

Curtain Call: A “This Is the End” Retrospective

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This is the end, beautiful friend.

—The Doors

Riffing off of Henry and Baker’s words from the Special Issue, when it comes to learning to perform—revision is not just part of the creative process, “revision *is* the process”—we end this collection with several of our artist-teachers who demonstrate why deep reflection is not just the end of the creative process “it *is* the process.” Select contributors take a bow and reflect on the ends or whys of the theory, research, and experience of teaching and learning writing in and about the performing and visual arts. This final curtain-call includes short-short individual, yet interanimating, essays. We begin with the voice of our new friend and colleague (Maria Soriano) who contributed an original piece, followed closely by redux authors (Anicca Cox and Lindsey Allgood) who look back on their original pieces in relation to this new volume. When all is sung (danced, designed . . .) and done, we’d love for contributors (and ultimately all readers/viewers/listeners) to ask the same words poet-scholar Claudia Rankine (2014) asks of those of us who want more than just getting-along out of life: “Hold up, did you just hear, did you just say, did you just see, did you just do that?” (p. 55).

Twists, Turns, Hours, and Experiments

~ Maria Soriano

In “Provocative Revision,” Toby Fulwiler (2008, p. 158) discusses the power of provoking students to revise and reconsider first drafts, suggesting that “The solution is usually in the writer’s returning to the piece, re-seeing it, looking more closely and finding through continued exploration, *the story that wants or needs to come out*” (emphasis my own). Sometimes, that story emerges best by way of another medium—one that is more personal, comfortable, or creative than plain old academic writing; speech, dance, film, sculpture, aria, or video game, to name a few. When performing or visual arts are connected with courses and writing, students are set free to apply and make meaning out of the curriculum in their own ways.

The combination also expands students' understandings of *creativity*, since many of my first-year writing students would never label themselves as “creative” or “artsy” people before we begin our concert poster unit. They immerse themselves in a lengthy process that involves listening to their favorite bands or artists, engaging with their imaginations to create concert posters that reflect the music, and writing about their design choices—a unit that combines traditional principles of academic writing with performative aspects of the arts.

This transformative sequence contains many twists, turns, hours, and experiments, but the end results grant students a deep sense of pride and lead them to feel true authorship for their work. The depth of explanation and personal connection with their project elements often leads them to produce writing that is strong, coherent, and well-developed in comparison to earlier essays. I can ultimately conclude that as a first-year writing instructor, my choice to incorporate poster design into my course has helped me realize how the elegantly interpretive nature of the performing and visual arts provides students with the room they need to write, create, and revise until that story *finally* comes out.

Between Practitioners, Across Texts, Inside Our Classrooms and Our Own Understandings of Ourselves

~ Anicca Cox

Arguably, writing studies occupies a unique place in the field of available discursive spaces inside institutions of higher education. If Victor Vitanza and Susan Jarratt are correct, as they argued in one of our disciplinary origin-story documents, “The Octalog” we are, in fact, a “meta-discipline (1988). And yet, when we put our experiential practice to the wheel of process and production, we find ourselves in delightful camaraderie with others. It is not merely that we can engage with and animate the texts of other discursive traditions, but rather, we can cooperate with, integrate, align and realign ourselves in deep relationship with other ways of knowing, doing, being and understanding via our vehicle of written practice. Here, my co-authors and I have found particular synthesis with visual and performing arts along lines of values, practice, articulation and pedagogy.

In some ways, our fields have a seemingly natural alliance. In my own explorations, I found that art instructors value and use writing seamlessly to engage their students and themselves in modalities that achieve deeper cognition of artistic practice. And they have much to say back to our discipline in their attention to embodiment and to the subtle differentiations between objects and representation. And yet, these alliances between us are not simple. In fact, it may be true that all alliances are at the same moment, personal *and* political in nature. And each

alliance is based on relationship building, between practitioners, across texts, inside of our classrooms and our own understandings of ourselves. Perhaps the greatest gift visual and performing arts may offer to the crystallized rhetorical structures we often find ourselves within writing studies is the gift of a reliance on subjectivity. Not subjectivity at the exclusion of critical experience and discourse, but rather, the placing of value on subjective, personal *and* interpersonal, reflective and embodied experience as an *integral part* of critical practice. These practices of engaging interpretive, reflective and subjective modes are valuable. Rather than subsume them into the service of an unattainable, quantifiable, objectivity we are often pushed to do by assessment initiatives and standardizing curriculums, rather, they offer us vehicles to again, engage in work that give us pleasure and meaning, finding our way to understanding through the shared process of inquiry and experience.

Write . . . Pause. Write-Pause. Write: Pause. Write and Pause.

~ Lindsey Allgood

When we collaboratively write, we must establish rhythm. Writing is an improvisational dance and physical performance. Language and linguistics give us the tools to choreograph and perform text together. When we collaboratively write, we tag team the choreography process, and we often subconsciously ask our partners very important questions: “Hold up, did you just say that? Did you just move that way?” As a performance artist, writer, and writing educator, I think about how I dance with my audience(s) in participatory performances and in the writing center, and how I danced with Michael Rifenburg over a thousand-mile distance as we drafted our essay.

This process raised several intriguing questions for me. What happens in the space and time between our writing and our pauses, and what are the constraints established by these rhythms that are often decided by punctuation, word choice, citation patterns, and drafting routines? Then, as when two artists collaborate, how does the merging of two writers’ habits, tics, and preferences affect the composed product? Perhaps the most interesting aspect of contemporary composing is how technology encourages us to rethink how we use time(zones) while establishing collaborative rhythm. In relation to tutoring, I think of how I time that crucial moment when a student turns their laptop or paper towards me, and when I choose to turn it back towards them. How does this rhythm, and the pauses between these actions, affect the student’s final product? Final composition products—student essays, paintings, ensembles, or book chapters—beg us to stop in stillness for a minute and ask, “Did we just *live* that?”

Without this question at the end of a composing, teaching, or learning experience, we cannot claim complete engagement with texts in all their forms, nor with any snippet of digested information. We cannot claim any sort of embodied knowing of our collaborators, our audiences, nor with our authentic selves. To claim and embody these essential experiences is the purpose of writing, and for me, the purpose of performance art. When we write, it is also important to ask ourselves of what elements the pauses in our collaborative rhythms are made. How do we reflect? When do we stand still? Where do we physically choose words? Answering these meta-questions helps us solidify the performative tools we use as we compose texts and ultimately as we compose our lives.

References

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