(DIS)CONTENTS

Chapter One
WHAT IS STRANGELY RHETORICAL?

There is no excellent beauty that hath not
some strangeness in the proportion.
—*The Essaies of Sr. Francis Bacon, Knight* (1613)

STRANGER RHETORS

You are strange. I am too. You are a stranger. That is your special power. And that is also the foundation of rhetoric in all its unique forms. This strangeness of ours offers us tricks for making potentially striking compositions. When we compose a text of any sort, we make something new, something slightly unfamiliar for a stranger, an other, our audience. We can tap into that novelty and make some *really* interesting things. As we make interesting things together, communicating endless novelties, we constantly practice being what we already are: stranger rhetors.

Let's riff or drift on this idea a bit and see where it takes us. Strangeness is apparent in the world around us. It might be rain while the sun is shining, sp,oM uMop əpᴉsdn, axolotls, or it might be someone born with extra fingers, like me. Strangeness is natively mysterious because it means we are perceiving something that would normally be otherwise. Strangeness lies at the edges, across lines. This is strangeness's power. Strangeness sits outside of town, yet it is intrinsically political because it pulls away from whatever norms lie within the social structures at the center of a city, the pole that polices in the middle of our *polis*.

Here is the real crux of the matter. Our otherness can be imagined as being for others. It can be a gift. It can also be taken, co-opted, commodified. However, our otherness allows us to be rhetorical in our exchanges with one another, pushing and pulling in all of our suasive communicative acts. Our rhetorical strangeness doesn't exist for ourselves so much as how we are perceived. This is because it is often hard to see how we are viewed by others as strange beings in the world. Our strange being in the world exists as a fundamental aspect of our own realities. Our otherness is also sometimes *against* others. Our stranger-ness always

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exists as some part of our identity—but it's also always either somewhat off-putting or kind of attractive.

Strangeness and normativity considered through the various ways that we compose things in the world are particularly what the following pages explore. As Cynthia Haynes puzzles out with us in her essay "Writing Offshore," "Yet we know (don't we?) that writing should be strange, that we should feel alienated, removed, and detached from our *standard* habits of reading and thinking" (2003, 671). This tension and resistance regarding the strange and the standard continue to lie at the heart of theorizing and practicing composition and rhetoric. Plato too wrote, "Writing, you know, Phaedrus, has this strange quality about it" (1972, 69), because it remains a stranger and cannot speak back and become more familiar when questioned. Through this exploration, we will arrive at what I hope to be some potentially useful takeaways.

The attempt here is to arrive at a theory of strangeness to see what it entails and what it can do rhetorically. And while the theory can sometimes take us to complex and fraught sites of thinking, in many ways, this book exists simply in the hope that we can find more ways of getting folks to do more interesting things with their compositions. In essence, the gist of rhetorical strangeness is twofold: strangeness is important for rhetoric because we are always speaking as others to others. And second, as a lens, strangeness allows us to think about generating more interesting and engaging novel forms of rhetorical expression through invention, as opposed to those conventional, normative voices that don't often get heard.

WHAT STRANGENESS MAY BE

Definitions are slippery fish. Go on—try to define what a table is. Strangeness is especially difficult to define because it, by its very nature, sits outside what we can usually grasp or lay hold of. Still, we know what a table is when we see it. We also know strangeness when we see it. It sits there like an unexpected animal looking out at us from the woods. Can we find it? Can we really ever catch a true glimpse, and then sit there, with it staring back at us for a minute before it quickly and quietly scampers off? It stands out, is different—hair or fur strikingly distinct from the trees and leaves nearby. In her article "Listening to Strange Strangers, Modifying Dreams," Marilyn Cooper considers the rhetorical effect that results from the strange shock of a dragonfly zooming into her car window while she's driving (2016, 17). Dragonflies are strange creatures. What is the strangest creature you can think of? (Maybe that's

not even a fair question, considering this new radical relativity.) And it is also important to remember that we're strange creatures too.

At the present time, our culture is invested in a constant hunt for novelty. We have become hunters and gatherers of strangenesses. Strangeness hunting is our new way of life as we scroll through media feeds, longing for a kick or a hit. So, what might it mean to consciously or thoughtfully practice strangeness hunting? Hunting a weird, wild beast, not to capture it but to have seen it, to have experienced its otherness: that is the contemporary condition.

For our purposes, strangeness is the measure of difference or distance between relations. Because relations exist at the heart of rhetorical situations, strangeness is the quality of any rhetorical object's distance from its most frequent formations—and often its audience. Strangeness is wrapped up in form. A strange table, for instance, might have 165 legs, be made of chocolate, and sit inverted. In any case, strangeness offers the potential of the not yet from the already. It offers similarities and differences, helps us perceive when things are more or less alike; it builds tension and creates attraction and repulsion.

Strangeness, though a noun, isn't exactly a solid thing, though it is a thing that can be felt, as with the adjectival *strange*. They are both qualities of things in more or less distant arrangement with other things. Strangers count as nouns, of course. Strangers offer unique singular beings that create tensions of difference and divergence. Strangenesses are naturally diverse, resisting old norms—found in places like normal schools and Normal, Illinois—and even resisting the oxymoron of the new normal. *Strange* seems to be something that we use to denote curious interest. As in, "Hmm . . . strange. That's out of the ordinary. . . ."

I do prefer the term strange to its most frequent synonym, weird, only because of etymology. Weird comes from the Old English *wyrd*, which essentially suggests a twist in fate—interesting, but not my main drive here, though strangeness is certainly connected to individuals experiencing twisting differences over time. The word *strange* comes from the Latin *extraneus*, meaning "from the outside." The first non-obsolete definition for "strange" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "Belonging to some other place or neighbourhood; unknown to the particular locality specified or implied. Of a place or locality: Other than one's own" (OED Online 2021). The otherness of strangeness is always called into question when any reader confronts a work or text—because a text is never one's own until it is taken in. How much does a composition fit within the nativity of one's experience, and will it be rejected upon this foundation? How do we compose when this strangeness always threatens

or sweetens the success of our work? The thought as it pertains to composition is that it confronts the cultural value of *being-in*: plugged in, jacked in, in the know, in the mix, bask in, come on in. We oscillate then, perceptually, between media that draw us in and rhetorical moves that draw us outside of what we have come to accept as familiar.

We could try to define strangeness by the negative: it is the unconventional, the unordinary, the unusual, the outside, the non-normative, the irregular, the aberrant, the atypical; it is that which deviates. Strangers embrace their own eccentricities—out of center—peculiar and odd and queer, strikingly interesting and novel. Trying to get at what it is by considering what it is not is a little like trying to shine a light on a moving noise in the dark. In working outside and against the confines of the city, strangeness is to pagan as convention is to the polis.

OUR STRANGE WORLD IN CONTEXT

Who are you in this strange world of ours, fellow writing rhetor? What are your own peculiar rhetorical strangenesses? When I was little, I would sit in front of a light-blue box fan and speak into the blades. My voice would come back, chopped and foreign. I would do that for a while, enjoying my other voice, the speech that was mine but different, altered. I could turn the fan off, or move away, and my voice would be normal again, as it should be. But what *should* a voice be? Should it be normal at all? And what makes something normal in the first place? These are difficult questions but ones that are worth sitting with for a while. Rhetorical strangeness is an experience of oscillation, like spinning fan blades. In one moment, novelty can be breathtakingly exciting. Another, a strange move might be too off-putting to bear. When rhetorical strangeness has an affective quality (and it often does), when it moves us to curiosity, to pleasure, those are the most interesting moments, when strangeness offers some brief sway (and those moments rarely last long—strangeness doesn't stick around).

Let's consider just a few more strange things before we move on. What is the strangest thing you can think of? The duck-billed platypus is a classic example. Blue-tailed skinks. Vampire squids. Slime molds. Venus flytraps are particularly strange—sold at novelty stores. What makes these things so weird? What makes them feel so strikingly different? They are part of our world. They are not strange to themselves. A platypus isn't so strange to another platypus. But to us, they *feel* different. And what is more, nonhuman actants like butterflies don't even have the word *rhetoric* to think about what is going on among them. We interpret things in our own strange, human, culturally oriented terms.

10–66 is the NYPD radio code for an unusual incident, such as a building collapse. We know that the police are always on the lookout for the strange and unusual. The unusual creates policing. The kinds of things we are seeking here are works that dissent from the usual forms while still working within the rules set by an audience's imperative. The stranger rhetor learns to police itself for itself—to survive.

A bug in the house or a snake in the yard gives us a strange jolt. It feels different because there is a *should-not* about that sort of being in certain places. The house or the yard offers us a normative space. The classroom has its own norms and boundaries. Our own spaces—the ones that we claim to possess—seem safe and familiar. When something else enters, something unexpected, we feel the striking shock of strangeness. But we must and do allow the other to enter; we entertain difference. We too can elicit powerful shocks by being as wise as serpents. The welcome charm of the platypus is not the same otherness as the unexpected and uninvited snake. But both create affect. We can as well in our writing and our speaking with our own embodied gestures. With rhetorical strangeness, we shift attentions.

Our obsessions are a ripe place to look for our cultural strangeness. American football is a strange, complex set of cultural practices that—when looked at from a distance—can be perceived as jarringly unusual. But I might posit that everything works this way. Everything normal, with some distance, can be thought of as strange. You know what's strange? Vacuum cleaner manuals. And conversely, everything that is far off or weird, when made familiar with some time, becomes not so strange after all. Strangeness is everywhere. We only have to seek it out. We can hunt out a stranger any time we wish, something to occupy our strange little minds for a moment before moving on with our everyday lives.

Try this. Think about something you find to be particularly strange and what makes it so.

. . .

Strangers are things or beings. The strangeness between and upon things is an energy or force. As with any rhetorical missive, strange things can attract. Strange things can repel. It is in their nature to do so. Research in particle physics describes what are referred to as "strange attractors," as theorized by Edward Lorenz at MIT (Lorenz 1995; see also Gleick 1987). Physicists think of strangeness as a force—or a flavor, as a type of quark with certain unique qualities or properties. We might, after all, work with the quirkiness of our various quarks. Beyond that, of interest to rhetoricians, strangeness is paired or foiled with what physicists

call charm, and both forces can be measured positively or negatively (see Anchordoqui and Halzen 2009, 6).

Rhetoricians have long understood conceptually how rhetoric itself is a force, at least since Aristotle outlined the term by saying, "Let rhetoric be an ability [or *dynamis*] to discern the available means of persuasion in any given situation" (2006, 37). Rhetoric is our dynamite. The dynamic power or ability involved in a unique rhetorical strategy may be thought of in similar terms to this emerging idea of strange attractors, chaotic formulas that make beautiful patterns. Beauty can appear in communication too. This examination of novelty in terms of rhetoric allows us to rethink what we mean when we talk about rhetoric at all. Still, with all the advances of the field, when I am asked to define rhetoric to the occasional new friend, I often spout out Aristotle's definition. Strangeness, too, offers available means for finding suasive ends within various forms. The ability to find strangeness, however, is a trick to be mastered, as with rhetoric. Being a good discoverer of means is like becoming an entrepreneur of language or a well-seasoned cook. The default is vanilla. So, we add sprinkles or spices. We have to learn to be savvy rhetors. A good, strange rhetor looks under rocks, behind trees, and through sheaves of paper to discover just the right means of grabbing listeners by their lapels.

The rhetor is a strange being in the world; he or she or it or they or xe is always already other. Strange composition strategies offer potentially effective sites of resistance for contemporary audiences who have been mediated in problematic ways by various procedural prisons; moreover, playful composing and reading strategies potentially free audiences from the forms, structures, conventions, and media that govern and anesthetize their everyday lives while offering them interesting new ones. I am arguing for novelty in the field of rhetoric and composition, or—I should say—a continuation of novel practices and their analysis. For some reason, I find that unless encouraged to do otherwise, students tend to create fairly conventional texts. Fun is at their fingertips. What we must be interested in doing, then, is helping us all find our unique voices within the boisterous contemporary public sphere by making use of the strangeness of various rhetorical devices. If we find strangeness provocative, then we are left with a question. Why is everything so boring?

A STRANGE SHKLOVSKIAN RHETORIC

In the field of rhetoric, to generate interesting connections, we can and often do create productive insights by simply considering the rhetoric of something. The rhetoric *of* X is a powerful tool that offers all sorts of

paired potentialities (see Schiappa 2001, 269). We might consider the rhetoric of food, or the rhetoric of race, or the rhetoric of socks or snow globes. Here we have the rhetoric of strangeness, which gives us a lens and a framework with which to build. The way I got down this line of thought began with considering a Shklovskian rhetoric, which is to say, a rhetoric that pushes against familiarity.

As such, the central concept that I want us to explore in conjunction with rhetoric—defined broadly—is *defamiliarization* and its effects. Defamiliarization can help us think about creating potentially interesting rhetorical texts. To help us bridge this connection, we can begin with Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, a Russian formalist and literary critic, who created the term **остранение** (transliterated *ostranenie*). Defamiliarization is just one translation of a word I am taking from Shklovsky. The word *ostranenie* has various contested translations: defamiliarization, estrangement, or enstrangment, along with simply making strange. Whatever the translation, Shklovsky's term has many connected theories beyond his own writing. Shklovsky remains a fringe figure in literary circles, but at the time he wrote during the early twentieth century, he was endangered and oppressed by the Soviet state as a dissenter, was interrogated, and barely made it out of the country with his life. That political outsider stance remains a serious aspect of his work, but it is also important in the present time for imagining an outsider rhetoric involving the composition of strangeness.

Defamiliarization still works as a rhetorical lens worth considering that functions across compositional media, especially within the buzz of media white noise. As a technique, defamiliarization is now more necessary than ever as our media ecologies become more familiar, and therefore more problematically captivating. Meanwhile, strangeness ebbs and flows within the tide of cultural novelties, from new digital spaces to new physical ones. In our mediatized world, a world that is increasingly fashioned for us, new forms—fashionably ahead of the trend—are the currency the contemporary rhetor must use to make his or her messages. We live in a flood—a media flood, an information flood, a world of bells and whistles, beeps and blips. And creating an argument that others will hear in a boisterous environment asks us to be increasingly interesting. In a world of media totalitarianism, one might do worse than return to a concept invented against totalitarianism: the avant-garde, defamiliarization.

The term *defamiliarization*, too, embodies this sense of something that was familiar but has deviated from that original form. According to translator Benjamin Sher, part of the Russian word *ostranenie*—*stranit*—signifies

a homeland or state, but also "strange" (Sher 1991, xviii). This reinforces the tension-producing quality of strange rhetoric and its dynamism—which is to say that strange rhetorical moves unbalance a situation, putting the stability off balance. Sher suggests *enstrangement* to get at the strangeness of the word itself. I tend to use defamiliarization here because of the popularization of that translation. But the concept of making things strange in general is all we really need here.

Shklovsky's theories were developed in the Soviet Union under Stalin as a way of thinking about unique, complex work that resisted mass consumption. Yet it seems that strangeness may be pulled into the field of rhetorical criticism with some successful effects at the present time. And Shklovsky did not theorize novelty in a vacuum. He thought about the formal aspects of work alongside a group called the OPOJAZ (**ОПОЯЗ**), or ***O****bščestvo izučenija* ***PO****ètičeskogo* ***JAZ****yka*, the Society for the Study of Poetic Language. This group is similar in some ways to the popular French group the Oulipo, a group that was also committed to the experimentation of language and generated various textual experiments in order to make composition captivating in new ways. The Oulipo, or the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, a working group investigating literature's potentials, represents another cohort that has explored the sorts of experiments on the surface of language that can make works interesting. The OPOJAZ, operating in Russia as the Soviet state mounted in political power, offers a different, politicized take. The work of collectives like these, seeing the text as textual, not *simply* as a lens to content, and yet viewing form and content as naturally interconnected, reveals the text—untexts the text, unmediates it—or unmediates it as remediation.

Defamiliarization, says Shklovsky, has the potential for working as an artistic device upon the audience. This unique term comes from Shklovsky's famous essay "Art as Device" from his book *Theory of Prose* (although I think it is a theory that applies to much more than prose). This insightful text has had a long influence; as Marjorie Perloff has said, it has "become a sort of bible to many of us" (2013, 15). In his writing, Shklovsky thoughtfully responds to a passage from Leo Tolstoy's diary where Tolstoy watches a man walking in the road bend down, pick up a stone, and sharpen his knife with it. The man is using the stone as a tool, but automatically, without thinking. Shklovsky recaps Tolstoy's story, then shares this insight. It is worthwhile to read the entire influential passage here:

> Objects are represented either by one single characteristic (for example, by number), or else by a formula that never even rises to the level of consciousness. Consider the following entry in Tolstoy's diary:

> As I was walking around dusting things off in my room, I came to the sofa. For the life of me, I couldn't recall whether I had already dusted it off or not. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I felt that it was already impossible to remember it. If I had in fact dusted the sofa and forgotten that I had done so, i.e., if I had acted unconsciously, then this is tantamount to not having done it at all. If someone had seen me doing this consciously, then it might have been possible to restore this in my mind. If, on the other hand, no one had been observing me or observing me only unconsciously, if the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been. (29 February [i.e., 1 March] 1897)
>
> And so, held accountable for nothing, life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war.
>
> If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been.
>
> And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. **By "enstranging" objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious." The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest**. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.* (Shklovsky 1991, 6, emphasis added)

The consideration of how much humans function on the level of the unconscious asks much of rhetoricians, who use their own artistic devices. Which devices awaken our senses? And when? And how? And are we unconscious now? If we dust our furniture unconsciously, as Shklovsky suggests through Tolstoy, then where or when does modern life actually find grounding? As Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart poetically inure us: "Strangeness raises some dust" (2019, 5). Because of the tool of art, we have capability, agency in our compositions to feel out and find presence—phenomenologically and rhetorically. Shklovsky's focus on novels as his primary medium has kept current critics interested in new compositions across media from applying his concepts to the field of rhetoric.

Many have considered the relations of figures and strangeness, and that thinking remains useful even after over 100 years since Shklovsky first wrote about it. Defamiliarization functions rhetorically across different forms of composition and media. In other words, a stranged text will often become a suasive text. Shklovsky's exploration into the study of poetic language has been carefully examined by a host of scholars, but

his theory of defamiliarization continues to haunt us as after modernism and strict theories of formalism have demurely gone upstairs. The ethics underlying Shklovsky's writing is intensely relevant for us today because it works against the flood of totalizing immersive media when ubiquitous media elicit only automatic or anesthetized responses from contemporary audiences.

The ability to bend forms and conventions after learning them, I would argue, is now one of the few ways that we have to jackhammer through the hazy apparatus of everyday life and get our audience's collective attentions in our overwhelmingly distracted mediatized culture. The introduction to Shklovsky's later book, *Bowstring*, contains a further elaboration and development of the idea of estrangement that may be connected back to this grounding found in the Greek consideration of the concept. The introduction tells us:

> Shklovsky redefines estrangement (*ostranenie*) as a device of the literary comparatists—the "person out of place," who has turned up in a period where he does not belong and who must search for meaning with a strained sensibility. The book's title comes from Heraclitus: "They do not understand how that which differs from itself is in agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre." Comparison, in this sense, does not involve the assimilation of someone else's "otherness"—rather, it catalyzes one's own "otherness" and the otherness of one's own language. (Avagyan 2011, x–xi)

A personalized language is distinct from an aberrant one, although it would almost depend upon taste to consider whether a composition differed too strongly, or—in the conceit of Heraclitus—pulled the bowstring too tautly.

Although he was much more interested in literary applications than strictly rhetorical ones, Shklovsky specifically mentions the one who first gave us a whole book on rhetoric, Aristotle. Their connection to one another often goes unnoticed, particularly in the field of rhetoric. Interestingly, Aristotle tentatively offers a similar program to Shklovsky's in his writing. His understanding of strangeness as an affective force exists in ancient Greece almost 2,300 years before Shklovsky's theory.

ARISTOTELIAN STRANGENESS

Strangeness may be thought of as a kind of applied poetics, and in Aristotle's book *Poetics*, we can see some early traces of strangeness for rhetorical effect. Because strange forms can be traced back so far, it is surprising that a more concerted effort has not been made to research

the strange in terms of rhetorical practice. Aristotle suggests, "Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly-coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered" (1932, 3.21). The balance of both the current and the strange is figured in much of the Aristotelian rhetorical schemata, though one would not normally use those terms. Nevertheless, Aristotle does in fact use that terminology—precariously placing the strange at the limits of rhetoric, somehow simultaneously concerned by it and in awe of it.

Aristotle's thoughtful consideration of strangeness continues in *On Rhetoric*. Aristotle explains in book III, "One should make the language unfamiliar; for people are admirers of what is far off, and what is marvelous is sweet" (2006, 198), using here the term *xenen* for foreign-language use. He even quotes another writer, Aneschetos (whose name means "bearable"), who says, (and you'll have to forgive the old translation because I like it): "Thou must not be a stranger stranger than thou should'st." And here we must begin to feel our own alienation from Aristotle's paternal warning.

Aristotle's initial mention of "the strange" is dismissive, but he does seem to imply *indirectly* that strangeness is rhetorical despite his opinion that strange usage is a kind of abuse of rhetorical figuration. Elsewhere in book III of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle talks about misuse and "the employment of strange words" and inappropriate metaphors. "Strange words, compound words, and invented words must be used sparingly and on few occasions [*toutōn glōttais men kai diplois onomasi kai pepoiēmenois oligakis kai oligakhou khrēsteon*]: on what occasions we shall state later" (2006, 198) suggests a wary Aristotle. Aristotle carefully counsels against going over the edge, or going too far, but acknowledges the usefulness of strange style for rhetorical purposes, noting that such tactics must be used sparingly, warning that a balance must be struck, keeping the audience in mind. His anxiety about strangeness has persisted in Western ideals and traditions of thought that privilege a functional and acceptable conventionalism. An example Aristotle gives of this rhetorical abuse is Gorgias talking about "pale and bloodless doings" (2006, 204). Aristotle initially seems to dismiss this metaphor as signifying a gimmicky novelty, but then shifts into a section on the effective use of simile—there is a paradoxical approbation of the strange techniques he sees in different Greek writers, including Plato himself. Of course, Aristotle's work goes on to influence much of rhetorical theory, and many have taken up the impetus to consider and enact rhetorical strangeness. The fact that Father Aristotle feels he must give a hesitant, provisional permission to be strange in the first place only invites our own persistent resistance.

Taking Aristotle as a prime mover for rhetorical study will serve us less and less moving forward. He remains a grounding, but we can push off and find new frontiers, as many have done in problematizing a tack that takes Aristotle as origin story. We have to pave new paths.

A STRANGE NEW VIEW OF RHETORICAL COMPOSITION

All rhetoric is based on the quality of strangeness. The degree of difference is the key fulcrum upon which a claim is placed. An argument is always *other* in that it is not already accepted as given by the party being persuaded—or not. The level of affectability and desire elicited in the strange thoughts of others will eventually result in the acceptance or rejection of those thoughts. Too strange, and the argument is rejected. With the force of strangeness in a rhetorical act, we either estrange or enchant our audience. Too familiar, and there is no argument at all. We must necessarily be strange with our rhetorical moves. We cannot help but be strange, but we can shape how our own strangeness is deployed. *Wonderful* rhetoric, rhetoric that fills its audience with wonder, offers some promise in re-creating new avenues for thinking about inventive communicative strategies. If I could sum up my entire philosophy of composition in one brief and accessible catchphrase, I might steal Apple's "Think Different," with its brash nonstandard surface error and its appealing call. Thinking differently is precisely what all of us are always after, and it is what we are often doing. This analysis is then a critical framework for how to explore, analyze, weigh, and create strange composition within the long-tried tradition of rhetorical criticism and invention. Here we reskew rhetoric, and perhaps rescue it, from the tired ways in which we've come to view it.

All rhetorical moves are strange.

What is *strange*? Rhetoric is.

Richard E. Vatz writes that the sine qua non of rhetoric is "the art of linguistically or symbolically creating salience. After salience is created, the situation must be translated into meaning" (Vatz 1973, 160). The use of rhetorical strangeness to show a text's textness, to draw out its meaning by directing attention, is powerful. Then we twist the meaning through various kinds of strange shifts and redirect the text and our audience to create that salience.

Others have touched upon similar thoughts. Who has not thought about strangeness? In the interest of time and space, we can touch upon only a few instances here. For example, Freud's uncanny is of particular importance to defamiliarizing composition, especially to see

how it affects the minds of its cooperative or resistant audiences. Freud explored the concept of the *unheimlich*, German for the not-at-home or the uncanny. Freud's discussion of the uncanny is also particularly interested in writing. Freud observes, "We laymen have always been greatly intrigued to know where the creative writer, that strange personality, finds his subjects . . . and how he contrives to enthrall us with them, to arouse in us emotions of which we might not even have thought ourselves capable" (2003, 25). I also want to note here that the distinction between creative writing and something else is often a faulty division. Freud explains in "The Uncanny," "*Unheimlich* is clearly the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut*, and it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. But of course the converse is not true: not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening. All one can say is that what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny; some things that are novel are indeed frightening, but by no means all. Something must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny" (124–25). The uncanny, employed in various modes of composition as a tactic, as a kind of *unheimlich maneuver*, rescues work from the banality of generalized media forms.

Moving from one German to another, we can connect how playwright and critic Bertolt Brecht, visiting Russia at some point in his career and coming across Shklovsky's work, translated the idea of ostranenie into the German word *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is often translated into English as alienation or distancing effect, but encapsulates some aspects of the same concept about which we have been talking (Bloch, Halley, and Suvin 1970, 121). The importance of consciousness for Brecht and Shklovsky means that a different kind of attention should be paid to form. Brecht mentions, "The effort to make the incidents represented appear strange to the public can be seen in a primitive form in the theatrical and pictorial displays at the old popular fairs" (Bloch, Halley, and Suvin 1970, 91). At the fair, Brecht relates, the emphatic peculiarity of carefully self-aware performances allows the audience a different, more thoughtful kind of experience.

Experiencing and coming to terms with difference is in order for recognition or rhetorical connections to occur. For one, Kenneth Burke has referred to a related concept he calls "perspective by incongruity" (1984b, 88). In a sense, the kind of composition sought here is really a Burkean "perspective by incongruity . . . established . . . by violating the 'proprieties' of the word in its previous linkages" (1984b, 90). Burke offers this tactic as a kind of resistance to what he terms elsewhere, in *Attitudes toward History*, as the "bureaucratization of the imaginative"

(1984a, 225). Playful composition—composition that violates its own proprieties—recalls to our mind the rules and structures of composition itself. Burke adds, "Perspective by Incongruity is both needed and extensively practiced" (1984b, 119). Burke also refers to this as "THE NIETZSCHEAN METHOD," which offers opportunity for invention: "Such a device quickly makes it possible to speak, let us say of Arabian Puritanism, thus extending the use of a term by taking it from the context in which it was habitually used and applying it to another" (1984b, 89). The result of finding strange combinations can help us overthrow habitual use through decontextualization and move toward a productive novelty. Beyond the novelty of novels, the need, the exigency, for this sort of playful structuralism continues into various compositional forms.

Burke also explored the concept of identification in *The Rhetoric of Motives*. He writes, "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division . . . If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (1969b, 22). So, our rhetoric is naturally strange, but as we embrace a kind of connection to one another we create what Burke calls identification. We connect through (not just in spite of) our differences. We can find a way to identify when someone shares something unique with us. Here we can add another useful thought from Burke, who writes, "Rhetoric must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard" (1969b, 22). In our wild cacophony of difference, rhetoric allows us to connect and interact. In the introduction to *Landmark Essays on Rhetorics of Difference*, editors Damián Baca, Ellen Cushman, and Jonathan Osborne tap into the meaning and importance of studying alternative routes in rhetoric. They describe "difference" as "a descriptor for critically engaging multiplicitous, complex living experiences across assymmetrical [*sic*, but I like the typo] dimensions of power" (2019, 2). The influences of difference are inbuilt into the rhetorical system. And so, we can be thankful for our strange rhetorical identifications with each other and the world.

This concept of connecting across our otherness can also be found in the work of Diane Davis. Working in part from Burke's concept of identification and Emmanuel Lévinas's ethical consideration of the Other, Davis suggests a pre-originary connection that she refers to as rhetoricity, which is "an affectability or persuadability that is at work prior to and in excess of any shared meaning" (2010, 26). And so rhetoricity allows us to consider our affectability, the ways in which we are even able to be interested by interesting otherness in the first place. I am convinced now more than ever that rhetoric is the practice of attempting to reduce

otherness by sharing our otherness with each other. That is, rhetoric is in its essence the creation of unique connections, about making ourselves strangers less and less.

And while the connection of strangers and stranged texts is one goal, it is also important to see strangeness as having the potential for intentional distancing, as queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz suggests with the counter-concept of disidentification. Muñoz explains it in this way: "Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (1999, 31). Hence, this othered/othering stance is also itself productive. When strangeness creates too much distance, it is important for us to be able to allow rhetoric to fail. It offers the potential to agree to disagree when necessary and also to accept and allow our differences to exist at all. When we aren't all perfectly identified with each other (and we aren't), we maintain our aspects of difference because when we allow that space, it allows us to still be a little productively strange (and rhetorical) with each other.

Meanwhile, other colleagues in the field of rhetoric have begun to touch upon this term *strange* with different approaches. One significant connection may be found in Michele Kennerly who, with a rare nod toward Shklovsky, works with others in a collection on *alloiosis*, where she encourages us by explaining: "Wonder refreshes otherness" and then asks, "What resources of rhetoric feed the sort of wonder that nourishes strangeness?" (2015, 87). In asking how *alloio*-rhetorics might be practiced, we invite a distant other to be *inside* but not *requisite*, without gawking or requiring anything. Perhaps no other contemporary thinker of rhetoric has come closer to this project's orientation than Kennerly. Later, she uses the term *atopos* as a non-place, a strange place, from which an outsider struggles for voice or representation when they are out-of-place (2017). The term *atopos* is distinct from *xenos* because the odd one without a place is not necessarily coming from anywhere at all—or anywhere known to us. The not-at-home rhetoric is a kind of homeless rhetoric, a displaced rhetoric—and here we imagine a rhetoric of handmade cardboard signs where strangers ask something of an other.

Bradford Vivian, a philosopher of rhetoric, suggests that we are not merely creating strangeness as foreigners in the world, but that we are inherently strange, ontologically so. In his text *Being Made Strange*, which is one of the primary places where rhetoric and strangeness have been connected, he argues for moving to the boundaries of rhetoric and, by default, the will toward representation. There, he suggests, "between identity and difference, between past and present, between self and other, our being—once so transparent and familiar—suddenly appears strange. In the interstices of this strangeness, of this 'dispersion that we are,' rhetoric acquires an ethos no longer identical with representation" (2004, 192). For Vivian, exceptionally strange rhetors may not necessarily even care to be known or heard in their various eccentricities or idiosyncrasies. In his thorough study, Vivian calls both the subjectivity of the speaker and their associated ethos already a stranger, already an amalgamation of foreignness.

Finally, Kristie Fleckenstein and Anna Worm also outline a framework for thinking through an "other rhetoric" that we can look forward to in the future. They announce, "We choose *other* as our descriptor for this future vision of rhetoric to emphasize the reality of difference, the constraints imposed by difference, and the beauty of a temporary unity forged through and across difference" (2019, 35) and "Other rhetoric requires not just the acknowledgment of difference but acknowledgment of the value that difference has" (38). Difference has value. And as Fleckenstein and Worm suggest, that difference is available in the future, coming at us as we build our desire for it. Sameness has its own values as well, but little work is exerted to achieve the value of our comfortable and habitual daily lives.

As such, we can continue discovering the potential found in what we are and what we are to one another in the present. Then we can see how we might move forward toward something different in the future. The future is always strange. Normal doesn't come back to us. Normal is merely a memory. And sometimes a familiar form might remind us of it. But difference is on the horizon. It is evident that contemporaries in the field of rhetoric and composition are increasingly struggling to confront the tensions that bubble up with strangeness on the line. The foreignness of any rhetorical message is why, I would venture, rhetoric itself is so dependent upon an understanding of strangeness. Rhetoric is always already other, it grates against any prior identification, it calls one to change one's mind. Rhetoric is at its heart essentially and necessarily strange.

THE LIMITS OF RHETORICAL STRANGENESS AND ANTI-STRANGENESS: WHAT IS NOT STRANGE? WHAT IS NOT RHETORICAL?

One of my own conceptual limits of rhetoric revolves around when some kind of transaction of intentional meaning doesn't occur. So, where are the limits here? And what's at stake with this line? Too strange can elicit total dismissal. It is perhaps fairly important to note a pretty significant caveat here. *We need normalcy too.* Of course, certain norms are required within any rhetorical act—for example, I am writing in English, not some personal language. But the norms are simply the other side of the same coin that functions as the currency of rhetorical exchange. Rhetorical messages come from unfamiliar places, and they must be tempered with at least some degree of familiarity—finding the balance there is the key to becoming a successful rhetor. My detractors might object, "Rhetoric is not so strange." Of course, every rhetorical act is dependent upon following some conventions. So, we must sit with all the caveats, all the considerations and contradictions, all the other voices, that call and challenge practices of strangeness. There is a balance of familiar and strange within any rhetorical situation that either topples or finds harmony with its audience. Too normal can elicit total dismissal too.

Who is for anti-strangeness? Standardized tests and certain forms of grading and assessment and rubrics and core educational standards that ask for things like correctness *above* or *before* creativity seem to continue to stand against a valuing of rhetorical strangeness. Meanwhile, strangeness produces rhetorical effects. However, strangeness can also produce something of an anti-rhetoric by being potentially off-putting or aggravating. The existence of a strange object in the world does its own thing. Everything is naturally being strange, sitting in its own unique strangeness. And these strange beings, all beings, really, have the potential to draw in or put off. Considering this (or any) boundary of rhetoric is potentially polemical as rhetoric continues to grow ever bigger and encompass more territory. From this angle, we practice the ancient tradition of *dissoi logoi*, or arguing both sides: strangeness is attractive, and strangeness is distancing.

Every exchange is somewhat strange. Otherwise, a communicative act is not rhetorical—a non-strange communicative act is something else; it might be called preaching to the choir. I have been using choir-preaching to delineate an end of rhetoric that seems already evident. In other words, strange compositions are out of the ordinary; suasive work occurs only when the audience does not already have the message. For example, a churchgoer on Sunday hears once again that "Jesus saves."

The person either believes this completely or would need some persuading—though there is a spectrum of belief. However, I am arguing that the message is only rhetorical if the person does not already completely believe it, if there is a stasis to be overcome, if the message is something other than the worldview of the listener. Rhetoric in its essence often comes from some outside place, even if that otherness is in and of and for ourselves. Yet defamiliarization is rhetoric's power or *dynamis*—finding the strange availability out of the host of options. Some might argue that a familiar or habitual thought might reinforce a belief, but this function is only the case if the audience still does not quite completely and totally believe the thought already.

Strange is a stasis word, meaning it has a tension, it has a politics. It gives one pause. It makes us reel back. We are wary of strangers. Don't talk to strangers! Stasis, we know from rhetorical theory, is the space where two confrontational sides come to a head, a standstill. In its political origins, stasis signifies a civil war (see Berent 1998, 331; Agamben 2015, 1–18). Terms that have their own tensions embedded within them are stasis terms; they are inherently political in the broad sense of politics creating divisions and putting people at odds. Strangeness can potentially cause division, which is why it is so important to study its effects rhetorically. Because the exotic can also woo, sway, and win over.

And so, in every conversion, in every rhetorical moment, a strangeness quotient is reached, accepted, and consumed. The strangeness quotient of any rhetorical act asks us to measure how far the audience is being asked to step; in other words, how strange is the rhetorical invitation or provocation? The strangeness quotient of any rhetorical move is a measurement of its extremeness. After all, how far are you asking your listener to go? Are you persuading them to join you for lunch or to believe that you are god?

What is the most normal thing you can think of? Are baseboards strange? Strange or not strange might not be the question. Perhaps everything has strange potential.

WITH WHOM MIGHT WE DISAGREE? ANTI-AGON, AGAIN, I

Antigone was, in almost every respect, an outsider. Resistant to the state, she stood outside the bounds of law, responsive to something better. She resisted Creon (whose name means ruler) to remember her brother Polynices (Sophocles 2000). In Heidegger's translation and interpretation of the play, he notes the Chorus proclaiming, "Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncannier than the human" (see Withy 2015, 108).

The status quo, resistant to deviation, is where we find our disagreement. And yet, who is against strangeness?! Most of our interlocutors here will inevitably come to our aid. Rarely will someone confess to hate otherness outright, especially in our collective written theory.

So, while it is difficult to find the Creons of theory, it is much easier, I believe, to discover the rulers of excision in spaces of praxis. In practice, we often find in the everyday schoolroom those who would squelch a Brown girl's handwritten "she ain't," which is in some ways, like Antigone's, a noncompliant expression of connection to home in a displaced and regulated space. Patricia Williams refers to this psychological attack upon minorities as "spirit murder" (1991, 55). It occurs in a variety of ways, some more subtle, such as microaggressions, but sometimes more explicit—in red ink.

Those who still practice rhetorics of exclusion, rhetorics of agonism and antagonism, rhetorics of gatekeeping, rhetorics of standardization: against these we stand—awkwardly. These rhetorics still proliferate. When rhetoric becomes closed off by gatekeeping or standardization or prescriptive rule-following, then—simply stated—certain prejudices have arisen in the situation. Now, in almost every rhetorical situation, certain expectations exist before the exchange occurs. But being open to the unexpected or the aberrant—which deviates from whatever has been predetermined in one's mind—allows real rhetorical change to occur.

And there is not only a psychological resistance to enacted difference, but also a careful resistance to pleasure and play. A *very normal* tension exists within ourselves as strange compositionists. Ira J. Allen points out this exact perceived tension within us as fantastic, imagined—the creator is also created, the ethos is crafted, and the stranger emerges. He explains, "Composition, in all its activity, centers and orients toward negotiation between senses of self, constraints internal and external to those (fantastical) selves, and the possibilities of enacting creative capacity in a shared world" (2018, 190). This negotiation between the behaving composer and the resistant one is something we figure out along with our texts themselves. But this is our great challenge and our great hope—that something is possible nonetheless.

We've straight-jacketed much of our compositional work in practice. And we can write that off to our fears of enjoyment. In an interesting twist, Lynn Worsham writes, "Make no mistake, I am not against pleasure (who could possibly be against pleasure?), but . . ." (1999, 717). Of course, who would be against pleasure? Who would admit to being against more interesting compositions? Yet Worsham adds that resounding "but." As have so many. Including myself, in weak moments.

Which leads me to my last antagonist—myself. I long for novelty. And yet there are my moments when I am squeamish about different iterations of strangeness, both in myself and around me. I pull back when it is too much. I walk this tenuous line between allowance and disavowal. And stylistic preferences are okay. But sometimes I recoil against the strange otherness that I find—even in me. This tension must remain—a constant working out toward opening up to whatever may come along and jar our senses. That's the potentiality in pushing our boundaries, or even stopping to consider why and where our different stopping points might exist in the first place.

STRANGENESS AS AN EXPERIMENTAL FRAMEWORK

Strangeness as a value system becomes an interesting point of reference for interrogating composed works regarding their interestingness or inventiveness. I know that I am asking for more than the standard here, to get us composing in a mode where we can begin to bend the conventions of composition practices toward productive new ends. It is important for us to always be considering the pros and cons of familiarity. In working along strange new paths, we buck various standards and conventions (often too male—too white—too straight) that we have come to normalize. As Vershawn Ashanti Young writes, "Standard language ideology is the belief that there is one set of dominant language rules that stem from a single dominant discourse (like standard English) that all writers and speakers of English must conform to in order to communicate effectively" (2010, 111). Seeing (or imagining) a single standard or only one way is prescriptive and restrictive. Young continues, "See, dont nobody all the time, nor do they in the same way subscribe to or follow standard modes of expression" (111). An idea about a standard persists, and yet we continue to wrestle against this tension. We must use something familiar, but we cannot let familiar forms hold us back.

A number of conventions within composition and rhetoric have become encrusted with stale traditions. We continue to follow the ruts we have worn in our paths of thinking and doing. Meanwhile, we continue to fear going off track and getting dirty in our compositional practices. If traditional methods such as formal grammar are dead in composition classrooms, they deserve some kind of autopsy. I hope we can interrogate what we perceive as a whitewashed sense of composition—pristine like a porcelain toilet placed in an art gallery. But not all good equates with cleanliness, of course, and not everything bad is dirty.

So, we want something within this framework or heuristic:

Table 1.1. A strange composition framework

	Alluring composition	**Repulsive composition**
Strange composition	**X**	
Plain composition		

What we really want is the top left quadrant: strange and alluring compositions. Plain and alluring compositions are okay. But we are interested in novel compositions that work upon us in engaging and positively productive ways. Of course, strangeness and plainness can work against an audience and be repulsive. Strange and terrible days like 9/11 are horrifyingly different from the normal humdrum of our everyday lives. Not every kind of strangeness is good, after all. For example, when Lady Gaga wore a meat dress, the effect was upsetting for some, too strange to be accepted for its novelty, although other aspects of her work have been strangely alluring and successful because she has been one of those rare purveyors of novelty. The boring and unengaging five-paragraph essay falls into the plain and repulsive category—uninteresting and drab and off-putting. (And we know that the problem with the five-paragraph essay isn't the number of paragraphs.) The problem is vomit, regurgitation, spitting back up what has already been given. One could argue that everything normal is strange, and vice versa. We play along these lines in our work as we create, potentially being engaging and off-putting along the way. It is all dangerous, I am reminded. We are playing games with our texts that can hit or miss.

Nevertheless, a strikingly real danger lies in designing, writing, and making for the sake of alienation. One may simply alienate one's audience. The potential to captivate or alienate, however, lies within every text, every work. In a sense, writing or designing in order to distract may be a kind of dissuasion rather than persuasion. The methodological approach of defamiliarizing forms achieves distraction from the everyday. This approach does not by any means seek to do away with conventions, habitualizations, or normalizations altogether—these provide a basis from which one can function and into which one might introduce form.

STRANGENESS? SO WHAT?

We are not merely interested in strangeness for strangeness's sake. Let us close here with a quick "Why?" that might help us transition to the next move in our line of thinking. First, it is worth simply acknowledging the power of strange communication strategies. There are still more

connections to be made, as well as an outlining of the strategies or devices by which one may make a conscious effort to *strange* a rhetorical act. Theodor Adorno seems to emphasize the importance of this line of thought by stating in *Minima Moralia*, "The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar" (2005, 80). Surely, all thinking is a moving away from what we already know, accept, and believe. All rhetoric helps us to shift our stance, rebalance our weight, and move into foreign territory. Let us then not be hostile to strangers or strange thoughts; let us learn to be hospitable to what will always be *other*. At the same time, we must learn as rhetoricians that we are strangers to our audiences, that we can make use of this peculiar status, and that if we fail to accept this role, we may never be heard at all.

Revolutionizing our attitude toward conventions is an approach that helps us to pierce through in our overwhelmingly televisual culture. Naturally, much of the world is already strange; it only has to be discovered as such. As critic David Crystal notes, "Linguistic strangeness is, in fact, a perfectly normal, everyday occurrence. That we are so used to it that we have learned to ignore it. That we forget to look for it, and therefore we do not see it" (1990, 13). So this is also a call for a critical reading of a strange world—and for always attempting to see it as novel.

Our modes of communication can move toward strange styles and forms, making waves like lights, sounds, and oceans do. What should we do to sound out our own barbaric yawps in a barbarously clamoring culture without being romantically invested in individuality, or even the powerfully divisive duality of stranging composition? Is it now time to reconsider a neoformalist—or at the very least, a conscientious informalist—view of composition strategies, one in which students are empowered by their ability to find, deploy, and bend rhetorical devices within the hum of the current media flood?

Prose stylist William Hazlitt wrote in a small article for the *London Magazine* in 1822, "It is not easy to write a familiar style" (Hazlitt 1822, 185). Of course, I would add that it is not easy to write an unfamiliar style either—partly because creativity is hard and partly because nonstandard forms are often considered culturally "uncalled for." Asao Inoue has taken a strong stance, for example, against a single monolithic STANDARD by which all compositions might be measured—calling such a standard racist because it comes out of a tradition decided by white men (2019). The endeavor here is to complicate expectations of standardization by seeing both potential and problems in normative and unusual compositions. Often in conflict with various ousted identity formations, norms in composition happen across forms. Defamiliarization in composition and rhetoric, then, is wrapped up in anti-sexist,

anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-classist, and other anti-categoricals that resist shunning. And also always we must resist our own individualistic narcissism that might tempt us to think that we are especially exceptional in some sense. We are each of us unique in our own ways.

Strangeness may be read and written in useful ways across our cultural landscape. It may be written in books, plastered on billboards, splayed across clothing, composed through cinema, or generated through other digital platforms. A look at strangeness offers insight to a variety of fields, including grammar, rhetoric, literary studies, visual arts, music, cinema, communications, game studies, web development, creative writing, advertising, and even soccer fields. How one composes, if one does it strangely, can be quite effective—there are simply questions left about why and how. Throughout this work, I intend to fluctuate between different forms of composition at will, although I am primarily a writing teacher. And while I am mainly exploring strange effects in written work, they appear in all sorts of creative rhetorical forms. Musicians and creative writers and painters and sculptors and graffiti artists and web designers and robotics manufacturers and makers of all sorts—everyone can make use of strangeness. The principles of rhetorical defamiliarization traverse across all the different forms or works that may be called composition, to the broadest degree. Rhetorical invention works across a variety of tropes through a variety of forms of composition.

If we do not learn to disfigure our writing and other creative work toward our own productive ends, we may never be heard. As Hunter S. Thompson wrote in *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time*, "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro" (Thompson 2010, 49). Be unique, I say. Create something different, I say. With many students, I usually get five very long paragraphs on a subject rehearsing the same tired, old arguments. Much of the time we simply just have Normal People Writing. Normal People Writing embraces the safe everydayness of simplicity and regularity, which is sometimes nice. Homogeneity is after all the de facto move in much of our communication. In response, we can teach conventions, pattern recognition, and then encourage pattern breaking for effect.

A brief note on bad composition and learning the rules may be necessary here. This is punk writing and an advocacy of rule breaking. This knowing breaking is reminiscent of the idea that Picasso could draw a perfect circle but chose to paint distorted faces. The play that can arise from learning the rules in order to conscientiously move within them becomes notable for this approach pedagogically. But who owns the rules, and what are they exactly? Perhaps feeling it out and seeing what can be made regardless is always already legitimate in its own right. In this light, writing

labs may truly become laboratories of writing. Imagine the students walking up as clients, the aides in their white coats (smudged up a bit, of course) gently helping them conduct strange experiments upon their own writing. A continued need for experimentation with language and other compositional practices can drive us onward. As the sciences move forward with funded experimentation and validated forms of inquiry, I suspect that some kind of formal understanding of language and forms might at least earn some interest from the humanities.

This call is a call for twists of style, an invention of argument by an invention of style. The trick, the joke, is that in order to make the text legible at all in a post-information society, you have to obliterate it. Explaining jokes away is no way to go about things, however. In what possible ways, we begin to think, could we go about making strangeness more accessible, or less strange? This isn't the goal at all. Instead, let's get to work. Seeing forms at the forefront of managing (or imagining) in*formation* becomes a means of outformation, moving toward the borders of composition into something interesting and engaging while also freeing and provocative.

Let us return to our first love, the reason we decided to start making—because we like when what we make is interesting or feels new. Meanwhile, I should add that one reason that this defamiliarizing move works is the presence of the rest of a composition as largely ready-to-hand, readable, or conventional. With art, I might compare it to all the work an art student puts into building her own frame, cutting and stretching the canvas, and gessoing it several times over in her studio space. The rest, the normative work, offers up a field for the surprising.

I'll close by offering a consideration of strange rhetorical moves as importantly *interesting*, which comes from the two Latin words *inter esse*, meaning "among" and "to be." Interestingness is ontological as the very fabric of our being. Interesting connects. Interesting work allows a composer to be among others, to be with them. This all makes me think about a triangle, one where interesting connection is key, the rhetorical triangle, where we see the relation between author, text, and audience. Yet strangeness places a tension between the audience and the other two points in this rhetorical situation, which often comes at great effort between the author and the text. How far can we stretch it? Is the rhetorical triangle equilateral, isosceles, or scalene? How sharp a point must we draw? We have to be safe to play, after all. Meanwhile, strangeness can seem dark and potentially dangerous. But strangeness has the potential to free us up too . . . it leads us through the dark. To what we can know . . . about each other and the world. Rhetoric might be stranger than we ever imagined.