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Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Dec., 2006), pp. 213-235
Published by: National Council of Teachers of English
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20456935
Accessed: 19-08-2018 19:54 UTC

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Melanie Kill

Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition

In the interest of better understanding the challenges of enacting new pedagogies in the classroom, the following essay focuses on the role of genre and uptake in the relational negotiation of self-presentation. I argue that to bring our teaching practices in line with our best intentions and most progressive pedagogies we need to be aware not only that reliance on the legibility associated with familiar subject positions motivates student resistance in the composition classroom but, moreover, that our interest in securing self-presentations as teachers may motivate everyday interactions that work to maintain the status quo.

> *It's kind of funny how in looking back on my previous experiences with English or language arts classes, it seems as though the first writing assignment is always the same sort of autobiographical piece. These assignments have come in various forms and with different focuses each time, but nonetheless [they usually break] down, more or less, to a surface reflection of who I am. I also find it quite peculiar that although I'm to write about the one topic I know about most, and consequently, one I should have the most to say about, I inevitably end up with no clue as to what I should say.*
>
> — Jacqueline Ho, first-year composition student

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First-year composition is enacted repeatedly in thousands of classrooms across the United States and is thus always open to new visions for productive change, but efforts to envision new purposes and possibilities for first-year writing courses often do not translate smoothly into actual practice. In response to developing understandings of the disciplinary specificity of academic writing—as well as the ever-changing world in which, and for which, students seek education—much recent scholarship suggests rhetorical agility as the most productive goal for first-year composition (see for example, Bazerman, "The Life of Genre"; Carroll; Cope and Kalantzis; Devitt, *Writing Genres*; Lovejoy; Lu; Petraglia; Russell; Sommers and Saltz; and the WPA Outcomes). While an interest in developing flexible and rhetorically-aware language users is shared among this scholarship, these formulations each explore to a different degree the complexity of the relationship between rhetorical agility and the fluidity of self-presentation on which it is predicated. If flexible subjectivities are, as I believe, integral to successfully agile communication, and we as writing instructors are to help students develop strategies to successfully negotiate them, we would do well not only to consider this relationship with an eye for the benefits of expanding one's performative repertoire, but also to take yet a closer look at exactly what difficulties and dangers this entails.

Notable work has already been done to this end. For example, Lee Ann Carroll's *Rehearsing New Roles* provides us with a view of writing in the university that takes students' perspectives into account and thus helps us to see the challenges that inform students' strategic applications of their literacies. More recently, in "An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism," Min-Zhan Lu points out that these strategic applications of literacy often draw on diverse discursive resources, and she calls on us to be more "responsive and responsible" users of language by assuming meaning rather than dismissing potential innovations as error. Carroll and Lu's insights do a great deal to foreground the importance of being aware of and responsive to the range of purposes and exigencies that student writing introduces to our classrooms, and they also highlight the need to further investigate the challenges posed by shifting purposes and subject positions in the interactions of the classroom as we address new and varied rhetorical situations.

These challenges involve, first and foremost, the problems that can result from the relationally negotiated nature of identity performances. Any new

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curriculum, particularly one that calls for rhetorical agility, requires students and teachers to undertake renegotiations of identity on at least two interrelated levels: 1) in their interactions with others, and 2) between their various presentations of self. As we try to enact progressive pedagogies focused around diversity of discourses, we must be attentive to the likelihood that inconsistencies will be brought to the fore by our intentional engagement with multiplicity. And we should be additionally mindful that because students will be speaking to us from various subject positions, we—to be truly responsive and responsible to their developing rhetorical agility—must shift accordingly in our responses to them. In this essay, I will argue that the work of renegotiating classroom identity cannot fall to students alone, and if we are to join in, we must not allow the weight of our authority to secure us in comfortably familiar positions.

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The student whose writing appears as an epigraph above states that in presenting herself in this literacy narrative assignment, she "end[s] up with no clue as to what [she] *should* say" (my emphasis). This "should" speaks volumes about her very sophisticated awareness of the relational nature of identity, and her discomfort speaks to the importance of acknowledging and addressing the complexity of the identity-work that goes on in the composition classroom. In the interest of better understanding this type of work, this essay will focus on the interstices of classroom interactions for what they can expose about the complexity of identity negotiations and our resistance to the challenges these negotiations can pose. Several concepts from rhetorical genre theory, particularly that of "uptake" (originally borrowed from speech act theory) will be central to this exploration. Although I will illustrate these ideas primarily though a discussion of texts produced in a first-year writing classroom, I see the concerns I am raising extending far beyond first-year composition. While we do not always face challenges to our identities, self-presentation is always a product of negotiation, and, consequently, we are likely to fall into defensive positions when the stability we rely on to negotiate these presentations is threatened for any reason. I hope that examining these rough edges of resistance will cast some light on the obstacles we face and the choices we make in the moments between utterances, in the interstices where responses are formulated, and thus help develop strategies for the negotiation of classroom identities through which productive new pedagogical visions can be enacted.

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Understandably, being compelled to take up unfamiliar subject positions (that lead to unknown ends) can provoke resistance. Lu, focusing on productive resistance, describes discursive resistance as deriving from dissonance between discursive resources experienced as a tool of dominance and those drawn on "to describe and thus control [one's] circumstances" (James Baldwin qtd. in Lu 19). But, of course, resistance does not always insist on change. In order to give productive resistance a chance, we need also to address resistance that works to maintain stability, not necessarily because that stability serves either individual or community interests, but simply because it is familiar and therefore comfortable. In the classroom, simultaneous struggles for stability and change can be seen in many, if not most, student-teacher interactions. I don't believe that we are likely to bring productive change out of these struggles until we acknowledge and examine the challenges we face in disrupting our own complicity in, and reasons for, maintaining the status quo at the level of everyday interaction. Moreover, as I previously noted, if we are going to put our pedagogical visions into action, we need to understand and anticipate not only our students' resistance to the destabilizing effects curricular change must have on our classroom identities but also our own defensive resistance.

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Presenting Selves in Genre

Whether or not identity issues are addressed explicitly in a first-year writing classroom, they are nevertheless in play. The fact of the matter is that for most, if not all, students, familiar ways of reading, writing, and thinking are challenged to some degree as they first encounter the particular academic reading, writing, and thinking practices of college classrooms. As a result of this shift of terrain, their ability to position themselves deliberately, and thus their self-presentation, is challenged. To a significant extent, this shift in practices and self-presentation is experienced as a shift in genres, as students are reading and writing not only new types of texts but also texts with new and different purposes.

Over the past two decades, scholars from a range of communication-focused disciplines have contributed to the development of the concept of genre from a simple means of classification toward awareness and understanding of the complex and dynamic social forces and exigencies that underlie the formation of genres. This reconceptualization of genres as dynamic, "stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough site[s] for social and ideological action" (Schryer

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107), rather than rule-bound structures, presents genre as a concept with tremendous potential for exploring how texts shape, organize, and perpetuate modes of human interaction.

As people orient themselves toward particular social spaces, they enact the genres valued in that system and thus, as Charles Bazerman writes, they "take on the mood, attitude, and actional possibilities of that place—they go to that place to do the kinds of things you do there, think the kinds of thoughts you think there, be the kind of person you can become there" ("Genre and Identity" 13). It is by engaging in the generic actions and interactions that are valued in particular communities that we perform and develop identities appropriate to the places and spaces we want to occupy. Particular genres and relationships between genres mediate our interactions in these social spaces and, in so doing, shape both our presentations of ourselves to others and our readings of others' selves (Bawarshi, Fuller and Lee, Paré).

Self-presentation is impacted by genres and genre systems not simply because people choose to fit in, but in large part because sense is most easily made from within the roles generally perceived to be relevant to a particular rhetorical situation. In Thomas P. Helscher's words, "to do business within a specific community, we occupy the subject position offered by the genre or genres at hand" (29). Systems of related genres provide particular ranges of subject positions in relation to which identities can be enacted and understood, and, as part of the production of coherence, people enact selves and behaviors that are meaningful within a given situation by performing roles in relation to them. In this way, what John Swales calls the "double generative capacity of genres" (45)—their ability to both establish rhetorical goals and provide a means for their attainment—is performed for identities. Genres both establish possible subject positions and provide for their attainment as meaningful performances of identity.

It is because of this relationship between genre and identity that we cannot escape the possibilities and problematics of identity in the composition classroom. As students are exposed to the genres of the first-year composition classroom, they learn about the "mood, attitude, and actional possibilities" available through the subject positions they are offered, but, as has long been acknowledged, the acquisition of these new ways of being and communicating is neither easy nor unproblematic. As David Bartholomae has famously pointed out, there are "difficult, and often violent accommodations that occur when students locate themselves in a discourse that is not 'naturally' or imme-

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diately theirs" (147). Although not easy to enact, I do believe that we can design classrooms and assignments in which those accommodations required by the goal of developing flexible and rhetorically aware language use can be experienced with as little "violence" as possible. However, doing this will require careful attention to the interactions that constitute this experience for students. Turning from genre to uptake in the following section, I'd like to focus on what takes place in the interstices both between genres and between the utterances through which they are enacted. Attention to the activities of these interstitial spaces can help us be attentive to the obstacles that we, teachers and students together, face as we negotiate presentations of self and also help us tease out the complexity inherent in the process of uptake that allows for new possibilities.

Uptaking Identities

As Anne Freadman describes genres, they are not composed of rules to be followed but, rather, of rules for play ("Anyone for Tennis?" 47). In other words, knowing a genre means knowing how and when to deploy not only its conventions but also, and perhaps more importantly, the variations it enables. Amy Devitt similarly emphasizes the dynamic qualities of genres when she defines genre knowledge as "knowing not only, or even most of all, how to conform to generic conventions but also how to respond appropriately to a given situation" ("Generalizing about Genre" 577). To respond appropriately, one must comprehend not only a particular genre, but also the relationships between that genre and related genres, the paths they follow and the moves they make. To discuss these moments of exchange between genres and interaction between people, we need a way to talk about these paths and moves, and this is where *uptake* comes in.

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The concept of uptake has rather humble roots as a relatively minor point in J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* lectures. Austin identifies three types of performative speech acts: (1) *locutionary acts*, in which the utterance conveys "'meaning' in the traditional sense," (2) *perlocutionary acts*, in which the utterance brings about an effect (for example, promising, persuading, deterring, etc.) and (3) *illocutionary acts*, in which the action is constituted by the utterance itself (for example, congratulating, informing, etc.). According to this formulation, an illocutionary act is distinguished from a perlocutionary

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act by the requirement of an effect on the interlocutor. For an illocutionary act to be successful, it must secure an uptake from the interlocutor and thus evidence its performative feat.

Steven Davis argues that the distinctions Austin makes between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are insufficient, as an effect can occur even without the interlocutor understanding the speaker's intentions (45). This point is well taken, but for the purposes of the present argument, uptake is less useful as a means of distinguishing between types of speech acts and more useful as a way of naming the process of exchange that takes place in all speech acts. Of particular significance in Freadman's elaboration of Austinian uptake is the idea that uptakes do not merely respond to, but actually *take up* and make use of the speech acts to which they respond. Responses, she writes, "are both enabled, and constrained, by the formal-material determinants of the signs they read and the signs they will write" ("Anyone for Tennis?" 44–45). By determining what is there to take up, a speaker's utterance sets the stage for their interlocutor's response. Freadman uses an analogy to tennis to illustrate this point, explaining that each return shot must account for and make use of the characteristics of the shot it returns.

If we understand the academic writing of first-year students to be largely delimited both by these students' position within the university and by the materials and assignments provided to them, this formulation seems to describe their situation quite well. To participate successfully in the academic and intellectual communities to which they are presumably pursuing entrance, they must write in genres, and thus assume subject positions, for which they might not yet understand the motivations or possibilities. To return briefly to Freadman's tennis analogy, students then have to account for and make use of the characteristics of shots before they know the rules of the game being played. And thus, as Bartholomae observes, they may initially appropri*a*te formally appropriate responses before they take up the purposes that motivate such uptakes. However, this account is only partial—after all, Carroll and Lu remind us, students also and already have their own purposes and motivations as well as a repertoire of more and less practiced means of realizing them. Students are limited to the materials with which we and the university supply them only if we (or they themselves) place these limitations on them. Rather than being passive interlocutors, because students are practiced and accomplished users of language in other contexts, they have substantial discursive resources on which to draw as they approach the myriad rhetorical situations of the university.

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As M. M. Bakhtin points out, a listener's passive comprehension of a speaker's meaning is a "scientific fiction," as "all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized)" (68). While Austin's formulation of uptake as the passive comprehension of an illocutionary force (the comprehension of which is a necessary condition for the transformation of that force into an act) on the part of the interlocutor may be sufficient for the relatively unproblematic discursive interactions that Austin selects as his examples, his formulation of uptake clearly doesn't account for intentions and purposes on the part of the interlocutor (at least not beyond the mere comprehension of the speaker's intentions). Freadman accounts for this greater complexity with the observation that "uptakes [...] have memories—long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric memories" ("Uptake" 40). The designs of teachers only partially delineate the rhetorical situation in which students engage in academic writing. Students respond not only to us but also to what these "long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric" memories allow them to anticipate of us.

Kirk Branch provides an example of uptake's memory when he describes a situation in which a student in an adult literacy program writes: "Furthermore Mr. Kirk gives us our assignments and he has always wanted us to do our best. He said, 'If you hadn't improved your English, you wouldn't have got a good job'" (221). What is notable here is that Branch never said anything of the sort. This student's detachment of his representation of Branch from Branch's actual conduct, is, at least in part, a result of the fact that the student is not responding to Branch alone (the immediate utterance), but to Branch as one in a long line of teachers, and thus also to the theories he has developed about what type of situation this is and what subject positions are relevant. After all, "'interpersonal' relations are never," declares Pierre Bourdieu, "except in appearance, *individual-to-individual* relationships and [. . .] the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction" (81, original emphasis). In this example, the student assesses a particular type of situation and positions himself in relation to his positioning of Branch in such a way that the student-identity he presents is an uptake of his assessment of Branch's teacher-identity. The student's performance of his student-self makes sense only in relation to a particular teacherly identity and thus Branch is inserted into this position regardless of his own intentions concerning his self-presentation.

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At the point that uptakes invent the utterance to which they respond, they clearly have the power to alter its significance. Most of the time, this action goes unnoticed as it is so smoothly guided by the established paths between "stabilized-for-now" genres within an ordered genre system, but when an uptake interprets and represents its object in an unexpected way—particularly a way that is likely to be disputed (as Branch might wish to dispute his student's representation of him)—its action becomes conspicuous and reveals that uptake is not merely a simple selection from a range of appropriate responses, but a far more complex and dynamic process. While uptake often works so efficiently as to seem automatic, it is nevertheless a process that always involves selection and representation that open it up to intention and design. As a result, uptakes can be partial, ambiguous, or in other ways intentionally and unintentionally uncooperative.

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While we know that the attitudes built into genres are sometimes, as Richard Coe writes, "danced without conscious awareness or intent on the part of the individual using the genre" (183), we clearly must also account for the intentions and purposes that people do have as they select and design their uptakes. Whether conscious intent is at play or not, attention to this moment of exchange is of great consequence because a particular uptake has the potential not only to influence the outcome of a given situation but also to impact a person's experience of themselves. Accordingly, uptake has a great deal to offer our understanding of identity.

In considering the stakes of uptake for identity, it is useful to reflect both on the reasons why people frequently stick to familiar paths and on the potential repercussions of these uptakes. Why does it matter whether or not we secure our intended uptakes? Why don't we simply reject misrepresentations and go about our business unaffected? I suggest that we care what people take us for because what they take us for provides a crucial aspect of the context in which we present ourselves and thus delimits what we can say and how effective it can be.

A powerful example of the interrelationship between uptake, identity, and communication comes from an anecdote a friend of mine tells about her experience working at a day care center. One day, a boy named William came to her, crying and infuriated, to report that one of his peers had said that William was not four years old. The fact that William *was* four years old was of little

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consolation to him; he wanted an adult not only to confirm his age but also to make the child who had challenged him acknowledge it. At one level, this demand can be dismissed as childish, but, at a relatively profound level, William understood that if he couldn't get other people to respond to him as a four-year-old, then, in practice, the actual fact of his age was of little or no significance. This is a risk all of us face as we are represented in uptake: if we can't secure the subject position we want to occupy, it matters little, if at all, who we presume to be in actuality.

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Using writing and reading as metaphors for the performance and interpretation of identities, it is significant that, as Frank Smith writes, "A reader 'gets the meaning' of a [text] from the writer's point of view only when the reader asks questions that the writer implicitly expected to be asked" (170). For this reason, an identity-reader's expectations are key to having the self one presents accepted as authentic, and, consequently, the easiest way of marking one's performance of self as authentic is by performing convention. In short, people can most easily make sense by performing authenticity. Judith Butler argues compellingly that "[i]f a performative provisionally succeeds, then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech but only because that action echoes prior actions and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*" (51, original emphasis). Our performances of self do not succeed because we are successful in communicating our intentions; they succeed because we place them effectively within an already established series of signs. For example, students believe that we are teachers not necessarily because they learn from us, but primarily because we perform the ritualized actions of teachers that make legible our role in the classroom. Students and teachers rely on interactions with each other to produce and maintain the authenticity of their identities as students and teachers. Identity must secure uptake; without uptake, it is not secure.

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to make the case that the stakes of genre and uptake for identity are significant for three interrelated reasons: (1) genres govern the viable subject positions in a given system of activity, (2) uptake often seems to function automatically but nevertheless always involves a process of selection and representation that open it up to intention and design, and (3) identities are negotiated relationally by securing uptake from others. Broken down in this way, we can see that the negotiation of identities is a

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complex and continuous process of positioning a self in relation to others. We depend on those with whom we interact to be who we think they are so we can secure the uptakes we expect from them. As much as we might try to secure identity once and for all, each interaction requires negotiation, and thus the relationship between rhetorical agility and flexible subjectivities is an intimate one. Our reliance on others in order to be successful in performing our selves, and the potential threats to self posed by this state of affairs, may help account for resistance against some of the demands of rhetorical agility. In the following section, through a discussion of a literacy narrative writing assignment and examples of students' responses to it, I hope to elucidate motivations behind more and less productive forms of resistance by illustrating some of these issues of identity and uptake at work between genres.

Writing Selves in Relation to Others

The first writing assignment of any class is an occasion for which much negotiation of self presentation must occur. In a composition classroom, this event tends to come early, and, particularly if students have been exposed to a variety of pedagogical models for teaching writing, it is fraught with a complicated range of expectations. One strategy that I have used to try to demystify this situation, for myself and my students, is to assign a low-stakes, introductory piece of writing that explicitly asks students to reflect on their past writing experiences and current writing goals and to consider how these relate to their understanding of how my class will operate.

Brief Writing Autobiography

Please tell me a little about your background. I am interested in who you are in general but also, more specifically, in what kinds of writing you do and have done. How is writing (of any kind) part of your daily life? What experiences have you had that made you feel good about writing, and what experiences have been discouraging? What kinds of academic writing have you done in college? What kinds of writing do you anticipate will be important to meeting your goals while you are in college? After reading the first chapter of [the course reader], what questions or concerns do you have about the reading and writing you will be doing for this class and beyond? How is English 131 (as described in the syllabus and [the course reader]) similar to or different from what you were expecting?

Write as formally or informally as you like until you have 1–2 single-spaced pages (in 12 point, Times New Roman font). Don't stay up all night worrying about your grammar but do proofread so that my first experience of your writing is a positive one.

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Responses to this assignment provide particularly rich examples for my purposes here because—as the first writing assignment of the quarter, written when students know of me and my course only what they've picked up in the first class meeting—these texts show students formulating self-presentations in response to an immediate rhetorical situation with limited access to shared contexts, and thus uptake's memory and students' diverse discursive resources are clearly called on. To provide a more complete understanding of the interactions taking place in the examples that follow, I will begin with an explanation of my goals for the assignment and a brief reading of the situation in which it puts students.

In addition to explicitly addressing writing experiences in order to call students' attention to their existing rhetorical agility, their writing goals, and the relationships between these and the composition course I am offering, one of the larger pedagogical aims of this prompt is to blur the divide between personal motivations for writing and those for academic writing, as I don't think this division makes for interesting thinking or interested students. In opening with the invitation for students to tell me about their backgrounds, it is my intention to address them as people with lives beyond the classroom. The line that follows—"I am interested in who you are in general but also, more specifically, in what kinds of writing you do and have done"—reflects my hope to acknowledge their personhood while making a move to focus their representations of themselves around the task at hand: writing. The small words *also* and *but* evidence my perhaps contradictory impulses to make room for students' personal self-presentations while at the same time asking them to represent themselves around the topic of writing, a subject many likely see as exclusively academic. In this way, my intention to have students explore the relationships between writing they do outside the classroom and the writing that they will be doing for this class is, in effect, a challenge to the division between personal identity and student/academic identity. But, of course, this comes down to me attempting to assign a particular subject position, that of one who is personally invested in a writing identity.

Beyond the explicit writing-focused identity designated by this assignment, the prompt has a particularly complicated relationship with genre. Because this assignment was designed not to exercise students' rhetorical agility but, rather, to encourage reflection on the agility they have displayed in the past, it does not explicitly ask students to role-play. They are to present themselves to me, an unfamiliar audience at this early point in the quarter, as they are most comfortable: "[w]rite as formally or informally as you like." This free-

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dom regarding register, along with the assertion that they shouldn't worry about grammar, put forward an implicit claim that there is no genre for this assignment, that they are "just writing." As I designed this assignment, I intended these features to make students comfortable, to allow them to focus on what they had to say rather than how they wrote it. But, of course, without clear markers of the rhetorical situation, this prompt may actually have required them to do more work to negotiate a suitable self-presentation. (For this reason, I have since begun using a survey format version of this assignment, which, though not a perfect solution, wears its genre on its sleeve and thus seems easier for many first-year students to navigate.)

Despite the implicit claim of genrelessness, most readers will recognize this as a literacy narrative assignment. Most of my students also recognized this, and although they may not have been able to label their text as a literacy narrative, they were clearly comfortable with the tropes and trajectory of this genre. Some of my students, however, did not find this prompt so easy to navigate, and it is these responses with which it is most instructive to engage because in one way or another the uptakes that produced them followed alternative paths and left conspicuous traces in their texts.

The first example I'll discuss finds a student so confident in his knowledge of the conventions called for by this assignment that he does little to tailor his response to the particular exigencies of my composition class. In his paper, titled "Background Paper," he mentions "literature" and "literary elements" six times in one single-spaced page, and concludes by expressing his hope to gain "an appreciation for great works of literature" in my class. I find this remarkable because—despite the fact that the course title, the syllabus, the first introductory chapter of the course reader (which discusses differences between writing in high school and the new expectations of academic writing in the university), and my introduction to the course on the first day of class made no mention of literature, and, in fact, provided plenty of evidence that this was not a literature class—all of this input was overridden in the production of his paper. His uptake responds almost entirely to his memory of what is done in an English class and little at all to the particulars of this rhetorical situation.

Kathleen M. Jamieson's assertion in "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint" that "even where immediate circumstances may seem clearly to solicit a certain form of rhetorical response, it is sometimes a different, even incompatible form that comes, through stubborn habituation, to rhetorical expres-

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sion," (406) offers considerable explanatory power in regard to this example. The pattern was set; the student saw the word *English* in the course designation and responded as he had learned to in the past. I'd like to suggest, however, that there is more at work here than "stubborn habituation" to an antecedent genre. I propose that he had an interest in producing this particular text because he is practiced in presenting a self in relation to it—he knew this subject position and its corresponding purposes and desires and consequently resisted the formulation of a self-presentation in response to the unfamiliar purposes of my class.

The student's writing can be interpreted as showing subtle signs of awareness of the contradictions between the rhetorical situation of my composition classroom and the course and student-self he is presenting. For example, nearing the end of his paper, he responds to my question about how the course is similar to or different from his expectations by writing: "I came into English 131 expecting a 200+ student class size, a discussion of literary elements, and a text overview. It was to my surprise that the class was no bigger than 25 students, and the integration of the computers into the course was new to me." What interests me here is that, while he sets up his expectations in the first sentence as if they have been contradicted, he then addresses only the difference in class size and leaves his mention of literary elements and course texts without comment. This could be read to suggest that he was aware at some level that these expectations, too, were not met, but, being familiar with the idea that English classes concern literary matters and English teachers want students who will find these matters significant, he did not override uptake's memory despite the evidence that contradicted it. This student is clearly being "strategic about [his] literacy" (Carroll 117) in a way that would be addressed by a composition course focused on developing rhetorical agility. However, recognition of the defensive function of his self-presentation shows this piece of writing not as the mere mistake of a student not paying attention to a rhetorical situation, but as the design of a student comfortably playing the role he has learned in the past and consequently resisting the flexibility that might have helped him better adapt to the specifics of the rhetorical situation.

While this uptake may have resulted in some initial confusion on the part of the student, it was quite a simple matter to resolve. Because the student had little personal investment in the student-self he was presenting and because his representation of my class was unarguably incorrect, I had no problem correcting the misunderstanding. But not all representations are so clearly right

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or wrong, and even those that are can be complicated by the participants' investments in particular performances of identity. It is to examples of more challenging interactions that I will now turn.

While the majority of my students that quarter quite automatically differentiated between the social setting of the classroom, in which we are organized for specific purposes, and other social contexts in which the presentation of a less student-focused identity would likely be expected, eight out of twenty-two of the responders produced papers with an introductory paragraph that made no explicit presentation of a student or writing-related identity.

One student begins: "In a nutshell I live a pretty simple life. I love surfing, women, music, and want nothing more out of life than to have some fun." Another starts off with a sentence stating his full name and place and date of birth, and then explains: "To understand who I am, in general, it is necessary to know of my earlier years because they have shaped my life more drastically than the others. Since I was born I have had an extensive medical background, I basically lived in a hospital for the first eight years of my life." Both of these students go on to discuss their writing and reading experiences, but they first frame themselves in terms of their lives outside of their role as students. In doing so, they draw on familiar antecedent genres of autobiographical writing as they very explicitly take up my invitation to tell me about "who [they] are in general." Nevertheless, I must admit that when I first read these papers I was surprised that they had even temporarily resisted the push, generated directly by the stream of writing-focused questions following my two person-focused questions and indirectly by the context of the assignment, to present student or writerly selves.

The unfortunate fact of the matter is that while I had hoped to leave room for students' presentations of personal identity, I hadn't fully thought through the implications of this proposition. When I meet students for introductory conferences in the first week of the quarter, I ask them to share questions or concerns they may have about the course, and I generally use questions and topics culled from their first writing assignment to keep our conversation flowing. In doing this work, I tend to fall into the familiar teacherly pattern of responding with some sort of comment or advice. Most of the ideas and information that students share in an assignment like this informs the work we do in class in some direct way, but, in the cases of the two examples above, because the information presented had little explicit bearing on the task at hand, I found myself hard-pressed to formulate an appropriate response to a

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rhetorical situation that my own assignment prompt had produced. Moreover, I think it is safe to say that I was resistant to doing so.

My problem, as I see it, was this: I needed to respond in a way that both supported my self-presentation as teacherly and at the same time addressed the immediate utterances these students had produced. In the first example, I was uncomfortable with the potential significance of the student's choices in presenting himself to me. In particular, his decisions to state that he loved women and only wanted to have fun left me uncertain as to how he had read the range of potential relationships that could develop between us and, in any case, suggested that he didn't anticipate taking the class very seriously. Despite my understanding of these statements as indications of possible misinterpretations, similar in some ways to those of the student who assumed he was taking a literature class, because this student was clearly invested in the self he was presenting, the best means of resolving the situation was far less straightforward. In the second example, the student's investment in the identity he presented was equally apparent and struck me as far more personal. I didn't want to fail to acknowledge his mention of his childhood illness because I was concerned that to do so would seem rude or invalidating. At the same time, I recognized that to take up a teacherly performance—asking questions and offering suggestions—would be intrusive and inappropriate in response to this particular utterance. Without a ready strategy for moving these interactions into productive territory, in both cases I found these responses to my assignment threatening to the legibility of my performance of teacherliness.

The representations of me implied by these responses were interestingly more challenging to my classroom identity than was that of the student who assumes I teach literature, because while I can correct the first student (and remain in my role as teacher while doing so) in the latter two examples the situation is greatly complicated by the fact that students have taken me for someone who I am not in that particular context, but could be in another. The choices they have made in response to my assignment take me up as someone with whom they might have a personal relationship that comes before our professional one. Despite my interest in challenging divisions between personal and academic identities, I was not prepared with any strategies for taking up this use of nonacademic discursive resources in ways that I was confident would be productive in the classroom context. Moreover, while I recognized a value in asking students to destabilize their performances of academic identity, I myself was not prepared to do the same in relation to them.

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In this situation, these students' uptakes responded appropriately to the writing prompt as an immediate utterance, but didn't account more fully for the larger context in which their texts would operate and the effects they might produce. I don't imagine that they had any particular intention to represent themselves in such a way as to threaten the stability of my self-presentation as their teacher, or even an awareness that it would be possible for them to do this, but because identities must be negotiated in relation to others, the representations of me that they selected in their uptakes had this effect. That students have the power to influence our self-presentations is important to keep in mind because, if we feel that the legibility we need to be productive in the classroom is threatened, this can lead us to adopt defensive postures. Of equal, if not greater, importance, I find the fact that students can challenge my classroom identity to be a valuable reminder that we as instructors also (and more easily) have the power to influence our students' performances of identity.

The final piece of student writing that I'll take up here—the one with which I began this essay—provides an example of intentional and productive resistance to the constraints of the genre for which the student recognizes my prompt is calling. The student, Jacqueline, begins her paper with a quite welcome and insightful reflection. I will quote at length:

> It's kind of funny how in looking back on my previous experiences with English or language arts classes, it seems as though the first writing assignment is always the same sort of autobiographical piece. These assignments have come in various forms and with different focuses each time, but nonetheless they usually break down, more or less, to a surface reflection of who I am. I also find it quite peculiar that although I'm to write about the one topic I know about most, and consequently, one I should have the most to say about, I inevitably end up with no clue as to what I should say. It's not that I can't talk about myself or that there's not much to say, but the fact that I'm require [*sic*] to summarize everything that makes me who I am and what I've done with myself thus far in life within a couple of pages, turns out not to be as simple and easy as the assignment originally seemed to be. So after a long process of thought and consideration, followed by the actual work of typing it out, in the end I come up with the finished product of a short piece of writing describing someone I hardly know. Well, in a way, that is. Of course I had been writing about myself the entire time, but after that tedious process of picking apart the details and carelessly putting them back together, I end up with a sort of version of who I am, but only on paper. This is not the same person that I've come to know as "Everyday Me," or even "One-Day-of-My-Life Me," and definitely not the person I'd identify myself with. It's just the same, boring Vietnamese girl born in Seattle with three sisters and two brothers. I honestly don't see myself as "ideally Vietnamese" and I don't think I should focus on my siblings if

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> the piece is supposed to me about me. Yet I suppose I'll have to come to terms with reality and briefly tell you about that girl, since I couldn't even begin to introduce you to who I really am within one or two pages.

Jacqueline's assertion that she has "no clue as to what [she] should say" in the context of such a confident and cogent reflection on her experience of this assignment suggests not an inability to produce a representation of herself, but considerable frustration at the feeling that she must do so from within the terms of the genre she has identified as appropriate to this situation. There is a clear conflict between these purposes and conventions and the response she would like to give, and so she produces this quite eloquent disclaimer to explain that the genre in which she feels compelled to write does not provide a subject position from which she can "even begin to introduce [me] to who she really [is]." She asserts that she will end up "describing someone [she] hardly know[s]," and thus acknowledges that this way of making herself socially legible requires her to produce an image of herself that is personally unrecognizable "in a way, that is."

It is interesting to note that Jacqueline's thoughtful and creative resistance to one of the subject positions offered by the prompt nevertheless represents a carving out of a considered writerly identity. Indeed, she presents herself as someone far more interested in rhetorical rules for play than conventional rules to be followed (to play off Freadman), and, from the perspective of my goals for this assignment, her recognition and exploration of this possible variation of the genre produces a more interesting response than any of the others I received that quarter. Part of what I find so impressive about her response to this assignment is that she narrates her resistance, reflecting on and acknowledging the forces at work on her as she struggles to devise a representation of herself in response to the rhetorical situation. Through her careful positioning of self, Jacqueline illustrates the ways in which effective writing requires one to be what Anis Bawarshi has termed a "double agent," that is, "one who is both an agent of his or her desires and actions and an agent on behalf of already existing desires and actions" (50). By stating explicitly that she is interpreting my prompt in the context of a long line of what she recognizes as similar assignments, she gives a nod to uptake's memory. Furthermore, her primary critique of the assignment involves a rejection of the constraining aspect of a genre that threatens to shape her presentation of self in ways that she finds unacceptable. Returning for a moment to Lu and Baldwin, we might say that Jacqueline experiences this genre as a tool of dominance but successfully takes

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over the conventional uptake in order to "describe and thus control [her] circumstances" (James Baldwin qtd. in Lu 19).

It is not clear from what Jacqueline writes whether or not she experiences as violent the conflict she describes between the self she feels compelled to present and the nearer and dearer self to whom she "couldn't even begin to introduce [me]" within the constraints of this assignment. But I do find it significant that this is the only piece of writing Jacqueline ever submitted for my class. She e-mailed me the day after she turned it in to let me know that she was dropping the class and wouldn't be coming to our conference the following day. I don't expect I will ever know her reasons, but I can't help but wish, quite defensively, that I'd had the chance to show her that I could be a more responsive and responsible reader of her writing than she may have imagined.

In the context of first-year composition, the metaphors of role rehearsal and fluid selves are appealing in that they frame the subjectivities that writing instruction prescribes to students as provisional.

In the context of first-year composition, the metaphors of role rehearsal and fluid selves are appealing in that they frame the subjectivities that writing instruction prescribes to students as provisional. Nevertheless, although postmodern notions of performativity may seem to downplay the effort involved in shifting between roles, it is important not to overlook the potential severity of challenges posed to one's sense of self even when one chooses not to fully commit to a given subject position. As Lu insists, the enactment of a "fluid" self (or "portfolio person," in her borrowing from James Paul Gee) is not as easy as it sounds. She cautions us against reassuring our students that "we can simply 'ease in and out' of disparate social domains, languages, Englishes, discourses, prototypical selfhoods, relations with others and the world in the same way one picks up and puts down a tool" (43). The student examples I've discussed illustrate this point, and I am suggesting it is significant to note that these shifts are not necessarily any easier for us as writing instructors.

Conclusion

Because identities undergo ongoing renegotiation in the flow of language-mediated actions and interactions that make up our daily lives, they are continually performed and re-formed. But many of the forces at work in the classroom, including both students' and teachers' desire for stable identities, seem set to maintain the familiar rather than push us to explore new territory (as I think most teachers and students would hope they would). Particularly

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when confronted with the challenges of new situations, people tend, uncritically, to opt for stability and familiarity. Thomas Helscher points out that

> as much as we in academia would like to believe in our capacity to make the genres of our professional communities more fluid and open to new experiences, the reality of institutions is that they resist change and growth. Thus, the process of (re)defining the discursive subject of a community is ongoing, but one characterized by a kind of formal resistance built into the nature and function of genre. (35)

But even beyond the "resistance built into the nature and function of genre" is the defensive resistance motivated by the relational nature of identity, which places individuals in the situation of depending on others to serve both as reference points and sources of validation for their presentations of self. Students' and teachers' desire for stability in the identities with which they interact in the classroom is likely strongly informed by the fact that our understandings of our selves require an understanding of the other selves with whom we interact. We have a stake in determining others' identities because, through their interactions with us, they play a role in determining our identities. Due to the relational nature of identities, we as instructors are implicated in and affected by what our students write, and unless we are prepared to respond productively, we run the risk instead of responding defensively.

Calls for changes to classroom practices often overlook the challenges that change can pose to students' and teachers' relationally negotiated roles in the classroom.

Calls for changes to classroom practices often overlook the challenges that change can pose to students' and teachers' relationally negotiated roles in the classroom, and thus leave instructors inspired by creative and valuable pedagogical visions but often unprepared to translate them into the interactional practices of their classrooms. It is because of our reliance on relational stability that challenges to traditional relationships and divisions of power in the classroom provoke resistance in defense of the stability of all identities involved. For this reason, we as teachers need to be especially attentive to the motivations informing our uptakes and to work thoughtfully to challenge the limitations of the interactions and relationships these uptakes perpetuate.

Lu and Carroll reach similar conclusions about the role of rhetorical flexibility in first-year composition but differ dramatically in their understandings of its possibilities. Carroll concludes pragmatically that "[s]uch a course serves a useful, albeit limited, purpose as a transition from high school and

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other previous writing experiences to writing in the university" (119). Lu, on the other hand, considers far larger stakes. She declares that "[c]omposition might very well be the only institutional space where a majority of college students might use their tuition dollars to buy some legitimate time to think, reflect on, and revise the tacit goals, values, and understandings prescribed by the discourse of flexible accumulation" and that "[t]rying to critically engage with the standardized designs of a discourse of flexible accumulation when reading and writing in English can have long-term effects on the future of all languages, all users of English, and the order of the world we share" (44). The scope of this vision is at once inspiring and daunting, but I think it can begin to be realized if (and only if) we manage to bring it into our classrooms in the interactions that seem most natural and automatic. It is by examining the processes of uptake that inform our most habitual responses that we have the best chances of making conscious choices to change and challenge limiting and self-defeating patterns of interaction.

In this way, we might begin to find ways to negotiate *with students* the new classroom identities and genres in which these visions may come to be naturalized. As Anthony Giddens asserts, "The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications" (2). Fortunately, the very interconnectedness that makes change so difficult and slow at the same time opens up the potential for individuals to have real effects on those with whom they come into contact. Whether the transition be to academic writing or new world order, staking out critical theoretical positions is not enough if we don't insert these theories into practice by deploying them strategically in the uptakes through which we negotiate selves in interaction with students. If we aren't prepared to enact, and react with, new strategies at the level of daily interaction, we risk uncritically perpetuating the same narratives and power relations that we are so strongly, in theory, struggling against.

Acknowledgments

I extend special thanks to Anis Bawarshi for insightful comments on multiple drafts of this paper as well as continuous support and wise advice. I would also like to express my appreciation to Amy Devitt and David Russell for their thoughtful feedback and encouragement. Finally, I am indebted to the students whose writing has taught me so much, particularly Jacqueline Ho.

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