Composed by Malea Powell  
Performed with help from all my relations  

2012 CCCC Chair’s Address  
Stories Take Place: A Performance in One Act  

*Editor’s note:* This is a written version of the address that Malea Powell gave at the CCCC Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, on Thursday, March 22, 2012.  

*Author’s note:* The text that follows is in script form with some inserted images so that it more adequately captures the genre in which this address was performed. I hope also that it allows you, dear reader, to make space for your own story in this web of relations.

**MALEA:** Aya eewee mila kakoki, Malea Powell ween_inki, myaamionkonci, ninti_iteehi teepahki neeyola kakoki. 

Hello. My name is Malea Powell, and I come from the land of the Miami. I am glad to see you all today. Before I begin I want to take a moment and honor the indigenous peoples of this place, those from the Illini confederacy who are my relatives, along with the ancestors of the Missouri, Osage, Shawnee, Kickapoo, and Meskwaki peoples upon whose lands St. Louis and its suburbs are built. I’ve had a lot of help making this performance—folks who responded to my calls for feedback, for stories, to participate today, folks who gave me much-needed words of encouragement and advice, folks who’ve been encouraging, supporting, advising, and teaching me for years. At the end of my forty minutes up here there will be a credits scroll on the screen to honor the contributions of all those colleagues, students, relatives, and friends whose practices of reciproc-
ity and responsibility made these minutes possible. Finally, I also want to offer thanks and respect to my elders for their teachings and their encouragement: what I do well is to their credit; what I do badly belongs only to me.

This is a story.

When I say “story,” I don’t mean for you to think “easy.” Stories are anything but easy. When I say story, I mean an event in which I try to hold some of the complex shimmering strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them with you. When I say “story,” I mean “theory” in the way that Lee Maracle tells it.

DAISY: This is Maracle:

Among European scholars there is an alienated notion which maintains that theory is separate from story, and thus a different set of words are required to “prove” an idea rather than to “show” one. We [indigenous people] believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, story, is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people. . . . There is story in every line of theory. The difference between us [indigenous] and European scholars is that we admit this, and present theory through story. (3, 7)

MALEA: This is a collection of stories. Stories, as we say, take place. So, let’s start where we are, here in this place we now call St. Louis, but early settlers called it Mound City. This story has lived here for about 1300 years. Today we stand literally in the space of an ancient city whose influence was central to
the development of dozens of contemporary tribal cultures from Florida to the Carolinas across Ohio to Wisconsin and down through Oklahoma to Louisiana. Cahokia. Inhabited from 700 to 1400, before European settler-colonialism arrived on the continent, Cahokia became the largest, most sophisticated trade city north of the Rio Grande. During its peak years of influence, 1050–1200, the city complex sprawled across nine miles on both sides of the Mississippi River. East of the river alone, it was a permanent urban home to at least twenty thousand people who lived in “hundreds of well-thatched rectangular houses, carefully aligned along the cardinal directions” situated around open plazas arranged in relation to ceremonial grounds, surrounded by vast agricultural fields, all oriented in relation to enormous human-made earthen mounds (Lawler in Jaffe). In that eastern city center, there were at least 120 mounds, including Monks Mound—a ten-story tall massive platfounded mound with four terraces that has a footprint of fourteen acres. Monks Mound, named now for the Trappist monks that lived nearby in the early 1800s, is larger at its base than the Great Pyramid of Khufu, Egypt’s largest (Hodges), and is also the largest human-made earthen mound north of the Rio Grande. Cahokia was a “a physically dynamic” planned city, modified and rebuilt many times over its seven-hundred-year history (Cahokia 26–28).
Monk’s Mound, present day (from Wikimedia Commons).

Big Mound during deconstruction, the last of the Big Mound, 1869; daguerreotype by Thomas M. Easterly (from the Missouri History Museum online archives).
The eastern portion of the Cahokia Mounds site—itself the largest archeological site in the United States—is about nine miles east and slightly north of us. Here on the west side of the river, the city once covered much of what we now consider to be St. Louis and some of its southern suburbs. In fact, just about a mile and a quarter north of this hotel—up Broadway, just down from Mound Street—is a plaque commemorating where the largest mound this side of the river once stood. During the nineteenth century, most of those mounds were leveled to build the city of St. Louis. Big Mound—the one up the street—was destroyed in 1869 to build factories that have since been razed, and its exact location is now the landing place for the new bridge from East St. Louis (Hodges). The lone surviving mound west of the river is Sugarloaf Mound, about eight miles south and west of us, just on the border between St. Louis and Carondelet.

So, this is where we are, where we’ve gathered to think and do together, here in the cradle of Mississippian cultural practices that still survive today in tribal cultures across North America. From the stories of Birdman, Falcon, and Red Horn to those of the Great Serpent, Mishibizhiw, the Underwater Panther, the Horned Serpent, these stories followed the rivers and the contours of the land to inhabit the place-worlds of Ho-chunks, Ojibwes, Omahas, Miamis, Poncas, Shawnees, Osages, Alabamas, Caddos, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Houmas, Kaws, Ioways, Otoes, Missouris, Quapaws, Meskwakes, Menominis, Kickapoos, Cherokees, Muskogees, Illinis, Tunicas, Kosaitis, Seminoles, and many, many others. And our disciplinary story is part of...
it now—this image from the 2011 CCCC Convention program comes from an incised Mississippian shell gorget found at Fairfield Mound, Benton County, Missouri back in the 1960s. Through the story carried by this gorget, we join the confluence of linkages between disparate Mississippian complexes and the making of knowledge on this continent—from Etowah, along the banks of the Etowah River just north of Atlanta in Georgia, Angel Mounds, along the Ohio River in southern Indiana, Fort Ancient, on the banks of the Miami River in Ohio, and here at Cahokia near the confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers. This is where we think and do.

As the stories today start to constellate, I want you to remember this image as a marker of this space we now inhabit. By “space,” I mean a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversation with the present and where—through those practices of making—a future can be imagined. Spaces, then, are made recursively through specific, material practices rooted in specific land bases, through the cultural practices linked to that place, and through the accompanying theoretical practices that arise from that place—like imagining community “away” from but related to that space. Both kinds of practice—the one centered in the land here on this part of the American continent, and the one constructed in the imagined disciplinary community we call rhet/comp—are being invoked today.
RESA: This is Momaday:

We have no being beyond our stories. Our stories explain us, justify us, sustain us, humble us, and forgive us. And sometimes they injure and destroy us. Make no mistake, we are at risk in the presence of words. Perhaps the greatest stories are those which disturb us, which shake us from our complacency, which threaten our well-being. It is better to enter into the danger of such a story than to keep safely away in a space where the imagination lies dormant. (169)

If, as Momaday claims, we are the stories we tell, then who are “we” in rhetoric and composition studies? More specifically, who are “we” at the CCCC? What stories do we tell of who we are, where we’ve been, where we’re going?

DORA: This is my story.

Se dicen: in Lak Ech: Tú eres mi otro yo. Si te hago daño a ti, me hago daño a mí mismo. Si te amo y respeto, me amo y respeto yo. (It is said: you are my other me. If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself.)

I often wonder about how untold stories affect us—those stories that are removed from our lives because of conflicting ideologies. In 1966, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said, “Censorship reflects a society’s lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime.” I write about censorship in Arizona, rhetorical subversiveness in the writings of nineteenth-century Mexican American women authors, and those same rhetorical techniques that Chicanas continue to use in the twenty-first century in order to make their silenced voices heard. I connect my voice to those around me—I tell those stories—I help make those stories visible to those who sense that I am their other self. Tú eres mi otro yo—y te respeto.

Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.

ANDREA: This is my story.

Janice Gould once wrote, “it is obvious that there is not a university in this country that is not built on what was once native land” (81). We need to remember and honor this. We are the land.

I’ve been thinking a lot about how to do the work that I love—how to tell stories, do decolonial work, and be the arms of an institution. While pursuing a PhD, I had a hard time believing the advice that I can do the work that I love before I receive tenure.
It might be because like many first-generation college students or students of color, I was convinced early on that I could never receive a PhD or become a professor; I was convinced that academic writing could not contain stories or sound like poetry. Or, maybe it had to do with how the institution values a certain set of knowledge practices. And when I did the work that I love, I found myself defending my work for no reason except my fear that I did not belong in academia.

A few years ago, I attended a lecture by Victor Villaneuva. Afterward, I asked him how he reconciles the pain and fear that comes with telling stories. I don't remember what he said to me, but I remember feeling unsatisfied. I wanted an answer—a solution.

Telling stories doesn’t always feel good. It’s not easy to bring them into academic spaces. For me, by working and living on my ancestral land—theorizing my relationships with the land and my ancestors has helped ease the pain. Through relationality, I can build another path—one that resists a defensive posture and instead, honors the stories and bodies who came before and will come after me. It isn’t a solution, but a worldview to tell stories, teach, and live in this weird space called academia.

Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.

MADHU 10: This is my story.

In the writing classes that I teach, I often ask my students: “What is this story about?” and “What is this story doing?” I ask these questions to get my students to step back from the rush of events in their narratives, to reflect upon the action, to think through the effect their stories might have on their readers. As a writer and a scholar, I often have to do the same. This stepping back is hard; it takes a great deal of courage to stand outside our own narratives for a moment and ask, “What is this story about? What is it doing to those who may read it?” Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter.

As a woman of color, when I think of the stories of our discipline, I find it hard to imagine how I fit in it. When I step back from our disciplinary stories, I find it hard to write myself back into it. And when I have tried to articulate my concerns, I have felt subdued, shamed, and disciplined.

Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter.

Some of you may very well say: “Well, if you don’t like it, why don’t you just leave?” I have no easy answer to this question. This discipline, this real-and-imagined place, is where I have chosen to hang my scholarly hat. As a home
place, our discipline resonates with all of the comforts and contradictions that are part of so many home places. And as we all know, the thing we learn at home, our memories of our home places, the stories we internalize follow us wherever we go. The answer is not as simple as just leaving forever. The answers are much more complex: we need to step back and figure out what our stories are about and what they are doing to those who don’t feel like they fit in.

Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter.

*Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**FRANNY**

This is my story.

Superheroes always have origin stories, so here is mine.

I signed up for a course called “American Indian Rhetorics” on a whim my last semester of college, in 2006. Because of a quirk of the way course levels worked, it was listed as an upper-level undergraduate course, but it turned out to be almost all PhD students. I was on board with all the postcolonial and paracolonial theory, but I had to stop them when they started talking about “the field” like everybody knows what The Field is. What field? The answer being, rhet/comp. My friend Qwo-Li, who I met in that class, sat me down and gave me the short version of “the canon” and “the rhetorical tradition.” She/he was like, “It’s totally Eurocentric and pretty weird,” and I was convinced. Shrug. I’ve taken two “history of rhetoric” grad seminars since then, and I still pretty much agree.

We talked about rhetorical sovereignty, and trickster rhetorics, and per-formative codex rhetorics, and meaning-making practices, and indigenous hypertexts. It was a sweet class. And so that’s how I came to know about rhet/comp: through indigenous rhetorical traditions.

It took me a while to realize how unusual this origin story is. But these days, I’m pretty tired of having to justify the fact that rhetorical traditions other than Aristotle are a fruitful and wholly appropriate intellectual foundation for a rhet/comp scholar. But, whatever. Haters gonna hate.

*Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**MALEA**

Stories take place. Stories practice place into space. Stories produce habitable spaces.

In Walter Mignolo’s newest work, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, he tells a story that begins with how the belief that Western civilization and European modernity “was the [zero-]point of arrival of human history and the model for the entire planet came to be taken for granted” (xii–xiv). He
calls this belief, alternatively, “the Western code” and “Western modernity/coloniality” (xii, 93). He invokes belief in the Western code in order to make visible an entirely different set of practices—those of decolonial thinking and decoloniality. And he locates decolonial thinking as materializing at the very same time in which the Western code was being produced—during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries (xxiv). Mignolo believes that our particular moment in the twenty-first century is significant because “we (on the planet) have entered into an irreversible polycentric world order . . . constituted by the commonality of the global economy”—capitalism—“and by disputes for the control of other domains” over which Western modernity/coloniality has claimed supreme dominance for the past five hundred years (xiv–xv). He says: “We should get used to the fact that modern history does not go directly from Greece and Rome to France, England, and Germany, but takes a detour, the Atlantic detour. And in that detour, the idea of the West itself”—of Western traditions, Western reason, Western civilization—was invented (57). Of the five epistemic and political projects that Mignolo identifies as operational and available options to Western colonial dominance,¹² his own story focuses on decoloniality because it includes “both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds coexist” (54). Mignolo is drawn to the decolonial project for the same reason that I am—it is the only project that “makes clear that all the rest are also options and not simply the irrevocable truth of history that has to be imposed by force and fire” (21). Additionally, the term decoloniality not only refers to all acts of decolonization, but it’s intent is also to directly address the multiple “spheres of control in which the colonial matrix of power operates” (54). For Mignolo, the colonial matrix of power has two foundations—racial and patriarchal—plus four spheres of control—economic control, authority, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity.

So, what does that mean for us? Mignolo again: “Decolonizing Western epistemology means to strip it out of the pretense that it is the point of arrival and the guiding light of all kinds of knowledge. In other words, decolonizing knowledge is not rejecting Western epistemic contributions to the world. On the contrary, it implies appropriating [those] contributions in order to dechain them from their imperial designs” (82). Under this practice, “Ancient Greece and Christian Paradise lose their privileges as the secular and sacred origin; they become just options among others” (82). The scenario he wants us to understand begins in the Atlantic in 1500 when, Mignolo claims, the world was “polycentric and noncapitalist,” and “[t]here were several coexist-
ing civilizations, some with long histories, others being formed around that
time” (3). What happened then? he asks; what is the “when, how, why, where”
of Western modernity? (4). He offers us two story versions in response to those
questions. The first:

The idea of modernity . . . appeared first as a double colonization, of time and of
space. [He argues these are the two pillars of Western civilization.] Colonization
of time was created by the Renaissance invention of the Middle Ages, the colo-
nization of space by the colonization and conquest of the New World. However,
modernity came along with coloniality: America was not an existing entity to
be discovered. It was invented, mapped, appropriated, and exploited under the
banner of Christian mission. During the time span 1500 to 2000 three cumulative
faces of modernity are discernible: the Iberian and Catholic face, led by Spain and
Portugal; the “heart of Europe” face, led by England, France, and Germany; and
the U.S. American face, led by the United States. (6)

The second version of that story:

Another version of what happened between 1500 and 2000 is that the great trans-
formation of the sixteenth century—in the Atlantic that connected European
initiatives, enslaved Africans, dismantled civilizations, and encompassed the
genocide in [what Columbus called Hispaniola]—was the emergence of a struc-
ture of control and management of authority, economy, subjectivity, gender and
sexual norms and relations that were driven by Western Europeans both in their
internal conflicts and in their exploitation of labor and expropriation of land. (7)

Both versions of this story stage a “dramatic scenario behind which an endur-
ing structure of management and control was being put in place” (7). Mignolo
calls this structure the colonial matrix of
power and emphasizes throughout his work
that “coloniality is constitutive of modernity
—there is no modernity without coloniality”
(3). The narrative of modernity and the logic of coloniality are two sides of the
same coin—inseparable.

Some of you might see where I’m going to go now, right? Our discipline—
whether you call it rhetoric and writing or composition and rhetoric or composi-
tion studies, or rhetoric studies, or writing studies—our discipline founds itself
at the heart of the narrative of modernity, and it is deeply mired in the muck of the logic of coloniality.

Our discipline founds itself at the heart of the narrative of modernity, and it is deeply mired in the muck of the logic of coloniality.

We mark our origins in precisely the same way—and in the same moment—as the colonial matrix of power—in the Renaissance’s reinvention of classical Greece and its own middle ages, a reinvention necessary
for empire. We are part of it, we are part of maintaining it, and now, I believe, we must be part of de-linking and de-chaining those discourses from their imperial designs. Now. Here in a hotel named for that fantasy of dominance, in the space of a massively influential indigenous civilization. Let’s face the consequences of our actions together.

**MATT**\(^{14}\): This is my story.

Early in my PhD, my chair, who is also LGBTQ-identified, told me a story about doing queer work in the field. She had been told by her committee at a large state university in the Southeast in the early 2000s that she should remove the words “gay and lesbian” from her dissertation’s title. They had told her that this would make her less marketable in the field and would “scare folks away.” I had encountered a moment of tension in the field. You see, my own chair wasn’t telling me to openly express my LGBTQ work or to hide it. She was just telling me what had happened to her. As someone who had spent the last ten or so years in the world of information technology in Boulder, Colorado, I found it unthinkable that academia wasn’t the incredibly open and welcoming place I’d understood it to be. I found it impossible to think that the stigmas and hesitations of the world had found their way into the ivory towers. Four years later, I can tell you, there’s not much scarier that I have done in my thirty-eight years than to put myself out into the academic job market as an openly gay man doing openly gay work. Sure, many—perhaps even most—seemed welcoming and accepting. But it would take many pages and many precious moments to tell the stories of awkwardness, silence, eyes cast down, and campus visits that moved quickly to talk mostly about teaching experience instead of research or that concluded with me being asked: “Now you do realize this is a technical communication position, right?” At that moment I was the one who was silent, eyes cast down.

*Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**KRISTIN**\(^{15}\): This is my story.

I’ve never really considered NCTE or CCCC as something I even could feel at home in, and I’m honestly not quite sure why. I haven’t felt purposefully excluded, but I also haven’t felt purposefully included. I’ve always seen it as this distant institution that I know has some control over my conferences and journals and publications, but that I don’t really have a voice or say in. It’s sort of how I view my state government, I guess. . . . I know they fund all sorts of things I do, and yes, I vote, but at the end of the day I never consider myself as
part of it. . . . I feel much more “at home” in the computers and writing community than the CCCC community, and I think in many ways that has to do with size. CCCC is so damn big that it’s easy to get lost in the shuffle. I also feel like CCCC is somehow comprised of the elders, and as a youngun’ it is my job to sit, watch, and learn. But I don’t see it as my job to speak up . . . at least yet. And, if I did, I feel I’d get that “wait, who the hell are you and why are you sharing your opinion?” look that, quite possibly, I might deserve. Feeling at home to me means that people know me, I know them, we relate on some level, we look out for each other, we value each other’s opinions, we have a shared sense of belonging. I don’t have that with CCCC.

Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.

KENDALL16: This is my story.

I remember once, during a job interview, the well-meaning scholar who used me as a teachable moment, letting me know that while I studied Chicanas, using Chicana theory, that some of what these Chicanas were saying had been said by this theorist named Foucault. As if I was not using Foucault because I had not read any of his work and hadn’t ever heard of him.

He went on to explain to me, in his teacherly tone, “Now as Foucault would say, you are not being critical of the organization. This isn’t a rhetoric dissertation.” The organization that I studied made intentional choices about what to include or omit in their archives, and he wanted me to be critical of their choices and actions, to question their intentionality.

As a researcher, I was more interested in what was there, what those Chicanas had decided was important to include in the making of their organizational memory. And I didn’t cite Foucault, whom I adore, because instead I cited Chicanas precisely because their writing, their theory, comes from a place that, as Cherrie Moraga writes, is emergent from the “physical realities of our lives” (21).

What was lost on this scholar was the intentionality of my practice, the intentionality in citation, in making a lineage worth building upon.

As a faculty member, I am often told “You can’t do that because this is the way it has always been. It cannot change.” And at times this seems about right. The theories I know have no place here. I remember then what studying archival research has taught me, when I look at the histories of people who were also told this—that you have no place here: “Be the change you want to
see.” This is what I adhere to. I speak it in the mirror. Over and over again. I speak it until it feels true.

*Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**LISA**

This is my story.

Stories make place. Stories reclaim space.

When, as a graduate student, my work began to coalesce around Native and indigenous rhetorics both inside and outside the classroom, I was gently warned: be careful; you’re going to have a hard time finding someone who will listen. The discipline doesn’t recognize this kind of work, and you’ll be hard put to get a job.

As my dissertation progressed, and I dug deeper into the challenges posed to American Indian museum rhetorics by adapting colonial communicative structures to tell Native stories of survivance, I sometimes heard rumblings: Does this even belong here? Is this rhetoric and composition? Is this even English?

As I went on the job market, I was advised: Don’t drink the Kool-Aid of rhetoric and composition. Find a home in Native American studies. It’s a safer place for your work, where you’ll be appreciated. Rhetoric and composition doesn’t get it. Your stories might die there.

First job interview: So what do American Indians have to do with rhetoric?

I have been stunned into silence many times by such questions.

Why did I stay? Why am I still here?

Because I’m determined to stun the silence back and speak.

Because there are a few people who are interested in hearing these stories, the stories of indigenous survivance, who pay attention when we say we are still here.

Because for every person who told me it could not be done, I found another who said it should be done, has to be done. There can be no justice, no balance, no wholeness in this discipline (or this world) until these stories are told, heard, acknowledged, and acted upon.

Because sometimes, when I help to tell the stories, someone says, “thank you, this changed me, and this is going to change how I think and how I teach.” Thus, the stories spread.

Because in spite of the nay-sayers, there is a community here, a web of relations and alliances who continue to give life to each other and the stories we all tell.
Because my work does have a place here.
I, too, belong here. I always have. We always have.
*Take this story. It's yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**MALEA:** This is my story.

As a graduate student, I was puzzled by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish rhetorics. Not puzzled about what Blair and Smith and Campbell and Whately and Bain *said*, more in why they said it. Why it’s this version of “the rhetorical tradition” that got transported to the United States during that long nineteenth century. I mean, the Scots were colonized by the English, so it always seemed weird that they tried so hard to be good British intellectuals, keepers at the civilized gate. And then I read Frantz Fanon, and in the beautiful intricacies of his articulations of internal colonization and the effectiveness of colonized intellectuals at maintaining order long after the actual colonial forces had left the country, I saw not only what I have been missing in my understanding of Scottish rhetorics but also the reflexivity I’d been missing in my own attempts to do something called American Indian rhetorics. And it took a Martinique-born French psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary to teach me what I had in common with those Scottish intellectuals—the experience of a privileged position in the aftermath of colonization. I understand, strategically, why this wasn’t a story our disciplinary founders told about “Enlightenment Era Rhetoric,” but I refuse to not tell that story now. Which is why, when I teach histories of rhetorics, we study what Mignolo points us toward—the establishment of the Western code, our discipline’s embrace of that code, and what it might take to break the sway of the teaching and scholarly practices propagated within the colonial matrix of power.

*Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.*

**SID**

This is my story.
I don’t like stories.
I don’t like the stock we place in them.
I don’t like that stories can use a plural pronoun, as the previous sentence does, and implicate the reader, appropriating the audience as part of the story.
I don’t like that stories carry that kind of power.
I don’t like stories. So, I am going to tell you one. It is about us.
Like you, I completed my undergraduate degree wanting to know more. That kind of desire is the desire of youth; it is an idealism. Like you, I chose to go to graduate school, and like you I wanted to know more about writing. I
wanted to write. That’s an idealism, too. I had no truck with literature, and back then that left few options for graduate work. So, like some of you, I enrolled in a creative writing program. They would teach me to write, about writing. That was naïveté. What they taught me about was stories. Rooms filled with other idealistic punks thinking that they had stories to tell worth the telling. And even more offensively, thinking that other people wanted to read them, hear them. Week after week, semester after semester, I sat and listened to stories. I listened to stories about stories. Not one of those stories taught me a damn thing about writing. “I know I have a story in me that will change the world,” one of my classmates announced once. “Now, that would be a hell of a story,” I thought. Fucking idealism. I switched graduate programs. And I met you.

The opening line of the preface to the 9/11 Commission report says, “We present this narrative” (xv). It’s a story. It’s an official story, authorized with signatures and stamps and proper circulation. Written into history. And you’re in it. We all are. There’s no antecedent to the plural pronoun. There’s no choice about it. You’re in the damn story and so am I. We are.

Since I took that first post–creative writing course in writing theory you and I have been in a lot of stories together. We’ve been in stories about education, stories about labor, stories about the profession, and stories about what we do. At some point in that first course you and I became we. That’s kinda funny that you and I would make a we. And that we’d listen to stories about us and tell stories about us. We don’t exactly get along all of the time. You do some stupid stuff a lot of times. And then tell stories that implicate me in your story. And you believe them. And authorize them. And stamp them. And sign them.

There are days I love being part of who we are. And then you start telling stories. About us. And I wonder just why I stay with you. You repeat a lot of the same stories you told me when I started graduate school. You think they are still relevant. They aren’t. I could collect portfolios of your stories; I could make an assessment of them.

Like I said, I don’t like stories. So I’m telling you one. You’re in it. And right now you’re hearing it amidst a cacophony of other stories about us. Stories that are being written into our history, stamped, approved, signed, and authorized. You think you’re telling stories that will change the world. That would be a hell of a story. I can’t wait to hear it.

Take this story. It’s yours now. Do with it what you will.

MALEA: While the remains of the Cahokia urban complex were noted by some early sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers and settler-colonists, usu-
ally in the context of encountering other tribes—the Cahokias for whom the city is inaccurately named, and the Peorias, both of whom lived in the area during those early colonial years—or in journals that gleefully recorded the lootings and grave destructions, no one connected the sophistication of the site with contemporaneous tribes. Instead, it was seen as either the evidence of a long-vanished people who'd left no ancestral traces or as proof that Vikings or Phoenicians had penetrated the continental interior prior to Europeans, or even to evidence of the lost tribes of Israel. Anything was seen as possible except the evidence of an organized, sophisticated culture that still persisted in the practices of the “savages” surrounding them. There was a brief moment in 1811 when Henry Brackenridge—a close friend of former president Thomas Jefferson—tried to bring media attention to what he called “the stupendous piles of earth . . . which must have required years, and the labor of thousands to build” (Hodges). But it wasn’t until 1839 when Samuel G. Morton—an eminent ethnologist—produced evidence that skulls looted from the burial mounds matched the shape of skulls from local Indians who had recently died. Very few people accepted his “proof,” and it wasn’t until the Smithsonian mounted a special investiga-

It wasn’t until the Smithsonian mounted a special investigation in 1881 . . . that scientists finally believed the mound builders were ancestors of the Native people they’d forced off those lands.
tion in 1881—led by archeologist Cyrus Thomas, who was trying to prove the “lost tribe of Israel” theory,19 that scientists finally believed the mound builders were ancestors of the Native people they’d forced off those lands. Even then, no mention of indigenous “civilization” was made. It wasn’t until the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 began its radical alteration of our North American landscape that the monumental story of Cahokia began to speak itself. An important part of Eisenhower’s Act were provisions for the study of archeological sites in the path of planned roadways. “This meant more money for more excavations than had even been available” (Hodges 2). As archeologists began to study the area where construction of I-55 and I-70 was planned, what they found was a revelation to them—nearly everywhere they dug they found homes, thousands of homes, surrounded by huge agricultural fields where corn and other crops were grown to feed the city’s inhabitants—suddenly the earthworks they’d previously categorized as trash dumps and burial mounds began to look like something else entirely—a city, a sophisticated precontact city larger than London during the twelfth century and, until the 1790s, would have been the largest city in what we now call the United States. For three hundred years, evidence of indigenous “civilization” had simply been erased, unseen, explained away as inconsequential to the project of empire. Let me be clear, the European and Euro-American colonists who settled in this area encountered evidence of this Native city at every turn—it dominated the landscape. They simply tore it up, tore it down, and ignored the clear implication that this land belonged to other people who, in fact, had highly sophisticated ideas about what to do with it!

OK, you get the metaphor. But, you say, “Malea, you’re just taking the stories of a few disaffected folks, a few naysayers, and you’re throwing in some stories about Cahokia and mashing it together with some theory from Mignolo and some big theoretical stuff about decoloniality and your usual accusations about the Greeks,20 and you’re not really saying anything that’s relevant to me. You’re not talking about how I should use what you’re saying in my classroom; you’re not telling me why this has anything to do with me, nor with the students in my comp classroom or my job as a teacher, or how it affects my job as a mentor of graduate students who really really need to learn about the Greeks so they can learn what “rhetoric” is really about so they can become younger versions of me!”21
My response? This is the biggest colonizing trick of them all—erasing real bodies in real conflict in the real world by separating mind from body, theory from practice to keep us toiling away in the service of a discourse that disadvantages almost every one of us. So I’ll say this once and for all. When I’m talking about decolonizing our discipline, our scholarship, and our teaching, I am talking about the actual students in our classrooms—their bodies, how their bodies are marked and mobilized in dominant culture, their language and how their language is represented in dominant culture, their lives and how their lives are denigrated as not quite good enough without the fix of Western literacy instruction, how so many of us believe they should be “saved” from their lowly, savage lives. Sound familiar? I’m talking about making space for them to create tools that will make it possible for them to see the real options open to them—to understand the press of Western fixations with print literacy as not personal, not about each of them at all, but as forces, discourses, they can negotiate, as decisions they can make, and giving them the opportunity to practice that decision-making in our writing classrooms and in our discipline as future valued colleagues. I’m talking about critical orientations to knowledge making. Believe me, the students in your classroom—undergraduate and graduate—already feel the effects of the colonial matrix of power—through the way that a controlling racist, heteronormative patriarchy acts on their lives—whether they have the words to describe it or not. I’m not talking about consciousness-raising or political conversion here. I’m talking—like Mignolo—about recognizing all available knowledge-making practices as real options, and about representing them as viable and valid in our classrooms and our scholarship. I’m talking about making consciousness-raising visible and accessible of those options being our goal. I’m talking about what the folks on the Language Policy Committee have been talking about since they drafted the Students’ Rights to Their Own Language Resolution in the early 1970s, and what folks who have been cast to the edges of the discipline because they do “other” rhetorics have been talking about for a long time. (And I’m not using “other” as code just for people who do race/ethnicity scholarship here; included in this capacious marginalized umbrella are folks who do disability studies, labor and class studies, GLBTQ studies, second language studies, creative writing studies, even folks in digital rhetorics and technical/professional writing.) What I’m talking about doing here is moving ourselves out of the missionary position, so to speak, out from under the Western code. Taking ourselves out from under the absolute power and control exercised over the possibilities for what “counts” as knowledge
inside the colonial matrix of power. I’m talking about a real answer to those disciplinary moments when we worry about things like whether the language of Edited American English is or isn’t “right” for our students, or whether we should “let” a graduate student write about indigenous rhetorics without citing Aristotle. I’m talking about those moments when we wring our hands and worry about them as if they don’t have minds of their own, as if they need to be rescued by the pale extended hand of empire, as if they need our sympathetic civilizing influence. I’m talking about decoloniality at every level we can manage, and then some. I’m talking about an epistemological shift of epic proportions where our job as teachers is to always reframe “the” way as one way, as a set of specific cultural values embodied in particular practices so that all of our students learn to see those value systems at work. 

“I am where I think and do.” 

We all have a lot to learn, not just about the knowledge practices that have been going on right here on this continent for the last few thousand years—things we haven’t seen because, like all those folks faced with evidence of Cahokian civilization who still didn’t believe it, we’ve been taught to see in particular ways for imperial purposes. We have to learn to re-see what’s in front of us, all around us, underneath our feet. There are a lot of ways to think about practices like “composition” and “writing” and “making” and “literacy” and “knowledge” outside the Western code. Some of “us” have already been
doing this work for a long time, already. True, as a discipline we’ve alienated and marginalized most of that work to such a degree that it’s not welcome in our journals, is barely visible at our conventions, and is nearly non-existent in our conversations about what “we” do in common. When it does appear, it’s quickly tokenized as a “special” or “alternative” discourse and quickly set off from what “really” counts. But we could change that behavior, we could change those practices, and we could change our beliefs about the breadth of what counts in our discipline. So let’s do it. Let’s tell different kinds of stories. Let’s do the thing that we do best—research, teach, mentor, administer in all the inventive and visionary ways that we all say we know how to do better than anybody else—but let’s do so in the service of a decolonized, multivocal knowledge world. Let’s start now.

SHELLEY\footnote{23}: The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.

JOYCE\footnote{24}: Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous.

PAUL\footnote{25}: Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world.

KENDALL: So you have to be careful with the stories you tell.

JAY\footnote{26}: Take this story. It’s yours. Do with it what you will.

SAM\footnote{27}: Tell it to friends. Turn it into a blog or a Tweet or a Facebook post.

WILL\footnote{28}: Teach about it or write about it or forget about it.

MALEA: But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story.

You’ve heard it now.\footnote{29}

Thank you for your time, your patience, your participation.\footnote{30}

\textit{Neewee; Wado; Mvto; Migwetch; Pilamaya ye; Gracias. Tanakia. Aho!}

\textbf{Notes}

1. I am deeply grateful to all the storytellers who participated in this performance
at the Opening General Session of the 2012 CCCC Convention in St. Louis. Their names and stories are printed here with their permission. I am also grateful to my colleagues who agreed to perform quotes or to read stories that had been gifted to them by others. I want to especially thank Michael Wojcik, my partner, who listened, carried, responded, organized, and endured. Neewee.

2. Daisy Levy is an assistant professor at Southern Vermont College.

3. During the performance of this address, I showed a marked map so folks could visualize this space. If you’re curious about what this map might look like, use a mapping program to mark the following points: 1) Cahokia Mounds State Park in Collinsville, IL; 2) 800 Washington Avenue, St. Louis (the Renaissance Hotel); 3) just north of that, the intersection of Broadway and Mound; 4) south of that, 4420 Ohio Street (near Carondelet). You’ll get an upside-down L that travels from east to west and then south along the river.

4. This property was purchased in 2009 by the Osage Nation for about $230,000—they intend to open an interpretive cultural education center there (Wexberg Sanchez). While the images available online couldn’t be reprinted here, it’s worth taking a look: https://www.stlbeacon.org/#!/content/18531/a_new_era_for_sugarloaf_mound.

5. Go back to the first map image in this script (p. 384)—notice how the rivers are like highways. Notice the central confluence of waterways near Cahokia. Notice the rivers that locate your place, where you sit reading this right now.

6. Gorgets like these were traded widely, and this design has a widespread geographical distribution. A major component of Mississippian cultures, the underwater panther is one of the Great Serpents, powerful beings who control the underworld. They are balanced by the Thunderers (or Bird Beings). When special care is taken to honor and respect the underwater panther, s/he is a great source of power and regeneration; when angered, s/he can enact devastating destruction.

7. Resa Crane Bizzaro is an assistant professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

8. Dora Ramirez Dhoore is an associate professor at Boise State University.

9. Andrea Riley Mukavetz is an assistant professor at Bowling Green State University.

10. Madhu Narayan is a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University. At the live performance of this address, she gifted her story to Stacey Pigg, who read it for her. Stacey is an assistant professor at the University of Central Florida.

11. Franny Howes is a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. At the live performance of this address, she gifted her story to Margaret Price, who read it for her. Margaret is an associate professor at Spelman College.

12. Mignolo’s five trajectories are 1) rewesternization—to rebuild the confidence the world had in the US; 2) reorientation of the Left—for the Euro/American Left.
to revamp the idea of the commons; for the non-Euro/American-Left, to consider to what extent political theories and the political economy of the West shall be the model; 3) dewesternization—a project of conflictive coexistence between forces that share economic principles like capitalism; 4) decoloniality—both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist; and 5) spirituality—the desire to find ways of life beyond capitalism and its magic of modernity which keeps consumers caught in the promises of dreamworlds (21, 36, 43–70).

13. The 2012 CCCC Convention was held in the Renaissance Hotel and America’s Convention Center.

14. Matt Cox is an assistant professor at East Carolina University.

15. Kristin Arola is an associate professor at Washington State University.

16. Kendall Leon is an assistant professor at Purdue University. At the live performance of this address, she gifted her story to Elaine Richardson, who read it for her. Elaine is a professor at the Ohio State University.

17. Lisa King is an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

18. Sid Dobrin is an associate professor at the University of Florida.

19. Here I’m referring to the then-popular speculation that the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel who disappear from mention in the Bible were the origin of many of the more “civilized” tribes in the Americas—a theory that has been amply disproven.

20. For example, see my essay “This Is a Story about a Belief....”

21. In my twenty-plus years in the discipline, every one of these accusations has come my way. More than once.


23. Rochelle Rodrigo is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University.

24. Joyce Rain Anderson is an assistant professor at Bridgewater State University.

25. Paul Kei Matsuda is a professor at Arizona State University.

26. Jay Dolmage is an assistant professor at the University of Waterloo.

27. Samantha Blackmon is an associate professor at Purdue University.

28. Will Banks is an associate professor at East Carolina University.

29. This entire multivocal piece is modeled on the storytelling practice in Thomas King’s The Truth about Stories. Some of these lines are exact repetitions of his, and some are riffs on the spirit of his. If you’re looking for exact quotes, see pages 9, 10, 29, and 32. But, really, you should just read the book.
30. Thanks to Doug Schraufnagle for being my PPT dude during the performance. Thanks to the following folks for helping to coordinate the multimedia capture of this performance: Michael Wojcik, Bump Halbritter, Shelley Rodrigo, Doug Walls, Gabi Rios, Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson, Casie Cobos, Lami Fofana, Jennifer Sano Franchini, James Jackson, Liza Potts, and Kathie Gossett.

Works Cited


