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“Building a Mystery”: Alternative Research Writing and the Academic Act of Seeking

Alternative forms of research writing that displace those of modernism are unfolded, ending with “multi-writing,” which incorporates multiple genres, disciplines, cultures, and media to syncretically gather post/modern forms. Such alternatives represent a shift in academic values toward a more exploratory inquiry that honors mystery.

Research writing is disrespected and omnipresent, trite and vital, central to modern academic discourse, yet a part of our own duties as teachers of writing that we seldom discuss.¹ For nearly thirty years, the conventional construct of research writing, the “research paper,” has seemed ready to collapse, undercut by the charge that it is an absurd, “non-form of writing” (Larson). Still, the research paper goes on. In a 1982 survey, James Ford and Dennis R. Perry found that the research paper is taught in 84 percent of first-year composition courses and 40 percent of advanced composition courses (827). The survey has not been repeated, but our own informal research suggests that the research paper is still taught in most composition curriculums, typically at the end of a first-year composition course or course sequence, and thus it is positioned as the final, even climactic, step for students entering the communities of academic discourse.²

This notable status has not kept the research paper from being notoriously vacant, clichéd, and templated. Research writing textbooks, despite their earnest good

intentions, tend to reinforce unoriginal writing by providing students not only with maps through the conventional routes of academic research, but also a standardized concept of how academic research writing should look and sound; textbooks typically provide sample papers, and stock advice on the “rules” of logical argumentation, linear organization, acceptable evidence, and the proper way to cite sources.

In this essay, we will present a series of alternatives to the modernist research paper: the argumentative research paper, the personal research paper, the research essay, and the multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural research paper. Part of our purpose is practical—we want to suggest new choices to teachers and students of research writing. However, we are also interested in the theoretical implications of alternative re-

The writing “process” Posusta outlines can be completed in just one night, although he admits that two are best.

search writing strategies. We see in these strategies movement away from the modernist ideals of expertise, detachment, and certainty, and toward a new valuation of uncertainty, passionate exploration, and mystery. We also see an in-

creased rhetorical sophistication. Alternative research writing often asks students to compose within a large range of strategies, genres, and media. Our students, whose work we will highlight at the end of this essay, create research projects that use, and mix, not only multiple genres and media, but also multiple disciplines and cultures. This work overcomes not only students’ fear of, and boredom with, traditional research writing, but also some of the false oppositions prevalent in composition studies and academic culture. These include the divisions between: academic and expressive writing; competing canons; fiction and nonfiction; high, pop, and folk culture; and the methods and jargons of different fields.

Escaping Posusta

Research writing instruction in its current state has begun to spawn parasitic parodies. What “Cliff Notes” has done for literature, Steven Posusta’s *Don’t Panic: The Procrastinator’s Guide to Writing an Effective Term Paper (You know who you are)* does for research writing manuals. Posusta is a snowboarder and mountain biker with an M. A. who tutored at UCLA. His book is at once a spoof of other research writing texts; an exposé of the emptiness of “academic discourse,” at least as practiced by cynics; and perhaps the best guide to research writing in that it makes full, explicit use of the value that hovers at the edges of other, more polite, texts: sheer efficiency. The writing “process” Posusta outlines can be completed in just one night, although he admits that two are best.

This efficiency took time to develop. Posusta recounts his own painful lessons as an academic outsider learning to, in David Bartholomae’s phrase, “invent the university”:

Writing papers for college or university professors can be terrifying. The first paper I ever wrote came back to me flowing with red ink. A note on the first page read: "Why did you ignore my instructions? Rewrite!" I had unfortunately interpreted the professor's instructions as mere suggestions. Papers are personal, aren't they? If I answer the question and speak my mind, I'll do fine, right? Wrong. (7)

To better invent, Posusta had to learn the academy's customs, rules, and practices. He eventually did this well enough to become a writing tutor, where he encountered students like the one he had been, struggling to write in the ways of the academy. Further, he found that most students put off their writing until the last minute. Rather than attempt to help them enact longer writing processes, he instead suggested methods for quickly creating acceptable discourse.

His book is a continuation of his tutoring. At a sleek 62 pages (with large print), it claims a special ability to help students quickly get up to speed. Devices such as the Instant Thesis Maker help:

The Instant Thesis

- #1. Although _____ ,
(general statement, opposite opinion)
- #2. nevertheless _____ .
(thesis, your idea)
- #3. because _____ .
(examples, evidence, #1, #2, #3, etc.) (12)

The only thing more efficient would be to let an expert like Posusta or a computer program do the work for you, filling in the blanks in the Instant Thesis, Body, and Conclusion. Posusta, however, stands guard against forms of cheating even he considers too efficient. He cannot keep students from downloading research papers from the Internet, but he can foil their plans to pass off as their own the sample paper provided in *Don't Panic*. While other authors blather about the evils of plagiarism, Posusta takes protective measures. Instructors reading the photocopies of his sample paper, handed in by students who have failed to read it, will find the following sentence in the midst of the competent prose: "I am plagiarizing, please fail me" (9).

As the many cases of plagiarism and Posusta's Instant Book suggest, the research paper has become a stationary target. We would like to believe that research writing teaches valuable skills and encourages students to commit to the academic ideals of inquiry and evidentiary reasoning. However, it may be as often the case that the research paper assignment teaches students little more than the act of producing, as effortlessly as possible, a drab discourse, vacant of originality or commitment.

Defenses of the research paper often rely on its preparatory function. We must teach the research paper, the argument goes, because students are likely to encounter it again in other courses across the disciplines. While this argument has validity, it can be countered by noting that teaching the research paper as the sole example of research writing will fail to prepare students for a myriad of other research-based writings: lab reports, case studies, news stories, position papers, take-home exams, and research proposals. Further, one can argue, the research paper is solely academic. In a culture overrun with data, the public often remains uninterested in the detached perspective of the modernist research paper. As Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee point out, facts take on meaning within networks of interpretation, which enable and shape cultural debates (6).

In a culture overrun with data, the public often remains uninterested in the detached perspective of the modernist research paper.

Richard Larson's well-known criticism goes further, charging that, theoretically speaking, the research paper does not exist:

Research can inform virtually any writing or speaking if the author wishes it to do so; there is nothing of substance or content that differentiates one paper that draws on data from outside the author's own self from another such paper—nothing that can enable one to say that this paper is a “research paper” and that paper is not. (Indeed even an ordered, interpretive reporting of altogether personal experiences and responses can, if presented purposively, be a reporting of research.) I would assert therefore that the so-called “research paper,” as a generic, cross-disciplinary term, has no conceptual or substantive identity. If almost any paper is potentially a paper incorporating the fruits of research, the term “research paper” has virtually no value as an identification of a kind of substance in a paper. Conceptually, the generic term “research paper” is for practical purposes meaningless. (813)

Larson's erasure of the research paper's grounding, however, reveals the omnipresence and importance of research writing. He opens his essay with a defense of research-based learning as part of any literate education:

Let me begin by assuring you that I do not oppose the assumption that student writers in academic and professional settings, whether they be freshmen or sophomores or students in secondary school or intend to be journalists or lawyers or scholars or whatever, should engage in research . . . and that appropriately informed people should help them learn to engage in research in whatever field these writers happen to be studying. (811)

Larson is joined by advocates of research writing, and the authors of sincere, non-Posusta research writing textbooks, in stressing the importance of research in our infoculture and the necessity of teaching research skills. Research writing, we are told, should teach students about how data is generated and expertise gained. It should also

allow them to cultivate their intellectual curiosity and expand their knowledge. The issue becomes method and form—how to do research and how to write it in ways that will allow students to embrace academic ideals and escape the cynicism of Postusta.

In alternative research writing, Larson's claim that research can inform nearly all discourse becomes the ground on which research writing is re-made. The models of composing we will present often involve choosing among, mixing, and juxtaposing a grand variety of discourses. The field of composition is here constituted as the study of all utterances—communicative, persuasive, expressive—in any genre, media, discipline, or culture. Seen in this light, research writing begins to enact the vision of composition theorist Derek Owens:

Feasibly, taken in this broadest sense, composition studies is a crossroads discipline, a catalytic zone where a motley assemblage of discourse communities and arenas for intellectual exploration converge, metamorphose, and regenerate. At the same time, we cannot study multiple disciplines without being brought back somehow to the art of composing: musically, syntactically, lexically, orally, dialogically, socially, politically, poetically. (160)

As well as a broadened field for composing, the practices of alternative research writing enact a revised understanding of the purposes of academic work. According to its original ideal, modern research writing was to inscribe an act of seeking by presenting the knowledge the act secured. Seeking was made to consist of creating the conditions under which knowledge could present itself to the mind ready to receive it. But, as critiques of modernism have shown, knowledge cannot “present itself” to the mind because the mind and the world around it cannot be separated. Research has never been the hollow act of recording dead facts in a static world, and research writing has never been a mirror of nature. As James Elkins says in *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*, the gaze into the mirror is always an act of desire:

Larson's claim that research can inform nearly all discourse becomes the ground on which research writing is re-made.

When I say, “Just looking,” I mean I am searching, I have my “eye out” for something. Looking is hoping, desiring, never just taking in light, never merely collecting patterns and data. Looking is possessing or the desire to possess—we eat food, we own objects, and we “possess” bodies—and there is no looking without thoughts of using, possessing, repossessing, owning, fixing, appropriating, keeping, remembering and commemorating, cherishing, borrowing, and stealing. I cannot look at *anything*—any object, any person—without the shadow of the thought of possessing that thing. Those appetites don't just accompany looking; they are looking itself. (22)

In the modern academy, the possessive gaze is expressed as the desire for expertise, which hides the passionate need to control the world. Werner Muensterberger

has seen a similar drive in exacting and prestigious collectors. In *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, he writes:

I have followed the trail of these emotional conditions in the life histories of many collectors. . . . They like to pose or make a spectacle of their possessions. But one soon realizes that these possessions, regardless of their value or significance, are but stand-ins for themselves. And while they use their objects for inner security and outer applause, their deep inner function is to screen off self-doubt and unassimilated memories. (13)

Alternative research writing may offer hope for resisting the will to possess without returning to illusory claims to detachment, objectivity, and pure reflection. Such research writing does not seek claims to constant truth or an unassailable perspective, but instead asks us to take comfort in contingency, and thrill at mystery. Desire here is enacted as a restlessness reversing the libidinal economy of ownership; instead of wanting to possess, or even “know” the other, we want to sustain the experiential excitement of not knowing, the seductive wonder we feel at discovering that the other is beyond us, unknown, inexhaustible. The ideal of alternative research writing is exploration freed from its historical weight of conquest and enslavement.

Alternative research writing then, is not only a set of pedagogic strategies, but also a series of expressions of an altered conception of inquiry. Knowledge here plays leapfrog with mystery; meanings are made to move beyond, and writing traces this movement. Research becomes seeking as a mode of being. As academic seekers, we journey toward a state of understanding that subsumes both ignorance and knowledge,

The ideal of alternative research writing is exploration freed from its historical weight of conquest and enslavement.

a state in which we “know” more deeply our own incapacity for certainty and find that it is uncertainty that keeps us alive and thinking. Alternative research writing is what William Covino calls a form of wondering: a way not to end thinking, but to generate and sustain it.³ This discursive inquiry has a literal parallel in many world cultures. Whether we think of Australian aborigines on walkabout or East Indian men on sunyata, intellectual wondering is enacted as physical wandering.

Alternative research writing is intensely academic, but it also strives to reconstitute the academy by reaching beyond the disciplinary thinking, logos-dominated arguing, and nonexpressive writing we have come to call “academic.” Alternative research writing inscribes an inclusive cross-disciplinary academy, which mixes the personal and the public and values the imagination as much as the intellect. Such writing thus helps us to regather creative work as inquiry, recalling, for instance, the moral charge Milan Kundera has given the novel: it must operate within the unknown to rediscover

our world and ourselves. The plight of the alternative research writer is like the one Donald Barthelme sees in the novelist beginning a work:

Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how. We have all heard novelists testify to the fact that, beginning a new book, they are utterly baffled as to how to proceed, what should be written and how it might be written, even though they've done a dozen. At best there's a slender intuition, not much greater than an itch. (486)

Student research writers may be working on a writing project that is, in some ways, different from a novel—still, we want them to have, and heed, an itch.⁴ We want them to use research writing to follow questions wherever they lead and write this winding trail in discourse that is dialogic, Protean, and playful, while also passionately engaged—in the act of seeking itself, the work of the restless, wandering mind.

Ours, then, is an Instant Thesis after vitamins:

1. The research paper may be a vacant (non) form;
2. nevertheless, research writing remains a valuable activity, central to the academy in an infoculture—
3. as evidenced by alternative research writing strategies, which we will discuss here.
4. Further, we want to suggest, these alternative strategies may be read as inscriptions of the field of composition and academic culture revising themselves, reclaiming mystery as the heart of academic experience and discourse.

The research paper as modernism diminished

But first, #0, some history. We will trace the research paper as a historical construct, in part to attach it to a modern era, now passing. We also want to suggest, however, a more complicated set of relations, in which the ghost of the original modern spirit lives on, rekindled in alternative research writing. At the advent of modern research writing, we find an egalitarian respect for the act of seeking, a desire to inscribe the passage into the unknown. Research writing was conceived in the modern era as a way of writing the making of knowledge, and this writing was, at least in theory, open to all.⁵ Anyone, according to this modern mythology, was capable of making a breakthrough, given the right disposition, intelligence, and training. The research paper as we now teach it, like many things modern, scarcely lives up to this promise. It is, typically, an apprentice work, not making knowledge as much as reporting the known.

Curricular histories cast the research paper as the product of the modern American university and modern society. In *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870–1990*,

David R. Russell notes, “The research paper, like the American university itself, is a grafting of certain German traditions onto what was originally a British system of college education” (79). The idea of requiring students to do text-based scholarship, a thesis or dissertation, began to take hold in the United States as early as the 1860s. In many cases, theses supplanted the earlier forensic speechmaking toward which much of undergraduate education was geared. The change in forms signaled a change in values as well: “Oral performance for a local academic community demanded only a *display* of learning, but the new text-based standards demanded an *original contribution* to a disciplinary community in written form: a research paper” (Russell 80).

Research writing prospered in a climate favoring originality and calling for the creation of knowledge. Such writing was to demonstrate the writer’s place in the society of knowers by increasing the society’s store of knowledge. As a written embodiment of modernist values, research writing proliferated. By the early 20th century, it was central to college writing courses. Its widespread adoption in these courses, however, may have stemmed from motivations very different from the stress on knowledge-making with which modern research writing began. In *Composition-Rhetoric*, Robert Connors writes:

The rise of the “research paper” as a genre in freshman composition is another way teachers tried to transcend the personal writing that occupied the early stages of any course. Library research—often unconnected to any writing purpose other than amassing brute facts for regurgitation into a “research” paper—became very popular around 1920 and has remained a staple in writing courses since. (321)

The research paper came to be chiefly a vehicle for training—not in the creation of knowledge, but in the recording of existing knowledge. Connors describes the state-of-being of the student research paper writer:

He is, finally, a medium, not an originator. His task is to explore the library or the words of the world, not timeless wisdom or his own experience. He is to be trained to pick and choose carefully among myriad facts, coming ideally to that selfless position of knowing secondary materials so well that he merges with them. As Canby et al. wrote in 1933, “Now if your paper is to be worth reading this must be the expression of information that has finally become so thoroughly digested that it truly comes from your own storehouse” (Canby et al., 300–01). The research writer is meant, in other words, to give himself up absolutely to a discourse community. (322–23)

A student writer given over to a discourse community may be ready for originality, ready to make the knowledge that will take the community to a new place. However, this potential was often lost in a tangle of legalistic concerns. Freshman research writing was not only to introduce students to the already known, it also sought to enforce a set of rules about the ownership of the known. As Connors notes, the research paper

assignment “meant to teach the entire process of ‘ethical’ research—giving proper space to varied sources and proper crediting of sources. These concerns were just a formalization of the growing concern with intellectual property that had become a notable part of nineteenth-century law and jurisprudence” (321). The emerging conventions of the research paper “presented teachers with a grateful mass of practical formal material for which they could hold students responsible—the minutiae of formats, footnotes, bibliographies, citation forms, and so on” (322).

Russell notes that teacher/regulators saw poor writing as caused by poor thinking, and saw poor thinking as a threat to the academy:

The “undisciplined” gropings of student prose were of course far from the research ideal held up by the disciplines. As faculty never tired of pointing out, student papers were replete with ignorance and errors of all sorts, which could seemingly never be entirely eradicated. Because faculty tended to regard poor writing as evidence of poor thinking, not as evidence of a student’s incomplete assimilation into a disciplinary community, faculty sensed that the discipline’s “store of knowledge,” acquired at great sacrifice, was “tarnished” by poor writing. (74)

The writing teacher thus becomes part guard, part dishwasher: “‘Scouring’ student writing for ‘mistakes of fact and expression’ became the goal, and writing instruction ‘professional scullery’” (Wolverton 407, quoted in Russell, 74).

The history of research writing in the American university is one of failed promise for students, teachers, and discourse. Begun with the egalitarian ideal of the making of knowledge, modern research writing has become the fallen “research paper,” an apprentice work piecing together what is known, and presenting this piecing in a form that is also known, at least by the teacher. The teaching of research writing has remained tied to a contrived and templated way of writing, and to the self-imposed charge of safeguarding the university’s store of knowledge—from those who do not know, and may never know, the words and thoughts that will grant them admittance to the society of knowers.

Some students seem to experience the culture of expertise as Kafka’s land surveyor does the castle—as impenetrable, governed either by inexplicable whims or rules that defy surveying. Those students who learn the rules, however, often suffer another dilemma—an apparent unwillingness or inability to think imaginatively or originally. Many of the teachers we know complain that even advanced students are content to do what they know how to do: present the knowledge made by others, write within set conventions, and produce what they have been conditioned to believe teachers want. The teaching of research writing is often part of this conditioning: by asking students to stick to researching the known,

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we teach them to fear the unknown. We also make possible Steven Posusta, who would make the research process and product generic, repeatable, and instant.

The alternative ways of researching writing we survey below challenge the conditioned fear of the unknown and the banalities of “efficient” research writing. These methods embrace the modernist value of collegial work within the unknown. At least two of the methods, the research essay and the multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural research project, recall the intellectual wandering of early modernists, such as Montaigne. As ways of working within contingency, methods that use multiple genres and media may seem in sync with postmodern literature and art.

Beyond this entwinement of the modern and postmodern, we prefer, however, to see these methods as neither modern nor postmodern, but instead as historical time-travelers, regathering habits of mind and ways of writing, while attempting to stage intellectual experience as seeking and saying in the heart of mystery.⁶ Inside “heart” is the “ear” and “hear”; it is thus what we heed in listening to poet Charles Olson’s call to pay attention to the life passing through us mysteriously. Throughout *The Special View of History*, Olson also reminds us of the consequences of practicing Herodotus’s original

By asking students to stick to researching the known, we teach them to fear the unknown.

translation of “istorin” as “to find out for yourself.” Such a perspective need not lead to a post-modern nihilism and relativism; instead, in an ever-changing world where every person is im-

perfect, and each event is an incomplete palimpsest we select or build from the shards at our disposal, the importance of the rhetorical process and critical thinking are amplified. When no researcher can have the “best facts or interpretations,” it becomes crucial to carefully assess the audience, occasion, message, purpose, and logic of our writing.

In teaching alternative research writing, we ask our students to practice not only this rhetorical sophistication, but also the gathering and syncretism found in so many cultures pre-dating and leaking into Western Civilization. In his novel *The Mapmaker’s Dream*, James Cowan has his Italian Renaissance mapmaker monk, while researching the geography of earth, describe this syncretism of an either/and (rather than either/or) world/consciousness in these words:

Every man who had ever lived became a contributor to the evolution of the earth, since his observations were a part of its growth. The world was thus a place entirely constructed from thought, ever changing, constantly renewing itself through the process of mankind’s pondering its reality for themselves. (60)

Similarly we recall the “nomadic” thought of Deleuze and Guattari, which inscribes “plateaus” of intense conductivity without center or fixed form. This is the kind of practice we envision for, and begin to see enacted by, alternative research writing. Like the surprising transformation of traditional nomadic life into the itinerancy of

our own, we see such research writing as committed, its practitioners engaged in a sustained, “lifelong” learning in which the spirit is always at stake precisely because the individual’s journey does matter in a world that is always changing and uncertain.⁷

Survey of alternative research writing methods

When taken in turn, the alternative research writing methods we will present—the research argument, research essay, personal research paper, and multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural research project—enact a gradual reopening of the purpose of research writing, reminiscent of a closed fist opening finger-by-finger. Viewed consecutively, these methods trace a movement away from the templated discourse of the research paper and into an increasingly complex world of rhetorical choices. This movement also performs what Zygmunt Bauman calls a “re-enchantment of the world,” supplanting the will to power with a sense of playfulness and wonder.⁸ Alternative research writing, as we read and enact it, inscribes an enchanted world that is a continual source of wonder. The stunted will to know is here eclipsed by its shadow: the academic act of seeking inspired by the endless seductions of mystery and the shimmering promise of syncretic mapping.

The research argument

Research writing has always *argued*; persuasion is needed, even in discourses aimed at exposition, to hold the writing together, and provide an understanding of what the data means. Robert E. Schwegler and Linda K. Shamoan, however, argue that research papers may contain arguments, but are nonetheless distinct from persuasive writing. Instead, they claim, the overall structure and aim of research papers fit the category James Kinneavy called scientific discourse: “writing that makes interpretive statements about some aspect of reality . . . and demonstrates the validity of these statements” (Kinneavy 88–89, quoted in Schwegler and Shamoan 818).

Still, most research writing textbooks now include some elements of argumentation, often in complex relation to the informational and interpretive intents of the modern research paper. In *The Craft of Research*, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams suggest that copious notes and collections of facts take on meaning only when writers discover the claims they want to make. These authors then provide an explication of the Toulminian scheme of claims, warrants, qualifications, and evidence. They further note that arguing in research writing can shift the emphasis of the paper from the information presented to the significance of the information, and even the authorial self projected on the page. The authors recommend that research writers imagine themselves in conversation with their readers: “. . . you making claims, your readers asking good questions, you answering them as best you can” (89).

Alternative research writing, as we read and enact it, inscribes an enchanted world that is a continual source of wonder.

In *Doing Research: The Complete Research Paper Guide*, Dorothy Seyler delineates three modes of research writing: the expository research paper, the analytic research paper, and the argumentative research essay. Each is animated by different kinds of questions and yields different sorts of discourse. She suggests the differences in a list of topics:

Expository:

Report on debate over relationship of modern birds to dinosaurs.

Report on recent literature on infant speech development.

Analytic:

Account of the processes used to identify and classify animals based on the fossil record.

Explanation of process of infant speech development.

Argumentative:

Support of claim that modern birds descended from dinosaurs.

Argument for specific actions by parents to aid infant speech development. (6)

Seyler's first argumentative topic would allow its writer to enter a current debate about evolution; far from reporting the known, this paper would stake a claim in a hotly contested area. The second topic functions on a personal level: it appeals to the parent, and/or future parent in its writer and reader. In each case, we can easily imagine that the student writer's claims would not be seen as pure knowledge, or even accepted as correct. Others in the class might suggest that birds evolved from another source, or that evolution does not make new families, phyla, or species. Advice about speech development could be supplemented or challenged by other research or the experience of the reader. Research and writing, here, become fodder for continuing debate.

The "research argument" constructs the academy as a site for informed conversation. Writers of the research argument seek to become experts, taking in the research they need to formulate and support an intelligent position. They are not, however, charged with ending dialogue and establishing set truth. Instead, their responsibility is to use research to inform debate, and to position themselves as reasonable persuaders.

Further, the research argument can call on students to consider, and use, a range of rhetorical strategies. While some books may stress a fairly rigid approach to argumentation—stressing, for instance, the appeal to reason, using factual evidence or probabilities—teachers and students can also adopt a more varied approach, stressing diverse appeals and showing how they can be integrated.⁹

The research argument pushes toward, then, an academic environment that values debate, and calls for the appropriate and strategic use of a wide rhetorical repertoire. However, the research argument can also be criticized for requiring the defense of a claim or position, rather than a detached examination of data, as in the modernist research paper, or a more open exploration of a series of claims, as in the alternative methods of research writing explicated below. These methods allow writers to examine a range of viewpoints, but without forcing them to adopt a single position to defend. They make conversations not only communal, but also internal.

The personal research paper

While the research argument asks students to at least simulate informed entry into public debate, the personal research paper allows students to research and inscribe a personal issue. In his textbook *Research: The Student's Guide to Writing Research Papers*, Richard Veit suggests that the advantage of the personal research paper is that it allows students to formally think about subjects to which they feel intimately connected. Veit acknowledges that his personal research paper is Macrorie's "I-Search" paper renamed and offers the same opportunity to answer existential, or practical needs; Veit and Macrorie's samples include papers on choosing the right camera and becoming a creative writer. Research sources include both written materials and interviews with those who can shed light on the question being pursued. In form, personal research papers often use a narrative structure and chronological order to recreate the writer's unfolding search. The papers typically end with either a tentative, perhaps temporary, conclusion, or the redirection of the question: "Should I be a writer?" becomes "Are the rewards of writing worth the sacrifices?"

The personal nature of these papers, it seems, might lead to writing that means much to the writer but little to readers. Veit and Macrorie, however, each stress that lively writing makes these papers captivating. Perhaps so, but the well-known criticism of Macrorie's approach—that it largely misses the social dimension of writing—still has force, even if the I-Search does seem a powerful method for helping students direct their own lives.¹⁰

Approaches are needed that preserve the spirit of the I-Search in discourse that explores questions that are more explicitly intellectual and public. For instance, recasting "Should I be a disc jockey?" as "Why does radio fascinate?" may lead to interdisciplinary research that is both library and interview-based and writing that is more likely to apply to readers as well as its writer. Such public/private work preserves the notion that learning is autobiographical, while also sustaining one of the chief lessons of rhetoric—that even the personal scripts in which we think are socially constructed and keep us connected to a shared, if conflicted, world. It also seems wise to preserve, while transforming,

the idea that open questions are to be pursued and explored, rather than avoided, or terminally answered. As Theodore Zeldin argues in *An Intimate History of Humanity*, the ability and willingness to hold an open and continuing conversation is a defining act of consciousness, necessary for becoming human. We might add that it is what we may most need to escape from the current barbarisms in which our world abounds.

The alternative methods of research writing described below typically make use of open-ended questions that are both personal and public. These methods are notably inclusive, allowing writers to use material from different kinds of research as well as personal experience. Further, they are syncretic discourses—using a variety of modes, genres, and, in some cases, media, and bringing together material from a number of disciplines and perspectives. We cannot claim that any of these methods will save the world, but done well, they can help enliven the worlds of the students who use them.

The research essay

We refer to essaying in the Montaignian sense of attempting, wondering, or as Scott Russell Sanders puts it, creating “experiments in making sense of things” (*Paradise* xiii):

The “essay is the closest thing we have, on paper, to a record of the individual mind at work and play . . . [it is] the spectacle of a single consciousness making sense of a part of the chaos” of experience. The essay works by “following the zigzag motions of the inquisitive mind. . . . The writing of an essay is like finding one’s way through a forest without being quite sure what game you are chasing, what landmark you are seeking.” (“Singular” 660, quoted in Heilker 89)

Paul Heilker argues that the essay counters the “thesis/support form,” which he finds restrictive to students’ development as thinkers and writers, and in conflict with current theories of social epistemology and rhetoric. These theories, he notes, tend to see truth and reality as multiple, provisional, dialogic, and dialectical. The essay better fits such theories in that it allows for multiple viewpoints, puts these viewpoints into dialogue with one another, and arrives, like the I-Search, at a provisional conclusion to be questioned in the dialectic’s next round, or a recasting of the question.

Potentially, the essay can include all of experience. As Susan Griffin suggests in “The Red Shoes,” and enacts in many of her works, essays can make the private public, erasing the lines we draw between parts of our experience. In this way, Griffin says, the essay is like the novel, which she finds to have discovered the legitimacy of private worlds for public writing. In form, the essay also resembles the novel by being varied in structure and often radically mixed in form. As Lydia Fakundiny notes, “Every essay is the only one of its kind. There are no rules for making beginnings, or middles, or endings; it is a harder, a more original discipline than that” (2). Further, essays typically collect many different kinds of discourse: personal narratives, philosophic speculations, textual interpreta-

tions, parables, legends, folk wisdom, jokes, dialogues, complaints, rants, and arguments. Essay writing requires fluid thinking, rhetorical flexibility, and the ability to orchestrate.

The essay is brought to research writing in the work of Bruce Ballenger. In *The Curious Researcher*, Ballenger says that students who write research essays shape, and are shaped by, the information they encounter. A broad range of topics is possible, since the writer is not limited to arguing a single position. Topic development often leads to the expansion of thinking as the writer takes in and reflects on various viewpoints. It also offers an element of risk, as writers must mediate between views and work toward their own developing understanding. However, with risk can come intellectual growth—as well as academic enculturation. By inscribing themselves in the midst of a dialogue, debate, or search, students cast themselves within a culture of seeking.

An objection to assigning the research essay stems from compositionists' concerns with preparing students for college writing. Students are unlikely to write this hybrid, post-Montaignian, research-enhanced form (or collection of forms) in other courses. It may be, however, that the research essay prepares students for the diverse literacies of the academy precisely through its variety of information and discourse. It can be used to teach students various modes and genres, while also showing how this variety can function together. The research essay can prepare students for further academic and intellectual work by helping them to cultivate the ability and desire to engage multiple perspectives on issues that remain open for further inquiry.¹¹

The multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural research project

The final alternative strategy we survey here, the multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural research project, further expands the field of seeking. Here, students explore topics of interest or fascination and use a variety of sources to inform projects that combine multiple genres and, in some cases, different media, disciplines, and cultures. These projects often resist, suspend, and/or decenter the master consciousness or central perspective inscribed in the essay as a unifying voice. They instead suggest a wandering consciousness, the traces of which we read in the various, linked, echoing pieces it has left behind for us to find.

These traces may come in the form of words, or in other media. In *The Electronic Word*, Richard Lanham calls print “an act of perceptual self-denial,” and says that electronic textuality makes us aware of that self-denial “at every point and in all the ways in which print is at pains to conceal” (74). Multi-media research writing also points out these denials, but offering a full world of expression and communication in which the visual arts, video, music, noise, textures, even smells and tastes work in complex

These projects often . . . suggest a wandering consciousness, the traces of which we read in the various, linked, echoing pieces it has left behind for us to find.

relations with writing. Like Web sites and other electronic discourses, multi-media research writing enacts a process of intertextual linking that erases the boundaries between texts, and between author and audience. Multi-media research projects gather material from many sources and often inspire readers to contribute more, or to do related work.

The act of gathering can also go beyond genres and media. The wandering, and wondering, consciousness is connected to the traits Julie Thompson Klein ascribes to interdisciplinary thinkers: “reliability, flexibility, patience, resilience, sensitivity to others, risk-taking, a thick skin, and a preference for diversity and new social roles” (182–83). Klein also claims that “the tendency to follow problems across disciplinary boundaries” is “. . . a normal characteristic of highly active researchers” (183). The wandering/wondering consciousness knows no boundaries because its focus is on the questions it pursues. Such pursuit is not careless, for it requires great concentration as well as openness. Enacting such a mind is a sign of great “discipline,” but not that which requires us to stick to bounded fields.

A combination of flexibility and focus is also often seen in the multicultural codeswitchers who have finally begun to gain recognition as the margins of culture become central sites for intellectual study. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes of the new *mestiza*, who “operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (79).

This “something else” is a state of consciousness and discourse that the multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural/ research project begins to work toward. Such projects can create intellectual spaces that allow for various information, mindsets, and ideas—as well as diverse methods of thinking and ways of expressing, arguing, and communicating—to question and deepen one another and together make a greater, but still dissonant, whole. These projects work by making, but not forcing, connections: as such, they model the holistic learning that most formal schooling, with its disciplinary structure and many exclusions, too often works against.

David Jolliffe’s work on multi-genre inquiry offers a starting point for considering how to enact multi-genre/disciplinary/cultural research writing. Jolliffe asks students to make an “inquiry contract” in which they agree to research and write several different pieces about a subject. Example topics, listed in Jolliffe’s *Inquiry and Genre: Writing to Learn in College*, include the history of the seeding system in tennis, the relationship between the stock market and the defense industry, and the roles of women in American wars. Students pursue their topics using a range of rhetorical strategies, including: the contract proposal; the clarification project, in which students write reflectively about what they already know; the information project, in which they report on things they

learn; the exploration project, with an essay raising additional questions; and the working documents project, which results in public writing designed to change people's minds.

Pieces within Jolliffe's method are reminiscent of the expository modernist research paper, the research argument, and the research essay, and—since each project begins with students' own interests—the overall agenda is similar to that of the personal research paper. By using these varied strategies, students strive to build a rhetorical repertoire. They also learn how to better recognize that their thinking is conditioned by the genres they write in, and that inquiry can extend across a range of singular, but related, texts.

Tom Romano describes multi-genre research projects that are potentially even more student-driven and open-ended. Romano's idea for what he came to call the Multi-Genre Research Paper surfaced after reading Michael Ondaatje's multi-genre "novel," *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, the reading of which Romano compared to listening to jazz: "... the reader feels something satisfying and meaningful, but may not be able to articulate what it is right away" (124). Romano asked his high school students to make biographical research projects using a style similar to Ondaatje's. The students wrote on subjects including Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Thorpe, Marilyn Monroe, and Maya Angelou. Romano reports on the results:

I have never read anything like these papers. Although four or five [of 26] were disappointing, showing little depth, breadth, or commitment, the rest were good, genuinely interesting in style and content, with seven or eight papers astonishingly superior. The visions were complex, the writing versatile. (130–131)

These students' projects are portfolios of diverse writing on a common subject. Each piece echoes the others, as an inner dynamic or theme emerges. A sample paper on John Lennon focuses especially on Lennon's love for Yoko Ono. The project is linked, in part, by a continuing series of poems about Lennon's murder called "Unfinished Music." It also contains other genres, including a news story, several narratives, and a meditation on the number "9" and its repeating presence in John and Yoko's lives. The author, Brian McNight, calls the project a "play," perhaps because it manages multiple voices (132–37).

Our students at Eastern Oregon University have gone beyond the multi-genre research paper to compose research projects that incorporate multiple genres, media, disciplines, and cultures. This approach originated in a 200-level Applied Discourse Theory course. It came out of long meditation on the way our students often found research sterile and theory either incomprehensible or dry. While initial resistance to the multi-genre/media/disciplinary/cultural approach was great—as the only thing more terrifying

Our students at Eastern Oregon University have gone beyond the multi-genre research paper to compose research projects that incorporate multiple genres, media, disciplines, and cultures.

than slavery is sometimes freedom—students quickly found the excitement in research and theory directed toward projects that linked their academic and personal lives.

“Multi-writing,” as we have come to call it, has now spread at our university to a 400-level capstone seminar in English/Writing; 300-level courses in Writing Theory, Electronic Literacy, and American Folklore; 200-level courses in Argumentation and Methods of Tutoring Writing; and a 100-level Exploratory Writing course. It has also expanded to courses in other disciplines, including a 100-level American Government course, and a 300-level Spanish Literature course. Next year, the university is planning a holistic revision of general education that will cast multi-writing as a central method for helping students to learn across disciplines and connect academic issues to their personal concerns. We see this sort of work early in college as an important retention effort, as well as a way of breaking intellectual ground for further work at the higher levels.

Through conference presentations and workshops, multi-writing has now been taken up on other campuses in our state and nationally and has moved into K–12 classes, especially those taught by fellows of the Oregon Writing Project, many of whom have participated in multi-writing workshops. At the primary and secondary levels, multi-writing helps students generate rich work samples, demonstrating multiple proficiencies for assessment.¹²

In teaching multi-writing in our discourse theory course, we first open students up to a sense of either a multi-dimensional self or multiple selves, in order to create in a postmodern world. We have used texts like Daniel Halpern’s *Who’s Writing This?*, where dozens of famous writers rewrite the little self-portrait of Jorge Luis Borges in their own surprisingly different ways. Often students move from writing traditional and summative autobiographical pieces, where the older and wiser narrator looks back, to multi-cultural and generative ones, where the writer creates a new incarnation to grow into. Also successful has been a variation of autoethnography where students interview three people about themselves, then affirm or rebut the comments. We even invented two new kinds of multi-autobiography: “ought-to” and “want-to” biography—where students with a difficult childhood they would rather not delve into can imagine a different past: struggling artist in Paris, Tibetan monk, Earth Goddess, architect, blues musician.

In our most recent term of teaching, multi-autobiography projects included: Frank Kaminski’s recycling box of personal obsessions from banal pop culture (*Star Wars*, the *Dukes of Hazzard*, the *Alien* movies); Katie McCann’s cast-a-way project in which she imagines she is stranded on an island (her writings and drawings are contained in bottles); and Cara Kobernik’s project on shoes. Shoes have been an important part of the author’s life since she was baby, due originally to medical problems with her feet. The project includes a mock shoe catalogue and an illuminated manuscript called “Shoe Stories,” as well as a beloved pair of sandals. In another memorable project, Lisa Rodgers

split her self into three emanations with very different personalities and had the three escape from the dictatorial “Lisa” and journey on an improbable adventure, reminiscent of *Thelma and Louise*.

To keep the self from becoming too abstract and imaginary, we then require a mini-body project. Texts like Diane Ackerman’s *A Natural History of the Senses* help students see how to combine facts with stylish prose. Student projects on the body often counter the typical images of the body prevalent in our culture, searching for other, richer views. Recent examples include Aubree Tipton’s study of the relation of mind to disease and Sherry McGeorge’s elaborate project on a feminist philosophy of belly dancing.

Finally, students create their own “multi-research project” on a theme they select. Some of these projects are biographical, like those of Romano’s students. Subjects of recent “multi-biographies” include Adrienne Rich, Howard Hughes, Georgia O’Keefe, and Kurt Cobain. Other students find different themes, including: angels, Schoedinger’s cat experiment, theories of the end of the world, massage, autism, the mysteries of tea, the Grand Canyon, the color blue, the Shroud of Turin, the Taiwanese language/dialect, the religion of television, masks, islands, Proppian interpretation of dreams, the concept of the “soulmate,” the birth of punk rock, and debates over the literary canon.

The works show remarkable syncretism. Aubree Tipton’s project on the Grand Canyon brings together courses she has taken in history, geology, and literature. Linnea Simon’s project on tea is a cross-cultural dialogue, while Jakob Curtis studies Taiwan as a multicultural. Shirley Crabtree’s interdisciplinary/multicultural project on fleas inscribes the history of this tiny but durable animal as part of a wider narrative of attempts by various imperial and fascistic entities to kill those seen as lesser.

The projects are widely varied in form. Like Romano’s students, ours typically employ a range of genres: narratives, interpretive essays, letters, poems, wills, employment applications, lab reports, ethnographic and archeological field notes, prophecies, aphorisms, monologues, and dialogues, to name just a few. Cara Kobernik’s project on the meanings of spring includes poems, personal and historical narratives, myths, folktales, monologues (including one by the Easter bunny), scripture and scriptural exegesis, aphorisms, science writing, philosophic reflection, and recipes.

Various media also abound. Judith Darrow’s project on the fresco includes several original paintings in a style that might be called postmodern gothic. Kobernik’s project on Spring is very nearly a coffeetable book, with many photographs and drawings and an elegant design, as well as a lovely, floral smell. Nearly all of Jan Harris’ project on blue is displayed in blue, on blue. The Grand Canyon project includes music, as does the project on blue, and many others. Videos are also common. Project containers are often interesting. We have received projects in folders, books, albums, boxes, crates, ovens, and even the back of a pickup truck. The project on blue comes in a binder covered with a blue suit.

Eric Hutchinson's project on train travel is contained in its own kerchief-and-pole hobo bag. McGeorge's project on belly dancing comes wrapped in a beautiful scarf.

Some of the projects include strong elements of parody, often with serious intent: Sherri Edvalson's "A Feminist Education for Barbie" explores the effectiveness of gender theory and pedagogy in a continually sexist culture; it is enacted through a series of

For Michelle Skow, a project on the Japanese American Internment grew into a larger capstone project, to which she has continued to add, even now that she has graduated.

mock assignments for various courses and contained in a Barbie bookbag. Sue Ruth's *EmpTV Guide*, which is written in the form of a mock *TV Guide*, includes substantial research on television programming and cultural criticism, as well as scripts for mock commercials and Barney's appearance on the Home Shopping Network. The project shows us locked into a media culture from which even parody cannot quite grant us escape.

In the midst of a grand variety of possible subjects, purposes, and forms, choices must be made. In his project on Houdini, Randy Kromwall saw and wanted to show intensity, obsession, awe, and passion in the magician's relationship to one of his most famous and dangerous tricks, the Water Torture Cell. Kromwall crafted a discourse that is part dialogue, part interior monologue, part lyric poem. The machine speaks, claiming that it is loved, and Houdini answers: "Yes, I love you / But you also terrify me. . . ." Kromwall gives his project a sensational tone and circus-like aura through the use of gothic type and several colorful posters advertising Houdini.

In her project on theories of good and evil, Judy Cornish used genres and media creatively to represent the ways in which her sources, and Cornish herself, have seen the two forces interlocking, and even becoming one. Her project design employed only black, white, and gray for its many images from high art and pop culture. Cornish made some images from scratch, and processed others into collages and striking juxtapositions. Among her writings is a dialogue in which the Kenpo concept of "push/pull," a way of absorbing violence, is explicated by a master and absorbed by a student, physically and spiritually. At the end, a provisional peace is realized when master and student redirect violence in a dance of acceptance.

In a reflective essay we typically assign at the end of a project, Cornish writes that her work on good and evil grew from her own hard life choices, which have made her question whether she was "good" or "evil," or if these words refer to anything real. Her project makes use of views on good and evil from writers of various time periods and cultures, including Toni Morrison, John Barth, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Kitaro Nishida. Cornish has told us that her personal connection to the material not only prompted the project, but pushed her toward doing more research and writing, even after she had

clearly gone far beyond the requirements of the assignment. She was intellectually exploring a question that she was also urgently living.

A similar personal impetus motivates many of our students' projects, and sometimes leads them to work beyond the project. For Michelle Skow, a project on the Japanese American Internment grew into a larger capstone project, to which she has continued to add, even now that she has graduated. Skow realized that her own identity was deeply entwined with her grandparents' experience during the Internment. In her reflective essay, she wrote:

The Japanese American Internment experience is something my grandparents rarely discuss. When they do, they refer to their internment as "camp"—a euphemism for unlawful incarceration. Both claim to remember little of what happened during this time, even though my grandma was eleven and my grandpa was fourteen. . . . I have urged them to share, in-depth, this part of their lives with me, but they cling tightly to their vow of silence. I cannot say I disagree with their desire to forgive and forget, but I feel a part of me is missing.

Skow's project became an act of historical memory and re-creation. It begins dramatically, with a stark copy of the internment order (see Figure 1).¹³ The project also includes: a conventional historical narrative about the Internment; found texts, such as James Masao Mitsui's poems written from photographs; Skow's own poems; diary entries written by Skow from the point of view of her grandparents during the Internment; photographs; and a poster announcing Executive Order 9066, the Internment order.

At times, we are taken to the camps; at other times, we are looking back at them. Gradually, Skow comes to better understand not only the Internment, but also her older relatives' attitude about it. She writes:

I want to forget Okasan as she sits,
Silently crocheting doily after doily,
Tablecloth after tablecloth.
Her nymph-like hands, cracked and withered
From the burning sun and stinging dust.
Working consciously, stitching a contract of silence:
Never forsake, never look back, never forget.

She has circled back to her grandmother's silence, with a new understanding. But not a full one. Skow followed up her first "multi-project" with another on first generation Japanese Americans that grew into a capstone for her English/History double major. Now that she has graduated, she continues to tell us about new reading and writing that she has done, including essays on her "third generation" cultural heritage,

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9066

**WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION**

Presidio of San Francisco, California
April 1, 1942

**INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY**

Living in the Following Area:

All that portion of the City and County of San Francisco, State of California, lying generally west of the north-south line established by Junipero Serra Boulevard, Worcester Avenue, and Nineteenth Avenue, and lying generally north of the east-west line established by California Street, to the intersection of Market Street, and thence on Market Street to San Francisco Bay.

All Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above designated area by 12:00 o'clock noon Tuesday, April 7, 1942.

No Japanese person will be permitted to enter or leave the above described area after 8:00 a. m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the Provost Marshal at the Civil Control Station located at:

1701 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following way:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property including: real estate, business and professional equipment, buildings, household goods, boats, automobiles, livestock, etc.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence, as specified below.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, or between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Friday, April 3, 1942.

2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Reception Center, the following property:
 - (a) Bedding and linens (no mattresses) for each member of the family;
 - (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
 - (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
 - (d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
 - (e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions received at the Civil Control Station.

The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

No contraband items as described in paragraph 6, Public Proclamation No. 3, Headquarters Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, dated March 24, 1942, will be carried.

3. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage at the sole risk of the owner of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.

4. Each family, and individual living alone, will be furnished transportation to the Reception Center. Private means of transportation will not be utilized. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station at 1701 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, California, between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, or between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Friday, April 3, 1942, to receive further instructions.

I. L. DeWITT
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

THE OFFICIAL REGISTER NUMBER IS 1

Figure 1: Executive Order No. 9066 as it appeared in 1942. The full text is repeated in Note 13.

and more writings from her grandparents' point of view. She says that she sees herself trying to mesh the first-generation world view and her own.

As well as asking students to write reflectively about (and, often, within) their projects, we also ask students to refract, to think about projects deflected from the original, threads left hanging, questions remaining, or questions not yet asked.¹⁴ Several of our students have followed Skow in creating linked projects. Michael McClure began with an autobiographic project, modeled after Gregory Ulmer's concept of "mystory," held in a trunk full of texts and objects supposedly recovered in an archeological dig.¹⁵ McClure followed this project with another on the artist Joseph Cornell, who made art in and from boxes, cases, and trunks. McClure's project includes a Cornellesque box of found and made objects, including an old gold watch, and several expository, interpretive, and creative writings, including a meditation on archeological time in Cornell's work.

These projects continue to evolve in the minds of their viewers/readers as well as their makers. We return to them again and again, trying to understand them in full, but also finding pleasure in knowing that we will not, that they will remain fertile mysteries. This is an experience far different from reading modernist research papers, where all meanings are to be made immediately clear, and the product is considered acceptable in large measure because it follows the rules. In multi-writing, "rules" are few. Students are shown some of the earlier projects, then asked to do something better. We assess them according to what they demonstrate as researchers, writers, and thinkers. We ask them to find a variety of sources, show us some of their range and depth as a rhetor, and reach for a philosophic understanding of their subject and their own project that will allow the work to hang together and make each piece part of the same web.

Establishing a progression . . . shows the purpose and nature of research writing changing to meet the demands of a fluid world of complex relationships.

Less efficiency, more mystery

It would be possible, perhaps even desirable, to deconstruct the progression we have presented. One could easily cast the alternatives listed above as simply a series of possibilities to be mixed and matched, as supplements of, or replacements for, the modernist research paper. It might be quite sound pedagogically, for instance, to ask students to write a research paper, then a research argument, essay, or multi-writing research project; or to continue teaching the research paper at the 100-level, and then move on to alternative methods later; or to use alternative methods in introductory courses to get students started researching with fervor, and then require the research paper as they progress toward graduation. Such methods would satisfy consciences that believe the modernist paper ought still to be taught, but also allow students valuable new experiences.

For our purposes, however, establishing a progression is vital, for it shows the purpose and nature of research writing changing to meet the demands of a fluid world of complex relationships. If we want to describe a fixed world as others have described it, the modernist research paper will do. The research argument allows us to move beyond exposition of the unchanging to inscribe a human world continually remade by argument, in which research supports the will to stake and defend a claim. The personal research paper allows an inward turn from this culture of conflict, asking its writer to explore and mediate personal conflicts, contradictions, and questions.

The research essay provides an important reconnection with the social scene of writing, taking as its purpose the personal exploration of an issue or theme of collective concern. The essay can be seen as a discourse of the question, in which a variety of genres

One can imagine an infinite multi-writing which would call into its fold, bit by bit, all of discourse.

of writing are used to wander the terrain of a subject matter through which the writer may have tread before, but which she or he cannot claim to finally “know.” The research

essay thus foregrounds a shift in priorities—begun in the research argument and personal research paper—away from claims to, or descriptions of, verifiable knowledge, and toward a more open stance on the part of writers aware of uncertainty and contingency.

The multi-writing research project makes visible use of possibilities implicit in the research essay. Here, the trail of a question or questions leads through a range of connected material, including different genres of writing and, in some cases, different media, disciplines, and cultures. The maker of the multi-writing project is a collector, but not in the way of Muensterberger’s collector/possessor. Instead, the intent here is to lay out a portion of what is potentially an inexhaustible, and radically open, network, to which the project’s maker, and its readers/viewers, can add. One can imagine an infinite multi-writing which would call into its fold, bit by bit, all of discourse. Even the other methods of research writing—the research paper, the research argument, the personal research paper, the research essay—would be subsumed by this syncretic, ravenous multi-text.

Are we arguing that facts are useless, or that the discourses of expository intent, such as the modernist research paper, be abandoned? No. We are suggesting, however, that facts and expository writing have limits; they allow only certain types of inquiry to take place. What we envision, finally, is a discourse that will not have limits, that will allow for various kinds and levels of inquiry to echo, question, and deepen one another. Cornish’s Kenpo scene may end with a brief bit of peace, but her project on good and evil settles nothing. Theories are both upheld and negated, as they challenge, question, and dance with one another. And yet, something important has happened. A student, an intellectual, a person has (re-)engaged an important, open question—one of the fascinations/terrors/joys through which she shapes, repeatedly and anew, her examined life.

Above all, we want our students to view mystery as a source of inquiry, research, and writing. Mystery is an academic value; what good would an institute of inquiry be if everything was already known? A collective appreciation of mystery can also be a basis for revising the academy, making it truly a place of free inquiry, where the unknown is approached from many directions, using a variety of ways of thinking, writing, and making. In this academy, we envision the research writer learning many traditions of inquiry and discourse, while also learning to use these traditions syncretically in the composition classroom. Here, students can begin to write the eclectic and multiple texts of their learning; they can, in singer Sarah McLachlan's oxymoronic words, mix craft and inspiration, and "build a mystery."

Notes

1. James E. Ford notes that the 1995 volume he edited, *Teaching the Research Paper: From Theory to Pedagogy, from Research to Writing*, is the first book on research paper instruction. His introduction provides additional counts: only 2 sessions on research writing have been presented at the MLA Convention, only 1 published bibliography has appeared on the subject (1). Further "[Research paper instruction] has been ignored in the periodic overview of the profession conducted by the MLA, NCTE, and CEA. . . . The annual and semiannual bibliographies published in the major writing journals omit it completely" (2). This inattention is striking, especially given Ford's estimate that 56 percent of first-year composition teachers devote an average of 29 percent of their time to research paper instruction (1–2).

2. In Oregon, for instance, the research paper is most often taught in the third of a three-course sequence in first-year writing.

3. See Covino's *Forms of Wondering: A Dialogue of Writing*, for Writers, a textbook on writing enacted through a series of dialogic forms. For Covino's re-reading of the Western rhetorical and philosophic tradition as a series of wonderings, see *The Art of Wondering*.

4. See Kundera's *The Art of the Novel*.

5. Of course, the practices of the modern academy were exclusionary—sexist, racist, and classist. Still, the direction of the academy at this stage was, roughly, toward greater inclusion.

6. Historian Daniel J. Boorstin identifies seeking as the great communal human act: ". . . While the finding, the belief that we have found the Answer, can separate us and make us forget our humanity, it is the seeking that continues to bring us together" (1). Philosopher Steven R. L. Clark brings together seeking and saying: ". . . the pursuit of knowledge through the exchange of ideas is something that we must assume we have been about since we were talking beasts" (4).

7. For examples of nomadic thought, see especially Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

8. Bauman identifies this reenactment with postmodernity, seeing it as a way of relating to the world that comes after the tragic history of modernism, in which power-supported structures of cultural meaning are repeatedly erected only to be demolished.

9. A work such as Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, while not nominally a research-writing text, could be helpful in showing students the range of argumentative strategies.

10. James Berlin's "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" and Lester Faigley's "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal" brand Macrorie's work "expressionist." Berlin argues that expressionist pedagogies typically encourage students to use writing to reach toward a deep, personal truth. While students in expressionist classrooms often work together, the purpose of this collaboration is for students to help each other come to realizations that are finally individual. Expressionist practices are thus reminiscent of Platonic dialectics.

In *Textual Carnivals*, Susan Miller carries the critique of expressionism further, suggesting that such pedagogic strategies perpetuate the dominant order by enacting writing as an individual act, separate from social concerns and constraints.

Expressionist discourse fares better, however, in Geoffrey Sirc's "Never Mind the Tagmemics: Where's the Sex Pistols?" Here, Macrorie is cast as something of a punk compositionist, whose work is finally devalued because it does not ask students to bow to the dominant discursive order of academic convention.

11. If our suggestions of the value of wondering and the uses of mystery seem to suggest a purely humanistic or philosophic viewpoint on research writing, consider an episode of *Nova* in which scientists confront the thrilling mysteries of the planet Venus. Venus, these scientists say, was traditionally thought to be very similar to Earth, close in size and, probably, composition. It was even thought that Venus might have oceans and rich oil deposits. Data from various probes, however, suggest not only that Venus is not like Earth, but that things happen there that could not happen on Earth, at least given our current understanding of natural processes and laws. The Earth's surface, for instance, is thought (and verifiably proven) to have been made over time, through the mechanics of volcanic eruption and plate tectonics. The surface of Venus appears to be all one age. By Earthly standards, this can't be.

12. For more on using multi-writing to meet proficiency standards, see "Multi-Genre Writing and State Standards," an article in the *Oregon English Journal*, which we wrote with high school teachers Tom Lovell, Jennifer Pambrun, and John Scanlan.

13. The text of Executive Order No. 9066 is as follows:

Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry Living in the Following Area:

All that portion of the City and County of San Francisco, State of California, lying generally west of the north-south line established by Junipero Serra Boulevard, Worchester Av-

enue, and Nineteenth Avenue, and lying generally north of the east-west line established by California Street, to the intersection of Market Street, and thence on Market Street to San Francisco Bay.

All Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above designated area by 12:00 o'clock noon Tuesday, April 7, 1942.

No Japanese person will be permitted to enter or leave the above described area after 8:00 a.m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the Provost Marshall at the Civil Control Station located at:

1701 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property including: real estate, business and professional equipment, buildings, household goods, boats, automobiles, livestock, etc.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence, as specified below.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, or between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Friday, April 3, 1942.
2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Reception Center, the following property:
 - (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
 - (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
 - (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
 - (d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
 - (e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions received at the Civil Control Station.

The size and number of packages are limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

No contraband items as described in paragraph 6, Public Proclamation No. 3, Headquarters Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, dated March 24, 1942, will be carried.

3. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage at the sole risk of the owner of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.
4. Each family and individual living alone, will be furnished transportation to the Reception Center. Private means of transportation will not be utilized. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station at 1701 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, California, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, or between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Friday, April 3, 1942, to receive further instructions.

J. L. DeWITT

Lieutenant General, U. S. Army, Commanding

14. A similar view of revision as refraction is held by Nancy Welch in *Getting Restless*. Welch argues that composition teachers have failed to ask questions such as “something missing, something else?” in responding to student drafts, instead conceiving of revision mainly as a way to narrow foci, correct inappropriate tones, and achieve clarity. For Welch, revision should strive not to eliminative dissonance, but instead use it as “the start of a reproductive struggle that can lead to a change of direction, a change of thesis, a real re-envisioning of the text, its meaning and intentions” (30).

15. Ulmer presents “mystory” as a writing-after-video that combines personal, professional, and historic elements and utilizes the jump-cut logic of television. Ulmer’s own mystory, “Derrida at Little Bighorn,” can be seen as a work of personal and public research writing for the electronic age.

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