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Introduction

CHANGING THE SUBJECT

From the place where we are right
flowers will never grow
in the spring.
The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.
But doubts and loves
dig up the world
like a mole, a plough.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
where the ruined
house once stood.

—Yehuda Amichai, “The Place
Where We Are Right”

On a sweltering summer day in 1963, civil rights leader Medgar Evers was gunned down in his driveway in Jackson, Mississippi. That same night, lifelong Jackson native Eudora Welty wrote a fictional account of the shooting from the perspective of the killer. It was published less than a month later in the *New Yorker*, the two pages of prose so realistic many believed it was written by the killer himself.¹ In an interview in 1972, she talked about writing the story and her understanding of the killer’s motivations.

That night I thought to myself, I’ve lived here all of my life. I know the kind of mind that did this. This was before anyone was caught. So I wrote a story in the first person as the murderer because I thought, I’m in a position where I know. I know what this man must feel like. I’ve lived with this kind of thing. . . . What I was writing about was that world of hate I felt I had grown up with and I felt I could speak as someone who knew it. I wrote from deep feeling and horror.²

In “Must the Novelist Crusade?,” she writes that “a plot is a thousand times more unsettling than an argument.”³ While the best

fiction avoids directly moralizing or persuading, stories—and the pathos they arouse—are the great bridge between literary and rhetorical discourse, between Aristotle’s foundational treatises on poetics and rhetoric. The act of writing stories, whether fiction or nonfiction, consists largely in trying to inhabit the world, both interior and exterior, of an Other, an act of imagination that has led scholars of literary theory to pursue the question of whether reading others’ stories makes us more empathetic, more sensitive, more able to listen and understand.⁴ During a conversation between President Barack Obama and novelist Marilynne Robison in 2015, Obama told his own story about the relationship of reading others’ stories and the cultivation of empathy.

When I think about how I understand my role as citizen, setting aside being president, and the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position of citizen, the most important stuff I’ve learned I think I’ve learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there’s still truth there to be found, and that you have to strive for that and work for that. And the notion that it’s possible to connect with some[one] else even though they’re very different from you.⁵

As painful as it can be in our present moment to be reminded of national leaders with an empathetic philosophy formed by taking seriously the stories—real and imagined—of those very different from us, it’s important to stay focused, both in times of peril and otherwise, on the role of empathy and connecting across difference.

How we make these connections is of vital interest politically as well as morally. As educators, as scholars of rhetorical theory informed by postmodern critiques of inequality and by feminist theories dedicated to pointing out historical and contemporary injustices and amplifying the voices speaking out against them, we are highly invested in developing theories that offer ways of forging alliances across differences. In our age of tremendous polarization between right and left, black and white, rural and urban, us and them, the need for ways of connecting across difference could not be more urgent. This book, the first sustained

exploration of empathy in rhetorical theory, examines how writers in public, digital, and transnational locations ethically engage with one another across pronounced differences. What do these engagements across difference have in common? How can we (further) develop such practices and habits of mind in ourselves and in our students?

This book's premise is that pathos—appeals to the personal in the form of stories and the (always political) emotions that can ensue—is one of the most powerful forms of persuasion and change. My purpose is to frame pathos in new ways and make a case for *rhetorical empathy* as a means of ethical rhetorical engagement. I define rhetorical empathy as both a topos and a trope, a choice and habit of mind that invents and invites discourse informed by deep listening and its resulting emotion, characterized by narratives based on personal experience.⁶ Rhetorical empathy is both a hermeneutic and a heuristic, a way of thinking (and feeling) constituted by language and a way of using language.

Empathy can be a slippery term. Why am I using that concept in particular, with so much cultural baggage, especially for women, and why use it in the context of engaging across difference? I discuss the similarities among sympathy, pity, compassion, and empathy and what the similarities mean for a study of rhetorical empathy in chapter 1, "A Brief History of Empathy," by tracing threads of empathy and similar concepts through rhetorical history, in the Greco-Roman tradition and beyond. I choose *empathy* rather than its various similar alternatives for a number of reasons. *Pity* and *sympathy* are even more culturally loaded terms than empathy in their associations with patronization, colonization, and a somewhat removed experience of an Other's plight. From its beginning, empathy has signified an immersion in an Other's experience through verbal and visual artistic expression. This element of an immersive experience that results in an emotional response, as well as the associations of empathy with altruism and social justice, possibly explains its continued linguistic cachet over terms such as *pity* and *sympathy*.⁷ In my definition of empathy, I focus on the topoi

of empathy in terms of how the subject positions themselves in relation to the object. Rhetorical empathy becomes both a *place* and a *stance*. I situate rhetorical empathy as coming alongside or feeling *with* the experiences of an Other rather than feeling *for* or displacing an Other, which is usually associated with pity or sympathy.

For every piece of scholarship on empathy in English in the last century—most of it within psychology and philosophy—there seems to be a different signification for empathy: “a cognitive process analogous to cognitive role taking or perspective taking”; “a primarily affective process (having some cognitive components)”; “an affective response more appropriate to someone else’s situation than to one’s own”; “other-oriented feelings of concern, compassion, and tenderness experienced as a result of witnessing another person’s suffering”; “sharing the perceived emotion of another—‘feeling with’ another.”⁸ As Lauren Wispé notes, the “trails back” to the original rhetorical contexts and struggles over definitions have become “overgrown with redefinitions [and] reinterpretations.”⁹ Kristie Fleckenstein points out that “sympathy, pity, compassion, empathy are slippery terms made even more slippery as usage shifts within and between disciplines.”¹⁰

In Euro-American epistemology, specifically within psychology, empathy often is associated with either cognition/thought or affect/emotion: *cognitive empathy* and *affective empathy*.¹¹ Rhetorical empathy functions as a conscious choice to connect with an Other—an inventional topos and a rhetorical strategy or *pisteis*—that can result in an emotional response. It is difficult to parse out the distinction between thought and emotion or, in other words, empathy, as a deliberate, cognitive function or a subconscious response we might associate with emotion. Work in cultural studies (Ahmed), rhetorical theory (Gross), and neuroscience (Decety and Meyer) has complicated the degree to which emotions (including empathy) are considered hard-wired components of our biological makeup or cognitive functions highly dependent on context and learned behavior.

This book is not meant to be an exhaustive study of the concept of empathy. It is an exploration of what happens when we think about *rhetoric* and *empathy* together. In joining these two incredibly complicated terms, my intention is not to create an oxymoron, as if by association with the popular concept of rhetoric, empathy becomes strategic to the point that it is entirely performative, although there certainly is a deliberate, performative aspect to rhetorical empathy. Neither do I want to take away from the strategic and social aspects of rhetoric by placing it with the term *empathy*, as if empathy is something located solely in the individual, an emotional connection unrelated to social codes and beliefs constructed, circulated, and maintained through language systems.

By combining the two, my intention is to highlight aspects of each: *rhetoric* as a strategic use of symbol systems using various modes of communication—language, still and moving images, and sound. And *empathy* as both a conscious, deliberate attempt to understand an Other *and* the emotions that can result from such attempts—often subconscious, though culturally influenced.¹² Empathy, like rhetoric, is an epistemology, a way of knowing and understanding, a complex combination of intention and emotion. While empathy in some respects has become almost clichéd, signifying for some a way of reinscribing existing power relations under the guise of sympathetic identification, rhetorical empathy can shift power dynamics among interlocutors by means of the very connections that may on the surface seem like conservatizing reifications. Empathy is never simple; its complexities make it one of the most difficult rhetorical topoi to think with and enact.

Julie Lindquist touches on the complex relationship between a conscious, deliberate, and strategic use of empathy and the often-unconscious responses emotions can create in us. In her article “Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy,” she uses an example of her own explorations of assuming what she calls “strategic empathy” in a first-year writing course focused on working-class rhetoric and informed by critical pedagogy. She describes her dilemma

of being in a position of power as the instructor yet wanting to approach her students fairly and without simply imposing her own views. Building on the work of Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald's romantic/pragmatic rhetoric, she argues that the work of such a course—and our pedagogy regardless of our theoretical influences—should take into account the very real effects theories have within the classroom. She describes a scenario that happened in the course in which she “performed empathy” and what happened as a result.

She analyzes her performance with her students and their responses using the concepts surface acting and deep acting, based on the work of sociologist Laura Grinstead and her appropriation of Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Both types of acting are deliberately assumed, affective displays. In surface acting, Lindquist explains, “You remain in control of your emotions by consciously structuring the impressions you produce,” and in deep acting, “you relinquish the possibility of emotional control.”¹³ Surface acting can come across as disingenuous: seeming to be empathetic rather than actually becoming empathetic. Deep acting happens when someone isn't trying to seem happy or sad but these emotions occur spontaneously as a result of surface acting, “a real feeling that has been self-induced.”¹⁴ Deep acting involves, then, an emotional component that cannot be faked or controlled—entirely. Both surface acting and deep acting involve on a certain level a purposeful choice to display emotion, but deep acting includes an element of change within the rhetor: “When you deep act, in other words, you work, through acts of will and imagination, to open yourself to the possibility that you might *persuade yourself* that the emotions you are presenting are real. You risk *becoming* the thing you are performing. Deep acting is, paradoxically, the process of exerting control in order to relinquish control.”¹⁵

Lindquist compares deep acting to the writing process: experiencing it is the goal of empathetic rhetoric, “but one moves toward it through the rhetorical work of surface acting.”¹⁶ This description of how rhetorical emotions function is, in many

respects, a fake-it-'til-you-make-it approach. An empathetic approach may not be deeply ingrained, but through habit and attempting to approach a rhetorical situation and an Other empathetically, effects of the sort she associates with deep acting can occur: we're changed in the process. Strategic empathy becomes a rhetoric that is "simultaneously empathetic and critical," a deliberate attempt to resist what Lindquist calls "post-modern paralysis."¹⁷

She describes the scenario in the course in which these concepts played out. The Iraq War had just started, and she felt it was odd in the context of their class discussions to not bring up what was then the elephant in the room. She writes that neither of the two former approaches she had taken in such cases, "neutrality (taking no position) or 'honesty' (communicating my real feelings about the ethics of the war directly)" had worked very well, so she decided she needed "another way to be with students, one that would enable the emotional responses that discussion of this issue was likely to invite."¹⁸ She became vulnerable. She decided to learn from them what they wanted and needed from her.

I told them that, given our very different positions on the war (they were generally pro, I was fervently con) and my position of relative power over them, I was having trouble imagining how to negotiate the discussion responsibility. I asked them to consider a scenario in which they were teachers in precisely my situation, teachers trying to figure out how to respond ethically and productively to a political issue about which they had strong feelings—keeping in mind that they (as teachers) had the power to silence students whose views were different from theirs.¹⁹

They responded that if they were in her shoes, they would share their own view but as one of many possibilities. The result was that she created an atmosphere of trust in which they felt they could share their stories and views without being judged, yet they knew where she stood as well. In hearing their stories, the *why* behind them began to emerge for her; in other words, their motivations began to be clearer to her and they became real people. In *staging empathy*—performing empathy even though

at the initial stages she was highly resistant to their views—she began to move toward *deep empathy*. She writes that

what made this strategy work, I think, was my willingness to make myself strategically naïve in two moments: first, in seeking advice about *how* we should conduct discussions about the war, and then later, when (working hard against my own emotional need to negatively evaluate some of the perspectives I was hearing about the war) I worked to communicate empathy for their positions as *affective responses*.²⁰

Affect is wrapped up in cultural discourses and ideologies, not (just) an individual response. Yet in hearing them relate their stories (some had friends and partners in the war, some were from conservative families, etc.), she gained the perspective she needed to see them as individuals and real people—and as members of larger groups with motivations that clearly informed and constructed their positions to a large degree. In performing empathy toward them, and in asking them to do so in return to some degree, she began to have deep empathy for them as people, even though they continued to disagree about the Iraq War and war in general.

Her account draws attention to the relationship among our emotional responses, our social discourses, our (emotional) connections or disconnections to an Other and their motivations, and our will. Emotions and empathy are rhetorical. Whether functioning on a deliberate, strategic, conscious level or on an affective level influenced by experience—and rhetorical empathy involves both—empathy is encompassed, created, and expressed within and through language and cultural codes.

Depending on your vantage point, the idea of empathy as a way of engaging with difference can be read as overly ambitious, naïve, or simply common sense. After spending the past several years studying how people are able to connect with one another across profound difference, I offer this conclusion: approaching others in rhetorical engagements must begin with changing ourselves, with listening, with trying to understand the personal and political factors that influence the person who makes our blood boil. This approach to rhetoric is very different from one that

listens to others in order to make a point and to change them. It goes beyond audience analysis and considering our audience and instead asks that we become vulnerable enough to consider our own motives, our blind spots, and our prejudice. Adopting this stance is vital for people with privilege; it is no longer an option. I write this as a queer, white professor with working-class roots who considers it no longer an option for myself. An approach based on rhetorical empathy can help those with little power and privilege sustain efforts to fight the status quo and to maintain perspective. An effort to listen to and understand others, especially those very different from us, helps us be better humans and more able to react in ethical and rhetorically effective ways. Ultimately, it helps sustain us in the midst of polarization and, in some cases, deep and traumatic injustice.

Engaging in what I call *rhetorical empathy* is hard work, but it's important, and some would argue it's the foundation of our work as educators. In this book, I include case studies that demonstrate various aspects of rhetorical empathy across a variety of marked social differences, including social class, race, and the intersections of gender, sexuality, and religion. I focus on the rhetoric of two labor activists—a Jane Addams speech in late nineteenth-century Gilded Age Chicago and the social media stories of Joyce Fernandes in Brazil; the online rhetoric of gay-rights activist Justin Lee; and the use of stories in public arguments by students in my classes at Baruch College at the City University of New York.

ORIGIN STORIES

This work is informed by pragmatism's emphasis on the material consequences of our theories and by feminist theories that value praxis.²¹ In light of this theoretical basis and my emphasis on how our stories inform our practice and thinking, my own story about how I came to be interested in empathy as a basis for rhetoric forms an important thread in this book. As important as empathy and engaging across difference are in a pluralistic society, I came to this project for highly practical and deeply personal reasons

ten years ago. I left my familiar and safe world as a writer and creative director to go to graduate school—a big enough change by itself—but I also fell in love and (finally) began the process of coming out, first to myself after many years of struggling with my sexuality in a conservative, Bible-belt culture in the 1980s and 90s, and then to my family and friends. By far the biggest challenge in my coming-out process was my faith: I was raised in a conservative Christian church, and now I'd complicated my life a great deal by falling in love not only with another woman, but with a woman who'd been involved with queer activism since she'd come out as a teenager. In college she was the leader of a Gay-Straight Alliance group, and she'd lived for a short time in San Francisco and interned for GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation). On top of this, complicating matters further, she was an atheist. I, on the other hand, was a lifelong Christian with (theologically conservative) clergy on both sides of my family. I had even, for a time, considered entering the ministry and spent a year in seminary after college. In my conservative faith, being (openly) gay was not an option.

She and I told each other our stories in the many hours we spent together. Based on her experiences, she'd formed views of Christians that were, to me, stereotypes. They didn't sound like the Christians I knew. But she also had good reason to not trust Christians when it came to the issue of being gay; she'd been burned too many times to trust them. It shook my world to hear a voice from the other side of a large wall separating "those people" outside my familiar discourse community from the voices inside that formed such a large part of who I was at that time. I soon realized her stories were not that different from my own in certain ways. In other ways we could not have been more different.

We changed each other, but more precisely we each became more vulnerable and honest about ourselves. She had been drawn to faith as a child but had been so turned off by what she saw of organized religion as a teenager and adult that she never gave it a second thought; I had known for twenty years that I was gay, but for the first time I was motivated enough (by love)

to risk being wrong and losing other parts of my life, and I took a leap. And was it a leap. I was able, finally, to be honest. It was both exhilarating and terrifying.

I lived for a time in a swirl of emotions, both elation at being able to be honest and despair over losing many people in my life who believed being gay and Christian are incompatible and who couldn't deal with the cognitive dissonance I represented. Here was a person they knew and loved and who wasn't "like those people": troubled queers whose lives were in shambles because they'd run from the truth. It was becoming clearer to me that many of the troubles of queer people were caused at least in part by being rejected by their families and people they love. Instead of listening, asking questions, and trying to understand my journey and walking with me in it, most of the people in my life went into a "don't ask, don't tell" mode. Someone I particularly respected told me on the phone one day that I was the biggest disappointment of her life. Fortunately, I was in my mid-thirties as I listened to these words, tears streaming down my face, and not an eighteen-year-old who was being thrown out of the house and disowned by their family. I had seen this happen more times than I wanted to count. I understand very well why some people never come out.

In the midst of this pain, I still believed firmly that my friends and family who disagreed with my "lifestyle"—and even those who would no longer associate with me—were well-intentioned people who never would consider themselves homophobic or hateful. I struggled a great deal with this dissonance and tried to bridge the widening gap between us. In that process, I realized quickly that using logical arguments would go nowhere ("But the church has been wrong before about so many things: what about slavery, and now divorce is so common and once was taboo?"). I looked for other ways to try to understand what seemed to be an abyss of difference between us, and I also needed a way to allay my own hurt and anger. I was looking for a book like the one I've written.

This study, then, began as a very personal question for me ten years ago when I began graduate school: how were queer

people and queer allies who identified as religious navigating the rhetoric of antigay people in their own communities? Much of the rhetoric in the intersection of religion and gay rights is toxic and polarizing, despite the great strides made in acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ people in recent years. I was interested in leaders of progay movements in religious contexts who were making inroads by using a compassionate approach to the very people who had ostracized and demonized them. The fact that people could hold radically different views on such a contentious topic—one so close to my own experience—and manage to find ways of overcoming their differences, or at least continue to talk to one another despite them, fascinated me and developed into this study.

My coming-out experience and growing up in the Bible belt taught me what it means to work for justice for queer people, starting with myself, and at the same time not dismiss people on the conservative side of the political spectrum. Recent events in our country have given me perspective on the need for resistance and protest and also the need for attempting to understand people who would not openly embrace racism, sexism, and homophobia but who nonetheless implicitly endorse them with their apathy and votes.

From the story I just described, I learned that the Other is, in many ways, not so different from me, yet the differences I encountered changed me in profound ways. I also learned the value of listening and being open to being changed rather than (only) trying to reinforce my own identity by persuading others to agree with me. That kind of vulnerability, on some level, changes others, but in the process we ourselves are changed. It was a profound lesson for someone raised in an evangelical Christian culture that values, above all, converting others, and that believes changing one's mind and being open to others are forms of compromise rather than ways of learning and becoming better. The kind of closed-mindedness I had internalized in that culture has felt eerily familiar in the years since as I've watched Tea Party purists in the US Congress shut down the government based on what they view as principle. How can we

function as a democracy and as a pluralistic culture when only our way is right—especially if our way is “God’s way”? This question is vitally important to our democracy, and my story and the theory I offer in this book hopefully can provide some helpful perspective. I have walked on both sides of a very wide gap, and this book, in a sense, is that story.

How can a peace-based, supremely feminist, antiracist practice such as empathy have any impact in our culture? From an educator’s perspective, how do we teach writing and ethical rhetorical engagement in the midst of tremendous polarization? These are the questions driving this project.

CONTRIBUTION TO RHETORICAL THEORY AND WRITING STUDIES

While I don’t deny that a primary purpose of rhetoric since Aristotle has been changing others and discerning how we ourselves are being shaped by discourse, this book takes as its goal a shift in the focus of rhetoric itself. If changing others is the goal, a more sustainable approach may be first to change ourselves. Rhetorical praxis based on listening and empathy does not necessarily change systemic conditions or even an immediate interlocutor or audience. It does, however, hold potential for changing the speaker or writer and for shifting the focus from changing an Other to understanding an Other. Such moves are an important contribution of feminist rhetorical theories on which this project relies and which I discuss in chapter 1. In its focus on changing the self versus primarily an Other in rhetorical engagement, rhetorical empathy is closely aligned with reflective practices that have developed and become highly influential in writing studies over the past twenty years in the work of, for example, Donna Qualley and Kathleen Blake Yancey.²²

A stance based on rhetorical empathy helps writers reach audiences different from themselves by imagining what their audience’s motives are. What do people’s views (and, more important, the stories behind them) suggest about them as

individuals as well as about their place in systemic discourses? Rhetorical empathy results in an emotional engagement that can disarm; it asks for vulnerability from the speaker or writer that can, at times, promote it in return. It is born from a stance (topos) of learning and adjusting rather than first and foremost trying to make a point and change an audience. The results of such a stance are personal narratives and emotional appeals that help writers and rhetors present themselves as real and identifiable rather than as a stereotype.

Rhetorical empathy circulates both ways: it's initiated by the speaker or writer toward an audience and ideally reciprocated by the audience in return, often as a result of the audience's being treated with dignity rather than as a stereotype or with (often justifiable) anger. It's recursive: it cannot happen without a rhetor or writer listening in the first place, reacting or acting toward an Other in a spirit of goodwill rather than anger. This approach can invite the same response in turn rather than defensiveness or stalemate. It changes the subject of discourse—both the content of discourse and its agent, and as a result it holds the potential for bridging difficult rhetorical impasses. When an interlocutor says, for example, “I once held your view, and I didn't think I was being hateful at the time,” as gay-rights activist Justin Lee writes to his conservative Christian audience in chapter 3, it can have the effect of diffusing rhetorically loaded words that cause people to shut down rather than listen in return. This kind of approach is not necessarily manipulative; in fact, if it's done with any degree of sincerity, it can have the effect of softening how a rhetor views their audience and can increase the chances that not only will the audience listen but that doors will be open for further engagement, listening, and learning.

CONTEXT AND EXIGENCY

In recent years, researchers have studied empathy from the perspective of cognitive science (Decety and Jackson), psychology (Eisenberg and Strayer, Hoffman), philosophy (Vetlesen), and

literary theory (Keen). Scholars in cultural studies (Ahmed, Berlant, Sedgwick) and rhetorical theory (Gross, Micciche) have focused on affect more broadly. Within writing studies, valuable work has focused on empathy in pedagogical contexts (Lindquist, Richmond, DeStigter, Leake), in public discourse and deliberation (Lynch, Fleckenstein), and in relation to Rogerian rhetoric (Teich, Peary).

Dennis Lynch makes the case that while empathy was once the centerpiece of modern rhetoric, it has been critiqued, as I outline in detail in chapter 1, by postmodern rhetorical theories that foreground the body and power struggles.²³ Empathy has been overshadowed in postmodern theories by the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur) and a much-needed focus on difference and power. In her defense of empathy as one of the goals of literary study, Ann Jurecic points to Paul Ricoeur’s belief that hermeneutics “seems to be animated by [a] double motivation: [a] willingness to suspect, [and a] willingness to listen.”²⁴ Following Eve Sedgwick’s notion of a reparative rather than paranoid orientation and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of listening, this project takes seriously the enterprise of empathetic engagement in an age of cynicism and polarization. As a reaction to such trends, it represents a needed balance of rhetorical theories and writing practices that offer ways of countering apathy and the paralysis of anger and cynicism. Rhetorical empathy balances and sustains. There is a place for both critique and repair, for exposing the workings of power and for resisting the temptation to use the tactics of those we critique. I see rhetorical empathy as both a seeing against and a seeing with—a practice that involves both critical and connected readings.

As appealing as empathy is, it also is rife with complexity: empathy shown by those with power can suggest manipulation, and empathy shown by those with less power can lead to acquiescence and potentially reinforce power imbalances. In postmodern theory, the use of solidarity or empathy by those occupying a dominant subject position has come to be suspect as at least patronizing and at worst manipulative. In *Language and*

Power, Norman Fairclough argues that whenever an individual or group occupying a dominant subject position in a rhetorical situation uses rhetoric characterized by empathy, it is only because that person or group has been forced to by those with less power. In other words, no one would willingly give up power or privilege unless it were in their best interests to do so (to whatever degree we give these up when we become vulnerable to someone with less power). For those with little power within intersectional subject positions, taking a stance of rhetorical empathy risks further vulnerability. This risk is real and should not be ignored; however, such a stance also offers the potential for greater perspective and personal strength.

Following Krista Ratcliffe's work in *Rhetorical Listening*, the book to which this project owes the most debt, I focus on both identifications and differences between interlocutors and acknowledge that struggle and rhetorical negotiations are always already present in discourse. I don't deny that power is always present and that the nature of rhetorical praxis is rooted in the effort to change others or circumstances in some way. All discourse works to shape us in some fashion, and rhetoric-as-change is a vital aspect of rhetorical studies and pedagogy—perhaps the most important function of rhetoric. My point is not to ignore this reality but to push against it and argue for a different way of being-with-others, contributing to Ratcliffe's call for scholars in rhetoric and composition to “map more theoretical terrain and provide more pragmatic tactics for peaceful, cross-cultural negotiation and coalition building.”²⁵ Rhetorical empathy builds on her work, shifting the focus of rhetoric from (only) changing an audience to changing oneself (as well) and extending rhetorical listening in new directions by accounting for the role of the personal and the emotions in rhetorical exchange.

In teaching stories such as Lindquist's, it's important to keep in mind that even though teachers inhabit one subject position that involves power in a classroom—albeit an important one—our power invested by the institution is only one aspect of our identities. Teachers also, of course, may be in

less privileged subject positions otherwise in terms of ableness, gender, race, class, or sexual orientation. Power and privilege are slippery concepts that shift in relation to context. A major goal of Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening is acknowledging privilege and getting to a place where someone realizes that how they approach argument is affected by social positioning and deep, historical narratives that play out in every rhetorical situation. People in nondominant subject positions are acutely aware of their social roles and positioning, as Jacqueline Jones Royster points out in "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," and must learn early in life to listen to the dominant majority in order to survive. Those with privilege must learn to listen and acknowledge their power.

Like Lynch, I argue in this book that the promise of empathy remains despite its constraints: the multiple, shifting, and intersecting identities constituted in the *I* of discourse can connect with those that constitute the *Other* to a degree that both experience identification and are changed in some fashion. This can happen not *despite* but *because of* the highlighting of the body and difference, as Lynch argues in "Rhetorics of Proximity: Empathy in Temple Grandin and Cornel West." In the midst of his qualifications of empathy's potential, Lynch suggests that because of its ability to open up new avenues for rhetorical invention, we should at least "make the effort to empathize" and to "approximate empathy."²⁶ He points out the need for further work in developing theories that "thicken our understanding"²⁷ of the concept of empathy while incorporating the insights of postmodern theory with "the body squarely at the center of rhetorical exchange."²⁸

METHOD AND SITES OF STUDY

My rhetorical analysis of examples in the book, particularly in the gay-rights chapter where I started my research and for which I coded hundreds of pages of online discourse between gay-rights activists and social conservatives, helped me identify the following four characteristics of rhetorical empathy:

- Yielding to an Other by sharing and listening to personal stories
- Considering motives behind speech acts and actions
- Engaging in reflection and self-critique
- Addressing difference, power, and embodiment

I use these four characteristics to analyze the following examples of rhetorical empathy:

- Appeals for justice and better working conditions for domestic workers in Gilded Age Chicago and contemporary Brazil, brought to light in one of Jane Addams's earliest speeches in 1893 and in the social media stories of labor and race activist Joyce Fernandes
- Rhetorical negotiations between gay-rights activist Justin Lee and evangelical Christians
- Composition pedagogies based on principles of rhetorical empathy

Two of the examples focus on rhetorical exchanges in online settings, an environment many consider the most toxic and polarizing space imaginable. We typically associate the internet with echo chambers of people listening and speaking only to those who believe as they do. While this is true in many respects, I find potential for enactments of rhetorical empathy in the multimodality of the web and its user participation, which I demonstrate in the case studies. Furthermore, unlike essays, book-length nonfiction, novels, or speeches, online discursive spaces provide the opportunity to analyze both a text and its reception. Unlike most online discourse, in the sites I analyze, readers may find they want to read the comments; in fact, they may find the comments the most interesting aspect of the exchange. Along with interviews with the writers and activists themselves about their rhetorical choices, the responses of their interlocutors make possible a triangulated analysis of rhetorical exchanges.

Chapter 1, “A Brief History of Empathy,” tells the story of empathy’s contested significations and its circulation, positioning it within several historical and rhetorical traditions. In the

case of a familiar concept such as empathy, it's important to establish which definition(s) of the word *empathy* I rely on and what exactly I mean by the term *rhetorical empathy* in order to clarify how I interpret the texts and rhetorical exchanges in this book. I highlight the semantic distinctions between how the signifiers *empathy*, *sympathy*, and *pity* have circulated historically. In his English translation of *On Rhetoric*, for example, George Kennedy chooses "pity" to translate the closest concept to empathy in Aristotle, the emotion *eleos*.²⁹ In the Christian New Testament, however, *eleos* appears twenty-seven times in the original Greek and often is translated as "compassion" or "mercy," including in Luke 10:37 in the parable of the Good Samaritan, wherein Jesus tells Jewish religious leaders that ethnic and political Others are their neighbors, whom they are to care for despite their differences, a fitting signification for the kind of work I associate with rhetorical empathy.³⁰

As LuMing Mao points out, our tendency in the West to foreground our arguments and definitions is itself a relic of our Aristotelian rhetorical tradition.³¹ A search instead for a contextualization of a concept—where and how a concept has circulated and to what consequences—follows the more indirect, analogy-based epistemologies of Chinese rhetorical traditions. I explore how empathy and related concepts have circulated in canonical rhetorical theories in the West and in others beyond those in the Euro-American rhetorical tradition, including the concept of *bian*, or "argument," in Chinese; the *Nyaya Sutra*, an ancient Indian text on argument; and the practice of *ṣulḥ* in Arab-Islamic rhetorical traditions. I discuss empathy's roots in late nineteenth-century German aesthetics and its circulation within psychological discourses in the twentieth century. I establish the ways in which rhetorical empathy builds on strands of twentieth-century rhetorical theories, particularly feminist theory. Traditional Euro-American rhetorical theory has most often been about how to gain power over or persuade an audience. The goal of rhetoric within patriarchal systems and established in Aristotle is to defeat an opponent through persuading him (certainly a *him*) that your position, and by extension you,

are superior. The change that results from rhetoric lies in your audience, not within yourself. Feminist rhetorical theories and rhetorical praxis beyond the Euro-American tradition, however, challenge these warrants and practices. Rhetorical empathy builds on such valuable work based on listening and understanding, the use of personal narratives, and a willingness to yield in a stance of self-risk and vulnerability, situating rhetoric as an ethical way of negotiating difference rather than an attempt to win a battle or gain power over others.

In chapter 2, “Threads of Feminist Rhetorical Practices: Storytelling and Empathy from Gilded Age Chicago to Facebook,” I consider the relationship between digital media and feminist rhetorical practices such as listening and the use of personal stories. I compare the rhetoric of two activists—Jane Addams in Gilded Age Chicago and Joyce Fernandes in contemporary Brazil, who are separated by over a century, social class, and networked technologies with global scope—using the lens of rhetorical empathy. I examine how rhetorical empathy functions within the site of labor-rights rhetoric in one of Jane Addams’s earliest speeches, focusing on rhetorical empathy as the ethical and epistemological basis of her rhetoric. Her embodied rhetorical praxis of empathetic rhetoric is as relevant now as it was over a hundred years ago during the Progressive Era, despite her relative obscurity in the United States public today beyond small pockets in the academic world and in Chicago, where she helped establish the social settlement Hull House in 1889 and where the bulk of her life’s work occurred. As the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011 highlighted, income disparity between top earners and the rest of the US population has grown exponentially over the past few decades, drawing comparisons to the Gilded Age (1875–1900). I focus on her first speech on labor rights: “Domestic Service,” delivered at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893 in Chicago, an early example of her mediating rhetorical style.

I compare Addams’s use of rhetorical empathy to the activism of Fernandes, a Brazilian rapper, history teacher, and former domestic worker who has brought attention to the plight

of domestic workers in Brazil by featuring their stories on Facebook and Twitter. She's now a pop star in Brazil, appearing on both MTV and a TEDx Talk in Sao Paolo, as well as media outlets around the world after she began posting the stories of domestic laborers on Facebook in July 2016. Her story was picked up by the BBC in early August, and the Facebook page she created to share the stories of other women like herself, "Eu, Empregada Doméstica" ("I, Housemaid"), was a sensation, with over one hundred thousand followers almost overnight.³² In the BBC article, Fernandes called Eu, Empregada Doméstica a place to "expose what is being swept under the carpet," advocating for improved working conditions and ultimately an end to domestic service as a "vestige of slavery." She approaches her audience of other young women like herself and women who employ domestic workers as one who knows intimately about the suffering and journeys she writes about. This additional element of her subject position and experience adds power to her rhetorical appeal based on personal experience.

Chapter 3, "Rhetorical Empathy in the Gay-Rights/Religious Divide," builds on and complicates Sharon Crowley's exploration of ways progressives can engage with fundamentalists in *Toward a Civil Discourse*. This chapter formed the starting point for the conclusions and theory I offer in the book: it features an exchange centered on one of the most polarizing issues in the United States, and arguably worldwide: support for full inclusion of LGBTQ people in society and support for traditional expressions of gender on the basis of religious belief. I analyze rhetorical exchanges between gay-rights activist and author Justin Lee and his interlocutors on the website of activist, blogger, and popular religious writer Rebecca Held Evans. I also analyze transcripts of interviews I conducted with Lee about his writing and rhetorical strategies.

My research on this topic not only was the exigency for my interest in a way of engaging across difference, but the close examination I did of rhetorical exchanges between gay-rights activists who identify as Christian and those in evangelical communities who resist LGBTQ rights provided the data with

which I identified recurring features of rhetorical empathy. Considering the various ways evangelicals in the United States have opposed humane treatment of gay people, including their support of the so-called religious-freedom bills in reaction to the Windsor Supreme Court case legalizing marriage equality in 2013, the question of how to narrow the divide between religious conservatives and queer people and allies remains kairotic.

Chapter 4, “Beyond ‘Common Ground’: Rhetorical Empathy in Composition Pedagogies,” turns from rhetoric in transnational, mostly online settings to the site of college composition, focusing on ways of fostering engagement across difference in the classroom. Current pedagogies in writing studies focusing on argument often neglect the role of the personal within political arguments. Approaches to writing based on the well-known feminist mantra that the personal is political and on what Michael Polanyi calls “personal knowledge” are valuable means of engaging across difference. Such personal epistemologies and writing have been downplayed in composition courses focused on professionalizing students and on argumentation as a primary genre in recent years. In this chapter I trace threads of rhetorical empathy in recent composition theories and share an example of a mixed-genre assignment based on principles of rhetorical empathy in my classes at Baruch College at the City University of New York. The narrative argument assignment on which I focus draws from elements of literacy narratives and argument and builds on students’ own experiences and stories, connecting them to larger issues outside the classroom that affect their lives.

First-year composition represents the only site on a national level with the potential to produce, in John Duffy’s words, “virtuous arguments.”³³ He points out that first-year writing “is not typically associated with improving public discourse, much less considered a ‘movement.’ For students required to take the course, it may initially be seen as a speed bump, an exercise in curricular gatekeeping best dispatched as painlessly as possible.” The reality is that each semester around twenty million students

take these required courses, a staple of college curricula he calls “the closest thing we have in American public life to a National Academy of Reasoned Rhetoric, a venue in which students can rehearse the virtues of argument so conspicuously lacking in our current political debates.” Composition pedagogies based on rhetorical empathy ask students to recognize the contextual and personally situated nature of all arguments and discourse, allowing a more nuanced, ethical avenue of approaching argument and accounting for the role of emotion and the personal in persuasion and change.

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