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DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE AND LINES ACROSS AMERICA

Barbara Couture and Patti Wojahn

Those of us who graduated from American high schools or colleges and were introduced to the "classic" exemplars of literature that define the American experience will have read or seen Thornton Wilder's (2003) *Our Town*—the bittersweet life story of an American girl in a small town that is her whole world, though the world she dreams she is in is so much larger.[1] And, if you have seen or read the play, you cannot fail to remember the strangely addressed letter Rebecca tells her brother George about: a minister had sent a letter to Rebecca's friend, Jane Crofut, and Rebecca tells George, "It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America." George, in turns, says, "What's funny about that?" And Rebecca goes on, "But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America, Continent of North America, Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God—that's what it said on the envelope." "What do you know!" replies George (Wilder 2003, 46).

What do you know, indeed! The expansiveness of this address and its endpoint in a single unity presumed to contain everything that came before it could not fail to capture our imagination. To consider that our personal experience is circumscribed somehow in the mind of God, with several other earthly entities defining one's place in that mind along the way, is both liberating and binding. After telling George about this strange address, Rebecca quips, "And the postman brought it just the same" (Wilder 2003, 46). Despite enormous possibilities for loss and limitation carried across enormous distances, one person manages to connect with another across villages, counties, countries, continents and so on by way of the postman.

Our Town touches us because of its power to display both the joy and the tragedy associated with our attempts to connect to one another and

make life meaningful for ourselves by defining a place where we belong. That struggle is bound by the way we locate and describe ourselves and by how others locate, describe, and choose to communicate with us. And it is this phenomenon of connecting and communicating across borders as experienced in the United States that our volume *Crossing Borders, Drawing Boundaries* attempts to explore. In the United States, citizens all share the title American, but not all who live within its boundaries and are subject to its laws are perceived to be equally worthy of that title.

In presenting this diverse set of essays exploring the ways groups of Americans experience "American-ness" in our country as they try to communicate with others about their lives and needs, we explore both the power and perversity of framing identity by places—real or imagined—that are defined by borders and boundaries. And we are reminded, too, that in our very presentation of these essays, we are drawing borders and boundaries around their meaning as well. In particular, we are staking a claim about the function of lines across America—real or imagined—in the sphere of another bordered universe: democratic discourse. To defend—as far as we can in a brief introduction—this leveling of sorts, we offer here some reasons it is important to think about democratic discourse in America and reasons lines, borders, and boundaries are important elements that dictate or diffuse the success of democratic discourse among those who choose to pursue it.

A few caveats before we begin: our purpose in introducing the topic of borders and boundaries in America from a rhetorical perspective is not to assume or defend a particular political or juridical perspective on borders and boundaries, nor to assume a definitive stance on what comprises America or American-ness. Rather, it is to offer a perspective drawn from themes that define our expectations for rhetorical interaction as identified by theorists (including ourselves) and from general expectations about American-ness that underlie perceptions of this quality as a popular ethos in the United States—an ethos that presents some challenges for creating a fair space for public discourse in our democratic society.

In short, our objective is to inspire thinking about elements of interaction that contribute to or exacerbate fair exchange in a variety of rhetorical situations here in the United States. In presenting this illustrative sample of discourse situations that inspire thinking about borders and boundaries, we have loosely arranged our collection into two sections. We consider in part 1, "Imagining Boundaries," what we perceive as more figurative border divisions. Here our authors theorize about specific categories of difference that have consequence for how individuals

interact when striving to learn in the classroom, understand key issues in a national context, or get their needs met in local communities—categories defined by language, academic context, or definition. In part 2, "Living Borders," our contributors examine more specifically the communication experiences of individuals confronting physical boundaries—be they national, community based, or self-selected. Our authors explore how these boundaries—crossed or drawn—have implications for rhetorical scholarship, language teaching, and valuing difference here in the United States. In the sections below, we introduce these works, framing them within the rhetorical context of democratic discourse. Admittedly, we are creating a very loose division here, for as the reader will see when delving into these essays, metaphorical, linguistic, and rhetorical boundaries and borders often are related to physical, geographical, and societal borders and boundaries. We leave it to the reader to tease out these relationships within the contexts of the situations each of the essays explores. At the end of this volume, we offer our reflection on the whole, along with some suggestions for future research and teaching practice.

We shall open our discussion of democratic discourse by calling out the terminological assumptions we are making in discussing democratic discourse in "America." And we shall start with what popularly is assumed about democracy and about the United States—that it is a place where all can pursue the American Dream. What is that dream exactly? Perhaps the most simply put description appears in an apt popular reference: *Wikipedia.* The openly editable and free encyclopedia claims the "American Dream is a national ethos of the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward social mobility achieved through hard work" (*Wikipedia* 2014). The encyclopedia entry continues: "The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the United States Declaration of Independence which proclaims that 'all men are created equal' and that they are 'endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights' including 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'" In short, this dream assumes an environment in which all boundaries can be overcome in its quest since all have equal opportunity to pursue it. Underlying this dream of equal opportunity, we argue, is a staunch faith in democracy as the vehicle through which equal opportunity is protected. In the United States, where the American Dream is espoused, it is common knowledge that democracy is perceived as a good; in fact, the many attempts that the US government has made to spread democracy across the world—regardless of their success or failure—have been

overtly justified as trying to do good. Philosophers and political scientists have taken a less biased stance toward democracy as an ultimate good, defining the accepted "objective" meaning of *democracy*, labeling criteria for achieving a true democracy, and also evaluating whether democracy once achieved is universally accepted as a flat-out good.

Let's explore for a moment the values democracy as a good assumes, values that gird the ethos of the American Dream. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (SEP) offers a handy summary of "normative democratic theory" that addresses the reasons democracy might or might not be "morally desirable," beginning first with a common definition of democracy and moving on to analyze the arguments made that this form of government is morally defensible (Christiano 2008, 2). *Democracy*, as defined in our *SEP* reference, "refers very generally to a method of group decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the collective decision making" (Christiano 2008, 2). The entry's author talks about the viability of a system in which all participants are considered equal and up to the task of decision making and also discusses whether there is essential merit in collective decision making in the first place—an important point affecting individuals' decisions to participate and their effectiveness in doing so. In short, the author aims to describe what democracy is and how we know it when we see it rather than to demonstrate its essential merit or value as a moral good.

If we were to poll the authors whose essays we present in our volume about the value of democracy and its signature of collective decision making, we would likely hear them answer resoundingly that yes, collective decision making that values all voices is a moral good. In fact, several of our authors raise concerns about what they identify as communities and circumstances in which boundaries or limits have been put on how decisions or actions are collectively determined.

Collectively, this volume and its authors argue that when the discourses of some are ignored due to slighting others, intentionally or not, communities do not function to preserve or to honor the ability of all to participate in group decision making, nor do they protect the freedom of all to participate. Nonetheless, freedom is a touted American value, a very cornerstone, if you will, of the American Dream. Going back to the *SEP* entry on *democracy*, its author supports the essential nature of this value, noting that, for many, freedom or liberty is the foundation of democracy: "Democracy [say some] extends the idea that each ought to be master of his or her life to the domain of collective decision making" (Christiano 2008, 6).

In the United States, when citizens pledge allegiance to our nation, they promise to preserve "liberty and justice for all." This pledge does not acknowledge that there is a problematic connection between freedom and collective decision making, a point elaborated in the *SEP* entry. On the one hand, if all are free to participate, the quality of collective decision making is at risk, not only because of the possibility of irresolvable dissension but also because not all can be equally qualified to make decisions that will best serve the whole (see Christiano 2008, 5). On the other hand, if all are not allowed to participate in democratic deliberation, then individual freedom to participate is curtailed. Yet holding this position is questionable as well because to assure freedom for each individual "each person must freely choose the outcomes that bind him or her," and if they do not so freely choose, "then those who oppose the decision are not self-governing" and, therefore, not "free." In short, "they live in an environment imposed by others" (Christiano 2008, 7). Given this essential contradiction inherent in the very idea of a democracy, what good does discussion do to preserve individual freedom when it aids deliberation leading to a collective decision? We will come back to this dilemma when we discuss the second term within our definition of *democratic discourse.* For the present, let's assume for discussion's sake that for democracy to function effectively, it must honor both individual freedom and collective decision making, and let's take up briefly what is required to preserve a democracy that works this way.

Scholars have identified a few environmental criteria requisite for democracy to function. In his wonderfully compact treatise *On Democracy*, Robert A. Dahl, for example, presents an excellent list of criteria that must be in place for democracy to be sustained: "effective participation," "voting equality," "enlightened understanding," "control of the agenda," and "inclusion of adults" (Dahl 2000, 37–38). Three of these criteria are especially pertinent to our focus on democratic discourse. The first of these is "effective participation," which, Dahl says, requires that "all . . . members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be" (37). Clearly, in a discourse exchange, if some are kept from participating, the discourse cannot be democratic. The second is "enlightened understanding," or the opportunity for all participants to have "equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences" (37). We will come back to this one, which has resonance for academics: beneath "enlightened understanding" is the scientific approach to knowledge seeking presumed to be the foundation of democracy, that is, reasoning from facts—the legacy

of the Age of Enlightenment. And, finally, for democracy to be preserved, individuals must have opportunity to take "control of the agenda," that is, must be given "the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are to be placed on the agenda" (38–39).

We shall take effective participation as a first requirement for democratic discourse and then look to rhetorical and critical theory to help us define elemental factors allowing for effective participation in a system or situation that involves collective decision making. We wish to posit a set of three guidelines that must be in place in order for effective participation in such situations to take place: first, a charitable perspective in which speakers assume that all others intend to make sense; second, a generous acknowledgment of bodily difference that averts dismissing the ways, needs, and speech of others; and finally, unreserved openness to others that goes beyond mere tolerance of those who share our societal space. Along the way, we will introduce the reader to essays in this collection that highlight these elements and raise awareness of their importance to fair exchange in rhetorical situations.

In explaining the first condition for fair exchange in collective decision making, it is instructive to consider assumptions that render a speaker eligible to participate in any exchange or conversation. A first assumption is accepting that another has something to contribute, a conversational condition Donald Davidson (1984) defines as "charity." Not to be confused with love or affection, charity here is the fundamental assumption that to converse, one must be willing to try to understand the other participants in the conversation. Davidson makes no attempt at a moral theory of behavior here; rather, he attempts to define what is essential for effective communication, and basically, it is essential for each speaker involved to assume the other speakers are trying to make sense and that all involved have a workable theory about what can be said to be "true"; this condition of mutual charity with regard to assumptions about a speaker's intentions is basic to communication. Yet this condition, as our contributors to this volume show, is not always what prevails in public-discourse situations.

For instance, in "American Rhetorics of Disappearance: Translocal Feminist Problem-Solving Rhetorics," Tricia Serviss addresses how even in the field of rhetoric, we could do more to extend a willingness to try to understand not only what but also how others are communicating. Using the case of feminist activists in Juarez, Serviss calls on theorists and researchers to work more diligently to recognize the nature, sources, and layers of the activists' rhetorical practices. In short, she argues that dismissing such layers prevents us from increasing our understanding

of the true meaning and effect of these discursive strategies—strategies that, at once, work and are recognized across national boundaries and contexts yet convey specific meanings that are embedded locally.

To bring us back to what Davidson tells us, making a choice to assume there is value in what others are contributing is essential to the process of viewing others' discourse with charity: "Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters. If we can produce a theory that reconciles charity and the formal conditions for a theory, we have done all that could be done to ensure communication. Nothing more is possible, and nothing more is needed" (1984, 197). Without the assumption of charity, conversation cannot occur, that is, conversation that involves the true interchange of ideas. And prior to the assumption of charity, we would add, are even more basic assumptions about the inherent worth of the speaker, worth determined all too often, we argue, on the basis of established borders between those similar to one's self and those different from one's self.

If a speaker is not considered to have the same qualities that give value to one's own self, then one's openness to the idea that another is making sense when speaking is almost irrelevant. Jacques Derrida (1997) explores the hazards of our very human tendency to treat others as lacking the personal worth we ascribe to ourselves in his treatise *Politics of Friendship.* Politics, including political systems such as democracies, are based on the ancient conceptualization of friendship, which makes of some individuals friends and of others enemies. Derrida made overt claims about friendship and democracy in a discussion at a conference at the University of Sussex. When interviewed, he said, "As you read the canonical texts in political theory starting with Plato or Aristotle you discover that friendship plays an organising role in the definition of justice, of democracy even" (quoted in Bennington 1997, n.p.).

Our current national difficulty in reaching consensus about any number of issues affecting the future prosperity of Americans is rooted in broad-based characterizations of those who disagree with us as enemies, that is, as individuals who are against "American" values—against our Constitution, against traditional families, or against the deity our forefathers invoked to bless us. Derrida claims there is a clannish blindness to notions of right and wrong underlying the kind of affiliation that values only friends. Friends protect friends—whether the bonds that tie friends together be personal, ethnic, geographical, or national—and they do so regardless of the objective consequences of their actions or behavior. And this is where a moral danger lies.

As we write, a recent illustration of blind fealty to friends comes to mind in the action taken by roommates of Dzhokar Tsarnaev, suspected perpetrator of the 2014 Boston Marathon bombings, in tossing his backpack, loaded with material to make explosives, in a landfill to keep authorities away from his trail. In a land where one's friends, whether defined by religion, neighborhood, or some other affiliation, are always more important than the others—the *not friends* who share the same place—safety and personal freedom cannot be assured for all.

In the United States, we continue to face contexts in which individuals can be said to fall into groups we consider friends and those we do not. A pressing issue dividing the United States now, what to do about the twelve million Mexican immigrants who are in the country without documentation, presents a poignant illustration of the consequences of such labeling. By persistently describing some immigrants' experience and lives as "illegal," for instance, we define them as enemies before an unbiased conversation about their actual circumstances or fate can even begin. And, of course, such exclusionary tactics have been employed to define as enemies certain subgroups of our "legal" citizens as well. Yet for some, the boundaries that include them are as significant—albeit in different ways—as those that others use to shun them. For instance, as another author in this volume, Vanessa Cozza, notes, geographical, cultural, legal, and psychological borders all set recent "legal" immigrants apart from other US citizens. In "De pie sobre la valla y mirando por la ventana:[2] Border Realities of the Immigrant Experience," she argues for opening dialogue about personal and public experience in our classrooms (and beyond) to include valuable perspectives and narratives of immigrants who have experienced these barriers. Such openness can lead us, she contends, toward a broader sense of community, interpersonal understanding, and collective decision making. We extend this call to other subgroups who are defined by some as certainly not friends, including those labeled pejoratively as gay, black, Hispanic, female, senior, and so on.

But to truly enter a discourse exchange in the spirit of charity presumes that, regardless of differences between them, speakers acknowledge and recognize each other as having basic rights, a perspective that requires us to honor fully the bodily differences of others—our second requirement for effective participatory exchange. It is shocking to recall that within the span of a few centuries, bodily differences have led some to dismiss others as not having even basic human needs. Such an erasure occurs when individuals are so discounted they are not even worthy of being named or having rights basic to human survival or well-being,

let alone the American Dream. Roslyn Diprose (2002), a scholar of the philosophical perspectives of such luminaries as Derrida, Nietzsche, and Levinas, explores the physical and psychological effect of being in a group not even recognized, let alone categorized, in her thoughtful argument for "corporeal generosity." By this she means quite literally accepting with generosity the bodily differences of others. She illustrates the horrific consequences of not doing so by describing the erasure of indigenous peoples and their rights that took place when Europeans inhabited Australia.

Citing Nietzsche, Diprose (2002) explains the power of naming and how our ability to name something can disguise the truth about something or deliberately establish a lie as truth. This happened, she claims, when early Europeans described Australia as "terra nullius," or a land belonging to no one. Seeing no established buildings or dwellings recognizable in European terms as homes, the early settlers there assumed the inhabitants had no ownership of the land, and the settlers therefore felt no compulsion to honor any rights to that property. In short, the Europeans' named conception of home simply had no equivalent in Australia—there was nothing there they recognized as belonging to anyone. What was lacking in the Europeans' callous dismissal of the peoples who did, in fact, inhabit Australia was "corporeal generosity," or an opening of oneself bodily to the bodily experience of another. In developing this concept, Diprose distinguishes the kind of thinking about inclusion that dominates current politics from a new "politics of generosity," which is based in a conceptualization of generosity toward all. To our minds, Diprose's "politics of generosity" extends the basic requirement for conversation that Davidson calls "charity" to another specific requirement for true democratic discourse: "corporeal generosity." In short, bodily recognition of everyone—that is, recognition of everything they are rather than of how they are spoken about—must characterize political conversation about the common interests of our society if collective decision making is to effectively take place.

This important point is acknowledged by several of our authors whose examinations of both current and historical representation of certain groups reveal how these representations fail to truly recognize the humanity or individuality of such groups. Specifically, in "Metonymic Borders and Our Sense of Nation," Victor Villanueva takes up and takes on nationalist narratives, calling into question the notion of nation as a fixed entity by using the case of Puerto Rico to show the absurdities of what can be seen as our current border hysteria. Calling for us to move beyond intolerance of different Others, Villanueva explores the racism

beneath exclusionary tactics, racism increasingly evident, for instance, in the enactment of Arizona's SB 1070 and Alabama's HB 56 anti-immigration laws.

Legislation like this, we argue, can lead some people to unilaterally and unreflectively suspect those who are nonwhite or those of "ethnic" heritage, limiting from the get go marginalized people's right to participate in discussions or decisions that should serve to protect democratic processes for all. In other instances, such legislation and the historical precedents behind it allow others to treat those not having English as their first language as ineligible for basic rights, such as the right to an effective education, as a number of our authors show. In "Crossing Linguistic Borders in the Classroom: Moving beyond English Only to Tap Rich Linguistic Resources," Anita C. Hernández, José A. Montelongo, and Roberta J. Herter address this injustice, taking on the issue of English-only instruction in our public schools and its ramifications. Practices such as this, they show, can close paths to the types of exchange and understanding critical for democratic discourse to thrive through building a discursive environment in which all participants are valued equally.

Similarly, in "Continuity and Contact in a Cosmopolitan World: Code-switching and Its Effects on Community Identity," Christopher Schroeder argues for theorists and teachers to discover and explore the expanded understanding gained when language barriers are crossed. Through evaluating a newspaper column in an award-winning Chicago ethnic newspaper, he shows that the moves made in code-switching or mixing languages can work toward expanding individuals' social identities, helping them overcome the challenges of cultural differences, and even complicating, instructively, nationalist narratives—thus opening up possibilities for greater participation. In our view, Schroeder shows how language use can encourage "corporeal generosity"—as Diprose calls it—and empower those who appear outside recognized groups to take charge of their own lives and circumstance and thereby thrive within a shared community.

Critical to expressing corporeal generosity toward all in a community is a commitment to acknowledge bodily difference while all learn together in the given, present environment. Diprose (2002) establishes the importance of bodily recognition (i.e., corporeal generosity) of varied identities occupying the same community by drawing a contrast between notions of community characterized by Nietzsche as opposed to Levinas. As Diprose tells us, Nietzsche's conception of community is "a sociohistorical formation built by truth, by language, which, through

the mnemotechniques of pain, through the discipline of a body-memory, constitutes our experience in common" (167). In explanation of this claim, she says, "By concepts we share, those of us who belong to the one social body will see the same leaf and share an understanding of its nature, we will build bridges together and understand their purpose, and we will look at each other with recognition of the passions and reasons that drive us" (167). For Levinas, however, what builds community is not the recognition of shared experience but rather the "generosity" that individuals have in recognizing "alterity." Putting this in terms of language use, the community Nietzsche envisions is based on the "said," or what has already been written or historically established as given about various identities. The community of Levinas is based on "saying," or what we are learning together about each other through talking in the present. As Diprose summarizes, "Beneath the community of commonness grounded in the said of language is the community of the saying, of exposure to alterity" (168). Inherent in the "said of language" is the construction of "social imaginaries," or preconceptualizations about difference that limit and stifle the possibility of building true community.

In our volume, Cori Brewster presents a compelling illustration of the importance of learning together about each other through talking in the present rather than referencing our past perceptions. In "'A Melting Pot That's Constantly Being Stirred': Rhetorics of Race and Tolerance at a Regional Museum," Brewster addresses how even in a site (a regional museum) designed to display openness to diversity and the stories of immigrants, the efforts of its designers nonetheless overlook discourses (such as those of indigenous people) outside of the dominant community narrative focused on "progress," failing to even acknowledge the existence of some groups (specifically, Chinese and African Americans) important to the history of the region. Whether this omission is the result of benign neglect or insidious prejudice is secondary to the fact that we have tendencies to dismiss those who appear to not conform to a history a certain community may espouse or presume to share.

A sea change in perspective may be required to overcome the societal tendency to repeat reference to only what is commonly shared by some. Diprose identifies this sea change as a shift in attention to the "politics of generosity": "Attending to the politics of generosity is a matter of attending to the source of any potential transformation of social imaginaries that . . . continue to do the damage to difference" (Diprose 2002, 171–72). As many of our volume authors would contend, "damage to difference" allows individuals and groups to dismiss differences as barriers simply standing in the way of creating more meaningful relationships

between them, differences that, if acknowledged, would allow for more generous interpretations of true societal opportunity for economic success, or effective education, or even personal safety.

But making this shift does not forego a certain amount of discomfort, as others of our authors show. In "Difference as Rhetorical Stance: Developing Meaningful Interactions and Identification across Racial and Ethnic Lines," Mónica Torres and Kathryn Valentine contrast a situation that exposes the threat of violence underlying one kind of engagement across racial lines with a situation in which engaged participants display reluctance to acknowledge differences, even when doing so would warrant productive discussion. Presenting both situations as problematic, Torres and Valentine employ rhetorical and cultural theory to construct a framework for productively analyzing the complications and potentials of these types of cross-racial interactions. Along with them, we believe that building identification with ethnically or racially different others without ignoring or "even fully bridging [such] differences" can be an important move toward building understanding, or, in Diprose's terms, toward acknowledging and accepting bodily difference.

From Diprose's point of view, preconceptualizations about bodies and relations between bodies are at the heart of modern politics and, for her, if political activity has any hope of improving society, it must transform to allow for relations that recognize all bodily difference. In short, modern politics must recognize "intercorporeality." As Diprose states, "My argument . . . is that . . . the generosity of intercorporeality is where politics (the organization of society for the improvement of human survival) takes place" (173).

Our discourse conventions in themselves can at times lead us to dismiss the needs and desires of others and avert a commitment to the "generosity of intercorporeality," as Diprose puts it. In public settings, we often are committed to listening to a particular way of speaking while dismissing speech that falls outside of that realm. For instance, in considering or making a reasoned argument, speakers and listeners may dismiss language that does not conform to discourse conventions common to argument, not only finding such expression inappropriate but also, in some cases, not crediting its connection to real experience. Yet to ensure the continuation of a true democracy and the freedom of all to enjoy effective participation, public discourse must allow for disruption, for the possibility that conversation, writing, or discussion may not fall within conventions common to a particular setting or may make us uncomfortable, confused, and even angry. In fact, the very goal to reach consensus or agreement through reasoned argument in the interest of

collective decision making may fall gravely short of meeting the needs and experiences of those sharing in this conversation. Contemporary critical theorists, including Diprose, have argued that public discourse must create a space where expectations for discourse performance do not negate the open possibility of entertaining a new perspective. And we agree.

We argue, in fact, that public discourse must make room for new perspectives required for the construction of knowledge. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Jean-Francois Lyotard (1989) characterizes the necessary conditions for building knowledge, defending a tension between form and disruption as key to achieving new perspectives. In an afterword to the essay entitled "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" he defines this tension as the linguistic expression of postmodernism, examining its historical and philosophical precedents in modernism. The project of modernism, he claims, is one of capturing reality, and in doing so, aiming for the best possible expression of what the majority perceive to be real—an expression that removes all doubt of our understanding of the situation described. Lyotard equates such "realism," or the relentless insistence upon expressing the real, with political power and with the suppression of art, which disrupts our perceptions of what reality may truly be. In Lyotard's words, here's how political power uses language's relationship to "reality" to retain control:

> When power assumes the name of a party, realism and its neoclassical complement triumph over the experimental avant-garde by slandering and banning it—that is, provided the "correct" images, the "correct" narratives, the "correct" forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that [the] public experiences. (Lyotard 1989, 75)

In short, the existence of political parties itself is a threat to expression that may not conform to a consensual perception of what is real. For example, political parties and movements can create a vision of life as it is "supposed to be" that dismisses the realities of life for one or another segment of the population not adhering to their vision, thus making the parties' or movements' followers comfortable with dismissing these same realities.

Again, more than one of our volume authors demonstrate how the situation described by Lyotard is experienced in American society when "correct" visions of what we should value are presented by a party or some other segment of society while disruptive perspectives are dismissed. A danger to democracy lies, we argue, in accepting the power of these visions to effectively dismiss the vision and expression of other

realities. In "'I Am the 99 Percent': Identification and Division in the Rhetorics of the Occupy Wall Street Protests," Randolph Cauthen, another of our authors, highlights how those affiliated with the Occupy Wall Street movement were dismissed, denied, or derided for their visions that some saw as outside the norm. Invoking a Burkean lens, Cauthen focuses on unconventional rhetorical practices of the Occupy Wall Street movement, such as foregoing leadership hierarchy and direction to create more room for diverse voices. He demonstrates how, ironically, the rhetorical moves of the 99%, in themselves, though designed to foster inclusion, stood in contrast to many people's perceptions of a correct vision for discourse in a democracy where life is as it is "supposed to be." And, of course, the very presence of the Occupy protestors in Zuccotti Park drew a physical boundary between them and those who espouse other values as well.

In addition to political powers using language practices to shape what "ought to be," thereby threatening others' visions of life as it is experienced by them personally, there is also another threat to the interpretation of reality as it is truly experienced. Lyotard labels this threat "technoscience," or the domination of technology and its power to produce and influence well-formed conceptualizations of reality—a power that leads the technologist to value performance over true substance.

Just as art and literature can be subordinated to political power and the power of the popular public market, so too can science be subordinated to the technologies that allow us to produce information and results perfectly and immediately. Lyotard concludes that the current trend to value this technical performance over inquiry is a threat to artistic or disruptive expression and ultimately to our intellectual perception of reality.

> There is no denying the dominant existence today of techno-science, that is, the massive subordination of cognitive statements to the finality of the best possible performance, which is the technological criterion. . . . The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy convey with them one of the rules which supports their possibility: the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments. (Lyotard 1989, 76–77)

As a demonstration of this claim, Lyotard draws a comparison between "knowledge," which is dominated by technical expression, and "taste," which is dominated by our perception of an art object as it conforms "in principle" to a concept and contrasts this with the Kantian notion of the sublime, which is the effect of having an idea of what

something is but not being able to express it, a condition of tension that combines the sensations of pleasure and pain. The experience of the "sublime," Lyotard tells us, is like this: "We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to 'make visible' this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate" (78). The beautiful exists somewhere here, in the space that prevents what Lyotard calls the "stabilization of taste." The truly artistic experience goes beyond "taste" and is fully within that space where reality can be conceived of but not presented.

Two authors in this volume specifically introduce ways of speaking that, like artistic expression, disrupt the "stabilization of taste," provoking new or different perceptions of a good—or one might say beautiful—society, a possibility not adequately expressed in our current ways of talking about it. Susan A. Schiller, for example, explores ways we reject certain kinds of language as inappropriate for expressing a studied view in "Traversing Rhetorical Borders of Spirituality in Academic Settings." Here she acknowledges that academic discomfort with the term *spirituality* as a perspective on living and learning all too often closes down the possibility for exchange in academic settings. She goes on to propose introducing spirituality into the writing classroom as a secular means toward achieving an enriched inner life, an invitation toward creativity and inspiration, and a path beyond cultural borders and limitations she sees as restrictively imposed by the academy.

And in yet another argument for expanding our notion of acceptable discourse for serious discussion, Jonathan P. Rossing, in "Humor's Role in Political Discourse: Examining Border Patrol in Colbert Nation," calls for more acceptance of alternative discourse strategies, showing how comedy and humor can participate vitally in public discourse on sociopolitical issues such as immigration. As a case in point, Rossing explores the rhetorical critique performed by political satirist Stephen Colbert, host of the now past, faux-conservative news program *The Colbert Report*, in calling popular positions on immigration into question. He shows how Colbert challenges the limits of expressible discourse in public settings—crossing boundaries that for some should never be crossed, such as that between serious debate and farce, and provocatively introducing issues that have remained buried in more formal settings, such as courtrooms and legislative hearings.

Rossing's argument that humor and comedy can disrupt the borders of serious public discourse in productive ways echoes, we believe, Lyotard's defense of preserving the conditions in which "inexpressible" expression survives. For Lyotard, preserving the possibility of disruption that is

"postmodernism"—and ultimately, we could extrapolate, preserving the diversity of ideas and perceptions that creates a healthy democracy—is a tantamount safety mechanism for society. Lyotard hints that our increasing quest for unity, for seeking the "illusion" that reality should conform to our "pre-vision" of it, has terrible consequences. A relentless pursuit of conformance to a political ideal, a religious ideal, a racial ideal has fomented abroad, and now in the United States, a return to "terror."

> The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name. (Lyotard 1989, 81–82)

Although Lyotard's argument is primarily one that speaks to the importance of disruption in artistic expression, it also speaks to what is lost when expression conforms to what is known or expected. Not only do we cater to taste rather than engage with art in doing so, or cater to performance rather than attend to science in doing so, but we risk creating a world where difference, not being heard, demands to be heard in ways frighteningly disruptive, in ways that spawn nothing less than terror.

But what, in the long run, does this theorizing—and the discussions raised in this volume—have to do in practical terms with the survival of democracy, and by association, democratic discourse? Quite simply, the way we choose to talk about and treat different Others and their reality—for instance, choosing to treat them as if they live and communicate inside or outside of our own borders of acceptability—can be a serious threat to democracy. In short, the borders we choose to draw or invent can threaten the underlayment of effective participation that girds democracy in action. In some ways, in fact, even continuously demanding consensus, as opposed to advocating argument, can be a threat to democracy—primarily because demands for consensus that force concession of one party or another can also threaten the charitable relationship between parties that must abide for democracy to flourish.

And this problem underlying an unyielding commitment to consensus leads us to our third requirement for public discourse in the service of effective participation, or *democratic discourse* as we are calling it. In order for public discourse to assure effective participation, there must

be room for dissent that is not dismissed or merely tolerated. In ending arguments that for whatever reason cannot be resolved we often hear the phrase *let's agree to disagree.* Underlying this statement is a tacit assumption of tolerance—we agree to tolerate the existence of an argument that does not conform to our own, and at the same time we do not let that argument deter us from continuing our own perception. The theorist Giovanna Borradori provides a provocative discussion of the virtues and faults of advocating tolerance in her interpretation of her dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. For Habermas, dialogue that emerges from effective communication leads to the possibility of consensus; Borradori tells us, "His crucial argument is that every time we communicate with one another, we automatically commit to the possibility of a freely achieved dialogic agreement in which the better argument will win" (Borradori 2005, 60). This leaves the loser of the argument in the position of tolerating the other when all is said and done. Derrida complicates this notion of tolerance in the face of difference, citing its origins in religious depictions of certain sects' agreements to tolerate the presence of other beliefs. He notes that in our current difficulties with terrorism and its association with Islam, we often separate the actions of terrorists from those who are Muslims but not terrorists by making "official declarations of tolerance" (quoted in Borradori 2005, 127). The problem with the discourse of tolerance, Derrida explains, is not only that it reflects "religious roots" but also "that it is most often used on the side of those with power, always as a kind of condescending concession" (127). In short, Derrida prefers a different conceptualization for the recognition of difference, and he calls it "hospitality."

Hospitality assumes an openness to difference and to communication that does not necessarily conform to norms that are known or expected—a difference crucial to the survival of a healthy democracy. Tolerance, though charitable, always draws a line between those who are tolerating, who have bounded a space—whether real or imaginary—as their own and those who are the subjects of tolerance and who are, consequently, marked as outside that boundary or intruding within it. Hospitality, in contrast, is the open-armed acceptance of whatever guest comes our way. Hospitality presumes a willingness to meet the unknown unafraid, to be welcoming, even in the face of potential danger.

> But pure or unconditional hospitality does not consist in such an invitation ("I invite you, I welcome you into my home, on the condition that you adapt to the laws and norms of my territory, according to my language, tradition, memory, and so on"). Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither

expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of visitation rather than invitation. The visit might actually be very dangerous, and we must not ignore this fact, but would a hospitality without risk, a hospitality backed by certain assurances, a hospitality protected by an immune system against the wholly other, be true hospitality? (Derrida quoted in Borradori 2005, 128–29)

Derrida goes on to acknowledge that a society or state cannot fully realize unconditional hospitality given legal and safety concerns; nonetheless, for it to truly represent the interests of all, it must have an ethical intention of unconditional hospitality—a physical and political parallel, perhaps, to the basic requirement of charity, which Davidson has told us must abide for any hope of communication to occur. And, if we are to remain true to our desire to uphold a democracy that ensures effective participation, as we defined it earlier, a hospitable openness to differences, whatever their source in our society, would seem requisite to that purpose.

A number of authors in this volume describe enacting this hospitable openness to differences. Elenore Long, Jennifer Clifton, Andrea Alden, and Judy Holiday address practices of the academy that have the potential to shut down rather than open up true exchange and dialogue with the outside public and communities where academics work. In "Fostering Inclusive Dialogue in Emergent University-Community Partnerships: Setting the Stage for Intercultural Inquiry," these authors offer new, more hospitable ways to cross university-community borders and to enhance open dialogue across diversity. Also addressing the public turn, Robert Brooke examines how community involvement is advanced or not advanced by public rhetorics within the boundaries of suburbia, a space apart that can be isolated from diverse social interactions—as well as from the natural and cultural landscapes of both urban and rural locations. In "Rhetorical Education at the City's Edge: The Challenge of Public Rhetoric in Suburban America," he argues that this isolation from engaging with contrasting and more diverse environments "makes it hard to engage in the full work of democratic [and participatory] citizenship" that welcomes all. And, finally, Karen P. Peirce, in "Employing Ethos to Cross the Borders of Difference: Teaching Civil Discourse," asks how we can alter the landscape of rhetorical education so that resolutely arguing for one's own point of view is no longer taught as the sole and ultimate aim of argumentative discourse, as we often teach when covering argument in writing classes; she asks that we also teach a hospitable openness, if you will, to alternate points of view and ways to express them in our discourse.

To conclude, in drawing together the perspectives we have shared throughout this chapter, we can form a definition of democratic discourse that realizes the intent of democracy to foster governance "by the people" and "for the people," to assure freedom of expression, and to guarantee inclusion of all within its realm through ensuring their effective participation in collective decision making. Democratic discourse, so defined, would demand conditions for conversation, dialogue, and policy making that

- *recognize all individuals within its bounds* without prejudice, that is, without defining some individuals outside the bounded circle of friends, and by adopting the charitable assumption that all are trying to make sense; that
- *recognize deeply corporeal differences* that, in order to be acknowledged, demand that we give all individuals the freedom to speak their minds in the manner suited to and comfortable for them, that is, without necessarily conforming to some preconceptions that may be held about what constitutes a well-formed performance; and that, given this recognition,
- *accept all with hospitality unreservedly* insofar as we are able to preserve the safety and security of others, that is, without the presumption of mere tolerance of some within the discourse sphere that keeps the tolerated perpetually under the thumb of those who are tolerating.

This is a tall order for conversation, dialogue, and discussion within a democracy where boundaries are drawn every day, defining rights of some and not others, providing quality education for some and not others, and offering equal opportunity to earn a living for some but not others. Some would have us define our democracy as healthy and secure within boundaries like these. But can we truly realize the American democratic promise in doing so? We argue that we cannot.

Along with Derrida, we agree that a society cannot practice democracy by curtailing the participation of some within it, offering them the protection of mere tolerance, and we support his dream of a democracy in which equal rights truly are granted to all.

> Within a democratic community whose citizens reciprocally grant one another equal rights, no room is left for an authority allowed to one-sidedly determine the boundaries of what is to be tolerated. On the basis of the citizens' equal rights and reciprocal respect for each other, nobody possesses the privilege of setting the boundaries of tolerance from the viewpoint of their own preferences and value orientations. (Derrida quoted in Borradori 2005, 73)

But beyond this, we believe practicing democracy within a space that merely tolerates difference is a threat to democracy itself. When

individuals or groups are excluded or at best merely tolerated, their ability to participate is blocked and consequently so are the benefits of the society that such inclusion would accrue to them. A society that blocks expression, refuses to recognize difference, or at best merely tolerates it is a society ripe for terror.

Borradori (2005) contrasts two societal conditions that potentially create an environment for terror, referring to the work of Habermas and Derrida. For Habermas, terror is the result of a clash of systems across which dialogue cannot take place because the opening has not been found; in short, there is no communication channel to allow communicative interaction to take place in a reasoned way across opposing viewpoints. Such a condition exists, for example, when language expressing the religious conviction of fundamentalist spirituality is thrown up against language expressing the secular consumerism of Western democracies—here never the twain shall meet, as the expression goes. The solution, according to Habermas, is to build trust across this divide, and trust begins by dissolving the inequalities that have allowed such polarization in characterizing the societies with opposing perspectives to grow.

But for Derrida, terror is not as easily limited to clashes between secular and religious systems or between ethnic clans or even between nation-states and the language barriers that define them. Terror can be exacted across the boundaries of clan, system, and state without reference to any bounded group. Terror is fostered anywhere where barriers make it impossible to recognize alterity, let alone include it and support it. For Derrida, modern democracies are at risk not because they do not have the mechanisms to build trust, carry on reasoned discourse, or develop inclusive policy but rather because these mechanisms of the modern democratic state cannot deal with something wholly other and not definable even within these structures. The stubborn blockage that such systems create against the Other exacts, for Derrida, a formula for terror.

At the same time, a willingness to risk admittance of the Other, that is, an acceptance of the fact that the danger of terror exists when difference confronts established systems, is absolutely essential to democracy. The old conception of democracy, Derrida tells us, is one based on a community of friends—outside of this circle of friends, be they defined by race, ethnicity, state, party, or nation, lies the enemy. A future in which true democracy can thrive would define democracy as a never-finished project, one in which we live democracy as an ever becoming project.

In the concluding pages of *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida (1997) imagines this future democracy—one that looks into the face of terror and recognizes that fomenting terror can be the "price" of maintaining a democracy based in the exclusivity of "friendship"; he says,

> Is it possible to think and to implement democracy, that which would keep the old name "democracy," while uprooting from it all these figures of friendship (philosophical and religious) which prescribe fraternity: the family and the androcentric ethnic group? Is it possible, in assuming a certain faithful member of democratic reason and reason *tout court* . . . not to found, where it is no longer a matter of *founding* but to open out to the future, or rather, to the "come," of a certain democracy? (306)

This vision of democracy requires not an abandonment of reason but a realization that reason, our Enlightenment legacy, also can keep us from seeing or hearing all that needs to be known. In the end, Derrida wistfully pines for this future approach to democratic governance, saying, "When will we be ready for an experience of freedom and equality that is capable of respectfully experiencing that friendship, which would at last be just, just beyond the law, and measured up against its measuredness? / O my democratic friends . . ." (306).

When? We cannot predict, but we can say there is merit in studying the processes of democracy as they are reflected in conversations with and across the boundaries that separate individuals into friends and enemies, citizens and "illegals," Americans and non-Americans, the documented and the nondocumented, the Anglos and the Hispanics, the liberals and the Tea Partiers. Each of the essays in this volume explores how actual public discourse at the site of such borders and boundaries represents or confounds effective participation. The settings are various, from vast public spaces such as cities and the spaces within them to the rhetorical spaces of history books, museum displays, newspapers, and media outlets to the intimate settings for public conversation in classrooms. At the end of each essay, our authors discuss implications for teaching about discourse that encourages effective participation and for research on how discourse functions to do so. At the end of our volume, we come back to these suggestions, adding some of our own and proposing some new directions to explore in our quest to understand the effects of borders and boundaries on public discourse.

Finally, to bring this discussion full circle, let us return for a moment to Thornton Wilder's fictional town of Grover's Corners, USA, and set it beside Gabriel Garcia Marquez's (2006) mythical South American town of Macondo in his masterwork *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Wilder's simple depiction of the solitary pain of individual lives and families in

a community where love and connection are fleeting moments erased by death and neglect resonates with Marquez's complex depiction of a community wrapped in isolation—solitude—where all that is written and all that is remembered about the rich history of its founding family, the Buendias, becomes forgotten. Both Wilder's and Marquez's depictions invite us to reflect on how community perceptions and histories both connect and isolate those within them. After recording pages and pages of the fantastic lives of seven generations of family members who thrived and perished in one town, Marquez seems to conclude there is no truth to such history; it is subject to too many different interpretations. As one of his protagonists concludes of the villagers of Macondo, they must concede that "the past was a lie, that memory has no return, that every spring gone by could never be recovered, and that the wildest and most tenacious love was an ephemeral truth in the end" (403). Marquez claims at the end of his saga that this inability to recover a truth from the past is the fate of "races condemned to one hundred years of solitude," to the isolated truth of memory and myth; they "do not have a second opportunity on earth." And neither does Wilder's Emily Webb, who, tragically dead in childbirth, has no business remembering the living.

But our story, unlike that of plays and novels, goes on beyond the tale's end, beyond what was written and remembered. Perhaps, in fact, we—of the American Dream—can have that second opportunity to thrive across generations by bolstering within our public discourse democracy's promise of fair participation and assuring that our conversations do not neglect or forget anyone's depiction of their experience. We can choose to isolate ourselves and our views, protecting them from knowledge about those whom we do not know, or we can find ways to talk about and negotiate individual experience in the societies we share that allow these settings ever to be created anew.

We do believe that through study and analysis of the interactions at borders and boundaries, as undertaken by each of the authors in this volume, we can discover how language use creates the conditions for establishing identity and admitting difference in ways that help us create ever anew a thriving American democracy—one in which we both honor the known traditions that bind us and release those bounds to include what we cannot now know. This American democracy would be filled with hope, like the world of Rebecca in *Our Town* that ever expands its boundaries to adjust for inclusion, becoming as diverse, wonderful, and unfathomable as the mind of God.

Notes

1.   In this chapter, we treat the term *American* in reference to those living in the United States. Other chapters treat the term more inclusively to reference people from across all the Americas.
2.   Standing on the fence and looking out the window.

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