TEACHING STYLE AS CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

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Definitions of style generally come in two versions—one narrow, the other broad. The narrow version identifies style with *verbal* style and considers a writer's choices at the level of word, phrase, and clause, although more recently it has come increasingly to include features beyond the sentence, including point of view, discourse structure, and genre. The other version defines style more broadly as "ways of doing" and takes within its purview virtually any artifact or practice that has communicative potential: fashion, music, electronic and digital media, deportment, food, and so on. The narrow definition of style, despite its recent revival in some quarters, is often associated with the outmoded formalism of New Criticism (literary studies) or with the product-oriented pedagogy of Current-Traditional Rhetoric (composition). Meanwhile, the broader definition is more positively received in English studies because it opens wider vistas onto social and cultural criticism. Apart from a few notable exceptions, these two conceptions of style rarely overlap. Scholars working with verbal style, although they might consider stylistic features in their immediate contexts, often stop short of fully considering style's cultural dimensions. Reciprocally, those working within the broader conception of style seem eager to leave verbal form behind in order to get on to the supposedly more serious and exciting business of analyzing fashion, music, and so on, and to protect themselves from the accusation of formalism and lack of theoretical depth.

While the narrow and broad definitions of style influence the way we think about and teach style, the distinctions upon which they are based are ultimately artificial, products of disciplinary interests and specializations rather than a viable description of style's nature and operation. In questioning the dichotomy, this essay emphasizes the continuity between the two versions of style, and in doing so, it answers Keith Rhodes's call (delivered earlier in this volume) to connect scholarship and classroom work on style to broader cultural practices. Toward these ends, we offer two frameworks for teaching students to explore relationships between verbal style and culture.[1]

The first framework encourages students to begin with the particularities of verbal form and, from there, explore broader meanings and functions in terms of three "arenas" of interaction: the textual, social, and cultural. Here

we focus primarily on the cultural arena, arguing that words and especially patterns of words are cultural forms just as surely as elements of fashion, music, architecture, and food are. Seeing them as such invites students to consider how their verbal styles (whether in written academic work or everyday interactions) work in concert with these other cultural elements to perform various identities.

The second framework turns the approach around and begins with cultural forms in matters like fashion and food as an entrée into the study of principles such as convention and deviation, which apply as surely to "broader" cultural practices as they do to a "narrow" interest in sentence-level matters of prose style. The suggestion is that, whichever framework the study of style employs, the important thing is to bridge the study of language and the study of the wider cultural context, or better yet, to teach students that language is one cultural practice among many, all of which can be approached together with the right conceptual tools. The frameworks, in other words, are temporary and provisional. They momentarily accept the artificial distinction of language and culture on the way to dismantling it. Before examining those frameworks more closely, we first situate them in other discussions of verbal style and culture.

STYLE AND CULTURE

Connections between verbal form and performative culture run throughout treatments of style in ancient rhetorics. Their doing so suggests just how thoroughly interdependent style and culture were in ancient rhetorical thought. Aristotle, for instance, had no technical terms, such as "figure of speech" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 242), for grouping stylistic devices or characteristics, so he improvised ones by borrowing terms either describing cultural phenomenon or carrying powerful cultural resonances. Metaphor, antithesis, and *energeia* (or vivid expression) he grouped under the more general term *asteia* or "things of the town" (Aristotle, trans. 1991, p. 244), a word that identifies these verbal forms with the elegance and refinement of the cultural center in contrast to the rusticity of geographic and cultural backwaters. Cultural resonances are also conveyed by those four qualities of style that are typically translated into English as "clarity, correctness, ornamentation, and propriety." What are their cultural associations? The tipoff is the term under which Aristotle (and his imitators) gathered them: the *aretai* or "virtues" of style. By classifying them as such, Aristotle suggests that the "virtues" do not simply describe the technical merits of a completed oration, but are instead guides to performance and action, prodding the orator to fashion his stylistic behaviors in ways that match (or at least aspire toward) criteria defining cultural excellence. The

virtue of correctness is particularly revealing. The term "correctness" is a poor translation of the original Greek and Latin terms, *Hellenizen* and *Latinitas*, because it neutralizes the cultural resonances the original terms carried. Better translations—or at least, more historically accurate translations—might be "good Greek" and "good Latin." Translated as such, these phrases reveal the cultural stakes involved—that is, pitting one culture's language against those of all outsiders, incursions of which were labeled as the ultimate stylistic "vice": *babarismos* or "barbarism."

Cultural and stylistic categories also mix and overlap in the rhetorics of Cicero and Quintilian. For instance, in their discussions of jests (many of which secure their effects through stylistic devices), both authors insist again and again that the orator only use forms of joking that "befit" a *liberalis* or gentleman and avoid the gross humor of the stage clown and lowly street entertainer.[2] Their advice suggests that certain verbal forms (such as irony and oblique punning) were part of a gentleman's repertoire for expressing his social and cultural identity, while other forms (such as obscenities or overly aggressive jokes) bespoke a more lowly status. With such advice, Cicero and Quintilian present verbal style as a medium for cultural performance. Elsewhere, they use non-verbal elements of culture as metaphors for thinking about style. Quintilian, for instance, draws on several cultural practices and artifacts and, through a series of analogies, uses them to mark a difference between a natural verbal style and an overly affected one. The natural style is like a healthy body that, through wholesome exercise and training, acquires grace through such physical adornments as a "healthy complexion, firm flesh and shapely thews" (Quintilian, trans. 1972, 8.Pr.19). The affected style, however, is like a man who "attempts to enhance these physical graces" by the use of "depilatories and cosmetics" or through "effeminate and luxurious apparel" (Quintilian, trans. 1972, 8.Pr.19-20). Notice how Quintilian discusses the virtue of naturalness in verbal style by calling upon another area of culture—in this case the care of the body through exercise versus artificial beauty created via cosmetics and dress (an analogy which echoes Socrates' famous dismissal of rhetoric as cosmetics and cookery in Plato's *Gorgias*)—thus suggesting that language is one cultural practice among many, joined together by general principles of style (such as naturalness).

In more recent discussions of style in rhetorical and composition studies, this intimate relation between style and culture is often either ignored or underappreciated. In *A Rhetoric of Style*, for instance, Barry Brummett is primarily concerned with the role that style plays in the formation and reproduction of cultures, but he has very little to say, beyond a few generalizations, about how verbal style participates in these processes. Instead, he adopts what we

characterized earlier as the broad definition of style and focuses, not on verbal style, but on clothing, music, cosmetics, visual media, deportment, and so on. In fact, he makes it clear early in his study that he wants to move beyond "limited view[s] of style" (2008, p. 2)—including those which identify it with "linguistic style" (2008, p. 1)—to other modes of stylistic expression: "I want to think of style as socially held sign systems composed of a wide range of signs beyond *only* language, systems that are used to accomplish rhetorical purposes across the cultural spectrum" (2008, p. 3, emphasis added). We agree that style should encompass the full "cultural spectrum," but we suspect that Brummett underestimates the importance of language and, more specifically, "linguistic style" as a force in cultural production. As the passage above suggests (particularly the modifiers "limited" and "only"), the role language plays within Brummett's conception of style is a minor one. In the book's middle chapters, that role becomes even more marginal. In other words, language ceases to be part of style altogether and, instead, serves as a metaphor (or simile) *for* style. Again and again, we come upon formulations like the following:

- "Style … is like a language" (2008, p. 33);
- "Style … is a kind of language" (2008, p. 45);
- "[S]tyle … functions as does a language" (2008, p. 32);
- "A fruitful way to think of style [is] as a language …" (2008, p. 99).

We understand what Brummett is doing here: he's taking a page from the playbook of structuralism and making a case for examining clothing, music, visual images, etc., as a system of relations (just as language is). But for those of us who study verbal style, the formulation *style is like a language* sounds profoundly odd because it suggests that the only meaningful link between style and language is, at best, a metaphorical or analogical one.

Towards the book's end, in a chapter devoted to American "gun-culture style," Brummett does consider verbal form in his discussion of the speaking style of American gun enthusiasts. But the analytical vocabulary he deploys to describe this style seems too general and impressionistic. For instance, he characterizes the speech of those who frequent gun shows and firing ranges as "plain," "reserved," and "direct and pointed" (2008, p. 159), but apart from noting that a word like "aesthetics" would be out of place in gun culture talk and that the honorifics "sir" and "ma'am" serve as markers of politeness (2008, pp. 159-160), he fails to specify what it is about their language that suggests such qualities or effects. He also fails to quote samples of their speech so that readers can either confirm or challenge his general characterization of it as "plain," "reserved," and "direct and pointed." Shortly after delivering this characterization, Brummett does include a sentence-long sample of gun talk, but it actually undercuts his previous claims about gun talk's general characteristics. The sample

comes from a poster at rec.guns who is chiding another newsgroup member for taking offense from someone who was carrying a handgun. That poster writes, "you might have been a little too curious for his temperament" (Brummett, 2008, p. 160). Given its understated, euphemistic, and Latinate diction, this comment is hardly "plain" and "direct." Rather, it's a model of indirection. It's as if Brummett's earlier claims about the limits of linguistic style and about style being *like* a language were self-fulfilling prophesies. For the analysis here stops short of moving beyond its impressionistic labels to specific verbal features, and if it fails to do that, then it cannot identify connections between those features and their cultural uses and meanings.

A more promising approach to exploring relations between verbal form and culture appears in Fiona Paton's "Beyond Bakhtin: Towards a Cultural Stylistics." In this essay, Paton draws on a mostly Bakhtinian vocabulary of analysis (heteroglossia, dialogism, parody) to argue that language is "materially embedded in its cultural moment" (2000, p. 170). To illustrate, Paton offers an extended analysis of Jack Kerouac's novel *Dr. Sax*, arguing that its style internalizes, and re-inflects, the languages and even media formats of various cultural forms contemporaneous with the novel's production (such as pulp fiction, comic books, jazz, literary fiction, popular cinema, and street vernacular). The strength of Paton's analysis lies in its effort to work from the particularities of verbal form toward the broader concerns of cultural criticism, ultimately situating the novel's style in the context of Cold War discourses on nationalism and debates among American intellectuals of the 1950s over high and low culture. But where Paton could have pushed her analysis further is in understanding the stylistic features she identifies as cultural forms in their own right. Instead, she treats them in one of three ways:

1. as compositional elements borrowed from other cultural forms: for example, onomatopoeia from comic strips, or phrasings and idioms from pulp fiction or nursery rhymes (2000, p. 189);
2. as vehicles for imitating the formats of other media: for example, parataxis mimics the "sequential narrative panels of a comic strip" (2000, p. 186);
3. as instances of Bakhtin's more abstract categories: for example, parenthesis contributes to the dialogic style of the novel (2000, p. 186).

These categories certainly call attention, at least in a general sense, to the social and cultural dimensions of verbal form, but what Paton might have also noted is that devices such as onomatopoeia, parataxis, and parenthesis are themselves cultural forms. In other words, they (together with hundreds of other verbal devices) are ritualizations of language at the level of word, phrase, or clause that circulate widely, while accumulating, carrying, and shedding

"cultural values and meanings independent of the content they may be used [in any given instance] to convey" (Holcomb, 2007, p. 80).

An analyst of style who does recognize such verbal patterns as cultural forms is sociolinguist Penelope Eckert. In her studies of adolescent speech at a high school in the suburbs of Detroit, Eckert charts stylistic variations within and across the school's two primary social networks: jocks and burnouts. What she finds is that features of verbal style work alongside of, and in concert with, other cultural products and practices and that, collectively, they form a richly expressive repertoire for performing identity. In other words, students perform identity by drawing on elements from *both* verbal style (variations at the level of phonology and syntax) and nonverbal style (variations in "clothing, posture and body movement, makeup, hair, territory, substance use, [and] leisure activities" [Eckert, 2005, p. 11]). Together, these verbal and nonverbal elements of style blend seamlessly in the everyday interactions of the students Eckert has observed. Theoretically, then, Eckert's study suggests that distinctions between narrow and broad definitions of style will not hold—that analyses of style (and its uses in performance) must consider verbal form working alongside (and together with) other cultural elements. Pedagogically, her study invites us to look for new ways to present and teach style to our students.

ARENAS OF STYLE: FROM TEXT TO CULTURE

To help our students explore relationships between verbal form and culture, and thus to construct a more comprehensive understanding of style, we offer two pedagogical frameworks. The first (considered in this section) moves from the textual features of verbal style through its social and rhetorical uses to its cultural meanings and values. The second framework (considered in the next section) reverses this movement and starts with stylistic activities more familiar to students (such as fashion, music, and food), activities whose social and cultural uses are more readily apparent to students.

The first framework serves as a model for helping students understand style as performance—that is, as a vehicle by which writers not only present a self, but also orchestrate relationships with readers, subject matters, and contexts. At the heart of this model is the notion of interaction. As Richard Schechner claims, "To treat any object, work, or product 'as' performance … means to investigate what that object does, how it interacts with other objects and beings" (2002, p. 24). Building on this claim, we consider style in terms of three arenas of interaction: the textual, social, and cultural.

1. Within the textual arena, students examine how all the words on the page interact with one another to form patterns and meanings. Here students gain practice in applying different vocabularies of analysis (those from traditional grammar, linguistics, or rhetoric), and they become more accustomed to following closely the word-by-word choices of an author as they unfold in a given text.

2. With the social arena, attention turns from interactions among words and structures to interactions between writers and readers *through* those words and structures. Here we have in mind something along the lines of Rosanne Carlo's contribution to this volume where Carlo examines the interplay between a "performative ethos" and "enfolding a reader." Along similar lines, students might consider how writers use style to construct roles for themselves and their readers, to position themselves in relation to those readers (above, below, equal, familiar, or distant), and to invite readers into participatory relationships with a text, relationships that include enacting all the various rituals of social interaction (joking, flirting, sparring, instructing, and so on).

3. With the cultural arena, students consider how a word or pattern has, independent of the content it might express, a particular value or meaning to some larger community of language users. To borrow an example from Eckert, consider "negative concord," or the use of double, triple, or even quadruple negatives, as in "I ain't never done nothing to nobody." Although this feature is stigmatized in most professional and institutional contexts, among burnouts it carries the positive value of performing an "anti-school stance," and among male jocks it performs "ruggedness." (Eckert, 2005, p. 19)

A good place to start is with patterns with which students are already familiar—at least, intuitively. We're thinking here of such powerhouse tropes and schemes as metaphor, anaphora, antithesis, and tricolon. Because these figures are so ubiquitous, so much a part of our culture's repertoire for performance, students will already have at least a tacit sense of some of their cultural meanings and values. Take tricolon, for instance. It's a scheme involving a series of three words, phrases, or clauses in parallel form:[3]

- We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (The Declaration of Independence, 1776)
- There's never enough bread, never enough olives, never enough soup. (Simic, 2005, p. 85)

- Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington—it began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston. (Barak Obama, "Election Night Victory Speech," 11/4/08)
- It concludes that *The Daily Show* can be better understood not as "fake news" but as an alternative journalism, one that uses satire to interrogate power, parody to critique contemporary news, and dialogue to enact a model of deliberative democracy. (Baym, 2005, p. 261)

Students will probably have little trouble identifying the textual features shared across all of these examples (parallel series of three). They might also observe some of the social uses of this pattern—that is, how the speakers or writers in these examples are interacting with their listeners or readers through tricolon. In the fourth example, President Obama uses tricolon (a staple of presidential oratory) to reassure listeners that his goals are thoroughly democratic, springing not from the interests Beltway insiders, but from the people—the *demos*—in their most familial settings. In the final example, Baym uses tricolon to perform another kind of ritual, one common to academic discourse: previewing the organization of his article for readers.

Where students might have trouble, however, and thus need more explicit guidance, is in teasing out the cultural meanings of tricolon. We begin by asking students, "Why three items in each series? Why not two, or four, or five?" If this question doesn't ring some bells, we ask them about other patterns, objects, or activities that have three parts. If one of our students doesn't volunteer it first, we recall one of the short educational cartoons from the 1970's series *Schoolhouse Rock!*: "Three Is a Magic Number," which celebrates the virtues of three while teaching its viewers some of its multiples ("Three, six, nine … Twelve, fifteen, eighteen …"). Other examples we use come from Alan Dundes, an anthropologist who documents the pervasive role three plays not only in ritual, myth, and folklore but also in everyday American culture:

- Folklore (three wishes, three little pigs, three blind mice).
- Games and spectacles (tick-tack-toe, three strikes and you're out, three ring circus).
- Product sizes and appliance settings (small, medium, and large; low, medium, and high).
- Eating rituals and food (three meals per day; coffee, tea, or milk; rare, medium, and well-done).
- Common or well-known sayings ("Beg, borrow, or steal"; "Lock, stock, and barrel"; "Ready, willing, and able"). (Dundes, 1968, pp. 404-09)

To Dundes' list, we might add religion and philosophy (the Holy Trinity of Christianity; the triadic semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce; the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of the Hegelian dialectic).

Having established the cultural pervasiveness of three, we return to tricolon and ask students what cultural meanings and values it might have. Even if they respond, "It just feels right," that's a start because it speaks to the cultural power of three and suggests just how thoroughly this number structures our expectations and behavior. We've probably all had the experience of drafting something and jotting down two items, when a voice in our head calls to us, "You need to add one more." Apparently, Captain Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* felt the same compulsion when he said, "I think we've arrived at a very special place. Spiritually, ecumenically, grammatically." His three-part list, especially the last two items, doesn't make much propositional sense, but it makes symbolic sense: he needs the three items, regardless of their semantic sense, to complete this little stylistic ritual. In fact, as Max Atkinson observes about conversational discourse, "Lists comprising only two items tend to appear inadequate and incomplete—so much so that there are various phrases that can be slotted in whenever we are having difficulty in finding a third item for a list," phrases such as "and so on," "somethingorother," and "etcetera" (1984, p. 57).

Part of what drives this compulsion towards tripartite structures has to be that, in our culture, three means stability, completeness, and (in some instances) finality. Tricolon, with its items cast in parallel form rather than dispersed over varying and irregular structures, serves as the stylistic crystallization of those meanings.[4] Thus, writers often use tricolon to deliver a well-rounded description of a person, thing, or event:

- [Colin Duffy] is four feet eight inches, weighs seventy-five pounds, and appears to be mostly leg and shoulder blade. (Orlean, 1995, p. 99)
- I require three things in a man. He must be handsome, ruthless, and stupid. (Parker, 2009, p. 19)
- Carlo, the counterman, unwrapped a Mars bar, dunked it in the universal batter, and dropped it in oil. When it floated, golden brown, on the surface, he removed it, sprinkled a little powder sugar on it, and handed it over.   "Careful," said Simon. "Inside it's bloody napalm."Mmmm. I like grease. I like chocolate. And I like sugar. (Bourdain, 2002, p. 253)

Writers also use tricolon to present a representative sample of some phenomenon or class (just as Obama's tricolon [quoted above] is representative of the citizenry):

- He kept scraps of wood in a cardboard box—the ends of two-by-fours, slabs of shelving and plywood, odd pieces of molding—and everything in it was fair game. (Sanders, 2008, p. 134)
- Many of us had suspended the connections to the world we had established back home—the part-time job in the library, the graduate program, the circle of supportive friends—and we resented the loss. (Gordon, 1998, p. 121)

In all of these examples, the tricola work something like triangulation, the technique by which astronomers calculate the distance of celestial objects from the Earth and navigators determine the position of their vessels. The tricola fix and thus offer what seems a reliable description of, or sampling from, their targets. Similarly, in academic discourse (even in the humanities), we often hear of "triangulating" data—that is, confirming some observed phenomenon by finding at least three instances of it, or examining a single phenomenon from three methodological perspectives.

In public oratory, tricolon often serves the performance function of cuing listeners to applaud (Atkinson, 1984, pp. 57ff.). Stephen Colbert capitalized on this power in a comedic segment, way back when he was just a correspondent on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.[5] In the segment, Colbert is supposedly on-the-scene in D.C., reporting on the previous night's State of the Union address, and while anchor Stewart is trying to get Colbert to report on the substance of the speech, Colbert's responses keep culminating in tricola delivered in tones and rhythms of presidential oratory. These tricola are followed by cut-shots to file footage of the House floor with members standing and applauding—as if Colbert were the President. Here are several of Colbert's tricola (reinforced by anaphora):

- The State of the Union is a celebration of democracy, a night when Washington and the entire country can reaffirm their faith in the nation—not as Democrats, not as Republicans, but as Americans.
- If we do go to war, there's no one I'd rather have defending me than the brave men and women of the armed forces. We're proud of you. We believe in you. And we will prevail. (Holcomb, 2007, pp. 71-75)

Finally, when the exasperated Stewart asks if Colbert can "tell us about the actual substance of the speech," Colbert responds, "Why, Jon? That won't get applause."

This segment implicitly confirms tricolon's status as a cultural form (Holcomb, 2007, p. 74). The humor wouldn't work if viewers failed to recognize as such. It wouldn't work, that is to say, if listeners failed to register how Colbert was using tricolon (along with other elements of performance, such as vocal tone and pacing, the cut-shot to the House floor, etc.) to signal a shift between

performing (and comedically confusing) two cultural identities—journalist and politician.

The three-arenas framework can be applied to other verbal devices—not only to the figures of speech, but to any pattern or feature whose meanings exceed the subject matter that, on any given occasion, it might express. For instance:

- The intentional misspellings and typos of geeks and gamers ("teh suc," "pwned," and "pr0n").
- The heavily nominalized and jargon-filled prose of academics.
- Passive voice in scientific writing.
- The esoteric (and overworked) diction and metaphors of wine connoisseurs ("with notes of honeysuckle and a strong, oaky finish").

All of these features (and so many more) are little rituals of language that circulate relatively widely, get rehearsed again and again, and assembled (along with other non-verbal elements) into fresh combinations as writers and speakers orchestrate their interactions with audiences and perform various selves. Exploring these possible functions requires students and teachers to treat verbal form as an object of serious (and deep) cultural analysis.

PRINCIPLES OF STYLISTIC PERFORMANCE: FROM CULTURE TO TEXT

In *Performing Prose*, we introduce stylistic principles like convention and deviation, voice and footing, tropes and schemes, through the close study of language—that is, to use the terms in the last section, we begin with the textual arena and work toward the cultural arena—finishing in our last chapter by showing how, once these concepts are worked out in language, they can be demonstrated as evident in all strata of cultural activity. Our point is that the concepts of culture and language are thoroughly interdependent, and that language itself is one of many such activities. Unlike the search for food, water, and habitat, the primary activities of existential life, or even sex, on which the perpetuation of species depends, language is a secondary activity that, by facilitating social interchange, supports and enlivens the primary work of survival and reproduction. The same trends found in linguistic style—convention and deviation, for example—are at work in other stylistic performances: in fashion, food, art, sport, technology, and other areas that are partly rule-governed and partly based on decisions, whether by individuals or groups. More significantly for the study of style, concepts like convention and deviation can help to form bridges between the understandings of style in various cultural activities. Here,

we'd like briefly to consider a second approach or framework for studying style. Instead of moving from language outward to the larger cultural arena, with the help of these conceptual bridges, we might well turn things around and begin with an area more familiar to the average student—fashion, for example—thereby applying the old premise of behaviorism in education: always move from the most familiar to the least familiar material (see Zoellner, 1969).

In matters of clothing, as in cultural practices, people depend partly on rules or laws, partly on conventions, and partly on personal choices. In the west, required clothing includes a top (shirt, blouse, etc.), a bottom (pants, skirt, etc.), and footwear (shoes, boots, sandals). At some public places, like the beach or the swimming pool, the rules are more relaxed unless you want to go into the snack bar for a hot dog ("No shirt, No shoes, No service"). Even at this most basic level, however, culture intervenes. In hot, moist climates like the tropical rain forest, some cultural groups wear nearly nothing (the rules are more like a perpetual trip to the beach), while in many desert climates, more elaborate rules for covering prevail—full-length robes and head scarves and veils, for example, many of which elements have been codified in religious law, such as that of Islam. Covering in one way or another becomes a matter of religious duty—and a matter of identity politics in global society, where requirements for dress become issues of confrontation and legislation. For any given society, the law becomes the foundation of required behavior. The law says what must be covered and to what extent. Despite the so-called sexual revolution and the vaunted freedom of expression in American life and art, laws against indecent exposure remain on the books. It is against the law for women to go topless on most U.S. beaches, for example, but not on most European beaches; and at least one well known political commentator on the European scene has expressed wonder over the prudery and hypocrisy of Americans on this score (see Zizek, 2010, pp. 121-22). The law may also require *un*covering, as in the case of some European countries that have tried to institute anti-veiling laws on the argument that public safety depends upon the police being able to identify the faces of citizens.

Beyond the law, dress is governed to some extent by *conventions*. We "dress up" for weddings and funerals and "dress down" for ball games and college classes. The occasions for dressing up have changed over the years—people used to dress up for air travel, for example, and Sunday church—as has the meaning of dressing up. (Do men dress up in tuxedo, dark suit with necktie, or just slacks with ironed shirt; must women wear a full-length gown, "little black dress," or skirt and blouse with low heels?) Along with historical shifts, regional and national customs cause variation in the definition of dressing up—the relaxed west coast versus the more formal east coast in the U.S., for example.

Finally we come to style—deviations from, or personal variations within, dress codes and conventions. East-coast businessmen might express themselves with a colorful tie, or businesswomen with a bright scarf, while still following the convention of wearing a dark suit to work. The daring may flaunt convention entirely, leaving off the tie or jacket, and thereby engendering expectations of rebelliousness or special creativity (that they better live up to).

Students can bring plenty of their own examples along these lines. The key is to make the transition to language via the conceptual bridges to the more familiar cultural practice. Once the concept of rule-governed, conventional, and deviant behavior is established, we can get at some key definitions in the basic study of language:

- **Grammar** is the set of rules by which a language functions. The rules change over time, but are relatively stable.
- **Style** comprises the choices a writer makes within that system. Style is often defined as deviation from a norm.
- **Convention** is the shifting ground of linguistic restriction between grammar and style, between definite rules and clear choices.

A great place to begin working with these distinctions is the kind of restrictions that often get codified as rules when they are in fact matters of choice or community preference. An injunction that every student will recognize, for example, is *never use the first-person pronoun*. What grammar (the law) actually says about use of the first-person is that, like all pronouns, it must agree in person, number, and case with its antecedent and with any verb to which it serves as subject. Avoiding the use of the first-person *I* or *we* is not a law or a rule, but a convention. For one thing, it is a convention of formality, like wearing a tuxedo to the prom. Drawing attention to oneself—whether by the use of *I* or by the wearing of flamboyant clothing—can be considered bad manners in some situations or in some cultures. One must become a student of the culture to know the conventions and codes, the manners and mores. Avoiding the use of the first-person *I* or *we* can also be a badge of identity— like the businessperson's dark suit, the head scarf of Moslem women, or the uniform of the soldier. Writers in science and engineering avoid the first person to suggest the objectivity and reproducibility of their work. It doesn't matter that *I* get one result in my lab; by following these procedures, *anyone* can get such a result. The emphasis thus falls on the methods and the findings rather than on the interpretations of any individual. In forthrightly using *we* in the famous paper announcing the structure of DNA, Francis Crick and James Watson flouted convention and emphasized the originality of their discovery and the daring quality of their interpretation (see the discussion in Holcomb & Killingsworth, 2010, pp. 50-53).

Students may grasp the analogies between language and other cultural practices quite quickly, but still have trouble crossing the bridge between them. Ultimately they must be convinced that it is in their best interest to know the inner workings of language as well as they know the intricacies of fashion, sports, or music. To that end, we rely on performance. Performance is the moment when language goes into action, when the writer puts the stylistic repertoire to use with a rhetorical awareness of audience and context. Good performance finally requires mastery of rules (grammar), knowledge of conventions (norms, audience expectations), and the informed practice of style (good decisions about deviations).

Performance will also reveal continuities (and thus bridge the divide) between the two definitions of style with which this chapter began: narrow definitions which identify style with verbal style, and broad definitions which identify it with fashion, music, food, etc. Narrow definitions often fall short because they measure style in terms of its efficiency in transmitting information (for instance, the whole prescriptive tradition on clarity and concision), or because they are too invested in the representational function of language (style may depict behavior—may even enhance depictions of behavior—but is not a form of behavior itself). In either case, style is defined (sometimes exclusively) as a relation to content and usually as content's subordinate partner. As a result, narrow definitions leave style vulnerable to charges of formalism. Broad definitions, by contrast, often ignore or underestimate the role verbal style plays in the production and reproduction of culture, and their selection of objects of analysis seem driven by a misguided assumption: if you want to examine relations between style and culture, you can't get there through verbal form.

If, however, we approach style as performance—as a medium for social and cultural interaction—then doing so will dismantle distinctions between narrow and broad definitions by treating the objects each traditionally analyzes as belonging to the same set. Reconfiguring them as such invites us (and our students) to consider patterns at the level of word, phrase, and clause as performative set-pieces—that is, as ritualizations of language that work alongside of (or sometimes in tension with) ritualizations in deportment, dress, food, visual design, sport, etc.—all of which play a role in structuring and orchestrating interactions not only between style and content, but also (and more importantly) among performers, audiences, and the contexts they inhabit. More generally, this reconfiguration invites students to marshal the strengths of both linguistic and cultural analysis in developing a practice of composition that addresses the deep motives of writers and readers in the widest possible context.

NOTES

1. These frameworks originally appeared in our textbook Performing Prose: The Study and Practice of Style in Composition. Here we elaborate on their pedagogical uses and explore their theoretical implications more fully.

2. See, for instance, Cicero's De Oratore (2.60.244; 2.60.247; 2.61.251-52; and 2.67.270) and Quintilian (6.3.17-18; 6.3.29; 6.3.46-47; and 5.3.83).

3. The following discussion of tricolon is based on our analysis of the same scheme in Performing Prose (pp. 151-154).

4. Our thinking here is influenced by Jeanne Fahnestock's Rhetorical Figures in Science where she argues that several key figures exemplify or "epitomize" particular lines of reasoning (pp. 23-24).

5. The following is based on Holcomb's analysis of the same segment (pp. 71-75).

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