

## CHAPTER ONE

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### *Dissoi Logoi:* Neosophistic Rhetoric and the Possibility of Critical Pedagogy

Some say that the good is one thing and the bad the other, but others say that they are the same, and that a thing might be good for some persons but bad for others, or at one time good and at another time bad for the same person.

—Sprague (279)<sup>1</sup>

The title of this chapter is taken directly from an anonymous sophistic treatise called *Dissoi Logoi*, or *Dialexeis*, and is traced back to the subsequent end of the Peloponnesian War (Sprague 279). I use this treatise as a convenient means to segue into my discussion of the infusion of sophistic rhetorical practices and theory into rhetoric and composition. The anonymous author of this treatise articulates the notion of contradiction as an inevitable consequence of discourse, and such notions of inherent contradictions have become standard rhetoric, the accepted *a priori* assumptions of postmodern discourses—an understanding that

truth and knowledge are contingent upon circumstance and language. “Truth,” Richard Rorty writes, “cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not”(5). This chapter will explore how the convergence of sophistic rhetoric with contemporary composition theory helps us to envision an alternate discourse model, based on notions of *logos*, *antilogike*, *mythos*, and *ethos*.

Let me begin with a disclaimer about my employment of sophistic rhetoric as a springboard for discussion about cultural studies, feminism, postcolonial studies, and composition: as Edward Schiappa has pointed out, scholars do not know exactly who the sophists were nor what unified their particular rhetoric as specifically “sophistic” (“Sophistic” 5). However, it may be useful to look at sophistic rhetoric (in its varied manifestations) as a point of departure from the hegemony of classical rhetoric—with its emphasis on taxonomies and categories. Susan Jarratt has repeatedly made this argument, suggesting that the sophists’ teaching and politics was based on “a materialist anthropology completely antithetical to metaphysics and the hierarchical epistemological structures it engenders, as well as to oligarchic political theory” embodied in Aristotelian and Platonic rhetoric (“First” 28). Moreover, scholars like John Poulakos argue that our picture of rhetoric has been rendered incomplete since, “For over two millennia we have treated the sophistic position as an obscure but interesting footnote” (“Toward” 35). Further, by reconstituting Greek history through the use of the sophists we engage in what Schiappa has referred to as a sort of “useful fiction” (“Sophistic” 10). Such creative imaginings allow contemporary scholars to critique certain notions of disciplinarity, since the discursive nature of sophistic discourse makes it a creative theoretical tool in which to redefine and explore the epistemological boundaries of disciplinary structures (12).

It is from this tenuous perch of historical uncertainty that I will tightrope across the discussion of sophistic rhetoric. As Eric Havelock has noted, “Much of the story of early Greek philosophy so-called is a story not of systems of thought but of a search for a primary language in which any system could be expressed” (8). I will demonstrate how the narratives of sophistic rhetorical

strategies may indeed prove useful in contributing to the teaching of both cultural studies and feminist pedagogy as it is manifested in the writing classroom.

#### DEFINING THE SOPHISTS

The term “sophist” comes from two Greek words—*sophos* and *sophia*, translated as “wise” and “wisdom,” respectively. The term had honorific connotative meanings, and expressed not only an ineluctable intellectual or spiritual quality, but also skill at a particular craft. However, it also acquired more pejorative connotations, with the implication that one who is *sophos* may be “too clever and may overreach himself” (Guthrie 28).

While the term itself is not difficult to trace, the attempt to define the characteristics of sophistry is a far more arduous task. While there were those who referred to themselves as “sophists,” and others who were labeled as such, the title was ascribed rather inconsistently by various writers, and therefore there is not a singular identifying characteristic of the “sophists” from which we can claim a common perspective or set of pedagogical practices (Schiappa, “Sophistic” 8). Jarratt notes that sophistic rhetoric collided with various “disciplines,” such as the

Natural sciences (*Protagoras* B1–2; *Gorgias*, *On the Nonexistent* B1–5; *Prodicus* B3–4; *Antiphon* B66C), social and political theory (*Protagoras* C1; *Thrasymachus* B6a; *Antiphon* B129–151), aesthetic responses and psychology (*Protagoras* B1; *Gorgias*, *Encomium of Helen* BII; *Antiphon* B123), law (*Protagoras* B6; *Gorgias* BIIa; *Antiphon* B1–66), religion and ethics (*Protagoras* A23, B4; *Gorgias* A28), as well as language theory and pedagogy (*Protagoras* A 5, 21, 26; *Gorgias* B14). (*Rereading* 13)

Despite the enormous range of what is considered sophistic rhetoric and Schiappa’s resistance to such categorization, the canon of those philosophers considered sophists include Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Antiphon, Thrasymachus, Critias, Antisthenes, Alcidas, Lycophron, and several anonymous texts, including the aforementioned *Dissoi Logoi*. However, for the scope and purpose of this chapter, I will primarily use the works related to the best-known sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias.

Over the years, several scholars—particularly those in the field of rhetoric and composition, such as Susan Jarratt, Sharon Crowley, Thomas Kent, Victor Vitanza, and Jasper Neel (among others)—have devised a neosophistic rhetorical criticism, a call for a return to sophistic rhetoric as a useful means of reinventing rhetoric in the ways in which it can be used to help mediate—indeed reinvigorate—composition theory and pedagogy. I can only assume that the resurgence of interest in sophistic rhetoric is, in part, due to the philosophical appeal of its near-poststructural, antifoundational soul. As Jacqueline De Romilly, in her foundational text, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, points out, “The sophists were the first to consider the relativity of knowledge as a fundamental principle, and to open up the way not only for free-thinking but also for absolute doubt regarding all metaphysical, religious, and moral matters” (238).

This concept of positionality and relativity is continually threaded through the theoretical and pedagogical fabric of composition and rhetoric. Furthermore, it is from scholars like Jarratt, with her extensive *oeuvre* on the intersections of feminism and classical rhetoric, that I draw a great deal of my theoretical research—particularly, her contention that the goal of a rhetorical historiography would not be to renounce the strictures of classical rhetoric, but instead to recognize the broadened perspective sophistic rhetoric offers. She suggests, “This historiographical goal fits with a view of writing instruction that seeks to complicate categories of fact and fiction and with feminists’ challenges to a strict separation between personal experience and abstract reason” (*Rereading* 29). However, before we can assess whether or not these “sophistic” rhetorical strategies are efficacious in teaching or theorizing about writing practices, we must first attempt to grasp what constitutes sophistic rhetoric and use those qualifying definitions as a means toward understanding how such rhetorical strategies may be beneficial in teaching students how to read and write texts.

Our general understanding of the sophists comes from what others have said about them. Plato describes them in several dialogues, and the characteristics he attributes to the sophist are far from flattering. In *Protagoras*, he claims:

Is not a Sophist, Hippocrates, a person who deals wholesale or retail in such wares as provide food for the soul? . . . Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul; and we must take care, my friend, that the Sophist does not deceive us when he praises what he sells, like dealers, wholesale or retail, who sell the food of the body, for they praise indiscriminately all their goods without knowing what is really beneficial or hurtful for the body. Neither do their customers know. . . . In like manner those who carry about the wares of knowledge and make the round of the cities and offer or retail them to any customer who wants them, praise them all alike, though I should not be surprised, my dear fellow, if some of them, too, did not know which of their goods have a good and which a bad effect upon the soul. . . . If you know which of his wares are good and which are evil, you may safely buy knowledge of Protagoras or of anyone; but if not, then, my friend, watch out. . . . (10)

I have quoted this rather extensive passage to illustrate how badly the sophists were regarded. Not only is the sophist a mercenary, but he is also likened to a shopkeeper who knowingly hawks bad produce. Additionally, he is a corrupter of knowledge, and much worse, the soul. The indictment is quite brutal.

What seemed to disturb Plato most about the sophists was that they charged, often exorbitantly, for the privilege of their instruction in the *techne* (art) of rhetoric—an abhorrent concept for many Greeks at that time. In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, Socrates rallies against the sophists, arguing that “those who sell it to anyone for money are called ‘sophists,’ just like prostitutes” (Sprague 2). Aristotle concurs, in *On Sophistical Refutations*, when he writes, “For the sophist’s craft is an apparent wisdom but not a real one, and the sophist is a money-maker by apparent but not real wisdom” (Sprague 2). However, in *Lives of the Sophists*, Philostratus attributes this fee-taking practice to Protagoras, and takes a more kindly view of the practice, claiming that Protagoras “invented the practice of speaking for a fee and was the first to introduce it to Greece. He merits no reproach on this account, for we are more enthusiastic about pursuits which cost us money than about those which cost us nothing” (Sprague 4). In *Meno*, Plato claims,

I know of a single man, Protagoras, who made more out of his craft than the illustrious Phidias, who created such noble works,

or any ten other statuary. How could that be? . . . For, if I am not mistaken, he was about seventy years old at his death, forty of which were spent in the practice of his profession; and during all that time he had a good reputation, which to this day he retains. . . . (51)

Ironically, it was the democratic—dare I say, capitalistic—practice of taking money from “all kinds of people” (Kerferd 25), rather than the teacher’s selection of the students, that made the sophist (at least according to Plato and Socrates) a slave to those who were willing to pay for the privilege of his instruction, a kind of intellectual whore.

G.B. Kerferd argues that it was not concern for the sophists that motivated Socrates’ criticism, but rather a fear of the democratizing effects such instruction would have on the Greek polis. Kerferd claims, “What they [the sophists] had to offer, in the words attributed to Protagoras, included teaching a man about matters of state, so that he might become a real power in the affairs of the city, both as a speaker and as a man of action, in other words become an effective and successful politician” (26). This point is exceedingly relevant for understanding the political, and therefore transformative, implications inherent in pedagogy, particularly critical pedagogy, which actively seeks to interrogate stable systems of discourse. Protagoras promises such transformative pedagogy when he says, “Young man, if you associate with me, on the very first day you will be in a position to return home a better man than you came, and better on the second day than on the first, and better every day than you were on the day before” (Plato, *Protagoras* 14–15).

The promise of Protagoras’ transformative pedagogy is worth noting, since he does not claim merely to make the student a more proficient speaker or writer, although, of course, the implication is that association with him will prove fruitful in cultivating those particular skills; instead, he makes the rather bold claim that the student will go home “a better man.” This sophistic view, that pedagogy extends beyond the mastery of skills into the realm of self-improvement and critical awareness, is one that has been consciously embraced by the liberal agendas of cultural studies, rhetoric and composition, and feminism, and I will more fully discuss this connection later in this chapter.

In an attempt to characterize the sophists, Guthrie suggests certain commonalities. First, the sophists were marked by their

professionalism, meaning, as I already mentioned, they were paid (often handsomely) for their services. Second, the sophists were literally Athenian outsiders, as their appellations ascribe them: Protagoras of Abdera, Gorgias of Leotini, Hippias of Elis, Thrasy-machus of Chalcedon, and so on. They were foreigners in a host country whose residents were distrustful, as all hosts are, of their unusual guests. Third, their pedagogical methods consisted of either small circles or seminars or public displays (*epideixeis*). The former were typically conducted in an affluent citizen's home; for instance, Callias' home is the setting in Plato's *Protagoras*. By Kerferd's analysis, sophistic pedagogy consisted of three areas: (1) matters of organization, (2) teaching methods, and (3) curricula—though all three were often incorporated.

The matters of organization revolved around certain forms of speech making, and one quite distinct type of performance was the *epideixeis* or public display lecture. Hippias gave such performances regularly at the Panhellenic games at Olympia. Gorgias offered to speak on any subject whatsoever in the theatre at Athens, and he spoke also at Olympia and the Pythian games at Delphi (Kerferd 28). According to Diogenes Laertius, Protagoras had been the first to introduce "contests in arguments" (*logon agonas*) or public debates, and this penchant for agonistic discourse came to be the general characteristic of the sophists (Guthrie 43).

The second pedagogical technique involved a lecture on a set theme, such as the ravishing of Helen as expounded by Gorgias. Since the sophists were often paid to provide training in speech making for the law courts, they constructed rhetorical exercises, like those of Antiphon's *Tetralogies*, which consists of a set of four speeches, giving a speech of the accuser, reply of the defendant, then a second speech on each side. The third element, the sophistic curriculum, varied among the sophists, but our general understanding emerges from Plato's *Protagoras*. Protagoras describes the curricula as follows:

But if he comes to me, he will learn only that which he comes to learn. And this is prudence in affairs private as well as public; he will learn to order his own house in the best manner, and he will be able to speak and act most powerfully in the affairs of the state. (16)

For Protagoras, there is no distinction between the public sphere, politics and law (*nomos*), and the private sphere of the “household,” since his pedagogy promises an inclusive discourse applicable to both.

Guthrie suggests a fourth commonality among the sophists, arguing that while there was no common ground in the subjects the sophists discussed, one subject they all practiced and discussed was the rhetoric or the art of the *logos* (44).

#### LOGOS AND CONTEMPORARY COMPOSITION THEORY

The persuasive power of *logos* is the theme of Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen*, wherein he argues against blaming Helen for leaving her husband and going to Troy with Paris. Gorgias considers four possible explanations for Helen’s behavior: (1) That it was by decree of the gods and of Necessity, (2) that she was carried off by force, (3) that she was persuaded by the power of speech (*logos*), and (4) that it was all the work of Love. In this treatise, Gorgias emphasizes the force of *logos*, and its ability to alter a person’s ability to think clearly and rationally. Ergo, Helen was not to blame for her actions, since she was under the spell of *logos*:

What cause then prevents the conclusion that Helen similarly, against her will, might have come under the influence of speech, just as if ravished by the force of the mighty? For it was possible to see how the force of persuasion prevails; persuasion has the form of necessity, but it does not have the same power. For speech constrained the soul, persuading it which it persuaded, both to believe the things said and to approve the things done. . . . (41)

Gorgias’ view of *logos* is that it is more potent than drugs, and he boasts, “[M]any and many a time have I gone with my brother or other doctors to visit one of their patients, and found him unwilling either to take medicine or submit to the surgeon’s knife or cautery; and when the doctor failed to persuade him I succeeded, by no other art than that of rhetoric” (Plato, *Gorgias* 67).

Gorgias explores his fascination with *logos* in *On the Nonexistent* or *On Nature*. He argues that if things are, they cannot be



known or grasped by humans, since ultimately, the concepts could not be communicated to another person because the means by which we communicate is through speech or *logos*, and this *logos* can never accurately describe the external world. What we communicate is never the actual thing, but only a *logos*, which is always other than the thing itself. He argues, “*Logos* arises from external things impinging upon us, that is, from perceptible things” (Kerferd 83). It is Gorgias’ contention that should the material world be apprehended, it is impossible to convey that to another and that we do not reveal existing things, but a *logos*, which is something other than the description of material substances. *Logos*, in other words, is not evocative of the external, but the external becomes the revealer of *logos*. Summing up *On Nature*, Kerferd concludes that, “It is not even speech that displays the external reality, it is the external object that provides information about the *logos*” (81).

Antiphon, another known sophist, also constructed a pedagogy that focused on the *logos*. In *On Truth*, he asserts that the mind (*gnome*) rules the body, and we believe what we see with our eyes, our perceptions, more than abstractions. However, when we speak, there is no reality behind our words, nothing comparable to the results of seeing and knowing. He writes,

When a man speaks he expresses no single thing or single meaning, indeed the subject of his speech is not any single thing either of the things which the most powerful beholder sees with his sight or the things which the most powerful knower knows with his mind. (Sprague 213)

This inability of our language to accurately reflect and critique reality is salient to those of us who teach reading and writing, and it has been the subject of much contention in the field of rhetoric and composition.

For instance, Thomas Kent makes note of this problematic when he suggests, “the Sophistic tradition provides the historical foundation for a paralogic rhetoric, a rhetoric that treats the production and the analysis of discourse as open-ended dialogic activities and not as a codifiable system” (25). Drawing on the work of Derrida and Davidson, Kent maintains that discourse analysis and production are hermeneutic acts, and he suggests

both that communication involves modifying our ideolects to match the ideolects of others and that we can never truly have a match. If we agree with Kent that discourse analysis and production cannot be codified, how then do we even begin to approach the teaching of reading and writing? Kent suggests that the sophists' view of *antilogike* (antilogic) offers an array of pedagogical possibilities for the writing classroom. But antilogic is a somewhat amorphous term, and so let me attempt to clarify what exactly is meant by antilogic and to examine how we, as compositionists, may glean both a theoretical and pedagogical understanding of the root of this term.

ANTILOGIKE: THE INDETERMINACY OF  
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND PRODUCTION

In the *Phaedrus* (261c4–e5), Plato condemns the sophistic use of what he called *antilogike*, which he characterizes as an argumentation technique that consists of emphasizing contradictory positions. The purpose of antilogic as a rhetorical strategy was to leave one's audience in a state of *aporia* (doubt) and thereby demonstrate the impossibility of absolutes and the labyrinth of language. Obviously, Plato disliked such slippery use of argumentation, and sought, instead, to work toward creating a rhetoric based on eternal ideas and categories.

To further our understanding of antilogic as employed by the sophists, Kerferd suggests that we must first be familiar with the concept of eristic, which is derived from the noun *eris*, meaning quarrel, or the seeking of victory in an argument. The meaning of the word is expansive enough to encompass not merely the act of victory, but the art that cultivates the devices for achieving such victory. Interestingly enough, concern for the truth is not a necessary part of the *techné*, since the primary objective is to win the argument. Therefore, “fallacies of any kind, verbal ambiguities, long and irrelevant monologues may all on occasion succeed in reducing an opponent to silence and so be appropriate tools of eristic” (Kerferd 62–63).

Antilogic, however, differs from eristic, in that it consists of opposing one *logos* to another *logos* by contradiction. Therefore, it constitutes a specific technique—namely, preceding from a

given *logos*, a position adopted by an opponent, “or the establishment of a contrary or contradictory *logos* in such a way that the opponent must either accept both *logoi*, or at least abandon his first position” (Kerferd 62–63). The problem with antilogic, as Plato sees it, is that instead of arguing on the basis of things by Kind, it proceeds on the basis of verbal contradictions.

Plato also objected to the use of antilogic because he feared that novice speakers would abuse the technique. He argues in *The Republic* that young men, first learning to argue, misuse their skills, “as in a game, appropriating them in every case in order to establish an antilogy, and imitating those who engage in cross-examination . . .” (qtd. in Kerferd 64).

Plato’s view of the phenomenal world is that it is in a continual state of flux, and, as such, “things which we say are large or small, light or heavy, may equally well be given the opposite epithet” (*Republic* 6–8). To sum up, antilogic demonstrates two things: First, that opposition between *logoi* can be simultaneous, and so, at any one time a person can be described as “tall” or “short” in relationship to whom he or she is being compared; and second, the opposition between *logoi* applies not merely to opposed arguments, but also to the facts of the phenomenal world (Kerferd 66). Antilogic recognizes that language is contradictory and unpredictable. Kent suggests that the sophists understood the hermeneutic task of interpreting the world through the contrariness of language.

Kent views the sophists’ employment of antilogic as the historical precursor for our understanding that we cannot reduce discourse to a self-referential metalanguage, and that discourse production and analysis refute systemization. Further, the dominant rhetorical paradigm in composition classrooms emerges directly from Aristotelian and Platonic rhetoric, which establishes a tradition of discourse that emphasizes categories, kinds, systems, and taxonomies—a discourse that is still the dominant model for the way in which we teach writing. However, Kent argues that “because no logico-systemic process can account for the paralogical moves we make when we produce or analyze discourse, no formal pedagogy can be constructed to teach the *act* of writing or critical reading” (36). He suggests that a much more effective way to teach reading and writing would be for teachers

to view their role as collaborators, rather than lawgivers, and rely on student literacies, thereby facilitating the students' understanding that the creation and dissemination of knowledge is socially constituted—not handed down or bestowed, but negotiated. This view of negotiating literacy is certainly consistent with contemporary composition scholarship, particularly as it has been rearticulated through the concept of the “contact zone.”<sup>2</sup>

#### MYTHOS: NARRATION AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF RHETORIC

*Mythos*, the poetic transfer of crucial cultural information, was condemned by Plato because of its “hypnotic effects.” Plato argued that it “fostered an uncritical absorption of the dominant ideology” (Jarratt, *Rereading* xxii). However, the sophists revelled in experimenting with *mythos*, particularly the use of narrative form and style. The sophistic view of rhetoric and language as playful and experimental, I believe, opens the pedagogical doors of the writing class and enables a broader, panoramic vision of rhetoric, a view that inevitably requires a revisionist definition. The first documented use of the word *rhétoreia*, or “oratory,” is in Isocrates' *Against the Sophists*, which appears to date from 392 BCE (Schiappa, *Protagoras* 43). While the hegemony of Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” has dominated the fields of communication studies and writing, Poulakos advances a sophistic definition of rhetoric: “Rhetoric is the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest *that which is possible*” (“Toward” 36; emphasis added). This perspective shifts rhetoric from the domain of the *logos*—where the only effective means of persuasion is through the presentation of *pisteis*, proofs—and instead transfers it to *mythos*, seeing rhetoric as an artistic, stylistic, aesthetic undertaking.

Poulakos examines each of these three terms—“opportune” moment (*kairos*), “appropriate” (*to prepon*), and “possible” (*to dynaton*)—and offers a vision of rhetoric that differs considerably from that of Aristotle and Plato, since it is a rhetoric that does not strive for epistemological certainty. I would like to examine each

of the three terms and consider how they may inform our contemporary notion of rhetorical pedagogy.

The sophists were keenly interested in the issue of timeliness as it related to speaking, and the notion of *kairos* dictates “that what is said must be said at the right time” (“Toward” 39). Phillip Sipiora provides a useful explanation of the term:

The rhetor must anticipate rhetorical exigencies; he or she can never know the particulars of a discourse situation until actually situated within it. And it is precisely because a rhetor cannot anticipate every important situational circumstance that he or she must carry a flexible attitude into any given rhetorical situation. (126)

While, most certainly, the sophists were concerned with the temporality of oral rhetoric, not written rhetoric, *kairos* is still applicable to the composition classroom. Walker Gibson makes clear the value of incorporating sophistic rhetoric into a writing and reading curriculum: “It’s precisely because rhetoric makes us sensitive to the limits of our own powers that it should play a major role in any curriculum” (287). In classes such as technical, expository, and professional writing, where we ask students to give oral presentations based on their written research, the teaching of *kairos* as a manifestation of rhetorical *techne* becomes, for most students, a necessary skill that reaches far beyond the writing classroom, since professional life often requires the verbal reporting of acquired research to an audience.

Complementing the concept of *kairos* is the concept of *to prepon*, the appropriate. Because situations have certain characteristics, savvy speakers understand their audiences, and speak on the subjects most appropriate to them. Again, from first-year English to advanced composition, one of the fundamental elements of composition pedagogy is to teach students the importance of understanding audiences’ needs and desires in order to persuade them to take action; deciding upon an appropriate *topoi* is an essential rhetorical skill.

However, both of these rhetorical motifs—*kairos* and *to prepon*—cannot truly be taught, and they function within what Kent might call a paralogical context. George Kennedy contends, “The two together constitute what may be called the artistic elements

in rhetorical theory as opposed to the prescribed rules” (26). The third element in this rhetorical trilogy, *to dynaton*, the possible, offers, perhaps, the most intriguing ingredient to the neosophistic revisionist position on rhetoric.

In Poulakos’ view, the possible stems from the ontological assumption that “the main driving forces in man’s life are his desires, especially the desire to be other and to be elsewhere” (“Toward” 43). In other words, the sphere of actuality, the *now*, is always lacking, and it is the future, or the *possibilities* of the future, the potentiality of the future, that is at the root of human consciousness and desire. Dreaming of the possible invites humans to envision themselves occupying a better reality, a “truer” reality, one more representative of their imagined potential. This, Poulakos writes, is where the rhetorician steps in:

The rhetorician tells them what they could be, brings out in them futuristic versions of themselves, and sets before them both goals and the directions which lead to those goals. All this he does by creating and presenting to them that which has the potential to be, but is not. Thus it is no paradox to say that rhetoric strives to create and labors to put forth, to propose that which is not. (“Toward” 43)

The possible, then, is the opposite of the actual, and a sound rhetorician relies on the narrative of possibility to encourage listeners to envision a brighter, more equitable future, enticing them to be taken in by the allure of the realization of their potential, and still, at the same time, challenges them to re-examine their present, their actual circumstances.

While those of us in rhetoric and composition have not characterized critical pedagogy in terms of the “actual” and “possible,” it is evident that they are philosophically kindred. Critical pedagogy does not merely foster critique of the political, social, economic, and intellectual status quo; it also demands social activism to remedy the “actual” in the hopes of achieving the “possible”—a more equitable democracy. In Henry Giroux’s understanding of critical pedagogy, it is the mode of critique whereby “lived cultures should interrogate the ways in which people create stories, memories, and narratives that posit a sense of determination and agency”(140).<sup>3</sup>

The attention to cultural narratives as a mediating force within critical pedagogy helps to contemporize and punctuate how the sophistic consideration of *mythos* is applicable and relevant for theorizing about composition pedagogy. Furthermore, the challenging of dominant cultural narratives has become the infantry work of three emancipatory movements—cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and feminist studies—whose theoretical and pedagogical concerns are connected to the revisioning of dominant historiographies to include those texts that have been glaringly absent from sanctioned canons. Emancipatory pedagogies seek to broaden the narrative possibilities, reinvent old stories and create new ones. The sophists clearly shared the liberatory objectives of these intellectual movements, since their pedagogical aims included making the student “aware of the potentiality of *logos* to reveal and conceal” (“Toward” 219–20). This concept of revealing and unveiling is integral to notions of ideology and semiotics. As Stuart Hall makes clear:

The social distribution of knowledge is skewed. . . . The circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others. . . . It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted. Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible. . . . The monopoly of the means of intellectual production . . . is not the course, irrelevant to this acquisition over time of symbolic dominance (“Toad” 44–45).

Clearly, sophistic pedagogy, like the rhetoric of Marxism, teaches us to be on the lookout for what is not there, what has been excluded, and to be suspicious of what has been rendered commonsensical, ordinary, and therefore, taken for granted. The philosophical imperative is to interrogate what stories are being told and who is telling them.

For instance, Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen* not only illustrates the sophistic view of *logos* and its power to persuade and manipulate (as previously discussed), but also argues in support of *antithesis* and *mythos*, since Gorgias insists upon indeterminacy in an argument:

How then can one regard blame of Helen as just, since she is utterly acquitted of all charge, whether she did what she did through falling in love or persuaded by speech or ravished by force or constrained by divine constraint? (42)

Gorgias challenges the dominant narrative and, by so doing, opens up, interrogates the notion of historical certainty; true to the notion of antithesis, he uncovers possible contradictions and a range of narratological possibilities.

It is precisely for this reason that Plato denigrates the rhetoric of Gorgias, equating it to cooking and cosmetics (and as contemporary readers we cannot ignore the obvious misogynistic references to practices that have traditionally been confined to the female domain). While Socrates does give rhetoric a role in Plato's *Phaedrus*, he insists on making it subordinate to "philosophy" (260–62). And for Aristotle, rhetoric is merely a method in the field of probable knowledge.

"FEMINIST SOPHISTICS":  
UNVEILING AUTHORITY IN THE WRITING CLASS

Jarratt draws a parallel between the exclusion of sophistic rhetoric from the traditional canon of rhetoric and the exclusion of women's discourse from the field as a whole, and she argues for re-examination of sophistic rhetoric, with its acceptance of *dissoi logoi* as a kind of postmodern discourse, confluent with the objectives of feminism and cultural studies. Further, the sophists' focus on *nomos* (custom), may be a useful starting point for the rewriting of history—a critical imperative of the emancipatory goals of feminist and cultural studies criticism. Also, Jarratt suggests that neosophistic rhetorical analysis may be the ramrod for the inclusion of texts that have been excluded from conventional canons, and that such recovery of marginalized voices "may offer increased leverage for dislodging the patriarchal institutions whose foundations were laid during the sophists' time" ("First" 39).

Indeed, Robert Wardy sees a direct correlation between the roots of rhetoric and philosophy and misogyny, and he maintains that "logos, philosophical reason itself, no matter how it varies



through the philosophical tradition, is almost universally harmful just because its misogyny lies concealed beneath a misleading ideology of false impersonality” (141). Wardy contends that Gorgias was correct to suggest in the *Encomium of Helen* that we are all “Helens open to psychic violation” by the dominating, solitary male, “the wielder of rhetorical power” (139–40).

Since the goals of both rhetoric and feminism are change, movement from one perspective to another, Dale Bauer and Susan Jarratt argue for the inclusion of what they have termed “feminist sophistic”: a teaching position that “combines the two fields for reflection on processes of change in the classroom and in society, reflection on what it means for a teacher to exercise rhetorical authority toward ends of social transformation” (149). The discourse within the liberal agenda of rhetoric and composition is to put one’s ideological money where one’s mouth is—teaching not from the pretense of liberal humanism, with its ostensible naturalization of power relations, but instead from an awareness of one’s political position within and outside the walls of the classroom: critical pedagogy. However, while the strategy of “feminist sophistic” and other such liberatory pedagogies is for the teacher to make clear his or her political and ethical commitment to social change, by no means does it advocate indoctrinating students to adopt a “politically correct” position. Instead, it argues against students’ cloaking the fixed agenda of the teacher, since such a strategy would effectively counter the goals of a critical classroom—which is to open up discussion, not artificially arrest it. Bauer and Jarratt call “feminist sophistic” a pedagogy that combines feminism with rhetoric, “linking civic responsibility for public discourse to personal experience” (150).

A pedagogy that couples the historical with the personal has its origins in classical education. Sharon Crowley points out that according to Quintilian, once a child reached twelve or so, the student was handed over to a teacher of rhetoric. The rhetorician, then, engaged his students by teaching them reading, analysis, imitation, and composition. His pedagogy also included exercises in moral reasoning and judicial speeches—producing a student who would become a citizen-orator, a “good man speaking well” (318). Crowley argues that the central focus of the educational system was,

To produce students who were not only highly literate, but who were conscious of the power, and the responsibility, conferred on them by their mastery of linguistic and discursive skills. . . . Ancient teachers of rhetoric taught their pupils that the practice of rhetoric entailed deep concern about important ethical, political, historical, and legal questions (318).

As a rhetorician, Crowley's plea for the revival of sophistry stems not from nostalgia—particularly to a time that excluded women from the discourse—but, rather, from a desire to advocate that teaching have an ethical and therefore social dimension. To ignore this teaching imperative is to be derelict in one's duties, and “from a Sophistic point of view, teachers who refuse to make judgments about which issues are more important than others, which issues deserve to be studied, and which issues should be ignored abdicate their responsibilities to their students, and to their communities” (333). Patricia Bizzell sees this positionality, or what she terms “rhetorical authority,” as a necessary component to teaching, and she contends that such a pedagogy of persuasion is more respectful to students' values, since the admission of a position problematizes the value-neutral classroom. Further, she insists that “the values-avowing teacher is saved from being a propagandist by the extent to which he or she must draw on values shared with the students in order to be persuasive” (“Teacher's” 195).

To be sure, this pedagogy of assertion is not embraced by everyone within the field, and contestations about the teacher's authority (giving up or reclamation) is a subject of much discussion. Gerald Graff, in particular, has questioned not only the usefulness of teachers' relinquishing pedagogical authority in a student-centered classroom, but also the value of assertion. He confesses,

I took up strong positions, identified myself with a cause, and stated my views “up front,” leaving students in no doubt as to where I stood. Not surprisingly, I soon discovered that the effect of this polemical onslaught was to make my students all too compliant and docile. (181)

This dilemma, which Graff terms the “Bully/Wimp Syndrome,” is not uncommon for those of us who teach writing and seek to

model the Freirean paradigm of the critical classroom; but, at the same time, we must also recognize an obligation to share knowledge with our students—not from an inauthentic position of “peer,” but from the inevitably authoritative (not authoritarian) position of teacher.

Like Crowley and Bizzell, Susan Miller also argues for a more holistic, socially responsible approach to the teaching of rhetoric, arguing that, “American teachers must reclaim the development of literacy from relative darkness to make their students the *capable thinkers and citizens* whose absence, and whose replacement by general muddle, we now feel” (56; emphasis added).

But while Miller offers a three-step approach to the incorporation of classical rhetoric in the contemporary writing class,<sup>4</sup> its prescriptive quality still seems to me insufficient to help students with the daunting task of becoming “capable thinkers and citizens.” If we buy into the argument that our pedagogical and ethical obligation is not simply to teach students how to write better papers, but to have them become more thoughtful, critical thinkers, and ergo, more politically and socially active citizens, then the question remains, how do we teach ethics in connection to writing? How can we make the same promise to our students as Protagoras does to his, that by association, they’ll “go home a better man”? In essence, how do we teach *character*? I’d like to suggest that the answer(s) to this question might best be addressed by examining critical pedagogy, whose liberatory aims are inextricably tied to the creation of elevated consciousness, a critical consciousness of social reality. How an individual acts, or rather, enacts change in the world, is certainly related to the development of character.

#### ETHOS: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND “THE POSSIBLE”

*Ethos*, as characterized by Aristotle, is one of three methods of creating a persuasive argument: “Of the *pisteis* provided through speech, there are three species: for some are in the character [*ethos*] of the speaker, and some in disposing the listener in some way, [*pathos*] and some in the argument [*logos*] itself, by showing or seeming to show something” (37). In this Aristotelian

framework, a speaker's character is integral to his ability to be persuasive, and Aristotle suggests that *ethos* may be the most effective means of proof:

There is persuasion through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly than we do others on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt. (38)

In his *Antidosis*, Isocrates emphasizes the paramount importance of an orator's character in relationship to his ability to be rhetorically effective. He writes,

Furthermore, mark you, the man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honourable name among his fellow citizens; for who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? (339)

The rhetor, in the Isocratean notion of *ethos*, exists out of time—in that the effect a particular rhetor's message has on an audience is influenced even before he or she utters a word. From an Isocratean perspective, we are persuaded by the personae of the individual, the fiction, the narrative, which constitutes that speaker's life, through his or her creation of *ethos*.

The tripartite system that constitutes *ethos* consists of virtue (*artete*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and good will (*eunoia*), and while all three are integral to the concept of *ethos*, virtue is the characteristic that I believe encapsulates the essential ideology of emancipatory movements. As Aristotle defines it, “. . . virtue [*arete*] is an ability [*dynamis*], as it seems, that is productive and preservative of goods, and an ability for doing good in many and great ways, actually in *all ways in all things*” (79; emphasis added). Virtue is defined, in a general sense, as the ability to do good, particularly if it is most “useful to others” (80). James Kinneavy and Susan Warshauer note the etymological roots of the word, tracing it to *ariston*, meaning nobility or aristocracy, “sug-

gesting that the ethical appeal is a type of cultural appeal. To be convincing, a speaker must exhibit that quality of character that culture, and not the individual defines as virtue” (175). While Aristotle goes on to list the various attributes of virtue—manly courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom—it is the virtue of “justice” [*dikaiosyne*] that most closely embraces the ethical tenets of emancipatory movements: “Justice is a virtue by which all, individually, have what is due to them and as the law requires” (80). Now, of course, what critical pedagogies teach us is that we need to move beyond laws, which are elitist and patriarchal, designed to serve and maintain the status quo; however, the concept of justice (as distinguished from the practice) is that it serves the needs of individuals within a social context. In sum, “[t]he greatest virtues are those most useful to society, in which benefits may be conferred on others through one’s acts” (Kinneavy and Warshauer 175). Poulakos’ articulation of “the possible,” with its promise of transformation, complements the goals of critical pedagogy and similar emancipatory movements, whose ideology is founded upon rectifying social injustice. Further, the way to accomplish this task is through the promise of the possibilities of rhetoric, and its power to transform the “actual.”

There are four issues here that I would like to highlight in regards to *ethos*: (1) A speaker’s rhetorical effectiveness is based on his or her perceived character, which exists outside the moment of the rhetorical act, and is, in itself, a fiction, and is therefore tied to the notion of *mythos*; (2) the characteristics of *ethos* are culturally constructed, created within a system of culturally inherited values and beliefs; (3) virtue, or the contribution of the social good through individual acts of kindness, is rhetorically persuasive; and (4) justice, as manifested through “the possible,” reflects the optimistic, transformative ideology of critical pedagogy.

How, then, do we apply the concept(s) of *ethos* to the teaching of composition? Kinneavy and Warshauer argue that explorations of *ethos* in the writing class will help students to learn how to “shape their self-image in discourse,” and to be wary of the way the media manipulate “character” to further political and social agendas (172). Such pedagogical objectives seem consistent with the goals of critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and feminism.

Further, as Jarratt and Reynolds point out, “The alliance between feminism and (sophistic) rhetoric thus makes sense historically. It is precisely the concept of *ethos* in rhetoric that theorizes the positionality inherent in rhetoric—the speaker having been created at a particular site within the contingencies of history and geography” (“Splitting” 47).

The emancipatory movements explored in this book are concerned with *ethos*—the myriad ways in which to improve upon the lives of those who have been traditionally marginalized, whose voices have been ignored, or worse, silenced. The challenge of the sophists that makes their view of rhetoric salient for those of us who teach writing is that their philosophies seem to embody a realization that knowledge and values are historically contingent, and they seem to have possessed an understanding of the relationship between the public and private, theory and practice. Sophistic rhetoric is a “study of how to make choices and a study of how choices form character and make good citizens” (Neel 211). Classical rhetoric, as rearticulated through a neosophistic model, makes it incumbent upon us to teach students what the Greeks have taught us—that academic literacy entails the ethical burden of civic responsibility.