Bodily Pedagogies: Rhetoric, Athletics, and the Sophists’ Three Rs

Debra Hawhee

For rhetoric and composition, the last decade of the twentieth century might be deemed “The Return of the Ancients.” In many ways, contemporary scholars have taken up an earlier resurgence of the ancients, one that began decades earlier with what have since become standard historical treatments of the ancients (Kennedy, Kerferd, and Guthrie), and, perhaps most notably, in 1972, when Rosamond Kent Sprague’s volume The Older Sophists made available the sophistic fragments in translation for the first time. But recent work aims to be more connective: rather than writing history for the sake of history, scholars such as Janet Atwill, Richard Enos, Susan Jarratt, John Poulakos, Takis Poulakos, Kathleen Welch, Victor Vitanza, and most recently Jeffrey Walker (Rhetoric) have reclaimed, refigured, and reread Aristotle, Isocrates, and the sophists, delineating ways in which these ancient figures might help us reframe or reconsider contemporary debates about pedagogy. The connections to feminism (Jarratt), cultural studies (T. Poulakos and Welch), postmodernism (Vitanza and Atwill) and the liberal arts (Atwill and Walker) have been convincing enough to spark renewed and broadened interest in how the ancients conceptualized rhetoric, how they taught, what they did.

In many ways what follows is also a return to the ancients, but rather than attempt to connect the ancients to discourse already in circulation—an important task, to be sure—I want to instead explore a connection that inhered in ancient practices, a connection that isn’t as apparently relevant to contemporary pedagogy, but as I will suggest just might be: that between rhetorical training and athletic training.¹ It is important to note at the outset, as many writers have pointed out (for

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example, Ong 43–45; J. Poulakos 32–39), that Greek culture is highly agonistic, and further (a point I will return to later) that, as with most civic activities in antiquity, these endeavors were decidedly masculine (Keuls; Stehle; Gleason), two considerations that help render more salient the cultural and historical connections this article will explore.

The Place of the Sophist

The opening of Plato’s *Lysis* depicts the character Socrates in transit from the Academy to the Lyceum, two of Athens’s three public gymnasia, when he is intercepted by his friend Hippothales, who invites Socrates to join his circle of friends. The ensuing exchange, as narrated by Socrates, proceeds as follows:

Where do you mean? I asked; and what is your company?

Here, he said, showing me there, just opposite the wall, a sort of [enclosed area] and a door standing open. We pass our time there (*diatribomen*), he went on; not only we ourselves, but others [as well]—a great many, and [beautiful].

[What is this place, and what do you do there] (*kai tis e diatribē*)?

A wrestling school (*palaistra*), he said, of recent construction; and our pastime chiefly consists of discussions, in [which] we would be happy to let you [take part].

That is very [kind] of you, I said; and who does the teaching in there?

Your own comrade, he replied, and supporter, Miccus. (203b–204a; trans. adapted).

Socrates has happened upon a private palaestra, common during his time in Athens, a place where young boys were sent to learn wrestling and other sporting activities. But more than that, as this passage indicates, such schools were also the site of philosophical discussions the likes of those described by Hippothales, in this case conducted by the sophist Miccus. Such discussions were understood as a kind of informal training, as they fostered the production and demonstration of skills important for public discourse, and the working through of particular cultural and philosophical topics, like friendship, in the example of *Lysis*.

Evidence of sophistic activity in gymnasia and palaestrae is scattered through the remains of Greek writings. In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates refers to the sophists’ frequenting the Lyceum (18, 33). Diogenes Laertius writes of Gorgias’s student Antisthenes (444–365 BCE), who was the first to set up some sort of permanent school at Athens; he apparently located his school in the Cynosarges gymnasia and attracted a large group of students (6:1–13). In his treatise “The Dialogue on Love,” Plutarch mentions that his sons take philosophy in the wrestling school (2.749c). In the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Eryxias*, Prodicus is said to have been discoursing so loudly that the gymasiarch, the gymnasia overseer, had to ask him to keep the noise level down (397c–d). According to Plutarch, a public reading of Protagoras’s *On the Gods* may well have taken place in the Lyceum (*Lives* 9.54). The
sophists apparently infiltrated gymnasia in the beginning of the classical era and remained there until late antiquity.

To be sure, the sophists did not teach exclusively at gymnasia. Private houses also served as common meeting spots for sophistic exchanges. As R. E. Wycherly points out, “a Greek philosophical school was essentially a specialized extension of the Hellenic household” (155). It was very common indeed for citizens to play host to itinerant scholars, as we see in many of Plato’s dialogues. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, the opening shows Phaedrus reporting to Socrates that he has just come from the house of Epicrates, where Phaedrus, Epicrates, and Lysias discoursed on the subject of *erôs*. Isocrates set up a school in his own house, as did Kallias (Wycherly 155ff). While Isocrates taught in a house, he nevertheless spent some time in local athletic facilities, as he is said to have died in 338/37 in an Athenian palaestra owned by a man named Hippocrates (Kyle 144; Plutarch, “Lives of the Ten Orators”). Other sophists wandered about town, often imparting their wisdom in the agora. Xenophon tells how the sophist Euthydemus used a saddler’s shop near the agora as a place for sharing his art of discourse (Memorabilia 4.2.1). In Plato’s *Lesser Hippias*, Socrates says to Hippias that he has heard him making a display of his wisdom “in the agora by the tables” (368b). Most—if not all—sophists passed through the city’s gymnasia at some point.

For all practical purposes, the gymnasion, a sprawling space with numerous rooms inhabited by young men, was an ideal place for sophists to cultivate a following. For one thing, as Susan Jarratt has observed, the sophists were the Athenian version of “public intellectuals” (98), so it makes sense that they would visit the public gymnasia, since the sites were already an integral part of the daily practices of most free Athenian men. But perhaps more importantly, these locations were frequented by youths seeking to cultivate a citizen *éthos*. As Frederick Beck points out, “palaestrae and gymnasia were the only places of instruction frequented at all by boys in their middle and late teens” (131). As locations of physical training—young boys learned and practiced running, jumping, wrestling, and boxing, for starters—the gymnasia were already important sites for the production of citizen subjects, and moreover, the production took place in a decidedly corporeal style. From this spatial intermingling of practices there emerged a curious syncretism between athletics and rhetoric, a particular crossover in pedagogical practices and learning styles, a crossover that contributed to the development of rhetoric as a *bodily art*: an art learned, practiced, and performed by and with the body as well as the mind. What follows will continue to treat the two arts syncretically—by thinking them together—and in this manner will delineate features of the sophists’ pedagogy, refigure a portion of rhetoric’s history, and consider possible implications such a history may hold for contemporary pedagogy.
It is perhaps unsurprising that Isocrates, the fourth-century BCE orator and student of the famed sophist Gorgias, was the one to articulate most explicitly this fusion of teaching styles. As Takis Poulakos argues in his book on Isocrates’s rhetorical education, Isocrates’s approach to rhetoric was decidedly interdisciplinary, and according to Poulakos this “interdisciplinary approach to rhetorical education is only symptomatic of a larger commitment on his part, namely, to link rhetorical education with the affairs and concerns of the polis” (2). Since athletic training and competition were already deeply politicized in Athenian culture (Kyle; Kurke), what better art to link to, strategically and methodologically, than the practices in the gymnasium, the place where the political, ethical body emerges? While Isocrates’s linkage may have been strategic, he himself contends that the connection is historical: “Greek ancestors,” likely the older sophists, developed these “parallel and complementary [antistrophous kai suzugas]” arts of the body and mind, “not separating sharply the two kinds of education, but using similar methods of instruction, exercise, and other forms of discipline.” (Antidosis 180–83; trans. adapted).

Athletic and rhetorical training were thus bound together, as Isocrates points out, in at least two ways: (1) together, training in athletics and oratory provide a program for shaping an entire self, and (2) the two arts draw from similar pedagogical strategies wherein the respective instructors impart to students bodily and discursive forms of expression: then, according to Isocrates, they “set them at exercises, habituate them to work, and require them to combine in practice the particular things which they have learned” (Antidosis 184). Furthermore, this passage describes a style of pedagogy based upon what I’m calling the three Rs of sophistic pedagogy: rhythm, repetition, and response. I will return to this particular passage later, but for now, suffice it to say that the linkage between athletics and rhetoric in Isocrates’s treatise is more than just a clever comparison, and suggests deep connections between the two kinds of training practices. As Isocrates suggests, the sophists offered a distinctive approach to rhetorical pedagogy derived from physical trainers. The connection, however, does not lie in material learned, but rather inheres in a learned manner, a kind of habit-production based on movement. This movement begins with a rhythm.

**A Rhythmic Invasion**

Central for rhythmic production was the aulos, a pipelike reed instrument common to the era, and each palaestra had at least one aulos player associated with it. The aulos player’s job was to set the rhythm for all gymnastic exercises, including the general warm-up activities and the focused practice of specific bodily movement. To the rhythm of the music, javelin throwers, wrestlers, boxers, jumpers, and other
athletes would rehearse fundamental movements, be they throwing form, an approach or hold, or jab steps.

Given the proximity of athletic and rhetorical training, as well as the noisiness of auloi—their shrill sounds approximate those produced by modern-day bagpipes—it is also likely that music flowed into recitations and sophistic lectures, producing an awareness of—indeed, facilitating—the rhythmic, tonic quality of speeches. As Kenneth J. Freeman points out, the aulos did not merely provide background noise, but rather played an integral role in training, as the instrument was used “in order that good time might be preserved in the various movements” (128). Music’s role in the gymnasium, then, was to introduce a rhythm, to provide a tempo for the practice and production of bodily movements. In short, music established a rhythm through the cyclical repetition of patterns, and this rhythm was replicated in the bodily movements of those in training.

As with most topics, Aristotle was the first to delineate the logic behind music in education.³ For Aristotle, the intrinsic qualities of certain rhythms and modes cannot be separated from their effects on a person, so that some music is useful for relaxation, some for education, some for pleasure, and some for catharsis (Politics 8.5.4–7.8). After parsing the various effects of music, Aristotle moves to what is, at least for him, the more interesting line of inquiry—the way in which music works directly on character (étbos) and soul (psychē):

But it is clear that we are affected in a certain manner, both by many other kinds of music and not least by the melodies of Olympus; for these admittedly make our souls enthusiastic, and enthusiasm is an affection of the character of the soul. And moreover everybody when listening to imitations (mimēseis) is thrown into a corresponding state of feeling, even apart from the rhythms and tunes themselves. (8.5.5–6)

For Aristotle, the aurality of music differs from other mimetic arts, in that it more powerfully conveys étbos than those arts depending on other senses for perception. He writes that “other objects of sensation contain no representation of character, for example, the objects of touch and taste” (1340a.29–30). He then follows this with a long parenthetical comment on visual art, where he says such works “are not representations of character but rather the forms and colors produced are mere indications of character” (1350a.35). Noteworthy, however, is the way in which pieces of music “actually contain in themselves imitations of character” (mimēmata tôn étthon), and later, he discusses different kinds of rhythms as possessing (echei) more stable (stasimōteron) or mobile (kinētikon) character (1340b.9). In other words, music, with its sonorous, seductive movements, most closely approximates human étbos, as Aristotle writes “we seem to have a certain kinship (suggeneia) with tunes and rhythms” (1340b.17–18).

Aristotle draws his conceptions of musical étbos from the sophist Damon, a legendary music teacher who studied with the sophist Prodicus. According to a
Damonian fragment, “[s]ong and dance necessarily arise when the soul is in some way moved; liberal and beautiful songs and dances create a similar soul, and the reverse kind create (poioi) a reverse kind of soul” (Diels and Kranz 37.B.6). Hence, for Damon, music and its attendant practices of song and dance are productive arts; they directly produce (poioi) particular kinds of souls. Also following Damon, then, Plato’s Socrates contends that “rhythm and harmonies have the greatest influence on the soul; they penetrate into its inmost regions and there hold fast (baptetai)” (Republic 401d). The soul-gripping quality of music resides in an affective register, as music invades or penetrates (kataduetai) the depths of one’s character.

Aristotle, following the same logic, reasons, “[T]herefore it is plain that music has the power of producing a certain effect on the character of the soul” (1340b). What Aristotle has located in music is an almost inexplicable kind of transformative capacity. Following the line of thinking expounded by Damon, and also by the character Protagoras in Plato’s dialogue, whereby the rhythms and scales literally “move in” to the soul (Protagoras 326B), Aristotle and Plato view music as an almost mystical mode of provoking particular dispositions. In other words, music’s capacity to transmit dispositions falls outside of the category of reasoned, conscious learning, as rhythms and modes invade the soul, and at times, excite the body to movement. As J. G. Warry describes it, learning from music takes place through the production of tension or relaxation at muscular and nervous levels and is thereby more direct, more powerful (109). It is precisely because of music’s direct, bodily delivery, its capacity for dispositional transformation, according to Aristotle, that music must be used for education, and used carefully. Damon, Aristotle, and Plato therefore all mark music as an êthos delivery system, an affective educative mechanism.

Since ancient texts have a good deal to say about music in education, and, moreover, what they do say connects explicitly with athletic and rhetorical training methods and dynamics, music provides a useful context in which to consider rhetorical training as a part of a network of practices. Specifically, as a molder of êthos, music served as an educational tool for the ancients and was hence a facilitator of athletic and rhetorical training, insofar as it helped the physical trainers, as Isocrates observes, to “set [the students] at exercises.” Attention to music’s role in ancient education, therefore, brings to light the mimetic and repetitive aspects of training, aspects that emphasize education as a bodily practice.

The Greek word for rhythm, rhythmos, may be used to indicate “any regular recurring motion,” or “measured motion or time.” The motion-time complex of meanings then folds into disposition, as rhythmos may also mean “symmetry,” “state or condition, temper, disposition,” “form, shape of a thing,” “manner” (Liddell and Scott 1576). In the range of meanings alone we can see the way in which regulated repetition produces disposition. For Plato, rhythm was tightly bound with order (taxis), as he claims that the realm of the bodily order of motion (kinëseos taxei) is known as
micromotions over and over, the wrestler will acquire a bodily rhythm that enables
this peculiar use of the rhythmic verb that matters. In short, rhythm is
movement (Anderson 11), and the direction and manner of movement make all the
difference in the context of learning.

As J. G. Warry explains, rhythm is derived from the verb meaning “to flow,”
and the term itself invokes the movement of rivers. As Warry puts it, “When Greek
poets refer to the ‘flow’ of these seas, they are thinking not only of undulation but of
current, and the Greek idea of rhythm is one of current combined with alternation,
of continuity with vicissitude” (115). Here, Warry locates in the ancient concept of
rhythm a quality of cyclical differentiation, the same kind of movement Heraclitus
invokes in his still-famous saying, “It is not possible to step twice into the same
river” (Diels and Kranz 22.B.91), as the substances simultaneously combine and
scatter (sunistatai kai apoleipei). It is the interrelation between the generalized path of
the riverbed with its interruptive rocks and sediment on the one hand, and the force
of the water’s current on the other, that produces the eddies and swirls, the sudden
shifts in direction within the general flow—herein lies the rhythm. Rhythm there-
fore produces distinctive movements within a generalized direction; it combines
fixity with variability. In other words, rhythm emerges from difference, what Gilles
Deleuze and Félix Guattari call “productive repetition” (Thousand 314).5

Still, how do a river’s movement and a Heraclitean notion of differentiation
help elucidate ancient educational methods? Consider the remnants of an ancient
wrestling treatise, part of the Oxyrhynchus papyri. Even though the treatise is from
the second century AD, it constitutes a culmination of training methods (Harris
173) and is the only remaining manual of its kind. The fragment’s style—its move-
ment—is quite telling, so I quote it here:

Set up in the middle and engage the head from the right.
You envelop him. You get under his hold; you step through, engage [plexon].
You throw him with your right hand.
You are thrown; having attached from the side you throw left.
You throw him off with your left hand.
You turn him around. You entwine. You turn around.
You engage with a grip on both sides. (Oxyrhynchus Papyri 466)₆

This wrestling treatise illustrates the three Rs of sophistic pedagogy: rhythm, rep-
etition, and response. Even the passage itself takes on an almost hypnotic cadence
through the repetition of particular commands: “You turn him around. You engage
[plexon] . . . .” The logic of the passage seems quite straightforward: by going through
micromotions over and over, the wrestler will acquire a bodily rhythm that enables
a forgetting of directives. In other words, as rhythm is achieved, knowledge of fundamentals becomes bodily rather than conscious, and habituation ensues. Importantly, though, along with rhythm, this style of teaching emphasizes response as well, as the exercises are performed with an opponent, the “him” of the passage. “You get under his hold; you step through, engage.” “You throw him off with your left hand.” Instructed in pairs together (Gardiner 374), wrestlers in training went through their motions, executing the drill techniques described in the papyrus fragment above. In this way, responsiveness becomes incorporated in the rhythm, as the opponent’s moves must be taken into account, reacted to, and countered, all in the blink of an eye. The command plexon is noteworthy here, as it can mean “intertwine,” “engage,” or, as Michael Poliakoff suggests, “fight it out” (52–53). Hence, the opponent’s moves and the attention to specificity they require introduce difference to the repetition, demanding a new move in between each of the throwing directives. Stylistically, the manual captures the difference between repetitions, demanding and producing its own kind of rhythmic response.

**Diligence in Repetition**

The three Rs of athletic training—rhythm, repetition, response—lie at the very heart of Isocrates’s conception of training. The word Isocrates uses for both athletic and rhetorical training—epimeleias—is worth consideration here. The word itself encapsulates several dimensions of an intense engagement: “diligent attention,” “care,” and even, in plural form, “pains” (Liddell and Scott 645). Its root, meletē, means “practice,” “exercise,” and, when used in terms of rhetorical training, often means declamation (LS 1097).

Aristotle appeals to epimeleias in a further elaboration of the nature-as-habit doctrine and its relationship to pleasure and pain in the context of educational practices: “[Diligent attention] (epimeleias) and studies (spoudas) and exertions (suntomias) are painful; for these [too] are necessarily compulsions unless they become habitual; then habit makes them pleasurable (ethos poiei hdu)” (On Rhetoric 1370a.4; trans. adapted). The three nouns here—epimeleias, spoudas, and suntomias, are almost synonymous in their force of intensity. Epimeleias, as noted above, suggests an intense engagement with or even a “pursuit” of an object so as to take charge of it. The word also has forces of “curator” or “commissioner” (LS 1645), linking such diligent care to ownership. Spoudas comes from the word for speed (spoudē), and suggests an intensity of pace, a zealous exertion or earnestness in one’s studies. In some cases, it is also used to mean “disputation,” and thus has affiliations with rhetoric’s agôn. Similarly, suntomias suggests a kind of impetuous vehemence, and offers a way of describing intensity through musical language, where it means “high-pitched” or “acute” (LS 1728).
The learning dynamic described by Aristotle approximates an Empedoclean fragment in which Empedocles exhorts Pausanias to encounter his teachings with a certain intensity:

If you push them (ereisas) firmly under your crowded thoughts (prapidessin), and contemplate (meletēisin) them favorably with unsullied and constant attention, assuredly all these will be with you through life, and you will gain much else from them, for of themselves they will cause each thing to grow into the character (aauta gar ausei taut' eis ēthos bkaston), according to the nature (phusis) of each. (Diels and Kranz 31.B.110; trans. Wright 258)

This passage is rich with commentary about how education works as character sculpting. Here, Empedocles encourages Pausanias to engage his teachings with a particular intensity, as indicated by the verb ereisas, which has the force of “push,” “thrust,” and once again, “struggle.” Further, Empedocles is very specific about where the struggle occurs: “under your crowded thoughts (prapidessin).” Prapidessin marks a spot just under the diaphragm, in the midriff area. This area was deemed the somatic seat of intellect, the “mental powers and affections” that helped induce understanding. Once again, the body plays an important role in Greek thinking on habit production. Just as we see with musical rhythms, bodily habits emerge from an opening up of the body for alliance formation. In other words, Empedocles holds that cunning intelligence (mētis) emerges from the encounter with the immediate (fr. 106), and the encounter is more than perception—mind meets (and masters) matter—instead, it is a bodily production, a mutually constitutive struggle among bodies and surrounding forces.

As Aristotle’s and Empedocles’s passages suggest, the struggle habit formation entails is intensely demanding—even violent (as suggested by bia, “force,” “act of violence”)—for it requires sustained engagement, or, as Janet Atwill puts it in her consideration of the same passage, “severe discipline of contemplation” (90). In short, this level of engagement requires intensive attention, disciplined, painful, repeated exercise, all forces of meletē.

Thus meletē becomes the means through which permanent dispositions develop; it is the most effective mode of educational production. When he discusses the disposition (bēxis) of self-restraint in Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle considers the relationship between habit, nature, and meletē:

Those who have become unrestrained through habit are more easily cured than those who are unrestrained by nature, since habit is easier to change than nature; for even habit is hard to change, precisely because it is a sort of nature, as Evenus says: “I say practice (meletēn) is long-lasting, friend, and moreover with humankind it finally becomes their nature.” (7.10.41; 1152a; trans. mine)

As Jeffrey Walker points out in his discussion of the above passage, “meletē [. . .] is the means of cultivating ēthos” (Rhetoric and Poetics 148). And it is the kind of ēthos
suggested here that makes all the difference. This passage is noteworthy because it suggests that practice produces the very habit of self-control necessary to make oneself capable of training. In other words, education is enabled through one’s habit of meletê, of a belief in the transformative work of practice.

Training or epimeleias thus occurs through repeated, sustained engagement—a shared trait of athletic and rhetorical training as elaborated by Isocrates in Antidosis. Recall that for Isocrates, athletic and rhetorical training are “parallel and complementary” (182), the means by which “masters prepare the mind to become more intelligent and the body to become more serviceable” (182). In other words, these “twin arts” are, for Isocrates, the two fundamental arts for citizen training, because this particular training juncture, Isocrates contends, enables teachers to “advance their pupils to a point where they are better men and where they are stronger in their thinking or in the use of their bodies” (185). This mode of teaching thus, in Isocrates’s logic, better equips young Athenians to become effective citizens. Effective teachers, therefore, do not separate the two kinds of education, but rather use “similar methods of instruction, exercise, and other forms of discipline” (182):

For when they take on pupils, the physical trainers instruct their followers in the postures (ta schêmata) that have been invented for bodily contests, while those whose concern is philosophy pass on to their pupils all the structures that discourse (logos) employs. When they have made them experienced with these, and they have discussed them with precision, they again exercise the students and habituate them to hard work, and then compel them to combine (suneirein) everything they have learned. [...] (183–84; trans. mine)

Stylistically, this passage performs precisely Isocrates’s point about the interrelatedness of the two kinds of training. The first sentence contains two related yet distinct accounts of physical and philosophical training. In the second sentence, however, the two kinds of training merge in style as rhetorical training assumes the very dynamic found in the example of the wrestling treatise above. The verb diakribōsantes, for example, invokes a sense of precision, even perfection, obtained through a minute attention to detail, in this case the minutiae of discursive or bodily movements. Such attention no doubt is enabled through rhythmic repetition of schêmata, a term that may be used to describe a wrestling move, a figure of speech, a particular style or manner, or even gesticulation, as in rhetorical delivery (Liddell and Scott 1745), an important area of inquiry we will revisit shortly.

But the passage above also makes the important move of connecting rhythmic repetition to response production, as Isocrates calls for students to “combine [suneirein]” in practice the schêmata “in order that they may grasp them more firmly [bebaioteron katachôsi] and bring their [notions] [doxais] in closer touch with the occasions [tôn kairôn] for applying them” (184; trans. adapted). In other words, at stake in the connection between rhetorical and athletic training for Isocrates is precisely
the link between *schêmata*—forms of movement acquired through repetitive habituation—and their use in response to particular situations.

Rhythm, repetition, and response bring us to a consideration of time, as a “nowness” pervades repetition and the difference it produces. Throughout *Gymnastic*, a second-century treatise on sports that harks back to classical times, Philostratus reiterates the importance of using situational encounters to teach *kairos*, suggesting that a particular hold cannot be learned separately from a situation (an encounter) in which it is used (14.269). The repetition of movements is always produced in relation—to the opponent, to one’s shadow, to the javelin, to the rhythmic sounds of the *aulos*—hence the centrality of *kairos*, the time of response, of singularity, to sophistic pedagogy. In his Outline of a Theory of Practice, Pierre Bourdieu notes that the sophists, when called upon to systematize their arts, came up against “the right way and the right moment—*kairos*—to apply the rules, or, as the phrase so aptly goes, to *put into practice* a repertoire of devices or techniques” (20). “To put into practice” nicely approximates Isocrates’s phrasing, as *kairos* is his concern. As Isocrates contends, no system of knowledge can teach kairotic response; rather such response emerges out of repeated encounters with difference: different opponents, different subject matter, different times and places.

**FROM SUNOUSIA TO MIMÈSIS: BECOMING BY ASSOCIATION**

If musical rhythm comes to inhabit the body through productive repetition, rhythm also gets inculcated through a kind of *mimèsis*, another critical element in ancient pedagogy, and, as we will see, another way of producing repeated encounters with difference. As we saw earlier, for Aristotle, music is doubly mimetic: its rhythms imitate *éthê*, and when it invades the body and grips the soul, the connection formed between music and listener produces a second *mimèsis*, as the listener imitates ethical rhythms. *Mimèsis* or imitation was, for most Greeks, a primary mode of learning, as illustrated by Democritus’s fragment on the acquisition of technical expertise through observing animals: “We are students of the animals in the most important things: the spider for spinning and mending, the swallow for building, and the songsters, swan and nightingale, for singing, by way of imitation (*kata mimēsin*)” (Diels and Kranz 68.B.154). In other words, mimetic learning happens through a *relation* with the other, an observation and repetition of an other’s actions and practices—in this case the spider, the swallow, the swan.

That imitation was considered a basic part of the pedagogical process in ancient Athens is well known (Beck 268). Democritus’s pithy saying puts imitative logic in its most precise form: “One must either be good or imitate a good man” (Diels and Kranz 68.B.39). From very early on, then, Greek poets and philosophers held that learning happens through alliances. In other words, the forces (people,
At first glance, Theognis’s advice for obtaining skill seems quite easy: Kyrnos need necessary for ethos production. (poikilon) ethos, to make himself malleable, to open himself up and move toward horsemanship, athletics, hunting, and philosophy, or study of discourse (45). The practice the arts one is pursuing; these arts were named earlier in the treatise as noticed by his “ancestors” (43), harking back to the forces that produced the skillful dispositions he sees in others. Such active movement enables the alliances more complex. Here, Theognis tells his young friend to assume an octopus-like tive, movement-based verbs (estrephe, ephu, ephepeu) suggests that Kyrnos’s task is far only hang around with smart people. But the remarkable number of active, impera-
ing and admiring lead to an active emulating, an attempt to become like the objects miring” and “emulating,” work together to link desire to action. That is, the observ-
terms thaumazonetes and zelountes, yoked together in this passage and translated “ad-
helps elaborate the nature of such close association, as he advises his friend and mentee Kyrnos:

Turn (estrephe) to all friends, Kyrnos, a variable habit (poikilon éthos), mingling your disposition (orgén) in the manner of each one: now pursue (ephu) one, now move toward (ephepeu) a disposition of another kind; for skill (sophè) is even more powerful (kreisson) than great virtue (megálês aretês). (1071–74; trans. mine).

At first glance, Theognis’s advice for obtaining skill seems quite easy: Kyrnos need only hang around with smart people. But the remarkable number of active, imperative, movement-based verbs (estrephe, ephu, ephepeu) suggests that Kyrnos’s task is far more complex. Here, Theognis tells his young friend to assume an octopus-like (poikilon) éthos, to make himself malleable, to open himself up and move toward skillful dispositions he sees in others. Such active movement enables the alliances necessary for éthos production.

In Areopagiticus, Isocrates once again returns to the mechanics of training practiced by his “ancestors” (43), harking back to the forces that produced the Democritean and Theognidean observations discussed above. The very best of students, Isocrates contends, didn’t spend time in gambling houses or with flute girls, “but remained deliberately devoted (epitédéumasin) to those pursuits they had been assigned, admiring and emulating (thaumazontes kai zélountes) those who excelled in these” (48; my trans.). What Isocrates articulates here is a pedagogy of association—a cultivation of habits and practices by placing oneself in close relation to those who practice the arts one is pursuing; these arts were named earlier in the treatise as horsemanship, athletics, hunting, and philosophy, or study of discourse (45). The terms thaumazontes and zélountes, yoked together in this passage and translated “admiring” and “emulating,” work together to link desire to action. That is, the observing and admiring lead to an active emulating, an attempt to become like the objects of admiration through repetition of their actions. But zélountes conveys more than imitation (mimêsis), for its root verb (zélōō), here translated “to emulate,” may also be rendered “to vie with.” Its connotations, ranging from jealousy and envy to zealous
admirations, all hold a kind of desire—to “strive after, affect, desire emulously” (Liddell and Scott 755). The Isocratean passage thus suggests a concomitant coveting of and agonistic striving after qualities embodied in an expert practitioner of the art at hand: repetition cannot be easily separated from response.

Instances of associative pedagogy are evident among the sophistic characters in Plato’s dialogues. In Protagoras, for example, archaic literature functions to produce the desire to imitate. The dialogue’s phrasing produces literature as a place, a locus into which a youth is sent, as a warrior sent to battle (anagkazousin), and upon entering, he encounters the descriptions and encomia of good men from the past, so “that the boy in envy [zēlōn] may imitate [mimētai] them and yearn to become [ginesthai] even as they” (326). Again, envy and desire emerge as necessary components of imitation. But that imitation is given a place—here the literature, for Isocrates the teacher’s instructive ecology—a locus the students are to inhabit to the extent that the practices begin to inhabit them, as we see in the case of music when the rhythms and scales quite literally move in (oikeiousthai) to the boys’ souls (326b). Here, envy and desire rename the active, impelling forces operating in Theognis’s urgings of Kyrrnos.

It is Isocrates who articulates precisely the way associative pedagogy fits into other modes of learning, such as mastery of principles, for example. He writes in “Against the Sophists” that in addition to making the principles of oratory available for students, the teacher should “in himself provide such an example of oratory that the students who have taken shape (ektpōthentas) under his instruction and are able to imitate (mimēsasthai dunamenous) him will, at once, show in their speaking an unsurpassed degree of grace and charm” (18; my trans.). Here the word translated “have taken shape,” ektpōthentas, comes from ektpos, a term from the art of sculpting meaning “worked in relief” or formed on a model. The word itself marks the kind of imitation suggested by Isocrates’s scheme: that which provides a rough form to be followed in the sculpting of the student.

The passive form of the verb is suggestive, too, insofar as it thwarts a notion of a “sculptor” per se; the shape, rather, emerges under the teacher’s instruction, or in a particular milieu—that is, out of a relational, associative dynamic. In other words, the sculpting here emerges from a pedagogical alliance between model and student.

Perhaps more important, however, is the way in which the teacher as exemplar functions to supplement “principles of the art” in Isocrates’s educational scheme. Indeed, attention to the precise language preceding the passage on imitation suggests that modeling is not “teaching” at all, but rather something quite different: “The teacher must go through these aspects as precisely as possible, so that nothing teachable is left out, but as for the rest, he must offer himself as a model” (“Against the Sophists” 17). In other words, once the principles have been exhausted, there is still a remainder, a portion of the art of oratory that cannot be transferred through
explicit discussion of composition, arrangement, and style (16). This remainder enables students of philosophy to achieve “the perfect disposition” (teleis hexousin) harks back to kairos, the time of action, and also at the same time has to do with manner, an almost unarticulable style and grace that can be observed and emulated but not rendered into precepts.

Nonetheless, the ability to achieve this degree of perfection depends on the constant repetition of a certain hexis, here described as a degree of “grace and charm.” In other words, the “end result” of such pedagogy is not a finished product, but a dispositional capacity for iteration—the ability to continually repeat, transform, and respond.

“A Calisthenics of Manhood”

The development of such a capacity for iteration began early, with deportment training and exercises for young boys (Freeman 129). In the archaic and early classical periods, training in deportment took on a bodily manner with attention to self-presentation, bodily carriage, standing, sitting, and walking. As Maud W. Gleason notes in her study of later sophists, such a focus on the corporeal elements of deportment was central to the production of masculinity in antiquity. It was here, in these youthful exercises, that what Gleason calls “the cultivation of manliness” found its beginnings. As Gleason puts it, “Deportment matters. It is a shorthand that encodes, and replicates, the complex realities of social structure, in a magnificent economy of voice and gesture” (xxiv). Gleason’s consideration of the second century AD’s treatment of deportment in rhetorical training might be elucidated historically through a consideration of archaic and classical deportment training that took place in the realm of gymnastics, under the watchful eye of the gymnastic trainer. In this light, her observation that “[r]hetoric was a calisthenics of manhood” (xxii) takes on a more literal force.

Indeed, bodily comportment was an abiding concern for ancient educators. Aristophanes’s Clouds provides some insight into the fastidious attention to such practices under the “old education,” as the character Kreitton articulates the relationship between behaving oneself and managing one’s body: “Then in the gymnasium, when they sat down, they were expected to keep their legs well up” (966). This passage suggests a double force of manner: the politic, behavioral force, where one learned to repeat polite actions, and the way in which that behavior was linked to particular styles of moving: a manner of walking, speaking, acting.

This early emphasis on manner and movement carries through all phases of rhetorical and athletic training, as evidenced in the Isocratean passage above in which he invokes the perfect disposition in regards to rhetoric, and also in Aeschines’s
observation that he and his contemporaries “can recognize an athlete by his bodily vigor (euxia) without visiting the gymnasium” (189; trans. adapted). Underpinning Aeschines’s ethical argument here is a habituated practice of reading the body, a practice Aristotle refers to in *Nicomachean Ethics* when in his discussion of how witnessness indicates a versatile character he writes, “[W]e judge men's characters, like their bodies, by their movements (ek tôn kinēsōn)” (1128a.13–15). And later in his discussion of *hexis* Aristotle’s logic becomes almost tautological, when he argues that strong dispositional qualities cannot be separated from the status of their source: “[H]ealthy walking means walking as a healthy man would walk” (1129a.17). While the logic sounds tautological, the practice of body reading actually depends on habituation—one knows healthy walking when one sees it, precisely because one has seen a healthy person walking many times before. Of course, both Aristotle’s and Aeschines’s observations about body reading bring to mind Judith Butler’s widely invoked notion of performativity, where gender becomes a “stylized repetition of acts” (140): the bodies of Greek athletes—and rhetors, for that matter—were stylized as masculine; hence Aristotle and Aeschines offer a window onto the ancient production of masculinity as a bodily practice.

Again, repetition conditions the habit of mind, this time by shaping the way one reads another’s movements. The *euxia*, literally the good bodily habits, of the athlete and the “perfect disposition” (teleios hexousin) of a rhetor both emerged from cultural values and practices—from an inexplicable sense of what constitutes a good athlete or a good rhetor. Noteworthy, however, is the way in which the “sense” is generally tied to singular examples, *paradeigmata*, specific instantiations of good actions. The athlete’s and the rhetor’s *euxia*, as we can see in Aristotle’s direct comparison, overlapped, informed, indeed, helped produce each other. Thus athletics and rhetoric were bodily arts concerned with dispositional training, for as Cicero wrote centuries later, “Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis, by action the body talks” (*De Oratore* 3.59.222). Here, rhetorical delivery provides a good example of the convergence of these bodily arts.

**Cheironomia**

Early training in deportment was inextricable from a kind of bodily training in “gesticulation,” *to cheironomein* (Freeman 129), literally, the custom of hand movement, and also the term for “shadowboxing,” a training practice whereby a boxer rehearses and observes his jabs and punches, quite literally by sparring with his shadow. *Cheironomia* became associated with training in rhetorical delivery, as young men learned to combine the force of their gestures with the direction of their speech. Delivery, the aspect of rhetoric that deals with voice, gestures, and other elements of presentation, was the rhetorical “canon” most obviously concerned with corporeality.
As a recent article by Christopher Johnstone points out, despite its having been considered the most important aspect of rhetoric among the ancients’ delivery is a drastically overlooked category in contemporary histories of rhetoric (121–25). Johnstone’s work relies on archaeological and textual evidence to argue that delivery was likely a focus of sophistic pedagogy in the fifth century, and he writes compellingly about the sheer bodily strength required to deliver powerful, effective speeches at venues such as the Pnyx, where citizens gathered to deliberate legal and political matters (129–31). Perhaps one reason for delivery’s oversight is its sheer corporeality, as well as its attention to the less rational qualities of rhetorical speeches such as volume, rhythm, and cadence.

Quintilian, writing nearly five centuries after the early sophists, located Roman oratory’s indebtedness to gymnastics firmly in the domain of delivery, gesturing to its corporeality:

I will not blame even those who give a certain amount of time to the teacher of gymnastics. But we give the same name to those who form gesture and motion so that the arms may be extended in the proper manner, the management of the hands free from all trace of rusticity and inelegance, the attitude becoming, the movements of the feet appropriate and the motions of the head and eyes in keeping with the pose of the body. No one will deny that such details form a part of the art of delivery, nor divorce delivery from oratory; and there can be no justification for disdaining to learn what has got to be done, especially as cheironomy, which, as the name shows, is the law of gesture, originated in heroic times and met with the approval of the greatest Greeks [. . .] (1.11.16–19).

Here Quintilian articulates a critical intersection between rhetoric and athletics in the art of delivery. Quintilian described appropriate delivery as balanced, poised, evincing elegance, exuding propriety. These qualities, Aristotle claimed, could be learned from drama; indeed, the Greek word for delivery, hypokritis, also meant acting. But Cicero located the roots of delivery elsewhere; in De Oratore, the character Crassus disagrees with the Aristotelian genealogy when he claims,

But all these emotions must be accompanied by gesture—not this stagy gesture reproducing the words but one conveying the general situation and idea not by demonstration but by hints, with this vigorous manly (virili) throwing out of the chest, borrowed not from the stage and the theatrical profession but from the parade ground or even from wrestling (3.59.220)

Further, the practice of shadowboxing or cheironomia, invoked by Crassus here, itself combines agonism, imitation, and the three Rs—rhythm, repetition, and response—and as such provided a useful model for rhetorical training. The Athenian stranger of Plato’s Laws, for example, invokes this training technique as an analogue for the training of citizens, whom he refers to as “competitors in the greatest contests (athlētas tôn megistōn)”: 
If we were boxers, for a great many days before the contest we should have been learning how to fight, and working hard, practicing in mimicry all those methods we meant to employ on the day we should be fighting for victory, and imitating (mimoumenoi) the real thing as nearly as possible: thus, we should don padded gloves instead of proper ring-gloves, so as to get the best possible practice in giving blows and dodging them; and if we chanced to be very short of training-mates, do you suppose that we would be deterred by fear of the laughter of fools from hanging up a lifeless dummy and practicing on it? Indeed, if ever we were in a desert, and without either live or lifeless training-mates, would we not have recourse to shadow-fighting (skiamachein) of the most literal kind, against ourselves? Or what else would one call the practice of shadowboxing (cheironomein)? (8.830b–c)

As in many treatments of citizen training considered so far, this passage suggests that only the agon can prepare one fully for the agon, as evidenced by the question posed before this passage: “Suppose we had been rearing boxers or pancratiasts or competitors in any similar branch of athletics, should we have gone straight into the contest without previously engaging in daily combat with someone?”(8 3 a-b). Here daily combat provides the repetition necessary for learning, and cheironomia exemplifies the role of agonism in training: even the self can be the other in agonistic preparation. Furthermore, the passage suggests the way in which cheironomein, in addition to being a practice of productive repetition, is also a mode of imitation by which one approximates the agonistic situation, rehearsing previously observed bodily moves and gestures in an imagined context. For Plato’s Athenian stranger, the athlete provides a useful model for citizens in training insofar as he makes use of any available means of agonistic engagement.

Early rhetorical training and performance are thus tightly linked to a kind of bodily reading practice elaborated by Aristotle in his version of the healthy man walking. In other words, repetition inhabits rhetorical training from several directions. First, the desirable qualities—deportment, carriage, bodily movement—are picked up and repeated via constant association. Also through association one acquires a habit of “body reading,” of perceiving desirable qualities and their concomitant values.

If, as Cicero says, the body talks through action—habituated action—then body reading, or the encounter with these actions, emerges as an important (and necessary) effect of such repetition. Such repetition, always in relation to the particular temporal and spatial situation, is therefore productive, insofar as it shapes reading practices and the imitative, repetitive practices that emerge as reading provoke desire for sunousia, for transformation by association.

All styles of repetition, because they are particular to time, space, and the singular cluster of forces enacting them, emerge in response to specific forces: to opponents, and to values, beliefs, and practices that shape and are shaped by the differential, emergent repetition. In short, repetition in sophistic-style rhetorical training is always bound up with responsiveness within particular contexts.
This figuring of rhetorical training in terms of manner rather than (subject) matter holds implications for contemporary practice. In her widely read book *Rereading the Sophists*, Susan Jarratt makes a strong case for correlations between sophistic pedagogy and the contemporary critical pedagogy promulgated by thinkers such as Paulo Freire, Stanley Aronowitz, and Henry Giroux (107). Such an approach, while important for rendering the sophists useful and relevant for contemporary practices, nonetheless inscribes the ancients into a recognizable and familiar reason-based intellectual tradition—that of ideology critique. (This claim should be restricted to Jarratt’s connection of the sophists to critical pedagogy, and does not always apply to the rest of her book, for Jarratt’s book subverts rationality by placing the sophists “between myths and logos” [31–61], and it is precisely their extrarational elements that make the sophists, according to Jarratt, at all commensurable with contemporary feminist impulses). When considering styles of knowledge, however, useful models for pedagogy might be a bit strange, less familiar. Geoffrey Sirc, for example, looks to the methods of twentieth-century action painter Jackson Pollock as a way to think rhetoric and composition differently. As Sirc discusses it, Pollock’s approach to composition is one of inhabiting, an immersive approach wherein the lines between (and definitions of) artist and work become less clear. Pollock’s is a kind of hyper-attunement and continual experimentation, an invention through contact (7). Indeed, as Sirc puts it, Pollock “knew he could gain immeasurable force in his work by connecting more with situational space than compositional surface” (13). According to Sirc, then, a theory based on Pollock’s style of composition would produce students who “might end up saying something like ‘I can [...] literally be in the writing’” (10).

In a similar vein, John Muckelbauer locates a model of what he calls “productive reading” in Michel Foucault’s work, an approach that reads not to confirm what the reader already knew, but rather to produce new concepts—reading as formulation (rather than a formula). Muckelbauer calls this kind of reading practice a “style of engagement” wherein “instead of reading programmatically, [the reader] reads in order to produce different ideas, to develop possible solutions to contemporary problems, or as importantly, to move through contemporary problems in an attempt to develop new questions” (74). The emphasis here again is on manner rather than matter, though the convergence of the two is precisely what produces novelty.

If a technique or rhythm works, the student repeats it, always producing differently. And finally, to continue with Sirc’s and Muckelbauer’s experiments, both Pollock’s and Foucault’s approaches are nothing if not response—response to the material or conceptual tools at hand, to what emerges through the inhabiting. It is hence the style of inhabiting that makes all the difference.
Both Sirc's and Muckelbauer's theories of writing and reading, not unlike the three Rs delineated here, contest the notion of a subject in both senses of the word. First, Pollock-style composition cannot begin until the inhabiting begins—that is, until the "subject" (read: artist/writer) "gets lost" in the painting, what Sirc refers to as a kind of "exscription" (15). Similarly, Muckelbauer's delineation of a Foucauldian reading practice would ask that a "reader" submit to a text—its terms, its styles, its movements—as a way of taking it seriously. Perhaps productive reading is a contemporary instantiation of what I have been calling "associative pedagogy," which entails active, responsive submission. Second, the academic subject, be it composition or literature or literary theory, becomes more contested. Since ancient rhetorical performance and its concomitant training practices both took place at the level of the body, the focus lies on an attention to manner—to the way in which one acquires artistic expertise—over matter, here meaning subject matter, as in the modern notion of the three Rs.

That is, rather than focusing on material learned—the sophists didn't have a curriculum in the modern sense of a "subject matter" to be "covered"—sophistic pedagogy emphasized the materiality of learning, the corporeal acquisition of rhetorical movements through rhythm, repetition, and response. This manner of learning-doing entails "getting a feel for" the work—following and producing a rhythm. The body itself becomes a sundromos, an intensive gathering of forces (of desire, of vigorous practices, of musical sounds, of corporeal codes), trafficked through and by neurons, muscles, and organs. Entwined with the body in this way, rhetorical training thus exceeds the transmission of "ideas," rhetoric the bounds of "words."

Notes

1. See John Poulakos for a treatment of the sophists that also makes connections to athletics (esp. pages 32–39).
2. The aulos, often translated "flute," is more like an oboe, or a clarinet. Many scholars find the translation as "flute" objectionable (see Schlesinger; Sweet; Anderson, 8), so I will leave it untranslated. For a thorough and fascinating history of the instrument's material production and contribution to ancient musical theory, see Kathleen Schlesinger, The Greek Aulos.
3. Because of my focus on athletic and rhetorical training, I will restrict my consideration of music to music in education—as provider of rhythm and mode—rather than including education in music, about which Aristotle and Plato both have a good deal to say (Politics 8; Republic).
4. For more on Damon's influence on Aristotle's and Plato's theories of music, see Andrew Barker, 316–17. For a discussion of connections among katharsis, pathos, and musical modes, see Jeffrey Walker's "Pathos and Katharsis in 'Aristotelian' Rhetoric."
5. For an extended meditation on music and the production of difference, see Deleuze and Guattari's chapter, "1837: Of the Refrain" in A Thousand Plateaus. Their work here has helped shape my consideration of the ancient milieu of music and its role in training practices.
6. The text here is Jüthner's rendering of the fragmented Greek manuscript. Translation mine.
Works Cited


———. Panathenaicus. Isocrates 2: 368–541.


