Kairotic Encounters
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In their introduction to Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Invention, Richard E. Young and Yameng Liu outline two conflicting perspectives in early scholarship on invention. The first views invention as a process of discovery and posits a belief “in a preexistent, objective determining rhetorical order whose grasp by the rhetor holds the key to the success of any symbolic transaction” (xiii). The second perspective views rhetorical invention as a creative process, emphasizing “a generative subjectivity” in which discursive production depends on the rhetor’s ability to produce arguments. The distinction between these two perspectives hinges on issues of exteriority and interiority: the discovery model presents a subject that looks outside itself to “find” arguments, and the creative model assumes that the subject need only look inside itself for things to say. Despite divergent epistemologies, however, both perspectives depend on a particular model of subjectivity. That is, both the “grasping” and “generating” models of invention posit an active, sovereign subject who sets out either to “find” or “create” discursive “stuff.”

For the last twenty years or so, postmodern perspectives have problematized such assumptions about subjectivity and discourse. As Lester Faigley points out, scholars in composition and rhetoric have begun to interrogate the notion of a discrete, sovereign rhetor. Still, as Faigley contends, “where composition studies has proven least receptive to postmodern theory is in surrendering its belief in the writer as an autonomous self” (15). Perhaps this is so because problematizing subjectivity forces a reconceptualization of rhetoric itself, disrupting the rhetorical triangle and calling into question such commonplaces as “rhetoric is persuasion.”

The issue of postmodern subjectivity and rhetorical pedagogy is so broad and far-reaching that it cannot be fully dealt with in a book, let alone an article. Nevertheless, this issue will inform my investigation of invention. Given the incommensurability of current models of invention and emerging views of subjectivity and discourse, how might alternative models of subjectivity reconfigure rhetorical invention? What effects would such a reconfiguration have on rhetoric?

Invention-in-the-Middle

The concept of invention comes from the Greek verb heuriskó, which may be translated “I discover” or “I find.” In Greek literature, the verb most often occurs in its active forms, so that an agent or subject discovers or finds a particular object. Yet occasionally the verb takes on what philologists refer to as the middle voice, a reflexive grammatical construction which conflates active and passive meanings: the subject at once also becomes the object. Sophocles’ Electra presents a rather interesting use of the middle form: erga tous logos heurisketai, or, “and deeds make themselves words” (625; trans. L&S). Electra’s use of the middle form of heuriskó shifts the emphasis of the word away from its traditional unidirectional, object-targeted meaning (I find or discover x) to more bidirectional, reflexive movement: deeds make themselves words. I would like to consider, for a moment, the possibility of what I term “invention-in-the-middle” as an alternative to the distinctly objective and subjective models outlined by Young and Liu.

As a grammatical construct in ancient languages, the middle voice literally falls between the active and the passive. As Eric Charles White puts it, “the ‘middle voice’ can be understood as a possibility of movement among active, passive, and reflexive forms” (52).1 A consideration of invention-in-the-middle presses on the issue of subjectivity from a slightly different angle than approaches that suggest rhetors either discover or create. The discovery and creation models both depend on active constructions that presuppose a subject that is better described as the outcome of the rhetorical situation. In other words, when “discovering” or “making” arguments, one also “makes” a rhetorical subject. That is, as a first move, the discursive encounter itself forges a different subject; and as a second move, the emergent subject becomes a force in the emerging discourse: “I invent” in the middle becomes “I invent and am invented by myself and others” (in each encounter). The middle, then, at once combines and exceeds the forces of active and passive. In the
middle, one invents and is invented, one writes and is written, consti-
tutes and is constituted.

The sophist Gorgias exemplified “invention-in-the-middle” when he
took the stage at the Athenian theater and challenged the audience to
“suggest a subject,” a move which, according to Diogenes Laërtius, showed
that he “would trust to the moment (tô kairôs) to speak on any subject”
(DK 82A1a; Sprague 31). In other words, Gorgias would exploit the pos-
sibilities immanent in a particular rhetorical moment—a kairos—to cre-
ate a discursive offshoot, and along with that a new ethos to go somewhere
else. “Invention-in-the-middle” occurs always on the spur of the moment,
as a response to the forces at work in a particular encounter. The sophis-
tic concept kairos thus becomes critical to discourse production, as it
marks the opportunity for a subject to produce discourse, even as it marks
the other side of subjectivity—i.e., one is called upon to produce discourse.

As the ancient conception of time that attends to degrees of propi-
tiousness, kairos does not have a direct English equivalent. Most fre-
quently translated as “exact or critical time, season, opportunity” (L&amp;S
859), kairos marks the quality of time rather than time’s quantity, which
is captured by the other, more familiar Greek word for time, chronos. In
short, chronos marks duration while kairos marks force. Kairos is thus
rhetoric’s time, for the quality, direction, and movement of discursive
encounters depend more on the forces at work on and in a particular
moment than their quantifiable length.3

Elaborating kairos as a major principle of sophistical rhetoric, John
Poulakis writes that the concept realizes “that speech exists in time and
is uttered both as a spontaneous formulation of and a barely constituted
response to a new situation unfolding in the immediate present” (61).
Kairos, then, enables a consideration of “invention-in-the-middle,” a
space-time which marks the emergence of a pro-visional “subject,” one
that works on—and is worked on by—the situation. The sophistical notion
of kairos offers a tool through which to articulate invention away from
notions of rhetorical beginnings, with specific “ends” in sight (persua-
sion, for example), and toward notions of discursive movements, the in-
betweeeness of rhetoric. In other words, to paraphrase White, kairos
necessitates that thought always be on the move to resist freezing (41).

This essay seeks to sketch the contours of an “invention-in-the-
middle” by trafficking between the concept of kairos and the discourse that
congeals around the figure of Gorgias. What emerges herein is not a com-
plete “theory” of invention, but rather more of an intervention into the
discourse on invention, a retooling of rhetorical invention. I will elabo-
rate “invention-in-the-middle” by laying out the assumptions about dis-
course and rhetoric on which this mode of invention depends: sophistic
movement, the realm of the between, and logos as dunamis.

Sophistic Movement

Invention-in-the-middle is a kairiotic movement, a simultaneous extend-
ning outward and folding back. This space between subject and object is
mediated by action—in Electra’s case, a making of deeds into words.
Consider the mythical figure Kairos, who was depicted as a well-muscled
wing-footed figure perched on a stick or ball, balancing a set of scales on
a razor blade (fig. 1). Himera claims that the fourth-century B.C.E. sculp-
tor Lysippus “enrolled Kairos among the gods” (qtd. in Cook 860). Accord-
ing to Pausanias, Ion of Chios called Kairos the youngest son of

Fig. 1. The mythical figure Kairos was depicted as a well-muscled wing-
footed figure perched on a stick or ball, balancing a set of scales on a
razor blade. His long forelock suggests the importance of looking out for
kairos, as the propitious moment, and grabbing it before he passes by.
Zeus (859), making him the younger brother of Athena, the wily goddess of military encounters and of the practical arts.

The god Kairos is most often depicted (as in fig. 1) with winged feet, sometimes with wings on his back as well. He sports an athletic build, of the type Jean-Pierre Vernant calls the “divine super body” (23), with visible back and shoulder muscles and bulging calves. Kairos is often depicted as mostly bald with a long forelock; of all his attributes, his coiffure garners the most attention. Geoffrey Whitney, in his 1586 portrayal of Lyssipus’ Kairos (now Latinized and bearing the feminine name Occasio or Occasion), explains the significance of the unusual hairstyle (the voice of Occasion is italicized):

What means longe lockes before? that suche as meete,
Maye houldhe at firste, when they occasion finde.
Thy head behinde at balde, what telles it more?
That none shoulde houldhe, that let me slippe before. (181)

This depiction of the god Kairos (fig. 1) suggests the importance of looking out for kairos, as the propitious moment, and grabbing his forelock before he passes by to avoid being left to swipe at a bald head. Offering similar emblematic qualities is the portrayal of Kairos on a Theban limestone relief (now at Cairo), which features a winged figure dressed in military garb running above two female figures: one is dejectedly sitting in the background, while the other is flying ahead in the foreground (fig. 2). J. Strzygowski calls them Kairos, Pronoia, and Metanoia (Cook 863). Pronoia, the figure of foresight, is flying with Kairos, while Metanoia, the figure of afterthought or hindsight, is left behind. The relief, like Whitney’s depiction of Occasion, underscores the fleeting quality of Kairos and the consequences of not being prepared for contingencies or opportunities. This reading is also supported by the early addition of a butterfly—also an emblem of mutability—to Kairos’ other hand in the Hellenistic period (860).

These characteristics—hair, butterfly, and wings—support the standard symbolic reading of kairos as an embodiment of carpe diem, now a timeless literary trope—with a decidedly individualistic motif. Now, however, it seems productive to disengage kairos from this symbolic stability and examine the ways in which Kairos’ corporeal codes enable both new conceptualizations of the relations between humans, gods, and time and new perspectives on the concept of discourse itself. What does the god’s corporeal code suggest about discourse? Kairos’ winged feet, when considered together with discourse—from the Latin discurreare, to run to and fro, to traverse—foreground movement, the movement of time, the movement of language, and the shifting of forces. Kairos thus might be read to mark the celerity and multi-directionality of discourse; as such, the mythical figure bears witness to rhetorical “movement.”

The available remnants of discourse attributed to Gorgias and his contemporaries suggest that Gorgias cultivated a kind of sophist movement—in the sense of mode and tempo rather than historical period. Gorgias emphasized the rhythmic movement of discourse, a movement that was closely tied to the “mobility” of discourse. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, writing about the movements of music, observe that in the musical milieu, “rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments, or ties itself together in passing from one milieu to another” (313). Gorgias is known for emphasizing the rhythmic movements of discourse. One of
his legacies, as it is widely thought, is the introduction of rhythm and poetic style to the art of words. As Diodorus Siculus points out, "[Gorgias] was the first to use extravagant figures of speech marked by deliberate art: antithesis and clauses of exactly or approximately equal length and rhythm and others" (DK 82A4; Sprague 33). Similarly, Suidas contends that Gorgias "was the first to give the rhetorical genre the verbal power and art of deliberate culture and employed tropes and metaphors and figurative language and hypallage and catachresis and hyperbaton and doublings of words and repetitions and apostrophies and clauses of equal length" (DK 82A2; Sprague 32).

Gorgias thus moved lyrical poetry into the realm of rhetoric. As Charles P. Segal notes, “Gorgias, in fact, transfers the emotive devices and effects of poetry to his own prose, and in doing so he brings within the competence of the rhetor the power to move the psyche by those suprarational forces which Damon is said to have discerned in the rhythm and harmony of the formal structures of music” (127). Segal suggests that Gorgias followed the work of his contemporary Damon (n. 103), who studied music’s effects on the movement (kinesis) of the psyche. Further, Bromley Smith compares Gorgias’ speech to “a symphony because when read aloud it recalls a piece of music; for it has the cadences, tonal effects, diminuendos and crescendos of a sonata” (350), and Edward Schiappa argues that a proper title for Gorgias is “prose rhapsode,” thus marking Gorgias’ “striking and almost musical” style (251, 245) and his hybridized (poetic-prosaic) discursive strategies. Gorgias is thus the most musical of the sophists. Attuned to the effects of rhythms in speech, he becomes a part of the discursive forces at work, as the harmonies of poetry meld with the art of speaking, producing an art (paradoxically) grounded in movement.

Most of the figures Gorgias is credited with having brought to the domain of rhetoric suggest some sort of movement. For example, tropes (tropaios), from tropé, meaning turn, turning, and tropos, can be used to indicate musical harmony, or a particular mode. Metaphor, from metaporphai, transport, haulage, change, even a passing phase of the moon, was itself “transferred” to indicate the “transference of a word to a new sense.” Hypallage (hypallagei), a term for interchange or exchange, such as the exchange of women, or the change of regime or the color of wine (L&S 1851), came also to denote a verbal play on shifts in shades of meaning: apostrophe from apostrephein, a turning away, a bend in the stream, or, in rhetoric, a turning away from others to address one (L&S 220). Most of the figures are verbs-cum-nouns, and most mark the twists and turns (and potential twists and turns) that discourse can produce. The figures Gorgias used as tools of flight to produce discourse are tools of movement, facilitating the kind of discursive action that was later dubbed “to Gorgianize” (Philostratus, qtd. in DR A35; Sprague 41).

Gorgias is thus often characterized as the rhetor of style. Still, Gorgianic “style” is not the ornamental dimension of rhetoric (style as opposed to content). Instead, style, for Gorgias, is the rhythm and movement of the discourse itself; as such, it is irreducibly linked to content (and hence to what is traditionally figured as rhetorical invention). Thus before the canons were neatly divided into five discrete steps for discourse production, Gorgias demonstrated the impossibility of maintaining their separation. In other words, style, for Gorgias, was a means of invention, a kind of movement that Gorgias was always already caught up in, a movement that provides constraints along with possibilities.

In his defense of Helen, a speech in which he interrogates the prevailing assumptions about Helen’s responsibility for the Trojan War, Gorgias suggests that the power (dunamis) of speech could be the reason for Helen’s flight to Troy. In doing so, however, Gorgias also performs his point, implicating himself and his listeners in his own speech. He begins this line of argument by calling speech a “powerful lord” (dunastēs megas) that can effectively “banish fear and remove grief and instill pleasure and enhance pity” (8). Before he develops this point, Gorgias addresses his hearers in the imperative: “listen (pherē) as I turn (metastō) from one argument (logon) to another” (9). The verb metastō, from metahistemi, here translated as “turn,” is a verb of movement. It generally takes the force of “to transform” or “change,” as in to change form or position. This moment of direct address thus marks a critical—and literal—turning point in the Helen: not only does it mark a transition from one argument to the next, but it marks the transformation of Gorgias himself in that discursive movement. Gorgias does more than catalogue arguments; he cultivates an ethos that morphs between logos. It is, therefore, the turn itself, not the logos, but the very act of changing and being changed that Gorgias foregrounds when he directs those present to listen (pherē). The verb pherē means “to bear” or “to carry,” but it can also refer, at the same time, to a yielding or producing, as a cow producing (and hence bearing) milk. The act of listening, then, becomes just that: a productive, transformative act for hearers and speakers. At this point, Gorgias orders his listeners both to bear and to produce his act of turning. This moment
of direct address, then, emphasizes the transformative encounter produced through discourse.

Gorgias' speech thus inscribes him as a shapeshifter—for the sake of "argument"—performing a kairotic "invention-in-the-middle," by which Gorgias inserts himself into the situation at that particular moment, imploring those present to phere, to bear and produce the transformative rhetorical encounters: "Listen as I turn."

**Intermezzo**

The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between the intermezzo... Deleuze and Guattari (1987)

Given its relationship to the movements of discourse, "invention-in-the-middle" resonates with a more general "betweenness," an action that happens in the thick of things. "Invention-in-the-middle" assumes that rhetoric is a performance, a discursive-material-bodily-temporal encounter, a force among forces. This mode of invention is not a beginning, as the first canon is often articulated, but a middle, an in-between, a simultaneously interruptive and connective hooking-in to circulating discourses.

As an interruption, "invention-in-the-middle" calls for rhetorical cuttings, interventional piercings of particular moments to produce discourse. It is important to distinguish "invention-in-the-middle" and its partner term kairos from what is often called exigence. While a commonly held notion of exigence requires the "rhetor"—a discrete, rational being—to decode a "rhetorical situation" from outside (step one), and then consciously to select "appropriate" arguments (step two), kairos provides a point of departure from reasoned, linear steps—even from consciousness. As White observes, "The rhetorical practice of the sophist who allows kairos to figure in the invention of speech will issue, then, in an endlessly proliferating style deployed according to no overarching principle or rational design. The orator who invents on the basis of kairos must in fact always go beyond the bounds of the 'rational'" (21). Here White raises an important point about kairos's relationship to subjective reason: the movements and betweenness of kairos necessitate a move away from a privileging of "design" or preformulated principles. At times, however, these so-called principles could be so habituated as to not require "thinking" per se. Janet Atwill presses on similar issues in her study of rhetorical technē (art), the embodiment of the art that constitutes a performance, practice-based "knowledge" of kairos. Atwill observes that "knowing how" and 'knowing when' are at the heart of kairos, distinguishing technē from rule-governed activities that are less constrained by temporal conditions" (59). Kairotic impulses can therefore be habituated or intuitive—even bodily—and are not limited to a seat of reason or conscious adherence to a set of precepts. Rather, they depend largely on the rhetorical encounter itself and the forces pushing on the encounter. Such encounters mandate responses, and these responses can connect and hence lead to other emergent forces, while severing others.

Again, kairos serves as a useful conceptual tool with which to think about these cuttings. As White puts it, "kairos regards the present as unprecedented, as a moment of decision, a moment of crisis" (14). Here, the word "decision" demarcates the particular action of rhetoric. From the Latin verb decidere, which means "to cut off," a decision necessarily entails a cutting. The mythical figure of Kairos epitomizes decision and incision-making in that he is usually depicted bearing scales and razor blades, tools for measuring and cutting as well as for being measured and cut. Figure 1, for example, shows Kairos perched on a narrow surface, balancing a pair of scales on the edge of a razor blade. His excellent balancing skills are key: Kairos must remain in the middle, ever ready for a moment of intervention. The god thus illustrates what I would call a "rhetorical stance"; he is on his toes, prepared for action, and attuned to the forces at work at a particular time. The god Kairos stands as a figure of in(ter)vention insofar as kairos mediates—or goes "between"—the outside of the self, i.e., the nodes where the "self" encounters the world, and the discourse or the "other" that the self encounters. In some depictions of Kairos, for example, the god is exerting pressure on the scale closest to him. This action might be read as a kind of material encounter with justice, where Kairos provides intervention tools with which to transform the outcome of a particular encounter. Because his razor blades help him intervene "in the nick of time," Kairos designates the moment of the encounter between self and other.

Again, the **Helen** provides a useful example of this betweenness, this interventional slicing/being sliced into a situation. Gorgias cuts into the discourses already circulating about Helen, deciding to use some existing discourse, while ignoring (i.e., selecting out) others. For example, Gorgias is compelled to take on "those who rebuke Helen, a woman about whom
there is univocal and unanimous testimony among those who have believed the poets and whose illomened name has become a memorial of disasters” (2). As Kennedy points out in his discussion of the *Encomium of Helen*, however, Gorgias “ignores the more favorable treatments of Helen in Stesichorus’ *Palinode*, Herodotus’ *Histories*, and Euripides’ *Helen* (284, n. 1), seconding instead the general discourses that blame her for the Trojan War. Yet he contrasts this movement with another set of stories about Helen, the genealogical *mythoi*, which directly connect her to the immortals: “Now that by nature and birth the woman who is the subject of this speech was preeminent among pre-eminent men and women, this is not unclear, not even to a few; for it is clear that Leda was her mother, while as a father she had in fact a god, though allegedly a mortal, the latter Tyndareus, the former Zeus” (Gorgias 3). Gorgias goes on to connect her high birth with her “godlike beauty,” an observation that echoes his enumeration of praiseworthy virtues in line 1: those attributes praiseworthy in a city, the soul, action, and speech, are a good army, wisdom, virtue, and truth, and a beautiful body deserve praise as well. He omits details about Paris, though he speaks of that omission: “for to tell the knowing what they know is believable but not enjoyable” (5).

Here, Gorgias cuts and is cut in between the divergent discourses—those proclaiming Helen’s divine lineage and those associating her name with evil—in a manner similar to the *Dissoi Logoi*. This sophist treatise establishes the in-betweeness of discourse by expounding on the various sides of several issues—justice, beauty, virtue, the good, and the scanty—and of course, their opposites: “take the case of various contests, athletic, musical, and military; in a race on the stadium, for instance, victory is good for the winner but bad for the losers. The same holds true for wrestlers and boxers, and for all those who take part in musical contests: for instance, victory in lyre-playing is good for the winner but bad for the losers” (DK 90.1.6–7; *Sfragae 280*). Like the *Dissoi Logoi*, Gorgias’ *Helen* moves from the already established views to different views, constructing a veritable chain of instances where the same act can be viewed as, for example, both good and bad. Gorgias offers several possible explanations for Helen’s flight, each one adding doubt to her responsibility for her own actions. Such explanations include the forces of witchcraft, speech, and love. Gorgias does not settle on one definitive explanation, but enumerates several viable ones. In so doing, he resists pressing an ontological stamp on the situation: “Helen is not guilty because . . .” Instead, he moves between the reasons she might not be to blame—thus creating a conjunction of forces (“and . . . and . . . and . . . and”).

The movement of Gorgias’ speech, then, occurs in the middle, in the realm of the between. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, “Between things does not designate the localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (25). In other words, Gorgias’ betweenness, not necessarily Gorgias himself, seeks not to replace the previously accepted “truth” about Helen with another truth, but rather to undermine the very notion that one truth (or any truth for that matter) exists (much like the *Dissoi Logoi*). Sophistic truth resides in the logic of the “and”—in the connective force which constitutes the “turn” on which Gorgias impels his listeners to focus. Deleuze and Guattari explain the force of the “and”:

> There has always been a struggle in language between the verb *ēn* (and to be) and the conjunction *ap* (and), and between *ēn* and *ē* and *ē*. It is only in appearance that these two terms are in accord and combine, for the first acts in language as a constant and forms the diatonic scale of language, while the second places everything in variation, constituting the lines of a generalized chromatism. From one to another, everything shifts . . . That is when style becomes a language. That is when language becomes intensive, a pure continuum of values and intensities. (88)

In other words, the “and” interroges sweeping ontological claims by pointing to the multiplicity that emerges on the other end of the “is,” “x is y and z,” etc. The “and,” a copulative word, thus exposes the limit of the “is,” which Deleuze and Guattari compare to the standard diatonic, eight-tone musical scale, and thus assures variations or turns, enabling thought to depart and go somewhere else.

In a key moment at the end of the *Helen*, where Gorgias proclaims he has effectively “removed disgrace from a woman,” he also adds: “I wished to write a speech which would be a praise of Helen and a diversion (παίγνιον) to myself.” This line, one of the most intensely studied lines of Gorgias’, produces significant effects. On one hand, the two-pronged claim troubles generic constraints. Insofar as the *Helen* presses on what counts as “truth,” this final statement functions to upend the traditional genre of epideictic, going beyond the generic constraints of praise and blame to suggest that the speech has also served a recreational function. By extension, the final comment renders the entire speech a *paígnion*, a
game, and therefore undermines notions of "truth" in general; in short, the gaming aspect trumps the persuasive function of the Helen, i.e., the actual removal of blame. Poulakos offers this reading, writing that Gorgias "is content to have participated in the game of words, to have demonstrated to his audience that he is a splendid player, and to have tried to bring them into the game" (67). This final phrase (énon de paignion) folds truth back into the notion of a game, a paignion, hence subordinating a truth discourse to a playful jest.

On the other hand, Gorgias' last sentence sports the logic of the "and," wherein the two functions of the speech are not hierarchized but maintained as dual directions. The Helen is thus not one singular thing, but rather runs between—at once a discourse which challenges established truths about Helen and also a recreational discursive movement. The "and" thus effectively produces tension with the singular "would be" that precedes it ("I wished to write a speech that would be . . . "), splitting the notion of being and hooking it into other objects: both Helen and Gorgias himself. The "and" therefore serves the transformative function of "invention-in-the-middle," dispersing force between and among Helen, Gorgias, and—lest we forget—those who have been bearing the "turns" along the way.

The Gorgianic Logos-Dunamis Complex

Perhaps this Gorgianic emphasis on "turning" and its relationship to subjectivity can be illuminated by linking it to Gorgias' thought on the movement of fluids through the body. In Plato's Meno, Gorgias is said to have followed Empedocles in his belief that "existing things have some effluences . . . and pores into which and through which the effluences are carried" (76C). The effluences, fluids, films, or smells emitted or transmitted through the body were thought to be suited to the sensory perceptions. Further, Gorgias was said to have thought that fire moved through pores of materials in a similar manner, as evidenced in Theophrastus' refutation of Gorgias' theory that combustion from mirrors and other shiny surfaces takes place "by means of the fire passing away through the pores" (DK 82B5; Sprague 47). For Gorgias, bodies and souls, like bronze and silver, were porous entities which allowed effluents and other substances (words, fire) to pass through. No wonder his speeches were referred to as "torches" (Smith 359). This somatic relation also emerges in the Helen when Gorgias suggests an analogy between speech and drugs: "The power of speech has the same relation to the disposition of the soul as the application of drugs on the disposition of the body. For just as different drugs draw different juices out of the body, and some end disease but others end life, so also some speeches produce pain, some enjoyment, some fear; some instill courage in hearers; some drug and beguile the soul with a kind of evil persuasion" (14). So for Gorgias, speech (logos) can move through the soul (psyche) like drugs through the bloodstream, and the effects can be as potent as hemlock or as soothing as rubbing oil. Just as Gorgias focused on the turn in the passage discussed earlier, here he focuses on the changes produced on the disposition (taxis) of the body or soul when drugs and speech pass through, thus emphasizing the encounter between body and drug, speech and soul. Toward the end of this passage, Gorgias uses the same root term that he uses for drugs—pharmakon—in verb form (pharmakeusai) to suggest what speech does: some logos "drug and beguile the soul." At this point it is possible that drugs are no longer metaphorical for logos, but that logos becomes a type of pharmakon. Gorgias' pharmakon resembles the pharmakon in Jacques Derrida's reading of the concept in Plato. Derrida points out that "The pharmakon is that which, always springing up from without, acting like the outside itself, will never have any definable virtue of its own" (102). That is, a pharmakon (translated variously, as Derrida points out, as "drug," "remedy," "poison"), can only be considered in relation to something else, some other body, and its effects on a particular body cannot be known in advance. As Derrida puts it, "in order for this pharmakon to show itself, with use, to be injurious, its effectiveness, its power, its dunamis must, of course, be ambiguous" (103).

Not unlike Derrida, Gorgias acknowledges the most prominent characteristic of logos: its dunamis, its capacity to effect change. The dunamis of logos therefore cannot be known in and of itself—i.e., dunamis does not take a "form," but emerges only relationally—between drugs and blood, even between wrestlers. The French word for power, pouvoir, aligns with dunamis in interesting ways. As Gayatri Spivak points out, "Pouvoir is of course 'power.' But there is also a sense of 'can-do'-ness in pouvoir, if only because, in its various declinations it is the commonest way of saying 'can' in the French language" (qd. in Biesecker 358). Bearing in mind that pouvoir indicates "capacity" and "potential" helps to elucidate Foucault's suggestion that "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Discipline and Punish
194). *Dunamis* also captures the various forces of *pouvoir*, for it can be translated as “power,” “influence,” or “forces,” “means,” and “function,” “faculty,” “capability.” *Dunamis*, then, can also be said to produce reality. Linking *dunamis* to a productive notion of power yields a different reading of Gorgias’ notion of discourse. Gorgias’ explication of the *logos*- *dunamis* complex might suggest something other than speech as a means of control or domination (persuasion). Instead, Gorgias’ comparison of the power of speech (ἐκ τοῦ λόγου δυνάμεως) to drugs (14) might be read as a suggestion of the “can-do-ness” of speech. The function of *logos*, then, resides in its relations, at the specific junctures where it encounters and is encountered by other forces.

A consideration of language or rhetoric as an encounter of forces taps into a set of philosophical insights about the performativity of language as outlined by J. L. Austin and taken up by Derrida, Judith Butler, and others. Drawing on an Austinian-Derridean account of performativity, Richard Doyle offers an important insight about the ways in which an account of language-as-force troubles notions of hermeneutical or representational accounts of communication. For Doyle, “the transmission, passage, and communicability of language [...] become something other than an affair of meaning or information; they become something more like ballistics or contagion, the transmission and repetition of an effect across bodies of discourse and across bodies” (5). Such performative effects of language align with Gorgias’ notion of language’s drug-like effects, and its capacity or *dunamis* to incite movement.

The issue of a broad *dunamis* (i.e., the possibility of producing multiple effects) is never far from the ethical issue of use. The general point in section 14 of the *Helen* is similar to that made in Plato’s *Gorgias* (456a–457) when Socrates, marveling about the power (*dunamis*) of rhetoric, worries about the ethical ramifications of teaching such a forcible art. In response to Socrates, Gorgias argues that the teachers should not be blamed for the misuse of rhetoric, this time making a comparison to athletic training: “just because one has learned boxing or wrestling or fighting in armour so well as to vanquish friend and foe alike: this gives one no right to strike one’s friends, or stab them to death” (456d). Here, as in the *Helen*, Gorgias acknowledges the most prominent characteristic of *logos*: its *dunamis*, its capacity to (effect) change, and concomitantly, its potential (use for) destructive ends. By establishing that this broad *dunamis* is a characteristic of *logos* in general, Gorgias’ discourse attempts to free from future blame the teachers of rhetoric, just as the speech frees Helen from blame. But both discourses maintain a key point for sophistic movement: the *dunamis* of *logos*, like the bodily arts of pharmacology and athletic training, emerges in the encounter itself.

Gorgias’ arguments about the power of *logos* underscore the kairotic tenor of his rhetoric. Specifically, the art of pharmacology creates another link to *kairos*. In antiquity, the practice of medicine was guided by a loge of *kairos*. Aristotle regarded medicine as the most practical and common sphere for the use of *kairos*, as he writes in the *Ethics* of the importance of circumstance: “And if this is true of the general theory of ethics, still less is exact precision possible in dealing with particular cases of conduct; for these come under no science or professional tradition, but the agents themselves have to consider what is suited to the circumstances on each occasion (*kairos*), just as is the case with the art of medicine” (2.2.4). The production of a bodily state—be it the emission of particular fluids, the relief of pain, or the production of pleasure—depends on the singular encounter between the drug and the body in a particular condition at a particular moment. Aristotle wasn’t the only one who viewed the practices of medicine as a kairotic encounter. As G. E. R. Lloyd points out, the Hippocratic tradition held that diseases can be successfully treated “if you hit upon the right moment (*kairos*) to apply your remedies” (362; also qtd. in Atwill 57). Similarly, the effects of athletic practices of boxing and wrestling cannot be known in advance, but rather depend upon a particular encounter—the *agon*—which demands a deployment of skills on the spot, in the heat of the moment, in the blink of an eye. For Gorgias, both athletics and pharmacology capture the kairotic capacity of discursive practices.

This relational specificity—the emergence of effects from specific encounters—helps account for both the importance of *kairos* in sophistic rhetoric and for the general dissatisfaction with Gorgias’ attempts to explain *kairos*. Dionysus of Halicarnassus, for example, complains: “No orator or philosopher has up to his time denied the art of the ‘timely,’ not even Gorgias of Leontini, who first tried to write about it, nor did he write anything worth mentioning” (Sprague 82B13). Untersteiner and Rostagni both contend that Dionysius only considered “pedantic formal classifications” to be worth mentioning (Untersteiner 203, n. 11). However, enumerating the precepts of *kairos* would prove counter to Gorgias’ rhetoric—and to *kairos* itself. It is precisely because of this relational specificity that Gorgias “seems” to have no guiding “theory” of rhetoric or its uses. In many ways, Plato’s Socrates poses the impossible ethical question to Gorgias, asking him to account for rhetoric’s capacity for “misuse.”
If sophistic rhetoric depends on the specific encounter, then *kairos* is Gorgias' ethics.

So far, I have tried to address problems with the “subject” of invention and to rearticulate the “discovery” and “creation” models of rhetorical invention to allow for postmodern critiques of the singular sovereign subject. I have suggested “invention-in-the-middle” as an alternative mode of rhetorical invention, one that depends on a reshaping of rhetoric itself. This particular reshaping invokes the movement of discourse, rhetoric's betweenness, and the productive dimension *logos*'s power (*dunamis*). While this view of rhetoric certainly troubles programmatic approaches to discourse production and, consequently, to rhetorical invention, I would argue that this reconceptualization of invention is tenable. When rhetoric emerges from encounters, invention is practiced on many levels: in the unexpected syncopations that occur under the traditional rubric of “style”; in the strategic piecing together of discourse (also called “arrangement”); in the bodily and “surface” movements sometimes called “delivery”; and in the configurations of experiential “memory,” which necessarily entails the act of forgetting.

In other words, the traditional canons of rhetoric become less discrete, useful only for naming actions—for distinguishing the cuttings and connections, the “contagion”-like “transmissions” effected by discourse’s *dunamis*. To be sure, the logic of the “and” replaces the linear “then.” Rather than the five-step program (“invention, then style, then arrangement . . .”), the canons would cluster around “ands,” held in tension, and enacted only through the movements—or turns—of discourse. As I have tried to suggest, these canonical categories have little meaning without the relational specificity of particular encounters. It is only through the timely, *kairotic* encounter that “turns” happen, different *ethoi* emerge, and *logos* becomes action—or, in a reversal of Electra’s middle statement—words make themselves deeds.

Notes

1. See White's chapter on middle voice, which wonderfully situates the middle voice in Freudian work on sadomasochism. White's elaboration of and departures from the psychoanalytic tradition performatively produce the mobile fluctuating discourse which his book attempts to elaborate.

2. The translations of fragments about Gorgias’ life are taken from George Kennedy’s contribution to Rosamund Kent Sprague’s edition of *The Older Sophists*.

3. For the usefulness of *kairos* in contemporary pedagogy, see James Kinneavy and Michael Carter. James S. Baumlits an in-depth discussion of the concept's relationship to *prepon* or decorum. More philological treatments of *kairos* include those of William H. Race, Richard Broxton Onions (esp. pages 343–48), and J. R. Wilson (1980 and 1981). For important and rarely cited (at least in rhetorical scholarship) philosophical work on *kairos*'s relationship to *chronos*, see John E. Smith (1969 and 1986). Also, Carolyn Miller (1992 and 1994) has made good use of the concept in relation to technology and the rhetoric of science.

4. For an excellent discussion about the bodies of mythic figures, see Jean-Pierre Vernant’s "Dim Body, Dazzling Body."


6. For the *and*’s relationship to the conjunctive fabric of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical tool for opposing the ontology of the tree, see *A Thousand Plateaus* (25).

7. Isocrates, in his *Encomium on Helen*, chides Gorgias for violating the conventions of the encomiastic genre: “Nevertheless, even he committed a slight inadvertence—for although he asserts that he has written an encomium of Helen, it turns out that he has actually spoken a defense of her conduct!” (14–15).

8. Translation mine.

9. Austin’s theory of performativity explores the notion that language performs actions on subjects, as in the marriage ceremony’s “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Works Cited


