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A Conventional History for Rhetoric

From Invention to Convention

CONVERSATIONAL CONDITIONS Conversations can be difficult to enter. This may be because they are exceedingly hard to map or that they eschew simple starting points. Still, they have edges—beginnings, themes, parameters—even if those edges are hard to see. Because of these conversational conditions, personal input seems to always be a form of invention. It is an invented entry point; an invented present moment. Ironically, this same spontaneity is also always already a kind of history. That is, the decisive (invented) moment of our comment is often determined by where we think the conversation has been and and where it might go. More technically, we try to collect foregoing comments and consider those things which have been, or might be, argued. And then, once we have conceptually aligned all of that aural data, we construct a reply and chime in. The historical and inventive elements of conversation begin to converge. Conversation is always historically inventive insofar as our collecting of data is highly dependent on memory and mental abstraction. Historically conditioned invention also begins to reveal those edges I noted above. Subtle parameters give a frame for *how-what-why* something might be said. This has an obvious danger; one that we experience in daily talk. It can lead conversations into perpetual repetition and exclusion. Academic conversation, of course, follows a similar pattern. In fact, this pattern is even more prominent in academic disciplines given their scope and scale. Any forthcoming, invented, comment relies on a historical awareness of the foregoing opinions. Most of which are tucked into conversations held in various articles and books. The complexity of academic conversation is complicated by the varying distribution of, and large temporal gaps in, those published comments. As a result, academic conversations are often derivative. That is, academics dispute the invented and historical framing of the conversation rather than the original concerns whence they are derived. It is a conversation about the conversation. It is a redundancy known—all too well —by married couples, parents and children, and close friends.

To be clear, this opening anecdote is not merely a cheap exordium. It is not a compositional scaffold erected to smuggle in a wholly different academic argument. Instead, it serves three specific purposes. For one, it illustrates the limits of conversational conditions, their corresponding content allowances, and their inherent redundancies. Two, it is an exemplary case of the ongoing effects that two particular parameters—*invention* and

history—can have on all, but particularly scholarly, conversations. These dimensions are not arbitrarily identified. These two are engines for nearly any discipline's theoretical progress but also operate as its boundaries. Scholarly productivity can become dangerously locked in vain repetition, or preclude certain possible trajectories unless these two conditions are examined closely and, perhaps, even dislodged. And so, three, this anecdote suggests that if a conversation is to move forward, it must revisit its conditioning.

The bond between history and invention is particularly formative for contemporary rhetorical theory—seeing as how invention is itself a rhetorical category. Consequently, the constraining effects of *invention* and *history* is best studied as primarily a rhetorical phenomenon and from within the "conversation" of rhetorics. Invention has risen to prominence over the past half-century and its arc can be traced alongside the interest in history in the study of rhetoric. The two categories have quietly allied themselves to one another, and in some sense, become both the method and content of rhetorical theorizing. Historical studies of rhetoric often yield theories that highlight the importance of invention for rhetoric.[1] The study of invention often prompts the theorist to search for historical precedent. Meanwhile, history writing, and thinking, is itself already an inventive practice.[2] The methodological congruence between history and invention evinces a common philosophical interest in origins, beginnings, and starting points. Even if they do not always concern beginnings, the two parameters, nevertheless, always define edges, whether temporal or spatial. For example, on the one hand, history must identify moments, events, and instances where something "started." Put differently, history writing practices the art of invention. Formal rhetorical invention, on the other hand, similarly sifts out starting points, or grounds, for argumentation which are guided by memory—i.e. what is, or *has been*, done, known, or performed. While the dominance of historical thinking has been challenged in recent decades, the preeminence of invention has largely remained untouched.[3] In brief, that very omission is the concern of this essay. Below, I call for a shift in rhetorical focus—one signaled by certain philosophers, rhetoricians, and historians—from *invention* to *convention*. In sum, a conventionality can yield new horizons for rhetorical theory by dislodging the *other* pillar of a constraining binary .

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[1] Even when they do not explicitly reference invention as an art, they nevertheless include the conceptual principles which underwrite invention.

[2] White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse*. JHU Press, 1985.

[3] Enos, Richard Leo. "Recovering the Lost Art of Researching the History of Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1999): 7–20. See also Ballif, Michelle. *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*. SIU Press, 2013.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE ARGUMENT In the following analysis, I try to expose the feedback loop of history and invention, question its internal logic, and demonstrate the problems it poses for the rhetorical conversation. But, because it is a loop, it is difficult to unwind. I must admit, my attempt imposes abstract demands on me and the reader. This is because history and invention are intertwined as both the object of study *and* the means of doing the study. In effect, I am taking on the dizzying task of signaling a alternate mode of thinking *for* the rhetorical conversation while working *with* the very modes I seek to supplant.

I will try to disengage this loop by making two simple, though elongated, conceptual claims. One, that *invention is prominently embedded in the rhetorical conversation and thus constrains it*. As a corollary, its prominence yields redundant problems. The second claim is that *these problems are the result of invention's ablative posture*. That is, invention's problems are the result of its "into." I open the first claim by sketching the emergence of *invention* and *history* in recent rhetorical theory. I constrain myself to the last 60 years, or so, of rhetorical dialogue only because this era coincides with a budding focus on invention itself. In this epoch, invention emerged as a modality of liberation from compositional studies—where rhetoric lay dormant. Let me reiterate that, within this sketch, I focus primarily on *invention* because history, throughout this same era, has been overtly examined and critiqued[4]. Though, as I will mention throughout the essay, it has not been fully dislodged.[5] I cite attempts at historical-rhetorical reform and continue to affirm that they remain incomplete without my key reversal: from *invention* to *convention*. This sketch, its revealed logic and philosophical assumptions, calls attention to implicit problems that continue to arise when the two poles are in place. Or, more to my point, when *invention* goes unexamined. I then try to make those problems more explicit by drawing out the ablative logic of invention. Still, at this point, the mere intimation of conventional values will not have amounted to a proposal or reversal. My turn from invention to convention will require an alternate logic and technics which sidestep and heal these problems. The remainder of the essay will be given to outlining the tactile logic of convention. I turn to the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and examine the ways touch can even reinvent invention. By the end of the analysis, it becomes apparent that I have postponed addressing the paradox presented in the beginning of my critique. Namely, that

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[4] Ballif, Michelle. *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*. SIU Press, 2013.

[5] My entire sketch bears within itself a recursive paradox. Namely, that I use historical and inventive methods to find and critique them. Interestingly though, as invention is culled out by historical analysis, it gives rise to an alternate methodology which can then be applied to history. I withhold that application here in for the sake of time and precision. initiates the first reversal: from historical analysis to paradox. The difficult outcome of this reversal—and this is critical—is that this very alternate method does not remain an external instrument. The method actually coincides with the alternate rhetorical content it unearths. In simpler terms, much like am microscope *assumes* the existence of small things while presuming to discover them

I will have used *history* to cull out *invention.* So, in a final postscript, I propose a complementary essay which will use conventional, touchy, thinking to supplant history with tradition.

INVENTING A FOUNDATION To repeat, I do not presume to map the entire history of rhetoric. I also do not presume to offer something that is unforeseen in any of its past. I readily acknowledge that some of my conventional proposals have actually been practiced in rhetoric's earliest stages.[6] It is precisely in view of this fact that I focus this essay on the rhetorical conversation as it has existed over the last half-century. To be more specific, it is the reality of those forgotten theories and practices that draws attention to the ways conversation has since precluded them.

The rhetorical suspicion about convention, the very thing I seek to reverse, is cemented in the comments of one of the main contributors to the rhetorical renewal of the 50s and 60s. Hoyt Hudson, of the Cornell school, noted in a seminal essay that rhetoric had been strangled by embellishment and ornamentation. He also asserted this tendency was inherited through an allegiance to some kind of tradition. His words are worth quoting in full, given that they are a launching pad for my analysis.

> [I]t is plain that in any period when subject-matter was *conventionalized,* the consideration of invention would be neglected. Disposition would require only the slightest attention, whereas stylistic embellishment, memorizing, and delivery would constitute the orator's task. In any and all times the tendency is present—the tendency to depend upon *tradition* or *convention* for material and devote oneself wholly to style in writing and delivery in speaking.[7]

Thus, if rhetoric was going to step out of the confines of tradition, it must refocus itself by accentuating the liberating and constructive possibilities inherent in   invention. To Hudson's claim, rhetoric had, to this point, been reducible to compositional technique. It was not treated as an art or as a recognizable disciplinary conversation. But, the result of essay's like Hudsons prompted a rhetorical evolution that elicited a twin scholarly interest in *invention* and *history.* Janice Lauer has mapped this conversation thoroughly in her 2004 publication, and while I rely heavily on her overview, my goal is to examine it under the rubric of *invention* and *history.* Furthermore, unlike some, I am not interested in discriminating competing narratives; one defined by invention and the other history.[8] Rather, I hope this re-view unveils the two as the unseen parameters of the modern rhetorical

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[6] Farenga, Vincent. "Periphrasis on the Origin of Rhetoric." *MLN* (1979): 1033–55.

[7] Hudson, Hoyt. "The Field of Rhetoric," In *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation,* edited by Maurice Alexander Natanson, and Henry W. Johnstone, 20–31. Penn State Univ. Press, 1965. Emphasis mine.

[8] Shane Borrowman, Stuart Brown, and Thomas Miller, *Renewing Rhetoric's Relation to Composition* (Routledge, 2010).

conversation and reveals their philosophical reciprocity. In this brief sketch, we will see that throughout the second half of 20th century, the recognition that invention came *from* rhetoric prompted a budding interest in restoring invention *for* rhetoric. These questions —about the nature of invention—gave rise to a complementary interest in the study of history *for* and *in* rhetoric.

As Lauer points out, in the early part of the 20th century, invention had been marginalized because of its inherent ambiguity. Was it discovery or creation?[9] On the one hand it seemed passive, and on the other, active. In a manner of speaking, that very ambiguity would become the dual poles of the rhetorical conversation; they were invention (active creation) and discovery (received history). At this stage of the story, invention was a kind of synecdoche for rhetoric. Rhetoric would suffer the fate of its *prima par*: invention. In light of the peculiarity of invention, rhetoric as a whole was relegated to manuals of literature and composition. It's rich complexity had been tamed. By the middle of the 20th century, rhetoric was beginning to wriggle loose from a nagging historical burden. Beyond invention's ambiguity, rhetoric had not gained independent traction as either theory or practice. Historically, it was the runt of the philosophical litter. Unlike economics and physics, the progeny of classical philosophy, Rhetoric had not quite broken free of Plato's lurking critique.[10] So, while the independent theoretical value of rhetoric had been suspect since antiquity, its practical value, as inventive, had been extracted and reduced to compositional strategies. Still, amidst this, some students of language and literature prompted renewed interest in the historically conditioned creative strategies of rhetoric proper. As the 60s progressed, their renewed interest fomented into a movement that liberated rhetoric from compositional servility and spawned theoretical possibilities which could outflank philosophy.[11] This incipient independence had, at its core, an inventional framework. Specifically, essays by Harrington, Dudley, Corbett, and more drew attention to the inventional importance of rhetoric.[12] This movement would became the Rhetoric Society of America.[13] It, by no means, encompassed all of rhetorical theory and ambition. But, it its very existence bears witness to the fact that the *shape of the rhetorical conversation at large would be informed by inventional inquiries*. In addition, that very shape would create the conditions for a concomitant requirement for, and the importance of, historical thinking. So, the poles of *invention* and *rhetoric* were emerging concurrently but had not yet become symbiotic. Lauer notes that throughout the 60s, theories of invention were embryonic and diverse. Critically, despite their epistemic, logical, and linguistic motifs,

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[9] Lauer, Janice M. *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition.* Parlor Press LLC, 2004.

[10] Plato, *Phaedrus* (Penguin, 1973).

[11] Raymie E McKerrow, "Research in Rhetoric: A Glance At Our Recent Past, Present, and Potential Future," The Review of Communication 10, no. 3 (2010).

[12] Elbert W Harrington, "A Modern Approach to Invention," Quarterly Journal of Speech 48, no. 4 (1962).

[13] S Michael Halloran, "The Growth of the Rhetoric Society of America: An Anecdotal History," Rhetoric Society Quarterly 48, no. 3 (2018).

these varied theories still shared an interest in the "initiation" and "exploration" of discourse.[14]   It is also important to note that the variation in inventional theories was the result of interdisciplinary work. Different scholars mined different "non-rhetorical" works for conceptual resources.

IN THE INTEREST OF TIME A few tectonic shifts began to occur in the 70s and 80s. And, much like tectonic movement, they progressed slowly and largely unnoticed at the time. Critically, the interdependent importance of *invention* and *history* for the shape of the rhetorical discipline was coming into view. Scholars continued the trend of pulling from both inside, and outside, disciplinary resources to form concepts of invention. Two monumental ouvres had direct and indirect value for these newly forming rhetorical conceptions. One was germane to rhetoric and had been widely celebrated, and the other was outside the conversation, but fit its subterranean parameters. The first of these, Kenneth Burke's dramatism, had been giving invention a new shape since the 50s.[15] Burke helped rhetoricians of this era theorize invention as form of textual interpretation. The second oeuvre, Hayden White's historiography, was uncovering the tropological overlap between invention and narrated history. White's examination of the writing about the past gave voice to a hermeneutical form of invention. Invention could be considered as an interpretation of events. It was this latter, invention as hermeneutics, that began to give ground to historical study. Instead of asking, "where do we start to create," this model leaned on the other meaning of invention by focusing on where one might begin to interpret a historical text or event. Put simply, how do we invent cum discovery? These two decades began to bring these poles, *invention* and *history*, into greater alignment. Even though history was becoming a more fully recognized tool, the assumed approach of treating historical epochs as textual wholes did not yet take full consideration of the issue of time. This emerged in the later part of the decade.

It was the arrival of *kairos*, as an inventional instrument, that shifted historical analysis from treating the canvas of time as a interpretable "whole" and instead pointed historians and rhetoricians towards "holes," or distinctive moments, opening up within it. Already in the late 80s, the notion of time was becoming more important to theories of invention and establishing "starting" points of entry into any issue. Eric Charles White, among others, shifted attention from trying to establish invention through a chronological, sweeping view of history and opted for kairotic time[16]. Kairos, as White would have it, is defined by an opening in time wherein inventional force is to push in, and through. Kairos gave both invention and history a temporal identity. White remarks:

> "it refers to an opening or 'opportunity' or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture

[14] Janice M Lauer, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* (Parlor Press LLC, 2004).

[15] Lauer, Janice M. *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*. Parlor Press LLC, 2004.

[16] White, Eric Charles. *Kaironomia*. 1983.

through which the archer's arrow has to pass. Successful passage of a *kairos* requires, therefore, that the archer's arrow be fired not only accurately but with enough power for penetration." (13)

In White, and others as we shall see, invention and history would bring the notions of time and limit into close proximity. And, what is more, this limit is to be entered into.

The same period also deepened the interest in historical analysis by highlighting the social background of invention. Along with a new understanding of time, the social methodology would deeply inform the historical research of the forthcoming decades. Two particular works are worth noting. Michael McGee's "In Search of the People" and Karen LeFevre's *Invention as a Social Act* helped expose rhetoric to the need for history.[17] Both of these works moved along by a shared assumption. If the rhetorical community was going to establish a genesis, or invention, of ideas, then rhetoricians need to consider that those ideas are always given birth in some kind of society—amongst communities. Thus a socially "generated" account of rhetoric was bandied about and posed promise for a displaced form of invention and inventive agency.[18] The most important contribution of this new social shape to rhetorical invention was that it begged the question of whose society and rooted in which history?

Thus, at the turn of the millennium, rhetoric had undergone substantial changes. While the Rhetoric Society's shift from compositional foci the centrality of invention, now the conversation became aware of its need for history. Under the pressure of social, temporal, and interpretive dynamics, invention (and history) could not be a monolithic exercise. Through the help of historical consideration, rhetoricians transformed and multiplied invention.

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[17] Michael C McGee, "In Search of 'the People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly journal of Speech* 61, no. 3 (1975) and Karen Burke LeFevre, and Conference on College Composition and Communication (U.S., *Invention as a Social Act* (SIU Press, 1987).

[18] To be fair, this socially formed account of invention does draw close to the conventional approach that I will explore below. For now, it is enough to say socially formed invention pivot arounds questions of displaced agency that would be taken up by networked accounts of rhetoric much later. Convention, as I will argue, remains distinct from networks.

DISLODGING HISTORY Historical study fragmented invention, and invention would return the favor. History became histories; rhetoric became rhetorics; and invention would become networks of emergence. But, and this is critical, even *through the fragmentation the dual foci remained*. The transformation of invention and history enriched and solidified their role in the rhetorical conversation even though they had been contorted beyond classical recognition. By inheriting the ear deconstruction, these kinds of inventional theories continued to grow and diversify even though the boundaries of the rhetorical conversation had largely been formed. In other words, theories peered over the edges of other disciplines and solicited novel insights so long as they bore consequences within the boundaries of the rhetorical conversation . But the stability of this elliptical field was fading. Historical fragmentation was pushed to the brink of irrelevance.[19]

During the transition into the new millennium, the rhetorical conversation began to question some of its more reliable tenets.[20] This included: language, authorship, and the representational efficacy of textuality. Lester Faigley held that even in the midst of increasingly variant forms of inventional theory, they could be aligned with one another and invention could flourish in this postmodern context.[21] Victor Vitanza played a critical role in demonstrating the value of a fragmented history on the survival of invention in this era. He advocated for an inventional process that would produce more, and unexpected, variation. To[22] be more clear, history could not be subsumed under a singular perspective and thus history was full of histories. It was full of breaks and departures which themselves are invented moments. So, historical study would become an engagement with, but not a unified chronicling of, any of these splintering moments of invented histories. What Vitanza signaled in the dispersal of histories corresponded to further fragmentation of invention and of agency. Put simply, there was no single historical starting/ending point just as there were many inventional starting/ending points just as there was no single agent of history or invention. At the edges of the rhetorical conversation, this had value for gender and racial rhetorical studies. Personal identity was atomized in these dispersals and gave each nuanced person an individual significance apart from the tyranny of history or its victors. Meanwhile, within rhetorical discipline, critical rhetorical theorists, McKerrow and McGee formalized a practice that eschewed definite representational form, force, or agent.[23] The long term consequences of which could already be intimated in critical

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[19] Longaker, Mark. "Why History?" *Rhetoric Review* 30, no. 3 (2011): 327–31.

[20] Lauer, Janice M. *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition.* Parlor Press LLC, 2004.

[21] Faigley, Lester. "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal." *College English* 48, no. 6 (1986): 527–42.

[22] Vitanza, Victor J. "Some Rudiments of Histories of Rhetorics and Rhetorics of Histories." *Rethinking the History of Rhetoric: Multidisciplinary Essays on the Rhetorical Tradition* (1993): 103–239.

[23] McGee, Michael Calvin. The "Ideograph": A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly journal of speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 1–16. All see McKerrow, Raymie E. "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis." *Communications Monographs* 56, no. 2 (1989): 91–111.

rhetoric to the extent that it was difficult to know where to put one's inventional finger down. Still, their focus on invention kept rhetorical readers "grounded." In view of this fragmentation, rhetoric became less recognizable as a daily practice and activity. Some rhetoricians sensed doom for invention while others saw it as an opportunity to supplant inventional form with inventional process. Thomas Farrell was of the latter type and suggested that old rhetorical methodologies—such as the enthymeme—could distill this fragmentation for momentary cultural value and civil progress.[24] Still, while philosophies of history or macro historical perspectives where dissolving under the weight of fragmentation, invention's fragmentation actually multiplied its importance. This trend has continued into recent years. In some sense, its coming exile was set become its strength.

For later analytical purposes, I interrupt the narrative to identify two important transformations that occurred during this era. The first was the shift from form to process. Whereas invention had taken social, cognitive, and pedagogical form, now, invention was pure process. And, its pluriformity testified to its fecundity. Invention could not be tamed by representation. The second key movement was the shift from individuals to networks. *Invention* and *history* both had been constituent features of discrete agents—or at least discrete events. With increased historical fragmentation, rhetorical theory was offering a a history that was non-linear but was a multifaceted web of beginnings. Invention corresponded directly. Invention was not a moment on a line but a node on a network. Finally, the rhetorical conversation had circled back to its beginning to prove the seminal important of Hoyt Hudson's words. Hoyt had commented on the compositional and literature departments tendency to traditionalize and conventionalize rhetorical language. It took some 40 or 50 years of various representational iterations to wriggle lose from those conventions and that tradition and become free networks and variegated histories. In the next section, I want to carefully explore the underlying philosophical commitments which guide this trajectory by highlighting three critical problems.

[24] Farrell, Thomas B. *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*. Yale University Press, 1995.

INVENTION IN EXILE Currently, *invention* and *history* remain in a sort of exile. They have been dispersed and scattered over vast disciplinary distances. Yet, while they elude simple circumscription, even afar, they still operate as the nebular foci of the rhetorical conversation. In a more recent essay, Peter Simonson verifies this indirectly by offering an axial tool to locate the *history* of *invention*.[25] His first axis suggests that invention, as treated throughout time, can be plotted on a continuum of historical deference versus disruption. The second axis roughly corresponds to the first by situating invention as a form of "locating"an argument or as "dispersing" its placed assumptions. I can synthesize his axes as recurrence of *invention* and *history*. These axes highlight the way the pillar of history is still at work in the conditioning of invention. Simonson's account is also a nuanced permutation of the very ambiguous origins of this journey. By aligning the axes, there are, on the one hand, those theories of invention which "discover" arguments in the *places,* or *stances,* which arise from historical models. Or, on the other hand, there are those theories of invention which decenter places and destabilize stances by disrupting the received history. The axes re-ask: is invention discovery or creation? Simonson briefly touches on these etymological dimensions of invention in hopes of foregrounding his own disruption. He goes on to disrupt this continuum, and its constraining binaries, by highlighting mass media's ability to "generate" new arguments. With respect to my above comments, Simonson's proposal follows the networked approach to invention that results from fragmentation. Yet, while his model may rattle one pillar—some event, or ontological, historical ground—he still substantiates the deeper philosophical commitment to beginnings as such. So, even while Simonson's definition does expand theories of invention *cum* discovery it does not question the focus on invention itself. In other words, he only offers a permutation within the boundary but not a transformation of the boundaries themselves.

Along with Simonson's recent and macroscopic example of the binary at work, two other current trends also testify to *invention* and *history* . Namely, ecology and electracy. First, ecologies, or networks, have become a tool for describing the interplay of *invention* and *history*. As we shall see below, the organic interplay of systemic forces and needs interoperate and produce the "historical" (quasi-causal) ground for an unforeseen invented moment, event, or action. Electracy mirrors that ecological model, albeit in digital form. The work of Greg Ulmer has been instrumental in recasting invention in an electrate hue. His emphasis on electracy as a new modality of thinking and being has its followers and its detractors. Still, while his work has not overtaken the whole rhetorical conversation, he (or his disciples) has nevertheless demanded an answer as to the question: "what is the shape of invention in an electrified environment?" In sync with the fragmentary and modal model above, Ulmer posits a kind of rhetorical invention which is both a microhistory and multihistory. Let me now turn to these new trends in invention, directly, and examine their implications before concluding with a conventional reversal.

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[25] Peter Simonson, "Reinventing Invention, Again," Rhetoric Society Quarterly 44, no. 4 (2014).

A RHETORIC OF "GOING INTO" Well at the outset, I intimated that invention and history shared a certain philosophical commitment. Namely, to edges. This deserves direct attention. Invention and history have a mutual interest in starting points whether they are singular, plural, collective, psychological, social, nodal, modal, non-human, post-human, and more. They both still ultimately question where the edge is. Even if the edge is rejected, and nomadic plurality and heuretic montages are heralded in its stead, they, even in response, are still shaped by the issue of the edge. In fact, here, I want to carefully, and succinctly, outline the ways in which the rhetorical conversation seeks to go "in" to, draw from, or crash into the edge.

To begin, I will keep my concerns primarily to the issue of invention. As I noted above, this is the pole that needs the most attention if the rhetorical conversation is going to escape its echo chamber. Also, let me establish that the problem facing invention over time is not its constructive desire nor even its current iteration as a networked nebula. Rather, the problem is ablative. The ablative case, simply put, can be treated as the "prepositional" posture of a noun. It[26] describes a relation. Invention has been ultimately hampered by its relation to surfaces as limits to which, the rhetorical agent is expected to "enter." The forgoing theories have, in some manner or another, tried to go "in"to the plane, wherever that plane is specularly posed. So, in order to uproot invention rhetoric can simply think of a different relation to surfaces or limits. I want to think a relation that is "prior" (but not necessarily historical) to the agent, the node, or the beyond. The nature of the surfaces, the interface, need to be treated a primary. And, to think those surfaces, is to think with a different ablative arrangement. Namely, I propose that convention, or going with, is actually the phenomenological provision for inventive construction.

Third, I want to use two neologisms so that I can later easily draw attention back to this ablative attitude towards limits. Rhetorical invention's love of the edge is simultaneously a fear of edgeS.[27] Invention is *limbophilic* and *limbophobic*. Inventional models, old and current, posit a *going into* a limit but deny the establishment of limits *after* this entry has commenced. Said differently, they enter representations, as edged moments, historical events, choranic fields, or even commonplaces but they do not build them. We are to go into them through invention, or invention can arise from them, but either way, those defining limits are formative even without visibility. And, importantly, the finitude of inventional limits are always on the outside or at the edge. This means that invention often assumes that they are kind of boundary. Limit as boundary, as I hope becomes apparent, is fundamentally different than a limit as surface. Ironically, even this far away from the beginning invention has retained its ambiguity. It is uncertain about discovering or creating limits. Convention, on the other hand, brings that ambiguity in to paradoxical unity by *creating the discovered* limit. Its ablative posture, with respect to the surface, the

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[26] Simpson, John Andrew. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2008.

[27] This is not a typographic error. Rather, I intend to draw attention to the fact that invention tends to start with a singular edge and then retreat from building multiple ones.

edge, or the limit is fundamentally different. Before we explore the reversed value of convention, I want to look more closely at three forms of invention's ablative nature. That is, the "in" or "into," of invention, signifies going into, coming from, or even collision.

The first ablative problem facing contemporary account of invention is its hidden assumption of going into the edges it admires and fears. Recently Thomas Rickert has zeroed in on this trend by highlighting the alternate inventional models which resource Plato's conception of the *chora*.[28] Though Rickert himself does not identify the ablative aspects of these inventional theories he does affirm the limbic dimensions of the chora. He explains that the spatial assumption of the chora as "edge" is challenged by certain thinkers. Yet, even if the chora eludes a spatial description, the ablative "into" can still apply in the same way one can enter "into" a mood or a friendship. Rickert's titular ablation, "towards," is a confirmation in its own right. Rickert even acknowledges that there is a passing-into in the work of Julia Kristeva, one post critical theorist who posits the chora as an ancient origin and ancestor to modern symbolic forms. For Kristeva, one goes into the choric to see past the masculine forms of symbolic language. Thus, as Rickert expands, even though one may reject the ground of "places" established in symbolic language, one nevertheless seeks a deeper origin, start, or edge by *going into* the chora. Rickert's "inquiry" into the chora still affirms that invention yearns for a distance limit. One that it needs to go into.

Rickert continues to outline a chora as limit, edge, and limbus in his analysis of Derrida and Ulmer. For Derrida, there is an intimate bond between that unplaced place of chora and how we name it, khora. The altered spelling is a way to personify the limit field of chora as a woman with a name. It also, present the difficulty of "going into" her. Rickert points out that this bond between naming and chora presents an ironic withdrawal from naming or going into. Even with this reversed gesture of not-going-into, invention and its edge are still affirmed as a kind of impossibility. For my purposes, this is the result of the ablative movement of going-into, not-going into, or coming-from (as we will see in the next article). Inventional activity comes up against its own limit[29] but is still guided by the limit nonetheless—by what it cannot do. Even with Derrida's reluctance to place or name the chora, Rickert's notes his conventional to actually invent something. Derrida had ambitions for materializing these through an architectural venture with proper respect to the chora. But, as Rickert quickly points out, in what I would call a limbophobic moment, nothing was ever built, made, or lasted. In my terms, what goes into chora cannot permit of representation. For Rickert, Ulmer's work is an attempt to revitalize and take up the problem of inventing in this impossible place of the chora. But, his strategy shifts the ablative posture of invention. Ulmer begins to post a *passing through* the chora. It is important to not that

[28] Rickert, Thomas. "Toward the Chōra: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, no. 3 (2007): 251–73.

[29] Thomas Rickert, "Toward the Chōra: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention," Philosophy & Rhetoric 40, no. 3 (2007).

this new pre-positional arrangement nevertheless keeps the notion of of a limbic chora, as limit or edge, in "place."

One difficulty that becomes evident in reading Rickert is that the inventional theories which *go into* the chora do not fall short because they spatialize the resource itself. They fall short because they still do not bring anything to that limit or surface. Every construction, every writing, and every form is suspect. Forms, microlimits, are only explicable as fleeting expressions of that inventional moment of going into the big limit: the chora. Or in Ulmer's terms, gazing into that punctum. Chronic invention cannot think the "junctum" or its duration as representation. We are always setting and surpassing limits in the limbophobic and limbophilic complex. Every going into is an analytic splintering. Every surface is an occasion for dis-membering not for re-membering.

A Rhetoric of Coming From As already intimated, if *going into* fails to produce invented forms then invention can be rethought of as a *coming from*. Most recently, Trapani and Maldanado have reversed the ablative relation with that edge of invention by asserting that invention arises, comes form, or emerges in kairotic networks.[30] Much like what has come before, theirs is a permutation of the history and invention binary which pivots on the temporality of *kairos*. Trapani and Maldonado lean on ecological systems to substantiate this emergent account of inventive practice. For them, in ecologies, no limits, preconditions, or expectations can be placed on what my occur, be invented, or develop. Their aversion to limits heralds the passing of a limit in emergence. The limit is central even here in a limbophilic fashion. The emergence model, in its prohibitions, expresses a deep limbophobia about the limits, or edges, of any invented form.

In addition, Maldonado and Trapani forward the increasingly common notion that kairotic invention rewrites history rather than evades it. To be more clear, as an invention can come from a network, its nature refers back to that network whence it came and can explain its heretofore confusing complexities. That is, this emergent, passively invented, arrived moment may redact the so-called past. What is critical here is that the poles of invention and history are not being questioned directly but are repeatedly contorted to remain operative. The rhetorical conversation folds over and over into new shapes, according to Walsh and Boyle, even like geometric topology.[31] Maldonado and Trapani are limbophilic. There systemic approach even overtly utilizes what Derrida called limitrophy. It is a coined term that describes examining the edges and finding new beginnings and possibilities there

Interestingly, Trapani and Maldonado seem to approach the turn towards conventionality in their third proposition affirming metistic rhetoric. Metis, that Greek term for skill or

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[30] Trapani, William C, and Chandra A Maldonado. "Kairos: On the Limits to Our (Rhetorical) Situation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2018): 278–86.

[31] Walsh, Lynda, and Casey Boyle. "From Intervention to Invention: Introducing Topological Techniques." Topologies as Techniques for a Post-Critical Rhetoric. Ed. Lynda Walsh and Casey Boyle. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 1–16. Print

craft, acknowledges the temporary and constructive nature of those rhetorical actions which emerge in certain ecologies. Still, even with the affirmation of craft and skill, Trapani and Maldonado shy away from the representational implications of a conventional approach to rhetoric. They remain limbophobic.

So, in the end, Trapani and Maldanado emphasize the very role of the limit and thus affirm my suspicions: time and edge are intimately bound. In all, Trapani and Maldanado's model demonstrates that invention comes from the limit or the edge and, while that edge might not be explicitly historical, it is overtly temporal. What their models lacks echoes that ablative difficulty I mentioned above. Namely, the ability to bring the edge, the limit, the threshold into represented form amidst, and amongst, these ecologies. Or, more to my point, recognizing that these limits and thresholds are always already here and are radically available, useful, and "common."

A Rhetoric of Crashing Into The ablative posture of invention, as "going into," has one other mutated form. Instead of *going into* a limit, by locating a punctum and penetrating it, the inventor crashes into it. Victor Vitanza, as mentioned earlier, has been a pioneer in splintering the history of rhetoric and safeguarding it from becoming a monolithic identity. That is, from it becoming a weapon of exclusion. Vitanza's guardianship is not defined by a retreat from the limbic edge of history but to speed into it. It is his own mode of going *against* it. In a 2000 essay, Vitanza aims his splintering approach at invention. He suggests that, after the crashes, the rubble will reveal new beginnings. This essay, even in its creative openings, demonstrates that the limbophilia which has defined the rhetorical conversation is still very much at work in his accidental model of invention.[32]

In his essay, Vitanza applies the same kind of thinking at work in his hysteriography. He first affirms Gregory Ulmer's project and then offers his own anagrammatic model of invention. Vitanza begins showing how Ulmer's method—or, anti-method—breaks up the binaries which have gripped rhetorical invention. That is, the strain between *topos* and *tropos* are overcome in Ulmer. He resonates with Ulmer's model because it is as dispersive, in its dislocation of beginnings, as Vitanza's own model of history writing.[33] In the same way that Ulmer tries to locate inventional "influence" in a multitude of electrical sites, Vitanza spent the 90s dispersing the historical locations which had become strongholds of certain tyrannical, and exclusionary, empires. Early on, Vitanza brings the issue of limits into view by claiming that aleatory procedures for invention are not defined by them. To be conceptually fair, though, Vitanza still addresses this limit by crashing into and creating an intentional accident. Vitanza proposes that limits contain even their opposite insofar as to oppose the "place" of beginnings is still to erect an equal, but opposite, limit of the

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[32] "Accident." John Andrew Simpson, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2008).

[33] Victor J Vitanza, "Some Rudiments of Histories of Rhetorics and Rhetorics of Histories," Rethinking the History of Rhetoric: Multidisciplinary Essays on the Rhetorical Tradition (1993).

negatively excluded.[34] Thus, the limit is reborn. Vitanza hopes that his, and Ulmer's, alternate logic of thirds will break through this double limiting, transgress both boundaries, and enter an open plane of nomadic discovery.

Vitanza's essay has a few implications for historical time as well. Both he and Ulmer lean heavily on the sophistic notion of *kairos* noted above. Vitanza situates the kairotic moment as a critical occasion for hazarding an inventional crash. This has consequences for reading the past as crashes. In addition, for the future, Vitanza add remarks about Ulmer's account of memory as networked connectionism. That is, memory is not circumscribed in an event, which are the property of history, but in the associations of the little splintered electrate influences, which are akin to Vitanza's hystery.[35] Accordingly, memory is like a current and thus the old rules of history do not apply. Vitanza suggests that this new account of memory (time:history), corresponds to a new account of location (space:invention), and thus needs a new border logics.

Finally, Vitanza's own variable model of invention, the anagram, confirms his own inventional commitment to rhetorics. The anagram, as may already be known, is a word whose letters are dispersed into a new order. This manifests the kind of disruption that occurs in electrate invention. The assemblage of an entity, idea, or sentence comes from unexpected places (invention) and in unexpected times (history). Vitanza closes his essay by reminding his reader that this kind of discombobulation is can be engineered by barreling into the limits and splintered them. He notes that we no longer need to clash in argumentation but to crash into accidents.[36] His inventional, kairotic, moment is made full when those splinters lie along the ground ready for unexpected assemblage. The key, for my analysis, is that Vitanza is still conceptually committed to *going into* some kind of threshold, cutting up some kind of edge, or barreling into some kind of limit. He is still inventional. He is still guided by *the* conversation. He dismantles the edge which separates peoples and turns it into a joint exercise in disruption, made ready, and waiting, for the excluded. Together, he hopes, as a society they will break the boundaries. But, as I show below, this still lies within the pillars, the faint edges, of *history* and *invention*. More importantly, it never outwits the problems those pillars produce. History and invention have been contorted into monstrous versions, but they still constrain the conversation. This subtle retentions will be made problematic below.

So, here at the end of a lengthy tour through thinkers and texts, it is highly reasonable to assert that these two currents have shaped much if not all of the rhetorical conversation of recent time. I hope to have also shown that these pillars have presented problems, overt

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[34] Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Richard Emerson Young. *Inventing a Discipline.* National Council of Teachers, 2000.

[35] Vitanza, Victor J. "Some Rudiments of Histories of Rhetorics and Rhetorics of Histories." *Rethinking the History of Rhetoric: Multidisciplinary Essays on the Rhetorical Tradition* (1993): 103–239.

[36] Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Richard Emerson Young. *Inventing a Discipline.* National Council of Teachers, 2000.

or covert, for many rhetorical thinkers and thus many have tried to disempower them. Still, I hope to have been persuasive in suggesting that their inability to dislodge these pillars has been the result of the pillars' vacillation. This vacillation, from using history to revise invention to inventing new histories, has only led to the mutation of the pillars and not their full metamorphosis. Thus, Ulmer (invention) and Vitanza (history) are, at the moment, iconic manifestations of the two poles and testify to their radical transformation over many years. From here, I propose that rhetorics can be refreshed by doing something subtle and simple. In a word, it can reverse Hoyt Hudson and seek new paths precisely by supplanting invention and history with convention and tradition.

ABLATIVE ISSUES To initiate this reversal, I want to shortly, but carefully, identify three ablative problems which trouble invention. First, invention's limbophilia and limbophobia presents it with ontological difficulties which can thwart invention's aims altogether. Second, in light of that limbic priority, ironically, invention lacks form or representation. This latter term has been a bogeyman of theory for some time and will require some footing. Third, given the lack of representation, inventional theories have hardly surfaced amongst the common people. That is, since the common have been excluded in their access to edges, both metaphysically remote and politically prohibited, and if new edges have little to no probative value in view of limbophilia, then do the commoners fare any better by these new inventional theories developed in their name?

I have mentioned the terms limbophilia and limbophobia several times throughout the essay to signify that love-and-fear of edges which characterize invention. While this has become evident in the various inventional theories above, what I are dealing with, at the philosophical level, is the problem of limitations, boundaries, or unity. Unified objects, places, or subjects typically require some kind of edge, or boundedness, which is then sustained by a certain action (often exclusion of unwanted diversity). Deleuze and Guattari have been instrumental in trying to establish forms whose unity, *a la* limits, is always on the move and undergoing change. Still, even proximate and mobile limits are exceedingly hard to establish, as Diane Davis has recently pointed out in the debate of the edge between human and animal.[37] Davis builds on Derrida's notion of limitrophy wherein at that limit, remote as it is, we find things. Those "things" are invented, or are inventings, in that fuzzy conceptual haze which is at once our very inability to find it. So, limits may have a certain fecundity even as mobile or hazy. But, the unwillingness to actually "put our finger on it" results from the fearful assumption that limits arbitrarily separate what is inseparable. No one wants to be the bad guy who draws the line. Something may be left out. What philosophy is trying to avoid is a totality. It does not want to presume privileged knowledge of the finality of things. [38]Invention corroborates this an uncertainty about limits by first historically establishing limit sites, the *topoi* or *stases*, and then later displacing

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[37] Diane Davis, "Some Reflections on the Limit," Rhetoric Society Quarterly 47, no. 3 (2017).

[38] "Final." Simpson, John Andrew. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2008.

those same limits by deferring that line into an elsewhere. This new far off limit, only because it cannot be seen not because it is spatial, can be a chora or a political parameter. Either way, by the sheer fact that our philosophical procedures still take it into deep consideration in systematic explanations, it is still treated as a phenomenological given. It is a precondition of awareness, creativity, and rhetorical agency. The difficulty here is that since philosophy and rhetoric have pushed the limit to an distant non-place, rhetorical action is prefigured by that "out there" and is fated to *go into* it as inventional practice. This limit is adored as the provisional source of meaning and is feared and loathed as that same progenitor. So, the location of the limit makes invention somewhat impotent as either a discovery or a creativity. It can do neither. It can only go into limits but never draw them. This raises a simple question: what if the limit was constructed? Then would not the prepositional nature of *into* be inapplicable?

This also points to a second problem, a representational one, that may be clarified, in the end, with the same question. The allure of the limit, as is well worn in now, is also met with fear. In view of that ontological problem of exclusion, the fear is that rhetorics may reconstruct the very edges its seeks to displace. And, it follows from the foregoing that if invention cannot permit of limits, but can only reconstruct them, then it cannot fulfill its own ambitions. That is, to discover, or to reveal, would seem to demand some kind of recognizable form. Even as idea, or sensation, or even speech act, an invention *cum* discovery would need to cull it out with edges, however momentary. Simply stated, what would creating be with out the limbic? What is more, rhetorics has been timid about representation in its inventional models not only in light of the spatial problems of limits but the implied temporality of the term. Vitanza, for example, avoids the present, not to mention the re-present, in favor of an interplay between the future-anterior. So, while the present is all but subsumed in *kairos*, to re-present is all but anathema. Walter Benjamin's angel of history corroborates this discomfort with historical presents in that his angel's back is turned towards the future with its face gazing on the past. As history, but not the present, it watches the destruction of the past. Gillian Rose counters Benjamin by upholding another of Klee's angels, *Angelos Dubiosus*.[39] This angel, she remarks, is committed to the hard word of the middle where representation embraces, and doubts, its own efficacy and purity, but is compelled to try again and again to enable life. In other words, this angel is present. For Rose, the lack of representation is both cowardly, and it overestimates representational interests. Rhetorics own reticence about re-presentation, in both space and time, may also suffer this indictment. It disperses represented   agency (subjects), space (topoi), and time (kairos over history) thus making the present, where most live, opaque. I return to the same simple question: what if the limit was constructed? Would representation have fragility, duration, and always be renegotiated?

This highlights the third problem facing inventional recalcitrance and limbic confusion: it is uncommon. That is, common people, who live in the present and encounter limits

[39] Rose, Gillian. *Judaism and Modernity*. Verso Books, 2017.

daily, have very little access to the divinizing power of rhetoric.[40] Limits are not surpassable and theorizing about their fragmented form is remote. The drift from a common rhetoric to an inaccessible one is evident in the historical appeals made by inventional theories. Throughout the rhetorical conversation, inventional theories have resorted to certain historical moments to resource inventional procedures. In so doing, they resurrect the problem of drawing the limit of their procedure, and access to it, with historical defined points. For example, if a modern theorist draws from Plato to outline the creative agency required for a rhapsode, there may be only a few students or citizens who may have the skills, time, and monetary resources to practice it. Likewise with Airstotelian places, though common, they were only the property of a certain group as evidenced in the *Poetics*.[41] Even when the rhetorical conversation began to take this exclusionary practice in to view, it turned towards the sophists. There invention could be cast as a democratic *dissoi logoi*. But, as is often pointed out, costly nature of their services precluded some of those the practice was intended to serve. Even if we leave the debate about their fees aside, the cognitive cost was substantial. After all, how many commoners could employ Gorgianic insights on non-being or enlist the help of a trilemma in their daily routines? Thus, inventional theories, even in their most exotic and pluralized form, are still cognitively distant, or uncommon. As an aside, I submit that this conceptual distance corresponds to the deferral of limits which float out at the edge of inventional theories. But, to return to the point at hand, and to reaffirm, the "starting points," the limits of invention, remained proprietary and are violation of Heraclitus' ancient fragmentary insight that the logos was common to all. But, let me ask the question again in a different hue: what if the limit was constructed? Would this not reach behind to the Corax and Tisias tradition wherein rhetoric was a manual for the commoner?[42]

To answer these questions in a single response, if the limit were constructed, it would not be an invention but a convention. It would "go with" the edge. In fact, it would reposition invention as a derivative of, or response to, conventions. Below, I expand on the implications and methods of a conventional approach to rhetorics. My proposal is stimulated by what has become evident here: that invention can be read as fear of the Latin term: *fingere* (to form, to shape). It is precisely in this term that we can recast invention's limbophilia and limbophobia as chirophobia. That is, it fears its hands and fingers. Herein lies my reversal: those very fingers, their touch, lies at the heart of conventionality.

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[40] John Andrew Simpson, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2008). Divinizing/divning as establishing the line...c.f. divide.

[41] Aristotle, and George Alexander Kennedy. *On Rhetoric*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.

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CONVENTION AS THE SURFACE OF INVENTIONAL REVERSAL Immediately, the reversal is ablative. That is, the prepositional prefix of *con*, instead of *in*, transforms the rhetorical relation to limits. Coventions do not dispense with the limits that enamored invention. They still deal in edges but those edges arise in the going-together, or together-going, of conventionality. Conventions suggest that any agent—human, animal, or machine—is always convening with another agent, and that in their encounter, a line is drawn. Importantly, this limit is not long off, afar, or unseen as was the case with invention. It does not haunt. Rather, it is erected in the interaction of agents. It is representable but not permanent. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has probed the question of tactile interaction with care and his exacting insights fill out my proposal here. Jean-Luc Nancy, as Jacques Derrida would have it, is the philosopher of touch. Nancy's insights on touch are apropos here in light of the finger's touch manifesting *fingere's* role in "molding" and "shaping" via limits. By conceiving of conventionality as touching it becomes evident that they (conventions *cum* touched-limits) are the very surface of daily life. In addition, convention has immediate rhetorical purchase. That is, conventions overturn the three problems that face invention. One, conventions would fulfill the constructive ambitions of invention. Two, conventions are representable without presuming permanence or perfection. Third, conventions are accessible and common. Tropology and topology do not need to be dispersed or postponed in unplaced-placed limits. They convene in touching. The surface, the place, or the limit is textured. Conventions have three critical modalities which can demonstrate their ability to heal invention's wounds. First, "convention" is a description of a kind of conceptual movement. The word, secondly, "convention" often describes a cultural artifact. And, finally, conventions are typically treated as low-brow phenomena.

First, convention avoids that totality that was deeply feared by inventional ontologies. It does this not by displacing the limit, or crashing into it, but bringing it close and crossing its visibility.[43] Convention erects limits rather than championing or destroying them. To this point, inventional methodologies have inadvertently substantiated this totality by seeking to go into the outer edge or to crash through it. The edge, wherever it is, is a casing, a field, a unity—how ever large or small. Even when the inventional theories expressly reject totality, they remained haunted by it. For example, Trapani and Maldonado express a fear that ecologies of emergent invention, coupled with *kairos,* run the risk of self-containment.[44] Elsewhere, Ulmer's electric monuments, even when dispersed amongst hypermedia, are indebted to the puncture that happens at the provisional edge of those electorate reciprocities.[45] Even Vitanza's own model bears witness to totalities in that anagrammatic permutations occur within limits as the tragicomic destiny of invention. Totality is lurking even in these progressive inventional methodologies. Convention, conversely, avoids

[43] Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Crossing of the Visible.* Stanford University Press, 2004.

[44] Trapani, William C, and Chandra A Maldonado. "Kairos: On the Limits to Our (Rhetorical) Situation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2018): 278–86.

[45] Ulmer, Gregory L. *Electronic Monuments.* U of Minnesota Press, 2005.

totality precisely because it builds lines; it is a movement with lines; its line divide and separate every bit as much as they unify.

Invention's implicit totality derives from its pre-positional relationship to the limits of that totality. When those limits are given "out there," invention is compelled to enter them. Once gone into, new limits could not arise from invention lest those new edges become themselves the object of inventional penetration. This would inaugurate a perpetual cycle. But conventions require neither displacement or penetration under the rubric of touch. As Nancy points out, touch is the very establishment of the limit, the boundary, or the edge. Touch is a *with*. Interestingly, it establishes agency and action in one conventional moment of contact. That is, touch gives the surface of both the self and another. No one precedes the touch. There is no ground, no agent, nor object prior to the convention of touch. One is always only in touching and being touched. Touch, in its "drawing a line," signals back to the toucher their own awareness of self. Touching others is also a kind of self-touching. In simpler terms, touch is reversible. It brings both agents into awareness of one another and in to themselves. It is this very "awareness" that invention has sought after for so long. It has yearned to be aware of the starting point, the limit, the right action, or the proper word. It has driven itself mad establishing, deferring, and dispersing limits rather than beginning *with* them. Conventional touch not only establishes the agents but the surface of their interplay. This surface is neither a historically fixed ground, the limit below, nor a dispersed *abgrund*, the limit afar. It is proximate and provisional. This surface is a material plane whence to create and discover. This plane is both *topos* and *tropos*. The place of meeting in the touch, in the convention, is *figured*. It is *textured*. Even amidst all of the unifying effects of conventional touch, as Nancy points out, this erected surface is at once a meeting and departure. Convention, as touch, retains the dispersive power of invention. The touch establishes the separate nature of the agents and it also separates them both from the distinct nature of the touch itself. There is the touch, the toucher, and the touched. The latter two are distinct from one another. But the touch itself is both the shared limit and the impossible possible. The touch is there in the convention of the two though it remains distinct from them. Still, it cannot be beheld apart from them. It is the very witness of convention that allows this touch to be developed and for constructive responses to unfold. The touching ones do not *go into*, or conflate with, one another but go *with* one another as they go *with* the touch itself. Touching enables separation through its unifying convention-ality. Touch enables lines to occur. Summarily, its lines are neither total nor displaced.

Second, convention enables represented forms. To return to Nancy's account of touch, we must first acknowledge that the touch itself—not the agents who arise in the touching —is not itself fully realizable or representable. It does have futurity to it. It would appear that touch is no more material than invention. But, elsewhere, Nancy gives conventional rhetoric a representational gift in the important categories of exscription and promise. So, while conventions *cum* touching write boundaries, their contours and edges are written *elsewhere*. Conventions find representation, we might say, incompletely and remotely. Though this sounds like the *elsewhere* of a deferred inventional limits, the difference is that convention's exscription is the process by which a limit is presented by an another

absenting one. Exscription announces that which is absent (possibilities, etc) right the edges of the things which touch it. This is, once again, best understood in simple ouch itself. In the same way that *the* touch occurs, it is only "known"through touching or being touched—not as touch itself. Exscribed representation would work similarly as a kind of re-presenting of that touched surface which withdraws but is revealed in the edges of those things which touch it. As it concerns the second gift of Nancy, promises, conventional exscriptions, or conventional representations, write forms elsewhere and thus are always on-the-way. They are futural. They mirror touching in that they both are, and will be.

To summarize this second point, in touching, the touch itself is existentially factual but eludes total delimitation, as was noted above. This unrepresentable touch and limit gives edge to the agents involved in the touch. It is at that moment that one party is both touching and being touched. This touched surface describes its very unrepresentability in the edges of those doing the touching. It is the same with conventionality. If law, lets say, is conventional, it is not because it has a firm a circumscribed location which presides over surrounding territories. Rather, it is conventional, because it gives edges to other acts, practices, entities. Convention is not reducible to simple consensus (which would be a slip back into the tyranny of the One). Rather convention is a kind of perpetual meeting, enactment, and existential "fact."[46] In addition, touch is exscribed as a kind of tact. It is that limit or edge exscribed but not too far and not to close. Tact, which is a cognate of touch, is that prudent art which draws lines and edges in order to give rather than constrain.

Third, convention is common sensical. The idiom is misleading only because we have understood conventions, and common sense, as lacking any kind of philosophical rigor. Here, we rely on Jean-Luc Nancy to provide that rigor. To return to the ground of Nancy, that is the touch as surface, the most basic condition of thinking is that everything is always in-common. Mitsein (being-with) is more originary that Dasein (being-there). Or said differently, the primeval is actually coeval. Thus, sensing is not a ratiocinative process. So to say convention is common sensical is to refer to a pervasive existential condition. It is not something someone does *to, on,* or derives *from* an object. Rather, much like the touch, which is factual but unrepresentable, "sense" is that given shape of simply being-with. It is the posture of the world. It is a kind awareness that we are touching and being touched. This reality, this sense, is common to all. It does not require philosophical articulation. I am not just aware that I am thrown in to things but at each surface I am aware that "we are."

Vitanza asks, in his essay on aleatory procedures, in a parenthetical sidebar, whether we can even say "we" anymore.[47] He implies the dangers of smuggling in some kind of ground or totalizing narrative. Yet, what he mentions in passing becomes is the central feature of a conventional approach to rhetoric. That is, the *we* of conventions is not a consensus decision or the result of a inventional strategy. Rather, the *we* of conventionality is the

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[46] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* SUNY Press, 1996.

[47] Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Richard Emerson Young. *Inventing a Discipline.* National Council of Teachers, 2000.

given condition, the sense, of simple being in the world. Conventions do not subtract from the existential facticity of things. They testify to them. As a result, conventions can not be made proprietary. If we recall, this was exactly the shift from the dictatorial model of speech to the rhetorical as outlined in the Corax and Tisias myth.[48] Rhetoric was born forward in conventions. It move forward in one sense, by gesturing, and in another, by recognizing the that the "I" of the tyrants could not limit or repress "we" of speech. Lastly, this common sense is promissory. The question of "we," as Vitanza is right to fear and the Corax myth corroborates, can never be reduced to a principle, nostalgia, or predictive future state. Rather, "we," is existentially facticity, is openness to the future of what "we" might become. In addition, the promissory is lateral in that the "we" is our mutual belonging. We *will be* in touch. These abstract insights give explanatory power what local commerce, economic action, and even colloquial persuasion have always known: we have to do something. Those somethings are conventions. Conventional thinking gives us a both a road back to the tropes, figures, and techniques of the manualist tradition and to towards current local plane of creativity without fearing that such *techne* will foreclose the fecundity of invention.

Convention, community, and touching are always risky. In Derridean terms, they remain undecidable. To be sure though, in Nancy's terms they are still touchable. Still, on a more dangerous note, conventionality's risks are greater than inventions because its exscribed forms are vulnerable to abuse. The risk of erecting a "touched" form is that it (fingere) can turn to a fist. But touch contains its own corrective in its reversability. I do not have the space to fully exposit the notion here, but in the end, even when a form withdraws into untouchable tyranny, its absence becomes exscribed.[49] That is, it is always touched, and as such, an abusive form is always readily available for conventional touch deconstructive caress.

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[48] Farenga, Vincent. "Periphrasis on the Origin of Rhetoric." *MLN* (1979): 1033–55.

[49] Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Noli Me Tangere*. Fordham Univ Press, 2009.

ON TRADITION I hope to have shown that conventions have the conceptual promise needed to elide inventional thinking. Moreover, perhaps conventions can move the rhetorical conversation outside of its current feedback tendency. But, here in the wake of the analysis, an irony and difficulty plagues me. I have leaned on historical analysis to re-envision a conventional way of thinking. This is what plagues me: have I incidentally "reinvented?" This simple irony prompts me to return to the pole of history and apply this conventional thinking in hopes that it may metamorphosise it. In other words, can my model of conventional rhetoric offer a different research methodology than the one used to discover it? After all, my very "starting" point" *in* a critique essay *of* invention and history itself evinces, and relies on, the power of the pair. That is, to gain credence for my *invented* thesis, I had to establish its *historical* point of departure. Succinctly, I am bound by origins while trying to uproot them. But, from the vantage point of convention and touch, this does not have to be an accidental irony or a problem. Rather, in the same way that convention, as a meeting and touching, satisfy the aims of invention, there is an alternate methodology which can replace history without losing all of its ambitions. And, what is truly ironic, is that it is provided by Hudson himself. Namely, tradition.

Tradition is "conventionally" understood to be an extreme form of historicizing rather than its undoing. But, as I hope to show in a later essay, tradition is a sharing or "trading" by hand.[50] That is, tradition describes those moments of convention wherein the common sense was made manifest as noted above. Tradition can represent moments in history as altars which exscribe the touching that occurred there. Altars, as descriptions of tradition, are mobile, blood soaked, and decaying surfaces that are wrought and reconvened in touch. Tradition, because it is replete with these representational exscriptions, can help outline the "we" of memory/pasy and of anticipation/future. What is more, tradition shrinks the scale and scope of historical totality. In the next essay, I aim to show that radition can align, juxtapose, and bring things in to touch in a narrow and exact way.

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[50] Simpson, John Andrew. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2008.