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Teaching About Teaching: A Philosophy of Critical Literacy Through Phenomenological Ethics and Rhetorical Practices

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TEACHING ABOUT TEACHING: A PHILOSOPHY OF CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ETHICS AND RHETORICAL PRACTICES

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Dedication

To my parents, Elsa and Andres, to my husband, Alberto, to my siblings, Elsa and Marcos, to my beloved Ringo, and to all those who made this endeavor possible including my ancestors: love and unlimited gratitude.

TEACHING ABOUT TEACHING: A PHILOSOPHY OF CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ETHICS AND RHETORICAL PRACTICES

by

CORINA LERMA, M.A.

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis presents a phenomenological approach to developing an alternative teaching curriculum for a first-year writing course anchored in rhetorical practices, but reflecting upon my experiences and understandings of phenomenological ethics and philosophy, which I believe can help envision the classroom differently and provides relevant theories to help develop more ethically aware rhetorical practices for first-year composition students. A phenomenological ethical approach that is grounded in experience, embraces ambiguity as an access point, and makes a call to responsibility and problematizes the ideas associated decontextualized and prescriptive teaching practices in higher education foregrounds the ethical implications and responsibilities we hold as part of being in and of the world. This alternative and potential model focuses on the potentialities that everyday students bring with them to my classroom as well as exploring a complementary meta-pedagogical approach on the phenomenon of “teaching about teaching” that can ensure teaching remains a reflective endeavor. I’ll be doing this with the help of the phenomenological theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt and their similar concerns and goals with making students more aware of how being introduced to their own socio-political determinations can shed light on their potential to negotiate and historicize themselves in the world.

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Introduction to Phenomenological Ethics

“I believe that education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”

-John Dewey, 1897

While at first glance, Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt may seem as very distinct and, at times, contradictory philosophers, they all share the lived experience of teaching. At different times in their lives, they wrestled with the complexities embedded in pedagogical practice. For Beauvoir, her experiences as a teacher are evident in “the four chapters of [The Second Sex] devoted to the education, character and formal development of girls; her frequent references to her experiences as a teacher---in the need to transcend the stereotypes of female intellectual inferiority.”¹ In a similar way, Levinas’s ethics in educational theory and practice can be said to have been developed from the 30 years he served as director of a teacher education school in Paris, and the more than 40 years he spent teaching classes.² As a teacher, Levinas resisted principles or prescriptions for practice and championed a way to “re-envision the role in teacher education beyond that of providing content knowledge”³ to become a *maître à penser* or master of thinking. Despite the title, a master of thinking embodies a posture of humility and “to be a master of thinking is therefore to remain forever a student.”⁴ On the other hand, Arendt’s pedagogical practices can be described as having a more traditional approach with lectures and discussions, yet she is also described as having an “uncanny way of handling ideas so that they evoked a dramatic sense of reality [that] also sprang from her conviction that ideas grow out of our everyday experience and they are at its conceptualization, the way in which thought—as opposed to say, poetry, or painting—attempts to discover meaning.”⁵ All of the positions

¹ Catherine E. Portuges. 1985. “Simone de Beauvoir: Feminist as Teacher,” P. 109.

² Ann Chinnery. 2010. “Encountering the Philosopher as Teacher: The Pedagogical Postures of Emmanuel Levinas,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26, no. 8 (November 2010): 1704–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.023>.

³ Ibid. P. 1708.

⁴ Ibid. P. 1707.

⁵ Stern, Peter and Jean Yarbrough. 1978. “Teaching: Hannah Arendt,” P. 373.

adopted by these three philosophers as teachers encompass aspects of the study and theories of phenomenology characterized as a way of seeing rather than a set of doctrines.

Phenomenology can be understood as the study of lived experience and is concerned with the phenomena that arise from the experience of being in the world. The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, introduced with this approach a philosophizing alternative to the philosophy of Rene Descartes and the Cartesian system. For Descartes, reality is a separate and distinct entity that can only be understood in rational terms through cognitive processes of deduction. In contrast, phenomenology attempts to understand the outside world as it is interpreted by and through human consciousness as it is embodied and embedded in our lived world. Husserl's concepts of intentionality and bracketing show how to intentionally direct one's focus to describe realities and bracketing to achieve a deeper understanding of the object of study by suspending personal judgments or biases and prevent them from interfering with the phenomenological inquiry.⁶

The added element in phenomenological ethics involves the idea that we all possess a natural attitude towards the world, but if left unquestioned and blindly accepted it comes with a significantly limited scope of understanding the world. This can be ethically problematic in a variety of ways which is part of Husserl's theory of phenomenological ethics. Without thinking and questioning the world as well as being critical of it, it allows for morally problematic actions to occur and be justified with the natural attitude claim, "this is just the ways things are." Husserl writes, "self-reflection as the spiritual life which functions thereby- all this remains on the 'plane' which, [although] unnoticed, [is] nevertheless only a plane within an infinitely richer dimension of depth" (Husserl 162). Examining one's self and being conscious of our intentions and dispositions is to be awake and aware and adds another dimension of depth in our life. Similarly, we enact the ethical plane by embracing our acts and our intentions by being conscious of them in

⁶ Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, *The Phenomenology Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).

the first place. Without integral self-reflection and self-evaluation, there is no depth and especially no consciousness of our intentions which can have severe ethical consequences.

However, Martin Heidegger's phenomenology breaks away from Husserl's understanding and better aligns with my understanding of phenomenology as a framework for my thesis. Heidegger's concept of Dasein focuses on the situated meaning of a human in the world and consciousness as a product of the historical context from which it arises and, therefore, we can never truly approach an object in a presuppositionless form.⁷ In other words, objects of study or realities should not be separated from their contexts and realities and consciousness or subjectivities are co-creations.

Similarly, this approach to phenomenology aligns with rhetorical practices that hold rhetoric as ontological in nature. According to this lens, the world and what we know is constructed through discourse, space/place, and materiality (objects and things). Rhetoric, in this sense, is not to be reduced to a tool for communication or skill in the art of persuasion, but is the very means by which we negotiate ourselves in the world. As Barry Brummett describes, rhetoric "creates realities rather than truths about realities."⁸ Brummett proposes that no reality humans experience exists apart from human values, perceptions, and meanings. This ontological position, for example, expands the view of language as more than an instrument, since as language/discourse is unique with each use, truths and knowledge are partial, situated, and contingent, and reality is a construct that is only an interpretation where agency is negotiated.⁹

These ideas and understanding of phenomenology, phenomenological ethics, and rhetoric as ontological I will argue have a direct connection with orientations to critical literacy that can lead to new directions and possibilities in instruction models. Critical literacy as a lens, frame, or perspective for teaching "involves having an ingrained critical perspective or way of being that

⁷ Francis F. Seeburger, "Heidegger and the Phenomenological Reduction," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 36, no. 2 (December 1975): 212, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107054>.

⁸ Brummett, Barry. "Three Meanings of Epistemic Rhetoric," SCA Convention, November 1979. <http://comstudies2008.pbworks.com/f/Brummett.pdf>

⁹ Ibid. P. 4.

provides us with an ongoing critical orientation to texts and practices.”¹⁰ In other words, it encourages students to learn to read their worlds with a critical eye and centers “diverse students’ cultural knowledge (drawn from inside the classroom...and everyday worlds [homes and communities]) [out of and upon] their [already existing] funds of knowledge.”¹¹ Students can learn more about their lives and their dispositions while developing a critical literacy perspective that views the world as socially constructed and language as never neutral. Similar to phenomenology’s goal of capturing what “ought-to-be” and not what we “ought-to-do,” critical literacy aims at “imagining thoughtful ways of thinking about reconstructing and redesigning texts, images, and practices”¹² with more socially and equitable messages that center situatedness and lived experiences.

Therefore, the work that I am doing with this thesis responds to the need for a radical reform of educational practices, addressed and informed by the phenomenological theories of Beauvoir, Levinas, and Arendt, by offering a way of understanding the false expectations and ruptures imposed on students through dominant myths that focus on idealities and only the future potentialities of every student and the disconnected reality of the mythical real world that I see being promoted in current writing education models. It’s important to develop such an alternative model that is able to accommodate students’ sense of well-being, lived experiences, ambiguities, situations, unforeseeableness, and contradictions while embracing what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes as a misfitting process.¹³ This alternative model should uncover “the illusory, invisible ideological forces that make us do things in certain ways against our will and against our authentic self-interests.”¹⁴

¹⁰ “Key Aspects of Critical Literacy: An Excerpt,” NCTE, July 6, 2019, <https://ncte.org/blog/2019/07/critical-literacy/>.

¹¹ Norma Gonzalez et al., “Funds of Knowledge for Teaching in Latino Households,” *Urban Education* 29, no. 4 (January 1995): 443–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085995029004005>.

¹² Vivian Maria Vasquez, “Critical Literacy,” *Www.academia.edu*, accessed December 7, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/32233148/Critical_Literacy.

¹³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (June 17, 2011): 591–609, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01206.x>.

¹⁴ Jules Simon, ““On Violence: Guns or Roses in Texas with Reflections on SB 11,”” *Southwest Philosophical Studies*, n.d.

In this thesis, some of the key ideas upon which I focus are the alternatives and potentialities that the everyday students bring with them to my classroom as well as exploring what I intend to present as a complementary meta-pedagogical approach from a combined phenomenological ethical and critical literacy lens on the phenomenon of “teaching about teaching.” I’ll be doing this with the help of the phenomenological theories of Simone De Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt and how they seek to emphasize the need for students to become more aware as they are introduced to their own socio-political determinations and their potential to become more aware of their potential to historicize themselves in the world.

Chapter 1: Simone de Beauvoir, Embracing Ambiguity

The Ethics of Ambiguity by Simone de Beauvoir is her second major non-fiction work launching her work as a feminist and existential philosopher. In this work, she pays tribute to and clashes with her French contemporaries, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty by emphasizing the ethical responsibilities that come with the freedoms in existentialism. One of the main themes throughout Beauvoir's work is the need to push against the choices and actions of those who suppress us in order to achieve true freedom.

The first section of the book titled, "Ambiguity and Freedom," begins with a description of the ambiguity of humans and a strong critique of the philosophers who have tried to mask it through dualisms. She writes regarding the past and future that "between the past which no longer is and the future which is not yet, this moment when he exists is nothing."¹⁵ Beauvoir is describing how the freedom for each individual can come through the ambiguity or ambivalence centered in nothingness. She further notes that a human's ambiguity stems from being both subject and object or what she later contrasts as freedom and facticity. She also writes and describes that the "privilege...of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow-men."¹⁶ She is forming the distinction between being an object and subject and how this is tied to our existence. In other words, she does not try to resolve the ambiguity that is present in our existence as an object or a body with embodied experience and history and as a subject with possibilities that I pursue through projects and commitments and experiences from my subjectivity.

¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2018), P. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 8.

However, she critiques doctrines which fail to capture these notions about ambiguity and “their attempt to lie to us in vain” and adds “Cowardice doesn’t pay.”¹⁷ In other words, she argues past attempts that have led to what she describes as consoling ethics have aggravated the situation and have further fomented ways to treat each other as means. Beauvoir not only highlights the need to face the historical situation head on, but she also situates her work by using the example of the atomic bomb. She writes, “Though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created only to destroy them.”¹⁸ This example demonstrates ambiguity because it is able to capture both humans as subjects with the potential for projects and the ability to assert their will in ways that can impact the world, but it also places humans as objects because they can be so easily destroyed with the use of the atomic bomb. She writes and highlights “ the bond with the world, of [our] freedom and [our] servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all [humans].”¹⁹ The examples she provides are not involved or elaborate, yet they still capture our human inability to escape ambiguity even in the most ordinary aspects of life.

Even though Beauvoir makes clear existentialism is different because it has defined itself as a philosophy of ambiguity, she is against ideas of despair, sterility, or empty subjectivity when it comes to a human’s freedom. . She introduces Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Sartre’s descriptions of human existence, failure , and passion. However, she begins this section by capturing the idea that ethics begins with failure and that “without failure, no ethics; for a being who, from the very start, would be an exact coincidence with himself.”²⁰ In other words, if a human is fulfilled in all aspects then there would be nothing left to do or achieve and he or she be determined or with no

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 9.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 9.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 10.

choice. On the other hand, humans who are not determined or fixed are always in a state of progress or becoming what we are not by moving into the future. Therefore, she embraces the idea that failure is definitive but also ambiguous.

She quotes Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, as he writes, man is “a being who makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being.”²¹ According to Beauvoir, Sartre’s work shows how failure is not tied to ideas of unhappiness or unfulfillment. She interprets it as a way to explain how human’s passion is not thrown at her or imposed upon her, but she chooses it. She introduces with these ideas the concept of disclosure of being as an alternative model since we are not able to have a full coincidence with ourselves. She adds, the usefulness of human’s passion cannot be determined until it is defined by a human’s projects and ends. Beauvoir also highlights Sartre’s use of the phrase “in order that,” which she emphasizes implies intentionality. In other words, Beauvoir expresses that human intentionally discloses being and she desires this disclosure. She adds, “There is an original type of attachment to being which is not the relationship ‘wanting to be’ but rather ‘wanting to disclose being.’”²² This idea shows how humans can have experiences that inform them in a certain way which then entails, that they cannot achieve being or coincidentalality but, more importantly, can disclose a more authentic kind of being of oneself. For Beauvoir this is the process by which humans are able to uproot themselves from the world, and in a sense makes himself “present to the world and the world present to him.” This description embraces failure or the lack of being able to coincide with being. Rather, humans are always at a distance from themselves and become conscious of this relationship.

²¹ as cited in Beauvoir, 2018, P. 12

²² Ibid. 12

Furthermore, she writes, “Existence asserts itself as an absolute which must seek its justification within itself and not suppress itself, even though it may be lost by preserving itself...[One] must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of [our] being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it.”²³ The idea that one must realize our ambiguity introduces the idea of conversion. However, she differentiates the idea of conversion from the Stoic conversion because the Stoic conversion assumes a formal freedom from which they distance themselves from their experiences and they simply become passive observers. For Beauvoir and existentialism, the idea of the passive observer does not work since one must be engaged with the experience. Beauvoir aligns her idea of conversion more with Husserlian phenomenological reduction in which we “let man put his will to be ‘in parenthesis’ and he will thereby be brought to the consciousness of his true condition.”²⁴ Phenomenological reduction or epoché outlines the natural attitudes we have by which a person asserts the existence of an object, but the epoché places those assumptions or natural attitudes in brackets or parenthesis in order to focus on how things appear to consciousness within its intentional structure. Beauvoir’s existential conversion draws from this phenomenological reduction to develop the following: “existentialist conversion does not suppress my instincts, desires, plans, and passions.”²⁵ The existential conversion she proposes does not indicate my values and ends as absolute or an objective reality but are instead always linked to the freedom and a person’s choice to engage with them or project them. According to Beauvoir, there is no absolute value that is not embedded in human plans and engagements. Therefore, values come from the human condition and human projects and are not independent from human projects that generate them. The way that Beauvoir uses transcendence and the practice of bracketing,

²³ Ibid. P. 13.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 14

²⁵ Ibid. P. 14.

therefore, captures the movement towards and away from an object ‘transcendentally’ revealing a value. She emphasizes that value stems from human existence and not outside of human projects and commitments.

Disclosure of Passionate Attachments

Beauvoir is a proponent of embracing ambiguity in order to overcome the situations plagued with hopelessness and despair that comes as a result of desiring impossible moral perfection imposed on us by others through abstract systems of ethics. On the other hand, the system of ethics she proposes stems from the idea that one must aspire “to be a disclosure of being.” In other words, she explains all actions “disclose” who the actor is because action is a result of people’s abilities, values, and commitments. Therefore, we should strive to authentically disclose ourselves by desiring our own freedom. . In more simple terms, one should aspire to be what one is rather than trying to fulfill moral perfection or values imposed by others. For Beauvoir, freedom is the goal of ethics since everyone is naturally free and has a responsibility to turn natural freedom into moral freedom by willing themselves free.

Beauvoir’s call to will oneself free and to disclose being in order to achieve moral freedom reminds me of Jacqueline Jones Royster’s call to acknowledge our passionate attachments. In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*, Royster describes that “an acknowledgement of passionate attachments reminds us that knowledge has sites and sources and that we are better informed about the nature of a given knowledge base when we take into account its sites, material contexts, and points of origin.”²⁶ She emphasizes the idea that knowledge should not be regarded as something formless and

²⁶ Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream : Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (Pittsburgh: University Of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), P. 280.

invisible and instead we should understand knowledge in terms of producers. These producers “are embodied and in effect have passionate attachments by means of their embodiments. They are vested with vision, values, and habits; with ways of being and ways of doing.”²⁷ According to Royster, this awareness of passionate attachments is key if we are to understand how ways of being and doing shape the question of what counts as knowledge, what knowing and doing mean, and what the consequences of knowledge and action entail. By specifying attachments, we can recognize not only who has produced knowledge but for whom the consequences and implications by its existence hold true.

I would argue Royster’s acknowledgement of our own passionate attachments in terms of embodied experiences is similar to Beauvoir’s emphasis on disclosing being. Royster highlights the role of producers and Beauvoir believes by disclosing being we get to the actor of action and a better understanding of their values and commitments. At the same time, Royster argues against understanding knowledge and its producers as formless and invisible and Beauvoir argues against an understanding of morality as “something woven into the timeless fabric of the universe.” She describes part of the problem with desiring to achieve moral perfection lies in discussing morality in terms of ethical principles when morality is something that people develop in and through their lives and their commitments. For both feminist authors, meaning construction through morality or knowledge is subjective but meaningful because all meaning is subjective. The idea that meaning is subjective but meaningful also points to the need to consider the freedom of others. Royster believes through the awareness of one’s own passionate attachments and sources of passionate attachments, we are able to better understand what effects

²⁷ Ibid. P. 280.

they have on ourselves and others. Beauvoir provides a similar picture detailing the importance of others in the second section of her work titled, “Personal Freedom and Others.”

The Importance of Others: Freedom and Responsibility

Beauvoir opens this section by detailing the image of childhood and focusing on how a child sees the world as composed of fixed values. However, the child also understands a world of play where actions have no moral consequences. She describes how “human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees...[showing] the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit or seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things.”²⁸ The child is free in play and free to pursue and search for goals he or she has determined for himself or herself in a “happily irresponsible” fashion.²⁹ However, as the child grows, explains Beauvoir, he realizes his freedom and also the responsibility. This responsibility includes making the transition from natural freedom to moral freedom or irresponsibly avoiding the question altogether.

Beauvoir makes it clear that the worst path to take in making this decision is becoming a “sub-man.” She says the sub-men “have eyes and ears, but from their childhood on they make themselves blind and deaf, without love and without desire.”³⁰ In other words, the sub-man avoids taking responsibility for their actions and allows the fear of action and consequences to limit them to do nothing at all. In addition, the sub-man goes against Royster’s acknowledgement of passionate attachments and instead rejects “passion” which is his human condition. Beauvoir

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2018), P. 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.* P. 35.

³⁰ *Ibid.* P. 42.

also talks about passion as inherent to the human condition when she refers to “the failure of that drive toward being which always misses its goal.”³¹

Next, she describes the adventurer who she says is “close to a genuinely moral attitude” because he is involved in multiple projects and embraces freedom. However, this does not mean that the adventurer has genuine or authentic moral commitments and can be understood instead as mainly having an attitude of conquer and success. She writes about the adventurer that he or she “always meets others along the way [while] the conquistador meets the Indians; the condottiere hacks out a path through blood and ruins.”³² Therefore, the adventurer has little or no regard for the freedom of others and this prevents him from achieving freedom because his or her freedom relies on the freedom of everyone else.

Beauvoir’s final figure is the passionate person who she believes is close to but also unable to achieve genuine freedom. Unlike the adventurer the passionate person has a sincere moral commitment, but it is also this strong attachment that does not allow him or her to achieve his or her goals preventing this figure from achieving freedom. The freedom of a passionate person asks them to realize that their existence depends on others. The moral attitude and freedom she describes is tied to the ambiguous relationship we have with ourselves and others as central and inevitable. This interconnected relationship is what Beauvoir develops further in the third section of her work and describes as the aesthetic attitude.

The Aesthetic Attitude: : Relation versus Contemplation

In the third section of *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir begins again by reclaiming the relationship we have with others. She describes every man was to do with other men because we

³¹ Ibid. P. 42.

³² Ibid. P. 60.

interact with human meanings.³³ In this case, every individual is responsible for their own freedom. Beauvoir's ideas highlight the need for individuals to create their own meanings in the world and move away from an aesthetic attitude. She calls an aesthetic attitude a limited perspective in which an individual claims to be able to have a detached or distanced ability to regard or think about the world.³⁴ For Beauvoir, this attitude or perspective is an illusion since we are always embedded in projects or looking towards the future. For Beauvoir, the aesthetic attitude is a perspective that has the potential to romanticize the ideas that cause death, misery, and injustice for people. In order for the artist or the writer to overcome being trapped in the illusion of the aesthetic attitude, he or she must be situated in the world by being aware of how he or she is "oppressed or oppressing, resigned or rebellious, a man among men."³⁵ Beauvoir highlights the need for a person to find the exigency which is common to all individuals.

The ideas captured by Simone de Beauvoir in Section III of her work through the development of her critique towards the aesthetic attitude and her emphasis on a situated experience and search for exigency reminds me of the ideas by Eli Goldblatt and David A. Jolliffe in their work *Literacy as Conversation: Learning Networks in Urban and Rural Communities*. Similar to the aesthetic attitude that Beauvoir develops, Goldblatt and Jolliffe give a critique towards an academic attitude that is unable to respond to a reality too real for school. In other words, they critique a way of teaching and school models that adopts "fill-in-blank lessons and arithmetic drills—isolates students from compelling events and cannot help them develop new insights or perspectives that might come out of direct experience with other people

³³ Ibid. P. 74.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 75.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 78.

or current conditions.”³⁶ Their approach provides a wider scope for learning networks to be defined as a “web of public institutions... [that] sponsor activities in which people learn literacy through action and through human interaction.”³⁷ In keeping with these conceptualizations, the authors introduce the framework Literacy Education Audit of Resources and Needs (LEARN) which aims at moving away from the idea of literacy as only a problem-solution process and instead embraces the idea of literacy as a process of “human communication, inquiry, advocacy, and collective identity that is always situated within systems, institutions, and polarities: public and private, nonprofit and business, educational and recreational, oppressive and liberating.”³⁸ A vital element of LEARN is the dialectical relationships that should exist while engaging with meaningful community projects. To advocate for linguistic fluidity, the authors reference Bakhtin’s conceptualization of dialogic use of conversation shaped by centripetal and centrifugal forces that can lead words to specific meanings or force language to become inflexible or rigid. Doing so challenges public educators to know and understand what is happening before building “‘innovative’ curricula or building pedagogical castles.”³⁹ The essays stress that teaching writing and reading is challenging and that language should take place in action within local practices of communities.

As part of Goldblatt and Jolliffe’s framework, they emphasize the need to focus beyond academic or traditional environments for literacy and look for literacy in local community practices or projects that might be better situated in the world. They write “when people get together at family reunions, block parties, protest meetings, or funerals, they must make meaning

³⁶ Eli Goldblatt and David A Jolliffe, *Literacy as Conversation : Learning Networks in Urban and Rural Communities* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University Of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), P. 16.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 8.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 10.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 11.

out of complex social situations. People shed tears and laugh—sometimes simultaneously—but they walk away from a group event with some kind of conclusion about how they want their lives to be.”⁴⁰ Meaning can come as a result of interactions and experiences with others and not only in limited spaces for detached contemplation with others such as classes that can sometimes adopt the aesthetic attitude. Goldblatt and Jolliffe’s conceptualization of literacy as conversation stems from a concern that people have the ability to do things to make their worlds better. This idea also correlates with Beauvoir’s section titled, “The Present and the Future.”

The Present and the Future for Students

In this section, Beauvoir once again focuses on the relational aspect, but now of time, considering the relationship of action in the present to achieve an uncertain goal in the future. De Beauvoir understands people’s view of the future as another reflection of humanity’s fundamental ambiguity. According to Beauvoir’s work people view the future in two ways: first, they want the future to extend their current projects and moving on to new ones so, it seems as an extension of the present and existence. Second, people imagine an idealized future in which they will be able to achieve “Glory, Happiness, or Justice,” but this visualization of the future has no connection to the present and expresses a fixed belief in being. She connects this view to the ideas tied to religious salvation, and later to scientific and technological progress.

Furthermore, Beauvoir references Hegel and Marx in this section and says even they were skeptical of thinking about the future as static. Beauvoir emphasizes it’s key to embrace and not eliminate this lack because it is this lack that will “thrust [a person] toward the future.”⁴¹ Transcendence is possible through the goals that an individual strives for in the present with

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 15.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 19.

competing visions and all the competing visions cannot be reconciled into one reality in the future. An individual should not wait for their salvation to come from a foreign entity or place and should instead embrace the idea that one's salvation is within one's own existence and finite future.

The idea developed by Beauvoir regarding a mythical future is similar to my conceptualization of the myth of the ideal future student that is often modeled in education practices in which there is no longer a process of self-reflection or awareness by blocking their horizon of possibilities. Students lose the vision of their horizon of possibilities by focusing on an ideal future that has no real connection to their present or their present projects.

The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity for College Students

Beauvoir writes in the previous section a critique towards what she describes an aesthetic attitude in which individuals simply contemplate the world, but do not engage with it or try to change it. In the third section of her work titled, "The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity," she claims rather than adopt this aesthetic attitude, we should strive towards action. However, she writes about the difficulty that this step towards action entails since people face unnatural impositions or oppression that obscure the possibilities and their ability to choose their future. Therefore, freedom should not be understood as a positive movement, but as a revolt necessary for people to overcome the mystification that takes place and which most people consider to be a natural situation. Beauvoir shows the key relationship to others as part of how oppressors justify the oppression and says, "I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison."⁴² She adds the other should empower followers by making a sacrifice towards a higher cause in what she describes as a mix of nihilism and seriousness.

⁴² Ibid. P. 91.

Beauvoir's distinguishes two different conceptions of the future. First, there is the future which is the expanding and a continuation of the present and then there is a messianic future in which there is an eternal End where being fulfills itself.⁴³ Perhaps due to these ideas she emphasizes we should not confuse ambiguity with absurdity. Beauvoir differentiates them by writing, the "absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that is must be constantly won."⁴⁴ Therefore, she emphasizes to act in full ambiguity is to be aware of the idea that that action carries struggle, paradoxes, and tension. People try to escape their freedom by denying the tension in action. In order for a person to act in ambiguity, it is necessary that "action be considered as a finished form whose different moments, reflect and confirm one another so well there is no longer... separation between present and future, between means and ends."

Similarly, in the *Second Sex*, Beauvoir identifies the importance of ambiguity embedded in all relationships of reciprocity. Beauvoir writes, "They must reject the limitations of their situation and seek to open the road of the future...resignedness is only abdication and flight, there is no other way out for woman than to work for her liberation."⁴⁵ Beauvoir urges women to view the limitations associated with assigned roles of the other and to embrace ambiguity by keeping an open perspective of what the future might hold. Similar to the idea of dancing, there is an unpredictability tied with the future and with going against the ways things have always been; however, Beauvoir sees this as an access point into new opportunities for women to venture out and find their own liberation.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 128.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 129.

⁴⁵ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, vol. 1 (Vintage Classics, 1949), P. 506.

At the same time, Simon writes in “Friends and Feminism,” “Let’s try dancing with these women at least for a while and learn what it means to overcome our ingrained intellectual insecurities by dealing with our own ‘lacks’ and by enjoying the love and affection of some very good friends.”⁴⁶ Simon captures how Beauvoir argues for a mutual reciprocity in this dance and is able to take us in a different ethical direction by showing how women become political in their own terms similarly to dancing. You cannot learn unless you get out there and try to dance and embrace the ambiguity of what will happen.

These ideas linked to unpredictability and possibility are the ideas that I’ve made salient when redefining a classroom space based on ambiguity for students. When I refer to the everyday classroom, I mean a classroom that makes the effort to embrace the exploratory and unpredictable model of education and that is shaped, in part, by phenomenological ethical theories that place at the forefront students’ uniqueness and not the myth of the ideal future student or the imposed expectations of the myth of the real world. An everyday classroom should embrace unpredictability and the possibility of change always embedded action in full light of ambiguity and in fitting and misfitting relations.

⁴⁶ Jules Simon, “Friends and Feminism.” Unpublished Manuscript. P. 11.

Chapter 2: Emmanuel Levinas, Responsibility and Love in the Face-to-Face Phenomenon

Emmanuel Levinas's phenomenological ethics also focuses on lived experience and situation by highlighting the situation of the face-to-face encounter with the other. In the chapter titled "Ethics and the Face" from his larger work *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas's differentiation of the thing and the face establishes early on why the face cannot be totalized or seen. Levinas describes a thing as something that is given through vision and "offers itself to me" and that "in gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same."⁴⁷ In other words, the thing is part of what Levinas denotes is at a level of sensibility and enjoyment. A thing can be consumed, absorbed, or encompassed "by a centripetal, egoistic self."⁴⁸ The thing can become reducible to the sameness of the egoistic individual. On the other hand, to experience the face is to experience that the face cannot be part of what we see since it cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge. He writes, "the face is present in its refusal to be contained" and "cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed."⁴⁹ Unlike the thing, the face is not reducible to sameness and leaves me as the same but introduces an irreducible alterity. Similar to Beauvoir, Levinas foregrounds "to experience the face is to experience, not an object represented or constituted by myself and my needs, but an irreducible alterity who faces me and whose eyes look into mine."⁵⁰ In other words, the other is not to be regarded as a thing because it interrupts the mundane and carries a situation or an alterity that is irreducible and cannot be accounted for within the sameness of a self. According to Levinas, "This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity : An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2013), P. 194.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 195.

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 194.

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 512.

knowledge.”⁵¹ The experience of encountering the other or the straightforwardness of the face-to-face marks the primary situation as the living presence of another person and a relation with the other experienced socially and ethically.

The encounter with the Other introduces an irreducible relation, the epiphany, of the face-to-face, the encounter with another in which, similar to Beauvoir’s concept of ambiguity captures the other person’s proximity and distance. Levinas adds, “The Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness.”⁵² According to Levinas, one instantly recognizes the transcendence and heteronomy of the Other.

The face-to-face relation introduces the alterity of the Other; however, Levinas warns against reducing the alterity to a quality that distinguishes the Other from me. He explains, “a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity.”⁵³ Therefore, the alterity would be reduced with the implication that there is a way to classify me and the Other by common characteristics that can be further divided. He adds the incomprehensible presence of the Other, is not to be described negatively. The Other does not purely and simply negate the I. As he describes, “To experience the face is to experience, not an object represented or constituted by myself and my needs, but an irreducible alterity who faces me and whose eyes look into mine.” According to Levinas, the Other will remain infinitely foreign and transcendent. He maintains that speech or language is what follows from the epiphany or absolute difference introduced by the face.

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 518.

⁵² Ibid. P. 150.

⁵³ Ibid. 194.

Language and Levinas

For Levinas, language is vital in forming a relation that breaks up the unity produced by the same genus. In other words, “Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history.”⁵⁴ Discourse for Levinas, is a system of interaction that relates with what remains transcendent. Levinas begins this description of language by focusing on the formal work of knowledge which is to present the transcendent since “language is a relation between separated terms.”⁵⁵ Another distinction made by Levinas is between the said and the discoursing I. He writes:

Words are said, be it only by the silence kept, whose weight acknowledges this evasion of the Other. The knowledge that absorbs the Other is forthwith situated within the discourse I address to him [or her]. Speaking, rather than “letting be,” solicits the Other. Speech cuts across division. In knowledge or vision the object seen can indeed determine an act, but it is an act that in some way appropriates the “seen” to itself, integrates it into a world by endowing it with signification, and, in the last analysis, constitutes it. ⁵⁶

Levinas holds a view of language that is situated in the discourse I choose to express and that will solicit the Other. Language has its origin in the face-to-face encounter with the Other. He also focuses on speech not only as utterances or grammatical structures, but as performing an act or the action of adding meaning. In other words, language does not begin as the translation of an interior or pre-existent thought but is instead a response to the unforeseen expressiveness of the Other who faces and addresses me. Lastly, the system of language announces what Levinas describes as the “ethical inviolability of the Other.”

⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 194.

⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 195.

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 195.

Levinas combines a relationship with the Other through discourse with the idea of ethics and creates a clear demarcation between ethics and morality. The ethical relationship Levinas focuses on is “not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question.”⁵⁷ He adds that the putting in question emanates from the other and when considered with the idea of infinity describes the epiphany because of the encounter with the other. Levinas uses the imagery of the presence of a being not as entering, but as overflowing the sphere and determines its status as infinite. However, he warns against considering the overflowing the same as that of the image of liquid overflowing a vessel because in this case, the overflowing takes place as a position in the face of the same. In other words, the idea of infinity stems from a relation with the face as an epiphany or an openness not from a priori depths but from the experience of calling my powers into question. Levinas writes, “The idea of infinity is produced in the opposition of conversation, in sociality.”⁵⁸ Levinas highlights that the relation with the face or with the absolute other which I cannot contain, with the other in this sense is infinite, but is maintained without violence and in peace with this absolute alterity. According to Levinas, the resistance of the other does not represent violence to me and does not act negatively since it has a positive structure that is ethical. The revelation of the other means not grasping him in his negative resistance or a “struggle with a faceless god, but [how] I respond to his expression, to his revelation.”⁵⁹ Resistance is nothing but an ethical call to be responsible for the Other wherever possible.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 195.

⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 196.

⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 196.

The Phenomenon of the Face as Epiphany

Levinas defines the face early in his work *Totality and Infinity* as a very peculiar sort of phenomenon. He defines the face as “the way in which the other presents himself [or herself], exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face” (50). In *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas adds, “The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other.”⁶⁰ Therefore, a relation with the other demands an “interactive” relation with the other. The relationship with the face cannot be simply reduced or dominated by perception or to what one sees. Even though the face is exposed and without defense as Levinas describes as naked, there is also a poverty in the face. He points out that we try to mask this poverty by putting on poses and facial expressions. He adds, “This mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under any gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me.”⁶¹ Therefore, the face is a different type of phenomenon, which could be described as “non-phenomenal.”⁶² Diane Perpich describes the face as non-phenomenal because it does not appear as such and it remains exterior to concepts. She further writes, “Rhetorically, the face is an image that represents the inadequacy of every image for representing alterity. That is, it represents the impossibility of its own representation.”⁶³

For Levinas, the face is signification, and signification without context. He provides examples by mentioning how we are often a “character” within a context: “a professor at the

⁶⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity : Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Philippe Nemo (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011), P. 85.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 50-51.

⁶² Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Cultural Memory in the Present, 2008), P. 103.

⁶³ Ibid. 103.

Sorbonne, a Supreme Court justice, son of so-and-so, everything that is in one's passport, the manner of dressing, of presenting oneself...the meaning of something is in its relation to another thing" (86). However, he emphasizes the face is meaningful by itself and in this sense the face is that which cannot become a content and a response or responsibility which comprises this authentic relationship.

Equally important for Levinas is the relationship between the face and discourse which he argues are tied since the face speaks. He says, "[The face] speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse" (87). In other words, discourse is another way of breaking what Levinas describes as "totality." However, he distinguishes between the saying and the said. The saying and the said are not mutually exclusive or are at play independent of each other, since he describes the saying must bear a said. Yet, he adds "the saying is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The saying is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him [or her]" (88). According to Levinas, the first word of the face is the "Thou shalt not kill" (89). For Levinas, the approach to phenomenology begins with the face-to-face interaction and with recognizing in the eyes of the other a resistance to being dominated. Levinas writes, "But he can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance, but the very unforeseeableness of his reaction."⁶⁴ For Levinas, this unforeseeableness is key as this is where freedom and spontaneity are located. Not knowing how someone will respond to someone's demand shows the equal opportunity or freedom to resist. Levinas says, "We would remain within the idealism of a consciousness of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn

⁶⁴ Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, *The Phenomenology Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), P. 518.

into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle. The epiphany of the face is ethical.”⁶⁵ The ethical resistance teaches me about my vulnerability and creates an openness from which I learn. The relation with the other is a site of vulnerability and struggle, but is also a site of disruption of my rhythm and natural attitudes and creates a relation that overflows. Levinas focuses on the idea of overflowing to capture the inability to thematize the other’s unpredictability and capture the relation with the other which is tied to our responsibility.

Critique of Levinas’s Rhetoric

In “Figurative Language and the ‘Face’ in Levinas’s Philosophy,” Diane Perpich describes how Levinas treats the face as rhetorically by calling into question the rhetorical constraints present in Levinas’ philosophical position. According to Perpich, Levinas claims that the ethical relationship takes place in language, but he criticizes rhetoric as a form of language that averts the other’s freedom. She draws from Levinas’ work titled, “The Ego and the Totality,” to capture how Levinas “characterizes eloquence and propaganda as having the goal of flattering freedom ‘so as to make of it the accomplice of maneuvers that are to lead to its abdication.’”⁶⁶ Levinas’s view of rhetoric is that it is a form of propaganda and maneuvering to avoid the achievement of freedom. Furthermore, in the section titled “Rhetoric and Injustice” in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas suggests that rhetoric denies the authentic expression of the other through injustice and not as a face since it attempts to corrupt the other’s freedom. Perpich writes, “Levinas argues that the ethical relationship is accomplished only in language, but stipulates that it entails an access to the other outside of rhetoric and that it coincides with the

⁶⁵ Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, *The Phenomenology Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), P. 519.

⁶⁶ Diane Perpich, “Figurative Language and the ‘Face’ in Levinas’s Philosophy,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 103–21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40238209>, P. 42.

‘overcoming’ of rhetoric.”⁶⁷ However, Perpich argues against this notion of rhetoric and instead highlights that it is not only language with a certain sort of content that invokes the other and accomplishes the ethical relationship, but all discourse. According to her, Levinas’s description of invocation does not allow for an interpretation of language that affects the ethical relationship and one that does not. ‘

According to Perpich, the struggle between rhetoric and ethics in Levinas’ work has a resemblance to the struggle between art and philosophy in *Plato’s Republic* (Robbins). However, Perpich points out that just like Plato, Levinas also relies on a figure, image or a rhetorical trope to convey its main point:

Just as Socrates in the Republic is forced to abandon “plain” speech and present an image of the Good in the famous “analogy with the sun,” the central moment of Levinas’s ethics depends upon the figure—the face of the other—that the reader is prohibited from interpreting literally.⁶⁸

According to Perpich this is one of the contradictions that are not solved in Levinas’s thought and which highlights the tensions in Levinas’s account of the ethical relationship. However, there is something important to be said about Levinas’s contradictions and tensions as Perpich describes them, since the tensions and contradictions with his approach to rhetoric are caused by the contradiction inherent in his desire to deploy “a systematic (and thus unfailing) undermining of system.”⁶⁹ Perpich concludes in her argument that Levinas holds a stronger thesis that is able to reconcile some of the contradictions and tensions. She describes his stronger thesis to be that “the contradictory image of the face (which represents the unrepresentability of alterity)

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 45.

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 117.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 119.

pinpoints not just a tension in his work but something that is both necessary to his ethical enterprise and simultaneously puts it at risk, working both for and against his ‘system.’”⁷⁰ While I don’t intend to explore further some of the contradictions identified by Perpich in Levinas’s methodological and ethical philosophy at this time, I will focus on Levinas’s description of language and rhetoric.

In Defense of Levinas’s Conception of Discourse

While Levinas’s earlier description of rhetoric might align more with a definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion or empty language that is not sincere or utilized only with the intent to manipulate, I would argue his theories on language and objectivity closely resemble Barry Brummett’s definition of rhetoric as epistemic in an ontological sense as well as the theories of alterity by Mikhail Bakhtin whose conceptions about discourse develop implications about language which have had an influence on rhetorical studies.

For Levinas, language plays a central role in his philosophy as a phenomenologist. As Perpich claims, Levinas is especially aware of the problematic of systematization as evident by his theories on “totality” or systematic totality that encompass all reality, and the idea that this totalization allows for exploration of all the relationships internal to this system.⁷¹ Levinas finds the problem arising with such totalization is not in the self, but when the presence of the other is encountered. Harold Durfee describes, “Systematization attempts to include everything within the system which the self develops, consequently encompassing all by thought, or intuition or awareness. Everything would be placed upon the level of the subject producing the system, and

⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 119.

⁷¹ Harold A. Durfee, “Emmanuel Levinas’ Philosophy of Language,” *Explanation: New Directions in Philosophy*, 1973, 89–120, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-2420-4_6.

thereby would be reduced to the ‘same.’”⁷² Levinas’s philosophy of the face-to-face counters the idea of systematization and reducing the other to a mere placeholder in the in this or that stipulated system. For Levinas, there is a possibility for a common ontological basis for language and morality.

Levinas describes the relation to a singular being in which his or her singularity is performed or enacted in each instance of discourse. He explains, “Things acquire a rational signification, and not only one of simple usage, because an other is associated with my relations with them.”⁷³ Levinas’s philosophy of language is intertwined with the other and that our meaning-making process is ethical when considering the other. He adds, “Objectivity results from language, which permits the putting into question of possession...this objectivity is correlative not of some trait in an isolated subject, but of his relation with the Other.”⁷⁴ For Levinas, my ethical relationship with the other is the basis for all meaningfulness where saying something meaningful does not presuppose universality, but it does presuppose an appeal to a meaningful system of interrelated signs, to a positive language. Levinas defines discourse in *Totality and Infinity*, as “an original, non-allergic, ethical relationship with alterity productive of a meaning capable of founding communal meaning.”⁷⁵ This understanding of language entails a process of ethical separation of the other from the same and separation of the same from any system of totality in order to create openness and transcendence.

At the same time, the two aspects mentioned earlier key in on how Levinas’s philosophy of language of the saying and the said brings into question the complex relationships of the

⁷² Ibid. P. 90.

⁷³ Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, *The Phenomenology Reader* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), P. 526.

⁷⁴ Ibid. P. 526.

⁷⁵ Ibid. P. 530.

possibility and impossibility of discourse. Jeffrey Dudiak argues in his work *The Intrigue of Ethics*, that Levinas captures the two directions for language as the reductive and reconstructive. He writes, “the reduction from the said to the saying, across ever deepening structures that either describe conditions of possibility for earlier structures or provide the ever deepening meaning of these conditions: from intentionality to sensibility, to proximity as the meaning of sensibility, and to substitution as the otherwise than being at the base of proximity, and as the relation between the subject and the Infinite.”⁷⁶ The complex language relations captured between the saying and the said by Levinas parallels Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic relation of language.

In the philosophy of language of Mikhail Bakhtin, I rely on Helen Foster’s use of his work as she theorizes rhetorical subjectivity, which is language based.⁷⁷ She writes that Bakhtin’s theory of language differs from other theorists of language in significant ways. For example, unlike Ferdinand de Saussure, who theorized words as existing in a closed system where words have meaning relative only to all other words in the system, Bakhtin viewed words as significant when they are strung together (discourse) for a purpose by a person and between and among persons to make meaning. Meaning, then, does not reside in past meaning associated with words, alone, since words take on infinitely new meanings as they are used by people attempting to make words (language, discourse) serve their intentions. This is why Bakhtin maintains that language is both social and political. It is social because we learn and appropriate the language of those around us (for example, our families when we’re born) and political because we must struggle in our attempt to make heteroglot language serve our individual intentions.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics : A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

⁷⁷ Helen Foster, *Networked Process* (Parlor Press LLC, 2007).

This social and political aspect of language use can be understood by plotting Bakhtin's theory of dialogism along a continuum, where at one end is monologism and at the other is dialogism. (It's useful to think of this continuum as consisting of all the existing uses of language.) The idea of a continuum can be said parallels Levinas's approach to language through the relationship between the saying and the said. For Levinas, at and toward the monologic end is the language of authority (for example, parents, religion, institutions) that wants to restrain multiple meanings; at and toward the dialogic end is the language of many meanings. Bakhtin says that monologic discourse is centripetal, as the intention is to restrict and that dialogic discourse is centrifugal as meanings are many. Additionally, words, Bakhtin says, carry all of the intentions of everyone who has ever used them. He calls this heteroglossia; words carry the taste of professions, history, gender, age, class, etc. In a sense, I would argue Levinas's view of totality would be better represented by monologism or the systematization and totalization of language. Last, Bakhtin says that it isn't the monologic and dialogic distinctions that are so important as it is the fluctuating ratio between them.

The social and political aspects of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism relate to rhetoric and writing studies. According to Foster, agency, along with power, she says, resonates with the fluctuating ratio between monologic and dialogic discourse. Agency is closely related to invention and intentionality, while power circulates through all everyday practices. Power often gets our attention when, for example, we feel repressed or when we experience cognitive dissonance.

The fluctuating ratio of monologism and dialogism therefore correlates to the fluctuating degree of agency we have in different situations. The only constant is the fluctuating ratio and when considering these ideas with those of Levinas, we could say the fluctuating ratio is the

unforeseeableness he describes in every face-to-face encounter. For example, we could be in a room and enjoying a high degree of agency when another person enters and our degree of agency falls. Where we experience lower degrees of power, our fluctuating ratio of agency increases and vice versa.

Similarly, Levinas writes, “But he can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance, but the very unforeseeableness of his reaction.”⁷⁸ For Levinas, this unforeseeableness is key as this is where freedom and spontaneity are located. Not knowing how someone will respond to someone’s demand shows the equal opportunity or freedom to resist. Levinas says, “We would remain within the idealism of a consciousness of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle. The epiphany of the face is ethical.”⁷⁹ The ethical resistance teaches me about my vulnerability and creates an openness from which I learn. The relation with the other is a site of vulnerability and struggle but is also a site of disruption of my rhythm and natural attitudes and creates a relation that overflows. Levinas focuses on the idea of overflowing to capture the inability to thematize the other’s unpredictability as well as the relation with the other which is tied to our responsibility.

Another similarity with Levinas is Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism and alterity. Bakhtin’s theories on alterity and dialogism focus on the ethic of the social relation, alterity, that contributes to make us who we are. The process of alterity is how we construct notions of the self and other. He adds, “The mirror is incapable of capturing all of me. I am both in front of the mirror and not in front of it” (Bakhtin). Similar to Levinas’s use of the face to describe how the

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 518.

⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 519.

other cannot be reduced, in his conception of alterity, Bakhtin discusses how it is impossible to capture the self completely or fully without the relational aspect with the other.

At the same time, Bakhtin's approaches to language correlates with Levinas's philosophy that the face demands an interactive relation. The two types of understanding Bakhtin distinguishes when it comes to language are shallow and responsive. Shallow understanding is a passive reflection as it merely reflects back to us that which we already know or relate to about ourselves, whereas responsive understanding is "A matter of translating the experience into an altogether different axiological perspective, into new categories of evaluation and formulation" (Bakhtin). Responsive understanding seeks to elicit that which we do not know, so that it effectively broadens our understanding of the human condition. The ideas of alterity are imbricated with the ethical responsibility of subjects to use responsive understanding "as a means to promote empathy and understanding," as well as using it towards the development of our own becoming using Bakhtin's term, as we work toward building the architectonic of our lives. Thus, subjectivity in this case can be regarded as a sense of self, but also involves relations with the other. At the same time, identity then becomes a relational structure that is understood as a "limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is" (p. 19). Therefore, Bakhtin's philosophy captures how language comes to us from others and each of us is compelled to answer for our place in the world. This involves the complex necessity of co-creation. We co-create meaning in the act of discourse itself. I say something to you; you respond and it goes back and forth. What I meant and what you meant (can) morphs into something else. There are exceptions to this, though, as we can understand from Bakhtin's concepts of shallow understanding and responsive understanding. Discourse can

be regarded as an ethical and generative act that increases meaning-making and agency, and which ultimately changes who we are through our relationship with the other.

Barry Brummett's, "Three Meanings of Epistemic Rhetoric," asserts a relationship between knowledge and discourse, between how people know and how they communicate. In addition, it also establishes a relationship between reality, what there is to know, and discourse. In other words, it implies that the world is like such and that we can know it through communication. Even though Brummett develops the methodological, sociological, and the ontological definitions of rhetoric as epistemic, I focus on the ontological definition since I will argue is the one that closely resonates with Levinas's and Bakhtin's theories on language and discourse.

Rhetoric as epistemic in an ontological sense describes how rhetoric creates all of what there is to know and discourse creates realities rather than truths about realities. According to Brummett, "No reality that humans experience exists apart from human values, perceptions, and meanings."⁸⁰ Furthermore, he emphasizes how meaning is a thing created and shared in discourse, particularly rhetoric, so reality is a thing created and shared in discourse. The world and what we know is constructed through discourse, space/place, and materiality (objects and things). Rhetoric, in this sense, is not to be reduced to a tool for communication or skill in the art of persuasion but is the very means by which we negotiate ourselves in the world. This ontological position, for example, expands the view of language as more than an instrument, since as language/discourse is unique with each use, truths and knowledge are partial, situated, and contingent, and reality is a construct that is only an interpretation where agency is negotiated. He also notes that "rhetoric is a dimension of action follows from the argument that

⁸⁰ Barry Brummett, "Three Meanings of Epistemic Rhetoric.," *SCA Convention*, 1979.

meaning is a dimension of reality, for meanings are created and urged upon others rhetorically.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Hannah Arendt, Action Entangled in Public Spaces

“When the storyteller is loyal...to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence.”

-Isak Dinesen

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was born into a family of assimilated Jews in Königsberg, East Prussia. In her lifetime, she experienced being an immigrant, political exile, and lastly becoming a naturalized citizen of the United States. She is known as a creative and original thinker in the area of politics, particularly circumstances that lead to political rise. In one of her major works, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she argues that totalitarianism becomes possible in modern society when everything is managed to be manipulated and individuals are isolated. Additionally, in one of her most important works, *The Human Condition*, Arendt offers a phenomenological account of human action in the public realm by drawing from Aristotle’s concept of polis but also in questioning the Western traditions of Plato and Marx which center human fulfillment in the theoretical life. Arendt argues “the traditional emphasis on the theoretical is a betrayal of concrete practical life (*vita activa*).”⁸² She instead emphasizes the idea of concrete practical life or *vita activa* and distinguishes between the three levels of human activity that she labels as “work,” “labor” and “action.”

She describes labor as an enclosed with the main objective becomes seeking nourishment, clothing, and protection from the elements. She describes work as the manufacture of goods and as creating the human world of the marketplace. Action is in an Aristotelian sense political action or praxis. For the Greeks and Arendt, “polis opened a space where humans could

⁸² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1958), P. 342.

freely interact with one another” and “it is only in the life of action...that humans become fully authentic.”⁸³ Labor, work, and action are a unified but differentiated testament that we inhabit the world of our making and that the world is always shared with others. However, Jules Simon also shows “[w]e don’t merely reproduce, or labor, or work, but we make ourselves unique through acting on our potential for action and novel initiations.”⁸⁴ In other words, we all have unique life stories that can contribute to the web of interpersonal relationships. Arendt adds, “without action, the capacity to start something new and thus articulate the new beginning that comes into the world with the birth of each human being, the life of man...would indeed be doomed beyond salvation.”⁸⁵ Therefore, Arendt’s phenomenological approach is one of hope in which humans are not doomed to be running towards death, but one in which humans are not born in order to die but in order to begin something new. Her phenomenological ethics approach is grounded on the situation or the experiences of people in public spaces as well as their projects or human activity. For Arendt, access into the connections of our lived experience as well as understanding intersubjectivity is only possible by becoming aware of how we are embedded in our labor, work, and action as part of the experience of being in and of the world. (classes of people who do labor, who do action, etc.) Arendt’s idea captures how in order to be fully human we have to embrace all classes as part of what we do and how all three levels of human activity exist in us in different degrees by our weaving of the three or we would fail to get a full picture of the human condition.

This idea is made evident in the article titled, “What about the children? Benjamin and Arendt: on education, work, and the political.” Simon writes, “the theme of engendering critical,

⁸³ Ibid. P. 342.

⁸⁴ Ibid. P. 592.

⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 373.

thoughtful ‘action’ that works against the sort of ‘collectively sanctioned and mandated political policies’ that characterize totalitarian dictatorships, is one way to begin reflecting on Arendt’s philosophy of education.”⁸⁶ Arendt’s call to critical thinking as part of education models that break away from mass society mentality or practices that lead to indoctrination begins with adopting a stance that embraces education as an “instrument of politics.”

Her experiences as an immigrant and political exile shape her theories about the political role of education and warns us against the process of Americanization that is so embedded as part of education for immigrants in the United States. Simon describes, “Such Americanization took the form of educating immigrants to shed an old world in favor of a new one...that same Americanization grew into an educational policy that encourages promoting the illusion that a new world is being built, more specifically, a new world order is being built.”⁸⁷ Simon’s description of the Americanization process captures the experiences of the majority of students in the border town of El Paso, Texas and narrates some of the invisible undertones that shape classroom policies and objectives for first-year writing programs in El Paso Community and The University of Texas at El Paso. Alternative curricula needs to overcome the illusion of hierarchy or unidirectional knowledge transfer through which the instructor passes down knowledge to immigrant students in order to become better citizens. Graduate student teachers and students are being shaped by similar false myths without exploring opportunities for co-creation processes that give them a better sense of who they are and their identities as graduate student teachers and students in a first-year writing course or space.

⁸⁶ “What about the Children? Benjamin and Arendt on education, work, and the political” in *Teaching Global Community*, edited by César Rosatto and Hermán García, Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, (2011), P. 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* P. 5.

Similarly, in *Moving Up Without Losing Your Way*, Jennifer Morton discusses “the broken ties with family and friends, the severed connections with former communities, and the loss of identity—faced by students as they strive to earn a successful place in society.”⁸⁸ She captures the lost opportunities through the essential relationships with family, friends, and community. Similarly, I argue that the community college classroom can become the everyday classroom space which, rather than negating students’ essential relationships, brings these connections to the forefront along with their identities as a way to integrate these connections into their educational practices enabling them to be able to better negotiate the world and create new beginnings without having to sacrifice aspects by compartmentalizing their lives.

For Arendt, the possibility for change is identified with newcomers and with their potentiality for new beginnings. According to Arendt quoted in Simon’s “Welcoming Newcomers and Becoming Native to a Place: Arendt’s Polis and the City Beautiful of Detroit,” “we come into the world by virtue of birth, as newcomers and beginnings.”⁸⁹ As Jules Simon emphasizes newcomers are precisely the ones to bring about changes in the world (socio-economic connections) and create new connections. Arendt adds, “without action, the capacity to start something new and thus articulate the new beginning that comes into the world with the birth of each human being, the life of man... would indeed be doomed beyond salvation” (373). Therefore, Arendt’s phenomenological approach is one that embraces the ambiguity of new beginnings and of one in which humans are not doomed to be running towards death, but one in which humans are born in order to begin something new. Arendt and Simon show the

⁸⁸ Jennifer Morton, *MOVING up without LOSING YOUR WAY : The Ethical Costs of Upward Mobility*. (S.L.: Princeton Univ Press, 2021), P. 5.

⁸⁹ Jules Simon, “Welcoming Newcomers and Becoming Native to a Place: Arendt’s Polis and the City Beautiful of Detroit,” *Open Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (September 29, 2020): 586–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0130>, P. 592.

intertwined relationship of the creation of humans and the principle of freedom or the horizon of opportunity created by newcomers to recreate public spaces by embracing ambiguity.

Historicality and Storytelling

Comparably, all three phenomenologists (Beauvoir, Levinas, and Arendt) come to the idea of responsibility as something to strive for with a phenomenological ethics approach. Arendt finds “in the frailty of human affairs, and in the absence of a God or final end...a kind of redemption in the act of promising and forgiving, in the acts of promising to do something new, and releasing people from the prison of what they have done” (343). Therefore, Arendt places responsibility in the human community and in the need to understand the unreliability of human affairs due to human historicality and contingency. Instead Arendt emphasizes our stories and narratives as key to explain or describe who each of us is and makes a call is for each of us to know our own history and become responsible for our actions and that we act in promising and forgiving ways. [We both draw from the stories of others and are active creators of our own narratives.] Moreover, Simon writes, “The educator should stand in relation to the world in a representational disposition of responsibility even if she did not make it, in order to introduce a child to gradually take responsibility for the world.”⁹⁰ Educators hold a responsibility for the world that should be taught and shared with students. This teaching of responsibility can be shared with students through engaging them in various pedagogical (or classroom) situations of writing, dialogue, and faithful storytelling.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl writes in “Hannah Arendt’s Storytelling,” about Arendt’s love to tell stories. She writes, “She told her cherished stories again and again, with a charming

⁹⁰ Jules Simon, “Welcoming Newcomers and Becoming Native to a Place: Arendt’s Polis and the City Beautiful of Detroit,” *Open Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (September 29, 2020): 586–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0130>, P. 8.

disregard for mere facts and unflinching regard for the life of the story. She was also a collector, a connoisseur, of quotations and what Vico called ‘golden sayings.’”⁹¹ Arendt acknowledged that she lived in dark times and was very aware of the idea that the past could be transmitted as tradition—through story-telling and historical narratives [informed by ethical critique], but she also believed that when the past is not transmitted as tradition—but as ‘golden sayings’—it also allowed for free appropriation that can become dialogue. She also emphasizes thinking in her works as a form of thought and rethought spurred by internal and external dialogue. However, she differentiates the process of thinking from the process of writing.

Arendt writes about thinking in regards to Martin Heidegger and says:

“People followed the rumor about Heidegger in order to learn thinking. What was experienced was that thinking as pure activity...can become a passion which not so much rules and oppresses all other capacities and gifts, as it orders them and prevails through them. We are so accustomed to the old opposition of reason versus passion, spirit versus life, that the idea of passionate thinking, in which thinking aliveness become one, takes us somewhat aback” (The New Yorker, 1971). However, she grew apart from Heidegger’s ideas about thinking and she developed a type of thinking that was intertwined with the world and the flux of world changes in active thinking. For Arendt, active thinking brings new awareness into our actions and calls for a more faithful living experience. The type of faithful storytelling that [attends to the active role of thinking] could be a key for students [in my classroom] who are being asked to become aware of the ways education plays a part in their own oppression.

⁹¹ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, “Hannah Arendt’s Storytelling,” *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 183–90, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970279>, P. 3.

Part of an alternative curriculum for students in first-year writing classes, that I develop in this thesis, involves revealing the reality and the complicated process their graduate student instructors go through when stepping into a teaching role as a student and what Jessica Restaino is able to capture in the first pages of her book, *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*. Restaino focuses on the often-overlooked reality of so many in-training faculty or graduate student teachers including the anxieties, failures, accomplishments, and invaluable experiences during the first semester teaching writing. She explains that not enough research focuses on these experiences, but that it is a diverse field of study that could widen theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical views of rhetoric and composition. She uses Hannah Arendt's theories on labor, work, and action to examine the experiences of four graduate students as they are perhaps prematurely thrust upon their roles as instructors and undergo their first semester teaching. Restaino believes their experiences illustrate a process of "endless laboring" that impacts graduate student teachers and has altering effects in the field.

Restaino quotes Hannah Arendt's 1973 speech to describe writing as difficult and arbitrary:

You know the enormous difficulty each one of us has to write the first sentence. And this element of arbitrariness, we should never forget. But at the same time, this arbitrariness is somehow the mirror of the fact of natality. You know if you try to think of your own birth in terms of this, that everything that is meaningful must be necessary. That is an old notion of philosophy: that only that which cannot not be, is meaningful.⁹²

⁹² Arendt cited in Jessica Restaino, *First Semester : Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), P. 5.

According to Arendt, the act of writing is arbitrary but also a necessary way to insert our ideas into the world and to establish our distinctiveness. The words of a writer act upon the words of another and create a written exchange. Restaino draws from Arendt's ideas that prioritize arbitrariness in writing and her theory of natality because she sees these exchanges as new beginnings as key to continually renew our relationships to each other and avoid motionless or dormant ways of being in the world. Restaino writes, "Process-as-practice undermines a new teacher's potential to be a student of writing development, in much the same way that an overly formulaic approach to process instruction can fit diverse student needs into a limiting, generic set of predetermined practices."⁹³ If new graduate student teachers are prematurely exposed to their new roles and buried in Arendtian ideas of labor, it hinders their growth as both students and instructors. Graduate student teachers are no longer able to identify paths for themselves to discover their own unique identities as teachers and are often forced to adopt prescriptive methods and teaching practices. While this may be done in an effort to avoid hurting students and quickly performing an expected teaching role, instead of allowing for a serendipitous time and space to create better instructors who have the ability to experiment and reflect as they embark in this new experience, individual identities are made to fit the role.

Homely "Little Things" versus Unhomely

Hannah Arendt's theories capture the way human historicality produces a network of stories and narratives, where each is called on to explain who he or she is and shows the inextricable connection between action and speech (words) to the human community. This relationship is further exemplified in her work, *The Human Condition*, in which she takes on the familiar concept of "home" and by placing in different contexts is able show the dynamic and

⁹³ Ibid. P. 29.

different meanings for it as well as shed light on the opposing term and relationship with “homelessness.”

In her work, Arendt attempts to answer the question: “What does it mean to be at home in the world?” and she writes, “the man-made home erected on earth and made of the material which earthly nature delivers into human hands, consists not of things that are consumed but of things that are used.”⁹⁴ According to Arendt, earth provides the materials that we use to build a “world of things” and creates the conditions for human life. The things we create are part of what allows us to make home here, and it sustains us to give the necessary form and meaning to daily life. She further writes, “But without being at home in the midst whose durability makes them fit for use and for erecting a world whose very permanence stands in direct contrast to life, this life would never be human.”⁹⁵ She captures the two opposing images of durability with that of the condition of human life, which is ever changing and impermanent. It is the durability of the things we build such as a house that allows us to be human and that offers us the assurance or guarantee that we can contribute a more lasting effect or influence on the man-made world.

The idea of home also points to the concepts of public and private, which are realms that Arendt’s works often focus on. She parallels the concepts of home and oikos in relationship to political life and explains, “According to Greek thought, the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to the natural association whose center is the home (oikiri) and the family.” Arendt argues that the private space of home is necessary in order for the second life or “public life” to exist. In other words, a home represents

⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 20.

not just a shelter or a place to be in or belong to, but it is also a necessity that allows us to exist privately and to emerge publicly.

For Arendt, the home is necessary since it provides shelter or concealment to intimate areas of life that are not suitable for public appearance. This is evident in her description of intimacy in which she says, “The intimacy of the heart, unlike the private household, has no objective tangible place in the world, nor can the society against which it protests and asserts itself be localized with the same certainty as public space.”⁹⁶ Arendt describes how certain intimate aspects of life cannot be shared in common and the home provides a shelter for them and to our basic condition to be human.

However, Arendt also makes the distinction and speaks to the idea that home is not always tied to the physical or material structures that allow humans to make a “world of things.” Arendt also views home in terms of the elements of life that make daily life livable. This idea is further captured in Arendt’s work titled “We Refugees” which was written in 1943 only two years after she had emigrated to the U.S. In this work, Arendt speaks of home not in terms of spatial or material elements but in a sense of loss. Her essay is a reflection of the condition of refugees and more specifically the Jewish people that committed suicide during and after the war. She writes:

The story of our struggle has finally become known. We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our

⁹⁶ Ibid.

relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.⁹⁷

For Arendt, home is not a physical or material place any longer since it was taken and it became a place to which she cannot return. Home exists as a memory of what was familiar or what was natural and part of daily and private life. Her sense of loss and longing for home is also related to a sense of loss of the world. The private and public components or the material and immaterial components of home are destroyed impacting the feeling of familiarity. Therefore, in this case, Arendt's understanding of home is one that is connected to the Latin idea of habitus. Habitus represents "the familiarity of patterns, the physical appearance of one's self in the world, and the house as a material structure."⁹⁸ Home allows me to keep or store things that I will need for tomorrow or that are important in helping me fulfill my projects such as getting dressed for work highlighting an important distinction between home versus house.

Furthermore, Arendt's sense of loss reaches into the core of what makes life livable and in this world and presents home not as a place, but as the things that provide form, stability, and reliability to our daily life including language, familiarity, and the ability to express one's feelings openly. In addition, "The world that we make is necessary for being human...the durability of this man made-world—the language, the tradition, the buildings, and institutions—allows us to be together, to be human together."⁹⁹

However, this hopeful understanding of home and this phenomenological approach also signals or conceals a complex relationship captured by the terms homelessness and being

⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," accessed September 7, 2022, <https://contemporarythinkers.org/hannah-arendt/essay/refugees/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

unhomed. Postcolonial discourse and Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomely aims at adopting a theoretical position that escapes binary oppositions of center and margin or civilized and savage especially when describing immigrants. For Bhabha, one aspect of hybridity is unhomeliness and he refers to a hybrid identity as an unhomely identity to capture a feeling of being caught between two cultures. He says, "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres."¹⁰⁰ Bhabha describes being in a state of unhomely is a state simply of lacking a home, or the opposite of having a home, it is rather the creeping recognition that the line between the world and the home are breaking down. He adds, "In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting."¹⁰¹ Unhomely, therefore, speaks to a sensation that your home is not yours or as holes in the fabric of reality.

This is true for many Mexican Americans in El Paso who might feel in a continuous in-between state of homeness and homelessness or threshold of being and non-being or self and other. They negotiate the U.S. policies of immigration which have historically seen immigrants as fixed objects with fixed identities only in contexts of labor or work, but that have historically failed to see the larger web of relations to which they belong and that have failed to view them as newcomers with potential for transcendence and always in flux. As Arendt describes, "Under the most diverse conditions and disparate circumstances, we watch the development of the same phenomena—homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth." Overall, a phenomenological framework reveals the complexity of the phenomena of U.S.

¹⁰⁰ Homi Bhabha, "The World and the Home," *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466222>, P. 108.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* P. 110.

immigration conditions and provides a better understanding of freedom and awareness that can lead to a more ethical approach to pedagogical practices, policy-making and potentiality for transcendence, new beginnings, and a horizon of opportunities for immigrants in the U.S.

Students as Newcomers and New Beginnings

“We are born into this world of plurality where father and mother stand ready for us, ready to receive us and welcome us and guide us and prove that we are not strangers.”

-Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, 1954

Arendt’s quote illustrates the connection between an individual and the world. She describes the process with the words readying, receiving, welcoming, and guiding to outline social incorporation. Her example shows an awareness about the difficult work needed for this process to be a successful one. These ideas are linked to Arendt’s newcomer theories and society’s response. However, they are different from her interpretations of the “second birth” which she describes as the event when an individual moves beyond the welcome of the world. She writes in *The Human Condition*, “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our physical appearance.”¹⁰² The concept of insertion and appearance reinforces the second birth describes the gesture of opening a place or making a space that must be continually recreated by action.

According to Xavier Marquez, despite the fact that they do not reference each other in their works, Arendt’s space of appearance correlates with Michel Foucault’s space of surveillance and can enhance each other’s critique of modern society. One of the uniting aspects of both concepts is that both look at visibility and power or power relations. Space of appearance

¹⁰² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1958).

focuses on the common visibility of actors and how it generates power, which can be understood as the potential for collective action. Space of surveillance focuses on how visibility facilitates control and normalization producing relationships of inequality. While Arendt's ideas of politics and power center on "high politics (revolutions, political regimes, ravages or totalitarianism) that make possible collective action in the public realm"¹⁰³ Foucault focuses on institutions such as prison, asylums, and schools that are closed to public view. Yet, they are both concerned with the relationships of power, visibility, and identity. They both try to understand the ways in which "who we are" depends on how and where we are seen. Arendt's spaces of appearance is concerned with where our identity emerges as we act as equals with others, and Foucault's spaces of surveillance is concerned with where certain identities come to be imposed on and we are made subjects.

The two types of spaces represent poles in a spectrum of possibilities where we become partially constituted by the ways in which we become visible. Marquez writes, "A space of appearance is a setting where individuality emerges from self-disclosure among equals; a space of surveillance is a setting where an individual's identity is produced through specialized techniques of surveillance and punishment."¹⁰⁴ At the same time, invisibility shapes individuality and enables different forms of power. For Marquez, it is necessary to understand the relationship between these two types of spaces because a space of surveillance can thus work in tandem with the maintenance of a genuine space of appearance. For instance, when political leaders cannot control the conditions of their visibility, they are both more subject to the surveillance of the

¹⁰³ Xavier Marquez, "Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance," *Polity* 44, no. 1 (2012): 6–31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41426920>.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* P. 7.

public and more likely to engage in genuine action, which is unpredictable and incalculable and capable of generating new modes and orders.

Overall, Arendt's theories offer a philosophical reflection that captures the structures and mystery of human action. She asks us to reflect on "what we are doing" by using categories adequate to the processes of an active life. In other words, the categories of labor, work, and action can be understood as "articulations of the human action" in its everydayness. Arendt makes the connection between human action and humanity as the way we "can talk with and make sense to each other and to [our]selves." Therefore, this description introduces a plurality that holds the human condition and assumes an individual as an acting being. Arendt's definition of plurality combines the "basic condition of both action and speech." Given this understanding, equality "enables human beings to understand each other and those who came before them, so distinction appears as the quality that makes both speech and action possible and meaningful." As a result, humanity must be understood as the "paradoxical plurality of unique beings."¹⁰⁵

As part of developing an alternative curriculum that is partially informed by Arendt's theories, I take up again the discussion about spaces to discuss how the classroom space is not only a political and public space, but also holds power. One of the challenges that comes with developing this alternative curriculum lies in making those power relationships more visible and making bridges or transitions in each classroom space from a space of surveillance to a space of appearance for students.

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) as well as El Paso Community College (EPCC) attracts a unique group of students who have been influenced to accept the ideas about

¹⁰⁵ João J. Vila-Chã, "The Plurality of Action: Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 50, no. 1/3 (1994): 477–84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40337103>.

social mobility as a key factor in their academic experiences. Anecdotally, social mobility is a popular narrative along the U.S.-Mexico border the use of which attracts generations of working-class, low-income, and immigrant college students. These latter categories by and large describe the demographics of UTEP and EPCC. UTEP is also one of the largest Hispanic-serving institutions in the United States and is consistently “Ranked in the Top 10 for Social Mobility.”¹⁰⁶ While attractive, these marketing narratives often pay very little attention to the personal compromises that students make to enter worlds different from their own and overlook the ethical dilemmas tied to them.

However, these ubiquitous marketing strategies assume no previous or future ties or connections to community, identity, family, friends, or history. In essence, they work like myths created around student identities which place them at a disadvantage by assuming that they are empty vessels and that they are alone and empty when entering a classroom. These myths have been perpetuated throughout the El Paso educational community, and it becomes a problematic cycle in which students gain the ability to be reproduced through a mold with the same materials and expecting the same predictable outcomes. In other words, the education model becomes an assembly line for ideal future students and workers. Academic institutions become industrialized, and education becomes the process by which students become commodified into a capitalist economy. These traditional models of education disrupt self-reflection and self-awareness processes that are vital for students as they negotiate the new expectations of college and their communities. Schools and the classroom space become spaces of surveillance and not spaces of appearance for students.

¹⁰⁶ “Social Mobility,” www.utep.edu, n.d., <https://www.utep.edu/social-mobility/>.

When students enter school, they take on the subjectivity of a student. However, they have as many subjectivities as the different sorts of relationships they have and as many as the variety of roles they have, e.g., sibling, parent, cousin, friend, spouse, lover, sexual orientation, age, employee, coach, etc. Another way to think about how they are subjected is through the metaphor that Louis Althusser discusses. He describes how we are hailed, he says, and in responding to the hail, we are interpellated to the subject position (Althusser). His example involves a cop pursuing a suspect, who yells out “Stop!” As the pursued subject stops and turns around, they assume the subject position of a suspect. In other words, the pursuer recognizes the person as being a particular kind of subject and the subject recognizes in themselves that they occupy the position. This double recognition is the act of interpellation.

Another useful metaphor is the panoptic architecture of a prison which describes a space of surveillance (Bentham, Foucault). Designed so that prisoners can see a centralized guard station with blinds that prohibit them from actually seeing if they are being seen, prisoners adjust their behavior to the norms of the subject position of a docile prisoner. Therefore, the surveillance of the panopticon enacts the same sort of double recognition as involved with interpellation. Effectively, we are surveilled in our subject positions by our cultural others who are, themselves, performing the position and reproducing it. Are we a good student? Are we a good employee and so forth? To the degree that we perform our subject positions, we can experience reward or punishment, as well as everything in between. Often, we purposefully negotiate the norms of subject positions, while at other times, we purposefully resist or push back against them. Sometimes, we are successful; sometimes, we are not. Often, we achieve or fail by degrees. It really depends on the situation and the degree of agency we are able to exert.

Foucault's ideas on power and surveillance (panopticon) also work through a process of inclusion and exclusion restricting the subject's identification. As described by Chris Weedon, "Identification occurs when individuals are inserted in specific discourses and they repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature."¹⁰⁷ In those instances, when this identification does not occur, the individual experiences dis-identification and a rejection of hegemonic discourses or norms. Dis-identification leaves the individual in a state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. Thus, subjectivity in this case can be regarded as a sense of self, but also involves relations of power. At the same time, identity then becomes a relational structure that is understood as a "limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is."¹⁰⁸

In order to move away from schools or the classroom acting as spaces of surveillance, we have to allow for practices that create spaces of opportunities for students and shape spaces for appearance and collective action. As I alluded to earlier in this chapter, Arendt describes possible new ways of approaching spaces and new possibilities that involve being focused on self-identity, temporality, and evisceration of everydayness. For this reason, I will think about these ideas as the motivating force for certain projects and readings I will design for the FYC1 course that focuses on the everydayness and helps me deepen the concept of the everyday learner. In the article "Being in Time," Bloom quotes the ideas of Sullivan, a philosopher at the University of Notre Dame, and agrees with the idea that we tend to favor or set as a commonplace the future not only in life but in education models. Bloom explains, "Sullivan is mainly concerned with how we relate to time as individuals, and she thinks that many of us do it poorly because we are

¹⁰⁷ Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture : [Narratives of Difference and Belonging]* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), P. 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* P. 19.

‘time-biased’—we have unwarranted preferences about when events should happen.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, Bloom and Sullivan highlight the dangers with living outside of the moment and seeing time as a fractured consciousness between past, present, and future. Sullivan describes some of the time biases that exist include a near bias, structural bias, and a future bias. Near bias is defined as caring too much about what’s about to happen, and too little about the future. A structural bias describes preferring experiences to have a certain temporal shape such as planning a vacation where the best part comes at the end. Future bias is defined as the irrational willingness to discount what’s happened in the past because it is in the past and in favor of the future. Although Sullivan clearly expresses all of these biases are mistakes, Bloom argues “perhaps our biggest time error is near bias—caring too much about what’s about to happen, and too little about the future.”¹¹⁰ While this might be the case for life, I would disagree with Bloom, and argue in terms of education and education models, a future bias is our current biggest error. Designing courses in terms of what a student will need in the future and the world will be like in the future has caused students to ignore themselves in the moment. Sullivan argues for time-neutrality and temporal neutrality, “a habit of mind that gives the past, the present, and the future equal weight,” to help us think better about everyday problems and make better everyday decisions. Bloom describes how “thinking about our future selves has even been shown to resemble third-person thinking at the neural level.”¹¹¹ It causes individuals to change their way of thinking in a way that is different from when individuals think about themselves in the present. So, why should we favor the future and not the past and only consider where students

¹⁰⁹ Paul Bloom, “Being in Time,” *The New Yorker*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/being-in-time>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

end and not where they have been or are? Bloom concludes, achieving time neutrality “make[s] us more rational, more kind to others, and, at times, more happy.”¹¹²

This sentiment captures what Arendt would describe as the possibility for redemption in the sphere of human action. As part of the paradoxes, Arendt captures the idea of the irreversibility and unpredictability inherent to human action as “something arising not from one another, possibly higher human faculty, but from the very potentialities of action itself” and found through the power of our “faculty of forgiving.” Forgiving as an action to “undo the deeds of the past,” and “the capacity to bind oneself through promises serves to ‘set up in the ocean of uncertainty.’” Forgiveness should be understood as unpredictable and an action that will make us free from the acts of our own action has once set in motion.

¹¹² Ibid.

**Conclusion: Theory to Practice, Rethinking First-Year Composition through
Phenomenological Ethics**

“If we’re good enough teachers, are we only good enough to help students navigate the upward and (sometimes slippery) slope, but not good enough to get them to the summit? Should we, dare we, ask more of ourselves—as teachers?”

--Lyn Z. Bloom

Until this point in my thesis, I have argued the theories from phenomenologists, Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hannah Arendt offer a glimpse into the intricate relationship as a teacher and scholar as well as trying to embrace a fluid model of theory and practice. Their theories have allowed me to adopt a different lens when developing a curriculum that considers how education can become more equitable when we turn to phenomenological ethics to inform the study of rhetoric and composition. I have chosen these theorists because they are teachers whose teachings value the role of language, rhetoric, and discourse. At the same time, their theories in phenomenology contribute to an alternative model of education that embraces ambiguity, unpredictability, and openness to optimizing individual students’ unique potentials. In addition, in adopting some of their lenses, I was able to focus on how, with their help, alternative teaching spaces and teaching practices for writing can be developed, specifically at the introductory level when students are first being exposed to academic ‘training’ and expectations, as in first-year writing courses. However, throughout this process I ran into the most asked question and the question that has haunted me since the onset of this endeavor, “How does this look in the classroom?”

I related to Howard Tinberg’s experience in “Working Through Theory in a Community College Composition Classroom,” and to his sentiment about “not sufficiently [thinking] through

how [one] might translate the theoretical understandings contained in the *Ways of Reading* to the community college classroom.”¹¹³ Was I giving students the academic task of “text wrestling” through Beauvoir, Levinas and Arendt’s in line with more equitable notions of education and phenomenological ethics? Following similar critical questions to the one’s Tinberg used to self-reflect on his own practices, I concluded that asking students to “read against the grain” or embrace a “difficult essays” approach would be a disservice to students whose main goal, at times, remains to figure out if the college experience is right for them. As Tinberg writes, “First-year composition must be true not only to the conventions, scholarship, and best practices of Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline, but it must also be true to a whole galaxy of other concerns, including the nature of the institution and the diverse needs of its students.”¹¹⁴ One of those other concerns includes the responsibility of knowing for many of these college students, this is the first college course they will take and it has the potential to determine the rest of their college experience. For example, if students do well in this first course they might be more inclined to continue their education, but if they fail, they might drop out of college.

I constantly thought about these ideas as I tried to design a curriculum that reclaimed the experimentation and unpredictability element that every course should have, but I also thought about the best ways to translate the theoretical underpinnings into practice for me and for students. Therefore, I opted to introduce to students some of the theory from these three phenomenologists through short excerpts and quotes. I would give students time to read in class and we would have discussions in class about what they understood and collaboratively we

¹¹³ Howard Tinberg. “Working Through Theory in a Community College Composition Classroom,” in *First-Year Composition*, ed. Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F Lunsford, (Parlor Press LLC, 2014).

¹¹⁴ Ibid. P. 237.

would work with a meaning that would feed into their major assignments. Additionally, I had to work with certain constraints as I designed an ENGL 1301 course for El Paso Community College. There is a skeletal description of assignments that must be met in the semester, but these are the assignments that I was able to shape in a way that allowed students to self-reflect on certain aspects of their lived experiences and were influenced by aspects of the theories.

“Teaching about Teaching”: Meta-Pedagogical Approaches

Course Description

The purpose of English 1301 is the intensive study of and practice in writing processes, from invention and researching to drafting, revising, and editing, both individually and collaboratively. Emphasis on effective rhetorical choices and focus on writing the academic essay as a vehicle for learning, communicating, and critical analysis.

Course Description Reflection

The purpose of this English 1301 course is to reflect about how we think about language in action and especially how writing is taught at the college level. The course will consider how education can become more equitable when we turn to phenomenological ethics to inform the study of rhetoric. Emphasis will be placed in collaboration and experience reclaiming the messy, experimental, in-flux, unique, and in-between nature of teaching to develop a counterstory to decadent models of education that shape dominant myths about learning and teaching.

Course Objectives

- Engage in critical thinking skills, creative thinking, innovation and inquiry.
- Demonstrate analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
- Demonstrate the effective written, oral, and/or visual communication skills.
- Analyze the subject, occasion, audience, and purpose of writing assignments.

- Edit to improve content, organization, style, grammatical correctness, spelling, punctuation, usage and mechanics using Standard Written English.
- Demonstrate personal responsibility skills including the ability to connect choices and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Additional Course Objectives and Themes Reflection

- *Making the invisible become visible through reflection and critical thinking*
 - *Understand rhetoric and language use as intentional and never neutral*
 - *Consider how writing can provide ways to be socially aware and active in determining educational pathways*
- Respond/consider ideas presented about dominant narratives (ideal future student and the “real world”) and alternative narratives (everyday student and the everyday classroom)*
- *Explore power relations and interventions through the concept of misfitting*
 - *Understand counterstory as a method to disrupt standardized and dominant notions of language and writing*
 - *Challenge traditional notions of truth and objectivity*
 - *Explore through rhetorical practices the ideas behind the concepts of situation, ambiguity, and responsibility informed by phenomenological ethics*
 -

Simone de Beauvoir’s Inspired Assignment:

Descriptive Essay: Body as a Situation

For this assignment, I'd like you to compose a brief essay, in which you describe your **body as situation**. In other words, you can choose a situation to describe your embodied experience by paying attention to the **five senses** OR you can attach a situation to each of the five senses and develop each experience. In this essay, you will try to pay attention more to the environment or cultural situation and how you interpret it using your body. You want to add as much detail as you can since this is a descriptive essay. Try to describe the situation to a person that is not there or has no knowledge of what you're describing. You may be funny, too, or capture a combination of different aspects of the situation(s).

Audience: Even though the essay may be quite personal, do your best to include your reader's interests. How can my essay express both a personal and public scope? Does my description capture my embodied experience(s)?

This assignment asks students to think about themselves not only as individuals or bodies in the world, but asks them to disclose themselves or reveal themselves to consciousness within a world of relations and commitments. In other words, the assignment intends to give students a space for self-reflection where they can also view themselves as embedded in projects that can also reveal their passionate attachments (Royster). Royster believes through the awareness of one's own passionate attachments and sources of passionate attachments, we are able to better understand what effects they have on ourselves and others. In asking students to reflect and think about their embodied experiences and introduce some ambiguity and some of what Beauvoir describes as struggle, paradoxes, and tensions that come with action or acting in ambiguity.

Emmanuel Levinas's Inspired Assignment:

Class Activity and Reflection: "Disrupting the Chair"

The idea for the class activity is by Penny A. Pasque and is titled “Disrupting the Chair,”¹¹⁵ which can serve as a non-traditional introductions activity for students. Students are asked to leave their comfortable and expected space in their chairs and with their bodies create a circle. An “identity” is called and students are asked to join in the circle if they claim that identity by taking a step forward or remain in the outer circle if they do not claim the “identity.” For example, a low-risk statement or identity will be read out loud, “who loves chocolate?” Students who identify with this statement would step into the circle for a few seconds and then move back out into the larger circle. The purpose of this activity is to have students reflect on their social identities, the Other, and their experiences as well as show how identities are fluid and might change over time.¹¹⁶ The activity is followed with further reflection in which students are asked to think about the identities that made them feel comfortable or less comfortable sharing as well as what identities they’re most aware of and which they are least aware of and why. This class activity is important for my curriculum because it will challenge students to reflect differently about their identities and in a way performatively create the face-to-face encounter in class:

Disrupting the Chair: Who’s Here? Class Activity

If you don’t feel comfortable discussing or disclosing aspects of your identity, you don’t have to participate. Also, don’t “out” anyone on any identities. If you’re not fully committed to a statement about identity, you can also simply add a leg to the circle or not step fully into the circle.

- Who here loves chocolate?
- Who here loves cheese?
- Who here loves McDonald’s?
- Who here loves Whataburger?

¹¹⁵ Penny A. Pasque. “Advancing Disruptive Methodological Perspectives in Educational Qualitative Research Through Teaching and Learning,” in *Disrupting Qualitative Inquiry: Possibilities and Tensions in Educational Research*, ed. Ruth Nicole Brown, Rozana Carducci, and Candace R. Kuby (New York, Peter Lang, 2014).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* P. 233.

- Who here loves Mexican food?
- Who here loves sports?
- Who here identifies as an extrovert?
- Who here identifies as an introvert?
- Who here is an only-child?
- Who here identifies as the oldest child?
- Who here identifies as the youngest child?
- Who here identifies as the middle child?
- Who here identifies as first-generation college student?
- Who here identifies as a woman?
- Who here identifies as a man?
- Who here identifies as transgendered, gender transgressive, gender queer, or gender identities that I did not name?
- Who here identifies as a veteran or member of the armed forces?
- Who here identifies as religious?
- Who here identifies as spiritual?
- Who here identifies as white?
- Who here identifies as something other than white?
- Who here identifies as Hispanic or Latinx?
- Who here identifies as a parent?
- Who here identifies as an immigrant?
- Who here identifies as employed?
- Who here identifies as successful?

- Who here has any additional questions/categories to ask?

Reflection:

1. What identities are you aware of most often? Least often? Why?
2. How do social identities relate to your field or discipline?
3. In what ways did this activity change the way you think about your identity?
4. Were you always confident to step in and out of the circle?
5. Which categories were the hardest to disclose in a public space?
6. In what ways did this exercise limit or bind identities?
7. Were you surprised with your decision to step in or out of the circle in any of the categories? Explain.
8. How has your identity changed? How do you think it has changed or continues to change?
9. How does this activity relate to language use?
10. What do you think about your own identity?

While this activity might seem simple, I believe it is able to introduce to students many of the ideas that Levinas captures in his theories. Levinas's approach to phenomenology begins with

the face-to-face interaction, which introduces the alterity of the Other, but also the unforeseeableness. As he explains, not knowing how someone will respond to someone's demand shows equal opportunity or freedom to resist and captures the struggle. While I might create the demand by reading an identity or statement out loud, an opportunity for unpredictability and spontaneity is created. I cannot predict how or which students will join the circle and which students will not and in some cases they are unaware about how they will respond to the demand. At the same time, students are (at least during that activity) unable to reduce each Other to a box or to the label of student. The unpredictability of the face-to-face encounter in this activity can create a situation in which students reflect on how they are not only "students in a class" but have different lived experiences and cannot reduce the Other to sameness since they have different social experiences. The resistance that students might experience in this activity to disclose aspects of their identities or their experiences can capture the call to be responsible for the Other.

Hannah Arendt's Inspired Assignment:

Compare/Contrast Essay: Fitting/Misfitting in Public Spaces

For this assignment, I'd like you to compose a brief essay, that compares and contrasts a "fitting" and a "misfitting" situation in your life. You need to draw from Garland-Thomson's definition and conceptualization of "fitting/misfitting" and how it relates to your own experiences. Reflect on how these experiences can relate to your public affairs as a college student, worker, member of the community, or family life. Of course, you can also draw from any other experiences you think will better showcase or illustrate your understanding of the concepts "fitting/misfitting" and "public space."

As a brainstorming activity for students to begin considering their experiences with fitting and misfitting in public spaces, I developed a worksheet titled “Negotiating College Expectations through Fitting/Misfitting Situations.” The following passage by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is read as a class and discussed:

Fitting and misfitting denote an encounter in which two things come together in either harmony or disjunction. When the shape and substance of these two things correspond in their union, they fit. A misfit, conversely describes an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole...Misfits are inherently unstable rather than fixed, yet they are very real because they are material rather than linguistic constructions. The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits...These instances of resourcefulness arising from misfits are not ‘wounded attachments’ nor is this a politics of resentment; this is the productive power of misfitting .(Garland-Thomson 592, 604)

I follow up the reading with an example of a student, Luis Garcia, who arrives at college from his home in Brownsville, Texas, where his grandparents immigrated from Mexico in the 1960s. With family on both sides of the border, Luis grew up speaking Spanish and a Tex-Mex dialect, only using English in school. A strong student throughout high school, Luis has received a local scholarship—and he too is excited but nervous about what college will expect of him (Lunsford, “Negotiating College Expectations”). As a class, we try to predict some of the ways Luis might experience fitting and misfitting relations in the new college environment and discourse given his background. At the same time, students are asked to reflect on how Luis a newcomer might recreate or represent a new beginning as described by Arendt. While this connection might be more part of my reflection of the concepts, I believe Garland-Thomson’s productive power of

misfitting is very similar and connected to Arendt's concept of new beginnings. I want students to reflect on how they acted in the instances they felt they were a fit and how they acted on the instances they felt they were a misfit. Ultimately, I want students to reflect on how those relationships might have influenced their actions.

Overall, the experience of taking classes in philosophy, wrestling with the texts of these three figures, and trying to develop an alternative curriculum for a first-year writing course informed by some of the ideas of phenomenological ethics has been a tall order. It has been an insightful experience that more than anything has created spaces of endless thinking and reflection regarding my role as a student and instructor in a border town. I have constantly reflected on what I am asking instructors to do because this could also turn out to be the most difficult way to go about developing an alternative curriculum for a class. However, I also know that this thesis has not only answered the call to develop a curriculum where students are able to realize their own stories and become aware of their potentialities, but it has done the same for me.

I have been able to bring together my own experiences as a Mexican American in El Paso, Texas, community college student, philosophy student, and rhetoric student, into the classroom space and have fully embraced my responsibility for the Other with my students. I embarked on a misfitting process by taking classes in philosophy that ultimately yielded a productive approach to teaching and widened my horizon of possibilities. I also embraced the ambiguity and unforeseeable nature that comes with experimentation in academic spaces and with students who bring their own lived experiences and expectations into the classroom. While there are many different ways I could have incorporated my understandings of the theories of Beauvoir, Levinas, and Arendt, I realize that there is not only a way for classes to be, but also a

way that classes could be. Therefore, I do call upon instructors to find in their own experiences new and alternative ways of teaching or embodying the classroom space where students' unpredictable and irreducible identities are centered in an ethical space that is able to hold our ambiguities, diversities, and potentialities.

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Vita

Corina Lerma was born in El Paso, Texas and graduated with honors and an International Baccalaureate diploma from Coronado High School. She then continued her academic career in El Paso Community College where she completed and graduated with an Associate of Arts in General Studies and an Associate of Arts in Journalism. In 2014, Corina earned a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at Austin and later graduated with an MA in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Corina was completing this thesis as well as working towards her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition at UTEP.

She has taught first-year composition courses at UTEP and now as a teaching fellow of the UTEP-EPCC Humanities Collaborative continues to teach English and Philosophy courses at El Paso Community College. In her free time, she enjoys reflecting about rhetoric, philosophy, and education practices as well as playing fetch with her puppy Woodstock.

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