The Contagion of Sharing: Rhetorics of Community in an Age of Digital Media

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This dissertation, entitled “The Contagion of Sharing: Rhetorics of Community in an Age of Digital Media,” interrogates the relationship between rhetoric, ethics, and politics in community building, practice, and critique in an age of online communities and new media writing. I focus on how rhetoric and composition scholars overemphasize the role inclusion plays in communal phenomena and that not enough attention is paid to understanding how community practices and processes require both sharing and protection, identity and difference, and thus, inclusion and exclusion. I argue that, as teachers of rhetoric and writing, if we intend to help students write for, with, to and about various discourse communities, then we need to develop rhetorics that engage with problematic inclusivities, such as cultural appropriation.

In order to realize such rhetorics, my research draws on continental philosophers who have engaged with the concept of community following the atrocities of World War II. I place these thinkers alongside rhetoric scholars to redefine how rhetorical theorists can critique, produce, and practice community in political and pedagogical situations. To avoid appeals of nostalgia and false sentimentality, my starting point is to begin viewing constitutive and normative theories of community practice as related but distinct—something very few if any community theorists in rhetoric studies have done. Given my desire to balance theory with praxis, I offer case studies of religious communities, art
communities, and political communities to serve as examples of how my theory relates to
the pragmatic ways we engage in community practices in our everyday lives.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Ashley, Olivia, Lucy, and Greta.
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Numerous people have had significant influence on how I conceptualized and wrote this dissertation. Victor Villanueva and Patricia Freitag Ericsson recommended that I apply for the Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design program at Clemson University, so I might study under Victor Vitanza. Victor Vitanza introduced me to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Diane Davis, both of whom I met in Switzerland at the European Graduate School. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been introduced to Todd May and his work. I am indebted to his valuable insight and the challenging but always-relevant questions he raised in line with my work. Victor and Todd deserve more gratitude than I can give. Beth Lauritis and David Blakesley also had a significant impact on my thinking, as well as many more: Patricia Fancher, Glen Southergill, Steven Keoni Holmes, Nicole McFarlane, Austin Jackson, Jimmy Butts, Steven Katz, Cynthia Haynes, Andrew Israelsen, Diane Perpich, Frank Farmar, Werner Hamacher, Manuel De Landa, Witt Salley, Christa Albrecht, Doug Downs, John Goshert, and all my other incredible colleagues at Clemson University and the European Graduate School.
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INTRODUCTION:
THE CRISIS IN RHETORICS OF COMMUNITY

Community is both necessary and impossible.

Roberto Esposito

Sharing is contagious. It is also contagious to value sharing. Now the reader of these statements may assume a figurative connotation of contagious as a positive emotion or attitude that is easily spread to others, resulting in a desire to be included in this contagiousness. However, what if what is being shared is contagious itself, such as the common cold or the flu? Or, if we remain in the figurative, what if what is shared is an ideology of hatred? Then the contagiousness of sharing takes on a new meaning, and is not so positive, resulting in less of a desire to be included in or include this kind of sharing in our notions of community. Nevertheless, the appeal of sharing, in particular sharing as inclusion, remains.

In the 2012 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Charlotte, North Carolina one of the themes repeated over and over by some of the participants was that they were “the party of inclusion.” By this they meant they shared interests with groups who have been historically marginalized in American society at large, including those concerned with political issues of gay and lesbian rights, racial equality, equal pay for women, and other important political problems. The DNC participants wanted to include these groups in the “big umbrella” of the party. However, when the ethics of inclusion informing these rhetorics of inclusion are put to the test by the satirical news reporters from The Daily
Show with Jon Stewart, viewers quickly discover that this party of inclusion actually excludes many people and many value systems.

Stewart begins the piece by stating, “Tolerance. It’s one of the basic tenets of the Democratic Party. But is there truly room for everyone under the DNC’s big tent?” When asked what the key message of the party is, DNC members’ and participants’ answers include the following: “We are the big tent party. We represent everyone.” “We’re definitely the arms wide open party.” “We have just about everyone you can possibly imagine in the party.” And “We’re the party of inclusion.” However, when asked by the reporters to mention who is not included, the interviewees respond with the following answers: “Everyone’s welcome, except unless [sic] you own a corporation, or if you’re a hunter, or a gun owner, white males . . . they [the Republican Party] are a bunch of gun-toting hillbilly tea-partiers. That’s all I have to say.” And “We wouldn’t include those beer-toting fakers down in Florida, the Tampa [Republican National] convention guys.” The reporters then encourage the respondents to describe these types, and a whole host of derogatory terms are used to describe Republicans and conservatives.

Of course, the mock news reporters’ task was simply to make fun of this stance, and argue for more inclusivity, while perhaps playing on the interviewees’ willingness to keep talking. One can speculate on the many reasons these DNC “conventioners” spoke the way they did—from the simple appeal to perpetuate the conversation, to feeling safe to criticize in that environment. However, what is really exposed is that for the Democratic Party to include these LGBT, racial equality, and women’s rights issues, the party members felt they had to exclude other positions—namely, positions that would
attempt to oppress LGBT, racial equality, and women’s rights. Thus, while inclusivity is one of the DNC’s practices, an ethic of inclusion is neither the actual basis nor the end justification for their rhetorical practices. Of course, such an absolute ethic of inclusion would be impossible to put into practice, even in their “big tent” community. Nevertheless, the appeal of absolute inclusion, particularly within discussions of community, remains.

Thus, let me begin by arguing that the importance and value of this dissertation on *Rhetorics of Community* is, in the beginning and in the end, very connected to everyday concerns of human life. The character of such connected concerns depends greatly on our particular, moment-by-moment perspectives: we all belong, are a part of, or even might think we own various communities. These perspectives are expressed daily in our very thought and communication. In one moment I may say that I belong to a community. In the next moment that same community may become my community. As I state above, such language of community, whether in terms of “sharing,” “inclusion,” or “togetherness,” is contagious, for being in a community is not only part of who we are, but who we want to become.

Generally, we humans want to belong to a community, and in Western traditions we use the term *community* to create a sense of belonging and togetherness. We are extremely aware of some of these human collectives with which we are associated; we give little thought to others. Some we are not even conscious of until that group we did not see ourselves being a part of comes into crisis. Often this crisis is the result of a “contagion” of our community by other communities—a contagion that threatens our
sense of a “we,” even if that “we” had gone unacknowledged until the threat occurred. Our group then becomes, or at least is then recognized as a community, even though the sense of community those in the group felt most likely preceded that conscious recognition. Thus, to reiterate, the term contagion in the title of this dissertation should connote at least two meanings—we love to talk about, participate, and advocate “community”—it is contagious; however, we also fear exposure to others, or at least we often fear the “contamination” of our community by other communities. As a result of a fear for the social or biological life of our community, oneself, or a loved one, we often attempt to protect from those elements that threaten these community lives.

Thus, at minimum this phenomenon of contagion is almost always related to that community’s exposure to the difference of other communities, followed by a practice of sharing with or protecting from those who are different—such practices of sharing and protection are often viewed as inclusion and exclusion. Of course, contemporaneous with this exposure to difference is the phenomenon of identification. This relationship between difference and identification is one of the dominant tensions in rhetorical thought about community (which I take up in chapter 1); however, it has very real-world implications. Let me provide a brief personal example that helps explain what I mean by this—an example I think helps bring out many of the tensions in the problems with communities and the concept of community. It may also begin to indicate my own investment in the topic.

I grew up in a Mormon community in Utah. From an early age I thought almost everyone was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the LDS
and my daily encounters with others appeared to reflect that assumption. However, the older I became, and the more I began to “experience the world” and meet people who did not identify as Mormon, the more I began to explicitly recognize their differences from me. I began to identify and value similarities I had with those in the community of the Church and identify and devalue the differences I had with those in different communities. If I did not recognize these identifications and divisions, my parents, church leaders, and friends were often quick to point them out to me. We were trained to make such identifications, which then determined whether and how we included or excluded. These disciplined recognitions of similarity and difference were common practices of everyday communication in the Mormon community in which I grew up. When introduced to someone new, one of the first things I was expected (and I expected others) to ask was, “are you a member [of the Church]?” or some similar question. Of course, there were reasons, beyond habit, for asking such a question. Identifying this seemingly banal similarity or difference established by a simple “yes or no” provided a great deal of information for the questioner, often exposing details ranging from different ideological values to habitual practices. This question potentially exposed everything from the new acquaintance’s social acts of establishing and practicing dating criteria, how he or she endorsed and applied conventions of style in music and clothing, chose what to eat and drink, and of course, navigated the languages he or she spoke. Obviously this question did not necessarily expose what this person actually did believe in and practice (it was not a positive practice, unless the person
identified as a member of the Church), but at minimum it exposed what he or she did not believe in and practice, namely Mormonism.\(^2\)

As a result of this constant recognition of similarity and difference, I became hyper-aware of inclusivity and exclusivity, terms not synonymous with identification and difference—though there are parallels and connections between these two binary sets. Within the Mormon community, some of these practices of inclusion and exclusion were openly discussed, some were just an effect of the community’s way of life; nevertheless, they were a direct result of how others identified or differed from my local Mormon community.

These practices of exclusion and inclusion based upon identifying the similarities and dividing the differences went hand-in-hand with my experience of community. I could not seem to have one without the other. Because the LDS Church is a proselytizing religion, it places a great emphasis on recognizing those who “are not like us,” and then including or attempting to include them in the hopes of converting them to the belief system of the Church. To begin to include others, I had to first learn to differentiate and exclude them from the category of “Mormon” to recognize why they were not a part of my group. In seeming irony to this attempt to include, as a Mormon youth I was constantly reminded to “avoid even the appearance of evil,” by avoiding those people and things that went (or appeared to be) contrary to the values of my faith. Thus, as paradoxical as this may sound, I was to avoid those whom I wanted to convert, but it made complete sense to me. Through my “terministic screen,” as rhetorician Kenneth Burke would have it, Mormonism’s terminologies in practice reflected, selected, and
deflected how I viewed others in relation to myself, and vice versa, to the point of naturalizing these processes (see “Terministic Screens” 45, in Language as Symbolic Action). Mormonism was the lens through which the world was filtered for me; all other communities were inferior to the degree that they were not part of us.

For some time now I have separated myself from the LDS faith. I no longer believe in the foundations of the Church or its doctrines. I do not practice the ordinances or follow the leaders of the Church. In fact, many of my own values are in explicit opposition to many of the positions of the Church. However, I still consider myself connected to, if not a part of, the Mormon community (and I know most active members of the Church consider me a member, too—to a degree that is perhaps the cause of some discomfort). Even in my self-initiated separation from the Church, who I am now (or what my “I” is) is in great deal still partially defined, even constituted by my historical experiences and continual relations to the Mormon community and its practices. My “I” is partially constituted by a “we,” a “we” of which I may not be particularly proud or fond at times, though I am very proud and fond of many of the members of that “we.”

Now I am not unique in this analysis of my self in relation to one of my communities, neither is my dissertation concerned directly with a criticism of the Mormon community; however, I share this brief example for a few reasons: First, I explain this simply to demonstrate how communities, inasmuch as they are an aggregation of individuals, also affect and even effect those individuals with regards to who and what they are, in relation to everyday concerns of life. In other words, a project concerned with what community is and what to do with it can and should concern any
individual, within or outside of academia. Second, I share this example to expose how inclusivity does not work without exclusivity, and vice versa—rhetorically and ontologically. No matter how much we may wish to privilege or valorize inclusivity over exclusivity, the latter will be right there next to us, informing and enabling that privileging. Excluding all exclusions for the sake of inclusion itself is not only a paradoxically challenging and troubling thought and act, it is a utopian ideal—and in this dissertation I will go further than this view and consider such an extreme position ethnically, politically, and rhetorically problematic, if not dangerous at times. Third, which is connected to the second, I relate the example above regarding my problematic relation to the Mormon community to begin to expose how many of our notions of community have been romanticized. As Raymond Williams famously observed, community “seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (*Key Words* 76). In addition to Williams, Miranda Joseph has argued, “community is almost always invoked as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging” (*Against the Romance of Community* vii). And more recently, Cezar Ornatowski and Linn Bekins have stated, “the concept of "community" is typically used as a "god-term" . . . reified, ubiquitous, always positive, and ultimately unexamined” (253). 

Yet even though phrases like “a sense of community” almost always carry with them a positive connotation—contagiously leading to the valorization of themes of inclusion and sharing—in some contexts we may feel that some communities to which we belong, or which endanger those we love, should be challenged, should not be
affirmed, and in some cases should not be tolerated. Obvious examples of such oppressive communities are Neo-Nazi communities, Ku Klux Klan communities, and of more recent fame, the community of the Westboro Baptist Church.

I hope I have at least made an effective, if cursory, argument about the value of my project beyond academic discussion. The goal of the remainder of this chapter is to explain the broader exigencies of this dissertation within the fields of rhetorics, including a chapter outline describing where my dissertation contributes at the level of theory within these fields. However, I think that any project concerned with the topic of community will and should always have in mind how it is concerned with day-to-day problems that arise in relation to human collectives. I reference such issues throughout, including more detailed exposition and analyses of certain communities and their rhetorics: In particular, I discuss more on the Mormon community (chapter 2) in which I grew up, a communal phenomenon in the art world called, “biennialism” (chapter 3), Black Wall Street communities (chapter 4), and others.

**The Crisis in Rhetorical Theories of Community**

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between anti-fetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the
one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution.

Bruno Latour

The exigencies in the fields of rhetorics are not dissociative of the broader societal exigencies implied in the two examples I mention in the above section. Like the rhetorics of community found in Mormonism and in the Democratic National Convention—both of which rely on tropes of inclusion to define and brand what they are, yet encounter practical problems when attempting to put such an ethic of inclusion into rhetorical practice—the exigencies in the fields of rhetorics are also problematic in theory and in practice. Because of this, the topic of community is not unpopular. One has only to conduct a brief search on any Internet bookstore website or online library search engine for literature on the topic of community to realize that the subject is an important one for many scholars, whether the audience for their texts is academic or not. While the specific application of the term may differ—such as the development and criticism of non-profit organizing, community literacy initiatives, the theory and politics of public writing, the advocacy of social change and justice with regards to inequalities of race, gender, sexuality, and class in communities in and out of the classroom, and of course, all these issues through various social media technologies—most of theses “real world” applications rely on unexamined concepts of community that broadly privilege identification over division, inclusion over exclusion, consensus over disagreement, and unity over difference. Such privileged associations seem obvious: the term community most often carries with it thoughts of togetherness, sameness, and participation.
However, while these and other texts do some great work and should not be neglected, they use two approaches that are problematic: First, they almost always see community production from a top-down approach. They are concerned with creating better governing systems that organize and distribute. Thus, they presuppose the necessity of or access to a privileged position within a power relation for anyone to create or direct a community effectively. Indeed, while many of these theories are concerned with marginalized and oppressed groups, most of these theories rely on someone in the community having access to some sort of institutional or technological power relation. This is not a negative thing in and of itself. These rhetorics of community are productive, and generally should be affirmed; however, they do not account for communities built from the bottom-up, from individuals or groups that are not even counted in some way among a social order. In other words, these handbook rhetorics consider such community-building actions from the position of a benevolent gatekeeper. Second, as I mention above, these handbooks and other similar application texts privilege traditional notions of community, such as consensus over disagreement, and unity over difference. A recent history of theory on the topic of community from Continental Philosophy has criticized this privileging of unity over difference, and discovered problems of totalitarianism inherent in the presuppositions of constructions of community by consensus. This dissertation, with the help of such Continental philosophies, works toward rhetorics of community that are alternatives to such approaches.

While for some, digital media may seem the ideal *topoi* to begin rethinking community (and I will not ignore this—see chapters 3 and 5), such a rethinking should
not neglect the 2500+-year history in Western thought of community in philosophy and rhetoric. From Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke, and from contemporary political theorists like John Rawls and Robert Nozick to numerous continental philosophers, arguments for more ethical structuring and better understanding of “the social” continue to occur. My focus for this dissertation will be on the rethinking of community that has been occurring within French and Italian thought for at least three decades now. Particularly, I focus on the fields of rhetorics’ response to this rethinking, which arguably started, or at least found resurgence, with Jean-Luc Nancy’s essay, “The Inoperative Community,” which later was published as the opening chapter to his book under the same title. The thinking engaged in the re-questioning of community following Nancy’s essay has been in great deal a response to the direct engagement and experience with European totalitarianism, which by common definitions of community, as a unified group of people, would be a community par excellence. This, of course, is a conception of community that Nancy and the thinkers responding to his essay reject. Because of this direct and sustained engagement with the topic of community—from thinkers who lived during or in the wake of such explicit practices of fascism—rather than start at the place of digital media to begin articulating an ethical, political, and rhetorical framework of community, I think it is important to understand first what some of these thinkers have to offer.

However, while many of those in the fields of rhetorics have not neglected this work in Continental Philosophy theoretically, and have done a thorough job criticizing what destroys or betrays community, my broad conjecture regarding the crisis in rhetorics
studies is that rhetoricians employing Continental philosophies of community have not yet been able to articulate or rearticulate these theories in such a way that the theories might be extended outside of academic discourse to a place where they can be employed in “real world” politics and pedagogies. This may sound cliché; however, following Bruno Latour’s call to rethink criticism as assembling (see the epigraph above from “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam”), I argue that while rhetoricians concerned with Continental philosophies of community have done a persuasive job exposing the problems with other’s thought on community, they have not offered alternative “arenas in which to gather” (see Latour 246) for the purposes of producing, or what Latour might call “composing” community (see “An Attempt”). This call for more application of rhetorics for “practical use” is of course not new. Classical theorist Vincent Farenga argues that the origins of rhetorics emerged “out of the desire for democracy” (1035). Nevertheless, I define this as a current and actual problem with regards to the relevancy of the fields of rhetorics, in particular, with thought that employs Continental philosophies of community and singularity, identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion. Situating this exigency is the main aim of chapter 1, in which I begin by discussing how rhetoricians employing Continental thought have attempted to depart from Kenneth Burke’s notion of identification to work toward rhetorics privileging difference. I then engage with such rhetoricians, in particular Diane Davis and Pat Gehrke, who draw upon the work of Continental philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to make informed critiques in the name of community, but who also provide no alternative models for producing better community practices.
To supplement their critiques and to offer such alternative arenas of gathering, I negotiate with constitutive and normative theories of rhetoric and community, as both are problems in the fields of rhetorics. In chapter 2, I make arguments regarding what constitutes community: this is a concern with what some might call ontological issues, what community as a phenomenon is, or what makes a community a community. However, I am only concerned with this element of the argument to the extent that when rhetorical theorists, in general, use the term community we have some consistent if flexible idea of what is being presupposed in the term. Though over- and under-determination of meaning will no doubt occur, I think it is important that the reader and I share a similar understanding of the term community. To be clear, I am not concerned with creating an exhaustive foundational account of the being of community. Still, I am concerned with what community is to the extent that as a referent it allows us to critique how well our constitutive models of community reflect our everyday experiences of community. Also, I want a model of community to reference and presuppose when advocating for better non-oppressive community practices. Whenever one makes an argument about how something should be (a normative claim), one is still presupposing that the something is, that it exists or is constructed in a certain way (a constitutive claim). To make this argument about what constitutes a community, I draw on a variety of ideas, most prominently Jean-Luc Nancy’s extension of Heidegger’s concept of “being-with,” Todd May’s theory of practices, and Roberto Esposito’s theory of the necessary relationship between community and immunity. Esposito’s theory, in contrast to thinkers like Joseph Harris and Rosa Eberly (who each draw upon Raymond
Williams), finds a positive opposing term to *community*—*immunity*. Community’s relationship with this necessary oppositional term, I feel, more accurately describes communal practices and processes than a model that sees community in absolute terms of inclusivity as an ethical good and exclusivity as wrong. In other words I want to replace notions of community that "[tend] to mean little more than a nicer, friendlier, fuzzier version of what came before" individuality (Harris 13), with a conceptualization that sees community (sharing) as always in a necessary reciprocal tension with immunity (protection).

That said, my dissertation is most interested in making certain normative claims about community; chapter 2 also sets the stage for these arguments. I argue that we cannot escape arguing for some temporal forms of affirmative community practices, even if these are only implied in critique of problematic communities. This should not be confused with thinking that the term *community* is inherently a term that indicates an ethical good; as I mention earlier in this introduction, in many cases we often presuppose an ethical good in the meaning of the term *community*. Whether in theory or practice, community is a thing that is often presupposed to be a good, or at minimum, especially for rhetorics scholars, it leads us to privilege community over the individual, even if we understand that the two phenomena co-constitute one another. This tension between community and the individual is a major part of the crisis in rhetorics studies, which I address in chapter 1, and one of the goals of chapter 2 is to begin acknowledging the normativity implied in many of our arguments about community, and to—rather than fear
making normative arguments about community—advocate making better normative arguments for less oppressive community practices.

Understanding, producing, and taking part in such normatively-laden community practices is no easy task. Nevertheless, it is the aim of chapters 3, 4, and 5 to address how rhetoricians might engage in this project. My conjecture that there is still work to be done with the notion of community is not an overstatement; there is much at stake for the fields of rhetorics in establishing ethics of community that can deal with political problems of exclusivity in theory, practice, and production. As I allude to above, the requirements for doing so necessitate a reconfiguring of the familiar inclusion/exclusion tropes that influence our ethics and politics to such a great degree, and that are so heavily employed in rhetorical theories. In fact, it is within those three fields—ethics, politics, and rhetorics—that these three chapters find their exigency. Comprised of three main stages or movements, my dissertation begins developing an ethics of community (chapter 3), a politics of community that advocates the given ethics with specific aims in political contexts (chapter 4), and then considers these ethics and politics with rhetorics of community, or symbols, forms, practices, and processes of social action that enable this advocacy, particularly in the composition classroom (chapter 5). With and within each of these three stages, and as I allude to above, I address Aristotle’s three topoi that classify the human—knowing (theoretical knowledge), doing (practical and pedagogical knowledge), and making (productive knowledge)—throughout the project.

In chapter 3, I continue to extend Esposito’s notions of community and immunity by acknowledging that communal practices of sharing require some forms of immunity in
order to even practice sharing. In particular what is most often presupposed is the need to protect or negate a life—from the social life of the community to the biological lives of individuals inside and outside a community, and vice versa—so that there is a community with which one might share, so that there is an individual with whom one might share. I see *Immunity*, as I state above, as the “positive opposing term” to community for which Raymond Williams is searching (see *Keywords* 76). However, though Esposito does bring this insight, he does not provide an ethic of community, or set of values beyond the recognition that communities require protection so that they may share, and that too much emphasis on either sharing or protection will eventually negate the life of that community, socially and/or biologically. Thus, to begin developing such an ethics of community, I draw upon the works of Jacques Rancière and Adriana Cavarero.

Rancière adds to this ethics of community the recognition of a presupposition of equality. He sees equality as something presupposed in everyday speech acts. I argue that this presupposition of equality is persuasive enough to consider actions taken out of this presupposition to be an ethical good. I acknowledge this valuing of equality to be historically contingent but difficult to argue against. Cavarero posits that all communal and singular lives are vulnerable, and that we can thus respond within a range of two poles: caring and wounding. I argue that an affirmative community rhetoric should privilege caring for such (social and/or or biological) lives over wounding them, though such an ethic is by no means easy to put into practice, particularly when the care of one life appears to require the wounding of another. Drawing upon Rancière, Cavarero, and others, the ethics I begin to develop in this dissertation are neither built upon transcendent
values nor do they take part in the tradition of moral arguments of building immovable content or formal ethics. Rather than seeing ethics as hardline moral stances in which I demand we must follow, I see my ethics as what Charles Scott might call “recoiling ethics” (see the Question of Ethics) or ethics in constant need of questioning, revision, and care, and are contingent upon historical circumstances, communal, and individual needs.

In chapter 4 I also employ much of Rancière’s thought to begin developing a politics of community that advocates and puts into practice the ethic of verifying equality and care of human life. He argues that no ideology of equality can sustain itself institutionally, since “the essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division” (Shores 32-33). Thus, rather than focus on institutional goals of equality through top-down consensus and distribution, Rancière argues that the verification of equality more often occurs through acts of dissensus and decategorization. Therefore, a politics of community which advocates the ethic I articulate is, in sum, as follows: when a human being who has not been counted among the social order verifies his or her own equality, or has it verified by others, such an act actually disrupts the hierarchy of the social order, rather than solidifying it. In chapter 4, I explain political dissensus through discussion of historical communities like Black Wall Street, which have taken part in both the disruption and construction of solidarity in this way.

In chapter 5 I implement these ethics and politics into rhetoric and composition pedagogy, particularly those emphasizing digital and multimodal practices. For 21st
century students, learning multimodal composition practices has become a rite of passage to citizenship. Following the lead of rhetoric and composition scholars like Jeff Rice and Geoffrey Sire, many composition journals, conferences, and instructors employ themes of remixing and developing rhetorical pedagogies that engage in digital sampling as alternatives to traditional formalist writing practices. Students are encouraged to digitally sample from diverse cultures through collaborative ripping of images, audio, and video to produce and analyze new media texts. With such a focus on relations with others, one might argue that these are “community pedagogies.” Nevertheless, while such pedagogies implicitly promote ethics that value autonomy, difference, inclusivity, and discovery, they have neglected to consider how such “open” practices can also evoke wounds of vulnerability (a concept from Adriana Cavarero I discuss in chapter 3 and develop further in chapter 5). For example, *In Digital Griots*, Adam Banks recognizes how multimodal pedagogies that emphasize digital sampling from other cultures can result in uncritical and harmful cultural appropriation. Even sampling from one’s own culture (as if one can own a culture) can be dangerous and uncritical when one’s culture or position in that culture is blind to power dynamics within and between cultures and people. My aim in chapter 5, then, is to supplement these powerful and creative multimodal rhetorics and pedagogies focused on digital sampling with a heuristic for ethics based upon some of the ethical and political considerations of community I develop in chapters 3 and 4. I conclude, in particular, that supplementing multimodal pedagogies with an ethic of community that recognizes equality and the vulnerability in human life does not restrict
such pedagogies. Rather, it opens them to the invention of more nuanced multimodal compositions that engage with ethical and political problems of digital media.

While some rhetoricians may not like that I am dividing ethics, politics, and rhetorics so neatly, and might posit that I am limiting rhetorics, my reasons for these separations are mainly argumentative and do have a purpose that serves rhetorical theory. These reasons are not unlike Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s advocacy for “retreating the political” (see *Retreating the Political*). By retreating the political, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy do not mean suppressing or ignoring the political in the sense of closing down political discussion. Rather, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue that “the political” itself has been absorbed by the appeal of totalitarianism. This means that “the political,” in subsuming all discourse today (as in the idea that “everything is political”), actually erases all other discourse (philosophical, religious, scientific, etc.), rather than enabling more critical discussion from various perspectives. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy also argue that as a concept that includes all other discourses, the political has actually limited political thought. Since this perspective claims to dominate all other thought, the political paradoxically erases the specificities that differentiate it from other discourses. Thus, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy actually recognize this domination of “the political” as a closure—and I see similar problems with an absolute domination of “the rhetorical.” By advocating a retreat from the political, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy attempt to open the political by acknowledging how it draws on other epistemologies and discourses, rather than think of those other lines of thought as solely contained by “the political.”
Similarly, I have no desire to be part of the closure the rhetorical. When the question, “why these rhetorics?” is raised, I want ethical and political justifications that extend beyond an unquestioned value in rhetorical invention and experimentation. Though I present them in a certain order, this does not mean that the politics I discuss inherently precede the rhetorics or that the ethics contain both; rather, I view these three fields as always related. The rhetorics I articulate could potentially justify and found the ethics and politics, as well as find justification in them. Perhaps the best way to conceptualize my project is in terms of an ever-moving ratio of all three areas: rhetorics-ethics-politics, ethics-politics-rhetorics, politics-rhetorics-ethics—or any of the various combinations of the three. Any privileging of one term over the others in particular moments will no doubt cause what Kenneth Burke calls (following Friedrich Nietzsche), a “perspective by incongruity” (see Permanence and Change). I am aware that as I privilege one term in one moment, and another somewhere else, the meaning of one term will of course seep into the area of one of the others, ever so slightly or greatly shifting the emphasis for different readers; however, I do not point out each time this occurs unless I deem it absolute necessary. Such occasions to emphasize this slippage are when I fear the reader may re-inscribe traditional or even clichéd notions of terms like community or equality into the rhetorics, politics, and ethics of community I am describing or advocating. Though I know some readers will find it difficult to depart from those traditional and powerful significations (I am aware of the slippage of the signifier, especially in a term like community), I work diligently to persuade the reader to depart from (though not forget) those meanings. And while it is not solely traditional liberal
political paradigms to which I make my appeals, I do hope that my project will still speak to some of the same concerns usually found in liberal politics, in particular concerns of equality.

Let me close by saying that human relationality—which is not the same thing as community, I argue—may be an ethical good in and of itself; in other words something we should value; however, I am neither arguing against that position nor explicitly for it, as others have. That is not my project. I am arguing that being in a community is not necessarily an inherent ethical good—something we often presuppose. Many communities are destructive, and just because they may take part in practices that damage or destroy relationships with others, or take part in practices we generally find to be unethical, does not mean they are not communities and that we should label them “anti-community” (such a labeling occurs in Diane Davis’s “Finitude’s Clamor,” for example). In addition, there are non- and less-oppressive communities we can and should affirm, learn from, and build upon.

Thus, past the project of understanding what constitutes community in order that we might have a concept to presuppose when we use the term community, my positive project is to work toward ethical, political, and rhetorical frameworks of community that do embody and promote sets of values I think we should endorse, practice, and produce contingently. These ethics, politics, and rhetorics should be continually re-questioned. And though I reiterate that these are not transcendent values or foundationalist grounds for rhetorical action, I attempt to problematize my own rhetorical constructs to encourage how readers may respond to and supplement my own work. Overall, and broadly
considered, my dissertation is interested in concerns that address the following normative question, and others related to it: Since community itself is not an inherently good thing, but it is necessary to who we are and what we do, what types of non-oppressive communities and communal practices might we learn to recognize, advocate, teach, and actively produce and practice for better ways of collective living?
CHAPTER ONE
FROM IDENTIFICATION AND DIVISION TO SINGULARITY AND COMMUNITY

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes this communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric.

Kenneth Burke

The unconditioned existentiality of each one is this: it cannot exist through consisting by itself and in itself alone. Pure auto-nomy destroys itself of itself. But this must not be understood in an absolutely originary mode. It is not a matter of adding to a postulation of individuality or autonomy a certain number of relations and interdependencies, no matter what importance one may accord to such addenda. The “someone” does not enter into a relation with other “someones,” nor is there a “community” that precedes interrelated individuals: the singular is not the particular, not a part of a group (species, gender, class, order). The relation is contemporaneous with the singularities. “One” means: some ones and some other ones, or some ones with other ones.

Jean-Luc Nancy
The problem of identification and division surrounds the issue of articulating what the phenomenon of community is—a constitutive question—and/or what types of community should be affirmed or produced—a normative question—in the fields of rhetorics. In this chapter, I outline this problem, discuss where the term community has been brought into play in rhetorical theory to deal with the problem (most often in critique of identifications of community and “the self,” rather than in the articulation of or advocacy of (a) community), and then situate the need for the remainder of this dissertation on rhetorics of community within these contexts.

Most theorists interested in western rhetorical traditions will be familiar with the problem of identification and division. It has been articulated in many ways, under many pretexts and subtexts: in classical rhetorics it often goes under the theme of “the one and the many,” with some of the most fertile battlegrounds being found within the conversations of the Presocratics, Plato, and the Sophists. However, my interests lie more with contemporary debates of community, and most of these are traced directly to Kenneth Burke’s notions of identification and division, though he never articulated a specific theory of community. Many rhetorical theorists, following Burkean commentators like William Rueckert, who once referred to Burke’s main works as the “sacred texts” (“Rereading Kenneth Burke” 240), have over-emphasized or over-simplified the place of identification in Burke’s rhetorical theory (see, for example, Crusius (121); Hochmuth (136); and Wolin (17, 93)).¹ No doubt this narrowing of Burke’s thought to identification is also because the first half of A Rhetoric of Motives focuses on the concept. Burke himself also once wrote that the “key term” for the “new”
rhetoric is identification (“Rhetoric: Old and New” 62-3), rather than persuasion (see *A Rhetoric of Motives* 19-46), and Burke does appear to claim that persuasion requires or is preceded by identification: “a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identification” (46). Bryan Crable sums up this common reading as a result of the dominant place Burke’s *Rhetoric of Motives* has in rhetorical theory: “Efforts to characterize the text [*A Rhetoric of Motives*] often echo Rueckert’s formulation: the *Rhetoric* “is built on the principle of identification” (*Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations* 152, qtd. in Crable 215). However, Crable notes that while simplifying Burke this way is seductive, it shortchanges much of Burke’s thought, not just as a whole, but that contained in *A Rhetoric of Motives* alone: “the equation of Burkean rhetoric and identification is functional—it neatly summarizes his contribution to rhetorical studies—but discourages focus on the text as a whole” (215-16). Problematically, this oversimplification of identification, coupled with the popularity of Burke’s thought within the fields of rhetorics, has led to the valorization of identification as a rhetorical practice to be advocated.

One of the reasons I bring up this simplification of Burke’s notion of identification as a rhetorical practice he advocates is because theorists of community, and counter-rhetorics theorists in general (broadly considered, those who privilege difference over identity), often use Burke as a point of departure for advocating alternative rhetorical practices. Instead of criticizing other theorists for misreading Burke as promoting identification, these counter-rhetorics theorists attack Burke directly, implying that his rhetorical theories are practices he advocates, rather than theoretical descriptions
of how rhetorics function. For example, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin claim to be
countering Burke’s rhetorical theories with a highly normative “invitational rhetoric,” a
rhetorical practice that invites further understanding through the advocacy of multiple
perspectives and the creation of three conditions for rhetoric: “safety, value, and
freedom” (“Beyond Persuasion” 10; see also “A Feminist Perspective”). Another
prominent theorist who views the Burkean emphasis on identification normatively is
Krista Ratcliff. A thinker I greatly admire, Ratcliff claims that Burke, “in valorizing
commonalities,” normatively privileges identification over division and difference, and
thus “does not provide a sufficient recognition of differences as a place for rhetorical
exchanges and subsequent actions” (Rhetorical Listening 60). For Ratcliff, this is
particularly important when it comes to the politics and rhetorics of gender and race.3

I would like to make an important claim here, consistent with Crable’s work,
which I mention above: neither the over-emphasis/simplification and accompanying
valorization of identification nor the critique of this position as “Burkean” gives a very
generous or particularly accurate reading of Burke’s rhetorical theory. These readings
also do a disservice for rhetorical theory when applied to problems of community writ
large. Like the problem of constitutive and normative theories of community I briefly
close with in the introduction of this dissertation, Burke’s interest in identification as a
key component of rhetoric is an argument about the constitution of rhetorics, or what
rhetorics are and how they work. By shifting the focus slightly from persuasion to
identification, the scope of understanding what rhetoric is and how it functions is much
broader, according to Burke. Nevertheless, when Burke’s name comes up at rhetorical
theory conferences and classroom discussions, the notion of identification is often applied and implied as a normative practice that enables an ethical good or has an ameliorating function. Now, there is the potential for reading any argument as a normative argument, and one could easily criticize Burke for claiming that we should see rhetoric through a lens of identification, since it then may render the fields of rhetorics more important than other scholarly fields. (This argument would be something akin to viewing Burke’s descriptive project as having a hidden prescriptive agenda.) However, this is not how Burke is usually read by thinkers who wish to apply a normative critique; unfortunately, he is seen as taking up a normative argument that promotes identification for better uses of rhetorics, how we should use rhetorics of identification to create political change through the transcendence of division (for example, see Stob).

Now, it is not my goal to defend Burke, and he is not immune to criticism or from making normative claims at times. In fact, there are moments when he does explicitly advocate identification, but these moments are highly contingent upon the particular political situations in which he finds himself. For example, during the events of World War II, he is both critical of identification used to serve Fascist totalitarian attitudes (see “Americanism” and “Where are We Now?”), as well as advocatory of its uses to counter such attitudes: “in this solemn situation, our first duty to our nation and to ourselves is to approach every problem, to conceive of every issue, in terms that will make for the maximum of national unity, and so for the maximum of effectiveness against our Axis enemies” (“When ‘Now’ Became ‘Then’” 5). Each of these political positions is highly normative, though contingent upon particular circumstances; they are not absolute by any
means or specifically about rhetorical theory. Regarding his rhetorical theories, most consist of constitutive arguments about the phenomena of rhetorics, what rhetorics are and how they function, not normative arguments about what we ought to do with rhetorics, or what kind of rhetorics innately ameliorate.

Quickly, I would like to provide some further evidence for the two claims I have made, and hopefully this will transition into more contemporary rhetorical thought on community: (1) Burke does not privilege identification over division, and (2) Burke is most often making constitutive rather than normative arguments about rhetorics of identification. In *A Rhetoric of Motives* (the text most often referenced for seemingly advocating identification), Burke clearly points out that “identification is compensatory to division,” but that some identifications are in no way peaceful or ethical compensations for division (22). Some of Burke’s most powerful writing occurs when he discusses war (22), capitalistic exploitation (25), the perpetuation of status quo political conservatism (28), and more as phenomena of cooperation and unity. Of course, the notion of war as cooperation is not only seen in the identification of one or more groups unifying to kill another group, but in the idea of war as a cooperative practice of oppositions agreeing upon their intent to kill each other, of identifying a similar hatred for the foreign “other” with the foreign “other.” For Burke, “modern war characteristically requires a myriad of constructive acts for each destructive one; before each culminating blast there must be a vast network of interlocking operations, directed communally” (22).
As further evidence that Burke does not see identifications of commonality as an inherent ethical good, in his essay “The Rhetorical Situation,” he argues that identification “takes on many dimensions,” three of the most prominent are common sympathies (268), inaccuracies (269), and yes, identifications occurring by or with antithesis, or a “union by some opposition held in common” (268). In this essay, Burke famously refers to this latter rhetorical phenomenon as “congregation by segregation,” in which “identity may involve identification not just with mankind [sic] or the world in general, but by some kind of congregation that also implies some related norms of differentiation or segregation” (268). In other words, and to begin extending this problem even further, and transitioning more directly to the problem of community, the identification and inclusion of some in one community occurs at the expense of, as well as for the purpose of, the division and exclusion of others from that community, and vice versa.

To put it another way, yes identification can work as an answer to the problem of division; however, the use of identification also depends, employs, and even exploits division for its purposes, and vice versa. Neither identification nor division can exist without the presence of its antithesis. No doubt many grab onto Burke’s thought of identification because it is readily recognizable (or identifiable) as being put into practice in our everyday lives. However, there is even more evidence that Burke did not necessarily privilege identification over division in rhetorics, normatively or constitutively. In contrast to this commonly held position, Crable argues that Burke may have actually privileged difference, or “distance” in his thought over identification, as a
more dominant rhetorical motive. This motive of distance is part of a rhetoric Burke calls “pure persuasion.” Crable’s “Distance as Ultimate Motive” is an excellent source for a detailed exposition Burke’s notion of pure persuasion; however, a quick gloss of this argument goes as follows: since the appeal of identification can only exist if there is a distance of difference to bridge, rhetors actually desire this distance to be maintained to some degree; otherwise, they could not participate in identification. A rhetoric of pure persuasion, then, would be one where a rhetor does not actually desire complete identification with his or her audience, but instead wishes to perpetuate the rhetorical situation by maintaining some distance and difference. At most, I believe a careful reader should be cautious in saying that Burke privileges either identification over division or division over identification in his rhetorical theory.

Still, for some rhetoricians interested in the concept of community, whether explicitly following Burke or not, the claim that identification is the key to rhetorics means that one should privilege consensus and the identification of commonalities as a norm to be advocated, the solution to violent confrontations of difference. As I have just pointed out, I disagree with this reading of Burke, but it may be important to flesh out this argument, briefly. If this logic is accurate, consensus is the key to persuasive, as well as ethically good, rhetoric: if the audience discovers similarity with their own position and that of the rhetor’s, they will be more readily convinced by the rhetoric from the rhetor. Some rhetoricians have taken this “Burkean” focus on identification, or an emphasis on consensus, and run with it to develop rhetorics of community. This has occurred broadly in composition studies, as well as in communication studies.
One prominent example of scholars interested in communal goals of identifying common ground is Kenneth Bruffee. Bruffee argues for a social constructivist paradigm within rhetoric and composition studies that places a heavy emphasis on consensus, and views student groups in classrooms as communities of collaborative learning. While Bruffee agrees that the practice of recognizing diversity, difference, and disagreement is “consistent with the traditional goal[s] of college and university liberal education” (“Taking the Common Ground” 11), he advocates identification and affirmation of “our general commonality” as an answer to educational, and even societal problems that emerge from the convergence of diverse cultural identities (12; see also “Social Construction” and “Collaborative Learning”).

Bruffee is not alone in this thought. Other scholars also have employed a range of rhetorical theories arguing for better political collective communication practices through identifying similarities to achieve democratic consensus and other shared goals. Drawing upon Burke’s notion of identification, John Dewey’s idea of the public, Jürgen Habermas’s theories of consensus and understanding, and/or Etienne Wenger’s communities of practice, where “mutual engagement,” “joint enterprise,” and “shared repertoire” are emphasized, the general move is that for communities to have an impact, they need to work with and toward an idealized deliberative rhetoric that “puts aside” differences and builds on identifications of sameness, whether in language, ethical values, or other common grounds. Hypothetically, this position argues, such a shared discourse would solve the problems of democracy.
In contrast to this thought, there are many counter-rhetorics thinkers, in both composition and communication studies, who privilege difference, rather than place an emphasis on identifications of commonalities. Drawing upon poststructuralist and critical theories, many of these counter-rhetorics scholars are interested in critical race theory, feminist rhetorics, political economy, and other projects concerned with oppression and politics in communities and in the classroom. These theorists have criticized any position that conceptualizes or even appears to conceptualize a culture, community, or individual student (or a community’s or student’s goals, for that matter) with overarching or universal identifications. They counter that such identifications, even if they are identifications of democracy and equality, most often adopt or perpetuate the values and practices of (and thus benefit those) in dominant positions of power relations, thus excluding and oppressing those on the margins of the social order (see, for examples, Banks; Bartholomae; Biesecker; Bizzell; Canagarajah; Crowley; Clark; Clifford; Gilyard; hooks; Jarrett and Reynolds; Lyons; Olson; Nakayama and Krizek; Norton; Ratcliffe; Villanueva; and Vitanza, just to name a few).

As Carrie Shively Leverenz writes, “knowledge-making communities ignore or erase difference in order to maintain a single, authoritative, ‘normal’ discourse (168). This problem is articulated beautifully by Xin Liu Gale, who draws on her personal experiences to expose the contradictions and problems of identification, exclusion and assimilation in a country like the United States, so dedicated to the power of individualism, yet “so devoted to social ‘isms’ and community” (103). There are many variations and layers to this reasoning, and I have no wish to conflate each of the cited
above thinker’s arguments; however, I think it is noteworthy to understand that these counter-rhetorics positions have made enough of a mark in the fields of rhetoric to continually demand a recognition of difference from all scholars of rhetorics interested in community. While extremely valuable, these criticisms have coincided with the call to only use the term *community* in concrete and local material situations (e.g., Harris), and even more drastically, for the dismissal of the term *community* in and of itself in theoretical discussions of rhetoric (see Kent). One might speculate that these calls to limit the use of the term *community* are a result of the influence of counter-rhetorics (for example, see West’s “Beyond Dissensus”). As a response to these types of tensions, Gregory Clark begins to argue for a normative redefinition of community by considering “confronting differences” as the primary practice that should define community engagement. Such a notion, Clark posits, “rescues the discourse of community from domination and exclusion” (“Rescuing 73”).

Like Clark, but in contrast to thinkers like Harris or Kent, there are those who accept this problem of difference in community as a point of study, and demand that it require rigorous theoretical legwork. As William Covino states, “community remains an elusive but crucial concept, shaping our thoughts” (163). Thus, in many fields, including those not directly concerned with rhetorics, thinkers have tried to rehabilitate, form and cultivate the subject of community and communication (see Anderson; Carey; Depew and Peters), and others have attempted to understand how different communities’ communication practices produce cooperation and/or resistance (see Butchcart; Grewal; Warner). However, two thinkers in the fields of rhetorics have received a significant
amount of attention of late for their rhetorical theories applying the term *community*: Pat Gehrke and Diane Davis. Both employ the thought of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to theorize the concept. I mention this fact because this similarity connects Davis and Gehrke, and because I also wish to draw upon and discuss Nancy’s thought to inform my own rhetorics of community.

Gehrke, who wishes to affirm and extend the counter-rhetorics argument against the focus on identifications of commonality, is very interested in how the notion of community figures into democratic politics. Following Janice Norton’s claim that the concept of identification has become rhetorics studies’ common “master trope” (42; qtd. in Gehrke, “Being-for-the-Other” 6), Gehrke points out that positing the identification of commonalities as the means for negotiating communal differences is not only historically counter-factual to how politics have functioned, it also presupposes a stable foundation that does not exist. “[L]ife and living together . . . no longer can be determined or guided by any order or meaning or purpose that we might once have found in the world, in philosophy, in ethics, or in community” (“Community at the End of the World” 121-22). Gehrke argues that with the advent of post-structuralist thought, one would be naïve to think that groups—while they must acknowledge they exist *with* each other—could ever discover “a pregiven in-common substance or . . . balanced procedure for establishing mutually beneficial agreements and intersubjective truths” (124-25). For Gehrke, and for what might be broadly considered poststructuralist thought, since there is no foundational or common substance from which to base our claims and bridge our differences, any communicative practice used to establish common identifiable concepts to determine the
meaning of individual being or of community will always contain a bias, whether of race, class, gender, or other biases that are historically situated within institutions of power (125). Instead of the focus on the individual or on communities, Gehrke advocates a turn toward our relationality, or “the sheer fact of community, on face, and not to any meaning, structure, or form that might be given to community or communities” (125).

Applying the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, who builds upon Martin Heidegger’s proposition that any and all being is always already “being-with,” Gehrke sees this focus on the “sheer fact of community” as paying attention to the with of our existence. In other words, he wishes to turn our focus toward the relationality that is a fact of our existence, a phenomenon he sees as “not a precondition of being and not the ground of being, but [as] the totality of the fact of being” (125).

Like Gehrke, as I mentioned above, Diane Davis (“Finitude’s Clamor”; Inessential Solidarity) also draws upon Nancy’s thought of community. However, and perhaps more radical than Gehrke, Davis worries that though most counter-rhetorics theorists seemingly understand that the individual within a community is constituted by difference and plurality, they still privilege identification over difference. In particular, Davis argues that instead of privileging identification and consensus in community, these counter-rhetorics theorists tend to privilege it in the individual by advocating for the writer’s ability to present him- or herself as a single and stable identity, what Davis calls the “self-present composing subject” (“Finitude’s Clamor” 121). From Davis: “Even radical writing pedagogies . . . which presume that identity is constituted and plural, have a tendency to reproduce the myth of immanence [oneness] by encouraging students to
consider themselves presentable” (121, original emphasis). This identification of the self as “presentable,” for Davis, is a betrayal of the exposure of the shared relational difference (what she calls “community”) that actually constitutes a being. She will go so far as to refer to some of these pedagogical and rhetorical practices as “anti-communitarian.” To counter these identifications of the presentable self in the composition classroom, Davis suggests a “communitarian literacy” that sees “writers and readers [as] in the world and exposed to others, a literacy that can read and write writing as a function of this irreparable exposure, of this irrepressible community” (122, original emphasis).

Interestingly enough, both Davis and Gehrke employ Continental philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s thought on community to investigate phenomena that are not what are traditionally considered communities. Davis’s point of critique is the self-sufficient rhetor, or what often goes by the names of the autonomous subject, the free-willing agent, or the liberal individual in other discourses. Gehrke argues that we cannot persuasively discuss either the individual or communities without oppressing and excluding, and therefore he theorizes the term community as the relational phenomenon that situates a person’s seemingly singular existence. There are reasons for this use of the term community to critique phenomena of singularity, but it is important to know that for these two thinkers, as well as for others who use Nancy’s thought (see, for example, Hartelius and Asenas; Pinchevski; Rand; Reid; and Vitanza, Sexual Violence), the aim has been almost always a critique of the self, the autonomous individual, the rhetorical agent, and other terms concerned with subjectivity; however, his thought has not been used to
describe actual community production and processes. This is the main exigency of my dissertation: to work towards a rhetorical theory of community that acknowledges this relational existence of singularities, but is also applicable to specific communities and their practices.

To explain in more detail the exigency for this dissertation, and to begin to understand what I mean by the move I wish to make toward rhetorics of community with (though not away from) rhetorics of singularity, it is important to understand why thinkers like Davis and Gehrke employ the concept of community the way they do. My project is closely tied to theirs; I consider my project supplementary to theirs, so I think it necessary to investigate some of the main thinkers upon whom they draw most heavily—in particular, French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. As my own interest in the subject of community is greatly indebted to Nancy’s work, I want to briefly summarize some of the main arguments he makes about community. I will conclude that he does move us toward a norm of inclusion, a norm we can see as a set of ethical values that enable and/or result from what I will call rhetorics of community; however, my dissertation will argue that this norm of inclusion (or I might more accurately say, anti-exclusion) is not enough to withstand the actual pressures that everyday communities face to organize and sustain themselves and to make their impact felt in political realms, especially those groups that are on the margins—groups with which Nancy, Davis, and Gehrke are concerned. These conclusions are really more the result of another discovery I have already alluded to with the works of Davis and Gehrke: Nancy’s theory of community is really a theory of singularity. While this may seem like a radical statement for some, I will point to
evidence that Nancy himself (eventually) articulates this argument. If this is true, then it should be easier to accept that his theory, while informing rhetorics of community, needs some supplement to work as a theory of community that is relevant and real to people’s actual experiences of community, and that still engages the problems with which Davis and Gehrke are concerned.

Nancy’s Community of Being; Not the Being of Community

Nancy’s book *The Inoperative Community*, which developed out of an article of the same title he wrote in the early 1980’s, has been a powerful influence on Continental Philosophy and the many other fields that are directly invested in the thought of community. Fields in addition to philosophy and rhetorics that have called upon his thinking in this text and others include art, communication, composition, music, political theory, and more. Nancy’s essay and book have led to a series of direct and indirect responses engaged in a rethinking of community from other thinkers taking part in the continental tradition, most notably Maurice Blanchot (*The Unavowable Community*) and Giorgio Agamben (*The Coming Community*), and more recently Roberto Esposito (*Communitas*) and Adriana Cavarero (*For More Then One Voice*). As I state in the introduction of this dissertation, I will focus on the rethinking of community that has been occurring within French and Italian thought for at least three decades now, starting with Nancy’s essay, “The Inoperative Community.” Each of these thinkers’ re-thinking has been in some way or another engaged with problems of totalitarianism. They do not want a notion of community to be subsumed by totalitarian thought.
No doubt Pat Gehrke, Diane Davis, and other rhetoricians applying Nancy’s work have recognized a similar exigency. In almost every case Nancy and his responders reference the horrors of European totalitarianism as a major point of investigation and exigency to understand the problems of community better in the following context: if community, a term that usually carries a positive connotation, is considered in terms of unity and achieving oneness, then how do we reconcile the tensions between such an affirmative connotation and many of the similar themes of unity and oneness that motivated the exclusionary and violent actions of Nazi Germany and other fascist regimes?

To engage this question, Nancy employs an implicit version of stasis theory in The Inoperative Community in an attempt to separate the phenomenon of totalitarianism from that of community. As rhetoricians, with regards to argumentative invention, we often use stasis theory to discover or invent points of common ground or contrast in an argument. Stasis theory usually considers at least four staseis—conjecture, definition, quality, and policy. In most common usages of the term community and in much of the scholarship today using the term, the first three questions of stasis regarding the concept of community are usually presupposed, or are perceived as generally agreed upon as a known or established fact: the general conjecture is that community exists, it is defined in terms of inclusion or unity, and it is qualified as something that is good or beneficial, something humans desire to work toward and produce. These “givens” leave us only with policy, or the question of what courses of action should be taken to create such versions of community. In other words, debates regarding the question of community often only
surface at the point of policy, rarely being challenged at any of the other points of stasis—this is especially true in political, religious, and technological discourse, where we continually hear ethical and emotional appeals of unity in community building through speech and social media. The argument adheres to the following logic: if we already understand what community as oneness is and it is something we emotionally value as an ethical good, then we only need to discover what actions are possible to produce such a desired oneness. We therefore privilege community as a phenomenon that should be undeniably affirmed. Nancy does not really challenge this claim—that community should be affirmed. Rather, he challenges our conjecture and definition of the term community by asserting that this version of community as oneness is actually closer to a definition of totalitarianism, or what he calls “immanentism,” and that community is or should be something very different.

I mention above that thinkers like Diane Davis and Pat Gehrke have employed Nancy’s thought on community more in the service of rhetorics of singularity that question individualism and the free-willing rhetorical agent, rather than for rhetorics that might apply directly to community practices. One reason for this is because Nancy sees the history of philosophy, considered broadly, as thinking of the essence of the individual in a parallel manner to that of the essence of community. To explain this connection I will begin with Nancy’s thought in The Inoperative Community, which is arguably the foundation for much of Nancy’s later thought on community, singularity, and related phenomena.
The opening lines of *The Inoperative Community* are some of the most important when considering Nancy’s work. He begins with the claim that “the gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world…is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community” (1). Remembering this opening line is crucial because he is signaling his focus to the reader early in the text: a worry for the destruction or loss of community. However, this grievance is not a nostalgic lament for some idealized notion of what community once was, a mourning Nancy will criticize two thinker who influence him, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (9), and even Georges Bataille (17), for doing. Rather, Nancy is pained by the recurring destruction of community, which he argues, occurs in the name of community and through practices and processes we often recognize as those of community. I will explain.

For Nancy, thinkers like Locke, Rousseau, Marx, and Sartre have regarded the essences of the individual and of the community to be the same: to work toward completion through work—a work and completion that is community itself. In other words, from these thinkers’ perspectives the community *is* a unified body and its goal is to work toward *becoming* a unified body. This is similar for these thinkers’ perspectives of the individual: the individual *is* autonomous and his or her goal is to work toward *becoming* autonomous. Nancy contends that even communist oppositions to capitalist exploitation have not been exempt from this goal, “the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence *as community*” (2, original emphasis).
Nancy refers to this phenomenon—this goal to complete oneself, to complete the community, to make of things a totality, a oneness—as “immanentism” or the will to immanence. However, for Nancy, immanentism, rather than creating community, is actually the “great stumbling block of thinking community” (2-3), and what betrays or dislocates community. He argues that the will to oneness that underlies these common characterizations of the individual and of community is nothing other than totalitarianism; still, Nancy chooses the concept of “immanentism” over “totalitarianism” because of the obvious ideological and political connotations of the latter term. This distinction is important for Nancy, because this problem of immanentism as the thought of community “besets the general horizon of our time…encompassing both democracies” and their foundations, and not just what we typically consider to be totalitarian regimes (3). In this way, Nancy sees immanentism manifest in politics from leftist communisms to far-right capitalist individualisms. And while Nancy is sympathetic to leftist politics, he recognizes this will to oneness in any human collectivity or individualistic ideology where a rallying cry of unity or self-sufficiency is a common substance upon which the purpose of the group or individual is identified (2).¹³

There are two ways in which Nancy criticizes the notion of community as defined by immanentism: First, achieving this oneness appears to be logically, as well as ontologically, invalid. Second, attempting to achieve this oneness is politically dangerous. Nancy’s problem with the logic of immanentism, or this will to oneness, is that it follows what he calls the logic of the absolute:
The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all.

In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough to be so; I must also be alone being alone—and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute. (4)

The logic of the absolute is that something can exist on its own without any relation to another entity taking part in its being. The absolute must contain its outside or borders inside of itself. It must somehow suppose it is completely free of exposure to any sort of relation to another thing that exists with it or might potentially influence it to some degree, including that which it is not. That, or it must be able to enclose that relation as solely within itself. In its rhetorical form the logic of the absolute is simply begging the question. For absoluteness to be shown, it must already be assumed in its premise. (Rhetoricians will recognize a similar line of thought in Kenneth Burke’s discussion of the paradox of substance in *A Grammar of Motives*, though Burke is not speculating on ontology; rather, he is theorizing how we think and communicate ontology.)¹⁴ In other words, if some entity were truly to be or become *one*, according to this logic, it must be *the only one*, in relation to nothing else. It must be the only thing that participates in its existence—metaphysically or materially. Nancy sees this as an impossible logic, or at least, if some entity did follow this logic, it could not be known or signified in language, for to be so it would have to take part in relation to the existence of linguistic representation, at minimum. Thus, for Nancy, all existence is co-existence; any being’s appearance is always a co-appearance with another being (*Inoperative* 57-8). No being exists of and by itself, including human beings, of course. Here Nancy is extending
Martin Heidegger’s line of thinking that all being is always already “being-with.” As I soon explain, this is Nancy’s larger project: to expose and expound upon the ontological phenomenon of “being-with,” or the relationality inherent in the constitution of all singular beings. Initially, he calls this phenomenon “community.”

The second problem Nancy has with community being defined by oneness is that even if such a completion of oneness is impossible, he still sees the motive to become one as leading to violent actions and ends. Thus, it is not only a problem of conjecture and definition; it is a problem of quality and policy, a “should we or shouldn’t we?” problem of normativity. For Nancy, any community motivated by this will to oneness—in as much as the community sees achieving oneness with its members as its aim and essence—would have to eliminate all the elements that prevented the community from achieving this oneness, were it to fulfill its aim. Nancy warns that all “political or collective enterprise[s] dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it” (12). Any extraneous, contradictory, or just relational elements that take part in that community’s existence, but that do not fit the criteria that define this oneness, would need to be eliminated for this goal to be achieved. Thus, for Nancy, since all beings are already beings-with, which makes such absolute oneness impossible, any community motivated by oneness is a community that seeks its own end, even if it does not know it. Of course, for Nancy, this is the logic of Nazi Germany, and he makes this assertion directly. If the logic were actually carried out to its logical end by the German state, it would have been nothing other than the German
state’s suicide, for a “criteria of pure [Aryan] immanence” would eventually negate all but whatever single being was left who determined and satisfied the pure criteria in the first place (12, original emphasis). Thus we now understand Nancy’s opening line in *The Inoperative Community*, and his argument that “the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community” (1) at large is seemingly an ironic result of the rhetorical appeal and practice of oneness in communities.

So at this point in my discussion of Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of community, he has given us a few things to consider with regards to the concept—and remember it is his notion of community which rhetoricians like Diane Davis, Pat Gehrke, Victor Vitanza, Johanna Hartelius and Jennifer Asenas, and others concerned with rhetorics have employed to critique what Davis has called the “self-composed subject”: First, Nancy has argued that community cannot ontologically be or logically mean oneness. Second, even if we should choose to define community as oneness, or have oneness as a goal of a community, such a goal will be problematic if we are to presuppose any value in the life of that community, the lives of it members, or the lives of in relation to the community. So he has made a constitutional argument, as well as a normative one, and both are negative arguments at this point: what community is not—an absolute or immanent being, and what its aims should not be—oneness. There are points in his work where he blurs the line between the constitutive and the normative, but the two claims above are generally consistent. In the following paragraphs I delineate some elements of Nancy’s concept of community that I will apply to my larger project of rhetorics of community. I also attempt to show some of the limitations to his thought on community, from which
my own rhetorical exigency is established, and to push the conversation on constitutive (what community *is*) and normative theories of community (what types of communities and community practices *should be* advocated) further.

Nancy’s first claim about the logic and ontology of community may be reconcilable with constitutive arguments about community: No community is absolute; it is at least partly constituted by what it is not. If we think back on my brief example of the Mormon community, it should be clear how the Mormon community is constituted as much by its own ideologies and practices as by those community values and practices from which it differs and by which it excludes others. Therefore, I think that generally, I can move forward with this claim about what *community* is—communities are at least partially constituted by their exposed relation to difference. I say *partially*, however, because this cannot be the totality of what constitutes communities. I have made reference to practices throughout this essay, and believe that they must also be considered as constitutive of communities. I explain this in chapter 2.

However, Nancy’s normative claim that communities should not be united under a common goal, which would be a version of an attempt at oneness, is more difficult to reconcile with how actual communities function. This argument about community leaves us with some questions, namely, is there such a community that does not fall under this problem? It is important to note that for Nancy this aim of oneness can be metaphysical. In other words, he is critical of any community that seeks oneness under any heading, figure, term, or theme. The most obvious are those that seek it under figures of nationalism, racism, sexism, or heterosexism, like the Nazis or the Westboro Baptist
Church. These communities are easy to critique under this condemnation of oneness. Because these communities are united under certain hateful absolutes, such as anti-Semitism and anti-homosexuality, they violently exclude others to the detriment of the social and physical lives of those they exclude and include. However, what if we apply this criterion to communities we might wish to affirm, such as communities involved in civil rights movements—groups that unite under themes of equality and non-violence? Under Nancy’s normative argument, the ends of these communities would be death, as well. Of course, his claim becomes even more difficult to reconcile with how actual communities function, if we consider the theme of conflict (as Gregory Clark suggests), or difference itself (i.e., non-oneness) as a common substance under which a community might unite.

Now the goal of this dissertation is not to show the faults of Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of community. In fact, as seen in chapters 2, 3, and 4, I continually incorporate Nancy’s thought into the rhetorics of community I advocate and seek to produce, as well as the ethics and politics of community I see informing and being produced by those rhetorics. Still—and this is a point I wish to make with regards to how rhetoricians have used Nancy’s work—we must be very careful about how we use Nancy’s theory of community. Simply put, Nancy’s argument about what constitutes community is not about actual communities as humans experience them, at least not in totality. Rather, it is a theory about ontology, and how relational difference is one of the conditions of being—thus the term being-with; it is a theory of existence, whether of humans or communities. Nancy himself provides plenty of evidence for this claim.
In two of his later essays, “The Confronted Community,” and “Of Being-in-Common,” Nancy actually explains his project by articulating his move away from the concept of community and toward that of being-with as the driving theme. In the “Confronted Community” Nancy argues he has “preferred to substitute [for community], little by little, the graceless expressions, ‘being-together’, ‘being-in-common’, and finally ‘being-with’” (31). His reasons include the inability to avoid the weight of religious connotation carried in the word “community” that any reader might possibly take away from his work, as well as an acknowledgment that the renewed emphasis on the term has appeared to parallel the revival of the very same communities of oneness he was critiquing and warning against in The Inoperative Community (“Confronted” 31-2).

While this explanation of the move away from the term “community” makes it seem a purely rhetorical choice, in “Being-in-Common,” Nancy gives us even greater evidence that his focus has always been on constructing an ontology that the term community helps inform. Rather than provide a normative alternative to those communities he saw as destructive, Nancy’s project is one of ontology: “the question should be the community of being, and not the being of community” (1). In this pithy observational critique (a seemingly simple anasemic substitution16), Nancy has explained his whole project as one predominantly governed by the purpose of writing a singular/plural ontology. This ontology—with the term “community” as a once convenient and explanatory trope, as well as a point of departure and critique—enables the continual deconstruction of totalitarianism motive in the individualisms and communisms of modernity, yet still allows for a notion of singularity to co-exist with the
plural. Take note, however, that Jean-Luc Nancy himself has been hesitant to use the term “community” since *The Inoperative Community*. Miranda Joseph argues that Nancy’s departure from using the term is actually a sign of his abandonment of the project of community (xxix). In contrast, I think notions of community still have much to learn from Nancy; however, we should be careful in how freely and in totality we apply his thought on community to the actual construction of political communities, organizations, and associations, especially when projects meant to overturn inequalities and injustices against oppressed groups are at stake.

As rhetoricians like Davis and Gehrke have pointed out, such terms like “being-with,” “begin-in-common,” “being-together,” “being-singular-plural” and others (again, see “The Confronted Community,” “Being-in-common,” as well as *Being Singular Plural*) apply more aptly to an understanding of the existence of singularity. This demonstrates how all beings are produced by their contemporaneous exposure to other singular beings, thus problematizing any claim to a notion of a self-sufficient subject that we see in capitalist individualisms and other paradigms that see the self as an autonomous being. Is this phenomenon of relational exposure to difference important to a conception of community? Yes. However, saying that this relationality that constitutes singular beings is community in totality would be a grave mistake, I believe. If this were the main criterion that defined community, we would only be able to differentiate communities by the various relations to which they are exposed. What about those communities we find intolerable? What about those we wish to affirm? Is the only difference between the two a matter of their varying exposures to relations of difference? I am confident in
exclaiming that this is not enough. It does not reflect my experiences of community, and I think one would be hard-pressed to find someone who does find the phenomenon of experiencing relationality as exhaustive of the experience of community.

Thus, one of the goals of this dissertation is to supplement the critique of the autonomous subject that counter-history rhetoricians have employed for some time now—and I think Jean-Luc Nancy’s work is definitely applicable to this criticism. In addition, I also want to differentiate my focus from these rhetorical inquiries. These rhetoricians have concerned themselves with questions regarding the thought of the subject with regards to relational exposure to difference (what has been called community), and have attempted to write rhetorics that subvert a notion of the individual as a self-composed, self-enclosed being. My project is specifically interested in taking what they have to offer and writing rhetorics of community, of human collectivity. As I state in the introduction, I make arguments in this dissertation about how communities are constituted beyond relationality (chapter 2), but my main project is to work toward normative community practices which rhetoricians concerned with equality, justice, and a concern for human dignity might advocate and put into practice, practices that would enable the building of communities which rhetoricians would be motivated to produce in particular contexts. To begin developing these better rhetorical practices, I deem it necessary to consider ethical and political implications, justifications, and aims.
CHAPTER TWO

CONSTITUTIVE COMMUNITY OR NORMATIVE COMMUNITY?

In the previous chapter, I demonstrate how some counter-rhetorics theorists employ the term *community* in their scholarship—which is that they often use the term *community* to critique notions of the autonomous subject, or what also goes by the names of the self-composing rhetor, the capitalist individual, free-willing rhetorical agent and other terms that designate a human with absolute individuality and self-sufficiency. These counter-rhetorics theorists critique this subject by showing the many relations of difference that help constitute the subject’s being, his or her existence, and thus expose myths of notions like those of individualism.¹ In employing the term *community* to make this critique, many of these theorists, including Diane Davis, Pat Gehrke, Victor Vitanza, Johanna Hartelius and Jennifer Asenas, and others have drawn upon French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of community. In the previous chapter I argue how while Nancy’s thought does work well in criticisms of the individual and gives us a starting point for theorizing community, it is not sufficient for discussing how communities are formed, how they function, or for advocating better community practices and action.

In this chapter, I supplement Nancy’s thought on community, and the counter-rhetorics thinkers who have drawn upon it, by arguing for a constitutive model of community—what community *is*, or what makes a community a community. I want a model that rhetoricians can *presuppose* in their discussions of communities. Of course, as soon as they begin to make critiques of community or advocate for a given community, rhetoricians must then rely on normative arguments as well—how communities *should*
be, or what types of community practices one would advocate—from which to make these critiques and from which to advocate for better community practices. However, normativity in itself is often criticized or resisted by leftist politics and counter-rhetorics theorists. Thus, I end this chapter by arguing that normativity, while neither inherently good nor evil, is necessary to any community practice. As part of this argument for certain forms of normativity, I look ahead to the following chapters on ethics, politics, and rhetorics of community, in which I make particular normative arguments about community practices.

One of the problems I address at the end of this chapter is that I believe normativity is often confused for or conflated with normalization in rhetorical theory, as well as some leftist politics, in general. In brief, I define normativity as the element within any practice that advocates at least one value over another value—simply put, the “bitterness” or “worseness” of what happens in the practice. Normalization is a process in practices that creates and/or perpetuates conditions for unwitting conformity to a value. For this definition of normalization, I am working out of Michel Foucault’s thought. While I argue broadly against normalizing rhetorical practices, I am aware that one cannot help but participate in normative rhetorics whenever one practices critique or advocacy. Even the critique of normalization is a normative act, in which I am valuing some standard over normalization; the advocacy of democracy is a normative stance, in which one would be valuing democracy over other political systems or practices. If normative arguments are necessary to ethical and political stances, particularly when it
comes to knowing, doing, and making community, why not make the best normative arguments possible?

**A Constitutive Model of Community**

My goal is not to map out what might be called an “explicative” model of community, or a model that exposes all that is contained in the term *community* or within actual communities and their practices. In other words, I am not discussing a model of community that “leaves no stone unturned.” I am making no claims to such totality of thought. In fact, I will admit right here that the constitutive model of community I will adhere to is an insufficient model for a project of such explicative nature. My model of what constitutes community will not recognize everything; however, I believe it should be a model of community that will be recognized by most readers. In addition, it should inform the reader of things he or she might not have thought of when employing the concept or when participating in his or her own community practices. Think of my model of what constitutes community in much the same way that Aristotle uses the phrase, “in general, and for the most part . . . .”

To make normative arguments about community (which I do in the next three chapters), or make arguments about the types of community practices that *should be* endorsed, one still has to presuppose what a community *is*. I see at least three elements necessary to this presupposed constitutive model of community, all of which overlap and are related in theory, practice, and production: (1) the exposure to relations of difference between members of the community, as well as exposure to the relations of difference
between a community and other communities and individuals; (2) members of a community must share at least one practice, though most will share many, and there will be overlap with other communities; and (3) these relations of exposure to difference and these practices, to be communal, must dually and contemporaneously contain elements of sharing and protection, or preservation, of a community’s existence—including the social and biological lives of its members. Such practices of sharing and protection include practices of inclusivity and exclusivity, and might be better understood as a combination of these binaries in what Roberto Esposito will see as practices and processes of *communitas* (communal sharing with others) and *immunitas* (immunization from sharing with others).

None of these elements alone are enough to sustain a constitutive model of community. For example, though one might differentiate communities solely by each community’s unique exposures to relations of difference, such a differentiation would seem to be arbitrarily motivated. Besides the creation of categories, there would be no other reason to designate a group or for a group to designate themselves a “community”; that is, unless the group was differentiated by the communities’ practices (which might include the discursive practice of how the members of the community protect and differentiate their communal identity from others). Thus, I see all three elements as always existing and functioning in any community. If there are exceptions, I think they are rare, and thus exceptions. There may be other elements to add to a constitutive model of community (such as space and place, or, perhaps a “sense of community,” which I reference at some points in this chapter), but for the time being, I see any normative
argument about community contingent upon an awareness of the three elements above existing or at least contingent upon a presupposition of these elements. Below I give an explanation for each element, including evidence as to why each should be included in this flexible constitutive model of community. A brief caveat: when I get into discussions of inclusion and exclusion, protection and sharing, it may be difficult not to think that I am making normative arguments, in other words, what types of community practices should be advocated. However, I do my best to stay within discussions of what a community is, and when I go into normative arguments, I make the distinction as clear as I can. The difference is that if the three above elements of my constitutive model of community are not met, then one does not necessarily have an unethical or problematic community; rather, one does not have a community at all.

The first element of this constitutive model of community is the exposure to relations of difference. Just as singular beings are partially constituted by exposure to difference with other singular beings, so too are communities partially constituted by this relationality. In other words, the concept of being-with, to which Jean-Luc Nancy has dedicated a significant portion of his scholarship, also applies to what a community is. This is a constitutive argument. I mention being-with in the previous chapter in the discussion of Nancy’s notion of community, but there are multiple layers to this phenomenon, and some further explication, even some reiteration of being-with may help support the claim that communities are partially constituted in this way. To do so, I will continue to draw on Nancy’s thought. One of the clearest examples of his extension of Heidegger’s notion of being-with is in Nancy’s essay, “Of Being-In-Common.”
Nancy’s description and extension of Heidegger’s concept *being-with*, in his essay “Of Being-In-Common,” is one of the few times he employs an analogy to provide a clearer example of the relationality that is the condition for singular existence, of which I would include a singular community’s existence. For Nancy, singular beings are not necessarily human individuals, though a human being is a singular being. Nancy uses the term *singularity*, rather than *individual*, generally to avoid the confusion of equating his notion to individualism, in other words, to avoid mistaking his concept for that of the autonomous individual. As should be clear to this point, for Nancy, singularities are not enclosed in a fixed or self-sufficient structure (*Inoperative* 27-8), as the concept of the individual is. The exposure of singularity precedes identification, and is therefore “not [the same as] an identity,” though any collective or individual identity is a singularity and comes from the phenomenon of singularity (“Being-In-Common” 7). The analogy:

The logic of being-with corresponds to nothing other than what we could call the banal phenomenology of unorganized groups of people.

Passengers in the same train compartment are simply seated next to each other in an accidental, arbitrary, and completely exterior manner. They are not linked. But they are also quite together inasmuch as they are travelers on this train, in this same space and for this same period of time. (7)

In this way, a singular being is “with” the group, part of the whole yet still retaining its singularity. For Nancy, this analogy shows that these singularities are both together and apart, “both extremes [are] possible, virtual, and near at every moment” (7). The singularity may be exposed as *with* the group or as the separate single traveler in
distinction to the other singularities of the group. Again, this exposure precedes identification of the person as an individual or the group as a collective. Therefore, being-with, for Nancy, is continually relational, with no relation fixed, because a singular being is infinitely exposed to the relation of other singularities.

Another term Nancy originally uses, which may help the reader understand this phenomenon, is co-appearance. Co-appearance, (the French term is compearance (see Inoperative 28-9), is the phenomenon of singular beings that are or become “in-common” through co-appearing simultaneously as singular beings in the same space and time, as in the train example.4 We do not become individuals through some act of separation from others, for this separation that is an “I” and relationality that makes the “I” part of a “we” are contemporaneous and co-dependent upon each other, they already are. I can only appear as an “I” if I appear before, and therefore with some other singular being, who would be contemporaneously appearing with me. My singularity relies upon my “already always” relation, or co-appearance with others. Thus, neither singularity nor plurality precede the other, but they are with each other. Nancy argues, in fact, that rather than the erasure of exposure to others freeing a singular being—an argument capitalist individualism presumes—such an erasure actually would be “a privation of being” (Inoperative 57), because for Nancy singularity always already signifies plurality. And being-with is both the exposure, and thus sharing of singularities coupled with their separation and resistance to each other that allows them to be exposed and to share their limits in the same space and time in the first place.5 In brief, a “one” necessarily
requires another, including its resistance to and difference from that other (a “two” or a “three”), to be a “one.”

Again, in Nancy’s earlier writings, this phenomenon of being-with is a synonym for the phenomenon of community. However, as I articulate in chapter 1, this is not enough for a constitutive model of community. Communities are neither free from the phenomenon of being-with nor are they solely defined by it. If being-with is a grounding phenomenon of existence, then communities are obviously at least partially constituted by it. Being-with is the condition that allows recognition of the relations that make a community, or that give that community a “sense of community,” a sense of the “we”; however, it is also the condition for the “I,” and a sense of individuality. As Nancy puts it, “the totality of community . . . is a whole of articulated singularities” (Inoperative 76). I agree with Nancy to this point, but I feel it safe to say that most people would not consider the experience of relational difference in the same place (like a train) with others to be a totalizing criterion for being in a community. Though we often hear popular rhetorics that consider all human relations as part of a global community, most people’s sense of a “we” requires the sharing or overlapping of practices—whether that “we” is a group of people that call themselves a community on a daily basis, whether they are disposed to call themselves a community in times of crisis (when they “co-appear” with or against another community), or whether they do not use the term community at all to describe the group.

Accordingly, the second element I think necessary for a constitutive model of community, and that I will be presupposing throughout the remainder of this dissertation,
is the sharing of practices. In other words, for two people to be in a community, they must not only be exposed to each other’s difference, they must also share a practice. To make this argument, I will draw upon philosopher Todd May’s conception of practices. In *Our Practices, Our Selves; Or, What It Means To Be Human*, May argues that practices are comprised of goal-directedness, social normative governance, and the regularity of behavior. Mays’ conception of practices draws upon the works of Theodore Schatzki, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, and others, and allows me to develop a constitutive model of community that considers the phenomenon with, but beyond, the experience or recognition of the relational difference that constitutes being a singular human. Practices are not disconnected from the relational differences that also constitute communities and singular beings. These phenomena go together. However, I see understanding practices as partially constitutive of community enabling me to make a shift in focus: To ask, What does this group of people do that makes them a community? What are the community’s aims? How do they carry out these aims? And, in particular for my purposes, what explicit and implicit practices of sharing and protection do they participate in? Employing the notion of practices in a definition of what constitutes communities also enables rhetoricians not only to differentiate what constitutes communities beyond their networks of relations; it allows (though does not require) rhetoricians to start developing a flexible value system for the types of communities and community practices we would affirm.

As I stated above, May argues that practices are comprised of three elements: goal-directedness, social normative governance, and the regularity of behavior.
Regarding goal-directedness, May argues that practices have a purpose, an aim in mind. He gives many examples, three of which include teaching, cleaning, and playing baseball (*Our Practices* 8-9). Each of these practices does have ends in view, even if these ends are very different. Pedagogies are designed to impart or create knowledge, the goals of cleaning are sanitary and/or aesthetic, and playing baseball is a practice where the ends are related to entertainment, winning, and exercise. These are very pedestrian examples, but we might also look toward specific communities of practice like the Occupy Movements of 2011 and 2012. Their shared practice was protesting; the aims were to create awareness of social and economic inequalities, at minimum, ultimately in the hopes of changing government policies that disproportionately privilege large corporations—or the “one percent”—over marginalized groups of people, which in this case is actually the other 99%. Thus goal-directedness is an important element in defining practices, even if a practice’s goals are layered and diverse.

Concerning social normative governance, May explains, “a practice must, in order to be a practice, be socially and normatively governed” (9). May differentiates such dual element governing from “rule governed”: normative governance does not necessarily imply obedience to actual explicit rules; instead, such governance means that participants in the practice will know how to carry out the practice, and that there will be norms determining (often multiple) correct and incorrect ways of doing the practice:

There are right ways and wrong ways of engaging in the practice; though not all of the participants may be able to articulate exactly what it is that makes the right way right, they know it when they see it. (The people who
can articulate what is right and wrong about various aspects of a practice are often thought of as the experts in that practice.) (9-10)

May goes on: “The normative governance of practices must also be a social one. In other words, there is no such thing as a practice that can only be for one specific person” (10).

This does not mean that a practice cannot be carried out by one person individually, or that the practice must be a simultaneous engagement with another. Rather, the norm that designates how to carry out the activity is social. Though I may practice riding a bike, doing yoga alone in my living room, or reading a book by myself, each of these activities is socially and normatively governed. There are norms, or right and wrong, better or worse ways of performing these practices. These norms, which have been socially constructed in each of these activities, are socially recognizable, can be carried out correctly and incorrectly, and can be learned and arguably mastered (9-11). The specific social and normative characteristics of practices can and obviously do change—for example, what was once an incorrect practice of reading the last page first in a novel may normatively become the right way of reading—but that does not negate the fact that practices are still socially and normatively governed. In fact, such a socially accepted change would be a result of this governance. Take one of the practices of the Occupy Movements I mention above, the protest. Though one can protest alone, it will not be a practice of protesting unless it has some norms governing the act that are socially recognized as part of the practice of protesting: in particular, the public expression of objection to political or corporate policies is a socially recognized norm of the practice of protesting. For example, a person may think he or she is protesting, but if they are not
following this norm of objection, others will probably consider his or her actions something other than a protest. That is, unless what this person is doing is adopted socially as a norm of protesting. The Occupy Movements are particularly interesting because advocates and detractors continually critiqued the movements on how well they were protesting. Such a critique cannot be made unless there are norms of protesting that are socially recognizable, from which one could make that critique.

The third element of practices is the regularity of behavior. For May, “In order for something to be a practice, the various people engaged in it must be able to be said to be ‘doing the same thing’ under some reasonable description of their behavior” (12). Of course, discerning what a “reasonable description” means, May acknowledges, obviously will depend on the perspectives of those doing the describing, as well as the larger context, and thus will always be up for debate (12-13). For example, even within the various Occupy Movements’ protests, there were arguably different practices situated within the larger practice of protesting. There is the University of California, Davis incident made famous by Internet memes, in which students, to peacefully protest tuition hikes, sat in a line forming a human wall of sorts. As part of the larger police response a police officer walked along the line and pepper-sprayed the protesters. In contrast to this practice of protesting, the most prominent Occupy Movement, Occupy Wall Street consisted of thousands of protesters staying overnight in tents, playing music, carrying signs, and many other practices within the larger practice of protesting. While these instances differ from each other and people in these protests were not all doing the same
thing, there was enough regularity of behavior in each to be largely recognized as a practice of protesting.

This is because, as May explains, “practices can be composed of other practices” and they have “fuzzy borders.” For example, protesting is composed of many other practices, such as sign making, organizing, or boycotting. Even variations in those behaviors can be considered part of the regularity of behavior that constitutes a practice. In May’s own words, “the regularities that different people are engaged in [in a practice] may not be identical but complementary . . . what makes up the regularities of the practice is usually not that people perform the same acts but that they perform different, complementary acts that mesh into a whole” (13, original emphasis).

In sum, a shared practice, which I am seeing as a necessary elements of any community, requires goal-directedness, social and normative governance, and regularities of behavior. May uses the practice of playing baseball to show how all three components of a practice are at work. As I played baseball in high school and college, this example resonates well with me; hopefully it resonates with the reader, too, enough to understand the larger argument about practices.

In baseball there are often at least ten people on the field at the same time (not including managers, umpires, people in the dugout, and others). They are all engaged in the practice of playing baseball, and indeed are all engaged in the same instance of that practice. However, they are not all “doing the same thing” in the sense of displaying the same regularity. Each of the roles assumed by the players is socially and normatively
governed, and each involves its own regularities. Taken together, those regularities are complementary; they constitute that instance of the practice of playing baseball. Thus, we need to understand the regularities of practice as being either regularities of identity or regularities of complementarity. (12-13)

Even though the goals within this example could be many things, whether winning or just having fun, few of the players on a team are participating in an identical act contemporaneously, though they are arguably all practicing baseball when they hit, throw, or catch the baseball. Even within seemingly identical acts there is complementarity. Players will all throw the ball at some point in the game, for example; however, the kind of throwing will be different, depending on the norms of the game, which will help create the specific context and aims of the throw. Whether it is a pitcher pitching or an outfielder throwing the ball to the second baseman after catching a fly ball, such behaviors, while both can be identified as “throwing,” are actually complementary in character.

Now the particular practices I am most interested in for this dissertation are those practices that take part in sharing and protection. This is the third element I believe constitutive of community, which in some ways is just tying together exposure to relations of difference with practices. Arguably all practices can be exclusionary, even if the goals of the practice are not designed to exclude. For example, if someone doesn’t “know how” to do something that is integral to a community (for example, they may not speak the same language or understand the discursive norms), they may feel excluded
from that community. I am interested in both implicit and more explicit practices of inclusion and exclusion; however, as I state above, I want to subtly shift the terms—As I state above, I am more interested in how community practices enable and employ both sharing and protection as integral aims and means of those practices. I see these practices as necessary for any community building and action. To develop the idea further, I will draw on the work of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito.

Unlike so many other continental philosophy investigations of community, rather than focus on the relation of the individual to community, or vice versa, Esposito etymologizes the term community. In doing so, he finds various binary oppositions not unrelated to singularity and plurality, two of the terms in which Nancy is invested. However, the most interesting opposition to community Esposito discovers in the etymology of community, and from which I receive the most traction, is the term immunity. Going back to the Latin forms of community and immunity (communitas and immunitas, respectively) Esposito argues that both terms are connected by the root word munus. While this term munus has multiple meanings, Esposito will find the most tension in its definition as an “obligatory gift.” Following this definition, a person who is “in common” (or communis, an adjectival form of community) is someone who shares or is with “the obligation to give.” A person who is “immune” (or immunis, an adjectival form of immunity) would be protected or free from “the obligation to give.” Put another way, in terms of practices, if I were to practice an act of community, I would be sharing with others an obligation to give. If I were to practice an act of immunity, I would be protected
from that obligation (see *Communitas* 3-19 for the complete etymology, also *Immunitas* 5-6).

At this point, the difference between community and immunity seems only to mean the difference between sharing and protection from sharing. In other words, this is not much different than including and excluding, except perhaps with an emphasis on freedom and preservation rather than a deliberate “othering” so often articulated in critiques of problematic communities. I believe this shift explains communal formation and difference better than just exclusive in-group/out-group models. With this knowledge, and looking ahead to my normative arguments of chapters 3, 4, and 5, I ask the hypothetical question, why would I not privilege practices of community over practices of immunity? Is not sharing a better practice than protecting oneself from sharing? This seems to be a rhetorical question. However, the answer is not so obvious.

As Esposito argues, we currently live in a paradigm that actually privileges immunity (see *Bios* 45-77). This is relatively easy to see when we consider popular economic philosophies like libertarianism, which posits a concern for preserving oneself as being the best for the rest of society. The notion of the self-enclosed, self-sufficient, capitalist individual (which Nancy and many theorists have critiqued, including Diane Davis, Sharon Crowley, Pat Gehrke, Victor Vitanza, Victor Villanueva, and others) comes from a paradigm privileging immunity over community. Nationalisms, anti-immigration, certain gun rights arguments, preemptive warfare, laws like Florida’s “stand your ground,” which ultimately acquitted George Zimmerman of shooting and killing unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin, and other fear-mongering political stances that many
scholars of community find troubling all stem from an over-emphasized interest in the preservation and protection of something, usually conceptualized in terms of a life, whether the life of an individual or the life of a community. My interest for this chapter is not in explaining the reason for this dominant privileging or to argue for better practices of community and/or immunity—the latter is the aim of chapters 3, 4, and 5. Rather, I am interested in showing how, even if immunity has been overemphasized, the tension between sharing and protection is a constitutive element of all communities. In other words, not only do the terms immunity and community presuppose each other, the practices of protective immunization and communal sharing actually require each other. This requirement is not just in the sense of Derridean différance, or the Burkean paradox of purity, where one term’s meaning depends on the play of the presence and absence of its opposite, as well as any other terms that may find themselves in euphonic or other relations to a term. Community and immunity need each other materially, as well as semantically. The practices and processes of sharing cannot occur, cannot exist, without processes of protection or preservation; contemporaneously, practices and processes of protection cannot occur without sharing. There is no inclusivity without some exclusivity, and vice versa. This tension is seen most easily when discussing these terms as practices.

Following Esposito’s etymology, a totalizing practice of community, or absolute sharing, in terms of one’s self would be nothing other than the complete sacrifice of the self. (In immunology this would equate to something like complete immunosuppression, where the self is rid of any protective measures against pathogens and thus more likely to contract deadly diseases.) This sacrifice can be seen as metaphysical, in terms of an
identity, where such a sacrifice would mean that I am not counted as an “I” (a singular being, a citizen, a person, etc.), but am only an appendage of the community. It can also be seen corporeally. The person who is sharing the obligation to give must simultaneously practice some preservation of his or her self or there would be no person that can give, and therefore no one and nothing to share. For example, in pregnancy, an example Esposito draws upon, we can see a complex and ever-changing balance of giving and exemption that takes care not to allow too much excess of either sharing or protection, while at the same time employing each. If the mother’s body were to be too “communal” in the sense of communitas, implicating the mother into giving all her sustenance to the fetus, neither she nor the fetus would survive the pregnancy. To complete a full term pregnancy her body must perform functions of community with and immunity from the fetus. As Esposito says, “The immunity mechanism in pregnancy “immunizes itself from an excess of immunization” (Immunitas 169-170). Thus, for practices of sharing to occur, a body that is capable of giving (whether a human body within a community or a communal body) must be protected so that it can continue to share. And of course, for a community to exist, it not only needs to protect those singular humans within it that constitute it through the sharing of practices, it needs to practice protection from and with elements with which it shares relations, in particular those people or things that pose some risk to the life of the community (which might include elements within the community).

In contrast, Esposito explains, a totalizing practice of immunity, or protection, in terms of one’s self would be complete self-preservation and absolute exclusion from
others. However, as I argue in chapter 1 and the beginning of this chapter (by drawing upon Jean-Luc Nancy), this is impossible at least in totality, except in death: all singular beings are themselves constituted by relationality. Thus, the practice of protecting a being’s singularity requires a shared negotiation with the relations of others, from which it is being protected. “Too much” protection of the singular being may actually work counterproductively, leading to the demise of the protective being. (A more extreme example would be in medical cases of autoimmunity when the immune system sees itself as a threat and begins to hurt itself in the attempts to protect itself.\textsuperscript{13}) In productive practices of medically produced immunization, the body actually shares with an element of the danger from which it wants protection (in the form of a vaccine) in order to protect itself from that danger. If it did not share with this danger, it would not survive. This works in terms of a community, as well: for a community to retain a sense of a “we,” it must preserve the singularity of the people that share in making that “we”; otherwise, there would be no act of singular beings identifying with that sense of “we.” However, the community must also protect itself (again, this may just be political or social differentiation, though also biological survival) from singularities that do not share the sense of “we,” but with whom the community shares a relation—a relation of difference that takes part in later defining that certain group of people as a community. Thus, immunization functions through practices of sharing and exposure, and no communal sharing can continually take place without practices of protection (for more on this logic, see also \textit{Bios} 50-52).\textsuperscript{14}
In sum, Esposito theorizes a more productive conception of collectivity, in which we move beyond conceptions of community as in-groups and out-groups, inclusion and exclusion, and move toward conceptualizing communities as collectives functioning through practices of immunizing life in concert with practices and processes of sharing and exposing life (Immunitas 165-77). Thus, we should no longer look at exclusivities as a solely repressive and negative; neither should we consider inclusion as an absolutely affirmative and positive practice. Both practices can and often do have a normative function, and are open to criticism; however, together they are also necessary to the existence of a community, and to the existence of singular beings. In other words, they perform a constitutive function. No community exists without contemporaneous practices of protection and sharing.

In conclusion of this section on a constitutive model of community, I want to list the three elements I see as necessary to any community. This I do to help clarify my argument, and to give the reader a reference to presuppose when I use the term community throughout the rest of the dissertation. Though this bulleted list below may look neat and cleanly defined, I hope that the reader will see in my articulation above how the delineation of each of these elements (and each of their constitutive elements) is not so clear. The borders between the elements are blurry. Each element and the elements that make up that element share borders with each other, cross over into each other, and depend upon one another.

In short, a constitutive model of community must at minimum contain these elements:
1. Exposure to relations of difference
   a. Within the community: singular beings will differ from other singular beings and with communities as a whole, even as the singularity of each is partially dependent upon the shared exposure to this difference.
   b. Alongside other communities: part of what constitutes a community is that it differs from other communities. A group of communities may be part of a larger community, but the differences between the communities (most easily determined by a differentiation of practices—see below) allow each community to retain its singularity.

2. Shared practices
   a. Goal-directed: practices must have an aim or multiple aims to be a practice.
   b. Social and normative governance: the norms, or correct way of carrying out a practice is governed socially. There are right and a wrong ways of carrying out a practice, and these determinations are social in character. These norms of right and wrong can and often change, but such changes occur socially, not individually within a vacuum.
   c. Regularity of behavior: practices are constituted by identical and/or complementary behaviors, which, taken together, can be recognized as part of a larger practice. Apart, they may be seen as practices in their own right. For example, the practice of playing baseball is partially constituted by complementary behaviors of throwing and hitting, two complementary behaviors that have been practices regularly enough to be socially identified as part of the larger practice of baseball.

3. Communities are simultaneously composed of practices of sharing and protection: For a group of people to be a community, the members of the group must practice sharing
with each other, whether this is a sharing of an identity (e.g., “we are community of English teachers”), a sharing of ideas (e.g., an online knitting community, like Ravelry.com shares methods of knitting), or a sharing of materials (e.g., communities may share living space, food, or member’s of the community’s talents and labor). However, such practices of sharing contemporaneously take part in practices of protection, whether this is a protection of identity (“we are different from them,” and within the community “I” am different than “you”), a protection or preservation of ideas (such as archiving), or practices of the protection of materials, whether food, space, or biological life. The latter protection is especially important: for any community or persons to take part in sharing food, shelter, or one’s life, they also must protect or preserve their lives or they could not practice sharing them.

**Reconsidering Normativity**

I hope the beginnings of the constitutive model of community I provide above give rhetoricians something constant, though flexible, to rely upon in the construction of communities we may analyze, assemble, or produce for certain courses of action, and which we may presuppose when we use the term *community*. When we designate or recognize others designating a group of people as a community, I believe that it will be difficult not to see that such a community *is* a community, at least in part, because of its exposure to relations of difference, its shared practices, and in particular its practices of sharing and protection with those relations of difference (inside and outside of the community). This moves me in the direction of the larger arguments of my dissertation,
the normative ones. As I outline in the introduction to this dissertation, I argue for an ethics of community in chapter 3, a politics of community in chapter 4, and certain rhetorics of community for pedagogical application in chapter 5. These are normative arguments. I argue for types of values, advocacies, and available means of persuasion that one can and even should or should not use (in some cases) for particular community practices. Before the reader gets to that section of my larger argument, I think it is important that I explain the difference between normativity and normalization so that I might establish a justification for the remainder of the dissertation, and clarify that my project is not one of normalization. The remainder of this chapter will work toward that goal of justifying the need for some normative arguments and differentiating normativity from normalization. My hopes are that we, as rhetoricians, will not fear making normative arguments, but make the best arguments we can, while being open to adjusting and changing those arguments when certain ethical, political, and rhetorical circumstances call for such adjustments and changes.

I recently went to a rhetorical theory colloquium where a graduate student expressed concern about advocating any values in scholarship. She felt that anytime she did advocate a value, she was or would be accused of being normative, and that as scholars (she felt) we should therefore avoid normative arguments completely, and rely only on critique. Of course, and I will develop this thought further, the critical accusation she feared is itself value-laden—accusing normativity as unethical is an act of normativity, from my perspective. Nevertheless, this is how she felt. I did not ask her specifically why she felt this way, though many in the colloquium nodded in agreement.
Based upon the discussion that followed, I can speculate on some reasons why she came to this conclusion, including the pressures of scholarly objectivity and detachment (themselves normative requirements), leftist politics’ view of morality, and/or the influence of continental philosophy in general.

The first two reasons are simple enough to understand. Objectivity and detachment appear to go hand in hand with traditional expectations of academic discourse: even though queer theory, various feminisms, critical race theory, work in science rhetorics, and post-structural thought have exposed the systemic white, male, and heterosexual values and valuations that have historically founded academic discourse, appeals of objectivity and detachment from one’s topic still remain and hold sway. I believe I can generally say this is true based upon my own experiences teaching science and writing courses to third- and fourth-year college students. While the proliferation of fear mongering right-wing radio and conservative news outlets has convinced many of my students that academic discourse is neither objective nor detached from its subjects, my students still hold to the ideal that it should be objective and detached. However, though these reasons may have influenced the graduate student’s fear of making normative arguments, I do not think they are the main reasons.

The third and fourth reasons I believe the graduate student in the colloquium felt pressure not to make normative arguments have to do with the values of leftist politics and their relationship to continental thought. I believe these are the dominant reasons this graduate student felt fear of taking part in normativity. While the discussion that follows could easily be a dissertation in its own right, I address these latter two reasons by briefly
drawing upon a few thinkers that have used the term *normativity* recently in very different ways—Lauren Berlant and Todd May. Both are interested in leftist politics, considered broadly, and both draw upon continental philosophy in their work. Berlant’s view appears to find any normative practice to be wrong or troubling, and therefore advises against it. The graduate student’s fears are obviously reflective of this perspective, and I think this is consistent with some thought in rhetorics studies as well, including thought on community, which I also discuss. Without attempting to discern Berlant’s motives or intents, I conclude that it appears her view is confusing or conflating normativity with normalization. That, or she sees normativity as a substitute for something like “dominant ideology.” The second view I reference, Todd May’s view, discusses normativity *not* as an inherently ethical or unethical thing, but as a necessary part of any politics and ethics, and finally, as irreducible to normalization. I draw again upon May, in particular, since it is his notion of practices I argue are constitutive of community. To remind the reader, one of the elements of a practice is social and normative governance. If May is right, and I think here he is, then community practices cannot avoid being normative; however, they can practice less oppressive and more ethical normativity.

The first view, that normativity is an inherent wrong and should be resisted, can be found in Lauren Berlant’s article, “Starved.” I do not wish to pick on Berlant by any means, as I largely support her feminist and queer politics. However, her writing is a strong example of criticizing normativity without clearly indicating what the term means. She is an accomplished scholar that many readers will recognize. In other words, I do not
want my readers to think that this problem is one solely of rhetoric studies. Following a short reading of her work I show how it is prevalent in the fields of rhetorics too. Lastly, “Starved” is the text we were reading in the rhetorical theory colloquium; it is the text that led to the discussion of the graduate student’s fear of making normative arguments.

In “Starved,” Berlant worries that Western society has moved “beyond” sex. In particular her argument is that Western society has moved beyond “non-normative sexuality” politics (441, fn. 3). Such a movement beyond concerns for sex and “non-normative” sexuality appears to be the result of “political depression” (433). Berlant argues that there are many reasons this political depression is occurring, including the fact that “sex complicates the ordinary,” and the ordinary is appealing and has recently become more accessible for groups historically marginalized by sexuality (433). In her words, politics advocating “non-normative sexuality . . . as a condition of invigorating possibility for multiplying viable ways of living,” is now considered a “threat to the normal” by the very people who were once proponents of that position. This threat has become a catalyst for bowing down to the pressures of “claims for inclusion, better biopower, and cheerfulness about the inevitably queered excitements and entitlements wrought by or alongside of the capitalist fantasy machine” (441, fn.3). No doubt Berlant is right that many of the more radical political stances of queer theory and feminism have become less radical and found less exigency once the dominant social orders— influenced by capitalism—began appropriating, exploiting, or at least appearing to move towards acceptance of some sexual practices that are less and less being thought of as deviant. The reasons for such acceptance are no doubt complicated, and perhaps more influenced
by the assimilation of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) than the actual acceptance of such identifications by the society at large. Thus, I think her argument about political depression is warranted. But I do not wish to get sidetracked on her larger argument, important as it may be. I am more interested in how she uses the term normativity to make her argument—for I think her work in this article is symptomatic of a larger problem of confusing, conflating, or unnecessarily problematizing the concept of normativity with that of normalization in critical inquiries, including rhetorical theories.

In “Starved,” though it is prevalent in her other works, when Berlant uses the word normativity it is always with a negative connotation. Now a common definition of the word normative is an adjective that modifies a noun, such as an act or an idea, in relation to a societal or group standard. Whether the act or idea is deriving from that standard, establishing it, or just relating to it, it may be considered a normative act or idea. In other words, a normative practice is a practice that (1) establishes a value as a standard, (2) is in relation to a standard, (3) is derived from a standard, or (4) is a combination of all three. Such a standard may be related to quality judgments like right or wrong, good or evil, better or worse, permitted or forbidden, tolerable or intolerable. Upon first reading Berlant’s work, the terms normative and normativity appear to take on this same meaning. From Berlant:

Normativity is a vote for disavowing, drowning out, delegitimating, or distracting from all that’s ill-fitting in humans: it can never drown out, though, the threat posed by sex’s weird tastes . . . . In the 1990s I felt that I
needed to write openly, undefensively, and with explicit narrative pleasure about sexuality and sex, to convince people—students, really—to be willing to unlearn their attachments to normativity, with its compulsive formalism and unimaginative be-gooderness. My favorite verb was to lubricate: as in, I want my intellectual performance to lubricate a discussion about the centrality of sex, sexuality, and subjectivity to being ordinary in the normative political, juridical, and intimate domains of the social. (“Starved” 435, my emphasis)

While Berlant seems to understand normative acts as those related to a group or social standard, she does not appear to think that her own attempts to “lubricate a discussion” and to “unlearn [her student’s] attachments to normativity,” while against the dominant standard, each imply a better standard to follow, a better normative practice to advocate. The difference is that the standards, or norms, she finds preferable (“sex’s weird tastes”) are not currently the dominant standards. It is not clear what her position would be if her values were dominant. Nevertheless, by advocating these norms, she simultaneously demonizes normative practices while taking part in a normative practice—namely, the arguing for practices she believes embody sex’s “irrational exuberance” (436-7). And, of course, she apparently does this in the name of non-normativity. In other words, if normative takes on the definition I explain above, Berlant is advocating a standard of having no standard. This begs the question, is pushing for non-normative practices a normative practice? Though Berlant and others may not see it this way, and though I largely agree with some her arguments about sexual politics, I
think the answer is yes. That, or she has completely redefined *normativity* without providing that definition for her readers.

For example, I do not think she is arguing that irrational exuberance ought to be the dominant norm. In these discussions, though, it is often thought that a norm must be dominant in order to be a norm. However, there are several positions one might take: (a) that norm $x$ ought not to be dominant; (b) that norm $y$ is better than norm $x$, but that that does not mean that people are obliged to follow norm $y$ (this form of norm is implicit in Foucault and often in Gilles Deleuze, for example; or (c) that norm $y$ ought to be dominant, etc. Normativity is about the better and the worse, which does not necessarily mean that it is about imperatives, though Berlant may be using it this way.

As I mention above, Berlant is by no means alone in her problematic use of *normativity*. Many rhetoricians also conflate normativity and normalization, or at least do not make it clear how they are using the terms, which also may lead to some confusion for their audiences. Whether this is a result of a similar fear as that which the graduate student projected, or *normativity* has somehow become a word synonymous with oppression and dominant ideologies, is not clear, though it is most prevalent in rhetorical scholarship that is engaged in resisting dominant ideologies.18 However, in much rhetorical scholarship *normative or normativity* simply take on broadly negative connotations without definition, usually modifying a practice that is contested by the practice the scholar is advocating. There are many examples of this confusing language usage, though some of these contestations and uses of *normativity* are subtler than others. Some brief examples follow.
Against the exclusive universalism of Western philosophy and rhetoric, which has historically contributed to identifying certain people as not “fully” human, Wendy S. Hesford (“Human Rights Rhetoric of Recognition”) argues for “contingent identities” rather than “normative identity categories,” in human rights discourse. She views the latter as being an example of “symbolic mechanisms that have functioned as modalities of subordination” (283). It is unclear how her argument for using contingent identities in human rights discourse is not an argument for a better norm. In “the Rhetoric of Normal Surgical Solutions,” John W. Jordan makes a strong argument that, “definitions of health and illness, of normality and deformity, are ideas we create rather than facts we reference, and are continually redefined to accommodate our understanding of the world and the actions we perform in it” (23). He argues throughout the essay that normality is socially constructed, both by those in the general public and the medical profession. Throughout the article, Jordan appears to use the term normative as in relation to a standard. For example, he argues for “redefining the normative relationship between medicine and the patient’s body in [this] age of plasticity” (22). Nevertheless, Jordan also broadly separates “normative body rhetorics” from “traditional medical perspectives” (20), implying without explanation that the latter are not normative. In “Recovering Hyperbole: Rethinking the Limits of Rhetoric for an Age of Excess,” Joshua R. Ritter advocates for the use of hyperbole to disrupt “hermeneutical boundaries” (408) as an alternative to “normative frameworks of knowledge” (420). Though normative in this context seems to mean related to a standard, in this case a standard of rhetorical theory, it is not clear how he views his advocacy of hyperbole usage to “communicate the
ineffable or transgress the expressible” (425) as not also normative, as not a better or additionally needed standard for rhetorical theory. Lastly, Michelle Smith, in “Containment Rhetoric and the Public Sphere,” posits the nineteenth century Amana Society as a “non-normative community” because its communist lifestyle was resistant to American capitalist norms (140-41). Of course, it is unclear how a group that followed a norm of communism is considered “non-normative.” Each of these scholars, to a varying degree, unclearly uses the term *normative* with a negative connotation in his or her work, and these are only a small sample of the confusing resistance to the term *normative* in rhetorical studies—a resistance that seems to go hand-in-hand with the unacknowledged advocacy for alternative normative practices.

Most of the scholars above are doing strong descriptive analyses and are contesting (or analyzing the contestation of) political and cultural norms that should be contested. However, in each of the examples I cite above, the scholars—rather than just contest the specific cultural or political norms discussed in each article—also confusingly imply advocacy for a resistance to normativity in and of itself. At times they appear to use *normativity* as the advocacy of a standard, and other times they use it to indicate the creation of conditions where that standard (or norm) has become naturalized to the point of being considered “normal.” This latter connotation I consider to be, following Foucault (as I explain later in the section), *normalization* and *not normativity*. While at first glance this may appear to be a simple problem of definition, the conflation of these two terms, even if unstated, is not only confusing to readers, but it can potentially lead readers to paths of fear like that of the graduate student I mention above. At worst, such a fear of
normativity might lead to apoliticality, for it creates the question, “how do I argue against normativity without being normative?”

Now Berlant’s argument (as well as the arguments of those just cited) works better, for me at least, if what she means by non-normativity is closer to non-normalization. She may mean something else completely, such as “the perpetuation of dominant ideology,” but normalization would work for her argument, as well. I will explain the difference. Please note, that I am not arguing for a foundationalist definition of the two terms, but for a recognition and for better uses of the different determinations they might make. Scholars like Janet Jakobsen have also seen the need in differentiating the terms. Jakobsen, whose is writing for a queer studies audience, argues that “the reduction of resistance to the mere act of ‘resisting the norm’ has serious and unwelcome consequences,” noting that “resistance is not necessarily progressive” (“Queer is? Queer does?” 513). Though she goes in a different direction in this article and delineates the terms differently than I do in this section of my dissertation, she does think it is important to disarticulate norms, normativity, and normalization so that queer politics might better understand what it is doing when it is resisting. I have very similar concerns for the fields of rhetorics.

It should be noted that my differentiation of the terms does not make normativity an inherently ethical good or evil, but it does understand normativity as unavoidable in community practices, and understands arguing against normativity, in absolute, a highly problematic rhetorical practice. Not only is such a practice problematically normative itself, such a political stance may lead to the inability to take political action for a fear of
being normative. I note above how the graduate student’s fears of making normative arguments were in part because of leftist politics and its relationship to continental thought. This is not an argument I want to spend a great deal of time on; however, I also note this because both Berlant and May (whom I will discuss again, shortly) draw upon continental thought to support their arguments and advocate more progressive or leftist politics, even though they have very different views of normativity.

In “The Normative Framework of Democratic Politics” (chapter 4 ofPolitical Thought) May notes that in United States politics in particular, the politics of the right has laid claim to morality. In contrast, the politics of the left has criticized these moral stances because the right’s views of morality are opposed to the equal rights of various marginalized groups, such as those who identify with the LGBT community. Because of the right’s claim to morality, the left (and May includes progressive theorists and political activists) sees the term morality as containing “dictatorial and provincial” connotations. “The argument runs roughly like this: since there are no universal moral values, no set of values can claim ultimate superiority over any other; therefore, people should be exposed to a diversity of moral views” (Political Thought 102).21 May explains how for some progressives and activists, this political stance is connected to continental thought, in particular the works of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. However, according to May (and I am in agreement with him on this point), none of the above thinkers is against morality itself, but against transcendent moral values and the history of moral discourse, a history that attempts to draw upon transcendent values often through religious or other foundational texts to establish fixed
and oppressive rules of behavior. Not only do these continental thinkers agree that transcendent values do not exist, they argue that the enforcement of such values is intolerable (103). Note, however, how such a stance of intolerability is itself the advocacy of a value and related to a standard that would determine such intolerableness. Thus, for May, “at issue here is not the term *morality*. We may call these matters what we like. However, we are inescapably entrenched in an arena of normative judgment, of judgments of the better and the worse that are supposed, in one way or another, either to bind people to or discourage them from something” (104).

Similarly, what is at issue here is not the term *normativity*; however, if we are “entrenched in an arena of *normative judgment*” (my emphasis), as May argues, then why the constant criticism of and negative connotation of normativity without a clear definition or alternative term to designate the meaning of inescapable normative practices? Though there is no doubt a complicated historical precedence for this criticism and negative connotation, two of the things I do see at issue are the conflation of *normalization* and *normativity*, and accepting the idea that normative judgments need not be based upon transcendent values. I will close this section and chapter addressing both issues.

In brief, normativity in practices is, again, establishing, drawing from, or simply relating to a societal or group standard, whether this standard is dominant or not. It can be a straightforward “field of power,” as Jakobsen states, or a more complex “set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms” (517). For example, equality may be a norm that many advocate, it may even be the dominant normative argument, in other
words, the one we hear most often; however, it is not the dominant norm, or the standard we actually live by, especially in capitalistic societies, which place values of economic gain and economic freedoms over equality. Though not in complete contrast, for they do overlap, normativity is irreducible to normalization. I define normalization via Michel Foucault’s thought in *Discipline and Punish*, in particular his section on “The Means of Correct Training” (170-194). Foucault sees normalization as the focal point of discipline. Following Foucault, I see normalization as, like normativity, relating to a standard; however, normalization differs from normativity in that it focuses on establishing this standard as the dominant standard. Normalization establishes this standard through the creation and perpetuation of conditions (economic, architectural, linguistic, and others) in such a way as to make people conform unwittingly to that standard, and to view that standard not as a standard, but as what it means to be “normal” in their group or society. Of course, for Foucault what is considered “normal” is rarely the statistical norm. In fact, in normalizing judgment it is often impossible for most people to actually meet the standards of the norm, whether it is a norm of beauty, sanity, sexuality, or financial stability. By creating the conditions for people to unwittingly conform to that standard, normalization moves people toward an “ideal” but often unreachable point of normacy. As this point of normacy gets finer, less and less people can reach it and are thus defined by how far they deviate from that point. In sum, normalization works by making something socially constructed appear natural; in other words, it works by making what should be considered a resistible normative argument appear as something indisputable (see 177-179, in particular). Though this unachievable
ideal is not a requirement of normalization, per se, it occurs when normalization is most oppressive.

I would like to give a personal example of a rhetorical practice in terms of normativity and normalization to better support my claim that normativity should not be conflated with normalization. In the introduction of this dissertation I briefly relate my relationship with the LDS Church and the larger Mormon community. Though I no longer take part in the Church, and disagree with many of its normative and normalizing practices, my goal in this section is not to demonize the Church, but to describe one of its practices. I want to draw upon my experience in the Mormon community one last time to help explain a major difference between normative and normalizing practices. In particular I want to analyze the Mormon community practice of encouraging young members of the Church to go on a proselytizing mission.

The practice of encouraging young members of the LDS Church to serve a proselytizing mission is as old as the Church itself (established in 1830). As a normative argument, the standard claim is “every young man should fill a mission” (Kimball), meaning that every young Mormon man between the age of 18 and 25 should go on a proselytizing mission. Though more and more women are going on missions, and are being encouraged to go, the adage is still very gendered, privileging men. The simple normative argument goes as such: members of the Church believe they belong to the only true church on the earth, and thus should share their beliefs. The leaders of the Church have designated young men between 18 and 25 to be those missionaries; therefore, every worthy young man should go on a mission. However, as one can imagine, this argument
advocating that young men going on a mission should be the standard, the norm, by itself is not very convincing argument to young, questioning teenage minds, especially when going on a mission means suspending their everyday lives as they know them for two years.

To steer away from such questioning the Church and larger Mormon community relies on practices of normalization to “encourage” young men to serve their Church. In other words, rather than rely on the merits of the argument and the beliefs of the Church, the Church creates and continually perpetuates the conditions whereby the members of the Church feel that going on a mission is a natural part of the young man’s life, not up for questioning unless the young man is not considered worthy to participate. To explain this practice of normalization, I will now draw upon my own knowledge of and experiences in the LDS Church and larger Mormon community. In my writing style, I differentiate the sections more reflective of my experiences from memory and journals with italics (I grew up in the Church and served a two-year mission from 1997 to 1999 in Sydney, Australia). I admit these sections contain some later reflection, but they do stem from my memories and journals from that time in my life. I hope that the depth to which I discuss this example will not sidetrack my larger argument, but make a more convincing argument toward differentiating normativity from normalization.

The construction of the Mormon mission, though it may appear unique in comparison to other proselytizing practices of other religious organizations (two years for men, ages 18-25; eighteen months for women, ages 19+), exhibits features and characteristics parallel to those observed in other institutional analyses and discourse
theories, such as Michel Foucault's examination of the prison, the hospital, and the school in *Discipline and Punish*; the education system in Ian Hunter's *Rethinking the School*; Antonio Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony and the state; Jay Lemke's theories of discourse; and Richard Miller's analysis of bureaucracy in higher education. As I analyze some of the practices and processes of normalization in the Mormon community, I will draw upon a few of these thinkers, as well.

The practices and processes of normalization that each Mormon member must participate in before going on a mission are carried out in a series of stages. The types of disciplinary exercises one is normalized to perform to progress from each of these stages would be called "graduated," by Foucault. The individual (particularly the male member of the Church) is always being disciplined in relation to the next possible position or state within a hierarchy of privilege, accountability, and power. From Foucault:

> By bending behaviour towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary. It thus assures, in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification. (*Discipline and Punish* 161)

After baptism at the age of eight (for those born into the Church) male members’ behaviors are held in a constant condition of identification with all three of the elements exhibited in the above quote: a categorical term based on a terminal state, other individuals, and a type of itinerary. At the age of twelve, for example, one is expected to become a deacon (term) and receive the Aaronic Priesthood, become a teacher at
fourteen, a priest at sixteen, and receive the Melchizedek Priesthood at the age of eighteen. To make this progression from stage to stage one is expected to perform a number of responsibilities defined in the doctrines of the Church pertaining to each position.

Along with this progression is the continual comparison to other young men, and returning missionaries. Brad, Trent, Jeremy, and I weren't really best friends or anything, but we liked each other well enough. Each of us could hold his own with the ability to whisper about sports or girls and break mid-sentence into answering a question from our Sunday school teacher. Brad was not only the oldest of our group; he was also the most righteous. We always figured he'd grow up to be an apostle or something. I never felt that I consciously compared myself to him and the returned missionaries we saw coming home, but I did. We all did. From age twelve to eighteen Brad was the first to become a deacon, a priest, and so on. These progressions were contingent upon age of course, but his preceding us in callings and other responsibilities seemed the natural order of things as well. President or First Assistant Brad Crosby had a nice ring to it, and I quickly became accustomed to performing symbolic obeisance to his lordliness. No, really Brad was a nice guy who just learned the system quicker than everyone else. We had all heard our parents and leaders whisper about some "fallen" youth here or there. None of us wanted the burden of being referred to like that, and whether all of my group truly believed in the absolute truthfulness of the Church or not, we discovered early on that Brad was really good at pleasing those in authority. This made him well liked, so we just followed his lead.
The itinerary these young men are perpetually characterized by (and I am still referring to the Foucault passage above) is the plan to progress from each of these positions in the hierarchical order, through obedience to the Church laws and ordinances, toward the goal of being worthy of going on a mission by the age of eighteen. Adult and peer leaders observe the young men in their progression and report on these observations to the local bishop at monthly leadership meetings. At each terminal state in this progression each young man is interviewed and evaluated by his bishop to be considered worthy or not of advancement depending on how thoroughly he has performed his obligations and obeyed the commandments of the Church.

The most prominent terminal state in these series of advancements, the state that is also perceived and explicitly purveyed as the primary goal for continuing to discipline oneself from position to position, is that of achieving the status of elder in the church and getting a call to serve a mission somewhere in the world (according to LDS doctrine, women may receive mission calls, but cannot receive the priesthood). Yet it is not the figure of the missionary that is the focal production of this process of normalization, but the figure of the returned missionary. From birth (for those who are born into the Church) one of the dominant narratives in Mormon discourse is that of the returned missionary, or "RM," as hero returned home from battle. Throughout each year most churches will hold at least one or two services in which an RM speaks to the congregation about the uplifting spiritual experiences he or she had during the eighteen-month or two-year mission. This exciting moment, often termed a "homecoming" within conversations of the missionary and his or her family, is seen as a rite of passage to adulthood in the
Mormon culture. Though this conceptualization has recently been discouraged by LDS leadership ("New Mission") because of the negative implications on the identities of those who do not go on missions, the process of normalization remains. When one becomes an RM one simultaneously becomes "marriage material" and is more likely to be called to leadership positions in the Church. Phrases such as "When you go on your mission . . ." and "every young man should serve a mission" and later, “on my mission” are commonly repeated in Mormon discourse, whether from the pulpit or the pews. These discursive practices rhetorically perpetuate this rite of passage as a right to normal interaction because leadership continually reiterates that "a mission is a privilege, not a right."

Farewells and homecoming meetings were my favorite. Not only was I free from listening to some boring prepared-the-night-before or the morning-of talk, I felt privileged to hear from someone about to go on a mission or from an RM—either way, a person I was supposed to grow up to become. Oh, and I wanted to become them. Except for the weird ones, most farewell and homecoming meetings were graced with the presence of a lot of pretty young women—each sending a missionary out, or anticipating one's return. This, alongside the admiration of the entire congregation, made them appear god-like and infallible to me. I was definitely going to become a returned missionary. I learned the song, "I hope they call me on a mission" from an early age and as I became older it held more and more meaning for the person I would attempt to become.
There is a large set of normalizing criteria that must be met for a young person to be deemed worthy to go on a mission. Just as “a whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgments concerning the criminal have become lodged in the framework of penal judgment” (Foucault 19), so too is the prospective LDS missionary led through a similar normalizing process. This process includes an interview of worthiness, including a judgment of physical and mental health ("Statement") from a local physician in collaboration with the missionary's local bishop and the stake president (a lay position that presides over five to twelve wards). This is where the disciplining power is exercised to its fullest and becomes an "economy of suspended rights" (Foucault 11), for unless the prospective missionary deceives his or her interviewers, his or her right to be a missionary and then a returned missionary is contingent upon a life of obeisance and obedience to the commandments of the Church, including abstinence from drinking alcohol, coffee, using any tobacco product, and engaging in sexual intercourse or a serious crime. If any of these actions has occurred, the candidate must provide evidence of completing the repentance process, though more recently even the repentance process now will not "save" a candidate from mission forfeiture if the number of occurrences of some of the "greater sins" is too many. The candidate must also convey complete devotion to the Church and its leaders, including making a declaration that he or she believes the Church to be the "only true and living church upon the face of the whole Earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30). If the prospective missionary is deemed worthy, the bishop and stake president will sign a set of evaluative (which are sent on to
Church headquarters in Salt Lake City) to officially determine and confirm that worthiness.

*Those interviews with Church authorities were the worst. I still remember how nervous I was, thinking that my bishop or stake president, much more righteous than me, could probably detect any of the sins I was hiding and revoke the possibility of my going on a mission and becoming a returned missionary. I had never done anything too serious—hadn't drank, gone "all the way" with a girl, or even dreamed of questioning the Church—so I didn't really have anything to worry about. Nevertheless, yesterday's little white lie seems like tomorrow's road to apostasy when looking into the eyes of one's judge, especially since this judge often observed us outside of "official" Church functions.*

While this perpetual compliance of behavior toward various terminal states may appear totalitarian in its design to an outlier, most members of the Church do not recognize or believe they experience the repressive nature of such an apparatus. By the time most members are of an age to "participate" in the community, these processes have become naturalized. For LDS Church government is a Gramscian "government with the consent of the governed," a consent that is "organized and not generic and vague as it is expressed in the instant of [democratic] elections." It "does have and request consent, but it also 'educates' this consent" (Gramsci 259). In seeming irony, the Church educates this consent of the members through a discourse from birth that encourages, persuades, and eventually requires an individual to make a habit of continually petitioning for the consent of Church authorities: “Am I worthy to be a deacon?” "A priest?” “Am I worthy
to go on a mission?” “Am I worthy to get married in the temple?” “Am I worthy of a particular position in the Church?” In other words, the Church gains consent of the governed by educating the members to seek the consent of the Church government throughout their lives.

In this way the Church's discourse of consent "functions ideologically . . . to support and legitimate the exercise of power, and to naturalize unjust social relations, making them seem the inevitable consequence of common sense” (Lemke 20). Of course, the Church does not make any claims of being just, at least not in an egalitarian sense. But the members, nevertheless, refrain from discussing any feelings of repression or dissension—concepts identified with sin and apostasy in this discourse. Because of Mormonism's discursive formations' normalizing functions, the greatest motive for the member of the Church is the obtainment of normalcy as defined by those formations, whether officially decreed or not. Symbolic entry into the Church's dominant normalizing discursive formations is attained when one becomes a "card-carrying” member—when one holds a temple recommend, which allows a member to perform higher ordinances of salvation. Seeking and retaining this temple recommend becomes a habitual goal and a part of everyday life for members steeped in the normalizing formations of the Church community, and is a requirement for going on a mission.

*My whole life seemed to have been designed for this purpose: to go on a mission. My group of friends had daydreamed about the “exotic” places we would go—South Africa, Hawaii, the Philippines, Australia—the latter being my personal choice ever since I could talk about going on a mission. When I finally received my call I felt more than*
ever that it was from God. I was going to Sydney, Australia. The place I had dreamed about going for as long as I could remember. The restrictions of not being able to touch a girl, play sports more than once a week, and communicate with anyone outside of the mission boundaries (except for my parents on holidays) for the next two years were the furthest things from my mind at that moment. This was the path for me to become a returned missionary.

If my example of normalization above does not convince the reader of the difference between normative and normalizing rhetorical practices; or, if it does not resonate with the reader, I hope this last, brief example will: the practice of marriage. As a note, even though the LDS Church had a substantial influence on California’s Proposition 8, a state constitutional amendment that defined marriage as only between a man and a woman, I refrain from continuing to discuss the Church or the Mormon community in this dissertation. Below, I briefly discuss marriage as a practice, simply in terms of normativity and normalization. In this I will be much more brief than my example of sending young adults on Mormon missions, though marriage equality is of great importance to many people, including myself.

As a normative act, I have personally advocated for the standard that same-sex marriage should be considered and recognized as equal to what conservatives have deemed “traditional marriage between a man and a woman.” I believe that if marriage is going to be a social institution in a society or community, considering same-sex marriage equal to traditional marriage practices is a better way of practicing it.²⁴ “Traditional marriage” is also advocated normatively, in other words, there are those who think it
should be the standard for practicing marriage. However, unlike the argument for same-sex marriage, there has been a whole history of the creation of cultural values through the institutionalization of marriage practices in elementary education, religion, and law (just to name a few), which has normalized opposite-sex marriage as the standard and demonized and criminalized behavior that deviated from that standard. Because of the various institutional conditionings of the conservative argument that same-sex marriage was wrong, “traditional marriage” advocates did not have to make a normative argument about the definition of marriage; rather, such a definition, though it was socially constructed, was thought of as natural, as a given, as something that could and should not be questioned, because this standard had been normalized.

I also use the example of marriage because it indirectly relates to Berlant’s argument about the politics of sex I reference earlier in this chapter. While I agree with Berlant that traditional views of sex should not be normalized, I disagree that her political arguments are themselves non-normative. I would argue that arguments like Berlant’s, which view normativity antagonistically, and call for diverse views and practices, are equally normative acts. As May argues, normative judgments are inescapable; however, this does not mean that normative arguments must stem from transcendent values of certainty, or that their foundation must be absolute. Rather they can be built upon flexible values, values that have built into them the possibility of being adjusted and changed according to the contexts of our lives.

Nevertheless, such a commitment to even these types of values is a problem in thought on community in the fields of rhetorics. I mention earlier in this chapter how this
fear of normativity is consistently perpetuated in the fields of rhetorics. This fear does not exclude thought on community. For example, Pat Gehrke’s work potentially perpetuates this fear. I discuss some of Gehrke’s thought in chapter 1 in context of the Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of community, and largely hope that my project supplements Gehrke’s work; however, I do not agree with some of the conclusions he makes—in particular his attempt to appear as if he is avoiding all normative commitments. Though he does not use the term normativity in the following passage, his argument amounts to the same caution of it. Gehrke argues, “we must believe in the possibility of everything but retract from commitment to any particular thing. If one can believe without commitment, then one can be open to all belief, open to a democratic exchange and transformation of belief” (“Community at the End of the World” 135).

Of course the reader should conclude by now that I see his “must” as being a normative argument that is laden with commitments to certain values, in particular those values of “democratic exchange and transformation of belief.” He obviously values these things and is committed to them (and I am glad he is); however, his argument, that “being open to all belief” leads to democratic practices, is not a sound argument—some beliefs may be beliefs against democracy, and therefore work to prevent such democratic practices. In addition, his avoidance of commitments implies that we should not be committed to certain values. In contrast, a perspective that sees normativity as inescapable and as different from normalization can believe in all things, while simultaneously make certain commitments. For example, such a perspective could be committed to the prevention of rape, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other -isms and
practices that are the result of oppressive power relations. I personally find these things intolerable and violent to the practice of democracy, and am committed to preventing them from occurring. Such commitments do not stop me from being open to democratic exchange and the transformation of belief. In addition, being open to all beliefs, in and of itself, does not by any means automatically lead to a commitment in democratic principles. I may be open to all beliefs, as in, I believe they exist and will consider and question them; however, after considering and questioning them, I should make informed decisions and quite possibly argue for one belief over another because of its ethical, political, or rhetorical implications.

Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote, "nothing we do can be defended definitively. But only by reference to something else that is established. I.e. no reason can be given why you should act (or should have acted) like this, except that by doing so you bring about such and such a situation, which again you have to accept as an aim" (23 Culture and Value, original emphasis). In the following chapter and for the remainder of this dissertation I argue for bringing about “such and such” situations, namely those that verify equality and enable the sharing and protection of human life. In particular, my goal is to make better normative arguments for specific politics and rhetorics of community that bring about these norms. This is not to be confused with stating that all normative arguments are good or that these norms are based upon transcendent values—in absolute terms, normative arguments are neither ethically nor effectively good.

Normative arguments can and have resulted in violence, and normalization often starts from normativity. There are times when the line between normativity and
normalization is blurry. For example, when a normative argument through no intentions of the rhetor becomes normalized through institutional conditioning, we may view advocacy of that normative argument as advocating normalization. No doubt this is why some rhetoricians do not differentiate the terms. Thus, in the following chapters, I make the best normative arguments I can and allow for some flexibility so that these arguments are open to change, when needed. However, confusing my project with one of normalization, in which one would attempt to create or perpetuate the conditions for unwitting conformity to such ethics, politics, and rhetorics would be a mistake, one that the argument made in this current chapter will hopefully help the reader avoid making.

Many norms in normative arguments and normalizing judgments should be contested; however, we must also rely on normative arguments to resist these norms.
CHAPTER THREE

SOME INCLUSIVITIES ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS: AN ETHICS OF COMMUNITY

Care, rather than interest, lies at the basis of community.

Roberto Esposito

Man [sic] is first of all a creature who speaks: it is essentially as a speaking being that he discovers his equality with all other human beings.

Jacques Rancière

In every word that is pronounced or exchanged, no matter the language, there is the irremediably singular—yet already modulated through an echo that calls the other’s voice—sonorous vibration of this song.

Adriana Cavarero

In chapter 1, I posit that recent rhetorical theorists have used Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of community to critique notions of subjectivity found in rhetorical theory and popular discourse, specifically those notions of the subject that understand personhood in terms of individualism and that perpetuate autonomy, self-composition, and self-sufficiency without recognizing the necessary relations to others that constitute a person. While these thinkers are successful in making this critique, my conjecture is that how they use the term community and define the concept of community is insufficient for rhetorics intended to produce better community practices in terms of actual collective action—whether in terms of knowing, doing, or making community. One of these insufficiencies revolves around the tendency to draw absolute or predetermined
normative conclusions from constitutive theories of community. Thus, in chapter 2, I demonstrate how constitutive theories and normative theories do not always tie together so neatly, and I argue for what I see as a better constitutive version of community than just the idea of recognizing relations with others.

In sum, I posit that for a community to be a community, it must contain at least three elements, which I derive from the thought of three theorists: Nancy’s thought that communities are constituted by the internal exposure of difference to individuals and their communities to one another, as well as the exposure to the difference of “outside” individuals and communities; Todd May’s theory that communities are constituted by socially and normatively governed practices; and Roberto Esposito’s assertion that communities always contain a sense of internal and external community (the experience of sharing) in concert with a sense of internal and external immunity (the experience of protection). While all communities have these characteristics, they can and do differ in how they norm the practices that help define each community, practices that also enable the members’ senses of community and immunity.

In this chapter, I argue for and articulate an ethics of community that might serve rhetorics of community better so that rhetoricians may develop, practice, and critique community with an eye toward less- or even non-oppressive community formation and collective action. Though I draw on my constitutive theory of community articulated in chapter 2, one might argue that I am now (and for the rest of this dissertation) in highly normative territory. In other words, and not to be confused with or reduced to normalization (see chapter 2), I am arguing for certain standards to work with in
community practice, production, and critique. The ethics of community I advocate are not transcendent or deontological ethics; rather, they are flexible and contingent ways of collective being and doing I view as better than other ways of collective being and doing.

As I state in the introduction, even if the “contagious” themes of inclusion and sharing—which have been romanticized with regards to rhetorics of community—are not representative of what constitutes a community in totality and have problematic normative consequences, the rhetorical appeal of understanding a sense of community—and one’s ethics of community—as absolute inclusion is seductive. Rhetorics of community that employ such appeals are often effective in persuading others toward various ends, from financial gain and political agendas to very pedestrian purposes.

Before I begin to articulate what I see as a better ethics of community that works toward less- or non-oppressive communities than one based upon presupposing an inherent value in absolute inclusion, I want to give a more in-depth example that demonstrates why the practice of basing rhetorical appeals of community on an ethics of inclusion is a problem. One contemporary and seemingly affirmative example of the exploitation of these appeals can be seen in the art world community, particularly in the fairly recent phenomenon of the emergence of various international mega art exhibitions—a practice that has been called “biennialism.” Once I articulate biennialism’s rhetorical ethics of inclusion and the problems this rhetorical ethic presents, I articulate my own ethics of community, looking ahead to chapter 4 in which I develop a politics of community that advocates the given ethics within any social order.
As a caveat, I should note that I am not an art historian or expert art critic (though I refer to and draw from people who are one or both of these things), neither is my goal to tell the art world “what to do” with biennialism. Rather, I am merely an observer of a phenomenon I find fascinating and that I see having much to teach rhetorical theories of community. If I were to make any contribution to art criticism, it would be by chance and the mere fact that “socially engaged [art] practices are extremely difficult to discuss within conventional frameworks of art criticism” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells* 18), and thus, perhaps my alternative rhetorical framework perhaps can contribute something and help further the discussion. Nevertheless, my goal for this chapter is neither to show how to make people more ethical nor to make some concession that ethics precedes rhetorics or vice versa; rather, my goal is to provide a more accurate and productive vocabulary for the ethical presuppositions we might put forward for better community production, political action, and rhetorical criticism.

**Biennialism’s Rhetorical Ethics of Inclusion**

Though not all of the mega art exhibitions labeled “biennialist” occur biannually, the term *biennialism* generally refers to the phenomenon of curating art exhibitions that cater to various international audiences, incorporate hundreds of artists from all over the world, and expect thousands of visitors per week. In 2012, art historian and theorist Terry Smith records over 200 biennials in existence (94). Most of these exhibitions occur less than once a year because of logistics: the time, labor, and financial support required to make such large events happen. A selection of such exhibitions includes the São Paulo
Biennial, Biennal of Sydney, Documenta, Istanbul Biennial, Prospect New Orleans, Gwangju Biennial in South Korea, and more. Perhaps the most prominent example of this phenomenon is the Venice Biennial, which was established in 1895. I was fortunate enough to visit this exhibition in 2011, a year in which the Venice Biennial exceeded the 375,000 visitors of the summer of 2009 (see “Venice Biennal Hits Record”).

Most of these biennials reach out to their art aficionados, connoisseurs, and of course tourists, with public relations statements and communications emphasizing seemingly positive notions of community, such as inclusivity, sharing, participation, and togetherness. Such branding has contributed to the worldwide popularity and success of biennialism—a success that has a reciprocal relationship to its product: the appeal of recognizing different cultural identities all coming together as a “global community,” as artists and tourists to break the borders of national artistic conventions. This appeal, as Claire Bishop notes, once seemingly confirmed that the biennial, with its global reach and its comparative freedom from institutional red tape and historical baggage, provided a unique opportunity to experiment freely with curatorial arrangements. . . . constituting an alternative public sphere, one in which visual culture offered compelling propositions for a world in disarray. (Bishop, “Safety in Numbers,” 276-77)

Yet, while the idea of bringing together a global community of artists and lovers of art at exhibitions may appear radical to the casual observer and is heavily discussed at art and curatorial conferences (see Fowle 7), the idea of incorporating rhetorics of
community as inclusion with art exhibitions is not new. Sociologist Tony Bennett, in “The Exhibitionary Complex,” states that one of the original and principal functions of museums (art or otherwise) as public spaces was to give the appearance that the state was interested in including the general populace with state concerns. In other words, exhibitionary inclusion enabled states to simulate democracy for their constituents: “Museums were . . . typically located at the centre of cities where they stood as embodiments, both material and symbolic, of a power to ‘show and tell’ which, in being deployed in a newly constituted open and public space, sought rhetorically to incorporate the people within the processes of the state” (109). With globalization and art tourism extending the various scopes of power and what “the people” means in contemporary times, the mega art exhibition appears to be the culmination of, as well as the twentieth and twenty-first centuries’ answers to, the motive for and appeal of exhibitions to rhetorically “include everyone.”

Even if this re-emphasis on inclusion is not new and only a change in degree rather than in kind, many artists, as well as art historians and theorists, arguably have benefited from this re-emphasis, whether it goes by the name of community, participation, or the recognition of human and other relations. People have built their careers on this subject, such as contemporary art historian, Grant Kester (see Conversation Pieces or The One and the Many); curators and theorists have coined new movements, such as Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics”; and artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija—whose work often includes sharing meals with the “audience” or having the viewers participate in the creation of the art—have often celebrated, and have
been celebrated for, the exploitation of this appeal of inclusion in their artistic and theoretical practices.

One recent example of this rhetorical appeal of inclusion made explicit is the Emscherkunst triennial art festival in western Germany, which took place between June 22 and October 6 of 2013. Prominent Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was commissioned to create 1,000 tents for Emscherkunst as an artistic work titled, “Out of Enlightenment” (see figure 1). Prior to the opening of the festival, curator Florian Matzner told The Art

![Figure 1. Photograph of Ai Weiwei's "Out of Enlightenment," at Emscherkunst 2013; “Ai Weiwei’s Tents for Emscherkunst.2013”; Photo by Ai Weiwei; Emscherkunst.2013; Emscherkunst.de; Web; 17 Feb. 2014.](image)

Newspaper that Weiwei’s tents would be created so that, rather than pay the expensive prices of a nearby hotel, “visitors to the festival will be able to rent the tents for a night
for "a low, symbolic price." Manzter goes on, saying that, "the idea is to let normal [sic] people participate, and their activities will give the . . . work its sense" (Rivetti and Michalska). Thus, the appeal of inclusion in biennialism can function on multiple levels: the appeal is not only representative of curators’ branding and political ideologies or simply a theme of the art, it functions in and serves each realm simultaneously.³

However, some artists and theorists have been skeptical of these “communal,” “relational,” “global,” or “participatory” rhetorics in contemporary art, including those of biennialism. Such criticism includes the ideas that forms of cultural imperialism are already implicit in the discourses of museums and exhibitions (Bal 203-14), that avant-garde art is not really avant-garde if its “canonical” inclusion is predetermined (Ferguson 186), and that such rhetorics of inclusion in biennial art exhibitions can be naïve at best and manipulative at worst, using such rhetorics merely as masks for imperialist or corporate agendas. One of the more prominent voices of this latter position is curator Okwui Enwezor. Often noted for his directorship of Documenta 11, Enwezor, rather than simply criticize the mega exhibition as a problematic medium, has organized, driven, and implemented his own mega art exhibitions with concerns and themes critical of postcolonialism and with a particular determination to recognize artists forgotten or devalued by “Westernism.”⁴

A persuasive example of this criticism comes from art historian Claire Bishop, in particular her critique of relational aesthetics, an art practice first written about by Nicolas Bourriaud (Relational Aesthetics), whom I mention above. I will briefly explain this movement before getting to Bishop’s critique. Though art’s interest with communal
relations goes back much further than the work Bourriaud is commenting on, in the 1990s he considers relational aesthetics a new movement, which he defines as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (113). In short, relational aesthetics art is art that produces human relationality, and exposes or highlights this relationality as an important condition of human existence.

Seen in the works of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Santiago Sierra, relational aesthetic art can perform a political critique in a culture like the United States, which is based upon notions of the liberal, autonomous individual and the general promotion of individualism and self-sufficiency. However, Bishop rightly criticizes relational aesthetics for promoting relationality for the sake of relationality itself, and for projecting a naiveté of any institutional, site-specific critique or political context in which the art itself is situated: "if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" ("Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" 65). She continues: "the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic" (67).

Lastly, at least for my purposes, political art collectives such as Manifest.AR are also highly critical of the appeal to include everyone, whether in the name of participation or recognizing relations. Their work helps expose the problem of imagining and critiquing communal practices through an ethics built upon inclusion. Though much of Manifest.AR’s art critiques various exhibitions and museums, biennialism has been a major target. According to the collective’s manifesto, Manifest.AR uses digital
augmented reality art to “[break] down the mysterious Doors of the Impossible!” and to “install, revise, permeate, simulate, expose, decorate, crack, infest and unmask Public Institutions, Identities and Objects previously held by Elite Purveyors of Public and Artistic Policy in the so-called Physical Real” (“The AR Art Manifesto”). Through augmented reality art, Manifest.AR infiltrates biennialist and other art exhibitions that brand their exhibition as inclusive (particularly those, of course, that do not invite Manifest.AR artists) in order to expose the exclusivities and hidden agendas of these exhibitions. I was introduced to the collective’s work in the 2011 Venice Biennial, where Manifest.AR artists found the exigency to display their work in the lack of their invitation. From their website:

As “one of the world’s most important forums for the dissemination and ‘illumination’ about the current developments in international art” the 54th Biennial of Venice could not justify its reputation without an uninvited Augmented Reality infiltration. In order to “challenge the conventions through which contemporary art is viewed” we will construct the virtual AR pavilions directly amongst the national pavilions . . . . In accordance with the “ILLUMInations” theme [of the Venice Biennial]. . . our uninvited participation will not be bound by nation-state borders, by physical boundaries or by conventional art world structures. The AR pavilions at the 54th Biennial reflect on a rapidly expanding and developing new realm of Augmented Reality Art that radically crosses
dimensional, physical and hierarchical boundaries. (“Manifest.AR Venice Biennial 2011 AR Intervention”)

Manifest.AR made enough of an impact at the Venice Biennial that people who appeared to be Biennial representatives were handing out pamphlets stating: “STOP the ‘virtual’ infiltration of the 54th Biennial by unauthorized so called Augmented Reality Pavilions. Art should be real” (see fig. 2). I saw many visitors viewing the augmented reality art through their smartphones—so often that at times I questioned whether people were taking photos of the “real” pavilion or viewing the Manifest.AR art. One key point is that Manifest.AR’s provocative infiltration of biennalist and other exhibitions seems to

Figure 2. Unofficial flyer encouraging Venice Biennial visitors not to participate in augmented reality art. "Unofficial Flyer"; Manifest.AR; Manifestarblog.wordpress.com, 2011; Web; 18 Feb. 2014.
expose the problems of *how exhibitions include*, rather than point to the obvious pragmatics of exclusivities taking place. Even an exhibition like the Venice Biennial cannot possibly include every artist in the world in its exhibition. Yet, when I viewed a particular nation’s pavilion through a smartphone and saw the pavilion covered by a Manifest.AR image of a monster truck flying over a volcano, I did begin to look at some of the excesses and spectacle of many of the more prominent national art pavilions. For example, the pavilions of the United States and Russia—which paid for prominent pavilion spots that could only be seen with the price of a ticket—were like a large centerpiece in the Biennial in comparison to the small and hidden away pavilions on the margins of the exhibition, such as Haiti’s exhibit, which was located completely outside the Venice Biennial, and which could be seen for free.

To appropriate George Orwell’s phrase from *Animal Farm*, I started noticing that some inclusivities were “more equal than others.” To reiterate: Manifest.AR did not reveal unethical problems of exclusivity in the Venice Biennial, but rather unethical problems of biennialist inclusivity. While both the United States and Haiti were “included” in the exhibition, the Venice Biennial obviously valued one as greater, more important, and more deserving of a prominent place than the other. Of course, this valuation obviously coincided with the United States’ ability to financially support a prominent place in the 54th Biennial.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that even those artists “officially” participating in biennials are often critical of biennialism’s rhetorics of global inclusivity and participation. Their art is not ignorant of the problems of inequality, political
agendas, and the loss of specificity that such inclusive “community” rhetorics can endorse, enable, and perpetuate. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, a collaborative art duo whose work inhabited the United States Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 2011, are just such artists. Known for art that exposes otherwise hidden systemic political tensions of nationalism, environmentalism, and material problems of war and cultural politics, Allora and Calzadilla’s exhibit in Venice critiqued, among other things, the questionable rhetorical ethics of inclusion in art world. Their piece, “Track and Field” (see fig. 3), metaphorically paralleled and inverted the United State’s military might and sports prowess by literally flipping an American tank upside-down and having 1996 U.S. Olympian medalist Dan O’Brien run on a treadmill that caused the treads of the upside-down tank to move in perpetual motion. This piece questions the lack of

Figure 3. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s “Track and Field” at the 2011 Venice Biennial; “Allora and Calzadilla”; Photograph by Andrew Bordwin; Lisson Gallery; Lissongallery.com; Web; 18 Feb. 2014.
“progress” such military strength achieves; however, by placing the tank in front of the Palladian-style U.S. Pavilion, as one spectacle blocking another spectacle, Allora and Calzadilla also implicitly critique the perpetuation of inequality being carried out in any biennial that allows powerful nations to “buy” and perpetuate artistic influence.

Figure 4. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s “Half Mast/Full Mast” at the 2011 Venice Biennial; “Allora and Calzadilla”; Lisson Gallery; Lissongallery.com; Web; 18 Feb. 2014.
Inside the U.S. Pavilion, Allora and Calzadilla made an even more poignant critique of what I see as rhetorics of inclusion in biennialism. In “Half Mast/Full Mast” (see fig. 4), the duo incorporated a movie screen and split-channel video projector that appeared to divide the screen in half with a horizontal line. Each half of the screen, however, was unified by video of a seemingly seamless vertical flagpole running through the left-hand side of the screen. A gymnast would then enter either the top or bottom screen one-at-a-time and raises his body to a 90-degree angle, depicting a half- or full-mast flag, symbolizing how victory and defeat are apparently changes in position and perspective. The image outlined by the gymnast is also strikingly similar to the Puerto Rico flag (see fig. 5), the country in which Allora and Calzadilla work and reside.

Figure 5. Open source depiction of the Puerto Rico flag; “Flag of Puerto Rico”; Wikimedia Commons; commons.wikimedia.org, 29 Mar. 2007; Web; 18 Feb. 2014.
Of course, while Puerto Rico is included as an unincorporated territory of the United States, the citizens of Puerto Rico are arguably second-class citizens of the U.S. in that they do not enjoy the same voting and other rights. Thus, placed in an exhibit like the biennial, this work performs a broader critique not unlike Manifest.AR’s art—that inclusivity does not equal equality or democracy; however, it also performs a very site-specific critique not unrelated to the broader critique. By Allora and Calzadilla choosing such an image to represent United States art, the viewer sees the parallel tensions in the nationalistic inclusivities of the Biennial with the United States’ inclusion of Puerto Rico.

Similarly, but perhaps more explicit in their intentions, the Romanian artists Lucia Tkáčová & Anetta Mona Chisa, literally wrote about the problems of being included in the Venice Biennial on the outer wall of the Romanian Pavilin in “80:20” (see fig. 6).

Figure 6. Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová’s “80/20” at the 2011 Venice Biennial; VVORK; vwork.com; Web; 18 Feb. 2014.

Because the images are difficult to read, I will quote them here:

80% OF REASONS TO BE HERE:

- SALAMI TACTICS WITHIN THE ART CONCERN
- TO FIGHT THE WAY THE WORLD MAP IS FOLDED
- CONFRONTATION, VERIFICATION, GRATIFICATION
- TO HIKE UP OUR PRICE
- TO BE SCENE AND HERD
- ROMANCE IN THE AIR
- TO SPRITZ THE DAYS OFF
- GOOD EXCUSE FOR MASSIVE OUTFIT SHOPPING
- + ON ARTFACTS
- TO HIT ALL THE COOL PARTIES
- PERFORMING HISTORY
- TO PUSSIFY THE BIENNALE
- TO HAVE A CHANCE TO SAY ALL OF THIS OUT

20% OF REASONS NOT TO BE HERE:
- INVISIBILITY IS RESISTANCE
- NOT TO DECORATE THE GARDENS OF THE WHITE MALE
- BECAUSE JAN VERWOERT SAID: “FORGET THE NATIONAL” AND WE LIKE HIM
- VENICE BIENNALE = SHOWROOM OF WESTERN HEGEMONY
- GUILT
- NOT TO JEOPARDIZE OUR PLACE ON THE BARRICADES
- ART = REVOLUTION = SPECTACLE = CAPITAL
- BECAUSE WE ARE 1 COMMUNIST + 1 SOCIALIST FEMINIST
There is a lot one could comment on regarding the various statements Chisa and Tkáčová are making in “80/20,” but front and center is the fact that being included in the Venice Biennial actually presented a host of ethical problems for the art duo. While participating gave Chisa and Tkáčová the opportunity to expose the inequalities of the Biennial’s inclusivities (i.e., “TO PUSSIFY THE BIENNALE”), the duo also demonstrated that their inclusion potentially makes them complicit with the perpetuation of Western colonialism and misogyny.

As I state in my introduction and in the beginning of this chapter, I see a larger societal and scholarly problem of basing our notions of community upon ethics that value inclusivity and sharing for their own sake, distinct from exclusivity and protection,
whether in production, practice, or critique. While defining community in this manner carries a more romantic appeal, *inclusion* is an insufficient term for defining how communities actually function, and inclusion is also a problematic value upon which to base an ethics of community, as the examples above show. Such a definition situates community ethics, politics, and rhetorics with false presuppositions: that inclusion for its own sake is an inherent and totalizing, ethical good and should be advocated politically and represented rhetorically for that reason alone.

In other words, and to stay with the biennialism example, if there is an ethical problem with the phenomenon of biennialism, it is not the inability of mega art exhibitions like the Venice Biennial to include all. Rather, there are two ethical problems that carry a greater weight and exigency than a community’s inability to include everyone: (1) a community purporting to be able to include all, and (2) the justifications and manner in which the community carries out its practices of inclusivity, i.e., the values and norms that are actually informing such practices. In the case of biennialism, the problem is the terminologies in which they situate their existence and purpose and the method in which they carry out that purpose that should draw criticism, not the fact that they exclude, as, in the end, they must take part in some sort of exclusivity.

As Kenneth Burke argues, in *Language as Symbolic Action*, all observations and accompanying interpretations one makes regarding any aspect of existence are dependent upon—or at least implicated by—the terminologies in “which the observations are made” (46). In other words, one’s rationale for comprehending any given situation or
observation is shaped within a linguistic filter, framework, or what Burke calls a “terministic screen.”

To continue to draw upon Burke for a moment, I see “inclusion” as having been named the “god-term” for understanding community and community practices. Burke defines the notion of god-term as a word or phrase given the philosophic power to function as (a) god within any given ideology—in other words, a god-term is a term that gives a viewpoint (or terministic screen) within an ideology its weight and power, its foundation. It is the ideology’s dominant determiner of meaning. Now the establishing of such a god-term does not need to be intentional; however, Burke points out that it is part and parcel to the larger problem of defining what something is: “All thought tends to name things not because they are precisely as named, but because they are not quite as named, and the name is designated as a somewhat hortatory device, to take up the slack” (*Grammar of Motives* 54). He goes on—and this is one of the key points I am making or at least questioning with regards to community and inclusion (and related to the critique of biennialism), that the continual affirmation of a god-term like *inclusion* often does not even serve its own meaning or original purpose—“for the affirming of the term as their god-term enables men [sic] to go far afield without sensing a loss of orientation. And by the time the extent of their departure is enough to become obvious, the stability of the new order they have built in the name of the old order gives them the strength to abandon their old god-term and adopt another” (54).

If Tony Bennett is correct in positing that one of the original intents of the exhibition was to rhetorically include the general populace, then the current criticism of
the explosion of biennialism and its rhetorics of inclusion—particularly in relation to ideas of participation, relationality, and other appealing phrases such as “human” and “global community”—has appeared, just as Burke states, to have allowed communal phenomena such as biennialism to “go far afield without sensing a loss of orientation.” This enables those in power to maintain their ability to “show and tell,” as Bennett says, in the name of inclusivity, even if they are motivated by very different aims. For example, Terry Smith argues that the “primogenitor of all biennials,” the Venice Biennial has ceased being an exhibition empowering alternative curatorial practices. He points out that “the past three [Venice] Biennales have been laid out in zones” echoing more traditional, conservative exhibitionary practices, noting that biennials in general, rather than being more inclusive of various global perspectives, are instead emphasizing the ideological viewpoints of the regions in which they occur (87-88).

Thus, this rhetoric of inclusion in the “global art community” continues to appeal to its audience, even if the appeal functions more as a mask to privilege and showcase certain groups, nations, and ideologies over others in the name of inclusion. As Carlos Basualdo recognizes, “nearly all [biennials] rely on the official financial support of their respective countries or cities,” and therefore “diplomacy, politics, and commerce converge in a powerful movement, the purpose of which seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalization of the symbolic value of art” (56). Thus, communal phenomena such as the biennial might appear to enable, as art historian Grant Kester would say, the kind of “aesthetic experience [that] prepares . . . for entry into an idealized community,” but biennialism might very well function as the epitome of capitalist culture’s ability to
simulate such idealized and impossible communality: “Far from overcoming our narcissistic isolation, consumer culture feeds on it, transforming the redemptive power of an aesthetic communion into the banal transactions of the shopping mall and the eBay auction” (*Conversation Pieces* 29).

In brief, if one wished to critique the Venice Biennial, for example, through an ethic of inclusion, there would not be much of a critique to make beyond an acknowledgment of the fact that no group can include all and that inclusion in some cases would look less like “global community” and more like cultural appropriation serving only economic and nationalistic propaganda. An ethic of inclusion provides very little traction for critiquing or producing community, unless we are simply critiquing inclusivity as a particular means to a different ethical end. If one’s goal is to enact an absolute ethic of inclusion, the end result will not only be that one cannot do it but that perhaps one should not do it. Instead, I believe (and argue below) that a better ethic of community finds its basis in valuing the equality and care of communal and singular socio-political and biological life. Inclusion may just be one of many means to verify or enact this ethic.

**The Spectrum of Ethical Rhetorics of Community: The Affirmation of a Higher Quality of Life through the Equality of Intelligences and the Singularity of Voice**

As I mention in the Introduction, Raymond Williams posits that the term *community* has never been “given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (*Keywords* 76). This neglect allows the term *community* either to function as an empty
word or to deceive through appeals of false sentimentality, particularly when it is associated with positive terms like inclusion, participation, and sharing. Perhaps a potentially positive opposing term, then, is just what is needed to temper community’s unopposed, absolute, and yet problematic, moral “goodness.” Such a tempering might enable community to be a concept from which to extract more workable ethical content. I propose that the term for this task is immunity, a term I discuss in chapter 2 through the work of Roberto Esposito.

In chapter 2, I applied Esposito’s thought to make the argument that along with other elements a sense of community is composed of contemporaneous practices of communitas (sharing) and immunitas (protection). Thus, community requires the interplay of identity and difference, inclusivity and exclusivity. Let me briefly bring back that discussion and place it within the context of this chapter. “To survive,” Esposito writes, “a community, every community, is forced to introject the negativity of its own opposite, even if that opposite remains a contrastive and lacking mode of the community itself” (Bios 49). In other words, for any community to survive, then, it not only must exclude what it is not for its survival (whether in terms of discourse, socio-political identity, or physical being); it also exists in itself, through, by, and because of this protective exclusivity. This latter part is important: Esposito explains that protective immunity does not precede or follow the affirmative notion of sharing so often associated with community, but the two phenomena co-constitute one another. There can be no community without immunity and vice versa. The community/immunity relation is not a “relation of simple opposition,” but rather “a more complex dialectic in which neither
term is limited to negating the other but instead implicates the other . . . as its necessary presupposition” (*Immunitas* 5). Each term presupposes the other in meaning as well as in practice, even while seemingly moving away from the other term in meaning and in practice. So, while in chapter 2 I use Esposito’s understanding of the term *immunity* to create a constitutive theory of community, to better understand what a community *is*, presupposing this dichotomy as constitutive of community also helps formulate better normative rhetorical theories of community, or theories designed to help rhetoricians work toward more affirmative practices carried out in the name of and with a sense of community.

Understanding community through a sharing/protection dichotomy rather than an inclusion/exclusion dichotomy is not only more accurate of how a community functions, this understanding also enables a more flexible, subtle, and nuanced normative theory of community practices. Understanding community through an inclusion/exclusion dichotomy implies an absolute ethical “good” on one end of the dichotomy (inclusion) and an absolute unethical “evil” on the other end (exclusion). However, as I have shown with my example of biennialism above, as well as my earlier examples of the Democratic National Party convention and Mormonism (see the Introduction and chapter 2), the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy by no means informs normative judgment very well when practices of inclusion can have problematic, even unethical purposes and results. However, understanding community as practices and processes of sharing that require and presuppose practices and processes of immunity, or protection, carries more complex and workable ethical content. When one wishes to make a normative judgment—whether
in producing, practicing, or critiquing a community—one cannot simply ask, “does the community include or exclude?” and retrieve an ethical critique from the answer to that question, because all communities include and exclude, even if we tend to privilege and associate the former with ethical community practices. Rather, one can and should begin to ask, “how and why does the community practice sharing?” and “how and why does the community practice protection?” To put it another way, one can begin to ask, “what are the justifications, the aims, and the values that inform how a community shares and protects?” And of course, “what is being shared, and what is being protected?” Not unlike the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy, all communities take part in sharing and protection. The difference is that practices of community and immunity can each be seen to function positively or negatively to affirm or negate life. There is no absolute ethical good found in one or the other.

Now Esposito acknowledges that others have thought of community in similar terms and that others’ thought on community has shaped how we have come to understand it. In his book Communitas, he traces understandings of community through a communitas/immunitas dichotomy throughout modernity in the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, and Georges Bataille. In a sense, each of these thinkers understands community’s constitution in terms of a community/immunity dichotomy, but each thinker privileges one term over the other when the discussion moves to normative territory. For Esposito, Bataille is the thinker who values community most closely in terms of communitas, or sharing, and Thomas
Hobbes is the thinker who values social relations most closely in terms of *immunitas*, or protection.⁶

While Bataille senses the positive and even noble connotation of community, he privileges it to such excess as to see a necessary ridding of the self to truly experience community. For Bataille, the experience of community is such that “the common” travels through a being and permeates that being until individual subjectivity no longer exists. In this sense one cannot fully experience community without being completely dissolved into it, sharing one’s existence until there is no longer an individual who can share that existence. As I point out in chapter 2, this complete experience would result in the death of one’s sense of singular being, as well as the death of one’s actual being. This is not an inaccurate thinking of community with regards to Esposito’s etymology of *communitas*; however, Esposito, unlike Bataille, does not privilege this experience of excess community, or at least he finds it troubling (in *Communitas*), and (later in *Immunitas* and *Bios*) he argues that too much excess *communitas* is not productive for any community interested in the protection of its life or the lives of its members (*Communitas* 112-34).

On the other hand, *immunitas*, or immunity, is the condition of being protected from this obligation to give, from sharing one’s sustenance with others. As Esposito puts it, the person who is immune is exonerated or “safe from the obligations or dangers that concern the community” especially in the case when “that giving something in and of itself implies a diminishment of one’s goods and in the ultimate analysis also of oneself” (Campbell, "Interview: Roberto Esposito" 50-1). As I explain above, this diminishment of oneself means everything from the symbolic loss of identity or self-awareness to the
material loss of biological life (see also *Immunitas*, 1-21). So, while *communitas* carries with it a more positive connotation associated with generosity, friendship, and togetherness, when past a certain threshold of excess it also constitutes the permanent loss of singularity. So too, while *immunitas* has a negative connotation, especially in terms of the exclusion of others, the appeal of immunity is necessary for the protection of life, including the life of a community. Still, like community, when immunity is fully realized, it also ends in the death of singularity and community. If a communal or singular being were capable of creating such stringent protective borders that sharing and inclusion never occurred, the result would be no sense of being, as well as the loss of physical existence, as he or she would cease to be exposed to the relations required for identity formation and physical sustenance to occur. Thus, *community* and *immunity* are reciprocal in their presupposition of each other’s etymological meaning—where one is necessary for the determination of the other—and in actuality, in practice, communities need mechanisms of immunity to survive. Similarly, individuals and communities, if too immune, will negate the necessary relations that compose and sustain any singularity of being, also ending in the death of identity and physical being, whether communal or singular.

This complex interdependence of community and immunity exposes that, to develop an ethic of community, one cannot find much justification in simply privileging inclusion over exclusion or sharing over protection; rather, the community/immunity dichotomy has interweaving normative implications. However, there is a common strand found in both the privileging of sharing—found most prominently in thinkers such as
Bataille—and the privileging of protection—found most prominently in a thinker such as Hobbes.

Both Hobbes’s and Bataille’s positions, opposites though they may be, presuppose a value in the affirmation of a higher quality of human life, but each argues for this higher quality of life occurring through different means—one through communal sharing, the other through immunity and protection. Bataille argues that life is more fully experienced in the loss of the individual self—many of his examples are those interested in pushing this notion to its excess, excesses he saw occurring in erotic relations to bodily suffering. Hobbes saw life being valued through its sustenance and saw the protection of people’s quality of life best carried out through the absolutism of a sovereign power.

A more contemporary version of this conversation seemingly has taken place between Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida. Derrida discusses problems with immunity mainly in Philosophy in a Time of Terror and in Rogues. In these texts, he arguably demonizes immunity by conflating it with or reducing it to autoimmunity, or the process in which an individual or communal body over-protects itself from the danger of exposure to foreign bodies to such an extent that it misrecognizes parts of itself as dangerous to itself, eventually destroying itself in the act of protecting itself. Haraway, in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women (see “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies”), warns not to dismiss immunity so easily and that protection can also be productive and life affirming. Inspired by a friend of hers who died of AIDS because of immuno-suppression, Haraway counters Derrida by pointing out how tragedy can occur when a
body is too inclusive and its ability to protect itself from dangerous diseases becomes compromised.

Thus, from the pole of community to the pole of immunity there is a value in the affirmation of a higher quality of life that is being presupposed, whether in an act emphasizing sharing or protection. How one values this better life is what informs practices of sharing and protection, and thus inclusion and exclusion. Our ability to discern ethical and unethical exclusivities or protections as well as our ability to determine ethical and unethical inclusions or sharing is the productive result of the effect those acts of inclusivity or exclusivity have on a life we value. For example, one might see an act of exclusivity negate the quality of life of a person he or she values; as a result, that person often sees wrong in and wants to negate exclusion itself. However, a higher quality of life is being valued affirmatively first, and exclusivity is not inherently valued negatively.

So how might one better determine this valuing of the affirmation of life in a way that best negotiates the necessary combinations of sharing and protection? How does one determine what kinds of rhetorical invention, practices, and critiques are affirmations of sociopolitical and biological life? What should be shared? And what should be protected? These are difficult questions. Nevertheless, a better answer, while no doubt contingent, is through a lens that acknowledges presuppositions in the care for the singularity of being via the recognition of the equality of intelligences. While composed in one sentence this is a mouthful, I am alluding to the work of Adriana Cavarero and Jacques Rancière. Cavarero and Rancière each is concerned with the idea of community; however, rather
than attempt to develop ethical and political thought that somehow is able to subvert exclusivities in totality, each thinker advocates a different kind of ethical value that informs very practice-able community practices.

Below, I argue that taking equality and singularity seriously within rhetorics of community promotes a higher quality of human life, of human existence. Please note that by a higher quality of life, I do not mean a higher quantity of life, as seen in populist or pro-life arguments. While biological life-ness would seemingly be a necessary presupposition, a higher quality of life is as much or more concerned with how meaningful one’s life is to him- or herself and to others. In terms of an ethics of community, this affirmation of a higher quality of life through the values of equality and singularity promotes community practices that would enable the members of the community to live what the members themselves help determine to be a meaningful life. Thus, this includes the ability to have some control over one’s life. This, rather than a life in which meaning is solely determined by another’s control. I consider this to be intolerable. Valuing life through concern for one’s and others’ singularity and equality implies, of course, that domination and control over others are practices that lack a concern for the quality of human lives. In other words, these destructive practices disable one’s ability to have some control over the meaning of one’s existence. It seems to me that Rancière and Cavarero, though they have other agendas within the fields of philosophy, are very concerned with ethical values that create better modes of living, that enable humans to share and protect each other as singular and equal beings.
First, Rancière’s political thought provides a more persuasive argument—than one for absolute or radical inclusivity—for how one might affirm a higher quality of human life, even if he is not directly concerned with the same terms as Esposito. Rather than valuing life through its complete loss to others or through its complete protection from others, an ethics of community is better served through the knowledge of the presupposition of the equality of human intelligences and the verification of this knowledge through what Rancière calls an emergent “community of equals” or “subjectification.”

No doubt when many readers view or hear the term equality or related terms, such as democracy or freedom, they roll their eyes to terms that mean so much that they have potentially ceased to mean anything—not unlike community, perhaps. This, or they may read the term with skepticism, thinking a writer using such terminology has a naïve hope for a utopian society. This is not the case for Rancière. For Rancière, democratic politics not only “doesn't always happen—it actually happens very little or rarely” (Disagreement 17). In fact, if only received in sound bites, Rancière may appear to be as skeptical as anyone: “Democracy does not exist simply because the law declares individuals equal and the collectivity master of itself” (Shores of Politics 32). And finally, “social reality is a reality of inequality” (48, my emphasis). So what is this emergent community of equals, this equality of intelligences? I spend time on both in this section; however, I will spend a greater deal of attention to the former, a community of equals, in the next chapter.

Again, a community of equals must not be mistaken for a utopian structure of peace and prosperity. In his essay “The Community of Equals,” Rancière posits that at
least since Aristotle there has been a concern for equality in the idea of community. Nevertheless, Rancière’s point of departure for talking about equality in relation to community is Pierre Leroux, a 19th century philosopher and economist who attempted to conceptualize a community without hierarchy and with an equal distribution of property. Obviously influenced by the proliferation of socialist thought during his life, Leroux attempts to found his community of equality upon romanticized versions of historic communities of equality. According to Rancière, the two models Leroux uses to conceptualize this community of equality are the Greek Spartan community and the Christian communities espoused by the apostle Paul. However, Rancière shows Leroux’s task to be a difficult:

By taking a closer look at the accounts presented by equality to community we . . . see the image of the single great body crumble, and encounter all the deficit and discord which ensure that the community of equals can never materialize without some cement plugging the cracks in the image, without some obligation to keep tallying members and ranks and retranslating the terms. (65)

The first of Leroux’s examples, the Spartan fraternity, while “founded” upon equality, was only an equality of the few—men and those with property (66); the other example, the Christian community, attempting to be “one in Christ,” was only realized by communities of monks, who, not unlike Esposito’s notion of communitas, only found this equality in the renunciation of each of the community members’ own quality of life, becoming, in essence, slaves (68-72). Because Leroux’s two models of communal
equality could not achieve such a feat without completely ignoring exclusivity (a “community of masters”) or erasing the members’ subjectivities (a “community of slaves,”) it is no wonder that Leroux could not construct such a united community of equality to any greater success than the monks and the Spartans.

Of course, this is comes as no surprise to Rancière, whose scholarship is deeply informed by another 19th century thinker, French educator Joseph Jacotot. Rancière reads Jacotot as in contrast to Leroux: Jacotot argued that no politics or pedagogy of equality can sustain itself institutionally. Summing up Jacotot’s recognition succinctly, Rancière argues, “the essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division” (32-33). Rather than equality occurring through the distribution of goods, as we might see in liberalism (and other political systems—see my discussion of Rancière’s politics in Chapter 4), Jacotot’s equality via Rancière is enacted though momentary speech acts. In fact, it is through speech acts that humans are able to discover their equality with other beings (51) through the presupposition of the equality of intelligences.

According to Rancière, Jacotot taught that equality “was a belief implied by the very idea of intelligence.” And therefore, “belief in [equality], acquired or reacquired, [is] the basis of a community of equals” (81). This claim for the equality of intelligence found in speech acts is drawn from two premises: First, “every spoken or written sentence takes on meaning only if it assumes a subject whose corresponding venture permits the discernment of a meaning” (81). Thus, even though meaning is always over- and under-determined because of the play of the signifier and the arbitrariness of language, this does
not take away from the fact that the speaking subject must at some point presuppose equality in his or her listener to even believe that the listener(s) will comprehend some meaning from the speaker; otherwise, the speaking subject would not attempt to communicate. Second, “there are no two ways of being intelligent” (82). This latter premise seems to attempt to appeal to us as a simple and timeless truth, almost to the point of cliché; however, if we consider the endless amounts of ways one might measure intelligence, it is no doubt difficult to disprove. And this is all Rancière asks of us, to believe in this presupposition of the equality of intelligences and let others attempt to dissuade us of it.

If all speech acts presuppose the equality of human intelligences (and Rancière will eventually include or at least allude to writing and other composition practices as acts that presuppose this equality (see *Shores of Politics* 81-3)), then “it is always possible to make a show of equality” (*Disagreement* 34), or almost always possible. Material conditions can prevent one from doing so. One of these conditional constraints for such acts is, of course, time. Even though in the actual moment of speaking and listening, equality is being presupposed, as soon as any identifying of social status or hierarchies takes place, that equality is gone. When such an identification takes place, any act presupposing equality “turns into the opposite the moment it aspires to a place in the social or state organization” (*Disagreement* 34). (I discuss this in greater depth in chapter 4 on politics of community.) For while any person must presuppose equality just in the attempt to use language, whose meaning is arbitrary, there is no inherent equality in social order. In fact, just the opposite, and this is the tension that will eventually lead to a
democratic politics for Rancière, or how this ethic of equality is advocated (again, see chapter 4).

As I mention above, with Rancière, the presupposition of equality can occur in both writing and speech, comprising both the visual and aural spectrum of intentional symbol use. However, just because one has engaged in a communicative act that presupposes the equality of intelligences does not mean that one has produced or verified that equality. In other words, just communicating would not constitute an ethics or politics for Rancière, but rather the communicative act is the condition of possibility for an ethics of community—an ethics valuing the equality of human intelligences. Just because we have the capacity to presuppose equality does not mean that we should validate that presupposition. That “should” can only come from a connection to other presupposed values, such as a value in the quality of human life, which this presupposition in equality can inform and be informed by. (See my argument about the difference between constitutive and normative arguments in chapter 2.) An ethics valuing equality must continually make contingent arguments for this valuation within many contexts. Others have argued that humans also have “the capacity to create and destroy their own communities, along with the values that govern their development and the environment in which they survive” (Donnison 221). The fact that we have this capacity does not justify the advocacy of putting it into action.

Still, the conditions for this presupposition to occur are important—they do not stem from law or institutional structures but rather a repeated practice: “[a] community of equals is [a] . . . community of individuals engaged in the ongoing creation of equality”
(Rancière, *Shore of Politics* 84). And even though such a community of equals might be as small in number as two, and as large as events of mass protest, do not mistake institutions with good intentions as communities of equality. In fact, there are actually two conditions to recognizing such a community: First, it will not have “a goal to be reached but a [pre]supposition to be posited from the outset and endlessly reposited” (84). And second, a “community of equals can never achieve substantial form as a social institution . . . no matter how many individuals become emancipated, society can never be emancipated” (84). Any political strategy or pedagogy that attempts to create a structure to sustain such a community will only find itself over-relying on practices of immunity, to use Esposito’s terminology, to protect the structure rather than verify the equality of the members of the community. “Anything else paraded under this banner [of equality] is either a trick, a school, or a military unit” (84). This does not necessarily mean one should completely avoid implementing institutions, but one must realize that as soon as a community has become institutionalized, it will take continual mechanisms and practices of sharing and protection, and thus inclusion and exclusion, to maintain it. In such situations, our communities of equality turn into perpetual acts of justification to meet the institution’s goals rather than work in the service of equality. Therefore, we must be careful not to mistake a community with good intentions as always falling under (though it can fall under) the category of a “community of equals.”

To this point, the ethics of community I have articulated includes an affirmation of a higher quality of human life. I have argued that one condition for recognizing and enabling this higher quality of life (whether in terms of the social, the political, or the
biological) is through the presupposition of the equality of intelligences that occurs through communication with others. In chapter 4, I explain how this presupposition can be verified and advocated politically. However, before I get there, I want to add another “recognition” element that I think is important but may seem contrary to what we might deem an ethic of “community,” and that is a valuing of the care for singular beings. To articulate this third but important element, I refer to the thought of another contemporary Italian thinker, Adriana Cavarero.

Just as Rancière’s project articulates communication as the condition that enables humans to value and verify the equality of intelligences, Cavarero’s larger project is to expose another condition of possibility—the condition that enables us to speak, to even communicate. Cavarero contends that prior to and as the condition for speech is the vocalic—the voice—and that this phenomenon, this ontological condition, is a greater and more originary indicator of singularity than one achieved through semantic meaning and identity formation. She argues that the voice is “the condition of every communication. . . the communicability of the communicable, or the significance of the signification” (For More Than One Voice 29). Because no two voices are identical, a person’s physical phonic qualities, prior to any signifying content, communicate his or her singular uniqueness. “When the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and body who emits it” (4). Cavarero sees the vocalic as reaffirming “what Hannah Arendt calls the human condition: namely, the uniqueness that makes of everyone a being that is different from all the others” (3). Thus, recognition of this uniqueness is a simultaneous
recognition of relationality, because to communicate this uniqueness is to communicate difference—the voice must be heard by another.\textsuperscript{9}

The voice is always for the ear, it is always relational; but it is never as relational as it is in the first cry of the infant—an invoking life that unknowingly entrusts itself to a voice that responds. . . . There is nothing yet to be communicated, if not communication itself in its pure vocality. The voice first of all signifies itself, nothing other than the relationality of the vocalic, which is already implicit in the first invoking cry of the infant. (169, emphasis in the original)

Therefore, the voice is simultaneously an expression of uniqueness and a recognition of relationality, an expression that finds its origins in “the first crucial months of life,” where it “takes its time and its pleasure before handing itself over to the system of language” (170).

Now, significant for Cavarero is that the voice is the most important political category and that the primacy of the voice to signification enables her to critique the history of Western Metaphysics’ dependency on language, and universal terms such as “man.” Though I agree with much of her critique, in this dissertation I am less concerned with that history. With the advent of new media technology and the realization that not every person can hear—I am thinking of someone in the American Sign Language community, for example—I am not yet convinced of Cavarero’s conclusions that the best politics is a radically local politics where the voice is the most important political topoi,
that is, unless the idea of voice is broadened metaphorically beyond its actual phonic qualities.

Rather, I am more interested in how Cavarero’s thought enables the discovery of topoi that might better inform how we develop ethics of community—i.e., rather than terms such as inclusion and exclusion—in order to give us an indication of what values should inform how we engage in protection and sharing toward a higher quality of human life. I have already argued, through Roberto Esposito, that practices of sharing and protection better inform how communities are constituted and will help rhetoricians better discover ethical content in collective action and communal formation to affirm human life. However, how does one best negotiate what is too much sharing and too much protection, too much communitas or immunitas, as Esposito would have it? I believe one way to begin making these determinations is through a more robust concept of singularity.

Cavarero’s thought helps recognize that singular uniqueness is something that should be a concern for community. Let me explain. While Cavarero’s ontology of the voice does not automatically determine how one should or might normatively affirm the singularity of the voice (something I discuss in chapter 5 with Cavarero’s later work), it does provide the knowledge that there is a singular, unique being one can affirm—a being that is neither simply a myth of capitalist or liberal ideology nor a byproduct of some originary community (though relationality is a crucial element to that singularity). Taking singularity seriously means understanding that when a communal practice of sharing or protection goes so far as to negate someone’s singularity, then that community
has likely surpassed a limit of tolerability. From this content one can better determine ethical norms for sharing and protecting singularity in connection to community without falling back into individualistic, over-protective paradigms, such as that of Thomas Hobbes or American Capitalism; however, this ontology simultaneously provides a basis for ethics that do not fall too far in the other direction either, into a paradigm that sees any representation of singular personhood as a false consciousness or a potential betrayal of communal relations.

From the maternal scene onward, the voice manifests the unique being of each human being, and his or her spontaneous self-communication according to the rhythms of a sonorous relation. In this sense . . . a vocal ontology of uniqueness—stands in contrast to the various ontologies of fictitious entities that the philosophical tradition . . . designates with names like “man,” “subject,” “individual.” For what these universal categories share is the neglect of the “uniqueness” of those human beings.” (173, original emphasis)

In correlation yet in response to works like Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Inoperative Community* and other works that also critique the subject, works in which one can perhaps too easily surmise that any privileging of the individual is a betrayal of community (this can be seen in the works of rhetoricians such as Diane Davis and Pat Gehrke, as I discuss in chapter 1), Cavarero’s work refreshingly brings our attention back to a value in singularity, without disregarding the importance of community and its interdependent relation to singularity.
An Ethics of Community Beyond Absolute Inclusivity

In sum, the ethics of community I have argued for in this chapter is comprised of the following:

First, this ethics recognizes that placing absolute positive value in inclusivity and negative value in exclusivity as a basis for community is not only unfeasible but too easily masks economic, nationalist, and corporate motives that perpetuate inequality, as the example of biennialism illustrates. In fact, rather than viewing a sense of community through a dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion, I argue—following Roberto Esposito’s thought—that one’s sense of community is more accurately described through a dichotomy of community/immunity, or sharing/protection. Beyond being more accurate than inclusion/exclusion, the community/immunity dichotomy enables a more complex ethical extraction, per se, because the ethical content found in community is not solely tied to one pole of the dichotomy. One can find ethical affirmation in practices of community and immunity.

And what is being affirmed? Simply put, a higher quality of life. Not just heart-beating, biological life (though that is obviously part of it), but the idea of “lifeness” itself, found in its many varieties—including social identity formation and political subjectivities of individuals and communities—in other words, what is being affirmed is a higher quality of life. How one defines this quality of “lifeness” will be highly contextual and shift greatly, depending on the specific application and larger ideological assumptions. I am not arguing for a specific, explicative, and absolute definition of a
quality of life here; however, I am arguing that without a value in the equality of human intelligences and singularity of being, such a higher quality of life for each member of a community cannot be obtained.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, I contend that one way in which this ethics of community might determine affirmation of these quality lives is through a valuing the equality of human intelligences. In other words, I would argue that a human life is being affirmed, if his or her equality of intelligence is being valued. Rancière posits that in everyday speech, in everyday communication humans already presuppose this equality, otherwise we would refrain from speaking. Nevertheless, this condition for the possibility of ethics, the condition for equality, requires, at some point, a leap of sorts, a belief that verifying the equality of humans is an ethical good for singular and communal being. For without such a value, the community implicitly will perpetuate the domination of some over others. Of course, in addition to a value in the equality of humans, I argue, by drawing upon Adriana Cavarero’s ontology of the voice, that an ethics of community that wishes to value the equality of intelligences to affirm human life, should also value the uniqueness of each member of that community.

Applying this ethics of community is not easy. This ethics of community by no means explains how the problems of biennialism, for example, or any community will be solved. It is an ethics that acknowledges its deficits, that knows it cannot be institutionalized in totality. Yet, this ethics of community helps to clarify the problems of communal phenomenon such as biennialism by showing the various ethical complexities beyond inclusion and exclusion of communal formation, practice, and critique,
simultaneously buoying the ability to critique, produce, and practice communal phenomenon through a lens concerned with equality and singularity. In other words, I see this ethics of community changing how we know, do, and make collective action, whether in the name of biennialism or some other communal formation.

While Biennialism is a good example of the difficulties and problems with ethics of community rhetorically built upon inclusion, arguably, such an ethics does its most damage when used to critique communities that require (sometimes exclusive) protections, for it condemns those who need the most protection—those on the margins. And it is this point for which I do not want to be misread. Out of all the things my readers could take away from this chapter, I would have them note that an ethics of community built on an unopposed notion of inclusion is not simply a problem of logic and logistics. Rather, such an ethic is completely unsympathetic to oppressed communities requiring forms of exclusivity to protect members of the group. Therefore, I want to close with the description of a recent event that exposes just how problematic an ethic of community based upon inclusion is when applied to an actual community practice of protecting a member’s equality and singularity. This example also leads nicely, I think, into chapter 4, in which I discuss how these ethics of community I have developed—based on the affirmation of the quality of life through the valuing of equality and singularity—can be advocated politically.

On February 9, 2014, University of Missouri and future professional football player Michael Sam announced he was gay during an interview on ESPN’s Outside the Lines. While this act in itself is what I see as a practice verifying equality—a political act
I discuss in chapter 4—for the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in a particular event that occurred as a result of Sam making this announcement. Less than a week later, on February 15, Sam, along with the rest of his Missouri Tigers teammates, was invited to take part in a ceremony honoring the football team during a Missouri basketball game. The football team was to accept the trophy for winning the Cotton Bowl, an NCAA bowl game that took place a little over a month earlier.

What is significant about this event is that because of Sam’s announcement regarding his sexuality, the Westboro Baptist Church decided to stage a protest outside the basketball arena, carrying signs with sayings such as, “Death Penalty 4 Fags,” and more (see fig. 7). In response to this protest, thousands of students created a human wall to block the members of the Westboro Baptist Church from visibly picketing the game in which Michael Sam and the rest of the Missouri Tigers were honored. In essence, the students’ collective act was an act protecting Michael Sam from hate speech—an act of community in which the group cared for a singular being they saw as their equal, even in his difference from many of them.

This event, while lasting less than a day, speaks volumes regarding the kinds of values that ethics of community should be informed by. If one were to make a critique of the University of Missouri academic community through an ethic based upon absolute inclusion, then one would find the actions of the students to be in the wrong, to be intolerable. The students excluded the members of the Westboro Baptist Church. However, the ethics of community I have articulated in this chapter find verification in this protective act, this human “wall of love” (see Sieczkowski; fig. 8). The students,
seeing Michael Sam as unique but also as equal to themselves, affirmed Michael Sam’s life by protecting it from the protesters of the Westboro Baptist Church.

![Figure 7. A member of the Westboro Baptist Church protests Michael Sam’s sexuality at a Missouri Tigers basketball game; The Huffington Post; huffingtonpost.com; 16 Feb. 2014; Web; 24 Feb. 2014](image)

While inclusion can be a tactic to enact equality, to affirm life, it is impractical and even unethical as a basis for ethics of community. That is not to say that a politics attempting to advocate the ethics of community I have articulated will not have their difficulties being put into action. As I discuss in chapter 4, these are neither easy nor institutionally sustainable tasks. Nevertheless, how one views community, how one views ethical community practices needs to be more than a terministic screen in which community is only associated with positive terms, such as inclusivity, participation, and
togetherness. Rather, such an ethic must also consider how humans care for others in their communities, how they treat others as equals in their communities. Sometimes this care may just involve some protective exclusivity.

Figure 8. To protect Michael Sam from Westboro Baptist protesters, StandWithSam counterprotesters form a human wall outside a Missouri Tigers basketball game; Photograph by Mark Schierbecker; Wikimedia Commons; commons.wikimedia.org; 15 Feb. 2014; Web; 24 Feb. 2014.
CHAPTER FOUR
A POLITICS OF COMMUNITY

Perhaps after all there is no need for the workers to own their own factory and run it themselves in order to be equal. Perhaps it is enough for them to show, when appropriate, that they can do so. Not to found a counterpower susceptible of governing a future society, but simply to effect a demonstration of capacity which is also a demonstration of community.

Jacques Rancière

The articulation of the ethics of community I advocate in chapter 3 was no easy task. It is perhaps even more difficult to put into practice politically. However, this is a good thing. Unlike the normative models of community that draw on an inclusion/exclusion dichotomy, an ethics informed by a sharing/protection dichotomy—or as I might say, an ethics where values are found along the range of both the poles of community and immunity—requires more specificity, and is therefore more difficult to simulate, mask, or institutionalize. Nevertheless, even with this difficulty, advocating this ethics politically and putting it into practice is actually possible, unlike practices purporting to enable absolute, radical inclusivity. In brief, this ethics—which, I argue, finds value in the affirmation of a higher quality of life through taking seriously communicative presuppositions of equality and singularity—can be practiced politically whenever and wherever one is able to verify the presupposition of equality.

The goals of this chapter are to explicate this politics, for which I rely heavily on the thought of Jacques Rancière (see chapter 5 for further application of Cavarero’s
ethical thought applied to the composition classroom). After I explain this politics, I apply this political lens to analyze a historical community: Black Wall Street, a thriving African American community in the early part of the twentieth century that found roots in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Black Wall Street was a community whose growth and prosperity—and whose verifications of equality, as I view them in certain instances—created dissensus among the larger white community in Tulsa, thus becoming a catalyst for the infamous 1921 race riots. Rancière’s politics, in concert with the constitutive model of community I articulate in chapter 2, provides a particularly valuable explanation for communal phenomenon such as Black Wall Street, where protection and sharing went hand-in-hand with verifying the equality of a marginalized group of people.

**Verifying the Presupposition of Equality: Dissensus, Subjectification, Emancipation**

As I allude to in chapter 3, Rancière’s political thought is by no means a philosophy articulating a system for how to better distribute “who gets what” in a government. In other words, it is not a political model or mode that encapsulates the design of a more perfect social structure or a better way of governing. Nevertheless, it does inform rhetorics of community, and, in fact, it changes how one can critique, produce, and practice such rhetorics. While top-down political and community-building models can learn from Rancière’s political philosophy, they can never institutionalize what he calls subjectification and emancipation, or an emergent community of people engaged in the practice of verifying the presupposition of equality. Rather than a political thought whose emphasis is on the capabilities and responsibilities of people in power,
Rancière’s theory works for those invisible to a social order, those who are unheard in the public sphere, whose equality is unrecognized. As the reader of this chapter will see, Rancière’s political thought enables anyone to practice politics actively rather than passively await the distribution of equality from those in positions of power—for it needs no policies to be put into action, and it requires neither a perfect system of distribution nor mechanisms from which to perpetuate order; it only requires the existence of beings who can communicate, and thus presuppose and verify each other’s equality of intelligence.

As a reminder (see chapter 3), Rancière argues that existing in any speech act is a presupposition of equality, and this claim is built upon two premises. First, for any communicative meaning to take place between two individuals, even with the constant play of the signifier and arbitrariness of language, the rhetor must presuppose equality with his or her listener on a level of intelligence to expect any understanding from the listener. Without this presupposition of equal intelligence at work, the rhetor would have no exigency to attempt communication. The second premise is that there is no one correct manner of being intelligent: there are innumerable ways of being intelligent, and thus gauging an absolute measure is impossible. As a caveat, however, just because one presupposes equality in daily communication does not mean that such communication is automatically a political act of verifying equality. Nevertheless, this condition is still a powerful thing that enables such a politics of equality to occur:

A word has all the power originally given it. This power is in the first place the power to create a space where equality can state its own claim:
equality exists somewhere; it is spoken of and written about. It must therefore be verifiable. Here is the basis for a practice that sets itself the task of verifying equality. (*Shores of Politics* 47)

Thus, this presupposition, while not an automatic political act in itself is the basis for political action. For a community of equals to be realized politically, further action is required (47), but two conditions must be understood: (1) equality is not a goal that can be achieved institutionally but a practice to be verified repeatedly, and (2) such a verification—which Rancière calls “subjectification”—is temporal, never permanent, though its trace can have a residual effect. Unlike prominent rhetoric and composition scholar James Berlin and others who view almost any act as being political (understood in the phrase “everything is political”), in the sense that all acts either perpetuate a status quo or resist it, Rancière sees politics as occurring very rarely. “Nothing is political in itself for the political only happens by means of a principle that does not belong to it: equality” (*Disagreement* 33). One of my goals in this chapter is to articulate how that presupposition of equality becomes political, how it enables change, and how it rhetorically affects the social order: “a verification [of equality] becomes ‘social’, [and] causes equality to have a real social effect, only when it mobilizes an obligation to hear” (*Shores of Politics* 86, original emphasis).

Perhaps the best way to understand Rancière’s political thought, to understand what it means to “mobilize an obligation to hear,” is to place it in context with those ideas, systems, and practices that are not “politics.” For, as Rancière argues, politics occurs through dissensus (rather than consensus), subjectification (the verification of
equality), and emancipation. However, these terms and processes are very different from the terms and practices we normally associate with politics, such as order, law, consensus, and the distribution of rights.

*Police or Politics?*

‘Social’ reality is a reality of inequality.

Jacques Rancière

Because “no divine law regulates human society” (*Disagreement* 16), order appears to be a necessity for mainstream political thought and action. For groups of people to co-exist, authority is mandated, rules are created, and roles are assigned—at least, this is the narrative in which we are led to believe. Generally, this structuring of the social, this “set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems of legitimizing this distribution” is called “politics” (*Disagreement* 33). Whether discussing acts of law-making, taxing, distributing wealth, establishing a party platform, structuring a government, or organizing a military—actions that are all characterized as “politics” or “political” according to popular news media—an idea of order is at work to categorize, classify, and, as a result, hierarchize people, places, and materials. Even if the ethical values motivating these “political” acts range from personal liberty and economic freedom to democracy and protective rights, this structural ordering implies that someone has control over another person, even if that control is motivated by valid concerns for that other person. For this reason, Rancière refuses to call such actions “politics.” Rather,
he “propose[s] to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. . . . the police” (28, original emphasis).

Not to be confused with law enforcement officials, though they obviously play a role,

the police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (29)

There are multiple elements to this short passage, which I will parse out. First, if the police is defined by any “order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task,” then regimes we normally think of as democratic, such as the United States, and practices we consider processes of democracy, such as voting for consensus, are actually regimes and practices that can enable and take part in, if they are not themselves, policing. In other words, by the phrase “police regime,” Rancière is not just designating what mainstream politics would recognize as totalitarian regimes, such as North Korea; rather, policing is occurring “whenever someone thinks about establishing the theoretical rules of a city’s [literal and figurative] proportions.” And when this happens, “it means that democracy has already passed that way” (16).
Continuing with the above passage, the police is also “an order of the visible and the sayable,” or what Rancière elsewhere calls the “distribution of the sensible.” In other words, this distribution of the sensible is an order of what and who counts, and what makes discernible meaning, whether in terms of defining citizenship or more inconspicuous means of legitimation. This is beyond acts of lawmaking and also refers to “implicit law governing,” those presuppositions a social body perceives as “self-evident facts” of “what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done” (The Politics of Aesthetics 85). Thus, policing can and does occur even when there are no explicit, written rules or laws that enforce people to abide by them. Broadly conceived, the police is the process of the general distribution of powers—whether through lawmaking or normalization (see chapter 2)—and the legitimation of these powers into hierarchical patterns of relationships among people. Some obvious, explicit forms of policing include English-only education and “traditional” marriage laws. These laws legitimate certain people and groups (e.g., English speakers and couples who are identified as heterosexual), and these laws distribute powers across various social institutions and practices, influencing who qualifies for medical insurance benefits and whom a company can discriminate when hiring new employees, to name a few. However, policing also occurs in what may, upon first glance, appear to be less oppressive and more implicit distributions of the sensible, such as in the designation of “men’s” and “women’s” public restrooms—distributions that make people who identify as transgender, for example, invisible in a social order. This distribution of the sensible is
beyond exclusion in that the invisible are not even counted among what is excluded in a social order (for example, women are excluded from a “men’s” restroom and vice versa).

In contrast to the police is what Rancière designates as politics. As I explain in chapter 3, Rancière actually limits politics to very specific practices and processes that rarely occur; however, this limitation, in the spirit of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s “retreating the political” (see my Introduction), actually empowers and even saves politics from the ubiquity that enables pundits and journalists to label *ad hominem* rhetorics, for example, as “just politics.” Rather than argue that politics is overarching all acts, Rancière suggests that “politics only occurs when these [police] mechanisms are stopped in their tracks by the effect of a presupposition that is totally foreign to them . . . : the presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone” (*Disagreement* 17). Note, again, however, that politics is not the presupposition of equality itself, which occurs in everyday speech, but a practice whose condition is this presupposition. This practice is not one of distributing human rights, as liberal paradigms would have it. Such systems would still be policing. In contrast, Rancière reserves “the term *politics* for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing” (29). Thus, rather than politics being actions “from the top down,” per se, which attempts to achieve consensus and order, Rancière sees politics solely as acts of a particular kind of dissensus from the bottom up.

Of course, by a particular kind of dissensus, I mean that any act of decategorization or declassification is not necessarily political dissensus. Just because I might say, “I think we should break the categories for how we understand car parts,” for example, does not mean I am taking part in an act of political dissensus. Simply put,
political “dissensus is not the confrontation between interests or opinions.” Rather, “it is
the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself” (“Ten Theses” 8:24) that
requires a verification of the presupposition of the equality of a human intelligence. Thus
politics, along with dissensus, is also “a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of
subjectification (Disagreement 35),” which is “the enactment of equality” (“Politics,
Identification, and Subjectivization” 61).

By subjectification I mean the production through a series of actions of a
body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a
given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the
reconfiguration of the field of experience. (Disagreement 35, original
emphasis)

Subjectification is the emergent community of equals that appears simultaneously with
political dissensus. Another way of putting it is that subjectification is part of the same
process of the verification of equality that creates dissensus, only it is perceived from a
different perspective. Subjectification is a practice that enables a person who is invisible
in a social order to become visible, a person who is unheard to become heard. This
invisibility and unheard-ness occurs because the current distribution of the sensible, the
current social order, neither recognizes this person as part of the order nor as part of what
is able to be perceived by that order. Subjectification is thus the act of a person (or
community) who was not a subject becoming a subject through actions that acknowledge
or verify his or her equality with others; dissensus is this same process from the
perspective of the social order, one might say. Those relying on the social order’s
distribution of the sensible to determine meaning will see an act of subjectification—a person verifying his or her equality—as dissensus, as a de-categorization and declassification of the social order they rely on. It is a rhetorical disruption of the senses—of what is thought to be knowable and capable of being experienced—that occurs because of this exposure to a subject who is not a subject within the social order’s distribution of peoples and legitimation of powers. A brief example may help explain Rancière’s complex and often elusive political thought.

Coy Mathis is a Colorado 7-year-old whose parents identified her as a boy at birth; however, Coy has been identifying herself as a girl since at least the age of three. In 2011, even as Coy’s parents were becoming accustomed to their child’s transgender identification, they still checked “boy” when registering Coy for kindergarten. But when Coy refused to wear “boy” clothes to school, and with the help of transgender support groups and the school psychologist, Coy’s parents finally decided to let Coy wear the kind of clothes she preferred and supported her decision to identify as a girl at school. This identification included using the girls’ bathroom. While the complexities of Coy’s story deserve more attention than I am giving it here, simply put, when Coy’s use of the girls’ bathroom became known to district administrators (with the help of other parents, of course), “Coy was banned from the girls’ restroom” at her elementary school (see Erdely). Six months after a filing a discrimination complaint, the Colorado Rights Division ruled in favor of Coy Mathis, allowing her to identify as a girl at school and use the girls’ bathroom.¹
To place this powerful story in Rancière’s terms, in the very act of using the girls’ bathroom, Coy was verifying her equality as a transgender student with the other students at the school who may have identified as either a boy or a girl through more accepted, traditional gender assignments. She was performing an act of subjectification. She made count what according to how the social order’s distribution of the sensible did not count. From the perspective of the school district, her act was one of dissensus. Her transgender identification as a girl ruptured how the sensible had been distributed to that point—a seemingly clear line demarcating what allows someone to equate as boy or girl. This demarcation legitimated only those who identified with the traditional roles of the assigned distribution. In effect, this gender distribution, reified in the restroom signifiers, empowered those who identified with traditional gender assignments and made invisible those who did not. Coy’s act to use the girls’ bathroom (and her parents’ and supporters’ acts to support her) thus was a recognition of the inequality being committed and a verification of her equality with the other students. This was an act of subjectification, and act that no longer made her invisible to the social order. This process, following Rancière, is politics.

While Coy’s story made headline news, Rancière points out that such political acts can be “spectacular or otherwise” (Disagreement 30), and one’s ability to judge a successful verification of equality is not located in the creation of a new law or policy or the advent of a news-breaking broadcast. Rancière argues that political emancipation is not the freedom or liberation from all restrictions, whether they be legal, political, or social. Rather, political emancipation is the moment one recognizes one’s own equality.
and that enables “the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” (“Politics” 58-60). After one is emancipated, others can be emancipated. All that is required for this emancipation to be verified is for one human being to “mobilize an obligation to hear” (Shores 86) in another human being—for one being to incite another into seeing what he or she had not recognized before: a person’s equality. It is important to note that this other human being can even be one’s self, for to verify the equality of another, one must recognize the presupposition at work in his- or herself: “Proving to the other that there is only one world and that one can prove the legitimacy of one’s action within it, means first of all proving this to oneself” (Shores of Politics 50).

Thus, this recognition of one’s equality, this process of emancipation and the communal subjectification that may follow, can occur in a conversation with a loved one at home; they can occur on national television or watching television by oneself; they can occur while surfing the Internet; they can occur at a political rally. Political emancipation can occur anywhere. In sum, Rancière’s politics is a practice or series of actions that “that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order.” This undoing occurs through putting into effect a presupposition that the order itself denies: the equal recognition of “those who have no part” in that order. The implementation of this presupposition, this test of equality, exposes “the sheer contingency of the order, [and demonstrates] the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” (Disagreement 30), resulting in the formation of a community of equals.

However, lest my readers forget, it is important to remember that this ability to verify equality in any moment does not mean that such a notion of politics occurs often.
In fact, as I state earlier, politics in these terms occurs rarely (see Disagreement 17), for it cannot be institutionalized. “Equality is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it” (33). This discernment of equality is actually very temporal. Rancière calls it a “one-off performance” (34): as soon as an act of subjectification—the verification of equality of a person who is not counted among the social order—is no longer perceived as dissensus and becomes identifiable by the social order, whether one is then identified as a citizen, a community member, or some other identification, then the verification of equality is not necessarily still in action. Though the equality of intelligences is always presupposed in any communicative act, the verification of that equality is a practice that “is forever in need of reiteration. No matter how many individuals become emancipated, society can never be emancipated. Equality may be the law of the community, [but] society inevitably remains in thrall to inequality” (Shores 84).

No doubt, it is because of this one-off performance, as Rancière puts it, that most political thinkers actually confuse policing with politics. They find or fear the inability to institutionalize the temporal verification of equality; or, as part of the social order, they only see subjectification as dissensus and thus posit a political theory that relies on the legitimation of hierarchical powers, law, and a distribution of meaning (roles, languages, rights) for the people. This, however, even if performed in the name of equality, is actually policing, not politics. “Anyone who wants to cure politics of its ills has only one available solution: the lie that invents some kind of social nature in order to provide the
community with an *arkhê,*” or a structure that holds the community together and perpetuates the distribution of the sensible as all that there is to perceive (*Disagreement* 16).

In fact, the most prominent political systems of thought are, for Rancière, not actually politics but versions of policing whose goal is actually “the end of politics” or, at minimum, “eliminating the difference between politics and police” (63). These systems of thought confuse (if they do not deny it altogether) the practice of verifying a presupposition of equality as politics with systems of distribution, in which rights, such as equality (but sometimes not even this), are thought to provide the people via a governing body. Rancière designates such systems of thought as *archipolitics,* *parapolitics,* and *metapolitics.*

The most prominent version of archipolitics is found in Plato’s *Republic.* It is the idea that the best way to aggregate groups of people and achieve consent, and thus harmony, is by assigning each person his or her place or role in society. In an archipolitical community, notions of equality are not even considered, because equality would actually disrupt the rule of harmony. Such a system finds no need to even attempt to distribute or simulate equality because archipolitics relies on the belief that all are not equal (*Disagreement* 65-9). Parapolitics informs the political thought of Aristotle and later thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes. Aristotle and Hobbes each recognizes that “all by nature are equal” (*Politics* IV, 1292), but fears the disruptive character of politics or at least cannot reconcile it with a system that views “the greatest good [as] the rule of the best,” or the elite (*Disagreement* 71). Unlike archipolitics, parapolitics is interested in the
appearance of equality but is willing to sacrifice actual equality for a belief in the greater good, an interest parapolitics shares with archipolitics. From Rancière: “The good [parapolitical] regime is one that takes on the appearances of an oligarchy for the oligarchs and democracy for the demos [the ‘commons’ or ‘citizens’]” (74). In a parapolitical community, people are still assigned various, unequal roles, but they may perceive themselves as being considered equals by the social order, if their role demands that perception. (70-81).

Metapolitics, unlike archipolitics and parapolitics, is an invention of modernity. It is less a political system than a philosophy of how politics works. This is the thought associated with Karl Marx and (for some, ironically) with neoliberal thought. In metapolitics the truths about social conditions are never what they seem. Politics on the surface is only masking an economic agenda privileging one community or individuals over others—the Marxist version is the idea of false consciousness. The truth of politics for metapolitics “is located beneath or behind it, in what it conceals” (82). In other words, for metapolitics, politics exists merely as a means to conceal the truth of economic conditions. Similarly, Marxism’s enemy neoliberalism argues there is no need for politics, because the invisible hand of the marketplace will correct all forms of injustice (81-91). Thus, metapolitics is a philosophy that sees the discovery of the truth and the righting of injustice occurring only in the “end of politics” (86). All of these forms of political thought and systems, which again Rancière refers to as police, require structures to maintain a sense of stability and require some to know more than others and have
power over others. None require the belief in a presupposition of equality, a presupposition that is the basis for Rancière’s politics. ²

One can imagine that if there were a political system that was to embody the verification of equality as its primary practice, then it would probably look something akin to collective anarchism, and I would hesitate to call it a “system.”³ Nevertheless, Rancière does not give up completely on the thought that practices verifying equality can affect communities beyond the initial one-off performance of subjectification. Even while equality cannot be institutionalized in a community, the traces of an act of subjectification can influence how a community acts and perhaps help that community look for verifications of equality when the social order is seemingly breaking down and seemingly only perceiving dissensus.

The there is of the event [the verification of equality] brings out the facticity of being-there-together. In the movement of the event replayed, of the text restaged, the community of equals occasionally finds the wherewithal to imprint the surface of the social body with the traces of its actual effects.” (Shores 87)

Thus, there are moments when an act of subjectification, which momentarily creates a community of equals, occurs within a social order or a community of a policing character or is the reason that a community came into existence in the first place. There are even moments when such a “community of equals appears as the ultimate underpinning of the distribution of the institutions and obligations that constitute a society” (91). In this way, the trace of the effect of such previous acts of subjectification do not necessarily
disappear “without a trace,” as a punster might have it. This appearance of equality being the basis for the distribution of the sensible for a community can occur each time “an impertinent dialectic is created by those who have no rights in the matter, but who nevertheless assert such rights” and thus disrupt the social order and create a “new beginning” in invoking remembered past acts verifying equality (91). When the recollection of what was once dissensus but is now an equal subject in the eyes of the community—what was once only white noise or what was once invisible to that community and eventually became identifiable through a rupture to that community’s order—when this recollection becomes the motive for action and that rupture is reinscribed into the community, the community may take on the appearance of one based in the verification of equality. Such a community will find its ability to cause social change in the trace of those earlier acts of subjectification and each time the community re-practices such acts. Thus, the political effectiveness of a community “is predicated on a violence [to the social order] which antedates it” (85). These traces of subjectification, which may have been originally perceived as dissensus, can continue to have effect through a remembrance of the “appeal to what [was] inscribed earlier” (91)—the verification of the presupposition of the equality of intelligences.

For example, when Jack Baker and Michael McConnell applied for a marriage license in Hennepin County, Minnesota in 1970, they were taking part in a practice of subjectification, and the trace of their act of verifying equality remains to this day. In the act of verifying their equality with that of married couples who identify and whom the state identified as heterosexual, Baker and McConnell created “an impertinent dialectic
by those who,” according to United States and Minnesota law at the time, had “no rights in the matter, but who nevertheless assert[ed] such rights” (91). As such, this practice was perceived as dissensus to the social order, to those who could only imagine marriage between a man and a woman because of the particular distribution of the sensible of the sensible in Minnesota and the United States at large. The effects of this practice of equality have been far-reaching, including the emancipation of other couples who identify as gay and the creation of national organizations such as Marriage Equality USA, which has helped influence district courts to deem amendments attempting to ban same-sex marriage as unconstitutional, even in conservative states such as Utah, Oklahoma, and Texas. This does not mean that each act carried out by Marriage Equality USA is a practice of equality or that it is an institution able to distribute equality. Marriage Equality USA has become institutionalized: it has a board of directors and staff members assigned various roles. These facts alone mean that the organization itself contains what Rancière would call “policing.” However, the organization finds its power and political effectiveness in the trace of subjectifications that preceded it and in which it finds its motive for existence and motive to attempt to keep practicing this equality. Each time Marriage Equality USA (and other groups like it) works to verify the equality of a couple that “does not count” within a particular state’s distribution of the sensible, it is drawing on an appeal of equality that was reinscribed earlier, and whose trace informs the attempt to continue to practice verifications of equality.

It is highly likely that Marriage Equality USA will continue to have influence for some time, not unlike the community with which I would like to close this chapter: Black
Wall Street, a community whose struggle for survival and immunity from white oppression in the early twentieth century was equally a struggle for equality.

**Black Wall Street: A Community Practicing Immunity, Subjectification, and Dissensus to Verify Equality**

I close the previous chapter by mentioning that judging a community by an ethics of absolute inclusion relies on an insufficient understanding of community and is problematic normatively. While such an ethic encourages those in power to be more cognizant of recognizing marginalized groups, this ethic also works to freely condemn those communities that are the most vulnerable, those communities that have, at times, relied on practices of exclusivity to protect their own or another endangered community. I would argue that certain of these communities even have practiced some forms of exclusivity to verify their own equality with other communities. Along similar lines, judging a community’s political action as a success by its ability to establish new laws or policies is just as unsympathetic an approach to understanding community practices and politics in general. Black Wall Street was a community in Tulsa, Oklahoma that not only took part in exclusivities that are arguably ethical in the context in which they took place; it was a community that engaged in what Rancière would call political action, or verifying the presupposition of the community members’ equality (i.e., subjectification) with that of the white citizens in Tulsa during the early part of the twentieth century. Black Wall Street’s politics were actions observed by the ruling order of white citizens as only dissensus; however, these acts of dissensus were heard by the black community and
its sympathizers at large in the United States as subjectification, and they continue to be heard and have influence today.  

In the early twentieth century, Tulsa, Oklahoma was a major site participating in the oil boom that marked the turn of the century. While in economic terms the city was thriving, “it was a tale of two cities,” as historian, playwright, and lawyer Hannibal Johnson puts it, “one black, isolated, and insular; the other white, boundless and bustling” (2). Nevertheless, even with this divide stemming from the nineteenth century, many African-Americans saw Oklahoma as a land of opportunity where they could avoid racism, violence, and death. Treaties between Native American tribes and the United States resulted in certain tribes allotting land to freed slaves in the area. This fact, in concert with the actions of boosters like Edwin McCabe, who once envisioned Oklahoma becoming an “all-black state,” led to the development of many African-American communities in Oklahoma, communities that “opened their arms” to freed slaves and their progeny “from all across the country.” Though the state never reached McCabe’s vision, many of these predominantly African-American communities did emerge in Oklahoma. Indeed, these communities in Oklahoma thrived to such a degree that at one point more than thirty African-American newspapers were being published in the state alone (Johnson 3-5).

According to Johnson, these communities’ rapid developments occurred for two related reasons: African Americans discovered protection from white oppression—whether in the explicit form of the Ku Klux Klan or more subtle systemic racism—and found more opportunities to control their lives politically and economically (5). Sadly, if
predictably, this rapid growth did not occur with the blessing of the white communities, at large. From a 1907 article in *The Independent*, a national magazine:

[I]n the Oklahoma, or Western half of the new State, the negro was as free to homestead land as the whites. . . . in both divisions of the State there are probably a larger percentage of negroes who own their own homes and are in comfortable circumstances than elsewhere in the United States. So it will be seen that Oklahoma’s negro population is hardly to be termed improvident. . . . I have yet to find the [white] Oklahoman who does not admit a strong personal antipathy toward the blacks. . . . [i]n Oklahoma the negro can hope for no political or social position that requires white encouragement. (Abbott 209-211; qtd. in Johnson 7-8)

In spite of the efforts of boosters such as McCabe and many African-American families encouraging friends and relatives to make a new start in Tulsa and the rest of the state, “the culture of the day was decidedly racist” (Johnson 8). Nevertheless, even with the culture structurally divided in this way, many of the African-American communities continued to grow and prosper, particularly economically, and particularly in Tulsa. With newspapers warning that “Tulsa appears now to be in danger of losing its prestige as the whitest town in Oklahoma” and referring to the small section of Tulsa proliferating with African-American communities via racial epithets such as “Little Africa” or “Niggertown,” it is no small wonder that these communities prospered for as long as they did (8).
No small wonder because segregation was the ruling distribution. While African Americans could be employed as servants in the white Tulsa communities, the racial politics of the time made it impossible for African Americans to participate equally, politically or economically: they could not live in the white communities and were discouraged from patronizing white businesses. The effects of this segregation could have been devastating (and no doubt were, in terms of self-perception and general morale); however, as a means of resistance to this perpetuation of inequality and as a means of survival, the African-American community in Tulsa began “buying black,” as such. Ranging from legitimate business practices to what Johnson calls their “less-desirable counterparts,” such as brothels and speakeasies, “black consumers [were deliberately] doing business with black vendors” (Johnson 9), exclusively investing earnings that came from outside the district back into the district (18).

Segregation, for all its practical, moral, and philosophical deficiencies, forced the development of an insular African-American economy to cater to the needs of this walled-off community. With it, an affluent class of African-American entrepreneurs developed. In Tulsa, this increasingly prominent African-American entrepreneurial pool congregated primarily in a single business district. (9)

This district was so successful between the years of 1905 and 1921, that according to legend, Booker T. Washington dubbed the district “Negro Wall Street,” now referred to as “Black Wall Street” (Johnson 9). This concerted effort of African Americans deliberately investing solely in their own community led to the development of an
African-American trade union in 1910 (14) and the construction of African-American hospitals and schools, including Booker T. Washington High School, where principal E.W. Woods made every effort to acknowledge the students’ equality of intelligence: “You’re as good as 99 percent of all the people [in Tulsa] and better than the rest” (qtd. in Johnson 12). According to Hannibal Johnson, African Americans comprised ten percent of the population in Tulsa at the time. During this period, the first African-American police officer was appointed, Barney Cleaver, though his jurisdiction only pertained to enforcing the laws in the African-American sections of Tulsa (14).

“Buying black” was equally an act of immunity from white oppression as an act verifying the African-American community’s equality with the surrounding white community—an act that enabled the growth of the African-American community and made visible their equality to those white communities. However, what appeared to those in the Greenwood District as progress and as community members asserting their equality, looked only like dissensus and disruption to the social order in Tulsa, whose distribution of the sensible was defined by white privilege (19). Of important note, of course, is that these verifications of equality by the African-American community did not solely occur in Tulsa. As African-American soldiers returned from World War I in 1918 wearing United States uniforms, communities across the country began to recognize their equality with the white communities, and their rising expectations and sense of self-worth emboldened them to assert this equality in multiple situations. For example, in Mississippi, one returned soldier wore his uniform in public, within the eyesight of white returned soldiers and communities. In response, a white mob formed. The mob forced the
soldier to remove his clothing, threatening that if he did not leave town that night, his family’s lives would be in danger (20). Around the same time period, in Michigan, four African-American boys decided to swim in the vicinity of what had been designated a “white beach.” The violent response of the white community ended in the death of one of the swimmers and more than thirty additional people in the area (28). Thus, the practices of verifying equality carried out by the Black Wall Street community did not occur in a vacuum; rather, they were part of a bigger communal movement by members of the African-American community at large.

That many in the white community saw these verifications of equality as dissensus and rupture to the order they perceived seems quite clear. From 1919 to 1921 there were 179 lynchings recorded in the United States. In the context of this knowledge and the oppressively racist laws and customs in Oklahoma, including a considerable Ku Klux Klan presence, the Black Wall Street community survived, prospered, and asserted their equality in the Tulsa area through “serving almost exclusively the needs of its own residents” (27). This exclusivity was definitely a product of the segregation laws, actions, and customs enforced by the dominate order, the white community at large, whose actions should be condemned. However, the “buying black” exclusivity perpetuated by the Black Wall Street community, a marginalized and vulnerable group in this context, is understandable. Furthermore, within an ethics that recognizes the affirmation of the quality of life through practices of protection and sharing that verify equality and care for singularity (see chapter 3), the actions of Black Wall Street are beyond understandable; they are justifiable.
While the continual practices of verifying equality in the community were largely perceived as disruption to the social order by those in power, namely the white community at large, rather than seeing only dissensus in Black Wall Street’s “uppityness,” some white Tulsans actually began to recognize this protective, insular activity for what it was—repeated practices of subjectification by the African-American community. Some white community members even heard this voice from the voiceless and took actions to verify the equality of those in Black Wall Street. The International Workers of the World, a white group sympathetic to socialist politics, publicly condemned the racial inequality in Tulsa as a result of this recognition. However, their own acts of verifying another’s equality were also perceived as dissensus by the dominant order. In one instance, the IWW members, en route to a court appearance, were seized by a group called the “Knights of Liberty.” The “Knights,” governed by racist ideology, tied the IWW members to trees and tarred and feathered them, meeting no opposition from law enforcement (34).

The most prominent and terrible event that resulted from this racial tension, a tension that was the result of the African-American community asserting its equality with the white community in Tulsa, was of course the 1921 race riots. On the morning of May 30, 1921, Sarah Page, a seventeen-year-old white girl, alleged that Dick Rowland, a nineteen-year-old African-American, had sexually assaulted her in an elevator. Though within hours she withdrew her statement, saying that Rowland had only fallen against her when the elevator lurched, scaring her in the process, the initial accusation had legs of its own in a social order that was continuing to see African Americans asserting their
equality where none was supposed to be found (35-8). Based upon the initial allegation, Rowland was arrested and taken to the city jail to be questioned. The next night, while Rowland was detained for questioning, a lynch mob of 2,000 white men formed to “take the matter into its own hands” (37). To protect Rowland, a group of armed African-American men numbering around 200 met the mob at the city jail. In an attempt by a white police officer to remove the weapons from only the African-American men, a shot went off and gunfire on both sides erupted (45).

Utter chaos ensued. African-Americans fled east and north, toward the home turf, toward Greenwood Avenue. They tried in vain to protect and defend themselves, their families, and their community. Outnumbered and underarmed, they were at once valiant and vanquished. (45)

As the African-American men ran back to their community to protect their loved ones, large groups of white men obtained a later recorded $43,000 in guns and ammunition, including nitroglycerin and kerosene bombs to be dropped from the air via planes. The next morning, 15,000 whites attacked the center of the African-American community, the Greenwood District (46). Many horrific memories were recorded of the event: truckloads of African-American male corpses; one corpse being dragged behind a vehicle as if in warning or as a trophy of the riot; the execution of an elderly African-American couple after being ripped from their home; airplanes dropping fire bombs onto family’s homes and businesses, setting them ablaze; and more (46-50). By the afternoon of June 1, 1921, “Tulsa’s thriving, prosperous African-American community lay in ruins, leveled and charred beyond recognition” (50).
This terrible moment in American history is not as well known as the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. It is not as well known as Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Greensboro sit-ins, and Martin Luther King Jr. and the Selma to Montgomery marches. One could speculate about many reasons for why this is, such as the lack of press media or the absence of a change in policy following the event. From a perspective that views politics as governmentality, as policy-making, or as the distribution of rights, roles, and identities, Black Wall Street was a political failure. It did not influence change—at least not initially. However, Rancière’s political thought enables us to recognize Black Wall Street not as a political failure, as only a forgotten community in history, but rather as a group continually practicing acts verifying the equality of the African-American community in Tulsa. Even though the subjectification they practiced—which in the eyes of many members of the white community was nothing but violence to the social order and their accepted way of being—even though this violence to the social order resulted in the dominant community’s response of physical violence, this does not mean that the original verifications of equality were not successful or that they did not occur. Subjectifications will not always lead to policy change or cultural awareness. Sometimes a culture may not be ready to recognize that equality and will only see dissensus. Responses to political dissensus can range from confusion to violence. Sadly, in the case of Black Wall Street, the latter prevailed.

However, as Hannibal Johnson’s history shows, the traces of the verifications of equality that the Black Wall Street Community practiced have not been forgotten. While reparations for the atrocities that occurred in 1921 Tulsa are rightfully still being
demanded, many activists, reinscribing the trace of equality in their ancestors and the
previous inhabitants of the Greenwood area, continue to practice politics and to make
heard what has been forgotten in the Tulsa area. I would not be writing this chapter, if not
for these traces. These traces have resulted in structures such as the Greenwood Cultural
Center (123), a product of what Hannibal Johnson calls the renaissance and regeneration
of Black Wall Street, which continues to this day.10

In closing, I want to reiterate that one way in which the ethics of community I
articulate in chapter 3 can be employed is through politics (another way is through
pedagogy, as I articulate in chapter 5). However, an ethics that sees affirmation of a
higher quality of human life occurring through taking seriously equality and singularity
cannot be advocated through paradigms that require hierarchical observation and
normalization; such a politics of equality and singularity, as I see it, can only be produced
through acts of subjectification, and their result will be dissensus of the dominant social
order. Though not conceived in these terms, it is no doubt one of the reasons writing that
disrupts unity appears to thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy (Sense of the World 88-93;
103-22) as a form of politics (as well as rhetoricians such as Diane Davis, Victor Vitanza,
Pat Gehrke, and other rhetorical theorists interested in Nancy’s work). My caveat is that
such writing and communication is not always political. Such acts of writing
compositions of disunity can be political; however, to enact politics, they require an act
of dissensus occurring in direct connection with a verification of the condition that even
makes it possible for communication and composition to occur—the presupposition of
the equality of human intelligences.
CHAPTER FIVE
RECONSIDERING DIGITAL SAMPLING RHETORICS
FOR THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM THROUGH AN ETHICS OF COMMUNITY

I begin with an analogy: teaching research-based argumentation and critique in composition studies is like learning how to perform hip-hop music.

Jeff Rice

While I see value in both Rice’s and Sirc’s arguments in favor of the ability to play freely in texts and techniques in the writing classroom, . . . the mixtape as rhetorical practice offers composition pedagogy and digital writing theory far more than a whimsical pursuit of the cool.

Adam Banks

The vulnerable is not the same as the killable. The latter stands poised between death and life, the former between the wound and healing care.

Adriana Cavarero

For it is certainly easier to create without answering for life . . . .

Mikhail Bakhtin

In chapter 3, I construct the beginnings of an ethics of community. My ethics of community contrasts the ethical thought of rhetorical theorists who have, in essence, argued for an ethics of community built upon radical inclusivity, such as those drawing upon the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy and his notion of community. Though I still reflect
upon and apply much of Nancy’s thought to my own, I argue that ethics like his privilege recognizing relationality and absolute inclusivity as inherent values in and of themselves rather than as temporal means to affirm a higher quality of human life, a value I see informing the very appeal of the radical inclusivity he and others endorse. It is to Roberto Esposito I turn to discover that this affirmation of the quality of human life occurs through both communal sharing and protective immunities—not solely one over the other, as other theorists of community have situated radical inclusivity in relation to exclusivity. Once this precedence is acknowledged, one can quickly perceive situations where an absolute ethics of inclusivity, while productive in most cases, might actually put the affirmation of the quality of human lives in danger of erasure—particularly for groups of people and communities on the margins of a social order. By groups on the margins, I am thinking of people on the lower ends of power relations dominated by those identified as white, male, heterosexual, abled, etc. Should an ethics of community ask such marginalized communities to accommodate those in power absolutely? The short answer is no. In fact, I discuss a community in such a situation, Black Wall Street, in chapter 4: a community whose practices of exclusivity temporarily affirmed a higher quality of life of the members of that community by protecting them within the decidedly racist context of early twentieth century Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Thus, my ethics of community is concerned with the affirmation of a higher quality of human life. In acknowledging this value as preceding inclusivity, or the recognition of relationality, I discover ethical values that pertain to how we might better share and protect the quality of human life in ways that enable communities to practice
treatment those within and those outside a community in a manner that enables singular beings to live meaningful lives—this includes having some control over the shape of one’s life. This, rather than a life whose meaning is solely determined by another’s influence—something I consider intolerable. The ethical values that I believe better enable this relative control over communities’ or persons’ lives are equality and singularity. Rather than an ethics of community built upon absolute inclusivity, which I also critique as impossible and at times unethical, my ethics of community sees the affirmation of a higher quality of human life occurring through taking seriously Jacques Rancière’s concept of equality and Adriana Cavarero’s care for singularity, which I discuss in relative depth in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, I suggest that one way this ethics can be advocated in social spaces is through political action, and I continue to rely heavily on the thought of Jacques Rancière to articulate how this political action takes place. A politics of community that is based upon equality and care for singularity, following Rancière, cannot be institutionalized; it is not a system for better distributing rights of citizenship or ownership (though it can inform such systems). Rather, it is a bottom-up politics that is enabled in momentary acts verifying one person’s equality with another’s in a context where a person was not previously counted as an equal among the social order’s distributions of meaning. My examples include Coy Mathis, a transgender girl using the “girls’ bathroom” in defiance of the Colorado state school system’s distribution of gender assignments; Jack Baker and Michael McConnell, the first gay couple to register for a wedding license in the United States, when neither the state of Minnesota nor the country
at-large recognized gay marriage; and Black Wall Street, an African American community in early twentieth century Tulsa whose members built a thriving community and defied the inequality established by segregation laws and customs in Oklahoma. To the verifiers of equality, these acts are ones of subjectification, where one who was not a recognized subject of the social order becomes recognized as an equal subject, even if this act of recognition is by a few, including him- or herself. To those who dominate the social order, such political acts appear as dissensus or decategorization, because the system of meaning the social order relies on does not have the means to recognize the person or community as an equal.

Finally, in this chapter, I perform a bit of an about-face by deliberately turning a portion of this ethics of community toward pedagogical application. While I dedicate chapter 4 to Rancière’s political thought, here I extend Cavarero’s notion of care for singularity to see how a major element of the ethics of community I establish in chapter 3 might be applied to the multimodal composition classroom. This split (Rancière in chapter 4 and Cavarero in chapter 5) is more of a rhetorical move made out of an exigency for clarity and applicability to specific sites of struggle (politics and pedagogy) than it is necessary for explication in totality of the application of my ethics of community: care for singularity obviously plays a role in verifying one’s equality with another, and subjectification would seem to be a requirement to care for another’s singularity; however, for this chapter I want to speak to a very popular topic currently being discussed in rhetoric and composition studies—digital sampling—on which I see the values on singularity I develop from Cavarero’s thought having a particular impact. I
try to make connections back to Esposito and Rancière in places where the connection is not obvious; otherwise, I devote most of this chapter to the problems of digital sampling that I see Cavarero’s thought informing. A significant explanation of this exigency is no doubt in order.

Recently, a college student in Detroit was suspended for writing an essay about his creative writing instructor titled, “Hot for Teacher.” In the essay, he described his teacher as “stacked” and compared her to the character Ginger in the 1960s sitcom *Gilligan’s Island*. In response to the assignment, which was to “write honestly and that no topic was off limits,” the student freely associated his instructor, *Gilligan’s Island*, and the once-popular Van Halen song, also titled, “Hot for Teacher” (White). While this assignment was for a creative writing course, I open with this brief anecdote because versions of such “limitless” writing assignments are being advocated for use in the multimodal composition classroom. Scholars more attune to the inventive strengths of the associative rhetorical strategies found in the digital sampling and remixing practices of hip-hop and other artistic practices that employ sampling, such as DJing, have made limitless invention criteria a particular focus their work. Other thinkers have countered this idea by demonstrating how these digital sampling and remixing choices are actually informed by a complex awareness of communal difference and cultural histories. The latter position has critiqued the former as potentially endorsing naïve cultural appropriation at best, and at worst implicitly endorsing the production of racist, sexist, and homophobic content. Thus, in sum, there is a dynamic range of positions regarding how to approach digital sampling and remixing in the multimodal classroom. On one side
there are the pedagogies most concerned with invention, artistry, and enabling students to create at a moment’s notice; on the other hand are those pedagogies warning that such free play in digital sampling is problematic when considered in light of many of the important ethical and cultural concerns historically associated with rhetoric and composition studies.

My initial reaction is to posit that this latter position is more persuasive. However, there are incredibly powerful benefits to both arguments, incompatible though they may appear to be at first glance. My purpose in this chapter is to show that they are not completely incompatible, and that, as composition instructors, we can bring both positions into the classroom to help our students produce inventive and ethical multimodal compositions without dogmatically prescribing ethical norms to them. To do this, I explain some of the logics of the main proponents of these positions and then, drawing on feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, I offer a heuristic of vulnerability that rehabilitates the free association stance with the ethical concerns its respondents have brought to bear—ethical concerns in line with those I articulated in chapter 3, which also should have resonance with the concerns of chapter 4. In brief, this heuristic asks students and scholars to account for and justify their acts of sampling and remixing in terms of wounding or caring for the people and communities who took part in the creation of the sampled-from compositions.

A review of some of multimodal rhetoric and composition studies’ most prominent thinkers—such as Jeff Rice, Cynthia Selfe, and Anne Wysocki—suggests that more emphasis on associative rhetorics needs to take place in the composition classroom.
By associative rhetorics I broadly mean rhetorical practices that privilege juxtaposition, collage, montage, and other nonlinear compositional acts over or at least equal to more conventional argumentation practices of using claims, evidence, and other cause-and-effect logics seen in five-paragraph and other conventional academic genres. These associative rhetorics often draw attention in their presentation to all the available means of invention and persuasion that took and take part in the production and presentation of a particular rhetorical act. This attention includes pointing out the various historical and cultural considerations, human and non-human elements, especially those in relation to digital media. One example of these types of associative rhetorics can be found in the collage, whether considered as medium and/or trope. As a form of research writing the collage draws both explicit and implicit attention to the texts, images, and media that not only took part in the creation of the text; it also presents them as part of the text.¹

There are many justifications for advocating the teaching of associative multimodal rhetorics in the composition classroom: maintaining the relevancy of composition studies in a world where traditional print literacies are being dominated by less-constrained multimedia texts (Selfe, “Students Who Teach Us”; Multimodal Composition); the appeal of democracy found in allowing students “multiple modalities of expression, multiple and hybrid ways of knowing, communicating, and establishing identity” (“Movement of Air” 617); the increased capability for more student-to-student and teacher-to-student collaboration and a renewed interest in the writer’s relation to the materiality of media (Wysocki, “Sticky Embrace of Beauty”); as well as to challenge the
grand narratives in the history of composition while inventing new theories and practices to resist and even supplant formalist writing pedagogies (Rice, *Rhetoric of Cool*).

Whether this emphasis on associative multimodal rhetorics is meant to replace, subvert, or supplement more conventional argumentative rhetorics, the practice of sampling—more popularly, digital sampling—seems to be a perfect fit for this type of rhetorical composition. As I discuss below, Rice is one of the rhetoric and composition scholars advocating this practice.

In his book *Rhythm Science*, Paul D. Miller, also known as the writer, musician, and artist DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, defines sampling as “a new way of doing something that’s been with us for a long time: creating with found objects. The rotation gets thick. The constraints get thin. The mix breaks free of the old associations. The script gets flipped. The languages evolve and learn to speak in new forms, new thoughts” (25). Positing that “there is no such place as an ‘immaculate perception,’” Miller sees creativity in “how you recontextualize the previous expression of others” (33). One of Miller’s goals is to expose academic discourses to the sampling and remixing art of the DJ. He maintains that the DJ is an archetype of contemporary artists and writers who use multimedia, in that the DJ’s ability to create art is contingent upon an embrace of technologies that can reproduce sounds and video from previous works through sampling and remixing: “DJ-ING IS WRITING/WRITING IS DJING” (56). Along with the emphasis on artistic invention, other scholars have noted that the practice of sampling, under a broad umbrella of hip-hop culture, has been and can be used as a rhetorical means of political resistance to dominant societal norms of ownership, including those of
language, identity, and property (e.g., see Alim; Alim and Pennycook; Alim, Lee, and Carris; Banks; Pennycook).

Of course, viewing writing as the sampling, remixing, and recontextualizing of others’ works is not necessarily a completely new idea for those scholars familiar with the works of Roland Barthes or Mikhail Bakhtin, thinkers that challenged modern notions of authenticity and authorial creativity in their critiques by positing an always present excess of historicity preceding and surrounding the meaning of any written or spoken utterance. While this by no means equates in totality to what a DJ does, perhaps this is one of the reasons sampling as a means of multimodal rhetoric has found legitimacy in composition studies. As I mention above that Jeff Rice is one of the more prominent scholars at the forefront of advocating sampling as an associative rhetorical practice in the multimodal composition classroom. Provocatively for some readers, Rice draws on the history and practices of hip-hop music to situate the relevancy and effectiveness of teaching sampling practices in the writing classroom.

Sampling as a Strategy for Rhetorical Invention and Analysis

In The Rhetoric of Cool, Rice challenges conventional histories and pedagogies of composition, which find their tradition and purpose in a stable, linear, and continuous story (13-17). Like Victor Vitanza (see Negation), Rice draws on Jean-François Lyotard’s criticism of “grand narratives” and Foucault’s critique of the history of thought’s reliance on stable structures, to problematize composition studies’ history and
to argue for histories and pedagogies of composition that include engagements with discontinuity. From Foucault:

Rather than seeking the permanence of themes, images, and opinions through time, rather than retracing the dialectic of their conflicts in order to individualize groups of statements, could one not rather mark out the dispersion of the points of choice, and define prior to any option, to any thematic preference, a field of strategic possibilities? (The Archeology of Knowledge 37; qtd. in Rhetoric of Cool 15)

Rice sees Lyotard’s and Foucault’s arguments, or what Rice will call the “postmodern move” (15) as an impetus to write alternative histories of composition studies. If a history of a field necessarily affects the current way the field works, then these alternate histories enable Rice and other composition scholars to work against the status quo of formalist writing practices (8-10) and produce alternative pedagogies that involve the production of new media.⁴

While The Rhetoric of Cool maps out Rice’s larger theory and pedagogical philosophy, it is in an earlier and not unrelated work, the influential article, “The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip-Hop Pedagogy as Composition,” that he sees the importance of sampling in relation to contemporary writing practices. Specifically, his goal in this article is to propose a “whatever-pedagogy,” advocating “a writing practice that models itself after digital sampling’s rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition” (453). Rice, building upon Houston Baker’s argument to approach English studies pedagogy through a hip-hop lens, as well as Baker’s description of sampling, defines sampling as “the hip-hop process
of saving snippets of prerecorded music and sound into a computer memory. These sounds become cut from their original source and pasted into a new composition” (454).

Perhaps the most radical, productive, and also problematic element Rice adds to this hip-hop pedagogy and to the art of sampling is the notion of “whatever.” The “whatever” of Rice’s pedagogy comes from a few places: specific examples of popular hip-hop music; popular, mainstream discourses; and Barthes’s notion of punctum in connection with contemporary thinkers Gregory Ulmer, Geoffrey Sirc, Patricia Harkin, and Victor Vitanza. Therefore, “whatever” for Rice stems from many places and means a lot of things. First, Rice argues that, “‘take whatever you find and use it,’” is the principle in hip-hop that “acts as the dominant force in sampling”: “Whatever is available to composers (samplers) often includes TV shows, political speeches, past musical recordings of a variety of genres, or any sound at all. Through the complex juxtaposition of these isolated sounds, samplers construct new forms of meaning” (454). Rice then goes on to cite examples of popular musicians, like Public Enemy and the Beastie Boys, to show how their music was made through the sampling and remixing of others’ work. He concludes that, based upon these and other examples of sampling, “hip-hop teaches that cultural research and awareness produce composite forms of writing” (455).

The second element Rice associates with the “whatever” principle is how the term whatever works in youth culture discourses as a word that “evokes not so much a lack of response but either a sense that something has eluded the meaning of the response or defiance, dismissal, and opposition” (455). To support this claim, Rice draws on the hip-
hop star Redman’s song “Whateva Man,” determining the meaning of *whatever* in that song to be “something indefinable, obscure, out of reach” (455).

The third element Rice defines *whatever* by is Roland Barthes’ concept of *punctum* developed in *Camera Lucida*. *Punctum* is a reading practice similar to or in the realm of what has been called “reader response.” In contrast to *studium*, which draws on the political and cultural contexts to understand a film or image, a *punctum* reading would acknowledge the excessive details isolated from those contexts that establish an impactful, even avant-garde meaning for the reader or viewer. Since one of the ways Barthes describes *punctum* is as “the anything *whatever*, the sophisticated acme of value” (*Camera Lucida* 34; qtd. with emphasis in Rice 456), Rice is able to sample and remix *punctum* as *whatever*. This enables him to see his *whatever*-centered pedagogy as a “[challenge to] conventional reading practices” because it privileges “cutting a detail from its original source and recontextualizing it within a different setting” (456). He notes that such a notion of *whatever* (or *punctum*), which takes into consideration the excess of meaning emanating from any juxtaposition of reader and text, is particularly useful in our digital age. If a *punctum* reading exposes the excess of meaning in a composition, then a “whatever” composition would intentionally use those excesses to create meaning. Drawing on Ulmer, Rice advocates a “whatever-pedagogy” as an alternative to conventional composition practices: “in contemporary culture, elusive meanings abound as the emerging, electronic tools of expression rapidly alter discourse in general. Print culture’s linear, nonassociative methods of reasoning break down in an electronic realm where cutting and pasting guide communication” (456).
The fourth attribute Rice wants to incorporate into his whatever-centered pedagogy is the classroom “whatever,” for which he draws on Patricia Harkin’s “Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures As an Articulation Project,” and Victor Vitanza’s response to it. In brief, Harkin worries that when students meet difficulty or contradiction in their research, they will respond with a “whatever” attitude. Harkin sees this as a challenge to be overcome. In contrast, Vitanza sees the “whatever” attitude as a heuristic opportunity, enabling students to “[reinvent] by way of ‘whatever’” to create compositions that otherwise would be excluded in conventional writing genres (“Seeing in Third” 173; qtd. in Rice 458).

In sum, a whatever-centered pedagogy would consist of the four following elements: (1) a methodology privileging taking whatever one can find and using it; (2) a defiant, dismissive, and/or oppositional critique of and (3) alternative to conventional methods of discovery and composition—in particular this alternative method looks for the excess meaning in a composition; and (4) a pedagogical lens that would see such acts of defiance and dismissal in the classroom as teaching and invention opportunities. After describing these main elements of a whatever-pedagogy, Rice claims to put this perspective in practice by applying the logic of this pedagogy in the article itself: Sampling and remixing descriptions of the photographic images of Gordon Parks and Leonard Freed, the record covers and sounds of Blue Note Records and James Brown, and the method of African-American artist Romare Bearden, Rice makes the argument that “information technology informs power relations at the levels of race and class,” and
that this argument emerged from the practice of juxtaposition rather than through a more conventional model of argumentation, such as Stephen Toulmin’s (465).

Earlier in this chapter I posit that Rice’s whatever-pedagogy applied to sampling is radical, productive, and problematic. I have already explained how Rice views it as a radical alternative to conventional composition pedagogies and more conventional argumentation strategies. Barring a response from Toulmin scholars who might argue that Toulmin’s model of argumentation was originally intended for analytic purposes rather than a heuristic for invention, or that the values of a “whatever logic” could easily be subsumed under what counts as data or warrants for certain field variants, I agree that Rice’s whatever-pedagogy and research methodology are a radical departure—at least from how composition instructors have traditionally and broadly taught argumentation. However, is this pedagogy actually productive in classroom settings? And what might be its negative effects?

Rice is not alone in promoting such sampling practices in the composition classroom. Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber, Geoffrey Sirc, as well as Mickey Hess, and more, also have been influential in promoting a sampling methodology for multimodal writing instruction and practice, and note successes in teaching it. Yet with new methodologies come critiques. Adam Banks, drawing on Carmen Kynard’s “Wanted: Some Black Long Distance Writers,” notes that “trying to scratch or sample the practices of the DJ, MC, or hype-wo/man in Hip Hop and drop them into our scholarship without thorough, searching attention to the discursive and rhetorical traditions from which they emerge” is “foolishness” (Digital Griots 13). Here he seems to be most
critical of the “take whatever you can find and use it” method that Rice and others promote. Banks argues that such “isolated sampling or ripping” risks problematic cultural appropriation “if we somehow build our theorizing on individual practices without full recognition of the people, networks, and traditions that have made these practices their gift to the broader culture” (13). Nicole McFarlane goes further by maintaining that when students sample without an awareness of the socio-political contexts from which the sampling and remixing borrow and appropriate, they are more likely to uncritically “deliver assignments with sexist, homophobic, and/or racist, content” (“Digital Memory and Narrative”).

Now Banks’s and McFarlane’s similar concerns that unchecked or uninformed associative sampling rhetorics (in particular, those modeling the DJ and hip-hop) may result in uncritical cultural appropriation or worse, namely explicit heterosexism, sexism, or racism, are important and valid concerns. It is addressing these concerns that is the focus of this article. In my own teaching experiences I have found evidence that uncritical, or “isolated” sampling practices motivated by a “take whatever you can find and use it” method can produce uncritical and even harmful results, in and out of the classroom, unless supplemented directly with certain ethical frameworks. However, it should be noted that research methods informed by a whatever logic also bring to the forefront concerns about assessment, in particular those related to aesthetics. For example, while a “take whatever you can find and use it” method enables students to experiment freely under the auspices of lower stakes, how can a teacher rightly judge or inform them of what is “good” or “effective” composition? Most of us do not have the
ethos of an art or music historian. Of course, this is part of the point of such a whatever-based method—it challenges our traditional notions of assessment. But do we really want our students’ creations to model after Hearst Castle, or parallel unfettered capitalist consumption ideologies? For a full-fledged investigation of aesthetic and assessment concerns in teaching multimodal composition as avant-garde art (such as collage, montage, etc.), see Patricia Suzanne Sullivan’s *Experimental Writing in Composition*. Sullivan exposes many of the benefits and problems in projecting the identity of avant-garde artist onto our students.

Nevertheless, for this chapter, I am more interested in the ethical problems that can arise as a result of employing a whatever-pedagogy in the multimodal composition classroom and how instructors might anticipate and address those issues. Some students in my own classes have created some questionable material following a whatever logic. Most of the “whatever” projects that are frustrating are those by students that, given the license to “take whatever you can find and use it,” literally take the first 10 trivial things they find on the Internet and attempt to make a multimodal composition from those things in order to fulfill the assignment requirements. A greater (though not necessarily unproductive) challenge can be when students follow the logic to make a historically inaccurate argument or one charged with sexism, racism, or other prejudices. One student, not unlike comedian Jon Stewart’s mimicking of Glenn Beck, though minus all of the irony, juxtaposed images, sounds, and video of Barack Obama and his policies next to and over images and video of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Straight-faced, this student proceeded to make an argument about the apocalyptic consequences of electing
Obama—not unlike those arguments of Glenn Beck or other fear-mongering radio or cable television news pundits. Though it was not this student’s intent, the implied excesses of this presentation had racist overtones. I revisit this experience later in this chapter to show how the students responded to this presentation.

Of course, employing a whatever logic outside of the classroom can also produce unethical consequences. David Hesmondhalgh, in his influential article, “Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality,” raises some of these broader cultural concerns of unconstrained digital sampling. He draws from legal studies and media studies to question the problems of “cultural borrowing” inherent in digital sampling practices. Not unlike writing scholars like Rebecca Moore Howard, or Johnson-Eilola and Selber, who advocate for plagiarism policy reform, Hesmondhalgh acknowledges that copyright laws that view digital sampling without permission from the original creator as unlawful often discourage the creative and political powers of African American and other marginalized groups, which have historically employed sampling techniques to produce music and other artistic compositions. However, using as a case study the problems of international music star Moby’s sampling and remixing of African-American musicians like Bessie Jones and Vera Hall on Moby’s album *Play*, Hesmondhalgh resitutes the issue by demonstrating how less constraints on digital sampling laws can also increase the already-present unequal dynamics that privilege dominant groups in a power relation.

Moby’s 1999 Album *Play* samples and remixes a number of current and past African-American musicians. As Hesmondalgh explains, “one track makes use of a sample from a more recent hip hop record, another of a 1943 gospel hit, and other tracks
make use of live singers and choirs who perform in styles associated with African-American music (mainly gospel)” (57). However, the most praised and controversial samples are those taken from Alan Lomax’s field recordings, which can be heard in a compilation of his recordings called, *Sounds of the South*. As Hesmondhalgh notes, these field recordings are only used on three of the eighteen songs on the album; however, what is significant for Hesmondhalgh is that Moby’s use of these particular samples received considerable attention and praise by music critics, while the African-American musicians sampled initially received little to no credit and “very little compensation for their work” (57-8). I encourage scholars of digital rhetorics to read Hesmondhalgh’s entire article. He explains the many complexities of digital sampling copyright, and his analysis of Moby’s use of sampling on the album *Play* brings to mind the kinds of questions we should be asking in our own multimodal compositions that draw on digital sampling practices—questions that interrogate how other cultures, traditions, and people are being represented and acknowledged in our remixes, and questions that ask “why certain, highly partial, representations of these traditions and peoples are especially privileged in the musical and interpretative practices of the white western mainstream” (57). Since someone with Moby’s prestige and access to power is able to more easily take whatever he can find and use it to produce art, publish it, and present it to an audience of millions, giving him further license to digitally sample from anywhere and any person or group can actually work against the interests of marginalized groups’ political and artistic interests.

Hesmondhalgh’s critique is important: put into Rice’s terms and bringing the discussion back into the composition classroom, might a whatever-pedagogy unfettered
by ethical questions actually contribute to the perpetuation of white privilege that is already well under way in the U.S. higher education system? My answer: yes, but it does not have to. Banks argues that rather than teach the sampling practices advocated by Rice and others, in which he sees the risk of “isolated ripping,” composition instructors should follow what he deems to be the values of a “digital griot.” Banks describes griots as a combination of “storytellers, preachers, poets, standup comics, DJs, and even everyday people [who] all carry elements of the traditional griot’s role in African American culture”—a multifaceted role Banks describes as equal parts historian, social critic, archivist, entertainer, and cultural interpreter (Digital Griots 25). Adding “digital” to this identity, Banks shows how the griot’s role persists and is important in our multimedia age. He argues that some of the values of the digital griot include the ability to demonstrate

- knowledge of the traditions and cultures of his or her community (is grounded deeply in those traditions, and can “tell it”);
- the technological skills and abilities to produce in multiple modalities;
- the ability to employ those skills for the purposes of building community and/or serving communities with which he or she is aligned;
- awareness of the layered ethical commitments and questions involved in serving any community;
- the ability to “move the crowd”—that is, use those traditions and practices and technologies for the purposes of persuasion. (26)
Now some of Banks’s goals appear to be audience specific, that is, in places he articulates that he his “grounding a discussion of digital ethics for African Americans in a theoretical frame . . . that would encourage black people to make use of technological systems and tools” toward progressive political and ethical goals (123). I also understand that one of his aims in Digital Griots is to increase the awareness of multimodal theorists and instructors, in particular how sampling and practices related to it are rooted deeply in historically black music and story-telling traditions. However, I think any multimodal composition instructor would love to see the set of goals Banks articulates (see above) emerge in his or her students’ work, especially in a course that draws heavily on practices of digital sampling. In other words, the ethos of the digital griot, as Banks describes it, is a model we should help our students work toward becoming. However, I also know that our students come into the composition classroom with varying degrees of knowledge, skill, and self-confidence regarding their writing abilities. As bell hooks notes, students often find engaging in critical pedagogies “difficult, frightening, and very demanding” (53). This is one of the great strength’s of Rice’s methodology. It enables students to envision themselves as potentially great writers no matter their background and experience, and it does not hold them to the sometimes overwhelming and even paralyzing standards of paying due “attention to the discursive and rhetorical traditions” from which they sample (13), let alone considering themselves “grounded deeply” enough in their own traditions that they feel authorized to “tell it” (27) as Banks puts it.

So can we get from one to the other? I think we can, and for the remainder of this chapter I describe and suggest a heuristic for ethical invention that enables students to see their
digital sampling practices through a lens that finds political and ethical value in acts of caring and wounding. I call this heuristic, a *heuristic of vulnerability* and the type of ethics it helps discover and enact, a *rhetorical ethics of community*, which by now the reader should know is concerned with the affirmation of the quality of human life through equality and care for singularity.

Now, as David Foster argues, notions and tropes of community simultaneously have been endorsed and vilified in composition studies (“Community and Cohesion”). As I have established in previous chapters, by a rhetorical ethics of community, I am by no means promoting nostalgic notions of unity, cohesion, or commonality as ethical values that should be endorsed in absolute in the classroom. I agree with Carrie Shively Leverenz that such notions can lead to the erasure of difference (“Peer Response in the Multicultural Composition Classroom”). Rather, this ethics of community speaks to the verification in a presupposition of equality, as articulated by Rancière (see chapters 3 and 4). This ethics of community also speaks to feminist ethics of care articulated by composition scholars like Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie: “Unlike rule-bound ethics, ‘caring’ requires one to place herself in an empathetic relationship in order to understand the other’s point of view” (Beyond the Personal” 21); it speaks to the elements of the respect for the difference of others (singular beings and communities) advocated by Jacqueline Jones Royster (“When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own”); and of course, this ethic of community would, then, find value in maintaining “our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another,” as Judith Butler writes (*Precarious*
Life 30), as well as a collective responsibility for the social lives of others—in terms of equality. I see the combination of these ethical positions as potential first steps in developing, and not inconsistent with, a complex and mature ethos like that of Banks’s digital griot. In many ways I am calling for a reconsideration, reapplication, and revision of some the feminist ethics of care (I mention above) in respect to practices of digital sampling. In fact, as I state in the introduction of this chapter, the heuristic of vulnerability I describe below, which enables these ethics to be put into practice, stems from contemporary feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero’s notion of vulnerability. I suggest that this heuristic of vulnerability, in helping students develop such an ethic of care, can help bridge the seeming incompatibility of Rice’s and Banks’s digital sampling rhetorics and pedagogies. Specifically, this heuristic works by enabling our students to start from a rhetorical sampling methodology of “take whatever you can find and use it” and still work toward a digital griot ethos, so that students might begin to display an “awareness of the layered ethical commitments and questions involved in serving any community” (26).

A Heuristic of Vulnerability for Digital Sampling Ethics: Caring or Wounding?

In Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence, one of Adriana Cavarero’s prominent aims is to distinguish horror from terror. For Cavarero, horror is not the same thing as terror, which “moves bodies, drives them into motion. [Terror’s] sphere of
reference is that of a menace to the living being, which tries to escape by fleeing. This menace is directed, substantially, at life itself: it is a threat of violent death. He who is gripped by terror trembles and flees in order to survive, to save himself from a violence that is aiming to kill him” (5). In contrast, “horror does not concern imminent death from which one flees, trembling, but rather the effects of a violence that labors at slicing, at the undoing of the wounded body and then the corpse, at opening it up and dismembering it” (12). While one might interrogate and even argue with this differentiation, I am more interested in one of the concepts Cavarero says is key in understanding how horror is invoked: vulnerability. Her concept of vulnerability has enabled me to develop a heuristic I suggest can help scholars, instructors, and students begin composing with Rice’s “whatever” methodology for digital sampling practices and work toward the kind of multimodal ethos Adam Banks describes as embodying a digital griot.

Drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, and even Thomas Hobbes, Cavarero posits that one of the ontological characteristics of being human is vulnerability. Following up her work in For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression, in which she maintains that voice is the primary characteristic that expresses a singular person’s uniqueness and necessary relation to others (as I discuss in chapter 3), Cavarero adds vulnerability as an additional characteristic of uniqueness and relationality: “If, as Hannah Arendt maintains, everyone is unique because, exposing herself to others and consigning her singularity to this exposure, she shows herself such, this unique being is vulnerable by definition” (20-21). Not unlike Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of “being singular plural,” which posits that no person exists separate from his or
her relations to other being, Cavarero rejects ontologies of individualism, which “[refuse] to admit dependency and relationship” (21). She argues that each human being is still unique and singular, but that each person’s uniqueness and singularity is constituted in concert with the constant relational exposure to difference and dependency upon others. Just as no human’s voice is identical to another’s (see chapter 3), no two humans’ lifetimes of vulnerable exposures to others are identical.

By designating vulnerability as an ontological category, Cavarero means that part of what makes a human being a human being is that throughout life, “the singular body is irremediably open” to two responses: “wounding and caring” (Horrorism 20). Not only are no two persons’ vulnerable exposure to others identical, the degree to which one is vulnerable to others also changes depending upon one’s circumstances. In other words, though humans are always vulnerable, context governs the degree to which we can be wounded and the degree to which we require care.

Even though, as bodies, vulnerability accompanies us throughout our lives, only in in the newborn, where the vulnerable and the defenseless are one and the same, does it express itself so brazenly. The relation to the other . . . in this case takes the form of a unilateral exposure. The vulnerable being is here the absolutely exposed and helpless one who is awaiting care and has not means to defend itself against wounding. Its relation to the other is a total consignment of its corporal singularity in a context that does not allow for reciprocity. (20-21)
As the above passage makes clear, “‘vulnerable’ and ‘helpless’ are not synonymous terms” (30); vulnerability is irreducible to helplessness. One might say that helplessness is the most extreme form of vulnerability. However, understanding vulnerability through a theme of infancy (and thus helplessness) enables Cavarero to theorize how just as our degree of vulnerability changes depending on the context, so too can the “drastic alternative between violence and care” shift in degree and change in character as an active response to someone else’s vulnerability. For example, “refraining from wounding,” as Cavarero puts it, can be an act of care or violence, depending on the degree of vulnerability of the person to whom one is responding. In the context of an adult, the active response to wound or care may be the difference “between a hand that strikes and one that does not rise to do so.” But if the vulnerable person is an infant, a marginalized community, or an extremely sick person in one’s care, “the arresting of a violent hand is not enough.” As Cavarero points out, in such cases “it is necessary that the alternative inscribed in [the helpless person’s] primary vulnerability should also bring into account a hand that cares, nourishes, and attends” (24). This lifetime of vulnerability, in which the intertwining relationship between the degree of one’s vulnerability, contingent circumstances, and responsive acts—redefined as either caring or wounding, depending on those circumstances and the degree of vulnerability of the person acted upon—is best summed up in the following passage:

As a body, the vulnerable one remains vulnerable as long as she lives, exposed at any instant to vulnus [wound]. Yet the same potential also delivers her to healing and the relational ontology that decides its
meaning. Irremediably open to wounding and caring, the vulnerable one exists totally in the tension generated by this alternative. As though the null response—neither the wound nor the care—were excluded. Or as though the absence of wound and care were not even thinkable. And yet you might call that indifference, and even bless it, if it were just the absence of wounding, whereas, if it were the absence of caring, we would perhaps have to call it desolation. But exposure to the other that persists over the arc of an entire life renders this absence improbable. In fact, given that every human being who exists has been born and has been an infant, materially impossible. (30)

While we, as human beings, are vulnerable throughout the entirety of our lives, and there is no human who has never been vulnerable to another, the degree to which we are vulnerable is contingent upon the circumstances we find ourselves in; thus, we are “always vulnerable but only sometimes helpless, as contingency dictates and with a variable degree of intensity” (31). Similarly we cannot escape responding to another’s vulnerability to which we are exposed—even leaving someone alone is a response—and the degree to which our response is one of wounding our caring is also contingent upon circumstances.

Here is where I want to suggest a heuristic of vulnerability, based upon Cavarero’s thought, for ethical practices of digital sampling rhetorics. No, I am not equating sampling to the dismembering or disfiguring of vulnerable human bodies, which Cavarero suggests is a mark of horror. In fact, as I will explain, in the practice of this
heuristic of vulnerability for digital sampling, writers may find certain instances where wounding can function as an act of caring, particularly if that act of wounding is an act of symbolic violence to an oppressive social order’s distribution of the sensible, as Rancière would put it. Still, just as there are differences between terror and horror for Cavarero, there are differences between ignoring or erasing “the desires and material existence of others,” in our scholarship and pedagogies (see Ratcliffe 40) and sampling from others for purposes interested in the re-appropriation of meaning. While both practices are problematic, and deserve the attention of our concerted thought and actions, I believe the concept of vulnerability can make a particularly productive impact regarding how we practice re-appropriation methods like digital sampling and remixing.

I suggest that when we use Rice’s whatever logic (“take whatever you can find and use it”) for our own research and multimodal projects, or when we teach it as a method of invention in the composition classroom, that we supplement this method with a heuristic of vulnerability. Such a heuristic would view each composition students sample as coming from or in relation to a vulnerable human being or community, and would require the student to ask, “in my sampling and remixing of this work, am I wounding or am I caring for the people who created the works I’m sampling from?” AND “In my remixing of these works into a new composition, am I wounding or caring for those who might be exposed to my own remix?” I believe such a heuristic enables scholars and our students alike to work toward becoming more culturally conscious multimodal writers—toward carrying an ethos like that of Banks’s digital griot. In
essence, this heuristic works toward embodying an ethics of community as I have articulated in chapter 3.

While in its essence such a heuristic of vulnerability sounds simplistic, it actually has many layers. It also has no guarantees of leading to an ethics of community as I envision above. Nevertheless, it does require students and teachers to attempt to recognize and acknowledge our relationship between those from whom we take and those to whom we give (potentially the same people) when we practice digital sampling; for to ask the question, “am I wounding and/or am I caring?” requires that scholars and our students ask a host of other questions regarding our actions, and it enables us to consider additional concerns.

One concern is that to understand if I am practicing caring or wounding in my acts of sampling and remixing, I must be able to identify or even address those people from whom I am sampling. Whether I sample from a Martin Luther King Jr. speech, footage of the Arab Spring, or a Westboro Baptist Church protest, asking this question requires some research into various people or communities from which came the images and sounds I have sampled. I have to ask, “where did this come from?” and “Who created this work?” The problems of ethnography and of “speaking for others” are real, and acknowledging for whom I am caring or wounding requires some acknowledged and careful speculation and identification on my part—actions that expose my subject position and open me up to responses of wounding and caring, as well, from fellow scholars or classmates. And, of course, I must also presuppose that I am neglecting the recognition of someone, even if unintentionally.
An additional concern: I should be able to explain how my practice of sampling and remixing is an act of caring or wounding, or perhaps both. As Cavarero argues, an act of caring for one person may be an act of wounding for someone else, depending on the degree of vulnerability, and the context in which my response takes place. Like the previously mentioned concern, to address this problem requires additional research on my part beyond discovering the names of those who composed the media from which I am sampling. It also requires that I research (to the best of my ability and in the time allowed) the cultural values of those people and communities, so I might understand why my response could be an act of caring and/or one of wounding. Now realistically, no student in one semester (let alone scholars) will ever be able to fully discover the totality of the values of a community, particularly if he or she is not already a member of that community. As such, attempting to discover these values and discern if my sampling and remixing is an act of caring or wounding will require great empathy on my part. It should be noted, however, that “empathy is not an unproblematic concept,” as Kirsch and Ritchie have argued. Drawing upon Gregory Clark’s essay, “Rescuing the Discourse of Community,” and others, Kirsch and Ritchie posit, “the complex power dynamics between researcher and participants can undermine, threaten or manipulate” their relationship, even if enacted through an expression of empathy. And while sampler and samplee, as such, are very different than researcher and participant, the relationship can all too easily be one governed by acts of manipulation and threat.

As such, my empathetic position should also theorize how what I think is care may actually be an act of wounding. Of course, there are no perfect answers to these
questions; however, this acknowledgement can help lead to discussions of cultural appropriation, property ownership, identity construction, politics of (mis)representation, and as the late Stuart Hall might say, the very real consequences of cultural representation and signifying practices (“The Work of Representation”). The key in these types of discussions, in my experience, is to move away from a sense of someone owning a production, as we see in copyright law; in other words, we should move away from a notion that is solely worried about who owns the product or “originally created it” (though this should not be ignored), since this can take a person down an endless trail searching for authenticity that may not exist; rather, this discussion should ask how my sampling and remixing might affect certain persons, groups, or communities that have taken part in the creation, reception, and previous meaning of a particular work.

Following Royster, such recognition requires a subject position that admits, “what we think we see in places that we do not really know very well may not actually be what is there at all” (614). In sum, this heuristic requires a multimodal composer to begin developing the kind of self-reflexivity described in Catherine Fox's "The Race to Truth: Disarticulating Critical Thinking from Whiteliness."

Fox promotes the notion of a "spirit of critical affirmation" where, as scholars and teachers, we acknowledge our fixation with critiquing others' work and take part in more self-reflexive processes (198). Though this practice of criticizing others is often done in an attempt to enter into the academic conversation, and may stem from original intentions worthy of merit, we often neglect applying this criticism to ourselves and our ideologies; thus, we perpetuate a replacement of ideologies potentially as oppressive as those we
criticize, prohibiting any goals we may have regarding social transformation for our students. As Fox deduces, "there is nothing radical or transformative about supplanting a conservative, hegemonic truth with a leftist, marginalized truth" (202).

Thus, in acknowledging that perhaps both caring and wounding are taking place I have to ethically justify those actions. In other words, sometimes a digital sampler may ironically find wounding to be appropriate for a particular political situation, and negotiating such a claim can be tricky. For example, were I to cut and sample from footage of the Westboro Baptist Church community’s funeral protests of gay and lesbian lifestyles and then overlay it with loops of music and audio that implies a critique of the Church’s actions, I would acknowledge that my sampling and remixing could easily be construed as an act of wounding to that community. My perpetuation of this act would need ethical and political justifications, in this case acknowledging my concerns for equality of the Westboro Baptist Church’s targets and the problems of hate speech. Hopefully I do this in a spirit of critical affirmation, as Fox explains. From a certain perspective, I might argue that this act of wounding to one group is actually (or at least it is my hope that it is) an act of caring for that group and for others. This justification, of course, complicates the heuristic and ethic and hopefully leads to classroom discussions about the problems of universal or foundational claims to morality, deontological and consequential ethics, and perhaps even normative and descriptive ethics.

Just as important, I should consider how I am exposing my own vulnerability (how might I be cared for or wounded?) in presenting my remix. As I note above, any attempt to recognize and justify my practices of sampling and remixing also exposes my
own vulnerabilities to critique from scholars, colleagues, and in the case of our students, instructors and fellow classmates. Thus, a heuristic of vulnerability, while accounting for potentially wounding or caring for another’s work, also can increase the critical awareness of putting forth my own work to be sampled from and remixed by others. This should also lead to discussions of the ethics and politics of researching social media sites like Facebook (see McKee and Porter), the dissolution of the border between public and private, systems of surveillance, and the practice of exposing our daily actions and identification information on the Internet.

In explaining some of these concerns that students and scholars should ask themselves when applying a heuristic of vulnerability to their practices of sampling and remixing (in particular those that follow Rice’s whatever logic), I have suggested some of the benefits of using a heuristic of vulnerability as a supplement to Rice’s whatever-based method of invention: furthering practices of empathy, discussions of social construction, and the acknowledgment of political and ethical consequences of rhetorical actions, to name a few. There are additional benefits to supplementing a whatever logic with a heuristic of vulnerability.

For one, a heuristic of vulnerability enables me as an instructor to avoid didacticism. Rather than enforce my ethics of community or tell my students they are wrong if they do not think a certain way, this heuristic requires them to continually ask the kinds of questions necessary for developing or at least considering such an ethic. As David Sheridan, Jim Ridolfo, and Anthony Michel make clear with their notion of the “Kairotic Web” (68-9), there are so many elements that contribute in the constitution of
any multimodal composition, that encapsulating the specific ethical responsibilities of the multimodal composer is difficult. This often seems to lead to a very unsure ethic: “What is off limits one day is routine the next” (xvii):

   In multimodal compositions, the whole exceeds the sum of the parts, resulting in both challenges and new possibilities. Some of these challenges concern a set of ethical considerations that emerge from multimodal semiosis. Some of the potentials concern the reality that culture itself is multimodal, as are the cultural products of identity and consciousness. (xvii-xviii)

   Thus, in the process of applying of a heuristic of vulnerability, students and scholars might find themselves changing their minds regarding their own identifications of wounding or caring; nevertheless, by putting the heuristic into practice, they will have at minimum considered their ethical relation to some communities and cultures they otherwise may have ignored or not known existed. Even in our “globalized” world of multiculturalism I have learned not to be surprised when students are themselves surprised to learn about the challenges of being in a group Antonio Gramsci would call “subaltern,” such as the African American musicians participating in a predominantly white punk-rock lifestyle, as depicted in the documentary Afropunk.

   Another benefit is that there are multiple ways to practice pedagogically a heuristic of vulnerability. An instructor might assign a digital sampling project that endorses a “take whatever you can find and use it” methodology simultaneously with a heuristic of vulnerability, in which the recognition of caring and wounding would
immediately follow or actually be part of the remix. Alternatively, an instructor might decide to present them as two different assignments where the heuristic follows the sampling and remixing as a form of self-analysis and/or peer review. Personally, I privilege the latter method because it enables the students to appreciate the differences between the genres of sampling and traditional academic writing. As Mickey Hess points out, the way one establishes credibility in sampling is quite different from ethos-building in academic writing (282), and acknowledging one’s sources too explicitly in sampling can actually damage one’s ethos.

In the case of the student who overdubbed images and video of the Nazis and Hitler with sounds, images, and video of Barack Obama, I had added a version of the heuristic to the assignment during peer review to encourage ethical considerations in the students’ revisions of their remixes. As a result of peers’ comments, the student, while maintaining the argument about the apocalyptic consequences of the Obama administration, did end up acknowledging how the remix might be received negatively as racist or anachronistic. Though no one in class felt comfortable during that presentation, it was followed by a productive discussion of the problems in deciding what counts as nationalism and patriotism, and how certain communities are continually privileged, viewed as unequal, or even excluded and/or included within different definitions. Had the heuristic been implemented when the digital sampling assignment was introduced, this student may have made a completely different argument, and both the discomfort and the productive discussion may not have occurred. This is a decision instructors have to make depending on their own teaching styles, philosophies, and course goals. Discomfort is
always a possibility when using a heuristic of vulnerability. Unlike expressivist pedagogies that have also drawn on the term *vulnerability*, a heuristic of vulnerability does not attempt to avoid “confrontations over social differences” and instead attempts to learn from conflict and uncomfortable situations (see Jarratt 109).

Hopefully, practicing the heuristic in more formal settings leads to practicing it outside the classroom and outside of scholarship. I consider the application of this heuristic of vulnerability as a problem-based learning approach in which the students are not given the answers to how they should ethically respond to others when sampling and remixing; rather, it enables them to ask the right questions for developing such a rhetorical ethic. Studies have shown that problem-based learning approaches can increase students’ long-term memory of what they have learned, and can increase their tendencies to apply and transfer the skills across disciplines (Barrows and Tamblyn). Thus, the application of such a heuristic would hopefully lead to results similar to Hesmondhalgh’s suggestions for musicians who engage in digital sampling, no matter what the current copyright laws are:

I suggest that when recordings rely as enormously for their impacts on sampling ‘other’ musics . . . musicians and others in the music business should consider two sets of options. First, full and prominent credit should be given to the sampled musicians and the musical traditions to which they belong, giving indications of the cultural sources of the music, instead of mystifying the origin of the track in interviews and elsewhere (such as [Moby’s] misleading title ‘Natural Blues’). This would not require
academic notes, merely some basic research. Second, musicians should make strenuous efforts to establish ways of recompensing musicians, their descendants, or representative organizations. (73)

Finally, a heuristic of vulnerability also works even if the assignment or research project contains more specific constraints—in other words, a student or scholar does not need to be employing a whatever logic for a heuristic of vulnerability to find value (though I believe Rice’s logic does enable students to experiment and take important risks). For example, if students are creating a community history website as described by Darold Leigh Henson (see “Using the Internet as a Tool for Public Service”), a heuristic of vulnerability would be equally beneficial, and ask of the web designer to consider his or her articulations of a community’s history as acts of wounding and/or caring.

Some of my students have produced some very creative and powerful multimodal compositions through digital sampling and remixing by supplementing Rice’s whatever-based method with a heuristic based upon Cavarero’s notion of vulnerability. One recent student group produced a mockumentary-style video on the political battles regarding sex education instruction in one of the group member’s very conservative home state. Juxtaposing honest interviews with acted interviews, actual footage of the state’s legislative and education institutions with loops of “sex education instruction” footage from the films South Park, Mean Girls, Boy Meets World, and American Pie, this group of students parodically endorsed an extremely conservative slippery-slope argument that better sex education and access to contraception leads to rampant sexual promiscuity and social irresponsibility.
The group followed up this multimodal presentation with a self-analysis of their own sampling choices, applying traditional rhetorical critique (appeals of ethos, pathos, logos, etc.) with a version of a heuristic of vulnerability. They theorized that their use of the footage from Hollywood was consistent enough with the message of those movies to be an act of caring (though consistency does not equate to caring); however, they attempted to express empathy for potentially wounding those people they interviewed who were anti-sex education, as well as the type of characters they satirically depicted in “fake interviews.” Originally finding ethical and political justification in these potential acts of wounding (not unlike a Michael Moore film or a Daily Show interview), the group elected to remove the actual interviews from their final revision. This subtractive choice did not lessen the impact of their remix in the eyes of their peers, but strengthened it.

Conclusion

My larger purpose in this chapter has been to show how Jeff Rice’s “take whatever you can find and use it” method for digital sampling can lead to the kind of ethical and political concerns Adam Banks and others have raised. Arguably, Rice does this himself, implicitly. A generous reading of Rice’s article, “The 1963 hip-hop machine,” will recognize that Rice does not in totality follow his methodology of “whatever,” which he says governs the sampling choices in hip-hop. While he does take some “whatever” liberties in establishing the main properties of a whatever-based pedagogy, when he “cuts,” “samples,” and “remixes” to make an argument about how technologies influence race and power relations, largely to contest traditional print
literacies, Rice shows the reader that an amount of cultural awareness, historical knowledge, and an ethical framework were required to make his own argument.

To conclude this chapter, I have suggested that one way to help Rice’s and Banks’s seemingly disconnected perspectives on digital sampling find connection is through a heuristic of vulnerability that asks of scholars and students alike to account for their free association sampling decisions through a lens of caring and wounding. Though my intention in bringing together these disparate lines of thought has been one of caring for each, I understand that I may have potentially wounded them and others, as well. In sampling and remixing Jeff Rice’s, Adam Banks’s, and Adriana Cavarero’s different ideas to address the exigencies I have brought to bear, there is always a chance for misrepresentation, especially from my own privileged subject position (white and male). Nevertheless, I have tried to care for all three by showing how we might set their ideas to work with each other for productive classroom and research objectives. I have found enormous power in all three thinkers’ theories and hope that I have communicated that care and concern clearly, alongside a call to continue attempts at reconciling their important works. Lastly, I acknowledge my own vulnerability in writing this chapter, and hope that others will sample and remix my own work, applying a heuristic of vulnerability to further enact ethics of community.
Introduction

1 “Mormon” is a colloquial term (for some people it is derogatory, for others it is historically accepted) used to describe members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). LDS members believe in scripture in addition to the Bible, in particular a text titled, *The Book of Mormon*.

2 Mormonism is broadly considered the culture of the LDS Church. See Mormon historians like Richard Lyman Bushman for further examples of this delineation.

3 See Ornatowski and Bekin’s “What’s Civic about Technical Communication?” for thought that is also skeptical of romanticizing of “community.”

4 For examples of this kind of scholarship that privileges consensus see Phyllis Mentzell Ryder’s *Rhetorics for Community Action*, the edited collections *The Handbook of Community Practice*, by Marie Weil, and *Writing and Community Engagement*, Thomas Deans, Barbara Roswell, and Adrian J. Wurr’s *Writing and Community Engagement*, Karyn Hollis’s “Desktop Publishing for Community and Social Justice Organizations,” and even Joss Hands’s *@ Is For Activism*, though Hands’s treatment of consensus is quite complex. Each of these are great texts, but each, ultimately, leaves the concept of community unexamined.

5 Nancy himself points us in the direction of Heidegger and Georges Bataille for the foundation of his thought.
Chapter One

1 For other scholars who have followed Rueckert’s claim that *A Rhetoric of Motives* is founded on the principle of identification, or who have implied that Burke’s thought in general is founded on this concept, see also Ambrester; Biesecker; Briggs; Carpenter; Davis *Inessential*; Day; Quigley; Rosenfeld; and Wright. I do not wish to conflate these various scholars’ work. In fact, some of them are opposed to one another; however, each of them make a reference (sometimes critical) to identification being the foundation of Burke’s thought.

2 In 1992 Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin count over 200 critical essays in rhetorical theory alone that have applied Burke’s thought (“A Feminist Perspective” 331).

3 More common are perspectives like Paul Stob’s (see “Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, and the Pursuit of the Public”). Stob acknowledges Burke’s emphasis on identification to be a constitutive rather than normative argument, but then still presents the concept as an amelioratory aim of Burke’s, as well. Diane Davis, in *Inessential Solidarity*, also criticizes Burke for privileging identification over difference, but she focuses on the constitutive argument as well. There is more evidence for this position. Nevertheless, for a persuasive counter-argument to both positions (that Burke privileged identification constitutively and normatively), see Bryan Crable’s “Distance as Ultimate Motive,” which I reference in this chapter. Crable posits that Burke actually saw difference and distance preceding and thus necessary for identification to occur.

4 For a few examples of this scholarship, see how Roland Burkart applies Habermas’s notions of consensus and understanding to public relations communication, and how Joss
Hands employs Habermas’s notion of consensus to digital democratic activism; how Sun Youzhong applies Dewey’s thought toward the development of a “global public”; how Paul Stob applies both Burke’s and Dewey’s distinct but similar thought to argue for language as a community builder and problem solver; and how Fraga-Cañadas employs Wenger’s notion of communities of practice toward building communities of foreign language teachers.

5 My own normative theory of community has some affinities with Clark’s, though it will also depart significantly from it.

6 Davis acknowledges Michelle Ballif making this critique first in “Seducing Composition.”

7 See also Agamben’s Homo Sacer and State of Exception; also, Esposito’s Immunitas and Bios; and Cavarero’s Horrorism. Each of these texts is interested in problems of community. Esposito’s Immunitas and Cavarero’s Horrorism each draw directly on Nancy’s thought.

8 Nancy himself points us in the direction of Heidegger and Georges Bataille for the foundation of this essay.

9 Scholars interested in Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrecht-Tyteca’s New Rhetoric will also recognize this rhetorical tactic as dissociation.

10 See Janet Davis’s “Stasis Theory” for a clear and concise explanation of stasis theory.

11 I write “even” here because Nancy devotes a great deal of attention to Bataille’s community Acephale, and later in “The Confronted Community,” credits a current study
of Bataille for motivating him to write the original essay, “The Inoperative Community” itself.

12 Locke believed that things of nature are given in common, but that what one produces through one’s labor is one’s property, and that one’s property becomes part of one’s being (see Second Treatise of Government 27, §44). The idea of humans producing their own essence can also be seen in Sartre’s notion that each individual can define his or her own essence separate from deterministic causes (for examples of this argument, see Existentialism is a Humanism). Nancy gives credit to Rousseau for being the “first thinker of community” (9), but also criticizes Rousseau for lamenting a sense of loss for a more perfect primordial community, which Nancy argues has never existed. Rousseau, of course, advocates attempting to work to rebuild this primordial community. Though I do not list him above, Hobbes, on the other hand, while similar to Rousseau and Locke in some ways (of course, his thought preceded theirs), believed that community preceded civil society. However, as Roberto Esposito and Werner Hamacher have pointed out, Hobbes actually describes this community as one founded on absence—the renunciation and transference of one’s rights to no one—making it uncontrollable and thus to be feared. As a result Hobbes argues that the sovereign is the solution to this fear of an absence of control of rights, which are then transferred to the sovereign to be able to bind the community, or commonwealth, in the protection of those rights. (See Hobbes, Leviathan; Esposito, Communitas 20-40; and Hamacher, “Justice and Language.”) 12 For Marx, it is in human nature to produce; therefore, humans affirm their humanity through producing. However, this production has to be free from alienation. According to Marx,
alienation occurs when, because of capitalism, laborers no longer see themselves as
directing their own production. He argued that an unalienated community is a community
of those who are aware of and control their own production, thus producing their own
essence (see *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*; notes in class).

13 Nancy is careful to preface his essay with a warning: though his critique implicates
many of the great political thinkers of modernity, from Marx to Sartre, his critique
remains “from the left,” which for him means, “that the political [for Nancy, this is the
place where community is], as such, is receptive to what is at stake in community”
(xxxvi-xxxvii). In other words, leftist politics are those that are concerned with
maintaining a place where community can exist.


15 While in *The Inoperative Community* Nancy addresses this mainly as a problem of
logic, he eventually articulates it as ontologically problematic, as well. However, he will
begin to refrain from using the term *community* to explain this phenomenon. See, for
example, *The Sense of the World, Being Singular Plural*, and “The Confronted
Community,” in particular.

16 Anasemia is a grammatological mode of invention Derrida discusses in
*Dissemination* (see 81, for example). For more on anasemia, see Gregory Ulmer’s
*Applied Grammatology*, where Ulmer describes it as the process of invention that begins
to put “the very notion of the proper and familiar…in question” through a “reversal of the
figurative-proper relation” (83).
Chapter Two

1 This, of course, is one of the figures of liberalism Foucault genealogizes in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

2 Considering nonhumans as singularities is a line of thought Nancy will explore further in *The Sense of the World*.

3 This singularity might be considered what Mikhail Bakhtin called a part of a “mechanical whole” (“Art and Answerability” 1). From Bakhtin: “A whole is called "mechanical" when its constituent elements are united only in space and time by some external connection and are not imbued with the internal unity of meaning. The parts of such a whole are contiguous and touch each other, but in themselves they remain alien to each other” (“Art and Answerability” 1).

4 This seems to be interchangeable with the French term, “partage,” which means “sharing out” or “sharing and dividing,” and which Nancy will continue to use in later texts while basically abandoning the terms *comparation* and *compearance*. See Armstrong 85, 107.

5 “Being in common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (*comparaisent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This compearance (*comparation*) is not something added on to their being; rather their being comes into being in it. Hence community does not disappear. It never disappears. The community resists: in a sense, as I have said, it is resistance itself. Without the compearance of being—or of singular beings—there would be nothing, or rather nothing but being appearing to itself, not even *in common* with
itself, just immanent Being immersed in a dense pearnance (\textit{parenance}). The community resists this infinite immanence. The compearance of singular beings—or of the singularity of being—keeps open a space, a spacing within immanence” (58, original emphasis).

6 Nancy will refer to this as the “groundless ground” (\textit{Inoperative Community} 27).

7 One of the reasons I apply Todd May’s notion of practices, other than the fact that it is a sound theory, is because it does not presuppose individuals as autonomous beings. Other “practices” theorists, like Etienne Wenger may not either, but they do not explicitly argue against it like May does (see \textit{Our Practices, Our Selves} 12).

8 See James Gee’s work on “Discourse,” with a capital “D.”

9 For a Foucauldian history that does attempt to explain the emergence of the privileging of immunity, see Ed Cohen’s \textit{A Body Worth Defending}.

10 For more from these thinkers on this issue, see Derrida’s “Signature, Event, Context,” as well as “Structure, Sign, and Play.” I mention Burke’s discussion of the paradox of substance, in particular, the paradox of purity in chapter 1—see also \textit{A Grammar of Motives} 21-58.

11 For more on immunosuppression in political contexts, see Donna Haraway’s “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies” (in \textit{Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature}). Haraway’s work is in tension with works like those of Derrida (see fn. 34 below), who sees practices of immunity falling too easily into autoimmunity, where the body begins to see itself as something to protect against. Haraway argues that immunosuppression is just as dangerous as autoimmunity, and that focusing too much on
the latter enables us to not “take responsibility for the differences and inequalities of sickness globally” (252, fn. 2).

12 I can already see how this example could be taken literally as a pro-life politics. This is not my intention, and I do not believe it is Esposito’s. Even though Esposito is calling on an actual biological process to inform our notions of community and immunity, he makes no indication that this example is a metaphor of an actual ethics or politics, but only constitutive processes that should inform our ethics and politics.

13 For a slightly different take on autoimmunity in social contexts, see Jacques Derrida’s “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” in Philosophy in a Time of Terror, as well as Rogues.

14 Though not using the same terminology, Jean-Luc Nancy also recognizes this necessary reticulated process of sharing and protection for any being’s existence. In the term partage, Nancy expresses how all sharing is also simultaneously dividing (see Inoperative Community 57).

15 He will call this productive model, “common immunity.”

16 See, for example, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).”

17 I am paraphrasing the definition of normative from the New Oxford American Dictionary, though a quick Internet search shows other dictionaries to have similar definitions. I hate to sound too analytical by drawing upon dictionary definitions; however, my goal is not to establish the correct use of the term, but to understand that demonizing such a term unnecessarily problematizes necessary political normativity for the rhetoricians.
In contrast to the examples I explain shortly, rhetoricians interested in the fields of argumentation use the term *normative* in a similar manner as I do. See, for example, the works of David Zarefsky, Frans van Eemeren, Jeanne Fahnstock, Jean Goodwin, and Robert Rowland.

It is important to note that Jordan’s use of *normativity* is not necessarily with a negative connotation. However, he unnecessarily uses the term to distinguish one practice from another.

“Normativity is a field of power, a set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms, that forms the possibilities for and limits of action. Norms are the imperatives that materialize particular bodies and actions. As Judith Butler points out, for example, “sex,” insofar as it is a norm, materializes sexed bodies through power that is at once constructive and constraining. The normal could be simply the average, the everyday, or the commonsensical, but norms and the normal can also become hooked together so as to make the average not only normal but normative” (517). Though I agree with Jakobsen’s definitions of normativity and norms, she seems to be giving normal a very neutral definition, with which I would wholeheartedly disagree.

May cites Hoover and Howard’s “The Political Correctness of Controversy Revisited” as one example of this assumption. I think the works of rhetoricians like Pat Gehrke and Victor Vitanza are also consistent with this thought.

The processes of normalization are (arguably) also discussed in Foucault’s *History of Madness* and *The History of Sexuality*, where he genealogizes the various figures of social deviancy.
For the purpose of this analysis it is only important to know that the Church considers the priesthood to be the power and authority of God on Earth to teach the doctrines of the Church, administer ordinances, and lead the church; the higher priesthood is obviously accompanied with more privileges and authority.

I am well aware that some queer activists and other progressives argue against the need for government to concern itself with marriage at all. There are merits to many of these arguments. See, for example, Tom Boellstorff "When Marriage Falls."

This passage from Wittgenstein, though a slightly different translation, is also quoted in May’s *Political Thought* (105). May also draws upon Wittgenstein in his theory about practices (see *Our Practices, Our Selves*).

Chapter Three

The Venice Biennial website now touts that, “the Biennale has an attendance today of over 370,000 visitors” each summer it occurs.

I am presenting this quote from Bishop slightly out of context. In “Safety by Numbers,” Bishop is actually pointing out that biennialism performed these functions at its peak but not longer does, implying that biennialism is on a decline in terms of social impact.

Important to note: Ai Weiwei originally oversaw the manufacture of these tents for an exhibition in Beijing, and Weiwei’s original intentions were for drawing a connection to the Ruhr region of China. “‘The motifs and patterns on the tents convey a particular message. They are meant to evoke entirely different feelings than those associated with
the former industry- and capitalism-oriented history of the region, which have also left a permanent mark on the ecology of the Ruhr region. It was important to create a colourful and carefree ambiance, and most importantly: not to leave a permanent mark on the land. This project is all about communication and interaction, not production” (“Ai Weiwei’s Tents for Emscherkunst”). Thus, the motive to include “normal” people was not in the origins of the work. Nevertheless, Emscherkunst seems to have appropriated Weiwei’s original intents, with permission, of course.

4 See also, for example, Enwezor’s contributions to written works about art, such as *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* and “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a Sate of Permanent Transition.”

5 See one example of historical work about art’s interest in community, participation, and collaboration in Charles Green’s *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art From Conceptualism to Postmodernism*. Green’s research discusses art that predates many of the works Bourriaud identifies as “relational.”

6 Though I discuss briefly how Esposito reads Bataille and Hobbes in this section, others have made similar commentary regarding each thinker’s notion of community. For more on Bataille, see the edited collection *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication* by Andrew Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree. See also *The Dismembered Community: Bataille, Blanchot, Leiris, and the Remains of Laure* by Milo Sweedler. For more on this protective motive in Hobbes, see Adriana Cavarero’s *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* and, of course, Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. 
See Esposito’s *Communitas*, Adriana Cavarero’s *Horrorism*, Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Maurice Blanchot’s *Unavowable Community*, Mitchell and Winfree’s *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille* and Milo Sweedler’s *The Dismembered Community* for in-depth investigations of Bataille’s thought on this issue.

Again, this is not to say that sharing is the same as inclusion and that protection is the same as exclusion. In fact, as I show in Chapter 4, even acts of protection (which may take part in exclusivity) can be recognized as verifications of equality.

Looking ahead to chapter 4, I see The importance of this voice being heard will be even more important, or at least take a more prominent place in chapter 4.

**Chapter Four**

Though I was aware of Coy’s story as a result of radio and television news media, my summary of her story is mainly indebted to Sabrina Rubin Erdely’s article in *Rolling Stone*, “About a Girl: Coy Mathis’ Fight to Change Gender,” and two CNN articles by CNN Staff and Ed Payne.

See Todd May’s *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* for more on archipolitics, parapolitics, and metapolitics (chapter 2). May also brings this discussion in the context of more contemporary political thinkers such as John Rawls, Iris Young, Amartya Sen, and Robert Nozick.

For more of this argument, see chapter 3 of Todd May’s *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*.

See “History of Gay Marriage in the United States.”
5 For more, on these rulings, see Watkins (Utah), Brandes (Oklahoma), and Calkins (Texas).

6 One of the reasons I share this brief version of the story of Black Wall Street is that I had never heard of the community until I was approached by African-American rhetorics scholar Austin Jackson at the Conference for the Rhetoric Society of America. After giving a presentation on Esposito and Rancière, I was approached by Jackson, who was in the audience. He suggested that my theory would speak well to understanding communal phenomena such as Black Wall Street. To him I owe a debt for sharing his knowledge with me. See also “The Regeneration” and “The Renaissance” in Hannibal Johnson’s Black Wall Street for how the actions of the early twentieth century Black Wall Street community continue to have influence on civil rights politics to this day.

7 Hannibal Johnson cites these quotes from an article by Jonathan Z. Larsen, titled “Tulsa Burning” in Civilization.

8 According to the San Francisco Bay National Black Newspaper, when Black Wall Street was at its peak, the dollar circulated “36 to 100 times, sometimes taking a year for currency to leave the community” (“What Happened to Black Wall Street”).

9 Hannibal Johnson cites Scott Ellsworth’s Death in a Promised Land (50-51) as the source of this quotation.

Chapter Five

1 Scholars have argued that this emphasis is beyond traditional citation and exposes how texts and writers are an effect of language (see Scholes, Comley, and Ulmer; Ulmer, “Object of Post-Criticism” 86).

2 Many other composition scholars have drawn on Miller to understand the relationship between sampling and composition. See, for example, Banks, Brown.

3 See, in particular, Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Speech Genres*, as well as Barthes’s *Image-Text-Music*.

4 I should note, Rice is influenced heavily by the work of Gregory Ulmer, a scholar who draws on Jacques Derrida to develop a notion of digital literacy he calls “electracy.” Like Ulmer, Rice rejects instrumentalist views of technology and writing.

5 To say that Hess, Sirc, and others all promote a whatever-pedagogy would not be completely accurate; however, each draws on similar justifications of the benefits of free association (Sirc) or makes claims such as “sampling is not plagiarism” (Hess), and thus not beholden to traditional academic acknowledgment and citation. While I do not necessarily disagree with the benefits of these viewpoints, my concern, like Banks and McFarlane, has to do with the ethical and political assumptions made in these methodologies.

6 See Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl’s study, “Separate & Unequal,” as well as Casey McDermott’s commentary on that study in the Chronicle of Higher Education.
See Jacques Rancière’s *Ignorant Schoolmaster* for arguments positing that all humans are equal in intelligence. See Roberto Esposito’s *Immunitas* for understanding the protection and negation of life in political, and social terms, as well as biological.

Rhetoricians (such as Diane Davis, Pat Gehrke, and Victor Vitanza) have drawn on Nancy’s work to expose the myth of the autonomous individual found in capitalist and liberal individualisms.

Krista Ratcliffe’s particular interests are when scholars ignorantly or intentionally neglect the work of women and scholars who identify with marginalized communities.

As Wendy Wolters Hinshaw advocates, hopefully as instructors, we are also generally willing to make ourselves vulnerable to critique and resistance in the classroom.

I should note that Hess might disagree with the application of this heuristic because it asks that one acknowledge his or her sources. Of course, to what extent acknowledgment is required will be the instructor’s choice, and may have to be decided in the context of the course. It is one thing to teach sampling as a mode of resistance, as described by Alim and others; however, if it is described as a license to take freely from others and use, a notion Banks and this essay challenge, then we are promoting something entirely different. In other words, context may be the deciding factor on how much the heuristic should factor in one’s teaching of digital sampling.
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