

CHAPTER 10.

WHAT WE THOUGHT WE
KNEW: SNAPSHOTS ALONG
THE DEVELOPMENT OF
A CULTURAL RHETORICS
METHODOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Paired readings:

- Martinez, Aja Y. “Core-Coursing Counterstory: On Master Narrative Histories of Rhetorical Studies Curricula.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2019, pp. 402–416.
- Martinez, Aja Y. *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*. NCTE, 2020.

This essay presents a retrospective related through snapshot narrative vignettes. Because this collection focuses on questions of methodological approaches that reflect on choice, examines overlooked and/or undervalued research sites, and challenges traditional frameworks, this essay illustrates through storytelling a methodological education that has served as foundation toward the development of a Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy.

SNAPSHOT I: THE DUDE

I attended a school-to-prison pipeline high school, but because I was a student tracked into the minimally offered AP and Honors courses, I was considered part of the “college-going track.” As such, once my senior year began, I was summoned out of class one day to my guidance counselor’s office. The guidance counselor for college-bound seniors was an old hippie who clearly emitted “The Dude” vibes in his very chill, laid back, and lackadaisical approach to planning for the unknown futures of anxious college-bound teens. I remember arriving to this appointment

with a well-rehearsed script in my head, a script heavily informed and influenced by my parents, both of whom were not four-year college grads, let alone professional school or graduate school grads. I was prepared to inform this counselor of my plans to go to law school, plain and simple. As far as my family was concerned, I was always good at reading, writing, and researching, so naturally, I should aim for a well-paying legal career. It only made sense. And as the diligent first generation and first-born daughter of my Mexican American parents, I agreed this was a reasonable career objective. I announced my plans to “The Dude,” not fully comprehending there were four (at minimum) years of undergraduate learning I would have to clear before embarking on this law school ambition. In turn, “The Dude” casually informed me I would have to choose a major and earn my bachelor’s degree first. When I asked what he recommend I major in as a good foundation for my plans, he placed the social sciences degree listings before me and replied, “It’s really up to what you feel your flow is, man. But truly, for law school anything [with a whimsical sweep of his hand up and down the list] in the social sciences will do.”

I scrutinized the list, feeling a bit panicked at the thought that my well-rehearsed law school plan and script were nowhere to be located on this list. All I saw on this line up were lots of unfamiliar words that ended in “ology” and because I was feeling the vice grip of anxiety begin to close in around me, I pointed at the first word listed alphabetically on the list: Anthropology.

It wasn’t until about three years after this experience and well into coursework as an anthropology major that I began to learn about methodology. I relate the above story because it introduces the unifying thread that has led to what is now a twenty-plus-year academic career concerning legal studies and methodology. In retrospect, I can now say I was always in pursuit of a methodological outlet for my academic interests that centers minoritized ways of knowing and storytelling. But here again, as any novice learner, I didn’t know this at the start of my academic journey, so this essay is very much a retrospective related through snapshots, narrative vignettes (fully aware that I am mid-career, so there is still much ahead of me to learn). And because this collection focuses on questions of methodological approaches that *reflect* on choice, *examine* overlooked and/or undervalued research sites, and *challenge* traditional frameworks I present vignettes that display for audiences a methodological education that has served as foundation toward the development of my own Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy.

SNAPSHOT II: THE BAHAMAS

I was sitting in Dr. Richard Stoffle’s Ecological Anthropology course and perked up when I heard him close class one day by asking “anyone interested in going

to the Bahamas for some research?” Prior to this posed research possibility, I was simply a third-year anthropology major wading through several semesters-worth of overwhelmingly confusing prerequisites. Two and a half years into my undergraduate studies, I still had no clear idea what my major “anthropology” *really* was, nor how this would prepare me for the ever elusive and increasingly hazy goal of law school. And yet here I sat in Dr. Richard Stoffle’s elective course on Ecological Anthropology with an offer to go to paradise.

I jumped at the opportunity to join Dr. Stoffle’s cultural/applied anthropology research team comprised of undergraduate and graduate student research assistants. I didn’t know what I was doing, but figured I could learn along the way, and through the scaffolded system Dr. Stoffle established of graduate students training undergrads, and advanced undergrads training new undergrads, I was soon plunged into the methodological ecosystem of an applied cultural anthropologist. At this point in my education, I wouldn’t say I had a grasp on frameworks in a named theory sense—although because of Dr. Stoffle’s body of work and research interests I was receiving an education on the theory of co-adaptation (Stoffle et al., “Landscaping”) and Indigenous epistemologies that involved consulting and publishing with elders and other community members of which the studies were concerned (e.g. Stoffle et al., “Ghost Dancing”; Stoffle et al., “Shifting Risks”; Stoffle et al., “Nuvagantu”). As such, I began learning the methodological ropes of qualitative approaches such as ethnography, transcription, and field and site visits. This education also involved learning about the immense amount of detailed and necessary preparation to conduct such studies ranging from IRB application and approvals/denials/revisions, crafting of the interview instrument (demographic information, questions, follow ups, etc.), recruiting participants, researching and purchasing of field equipment such as tape recorders and tape, and then the necessary training to prepare for the study. At this point in the project I was only a volunteer (I would eventually be hired on as an undergraduate research assistant, which meant I’d be paid a small stipend for this labor—I think an important point in terms of compensating student labor); but for the time being, I was voluntarily spending whatever extra time I could eek out of my day on this project—a day already filled with a full undergraduate course load, a job as a receptionist at the student health center, and being a single mom to my then two-year old. What I learned on this project is the undeniable foundation for the work I continue to pursue to this day.¹

1 I have discussed aspects of my involvement in the Bahamas biodiversity and marine protected areas project in previous scholarship (Martinez 96) and anyone interested in detailed and intricate specifics of this project can (and should!) consult any of the associated reports from this project written by my colleagues (Van Vlack; Stoffle and Minnis, “Marine”; Stoffle et al., “Two-MPA”; Stoffle et al., “Sustainable”).

What has proven methodologically formative *and* transformative for me was not anything I learned in the classroom or from books but what I gained from the embodied work of preparing for and experiencing site visits as an anthropologist. What became clear to our team upon realizing we were enlisted by the Bahamian government for the *second* phase of the marine protected areas project was that the government had conducted a preliminary study with leading marine biologists and ocean biodiversity specialists but had left people, the very people invested in sustainable community-oriented generations deep fishing practices and sea stewardship, *out* of the initial study. No one thought to speak to local and native fishers—because what would a people who have stewarded the Bahamian seas (in non-commercial ways, no less) since emancipation from the British Crown, and according to some local sources, since the Arawak times, know about biodiversity and sustainability anyway? As I'm sure my audience can guess, the local people know a lot. But what fascinated me as a novice researcher, is that the Bahamian government had more faith in our team of mostly white anthropologists from the land locked deserts of Arizona to travel the 2,200 miles from Tucson to Exuma, Bahamas, to speak with their own citizens, and in turn document, transcribe, and compile a report to let the government know how much their people know about stewardship toward sustainability of the Bahamian sea. And herein lies a kernel toward the development of my Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy:

Why talk for or over a people when you can talk to the people
and let the people relate their experiences on their own terms?

SNAPSHOT III: WHAT'S GRAD SCHOOL?

Somewhere within the time I was immersed in my budding identity as an applied anthropologist and ethnographic methods researcher, one of my research team members asked what my plans were for graduate school.

"Graduate school?" I asked, "what's graduate school?"

I had spent the better half of three undergraduate semesters on this research team and of course knew there was a hierarchy within our ranks, with Dr. Stoffle as our Principal Investigator (PI) and lead, Alex Carrol the Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) (full disclosure, I hadn't yet connected the dots that the "G" in this stood for graduate), and then a whole array of undergraduate research assistants (URAs) like me. Admittedly, most of my education in methodology coincided with my education as a first gen student. As I learned from the team about research tools I likewise learned about institutional terminology and navigation strategies. Another URA peer of mine, Kathleen Van Vlack, was kind enough to fill me in on what exactly grad school was.

“It’s a continuation and extension of sorts of the kind of work we are already doing on the Bahamas project,” she simply stated.

“You mean I can get degrees beyond my bachelors in anthropology? I can keep doing this research? I don’t have to go to law school?”

“Yup,” Kathleen confirmed, “you can keep doing this research.”

As I neared my final undergraduate year, I began seriously contemplating this graduate school prospect, ever still aware of my assumed duty to my family to become a lawyer. As I prepared to select my final courses before graduation, I went ahead and scheduled an appointment with a family friend who happened to be an attorney—just to see if his answer would differ any from “The Dude” all these years later in terms of best course of preparation for law school. I assumed he would also say “anything in the social sciences would do,” and that I could leave his office with the peace of mind that I had done my best to prepare for eligibility to law school and had inadvertently discovered a passion for applied anthropology and ethnographic research methods instead. So, I was more than floored when he responded, “English. If I could do it all over again, I would have majored in English.”

Ever the dutiful daughter, but also by this point a worried single-mother, I wasn’t ready to lean fully in to the decision of grad school and the pursuit of advanced degrees in anthropology when I had been so conditioned to this point in my life to identify as someone meant for a career in law. And as first gen logics go, what viable career options are there for an anthropologist anyway? I truly didn’t know. No one in my family had *ever* mentioned becoming an anthropologist. So, I decided to keep the law school option in my back pocket, true as it was that my heart was with this qualitative research I was learning about and conducting. In a Hail Mary move, I went ahead and added English as a double major at the start of my fourth year of undergraduate study. This move added a *fifth* year to my degree program, but I had a toddler’s mouth to feed and familia to make proud, and I felt I better have more options for career possibilities than less at the end of this college experience. And while I stayed rigorously involved in my work as a URA for Dr. Stoffle, I also embarked on my coursework as an English major and encountered my first tastes of rhetorical methodologies.

SNAPSHOT IV: THE RHETORICAL TURN

As an English major I undoubtedly experienced the array of required core courses representing the old dead white guy canon trifecta: Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer. But it was the two rhetorical studies courses with Dr. Edward M. White and

Dr. Roxanne Mountford that sparked my interests. Particularly, in Dr. Mountford's class, we were assigned Sonja Foss's textbook *Rhetorical Foundations*, where I learned two major lessons that further contributed to the development of my Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy:

There are *many* methods of rhetorical analysis—not just the too often unnamed/unidentified Neo-Aristotelian approach;

and

Our stories, our embodied and lived stories, are valid and important rhetorical artifacts.

The above related revelations were in fact revelations to me because prior to encountering Foss's text and Dr. Mountford's course my only other interaction with "rhetoric" as a defined concept was in my first-year writing course where the (presumably literature) graduate student teacher assigned us *Gone with the Wind* to read and discuss for the entirety of the semester and then asked us to "rhetorically analyze" the entire book as a timed written final. Details about what this instructor actually taught us about rhetoric or rhetorical methods are fuzzy for two reasons, (1) who can remember anything else when their mind is weighed down by a semester's-worth of Margaret Mitchell's epic tome, and (2) I took this first-year writing course during a particularly barfy first trimester of my pregnancy and am astounded I managed to make it to class at all.

As we proceeded with Foss's book in Dr. Mountford's class, I was astonished to learn there were *many* more methods of rhetorical criticism beyond the singular approach I was provided in first-year writing (FYW). In fact, as it turned out, the FYW method we learned is most attributable to Aristotle, and as Foss specifies, it is *Neo-Aristotelian*—therefore nodding to the Enlightenment's influence on the resurgence of our attention to what the Greeks had to say about rhetoric. As Dr. Mountford instructed, this method is indeed useful for rhetorical studies, but she encouraged us to apply it as a tool best suited to analyze artifacts such as political speeches. This method-to-artifact mapping continued throughout the semester as we traversed the various other methodological options in Foss's book such as Ideological Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Generic Criticism, and (as important to my work as an undergraduate then as it is now) Narrative Criticism.

By the time we arrived at Narrative Criticism I had worked up the courage to approach Dr. Mountford with an idea I had for an artifact: my grandfather Alejandro's stories. I had a small sepia colored photo of my grandfather as a young man kneeling on a dirt road, one knee propped up, dressed in what looked like military fatigues, holding a rifle of some sort, upright and against his propped knee. And I knew, from his stories, stories I was quite literally raised

on (Martinez xxv-xxix), this photo represented more than just WWII-era military propaganda. And I knew, again because of my knowledge of the narratives, Aristotle's method would not be a sufficient enough method to fully encompass and piece apart the intricacies and complexity of this visual artifact in relation to the accompanying narrative artifact, a uniquely Mexican American border narrative that made this photo so much more than what could ever be gleaned by the eye. But Narrative Criticism, as presented by Foss, with its methodological tool set that centers the voice, the teller, would work, I only needed to make sure my chosen artifact, these family stories by my Indigenous-Mexican American grandfather would be accepted as a valid rhetorical artifact by my academic context. Before this point in my academic career, I had not ever merged my rich family stories/cultural rhetorics and ways of knowing with my work in the academy because I had not ever been offered the opportunity. Before this point in my academic career no teacher, professor, curriculum, or assignment had ever communicated to me that my stories, my embodied and lived stories, were valid and important rhetorical artifacts.

Happily, Dr. Mountford loved the idea of me centering my Grampa Alejandro's stories as rhetorical artifact for Narrative Criticism, I got an A on the assignment, and long story short, both Dr. Stoffle and Dr. Mountford wrote me letters of recommendation for graduate programs to anthropology and rhetoric and writing studies graduate programs—clearly rhetoric and writing studies won out—funding, ya know? I never ended up applying to law school. I did, however, end up writing a book founded in legal studies that makes a case for a narrative methodology that centers the voices of minoritized peoples.

PART V: SOME TEACHERLY RETROSPECT

I could spend time in this section reviewing the difficulties and joys I experienced throughout graduate school in pursuit of a methodological outlet for my embodied commitments to minoritized peoples and storytelling—but I won't. My existing body of scholarship² already demonstrates much of this process, so for fear of sounding repetitive I will instead jump into a discussion about learning to be a Cultural Rhetorics scholar and teacher of rhetorical methodologies in turn. In my 2019 *Rhetoric Review* essay, "Core-Coursing Counterstory" I recount my first opportunity to teach a survey of rhetorical histories course—a course similar in conceptualization to the rhetoric course I experienced with Dr. Mountford as recounted above. At this point in my career, I was a new

2 See particularly Martinez, "A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory"; Martinez, *Counterstory*; and Martinez, "The Catharsis for Poison: A Counterstory Retrospective."

tenure-track professor, but not a new teacher, having spent the past seven years of my graduate education teaching FYW and, of course, many units' worth of Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism. Now that I was fresh out of grad school, well placed in a hands-off English department who essentially handed me the reigns of this rhetoric survey to do with as I pleased, I felt a curricular freedom not typical of the graduate student teaching experience; of course, this freedom was simultaneously thrilling and daunting. While on one hand I had matriculated from a program that was known at the time for espousing a mainstream canonical "The Rhetorical Tradition" curriculum, on the other hand I had forged post-coursework pathways that built a network amongst scholars specializing in the new (to me) direction for our field: Cultural Rhetorics. Since this was the direction I wanted to continue to pursue, the question became how do I incorporate the rhetorical education I did have with the rhetorical education I was continuing to pursue? I found my answer where I was taught to find it from the moment I began conducting applied anthropologic research with Dr. Stoffle's team: go to the field, go on site, talk to the people—and in this case the field was the Cultural Rhetorics community (in-person and in-text), the site was the classroom, and the people were my students.

Over the course of ten years with time spent at three universities, I have shaped and honed a course that has many aliases: "Rhetorical Foundations: A Focus on Intercultural and Non-Western Rhetorics," "Rhetoric and Ethics," "Contemporary Rhetorics," "Studies in Modern Rhetoric: Contemporary Rhetorics—Cultural Rhetorics." Despite the variety of names, what has remained consistent for me through the span of these courses is my commitment to a Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy:

Instead of talking for or over a people let people relate their experiences on their own terms.

There are *many* methods of rhetorical analysis/critique—not just the too often unnamed/unidentified Neo-Aristotelian approach.

Stories, the embodied and lived stories of multiply minoritized and marginalized peoples, are valid and important rhetorical artifacts.

Moving from and through these guiding principles I have spent the better half of ten years crafting curriculum (see syllabi in Martinez "Core-Coursing" and *Counterstory* for examples) that offers students primary texts by rhetors and Cultural Rhetorics scholars whose voices and experiences are not traditionally

centered in the rhetorical canon. Inspired by my formative experiences with Foss's text, I have adopted portions of this book because I continue to believe it models for teachers a solid multiple-methods rhetorical curriculum.

Now in its fifth edition, there is surely room for critique of Foss's book (that lends itself to revisions worthy of perhaps a sixth edition?) such as her choice to continue placing Neo-Aristotelean Criticism in the first part of the book, describing this method as the "genesis" of rhetorical criticism, which of course indicates an Enlightenment-influenced Euro-Western orientation of the book/author to the rhetorical canon that Cultural Rhetorics scholars (e.g. Cedillo and Bratta; Cobos et al.; Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab; Sackey et al.) before me and beyond me have done a thorough job of critiquing. In previous scholarship (Martinez 68, 97-98, 121-125) I have joined the call Lisa A. Flores ("Between Abundance") makes for a centering of Racial Rhetorical Criticism, and I believe incorporation of this method into Foss' offerings would greatly enhance the impact and significance of her text, especially within our contemporary times when racial rhetorical methods are more necessary than ever. Recently, upon teaching the Foss text and finding myself critical and wistful for inclusion of chapters that would instruct students on frames like Racial Rhetorical Criticism, I realized something I was interested to try out with my students—something we could very well do ourselves.

PART IV: LET'S WRAP IT UP ALREADY! A FINAL PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

As I mention above, I never really shed my applied anthropology roots. To this day I research from and make meaning from my classroom as a site. For a few years now and a couple publications' worth (Martinez, "Core-Coursing"; Martinez, *Counterstory*) I have argued it is no longer methodologically enough to simply assign "diverse" or Cultural Rhetorics scholarship and read these texts for what they offer as primary texts alone. No matter how nicely the multicultural model is packaged, if you're still assigning students the same tired old Neo-Aristotelian application of tools to every text you assign, it will never matter how diverse, how cutting edge, how fresh your primary texts are—you'll still miss important insights due to the limitations of this lens. If my methodological work as a critical race theorist and counterstoryteller has taught me anything at all, it is that *tools matter*. I know also that tools/methods can be embedded within what may seem to the undiscerning reader just a primary text, when in fact the author is offering insight into analysis of an interesting rhetorical artifact AND the tools/method by which they did the analysis all along. It is then up to us as rigorously engaged rhetorical teachers and/or scholars to *read these essays two-fold*. Let me offer an example.

Angela M. Haas's 2007 essay "Wampum as Hypertext" is a highly regarded, assigned, and cited essay in rhetoric and writing studies—an essay many curriculum builders include on their syllabi as a nod to either American Indian rhetorics, cultural rhetorics, digital rhetorics, or some combination of these three. Haas' essay is excellent in its introduction for an unknowing audience to an Indigenous multimedia and hypertext called wampum (77). While this essay is well loved and, in many cases, widely incorporated into rhetorical studies curriculum, it is most often not fully appreciated for all that Haas offers. Beyond teaching us the rhetorical importance, and for many, the very existence of wampum as a rhetorical artifact worthy and valid of analysis (see the connection here to my own grandfather's stories as artifact?), Haas also offers us a meticulously crafted method of analysis. Her critique engenders aspects of Indigenous epistemologies, digital rhetoric, visual rhetoric, and storying, all braided together to create a methodological lens that she in turn provides the audience toward comprehension of the importance of wampum. At this point of my example, it is important to point out the neo-Aristotelian method is not present in *any* aspect of Haas' analysis of wampum. Why? Because as method-to-artifact associations go, Aristotle (neo or otherwise) has no business framing wampum. Not because it's impossible to conduct a neo-Aristotelian critique of wampum but because details will be *missed*. Epistemologically speaking (and ideologically too for that matter) there are cultural intricacies and complexities to wampum, as Haas so meticulously illustrates throughout her essay, and as much as primary texts are ideologically informed, so too are our methods. Which brings me to my final (for this essay) Cultural Rhetorical Methodological Philosophy:

Read cultural rhetorics texts rigorously and two-fold. Make efforts to learn from cultural rhetorics texts what they offer as rhetorical artifact and as rhetorical method.

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In all, my journey as a student, researcher, anthropologist, critical race theory counterstoryteller, and cultural rhetorics teacher-scholar has been storied. So, I tell stories. It is my hope that these snapshots provide you, my audience with some insight into a path forged sometimes by chance, mistake, and confusion, but that always seemed to right itself due to supportive mentorship and a steady passion to hear from those who are not often listen to. I know I still have much to learn and room to grow, but as things stand, I believe I am on a steady continuum towards realizing my passion as I add to and expand my:

Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy

Instead of talking for or over a people let people relate their experiences on their own terms.

There are many methods of rhetorical analysis/critique—not just the too often unnamed/unidentified Neo-Aristotelian approach.

Stories, the embodied and lived stories of multiply minoritized and marginalized peoples, are valid and important rhetorical artifacts.

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