanding, and revising collective knowledge. This is a process that personalizes inquiry while leaving a space for social and cultural interpretations.

Likewise, the excerpt I have included from the “Scare Quotes II” section¹¹ also demonstrates the prevalence of borrowing texts and ideas as well as the arbitrariness of attributing an idea or phrase to an “original” author or source. Rather than push the reader away from investigating the sources Howe uses, this arbitrariness actually encourages the reader to investigate Howe’s sources as a more intensive process of research and to think more about citation and documentation. As Howe incorporates direct words, phrases and sentences for documentary sources without putting them in quotation marks or citing them directly, she enacts what compositionist Rebecca Moore Howard defines as patchwriting, a process through which student writers “appropriate[] phrases, patched together into new sentences; they appropriate[] whole sentences, deleting what they

¹¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines scare quotes as “quotation marks used to foreground a particular word or phrase, esp. with the intention of disassociating the use from the expression of from some implied connotation it carries.” The reference to scare quotes extends Howe’s exploration of borrowing and quotation and the various relationships a writer may have to quoted or borrowed material.

consider irrelevant words and phrases; and they change[] grammar and syntax, substituting synonyms straight from *Roget's Thesaurus*. Some provide[] footnotes, attributing the source; others [do] not” (5). Howard argues that while many composition instructors criminalize such use of a source text as plagiarism and fail students for cheating, patchwriting is actually a strategy that many writers—experienced and professional included (as we see from Howe’s example of Emerson)—use to understand difficult texts. Some patchwriting is invisible, as the writer has “stylistically erased” traces of the source, and some patchwriting, particularly that done by student or other “novice” writers, is traceable to the source text and is identified easily as writing that has not properly been attributed to the original author. In her book, *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators*, Howard goes so far as to argue that all writing is a form of patchwriting, as writers borrow one another’s ideas and write through a variety of texts as they compose. However, when a source trail of patchwriting is obvious, we call it cheating, but when it is erased, we consider it good or “original” writing (7).

Howe does exactly this sort of patchwriting throughout *The Midnight* but most obviously (and traceably) in both of her “Bed Hangings” sections. Indeed, tracing Howe’s use of Cummings’s *Bed Hangings* can become an obsession of the reader, for her use of source texts is obvious and yet stylistically patchwritten in poetic forms:

1746 (fig. 39) A figured
head cloth worked by
Polly Wright of Hatfield

Massachusetts in 1765
 (privately owned) This
 curtain fabric of “moreen”
 by a donor born in 1836
 A swatch and swatches
 described as “harateen”
 Owner John Holker 1850

(Howe 16)

The above stanza has been almost entirely appropriated from Cummings’s *Bed Hangings*; however, Howe makes stylistic choices as to what words, phrases, or fragments she uses from her source text in order to persuade her reader to see the ways in which historical knowledge is constructed by the interpretation of, deliberate omission from and within, and selection for the historical documents available to us. It is the researcher’s job to interrogate her sources, to investigate what has been omitted as well as included in a document and why. We must ask these questions when we trace the above passages to their source. For example, the first five lines of Howe’s poem are borrowed from the passage below, in the “Technical Notes” section:

The head cloth worked by Mrs. Alexander Bullman of York, Maine, about 1746 (Fig. 39) and one of red and white copperplate (Cushing family, Hingham, Massachusetts) are both about fifty-nine inches wide. A figured head cloth worked by Rebekah Dickinson and Polly Wright of Hatfield, Massachusetts, in 1765 (privately owned). (51)

Upon reading Howe's source text, we wonder why she has chosen to leave out details of the head cloth's colors as well as owners. More importantly, we wonder why she would only attribute the work done on this head cloth to one woman, Polly Wright, and not acknowledge the work of her partner, Rebekah Dickinson. As readers, we must think about what Howe is trying to say in this patchwriting, understanding her omission of Rebekah Dickinson as a way of persuading us to see the somewhat arbitrary nature of inclusion in documentation or to see how easily marginalized figures such as female embroiders can be omitted from "documentary evidence."

Ultimately, Howe's extensive use of patchwriting and borrowing encourages us to question generic conceptions of originality, of cheating, of plagiarism in academic research and demonstrates the ways in which re-assembling source texts challenges—and revises—historical record. She also uses patchwriting to create a collaborative investigatory process between writer and text, modeling the "positive pedagogy of writer-text collaboration," which Howard argues productively challenges the dichotomy that novice writers are cheaters when they patchwrite while experienced writers are original when they do the same (35). Investigating the sources Howe chooses to borrow or quote in her research of the many subjects in *The Midnight* as well as how Howe choose to write through or patchwrite these sources into her poetry allows us to disrupt conventional approaches to academic research by interrogating documents that have come to classify, categorize, and define historical subjects. Howe and her reader travel "as relations" through the source texts to consider "other documentary evidence" that

may exist silently within the pages of these sources and that may be extracted and articulated through borrowing, (mis)quoting, and patchwriting from these sources.

Rather than present research as a process of faithfully citing documents in order for a student to demonstrate her ability to find and record important academic knowledge, composition instructors can draw upon Howe's patchwriting techniques to encourage students to write through and investigate their sources across multiple genres. Why not model patchwriting as an important research process, one that allows the researcher the space to work through questions about sources and to question knowledge in her sources rather than accept it? Why can't research take place across genres, as a process of interacting with source texts, with carrying on a dialogue with source texts rather than regurgitating the source texts in a traditional research paper? If professional writers such as Howe engage in patchwriting through sources, and if Howe shows us the ways in which such patchwriting can help us to think critically—and poetically—about historical records and documents, we should allow our students a way to interact with the sources they encounter in their research in similarly meaningful ways. As Howard claims, “even though compositionists may today espouse a social democratic rhetoric, they continue to do the work of liberal culture—the work of protecting a hierarchical status quo—when they continue to criminalize patchwriting in their pedagogy” (13). Rather than using academic genres such as the research paper as a gatekeeping device that separates those who can master academic conventions, compositionists can present a multigenred approach to research that asks students to investigate a variety of found and source texts and converse with these texts. As Howe shows us in *The Midnight*, such a multigenred

research approach allows us to make connections across subjects, sources, and genres—to “read and weave at once”—and to generate new meaning that merges the academic and the personal.

The Scissor Work, Cutwork, and Patchwork of *The Midnight's* Multigenre

Research Writing

As the writer creates and pieces her composition, she interacts with a variety of texts: those she is researching, those she has read, those she has written, and those she desires to compose about herself/her selves and others. Howe sees this assemblage of materials as an essential part of the process of creation: her family members' books serve as “transitional objects” that “contain dedications, hints, snapshots, press cuttings, warnings—scissor work,” which is the same sort of scissor work Howe creates in her own work.¹² Likewise, Howe associates her process of “scissor work” and assemblage, of connecting pieces of texts in writing, with the work of Jonathan Edwards, who “kept old bills and shopping lists, then copied out his sermons on the verso sides and stitched them

¹² Both Marjorie Perloff and Stephen Collis write about the “opus scissum” qualities of Howe’s work. Perloff argues in her 2009 essay on *The Midnight* that Howe’s text is a form of the “scissor work” that Howe herself describes in her description of her family’s interaction with books. In his review of *The Midnight* in *Jacket* 25, Stephen Collis argues that Howe enacts “opus scissum” or as she “proceeds to explore the relationship between the history of ‘opus scissum,’ the ‘cutwork’ that was ‘Queen Elizabeth’s favorite form of lace’ and the literary ‘cutwork’ of the poet-assembler who ‘cut[s] these two extracts from *The Muses ELIZIUM*’ by Michael Drayton.” While “scissor work” is not a specific term in sewing or embroidery, “cutwork” is a particular form of embroidery where pieces of fabric are cut out and thread is used to embroider and stitch around and within the missing pieces of cloth. Collis describes Howe’s cutwork that “both creates and destroys the cloth of bed and book sheets” within her text and contributing to a poetics of erasure.

into handmade notebooks,” as well as the work of Emerson, who “cut his dead minister father’s sermons in manuscript out of their bindings, then used the bindings to hold his own writing” in addition to “mutilat[ing] another of Emerson senior’s notebooks in order to use the blank pages” (58). Howe outlines a history of this type of patchwork writing, of cutting and assembling multiple source texts as well her own autobiographies, poetry, and academic research and stitching them together through multigenre analysis.¹³

Howe also uses patchworking—cutting and piecing together of a variety of fragments of materials, sources, and genres—in a way that demonstrates academic rigor but that provides a glimpse of a multidimensional reality, one that accounts for that which is so often silenced or ignored in common practices of academic research. In “Scare Quotes I,” Howe’s speaker describes Howe’s process of inquiry as a process of patchwork: “I am assembling materials for a recurrent return somewhere. Familiar sound textures, deliverances, vagabond quotations, preservations, wilderness and shrubs, little resuscitated patterns. Historical or miraculous. Thousands of correlations have to be sliced and spliced” (85). Howe’s work enacts writing as the interactive piecing of various genres as well as the cutting and assembling of sources (as discussed in the previous sections of this chapter). The threading together of these pieces by connecting the ideas and concepts that exist among these disparate fragments rejects the self-containment and

¹³ Craig Dworkin’s essay, “Penelope Reworking the Twill: Patchwork, Writing, and Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life*” explores Language poet Lyn Hejinian’s “patchwork” techniques in *My Life*, arguing that Hejinian’s work resembles a patchwork quilt in its “stitching” together of “scraps” and its use of patterning (i.e. repeating motifs and topics of discussion). He also argues that patchwork quilts (similar to *My Life*) are autobiographical, serving both personal and social functions (60). Thus, Hejinian’s work—as well as the work of female quilters Dworkin discusses in his essay—may be considered part of the patchworking lineage that Howe establishes in *The Midnight*.

teleologic force of traditional research methods. Ultimately, Howe experiments with genre in the way that Wendy S. Hesford calls for in her essay, “Autobiography and Feminist Writing Pedagogy:” she “contest[s] and blur[s] the boundaries between the public and the private by mapping the terrain of autobiography differently and by explicitly bringing autobiography into [her] scholarship” (168).

Reading *The Midnight*, we see the ways in which Howe’s attempts between the years of 1999 and 2002 to understand personal memory and recorded history extend within and beyond her desire to come to terms with her mother’s death: she approaches this subject of her mother as a researcher, methodically exploring her mother’s life, her relationship to her mother’s family, their place in Irish history and culture, the literature that was important to them, and how all of this has filtered into her academic and poetic pursuits. As she inquires, Howe grapples with what Catherine Martin calls “errant memory,” the memory of personal experience and of dreams that splices, intersects, and entwines history (760). Mary Manning is not only Howe’s mother: she is a public figure, an Irish actress and the wife of a Harvard Law Professor. She leaves Howe with fragments of memories and dreams as well as with books, marginalia, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Howe also inherits from Manning a love of literature, of Yeats and *Wuthering Heights*, and the “covenant” of poetry (149).

Through her written work, Howe is able to experiment with piecing together the materials her mother has left for her as her own personal form of expression as well as to contribute to historical document. We witness Howe’s attempts at piecing as she describes her mother’s copy of Yeats’s *Later Poems*: through the work of Yeats,

Manning is able to access a “sequestered ‘self’ where she would go home to her thought,” where she could access the self she left behind in Dublin (75). The material proof of this lies in Manning’s book: inside, six Irish actors have inscribed their names, and Manning has also left pieces of wrapping paper that served as markers for particular poems. Howe inherits this book of poetry as well as the markers, which she arranges and re-arranges every time she opens the book: “Sometimes I arrange the four snippets as if they were a hand of cards, or inexpressible love liable to moods. I like to let them touch down randomly as if I were casting dice or reading tea leaves,” she says. While her mother leaves Howe with patches of documented memories in the forms of signatures and paper, she also leaves her with scraps Howe may use to create new possibilities for researching her mother’s life, making meaning through juxtaposition, and carrying on their covenant of poetry by arranging what is left of the past. Here writing functions as the process through which meaning is made from the “material” that is given. While we have a given number of fragments, of pieces of information to work with, Howe suggests the possibilities for how we combine and interpret our sources are endless. Rather than treating composition as an exercise in which the writer fits sources and pieces of information into a predetermined structure, Howe shows us the ways in which playing with these fragments, actively thinking about their construction and design, can become a new model for what we might consider academic research.

This long tradition of patchwork writing, of patching together pieces of text—both source texts and texts by the writer—can be a pedagogical tool composition instructors could use in their classrooms as they encourage their students to produce

multigenre texts which connect various pieces of writing that reflect a student's of academic inquiry, a process of researching, thinking, and connecting. Howe's model of writing encourages students to develop a critical consciousness as they connect their own interests, experiences, and writing to the interests, experiences, and writing of others. Composition instructors can use Howe's text to design composition assignments that ask students to write patches of text that define terms, summarize lectures, reflect, describe characters, and apply their knowledge to contemporary examples from their lived experience. We can create assignments that ask students to approach academic inquiry by splicing oral history, argumentation, narrative, autobiography, poetry, visual rhetoric, design, found texts, and source texts in order to explore a research topic as well as the investments of a variety of people, including the writer, in the documentation of this topic.

One example of what this model might look like for undergraduate students is British scholar Jan Parker's Patchwork Text that has been used in a variety of disciplines including English, education, and nursing.¹⁴ The Patchwork Text, a multigenre, multi-

¹⁴ Another source for examples of patchwork writing is Davis and Shadle's *Teaching Multiwriting*. Davis and Shadle include samples of their students' work, which are often multimodal and multidimensional work that combine not only writing in various genres but also found texts and objects that function as sources in their students' research projects. One multiwriting project is described as follows: "The Woven Thread of Time,' a multiwriting project by Connie Berry. Like rope, our clothes and papers are woven of fibers carefully entwined. Connie's elaborate multiproject contains samples, artifacts, and tools of weaving that fit into an enormous woven box. A glossary, pictures, miniresearch essays, and literary excerpts persuade us of the omnipresent power of the metaphor of weaving throughout history, mythology, and literature all over the world. Experiencing this, we begin to warp the loom of our identity." For more information on Davis and Shadle's projects, see *Teaching Multiwriting* or their article, "A Piñata of Theory and Autobiography: Research Writing Breaks Open Academe" in *Writing*

vocal piece of writing used in a variety of disciplines, is a model for student writing created by Jan Parker and a group of professors from the United Kingdom. Originating out of a professional training program, the Patchwork Text was designed to “break professionals out of objective and linear thought patterns” and offer “space for reflectivity” (Parker 181). These professors then designed writing projects for their students based on the Patchwork Text model: throughout the semester, students compose “patches” of text, about 500 words at a time, that focus on different aspects of their topic and that require the use of various academic, creative, and reflective genres. Parker and her colleagues, in a series of articles published in 2003,¹⁵ demonstrate through case studies and assessment the effectiveness of this type of text in English, science, teacher training, business management, and Sociology courses.

The goal of the Patchwork Text, like the goal of Howe’s text, is to “stitch” together “patches” of analysis, reflection, experience, and criticism. As the semester progresses, students ultimately synthesize these patches in a conclusion that considers both critique and reflection. At various points in the creation of this text, students are asked to write short pieces of creative, academic, and professional text, engaging in critical analysis as well as personal reflection, connecting their own experiences outside of the classroom with what they are learning inside of the classroom. In this type of

Research Revisited: A Sourcebook for Teachers, edited by Pavel Zemliansky and Wendy Bishop, as well as their sample syllabus on the book’s supplemental website.

¹⁵ This series of articles was published in a special edition of *Innovations in Education & Teaching International* 40. 2 (May 2003), edited by Peter Ovens, Jan Parker, and Richard Winter, which describes how patchwork texts can be used in the fields of business, science, sociology, and nursing. This issue discusses how instructors can design writing assignments and assessment that supports this form of writing.

assignment, “writing itself becomes a learning process, not merely a result or ‘proof’ of learning” (227). As in Howe’s text, within the Patchwork Text, writing becomes the process through which learning about and experimenting with disciplinary knowledge and genres takes place—as opposed to the product of re-producing genre conventions and empty forms a student attempts to master in hopes of acceptance into the academic discourse community. In this way, Parker points out, writing resembles the “dealing with uncertainty, ...delaying closure, [and] synthesising disparate voices” that many academics face in their fields but that is often not included in course syllabi (230).

Parker describes the texts her final-year English students produce in a Greek Tragedy class in her article, “The Patchwork Text in Teaching Greek Tragedy.” Her own essay resembles the Patchwork Texts created by her students: she juxtaposes academic analysis and description of pedagogy with boxes of text containing pieces of her students’ writing. Parker uses the Patchwork Text in her class in order to encourage students to think critically about tragedy on a variety of levels. In the first part of the semester students are supervised by Parker as they composed 500-word “patches” of writing in “any kind of public writing: creative, emotional, descriptive” in order to reflect on their reactions to the reading and to contemplate large themes such as “the alien, ritual, and justice and revenge” (184). In the latter part of the semester students are encouraged to synthesize their own the pieces of writing they composed in order to link, through various genres, critical and/or reflective responses to works such as *Euripedes*, *Sophocles*, and *Othello*. The result of this is both a deeper understanding of tragedy as a genre, of each of the works on its own, and of overarching themes that emerge in the genre of tragedy and

in their lives. In addition, students have the opportunity to link their emergent understanding of tragedy to contemporary works of literature and film as well as their own experience, in effect rewriting possibilities for the genre of tragedy. For example, one of Parker's students juxtaposes the opening monologue in the film *Trainspotting* with her understanding of Antigone in order to apply a classic work to a more contemporary representation of tragedy. Another student rewrites a contemporary story of Pentheus and Tiresias, complete with references to steroids and silken panties. "Stitching" these texts together at the end of the semester allows the students to see how these disparate "patches" of learning through writing can be connected to reflect a multi-dimensional, inter-disciplinary understanding of texts, genre, and self.

Parker's work shows us that the process of patchworking can function as a new model for composition, where students can explore what it means to write a multigenre text and what it means to stitch patches of writing together in ways that defy the static conventions of the academic critical essay that speaks from an objective subject position and presents a thesis and three supporting body paragraphs. While the field of Composition and Rhetoric has struggled over the years to find new ways to include more students with diverse backgrounds in academic conversations and to find new forms and/or genres of writing that challenge and improve the possibilities for student writing in composition courses, the concept of patchworking seems like a promising one as it presents writing as a process of learning rather than a product of academic training. Unlike many of the other examples of student texts that combine, blur, or juxtapose genres, the Patchwork Text does more than add personal reflection to the domain of the

critical essay. It posits writing as Howe posits writing: as more complicated than a binary of personal/academic and as possessing the potential to articulate a writer's multiplicity of identities, languages, experiences, and intentions.

In its multiplicity of genres, its presentation of composition as patchworking, and its blurring of the personal and the academic, *The Patchwork Text* demonstrates how students might create a work that formally resembles *The Midnight* in their coursework. This pedagogical project makes it easier for us to see how *The Midnight* can be used successfully in the introductory composition course, if composition instructors reframe their goals for and assessment of student writing. Instead of teaching the conventions of academic genres such as the argumentative essay or the research paper as static, instructors could ask students to explore a wider variety of genres, both academic and personal, and to think critically about the gaps and bridges between genre conventions and the ideas that can be articulated within these genres. Instead of asking students to complete a few isolated pieces of writing, instructors can encourage students to compose in a variety of genres to see how those different approaches to writing connect to overarching questions and issues one is able to research within the academy. Instead of assessing students on how well they mimic the conventions of academic genres, instructors can assess students' ability to stitch together pieces of ideas or interpretations of disparate sources as well as their ability to "read and weave" as they compose, to consider and reconsider the positions of themselves as well as the positions of others.

By using Howe's work and creating multigenre writing assignments that model her text, we can present genres as frames of experience and social action that student

writers can explore and revise as they link their personal experiences to larger social and historical issues. These texts encourage students to see how what is considered important by one discourse community has been informed by the personal experiences, understandings, and values of the members of that discourse community, and, what is more, discourse communities can change their priorities if they investigate other voices and genres of communication that exist outside of what has already been accepted as convention. While students—and instructors—may fear that multigenre texts will be interpreted by others as jibberish written by inexperienced writers who have yet to learn the craft of composition, experimenting with a variety of genres or forms of writing within the same text can be a productive way for the field of Composition to broaden what is considered worthwhile work in the writing classroom.

Strategies for Using *The Midnight* in Advanced Composition

As we have seen in this chapter, Howe's work answers the call of genre theorists to cultivate genre awareness and exploration as part of teaching academic inquiry and critical thinking, as well as that of composition scholars who have argued for new approaches to teaching "alternative" forms of (multigenre) composition. Her use of multiple genres in conversation with one another goes beyond merely inserting the personal into the academic; rather, it successfully weaves content and form in way that shows the interdependence between what we write and how we write. Furthermore, Howe's text legitimates the role that the personal plays in academic inquiry and the process through which we can piece together patches of our own experience with

documentary sources as a means to experiment with alternative ways to construct knowledge. *The Midnight* exemplifies in its content and form how such experimentation amongst a variety of genres can emerge as a new process of knowledge production. It broadens the possibilities for how knowledge can be produced with a critical eye and encourages us to reconsider the generic boundaries.

Beyond seeing this work as a contribution to scholarship of genre theory, patchwriting, and multigenre research, compositionists can use this as a pedagogical text that models how personal and academic interests both contribute to meaningful knowledge-making and demonstrate the benefit of intertwining genres and investigating source texts as academic inquiry. In advanced composition courses, Howe's text can be read by students as an example of multigenre research. As they read this text, students can trace threads of inquiry across genres, for example, investigating how Howe's research on the Great Awakening for a course syllabus led to her discovery of *Bed Hangings*, which in turn led to an exploration of the history of weaving, embroidery, and the archiving of domestic arts in museums. They also may consider how Howe's inclusion of research on Irish literature and theater is connected to the memories she has of her mother reading to her and helping her children put on plays. Through this experience of reading, students will see the ways in which Howe's academic pursuits as a teacher and a poet are fueled by the questions that are important to her in her everyday life.

What is more, students can take time to think about why Howe combines first-person narrative, poetry, and excerpts from source texts in her work, building genre

awareness as they think critically about Howe's motivations in moving across genres.

Because Howe writes critically as well as creatively and blurs the line between non-fiction and fiction (i.e. "embroidering facts," lying, and "errant memory"), instructors can use Howe's text to discuss such binaries and to raise questions about the validity of objective fact in relation to subjective lived realities. Closely examining the ways in which Howe constructs her text allows us to see how she juxtaposes genres in order to distort such binaries and envision new methods of researching and using academic source texts. For example, students may explore the techniques Howe uses as she writes through a source text such as Cummings's *Bed Hangings* using poetic form, considering how writing in poetic form changes the writer and the reader's relationship to words. They may also consider why Howe manipulates order, spelling, and context as she rewrites a catalogue of historic preservation into a poem and how such manipulations make an argument about the generic conventions of such historical cataloguing. In addition, they may draw upon the autobiographical stories and meditations she includes in her prose sections—including descriptions of her research process as well as her experiences of sifting through family memorabilia that includes books and photos—in order to further contextualize the objectives and effects of using poetry to investigate historical and literary sources.

The Midnight also can serve advanced composition students with a fruitful model for multigenre research writing. I often use Howe's text as a model as I design writing assignments, creating prompts that invite students to write in multiple genres and then work to patch their work together as the semester progresses. Rather than encouraging

students to see the merging of genres as an afterthought in building multigenre awareness, I explain the advantages of multigenre writing as part of our writing course and actively encourage students to work with multiple genres simultaneously. For example, I draw upon a long history of documentary poetics, which includes Howe as well as Charles Reznikoff and Muriel Rukeyser and where poets construct poems from found texts either through procedural methods or their own selection, to design writing assignments where students construct poems from magazine text or newspaper articles.¹⁶ As they “patchwrite” a poem from such found texts, students gain an awareness of the genres of journalism and the language and subject positions used in popular magazines while thinking about how they must rework this language to meet the linguistic and formal conventions of poetry. Likewise, students can extend this sort of experimentation by taking a literary or historic text and making a sort of argument about that text in poetry by selecting particular words, phrases, images from the text and juxtaposing these pieces in provocative ways.

Another way of encouraging such multigenre awareness is by asking students to “revise” pieces of their writing by reworking what they have written into another genre, revising a personal narrative into a formal report from someone else’s perspective, or an oral history into a research paper, or even one smaller version of a text into a larger multigenre text, as Howe does as she inserts a revision of her 2001 chapbook, *Bed*

¹⁶ I am indebted here to Jena Osman, whose creative, pedagogical, and critical work on documentary poetics has encouraged me to incorporate reading and writing activities within which writers to compose poetry from source texts. For critical discussions of teaching documentary poetics, see her contribution in *Poetry and Pedagogy* entitled “Gumshoe Poetry.”

Hangings, into *The Midnight*. As I ask students to piece together shorter writing assignments into a larger final project, I instruct them to use *The Midnight* as a possible model for seeing the personal threads that run across the multiple pieces of writing they have done, urging them to explore how their academic interests are (or could be) motivated by their personal interests and to reflect upon how both the content and the form of their writing are interdependent in making meaning. Lastly, we take time to think about the options students have for piecing together these pieces of (often disparate) writing in meaningful ways that articulate a student's personal and academic interests. Students look carefully at the ways in which Howe divides her text into five sections and how patches within these sections have been stitched together with common threads from Howe's academic, historic, poetic, and personal pursuits and then proceed to create their own multigenre works.

The students who are most successful in producing multigenred texts are those who are able to connect and intertwine creative and critical writing as well as personal and academic interests. Successful students explore the boundaries of creative and academic writing, ultimately using their writing to disrupt generic expectations of particular expressive and critical genres. In advanced composition courses, there are many possibilities of success within individual pieces of writing as well as longer patchworked texts. When asked to compose an essay in which she defined a concept or a word, one of my students turned in a work entitled, "The United States of Psychotherapy: A Dictionary of the Warped World of Therapy." She mimicked the voice and style of the dictionary as she provided a variety of "definitions" for therapy based on her own

experiences with mental illness and psychiatry. Another student took great joy in revealing in a reflection included in his final multigenre writing assignment that he had “lied” in an oral history he included in this work: he invented an interview with his grandmother who suffers from Alzheimer’s, attempting to capture the pain and the dementia he knew she experienced daily by piecing together in his oral history fragments of memories he had of talking with her with his desire to understand her condition from her perspective. For his final project, one student used the oral history assignment to interview his father about the revolution in Ghana and investigate why his father chose to immigrate to the United States, weaving this into narratives of his childhood, and ultimately creating a multigenre genealogy that included creative writing, ethnography, and academic research.

In conclusion, *The Midnight* informs discussions in Composition and Rhetoric as it models a form of multigenre research writing that uses innovative composition techniques of patchwriting and patchworking. Howe experiments with sources texts and juxtaposes creative and critical genres as a process of experimental research that expands possibilities for and challenges conventions of academic inquiry. This is valuable not only for scholars of genre theory and multigenre writing to consider in designing innovative composition curriculum but also for student writers to learn from as it cultivates multigenre awareness and provides students with methods and models for composing multigenre research texts that merge the personal and academic. Incorporating such avant-garde work into the theory and practice of Composition, as we can see from the student examples I list above as well as the writing activities I discuss in my

conclusion, has the potential encourage students to think critically and creatively about the genres they investigate *as* they learn to negotiate within and between these genres in the writing classroom, fostering an approach to composition that allows a writer to “read and weave at once.”

CHAPTER 5

AVANT-GARDE PEDAGOGY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM:
INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE

Isn't the avant garde always pedagogical? (Lyn Hejinian, *My Life*)

In my concluding chapter, I would like to extend my discussion of the works of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Harryette Mullen, and Susan Howe beyond the realm of composition theory and consider how their work, as well as avant-garde poetry in general, can contribute in meaningful ways to developing innovative writing pedagogy—both critical and creative—that addresses the multilingual and multimodal realities of students in the 21st century. The traditional divide in English departments between literature and composition as well as creative and expository writing pedagogy often has limited interdisciplinary conversations about innovative writing practices; however, as I have shown in previous chapters and continue to discuss here, there is increasing overlap in topics of discussion as well as more room in English studies for such innovative, avant-garde writing, which can help writing instructors of Composition, as well as creative writing, to envision new teaching methods and writing assignments that encourage students to articulate and investigate multiple discourses, genres, and identities in their compositions.

As my previous chapters demonstrate, it is worthwhile for composition as well as creative writing scholars and instructors to explore marginal or avant-garde texts, particularly those written by multilingual and multicultural writers who disrupt generic conventions and investigate and complicate writerly identity/ies. In his essay, “)Writing Writing(,” included in Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr’s edited collection, *Poetry and*

Pedagogy, Jonathan Monroe points out that what he calls the “history of tensions” between the disciplines of Composition, creative writing, and literature within English studies slowly have dissipated, and he sees increasing space for generating innovative writing pedagogies throughout English studies and Writing Across the Curriculum:

“antigenic” or multigenre writings, such as those associated perhaps most readily with the diverse energies of Language Writing and multicultural, multilingual poetics, have been especially significant in carving out spaces for writing outside the university that have slowly opened up opportunities for alternative writing within the academy as well. As a consequence, the academy has itself become increasingly receptive in recent years to attempt to write past institutionalized divisions of writing that have tended to compartmentalize and delimit the writing process. (65)

With this new space for innovative writing and reading within the academy, we should strive, Monroe suggests, to examine avant-garde writing practices that celebrate what he calls the pleasures of difficulty as well as democratic reading and writing practices that support multiple literacies. As scholars and teachers across English studies, and across the academy, are gaining an appreciation and knowledge of innovative poetry, we should use this opportunity to revise how we teach writing process(es) in a way that is informed by the compositional practices of the avant-garde.

The Poetic Avant-Garde’s Influence in Creative Writing and Literature Classrooms

Another reason why this space for innovative writing practices is growing in the academy is because the presence of avant-garde writers on college campuses has increased. While avant-garde poets of the late seventies and early eighties usually were positioned outside of the academy, many contemporary avant-garde poets find themselves teaching—and at times administrating—within the academy: Charles Bernstein at the University of Pennsylvania, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Jena Osman at Temple University, Lyn Hejinian at U.C. Berkeley, Susan Howe at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo (although she retired in 2006), Mullen at U.C.L.A., Juliana Spahr at Mills College, and Joan Retallack at Bard College. This growing presence has increased the literary scholarship of avant-garde poetry as well as the teaching of avant-garde poetry in literature courses and, in some cases, altered creative writing programs.

However, despite the possibilities and platform for an avant-garde writing pedagogy that Monroe highlights in the quote above, the academic institutionalization of avant-garde writing practices is often seen as a threat to the marginal, border, or outsider status historically attributed to (and often embraced by) the avant-garde. It often seems that avant-garde poets and scholars are hesitant to outline specifically what an avant-garde writing classroom would/could/should look like within the academy, even though there has been ample discussion of the benefits of reading avant-garde work in English studies, as I discuss in this section, and, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, there are many nodes of intersection in avant-garde writing and current composition theory. We can contextualize this by understanding that the avant-garde has historically positioned itself outside of the academy as well as outside of artistic and cultural

conventions, and therefore some may believe that attempts for the avant-garde to contribute to academic conventions and practices would dissolve the oppositional and disjunctive force of such a movement. However, because avant-garde poets have established themselves in many English departments across the country, and because these poets and scholars already have conceived of successful strategies for “avant-garde reading” within the academy, English studies likewise can benefit from similar conceptions of “avant-garde writing,” particularly writing that disrupts dichotomies of creative and critical as well as personal and academic.

An example of the influence that an avant-garde poet has had on the writing curriculum at her college is the role that Joan Retallack has played at Bard College. Up until last year, Retallack ran the Learning and Thinking program at Bard, which is an intensive three-week summer writing program required of all freshman. In this program, students read difficult texts from a range of disciplines, including avant-garde poetry, and use writing as a tool to understand and contemplate the readings. Although the original writing activities for this program were created by Peter Elbow in the eighties (Vilardi xi), Retallack and other avant-garde poets who have worked in the program (including Osman and Spahr) subsequently have created a writing pedagogy inspired by avant-garde approaches to reading and writing exercises. With Spahr, Retallack also recently edited a collection, *Poetry and Pedagogy: The Challenge of the Contemporary*, in which she and other teachers and poets—including Bernstein, Hejinian, and Osman—develop an argument for the importance of teaching avant-garde poetry and outline approaches to reading this type of poetry in literature and creative writing classrooms. Their goal is to

present the “reading [of such avant-garde texts] as a kind of poesis in and of itself—a making of meaning as significant as the act of writing” (7). In their introduction to this work, Retallack and Spahr argue that many of the poets in their collection have been inspired by contemporary avant-garde poetry to alter their pedagogy of teaching literature.

The collection offers an excellent avant-garde pedagogy of reading in which students engage in meaningful interactions by writing through and with difficult avant-garde texts. In his contribution to the book, entitled “‘Isn’t the Avant-garde Always Pedagogical’: Experimental Poetics and/as Pedagogy,” Alan Golding discusses works such as Bob Perelman’s *The Marginalization of Poetry* and Ron Silliman’s *Lit* to consider the ways in which avant-garde poets sometimes use their writing to engage implicitly and explicitly in a discussion of creative writing pedagogy, as they contemplate and attempt to enact a creative writing pedagogy that examines experimental writing. He claims that “the simultaneous legacies of didacticism and anti-institutionalization within avant-garde poetics make that poetics an especially fruitful site for thinking about teaching” (13). Golding focuses his discussion on the potential for avant-garde poetry to teach “a commitment to alternative reading practices,” which he says is exemplified in critical works such as Spahr’s *Everybody’s Autonomy: Collective Reading and Connective Identity* (23). Other essays in *Poetry and Pedagogy* such as “Deformance and Interpretation” by Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels as well as “My Susan Howe or Howe To Teach” by G. Matthew Jenkins outline writing activities that students can do in order to come to a greater appreciation and understanding of difficult poetic texts.

McGann and Samuels's "experiments" include reordering, isolating, altering, and adding to a text as an approach to reading a poem in order to heighten awareness of language and understanding of meaning. Jenkins describes teaching Howe's *The Nonconformist's Memorial* in an advanced composition and literature course at a two-year school, asking students to approach the text by making connections and to look at patterns of syntax, context, connotation, and denotation (214).

There also are some essays in the book that suggest pedagogical strategies for the writing classroom. In her essay, "FFFFFalling with Poetry: The Centrifugal Classroom," Lynn Keller outlines the traits of what she describes as a "centrifugal classroom" where reading is participatory, multiple possibilities for making meaning are explored, and the traditional hierarchy of the classroom is disrupted. While Keller envisions this classroom as one where literature is taught and students learn avant-garde reading approaches, I see an affinity between her centrifugal model and models for writing classrooms inspired by the work of M.M. Bakhtin. The best example of such a model is Kay Halasek's *A Pedagogy of Possibility: Bakhtinian Perspectives on Composition Studies*, in which Halasek argues for creating a centrifugal and heteroglossic composition classroom where student writing is seen as an amalgamation of a variety of voices, discourses, and ideologies and where "creativity and meaning-making through the sharing of discourses" is modeled and encouraged (174).

Osman, in her essay, "Gumshoe Poetry," included in *Poetry and Pedagogy* describes her teaching of "found text collage" such as T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" in the context of the creative writing classroom. She asks students to look through the sources

that Eliot used to compose the poem and to think about why and how he used each source. Then she asks students to compose their own found text collage where each line comes from an outside source. This process, she argues, encourages students to think about why poets make particular choices about form and content, and it also expands the possibilities for what students think of as “self-expression.” While Osman says her students often consider personal experience to be the only content appropriate for poetry, such “detective” exercises, in which students think about using outside sources in their poetry, help students to see that self-expression involves not only “what you say” but “how you say it” (239). Such investigation of the possibilities of using sources in writing has interesting possibilities for composition students, as I discuss in detail in my chapter on Howe.

The only work within this collection that specifically addresses how an avant-garde pedagogy could be enacted in the expository writing classroom is Monroe’s essay, “)Writing Writing(.” Monroe draws a connection between the avant-garde pedagogy of reading described in *Poetry and Pedagogy* and a possible avant-garde pedagogy of writing. He argues,

The essays in the present volume remind us that it is important to encourage a sense of multiplicity and heterogeneity of writing practices across the disciplines at all levels of the curriculum (not merely in advanced undergraduate and graduate seminars) in ways that will challenge the stupefying regimentation of the standard “expository essay,” cultivate the capacity to respond to various

nonnormative text(ure)s, and so begin to close the gap between innovative reading and innovative writing practices. (67)

Thus the work of creating avant-garde writing practices across the curriculum, Monroe admits, lies ahead. For Monroe, this involves writing instructors encouraging students to engage in avant-garde texts that are often considered “difficult” and therefore disregarded. Instead of disregarding such texts, Monroe says that students should be encouraged to learn about and practice “the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ [that] recent innovative writing suggest[s], a kind of writing that involves something like continual movement between the particular and generalizable, between the local and the translocal (not ‘universal’), between instantiation and abstraction” (73). While Monroe suggests the work of Joy Harjo, Cha, Kamau Brathwaite, and Spahr to get us started with this project, he encourages instructors to take the next step in imagining what avant-garde reading and writing practices would look like across the college curriculum.

Some participants in Retallack’s Learning and Thinking Program and the Institute for Writing and Thinking, an associated program at Bard, have published pieces that describe writing activities done in the program in Teresa Vilardi and Mary Chang’s edited collection, *Writing-Based Teaching: Essential Practices and Prevailing Questions*. Based on even a preliminary glance at the table of contents, however, it seems as though most of the essays included in this collection build upon the process model in Composition, providing discussion of a particular part of this model—freewriting, journaling, and revising, for example. While some essays explore play, writing in the community, and collaborative writing, for the most part the book draws upon expressivist

composition theory to argue the importance of writing in the classroom. This is not to say that publications that arise from Bard's Language and Thinking Program or the Institute for Writing and Thinking have any sort of obligation to publish work that outlines avant-garde writing practices; however, it does show that even in programs where there is a concentration of avant-garde writers teaching, there is not necessarily a writing pedagogy (or a published description of that pedagogy) that enacts the writing practices of the avant-garde.

Indeed, very few works outline what an avant-garde writing pedagogy would or could look like even in creative writing workshops. One exception to this is the Teachers and Writers Collaborative (T&W) which has published *The Third Mind: Creative Writing through Visual Art*, edited by experimental poets Tonya Foster and Kristen Prevallet; David Morice's *The Dictionary of Wordplay*, which catalogues over a thousand word procedures, experiments, and games; and *Educating the Imagination: Essays for Teachers and Writers*, a collection edited by Christopher Edgar and poet Ron Padgett, containing essays by writers and teachers that model reading and writing experiments. Another recent example of a work that includes avant-garde writing practices for creative writing workshops is *Poets on Teaching: A Sourcebook*, in which a wide variety of contemporary poets—including avant-garde poets such as Kenneth Goldsmith, Silliman, Rae Armantrout, Jed Rasula, Osman, Spahr, and Prevallet—discuss their poetics as well as exercises for and approaches to teaching creative writing. However, while such pedagogical models for creative writing are important, I believe that writing instructors and scholars within the academy need to think about more ways to encourage students to

develop innovative writing practices in their expository writing as well. One of the most effective places within the academy for us to do this is in the composition classroom, the first—and sometimes the only—writing classroom students may encounter in the academy.

Envisioning Possibilities for Innovative Practices in the Composition Classroom

For avant-garde poets who often describe their work as in tension with academic conventions, it may seem contradictory to outline a set of avant-garde writing conventions; however, since the avant-garde of the twentieth century already is present in the academy in a variety of ways—its work in literature curricula, its instructors and students in creative writing programs, and its writers in English departments—I believe it is important to think about how avant-garde writing practices may become more of a part of composition *and* creative writing curricula. Yet even when Charles Bernstein is interviewed by Colin MacCabe and David Bartholomae at the University of Pittsburgh, he seems hesitant to “prescribe” an avant-garde writing pedagogy for composition classes *or* creative writing workshops. He does, however, provide a description of the writing activities he requires of his students as well as his vision of what a composition classroom could look like. When asked whether he is able in creative writing workshops to teach students to “write difficultly,” i.e. to write like an avant-garde poet, he responds,

I...tend to teach reading classes rather than creative writing classes, since I feel some of the “expressive” assumptions about creative writing workshops can get in the way of doing difficult reading and difficult writing. I call my classes creative

reading workshops, meaning you write creatively in response to the reading... Like a writing class, I require weekly compositions, but these are in the form of journal entries or imitations or performances, and I especially encourage doing cut-ups and other procedures on the week's reading... When I teach writing as such, I also use a list of dozens of different writing forms and structures—in effect an experimenter's list. (MacCabe 63-4)

While Bernstein says he shies away from teaching creative writing workshops because of the polarized conceptions students may have (and other instructors may perpetuate), he does describe the extent to which his courses integrate reading and writing in a way that allows students to explore avant-garde writing by composing in a variety of forms, personal ones like the journal as well as public ones such as performance.

In addition, Bernstein's list of what he has called "Wreading Experiments" encourages students to try out various formal and stylistic techniques in responding to the readings.¹⁷ Among the many wreading experiments are "translation" exercises where students "translate" a poem into another discourse or dialect or to use online translation engines. He also provides instructions for students to use cut-up methods in the tradition of William S. Burroughs and Dadaist Tristan Tzara and gives students the option of composing their own poem in the style of a particular writer, and accomplishing this collaboratively if they wish. Such wreading experiments help student readers as well as writers to see composition as a process through which we acquire knowledge and

¹⁷ On his website, Bernstein writes that his list is based upon Bernadette Mayer's list of writing experiments from the 1970s.

understanding *and* through which we explore the possibilities of language and form.¹⁸

While Bernstein has designed these experiments for students interested in reading avant-garde works, it is not difficult to see how these types of experiments could be integrated in creative writing as well as composition curricula.

In his interview with Bartholomae, Bernstein also says that he is hesitant to outline any sort of composition curricula since he does not ordinarily teach writing courses, but that he is concerned about pedagogies that focus on punishing students for errors and worries for those students who struggle to “reproduce” academic models. He does consider what his alternative composition course might look like:

My imagination of teaching composition is working in and on a series of different language projects, employing different shapes, styles, and forms, and exploring how these make for different meanings, where meaning is understood as something socially and aesthetically—as much as logically or lexically—determined. That is, if you consider the limitations of, and possibilities for, each form and each standard, you create a more open and democratic conception of language practices that does not preclude the importance of standardized forms but rather sees those for what they are—the dominant choice, which you may need as a survival skill, but which has a direct relation to truth or coherence. You

¹⁸ In their forthcoming essay, “Creative Writing as Creative Reading in the Poetry Workshop,” Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Jena Osman outline the writing and reading activities they implement in their creative writing workshops. They detail how student-respondents present the poetry of their peers by focusing on particular elements such as genre, language, voice, and materiality. Like Bernstein, they also encourage students to write in response to avant-garde works they are reading in class and connect the creative reading practices they describe to the list that Bernstein compiles on his website (attributed in DuPlessis and Osman’s essay to Bernadette Mayer).

might also discover that in many ways, those dominant forms, I would say, force you into a kind of inarticulateness...force you into...I can't imagine any writer who isn't aware of it...It's an inarticulateness that perhaps those most facile in their use of the standard suffer from the most. (MacCabe 51)

I quote Bernstein's conception of the composition classroom in its entirety because I think it dovetails with my own project, which takes up some of the possibilities that Bernstein posits. As my discussion of composition scholarship has demonstrated, many writing instructors are eager to find new ways for student writers to explore many forms of writing within the classroom, to critique openly the purpose of genre and language conventions, and to consider the extent to which these conventions allow them to articulate their ideas and experiences as members of various communities. Bernstein's conception of a composition classroom articulates this common desire and provides a sort of foundation from which I hope to build.

The next step, then, is for us to consider how we can apply such discussion into our writing pedagogy, particularly in the composition classroom. Rather than see this as an attempt to institutionalize the avant-garde, I see it as an opportunity to promote gestures/movements toward the innovative within an academic writing classroom rather than to require innovation or prescribe experimentation. Likewise, since the freshman composition classroom often serves as students' first step in an institution of higher education, introducing students to innovative writing practices within this classroom is an important move to ensure that students acquire *all* of the important "skills" they need to survive—as individuals with complex and sometimes conflicting linguistic and cultural

identities— in the academy, including avant-garde skills of disruption, experimentation, and questioning. What follows are some possible moves that composition instructors can make in their writing pedagogies in order to begin to build an avant-garde composition classroom. I have provided a sample of approaches and discussed how these might be applied in a variety of writing classrooms, from the basic writing course to the advanced composition course, to demonstrate the many possibilities for altering our course design and pedagogy in a way that enacts avant-garde composition practices.

Investigating Language in the Basic Writing Classroom

The students in my basic writing classroom have a fraught relationship to their English classroom. During the first week of class, I often encounter tears: without fail, one or two students break down as they hand me the first draft of their first essay. Sometimes they are insecure about their writing as well as their identity as a student, and some of them feel as though they are met at every turn in their academic career with judgments that they, their linguistic abilities, and their writing cannot cut it in the academy. These feelings of insecurity, remarkably, often melt away when we begin to talk about language in the basic writing classroom. As students read the work of multilingual writers, i.e. writers who speak and/or compose in a variety of standard and non-standard discourses, they begin to consider the benefits and advantages of knowing multiple discourses and belonging to multiple discourse communities. Students who speak multiple languages—and even native English speakers who have never thought

about the ways in which they know different forms of language(s)— also begin to see their own multilingualism and multiculturalism as potential topics for academic discussion rather than a hindrance that they feel the need to hide or mask in their composition classroom. Indeed, the more we explore language; the more we talk about slang, dialect, and multilingualism; the more we explore multilingual etymologies of words; and the more we discuss the ways in which the discourses we use are always in flux and changing according to the audience to which we intend to communicate, the more students pay attention to these elements in their own writing.

With these issues in mind, I use the following three assignments in my basic writing courses.

1. The Power of a Word:

- a. First draft: Now that you have read a variety of essays that each explores the (often changing) definitions and meanings of one word in our culture, choose your own word to research. It can be a word you like or a word you don't like. It can be a word in Standard English or any language you speak, or a word that may be considered slang—either English slang or slang in other languages. Write about what this word means and how it is used by one or more groups of people and/or society at large. You might want to use a dictionary or encyclopedia to get you started, but push yourself to think about how this word is used by you, your friends, your community, in the media, or by other groups of people.

- b. Second draft: After doing your own research on the word you chose, and thinking about the controversial words such as “bitch” and “queer” from our readings, think about this issue in a larger sense: what power do words have? Do they have the power to change people? Do they have emotional power? Can you think of examples where words are used violently? Can you think of examples where words unite people? Where does the word you chose fall in this spectrum?
2. The Benefits and Costs of Being Bilingual/Multilingual: Now that we have read a selection of essays by writers who describe their relationship to the multiple languages that they speak, write an essay in which you explore the advantages and disadvantages of being bilingual—or multilingual—in America today. Use your own experiences or experiences of people you know as well as what the writers say about this issue to develop your paper. You can also incorporate multiple languages in your paper to develop your points. Keep in mind, too, that you can consider dialect, slang, specialized languages, and mixed languages as part of multilingualism. Ultimately, try to take a position on this issue: Overall, do you think people in America should be multilingual? Why or why not? In what ways is this more complicated than a yes/no response?
3. Should English Be the Official Language of the United States? As our readings and investigation of current language debates in the media show, speaking

English is a contentious issue in our country today. While English is *not* the official language of the United States, many people believe it should be and want to pass local and national legislation to make it law. What is your take on the issue? Should everyone who lives in the United States be required to speak English? Why or why not? How do you respond to people who say that allowing people who don't speak English to live in the US (or become citizens) threatens our ability to maintain and preserve English? To maintain a national culture? Can a person be considered American and not speak English?¹⁹

As these essay prompts show, I encourage students to explore social, cultural, and political issues related to speaking, writing, and learning language in their essays. As they prepare these essays, students do short writing assignments where they reflect on their language experiences and education and do exercises where they “translate” a piece of their writing from one discourse to another and reflect upon how this changed their meaning and their audience. Students also practice the sort of syncretic literacy Mullen outlines in her creative and critical work as they explore multiple definitions and associations of words across the discourse communities to which they belong in considering etymologies. I also design my essay prompts to offer students a space for using multiple languages, vernaculars, and dialects in their essays, and to encourage them

¹⁹ These writing assignments are ones that I have used when working with the composition reader, *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*, Eds. Paul Eschholz, Alfred Rosa, and Virginia Clark. Assignments have been adapted from the ones that Eschholz et. al include in this reader and are intended to be used with the readings from *Language Awareness* as well as a Bedford Select reader I have designed with my colleagues at Montclair State University, entitled *Made with Words*, for our basic writing classes.

to consider when and where they may have unintentionally mixed or juxtaposed various discourses in their writing—and what the effects of this are.

Some choose not to do this, but many others rise to the challenge, writing about the linguistic distinctions in a variety of socio-economically diverse Dominican communities, analyzing Spanish and English slang, or including phrases in languages other than English that they leave untranslated in their academic essays. Some students use these assignments as spaces to resist monolingualism or the possibility of direct translation in writing across languages, and others use them to explore discourses they are exposed to outside of the classroom when they compose text messages, listen to rap music, or speak Spanglish or in dialect. I also ask my basic writing students to compose analytical essays that explore “English-Only” policies in education and American society, examine the benefits and costs of learning Standard English, and consider the relationship between language and identity. Oftentimes the students who have translated for their parents for years, who moved to the United States without speaking a word of English, who were laughed at as children because of their accent, and who have felt linguistically or intellectually inadequate in the classroom are the ones choose to write at length about these issues. Their work often weaves their personal experiences with critical analysis of the readings we have done, and they demonstrate the complexities of these issues while developing their own awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of being a multilingual writer in the academy and in American culture at large. Many of them, ultimately, create hybrid spaces similar to the ones that Cha enacts in *DICTEE* as they

articulate the linguistic experiences, struggles, and triumphs of their families and themselves dialogically to an academic audience.

While all of this certainly can happen without explicit discussion of innovative poetics in the basic writing classroom, the work of writers such as Cha and Mullen can potentially teach writing instructors invaluable lessons about how we should approach language—and multilingualism—in our writing classrooms. In particular, these works suggest possibilities for cultivating an awareness of language is used in different communities and for addressing monolingualism, linguistic identity, and linguistic inequity in the classroom. My reading of Cha as well as innovative multilingual poets such as Cecilia Vicuña, Edwin Torres, and Myung Mi Kim has led me to consider what a multilingual pedagogy of resistance could look like in the basic writing (and composition) classroom; likewise, I have tried to find ways to give my students the space to investigate language as Mullen does in her work and to question the place of Standard English in their academic career and American society.

For example, I have used the reader *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers* and a language-focused basic writing reader that I designed with my colleagues to provide students with a space to read multilingual texts as well as texts written in dialect or that include slang. The texts from these readers could be effectively paired with excerpts from Cha's *DICTEE* as well as Mullen's poetry. When I discuss texts about language with my students, I urge them to consider the reasons why a particular writer would choose to write in a language other than English or a dialect or vernacular when she is writing for an audience that is fluent in Standard English, what it means that a

writer chooses or does not choose to translate words and phrases into Standard English for her reader, and what the effects of the writer's language choices may have on readers.

Because many of my basic writing students have personally experienced how multilingualism, association with multiple discourse communities, and being labeled as academically inadequate can determine their ability to be heard by the academic community and their ability to construct an identity as a member of an academic community, they are especially invested in communicating their experiences to an academic audience. They think especially carefully about how they want to communicate their position on issues of multilingualism and languages of power, and in addition, about how and when they can articulate their knowledge of multiple languages and discourses. This investment and interest means that we can create spaces for resistance in the basic writing classroom where students can explore the multiple discourses they speak and negotiate with academic English, which not only challenges assimilationist pedagogy but also encourages students to see multilingualism as a beneficial—as opposed to detrimental—to their writing.

Likewise, creating writing assignments where students are encouraged to investigate and experiment with multiple discourses promotes more investment and rigor in student writing without compromising academic standards or throwing out academic conventions of language, as some compositionists fear. For these reasons, basic writing students benefit in significant and meaningful ways by reading the work of writers—poets, essayists, scholars, and musicians—who are interested in the complicated

relationship between language and identity and who use their writing to articulate their complex relationship to multiple discourse communities. When multilingual and multicultural students are given the space to contemplate—and to experiment with—language, their writing develops increasing complexity of analysis, linguistic sophistication, and intellectual investment.

Incorporating Writing Experiments into the First-Year Writing Classroom

As I have exemplified above, composition instructors may design their courses around themes of language and identity in attempts to enact an avant-garde approach to writing in their classrooms where language standards are explored and questioned and students are encouraged to think about the ways in which language is entwined in issues of identity, culture, and (in)equality. However, instructors also may draw upon the writing processes of avant-garde poets to create language games and writing experiments that encourage active investigation of source texts; innovative approaches to drafting and revising; and the exploration of the limits, boundaries, and possibilities for multiple discourses and genres. Such writing activities can be incorporated into classroom practices regardless of the subject matter of a particular course in order to encourage students to develop a more dynamic, dialogic relationship to the texts they read and write.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, Bernstein, DuPlessis and Osman, as well as Mayer have outlined avant-garde writing exercises that can be taught in literature and creative writing courses. In this section, I have adapted some of these writing exercises for the composition classroom. For each adaptation below, I have taken a particular

activity from the “Experiments” page of Bernstein’s website and then revised it for the first-year writing classroom in ways that I believe encourage students to interact with source texts—and their own drafts—in order to cultivate an awareness of a variety of discourses and genres and to question the boundaries between them. Although some of my revised exercises may not be too different from the writing exercises typically implemented in the first-year writing classroom, I hope that the combination of all of these writing activities provides a sketch of what enacting an avant-garde composition pedagogy might look like. I have chosen a selection of Bernstein’s experiments that I think could be revised to promote the following: investigating source texts, brainstorming and drafting, and revising.

Investigating Source Texts:

Homolinguistic translation: Take a poem (someone else's, then your own) and translate it "English to English" by substituting word for word, phrase for phrase, line for line, or "free" translation as response to each phrase or sentence. Or translate the poem into another literary style or a different diction, for example into a slang or vernacular. Do several different types of homolinguistic translation of a single source poem. *Chaining*: try this with a group, sending the poem on for "translation" from person to another until you get back to the first author.

In the experiment above, Bernstein provides us with a method to explore a text, specifically in this case a poem, by thinking about a poet’s word choice and

simultaneously considering the other choices a poet could have made by “translating” the poem into different discourses. By revising this experiment in a way that asks students to “translate” an excerpt from a difficult text they are reading in the first-year writing classroom, composition instructors can use this sort of generative word exploration to help students investigate challenging academic texts, think about academic discourse, and consider what may be lost or gained by presenting the writer’s ideas in another (possibly non-academic) discourse. Indeed, some similar experiments by Bernstein ask readers to translate using dialect, text message shorthand, pidgin and idiolect as well as relying upon electronic search engines that translate sources from one discourse to another. Composition instructors could ask students to do this on their own or in groups to demonstrate the extent to which reading difficult texts is a communal activity. In both forms of the activity, students learn to actively challenge and question a writer’s choice of language while also thinking carefully about why a writer may choose to use a particular discourse and form to present her ideas.

An additional experiment that can be revised from poetry to first-year writing source texts is the following:

Take a poem and erase all but one part of speech, leaving the visual layout intact, or read it backward or otherwise re-order it, or translate it. Alternately, use these experiments as a way to rewrite or transform your own poems.

Bernstein classifies the experiment above as “creative reading,” a way to interact with source texts as a process of reading. He also recommends writers use a process of “Deformative Criticism” designed by Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels to develop such

modes of reading.²⁰ The benefits of creative reading is that it encourages readers to interact with source texts in a way that generates new possibilities for meaning rather than merely asking readers to identify a writer's ideas. Indeed, at times creative reading can generate new texts that position a writer's work and a reader's ideas in dialogue with one another. An example of this is the "general cut-ups" experiment below, which asks readers to deconstruct a sources text and use words, phrases, and lines from this text to create a new text that presents their own ideas and response to the source:

General cut-ups: Write a poem composed entirely of phrases lifted from other sources. Use one source for a poem and then many; try different types of sources: literary, historical, magazines, advertisements, manuals, dictionaries, instructions, travelogues, etc.

Composition instructors can ask their students to "cut up" the contents of a source text and use it to compose a poem or an argumentative essay, in both cases promoting genre awareness by asking students to relay meaning across forms. This activity also can be used to raise awareness of academic conventions by discussing the rules of using source texts in academic writing and the ways in which deviations from these conventions are often considering stealing or cheating.

²⁰ McGann and Samuels have published a description of deformative criticism on their website that is linked to Bernstein's list of experiments as well as in an essay entitled "Deformance and Interpretation" included in *Poetry and Pedagogy*. It also is of note that Rebecca Moore Howard refers to McGann's method of deformative criticism in *Standing in the Shadow of Giants* as she outlines a composition pedagogy that uses patchwriting as a method of working with/through source texts. Howard also reveals in her chapter, "Pedagogy for (Re)formative Composition," that she and McGann are members of a collaborative scholarly group called the (In)Citers.

Brainstorming and Drafting:

Many of Bernstein's experiments can be performed by students as preparation for and as initial drafts of the essays they write in their first-year writing course. Below are three writing activities that easily could be adapted from writing a poem to writing an argumentative essay:

Write a poem consisting entirely of things you'd like to say, but never would, to a parent, lover, sibling, child, teacher, roommate, best friend, mayor, president, corporate CEO, etc.

Write a poem composed entirely of questions.

Improvisation: Ask someone to suggest a poem title and topic. Write the poem immediately in response. Do this as a quick series, five minutes maximum for each poem.

Each of the above has the potential to serve as a writing prompt in the first-year writing classroom that promotes active investigation of the conventions of argumentative essays and that encourages students to use their writing to explore questions and limits. For example, students could write an argumentative essay of things they would like to say in their college writing but never would because they don't think it would be appropriate. They could also write an exploratory draft of an essay composed entirely of questions, disrupting the belief that academic writing is supposed to provide answers or present facts objectively. Lastly, writing an improvisational argumentative essay about a topic

that is not normally considered to be part of academic inquiry is another way to encourage students to think about what is often considered acceptable or unacceptable within academic writing and whether or not students can—or want—to challenge these boundaries.

In any of the above writing activities, students are asked to think critically about how they define academic writing and to question why an academic genre such as an argumentative essay might follow particular conventions. The activity about saying things you wouldn't say in an argumentative essay may help students become aware of why they normally wouldn't want to make particular statements or bring up particular content in an academic essay, and it may also inspire some students to try to say some of these things in their writing, to be persuasive or even provocative in their writing. Likewise, the essay of questions may get students thinking about why a reader looks to an academic essay for answers, or it may encourage some students to consider how they might include these questions in their academic writing and allow the questions to be guides for academic inquiry. Even writing arguments about subjects that might not necessarily be considered appropriate for an academic audience helps students to consider what the limits of academic writing may be as well as how academic writing might change—for better or worse—if writing on a wider range of subjects *were* encouraged in the first-year writing classroom.

Revising:

While Bernstein's experiments can help students get started with their writing and to raise awareness of academic conventions throughout a student's writing process, I also want to argue that some of Bernstein's writing activities can be helpful for students as they work to revise the essays they write for first-year writing. What follows are three activities I might ask students to do with drafts of their essays:

Recombination: Write a poem and cut it somewhere in the middle, then recombine with the beginning part following the ending part.

Backwards: Reverse or alter the line sequence of a poem of your own or someone else's. Next, reverse the word order. Rather than reverse, scramble.

Both of these writing activities can be applied to students' essays: they can cut up their own essay following these instructions for "Recombination," and they can also experiment with reversing or scrambling the paragraphs in their essays or the sentences in their paragraphs in order to consider the multiple possibilities for restructuring their essays. Both of these activities help students in the first-year writing classroom to see how writing is design, how writers make choices about the structure of their work and how there are multiple possibilities available to writers. They also encourage student writers to negotiate between options and to consider multiple structures for their essay and to think about why they might choose one paragraph or essay structure over another. While some students may argue in these activities that there is a *right* way to organize an academic essay and that academic writers should follow these organizational guidelines,

such activities require students to think about *why* they view a particular structure as the *right* structure for a paragraph or essay and why they consider other possible structures to be not as effective.

By designing writing experiments in the spirit of those of Bernstein—as well as DuPlessis, Mayer, and Osman—composition instructors can present an avant-garde approach to composing in their day-to-day classroom practices. Writing experiments such as the ones I have described in this section posit writing as a mode through which we can converse with difficult texts, explore and question conventions, and consider a variety of writerly choices as we compose and revise our own texts. While I have focused here on writing activities that I think would work well in a first-year writing classroom in which students are being introduced to academic writing and its conventions, these writing experiments could be adapted easily in a variety of writing classrooms in order to promote language and genre awareness, strategies of negotiation across discourse communities, and active investigation as foundational to academic inquiry.

Designing Multigenre Texts as/in Advanced Composition

Another way that compositionists can build an avant-garde composition classroom is by designing writing curricula that encourage students to explore multiple genres as an integral part of academic inquiry. As I have discussed in my chapter about Howe's multigenre approach to research, the book length works of avant-garde writers such as Howe as well as Cha provide models for what such multigenre research projects are capable of producing. As we see in *The Midnight*, such a multigenre approach enables

Howe to explore how different genres allow us to experience language and meaning differently. This promotes diverse interpretation of source texts and academic questions and causes us to reconsider the tentative line we often draw between creativity and critical analysis.

Compositionists can use multigenre texts like Howe's in a variety of ways: first and foremost, advanced composition classes can read a text like Howe's and consider it as a model for larger semester-long research and/or multigenre projects. Multigenre texts such as *The Midnight* provide ample opportunity for readers to examine possibilities—both academic and creative possibilities—for writing about (and with) source texts in creative and expository genres. Likewise, texts like *The Midnight* and *DICTEE* also allow students to discuss genre conventions of poetry, memoir, and critical essay and to consider the extent to which the writers of these texts conform to and challenge the conventions of such genres, as well as the effects that such multigenre writing has on a variety of readers. For example, students may discuss the sorts of expectations and interpretative strategies readers of poetry may bring to the text and how expectations and strategies may differ when a reader encounters this text as a memoir or as scholarly research. Students also may use this text as a model for their own multigenre project, looking to parts of this work for composition ideas and techniques as well as drawing upon class discussions of appropriation and juxtaposition of multiple genres to think about the effects similar juxtapositions may have on readers of their own multigenre work.

In creative non-fiction or advanced composition courses, instructors may assign students large multigenre projects that connect writing they have done in multiple genres throughout the semester. One multigenre project I have assigned to students is to look through the weekly writing assignments they completed in the first half of the semester (including poems written from source texts, oral histories, definition and short research papers, and narratives) to find patterns of subjects, language, or ideas across genres and then assemble these works into a multigenre portfolio. The goal of this assignment is to have students think about how writers actively construct their texts by assembling research, observation, interviews, personal experience, and a variety of other compositional methods to create a cohesive text. My assignment reads:

As we have seen the work of Jane Tompkins, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Joan Didion, and Leslie Marmon Silko, trying to document past events and experiences forces us to piece fragments of memory, research, and history together in order to make sense of them in our writing. Throughout the semester you have made these writerly decisions in the writing you have done for this class as you have chosen events and traditions to write about, thought about the tone and style in which you write about these topics, and thought about how to organize each of your texts. Now it is time to reflect on the writing you have done and present it in a sort of book collection or portfolio.

While you have written about a variety of topics in this course over the semester, you will now try to figure out how these pieces of writing can fit together. You

might discover a few underlying themes in your work and end up arranging your pieces around themes as Didion does in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. You also may try to put these works together in innovative ways by juxtaposing your work with photographs and other images (as Cha and Susan Howe do). You might think of a topic for a new piece of writing that explores how your pieces of writing are related to one another. It is up to you how you want to present these works—just be creative and make sure you meet the basic requirements of the assignment.

I asked students to choose two or three of the short, three to four page pieces they wrote previously in the semester and then to compose five pages of new text (in any genre) that helped to connect these pieces and create a new, longer work that showcased recurring themes and concerns in their writing. Students also were encouraged to revise the pieces they previously wrote—thinking about genre, style, tone, and organization—to create their larger work. Because the topics of these short pieces were self-directed, it was not difficult for most students to see how these pieces connected to one another and/or reflected different aspects of or interests in their lives, and students created a wide variety of multigenre works to showcase the work they had done in the first part of the semester.

The instructions on the cover of one of my student's multigenre portfolios encouraged the reader to “excuse any tirades of pretensions, forced sentiments, or any other hat tricks [he] resorted to” and to “enjoy a milk or brandy while reading.” This student's portfolio was a 40-page multigenre work that demonstrated a broad range of creative and academic writing, piecing together his interests in philosophy, poetry, and

the occult as well as documenting this student's use of writing as a process of investigating and researching local LGBT community organizations and as well as city and campus issues. In addition, this student used this text to explore how his identity as a writer was shaped by his sexuality, his intellectual pursuits, and his childhood. As I read his work, I saw how he drew upon course themes such as the nature of documentation, the ways in which we construct reality within non-fiction writing, and the extent to which genres and categories of literature can be manipulated to encourage exploration and new understandings—all themes that are enhanced by reading texts such as *The Midnight* and *DICTEE*. I also saw a glimpse into how this student was using multiple genres to develop an identity as a student—even an academic—as he was negotiating the other identities that were available to him while he attempted to articulate and analyze past life experiences. Inspired by the avant-garde multigenre works that we read in our class, this student had found a way to investigate his personal and intellectual interests across genres—by using poetry to research and critique our public transit system, by composing mini-ethnographies of a community organization for gay youth, by writing stream-of-conscious narratives about his childhood, by researching the history and contemporary uses of magic— and to see how such pursuits were interwoven in a way that was inspired by his reading of *DICTEE*. None of this was revealed by happenstance: this student had thought long and hard about his assembly of his writing, the result of which was a multilayered and engaging multigenre work that included multiple discourses, articulated the multiple identities of the writer, and that merged the academic and the personal as well as the creative and the critical to expand possibilities for academic inquiry.

As my student's multigenre text demonstrates, applying the multigenre writing practices of innovative poets into the work of Composition provides compositionists with new pedagogical tools of exploring multiple genres and composing in pieces that can then be assembled in numerous ways to design and develop meaning in the composition classroom. When composition instructors strive to build multigenre awareness in their classroom, they encourage students to practice identifying generic conventions of a variety of genres, to explore the possibilities for articulating ideas and experiences within different written forms, and to impress upon students the importance of being able to negotiate between genres. Building such fluency within and between multiple genres provides students with a foundation for learning about genres they may encounter in their future studies (or careers), and it also encourages students to see the (creative) choices writers have among and within genres.

In conclusion, these pedagogical changes may seem small, but they do contribute to designing an avant-garde writing classroom, one that opens up hybrid spaces for languages, modalities, and identities that exist on the frontier/boundary/margin/border of academic disciplinarity. The argument I want to end this dissertation with is the same argument that I present at the beginning of this text: there is important work that exists at the edge, the boundary, the margin, as avant-garde poets and compositionists—as well as many of our students (if we choose to see)—can show us. It is at the margin, at the border, at the frontier, as David Wallace describes in his recent essay, where disciplines, rules, limits, and guidelines are not only questioned, challenged, tested, and disrupted but also critically understood. Avant-garde writers show us that by working at the margins

and limits of forms and discourses we come to understand both what is contained by as well as what permeates such limits. It is from this border space where we investigate and explore what exists within these boundaries—the disciplinary knowledge, the conventions, the rules—while also negotiating across such boundaries and designing innovative spaces where we exist between such divisions and create new knowledge from such hybrid positions. Our students, coming into the classroom with diverse linguistic and cultural experiences, often see academic work from border vantage points. While we often feel as writing instructors that it is our job to position them directly into academic disciplinarity, familiarizing them with customs and conventions, we can instead choose to work from the margins with our students, investigating such disciplinarity within the academy but also opening up avant-garde spaces where such disciplinarity is complicated, where academic conventions are explored in juxtaposition to the conventions of many discourse communities through composition. In avant-garde composition, we experiment within and across generic and linguistic conventions to learn and expand possibilities for composing.

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