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Playing Around the Real: Games, Play, and the Declamation Dynamic in Ancient and Modern Rhetorical Pedagogy

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For my mother.

Playing Around the Real:
Games, Play, and the Declamation Dynamic in Ancient and Modern Rhetorical Pedagogy

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This dissertation reassesses declamation, a pedagogical exercise that was prominent in the rhetoric schools of ancient Greece and Rome but that is now, by many accounts, a mere historical artifact. On the contrary, this dissertation presents declamation as the source of an essential and ongoing dynamic that not only survives but actually underlies much of what continues to take place in contemporary rhetoric classrooms. As such, this dissertation is not only about ancient declamation itself, but about a "declamation dynamic" – what Wittgenstein might have called a "family resemblance" – that is essential to any form of rhetorical instruction, particularly approaches that involve games, performance, and role-playing. This dynamic is traced to its ancient roots, and the argument is made that the study and reevaluation of this type of ancient exercise will give contemporary rhetoric teachers a clearer view of their own practices and better equip them to instill modern students with that most enduring of rhetorical values, *habitus* – the ability to intuitively grasp the constructed and contingent nature of any rhetorical situation and to adapt accordingly.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Imagine this: students in a hi-tech classroom pore over individual computers and work furiously to decipher a cryptic email from a mysterious teaching assistant who claims to be hiding from an ominous secret society embedded in the very university the students themselves attend. This is a true story: As part of an experimental alternate reality game designed to teach rhetoric, a team at the University of Texas at Austin used this far-fetched scenario as the starting point for a game in which real students learned about rhetorical concepts and skills and ultimately crafted real— and, in some cases, really impressive—multimodal arguments.

This moment in the game, the first day, the first clue was, in many ways, a testament to the power of games and play as pedagogical tools. The students were deeply engaged, losing track of time and focusing intently, creatively, and critically on the task at hand. They worked collaboratively with little or no prompting from the instructor, independently populating an online forum with tips, ideas, and progress reports. And they seemed to genuinely enjoy the task at hand, possibly even demonstrating that magic fusion of focus, awareness, and pleasure known as "flow.[1]"

At the same time, this moment epitomized the fundamental challenge facing educators who try to bring play in to the classroom workspace: To make such a game

[1] Csikszentmihalyi**,** Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* New York: Harper, 2008. Print.

pedagogically effective, it must have pedagogical "content." But to make the game a *game* worthy of the designation (and effective in the ways that make games appealing to teachers in the first place), it must also be fun and intrinsically rewarding on its own terms. The question of how to bridge this gap between content and game—or, phrased differently, between work and play—is among the most important and challenging theoretical issues of our day. And not just for writing teachers: As Jane McGonigal and others have persuasively argued, games (broadly defined) have the potential to make almost every scene of modern life, from household to office to public space, more fulfilling, more ethically engaging, even more efficient—a magical, quasi-utopian prospect sometimes referred to as the "gamification" of reality.

But many game scholars and enthusiasts note that while games indeed have the potential to remake a wide array of environments and activities in more "fun" images, for this very reason they are also open to an equally wide array of shallow forms of exploitation. Thus the term "gamification" has become a withering insult from the keyboard of hip scholars such as Ian Bogost, one of the pioneers of game rhetoric, even as it gains cachet and currency among hip advertising and marketing mavens at a variety of gamification-themed industry conferences and summits.[2] According to Bogost, gamification is a *bad* thing if it involves the importation of superficial aspects of games—levels, points, etc.—into a new domain for the purpose of product promotion or image renewal without really engaging with the deeper forms of cognitive activity that make

[2] See, for example, the "Gamification Summit," at which McGonigal was a keynote speaker.
http://www.gsummit.com/

games and play special. From a marketing perspective, however, the early evidence seems to suggest that gamification can, to at least some extent, make products, companies, and public spaces more fun, appealing, marketable—which makes it a very *good* thing, regardless of the level of real "play" (a notoriously ambiguous concept[3] anyway) involved. Which raises the question: Where is the line between good gamification and bad? And when we, as writing teachers, bring games into the rhetoric classroom, *which side of it are we on*?

The question is more complex than Bogost makes it out to be; if the mark of what he calls "bullshit" gamification is an ineffective engagement with the deep dynamics of play, then plenty of plot-heavy commercial videos could be critiqued on the same grounds. In fact, the true integration of content and play is not a litmus test for a game's authenticity; it's the essential challenge of game design itself. And a badly designed game still qualifies, I would argue, as a game, just as a badly written student essay still qualifies as an essay, or a badly planned syllabus still counts as a class. Bogost is right to distinguish between effective and ineffective uses of games and play, but in drawing a sharp distinction between these two domains, he begs his own question. The challenge is not separating real games from phony gamification but understanding what makes good gamification possible. If this dilemma seems intuitively familiar to writing teachers, that's probably because—though usually phrased in different terms to emphasize more

[3] Brian Sutton-Smith's landmark text *The Ambiguity of Play,* for example, is perhaps the most persuasive accounting of the concept precisely because it explores the very different discourses surrounding play rather than attempting (like Caillois and Huizinga) to define play itself in any absolute sense.

traditional media—it's also the essential challenge of rhetorical instruction, if not of rhetoric itself.

In the classroom, on that first day of our alternate reality game designed to teach rhetoric, the students really *were* engaged with our game[4], and they were engaged *because* of the play dynamic that it mobilized: They were (at least initially) intrigued by the story, they were challenged by the puzzle without being overly discouraged by its difficulty, and they were immediately plugged into a broader class community suddenly mobilized for a palpably shared goal. But despite these successes on the *play* side of the equation, in the final analysis, we concluded, our game failed to fully capitalize on the power of its medium—the very power evident in this initial student response—because we, as game designers, were never able to completely bridge those remarkable bursts of ludic energy, those fleeting moments of flow, with the rhetorical concepts that we were trying to teach. The *rhetoric,* the *content,* or—to use an ancient term to which I will return— the *techne* remained on the uninteresting, gamified (in Bogost's pejorative sense of the word) margins.[5]

[4] This assertion is supported by our classroom observations and notes; but we acknowledge that those observations, like this conclusion, are inherently subjective.
[5] In this first level, the key to crack the "code" required students to distinguish between fair and unfair examples of paraphrasing in a series of emails. By arranging the nonsense subject headings of the "good" emails, they gained access to a website with the next clue. But the students never picked up on this "lesson" and instead applied the (to the game designers) totally unexpected power of enthusiasm and teamwork to crack the code by brute force, simply trying every possible combination until one worked.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Yes, it is always a challenge to bridge the content of a game with the ludic energy of play, particularly when gamifying (in either sense of the word) a typically non-playful activity or environment. But gaming in rhetoric classes is different. In rhetoric, games aren't moving from the outside in—they're already on the inside. In fact, as this dissertation will argue, games and play are at the heart of the rhetorical traditional that we, as rhetoric teachers, have inherited from classical culture and continue to transmit in the classroom. Unlike marketing executives or management consultants, we don't have to rely entirely on other disciplines to inform our use of gaming. Of course, outside disciplines such as game studies, ludology, and cognitive science can inform our practice in powerful ways. But the foundations of a gamified rhetoric were laid in antiquity, even as rhetoric was coming into focus as distinct discipline. As rhetorical pedagogy changed and became more systematic and standardized in the Roman Empire, so too its games. As Greco-Roman rhetoric has continued to evolve through the centuries in its long transmission to the writing teachers of today, its unique and pervasive play dynamic has evolved as well; and even now the play dynamic is present on some level in almost everything we do in the classroom. As rhetoric-teacher game-designers, our mistake was to think of and present "rhetoric" as content and "game" as delivery system, a medicine and sugar dichotomy, when rhetoric is already, by its nature, a playful enterprise, rhetorical pedagogy already a kind of game.

But this aspect of our field has become so deeply buried (deliberately, perhaps) that we've forgotten where to find it, let alone how to use it effectively. And so now, as games gain currency in other cultural contexts, we find ourselves transfixed by the

seemingly exotic and foreign power of games, and we humbly borrow strategies and concepts in an attempt to invent a gamified rhetoric ex-nihilo without noticing the venerable, time-tested game machine moldering in our own basement. That *machine*—and I use the term to indicate both its power and replicability—is the practice of declamation.

In ancient Rome, teachers used play speeches based on fictional legal cases or scenarios drawn from history or literature to train orators; this practice provides us with a very different, and much more playful, learning paradigm from within the heart of our own tradition. Declamation dates back to the earliest Greek rhetoricians: Its purpose was almost always pedagogical, and, although (much like video games now) its practicality and ethicality were frequents topics of debate, most commentators of the day agreed to at least some degree on its effectiveness[6]. In some ways, as I will discuss, declamations are a direct ancestor of the modern argumentative essay. But declamation differs in that it was also a fun game; in Rome (particularly in the Augustan period) people voluntarily declaimed long into adulthood at both public and private social gatherings (Kennedy 316). Also unlike the argumentative papers we typically assign, a declamation never functioned as a direct model of a real-world rhetorical situation or a presentation of the declaimer's "real" opinions or beliefs. Instead, "Sophistopolis," as D.A. Russell refers to

[6] Quintilian ultimately agreed on this point, even though he was perhaps the fountainhead of a "pragmatic" line of critique that took issue with overly far-fetched or salacious declamation themes.

the world of the declamation (22), had its own (imaginary) time, place, and characters; its own government and legal system; even its own style of speech.

Of course, in antiquity these were the very features that aroused criticism about the practical value of rhetorical schools in general and of declamation exercises in particular, and many (indeed most) ancient commentators seemed to take issue with the practice in one way or another, even as they promoted or practiced it themselves. But the sheer longevity and pervasiveness of declamation in ancient culture is perhaps the strongest evidence that it not only survived these critiques but actually absorbed them into its larger rhetorical "game." Ancient anti-declamatory discourse in antiquity is often, as other scholars have noted, highly declamatory in form and tone.

A similar paradox is evident, I would argue, in writing pedagogy today. Most of our assignments emphasize carefully researched and reasoned (read *serious*) judgment, yet even the most seemingly straight-forward and pragmatic essay prompts are, in certain key ways, implicitly reflective of the playful and unreal *declamation dynamic* so explicit in those bizarre relics of a distant age. In a typical essay, when we ask students to research a controversial topic and make a judgment or argument about it, we are asking them to play the role of an interested and informed person who cares about this issue and takes a well-supported stand on it. Our hope, of course, is that this role will become reality, that the student will not only become what she plays in this particular instance, but that she will gain the skills to truly engage in other rhetorical situations as well. With this trajectory in mind, we downplay the role-playing element as much as possible, wishing, perhaps, for it

to simply disappear (thus accomplishing our goal). From a modern perspective, such a strategy seems almost self-evident.

But it is a distinctly *modern* point of view, with roots that trace as directly to Romantic individualism as to the rhetorical traditions of Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian. The default model of rhetorical instruction today is premised on the idea that students should produce—or should convincingly pretend to produce—real writing from their real perspectives to convey what they actually think about things in the real world. Post-modernism has had an important impact on the field, of course, and in its exposure of the constructed nature of subjectivities has made the role-playing element implicit in these kinds of assignments more visible—it makes sense, now, to speak of training students to inhabit different subject positions rather than to help them channel their one true voice. But it has not dislodged this essential idea, or ideal. Even if writers lack a monolithic, stable self, we still try to train them to write as *themselves*, however contingent or variable this designation might be.

The theory that most writing textbooks and teachers rely on to inform this practice is, to one degree or another, generally drawn from classical rhetoric. Yet, I suspect that it would have seemed quite strange to an ancient rhetorician. In fact, much of the very theory that we now adapt for self-consciously realistic writing assignments was probably designed for the self-consciously unrealistic activity of declamation, the largely forgotten capstone of classical rhetorical pedagogy. From the earliest modular exercises taught under the auspices of a grammarian, ancient Greek and especially Roman students were moved not so much towards the forum or courtroom as towards the front of the

classroom. It seems strange to think of declamation as an end in itself, and yet for many declaimers and declamation fans, it almost certainly was. That is not to say, however, that students were not also being trained in "real world" cultural literacy and rhetorical efficacy. It is to say that the game of declamation was part of that literacy and efficacy, despite (or, perhaps, because of) the well-defined distinction between its themes and actual speaking situations.

As mentioned above, many ancients were suspicious of declamation as a form of practical training on exactly these grounds, and declamation critique appears to have been something of a commonplace (not unlike the commonplace backlash teachers and administrators anticipate today when considering ways to introduce gaming into the classroom). But declamation was always *already in* the rhetoric classroom, so the backlash against it could hardly be separated from backlash against rhetoricians themselves (even if rhetoricians were among the harshest critics). Quintilian, the paradigmatic Roman rhetoric teacher, defended declamation (and perhaps himself) by demanding that it be as pragmatic and realistic as possible; this way, he argued, it would provide real preparation for the law courts students were, as least ostensibly, being trained to enter. Unlike many of his counterparts, Quintilian actually had considerable experience speaking in the courts, and he still believed that declamation, of a certain comparatively dry variety at least, could indeed serve as effective preparation for this real-world role (Bonner 82).

On first glance this might appear to be a clear line connecting ancient and modern approaches to writing pedagogy. But in actuality it exemplifies the fundamental

difference between them. If Quintilian is representative of the most pragmatic, realistic, and—in this respect—*modern* form of rhetorical pedagogy found in ancient Rome, then the emphasis on declamation in his classroom is itself worthy of note given the absence of anything explicitly resembling declamation, as such, in the modern classroom. But even more striking is the continuity between Quintilian's pragmatic form of declamation and the salacious variety that he derides. For Quintilian and his more extravagant colleagues alike, key aspects of the practice were so essential as to be beyond question; even the most pragmatic critiques of declamation left them untouched. They formed its conceptual bedrock; both pedagogical analysis[7] and critical commentary[8] of actual declamations from the period tended to focus on them. Which is why it seems remarkable—from a modern perspective—that all of these key principles reify the *distinction*, rather than the continuity, between courtroom and classroom, between play speech and serious speech, between declamation and reality.

In this dissertation, I identify in ancient declamation four key principles that together constitute what I refer to as the *declamation dynamic*: 1) *color*-ation or freehanded scenario-creation 2) imaginative audience construction 3) role-playing or imaginative persona construction, and 4) a game-like mediation between rules[9] and free play. My interest in these principles goes beyond historical inquiry. I believe that by theorizing ancient declamation we can come to a clearer understanding of the dynamic elements that made the play *work*—that made this original and originary rhetorical game

[7] As in the sermos of psd.-Quintilian's *Lesser Declamations*.
[8] As in the Elder Seneca's memoirs.
[9] I.E., the handbook or *techne* tradition.

both pedagogically effective and intrinsically rewarding for centuries of teachers, students, and, indeed, lifelong fans. And a better understanding of how this historical practice worked will provide modern writing teachers with an invaluable model for the self-conscious integration of gaming and play into today's classrooms. I say self-conscious integration because I believe that the declamation dynamic has always been an integral part of our ongoing rhetorical tradition. Games and play are, therefore, already part (and parcel) of our pedagogy.

Each of the four following chapters expands upon one of the key principles of the declamation dynamic outlined above. Since I see this dynamic as always operative (though not always apparent) in both past and present rhetorical pedagogy, in these chapters I discuss both ancient declamation texts and modern rhetorical theory and praxis, and I freely call on the critical tools afforded by other disciplinary perspectives whenever they seem useful. But I try to never lose sight of my primary purpose, which is to provide modern rhetoric teachers with insight that they can actually use in the classroom. And since I believe the value of ancient declamation for this audience lies primarily in its crystal-clear embodiment of these abiding but elusive principles, I begin each chapter by identifying an aspect of the ancient practice that plays this kind of metonymic role. I then move on to analyze its philosophical, rhetorical and, in many cases, scientific foundations and, most importantly, its ongoing implications.

The following brief summaries are intended to introduce the elements of the *declamation dynamic* that are the subjects of each of my primary chapters.

Scenario construction:

To be sure, declamation was a tightly constrained game with a clear set of rules. In many ways, declaimers were much more constrained than a modern writing student working on a standard essay: They were not allowed to select their own topic; they could not research their theme or rely on inartistic evidence; they were expected to adhere to a fairly rigid form. But in other ways they had an amazing degree of creative flexibility, and over aspects of the assignment that most teachers of today would consider sacrosanct. Not only could a declaimer manipulate his persona, he could also artistically manipulate the parameters and tone—what ancients called the *color*— of his already blatantly artificial rhetorical situation. More specifically, declaimers were allowed to freely augment the bare bones scenarios outlined in controversy themes with additional facts or unmentioned events, freewheeling characterizations or entirely new characters, context and backstory, details and anecdotes. The game was not so much to write a speech for a particularly challenging situation as to take a few unarguable facts and build them into a rhetorical situation and speech suited, to the best possible degree, to each other.

In this chapter I analyze the critical considerations declaimers and their critics focused on when thinking about this part of the game. Furthermore, I argue that a facility in the skill of *color*-ation actually served to instill a flexible view of all rhetorical situations and to performatively undermine the kind of rigid subject/object dichotomies that scientific objectivity in all its variations has so deeply engrained in the modern psyche. To some limited extent, as I discuss in this chapter, rhetoric teachers and textbooks today do engage with this principle—allowing, for example, students to choose

their ideal audience or publication for an argumentative essay. But I believe that a much more radical engagement would yield correspondingly richer results, enabling students to recognize the ways in which speaking in a situation to some extent *creates* that situation. This insight is similar to Kenneth Burke's observation that actors (in the "real world" sense of the word) define the situations they act in through the language they use and through their language-based motive-systems or orientations.[10] It also offers a model of reality closely supported by the findings of second and third generation cognitive science. In this chapter, I expand on my argument that a writing pedagogy that cultivates this awareness would pay off both in terms of rhetorical skills and ethical development.

Audience construction:

Declamation was a self-consciously theatrical activity. Not only were teachers and commentators such as Quintilian and the Elder Seneca explicit about parallels between play-oratory and plays on the stage, extant texts of declamations contain many meta-theatrical allusions to their own conditions of performance. For this very reason, perhaps, the live delivery of student declamations was, by most accounts, a spirited and fun exchange involving at least two levels of meaning: Declaimer-as-fictional persona performing in a fictional scenario that included the directly addressed student-audience, on the one hand; student-as-student addressing a group of peers, on the other. Since modern writing pedagogy focuses so intensely on training people to write or speak in "real" situations, this kind of performative double consciousness is usually overlooked, despite its presence in any kind of class presentation or even peer review dynamic. In

[10] See in particular *Language as Symbolic Action*.

declamation, however, it was not only made explicitly obvious by the very conditions of classroom or public performance, it was deliberately emphasized in the declamation themes themselves and foregrounded as a key part of the practice.

This matters today because theatrical consciousness is an essential part of *any* occasion for speaking or writing, and it is deeply intertwined with a rhetorical view of the world. Richard Lanham notes that theater provides an "alternate conception of human reality" characterized by artifice and self-consciousness, and, although our historical tendency has been to "ritually condemn" this rhetorical point of view, according to Lanham our ability to thrive in a new information economy depends largely on our ability to toggle back and forth between conceptions of "life as information" and "life as drama" (177). That declamation, by its mode of performance, provided a sophisticated method of training in exactly this area is one of the more remarkable aspects of the practice. In this chapter, I will examine how it achieved this in antiquity, why an engagement with broadly-defined modes of performance is essential to any rhetoric pedagogy today, and how we can find and exploit this dynamic in the classroom practices we already employ.

Persona construction:

On perhaps no single principle do ancient and modern approaches to rhetoric instruction diverge more dramatically than in the practice of role-playing. Strange as it seems today, an ancient declaimer *never* spoke in his own skin: whether the particular theme was a fictional legal case (referred to hereafter as a controversy) or a fictional or historical scenario, the speaker always spoke from an imaginary subject-position—not even the eminently pragmatic Quintilian questioned this aspect of the practice. And while

this may seem like an inevitable result of the structure of the game—in controversies speakers made legal arguments, so of course they had to speak as legal advocates rather than students, one might object—the role-playing in declamation went far beyond playing an imagined future self.

In fact, the careful selection and design of *role* was an essential part of the game, and declaimers' strategic decisions about exactly *who* to be were as carefully critiqued and praised or blamed by teachers and other observers as lines of argument, style, or delivery. In some cases it was even advisable to play not the lawyer representing a disinherited son, a divorced wife, or a deposed ruler but the son or ruler himself. Either way, the *who* created for these performances was in most cases far too specific and far too implausible for the student to simply self-identify in a one-to-one fashion; in fact, the themes seem designed to prevent this from happening, while nevertheless opening (like any good role playing game) avenues for the exploration of themes and value-conflicts that were very real and relevant to the real students' lives.

In this chapter, I will explain the importance of role-playing in declamation, I will point out elements of modern pedagogy that already reflect it, and I will argue that a more open and deliberate engagement with this principle in the classroom decreases writing-induced anxiety, loosens the hold of deeply ingrained thought patterns and ego-identifications, and generally makes for a more fun and effective learning environment.

Mediation between rules and free play:

From one perspective, classical declamation exercises formed a bridge between two persistent "images" of rhetoric—systematic rules and precepts as elaborated in

handbooks or *techne*, on the one hand; spontaneous, context-dependent receptivity to situation and kairos, on the other. But these images were actually two aspects of a unified pedagogical program: technical precepts and *progynmasmata* exercises laid the groundwork for skill integration through holistic exercises such as declamation and, ultimately, for the acquisition of an overall rhetorical habit or *hexis.*

Although rules paved the way for and theoretically informed declamation practice, particularly at beginning stages, the advanced student or professional sophist was expected to eventually transcend them in the crucible of performance. But this process of transition has always been ambiguous and difficult to teach since it is, by definition, beyond the kind of discrete content easily conveyed in the classroom. Ancient rhetoricians such as Isocrates believed that, for this very reason, the singular rhetoric teacher had to be at the very center of any pedagogical program; it was only by imitating and absorbing the teachers unquantifiable rhetoric habit that students could build on whatever natural talent they already possessed and become true orators.

In this chapter, however, I make the argument that mass export of a more-or-less standardized rhetorical curriculum across a far-flung empire resulted in the Ancient Romans' finding themselves in need of a more easily replicable method of mediating between the technical and kairotic aspects of a rhetorical curriculum. I suggest that the practice of declamation became so popular in Roman rhetoric schools because it was able to fill this gap. I use a close reading of one of Isocrates' most famous speeches to support my claim that the ultimate role of the teacher, as envisioned by Isocrates, was always already analogous to the function of a game such as declamation, insofar as it also

involved the creating an authority-governed space within which free play could occur rather than the direct conveyance of static knowledge.

In short, declamation provided rhetors the opportunity to both practice and go beyond the rules that undergirded their rhetorical education and, in the process, to hone their philosophical receptivity to situation and audience in a playful, safe space. When the University of Texas design team mentioned at the beginning of this introduction was struggling with the fluid integration of rhetorical content in the structure of a game, we could have benefitted greatly from a deeper consideration of the ways declamation, an open-ended and unpredictable game, was built upon and directly engaged with the *techne* tradition. In this chapter I will examine how this worked in antiquity and what we can learn from this dynamic as we continue to integrate games into the rhetoric classroom of today.

Chapter Two:

The "Gilded Pill": Persuasive Play and The Declamation Dynamic in Ancient and Modern Contexts

In short, declamation was a popular performance game played in Ancient Greece and Rome by rhetoric students, professional sophists, rhetoric teachers—even, for the sheer pleasure of the practice, by adult citizens in a variety of social situations. As previously mentioned, the game involved composing and delivering speeches based on themes or scenarios in the form of either fictional legal cases or scenarios drawn from history or literature. The former variety, which was generally considered to be more complex and advanced, allowed speakers a wide range of rhetorical approaches to any given theme and, as such, they would often preface speeches with a brief overview of the scenario as they had decided to interpret it , specifying which side was being taken and whether they would be playing the plaintiff or defendant directly or acting as a fictional advocate and generally giving some indication of the spin or *color* being applied to the basic facts (Kennedy 316-318). This was helpful because, in the speeches themselves, declaimers were free to modify almost everything about the cases except details explicitly laid out in the wording of themes, which was itself often a matter of close analysis and debate (Bonner 51).

Our knowledge of this ancient practice is actually based on a quite limited corpus of surviving texts. Of the four Roman sources, only one—Quintilian's *Major Declamations*—contains complete speeches, which were most likely showpieces or

example texts from one or several rhetoric schools. Another of the collections, the *Lesser Declamations* also attributed to Quintilian, is another artifact from one or more rhetoric schools, and probably consists of a teacher's lecture notes. Although it includes excerpts of speeches, it is perhaps most notable for its "sermo" passages, in which this rhetoric teacher provides direct commentary on the best way to approach specific themes.[11]

The most idiosyncratic and, in some ways, most interesting source is the Elder Seneca's *Controversiae*, the author's first-person accounts of many of the most famous declaimers of his day. This work is striking in part because it comes neither from a teacher nor from an active declaimer but rather from an enthusiastic *fan* of the practice: According to its introduction, Seneca employed his astonishing memory to record short quotes (in most cases pithy epigrams) and general reflections from a lifetime of attending declamations at the request of his rhetorically inclined sons. The performers he describes seem less like students or former students or even teachers than professional athletes passionately devoted to their sport and keenly aware of the stakes each game held for their lives and reputation. This is, at any rate, the way Seneca evidently perceived them, and he describes his literary project in grand terms as an act of preservation, a lasting memorial to those he sees as the greatest speakers of his day, despite the wholly fictitious nature of their performances: "Indeed, I think I shall be doing a great service to the declaimers themselves, who face being forgotten unless something to prolong their memory is handed on to posterity" (Seneca 1.11). He claims to be uniquely qualified for

[11] The fourth source is a collection of declamations fragments from the rhetorician Calpurnius Flaccus.

this task because he has "heard everyone of great repute in oratory, with the exception of Cicero," and he further laments how close he came to hearing even this Republican icon. Tellingly, however, the speeches of Cicero that he regrets so narrowly missing weren't the *real* speeches we think of today as the great statesman's primary and most lasting achievements in public oratory but rather his completely made-up and utterly ephemeral declamations. If not held home by raging civil wars, Seneca opines, he "might have been present in that little hall where [Cicero] says two grown-up boys declaimed with him, and got to know that genius, the only possession of Rome to rival her empire" (Seneca 1.13).

Clearly, then, while declamation is generally thought of as a schoolroom practice, and while that was certainly its origin and primary venue, in Rome it also evolved into a much more pervasive social and recreational activity. Declamations could be public spectacles (particularly if a teacher were trying to advertise for his school by showcasing his own rhetorical prowess) or private social events (Kennedy 316). They could also be personal, even therapeutic, exercises. Cicero himself writes in a letter to his friend Atticus, composed during a politically uncertain and dangerous point in his life, of declamation's simultaneously relaxing and stimulating effects: "In order not to give in entirely to depression, I have taken up certain so-called theses, which are both of a political nature and appropriate to the times, that I may keep my mind from complaints and practice myself in the subject proposed" (qtd. in Kennedy 236). He goes on to emphasize both the playfulness and ideological flexibility natural to declamation, writing that "speaking on both sides of the question, now in Greek, now in Latin, I both divert my mind for a bit from my troubles and deliberate about a relevant problem" (qtd. in

Kennedy 237). Although these two benefits may seem, on the surface, contradictory, for orators who were habituated to declamation throughout their student and professional lives, they were actually quite consonant: Indeed, Cicero seems to have found declamation so intellectually stimulating in part because of its freedom from the positions and loyalties of ordinary political life.

His view here is echoed by modern scholars such as Michael Winterbottom, who have also identified a positive virtue in the unrealistic nature of many declamation themes. Winterbottom argues that the play element of the practice allowed declaimers to focus on rhetorical skills rather than on real world issues that might have obscured and complicated the learning process (65). This dynamic would have created a safe space for learning and practice that was, for these very reasons, also fun to inhabit. In a similar vein, Jeffrey Walker has pointed to the "fictive" nature of declamation themes as a key source of the pleasure students evidently derived from the practice. Indeed, Walker points out, many students felt nostalgia for their rhetoric school days in general, and for declamation in particular, throughout the rest of their lives: "Through declamation, rhetoric's regime of 'exercise in evenly balanced cases' in a fictive parallel reality, students both cultivated through performance their rhetorical capacities and entered the 'sweet garden' of practical *philosophia* and a democratic civic imaginary, where students… experienced a kind of revelation and intellectual liberation" (Genuine Teachers 199). This may explain why so many graduates of rhetoric schools continued to declaim long into their adult lives (Kennedy 316).

A specific theme from psd.-Quintilian's *Lesser Declamations* will provide a sense of the tone of these exercises and the room for improvisation that they afforded: "A rich man took ship with a poor friend and a daughter. He was shipwrecked. The poor man rescued the rich man's daughter" (259). To this point, the theme is entirely focused on backstory; none of these details have a direct bearing on the actual legal case at issue, except insofar as they affect the ethos of the poor man. But they are integral parts of the game because they give direction and scope to the much more elaborate colors or stories that individual declaimers would be expected to supply in their speeches to flesh out the bare-bones of the scenario.

The theme continues: "There was a report that she was to marry a certain young nobleman. On a day there was a commotion in the rich man's house. The poor man and the girl were found together. Both said that the girl had been violated. The rich man commanded the girl to opt for marriage. Brought before the magistrate, she opted. Later on the rich man discovered that the girl had not been violated. He commands her to leave the poor man. On her refusal to leave, he disowns her" (259).

A number of important and typical features of controversies are illustrated here, the most obvious being their highly dramatic nature: Typical declamation motifs include shipwrecks, pirates, poison, parricides, tyrants, heroes, and, most common of all, disownings for any manner of perceived violations of paternal authority. Indeed, the most widespread critique of declamation from antiquity to the present day has been its predilection for fantastical, seemingly unrealistic scenarios. Even in Seneca's predominantly enthusiastic accounts, the power of Roman pragmatism at times

overwhelms his sheer ludic pleasure in declamation for declamation's sake: Although his early chapters laud declamatory eloquence as a kind of "holiness" (Seneca 1.10), he later claims to have become "ashamed of a long period of trifling" (Seneca 10.1), and he suddenly recasts declamation as a potentially debilitating waste of time that takes place in "safe surroundings" where "folly costs… nothing" and flashy, ineffective rhetorical flourishes can often trump reasoned argument, all of which leads to bad habits that dog "declaimers… right into the courts" (Seneca 9. preface. 2).

But the harshest critiques often came from rhetoricians themselves, Quintilian being the preeminent example. He was the most successful and famous teacher of rhetoric in Rome, so the fact that he advocated declamation as a pedagogical tool shows how widespread and deeply ingrained the practice was in the rhetorical curriculum of the day. But he was also very insistent about verisimilitude: In his *Institutes*, he insists declamation themes should bear "a very close resemblance to reality" (2.10.2); since students are, at least ostensibly, being prepared for the law courts, declamation scenarios should mimic as directly as possible the real court cases they will some day plead, while grand or "poetical" topics are merely so much "theatrical ostentation, or insane raving" (2.10.8).

Actual declamation themes, however, were by most accounts usually not realistic at all—at least not in the narrowly pragmatic sense for which Quintilian seems to be advocating. This gave rise to a widespread, commonplace tradition of declamation critique. Thus Messala, the Quintilian-like character in Tacitus' *Dialogue on the Orators*, argues that declamations are actually *harmful* to budding advocates because of the fact

that they are fictitious and separated from reality rather than focused on the important aspects of knowledge that form the material for real debates in the forum (119). In the opening scene of Petronius' *Satyricon*, the protagonist Encolpius attacks the rhetorician Agamemnon for his declamatory curriculum on very similar grounds:

> No, I tell you, we don't educate our children at school; we stultify them and then send them out into the world half-baked. And why? Because we keep them utterly ignorant of real life. The common experience is something they never see or hear. All they know is pirates trooping up the beach in chains, tyrants scribbling edicts compelling sons to chop off their fathers' heads or oracles condemning three virgins—but the more the merrier—to be slaughtered to stop some plague. Action or language, it's all the same: great sticky honeyballs of phrases, every sentence looking as though it had been plopped and rolled in popyseed and sesame. (21)

It is important to note, however, that these examples from Tacitus and Petronius are *literary* works and—despite the fact that modern scholars have cited both as evidence of widespread anti-declamatory discourse in antiquity—the negative view they present is at least somewhat mitigated by their larger context. In Tacitus' *Dialogue*, orator-turned playwright Maturnus is defending his decision to abandon a narrowly defined pragmatic form of legal rhetoric in favor of the epideictic rhetoric of the stage, a venue which the dialogue as a whole seems to present as allowing for a more politically (and artistically) effective rhetoric than speech in the Imperial courts (*Rhetoric and Poetics,* Walker 105). And the debate between Encolpius and Agamemnon in *The Satyricon* is, despite its

overtly anti-declamatory tone, marked by the performative, playful norms of declamation itself; needless to say, a declamation against declamation should probably not be taken at face value, especially in a Menippean satire (Gunderson 10). Even Seneca, after voicing the complaint quoted above about the unrealistic nature of declamation themes, continues his memoir, focused as it is on unrealistic declamation themes, with just as much relish as before. Perhaps the conventions of his day dictated that he take a time-out to give pragmatism its due (he is writing for his sons, after all) before enthusiastically returning to the game.

If this is a contradiction, at any rate, it is one that is just as evident today as it was in antiquity, with many modern scholars taking these ancient commentators' critiques at face value and making superficial plausibility the primary criterion in their pragmatically oriented praise or blame of declamation. George Kennedy, for example, has interpreted declamation as having little real pedagogical benefit, particularly from a modern point of view, because its circumscribed, artificial nature and the boldly drawn, extreme scenarios it featured bore little resemblance to the subtleties of real life and, as such, did not demand of the student "careful observation of the world" or "profound background knowledge," key goals of modern classroom approaches (333). In his influential, 1959 study of Roman declamation, S.F. Bonner took a slightly more charitable view, though with the same basically dismissive attitude towards declamation's more fantastical elements. Like Quintilian, Bonner argues that the "only justification" for declamation was its "preparation for an public life" (70). Nevertheless, he accepts the argument that salacious themes can play a justifiable role as the "the gilding on the pill" of an otherwise

purely pragmatic practice, insofar as they might help to hold the interest of adolescent male students (Bonner 39). But he sees this as a necessary evil. Indeed, his commitment to realism as the key criterion in his evaluation of the practice is perhaps most evident in his painstaking comparisons between the laws of declamation themes and their real Greek and Roman counterparts, a primary focus of his book on the subject.

This commitment to realism is at least partly reflected in Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students,* one of the most compelling adaptations of ancient rhetorical theory currently on the textbook market. These authors set forward the Quintilian position that declamation was (or could be) directly engaged with reality as "preparation for a life of active citizenship" but with the caveat that the themes in question — like the highly realistic (because based on real events) controversies they introduce as student exercises in their own book—depended on realism for their effectiveness (22).

I would suggest that a narrow emphasis on realism somewhat misses the point of the ancient practice. Even for Quintilian, it is worth noting that the somewhat conservative line he takes with regards to declamation in his *Institutes of Oratory* is strikingly at odds with the actual declamation themes (including the one quoted above) found in the *Lesser* and the *Major Declamations*, collections attributed to him in antiquity and across the intervening centuries. Those attributions may be incorrect, of course, but the distinctively Quintilian character of much of the rhetorical advice accompanying the themes and declamation fragments in the *Lesser Declamations* at least proves that, as D.R. Shackleton Bailey notes in his introduction to that collection, "their author was

intimately acquainted with his Orator's Education" whether or not it was actually Quintilian himself (2). More was at play, it would seem, than a simplistic binary between realism and fantasy.

In fact, the age-old contradiction between the commonplace view that declamation depended solely on realism for its pedagogical effectiveness and the obvious *unrealism* of declamation as it was actually practiced may reflect deeper tensions about the very nature of rhetoric as a discipline[12]. Jeffrey Walker's alternative history in *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* can help to provide one likely explanation of how this cognitive disconnect became so widespread in the ancient (and, for that matter, modern) world. Walker calls into question the traditional rhetorical origin narrative, in which the discipline begins as pragmatic political and legal discourse in Ancient Greece and gradually degenerates into increasingly less practical and more vacuous forms of epideictic speech[13] as opportunities for real, democratic discourse gradually diminish under the Roman Empire. Walker flips this account on its head, and a different story in which "the art of rhetoric, *techne rhetorike*, in fact originates not from the pragmatic discourse of the fifth-to-fourth century *rhetor* but from an expansion of the poetic epideictic realm to include, first, various kinds of epideictic prose and, ultimately, epideictic imitations of pragmatic prose" (*Rhetoric and Poetics* 18). In other words, Walker makes a claim for the historical primacy of *epideictic* rather than pragmatic rhetoric, which he sees as originally

[12] And particularly narratives about rhetoric's supposed decline during the Second Sophistic period, which was precisely when Roman declamation was at its most popular and, by many accounts, most self-indulgent point.
[13] Of which declamation would, presumably, be the most egregious.

part of the poetic tradition and which he points to as having a fundamentally important persuasive function as a shaper of values within a community, even if it did not have the narrowly defined purpose of deliberative or judicial rhetoric (*Rhetoric and Poetics* 9, 18). Viewed in light of Walker's narrative, then, declamation seems more like a return to the roots of the rhetorical tradition than a symptom of its fundamental decline.

But while this compelling alternative history would help to account for the nature of actual rhetorical practices like declamation, it is decidedly at odds with the stories rhetors have always told about themselves. Walker notes, for example, a kind of cognitive disconnect in Cicero's description of rhetoric at the beginning of his youthful work *On Invention*, in which he characterizes the discipline not "in the narrow sense of practical civic oratory" (64) but rather "as an unlimited art of persuasively spoken wisdom, one whose function is not only to win lawsuits or accomplish legislation or bestow civic honors but to shape culture," and the rest of his text, which is almost entirely devoted to precisely the narrow vision of rhetoric he begins by deriding: the "*rhetoreia* practiced in 'the petty disputes of private citizens'—private lawsuits" (*Rhetoric and Poetics* 65).

This paradox is perhaps echoed in the similar contradiction between virulent critiques by many ancient authorities of declamation themes for being too unrealistic, on the one hand, and the cultural pervasiveness of the practice as it was actually taught in the schools of those same authorities[14], on the other. But I would argue that it is *also* echoed in the seemingly contradictory desire of the ancient world's foremost declamation

[14] Psd.-Quintilian's *Minor* and *Major Declamations* being the prime examples.

"fan"—the Elder Seneca—to keep his favorite pastime and the real world of the forum as firmly delineated as possible. In marked distinction to the pragmatic perspective outlined above that declamations should always be as realistic as possible, Seneca insisted that real law cases should be as *little* like declamations as possible, and he directed some of his most pointed criticism towards declaimers who attempted to employ their play skills in the real world of the forum. Perhaps Seneca's anxiety of this count can be read as a further manifestation of the same internal contradiction that Walker notes in Cicero's early work. But--where Cicero professes his allegiance to a broad, Isocratean view of rhetoric that is perfectly compatible with a variety of epideictic genres such as declamation— then ends up focusing entirely, in practice, on realistic, narrowly pragmatic discourse without reconciling these two visions—Seneca focuses entirely on an epideictic form of discourse while paying lip service to the narrowly pragmatic forms of courtroom discourse that he ignores in his text.

Viewing declamation as a form epideictic rhetoric that existed in an uneasy tension with pragmatic forms of deliberative and judicial speech also helps to support the view, held by many modern scholars, that the practice functioned as an important method of ideological training for the young elite and, as such, did reflect the very real value system of the ancient world[15], regardless of its level of superficial verisimilitude. Robert Kaster

[15] Such a view of declamation makes even more sense given its place in the overall progression of ancient rhetoric school curriculum. Craig Gibson has recently argued that the *progymnasmata* exercises that preceded declamation were also part of a carefully engineered system of ethical training, and that the "banal, derivative, and utterly commonplace" nature of many of their moral messages is an indication of "how well the curriculum worked to reflect and reinforce the values of elite society" (30). Gibson

has argued, for example, that the extreme nature of the crises featured in declamation themes was less important than the highly traditional values by which declaimers tended to resolve them. According to Kaster, "it was one of the main effects of declamation to inculcate, by sheer repetition, approved values in the still impressionable minds of the next generation of the elite; that one aspect of declamation which most commended it to its culture was the reassuring ability it developed in the declaimer to respond to the most startling, novel, or extravagant circumstances by appealing to the most traditional sentiments and by marshaling the most conventionally 'reasonable' arguments (325). Similarly, Martin Bloomer has warned against the temptation to find in declamation a kind of counter-cultural mechanism encouraging empathy for the marginalized elements of ancient society or for engaging in social critique: "Speaking on behalf of the prostitute who applied to be a priestess or the rape victim who hesitated between choosing death of the rapist or marriage with him was not an exercise in situational ethics nor did it necessarily impart any enlightened state. It did naturalize the speaking rights of the freeborn male elite." Furthermore, "such school exercises with their projection of idealized social and family order are a kind of social comfort, a reassurance to and from the elite as well as a linguistic training of that elite" (Bloomer 58). In a more recent monograph on the subject, Neil Bernstein also accepts this interpretation, arguing that by performing "the roles of characters subject to social pressures that they knew they would

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claims are, in a way, parallel to Kaster and Bloomer's claims about declamation, insofar as his sees the ideological content of the *progymnasmata* as one of their most important features.

never encounter in their real lives," ancient rhetoric students were actually being taught "that the right to speak publicly was reserved for men like themselves" (7).

In fact, it has become something of a critical commonplace in contemporary studies of ancient declamation that it did not provide a forum for social critique, that it did not engender critical awareness, and that it was not intended to have these effects. But at least one scholar, Christy Friend, has directly questioned these interpretations of the normalizing ideological function of the practice, arguing instead that it did create a discursive space for *possible* social critique, even if the effect was not always very subversive. According to Friend, "the prominence of legally disenfranchised groups in the *controversia* themes cannot be underestimated" (306), and she even goes so far as to claim that declamation embodies "several practices advocated by contemporary critical pedagogy: a focus on ethical and political conflict; a concern with the positions of legally disenfranchised groups; an insistence that students, no matter what their initial opinion, listen to and sometimes try out unfamiliar perspectives on the issue—including those of oppressed groups; and teacher advocacy of nonmainstream perspectives" (310). Friend does not claim that transformative social critique always occurred through declamation, and she admits that the arguments outlined above—the view that declamation was, at least in part, a reflection and reinforcement of elite roman values—are "a valid critique, for all declamations are framed within the context of a legal system that assumed the noncitizen status of women, children, and slaves" (311). She admits, as well, that "declamation was not perceived by its proponents as a subversive forum, nor did it motivate large-scale social change"; but she nevertheless parts ways with Kaster and

Bloomer in contending that the practice "did foreground conflict, focus on minority concerns, open spaces where radical arguments could be voiced, and encourage students to think in these terms" (312). Like my own project in this dissertation, she finds in declamation direct implications for present-day pedagogy. Less similar, however, is her marked personal investment in critical pedagogy, which leads her to search for specific correspondences between declamation and this contemporary school of thought, and perhaps limits her structural analysis of the practice as a whole. All the same, comparing ancient declamation to contemporary critical pedagogy is an undeniably bold and inspiring move.

By contrast, other scholars who have also identified in declamation a kind of critical function—or at least the potential for one—have tended to describe it as an indirect or even inadvertent result of the practice. Erik Gunderson, for example, has found in ancient declamations "a zone of intellectual engagement where serious questions are elaborated in a pointedly frivolous context" (6). Gunderson argues that the unrealistic nature of many declamation themes can be seen as a kind of political buffer that enabled off-limits, dangerous topics and points of view to be examined and performed. He notes the way that, in controversy themes, "the real keeps on intruding: political allegory, individual advancement, and the nature of authority in general return endlessly to the scene of declamation" (6). But where Friend suggests that declamation might actually have been intended to function as a forum for direct social critique, according to Gunderson, any critique it allowed for occurred on a more subtle, psychological, structural level. For example, he argues that because the practice "did not merely mime

'real' rhetoric in the sense of offering an imitation of forensic oratory," but also mimed "the very psychic rhetoric by which [ancient Romans'] self-relation is produced and sustained," it had the power to "reveal the syntax and grammar of Roman identity" and thus to inspire a kind of critical awareness (18). But this awareness was neither revolutionary nor overt; rather, it was a "mode of reflection" mobilized not "in the name of critical break with the rules of the game, but instead… in the name of a fuller reinvestment in the game itself" (233).

Regardless of their interpretation of the ancient declamations' critical function or pedagogical effectiveness, almost all modern scholars writing about the practice have noted that it was, first and foremost, a kind of game. This is important because many contemporary scholars in a variety of other disciplines, though not writing specifically about declamation, have come to recognize the potential benefits of games and play as legitimate classroom practices. Furthermore, since the most common pedagogical uses of games involve some form of role-playing, a connection is easily drawn to the practice of declamation. James Gee in his landmark *What Video Games have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* argues, for example, that games facilitate the acquisition of complex sets of skills through "identity work," as players (particularly in role playing games) adopt different identities and form bridges between old and new identities as new kinds of knowledge are gained (51). The essential dynamic involved in this process of skill acquisition, according to Gee, is the eventual recognition by students/players that the play identity they've adopted for purposes of a classroom exercise lies within their real

reach: “If learners in classrooms carry learning so far as to take on a projected identity, something magic happens… The learner comes to know that he or she has the capacity, at some level, to take on the virtual identity as a real world identity” (66). Similarly, in his groundbreaking book *Augmented Learning*, Eric Klopfer explores the use of handheld technologies such as PDAs or smart phones to create mobile, immersive games involving realistic scenarios that place players in the role of an expert in a given field (for example, an environmental engineer investigating a chemical leak). Klopfer argues that such “epistemic games” are effective learning tools, particularly when they cause players to truly see “themselves in the role that they are playing—this means that the game effectively creates the simulated real-world experience for the player” (124). In addition, situating games like these in real environments reinforces learning by incorporating a wide range of sensory details: “Buildings, people, smells, sounds, and even feel become a part of the game, allowing for tight connections between the player, the game, and the real world” (123). This approach uses technology to take the “very close resemblance to reality” that Quintilian called for in declamation themes to an extreme (2.10.2).

In an interesting twist on this line of thought, Jane McGonigal has recently garnered considerable scholarly and popular attention with the argument that games should not more closely resemble reality but that *reality should more closely resemble games*. According to McGonigal, “games are fulfilling genuine human needs” and “providing rewards that reality is not” (4). As such, she calls for an application of “the lessons learned in game design to reality itself,” so that we can “engineer alternate realities: new, more gameful ways of interacting with the real world and living our real lives” (115). The

kind of pervasive gamification that McGonigal calls for is increasingly plausible, as Montola, et. al discuss in their practically oriented manual *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design*. Indeed, this technique is becoming more and more common not only in schools, but in offices, stores, city streets, and even cemeteries.

The wide range of scholars and game designers creating or theorizing these types of games differ in their particular techniques, technical terms, and agendas. But they all share an essentially pragmatic orientation: Whether they believe that reality can be improved by becoming more like games or that games can better prepare people for professional life by closely mimicking reality (or some combination of the two points of view), they have the same underlying goal of improving reality through play. Other scholars, however, have warned that this seemingly noncontroversial (and, as seen above, highly traditional) point of view entails subtle dangers. As discussed in my introduction, the game-oriented rhetorician Ian Bogost recently penned a controversial online article decrying the rise of shallow, exploitative gamifiction in exactly these kinds of contexts ("Gamification"). His dissatisfaction really isn't all that surprising: Though often grouped with pragmatically inclined (in the sense I've been discussing in this chapter) game scholars like those discussed above, Bogost's influential *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* approaches games and play with a very different—and perhaps more rhetorical—emphasis than scholars such as McGonigal or Gee. In this text, Bogost outlines his concept of "procedural rhetoric": video games, he argues, do have singular pedagogical value because of their similarity to real world contexts and institutions. But this value lies not in their ability to directly prepare students through

mediated trial runs; rather, as artifacts for rhetorical analysis, games expose their own constructed, rule-governed nature, which in turn exposes the constructed and rule governed nature of real situations and institutions.

According to Bogost, games frame arguments by crafting "possibility spaces" delimited by sets of rules; as such, they persuade by modeling how social or cultural systems function, successfully or unsuccessfully, in the real world. By critically engaging (or even creating) these systems, then, students learn to question and critique broader, often implicit, social systems at work in their lives[16]. While this exposure or heightening of awareness may have pragmatic benefits as preparation for living in the real world, these benefits more closely resemble the benefits of cultivating what Dionysius calls the "one great character" than the direct, one-to-one benefits of either the kind of "epistemic" role playing/career preparation games that Klopfer describes or the realistic court cases that Quintilian seems to be calling for in his *Orator's Education*.

The arguments are not as radically new as they might seem, even in a modern context. In a fashion perhaps more akin to the pervasive games that McGonigal describes, theatre scholars and practitioners have long used theatre games to reflect and re-imagine their immediate environments. Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* is perhaps the most interesting and illustrative technique for achieving this result. In the introduction of Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, a collection of theatrical instructions and prompts not unlike declamation themes, he calls theatre "the art of looking at ourselves"

[16] This bears comparison to Gunderson's view of the critical function of ancient declamation (discussed above), although the process is much more conscious and deliberate in Bogost's analysis.

(xxx). In his games, participants perform social problems or anxieties and, through performance, allow the "Spect-Actors" the chance to learn about and creatively address these issues. By thinking about the world in a more theatrical sense, he writes, people are better prepared to deal with its contingencies: "Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, real passions — just as we all do in our daily lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theatre, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage" (xxx).

In this way, theater games help to bridge discussions of ancient declamation and modern game studies, and perhaps even to provide a synthesis between the different approaches to games exemplified by McGonigal and Bogost. For example, ethnographer Victor Turner, like Bogost, uses games to heighten student awareness of social or institutional structures. In *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Turner argues that students learn much more effectively about a foreign culture by actually enacting that culture through organically developed performances. This practice of what he calls "ethnodramatics" enables students to understand and experience other social structures in a far richer and more nuanced fashion than by simply reading or watching films (89). Ethnodramatics, then, bears comparison in terms of both purpose and method to ancient declamationas interpreted by Friend (see above), and provides further support for the value of these kinds of performative practices in the modern classroom.

I began this chapter with a general description of the institution of Roman declamation and then focused on a specific area of tension in the ancient literature between pragmatically realistic and playfully fictive views of the practice. I then discussed a similar area of tension in modern discussions of pedagogically-oriented play between, on the one hand, games that function pragmatically as direct preparation for real life and, on the other, games that use procedural rhetoric to stimulate critical awareness, before briefly discussing performance and theatre games as a possible bridge between these notions of games-as-pragmatic-training and games-as-structural-critique.

I would like to conclude with the claim that what I refer to as the trans-historical *declamation dynamic* accounts for the similarity between discussions of declamation in antiquity and discussions of gaming today, and it also accounts for the power of theater and performance as a kind of critical middle ground. From a theatrical perspective, the declamation dynamic uses performance to train people to function more skillfully in a variety of real situations by learning to see those situations theatrically (or rhetorically). But the same can be said of this dynamic from the perspective of game studies, or, indeed, from the perspective of ancient rhetoric. In all of these contexts, a similar result is achieved by very similar (performative, playful) means. The constantly-shifting common ground that makes this possible—the declamation dynamic, the "one great character,"—will be the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter Three:

Make the Road By Walking: Declamatory *Colores* as Emergent Cognition

Picture yourself as an elite, intergalactic agent on a mission to rescue an obscure space colony that has been attacked by aliens. Upon arriving, you find that a mysterious plant with the power to control minds has overpowered the free will of most of the surviving human inhabitants, turning them into an army of killer zombies determined to stop you at all costs. Should you try to save them? Or should you simply blast your way through to complete your mission? Decide whether they still qualify as humans in their zombie state. Then explain your decision to your team of soldiers.

Now picture yourself as a leader in an isolated island colony recently stricken by a sudden and unnatural famine. A month earlier your city sent an agent in search of grain. You gave him your fastest ship; you pooled your resources; you set a date for his return. But in his absence, things soon became so desperate that the populace – including you – resorted to eating the bodies of the dead. The agent returned on the agreed upon date with twice as much grain as expected, thanks to some shrewd business dealings during a time-consuming extra stop on his way home. Find a way to redeem your city's collective humanity by blaming the agent for this moral disaster and convicting him in a court of law.

The first scenario is adapted from a mission in BioWare's bestselling video game *Mass Effect*. The second is a declamation problem traditionally attributed to the Roman

rhetorician Quintilian. In both cases, though, the "solutions" available to players depend on their ability to not only intervene in a crisis situation through speech but also to transform the very nature of the situation through the way they speak about it. Players must, in other words, *speak into being* a world in which actions, responsibility, and the very sanctity of human life are viewed and valued in ways conducive to their particular arguments.

I introduce these two examples because they highlight what I see as an important similarity between the ways declamation themes and virtual environments such as video games train people to think about rhetorical situations. In the video game *Mass Effect*, a player confronted with this dramatic crisis would have to not only fight her way out in order to survive the level (the game is a "first-person shooter," after all) but also use strategic dialogue with other characters to determine goals, define enemies, and rally enough friends to make winning even possible. Similarly, to "win" in the game of ancient declamation, a student needed to not only find the available means of persuasion in the imaginary situation at hand but also to actively invent the rhetorical situation within the broad parameters of the overarching declamation theme. This paradoxical dynamic reflects the highly rhetorical manner in which the ancients saw "reality"—a view strikingly applicable to many digital environments. Nevertheless, this view is just as strikingly at odds with most approaches to contemporary process-oriented composition theory. This is true even (perhaps *especially*) of the "social-epistemic" approach that now dominates our discipline, despite its focus on the constructed nature of social discourses and their relation to the writing process. I see this as a problematic contradiction.

In this chapter, then, I briefly trace the rise of this social view in the history of process theory, and I make the argument that it harbors an often implicit but powerful investment in scientific realism. I then analyze two ancient sources as paradigmatic examples of the very different way Imperial Romans saw the relationship between imagined and "real" worlds before situating this distinction in the context of a broader conflict between scientific realism and kairotic indeterminacy in the history of rhetoric. The training that ancient rhetoric students received in declamation was deeply informed by this broader, anti-foundational view, and I present a key aspect of the ancient practice—the *color*—as an alterative pedagogical model that achieves many of the ethical and critical goals of social-epistemic composition theory but without its philosophical investment in realism. Finally, I return to the world of *Mass Effect* to demonstrate the particular relevance of the kind of training afforded by declamation for the digital and virtual worlds contemporary students are increasingly faced with in their "real" lives outside and after school.

Realism in the Social View of Process Theory

Almost thirty years ago, Lester Faigley famously observed that "expressive" and "cognitive" views of process theory were being increasingly called into question by an emergent approach to process that he dubbed the "social view" (157). Since then, the social perspective has become so dominant in the field that, despite its roots in the process movement, it is often seen as something fundamentally different – a new

paradigm shift[17] altogether. According to Ronald Brooks, such "post-process" scholars tend to define themselves in opposition to the process movement on the grounds that, first, it "attempts to make generalizations about the writing process, which is far too complex a phenomenon to measure empirically; and second, the method of teaching that has emerged from the process movement too often ignores social and cultural factors of writing" (96). What is perhaps most interesting about these "post-process" critiques is how precisely they replicate Faigley's decades-old, three-part breakdown of the process movement itself, taking something very similar to the "social" view of process Faigley identified and called out cognitive and expressive views for almost identical reasons. Process or post-process, it seems, the conversation has stayed largely the same.

Even so, the power relations have certainly shifted. Now, the scholarly consensus has definitively moved beyond strong views of subjectivity and authentic expression, on the one hand, and computer-influenced cognitive models of the stages of the writing process, on the other. Almost everyone can now agree, to a greater or lesser extent, on the social nature of the act of composition. This is clearly reflected in contemporary rhetoric textbooks, regardless of their more subtle theoretical allegiances.

For example, John Trimble's long-lived *Writing with Style* opens with the decided social view that every profession, including writing itself, has a distinct "style of thought that must be mastered before a person feels at home in it" (3). This recognition of the

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[17] The notion process theory as a "paradigm shift" in writing instruction goes back to Maxine Hairston's influential 1982 article "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing," from *College Composition and Communication* 3 (1982): 76-88.

power and importance of what discourse analyst James Paul Gee refers to as "'Big D' Discourses"[18] is perhaps a key reason Trimble's text – despite its decidedly expressivist bent—has remained so relevant and marketable, even in a "post-process" world[19]. Similarly, the first lines of the preface to Gerald Graff, Kathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst's much more recent and very popular textbook *They Say/I Say* sum up their overarching goal as "to offer students a user-friendly model of writing that will help them put into practice the important principle that writing is a social activity" (vii). The authors' allusion to computer jargon ("user-friendly model of writing") signals, from the very first page, the cognitive leanings of their template-based approach. But it is couched in explicitly social terms.

Interestingly, the social view has been one catalyst for the contemporary revival of ancient rhetorical theory and pedagogy. One of the best examples of this trend is Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's textbook *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. In the preface, these authors clearly identify ancient rhetoric with a process-oriented social focus and situate it in opposition to what they see as a troubling emphasis on product in current-traditional rhetoric:

> We appealed to ancient rhetoric as the source of our thinking for this book because ancient rhetoricians invented and taught an art that was immersed

[18] Gee defines Discourses as "socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the 'right' places and at the 'right' times with the 'right' objects (associations that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network')" (34).
[19] Originally published in 1975, by 2000 the book had gone through two editions and been reprinted 32 times (Trimble vii).

> in the daily traffic of human events and in communal discourse about them. In this the art differed markedly from the modes of composition ordinarily taught in school today, which present writers and speakers with an abstracted set of pseudoscientific rules that dictate how a finished discourse ought to look. (xii)

They also cite the "ancient assumption that rhetoric cannot be fruitfully studied and practiced apart from the issues that engage the communities it serves" to justify their decision, throughout the text, to contextualize and frame ancient rhetorical theory with very real and very current "contested topics in contemporary political and ethical discourse" (xii).

As effective and useful as this textbook certainly is, I would argue that it contains a subtle but important contradiction in the way that it squares its deep investment in practicality and current events with the deliberate unrealism of the many ancient rhetorical exercises that it re-imagines for contemporary students. Unsurprisingly, this contradiction is most apparent when the authors discuss ancient declamation. On the one hand, they acknowledge the playfulness inherent to the ancient practice. They observe that modern writing teachers, by contrast, often miss the fact that:

> messing around with language is fun. Composition need not be undertaken with the deadly seriousness that moderns bring to it... Ancient peoples fooled around with language all the time… Romans who live during the first centuries CE held rhetorical contests called declamation, the object of

> which was to compose a complicated and innovative discourse about some hackneyed situation involving pirates or angry fathers. (27)

But only a few pages earlier, they offer a sort apologetic defense of these same kinds of practices, arguing that the use of "artificial rhetorical situations" in the *progymnasmata* and declamation had the highly *practical* underlying purpose of teaching ancient students "something about the community they would later serve, as well as about rhetoric. In other words, they did not study rhetoric only to learn its rules. Instead, their study was preparation for a life of active citizenship" (22).

I would certainly agree with both of these basic claims—declamation themes were indeed intended to teach students something about the communities in which they lived, and the rhetoric schools were certainly preparation for real social engagement. But I disagree with the implication that the playfulness exemplified by "hackneyed" declamation themes (27) was somehow ancillary to the serious business of learning something important about real communities (22). On the contrary, I believe that one of the most essential and pedagogically effective aspects of ancient declamation was the way it used playfulness and unreality to teach students about the malleability of the discourses that defined their real communities and gave them practice in shaping social context for persuasive purposes.

Roman Power Plays: Two Examples from Ancient Texts

Two stories from ancient sources are particularly illustrative of the rhetorical and contingent way the ancients saw their "real" social world in this kind of malleable—even artistic—way. The first is Tacitus' *Dialogue on the Orators*: Closely modeled on

Ciceronian dialogues such as *On the Ideal Orator*, the text opens as two seasoned lawyers call on their friend and former colleague Maturnus, a man who has abandoned the courtroom and forum in favor of the theater. Despite his shift in profession, the orator-turned-playwright's newest work has apparently provoked a dangerously political response: a public reading of the drama (a history of the controversial Republican hero Cato) has "offended the feelings of powerful men, because (so ran the charge) [Maturnus] had forgotten himself in the plot of his play and had presented the views of Cato alone, and there was much talk in Rome about this" (94). The lawyers seek to persuade their friend to abandon the stage and return to the (as they see it) more practical and less dangerous world of forensic oratory.

One of the immediately striking things about this exchange is the way Maturnus defends his new poetic calling: Although he sees drama as fundamentally superior to the practical demands of "speeches and lawsuits" and the "cases of so many friends and the client relationships of so many communities and towns" (94-95), he nevertheless sees it as a kind of rhetoric, a "loftier and holier form of eloquence" (95). Indeed, as Jeffrey Walker notes, the kind of poetic eloquence that Maturnus defends may be closer to the original notions of rhetoric than the "speeches and lawsuits" that Maturnus' friends (and, indeed, most modern rhetoric teachers) see as the discipline's proper domain. Although a standard history of rhetoric begins with pragmatic political and legal discourse in Ancient Greece (especially Athens) and gradually devolves into epideictic display oratory (of which declamation in the Second Sophistic is perhaps the consummate form), in his book *Rhetoric and Poetics,* Walker outlines an alternative history that *begins* with epideictic

oratory, which was then gradually expanded to include more pragmatic forms of speech (18).

According to Walker, the sophists, with their holistic approach to rhetorical education, were the direct successors of the poets; originally, rhetoric and poetics were a unified discipline (28). Over time, technical rhetoric came to represent rhetoric as a whole, but this severed rhetoric from its poetic roots and, since a purely technical rhetoric (as exemplified by the handbook tradition) is an unsustainable concept, this situation gave rise to many contradictions (40). At the beginning of Cicero's youthful work *On Invention*, for example, the great orator praises a liberal vision of a broadly defined *logon techne*, but in the rest of the book, he tightly circumscribes the realm of rhetoric within spaces practical, legal, and deliberative (64). Only in his later years, with more mature works such as *On the Ideal Orator*, was Cicero able to at least partially reconcile these two perspectives.

The *Dialogue on the Orators* is very much in response to this larger debate about the nature and proper domain of rhetoric. Maturnus presents an essentially sophistic point of view, arguing not so much in favor of poetics over rhetoric as in favor of a more poetic form of rhetoric (Walker 134). Even Aper, one of his interrogators in the dialogue, seems to recognize the implicit return to tradition in Maturnus' chosen "task" of adding "Roman names such as Domitius and Cato and also events of our history to the tales of the Greeks" (95). And although Maturnus seems to be favoring, with this poetic and historical focus, a withdrawal from the domain of everyday political concerns, the dangerous response to his play clearly demonstrates the real persuasive power plays

could have—often by implicit analogies to contemporary events. Indeed, Maturnus makes the case that in the political stability of the *Pax Romana,* eloquence (of the more practical kind) had no other place: "Who does not know that it is more advantageous and better to enjoy peace than to be assailed by war? Nevertheless, wars produce more good soldiers than does peace. The situation with eloquence is similar" (126). But the poetic rhetoric he favors is still a form of politicized rhetoric, and he still refuses his friends' admonitions to bow to political pressure and make his title character "a Cato who is not indeed better but nonetheless not so likely to cause trouble" on ethical grounds: "You will read [in my revised version] what Maturnus [speaking of himself in the third person] considered his duty and you will recognize what you have heard" (94). Furthermore, he speaks of his upcoming project much as an orator might have spoken of a planned speech: "I have already arranged the material for this play and have molded it in my mind" (94).

Plays with characters such as Maturnus' Cato were rhetorical because of the light they threw on "real" events, potentially making those real events—by virtue of the spin that followed from their unreal performances—fundamentally different rhetorical situations. The idea that the same thing can be seen in more than one way is at the heart of the rhetorical tradition; it is also at the heart of Maturnus' argument about the greater propriety of a "holier" form of poetic "eloquence" in the context of the Augustan Roman Empire. Proofs such as that "if some state should be found in which no one did wrong, the orator would be unnecessary among guiltless people, as a doctor is among healthy ones" (Tacitus 129) sound strikingly similar to arguments from the much older Greek

sophistic text *Dissoi Logoi*: "Some say that the good is one thing and the bad another, but others say that they are the same, and 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. I myself side with those who hold the latter opinion… And again, illness is bad for the sick but good for the doctors" (*Dissoi Logoi* 2-3). Maturnus' defense of poetics, then, uses rhetorical techniques and sounds much like a declamation. Indeed, when he tells his orator-friends that if "some god had suddenly exchanged lives and times" and placed them in a more politically turbulent context (like the ones he has been writing about in his plays, and like the ones featured in declamation themes) then they "would not have lacked that very great praise and glory in eloquence" enjoyed by the great orators of the past (130). The unstated implication of this argument is that Romans in Maturnus' age could still achieve such dramatic glory and praise, still enjoy the artistic benefits of turbulence and political instability—in plays and declamations. And these unreal productions had a very real impact on the political reality of Imperial Rome.

To illustrate exactly how performance could affect reality during this period, I turn now to a second example, this one from the declamation memoirs of the Elder Seneca. While recounting the ways different declaimers approached a particular declamation problem involving a man accused of insanity for adopting a very lowborn grandson, Seneca tells the story of how his friend Latro inadvertently "said something that was harmful to himself rather than to his declamation. He was declaiming it in the presence of Augustus and Marcus Agrippa, whose sons—the emperor's grandsons—the emperor seemed to be proposing to adopt at that time. Agrippa was one of those who were made

noble, not born noble. Taking the part of the youth [the father's son, who protests the adoption], Latro said: 'Now he is by adoption being raised from the depths and grafted on to the nobility'—and more to this effect" (315). Gunderson notes that, in this story, Latro has "unexpectedly made a piece of social commentary. He has just implied that Agrippa's kids are like the sons of a whore. It is possible to excuse and cover over their birth, but there will always remain a controversy over the nature of status that reminds one of a controversia" (102). For Gunderson, then, the implied social critique was already in the air whether it was articulated in a declamation or not, and he interprets this episode as an interesting example of the dialogic relationship between declamation and reality. But the more salient point, I think, is that the world in which Augustus' soon-to-be-adopted sons could be seen as socially unworthy was created by speech acts such as (indeed, epitomized by) Latro's declamation. Latro could not apologize—was, as Gunderson aptly notes, "silenced by his own speech" (104)—because any additional speech would further concretize the offending rhetorical situation that his declamation had accidentally called into being. Intentionally or not, he had placed the real Augustus, by analogy, within the *color* of his imaginary declamation (a concept to be discussed in greater detail below). He had, as the linguist J.L. Austin might have put it, made an "illocutionary statement," a speech act that does something real without describing or referencing a preexisting, stable state of affairs. As historian John Alexander Lobur notes, "the themes and arguments that occurred in declamation" were easily transferred "to situations in the political realm." And this had real consequences. Latro's situation as a whole "demonstrates the extent to which the ruling family was at the mercy of construal" (135).

This potential for real political impact through declamation also helps to explain why the emperor was unable to retaliate or punish Latro for the speech: As Gunderson notes, not only did the imperial ethos, with its requisite *humanitas*, oblige Augustus to "kindly receive art as art even while appreciating that life and art converge" and thereby avoid "embodying the illegitimate power of a declamatory tyrant" (Gunderson 104), he was also forced, to use a sports metaphor, to play it as it lies—to accept the world as it has been called forth by speech and then remake it through further speech rather than try to forcefully unmake it through tyrannical action. The use of brute force would, in effect, attempt to deny the reality of the world created by discourse and destroy the game by denying (or trumping) the authority of its (declamatory) rules. This approach might have seemed a dangerously doubled-edged sword: the emperor's "real world" authority was also, after all, partially dependent on discourse, and Augustus was acutely aware of the necessity of winning and keeping approval for his new political role from both the masses and the aristocrats (such as declaimers). Victory in battle could only go so far towards establishing legitimate rule; to be emperor, Augustus had to articulate the role of emperor and then be taken at his word. After calling the Roman Empire itself into being, he had colored this autocratic political organization as consonant with (if not the culmination of) Republican values—he had, in other words, created a kind of rhetorically effective (if ironic) *color* for his ascension to absolute power. Indeed, his very name was, as Edward Gibbons points out, a carefully calculated rhetorical coloration of his persona and role in the new empire: "It was proposed in the senate to dignify their minister with a new appellation [January 16, 27 B.C.]; and after a serious discussion, that of Augustus was

chosen, among several others, as being the most expressive of the character of peace and sanctity which he uniformly affected" (60).

Augustus' real world rhetorical challenge as the first Roman emperor was analogous in many ways to the simulated challenge presented by declamation themes, and he responded to it with a kind of *color*. This worked both ways, though: imperial ideology may have depended, in part, on the practice of declamation for its ideological justification among elite Romans. As Lobur observes, declamation themes often had the distinct rhetorical purpose of recasting some Republican symbol (some as Cicero) as an "amalgam of imperial virtues"—even as (or because) it allowed an elite imperial Roman declaimer a venue to "foreground his mastery of and commitment to republican *dictio*" (158). As such, declamation themes actually preceded and influenced the formation of an Imperial ethos (Lobur 163). Although the Emperor monopolized the ability to achieve "the consensus universorum so dearly sought by competing republican elites," he nevertheless "did not deny the actual necessity of obtaining it"; in fact, his political success depended on "convincing the citizenry that it was his top priority" (8). Since many declamation themes could be used to creatively accommodate Republican values to imperial realities, in one sense declamation *created* imperial "ideology and symbolic imagery" (163), not the other way around. Given this paradoxical dynamic, it seems much more plausible that, for declaimers themselves (including rhetoric students from aristocratic Roman families), declamation also, as Gunderson puts it, exposed society as an "effect of the pleading"(Gunderson 7) by modeling the dependence of reality on what

it said about reality. But this does not necessarily mean that, for ancient Romans, a reality dependent on rhetorical speech acts was any less real.

Scientific Realism vs. Emergent Cognition

These stories from the ancient literature are relevant for modern teachers and composition scholars because they crystallize an age-old and ongoing conflict between scientific realism and rhetorical indeterminacy. Cognitive scientist Mark Turner, for example, sees the search for abiding cognitive structures as the most important frontier for research in the social sciences, and he acknowledges that the discipline of rhetoric has been engaged in exactly this kind of systematic investigation for centuries: "The rhetorician strives for conscious awareness of these cognitive operations and conceptual structures, in the hope of discovering ways in which to manipulate them" (153). Nevertheless, he warns against taking rhetoric as the banner or umbrella for the kind of emerging scholarship that he predicts: "Rhetoric in our time has fallen on abject and humiliating circumstances. It is now associated for the most part not with research but with fraud, poverty, and the humanities. We cannot afford these connotations; we must have others: bold scientific research, emerging syntheses, new paradigms, wealth, rigor, power, truth" (154).

Turner's argument will seem familiar to anyone with a passing familiarity with the history of rhetoric—it is essentially the same one that Socrates makes in Plato's *Gorgias*. According to the anti-rhetorical tradition Turner has inherited and exemplifies, there is a continuum between science and quantifiable truth, on the one hand, and the humanities, fraud, rhetoric on the other. Poor, dissembling rhetoric, in other words, simply isn't

scientific—true—enough. And Turner's position is valid if science is defined in essentially dualistic, realist terms. Given this definition, in fact, cognitive science—but not rhetoric—seems to offer a way out of the vexing, age-old epistemological dilemma of subjectivity itself. As Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch note in their groundbreaking work *The Embodied Mind*, the insights of cognitive science have inspired a refocusing of both philosophical and scientific inquiry away "from concern with a priori representations (representations that might provide some noncontingent foundation for our knowledge of the world) to concern with a posteriori representations (representations whose contents are ultimately derived from causal interactions with the environment)" (137). This essentially sidesteps skepticism about the possibility of knowing the "real" external world by turning the gaze of the "realist" scientific eye inward, at the mind itself. The scientific way of seeing, however, is itself unchanged: "The cognitive scientist is thus able to remain a staunch realist about the empirical world while making the details of mind and cognition the subject of his investigations" (Varela et. al 137). If cognitive science is seen as an objective search for abiding cognitive mechanisms and structures, this saves (or seems to save) scientific realism from epistemological skepticism.

Rhetoric also makes the mind and cognition the focus of its investigations. But, despite its undeniable commonalities with the goals and even with the methods of cognitive science, it takes epistemological skepticism as its very starting point. The Older Sophist Gorgias' epigrammatic propositions in the fragmentary text *On the Nonexistent*, composed long before Aristotle, encapsulate this kind of rhetorical anti-foundationalism:

"first and foremost, that nothing exists; second, that even if it exists it is inapprehensible to man; third, that even if it is apprehensible, still it is without a doubt incapable of being expressed or explained to the next man" (Gorgias 42). The *Dissoi Logoi*, the work of another of the Older Sophists, is perhaps even more salient in its declamation-like assertion that there are two sides to every issue. If this is true, then there is really no issue—no "truth," to use Turner's terms—in the conventionally "real" world apart from the rhetorical positions people take on and in relation to it. For this very reason, rhetoric's inward investigation of the nature of abiding cognitive mechanisms is also an outward investigation of the nature of communities, shared belief or *doxa*, and discourse. From the point of view of rhetoric, the domains of subject and object, mind and world, individual and community are not mutually exclusive—are, in fact, interdependent. And while Turner's rejection of rhetoric epitomizes a classically dualistic, "realist" approach to science and cognitive science in particular, other approaches are gaining currency. As Varela notes, "an important and pervasive shift is beginning to take place in cognitive science under the very influence of its own research. This shift requires that we move away from the idea of the world as independent and extrinsic to the idea of a world as inseparable from the structure of these processes of self-modification" (139). According to Varela, this new perspective requires us to look at cognitive processes not in terms of distinct subjects and objects, but in terms of "operational closure":

> The notion of operational closure is thus a way of specifying classes of processes that, in their very operation, turn back upon themselves to form autonomous networks. Such networks do not fall into the class of systems

> defined by external mechanisms of control (heteronomy) but rather into the class of systems defined by internal mechanisms of self-organization (autonomy). The key point is that such systems do not operate by representation. Instead of representing an independent world, they enact a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the structure embodied by the cognitive system. (139)

So where traditional, dualistic versions of cognitive science—which are, as Turner makes clear, not compatible with a rhetorical way of looking at the world—sidestep epistemological skepticism by making the mind itself the focus of their dualistic inquiry, the emerging school of cognitive science that Varela discusses challenges the very premise of epistemological skepticism by asserting—in a consummately rhetorical way — that the knowing subject and the known world are deeply interconnected. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson similarly note, this emerging theoretical perspective in cognitive science denies, "on empirical grounds, that there exists one and only one correct description of the world" (96). Instead, "cognitive science and neuroscience suggest that the world as we know it contains no primary qualities in Locke's sense, because the qualities of things as we can experience and comprehend them depend crucially on our neural makeup, our bodily interactions with them, and our purposes and interests" (Lakoff and Johnson 26). But the concept of "operational closure" goes even further, asserting not only that different "correct" descriptions of an external world are possible but that worlds themselves are enacted as part of integrated, non-representational cognitive systems. From this point of view, knowing a world *is the world*; there is no

world apart from knowledge of it. But this statement is not the same thing as saying that any description of or response to a world inevitably follows from its cognitive enactment. There are limits. This is because action and response always take place in some preexisting context. But that context is not objectively true apart from a community's collective response to it—apart from *doxa*, that is, the special domain of rhetoric.

Varela sums up the practical implications of this view with the observation that "all of our activities depend on a background that can never be pinned down with any sense of ultimate solidity and finality. Groundlessness, then, is to be found not in some far off, philosophically abstruse analysis but in everyday experience" (144). But accepting this premise does not imply solipsism. Just as our enacted experiences are interconnected with the world, they are also interconnected with the experiences of others. We cannot effectively enact anything we want at any time; our resources for responding to and enacting a situation are inseparable from what Varela calls "'common sense,'" or "knowing how to negotiate our way through a world that is not fixed and pregiven but that is continually shaped by the types of actions in which we engage" (144). Even a groundless world requires skillful action in response to situational limits and context (i.e., the rhetorical situation); it requires us to pose "within broad constraints, the relevant issues that need to be addressed at each moment. These issues and concerns are not pregiven but are enacted from a background of action, where what counts as relevant is contextually determined by our common sense" (Varela et. al 145).

Theories of enactive cognition and groundlessness are perfectly compatible with the practice of ancient declamation. Declamation, in fact, seems specifically designed to train

students in seeing the world as something enacted—within broad constraints—through performance and discourse. In fact, there was a mechanism built into the practice that served this purpose so perfectly that it seems quite strange from a more "objective" point of view (which may be one reason declamation has, over the centuries, so often been marginalized as a valid pedagogical practice). This mechanism was the *color*.

The *Colores* in Ancient Declamation

The canon of invention implies, by its very nature, that rhetorical situations are not pregiven, stable quantities but are instead created through the process of finding the means of persuasion available within them. In ancient declamation, the *color* was the essential technique for practicing how to best capitalize on this kind of situational flexibility. As defined by Matthew Roller, "The declamatory color is a formal device for supporting a particular line of argument. Specifically, in Seneca's usage, it is a piece of information, or an interpretive framework, that a declaimer introduces in a controversy in order to make the case more advantageous to his side. He may introduce anything he wishes, provided it does not contradict the fixed elements of the case as set forth in the thema" (Roller 114-115).

Declamation themes, then, were less fully developed scenarios than the broad outlines of loosely defined liminal spaces. It was the declaimer's job to create a figured world within these spaces that was perfectly suited to a particular persuasive purpose. In the process, the precise wording of controversy themes could not be directly contradicted—this was a basic rule of play—but almost any twist on the situation or its back-story not explicitly proscribed by the theme itself was fair game. Furthermore,

details that *were* explicitly mentioned in the theme could be cast in whatever light the declaimer wished. As Roller notes, "the invention of prior encounters or agreements between two parties is a common technique for alleging motive, and thus for portraying the events given in the *thema* in a way that supports whatever standard of judgment is being invoked: morality above all, but sometimes also necessity, expediency, and others" (Roller 114).

Indeed, as the practice of declamation grew in sophistication, so did the complexity and importance of selecting and deploying effective *colores*. According to Bonner, "the term color had, before Seneca's day, been applied only as a general word for 'cast' or 'tone' of style… But in Seneca it takes on the quite different meaning of 'twist of argument, 'plea,' 'excuse'" (Bonner 55). By the time of Imperial Rome, the *color* had been systematically incorporated into the declamation game, a more free-form version of which had already been in play across the Greek world for hundreds of years. The underlying dynamic was not fundamentally new; *colores* were the Roman codification of the age-old epistemological skepticism at the heart of the rhetoric tradition and epitomized by sophistic texts such as the *Dissoi Logoi*. But the Romans systematized this perspective; indeed, this is but one example of the broader process by which Romans, as James Murphy observes, "took the comparatively loose ideas of Greek educators and molded them into a coherent system, which instilled in its student a habit (*hexis*) of effective expression" (37).

Ironically, the adaption of this rhetorical way-of-seeing/being (*hexis*) to fit within the rules and constraints of a highly systematic pedagogical practice such as declamation

actually stimulated and necessitated experimentation and innovation. To stand out from the crowd, declaimers had to try just about everything in their *colores*—sometimes with mixed results. As Bonner points out, "many [*colores*] were stupid, unconvincing, the products of exhausted ingenuity" (56). But such exhaustion actually reflects the incredible range of *colores* that declaimers would invent for any given controversy theme. In the declamation game, as in many creative domains, constraint was the mother of invention.

It was this creativity-by-constraint that made the declamatory *color* so unique and so pedagogically effective. Summing up the appeal and power of *colores*, Bonner writes:

> Making black white and the reverse was the age-old prerogative of the pleader, but the *colores* of the declaimers were something more subtle; by a slight shift of argument, by an added insinuation, or a guileless plea, they tone down the guilt or represent it in even more glaring colours. The *colores* are the Persian carpet of the declaimer; look at it from one angle and the colours are bright and clear, the pattern simple, but observe it from another angle, and the shade deepens, the pattern changes, and the whole appears in a different light." (55-56)

From one point of view, learning to invent *colores* trained declaimers to see the diversity of rhetorical situations available within the broad constraints of any given scenario. At the same time, the practice trained them to see the limitations those constraints imposed. The interpretation of the wording of themes was, itself, an essential declamatory skill, and declaimers analyzed themes much as a modern law student might

analyze a statute or contract. But even if a *color* did not explicitly contradict the theme, it was still possible to cross an unstated line; the mere fact that a *color* was technically legitimate did not necessarily make it appropriate or plausible. Often, a *color* failed to win the applause of audience or teacher by failing to meaningfully engage with the essential dynamics of the theme itself. Thus Seneca complains about far-fetched, irrelevant *colores* such as dreams or omens: "It is laughable to make a point of something that cannot be proved false. It makes little difference whether you put up a false witness or yourself where your own case is concerned: the liar is to be disbelieved—you yourself generally are" (242-243). Such *colores* broke the spirit rather than the letter of the law: Like the Deus-ex-machina of a Greek drama, they sought a solution to the rhetorical problem outside the space afforded by the theme, even if they stopped short of contradicting it outright. They were bad for the game because they introduced non-debatable elements that other declaimers could not easily redeploy or respond to in their own speeches—since the sole witness of a dream is the dreamer, discussion ends there. From a pedagogical perspective, too, *colores* like this were trump cards that did not require careful analysis of the theme's constraints and possibilities for effective use. In the play world of declamation, they were unethical. But if Seneca's judgment is any indication, for this very reason they generally failed in practice.

Declamation Themes and Dialogue Wheels

The *Mass Effect* videogame franchise has been an undeniably massive critical and commercial success, leading to two game sequels, selling millions of copies worldwide, and garnering almost universally positive reviews. Even more interestingly, perhaps, it

has spawned a variety of narrative adaptations in a variety of other media, including a series of "tie-in novels," a comic book series, and a major motion picture rumored to be in the works (*Mass Effect Wiki*). This proliferation into different media is perhaps unsurprising given that, from the first installment, what set the game apart arguably had less to do with action sequences, graphics, and game play than with a ground-breaking approach to dialogue and story. As a review of *Mass Effect 2* in a popular online gaming magazine points out, the game was so effective in part because its designers found a way to take narrative inspiration from linear forms such as cinema without sacrificing the interactivity that makes videogames such an appealing medium in the first place (McNeilly).

As the reviewer observed, "it is often the case that film's narrative devices feel overly contrived in a dynamic, interactive setting in which the player should be calling the shots" (McNeilly). But *Mass Effect* avoided this problem by finding a way to balance what a player *can* control in cinematic, narrative sequences with what they cannot—and actually making the gap between these two domains a source of interest and engagement. To achieve this, the game introduced a sophisticated dialogue interface in which the player is given, at set points within a conversational exchange with other characters, a series of broadly paraphrased rhetorical choices arrayed on a "conversational wheel" (*Mass Effect Wiki*). The player chooses one of these options, then watches them play out in much more specific cinematic detail. As the *Mass Effect* wiki page explains,

> …one choice may appear [on the conversational wheel] as "Don't try to study me," while the actual spoken line is "I'm not some artifact you can

> take back to your lab, doctor." Dialogue choices impact how others react to Shepard, the rewards for completing quests, possible discounts from merchants, romance paths and, most importantly, the Commander's morality. It is also possible to defuse tense situations without violence, or actually provoke it.

From the perspective of composition theory, this game interface is interesting because it creates a critical space between the player and the rhetorical actions of her digital avatar[20]. This interface exemplifies the balance between constraint and free-play that is an essential aspect of any game; I discuss this dynamic in greater detail in the next chapter. In the present context, though, the more salient point is that it encourages the player to think about rhetorical actions in epistemic terms: What the avatar says will fundamentally change the field of play in unpredictable and far-reaching ways that will ripple out across dozens of missions and hours of game play. Allies and enemies are created, new missions uncovered, the protagonist's personality shaped. The vast virtual world literally changes—in quite obvious and concrete ways—based on the higher level rhetorical decisions the player makes, then watches play out on the screen.

I believe that this interface involves a much more limited and closely circumscribed version of the kind of critical work involved in crafting *colores* in declamation themes. Like the world of *Mass Effect,* the world of the declamation was malleable *to a point*,

[20] This is why some writing teachers have found the game useful in classroom exercises. See, for example, Chris Ortiz y Prentice's remarkable lesson plan involving the game, developed for a first-year writing class in conjunction with the Digital Writing and Research Lab at UT Austin.

dependent on a variety of rhetorical choices that were constrained, like the choices on the dialogue wheel, by the wording of the themes. This dispersal of epistemological stability is also a fundamental aspect of what Lev Manovich describes as the “flattened” landscape of new media. According to Manovich, new media encourages a free wandering antithetical to any deliberate "ordering… by a writer or orator" (78). On the other hand, Manovich sees new media as inherently antithetical to rhetoric since, he argues, rhetoric amounts to a kind of control, the conveyance of essentially static repositories of "knowledge and memory" in order to change readers (whether in terms of persuasion, identification, etc.) in determinate ways (76). Manovich, like Turner, wants to distance his discipline (in this case new media rather than cognitive science) from the baggage of the rhetorical tradition — but for opposite reasons.

However, declamation has more often been criticized for its indeterminacy, its lack of stable (let alone static) content or identity: As Cassius Severus put it, “real” oratory deals with the concrete, while declamation deals only in illusion: “it is one thing to fight, quite another to shadow-box” (Seneca 387). In the ancient literature, declaimers are usually seen as suspect because their speeches lack real substance, not because they exert control over the way their audience relates to knowledge. They are also suspect because they lack stable identities: Severus states of declaimers that, “With their surroundings, they will change their character” (387). But this ethical and epistemological flexibility is, in fact, the clearest and most important area of overlap between declamation and contemporary media such as video games. As discussed above, the shadows in which declamation dealt had the power to refigure social realities in powerful ways. Similarly,

modern games are increasingly valued not only as entertaining escapes from the real world but as potent tools to refigure it.

I would contend, however, that this view assumes a split between reality, on the one hand, and rhetoric, new media, games, declamation, on the other. The *colores*, as a key part of the declamation dynamic, tell a somewhat different story. Learning how to enact situations within broad constraints in an effective and ethical manner was a key part of the declamation game. It's a lesson from which modern students living in a world characterized by new media, video games, and a vast dispersal of authority and identity stand to benefit at least as much as their ancient counterparts. And possibly much more.

Chapter Four:

Real Play: Immersion and Reflexivity in the *Declamation Dynamic*

It is hardly controversial to point out that every act of communication is a kind of performance and involves some element of role-playing and audience construction. Nevertheless, contemporary rhetoric students are often encouraged to write as "themselves" and to convey their "real," informed opinions to "real," directly accessible audiences. But even without venturing into the realms of philosophy or epistemology, a close analysis of the nature of argumentation shows the degree to which speakers always invent and reinvent their ethical positions vis-à-vis changing notions of particular audiences. In an important sense, both poles are equally functions of the speaker's imagination; this is because, as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca note in *The New Rhetoric*, the particular persona a speaker chooses to play at any given moment in the course of a speech or text will depend on her evolving image(s) of her audience(s) (19-23): "Even when an orator stands before only a few auditors, or indeed, before a single auditor, it is possible that he will not be quite sure what arguments will appear most convincing to his audience. In such a case, he will, by a kind of fiction, insert his audience into a series of different audiences" (22). The variety of "masks" that the speaker selects will entirely depend, then, on the variety of audiences that she imagines. These two key aspects of the rhetorical situation—the ethos invented by the speaker and the audience imagined by the speaker— are codependent, and co-constructed: Like the

mask the rhetor creates and wears in a given situation, "the audience, as visualized by one undertaking to argue, is always a more or less systemized construction" (19).

The observation that audiences are constructed obviously does not imply that the speaker is at liberty to construct any audience she wishes for any situation. It does mean, however, that invention is always an imaginative act—an act upon which the success or failure of a discourse largely depends. By contrast, many contemporary approaches to teaching audience analysis and persona give the impression that generalizations about audiences can correspond directly to "reality." On closer analysis, though, audiences are seen to be abstractions, and there cannot even be analysis of the people a speaker or writer addresses *as an audience* until images—based on but separate from those people—are invented by the speaker (for whom they exist as an audience). The role the speaker chooses to play is, likewise, entirely dependent on these constructed images. When we teach invention and audience analysis, then, we are actually teaching specialized, pragmatic acts of imagination.

While I do not, as mentioned above, find this dynamic to be particularly controversial, I do believe that its implications, when taken to their logical conclusion, conflict in many ways with predominant approaches to teaching rhetoric. In this chapter, I will describe these conflicts and present ancient declamation as a pedagogical model that naturally foregrounds this often-overlooked but essential imaginative process. The bulk of the chapter will be taken up with a comparative analysis focused on ancient texts that shows how and why declamation was an effective method for teaching ancient rhetoric students to construct audiences. Finally, I will show why any pedagogy that

addresses these skills necessarily engages with what I call the *declamation dynamic*, and I will discuss some of the implications of my claims for contemporary rhetoric teachers.

Audience construction is inherently difficult to teach. Take, for example, Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's highly successful and effective textbook *Everything's An Argument.* This text directly references the imaginative aspect of conceptualizing audiences, pointing out that "as a writer, you'll almost always be addressing an *intended* reader who exists in your mind" (28). They further illustrate this dynamic through some interesting meta-analysis of their own writing process, noting that "you are our intended reader… Though we don't know you personally, we see you in our minds, for we *intend* to write for you" (28). And yet, as straightforward and frank as this pedagogical approach seems to be, I think it epitomizes a kind of subtle confusion that often results from conflating real and imagined audiences. The authors are teaching students about the imaginative process involved in addressing intended audiences while at the same time addressing those imagined student-readers *directly*, as though they were speaking straight to the "real" people. They imply that although they do not know the eventual readers of their text, they are nevertheless in direct, conscious communication with them and, as such, have imagined them exactly as they are—so much so that the distance between imagined and real audiences has all but disappeared. Some real student-readers may pick up on the implicit irony—the "you" in the text is not actually "me" as reader, as the authors have just pointed out—but as this would require a fairly sophisticated critical awareness, it amounts to pedagogical begging of the question: students would have to

already understand the operative concept to get the joke. The authors can hardly be blamed here: When writing about audience construction while addressing an imagined audience, it takes an extremely unnatural and artificial critical maneuver to simultaneously acknowledge the distance between this construction and the eventual, actual audience. This makes it a very difficult concept to codify or convey adequately in a textbook.

The situation is even more difficult for teachers directly addressing students in a classroom setting. The constructed audience in a live exchange is just as much a function of the imagination as in a written exchange, but the imaginative dynamic is inherently more difficult to grasp in such a context because of the physical presence of the actual audience. As such, if a teacher presenting this concept points to her own act of teaching as an example rhetorical performance, her ideal and actual student audiences are likely to be instantly conflated in the minds of the actual students. Since a live audience is immediately present and able to respond to the speaker, enabling her to modify her persona in appropriate ways based on real-time feedback, there is an intuitive impression that the ideal and actual audiences are one and the same. This impression is particularly strong in the case of a teacher using her own teaching as an illustrative example: the actual student audience is so obviously present to itself that the notion of a student audience is instantly obscured. But, in fact, rhetors must imagine physically present audiences just as they must imagine the audiences of written discourse. The speaker must still "break down" the live audience in various ways and organize and characterize it as

falling into one or more social groups[21]. Indeed, this act of audience construction is perhaps the most important part of argumentation, since, according to Perlman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "the essential consideration for the speaker who has set himself the task of persuading concrete individuals is that his construction of the audience should be adequate to the occasion" (19).

The main challenge here, from a pedagogical standpoint, is achieving enough critical distance to avoid obscuring for students the mediation involved in the act of inventing audiences: Students are likely to assume that they must simply analyze the attributes of their real readers or listeners in order to directly appeal to them in an effective way, but, as Perlman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe, the task of the speaker or writer is actually one of creation and correspondence rather than direct analysis: An image must be created that is as "adequate" to the real occasion as possible (19) since the occasion-as-occasion or the audience-as-audience is always a function of thought or language. Though this distinction might seem somewhat abstract or even irrelevant to the exigencies of an actual writing class, the implications are, as I hope to show, actually very concrete and practical.

Given the difficulties just outlined, how *do* we teach the imaginative act of audience construction, for both spoken and written mediums of communication? Simply

[21] As Perlman and Olbrechts-Tyteca further note, "The breaking down of a gathering into sub-groups will also depend on the speaker's own position. If he holds extremist views on a question, there is nothing to restrain him from considering all his interlocutors as forming a single audience. On the other hand, if he holds a moderate view, he will see them as forming at least two distinct audiences" (23).

focusing on exemplary, real acts of speaking or writing is not an adequate solution. To cite an example from the third edition of another excellent textbook, Lester Faigley and Jack Selzer's *Good Reasons* introduces the concept of audience through the example Rachel Carson's environmental expose *Silent Spring*. The authors note that Carson succeeded where other similar but more technical arguments had failed because "she not only knew her purpose for writing *Silent Spring,* but she also thought a great deal about who she was writing for—her audience. If she was going to stop the widespread spraying of dangerous pesticides, she knew that she would have to connect with the values of a wide audience, an audience that included a large segment of the public as well as other scientists" (12). As apt and well-explained an example as this undoubtedly is, it nevertheless seems to conflate—on the level of *process* rather than product or effect—the act of audience construction that enabled Carson to create such an effective argument. One could perhaps phrase the authors' point differently by saying that Carson tailored her argument to connect with the values of an imagined, composite audience, which she broke down into different segments according to levels of technical expertise. But even this would be misleading because the mere actuality of her text and its impact are still likely to leave the impression that the audiences Carson imagined and the actual readers she influenced were one and the same.

Alternatively, one might approach audience construction from the standpoint of invention: that is, teaching students concrete strategies for investigating and categorizing audiences according to specific characteristics. This approach, which is grounded in the technical tradition of ancient rhetoricians and, as such, is closely related to the practice of

declamation, is perhaps best encapsulated in an ancient context by the method of audience analysis outlined in Cicero's early work *On Invention*[22]. While discussing the manner of crafting an effective introduction, Cicero outlines "how topics intended to enable the orator to work his way into the good graces of his hearers ought to be handled" (I.XVII). The strategies he advocates depend on such basic criteria as whether or not the "hearer is adverse to one" (I.XVII); whether or not "your adversaries appear to have made an impression on your hearers" (I.L); whether the audience is tired or uninterested in the subject matter (I.L); and so forth.

In Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's accessible yet comprehensive rhetoric textbook *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students,* this tradition is engaged on a very sophisticated level; the authors not only list some of the technical traits of audiences, as outlined in ancient rhetorical treatises, but also ground this analysis in contemporary cognitive science, discussing factors that render people more or less likely to change an opinion. In summation, they note that "rhetors need to assess the emotional states of their audiences as well as the intensity with which they cling to those states. Rhetors need to decide as well whether those emotional states render their audiences receptive to themselves and/or their proposition. Next, they should decide whether an audience can be persuaded to change their minds and, if so, whether they will be moved by appeals to their current emotional states or to a different one induced by a rhetor" (255).

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[22] According to H.M. Hubbell's introduction to the Loeb edition of this work, "The treatise *de Inventione* is a youthful work of Cicero, which was probably written while he was studying the elements of oratory, and is in fact hardly more than an elaborate note-book in which he recorded the dictation of his teacher" (vii).

As effective as this tradition is, particularly in the scientifically grounded form it has been given by Crowley and Hawhee in this excerpt, on its own it still falls prey to the same conceptual limitations as the earlier examples. First, in both Cicero's and Crowley and Hawhee's texts, audiences are implicitly presented as singular and stable entities. There is no discussion of the multilayered, complex manner in which an aggregation of people must generally be considered in order to create an audience construction that is, as Perelman and Tyteca put it, "adequate" to the actual rhetorical situation (19). Indeed, in both these examples, the audience envisioned by the rhetor is not presented as a construction at all but simply as *the audience itself* – despite the obvious simplification that is involved in categorizing an audience according to singular characteristics[23].

It is nevertheless instructive to note that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the modern theorists with perhaps the most insightful analysis of audience and persona—an analysis they partly base on principles drawn from ancient rhetorical theory—are concerned only with the analysis of *argumentation itself*, not with its production, its pedagogy and certainly not with its delivery or performance, which they somewhat dismissively write off as "the province of conservatories and schools of dramatic art" (6). Their slight disdain for pedagogy is also seen in their critique of classroom exercises, "mere essay writing," in which the imagined audiences do not correspond to real

[23] According to Perelman and Tyteca, this is true regardless of the size of the audience; it is even true if the audience being addressed is simply oneself. In fact, they argue that "agreement with oneself is merely a particular case of agreement with others. Accordingly, from our point of view, it is by analyzing argumentation addressed to others that we can best understand self-deliberation, and not vice versa" (41).

"concrete individuals" (19). Although declamation is surely the epitome of the kinds of artificial exercises they deride here, I would argue that the deliberate artificiality of such school-exercises is not necessarily to blame for the unwanted consequence of an ill-defined (or poorly imagined) audience and that they need not necessarily result in flat, aimless discourse—although, as many composition scholars have previously argued, this is one possible result.

In fact, I will attempt to turn Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's point on its head, arguing instead that a critical awareness of, and skill in, the imaginative act of audience construction can *best* be cultivated through exercises based on un-real—that is, counterfactual—rhetorical situations because the presence of real situations and real audiences always tend to obscure the mediating role of imagined audiences. That is why the *declamation dynamic* is an essential part of any pedagogy that effectively teaches this skill.

Nevertheless, one might object that Cicero was, himself, a declaimer, and the techniques he outlines in *On Invention* were surely employed in relation to declamation exercises. So how could declamation, or the underlying *declamation dynamic*, escape what I have been describing as the problems inherent to technical systems of rhetoric with regards to audience construction?

Although declaimers were, like Cicero himself, trained to analyze audiences in the somewhat singular and reductive ways advocated (by necessity) by technical systems, the performative aspects of the practice mediated between these techniques and the complexities of real speaking situations. Declamation—or the *declamation dynamic*—is

the essential link between rhetorical techniques (or *techne*, technical handbooks) and the contingences of kairos, between rules and free play. I trace this function in part to declamation's structure as a game, since games naturally depend on the interplay between constraints and, within those constraints, flexibility.

In particular, I see two key aspects of declamation that, taken together, help to explain why the practice was able to mediate between the reductive (but practical and teachable) methods of audience analysis advocated in technical systems and the complex, shifting, multilayered contingences of audience constructions adequate to real speaking situations (but very difficult to codify or convey in precept form). The first of these relates to the liberating transformation from rhetoric student to full-fledged rhetor that, according to Jeffrey Walker, took place in declamation (*Genuine Teachers* 199). Since this transformation leads to the direct experience, through play and the suspension of disbelief, of the fictive world called forth by and for the declamation, I refer to this as *immersion.* The other, seemingly contradictory, aspect is the constant awareness (overt or implicit) of the declamation's artificial context—the classroom, the speaker's "actual" student identity, the actual audience of peers; I call this *reflexivity*. *Immersion* and *reflexivity* are operative in any rhetorical exercise (including modern college essays), regardless of the degree of overt performativity. But declamation worked so well for so long in large part because it did not (like many modern rhetorical exercises) ignore or deny this tension but instead *embraced* it, making the skillful management of rhetorical double vision an explicit learning objective and a key part of the game. The declaimer had to play his dramatic role *seriously*, to the hilt, while *simultaneously* (and often

ironically) playing his role as real world student to the hilt as well. To fully succeed in the exercise, in fact, he had to effectively *combine* these roles, both for himself and for his student audience, using their real world identities to strengthen his own play ethos and persuasive power. In so doing, the declaimer naturally learned how to construct and adapt to complex, multilayered images of audience.

To explain and theorize this process, I will borrow an idea from cognitive science: Declamation was a preeminent exercise in *conceptual blending*. This term, coined by Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, refers to the blending of two contributing conceptual spaces into a third, emergent conceptual space "identical to neither of its influences and not merely a correspondence between them" (Turner, *Cognitive Dimensions* 17). According to Turner, it is an essential feature of human thought. It is also a key overlap between the domains of theater and rhetoric. According to cognitive theater theorists Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart, theater—like declamation—always involves multiple levels of mediation and meaning because it relies on this key cognitive faculty: Spectators never lose sight of either contributing space—actor as actor on a certain stage at a certain real time, on the one hand; actor as character in a fictional time and place, on the other. As such, theater is not actually *representational* since "mind/brain's ability to project and compress information about these relationships into a blend that constitutes a person's mental image of a millisecond of a performance defies the notions of mimesis" (20).

The same dynamic is operative in any form of communication, but since rhetorical pedagogy ostensibly trains people for speaking in "real" situations, this

performative double consciousness is easily overlooked (or deliberately ignored). In declamation, however, it was deliberately emphasized. For example, surviving declamation texts often display clear double entendres or passages with multivalent meanings, which I take to be evidence that declaimers were practicing the ability to imagine audiences on multiple levels simultaneously. According to Erik Gunderson, for instance, this dynamic is even apparent in the interplay between the archetypal "rhetoric teacher" teaching *about* declamation and the archetypal "father persona" character *in* declamation excerpts found the *Minor Declamations* attributed to Quintilian. In this text, the teacher draws implicit comparisons between his own "real" persona, as figured in the *sermo* or commentary sections accompanying most of the declamation themes, and the father-persona figured *in* the excerpted declamations themselves. Since the students would be expected to actually perform this father figure (based, of course, on the example and advice of their paternal teacher) in their own compositions, the process provided "a chain of association whereby the 'I' of each of these is offered as an orthopedic double for the ego of the young speaker who accepts them as his own" (Gunderson 144).

Because they share this kind of double-vision or constant oscillation between immersion and reflexivity, theater and declamation can be seen, for similar reasons, as threatening to stable epistemologies. Along these lines, Richard Lanham notes that theater provides an "alternate conception of human reality" characterized by artifice and self-consciousness and that, although our historical tendency has been to "ritually condemn" this point of view, it is now more important than ever before: as our ability to thrive in a new information economy depends, he argues, on our ability to toggle back

and forth between conceptions of "life as information" and "life as drama" (Economics 177)—the very kind of training declamation was designed to provide.

I will now offer three declamation case studies to ground my claims about its immersive and reflexive qualities: The first is an actual student declamation from the third century B.C.E. Although it predates the other examples by hundreds of years, it provides a rare glimpse of what declamation was like for an ancient rhetoric *student*. The second and third examples, by contrast, are from psd.-Quintilian's *Major Declamations* and *Minor Declamations,* respectively, and were probably composed by rhetoric teachers as a classroom models for student imitation. Nevertheless, this function makes the "double vision" even more apparent since the "actual" identities of the teachers also figure in the declamations and interact and contrast with the teacher-speakers' *persona* in distinct, representative ways that are both similar and radically different from the first, student example. All three provide key insights into the ways this double vision affected the conceptual process involved in declamation and characterized the experience of writing and delivering these performances.

Extant declamations "texts" are few and, for the most part, fragmentary. Student declamations, in particular, are extremely rare, as they were primarily created for purposes of oral performance rather than as final, written products and, furthermore, because student exercises were not seen as important enough to preserve through the centuries. But the rare exception has, by chance rather than design, survived. Walker

includes the complete text of one such fragment found in "necropolis in Middle Egypt (where it was used as mummy wrapping)" (*Genuine Teachers* 190). Walker sums up the declamation scenario as follows:

> The speech is set in the historical context of the Lamian War of 323 B.C.E., in which a combined Greek force of Athenians and their allies tried to throw off Macedonian domination after the death of Alexander the Great. This is relatively recent history — about fifty to eighty years before the declamation's composition — but not exactly current events either. Athenian independence was not a realistic possibility when this writer wrote, a non-issue outside the garden of declamation. The speaker appears to be Leosthenes, an Athenian general who had assembled a large force of unemployed mercenaries at Taenarum, at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, and upon Alexander's death joined to it the Athenian and other forces… In what remains of the declamation it appears that Leosthenes is speaking just after the death of Alexander and urging the Athenians to seize the opportunity to regain their liberty. The speech is thus set in the moment of decision to launch the Lamian War. (*Genuine Teachers* 191)

Despite its historical distance from this young declaimer's real life, the events in this theme did indeed have a direct relation to the real political and social order in the Ptolemy II's Egypt. Leosthenes—whom he is performing in the theme—represented an *unsuccessful* opposition to the origins of that social order; as Walker notes, "the student

and contemporaries know that Leosthenes and his contemporaries died and the rebellion failed" and that "it accomplished nothing" (*Genuine Teachers* 195). Furthermore, for people in the declaimer's social class, the political stability and relative wealth that resulted from that failure and its aftermath "probably looked rather good" (*Genuine Teachers* 195). Thus, the boy is arguing against the social order in which he finds himself (advantageously) situated. But, as Walker also notes, he (as Leosthenes) primarily bases his argument on "appeals to national honor and shame," not on pragmatic arguments about the likelihood or feasibility of success or even on the longer-term implications of his rebellion, which he mentions only in passing. I would venture to suggest that the ethical "ideal" performed by his character—bravery, self-sacrifice, honor—was very much in keeping with the ideals of his contemporary society, even if the practical, political goal of his proposed revolution was not.

I would also suggest that the young declaimer's imaginary audience is consciously blended with his real audience of fellow students: It is surely not coincidental that this young man speaking for an audience of young men focuses so much, in his speech, on an imagined audience of young Athenians:

> I entreat especially the younger men among you who have had, since childhood, an adequate military training—to be strong in their thought, and to employ their own bodies in a timely demonstration of their virtue—so that your quietude at other times is not attributed to cowardice but to caution—and may we not, men of Athens, go into action without your power, and may you not be compelled in any way by us either to do what

> others command, or to go into battle with inferior forces…" (*Genuine Teachers* 192)

The theme of the declamation, then, is inherently multivalent: it was about a highly dramatic and historically remote moment, but it was also about the present moment, the present audience, the present ethical ideal. The declaimer was speaking as a failed rebel addressing a doomed rebel army, but he was speaking in a way that his student audience could understand and identify with, and he emphasizes this overlap in the content of his speech itself.

On one level, all this would have simply been an exciting, fun, pedagogically effective rhetorical game. As Walker notes, students probably enjoyed speaking in "a historical moment of high drama where speech and judgment were highly consequential. The sense of high stakes emphatically foregrounds the elements in the rhetorical situation that the declaimer, in character, must attend to" (*Genuine Teachers* 195). By the same token, though, it would have cultivated *through performance* a kind of structural awareness of the constructed and contingent nature of the social and ethical ideals that (the character of) Leosthenes represents and, by extension, of the declaimer's own social and political world: The declaimer is *performing* those ideals against the backdrop of their practical failure. Leosthenes is *not* part of the declaimers' social system—in fact, he is directly opposed to it—yet he is close enough in ideology and ethos that his military and political failure would strike very close to home, especially for a performer literally *standing in his shoes.*

This dynamic, and the fun it involves, was made possible by and through performance itself. The student was not simply engaging in a thought experiment or abstract case study: he was actually playing Leosthenes. As Walker points out, the format of the surviving text indicates this purpose, as it is punctuated only by dashes "probably to indicate pauses in delivery, which suggests that the text was probably meant as a script for performance" (*Genuine Teachers* 191).

Though fragmentary, this speech clearly shows the essential role, from the *student's* perspective, of both immersion and reflexivity in declamation— the real experience of playing Leosthenes and directly experiencing a doomed-but-strikingly-familiar ethical position, on the one hand and, on the other, the conscious juxtaposition of the imaginary world of the declamation theme and the immediate context of real, schoolroom performance before an audience of peers. My next example shows how a very similar dynamic could be employed by a teacher wishing to model this skill for his students.

In the outlandish theme of Declamation XII from psd.-Quintilian's *Major Declamations,* an isolated island colony recently stricken by a sudden and unnatural famine sends an agent in search of grain; he is provided with money and ship, and a date is set for his return. But in his absence things grow so desperate that the populace resorts to eating the bodies of the dead, an almost unforgivable sacrilege. The agent returns on the agreed upon date with twice as much grain as expected, thanks to some shrewd

business dealings during an extra stop on his way home, but he is charged with undermining, by delay, the city's very humanity and precipitating an ethical disaster.

In this speech, a prosecution of the agent by an angry citizen, the speaker repeatedly blurs the distinction between declaimer and audience. As in most declamations, he assigns the audience a role in the fiction—in this case as a group of citizens and former corpse-eaters like himself. Since, in their roles, both speaker and audience stand guilty of the same terrible act, both are also tasked with the same fundamental responsibility of reconstituting the violated category distinctions (animal/human, forgivable/unforgivable) by refocusing blame on the agent. As such, the underlying exigency of the situation is explicitly extended from the speaker to the entire classroom audience:

> As his accuser do I not share a common grievance with the jury? Does anybody defer to another in this revenge?... To all nations, for all ages to come, we have been damned. Everybody will describe these monstrous acts, everybody will curse us except those who would not believe it. We have defamed the very word famine, and what is the last straw for the unfortunate, we have also lost our claim to pity. Yet there was still a single defense—we seemed to be forced into all these acts through the dereliction of that man over there. If he is innocent, the guilt belongs to us. (146)

This function of ethical reconstitution was a key element of many declamation themes. Robert Kaster notes that it often "becomes the declaimer's job to put the surfaces

back into some sort of acceptable, more or less conventional order—which is precisely the role for which the declaimer is being trained" (328).

But in addition to the intense, immersive focus on the ethical quandary and high drama of the imagined scenario, the speaker also weaves in subtly disjunctive references to the student-audience's real-world context throughout the speech—making playful allusions, for example, to the *progymnasmata* or graduated series of preliminary exercises that prepared students in the grammar schools for higher rhetorical training. For example, in the speech's confirmation or proof, the speaker calls upon traditional stories and fables as evidence for the almost unimaginable (imagined) horrors he has been calling up in his auditors' minds' eyes: "Whoever fabricated the talk to the Cyclops, the Laestrygonians, the Sphinx, or the maiden Scylla whose barking loins resounded along the shores of Sicily, and whatever else I learned by heart at home when I was just a poor boy, let all these receive proof and confirmation from our city" (162). Similarly, when he equates rhetorical invention (which he calls "concoction") with "gluttonous leisure time," it would surely have been interpreted as an ironic jibe at the artificial, safe space in which the audience of rhetoric students actually found themselves—what "Juvenal calls this the rhetorica umbra, the 'shade of the rhetorician's school'" (qtd. in Kaster 323).

In this passage, then, the speaker—probably the teacher himself—performs not only the deft use of authoritative source material to support his narration of events within the fiction, but he also alludes to the student-audience's educational progression *outside* the fiction. This passage alludes to the educational progression in which the audience was actually engaged and, specifically, to the transition from early exercises such as mythos

to more advanced exercises such as refutation and confirmation. And the speech actually performs this progression *as part of* the most advanced exercise of all, declamation, the purpose of which was to incorporate all of the earlier skills into a single organic whole. The effect, I argue, would be to create a second-order conceptual blend between classroom context (including the rhetorical lessons learned and to be learned) and the fantastical fiction of the declamation theme. In actual *performance*, though, it would have gone even further: The teacher is directly *moving and persuading* his student audience through the rhetorical techniques they have learned and are continuing to practice *while at the same time* calling attention to the power of those techniques in performance. Moreover, he uses this overlap between direct experience and classroom reflection to strengthen his own (reflexive) ethos as teacher and, thus, his persuasive power in the (immersive) scenario. Most importantly, perhaps, he is modeling through virtuosic performance how these kinds of conceptual blends between immersive and reflexive domains can be crafted and manipulated by a skillful speaker.

This skill was not only rhetorically effective; it also facilitated critical awareness. This function is particularly evident in Declamation 256, "Mad father of three sons," from psd.-Quintilian's *Minor Declamations*, which maximizes reflexive awareness of the classroom context of performance and also of the logical contradictions inherent in Rome's patriarchal social structure as depicted in the theme itself. The scenario is as follows: "A father of three sons killed two of them in madness. Cured by the third, he disowns him" (107). Although it would seem natural that declaimers speaking on this

theme would have spoken in the persona of, or as an advocate for, the son, psd.-Quintilian's example declamation is in the persona *of the father* and defends the father's decision to disinherit the son who cured him, thus forcing him to face up to his murderous actions. A young declaimer, speaking on this theme before an audience of young male students and sons, would be making a case directly counter to the interests of their nearest analogue in the theme—to, no doubt, ironic effect. But in addition to its potential irony and humor, this theme demonstrates the ways performance functioned, in declamation, as a mode of serious—though not necessarily radical—social critique at the conjunction of the *immersive* and *reflexive* dynamics that it involved.

The son in this theme in no way contradicted the Roman moral ethical imperative of absolute filial service; in effect, he did nothing *wrong*. Yet the patriarchal system itself is upended by the fact of the father's madness. The son is caught in a grey area of structural failure that hinges on an unresolvable ambiguity: In a society of absolute paternal authority, what is a son's responsibility to a mad (or, in less radical terms, fallible) father? Like many declamation themes, this is such an extreme case that it can seem blackly humorous or even absurd, but its implicit cultural critique becomes more obvious if its underlying ethical dilemma is put in milder terms: How can a son best serve a father whose wishes are not in his own best interest? Can a son know best? If so, what becomes of paternal authority?

From this point of view, this declamation theme *can* be viewed as a brute exercise in social indoctrination: The declaimer, a son himself, is confronting an area of structural failure within Roman ethics by arguing *against* a "son" *as* a father on behalf of what is at

once the most conservative and, perhaps, counterintuitive possible resolution to this ethical crisis—a resolution that seems specifically engineered to strike as close to home in his (and his audience's) "real" world as possible. This shows, as in the previous example, the typical "reconstitution" dynamic discussed by Kaster. The declaimer will presumably, after all, someday play the role of patriarch himself, and by pointing out this breakdown in paternal authority and then fixing it by *doubling down on that same authority,* the declaimer may, in effect, be forcing himself to view the archetypical father-figure and his authority in an even stronger, less alienable light.

However, the fact of performance puts this dynamic in a somewhat more complex and ambiguous position. The declaimer is not merely subjecting himself to the father's authority within this declamation; he is actually embodying that authority and experiencing its failure and (somewhat irrational) reconstitution *first-hand.* At the same time, the ironically reflexive tendencies of Roman declamation—such as a son speaking (on tenuous grounds) *against* a son, *as* a father—keeps the real world experience of *son* directly in view. The practical effect of this exercise on declaimers may indeed have been a restrengthening of their commitment to and acceptance of the Roman ethical and social order; even so, it also cultivated an awareness of the limits and constructed nature of that order by actively performing its limits.

Gunderson makes a similar point, noting that by employing the syntax and grammar of real legal and political life in Rome, declamation served to "expose society" itself as an "effect of the pleading"—in other words, of discourse (7), but at the same time that the practice was a "mode of reflection" mobilized not "in the name of critical

break with the rules of the game, but instead… in the name of a fuller reinvestment in the game itself" (233). Gunderson's analysis of this dynamic is extremely insightful, but he focuses mainly on the textual side of the practice—declamation as it continues to exist on the page—yet the "mode of reflection" that he identifies is even more effectively cultivated through, and dependent upon, performance itself.

That essentially *theatrical* experience was a key part of rhetorical training and technique in antiquity. In the remainder of this chapter, I draw on cognitive science and theater studies to help explain why this was so important in ancient declamation and why it continues to be important in modern rhetorical pedagogy.

In a passage partially quoted in the previous chapter, Quintilian notes that:

> The chief requisite, then, for moving the feelings of others, is, as far as I can judge, that we ourselves be moved; for the assumption of grief, and anger, and indignation, will be often ridiculous, if we adapt merely our words and looks, and not our minds, to those passions… In delivering, therefore whatever we wish to appear like truth, let us assimilate ourselves to the feelings of those who are truly affected, and let our language proceed from such a temper of mind as we would wish to excite in the judge. (6. 2. 26)

Quintilian draws an important distinction here between real emotional experience and its outward—visual or verbal—appearance. Presaging one of the core tenets of modern method acting, he contends that only by genuinely experiencing an emotion can a performer excite a corresponding emotion in auditors. On the other hand, Quintilian

acknowledges the inherent artifice involved in this process: Rhetors must move *themselves* to effectively move *others*—indeed, such is the power of involuntary imitation that, being moved, they *will* move others. But, as Quintilian further notes, speakers are as helpless as the audiences they hope to persuade: "our feelings are not in our own power" (2. 6. 29).

Lee Strasbourg, one of the fathers of American method acting, articulated a similar difficulty: "Essentially the actor acts a fiction, a dream; in life the stimuli to which we respond are always real. The actor must constantly respond to stimuli that are imaginary. And yet this must happen not only just as it happens in life, but actually more fully and more expressively" (209). Quintilian's solution to this paradox is disarmingly simple: By vividly imagining the situations about which one is speaking, he writes, orators can evoke in themselves images of the appropriate *real* emotions, and, in turn, move their audiences in persuasive ways. For Quintilian, then, imagination is a rhetorical skill like any other and must be improved through training. Indeed, the most imaginative speaker is also the most persuasive: "Whoever shall best conceive such images, will have the greatest power in moving the feelings" (2. 6. 30). Cicero, following Demosthenes, makes the very similar point that delivery is the key part of rhetoric precisely because performance is what "penetrates the mind" and allows the speaker to "seem such a man as he wills to seem" (*Brutus* 143).

Almost all modern acting schools teach similar imaginative techniques, whether they also teach that actors should be completely *immersed* in their roles or not. The

introductory handbook for the influential Atlantic Acting School, for example, states that "the great debate throughout the history of acting is whether the actor must feel what his or her character is ostensibly feeling at any given moment" (31), and—in direct opposition to figures such as Stanislavsky and Strasbourg—its answer is "no": the actor's job is simply to convey an illusion through learned techniques. Yet even from this point-of-view, an imaginative process is necessary to achieve the desired illusion. The actor, like the young rhetor in an ancient Roman rhetoric school, creates an "as if," a "fantasy in which [she uses her] imagination in a way [she] can readily accept" (28). The fantasy need not be the same as the depicted situation because its only measure of success is external, illusion, appearance, the way *the audience* sees the action rather than what the actor herself is directly, immersively experiencing.

For Quintilian, rhetorically effective imagination depended largely on the techniques of *enargia* or *ecphrasis*, one of the basic modular skills taught in the *progymnasama* or preliminary exercises that led up, in his pedagogical system, to the capstone exercise of declamation. *Ecphrasis* generally involved "a vividly detailed account of some person, place, time or event which aimed to 'bring the subject before the eyes' of an audience" (Webb 295). But reframed as an "as if" exercise designed to conjure up emotional images in a speaker in order to excite corresponding emotions in an audience, it differs in its internal direction: A rhetor must call up an image for herself rather than for an outer audience—in effect, she is her own audience—for purposes of a second order appeal to an outer audience. By successfully moving herself, she successfully moves her audience. In both stages of emotional response, feeling is

involuntary: Orators can be trained to control their mental images, as Quintilian advocates, but they cannot actually be trained to control their affective responses to their own mental images; likewise, their audiences may be brought to anger, or grief, or tears, by the force of the image of the speakers' feelings, but this result depends on involuntary rather than rational response. It is inherently unpredictable. As such, a speaker's goal in this context, Quintilian writes, is "to force" an emotional response upon an audience (2. 6. 27).

This "force" follows from a layered process of involuntary response that both post-modern philosophy and cognitive science and neuroscience tell us is actually a mode of *imitation*: the speaker imitates the emotional response appropriate to an imagined scene, and the audience imitates the speaker's emotional response. But since there is no "real" originary object to set off this chain of imitation, the "hall-of-mirror" dynamic is closer to the "theory of primary mimetism" described by Judith Butler than to genuine Aristotelian mimesis. Identity, according to Butler, is an imitative, embodied performance devoid of an "authentic" source: It merely "produces the illusion" of a "core" by producing "on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth" (134). In the same way, the emotionally fraught roles adopted in declamation were imitations "for which there is no original" (127). Much of the deconstructive or subversive potential of declamation can be traced to this dynamic. Like the subversive gender performances analyzed by Butler, declamation used performance to establish "the instability" of the very categories that it constituted (Butler 125).

Modern neuroscience has provided compelling support for Butler's performative account of human identity. According to neuroscientists such as Vittorio Gallese, systems in our brain mirror the actions or feelings of others as if they were our own; we enact representations"of other people's experiences, but we do so on a direct, pre-linguistic, pre-theoretical level. As such, we imitate an external other before (or below) the distinction between self and other even arises, and this kind of performance actually constitutes the self. Embodied simulation is a game we can't not play: as Gallese puts it, "we-ness and intersubjectivity ontologically ground the human condition, in which reciprocity foundationally defines human existence" (530). Imitation makes us who we are. The implications of this line of research for performance studies are vast. Amy Cook, a scholar working on the border between cognitive cultural studies and performance theory, has argued that the function of conceptual blending and the imitative processes dependent on the mirror neuron system are essential aspects of the theatrical experience. Because of the physical presence of audience and actor, she contends that in live performance the mirror neuron system creates a particularly powerful "shared neural substrate linking imagination and understanding, doing and feeling, fact and fiction, actor and character, me and you" (589).

These observations apply equally well to the context of declamation and help justify the relevance of the declamation dynamic in the modern classroom. Performance is always *immersive* because (when it works effectively) the audience directly experiences, through a mirroring process, what the speaker experiences. At the same time, the very nature of this "shared neural substrate" blurs or even erases the distinctions

between character, performer, and audience, between reality and fiction, which paradoxically results in a reflexive awareness of the "real" theatrical conditions and the real speaker and audience (*because* these are all superimposed on their imaginary counterparts). This complex interplay is a pervasive aspect of human cognition and communication and, as such, is an essential aspect of what I call the *declamation dynamic*. The historically situated practice of declamation—ancient oddity that it may seem to be from a modern point of view—was an extraordinarily efficient vehicle for training students to be aware of this interplay and to understand, to directly experience, and to *master* it. An awareness of how and why ancient declamation achieved this result will give contemporary rhetors a critical view of their own pedagogical practices and better enable them to activate this same dynamic in their own classrooms.

In this chapter, my intention was not to argue that declamations are the same as games or theater. However, I do think declamations, plays, and games all perform related cognitive and social functions in their respective cultures. They are all ludic spaces at once inside and outside the "real-world" concerns they parallel and represent. And they are all what Martin Bloomer (writing about declamation) has called "technologies of the self" (Bloomer 59); that is, they, as James Gee (writing of video games) puts it, "recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection on identities in clear and powerful ways" (Gee 51). These kinds of trans-historical connections are made possible by the fact that, as Mark Turner argues, certain "basic cognitive operations" are "universal among human beings, fundamental to cognition, and indispensable to reason, inference, and

invention" (15). An analysis of basic cognitive operations involved in declamation such as imitation and conceptual blending can help us form a new conceptual blend between past and present that enables us to see declamation not only as a historical artifact but also as a living pedagogical technique with something to teach us about rhetoric today.

Chapter Five:

The Good Man Playing Well: Declamation and the Ethics of Rhetorical Performance

The previous chapter focused on the importance of audience construction as a fundamental skill and a key aspect of what I call the *declamation dynamic* that is often obscured in modern approaches to rhetorical pedagogy. I further argued that the historical practice of ancient declamation was so pedagogically effective, in part, because of its emphasis on unreal, counterfactual rhetorical situations, which created a critical distance between the declaimer's "real" student audience, on the one hand, and his imagined audience, on the other. This distance—a key aspect of the *declamation dynamic*—naturally foregrounded audience construction while sidestepping the contradictions and difficulties that arise from attempting to explicate the imaginative process directly. Put simply, audience construction is a skill more easily experienced than explained.

The same is true of a directly corresponding aspect of the *declamation dynamic* that was briefly introduced in the last chapter and will be the primary focus here. As the practice of declamation directly exposed students to the process of audience construction, it simultaneously exposed them to the process of persona construction—indeed, the two poles are completely interdependent: The image of an audience that a rhetor accepts at any point in a discourse will (or should be) be reflected in her decisions about persona. Because a rhetor's image of her audience and her choices about persona are so interdependent, the challenges inherent to teaching audience construction as discussed in

the last chapter have corresponding difficulties with regards to teaching effective persona construction: Whereas direct explication of audience construction has a tendency to essentialize audiences as stable entities rather than as complex, shifting images, direct explication of persona construction has the tendency to essentialize the roles that rhetors play in different discourses (or at different points in one discourse) as grounded in stable, core identities.

In this chapter I will start with a few examples of this essentializing tendency as reflected in contemporary rhetoric textbooks, then move on to contrast it with the approach taken in the pedagogy of ancient rhetoric schools as epitomized by the practice of declamation. I will argue that, as with the process of audience construction, in declamation ancient rhetoric students were directly confronted by the otherwise elusive process of persona construction by virtue of the practice's imaginative and counterfactual nature: It was an immersive experience that complemented (and perhaps completed) the rhetorical theory constituting the rest of their school curriculum.

Throughout the chapter, however, I will keep in view the likely objection that rhetorical role-playing of the kind practiced in declamation—and which I am holding up as a kind of pedagogical ideal—is not only impractical but also potentially immoral. One might argue, for instance, that training students to effectively play rhetorical roles without appealing to their actual identities or beliefs amounts to a kind of training in disingenuousness. One might worry that such an approach flies in the face of Isocratean and Quintilian ideals of rhetorical training as a kind of *ethical* training, of the ideal product of rhetoric schools (or of contemporary writing classes) as not just people

speaking or writing well, but of *good* people speaking or writing well. I will argue, however, that the flexibility to persuasively perform any subject position can, in itself, be seen as a kind of ethical ideal and one that does not necessarily contradict other pro-social ethical ideals. Indeed, this form of ethical training is integral to the *declamation dynamic* itself.

In the insightful discussion of ethical appeals in the popular textbook *Everything's An Argument,* Angela Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz point out that, in addition to establishing authority over a subject, a rhetor must establish credibility with an audience and that this often depends on such difficult-to-quantify effects as "plain old likeability" and "humor" (59). They further acknowledge that audiences can often "make assumptions" about "people's competence based on nothing more than good looks," and point out that, "like it or not, readers and audiences are going to respond to how you present yourself as a person" (60). In *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee go further down a similar path in their discussion of the differences between ancient and modern views of ethical appeals. As this passage nicely sums up the most common ethical objection to practices such as declamation, I will quote it at length:

> Today we may feel uncomfortable with the notion that rhetorical character can be constructed, since we tend to think of character, or personality as fairly stable. We generally assume as well that character is shaped by an individual's experiences. The ancient Greeks, in contrast, thought that

> character was constructed not by what happened to people but by the moral practices in which they habitually engaged. An *ethos* was not finally given by nature, but was developed by habit (*hexis*)… Because the ancients thought that character was shaped by one's practices, they considered it to be much more malleable than we do. Within certain limits imposed by class and gender restrictions, one could become any sort of person one wished to be, simply by engaging in the practices that produced that sort of character. It followed, then, that playing the roles of respectable characters enhanced one's chances of developing a respectable character. Playing a virtuous character, in turn, increased the chance that the rhetor would enjoy a positive, and hence persuasive, situated ethos. (198)

Crowley and Hawhee's account of the ancient view of identity has much in common with post-modern composition theory. According to Lester Faigley, postmodern theory "would situate the subject among many competing discourses that precede the subject" and "understands subjectivity as heterogenous and constantly in flux" (227). Nevertheless, in Crowley and Hawhee's account of ancient ethics there is an implied distinction between the rhetorical subject and the presentation of the subject to an audience: The former is a product of a nexus of practices, but the latter depends on strategic decisions by the rhetor. This is reflected in the authors' practical advice that "rhetors can construct a character that seems intelligent by demonstrating the ways that they are well informed about issues they discuss" and that "rhetors can create a character

that seems intelligent by demonstrating that they are informed about the issues they discuss" (202).

There is an illustrative interplay between "seeming" and "being" in these statements: Rhetors can "seem" a certain way for audiences by showing these audiences that they actually "are" a certain way. Even though their overview of ancient views of persona critiques notions of stable subjectivity, the distinction that the authors draw (whether intentionally or not) between the subject and the subject's rhetorical ethos gives the impression that the subjectivities or personae that speakers or writers project depend on presentational choices about an abiding or stable core persona rather than on the performance of a radically malleable subjectivity. I point this out not to accuse the authors of inconsistency but to highlight an inherent, almost grammatically inevitable, tendency in the discussion or teaching of persona construction as a rhetorical skill. In short, it is very difficult to stimulate critical awareness of the constructed *nature* of subjectivities or personae while also teaching students *methods* for actually constructing personae for specific audiences and rhetorical situations. A method or *techne* always seems to imply some kind of stable, underlying basis for its system.

If this amounts to a tension between theory and practice in this sense, then there is a corresponding tension between ethics and practice—between, to paraphrase Quintilian, "speaking well" and "being a good person who speaks well." This raises a number of age-old questions: To what extent is the necessity of teaching rhetoric students to construct personae an *ethical* exercise? Is it the business of rhetoric teachers to teach their students to simply "be persuasive" by playing different roles in various situations, or

should they also teach them to "be a good people who are persuasive in different roles for different situations"?

In their overview of the Ancient Sophistic view of identity quoted above, Crowley and Hawhee outline what seems to be a two-part process of ethical development: First, they suggest that by "playing the roles of respectable characters," a rhetor is more likely to, herself, develop a respectable character (198). And just as this can be expected to have a positive internal ethical effect, it may also have a positive effect on way the rhetor is perceived by an audience (198). This line of reasoning has the benefit of endowing rhetorical role-playing with an ethical purpose without grounding it in essentialist notions of stable subjectivity. It gives rhetoric teachers a reason to teach the process of rhetorical role-playing by explaining why such a skill is important in persuading audiences, but it protects against the threat of amoral relativism by linking persuasive ethical appeals and persona construction with the internalization of the moral values of a community. *Playing* a good person, in this view, *is being* a good person.

However, in his analysis of postmodern composition theory, Lester Faigley suggests a slightly different ethical imperative. According to Faigley, "ways of theorizing subjectivity are needed that neither hold out for liberal humanism, collapse subjectivity into vague notions of community, nor reject the idea of the subject altogether (239). Drawing on Lyotard's notion of the "differend," Faigley suggests that, in the context of rhetorical pedagogy, the real ethical imperative lies not in merely teaching students to select one "external theory of ethics" over another—which is essentially what it means to, as Crowley and Hawhee put it, "play the roles of respectable characters" for particular

communities. Instead, students should be taught to "consider the implications of their linkages" (238)—that is, the way units of discourse connect with other units of discourse and broader generic conventions and context to create meaning (Faigley 236). A "*differend,"* in Lyotard's sense, occurs whenever two possible systems of linkage are in conflict, such that each party "does not agree on the relevant rule of justice" (233). Faigley finds in this the non-foundational ethical imperative to recognize that "no one regime of phrases can serve as a metalanguage" (235)—that there is no single way to interpret discourse—and he argues that this ethical vision can be applied to composition pedagogy: "Lyotard would not have us look to external discourses of the 'true' but to the discursive practices of the classroom" (236). Instead, "in a postmodern theory of rhetoric, there is no legitimate preexisting discourse of values for rhetoric to convey," so "ethics becomes a matter of recognizing the responsibility of linking phrases" (237). Ethics, in this sense, is less a matter of effective practice than of a special kind of critical awareness about the nature of discourse.

What I find most interesting about a comparison of these two visions of a non-foundational ethical imperative for composition pedagogy is their underlying compatibility. Just as Crowley and Hawhee's summary of Sophistic ethics emphasizes the internal and external importance of an ethical persona, even if operative criteria for ethics is(are?) determined only by the contingent values of specific communities, Faigley sees serious ethical stakes in a rhetor's awareness of and "responsible decision" regarding her linkages, even though there is no "external discourse to validate this choice" (237). The fact that Crowley and Hawhee's account nevertheless seems to imply a more-or-less

stable foundation for a rhetor's subjectivity while Faigley and Lyotard's does not follows, I would argue, from their differences in purpose and context. Faigley is operating on a theoretical level and, as such, is primarily focused on an ethics of *awareness* about the nature of discourse. Crowley and Hawhee, however, are writing a textbook for student writers and, as such, are operating on the level of *practical* ethics—the actual practice of effective ethical appeals. Their aim (in this passage) is to teach students to *play* ethical personae, while Faigley's aim is to make his reader aware of the nature and stakes of interpretation and discourse.

These are really two aspects of the same postmodern pedagogical vision, and the fact that apparent contradictions between them arise follows from a very basic limitation of language: It is not possible to articulate the limits of a system *within that system*. This is the same limitation that the enigmatic, 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein investigates in his controversial early work the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

> Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.
>
> What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent.
>
> What expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by means of language.
>
> Propositions *show* the logical form of reality.
>
> They display it. (4.121)

This complex dynamic is reflected in the unique rhetorical structure of the *Tractatus* itself, a finely calibrated system *through* which a reader is brought to grasp a realization that could not be contained *in* the text. As such, it is also a kind of template for

the novel rhetorical devices found in Wittgenstein's later work, all of which share the strategic goal of manifesting realization *beyond* an illustration or analogy by clearly elucidating that illustration or analogy. This is no less true of the "language games" in Wittgenstein's posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* than it is in the self-proclaimed "nonsense" propositions of the *Tractatus.* In both cases a process of implicit delimiting occurs in which the most important elements of the argument lie beyond the implied boundary.

On the surface, Wittgenstein's rhetorical method in the *Tractatus*, as demonstrated in the following line of argument, is fairly simple: 1) All experience is preceded by logic, the "scaffolding of the world" (6.124). Logic is not part of experience, but its necessary condition, its basis. It finds its common expression in language, so that "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (5.6). Thus, "We cannot think what we cannot think, and we cannot say what we cannot think either" (5.61). 2) But because logic is the condition of thought or language, it cannot itself be the object of thought or language – such thought would require a perspective outside the world: "Logic is transcendental" (6.13). 3) Thus any previous arguments establishing the nature of logic are ruled out. 4) Still, the comprehending reader has come to a realization *through* them. Like the logic of language, the nature of ethics and aesthetics makes them, too, unsayable (6.42). In all these cases, the transcendental *shows* itself but cannot be *said*. This apparent paradox leads to the infamous proposition 6.54: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them."

What complicates matters are the various possible interpretations of this statement. What, exactly, is the reader supposed to make of the "nonsense" propositions? Presumably they are intended either to communicate sense in spite of their nonsensicality (as posited in the outline above) or simply to make their nonsensicality obvious. In the latter case, the purpose of the book hinges entirely on 6.54 because it is only there where, like an actor, Wittgenstein removes his mask and exposes his true purpose, which is exactly opposed to his apparent one. In this reading, the propositions of the text have no validity beyond disabusing the reader of the inclination to pursue such lines of thought in the first place.

David Rozema argues from a related perspective in his article "*Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus*: A 'Poem' by Ludwig Wittgenstein," that the *Tractatus* performs a form of poetic catharsis: "Thus, though Wittgenstein neither considered the *Tractatus* to be a poem nor intentionally wrote it as a poem, it turned out to be a kind of poem in the sense that its form fits its content, both of which, in turn, accurately picture a specific form of life, and the passional result of this poetic construction is (and was, for Wittgenstein) a certain appropriate disdain for the form of life it pictures" (346). In this reading, the logical "scaffolding" preceding experience discussed in the book is nothing more than a faulty perspective that leads to a depraved worldview by excluding "transcendental" elements such as ethics.

Although their analysis does not, like Wittgenstein's, imply any particular disdain for the "form of life" they depict, Crowley and Hawhee nevertheless run into the same fundamental contradiction that Wittgenstein performs in his work. In short, Crowley and

Hawhee cannot fully commit to a non-foundational, constructed ethical view while simultaneously teaching students how to actually play ethical personae, just as an actor cannot fully commit to a role while describing its artificiality. By the same token, the critical awareness Faigley calls for[24] cannot be taught while simultaneously teaching concrete skills of rhetorical performance. This is not to say that a single teacher can't strive to achieve both goals, or even that an actor cannot play a role ironically, but merely the teacher or actor can only achieve reflexivity by alternating between contradictory dynamics. The tension between these two points-of-view is directly analogous to the immersion/reflexivity binary discussed in the last chapter in terms of audience.

Although post-modern composition is, in many ways, a direct repudiation of the assumptions about subjectivity made by expressivist scholars such as Peter Elbow, I would nevertheless argue that Elbow identifies more or less the same tension or binary in his discussion of the modes of knowledge that he refers to in his seminal work *Writing Without Teachers* as the "doubting" and "believing" games. According to Elbow, both modes are integral to the acquisition of knowledge, despite the typical privileging of the skeptical "doubting game" in most forms of academic discourse. Elbow questions this discounting of the "doubting game," arguing instead that only by a willing act of belief (even of seemingly absurd or abhorrent positions) can propositions be fully understood

[24] I would suggest that Faigley's view of the ethical goal of post-modern composition pedagogy is exactly analogous to the intended critical effect of the *Tractatus.* Just as Wittgenstein wanted his readers to see something unsayable about their world by performing a analogous but more closely circumscribed version of that world in language, post-modern rhetorical pedagogy strives to make students aware of the implicit implications of different forms of discourse through practice in those very forms of discourse.

and evaluated. From this point of view, Wittgenstein's whole approach in the *Tractatus*—in which he presents the whole work as a demonstration of its own limitations—is a kind of *believing game*. This is? what Wittgenstein means when he says that his propositions in the work have a merely indexical function, such that "anyone who understands" them "eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it)" (6.54). The meticulously constructed text is, in the final analysis, a deliberately limited and artificial system designed to direct the reader *beyond* its limits through a transcendence that cannot be directly explained *in* the work but must be performed *by* the work.

Similarly, Elbow notes that "by believing another point of view in a sincere way, one is able to get farther and farther into it, see more and more things in terms of it or 'through' it, use it as a hypothesis to climb higher and higher to a point from which more can be seen and understood—and finally get to the point where we can be more sure (sometimes completely sure) it is true" (163). This certainty (or comparative certainty) about the truth-value of a statement is made possible by *experiencing* the statement through willing, immersive belief. Immersion is helpful in this way not because it makes one more likely to ultimately accept the statement in question but because getting inside the statement enables one to, in effect, see beyond it, to evaluate it from a higher point of view. Nevertheless, this critical vantage point depends on presence rather than distance, on what Elbow describes as "a *kind* of inner commitment" such that "it helps to think of it as trying to get inside the head of someone who saw things this way. Perhaps even

constructing such a person for yourself. Try to have the experience of someone who made this assertion" (149).

According to Elbow, the believing game can sometimes lead to greater level of critical insight than the more agonistic, dialectical doubting game. The doubting game is "the self-extraction game, the logic game, or the dialectic of propositions," and thus always remains bound to the basic structure of the disputed propositions. The believing game, by contrast, is the "the involvement or self-insertion game, the metaphor game, or the dialectic of experience," and allows for the direct experience of things that can *point towards* a higher level of critical awareness that transcends the dialectal system that is under investigation (149).

This kind of critical awareness can only be achieved by *performing* the contested object, identity, or institution. It requires, in other words, an element of role-playing. And it is an inherently *ethical* exercise. As Wittgenstein puts it, "the sense of the world must lie outside the world" (6.41), and that, therefore, "it is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same)" (6.421). This is why the believing game (broadly defined) is an ethical enterprise, both in terms of ethos *and* in the sense of broader ethical values. From this point of view, in fact, ethical performance *is* ethics.

I would argue that ancient declamation was a highly systematized form of the believing game and, thus, an ethical exercise for exactly these reasons. Students performed imaginary personae and perspectives in imaginary situations that were

nevertheless in dialogue with the values and sites of social tension in their "real" social world. This fostered the kind of critical awareness that is called for by post-modern rhetorical theory. At the same time, they practiced practical, technical skills of invention, arrangement, and delivery. As such, it mediated between the seemingly contradictory ethical visions discussed above and resolved the apparent tensions between a practical and a critical approach to rhetorical ethics. As a "real" rhetorical performance, it gave students the opportunity to sincerely and wholeheartedly make ethical decisions and engage in persona construction; at the same, it took place within an explicitly artificial system, the limits of which were never far from view. The *game* gave players a sincere and immersive experience, while the game's obvious *limits*—limits *experienced* rather than *explained*—fostered a critical awareness that prevented techniques or ethical decisions from seeming to be grounded in essentialist notions of "self."

While my argument thus far in this chapter has been inspired by ancient declamation, it has focused primarily on the *declamation dynamic* in a trans-historical sense rather than on the practice and institution of ancient declamation itself. But I want to further argue that ancient rhetoric teachers and their students actually viewed this practice in this way and that as a pedagogical tool it was designed to strike this mediating balance. The following section of this chapter, then, will focus on analyses of ancient texts. In particular, I hope to show that declamation was seen—by at least some ancient teachers—as an inherently ethical exercise, and that the flexible and immersive performance of different identities was viewed as having an ethical function that went beyond mere value-neutral rhetorical skill.

In a fragmentary text entitled "On Mistakes Made in Declamation,"[25] psd.-Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes enigmatically of something he calls the "one great character (i.e, that from philosophy)"—the meta-persona that he believed declaimers must learn to truly master their art. By embodying this "great character," Dionysius expected rhetors to be able to comprehend, perform, and address any type of audience. In illustration of the possibilities of this "role," he gives three preeminent examples: Plato, Demosthenes, Homer. Each excel in their respective rhetorical spheres — philosophy, public speech, poetry — because of their ability to master and encompass a variety of disparate personae: Plato assumes the characters of "sophists, politicians, workers, young boys, men, old men, women, slaves, and free men engaged in speech with him"; Demosthenes assumes "the character of a statesman" then entangles "with it that of a flatterer"; Homer "takes up the assumed personages with great art regarding their differences and makes them distinct" (1-2). In each case, psd.-Dionysius precedes these specific accomplishments with an allusion to "it," "this character," the elusive "great character" that is not the same as the aggregate of these specific characters but is essential to their effective performance.

I believe that this "great character" is the subjective aspect of what I am referring to as the *declamation dynamic*. It is, in other words, the intersection between a critical awareness of the constructed and emergent nature of subjectivity, on the one hand, and

[25] I would like to thank Professor Jeffrey Walker for making his unpublished translation of this text available to me.

the specific skills that teachers such as psd.-Dionysius taught to help students investigate and perform rhetorically effective personae, on the other. I further believe that seeing the "one great character" in this way can reconcile three predominant views of the ethical import of declamation and help to explain and justify my larger argument for its abiding, trans-historical relevance in rhetorical pedagogy.

These three views are as follows: Scholars such as Robert Kaster argue that declamation was little more than an ideological prop, firmly grounded in (and in the service of) the dominant social structure of imperial Rome[26]. Other scholars, such as George Kennedy, critique declamation as superficial and disengaged from the broader social world (of ancient Rome or any other time and place)[27]. From this point of view, the extravagance of declamation themes is a function of their *a-political* nature, which was itself a calculated response to the political pressures of an increasingly tyrannical power structure with no place (or tolerance) for real, Ciceronian-style oratory. Finally, post-modern scholars such as Erik Gunderson argue that declamation *did* inadvertently serve to expose the artificiality of social structures themselves, even as it prepared students to

[26] Kaster notes that it often "becomes the declaimer's job to put the surfaces back into some sort of acceptable, more or less conventional order—which is precisely the role for which the declaimer is being trained" (328).

[27] Kennedy sees declamation as of limited pedagogical value because it was disconnected from reality, not demanding of the student's "careful observation of the world" or "profound background knowledge" (333).

enter into and, indeed, lead and propagate those institutions[28]. This final view is the closest to my own.

But none of these perspectives fully accounts for the possibility that declamation had a *real*, ethical intent that was inseparable from its nature as *artificial* exercise. Ancient rhetoric teachers themselves, at any rate, took it very seriously, even if it was widely criticized. Since at least the time of Isocrates, an ideal rhetorical education was seen as having an ethical dimension. For Isocrates, in fact, this ethical dimension was both more important and more teachable than persuasiveness or mere rhetorical skill. Isocrates argued that great speakers, like great athletes, are born not made; teachers and trainers can nurture innate talent, but "neither has that knowledge by which he could make anyone he wished an adequate athlete or orator" (*Antidosis* 185). Nevertheless, he claimed that his unique educational system, although incapable of fashioning "either good debaters or good speech writers from those who lack natural ability," may still "make them more intelligent in many respects" (Against the Sophists 15). As Edward Schiappa notes, these other forms of intelligence involve primarily *ethical*, rather than persuasive or oratorical, qualities: "While Isocrates does not deny that his educational program assists in the production of discourse appropriate to the rhetor, he chooses instead to emphasize the goal of epieikeia – which can be translated as decency, reasonableness, or virtuousness" (42-43). Through the dissemination of a specific form of political discourse (which was deeply entwined with a particular ethical perspective),

[28] As Gunderon puts it, declamation exposed society as an "effect of the pleading" by modeling the dependence of *reality* on what is *said about reality* (Gunderson 7).

Isocrates hoped to "cultivate the psyche of individual students and, by extension, the psyche of the polis" (Schiappa 47).

According to Takis Poulakos, the ethical focus in Isocrates' speeches and pedagogy is closely related to his skepticism about the ability of any systematized rhetorical art to effectively manipulate community opinion or doxa for narrowly defined persuasive goals. In fact, for Isocrates, persuasion and influence "with the sole end of winning over auditors in particular situations" were a secondary concern (Poulakos 64). His brand of discourse therefore diverges sharply from the paradigm typically associated with the classical period by focusing chiefly on rhetoric's "constitutive possibilities," its "power to create a world of its own making and situate audiences as potential inhabitants of that world" (Poulakos 65)—to create, that is, a world very similar to the world of declamation.

Quintilian had very similar views on the essentially ethical function of his discipline. As the foremost rhetoric teacher in the Roman Empire during his time, he was certainly an establishment figure. The pedagogical program laid out in his monumental *The Orator's Education* both reflected the school system already in use across the Roman Empire by the first century AD and also codified it for continued use throughout much of Western history. And yet Quintilian's program is striking and appealing (now and, perhaps, in its day) for its *contrast* to the amoral excesses and oppressive politics of the

Roman Empire under emperors such as Domitian.[29] Quintilian saw the ideal orator as a *good* man speaking well; ethics, moral education, and rhetoric were, for Quintilian, inseparable, regardless of political context; as such, politics is something he touches on in only the most oblique of ways (Murphy XX). His example would seem to argue, then, that rhetorical instruction in Ancient Rome could (or at least was intended to) serve an ethical function beyond expedient ideological indoctrination; indeed, it seems to have formed a counterweight to the predominant moral climate.

As the capstone of that educational process, declamation must also have served some ethical purpose. Quintilian himself was a foremost proponent and defender of the practice, even if he did harbor some reservations about the practical value of some of its more outlandish manifestations, and two of four or so major collections of Roman declamation literature still in existence have been (rightly or wrongly) attributed to him. This raises the obvious question of how a rhetoric teacher as concerned as Quintilian was with a seemingly stable ethical ideal would encourage a practice like declamation that, on the surface, seems to emphasize ethical fluidity and flexibility.

The answer to this has to go deeper than the superficial response that Quintilian's ethics were perfectly in line with the stereotypical Roman values actually promoted in declamation themes (such as paternal authority, rigid class structure, propriety), even if the prevailing spirit of his day was not. Instead I would argue that, for ancient

[29] James Murphy writes of Quintilian that "his continuous concern with moral virtue can best be understood in the context of an age in which public morals seemed to have descended to a savage low" (Murphy XX).

rhetoricians like psd.-Dionysius and Quintilian, the ability to persuasively inhabit and *perform* a variety of subject positions was, in itself, an ethical as well as a rhetorical quality.

That is why declamation was an ethical exercise, regardless of the content or overt ethics of specific declamation themes, regardless, even, of the relationship between those themes and the dominant power structures of Ancient Rome. But this nevertheless leaves open the question of declamation's relationship with "real" life: How did this indefinable or "great character" play out in the real-world speaking situations rhetoric students were, at least ostensibly, being prepared to enter? A scene from the Elder Seneca's memoirs clearly indicates both the ambiguity of this relationship as well the intrinsically ethical significance that the performance of declamation nevertheless held for Ancient Romans.

Seneca is an interesting figure in this regard because of the internal contradiction that he so clearly presents. On the one hand, he had a very high estimation of rhetorical skill and of one of the primary forms (and forums) for rhetorical skill in his day—declamation. On the other hand, he is adamant that a distinction should be maintained between declamatory performance and reality; the consequences of attempting to cross that line—for example, by speaking "declamatorily" in a real court—could be humiliating or worse, as his example of Albucius shows: This sophist's inappropriate use of declamatory tropes in a real court proceeding effects a kind of rhetorical apocalypse when the opposing counsel calls a figurative bluff, costing Albucius the case and causing rhetorical figures themselves to be effectively (if facetiously) "banished from the world," or at least from that court (preface 7. 11). For Seneca, they no more belonged there in the

first place than real speech belongs in the play-world of declamations: later in the text, he notes that nothing is more "indecorous" than when schoolmen imitate "the practices of the forum," and he praises the declamations of the sophist Capito precisely on the grounds that he didn't cross this line in either direction: "he was a genuine schoolman" (preface 10. 363).

But despite his insistence on an unbreachable *stylistic* line between declamation and real life, he evidently sees no distinction between the ethical value or accomplishment of "real" and "play" orators themselves. The most extreme example of this comes early in his text when he explains his purpose in composing a memoir to the great declaimers of his day; in true epideictic fashion, his text will be a kind of monument, he hopes: "something to prolong their memory" that is "handed on to posterity" (1. preface. 11). He is qualified for the purpose because he had the chance, in his lifetime, to hear "everyone of great repute in oratory" with the exception of Cicero, whom he missed in his native Spain only because of "the raging civil wars, which… kept me behind the walls of my colony; otherwise I might have been present in that little hall where he says two grown-up boys declaimed with him, and got to know that genius, the only possession of Rome to rival her empire: and, use a common saying that is particularly appropriate of him, I could have heard the 'living voice'" (1. preface. 13).

As historian John Alexander Lobur argues, the character of Cicero was—particularly in his role as the star of many declamation themes—a complex ethical signifier. These themes, Lobur claims, often had the distinct rhetorical purpose of recasting this Republican figure as an "amalgam of Imperial virtues," even as (or

because) it allowed an elite Imperial Roman a venue to "foreground his mastery of and commitment to republican dictio" (158). Ironically, an elite Imperial Roman was never so successfully *in character* as when he was *Ciceronian in character*; to achieve legitimacy, Imperial culture had to *perform* its Republican antithesis.

Needless to say, Cicero was more than a historical figure, particularly within the declamation culture Seneca was chronicling: He (or his character), in all its shifting permutations, was a kind of embodiment of the ideal Roman ethos. Given this context, what is perhaps most striking about Seneca's reminiscence of the historical Cicero he almost met is that, for Seneca, Cicero's ethical significance is evident in his *declamatory eloquence;* the "living voice" could be heard just as clearly in a declamation as an actual political oration. Evidently, for Seneca there is no essential difference. To cast this argument as an enthymeme: Cicero was an important signifier for the Roman ethos, and Seneca's imagined (since he wasn't actually present) example of Cicero's ethical glory is a *declamation* (in which, by definition, Cicero would have been performing *as a different character*). Ergo, the locus of ethical accomplishment in Rome was, at least in the context of rhetoric, not one's "real" character. In this scene, at least, Cicero exemplifies his ethical accomplishment *by playing someone else*. The "one great character," after all, is always on stage.

There is something obviously theatrical in this irresolvable and fluid approach to ethos and persona, so it is not surprising that Quintilian saw theater as an important component of a broader rhetorical training. For younger students, he advised that the

canon of delivery be taught by reading aloud, a practice that could be improved by training with actors. Later, he makes the point that actors can help orators master the use of gestures and expressions (Bk. II, Chap.10). In a similar vein, the Greek sophist Libanius not only had his younger students study and recite literature as training in delivery, he even went so far as to cast them in plays they were studying and have them literally perform the texts (Cribiore 165). This striking level of engagement with theater implies that, for ancient rhetoricians, drama taught delivery but also more: Through the artistic practice of playing characters, students were learning something essential about how to be persuasive speakers.

In a passage from Book VI of *The Orator's Education* discussed in the last chapter, Quintilian gives a fascinating hint as to what he might have understood that "something" to be when he draws an explicit connection between embodied performance and affect: "In delivering, therefore, whatever we wish to appear like truth, let us assimilate ourselves to the feelings of those who are truly affected, and let our language proceed from such a temper of mind as we would wish to excite in the judge" (427).

Nowhere in this passage is "truth" or "genuine" feeling mentioned in distinction to its performance or appearance. Assimilating oneself to the feelings of one's persona in a rhetorical situation is not distinguished from one's "actual" ethical position with regards to that situation. The only index of authenticity is the rhetorical situation itself: one *should be* what one *needs to be* in order to elicit a desired response from a specific audience. In the context of declamation, this passage could even be interpreted to imply a *double* remove from "authentic" reality: Quintilian seems to imply that rhetors should

assimilate themselves not only to their own persona in a speech, but also to the *characters* in their imaginary rhetorical situation—the disinherited son, the poisoned father, the divorced wife, the deposed hero, etc. This kind of theatrical identification is even more remarkable since it would have to be integrated into a primary act of role playing: To effectively connect with an audience, then, good declaimers had to directly and sincerely empathize with imaginary characters *from the point of view of the imaginary characters they were playing*.

That skill is very close to the skill required of good actors. In the context of rhetoric, however, it may strike the modern (though probably not the post-modern) sensibility as somewhat un-ethical. But as I hope this chapter has established, there is ample evidence to suggest that, in the tradition of ancient rhetoric that Quintilian inherited from the Greeks and codified for over a millennium of subsequent Western culture, role-playing and ethics were actually complementary and perhaps even co-dependent.

This ethical vision remains relevant today, in part, because it is extremely practical. Perhaps the most effective way to train students to effectively perform the rhetorical subject positions required by their future careers is to give them playful practice playing them right now. Take, for example, the "mobile games" described by Eric Klopfer in which handheld technology such as PDAs or smart phones are used to "augment reality" through elaborate role playing scenarios in which players assume the persona of an expert in a given field (for example, an environmental engineer investigating a chemical leak). Klopfer argues that such "epistemic games" are effective

learning tools, particularly when they cause players to truly "see themselves" in the role that they are playing (107). At the same time, superimposing these game in real environments reinforces learning by incorporating a wide range of sensory details and peripheral information, all of which complicates simplistic, rule-governed responses to problems (think *techne*) and fosters complex, context-specific thinking (think *philosophia*): "Buildings, people, smells, sounds, and even feel become a part of the game, allowing for tight connections between the player, the game, and the real world" (123). Presumably the player's real identity and *reflexive* experience of the intersections between "play" and "real" worlds fall into this category. The player would not only immersively experience the imagined role but also experience the *limits* of that role, limits made manifest by the obvious but unspoken borders between the game and the "real" world.

I would like to close this chapter with some quotes from actual students in a rhetoric class I taught focused on political argumentation.[30] These are culled from responses following a declamation-inspired exercise in which the students wrote and delivered speeches in the personae of specific stake-holders in political controversies that they had been researching throughout the semester. The exercise required them to use their research to imagine a character and outline, in preliminary writing assignments, both his or her characteristics as well as a specific rhetorical situation and audience that he or she might realistically address.

[30] Student names have been changed.

In some cases, students imagined themselves to be playing the role of an expert or authority on the issue at hand; this often gave these students a new sense of confidence. Jennifer, for example, spoke on the issue of health care reform in the persona of a doctor. She wrote that she *"*found it less intimidating to speak as someone other than myself, firstly because the assignment was more fun than a normal speaking assignment, but also because I felt like my opinions were strengthened and validated by the professional that I embodied.*"* James similarly noted that "speaking in a persona allowed me to act with more authority, which I felt was helpful. It made it easier to decide a position and present because it was removed from myself."

This effect was particularly marked if a student's authoritative persona coincided with his or her long-term professional goals. Jennifer indicated that the act of role playing deepened her interest in the political issue and gave her a direct, personal, empathetic understanding of multiple points of view in the controversy in part because the role she was playing corresponded to the way she imagined herself in the future: "I had not felt so much connection to the issue while reading other peoples' stories online. It wasn't until I literally put on a suit and imagined myself many years from now as a doctor with a passion and devotion to medicine that I came closer to understanding that perspective."

This sense of overlap between students' "real" identities and their imagined personae was something of a motif in their feedback about the exercise. In some cases, declamation actually seemed to increase their sense of sincerity and innate voice, despite the fact that they were playing imagined roles. Jack, for instance, wrote that the experience of role playing allowed him to express his actual feelings more fully and

sincerely: “Being able to speak in character allowed me to completely express my feeling without feeling as though someone would judge me since nobody knew if I was agreeing with that persona or not. It was a great experience that allowed me to show my full voice and potential.”

As positive as this response appears to be, it raises the question of just how far Jack’s declamatory persona really was from his real world identity: If his liberating sense of free expression followed merely from the opportunity to express his “real” feelings without overtly claiming them as his own—and thus having to answer for them to his fellow students—this would seem to call into question the value of declamation as a critical or ethical practice. Far from raising his awareness of the limits of identity and social structures, the practice seems almost to have reinforced his commitment to them.

In a similar fashion, Rosa wrote that declamation made public speaking less intimidating for her despite the fact that her persona was very close to her real world identity: *“*While I don’t typically enjoy public speaking, I found this exercise to be easier than other presentations, partly because I wasn’t speaking as myself. This was surprising because the speaking I was portraying was practically me as far as our beliefs are concerned, but because I was not presenting as [myself], I was able to overcome being nervous and just present without fear of being judged because it wasn’t me speaking, but the persona I created.” Again, it would seem that Rosa’s declamatory persona was little more than a thin (if comforting) veil on her “real” identity.

I would argue, however, that both Jack and Rosa may well have gained critical awareness through the act of performing an imagined or artificial version of their “real”

identity. In fact, Rosa's observation that "it wasn't me speaking, but the persona I created" is striking *because* of the similarity between this persona and her "real" identity. Just as the use in ancient declamation of the syntax and grammar of real legal and political life served to "expose society" itself as an "effect of the pleading" (Gunderson 7), the realistic performance of a "created" persona so close Rosa's "real" identity may well have caused her to view that "real" identity as likewise "created."

In conclusion, I would argue that it is possible to reconcile the ethical goal of performance-based pedagogies that seek to cultivate "critical consciousness" with the harsh historical realities of Roman culture in which the original performance-pedagogy, declamation, was embedded. Even if all that classicists such as Bloomer and Kaster say about its ideological context are true, this does not negate the role the practice played in cultivating an (perhaps *the*) essential critical faculty: The one great character. This kind of training—the origins and effects of which can be traced from Isocrates to modern-day rhetorical pedagogies—may not have created revolutionaries, but it certainly did train ancient Romans to see their identities as well as their institutions as contingent and constructed. This understanding, by its very nature, trained them to see rhetorical flexibility and skill as an ethical value in its own right, since ethics follows from as well as defines and constitutes such identities and institutions. That this kind of training is the anti-essential goal of any rhetorical pedagogy in any historical period. What is frequently overlooked in *our* historical period, however, is the key element played by *performance* in achieving it.

Chapter Six:

Playing Between the Rules: *Techne, Kairos,* and the Mediating Power of Games

Each of the three preceding chapters applied similar claims about how ancient declamation used playfulness and un-reality to stimulate critical awareness in ways that more straightforwardly "realistic" exercises cannot: Chapter Three focused on how the *colores* trained students to see rhetorical context as governed by constraints but partly created through discourse; Chapter Four focused on how the interplay between real and imagined audiences taught the process of audience construction; Chapter Five focused on how the performance of *personae* taught students to think of effective rhetorical ethos as dependent on the ethical values of a community but also as fluid and contingent—and furthermore to see that flexibility as itself an ethical quality. Implicit in each of these arguments has been an interplay between rules, technical precepts, and limits on the one hand, and a fluid, direct experience through performance, on the other. This interplay in all its permutations is at the very heart of what I am setting forth as the *declamation dynamic.*

Since at least the classical period, there have been two archetypal and somewhat contradictory "images" of what it is that we teach when we teach "rhetoric." As David Roochnik has argued, it is precisely this paradox—hinging, as it does, on an ambiguous view of determinacy—that has fueled traditional, philosophical critiques of the discipline:

> The rhetoricians' view of determinacy is an exact counterpoint [to the philosophers]. If Socrates praises determinacy while denying the possession of a determinate body of knowledge, they praise indeterminacy while simultaneously hanging their shingles…The rhetoricians typically require some measure of democratic openness and free speech to ply their trade. They affirm contingency and change and tailor speeches to their specific circumstances. In this manner, they advocate the open hand of indeterminacy. In sharp contrast, however, they claim a specific expertise allowing them to teach students and, very significantly, charge tuition. In other words, even if stochastic, rhetoric is nonetheless a techne, the paradigmatic form of teachable, marketable knowledge. (Roochnik 193)

According to Roochnik (a philosopher, after all), the dispute hinges on fundamentally opposed views of the nature of reality. Where philosophers assert a determinate truth at the heart of reality despite the indeterminacy of both immediate, relative experience and their own philosophical investigations (which may point towards absolute truth but nevertheless remain part of relative experience), the rhetorician asserts only an indeterminate relativity-as-truth (*kairos*) despite the limited determinacy of relative experience (including rhetorical situations). This allows for rules and guidelines (i.e., rhetorical *techne*—rules, precepts, personae, forms) to exist and function pragmatically in the world—even though ultimately, upon analysis every seemingly determinate rhetorical situation dissolves, along with its rules, into indeterminacy. This

privileging of *kairos* over absolute knowledge has often brought rhetoric into conflict with the western philosophical tradition.

But it would be a mistake to simply label this as a conflict between philosophy and rhetoric. In fact, two views exist in an analogous tension even within the tradition of rhetorical pedagogy itself. From the first point-of-view, the discipline looks like a system of rules and precepts of the kind elaborated in ancient rhetorical handbooks or *techne*. This quantifiable and teachable subject matter corresponds to the step-by-step classroom approach that characterized a young rhetoric student's days with the grammarian and the early stages of his study under a rhetorician. Quintilian, for instance, was particularly emphatic about the importance of gradual progress in a student's early studies, admonishing teachers to not, "through ostentatious haste, begin where they ought to end, and, while they wish to show off their pupils in matters of greater display, retard their progress by attempting to shorten the road" (1.4.22). In Quintilian's school, this gradual progress was achieved primarily through repetitive practice in the *progymnasmata*; Quintilian believed that if students were able to master the skills contained in narrowly delimited exercises, they would ultimately be able to transmute them into an overall rhetorical way-of-being that functioned effectively in the complexities of real rhetorical situations. Indeed, the relationship between the acquisition of a rhetorical *hexis* and the acquisition of narrowly defined skills is a fundamental principle in Quintilian's pedagogical vision. Describing the exercise of paraphrase, for instance, he noted that whoever "shall successfully perform this exercise which is difficult even for accomplished professors, *will be able to learn anything*" (my emphasis, 1.9.2).

The other view of rhetoric corresponds more, perhaps, to the "anything" that Quintilian saw as the larger, ultimate purpose made possible by all the preceding lessons and exercises: the habit of spontaneous, context-dependent receptivity to situation and *kairos* and the ability to speak persuasively in whatever way was called for in an unpredictable and fluid situation. Although for many rhetoricians, including Quintilian, these two views are progressively linked stages rather than a dichotomy, there has often been controversy over which should take precedence and of the best way to facilitate the transition from the first to the second.

Quintilian refused to come down on either side. As James Murphy notes, "even if Quintilian disdains reliance on 'rules,' he describes a systematic, programmatic educational program" (Murphy 49):

> But let no man require from me such as system of precepts as is laid down by most authors of books of rules, a system in which I should have to make certain laws, fixed by immutable necessity, for all students of eloquence… for rhetoric would be a very easy and small matter, if it could be included in a short body of rules; but rules must generally be altered to suit the nature of each individual case, the time, the occasion, and necessity itself. Consequently, one great quality in an orator is discretion, because he must turn his thoughts in various directions, according to the various bearings of his subject. (2.13.1-2)

According to Quintilian, rules become a problem if they are adhered to in an inflexible way. Far from calling for the abandonment of guiding precepts, though, he specifies a

context-sensitive method for their application in which they are "altered" to suit any given rhetorical situation. In this light, they are taken as guidelines as valuable for the ways they can be bent or broken as for the ways they are directly followed. Indeed, Quintilian's assertion that "one great quality in an orator is discretion" bears comparison to psd.-Dionysius's assertion that the most important "persona" for a declaimer to master was the "one great character (i.e, that from philosophy)," a meta-persona that was, by definition, no particular persona at all but, rather, the flexible ability to adopt whatever persona best suited a particular rhetorical situation (1). "Rules," in this sense, like the *personae* adopted by well-trained orators in different rhetorical situations (as discussed in a previous chapter), have abiding value insofar as they are adaptable, in one form or another, to many rhetorical situations, but rhetors should not identify themselves with or become too attached to the particular personae or to rules themselves.

Logical as this view sounds, it was in some ways a departure from the prevailing pedagogical traditions of the day. According to Maria Silvana Celentano, Quintilian is the "only author in the history of classical rhetoric to have codified two distinct levels of oratorical *exercitatio,* one aimed at reinforcing the basic skills in young pupils and the other at consolidating what pupils have learned during their studies of rhetoric (357). The use of specialized, skill-focused, *progymnasmata* exercises had been an important part of rhetorical pedagogy since at least the time of the psd.-Aristotelian *Rhetoric to Alexander,* but there had been a long standing debate among rhetoricians about what kind of exercise was most effective—the skill-based *progymnasmata* or more naturalistic exercises such as declamation (Celentano 359-360). Quintilian saw both aspects as interrelated and

equally important (Celetano 360) and therefore suggested the need for higher-level, integrative, and holistic forms of practice that enabled students to combine and integrate modular skills into more deeply ingrained habits or characters.

This was so important because, in the Isocratean tradition of rhetorical education that Quintilian had inherited and codified, the ultimate goal was less the transfer of discrete skills as the production of a certain kind of person. Students were taught rhetoric so that, as Jeffrey Walker notes, they would "develop a capacity, a *dunamis* of thought and speech, a deeply habituated skill, that can be carried into practical, grown-up, public life—as the student gathers experience and matures" ("What a Difference" 148). Such a rhetorical *dunamis* is, itself, a kind of character or persona, but not in the sense of a stable or essentialistic subjectivity. Rather, like the "one great character" of psd.-Dionysius, it is a chameleon-like ability to employ critical judgment as an active response to rhetorical situations; it is a kind of judgment *in performance.* Declamation was the final step in the progressive ladder of rhetoric school exercises because it played this integrative function, but it was not fundamentally separate from the more rigidly structured exercises that preceded it. Declaimers had to call on the technical skills that they had amassed but, at the same time, could not rely on them in an individual or slavish way.

Robert Terrill has argued that the *progymnasmata* themselves played an independently important role in creating a holistic, integrated habit, or rhetorical *hexis*. In particularly, he points to imitation exercises such as translation and paraphrase as not only effective in nurturing specific rhetorical skills but also in cultivating "a form of duality that is an especially productive resource for citizenship, and that these doubled

attitudes are among the outcomes of a rhetorical education that are its most significant contributions to public culture" (297). According to Terrill, this duality forces students to oscillate their attention between model texts and their own texts, which causes them to interrogate norms of "sincerity," on the one hand, while reminding them of the intertextual, dialogic nature of all public discourse, on the other. According to Terrill, *imitatio* juxtaposes the activities of reading and writing, but without combining them completely:

> Although a mimetic pedagogy seeks to understand the two processes of analysis and genesis as depending on and feeding each other in a productive symbiosis, the rhetor is not expected to find a middle way between interpretation and production, or to synthesize a third practice that entails them both. Rather, a rhetor schooled through *imitatio* learns to oscillate her attention between analysis and genesis, so that she constantly is shifting her identity between ''interpreter'' and ''performer.'' (304)

For Terrill, this oscillation is at the very heart of the kind of "character" or habit that rhetorical pedagogy was designed to foster. Since *imitatio* would have fallen primarily into the first of the two levels of exercise envisioned by Quintilian—the "one aimed at reinforcing the basic skills in young pupils" rather than the one aimed at "consolidating what pupils have learned during their studies of rhetoric"—from this point of view, the process of habit formation is fully operative from the earliest stages, not something that happens later as a result of the holistic integration of discrete skills through capstone exercises such as declamation. This interpretation makes particular

sense in light of Terrill's claim that rhetorical *hexis* is marked not by seamless integration of skills but by the incommensurability of fundamentally contradictory modes: "the mixed motives of rhetorical awareness constitute interpretation and production—uneasily coalesced and dynamically liquid, but never fully amalgamated into a bland mash—and their pull and push keep the rhetorical art from slipping into irrelevance either through a fatal rupture with the past or through a tradition-bound calcification" (304). According to Terrill, then, an attitude of internal duality and oscillation is both rhetorically effective and productive of ethical civic engagement.

Although, as discussed in previous chapters, I agree that rhetorical "doubleness" is an integral element of rhetorical consciousness[31], I think it is going too far to label it as the ultimate goal towards which rhetoricians such as Quintilian and psd.-Dionysius aspired. I also think it is a mistake to see the *progymnasmata* exercises as pedagogical endpoints in themselves. Instead, I would argue that psd.-Dionysius's description of the "one great character" so important in declamation lends support to the view that this highest ideal went beyond irresolvable binaries—but without completely collapsing them into, as Terrill puts it, "bland mush" (304). Psd.-Dionysius's description of this faculty is suggestive in the way it emphasizes both the variety of particular characters a rhetor might need to imagine and perform in the course of a declamation *and* the underlying "great" character that must govern all of them, but without setting up an opposition between these two poles. The interplay between the "great" and specific characters is indeed paradoxical, but it is apparently not irreconcilable. In describing it, psd.-Dionysius

[31] As in my discussion of immersion and reflexivity in Chapter Five

uses progressively linked, parallel clauses to evoke a sense of inseparability or pervasion that nevertheless does not imply identity:

> Just as in the soul it is necessary for reason to rule, and for passion (thumos) and desire (epithumia) to be obedient to it *and as much as we act from passion we must be impassioned with reason, and as much as we comply with desire we must not comply too unreasonably* thus speech requires this one greatest character from philosophy, since reasoning must underlie speech and must guide everything else (I mean passionate expressions, wailings, witticisms, bitter remarks, and hateful remarks) according to what is useful. (my emphasis; 1)

In distinction to the determinate precepts of rhetorical *techne* or the concrete modular skills taught in *progymnasmata* or even the rhetorical double-vision cultivated by imitation exercises such as paraphrase or translation, the "great character" psd.-Dionysius describes is notable for its unified but paradoxical *ambiguity*. It exists in the irresolvable but unified space between reason and passion, between desire and restraint—put differently, between *rules and free play*.

I would argue that this structured ambiguity is the very core of any rhetorical pedagogy because of the necessity of mediating between *techne* and *kairos,* between precepts and a habitually rhetorical mode of being. It is necessarily *ambiguous* because these two pedagogical imperatives are always in tension. But this ambiguity makes it difficult to quantify, reproduce, or *teach*—an undeniable problem, given its central importance in the classroom.

I would suggest that there were, in ancient rhetorical schools, *two* main sources of this essential *structured ambiguity.* One was the practice of declamation. The other was the teacher. Although, as I will further argue, I believe that the former came to replace the latter as the focus of Roman rhetorical pedagogy for a variety of historical reasons, I see them as closely related both in terms of method and effect, insofar as the ideal Isocratean or Quintilian teacher and the practice of declamation were both pedagogically productive but ultimately indeterminate spaces. This overlap enables me, after discussing each of these sources individually in the next two sections of this chapter, to conclude by suggesting a synthesis between them with significant implications for contemporary pedagogy.

The Declamation Game

Declamation provided rhetors with the opportunity to both practice and go beyond the precepts and exercises that structured their early rhetorical education and to hone their receptivity to *kairos,* but in a safe, circumscribed space: This is precisely what made it, as Walker points out, "a sort of game" (*Genuine Teachers* 340). And like any game, declamation depended on rules to both separate it from and connect it to reality. As discussed in other chapters, much of its fun and its effectiveness followed from its deliberate artificiality, but this very artificiality depended, to a large degree, on its rules. This is a fundamental concept in much performance and game theory. According to Richard Schechner, for instance, "games, sports, theater, and ritual" are all domains in which "the rules are designed not only to tell the players how to play but to *defend the activity against encroachment from the outside*… If one is to find a 'better way' to

perform, this better way must conform to the rules… Special rules exist, are formulated, and persist because these activities are something *apart from everyday life.* A special world is created where people can make the rules, rearrange time, assign value to things, and work for pleasure" (11).

Such a world was the world of declamation—an imaginary place that D.A. Russell, as previously noted, dubbed "Sophistopolis" (22). Clear rules and artificial challenges set this world apart from the amorphous and constantly changing real world, creating a clearly delineated (and protected) space within which spontaneity, creativity, and learning could flourish. This is a large part of what made it such an effective learning technology, and also what made it fun. As Jane McGonigal similarly notes of games in general, "By removing or limiting the obvious ways of getting to the goal, the rules push players to explore previously uncharted possibility spaces. They unleash creativity and foster strategic thinking" (21). [32] Rules, in this sense, actually become catalysts for innovation. Similar observations have been made in many other creative domains. For example, writing of the techniques of modern visual artists such as Claude Monet, Jasper Johns and Paul Mondrian, Patricia Stokes notes that "subject matter is often constrained to emphasize the multiplicity of ways to represent or present the same thing. The goal is to learn how to do different things as well as the importance of doing things differently, of applying constraints that preclude getting or staying stuck in an old solution. In such a

[32] This is closely related to the delimiting function identified by Michael Winterbottom in his argument that the farfetchedness and unreality of declamatory fictions enabled declaimers to focus on the rhetorical skills involved in argumentation rather than on the real world issues that might have obscured and complicated the learning process (65).

context, problem finding, an important component of creative behavior, can be seen as constraint finding" (303). Similar sentiments are evident in Wordsworth's sonnet about the pleasure of limiting oneself to the sonnet form:

> In sundry moods, twas pastime to be bound
> Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
> Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
> Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
> Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Play in this fundamental but paradoxical sense—what ludologist Roger Caillois calls "response *which is free within the limits set by the rules"* (9)—is at the very heart of creativity. It is also the crux of the practice of declamation, if not of ancient rhetorical pedagogy as a whole. As Quintilian notes that *"*the beginnings of every kind of study are formed in accordance with some prescribed rule. We must, indeed, be either like or unlike those who excel, and nature rarely forms one like, though imitation does so frequently" (10.2.2). Quintilian presents imitation, then, as a kind of productive constraint, a "prescribed rule," and it is for this very reason that he considers it to be natural and effective and accepts it (like Isocrates before him) as one of the pillars of his pedagogical program. At the same time, he insists that imitation alone is neither sufficient nor desirable. Instead, students must strive to thoroughly understand and internalize the excellent aspects of whatever orator they are trying to imitate, then *surpass* the model through innovation and creativity: "But he who shall add to these borrowed qualities

excellences of his own, so as to supply what is deficient in his models and to retrench what is redundant, will be the complete orator whom we desire to see" (10.2.28).

Declamation was a technology for achieving this integrative goal *because* it was a game and, therefore, had rules that functioned as catalysts for the creative exploration of rhetorical problems within a delimited space, set apart from real life, with a finite number of variables. But these very elements were, by definition, artificial, and thus set the practice up for persistent critique. Quintilian himself relates an anecdote that seems to dramatize both the creative potential and potential hazards of declamation's rules and structures:

> The danger stems from the effect of the retirement in which they have almost wasted away their life that they should shrink from the field of action as from too dazzling sunshine. This is said indeed to have been the case with Porcius Latro, who was the first professor of rhetoric of any eminence, so that, when he was called on to plead a cause in the forum, at the time that he bore the highest character in the schools, he used earnestly to entreat that the benches of the judges might be removed into the hall, for so strange did the open sky appear to him that all his eloquence seemed to lie within a roof and walls (10.5.17)

This story is about more, I think, then the need for real world experience. After all, Latro was—despite his ineffectuality in this real legal case—an "eminent" rhetoric teacher. Quintilian does not critique his abilities in that role, nor question his "eloquence" within the context of the schoolroom. Quintilian's warning is, instead, about the dangers

and difficulties of transitioning from one domain to the other, from enclosed schoolroom to open-air forum. In this, he is echoed by the Elder Seneca in his critiques of otherwise excellent declaimers who misapply their skills in real world contexts.[33] The "roof and walls" upon which Latro depends seem to symbolize the creative delimitations—the rules, themes, and precepts—of the school environment. The "highest character" that he enjoyed as a teacher in this circumscribed realm is of little direct use in the unbounded realm of reality, but this in no way detracts from its preeminence *in that circumscribed realm*. But this raises the obvious question (as relevant now as then): If transfer of rhetorical skills from the rule-governed space of the schoolroom to the unpredictable real world is so problematic, how can game-like rhetorical exercises ultimately benefit students?

I suggest that for Latro (and teachers and declaimers like him) the limits of the schoolroom roof and walls represented not only a comforting source of confidence but, much more fundamentally, the rules and limits of a *game*. This was (and remains) important because games resolve (or at least mediate) the paradoxical tension between the dual imperatives of *kairos* and *techne*, teacher and handbook, imitation and precept. The essence of game and play is, as Caillois writes, "a response *which is free within the limits set by the rules*" (8). But, unlike the amorphous "goal" of rhetorical facility or the (proudly) unquantifiable Isocreatean teacher, games are very concrete. According to McGonigal, games all share four key elements: "a goal, rules, a feedback system, and

[33] As in Seneca's account of the declaimer Albucius's courtroom humiliation (preface 7. 11).

voluntary participation" (21). With the possible exception of the fourth—participation in a school context is rarely "voluntary" in the way McGonigal intends—the systematic pedagogical system of Roman rhetoric schools, and the exercise of declamation in particular, added these traits to an otherwise less manageable and, potentially, less fun domain of human experience.

Teacher as Game Master

The mediation between *techne* and *kairos* might be ambiguous and unquantifiable *in its nature*, but for Quintilian and Isocrates before him, its *source,* at least, was quite clear: The teacher himself. According to Quintilian, the teacher must "speak much every day himself, for the edification of his pupils. Although he may point out to them, in their course of reading, plenty of examples for their imitation, yet the living voice, as it is called, feeds the mind more nutritiously—especially the voice of the teacher, whom his pupils, if they are but rightly instructed, both love and reverence" (2.2.8). Quintilian, then, saw the teacher is the core of any rhetorical education precisely because he was a bridge between artificial content such as examples and technical precepts and the "living voice" of a real rhetorical hexis.

The origins of this view can be traced directly to the Greek rhetorician Isocrates—the originator of the rhetorical tradition inherited by both Quintilian and psd.-Dionysius. Isocrates criticizes teachers who make the error of "using an ordered art (tetagmene techne) as a model for a creative activity (poietikon pragma)"; such teachers are, he argues, missing the essential point. This is because the art of rhetoric lies not in forms or *ideai,* important though they may be, but in the ability to "to choose from these the

necessary forms for each subject, to mix them with each other and arrange them suitably, and then not to mistake the circumstances (*kairoi*)… these things require much study and are the work of a brave and imaginative soul" (*Against the Sophists*, 12-13). The content or *techne* of a rhetorical education is, in short, simple stuff, and correspondingly easy to convey. But this knowledge is useless without the much more ambiguous and unquantifiable knowledge of how to combine and deploy it—a creative activity that can only be taught (if it can be taught at all) through the guiding influence of the master.

As such, by thus calling the value and feasibility of the *techne* tradition into question, Isocrates' invested much greater authority in the person of the teacher. Michael Cahn has argued that this shift in the "center of rhetoric" was a calculated response to a disciplinary crisis precipitated by increasing skepticism about the efficacy of sophistic "crash courses" in oratory and the correspondingly poor repute of the " rhetoric teachers" who provided them (Cahn 134-135). Isocrates' alternate educational model—set apart by his use of the term *philosophia*—was dependent not on any art or set of rules but on *himself*; his selling point was not a handbook but personalized, long-term, transformative relationships with students. As such, his greatest achievement was "a deconstruction of the art in favor of the guiding voice of the teacher" (Cahn 135).

However, if the teacher's voice is to retain its value as a flexible alternative to rigid sophistic systems of rhetorical education, it must itself resist appropriation and codification, remaining ever "beyond the bounds of a technical reconstruction," never becoming "a historical achievement for the discipline of rhetoric" (Cahn 140). Therefore, as a model for both individual students and a broader community, Isocrates had to retain

flexibility by remaining strategically ambiguous. Yun Lee Too has identified this flexibility as a key element of his "pedagogical contract," in which student comes to mirror teacher through an emulative process without either party sacrificing their independent identities. Just as contingency and *kairos* invalidate any rigid rhetorical *techne*, they also preclude simplistic imitation; instead, a student must "revise and adapt the identity provided by his paradigm to his particular needs at any moment: he cannot take his teacher to be a rigidly prescriptive model for rhetorical action" (191).

I would argue that the strategically ambiguous "teacher" of Isocrates' educational system is the pedagogical model for the "one great character" described by psd.-Dionysius. It is no coincidence that the term Isocrates used to describe the foundation of his discipline, *philosophia*, is the same term Dionysius uses to describe the source of "the one great character (i.e., that from philosophy) on which everything that is fitting at every point depends" (1). For Dionysius, the one great character exemplified by Plato, Demosthenes, and Homer was indeed something to imitate; but it was also, by its very nature, inimitable, at least in any specific, singular sense. Similarly, the ultimate object of emulation in an Isocratean school emerges not from the "teacher" as a single model or example, not from the teacher's model speeches, nor even from the teacher's voice or persona, but from the complex interplay of all of these elements, which creates a fluid network of meaning open to multiple, subjective interpretations circumscribed only by the overarching ethical program. This dynamic enables students (or, more broadly, audiences) to respond to speeches in rhetorically effective fashions despite contingency-based obstacles such as divergent political perspectives, intelligences or interests. It also

models the rhetorical ideal described by Dionysius and Quintilian: Playing the part of the rhetor that can play the part called for by any particular audience in any given situation—the "one great character."

This shared ideal between Isocrates and later rhetoricians is perhaps most evident in his famous *Panathenaicus*, a literary "speech" in which the ambiguous interplay between examples and authorial voice is not only made particularly explicit but actually *performed* within the text itself. The work is framed as a display speech delivered at the Panathenatic festival in Athens, but this dramatic setting is abandoned towards the end of the work when Isocrates shifts into an account of a discussion with several former students, each summoned to help evaluate the preceding speech. One of the sharper student-critics, unconvinced by Isocrates' ostensible purpose in assembling the group (which he sees as ill-qualified and disinclined to offer any real critique), offers a radical reinterpretation of the speech's apparent meaning through an equally radical reinterpretation of Isocrates' pedagogical intention: The teacher is in fact testing his pupils, seeing if they are "still lovers of wisdom" who remember their "lessons" well enough to decipher his work's hidden meaning (*Panathenaicus* 236).

The student thus recasts the work's message (which includes a vitriolic critique of Sparta) and its apparent discrepancy with earlier, more sympathetic speeches—such as the *Archidamus,* a highly declamatory speech which, interestingly enough, is written from the perspective of a Spartan general—as a double entendre designed to "appear to those who are hostile to the Spartans that you are accusing them while they do not notice that, in fact, you are not doing this but praising them" (*Panathenaicus* 239). Only the

careful, knowledgeable reader will be capable of unraveling the speech's complex interplay of examples from "history and philosophy, and all sorts of decoration and fiction," thereby discerning Isocrates' true authorial intent (*Panathenaicus* 246). Isocrates' dramatized speaker indeed maligns the Spartans through "random abuse of their actions" and "harsh words," but by merely presenting the rival city-state's battles and achievements (even in a negative context), "gathering them all together and setting them next to each other," he will actually increase public awareness of these noble acts and ultimately reflect praise on the Spartans (251-252). The subtle strategy is, according to the student, a response to the fallibility of an Athenian audience, which would be likely to reject Iscorates's pro-Spartan perspective; only by concealing "as long as possible the intention" he had when composing the discourse can he achieve his rhetorical purpose and become "especially famous" (*Pananthenaicus* 249).

Importantly, that rhetorical purpose—the speech's underlying ethical message—remains unchanged by either interpretation. As Isocrates states earlier in the text, "virtue (arête)," defined "as a quality found in the souls of good men" together with piety and justice "is the topic of the whole discourse," and this remains true whether it is read as harsh indictment or veiled encomium of Sparta (*Panathenaicus* 183). According to the student, the speech's most brilliant achievement (an achievement which in his eyes elevates Isocrates to the level of Homer himself) is its ability to respond to contingency and *kairos* by simultaneously appealing to disparate audiences through exoteric and esoteric levels of meaning:

> And you have come upon this justly, for you have praised both cities well and appropriately. The one, Athens, is praised according to the judgment of the multitude, a judgment that no famous person would despise; all long for it and would endure anything in order to get it. The other, the truth, among whom some would prefer to have a better reputation than among other people, even if the latter were twice as many as they are now." (*Panathenaicus* 261)

Because the ethical import is not anchored to the "real" message of the speech, the "real" message is, from a pedagogical point of view, irrelevant. Isocrates performs this key aspect of his educational program in the speech's enigmatic finale when his persona in the speech refuses—despite evident pleasure in the student's critical acumen—to validate (or refute) his interpretation: "… I did not comment at all on what he said, either on how his suppositions had hit on or missed my own thoughts, but I let him continue to hold the opinions he had expressed" (*Panathenaicus* 265). The reason for his silence, it would seem, is that the teacher whose "own thoughts" he could definitively confirm or deny was *not* the teacher that the students were being trained to imitate. The *real* teacher-as-object-of-emulation was ambiguity and rhetorical flexibility itself, which the student in question had successfully identified and praised.

It might appear that there are two distinct elements in the speech that Isocrates (through his student interlocutor) sets forward as objects of praise and emulation: First, the arête that he identifies as the underlying subject of the entire discourse; second, the ambiguous manner in which that arête is expressed, which strategically conforms to the

abilities and inclinations of the audience. In actuality, though, I would argue that for Isocrates and the heirs to his tradition of rhetorical pedagogy, ethical virtue and performative ambiguity are deeply intertwined. The *Panathenaicus* does not present a coherent ethical vision *despite* the ambiguity of its overt argument; it presents a coherent ethical vision *because* of this ambiguity. Indeed, this ambiguity is what set Isocrates, by his own account, apart from the *techne*-toting Sophists who were his chief competition. It is the essence of what he is performing in this textual monument to his own pedagogical ideal. "It"—indefinable as it is, because it is indefinable—is Isocreatean *arête* itself. And it was this ambiguous and unquantifiable but rhetorically effective *arête* that mediated between rules and kairos—that was, in other words, *the teacher*.

Although one of the key purposes of this speech would seem to be the foregrounding of the essential role of the teacher, if the student auditor's interpretation is correct, then the speech itself also exemplifies the *declamation dynamic* in each of the aspects discussed in this dissertation's previous chapters. To begin with, like declamation, the speech bends rhetorical genres: Just as declamation was epideictic oratory masquerading as judicial or deliberative speech[34], the *Panathenaicus* is—owing to its secret political message—a kind of deliberative speech masquerading as epideictic oratory. Furthermore, the speech (again, according to the student's reading) presents

[34] Robert Kaster has pointed out the way that declamation served to reinforce accepted values by giving declaimers practice in reconstituting those values in extreme situations that might call them into question (328). This corresponds to Perlman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's view of epideictic rhetoric as discourse that "sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them (51).

historical and political context in the form of the actions of the Spartans as fluid and subject to interpretation through discourse and rhetorical spin; the student sees the whole speech, in fact, as a very subtle *color* on the Spartan's actions. In addition, It is carefully designed to address its audience on multiple levels simultaneously, since Isocrates was supposedly speaking both to the general populace of Athens *and* to a small intellectual elite. And this construction of audience directly determines the speaker's construction of a complex ethos on both explicit and implicit levels, as the student further observes.

Finally, the speech remains, like the *declamation dynamic* itself, ultimately ambiguous and irresolvable. The student never knows whether his interpretation is correct because Isocrates never tells him. In the end, the teacher remains silent and lets his example do the teaching, just as, in the end, there was never a single *right* way to approach a declamation theme. Isocrates refrains from validating or invalidating the student's interpretation because to do so would have placed the teacher within "the bounds of a technical reconstruction" and completely undermined his pedagogical function (Cahn 140). As such, despite his positively central, indispensible role in Isocrates' pedagogical system, in the end, the teacher is less important than the dynamic that he sets in motion, as exemplified by the student's speculative reading of the *Panathenaicus*. For all of these reasons, the *structural ambiguity* of the Isocratean teacher was in many ways analogous to the *structural ambiguity* of the practice of declamation, and the dynamic cultivated by ideal teacher (as exemplified in the *Panathenaicus*) was very close to the *declamation dynamic* that I have been analyzing throughout this dissertation.

Game as Teacher

With the standardization and propagation of schools under the Roman empire[35], the concept of the irreproducible, singular teacher presented a significant problem. The ideal teacher is precisely what cannot be reproduced and exported, what cannot be guaranteed in every rhetoric school in every far-flung colony. But the practice of declamation *could*. I would suggest that the centrality of declamation in the Roman rhetorical curriculum was, in some ways, a response to this need for reproducibility. Just as in Classical Athens, Isocrates moved the focus of rhetorical pedagogy from *techne* to *teacher* (Cahn 134-135), the exigencies of the Roman Empire necessitated moving it again from *teacher* to *declamation*. But because of the correspondence between the teacher dynamic and the *declamation dynamic* outlined above*,* this *did not* amount to a return to the reductive emphasis on the *techne* tradition that Isocrates had repudiated. The *Panathenaicus* shows why this was possible: At the highest level, the teacher's job was to create a rule-governed space within which free-play could occur rather than to simply convey a static repository of information. Declamation had exactly the same purpose and function.

So by encapsulating the mediation between rules and constraints in the game-structure of declamation, Roman rhetoricians also made their discipline more

[35] As James Murphy notes, "The remarkable thing about Roman education is that it took the comparatively loose ideas of Greek educators and modeled them into a coherent system, which instilled in its students a habit (*hexis*) of effective expression. Moreover the Romans embedded this system in a network of 'public' schools (i.e., classrooms of numerous students, each under one master), which used a common curriculum throughout the Roman world" (*Short History* 49).

systematically teachable. Systematization was, after all, perhaps the Romans' greatest educational accomplishment:

> Virtually every individual element found in the program described by Quintilian was inherited from the Greeks, and especially from Isocrates… What was not inherited, however, was the deftly designed correlation of these elements into a 'system.' As a system the process could be—and was—replicated over time and space. As a system it could be promoted worldwide as a tool of public policy equal in geopolitical value to the legions and the tax collectors in making the world Roman. (Murphy, *Short History* 50)

There were, no doubt, many good or even great Roman rhetoric teachers, but they could hardly have been counted on in each of the countless schools across the far-flung empire. I would argue that the game-like elements of the pedagogical system as it developed—the introductory exercises as well as the full-fledged practice of declamation—partly filled this gap. To recap the argument thus far, systemized rules, precepts, or rhetorical exercises on their own inevitably prove, as rhetoricians have always asserted, insufficient in the face of the contingencies of *kairos*. At the same time, students (and teachers) need quantifiable, teachable techniques to prepare them for ultimately unquantifiable contingencies. In the Isocratean pedagogical tradition, a balance was struck between precepts and exercises and the imitation of the irreducible ambiguous teacher; but without singular teachers upon which to ground their mass-producible, world-wide program, the Romans needed a substitute; systemization, in and of itself,

would have simply emphasized rule and precept at the expense of kairotic flexibility—producing graduates with few rhetorical skills of real world value.

This is precisely why the systematization of rhetorical pedagogy came as kind of *gamification*. This process, in the form of declamation, opened the schools to critique (much as much gamification in schools and other contexts is criticized today[36]). But it is also what made the rhetoric schools so appealing and fun for so many students. As Walker notes, "Through declamation, rhetoric's regime of 'exercise in evenly balanced cases' in a fictive parallel reality, students both cultivated through performance their rhetorical capacities and entered the 'sweet garden' of practical *philosophia* and a democratic civic imaginary, where students… experienced a kind of revelation and intellectual liberation" (*Genuine Teachers* 199).

Declamation was a game because it was a domain where the "rules" applied more than in the real world. And these rules were *replicable.* At the same time, the game was not accounted for by the rules in and of themselves but by the "play" between them; learning the game meant learning to mediate between the constraints of rules, themes, and precepts, on the one hand, and creativity, innovation, and *kairos*, on the other. Since not every teacher could be an Isocrates or a Quintilian, the game of declamation provided systematically reproducible liminal space within which students could learn about the play between determinate but stochiastic rhetorical "rules" and the indeterminacy of

[36] See, for example, Ian Bogost's article "Gamification is Bullshit," as discussed in a previous chapter.

kairos. This happened through low stakes experimentation, playful imitation of each other as well as the teacher, and through play itself.

And this play was a significant part of what made the practice so effective. Writing about games in general in a passage that seems to echo Walker's description of the "sweet garden" of the rhetoric school (for which many ancient rhetoric students remained nostalgic throughout their lives), McGonigal argues that while "the success we achieve in games is not, of course, real-world success," nevertheless "for many people it is more realistic than the kinds of success we put pressure on ourselves to achieve—whether it's money, beauty, or fame. It's depressing to spend our lives pursuing unrealistic goals… they shift our attention away from depressing goals and train us to be more flexibly optimistic. Today's best games help us realistically believe in our chances for success" (71).

In the context of rhetorical pedagogy, the revolutionary shift McGonigal is calling for looks a lot like a return to the ancient past. And, in fact, the resistance and skepticism about gaming that she takes on it her book sounds strikingly similar to the critiques of declamation that arose when it reached its most game-like state. I would argue that this is an inevitable result of the uneasy coexistence of competing, separate domains of experience. Unlike the more basic, trivial games discussed by theorists such as Caillois, McGonigal sees the astounding popularity of modern gaming and game culture as an indictment of (and alternative to) unenjoyable and ill-designed aspects of real life: "What if we decided to use everything we know about game design to fix what's wrong with reality? What if we started to live our real lives like gamers, lead our real businesses and

communities like game designers, and think about solving real-world problems like computer and video game theorists? Imagine a near future in which most of the real world works more like a game" (7). In answer to these questions, she concludes that it is "high time we start applying the lessons of games to the design of our everyday lives. We need to engineer alternate realities: new, more gameful ways of interacting with the real world and living our real lives" (115).

At first glance, the shift McGonigal calls for seems to be an inversion of one of the essential qualities that early ludolgists such as Caillois thought made games *games*: The clearly delineated boundary between game and reality. But, in fact, the games and game-like strategies that McGonigal advocates do not involve a blurring of this boundary (which would presumably make games much less fun) so much as a *shifting* of it: She suggests, for example, that games be played in "real" places and contexts, to achieve "real" ends, and that game dynamics influence the design of real world institutions. All of this follows, I would argue, not from an increasingly game-like reality, but from an increasingly powerful alternative "play" domain that is in *competition* with reality. And this is, perhaps, the real reason why modern video games and the trend of gamification are—like ancient declamation in its day— so popular and, at the same time, seem so threatening (even immoral) to so many people.

Nevertheless, games *are* astoundingly popular aspects of modern life and—as scholars such as James Gee, Ian Bogost, McGonigal herself, and many others have noted in recent years—incredibly powerful classroom tools. But this potentiality seems to have

become most apparent at the very moment of their most public and prominent critique[37]. The same was true for declamation: At the practice's height of systematization and popularity, a cottage industry of declamation critique simultaneously sprang up alongside it, many examples of which have been previously discussed.

Although modern scholars have often pointed to these critiques of ancient declamation as a symptom of the decline of rhetoric during this period, I argue that the opposite is actually true: As declamation became more fully developed as a pedagogically effective game, it became (like the games discussed by McGonigal) an increasingly self-sufficient, alternate domain of experience appealing enough to actually *compete* with reality. When even passionate fans of declamation such as the Elder Seneca took offense at declaimers who attempted speak declamatorily in real situations, perhaps their ire followed as much from the threat that the play domain posed (or seemed to pose) to the real one as from the real-world incompetence of the declaimers. In this light, Latro's request that the benches of the "real" judges be removed into the hall can be read as a double-entendre: Perhaps there was a desire (even an unarticulated one) among many graduates of Roman rhetoric schools that the real court rooms they had moved into might be made more like the "play" courtrooms they had inhabited in the "sweet garden" of the rhetoric school. If this is the case, it calls into question the widely-held belief—drawn by Quintilian himself and by many subsequent authorities—that unrealistic declamation

[37] See, for example, the records of the 2006 congressional hearings entitled "What's in a Game: Regulation of Violent Video Games and the First Amendment" (http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/resources/transcripts/).

themes were less pedagogically effective. On the contrary, they may have been *too* pedagogically effective.

All of this matters *now* because modern rhetoric departments face challenges similar, in many ways, to the challenges faced by the far-flung Roman educational system. Most lower-division rhetoric and composition courses in colleges and universities today are taught by graduate students or instructors who may or may not specialize in rhetoric and who may or may not have interest or expertise in pedagogy. While this was not the case in ancient Rome, the implications of two situations are comparable: modern departments must develop introductory rhetoric curriculum that can be easily reproduced and that can be effective whether or not a master teacher is running a class. As in ancient rhetoric schools, they need an easily replicable method of teaching students to balance the precepts of rhetoric textbooks with the fluid demands of kairotic discourse. I argue that, as in ancient Rome, the declamation dynamic can fulfill this need. But what would this actually look like in practice?

In my conclusion, I will discuss some of my own classroom experiments with declamation-inspired techniques, drawing heavily on real student feedback to test—in a modern classroom context—the theoretical assertions made in the previous chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to use close analysis of a historical practice to make a trans-historical argument about the teaching of rhetoric. To this end, I have identified four key elements of what I refer to as *the declamation dynamic*, each epitomized by the ancient practice of declamation but essential to rhetorical pedagogy in any time period: 1) scenario construction, 2) audience construction, 3) persona construction, and 4) mediation between rules and free play. These four elements are nothing new. In fact, I have argued that they are essential aspects of *any* rhetorical exercise, including the kinds of papers that are already typically assigned in contemporary writing classes. However, I contend that they are generally not as skillfully or thoroughly engaged as they were in the historical exercise of ancient declamation. It has been the primary goal of this dissertation, therefore, to analyze how ancient declamation channeled these elements so efficiently and why they made the practice so effective, as well as to suggest their implications for contemporary classroom practice. I would now to like to explore, in more concrete detail, some approaches that might achieve a similar result in rhetoric classes today.

First, though, I want to again acknowledge that I am not the first person to suggest the benefits of applying of ancient rhetorical practices in the contemporary classroom—

indeed, this is a long-established[38] but also quickly growing area of interest in the field. Summing up what is becoming an an increasingly widespread view, Marjorie Woods has aptly observed that historical exercises should be seen not only as artifacts but as "epistemological experiences that can help generate sophisticated verbal discourse at any time, including our own" (163). However, the focus in this project on declamation, in particular, rather than the *progymnasmata* exercises that preceded it in an ancient rhetorical curriculum sets it apart from most of these other trans-historical projects. To cite one illustrative example, Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* provides assignment prompts modeled on *progymasmata* exercises but barely mentions declamation. A good place to begin this concluding discussion of concrete pedagogical applications, then, is with the question of why the *progymnasmata* exercises seem to have been an "easier sell" for contemporary teachers than declamation and what declamation can offer as a closely related but alternative model for modern teachers from ancient rhetorical pedagogy.

The simplest answer to the first part of this question is that declamation is more ambiguous and (even now) more ethically suspect than the much more straight-forward modular progression of the *progymnasmata* exercises. Declamation was both part of this progression and beyond it, a final stage that drew on all the previously mastered exercises yet was less constrained or rule-governed than any of them. Declamation also straddled

[38] See, for example, Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert Conner's seminal *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student,* now in its fourth edition and still a popular textbook for contemporary rhetoric classes.

the boundary between pedagogical exercise and adult recreational activity—all of which may make it seem less easily controllable and adaptable for pragmatic purposes by teachers today. This impression is likely to be strengthened by the fact that *progymnasmata* exercises seem less vulnerable to the kinds of ideological critique that are so frequently leveled against declamation. Woods observes, for example, that medieval rhetorical exercises (which are closely related to the tradition of ancient *progymnasmata*) are particularly relevant today because they were designed to function well with diverse groups of students: "Students in the modern classroom increasingly resemble their pre-modern counterparts in their varied backgrounds and levels of achievement," such that "in my experience, the more diverse the strengths of the students in the classroom, the better such exercises work, and this is especially true if an oral, performative component showcasing different kinds of talents and insights is included" (161). Declamation, however, is often thought of in simplistic terms as a kind of social conditioning for a monolithic bloc of economically and politically elite Greco-Roman students.

I would suggest, though, that the benefits Woods identifies in historical exercises[39] generally are just as applicable to declamation as they are to medieval exercises or to the *progymnasmata.* In fact, I would suggest that the effectiveness of these other exercises, like the effectiveness of declamation itself, followed from the effective

[39] Woods herself certainly does not exclude declamation from her argument for the benefits of historical exercises. However, I would suggest that declamation is nevertheless often neglected to the point of exclusion from these kinds of discussions, which tend to focus on the preliminary exercises.

engagement of different aspects of what I call the *declamation dynamic.* As preliminary exercises, however, they engaged the dynamic piecemeal, while declamation engaged it *in toto.* From a modern perspective, it is perhaps tempting to view this holistic integration of rhetorical skills as a complication if not a drawback in the classroom; indeed the more-or-less rigid structure of the *progymnasmata* progression is part of what has made it so appealing for use today. According to Woods, for example, the most pedagogically effective aspect of medieval rhetorical exercises—and I think this observation is just as applicable to the ancient *progymnasmata*—is that they were "extreme": "as short as possible, as concentrated as possible, and as structured as possible. Imitation, variation, and playfulness are the key" (160). In this observation, Woods clearly identifies the importance of *free play within constraints* that made these exercises so effective. This paradoxical dynamic was, of course, just as essential to ancient declamation—indeed, it was the subject of my last chapter. But I would suggest that the dynamic was approached in fundamentally different ways in the two domains: The *progymnasmata* emphasized the constraints of narrowly defined rhetorical tasks—which created a space for creativity and free play. Declamation was an infinitely more variable zone of free play—but was, nevertheless, ultimately governed by conventions and constraints. Both practices mediate between rules and free play in the ways I have discussed, but in declamation this mediation was much subtler and more central, precisely because free play rather than constraints were taken as the starting point of the practice. This is why declamation was the ultimate training method for the kairotic contingencies of real life and was the goal towards which all the *progymnasmata*, with their increasing levels of ambiguity and

complexity, were meant to lead.

But this suggests yet another reason about why declamation may seem less appealing to contemporary teachers than the *progymnasmata*: In the idealized curriculum of ancient rhetoric schools, declamation took place at the end of a very long and difficult educational process. As Raffaella Cribiore observes, this process consisted of "rigorous training" in "intellectual gymnastics" (the *progymnasmata*) that "were structured like the links of a chain that a student had to master in a process of accumulation" ("Short Road" 77-78). As such, "if a student aspired to become 'a good man, skilled in speaking,' with the broad education that Quintilian advocated, the training inevitably took a long time" (Cribiore, "Short Road" 77-78). But contemporary rhetoric teachers often only have a single semester with their students; as such, they clearly do not enjoy the luxury of leading their students down such a "long road" to rhetorical mastery. Given this situation, it is perhaps natural that in adapting ancient rhetorical pedagogy, contemporary teachers tend to focus only on the initial, fundamental stages of that road. There simply is not time to go any further.

But in this situation, contemporary rhetoric teachers are actually much more similar to some of their ancient counterparts than they might initially realize. In ancient schools, too, changing social and political dynamics eventually called into question the sanctity of the traditionally lengthy and involved approach to rhetorical education characterized by the *progymnasmata*. As Cribiore points out, by the fourth century many "students who wanted to engage successfully in forensic activities without knowing Roman law did not need to follow the long road to rhetoric," but were able to achieve

similar levels of success though "a shorter training" that would enable them to "engage as speakers in public displays in the theatrical form of oratory that was so popular" ("Short Road" 83). Cribiore is, of course, referring here at least in part to declamation. In fact, the reasons ancient authorities such as Lucian were critical of this new-fangled "short road" to rhetoric are almost exactly the same as the reasons they were critical of declamation itself. Lucian claimed that short-road rhetors "compensated for their lack of mastery of traditional techniques by strategies of various kinds, which included flamboyant dress, elaborate gesturing, modulation of voice, and keen understanding of their audience's expectations" (Cribiore, "Short Road" 83). Nevertheless, he also recognized that the "smooth continuity of education stood in contrast to the changed times" and that rigidly traditional approaches to rhetoric were indeed becoming outdated and unnecessary (Cribiore, "Short Road" 86).

I would suggest that the changing dynamics that made the short-road to rhetoric—with its tendency to skip over fundamental stages of the long-road and leap directly to instruction and practice in declamation—so appealing in the later Roman empire also make declamation much more relevant to the circumstances faced by contemporary teachers. Now, for all practical purposes, the "short road" is the *only* road—and it's a good deal shorter than even the most cursory of ancient rhetoricians would have been likely to advocate. Contemporary students, like the students of which Lucian lamented, are often narrowly focused on the pragmatic, career value of their educations, and may have little patience for step-by-step, graduated systems that seem disconnected from real-world applications.

This is not to say, however, that a shift in pedagogical focus from *progymnasmata* to declamation necessarily entails a rejection of systematic process or careful cultivation of fundamental rhetorical skills. It means, instead, situating this process in the context of a single synthetic and holistic exercise rather than in the context of many modular and analytic ones. This need not be a haphazard or disingenuous process. On the contrary, psd.-Quintilian's *sermo* commentaries in the *Lesser Declamations* clearly indicate the ways ancient rhetoric students engaging in declamation approached speeches and rhetorical analysis *analytically*: The master advises them, for example, on persona, handling of audience, choice of *colores*, etc.[40], and presumably the students then engaged in similar analyses of their own before imitating his examples. But in engaging in these individual analyses, students never lost sight of the ultimate form and venue for their eloquence in fully developed speeches—something that would have been barely visible in the tightly constrained forms of the *progymnasmata* exercises. This is a subtle distinction that, I suggest, made a very big difference.

By way of conclusion, then, I want to suggest that this short-road approach, in which declamation is emphasized from the earliest stages, might have more relevance for contemporary pedagogy than the more traditional long-road approach that began with years of intense training in the systematically ordered preliminary exercises, though the latter approach has received much more attention by contemporary scholars. But what

[40] Similarly, the Elder Seneca usually critiques or praises the great speakers of his day in terms of their handling of fundamental *aspects* of declamation—especially their use of *colores*, their handling of persona, and their choice of pithy *sententiae*—rather than their declamations as a whole.

would a short-road approach, adapted for the contemporary classroom, actually look like?

In these final pages, I would like the present some speculative suggestions for classroom practice. These are general approaches rather than fully formed exercises, intended as hypotheses rather than as conclusions, meant to inspire future research and, much more importantly, classroom experimentation. Each of these three approaches emphasizes one aspect of the *declamation dynamic* as discussed in the preceding chapters and, in this way, performs an analytic function analogous to the *progymasamata* exercises. Unlike the *progymnasmata*, however, this analysis takes place in the synthetic and performative context of the overall practice of declamation, with the goal of holistic rhetorical performance constantly in view.

Pick a *Color*: Contextual analysis of political speech

In the *sermo* or commentary sections of the *Lesser Declamations*, psd.-Quintilian often explains his choice of *color* for a specific theme before actually demonstrating that approach. Contemporary teachers could ask students to perform similar kinds of critical analysis of concrete rhetorical situations and then present their analysis to the class. If several students analyzing the same rhetorical situation come up with several different ways of "spinning" its contextual facts, a productive discussion (perhaps even a debate) of the relative benefits and drawbacks of each approach is likely to result. Furthermore, this approach will naturally train students to see rhetorical context as a function of discourse rather than as (mere) objective facts.

There are, of course, many different kinds of themes that could be employed for this type of exercise. However, I think it is important to note the importance of imitation

as a key pedagogical tool in teaching declamation—just as in the *progymnasmata*—especially in the early stages of a "short road" approach. To wit, in the *Lesser Declamations* psd.-Quintilian always *illustrates* his analysis with model declamations, presumably with the ultimate goal of student imitation[41]. Rather than relying on a contemporary teacher to produce her own model declamations (although this would also be an interesting and plausible approach), a theme might be distilled from a real political speech, either from contemporary public discourse or from history. The students could be given basic facts surrounding a political crisis or scandal as material for their analysis of potential *colores*, then compare their approaches to the actual approach taken by a real politician in this situation. Conversely, a class could first analyze the approach taken by a politician, then investigate alternative ways they might have "spun" the facts to different effect. As in Woods's discussion of medieval, *progymnasmata*-inspired exercises, "imitation, variation, and playfulness are the key" (160), but, unlike those exercises, this variation and imitation takes place in the context of a fully-formed speech rather than a narrowly constrained exercise.

That being said, one of the key elements of declamation that made the game so fun and effective was—as discussed throughout this dissertation—the dramatic and heightened nature of many declamation themes. A contemporary teacher employing this

[41] But imitation in the creative, indirect sense discussed by Robert Terrill: "*Imitatio* is not a single-minded process in which the rhetor simply absorbs and then regurgitates another's ideas, but a double-minded inventive process through which the student rhetor analyzes both the model text and the target situation in order to craft discourse fitted to her purposes, abilities, and audience" (302).

method would be well advised to channel this playful dynamic by broadening her definition of "political speech" to include not only current political discourse, but also persuasive speeches from history (say, the Gettysburg Address) or literature (say, Antony's speech in *Julius Caesar*). The more distant the time period or cultural context, the harder the students will have to work to imagine the different elements of the rhetorical situation and invent appropriate *colores* to suit it.

Alternatively, a teacher might choose to invent a theme that is closer, in some ways, to the students' time period and everyday experiences but that is nevertheless—like ancient declamation themes—highly dramatic and fraught with contested issues of power and authority. Whereas many ancient Roman declamation themes dealt with issues of paternal authority and disinheritance, a contemporary teacher might write a theme that focused on the power and authority of corporations—for example, by centering on a whistleblower who has been fired without a severance package for pointing out gross corporate maleficence.[42]

Persona construction:

An exercise focused on persona might be structured along almost the same lines. As in the previous exercise, students could be given the basic facts of a real rhetorical situation, but with a closer attention to the background and situated ethos of the speaker. They could then be asked to produce hypothetical "game-plans" for the speaker's invented ethos or persona; alternatively, they could be asked to first analyze the real

[42] I would credit James J. Murphy with pointing out, in a lecture at the University of Texas at Austin, this parallel between paternal authority in the ancient world and corporate power in the modern world.

speaker's approach to persona in the actual rhetorical situation and then imagine and present alternate approaches. Again, the goal would be to stimulate discussion in the classroom through imitation, variation, and playfulness. And, as with the exercise focused on *colores,* students would be learning to see invented ethos as something constructed—that is, as something created through discourse within the constraints of a speaker's' preexisting, situated ethos.

Audience construction:

In this exercise, students would again be given the basic facts of a rhetorical scenario, but here with a particular focus on the disparate elements of their audience. The main challenge would be to divide and subdivide this aggregate audience into smaller representative sections—first, for example, into friendly and hostile groups, then further according to shared interests, preexisting loyalties, persuadablity, etc. Students would have to present to the class an "audience profile" identifying the most important group or groups to appeal to in the speech, as well as important secondary groups worthy of consideration. They would also have to present a "game-plan" according to which a speaker could appeal to a single group or, on a more complex level, to multiple groups in the course of the speech. This kind of analytical work would encourage the students to view audiences as *constructed* and, furthermore, would emphasize the necessity of forming an appropriately approximated "image" of an audience to effectively invent and deliver rhetorical appeals. As in the previous exercises, a productive discussion could ensue about the differences between different students' audience constructions and about how these various "images" would (or should) change a speaker's' approach in designing

her speech. As in the previous two approaches, this work could take place in dialogue with analysis of the actual example of political speech (broadly defined and including literary and historical sources) from which the basic facts of the scenario were adapted. Looking at an existing speech from this perspective would further emphasize the interdependence of considerations of audience and speakers' rhetorical strategies, as well as the inevitable limitations and omissions that follow from any one approximation of an audience. And, as in all of these approaches, the mere juxtaposition of an actual political speech with students' playfully hypothetical variations would likely stimulate critical awareness by exposing the "real" norms of modern political speech, as Gunderson similarly noted with regards to ancient declamation, as partially an "effect of the pleading" (7).

Each of these preliminary exercises would teach essential rhetorical skills in a constrained, limited context, but with the ultimate goal of holistic rhetorical performance never far from view. In fact, each would, like the exercise of declamation towards which they build, involve rhetorical performance—here in the form of presentations and defenses of rhetorical analyses and corresponding examples. Each would, therefore, tap into the fun, playful, and flexible aspects of the *declamation dynamic* even as they focus on discrete rhetorical skills and forms of critical awareness. This would amount, then, to a kind of *progymnasmata* progression leading towards declamation, but already *within the context of declamation*—in other words, a shorter road with the same ultimate destination as the long one. As I hope the preceding chapters have made clear, this

approach is nothing new—on the contrary, these aspects are native to the exercise of declamation, and ancient rhetoric teachers (such as psd.-Quintilian in the *Lesser Declamations*) have always focused on exactly these kinds of considerations with their students in ways very similar to what I have suggested here. Nevertheless, this approach stands in stark contrast to most contemporary adaptions of ancient rhetorical pedagogy. It is my hope that this dissertation will encourage contemporary teachers to reassess that neglect and to start experimenting with declamation as a means of channeling the *declamation dynamic* in their classrooms. To do otherwise is, I think, to forfeit a powerful, time-tested classroom tool and—perhaps more to the point—to miss out on a great deal of fun.

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