Wayward Inventions:
He(u)retical Experiments
in Theorizing Service-Learning

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Learning is much closer to invention than verification.
—Gregory Ulmer

Despite the many features common to both endeavors, service-learning has yet to embrace, in any consistent way, a practice long familiar to those in composition studies: the importing of literary and critical theory for the purpose of addressing a variety of disciplinary and institutional questions—or, more exactly, for introducing other contexts within which we might understand old questions in new ways, and possibly generate new questions to guide our inquiries. This reluctance, if that is the right word, may be explainable in part by service-learning’s overwhelming need to attend to the considerable details involved in enacting community-based pedagogies, not to mention the unavoidable problems that arise when teachers are faced with having to coordinate the requirements of their institutions, students, and community partners. And yet, we think that for the most part, service-learning has not sought to understand its own practices by importing perspectives external to those practices. Such a move, while routine among composition scholars (witness the pages of JAC, for example), is largely absent from the current discourse on service-learning.¹

We do not wish, however, to overstate our claim. Service-learning has in recent years, demonstrated that it is hardly indifferent to theoretical concerns. To note but one example, the burgeoning literature of service-learning has, among other things, reprised earlier debates about foundations in literary and composition studies—as evidenced by a lively
exchange about epistemology that emerged in the pages of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (see, in order, Liu, Richman, and Tucker). Predictably, and appropriately, those who argue about founda-
tions in the context of service-learning tend to draw extensively upon the
traditions of pragmatism. We observe, for example, that service-learning
practitioners in English studies have relied heavily on American pragmatist
thinkers as sources for helping us understand the larger meanings of
what we do. To be sure, there is a discernible range in our appropriations.
That is, we have found value in American pragmatists as early as George
Herbert Mead (see, for example, Rhoads) and as recent as Cornel West
(see, most notably, Flower). But it is John Dewey who remains at the
forefront of our theoretical discussions about service-learning.

And for good reason. Dewey’s example of how to think instrumentally
about schools, publics, democracy, and knowledge; his emphasis on
reflection as characteristic of all learning; his naming of the local
community as the ultimate source for his Great Community; his belief in
an experimentalist method applicable to *social* problems—in all such
respects, Dewey has proven himself invaluable to our attempts to theorize
service-learning (for a very small sampling, see Deans, Giles, Giles and
Eyler, Julier, Ehrlich). Certainly, without Dewey, the sometimes
(over)heard criticism of service-learning as a theoretically weak enter-
prise might have more credibility and substance.

Yet, for those who wish to think imaginatively about the theoretical
implications of service-learning, as we intend to do here, such a thorough-
going allegiance to American pragmatism (in general), and Deweyan
experimentalism (in particular), has its dangers. Robert Tucker has
recently observed, for example, that those who enlist pragmatism on
behalf of service-learning frequently do so with the intention of locating
a stand-in or substitute for foundational epistemology. What results is the
paradoxical situation wherein pragmatism, as eager understudy, grabs the
spotlight to perform the role of a “rival epistemology to *replace*
foundationalism” rather than, as Tucker would have it, “a perspective that
encourages us to avoid epistemology as a subject of discussion” (5). It
should go without saying that attempts to *ground* service-learning prac-
tices in pragmatist thought might not be warmly received by Dewey who,
in this revised scheme of things, comes across, ironically, as something
of an epistemological father figure for service-learning.

Nonetheless, if as Tucker claims, pragmatism “is not epistemic [but]
heuristic,” then we are obliged to ask what exactly is it that we discover
through our embrace of pragmatism (11). The pragmatist answer to this
question is that we learn the consequences of our experiments: the results of our tentative hypotheses formulated to determine what works best for us in this situation, solving this problem, achieving this goal. For Tucker, then, "experimentation is the lifeblood of a thriving service-learning community" (12). And we think Dewey would agree, since the inductive empiricism that marks his brand of experimentalism is happily attuned to the everyday practices of service-learning teachers and administrators, as several commentators before us have already pointed out.

And yet, Dewey's experimentalism is limited in ways that we think are somewhat confining. Dewey takes considerable pains, for example, to insist that our experiments arise out of a shared need to address issues, challenges, and problems as they emerge in specific contexts. What Dewey does not sanction is the application of predetermined solutions external to those contexts. This point is made in, among other places, Dewey's observations on the conventional distinction between pure and applied science—the latter popularly understood to be little more than a sullied rendition of the former. Disputing conventional wisdom, Dewey argues that "science is converted into knowledge in its honorable and emphatic sense only in application" (Public 174). On this matter, in fact, Dewey forwards his own distinction, lamenting that current applications of scientific knowledge are "rather to human concerns than in them":

That is, it [scientific knowledge] is external, made in the interests of its consequences for a possessing and acquisitive class. Application in life would signify that science was absorbed and distributed; that it was the instrumentality of that common understanding and thorough communication which is the precondition of the existence of a genuine and effective public. (174)

Here, again, we are reminded of Dewey's resistance to all external application—in this illustration, of a certain sort of scientific knowledge, but elsewhere of such fictions as timeless principles, undisputed dogmas, universal techniques, and so on. A cornerstone of Deweyan experimentalism, then, is that it always and only occurs within the context of any given ensemble of practices that are, for Dewey, neither beholden to, or authorized by, anything external to those practices.²

But what if this were not so? What if we took an experimentalist approach not only to our practices, but to our theoretical understandings of practice? What if we looked upon theory as a repository for illuminating, outside perspectives on what we do rather than a foundational threat,
which, because it does not arise out of our immediate practical concerns, has nothing important to say to us about those concerns? What if we encouraged a theoretical pluralism, one that offered us alternative perspectives on service-learning? Is there any kind of experimentalism that might cultivate such outside perspectives on service-learning, and do so unapologetically? Do we have models for a kind of theoretical experimentalism?

We think that Gregory Ulmer's complex, multivolume, invention project, *heuretics*, offers precisely this sort of experimentalism. In his book of the same title, Ulmer's opening sentence speaks directly to the creative possibilities of theory: "Theory is assimilated into the humanities in two principal ways—by critical interpretation and by artistic experiment" (3). While in English studies and elsewhere, the former of these two understandings, hermeneutics, has been dominant, the latter approach, heuretics, has received little attention. When, for example, we identify theory with foundationalism (as we routinely do) in composition and literary studies, and then proceed to dismiss theory's naiveté for having epistemological pretensions, we forget that theory does other things too. For Ulmer, the most important of these other things is that theory enables us to imagine the writing of alternative texts:

The relevant question for heuretic reading is not the one guiding criticism (according to the theories of Freud, Marx, Wittgenstein, Derrida, and others: What might be the meaning of an existing work?) but one guiding a generative experiment: Based on a given theory, how might another text be composed? (4-5)

Following Ulmer's lead, we might ask: How might we compose another text (or other texts) of service-learning, a text that originates not out of our experiments with current practices, but one that arises out of our experiments with theories external to those practices, out of theoretical curiosity?

We think that service-learning can only stand to benefit from heuretic inquiry—that is, from experimentation with other metaphors, other perspectives, other contexts for understanding that theory provides. In the following pages, then, we offer three heuretic experiments. We freely admit that none of the explorations below have yet to be fully developed or elaborated. However, we offer the following starting points, invitations, if you prefer, to rethink service-learning from three points of view...
that may both illuminate our understanding of current practices and, at the same time, suggest new ones for the future.

A Rhizomatic Understanding of Service-Learning

Many institutions have recently transformed small, independent service-learning projects into large administrative programs. Yet, the benefits and hazards for service-learning programs when they become institutionalized have not been researched or theorized extensively. In “Developing Campus-Community Relationships,” Catherine Gugerty and Erin Swezey put this problem more succinctly. They admonish service-learning programs for failing to address the complexities of power in service-learning partnerships. Thus, they note that “although most institutions of higher education have the best intentions when they embark on service-learning programs, their lack of attention to power differentials and to ethnocentric values creates harm and distrust in many communities” (95). In short, institutions of higher learning risk becoming benevolent tyrants who injure the community by trying to save it.

To theorize this problem, we might do well to articulate it in dialectical language. Thus stated, most institutions of higher education conceive power within a service-learning partnership as teleological, emanating from a single source—a teacher, a service-learning administrator, or, more commonly, a presidential or regent’s initiative—and from this locus branching out into the community. From an institutional perspective, a final goal in many of these partnerships is not only for the university to meet legislative mandates for public service to the community, region, or state, but also for the institution to arrive at a greater understanding of itself and its place within the community. Thus, the institution is enriched through something of a colonizing enterprise, no matter how well intentioned such an enterprise may seem to individual students, teachers, and administrators.

Although the institution’s greater understanding of itself within the community is no doubt laudable, such an understanding becomes exploitative when power is viewed as unidirectional, flowing from a root source to its branches, rather than multidirectional, flowing back and forth from several different nodes, which include, but are not limited to, the institution. This unidirectional flow of power creates a clearly identified self (the institution or participants within the institution) and other (the larger community). This self gains a greater understanding of itself as it interacts, appropriates, and projects itself onto the other. As a result, Gugerty and Swezey warn that well-meaning service-learning partn-
ships often result in deficiency models wherein the "lacking" community partner becomes an extension of the institution. In their view, then, "it is essential that institutions not regard communities merely as teaching and research laboratories, an approach that assumes a false hierarchy of power and perpetuates an attitude of institutional hierarchy" (95).

There are several different solutions to this dialectical problem, three of which we will quickly review here for their possibilities and their shortcomings, and the fourth of which will be discussed more extensively. The first three are Mary Louise Pratt's "Contact Zone," Gugerty and Swezey's "role reversal," and Joseph Harris and Susan Miller's "city." Increasingly, service-learning scholars have been exploring the potentials of metaphor. Lori Varlotta, for example, asks readers to consider textual metaphors, especially as they are expressed in the language of our pedagogies, such as "the classroom as text," "experience as text," and "service as text." The textual metaphor for service-learning is a useful one (see our opening discussion, for example), especially for compositionists, because textual metaphors, Varlotta argues, point our attentions to the crucial relationship between language and the service-learning experience. In a different vein, Cynthia Novak and Lorie Goodman, as well as Elizabeth Hayes and Sondra Cuban, note that border metaphors, especially as they are expressed in Pratt's "Contact Zone," enable us to envision service-learning as a cross-cultural experience. These works, though small in number, suggest a growing need to cast service-learning within the appropriate language.

In her landmark address to MLA, Pratt theorizes the intersubjective space that occurs when communities overlap. She argues that the hegemonic power within this space must responsibly acknowledge and facilitate the "other." This can be a teacher acknowledging specific insights of her students from their perspectives, or a colonial power acknowledging subversive acts and the reasons for those subversive acts in its colonized citizens. The result, Pratt hopes, is that power will begin to shift from the hegemonic actor to the "other" when the other is no longer seen as such. Although Pratt's understanding of this space and its power dynamic is hopeful, it limits the relationship of the actors to one possibility. That is, the different relationships that may occur within a "contact zone" can involve, but are not always limited to, a hegemonic self with its other.

Gugerty and Swezey identify what might be seen as a variation on Pratt's hegemonic self and other: the role reversal. They argue that
There needs to be a role reversal for both the service-learning educator and the community service provider. The educators need to take the time to immerse themselves in a direct service experience, preferably where the students will be or are currently involved. And the service provider in turn should become the teacher and take time to share with students the knowledge he or she has gained from the organization. (102)

The role reversal places hegemony temporarily with the other. Bakhtin theorized this reverse dialectic as carnival in his *Rabelais and His World*. Although a temporary reversal, the very fact that power is reversed shakes loose the rigidity of the relationship, allowing a new dynamic to emerge. Like Pratt, however, Gugerty and Swezey's "role reversal" limits power relationships to a singular dynamic, one in which there is a clearly identified self whose power flows to the other. (Even in Gugerty and Swezey's "role reversal," wherein the flow of power is temporarily reversed and yet remains unidirectional, there is still seen a clearly identified self that ultimately regains its hegemony).

Joseph Harris and Susan Miller offer an alternative to the first two solutions in their "community as city" metaphor. Harris and Miller identify the city as the public space where many different individuals are thrown together. Yet, in this configuration, individuals do not identify themselves with the city proper, but rather with various smaller communities of which they are a part. Harris and Miller's move then is to identify several nodes of power that exist within a large community, not just the singular hegemonic self and its other offered by Pratt, Gugerty, and Swezey. Like a drop of mercury that upon touching the ground breaks off into several little droplets, the city represents a collection of several different relationships of power rather than just one. Harris and Miller, unfortunately, do not theorize how these different nodes of power interact. In fact, Harris is almost defiant in offering any interaction among these nodes of power that might result in a hegemonic self with its other. Quoting rock-critic Lester Bangs, he emphatically states that he wants "no Jesuses in my promised land" (107). As a result, the city metaphor, too, becomes a limited way to theorize the various relationships that take place within service-learning.

While it is tempting to feel that we have exhausted all possible solutions, we would like to offer Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "rhizome" as a theory that will address the dialectical concerns broadly defined above and that builds on the strengths of the other solutions without falling into the same problems. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze...
and Guattari seek to theorize beyond the dialectical models of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They note that the philosophies of Frege, Hegel, and Marx identified the movement of power within the unidirectional direction of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This movement originally emanates from the self and its desire to understand itself by projecting itself onto the other. Through a process of negation and differentiation with the other, the self works through a process that eventually results in a total understanding of itself. For Hegel, it is the Absolute that works itself through this process; for Marx, it is humanity. Deleuze and Guattari go on to note that the traditional metaphor for this process is the root-tree. The tree emanates from a single source, the root, out to its multiple and differentiated branches.

Deleuze and Guattari respond to nineteenth- and twentieth-century dialectics with a theory that acknowledges, but attempts to go beyond, traditional dialectics. They argue that power must first be viewed as emanating from several origins rather than one. In a manner that comes strikingly close to Harris and Miller, they note that larger communities are often an uneasy conglomeration of smaller, independent communities. Yet, moving beyond what we see theorized in Harris and Miller, they argue that power flows multi-directionally among the different nodes of power. In short, power becomes a great deal more fluid under Deleuze and Guattari. And because there is no clear origin, nor a unidirectional flow of power, there is no uniform self and other, as well. Rather, different nodes can act simultaneously as self and other depending upon the particular context. Deleuze and Guattari name their theory "the rhizome" after bulbous plants like grasses and weeds in which there is no clear beginning, middle, and end. Yet, they argue, rhizomes are not limited to plants: "Even some animals are [rhizomatic], in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers" (6–7). We hardly mean to suggest that hegemonic powers do not exist, or that power does not sometimes flow in a unidirectional path. Rather, we want to suggest that hegemony and unidirectional power are but one possibility in a complex web of relationships.

In applying the language of the rhizome to that of service-learning, we can begin to theorize the diverse communities that bear upon the service-learning experience, and the diffuse power that moves freely and complexly among them. The rhizome allows us to acknowledge that there are
several nodes, several bulbs and tubers, from where and to where power circulates. Not only is power located with an institutional head, such as the increasingly prevalent campus service-learning “director,” but also, and simultaneously, with the community head outside the university, and most immediately with the classroom head in the figure of the teacher. Many well-intentioned students and instructors unfortunately begin by conceptualizing the power structure as top-down, in part because they experience it that way as it might be handed down from a service-learning director to the instructor to the students, and in part because many projects begin by trying “to repair” a deficiency within the community outside the university. They fail to recognize or acknowledge power structures that exist outside their institutions. By identifying the rhizomatic nature of many communities, all participants can begin to recognize, appreciate, and play upon multiple organizations of power.

Likewise the rhizome becomes an important means of visualizing how power flows among the different nodes. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the rhizome itself encompasses all types of power relationships. Within specific nodes, power dynamics might initially result in the dichotomous struggle that Pratt attempts to theorize and eventually overcome. For example, within the classroom and within the communities where the service-learning project might take place, students will most likely find themselves as the lessers among greaters. In the case of the classroom, the initial hegemonic power is the instructor; in the communities, it is the various contact people where the project takes place. However, as the project develops, and as the students work closely within the different groups, those spaces become more collaborative and more intersubjective. Yet, even then there will also be spaces where and moments when the students feel themselves to be the source of hegemonic power—spaces and moments, in other words, that exist apart from the classroom or the community where the students gather to continue work on their project. These different nodes (and the relationships that develop within them) are sometimes at odds and sometimes in agreement, but always changing, always developing. Similarly, there are many primary and secondary relationships that develop, relationships that change the identities of the participants as well as relationships where identities are properly constant. Using students again as an example, we might think of those spaces, such as the project site, where their identities are beneficially altered, and those spaces, like a coffee shop, where they meet to discuss the project in spaces where changing identities are negotiated and stabilized.
The formalizing of service-learning programs within institutions will inevitably lead to more complex relationships between the different participants. As these relationships become more complex, service-learning scholars and practitioners must theorize their roles and the institution’s roles in an equally complex manner that will avoid oversimplification and reduction of service-learning projects. This should suggest a theory that includes, but also moves beyond traditional dialectics so that the relationships, particularly the power relationships, of the different participants are fluid and multi-directional.

An Ecofeminist Understanding of Service-Learning

In her attempt to outline an ecofeminist citizenship, Catriona Sandilands observes that such a project must concern itself with the “politicization of marginalized knowledges of gender and nature, the insistence that degraded and undervalued ways of being in the world must be heard in public and understood as rich, complex, and satisfying for the long term health of humans and other beings” (230). By drawing a connection between ecofeminist theory and a more active citizenry, she points to ways that ecofeminism may serve as a rich theoretical complement to the continued development of service-learning pedagogies. We want to explore here what Sandilands might suggest to us about this relationship, and we begin our discussion within the context of the longstanding divisions in English studies between literature and composition.

As many feminist and ecofeminist scholars assert, an essentialist perspective toward knowledge can ultimately undermine the potential for collective agency among peoples, publics, disciplinary communities, and the like. Sandilands, for instance, argues that a more democratic public sphere cannot be realized if “knowledges are essentialized; the point is not only to show their particularity and situated practice, but to orient their appearance to the potential creation of commonality” (230). Her comments unwittingly speak to what may be the foremost hurdle in joining ecofeminism and service-learning—namely, that within English departments, the former would most likely be represented by a literary critical approach; and the latter, because of its pedagogical emphasis, would most often be associated with composition. Once again, the all-too-familiar division between literature and composition is reprised, even though ecofeminist understandings of knowledge help us see that it should not be.

A case in point: In their recent survey of ecocomposition pedagogies, Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser further reinforce this disciplinary
divide. Amid their comprehensive look at ecocomposition pedagogies—an overview that at virtually every turn demonstrates the inter-connectedness that characterizes ecocomposition—the reader finds a surprisingly rigid distinction between ecocomposition and ecocriticism. The authors argue that "ecocomposition should direct its focus not to literary criticism or even textual interpretation in the larger sense, but should evolve as its own inquiry into the relationship between the production of written discourse and the environment" (577). Along the same lines, they rehearse commonplace binaries of theory and practice, literature and composition, and classroom-based and experiential pedagogies to support their argument for not integrating ecocomposition and ecocriticism. Dobrin and Weisser thus claim that

Ecocomposition's focus on discourse takes in more than just textual interpretation; it looks at discourse as the most powerful, indeed, perhaps the only, tool for social and political change. . . . Hence, ecocomposition's split with ecocriticism comes from the will to examine and participate in the activity of textual production rather than to engage in textual interpretation. (577–78)

The cost of maintaining this stringent divide between literature and composition would seem to run counter to the very connectedness and interactivity that distinguish ecodiscourses. In limiting textual interpretation to ecocriticism and textual production to ecocomposition, the authors would seem to advocate a strict partitioning of what, together, might constitute an effective repertoire of transformative literacy practices. One result of reinforcing our existing disciplinary divisions, then, may be to diminish our effectiveness in promoting the sorts of democratic changes that ecodiscourses can yield. In keeping with an ecofeminist approach to the interrelated quality of all knowledges, service-learning may be the linchpin by which we may overcome some of our most treasured dichotomies: of reading and writing, of theory and practice, of research and pedagogy. Joining service-learning to ecofeminist critical theory gives us a new perspective by which to consider both and, in doing so, provides us with one example of the potential lost when we do not allow interconnectivity to be a part of our disciplinary identity.

Place and Knowing
Closely tied to democratic ideas of how learning happens, ecofeminism and service-learning both interrogate conventional notions of where
learning happens. The ecofeminist emphasis on place reveals a primary way that an ecofeminist-informed theory of service-learning could further expand our concepts of knowledge and knowing. We most often regard place, for example, as a figurative concept. That is, we routinely use spatial metaphors to describe “subject positions” within larger “social locations,” demarcated by “borders,” and “margins,” all of which are defined by (and defining of) issues pertaining to gender, race, or class. However, a strict, metaphorical knowledge of place often denies that physical realities influence the particular, local knowledges that arise from our natural environments.

Christopher Preston reminds us of the interplay between our “synthetic knowledge” of place—the socially constructed, ideological dimensions of place—and the physical place itself by arguing that “knowledge of the world is grounded by the landscapes that surround us” (215). Preston cautions, however, that “knowledge is not causally determined by landscape, but the constructions we call knowledge [and hence those that we privilege or reject] do not float free of the natural world.” In other words, for Preston, the environment is the ground for, not the cause of, a knowledge shaped (but not wholly determined) by place (215). In keeping with ecofeminist principles, Preston urges us to see relationships—of the local and the global, of the natural and the social, of the embodied and the discursive. An epistemology of this sort, for example, drives the Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP), a project designed by Calvin College to bring service-learning into the social sciences, one of the few university disciplines in which service-learning remains underrepresented. By attending to the importance of place, the CEAP program promotes a “science of local knowledge” to put in dialogue with the universality of knowledge often suggested by natural sciences pedagogies. Grounding service in place, as Preston suggests, yields a “local understanding. . . . When we depend on our understanding of the places where we live, we gain a greater understanding of who we are, the intricacies of our place, and or responsibilities as citizens of these places” (Curry, Heffner, and Warners 58, 59).

In its emphasis on place, ecofeminism again reveals itself to have the potential to complement service-learning in English. That is, by understanding the importance of place to inquiry, we are given a different way to understand service-learning’s emphasis on engaging the local community—investigating its particular knowledges, learning from them and adding to them. Service-learning seems especially well-suited to help get us beyond the “view from nowhere” that informs so many of our received
knowledges. And it moves us beyond such knowledges because it keeps our attentions directed toward the local and the immediately significant within all of our environments—natural, social, and professional communities. Ecofeminism thus invites us to consider the relationship between place as environment and place as community, and how this relationship may be manifested in our service-learning pedagogies.

To that end, because service-learning pedagogies always include some reflection, when such pedagogies are joined to ecofeminist theory, we are thus encouraged to undertake the kind of critical analysis of knowledge and knowledge production required of activist pedagogies. An epistemology that posits knowledge as something emerging out of the places we inhabit, as something that happens between people in those places, as something mutable, as something relative to the language(s) we use, as something aware of its own local particularities—such a knowledge seems compatible with both an ecofeminist-inspired theory of service-learning and our goals for students in English.

Reading and Rewriting the Word and the World

In *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Paulo Freire and Myles Horton recollect their individual development as readers. Speaking of his reading experiences, Freire observes that

Books give me a certain theoretical instrument with which I can make the reality more clear vis-à-vis myself. . . . This is the relationship that I try to establish between reading words and reading the world. . . . The process of reading reality in which we are enveloped demands, undoubtedly, a certain theoretical understanding of what is happening in reality. . . . Books have to do with this reading of reality. (31)

Perhaps the most significant contribution that Freire makes to our present discussion of service-learning and disciplinarity—and one that ecofeminism offers us as well—is an understanding of service-learning as a theory of activist reading and writing. Service-learning offers students the chance to bring together academic reading and social reading, revealing to students the dynamic relationship between these two orientations. It thus has the potential to show students not only how to move from the word to the world, but also how to move from the world to the word. Like Freire, we want our students to be able to forge relationships between reading texts and reading reality.
Though her approach is not specifically one that draws upon ecofeminist theory, Cathy Comstock shows us a certain approach to reading literature that might have implications for social change. As Comstock points out, "The intensive personal engagement and evocative language made possible through literature can be complemented with a structural analysis of overarching socioeconomic influences and forces potentially at work" (84). Ecofeminist literary criticism draws attention to the activist dimensions of reading by facilitating students' understanding of literary texts as revealing of social hierarchies, specifically, power relations between men and women, and between humans and the non-human; hence, it offers students yet another way to more critically examine texts as embodiments of ideology. In pedagogical terms, what is suggested by ecofeminist theory, as well as by Comstock's pedagogy, is a model of service-learning in the literature classroom. This model includes a different conception of reflection, one that encourages an expanded definition of the personal to include not only subjective experience and aesthetic appreciation but also an awareness of how power relations at all levels shape our understanding of who we imagine ourselves to be.

Returning to Sandilands' vision of ecofeminist citizenship, we can begin to look upon the reflective writing generated in service-learning classrooms as central to the development of a more inclusive, democratic, and, yes, ecofeminist public sphere. We must, Sandilands argues, expand our listening to hear and thereby legitimize "other expressions," which require a "reconsideration of who 'we' as citizens are" (228). Drawing upon the work of Iris Marion Young, Sandilands argues that traditional conceptions of citizenship "banish to the private certain modes of thinking, speaking, and acting that are not only highly important, but are systematically gendered, racialized, and cultured" (228). Ecofeminist theory helps us recognize that institutionally "othered" genres, such as reflective writing, are not just tools for self-understanding, but are legitimate and useful forms of public communication. What Sandilands calls for is an expanded understanding of what constitutes democratic speech. Sandilands asserts that:

[I]n order to conceive of a more inclusive practice of democratic speech, we need to welcome practices of storytelling, greeting, and rhetoric, not as a way of including more and different speakers but as a way of genuinely questioning the ways in which different practices of speech engender different understandings of the world, and of learning how to listen differently to the stories that shape our common world. (228)
The reflective writing created by our students in service-learning courses in literature and composition can make valuable use of these alternate genres and discourses. Ecofeminism thus might encourage us to consider students' reflective writing as having a public function, a discursive role in civic life.

Like service-learning, "ecofeminist pedagogy can be interpreted as a critical praxis" (Houde and Bullis 150). And it seems that much of what informs ecofeminist praxis is restoration—not of the unity but of the interconnectedness of things and therefore the possibility for relationships between and among them. This repair work is undertaken not for the sake of diminishing difference but for the goal of demarcating "difference for the sake of exchange" (Rose 314). On the level of disciplinary identity, then, an ecofeminist theory of service-learning responds well to the divisions and dichotomies that have come to characterize the field of English studies. We are encouraged to rethink and revise our differences, realizing that within the theories and practices that seemingly divide us also lie transformative possibilities. Ecofeminism requires of us that we make connections—among each other, our disciplinary communities, our multiple knowledges, our words and our worlds.

A Habermasian Understanding of Service-Learning
In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas details the historical conditions accompanying what he calls the bourgeois public sphere in its course of development. In tracing the emergence and demise of the public sphere, Habermas attempts to delineate "the material conditions . . . for a rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions" (Calhoun 1). In addressing this problem, Habermas discovers the bourgeois public sphere arising out of notions of civil society and "representative publicness" to be found in the European High Middle Ages but later evolving along with the emergence of the modern depersonalized state and the early trade capitalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere is traceable, in particular, to two important and related developments. First, Habermas points to the reconstitution of the family as a private, intimate sphere—a cloistered domain of human relations ostensibly immune from market forces and one therefore free to develop its own separate rules, unencumbered, in large measure, by external purposes or needs. What the reconstituted family actually offered, according to Habermas, was a new subjectivity
founded upon the idea of something essentially human that eluded the overdeterminations of economic, official (or any other kind of vested) status that might otherwise limit or consummate the human subject. The intimate sphere thus provided a locus from which a critique of state or other official authorities, of rank and status difference might originate. It suggested the possibility of such a realm, and it thus served as a necessary forerunner for the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere.

The other model that Habermas points to is the world of letters in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Habermas, the appearance of opinion and literary journals, of commodified news, of salons in Paris and coffeehouses in London—all contributed to the emergence of a discursive space set aside for purposes of rational-critical debate. In this way, the literary public sphere is, for Habermas, a prototype for the broader, more politically interested bourgeois public sphere of the late eighteenth century, the summit of its historical ascendancy.

What, then, are the hallmarks of the public sphere? First, notes Habermas, while the bourgeois public sphere never assumed an equality of status among participants, it did assume that such differences in rank, wealth, and social status could be temporarily set aside—or to use the more familiar term, "bracketed"—for purposes of rational discussion. The presumed value of doing so lay in the notion that ideas, debates, propositions, and so on could be judged best on their purely argumentative merits, uncompromised by the external identity of the participants involved. A second feature of the bourgeois public sphere resided in the expansion of possible topics for discussion, and thus of interpretive freedom, the result of a gradual loosening of ecclesiastical and state monopolies on the received ways in which discourses were distributed and regulated. A third feature of the bourgeois public sphere could be found in its principle of inclusiveness. Habermas allows that any given instance of the public sphere might very well be exclusive in its membership. Nonetheless, Habermas observes, "it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public" and thus came to represent a new, bourgeois version of representative publicness (36–37).

In the nineteenth century, the blurring of strict demarcations between state and society, between the previously distinct realms of public and private, made the old concept of a public sphere largely untenable, obsolete. Received notions of a general, common interest were sup-
planted by models of "fairly negotiated compromise among [competing] interests" (Calhoun 22). In the last half century, Habermas points to a culture of passive consumerism as the most likely substitute for a locus of rational-critical debate, an actuality which effectively renders the public sphere "an arena for advertising" promulgated by a mass media primarily designed for orchestrating consent (Calhoun 26).

**Criticisms of the Habermasian Public Sphere**

Apart from a few notable exceptions—John Trimbur, Susan Wells, and most recently, Christian Weisser—compositionists have been slow to appropriate Habermas for our disciplinary purposes. And with the possible exception of Weisser, compositionists have not looked to Habermas for ways to reconsider service-learning pedagogies and their larger implications. Yet Habermas, we believe, can contribute to our present thinking about service-learning, especially if we look at certain criticisms leveled at his work. Let us explain.

Many critics point to a certain methodological inconsistency to be found in Habermas. They point out how Habermas’s exemplary historicist scholarship is compromised by its apparently normative intentions. Such critics observe that Habermas is not merely examining the conditions that allowed for the historical emergence of the bourgeois public sphere; he is also making an argument for its restoration in our moment, and perhaps worse, for *all* moments. Thus, for many critics, behind Habermas’ detailed historical scholarship in an idealized public sphere, a public sphere that somehow manages to transcend historical determination altogether. Needless to say, this sort of idealism is more than a little hard to square with his Frankfurt School Marxism. And even non-Marxist critics, such as Richard Rorty, part ways with Habermas when, as Rorty claims, Habermas “goes transcendental” (173). Clearly, many readers of Habermas reject the tagged-on idealism of what remains otherwise a remarkable work of historicist scholarship.

For our service-learning students, however, what’s tagged-on is not idealism but history. Our students, we observe, have plenty of idealistic hopes and desires; nor can we ever imagine wanting them *not* to embrace and act upon those ideals. What our students typically do not have, though, is an historical perspective on the very concerns that their ideals seek to address. In our service-learning classes, then, we need to discover ways to cultivate historical understandings of their service-learning experiences. We need to ask our students to ask of themselves: “Why are my ideals necessary in the first place?” “What is it exactly that brought
about the human and social needs that my community partner tries to meet?" "Beyond the service that I perform, what would it actually require to solve the problems that my organization tries to address?"

Moving outside of our classrooms, and into the larger, structural questions we might pose, we could thus encourage a variety of oral and institutional narratives that attempt to situate the history of individual agencies and organizations within the larger history of our neighborhoods and communities. This might be but one way to foster a much needed historical sense that, in our experience, is largely missing from the intellectual life of our students.

What we are suggesting, then, is that rather than chide Habermas for his vexing blend of historicism and idealism, we ought to take advantage of it, and therefore look for ways to reveal to students how their most dearly held ideals are shaped by forces larger than themselves—larger in both the local and structural senses. Unlike Habermas, however, who subsumed the ideal as part of his historicism, we need to look for ways to subsume the historical as part of our students' idealism. Habermas, it seems to us, has provided a model—a model for the possibility that historicist method can be wedded to idealistic motivation, a model for the possibility that our students can acquire an historical understanding of their ideals, without the accompanying demand that they surrender those ideals to a totalizing historicism.

A second criticism of Habermas centers on his apparent indifference to praxis, to action. This is the criticism leveled at Habermas by Harry Boyte who, echoing criticisms of such feminist critics such as Mary Ryan, Geoff Eley, and Nancy Fraser, claims that Habermas' notion of the public sphere turns its back on the subaltern, popular, decentered publics “created through a turbulent, provisional, and open-ended process of struggle, change, and challenge” (344). But, as Boyte points out, even many of Habermas' severest critics share with Habermas a tendency to separate public discourse from public action. What kind of rational-critical argument is even possible, Boyte asks, if “common action is separated from public debate?” What is the quality of our public discourse if it is wholly divorced from civic responsibility? (345).

For Boyte, a public sphere that shuns praxis, that excludes action from rational-critical debate, is a public sphere that reproduces the traditional knowledge endorsed by formal schooling—distanced, analytical, and socially uncommitted knowledges. Worse yet, by assuming that public involvement is irrelevant to public debate, by ignoring the rich
problem-solving traditions of American democracy, the Habermasian public sphere ultimately renders citizens into spectators.

_Possibilities and Some Redefinitions_

But it is precisely here, in the space of this critical oversight, where we may glimpse something of how service-learning can contribute to our still developing understanding of the contemporary public sphere. Following Boyte’s lead, we might imagine a revised notion of the public sphere that incorporates what service-learning has always embraced as one of its pedagogical cornerstones—namely, the action/reflection dialectic that Tom Deans employs to establish a linchpin between the theories of Freire and Dewey in order to examine the importance of each for service-learning pedagogy. Building upon the action/reflection dialectic, service-learning may have something important to offer critical discussions about how best to describe the intellectual work performed by students and teachers involved in service-learning projects.

To offer but one example: If Habermas is right in claiming that present-day versions of the public sphere are utterly diminished in their capacity to provide a space for rational critical-debate; and, similarly, if Boyte is right in claiming that Habermas (along with most of his critics) divorces public debate from public action, then recent discussions of the current role of the “public intellectual” become rather beside the point, for the public intellectual, at least for Habermas, has no authentic sphere in which to engage authentic rational-critical debate; for Boyte, the public intellectual has no sphere within which to connect public debate with public action.

Yet, there may be another possibility. If we take our cue from the action/praxis dialectic so fundamental to service-learning pedagogies, we may be inspired to rethink what we mean by the term “public intellectual.” And if we do, we are likely to arrive at one of two conclusions: we will understand the need for a more inclusive definition, as suggested by Ellen Cushman, or we will understand the need for an additional term altogether, as suggested by one of us. We prefer the latter.

As one of us has argued elsewhere, we think the term _community intellectual_ better captures the sort of intellectual work service-learning practitioners—students and teachers alike—routinely perform in their local neighborhoods and communities. Certainly, as Linda Flower has shown, service-learning projects can, and do, entail the creation of public spaces for discussion of local issues. But they also entail much more:
issue advocacy, human services, information centers, shelters, crisis intervention, sites for community-based inquiry, and so on. In other words, service-learning pedagogies lead us to a recognition of those “other publics and other intellectuals whose efforts, while often unheralded, make an authentic difference in the lived lives of our neighbors” (Farmer 204).

Until such time as those other publics and other intellectuals are named, we do not think it possible to bring different kinds of intellectual work into relationship with one another. Therefore, in placing our alternate term, *community intellectuals*, against the more familiar *public intellectual*, we hope to reiterate, by analogy, the action/reflection dialectic that characterizes service-learning pedagogies. In so doing, moreover, we hope to enlarge our discipline’s conventional understandings of intellectual work to include both debate and the many varieties of community participation while, at the same time, offering a new, more favorably informed understanding of what service-learning is, or may yet become.

**Heuretics, Hermeneutics, and Service-Learning**

At the beginning of our article, we tried to establish the need to get beyond, or outside of, pragmatist restrictions on what counts as acceptable modes of theorizing service-learning. To this end, we called upon Gregory Ulmer’s *heuretics*, because in Ulmer’s emphasis on the creative (if not always poetic) value of theorizing, we found a different kind of experimentalism—an experimentalism that originated in theoretical curiosity rather than in the need to solve problems or address issues. As our readers can tell by now, our experiments in theorizing often led us to ways to reconsider some of the ongoing challenges facing service-learning teachers and administrators, but we were not originally motivated to solve the many problems confronted everyday by service-learning practitioners. Rather, we wanted to find out what might happen if we considered service-learning through perspectives distinct from those emerging out of direct experience. We understood that our project was both an inventional experiment, as well as a heretical one (in the original Greek sense of that word: *hairesikos*, able to choose). Still, we think it crucial that service-learning has such choices, that service-learning (like composition studies in general) be free to understand its own practices by importing perspectives external to those practices.

We would like to close, then, by restoring to our heuretical enterprise what Ulmer identifies as the other motivating purpose of theory—
namely, hermeneutics, or theory's critical, interpretive function. Some time ago, for example, Terry Eagleton pointed out that the need to theorize occurs when existing practices undergo some perceived crisis of confidence in their own legitimacy, when "taken-for-granted activities begin to falter, log-jam, come unstuck, run into trouble," and so on (26). Theory thus becomes necessary on a large scale "when the traditional rationales which have silently underpinned our daily practices stand in danger of being discredited, and need either to be revised or discarded" (26). If Eagleton is right—and we think he is—then theory itself is obviously both a political and historical practice. And if, in turn, this conclusion is true, then calls for a more fully theorized understanding of service-learning must speak to some felt sense within our community that service-learning, as it is presently conceived, is a repertoire of practices on the threshold of some vaguely perceived crisis.

We think this is, indeed, the case. The crisis facing service-learning, however, is not one of imminent extinction but of imminent co-option. At the institutional level, service-learning programs are becoming more established, more comfortably situated within the panoply of university-wide, administratively endorsed programs. As such, they enjoy a certain institutional visibility, to be sure, but a visibility that may be more directed toward public relations than public or pedagogical commitments. For state public universities in particular, service-learning programs may be especially well-suited to function as a kind of low-maintenance showcase for evidence that the institution is keeping its legislative promise to serve the citizens of the state. Additionally, service-learning may be too readily construed as something like advanced vocational education, that is, as a curriculum option composed entirely of practica and internship programs that offer free labor to the private sector while, at the same time, provide an "authentic" educational experience for students. Worse than this depleted understanding of service-learning, student organizations, teachers, and university administrators alike may be tempted simply to collapse service-learning into any number of other "volunteer" opportunities sponsored by the particular institution. In all such respects, service-learning is vulnerable to being profoundly compromised by the very institution that sustains it.

But service in general—and, by implication, service-learning in particular—are both in peril of being co-opted by even larger forces as well. In a commencement address to graduates at Ohio State University, President Bush issued a call to service, emphasizing, among other
assumed virtues, the need for charity, neighborliness and civic responsibility. On the face of things, we could hardly disagree with anything that Bush had to say. But read for its absences, for what was left unsaid, Bush’s call for a new spirit of volunteerism could be interpreted as a bromide, a soothing remedy for the withdrawal of public monies to assist the poor, the elderly, the homeless, the disabled, the educationally deprived, and the increasing number of Americans without adequate health care—in short, the very populations that service-learning students often work with in their home communities. The need for community service and service-learning is thus structurally intensified by policies of social retrenchment—an irony that, among other things, will likely signify increasing grant possibilities for service-learning programs, but just as likely escape notice in the literature on service-learning practices.

We theorize service-learning, then, not only because we need new understandings but also because we need larger understandings—critical understandings—of what it is we do and whose interests we serve when we enact our programs and pedagogies. We need to theorize service-learning, then, because we need a specifically historical sense of our practices, and how those practices are encompassed by larger structures and agendas. We need to theorize service-learning, then, because we need to be able to imagine possible other futures for how service-learning might eventually manifest itself within and beyond institutions of higher learning. To these ends, we offer three inventions for how such a project might begin.

Notes

1. The work of Paulo Freire remains the most notable exception to this claim, thanks largely to the efforts of Tom Deans, whose juxtapositions of Dewey and Freire, while illuminating, has, we think, had the unintended effect of assimilating Freire into the pragmatist tradition. To be sure, when service-learning in composition assumes a more critical stance, this typically derives from Freirean-inspired pedagogies. But just as composition studies has wrangled with a tendency to appropriate Freire in a too-easy manner (emptying his thought of its political significance, for example), service-learning might likewise be susceptible to the same temptation. We think it important to be wary of reducing Freire to a kind of Dewey with an attitude, and we think there is some danger of enlisting Freire for this purpose.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin is perhaps the one theorist who has consistently extolled the virtues of outsidedness in a variety of contexts: in self-other relations, in author-hero relations, and even in the outside perspectives that one culture is able to bestowed upon another. In the context of our discussion, Bakhtin’s
comments on cultural outsidersness might be most appropriate. “It is only in the
eyes of another culture,” Bakhtin tells us, “that foreign culture reveals itself
fully and profoundly.” This is because, as Bakhtin explains, “we raise new
questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers
to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to
us its new aspects and new semantic depths” (Speech 7). While there are
limitations to our analogy, we think that outside theoretical perspectives on
service-learning can, indeed, provide service-learning with new perspectives on
itself, new questions, and most importantly, new “semantic depths.”

3. Ulmer’s project is developed in two works, Heuretics: The Logic of
Invention and Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video, where he
promotes an inventional genre called “mystory,” and its study, “mystoriography,”
or how invention is experienced as an intersection of discourses. In taking on this
project, Ulmer announces his goal as a search to find “forms appropriate for
conducting cultural studies research in relation to the electronic media” (xi). We
find Ulmer valuable because he offers an alternative to Dewey’s experimental­
ism, one that conducts inventions, experiments in theorizing, so that other texts
may be written (5).

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