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**Sophists, Systems, And Skills: New Directions For Style Theory**

Stanislav Kozadayev  
*Wayne State University*

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF STYLE

Introduction

We live in an increasingly media-saturated world, in which we are persuaded by appeal to multiple modes of perception and reasoning simultaneously. In such a world style is an extremely important element of persuasion, as “relations of control and autonomy are negotiated through the artful composition of speech, gesture, ornament, decor, and any other means for modulating perception and shaping response” (Hariman, *Political* 49). Thus, style should be considered an integral part of everyday experience.

However, the question of style continues to undergo sporadic periods of engagement and abandonment by critics and continues to suffer from a lack of a theoretical basis to aid further inquiry. Currently, this area of study is seeing a resurgence, as scholars are once again beginning to explore the stylistic dimensions of culture. Nevertheless, there are currently few works dealing with style, fewer still that explore style from a communication perspective, and none that offer a theory of style with sufficient explanatory power to appeal to a wide range of critical scholars.

In this dissertation, I argue that the theoretical void surrounding style is at least in part due to an overreliance on the Aristotelian thread running through the rhetorical tradition and that it is this same tradition that has simultaneously influenced and limited the more general critical engagement with style. However, I also argue that we can look to the rhetorical tradition for alternatives to Aristotle and that we can update the rhetorical tradition with more recent philosophical developments in order to establish a theoretical basis for engaging style.
In the rest of this chapter, I examine the cyclical engagement and abandonment of style by critics and outline some common features of “the problem of style” (Vivian; Derrida, *Eperons*) that tend to recur with each period of such critical engagement. These common features of the problem of style revolve around the reduction of style to a set of elements or components, sometimes referred to as “stylemes” (Lang 182). As other scholars have already noted, this “tendency in stylistic analysis to catalog elements of design independently of substantive meaning” (Hariman, *Political Kindle* 125-134) offers little basis on which to build a theory of style, as this approach fails to account for both the dynamics of the stylemes and, even more importantly, for how a set of stylemes become a style. For example, although scholars note that stylemes “all seem to be marked by the expression of the whole” and although “the feel of the whole is found in the small parts,” Schapiro notes in dismay that investigations of style that proceed as “a search for hidden correspondences explained by an organizing principle that determines both the character of the parts and the patterning of the whole” (59-60) constantly come up short. This has led some scholars to go as far as dismissing the notion of stylemes altogether. "Stylemics is, then, a science manqué," says Lang. “The search for the styleme is the search for an object that points always to the fact of its own transience and contingency” (182). Finally, and most importantly, this conceptualization of style completely ignores the “other” meaning of style – style as quality or skill. Here, again, scholars recognize that style also functions as a “value term” for both critic and artist: “style as such is a quality and the critic can say of a painter that he has 'style' or of a writer that he is a 'stylist','’ says Schapiro, but
immediately notes that this meaning of the term as “outside the scope” of the critic, even as he contends that this meaning of style “should be considered seriously” (52).

While, as Schapiro and others point out, the styleme can and should be problematized, I argue that this reductionist focus on cataloguing a set of stylemes is merely one symptom of the persisting legacy of Aristotelian style theory and that this approach continues to hold communication critics back from establishing a theory of style more useful to 21st century criticism. Furthermore, I argue that the rhetorical tradition is resultantantly blamed for an impoverished view of style by critics in related disciplines (primarily in composition studies, but also in art history and criticism) and that this accusation is justified by the continued overreliance on Peripatetic notions of style by communication critics who are otherwise past Aristotle philosophically.

I propose two initial steps for moving past this Peripatetic bottleneck and towards establishing conditions of possibility for a useful theory of style. First, I propose that we can look to facets of the rhetorical tradition which flourished prior to Aristotle. I argue that while these “Sophistic” facets of rhetoric have already seen a revival, neosophism has not produced a new theoretical foundation for style not only due to the Sophist disinterest in theory, but also due to the highly fragmented nature of the remnants of Sophism currently available to scholars. I then attempt to buttress the shortcomings of neosophism by focusing on select pre-Socratic terminology that relates to the intersection of rhetoric, Sophism, and style, but has not heretofore been incorporated into scholarly discussions of style. I anchor this terministic cluster with “metic intelligence” (Raphals), a concept that also functions as
both lens and filter in reexamining this terminology as a means of discoursing about style as skill and quality.

Second, I propose that we can look to contemporary philosophical advances, which have already found their way into communication criticism, but have not yet been applied to the problem of style. Specifically, I propose that we can look to the language of complex adaptive systems (CAS), a branch of systems theory, in order to move beyond the now traditional approach to style. While systems theory has proven to be of great utility in its application to communication criticism more generally, the rich language of systems has not heretofore been utilized in addressing the question(s) of style as skill or quality. I argue that systems theory is especially useful as an alternative to Aristotelian conceptions of style because systems theory is able to provide insight into the dynamics and action of structures and is able to correct overly reductionist thinking with a more thorough conceptualization of the emergent.

Finally, I propose that the two alternatives to the Aristotelian approach to style can be combined to inform each other. Systems theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between systems theory and style. Therefore, combining the two alternatives to Aristotle can enrich our understanding of the concept, while accounting both for the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.

I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the chapters that follow.
The Problem of Style

When Stuart Ewen first set out to research what was to become *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* in late 1983, he described his experience as follows:

This frustration hit me on the first day that I set out to "research" the topic. I walked out of my house, to the local subway station, with the purpose of taking the train up to the Butler Library at Columbia University. At the entrance to the station, I glanced and then stopped to look at the newsstand next to the station doors. Among the hundreds of slick and colorful magazine covers, the word "style" appeared again and again. On news magazines, sports magazines, music-oriented magazines, magazines about fashion, architecture and interior design, automobiles, and sex, "style" was repeated endlessly. It seemed to be a universal category, transcending topical boundaries, an accolade applied to people, places, attitudes, and things. Still not sure what style was, I proceeded to the library with the knowledge that I was on the trail of a hot topic, a universal preoccupation, a key to understanding the contours of contemporary culture.

What I encountered at the library was sobering. Looking through the card catalog I understood that this would be a daunting topic. Unlike the newsstand, the card catalog offered few clues. There was a predictable reference to "See Fashion, Clothing," but I had spent more than a year in those sections of the stacks devoted to costume, the history of fashion, and fashion merchandising, and sensed the limits - as well as the utility - of the materials found on those shelves. In the card catalog there were also some references to works of literary style - William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*, to name the best known of them. This was not what I was looking for either, I thought to myself, realizing that I was about to tackle a subject that was, at best, amorphous; a subject that had no clear shape to it, and lacked the kind of concreteness that has shaped the catalogs of knowledge that scholars and students depend upon for intellectual guidance. (2-3)

When Robert Hariman first set out to research what was to become *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* roughly a decade later, he wrote: "Established academic conceptions of style hardly prepare one to take seriously the aesthetic dimension of political experience. Stuart Ewen has neatly summarized the problems facing such an inquiry:" (115-116). Following the colon, Hariman quoted the same passage of Ewen I cited above. Nothing seemed to have changed in the intervening decade. Yet another decade later, in 2005, Drew
Lowe expresses the same sentiment regarding the simultaneous ubiquity and elusiveness of style: “In trying to conceptualize and explain style, I’ve often felt like Potter Stewart trying to define obscenity; I can’t quite say what style is, yet I feel confident I know it when I see it,” concluding that “too often, I have been left with the feeling that something was missing” (241). Similarly, and most recently, scholars at the turn from the first to the second decade of the 21st century lament that style has “fallen into desuetude” (Folk 140) in both rhetorical studies (Brummett, *Rhetoric*) and composition studies (Pace; Butler, *Diaspora*).

As evident from the above, and as other scholars have already noted, the situation has not changed since Ewen: “The simultaneous promise and problem of style.... are seemingly everywhere yet, for the same reason nowhere in particular” (Vivian xi).

While scholars have been eager to find specific reasons for the lack of current engagement with style, I want to argue that there is a deeper issue at play. This issue is the lack of a theoretical basis on which to rely for a continued discussion of style, both in rhetoric and composition studies, as well as in criticism at large. A deeper look at 20th century literature will demonstrate that style has been engaged and abandoned cyclically, presenting the same challenges to each subsequent generation of scholars. Most recently, the desuetude into which style has fallen has been alternately blamed on the “social turn” of the close of the prior century (Pace), on style’s association with current-traditional rhetoric and its negative perception by critics (Butler *Diaspora*), and – this being perhaps the oldest justification for negatively perceiving style - on style’s association with rhetoric at large and rhetoric’s negative perception by critics (Folk). What the above reasons fail to take into account, however, is that the engagement and abandonment of style, along with
the tendency to blame adjacent disciplines, is merely the repetition of similar, earlier cycles. Hariman, for example, writing during the same “social turn” of the 1990s that Pace later blames for distancing us from style, blames the irrelevance of style on art studies and formalism as distancing us from questions of sociopolitical relevance (*Politics*). A similar line of reasoning is taken up by Wallach, who likewise argues that the question of style in art criticism merely gets in the way of “conceptualizing the relation between the aesthetic and the social” (14). Likewise, while 21st century scholars currently perceive a heavier engagement with style in prior decades, scholars during those same decades that Butler, for example, has designated as “the golden age” (*Diaspora* 6) of the question of style (that is the 1970s and 1980s) lament that style has fallen out of favor with critics (c.f. Kubler; Lang). For example, Kubler’s 1977 review of literature on style in the first half of the 20th century finds that "a conscientious search for scholarly discussion of the concept of style in this century show a decline in its appearance among serious works of reference" (163). Yet Kubler also finds that, in the second half of the 20th century "the unit of study represented by the concept of style has been continually diminished" (165).

This almost paradoxical view of style as always having been more useful in the past clearly cannot be logically justified. On the other hand, if we consider that no period of scholarly interest in style left us a useful theoretical foundation on which to base further discussion, the cyclical nature of style’s engagement and abandonment by critics begins to make sense. This – the lack of a solid theoretical conceptualization – is one of the chief recurring features of the problem of style. As an example, consider Hariman’s *Political Style: The Artistry of Power*, which is quoted above. Hariman’s book has been well
received and has also managed to gain hold outside of rhetorical studies, a rare achievement in the discipline. However, Hariman’s work is composed entirely of four case studies of what he calls “mirror texts,” that is texts that demonstrate how four different communication styles operate in the sociopolitical realm. There is no theoretical analysis or historical examination of the concept of style in *PS*. In fact, Hariman does not even point towards a possible theoretical orientation to aid contemporary scholars. Instead, he points only to the fact that style remains elusive.

This strange term, which can apply to everything from the fine arts to what happens at the hairdresser’s, may seem additionally confusing when applied to politics. The fact remains that we don't have a suitable vocabulary for discussing an important class of widely distributed skills. (Hariman, *Political Style* 50-52)

Hariman’s approach is emblematic of the current state of critical engagement with style, an approach that always seeks to bypass the question of style itself and to quickly move on to discussing either aesthetic matters tangential to style (Brummett *Politics*) or specific uses of stylemes (Hurh). Style, therefore, is often seen in the headlines, but never offers the contemporary critic any theoretical fodder. Perhaps the best example of this kind of scholarly false advertising is the journal *Style*, which has now seen over five decades of publication. Despite the name, a review of articles in this journal shows that style rarely makes it even into the title. Instead, articles like Hurh’s “Dirimens Copulatio and Metalinguistic Negation in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” and Wanlin’s “A Cross-Cultural Comparison of *Infernal Affairs* and *The Departed*” demonstrate the complete lack of concern with conceptualizing style that can be inferred from the Gale subject headings of the journal itself, which, as other scholars contend, are in themselves “highly suggestive” (Folk 150): Literature and writing; Literary criticism; Arts and humanities. As the above
demonstrates, and as other scholars have already noted, style tends to be habitually avoided in academia (Crowley; Folk), resulting in the current cultural condition wherein "no terminology appears to isolate style qua style" (Vivian xii).

The wholesale avoidance of conceptual and theoretical considerations of style can, however, be justified by the lack of a theoretical basis for furthering scholarly discussions. If we look at the few theoretically-oriented texts belonging to what Pace designated as “the Golden Age” of the question of style (but notably not the answer to this question), we can see merely another cycle of scholarly engagement that has produced no lasting effect on subsequent theoretical development. The failure in conceptualizing style is often acknowledged even before the effort begins. For example, consider The Concept of Style, a collection of essays first delivered in 1977 as lectures at a Summer Institute in Aesthetics in Boulder (Lang) and which served as an interdisciplinary meeting for scholars of disciplines as unrelated as art history and sociolinguistics. This collection begins by wondering "whether, in the analysis of style, such resistance to a systematic foundation may not be rooted in the concept of style itself" (14) and culminates in "A Checklist of Questions about Style" (299-304) a list of unanswered questions five pages long, "distinguishable from any particular theory of style" (299; emphasis original). Or consider, Style in Language, a prior series of conferences in 1958 that, at the outset, describes style as a "fluid and dissonant notion" (Sebeok 4) and which mirrors prior and later critical efforts in that it ultimately fails to propose a theoretical foundation for subsequent scholars.

Additionally, the concept of style has received no help from the critics and philosophers who are the staple of critical discourse today. Barthes, in Writing Degree
Zero, dismisses style as noise, as a dirty, biological set of impulses and habits, and finally as something wholly indistinct. Style, Barthes writes:

is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention.... Its frame of reference is biological.... It is the decorative voice of hidden, secret flesh.... the outcome of a blind and stubborn metamorphosis.... the transmutation of a Humour[sic].... it achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter.... style is always a secret. (10-12)

Foucault, likewise dismisses style’s utility when developing his concept of discursive formations, insisting that his analysis is more substantial in that “it questions neither the style nor the succession of the sentences; in short, it leaves the final placing of the text in dotted outline” (Archeology 75). Derrida, drops the “question of style” in favor of a prolonged poetic discussion of “woman,” which he contends “may amount to the same thing” (Eperons 34), a Zoharic approach that, unsurprisingly, offer little theoretical foundation for subsequent scholarship and does nothing to ameliorate the continued estrangement of criticism from style.

Prior scholarship has, naturally, noticed this estrangement. Lang offers perhaps the best summary of the cyclical engagement and abandonment of style, as well as the reason for this phenomenon. First, he notes that “the study of style seems constantly to start anew, returning each time to the 'beginning' of the concept” (14). This should already be evident from the above discussion of style’s continued rediscovery during the 1970s, again during the 1990s, and finally during the two most recent decades. However, Lang further states that "it also seems clear that in neither its past nor its current efforts has the analysis of style found an axis or fulcrum from which to move” (14), again, noting the lack of a theoretical basis available to critics. It should be clear then, that unless we can establish
some sort of theoretical basis for conceptualizing style, we are certain to continue to repeat
the history of critical engagement with style and end the current resurgence of interest in
the subject in yet another set of question marks for subsequent scholars to rediscover. It is,
therefore, crucial that we find at least a tentative way towards a reconceptualization of style
with sufficient explanatory power and utility to appeal to critics today. This, however,
requires a diagnosis of the current conceptual limitations standing in the way of such a
project.

**Traditional Limitations**

Lang notes that, due to the lack of a theoretical “fulcrum” examinations of style
constantly return “to the 'beginning’ of the concept” (14). While the intent behind his
quotation marks around the word “beginning” are not made clear during the course of his
exposition, Lang - knowingly or unknowingly - points to what I consider the most evident
limitation currently imposed on the problem of style. This is the convention of beginning
with Aristotle. This convention of starting with Aristotle as the synthesizer of Platonic and
pre-Socratic thought takes for granted that Aristotle - unproblematically - rectified the
extremes of Plato's positions as he laid down the foundation of “Western Thought.”
Discussions of style, however, began with Rhetoric, not with philosophy, while stylistic
devices emerged out of epic poetry that preceded both disciplines. To begin with Aristotle,
then, is to ignore a large-scale shift in conceptual orientation that began with Socratic
thought. As I will argue in the following chapter, this shift holds one of the keys to
reconnecting with style because it is within this shift that we can place the conditions of
possibility for both the formation and the limitations of our present-day approaches towards
style. Rhetorical scholarship, especially, continues to be held back by an overreliance on Aristotle, both critically and pedagogically.

While few literary critics, rhetoricians, or philosophers today would admit to explicitly and consciously espousing Aristotelian theory, there is, nevertheless, a strong Aristotelian influence in what scholars today refer to as the “dominant tradition” (Seas 4) within rhetorical scholarship:

...Whitehead's observation that the history of philosophy is one long footnote to Plato can for us be transferred to the Rhetoric: All subsequent rhetorical theory is but a series of responses to issues raised by that central work. There is no comparable situation in any other discipline: No other discipline would claim that a single ancient text so usefully informs current deliberations on practice and theory. (Gross and Walzer ix-x)

Seas, likewise, notes that “our traditional understanding of discourse and rhetoric that has survived up to the present day.... relies on certain assumptions about…the production of meaning via transparent language, the coherent stability of the human subject, and the intentional application of power to effect change” (2), all highly Aristotelian assumptions. Seas further notes that the effect of the dominant tradition on rhetorical scholars produces a condition wherein “we remain bound by the strategic blind spots of a dominant tradition that may have originated in the tactical art of the sophists but has accrued these philosophical predispositions through centuries of institutionalization” (2-3).

Therefore, while most rhetoricians today no longer acknowledge the key presuppositions of the Peripatetic school - such as the division of content and form or reason and emotion, as well as the primacy, in each case, of the former over the latter – the dominant tradition continues to exert an influence on rhetorical scholarship that is
especially limiting when it comes to questions of aesthetics and style. Because the Aristotelian drive towards simplicity through reductionism is especially ineffective when dealing with complex and emergent phenomena, “holding to this dominant tradition thus inhibits contemporary rhetorical studies from generating new paradigms…” (Seas 3). Hawk, likewise, notes the historical continuity of the reductionist influences of The Rhetoric:

The desire for simplicity has haunted rhetoric and composition for most of its history, from stock forms for producing oral speeches in ancient times to simple processes for the production of written texts in contemporary times…. This has certainly been the tendency in rhetoric and composition…[where] rhetoricians of various stripes have tried to produce simple systems that make writing teachable. (831)

The specific effects of the Aristotelian tradition on critical engagement with style – both historically and presently - will be the focus of the following chapter. However, it is important to note at the outset that the Aristotelian influence on rhetorical scholarship is rooted in an approach to style that reduces style to a set of devices or elements that can be quantitatively evaluated with a high degree of consistence, producing the three levels of style – Grand, Plain, and Middle - which became one of the main legacies of the Peripatetic tradition and which continue to constitute the pedagogic foundations of rhetorical studies, along with Aristotle’s “canons of rhetoric” and his division of persuasion into ethos, pathos, and logos. As I will argue in the following chapter, while this conceptualization holds some utility for using the notion of style as an instrument of control, any utility in constructing a theoretical basis for examining style conceptually continues to be severely limited by an approach focused on controlling the aesthetic dimensions of texts, rather than seeking to understand their role in textual production. Therefore, it is specifically this Aristotelian
undergirding of the rhetorical tradition that continues to delimit our conceptualization of style to a set of elements, mannerisms, or devices. This conceptualization remains unchanged from Kenneth Burke’s 1934 definition of style as "the exploitation” of a set of “technical forms” to achieve “aesthetic ingratiation” (CS 52) to Hariman’s 1990s definition of style as "a coherent repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions for political effect" (67), as well as to Vivian’s definition of style in the current decade as "a set of persuasive, argumentative, or symbolic techniques adapted to instrumental ends" (xxiii). Therefore, although we are currently at the point of near universal recognition that rhetoric continues to be hampered by a dominant tradition with highly Aristotelian leanings (Hawk; Seas), few specific theoretical advances have been offered to replace the dominant traditional approach to style in communication studies.1 Drew Lowe summarized the frustration of the contemporary critic held back by Aristotle most succinctly:

Using present theoretical models of style, I have found myself clinging to atomized descriptions that tend to focus on the writer’s choices, on speculations about the writer’s personality, or on the marriage of form and content. Too often, I have been left with the feeling that something was missing…. We need a new model. (241)

Proposal for Alternative Approach

In the rest of this dissertation project I will build on the currently emerging scholarly trend (c.f. Lowe) of recognizing style as needing an alternative theoretical

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1 Typically, the theoretical focus is instead shifted towards the socio-political (Ewen; Harriman Political; Brummett Politics), a tradition that began with Kenneth Burke’s rehabilitation of style and rhetoric along the very same Aristotelian lines largely responsible for this new-old conception of style as a set of devices used for ingratiating the audience.
approach and propose two initial steps towards exploring such an alternative: Looking before and after Aristotle. As already noted above, beginning with Aristotle ignores a substantial portion of style’s conceptual development. Therefore, the first step towards an alternative conceptualization should account for style’s origins more fully. Style originates as a rhetorical concept, flourishes within a Sophistic context, and becomes problematic only post-Socrates. While Sophism thus presents the obvious historical alternative to Aristotle, Sophistic writings are not sufficiently preserved to allow us to discern a Sophistic theory of style. Furthermore, the possibility of a unitary notion of a "genuine" Sophism is itself highly problematic. To remedy the above concerns and to allow an exploration of the Sophistic period of style’s development, I argue that we can examine concepts that relate to the intersection of style and Sophism from a more established neosophistic perspective, thereby recovering some fragments of a pre-Socratic conceptualization of style. While these fragments do not in themselves form a coherent theory of style, they provide a starting point for a theoretical alternative to Aristotle. Additionally, I anchor my exploration of this pre-Socratic terminology with a focus on “metis” (Detienne and Vernant) or “metic intelligence” (Raphals), a concept that helps flesh out the ways in which style can be both a skill and a quality and thereby begin to fill in the theoretical gaps we have accumulated over the past two millennia.

After a reexamination of the historical context within which style originated and developed, the second step towards an alternative to Aristotle looks to the future of rhetorical theory by exploring more recent theoretical developments that have not yet been utilized in constructing a theory of style. I propose systems theory as a second step towards
moving beyond the Aristotelian approaches to style and textual production. Systems theory is especially useful as a means of correcting Aristotelian conceptions of style because systems theory aims to provide insight into the dynamics of formation and development within structures and, therefore, offers a more thorough conceptualization of emergent processes. While systems theory has proven to be of great utility in its application to communication criticism more generally (Hawk; Rogers et al; Innes and Booher), the rich terminology of systems language has largely gone unused when addressing the question(s) of style. Therefore, systems theory constitutes an approach already proven to be effective within our field, yet not heretofore applied to the question of style. More specifically, I focus on the language of complex adaptive systems (CAS), a branch of systems theory, as a means of constructing a framework for an alternative theoretical approach to style. Following my examination of systems theory and CAS, I propose a way to combine the language of systems theory with the pre-Socratic terminology already explored earlier, with the goal of having the two inform each other. I argue that systems theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between systems theory and style. Therefore, combining the two alternatives to Aristotle can allow us to begin to establish a theoretical base for further discussions of style and enrich our understanding of the concept, while accounting both for the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.
Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2: In the following chapter I trace the history of style with a focus on the way Aristotelian conceptions of style survive through present day. I begin by examining primary texts from both Aristotle and the Peripatetic school, as well as subsequent documents that demonstrate the way Theophrastus’s extension of Aristotle’s “canons” of rhetoric suffused subsequent conceptualizations of style by Roman, Christian, and medieval rhetoricians. I then move forward historically and show through a review of subsequent literature that Peripatetic assumptions about style and language survive almost entirely intact in the works of 17th, 18th, and 19th century rhetorical theorists and, furthermore, that this “current-traditional” approach to style remains unchanged throughout the 20th century. Through the review of literature I demonstrate that, despite contemporary philosophical advances in the discipline, contemporary communication criticism largely follows the same Aristotelian tradition, beginning with Kenneth Burke’s revitalization of style and rhetoric during the second quarter of the 20th century and continuing through the work of scholars like Hariman and Brummett at the turn of the millennium. I also demonstrate the influence of the Peripatetic orientation on conceptualizations of style more generally, by examining the way Aristotelian approaches endure in composition studies and art criticism, as well as the ways in which these approaches create similar conditions of impossibility for constructing theories of style suitable to contemporary critical work. Finally, I survey contemporary pedagogical materials in order to demonstrate the lasting influence of the current-traditional model on communication pedagogy, where this model now appears universal and unchallenged.
I then argue that the Aristotelian approach to style lacks the depth and explanatory power that theories should provide and instead merely implies an underlying negative attitude towards the aesthetic, considered by Aristotle to be a necessary evil when communicating with the uneducated masses. Therefore, while any single approach has shortcomings, the Aristotelian conceptualization is especially limiting because it seeks to minimize the importance of style by reducing style to a set of devices used for aesthetic ingratiation. Ultimately, this conceptualization prevents us from building a meaningful theory of style with explanatory power.

Chapter 3: In this chapter I present the first step towards an alternative to Aristotelian style theory. I do this by looking to the origins of style. Style originates in poetry, flourishes within a Sophistic context, and becomes problematic only post-Socrates. Unfortunately, while Sophism thus presents the obvious alternative to Aristotle, Sophistic writings are not sufficiently preserved to allow us to discern a Sophistic theory of style. Furthermore, the notion of a "genuine" Sophism is itself highly problematic. I argue, however, that we can examine concepts that relate to the intersection of style and Sophism from a neosophistic perspective, thereby recovering some fragments of a pre-Socratic conceptualization of style. While these fragments do not in themselves form a coherent theory of style, they provide a starting point for a theoretical alternative to Aristotle.

I anchor my exploration of this pre-Socratic terminology with a focus on “metis” (Detienne and Vernant) or “metic intelligence” (Raphals) because this concept fills the voids created by Peripatetic overreliance on logic and rationality in the same oppositional way as sophism, while also providing a more concrete base for the otherwise vague notion
of a neosophistic perspective. Historically, metic intelligence has been minimized in importance as mere cunning. It has, therefore, received minimal attention from communication critics. Furthermore, the concept of metic intelligence has not heretofore been connected to the question of style. As I will argue, however, metic intelligence is one way to account for the artistic side of textual production that the Aristotelian tradition continues to occlude. Klein writes that metic intelligence “is a form of intelligence like the savior of savoir-faire; it is the knowledge that philosophy, as Kant says, can never conceptualize, because it underlies the distinction between philosophy and its other: art” (11). Therefore, the concept of metis will be instrumental to my filling in the theoretical gaps bequeathed to contemporary critics by Aristotle, as well as to my attempt to account for how we can discourse about style not only as a prescriptive, but as both quality and skill.

Chapter 4: In this chapter I present the second step towards augmenting Aristotelian style theory. I do this by exploring systems theory terminology that others have already applied to moving past structuralist approaches, both in communication and in other fields. Although this terminology is widely accepted by critics at large, the rich terminology offered by systems theory has not been applied to constructing a theory of style. I begin with a brief overview of systems theory within the general context of chaos, complexity, and emergence theories. I then move on to a discussion of complex adaptive systems (CAS), as well as systems terminology necessary to understand the systems perspective. Following the general overview, I discuss the current state of systems theory application to communication criticism. I demonstrate that although systems theory has seen a wide
range of uses within the discipline, the rich terminology and the stable theoretical foundation that systems theory offers have not been utilized in constructing a theory of style. However, I also review several nascent proposals to view the rhetorical situation and style in the context of systems theory and network theory that have emerged during past decade. Although such proposals do not offer a working theory of style, they do provide further support that systems language can offer us a way towards such a theory.

In the remainder of the chapter I combine the pre-Socratic terminology first explored in Chapter 3 with the terminology of complex adaptive systems with the aim of allowing these past and future alternatives to Aristotle to inform each other. I argue that CAS theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between CAS theory and style, allowing us to discourse about style as skill and quality. I conclude the chapter by arguing that combining the two alternatives to Aristotle can enrich our understanding of the concept of style, while accounting both for the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, I offer a summary of my findings and arguments. I then outline some of the more significant implications of these findings and arguments. Finally, I turn to the limitations of the current project, as well as some possible directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2: STYLE FROM ARISTOTLE TO PRESENT DAY

Introduction

In this chapter I trace the history of style. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, Aristotle’s position and theory reaches from Theophrastus to contemporary scholarship. I therefore trace the history of style with a focus on the way Aristotelian conception of style survives through present day. I do this by examining primary texts from both Aristotle and the Peripatetic school, with a focus on the way Theophrastus’s extension of Aristotle’s “canons” of rhetoric suffused subsequent conceptualizations of style by Roman, Christian, and medieval rhetoricians. I then demonstrate that Peripatetic assumptions about style and language survive almost entirely intact in the works of 17th, 18th, and 19th century rhetorical theorists and that this “current-traditional” approach to style remains unchanged through the 20th century. I demonstrate that, despite the availability of more recent philosophical frameworks and critical models, as well as their successful utilization in other fields, contemporary communication criticism continues to be delimited by the current-traditional model that has its origins in Aristotelian style theory. I conclude the chapter by restating the argument that the Aristotelian approach to style has as its telos the elimination of style from discourse. Therefore, the currently dominant model of style in language and communication proceeds from a preoccupation with eliminating the subject of its inquiry, rather than providing explanatory power and a theoretical base for further critical work, transforming style into format through a traditionalist and largely atheoretical “preceptive” (Murphy) approach. The continued reliance of critics on this
approach ultimately prevents us from building a meaningful theoretical base for the concept of style.

**Pre-Socratic Greek Rhetoric**

The concept of style – “this strange term, which can apply to everything from the fine arts to what happens at the hairdresser's” (Hariman, *Political Style* 50) - has spread to every aspect of Western culture. Yet, the concept of style has a unitary origin in the ancient rhetorical studies of what the Greeks called *lexis*. Thus, while the West continues to locate the origins of its style theories in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, style was already discussed by the Sophists, prior to the emergence of the philosophical academies. As Poulakos puts it "those who practiced [the art of Rhetoric]” came prior “to those who reflected about it” (25). Additionally, an even earlier awareness of the concept in epic poetry preceded style’s formalization and study (Kennedy *Classical*).

Aristotle acknowledges the artistic origins of *lexis* in Book III of his *Rhetoric*, noting that “It was naturally the poets who first set the movement going” and concluding that “thus the arts of recitation and acting were formed, and others as well” (3.1 1404a). Aristotle also locates the origins of Rhetoric in the poetic: “Now it was because poets seemed to win fame through their fine language when their thoughts were simple enough, that the language of oratorical prose at first took a poetical color, e.g. that of Gorgias” (3.1 1404a).

Although no ancient theories of style survived into the classical era, Greek epic poetry clearly demonstrates an awareness of the stylistic components in speech. Most obvious are the individual styles of speaking belonging to the characters of the epics. In
book nine of the *Iliad*, for example, Odysseus, Pericles, Phoenix, Achilles, and Ajax all speak in distinctly dissimilar styles. The careful, planned, formal rhetoric of Odysseus is contrasted with the more personal, *ad hoc* rhetoric of Achilles, and both of these are, likewise, distinct from the military bluntness of Ajax. Kennedy writes:

> Much can be learned about classical rhetoric from the ninth book of the *Iliad*. Many devices of invention, arrangement, and style were clearly in use long before they were conceptualized and named. (*Classical* 14)

This lack of conceptualization, the lack of a formal theory of style, continues until roughly the time of Aristotle, at least as far as surviving documents are able to show. Plato, in *Phaedrus*, mentions categories of style found in the handbooks by Polus, Licymnius, and Protagoras, as well as proper, figurative, and poetic words and devices discussed by Thrasymachus. This prompts Kennedy to state that among the observations that can be drawn from *Phaedrus* is that "at least some of the [ancient, lost] handbooks included discussions of style, specifically of the various kinds of diction available to the orator and the forms of linguistic ornamentation which he could use." He also highlights the fact that "this development was probably a result of the influence of the Sophists" (*New History* 20).

However, although the ancient manuals may have covered forms of diction or ornamentation, their purpose was prescriptive, not theoretical. They were how-to manuals, not philosophical treatises. Murphy notes that ancient Greece thus represents the "earliest attempts to establish precepts for human discourse” and that “the most prescriptive of these arts is that of rhetoric," which was transmitted "by laying down specific directions... in the form of direct suggestions for conduct" (3).
Furthermore, the teaching methods of the Sophists using these manuals combined the study of practical rhetorical techniques with mimetic exercises, which required that students study speeches directly and perform their own orations. Rather than merely conceptualizing or studying theories, the student was expected to learn, in large part, through *mimesis*. (This term was later translated into Latin as *imitatio*, which is the basis for the current convention of translating *mimesis* as "imitation.") Thus, while the general scholarly opinion is that “ancient writers divided the teaching of discourse into three major areas: Theory, Imitation, and Practice” (Murphy ix), theory does not occupy a prominent place in rhetorical engagement with style prior to the Socratic shift. As far as extant sources show, Gorgias, for example, does not offer a theory of style to the student of rhetoric, despite having a distinct rhetorical style derived from the poets preceding him and despite earning widespread fame for its utilization. It is also illustrative that in Plato's *Gorgias*, Gorgias is several times fictionalized as unable to formally define what he does. Although the lack of theoretical systematization was likely not seen as a deficiency by the Sophists, by Plato's time, *theoria* became so crucial to the validation of any discipline that the lack of a formal theory was used as grounds to attack not only Gorgias as an incompetent teacher, but the status of Rhetoric as a *techne*. Plato employs this strategy extensively in his *Gorgias*, where he, in the guise of Socrates, proclaims that Rhetoric is not a techne: “An art [techne] I do not call it, but only an experience [or “knack” or “habit”], because it is unable to explain or to give a reason of the nature of its own applications.” We can thus tentatively locate the transition from a more mimetic and experiential pedagogy to a more
theoretically oriented style of instruction during the overlap of the lives of Gorgias and Plato, as well as during the lifetime of Isocrates.

Like Gorgias, Isocrates has his students learn not through studying rhetorical theory, but through *mimesis* - through direct imitation of his own written speeches. This changes after Isocrates. While *mimesis/imitatio* continues to be used as a pedagogic tool, its role in the transmission of knowledge continues to be reduced (Kennedy *Classical*). However, the beginnings of a kind of rhetorical theory do begin to show up in Isocrates’s instruction. One of his surviving contributions to stylistic theory, for example is the prescription of avoiding *hiatus* - the successive use of words ending and beginning with a vowel. Although Isocrates does not develop a full, formal theory of style, he can be seen as a kind of “transitional form” between the prevailing lack of attention to theory shown by the earlier rhetoricians and the prevalence of theory as a validating force in and after the influence of Plato. Scholars have also noted that with Isocrates begins the Greek tradition of a *particular kind* of approach to rhetoric, which has been described as “preceptive” because the focus of the instruction is on providing direct advice (praecepta) to the student, much as the earlier (lost) rhetorical handbooks had done previously. In Isocrates, therefore, we can see the foreshadowing of “the Greco-Roman preceptive tradition which begins with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and continues through Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Donatus, and Saint Augustine....” (Murphy 363).

*Aristotle and Theophrastus*

With Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* an incipient theory of style emerges. As I will demonstrate throughout the rest of the chapter, this theory continues to suffuse
contemporary conceptions of style. Aristotle sees style as the casting of thoughts into language. It is of great interest that he places style before arrangement within the structure that would become the five canons of rhetoric roughly 200 years later, as this may imply that earlier conceptions of style held style to be more closely connected to realm of invention, rather than later version of the canons that situate style nearest the realm of delivery (Hawhee). Thus – and unlike the later Theophrastian version of the canons that survives today - for Aristotle, the canons are: Invention, Style, and Arrangement. Aristotle's theory of style defines five “virtues” or “excellences” (aretai) of style as: clarity, distinction (stressing proper use of metaphor), hellenismos - correct Greek, ongkos - impressiveness in composition, and to prepon - propriety. While Aristotle considers rhythm worthy of discussion, he chooses to focus primarily on meter, which can be expressed in exact numbers, and largely avoids discussion of the kinds of rhythmic flow of the cadences of language that escape formalization, noting in Book 3 of the Rhetoric only that good prose sits between the regular meter of poetry and an absence of rhythm altogether. It is worth noting that in the Rhetoric Aristotle does not use the three categories of style – grand, middle, and plain - defined later by Theophrastus. He does, however, discuss distinctions between written discourse (including epideictic oratory) and oral discourse, as well as differences in judicial and deliberative oratory. Aristotle compares deliberative oratory to scene painting and states that deliberative oratory requires less detail than judicial.

In order to further explicate Aristotelian style theory, we have to rely in part on Theophrastus, who, after taking over the Peripatetic school began to codify and further
systematize Aristotle’s approach to style in language. We can then return to Aristotelian style theory in the next section of this chapter. Theophrastus was a student of both Plato and Aristotle, as well as Aristotle’s chosen successor as head of the Lyceum. His contribution to theory of style is his treatise *On Style*, in which he formalizes Aristotle's conceptions of style and its virtues. Theophrastus is the first to formally classify styles as grand, middle, and plain. His virtues of style condense Aristotle's five into four: correctness, clarity, ornamentation, and propriety. It is Theophrastus, therefore, who fully formalizes both Aristotle's categories and Aristotle's virtues of style. It is also Theophrastus who finalizes the order of the canons of rhetoric still in use today: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery.

With Theophrastus, the transition to a theoretic view of Style completes. Thus begins the 2000-year legacy of Aristotle’s approach to style. Theorists following Theophrastus all share the tradition of classifying style into categories, as well as ascribing virtues or desirable qualities appropriate to style. The differences are typically only in the classification. Demetrius, for example, in his own *On Style*, offers four, rather than three categories of rhetorical style: plain, grand, elegant, and forceful. Hermagoras is the sole exception among classical Greek theorists, grouping arrangement and style together, under the term economy.

*Aristotelian Style Theory*

Aristotle bases his position vis a vis style on his more general position vis a vis language, a position often referred to as “representative” or “representational” because it assumes that the goal of language is the representation of ideas:
The first question to receive attention was naturally the one that comes first naturally – how persuasion can be produced from the facts themselves. The second is how to set these facts out in language. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.1.1403b)

However, the above assumption necessarily breeds a certain mistrust of the aesthetic or artistic properties of language, since they are seen, at best, as a distraction and, at worst, as a deliberate falsity used to mislead the unwary. Aristotle, therefore, rejects the magical properties of language as seen by Gorgias and his followers (Kennedy *Classical*) and states at the outset that “we ought in fairness to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts” (*Rhetoric* 3.1.1404a). Therefore, Aristotle’s theoretical position inherently attributes a negative axiology to style. It is highly worthy of note, therefore, that the 2000-year history of style in language proceeds from a theorist who wished to minimize – if not eliminate - the role of style in discourse. Kennedy states that "the way classical rhetoric traditionally viewed style as a set of qualities 'laid on' to the thoughts which invention had provided and disposition set out, rather than as something integral to the whole speech" was "a heritage of Aristotle’s efforts to reduce the importance of style in rhetoric" (*Classical* 106). Other contemporary scholars note that Book 3 of his *Rhetoric* seems merely “to be Aristotle's grudging concession to a demand that he produce a complete art” (Fahenstock 166). Yet other scholars note similarly that while Aristotle “grudgingly admits” the smallest possible role for style in discourse, he nevertheless argues that “in an ideal world it would be unnecessary to even consider lexis” (Hartley 34).

Aristotle’s attitude towards style is already evident from his description of style’s genesis, which he outlines in a single passage of the *Rhetoric*. I have broken this paragraph down and added emphases where appropriate. First, the aesthetic is judged to be...
compensatory to thought: “It was because poets seemed to win fame through their fine language when their thoughts were simple enough, that the language of oratorical prose at first took a poetical color, e.g. that of Gorgias.” According to Aristotle, rhetoricians adopted the use of poetic devices because they - like poets and unlike philosophers - needed to disguise a dearth of content. Second, style pleases the masses because the masses do not know better: “Even now most uneducated people think that poetical language makes the finest discourses.” The educated, Aristotle assumes, have already achieved a social consensus regarding the place of the aesthetic in (or rather outside of) discourse. Third, people are not sufficiently aware of the differences between modes of discourse: “The language of prose is distinct from that of poetry.” Aristotle goes on to claim that even the language of tragedy has moved away from the poetic and dropped tetrameters in favor of iambics “because they are the most prose-like of all meters” and that “tragedy has given up all those words, not used in ordinary talk, which decorated the early drama and are still used by the writers of hexameter poems” (3.1.1404). Finally, Aristotle ends his account of the genesis of style with: “and it is now plain that we have not to treat in detail the whole question of style, but may confine ourselves to that part of it which concerns our present subject, rhetoric” (3.1.1404a). What does Aristotle mean by “the whole question of style”? For Aristotle, the whole question of style concerns itself with the creative power of figural devices (chiefly metaphor, but also rhythm, euphony, and sentence structure), to which Aristotle gives minimal attention in his Rhetoric and some of which he discusses more at length in his Poetics. Poetry, however, is the only domain in which Aristotle allows the other question of style to retain (a limited) viability and only because post-Plato the poetic
is no longer an epistemological, pedagogical, or intellectual threat to academics vying for control over the education of Athenian youth and the production of the citizen of the polis (paideia). Regarding the above, Kennedy notes that Aristotle “seems to make too sharp a distinction between rhetoric (controlled by a speaker’s intentionality) and poetics (in which the creative artist plays more the role of facilitator or agent of expression of something beyond himself)” (Aristotle: On Rhetoric 312). While this critique is certainly just, as I will argue later on, the division of discourse into poetic and non-poetic is itself not only highly problematic, but also (ironically) a heritage of Aristotle’s treatment of language.

As with his genesis of style, Aristotle’s final position on style in language can, likewise, be found in a single passage of his Rhetoric:

The right thing in speaking really is that we should be satisfied not to annoy our hearers, without trying to delight them: we ought in fairness to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts: nothing, therefore, should matter except the proof of those facts. Still, as has been already said, other things affect the result considerably, owing to the defects [or “the corruption”] of our hearers. The arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others: the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much importance as people think. All such arts are fanciful [phantasia] and are meant to charm the hearer. (3.1.1404a)

Aristotle closes the above paragraph with one final “proof” that the art of language is inconsequential to the transmission of ideas. “Nobody,” he says, “uses fine language when teaching geometry” (3.1.1404a), a statement meant to underscore the irrelevance of the aesthetic properties of language to the transmission of Truth.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, Aristotle’s representational approach to language as the “garb” of thought, combined with a strong mistrust towards the aesthetic produces a highly problematic theory of style. Kennedy writes:
[It is] a weakness that Aristotle treats the matter of style as secondary to content.... nor does he connect amplification of subject matter with stylistic amplification. ...Aristotle's approach was, however, adopted by most ancient rhetoricians; and the result is that invention and style became separate processes: thoughts, already worked out and arranged, and then deliberately cast into words. (*Aristotle: On Rhetoric* 311)

Because Aristotle’s focus was on controlling and limiting the power of the aesthetic, he ultimately labored “to reduce the importance of style in rhetoric” (Kennedy *Classical* 106). While I will offer a more detailed examination of this issue at the conclusion of the present chapter, it is worth noting that it is Aristotle who sets in motion what some scholars have called the “preceptive tradition” of language use, due to this approach’s focus on providing *praecpta* (advice) to orators. Murphy notes that it is “the Greco-Roman preceptive tradition which begins with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and continues through Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Donatus, and Saint Augustine....” (363) that dominates approaches to style throughout the two millennia that follow Aristotle. Other scholars note that as subsequent approaches to style increasingly focus on the preceptive aspects of the Aristotelian tradition, the ultimate result is not in a theory of style, but a tradition of style that allows pedagogues to prescribe a “hodgepodge of grammatical, semantic, and stylistic criteria,” perpetuating a condition wherein “authors tend to seize on pieces of stylistic advice that have been handed down to them without regard to their relation to some theoretical matrix” (Crowley 246), another issue which will be treated more thoroughly at the conclusion of this chapter.

As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, Aristotle’s focus on control and decorum as chief linguistic virtues survives as the dominant approach to discourse production and education. However, it is not only Aristotle’s preceptive tradition that
dominates that ages that follow, but even the chief precepts themselves. They are, therefore, worth a brief examination.

As noted above, Aristotle defines five “virtues” or “excellences” (aretai) of style: clarity, distinction, correct Greek, impressiveness in composition, and propriety. Of the five aretai, however, two are given the most emphasis in the Rhetoric: clarity and appropriateness, while a third – correct Greek – is seen merely as a means towards clarity and appropriateness. Aristotle’s privileging of clarity is so strong that he advises clarity as the foremost goal even in his Poetics (Kennedy Aristotle: On Rhetoric). Aristotle therefore states at the outset that “style to be good must be clear.” This clarity “is secured by using the words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary.” Note the implication that poetic language and figuration are to be avoided for the sake of clarity, a precept that survives in rhetorical pedagogy to this day, as I will demonstrate later in the chapter.

Finally, Aristotle states that:

It [style] must also be appropriate, avoiding both meanness and undue elevation; poetical language is certainly free from meanness, but it is not appropriate to prose. (3.2.1404b)

Note, again, the emphasis on figuration as inherently inappropriate to discourse and the emphasis on propriety. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Theophrastus – a student or Aristotle and the next link in the chain that will transmit his teachings on rhetoric and style to scholars of the following two millennia – immediately reduces Aristotle’s five virtues of style to four: correctness, clarity, ornamentation, and propriety. This codification further reduces the role of “distinction” and “impressiveness” by combining and rebranding them as “ornamentation,” a role of style in discourse that will, henceforth, be deemed at
best optional and at worst detrimental to discourse. The twin goals of clarity and propriety, on the other hand, become the most dominant aspects of the preceptive tradition of language use, post Aristotle.

**Style Becomes Format**

While Aristotle’s theory can be said to thoroughly address language and communication from a representationalist standpoint, it is important to note, again, that Aristotle wished to eliminate the role of style in language. It is therefore also important to note that Aristotle discusses style only because eliminating style from language proves impossible and focuses on reducing the role of style in discourse as much as possible. Two consequences follow from this: First, when he does discuss style, Aristotle completely ignores the larger meaning(s) of the concept as quality, attribute, or skill (not to mention the Gorgianic concept of word-magic) and substitutes for this larger concept of style an almost entirely different conceptualization of style as a set of traditions or prescriptions to which language must conform. Second, in working against the sophistic position of style in language as providing a (magical) power to the orator through creative application of artistic skill, Aristotle aims to diminish the value of the aesthetic components of language, such as the figural devices which are to become the hallmark of style in rhetoric.

The result is that Aristotle’s theory of style is highly dismissive of the art of language and, often in lieu of explanation, attempts to set up general conventions of language use. Only one sentence in his *Rhetoric* can be said to address style in language directly. Here, Aristotle clearly expresses his position by describing the aesthetic properties of language as mere illusion: “All such arts are *phantasia* and are meant to charm the
hearer” (3.1.1404a). For Aristotle, the term *phantasia* denotes a combination of illusion and confusion. In *De Anima* 3.3, for example, Aristotle describes *phantasia* as including dreams, hallucinations, and any other mental imagery.

Therefore, a highly problematic relationship of theorist to style develops after Aristotle. Style has to either be ignored completely or has to be substituted by format. Hence, exploration of style still carries with it "the common confusion between style and format" (Kubler 164), as seen in the term “style guide,” still used in publishing today (and which also overlaps with uses of “genre”). It should not surprise us, therefore, that style’s utility as a concept has been largely limited to describing a set of conventions or traditions one must follow or to a set of conventions or traditions that define a particular historical period or school of thought. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, these limitations, while originating in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* over two thousand years ago, have nevertheless continued to delimit the realm of style up to present day.

**Roman Rhetoric**

Three hundred years after Aristotle, Cicero follows the Peripatetic theoretical outline in his *De Oratore*, stating that “the subject matter of rhetoric seems to be that which Aristotle approved” (1.7) and following with a description of Aristotelian (as codified by Theophrastus) canons of rhetoric. Like Aristotle’s privileging of *heuresis*, Cicero calls *inventio* “the most important” (1.7) of the canons. And like Aristotle, Cicero considers style to be subordinate to the transmission of ideas, defining *elocutio* as “the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter (idoneorum verborum ad inventionem accommodatio)” (1.7). Finally, Cicero also categorizes styles of rhetoric as three: *grandiloquent, plain, and*
tempered. However, Cicero establishes a theoretical correspondence between the three styles and what he terms the three "offices" of oratory: docere, delectare, movere/flectere, that is to teach or inform or instruct, to please, and to move or bend. Each style is a preferred way of serving each particular "office" - plain for docere, tempered for delectare, grandiloquent for movere/flectere. In De Oratore, Cicero defines what he considers to be virtues of style in a manner that could be said to be derived directly from Theophrastus: purity (or correctness), clarity, decorum (appropriateness), and – lastly - ornament. The only difference between Cicero and Theophrastus is that Cicero moves ornamentation into the last position in the list, a move highly illustrative of the trajectory of the status of style in discourse. The three offices are a particularly important concept, as they give a view of style as seen by the classical rhetoricians after Aristotle: a proper, appropriate, or correct means of serving each office of oratory. Cicero sums up the consummate rhetorician thusly: “He in fact is eloquent who can discuss commonplace matters simply, lofty subjects impressively, and topics ranging between in a tempered style” (De Oratore 29.101).

While the Rhetorica ad Herennium was not written by Cicero (but by a lesser-known contemporary who may have had similar schooling), the document is important as a means of supporting the universality of categorizing style and virtues of style as the de facto approach of the age. The ad Herennium also categorizes styles as being either grand, middle, or plain. However, the ad Herennium also provides what Kennedy calls a "defective counterpart" to each style. The defective counterparts define the common pitfalls of each stylistic category: swollen, slack, and meager. Finally, the text also defines three qualities of style, corresponding to Aristotle's and Theophrastus's "virtues," and thus
firmly in their tradition: *elegantia* (split into *latinitas* - correct Latin and *explanatio* - clarity), *compositio* - "avoiding harsh sound clashes and excessively figured language; making the style uniformly polished" (Lanham 115), and *dignitas* - tasteful embellishment. Likewise, in the Aristotelian tradition the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* stresses the preceptive approach and defines theory as "a set of rules that provide a definite method and system of speaking" (1.2.3). Scholars note that this definition clearly follows similar definitions of theory as used by Isocrates and other Greek rhetoricians (Murphy).

Quintilian offers a similar view and generally endorses and defends the classical Greek stylistic concepts found in Cicero. Quintilian’s restyling of the Aristotelian and Ciceronian virtues of style reads: “Style has three kinds of excellence: correctness, lucidity, and elegance,” but immediately qualifies this with the statement that “many include the all-important quality of appropriateness under the heading of elegance” (*Institutio Oratoria* 1.5.1), once again subordinating the aesthetic to the appropriate and style to decorum. Quintilian therefore forms yet another link the transmission of Aristotelian style theory to subsequent scholars of rhetoric and yet another reduction of the virtues of style that aims to shunt aside the aesthetic properties of language as inconsequential. As Murphy notes, this preceptive "approach reached a high level of sophistication in the Roman schools, as can be seen from the work of Quintilian, and it was transmitted by Roman education directly into the Latin culture of the medieval West" (ix). As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, Quintilian’s three virtues of style – correctness, clarity, and propriety – will survive intact well into the 18th century and will form the basis of “current-traditional” approaches to style in language as developed by Campbell and Blair.
While the categorization of style delineated above was almost universal during this era, there was a second tradition, which approached the classification a bit differently. This is the tradition passed down through Dionysius of Halicarnassus (circa 60BCE) and later Hermogenes of Tarsus (circa 160-180 CE). In *On Composition*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus develops a distinctly different theory of style from the prevailing classification of several distinct styles. He conceptualizes an ideal style, presumably in the Platonic sense of a single, unreachable perfection. This perfect style is composed of parts or components, which are similar to the qualities or virtues of style discussed by other theorists and which the rhetor mixes and matches to achieve the desired effect on the audience. This theory was passed down through Aristides and further developed by Hermogenes. Hermogenes continues the tradition of Dionysius's system and defines seven main qualities of style in his *On Ideas of Style*: clarity, grandeur, beauty, vigor, ethos, verity, and gravity. Some of these are further subdivided by Hermogenes, providing twenty "ideas" of style. Kennedy observes that the use of "idea" as the choice term "is easily coordinated to Platonic ideas" (*Roman* 104). Therefore, while this second tradition conceptualizes style somewhat differently from the Aristotelian one, the "ideas" are not significantly different from "virtues" or "qualities" in that they are centered on what is appropriate or correct in an ideal sense. Most notably, this method of classification ultimately disappeared from theories of discourse, since it had little basis on which to challenge the dominant Aristotelian tradition.
used by Cicero in constructing his “offices” of oratory, a tradition then passed down through Quintilian, Augustine, and others, as the rest of this chapter will demonstrate.²

Thus, by the time of Cicero, style was largely subordinated to the three "offices" of oratory. Style was, by this time, almost completely stripped of its larger meaning, both epistemological and as means of personal expression. Instead, there was only the adherence, with various degrees of success, to the prescriptive "virtues" or "qualities" or "ideas" that defined a style as an unreachable ideal. While an individual orator's style was spoken of, what was under discussion was actually the collection of achievements and shortcomings in reaching this ideal, not the qualities of individual expression. In *A Rhetoric of Motives* Burke writes that the three styles were not thought of:

> as personal expression, but as a means for carrying out the three "offices." That is, the plain style is best for teaching, the tempered style for pleasing, and the ornate (grandiloquent) style for moving. Though human weakness makes an orator more able in one or another of these styles, the ideal orator should be master of all three, since an oration aims at all three functions. (73)

As classical theories of style developed, the style of an individual orator, in the sense that we understand the term to apply to manifestation of individual traits, did not simply disappear. In addition to measuring orators’ styles against theoretical ideals, their

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² The only other historical alternative to the Aristotelian tradition is the Sophistic one, beginning with Gorgias and continuing through the work of Demosthenes and the anonymous author of *On the Sublime*. While this tradition, as well as its periodic revival, has left a lasting imprint on rhetorical scholarship and continues to contribute to contemporary rhetorical studies, the Sophists did not leave behind a theory of style. However, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the Sophistic contribution to the study of rhetoric still contains much that has not been utilized in filling out our conceptualization of style.
personal stylistic qualities were also evaluated aesthetically, despite the growing incongruity between theory and practice. For example, Cicero remarks:

What a wide distinction there is between the accomplishments and natural abilities of orators! Isocrates possessed sweetness, Lysias delicacy, Hyperides pointedness, Aeschines sound, and Demosthenes energy; and which of them was not excellent? yet which of them resembled any one but himself? Africanus had weight, Laelius smoothness, Galba asperity, Carbo something of fluency and harmony; but which of these was not an orator of the first rank in those times? and yet every one attained that rank by a style of oratory peculiar to himself. (De Oratore 3.7)

Likewise, Cicero says of Sulpicius and Cotta: “What things were ever so dissimilar as they are one to another? yet what is so excellent as they are in their respective styles” (De Oratore 3.8)?

This sense of style, however, posed a problem for theoretical discussions of oratory. If we recall that style emerged out of epic poetry as a pre-theoretical concept, it stands to reason that certain aspects of style should have become problematic when subjected to theory as the sole means of knowledge production and dissemination. This tension between theories of oratory and the broader meaning of style (a tension which remains with us today) is illustrated well in De Oratore:

It may perhaps occur to you, that if there be almost innumerable varieties and characters of eloquence, dissimilar in species, yet laudable in their kind, things of so diversified a nature can never be formed into an art by the same precepts and one single method of instruction. This is not the case; and it is to be attentively considered by those who have the conduct and education of others, in what direction the natural genius of each seems principally to incline him. (3.8)

Cicero’s attitude is a clear distillation of classical rhetorical theory, by his time several hundred years old. While individuals have “natural genius,” the goal of rhetorical education is to develop each orator’s natural ability in such a way as to best conform to the precepts of theory and the appropriate format for message delivery. In the same section,
Cicero goes on to compare great orators to great artists, explaining that artists with diverse personalities and qualities of expression emerged out of the same schools, yet were able to retain their individuality. He stresses that a good instructor is able to bring individual abilities in line with the appropriate, virtuous, “excellences” of art, saying of Isocrates that:

He used to apply the spur to Ephorus, but to put the rein on Theopompus; for the one, who overleaped all bounds in the boldness of his expressions, he restrained; the other, who hesitated and was bashful, as it were, he stimulated: nor did he produce in them any resemblance to each other, but gave to the one such an addition, and retrenched from the other so much superfluity, as to form in both that excellence of which the natural genius of each was susceptible. (*De Oratore* 3.8)

Note that “that excellence” is not natural ability itself, but only that into which natural ability is formed by adherence to standards or propriety (*to prepon* for the Greeks, *decorum* for the Romans). Cicero was, perhaps, the greatest champion of rhetoric, post-Plato and the person who placed the consummate rhetorician above the consummate philosopher, arguing that a consummate rhetorician is already inherently a consummate philosopher. Nevertheless, even for Cicero, it was ultimately the virtuous adherence to decorum that made an untamed barbarian into a successful artist. “I am arguing for my ideal,” says Cicero in *De Oratore*, “and I return to that Platonic Idea” of the ideal speaker “who can discuss trivial matters in a plain style, matters of moderate significance in a tempered style, and weighty affairs in the grand manner” (29.101).

By Cicero’s time, the legacy of the three offices of oratory had accreted into a firm foundation for theories of style, even prior to the support given to it by Quintilian. And it is this legacy, which Augustine is later to inherit and emphasize in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. It is also this legacy that will be transmitted to rhetoricians of the middle ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment.
Historians of rhetoric presently agree that the history of rhetorical approaches to style features a remarkable consistency in its adherence to the basic tenets of Aristotle’s theory of language use. There is therefore a remarkable consistency in the way that rhetoricians historically theorize style, a consistency that overshadows the comparatively minor differences between specific time periods or cultural eras. Beginning with the period immediately following the Roman refinement of Aristotelian rhetorical theory, Kennedy says of Byzantine rhetoric that it “tended to hold or draw back public address into classical forms of argument and arrangement, as well as style,” concluding that “the most important feature of Byzantine rhetoric is not those small ways in which it developed a distinctive color, but the extent to which it transmitted unchanged the basic concepts of classical theory and practice” (Christian 287). Kennedy further notes that in echoing Aristotle’s view of style, Byzantine rhetoric features “consistent references to clarity as a fundamental value” (Christian 286). He also notes that “classical grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic were thus regularly taught in schools in Constantinople and other Eastern cities, even in Greek-speaking Italy and Sicily” and that “the final period of Byzantine rhetoric contributed to the rediscovery of the full theory of classical rhetoric in Renaissance Italy” (Christian 291-292). Similarly, in an exhaustive study of medieval rhetorical theories, Murphy concludes that all medieval writers on rhetoric share one dominant concern for order. All the treatises are preceptive, designed to give advice (praecpta) to future writers and speakers. The medieval writers are thus clearly in the Greco-Roman preceptive tradition which begins with Aristotle's Rhetoric and continues through Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Donatus, and Saint Augustine.... Underlying every medieval rhetorical treatise, whatever its genre, is
the assumption that the communicative process can be analyzed, its principles abstracted, and methods of procedure written down to be used by others. (363)

Murphy also notes that for medieval rhetoricians “this is the essence of rhetoric,” and concludes that “This may well be the most significant conclusion to be drawn from this entire study” (363). Similarly, Howell notes of the late medieval period that: "The accepted tradition [in pre-Renaissance England] is best described by saying that the logical treatises of Aristotle, as construed by commentators of the ancient pagan world and by their Christian and Mohammedan successors, were the ruling authorities" (6). For example, the Oratio contra Rhetoricam, written by John Jewell around the middle of the sixteenth century, presents a view of rhetoric that does not seem to differ at all from Aristotle's Rhetoric:

> Truth, indeed, is clear and simple; it has small need of the armament of the tongue or of eloquence. If it is perspicuous and plain, it has enough support in itself; it does not require flowers of artful speech. (Quoted in Howell 7)

Like other scholars, however, Howell also notes the Aristotelian tradition remained static only up until Ramus's "revolt" against "traditional rhetoric" at the close of the 16th century, at which point Ramus "dominated English logic.... and held an English following.... during most of the seventeenth century" (7). Nevertheless, while Ramist rhetoric represents a point of historical development for rhetoric at large, with regards to style Ramus can be said to merely intensify Aristotle’s position that style as ornament merely “dresses up previously formulated ideas in attractive verbal garb” (Bizzell and Herzberg 6). Although Ramus's tearing apart of rhetoric is too well known to be recounted here, it is worth noting the reasons for his separation of logic and rhetoric and his assignment of only style and delivery to the latter because the effects of the Ramist
reinvigoration of the Aristotelian position in reducing style “to nothing but figures and tropes and rhetoric to nothing but style” (Bizzell and Herzberg 572) have persisted to this day (Bradford). For example, Folk notes that because “Ramism succeeds in aligning style squarely with emotion, and because ornament was primarily realized in tropes and figures, dominant models of rhetoric and writing education became forms of supergrammar [sic] that persisted for centuries” (144). Other scholars, likewise, agree that the prescriptive tradition of treating style as a form of grammar was cemented by Ramus and persists to this day (Bradford), a notion that I will elaborate upon later in this chapter. Initially, however, Ramus's efforts merely paralleled other similar efforts of the late medieval and early renaissance logicians such as Ramon Lull and were motivated by a desire to simplify (even further) the Aristotelian tradition inherited by writers of the period. Seen by Ramus, Lull, and others as an "overly complex instrument" (Howell 9), Aristotelian rhetorical prescriptives were judged inadequate in relation to the emerging needs of the early renaissance rhetorician who was now frequently called upon in order to adapt formal discourse to the purposes of religious conversion of commoners, "a new theory of communication as between preacher and layman" (Howell 11). Thus, in direct opposition to the Aristotelian precepts that forced the commoner to appease the aristocrat in the aristocrat's language (Hartley), the rhetoricians of the medieval period began to be concerned with the precepts that would force the aristocrat to conform to the less elaborate modes of expression found in the lower classes. This new telos of simplification and its renewed emphasis on the plain style of speech only increased in dominance "as the stable aristocracy of the late medieval world began to lose its political power, and the middle
class began to assert its authority" (Howell 10). The Ramist separation's "most significant effect," however, was a renewed emphasis on privileging invention, reinvigorating the Aristotelian notion that "the conceptualizing part of the composition process came to be regarded as a private activity rather than one of the steps in the preparation for communicating with an audience" (Howell 6). Like other historians (Kennedy), Howell notes that the "organizing principle of Aristotle's *Topics*" put all the weight on invention as supported by arrangement and that this axiology continued through Cicero's *Topics*, Boethius's *De Differentiis Topicis*, and made its way largely unencumbered into medieval theories of communication, where it was "widely respected by later scholastics" (15). Even more importantly, especially in light of the Ramist reform of rhetoric, Howell notes that Ramus's "reform of the liberal arts" in assigning invention and arrangement to dialectic can be similarly traced to Aristotle's *Topics* becoming "a recurrent feature of scholastic logic" (149). Ramus's associate, Audomarus Talaeus, likewise ascribes the separation of logic and rhetoric to the Aristotelian tradition and insists that both he and Ramus merely "returned" invention and arrangement "to logic, where they properly belong" (trans. Howell 148-9). Finally, Ramus himself justifies his actions as merely refining Aristotle's theories (*Dialectique*) and makes a consistent effort to conform to "traditional Aristotelian logic" (Howell 155). The effects of Ramist widening of the separation between logic and rhetoric on style are still felt today. As scholars note, “almost 500 years later, the view that style is an ornament is still persistent in most academic quarters” (Folk 144).
The Revival of Plain Style

As demonstrated above rhetorical theory proceeded through the Renaissance and, ultimately, into the Enlightenment period without the development of novel conceptualizations of style to challenge the dominant Aristotelian tradition. Furthermore, the single greatest development in approaches to style running through both of these historical periods actually reinvigorated one of the most problematic features of Aristotelian language theory as it relates to style. This was a renewed emphasis on the plain style - the format of least figuration - as being the most representative of a factual or non-rhetorical Truth. Based on the extensive historical coverage available to scholars of rhetoric today, three historical factors stand out as creating the conditions of possibility for this renewed valuation of the plain style. First, there is the earlier rise of the Church and the subsequent increase in demand on orators to address the commoners, as already described above. Second, and reinforcing the first historical development, there is the rise of the bourgeoisie (Hartley) and the subsequent additional need for orators to communicate in the simplest language possible in a direct reversal of the pre-Renaissance cultural condition wherein "the commoners had at all times to conciliate the aristocrats" through the use of "stylistic rhetoric" (Howell 10). The third and final historical development is, perhaps, the most significant, as its influence is still strongly felt today. This is the rise of the scientific paradigm. While this particular epistemological orientation is often described as Cartesian-Newtonian or (following Kenneth Burke) as logico-scientific, the initial turn towards the plain disclosure of scientific fact as the stylistic telos can be traced back to Bacon’s publication of The Advancement of Learning in 1605. Bacon presents his views on what he
perceives to be the aesthetic corruption of reason in much the same way as Plato had done in his *Republic*. Bacon opens with the vices or diseases that affect scholars, one of which is "delicate learning" and "vain affectations" for style over substance or "the excessive devotion to mannerism as distinguished from matter" and promotes the plain disclosure of fact as the only acceptable style for “men of learning” (*The Advancement of Learning* 1). As Howell notes, “the influence of that remarkable work upon the theory of style in communication in the world of science, as upon the entire theory of the transmission of knowledges... cannot be overemphasized” (386). While the above three factors are perhaps the most influential in cementing an axiology of style based on mechanistic efficiency as rhetoric moved through the 17th and into the 18th century, the more general effects of the changing cultural conditions in the West are less disputable when it comes to the privileging of plain modes of expression and the underlying assumption that the plain style is style-less and that the aesthetic is a vice or disease. For example, Thomas Sprat, writing during the latter half of the seventeenth century called stylists those who "make the Fancy disgust the best things... in open defiance against Reason" (*The History of the Royal Society of England*: Quoted in Howell 387).

Therefore, although scholars naturally emphasize historical changes to the conceptualization of discourse, it is again worth noting that the classical tradition continued to be adhered to without modification by a large number of rhetoricians even throughout the eighteenth century. Their number included such prominent figures as John Holmes, John Lawson, and John Ward. For example, Campbell writes that in all the works on rhetoric in both French and English available to university scholars of the time "every thing
[sic] valuable is servilely copied from Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian” (*Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence*). Ironically, however, the adherence to Aristotelian rhetorical theory is largely true even for Campbell himself, along with Blair and Whately. The dominance of Aristotelian language theory as underpinning current-traditional views of style thus cannot be overemphasized. As Crowley notes, “eighteenth-century stylistic theory discriminates two general uses of language: it should translate the writer's thought in the clearest possible way; and it should express this translation in such a way as to capture the attention of its readers” (238). Again, it is worth noting that this theoretical position is exactly the same as the one Aristotle outlines in Book 3 of his *Rhetoric*, especially since this position also assumes that the plain style represents linguistic neutrality. It is also worth noting that as the 17th century passed into the 18th, it also passed on a renewed emphasis on the *Rhetoric* as being the primary theoretical source for views on style:

> What Aristotle says of style undoubtedly affected what English rhetoricians of the seventeenth century came to advocate in that field.... Modern theory has been particularly benefited by Aristotle's conception of the basic organization of persuasive discourse, and that benefit began to operate widely in English learning as the seventeenth century produced her Greek, Latin, and English version of the *Rhetoric*. (Howell 385)

**Campbell, Blair, and the Birth of Current-Traditional Rhetoric**

Hugh Blair is particularly important because he is the last theorist to discuss rhetorical style, because the current-traditional model proceeds from his work, and because his version of Aristotle’s approach to style in language survives virtually unchanged as the dominant theoretical and pedagogical approach not only throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, but already well into the 21st:
Most treatments of the qualities and kinds of style in early nineteenth-century textbooks are drawn from Campbell and Blair with virtually no important modifications. That their authors view language as separate from and secondary to thought is apparent in their discussions of good use, grammatical purity, stylistic perspicuity, diction and syntax, and the figures. (Crowley 238)

It is therefore important to examine Blair’s views on style and language before surveying the largely static condition of rhetorical style throughout the 200 years that followed his work. As discussed above, Blair is wholly indebted to the classical (Aristotelian) model of style, which he inherited from Campbell and which was “thoroughly grounded in the general current of eighteenth-century linguistic theory” (Crowley 233). This general current largely followed the classical tradition and was assisted by the longevity of Ramistic rhetoric (Folk; Bradford). Farnaby’s Rhetoric (published in 1706), for example "was based ultimately on Talaeus" (Howell 280) and defines elocution as "the adorning of Speech either with fine Words or Expressions.” Campbell, likewise, follows Aristotle’s prescriptive approach to “virtues” of style, writing in his Philosophy of Rhetoric (published in 1776) that in order for style to be good:

First, the words will be in English; second, that their construction, under which, in our tongue, arrangement also is comprehended, be in the English idiom; thirdly, that the words and phrases be employed to express the precise meaning which custom hath affixed to them. (170)

As is repeatedly the case when it comes to style, Campbell seems to proceed in the exact manner for which he ridicules his contemporaries, that is by “servilely” copying everything of worth from Book 3 of Aristotle’s Rhetoric. Recall that Quintilian’s reduction of Aristotelian virtues of style defined only three such aretae: correctness, clarity, and elegance (qualified as propriety). Substituting “Latin” for “English” in the above quotation produces merely a paraphrase of Quintilian’s directives that style should be correct, clear,
and decorous. However, by the time this Aristotelian theory of style becomes the current-traditional theory of style the influence of Campbell and later Blair cause one important change. This is the renewed privileging of the first two aretai—correctness and clarity—above all else, an approach that not only survives unchallenged throughout the 200 years following these theorists but remains the dominant pedagogical tradition today. As scholars note, for Campbell “perspicacity” is a “stylistic essential,” which serves “his need to pin language down to a strict referentiality” (Crowley 235). While Blair is typically said to differ from his contemporaries in his greater acceptance of the figurative aspects of language and their relationship to the affective aspects of communication, his approach to style ultimately echoes the tradition passed down through Cicero, altered by Ramus, and formalized by Campbell.

Because Blair is the last representative of an active theoretical engagement with Aristotelian style theory prior to theories of style falling into disuse, his stance is worth a brief examination, both as a historical benchmark and as a case study in the inadequacies of such a position. First, it should be noted that by Blair’s time the concept of style becomes somewhat confusing to theorists purporting to write about it, a cultural condition that remains with us today and which prompted the writing of the present document. Blair begins his Lecture 10 of Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (published after his retirement from teaching in 1783) by stating that “It is not easy to give a precise idea of what is meant by style.” Note that this statement comes from a theorist who championed precision as the goal of writing. Blair continues: “The best definition I can give of it [style], is, the peculiar manner in which a man expresses his conceptions by means of language.”
Here, Blair subscribes fully to the Aristotelian notion of separating thought and language. However, the conflict in Blair’s position immediately manifests itself in the following two statements from Lecture 10: First, Blair acknowledges that “style has always some reference to an author's manner of thinking.” Second, he also feels that style “is a picture of the ideas which arise in his mind and of the manner in which they arise there.” Finally, Blair admits that “it is, in many cases, extremely difficult to separate the style from the sentiment.” Theoretically, then, Blair’s position is illustrative of the general discontent with the concept of style as confusing or only partially coherent. Moreover, Blair’s treatment of style is exemplary of the Aristotelian tradition in that this theoretical stance is not only muddled in its understanding of that which it attempts to theorize, but that it leaves no foundation on which to base subsequent expansions of such a theory. Style is presumed to be the dress of thought, yet always qualified with a “but also.” The incompleteness has become a feature of the theory itself. However, this problem is easily solved by Blair in the same manner as every Aristotelian theorist before him: While admittedly unable to offer a proper theoretical treatment of the concept under discussion, he turns to the “preceptive” (Murphy) side of Aristotelian theories of style and proceeds to lay down a set of praecepta for “good style” that should, by now, be very familiar to the reader. “All the qualities of good style may be ranged under two heads,” says Blair: “perspicuity and ornament.” Under the heading of perspicuity, Blair lists purity, propriety, and precision, again echoing Campbell and the two millennia preceding him. Blair stresses precision as particularly important, no doubt due to the continued rise of the status of the kind of scientific discourse already championed by Bacon, Descartes, et al. and stresses the etymological origin of
precision as *the* stylistic telos. Precision, says Blair in *Lecture 10*, “comes from ‘praecidere,’ to cut off: it imports retrenching all superfluities, and pruning the expression, so as to exhibit neither more nor less than an exact copy of his idea who uses it.”

**20th Century, 21st Century, and the Reach of Current-Traditional Rhetoric**

As discussed in the previous section, the current-traditional approach to style is marked by an incredible longevity, remaining largely unchallenged from Campbell’s and Blair’s publications in the mid to late 18th century (Bain, Bradford; Berlin; Folk; Winterowd). As other scholars note, this “stability” is “one of the more remarkable features” of current-traditional rhetoric and is largely due to the fact that “the British theorists’ assumptions about the nature of language and the function of rhetoric remained intact in their American manifestation” at the start of the 20th century (Crowley 233). While these assumptions were drawn directly from Blair and Campbell, they were also bolstered by a renewed interest in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, which began to be consulted and quoted directly during this time period (Hartley; Howell) and which, unsurprisingly, provided further support for the current-traditional model of language, rhetoric, and style. Therefore, early 20th century approaches to style “still tended to absorb classical constructs—and even their actual theoretical forms” (Folk 145).

Undoubtedly, every reader of this document had, at some point in their schooling, gone through the exercise of sentence length reduction as part of their training in proper language use. I personally experienced this training in precision as part of my 8th grade English class and, again, decades later, during a graduate seminar in writing for anthropology. The only difference between stylistic education in junior high school and
graduate school was the subject of the sentence. As will be discussed in the remainder of this section, this “pruning” approach to language use – and as the telos of “good style” – becomes the chief feature of what is now referred to as the current-traditional model of style in language. While a highly impoverished theory vis-à-vis style, this theory is highly reflective of a more general theory of language unchanged since the time of the Peripatetics. Indeed, Blair’s summary of this issue can, once again, be said to be copied from the *Rhetoric*:

> For all that can possibly be required of language is, to convey our ideas clearly to the minds of others, and, at the same time, in such a dress, as by pleasing and interesting them, shall most effectually strengthen the impressions which we seek to make. When both these ends are answered, we certainly accomplish every purpose for which we use writing and discourse. (*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres; Lecture 10*)

Scholars today agree that the current-traditional model assumes that “necessary instruction can be condensed into principles” (Bain 1145), that as a representative theory of language use “it limits students to a concept of language whose only function is to translate ideas (whatever those are) onto a page” (Crowley 247), and that “the work of the writing teacher is to teach the transcription process, providing instruction in arrangement and style — arrangement so that the order of experience is correctly recorded, and style so that clarity is achieved and class affiliation established” (Berlin 27). As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars today also agree that the current-traditional approach to style is wholly inadequate, both theoretically and pedagogically (Berlin; Brummett; Hawk; Lowe; Winterowd), as is the current-traditional model at large.

The current-traditional approach to style in the pedagogic realm exhibits remarkable stability, and this model still remains dominant despite all critical and
philosophical advancements of the previous two centuries. As noted above, Blair and Campbell’s version of Aristotelian style theory survived largely intact into the 20th century and was subsequently incorporated into textbooks and writing manuals, where it continues to inhere today. Multiple surveys of rhetorical and composition textbooks conducted towards the close of the millennium confirm this fact (Berlin; Berlin and Inkster; Crowley; Winterowd). For example, Crowley notes that 20th century textbooks remain so firmly rooted in the preceptive tradition that virtually no changes are observed between late 19th and late 20th century approaches to style:

A rapid survey of current-traditional textbooks published in the 1980's reveals that contents haven't changed a great deal since 1904. Such textbooks do not ordinarily address themselves to a theory or philosophy of style…. Most remain content simply to prescribe a list of qualities which are to characterize style. (245)

This statement is confirmed both by Berlin and Inkster - writing at roughly the same time period - and by Winterowd’s subsequent reexamination of rhetorical and composition textbooks in the late 1990s.

The resultant condition is that current-traditional rhetoric instruction abandons all theoretical and philosophical considerations of style and, instead, urges the student to merely follow a set of guidelines. In this way, current-traditional models of style make style into a kind of grammar or a kind of “supergrammar” (Folk) – a set of praecepta to be followed unquestioningly. One critic describes the consequences for pedagogy as follows: “The teacher tinkers with the student's style in something like the way an old-fashioned doctor, an empiric, tinkered with his patient's organs, using surgery, bleeding, and drugs, haphazardly and without reference to a general theory of health or illness” (Milic 2). As the below survey of contemporary textbooks will demonstrate, little has changed after the
turn of the millennium. Textbooks used during second decade of the 21st century can, therefore, still be accurately described as prescribing a “hodgepodge of grammatical, semantic, and stylistic criteria,” perpetuating a condition wherein “authors tend to seize on pieces of stylistic advice that have been handed down to them without regard to their relation to some theoretical matrix” (Crowley 246), as well as perpetuating a stance that “makes the patterns of arrangement and superficial correctness the main ends of writing instruction…” (Berlin 9). I will therefore close this historical examination of with a brief survey of the approaches to style found in contemporary public speaking textbooks published during the second decade of the 21st century.

Warren and Fasset simply define style as “The mode or genre of a message” (23) and do not return to the subject in the remainder of the book. Metcalfe devotes a chapter to language use and, like others, focuses on clarity and vividness, stressing that the orator must use “precise words” and “clear terminology” to “create mental pictures” and avoid “obscure terms and flowery words” (230). Tacked on to the end of this chapter is a section on “Building a Unique Style,” which defines style as “the distinctive manner in which a speaker uses language to convey ideas and feelings” (234) and which is followed by a list of figures that the student is advised to use sparingly, but which also promise to make the speech more memorable to the audience. How one is to actually develop a verbal style and

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3 Perhaps the best and most enduring example of the current-traditional approach to language is Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style, which was originally published in 1920 and, having been through only 4 editions, was ultimately named as one of the 100 most influential books written in English by Time magazine in 2011. Still in use, this text has made famous the motto “Omit unnecessary words!”
how one is to develop this style in relation to him- or herself is never discussed. Lucas devotes a chapter to “Using Language,” which eschews all reference to style and instead covers using language “accurately,” “clearly,” “vividly,” and “appropriately” (223-234). This last section on appropriateness is, unsurprisingly, given the most detailed treatment and is further subdivided into appropriateness “to the occasion,” “to the audience,” “to the topic,” and “to the speaker” (232-234). Lehman and Dufrene treat stylistic matters under the heading of revision and, likewise, avoid mentioning style. Instead, the student is advised to follow a hodgepodge of grammatical, stylistic, and other praecepta, such as “eliminate outdated expressions,” “curb clichés,” “eliminate profanity,” “use euphemisms cautiously” (62-69), etc. Willis-Rivera does not discuss style or figures, devoting a chapter to “Verbal Communication” instead and presenting a similar mixture of praecepta – avoiding jargon and profanity, accommodating contexts, avoiding biased language – alongside statements such as “language is ruled by grammar” (100) and a section titled “Using Language as a Means of Control” (102). Quintanilla and Wahl also drop all mention of style and instead discuss “message clarity,” which is achieved by using “specific language” in lieu of “general language” (189) and which parallels the almost standard advice of contemporary public speaking textbooks to use plain and concrete, rather than ornamental and abstract language for the purposes of precisely conveying ideas to the audience. Valenzano et al. include a chapter on “Language,” but do not mention the concept of style. Instead, and following the general trend already delineated above, they present a mix of stylistic, grammatical, and other praecepta, such as avoiding profanity alongside a short list of the more common stylistic figures, such as parallelism and antithesis, alongside
metaphor and simile. As with other textbooks, the student is promised that – as long as they are used sparingly – figures will make the speech more memorable and less “boring” (225). The aesthetics of style, again, are not discussed, leaving the prospective orator to wonder how to evaluate whether or not a given figure should be used and, if so, how. Sidelinger et al. is the most recent (2019) public speaking textbook, which is worthy of note because it does not mention style or figures at all. Considering the decline in attention paid to style, this may indicate a possible future trend in communication pedagogy.

**The Dominant Tradition Today**

Kennedy states that "the way classical rhetoric traditionally viewed style as a set of qualities 'laid on' to the thoughts which invention had provided and disposition set out, rather than as something integral to the whole speech" may well have been "a heritage of Aristotle's efforts to reduce the importance of style in rhetoric" ([Classical](#) 106). As is evident from the preceding sections, Aristotle’s approach to style in language survived largely unchallenged for over two millennia. Even as we move through the 21st century, textbooks still rely on current-traditional models of style, which means to eschew theoretical engagement with style altogether and, instead, participate in the “preceptive” (Murphy) tradition by prescribing a “hodgepodge” of “stylistic criteria,” without reference to underlying theoretical bases (Crowley 246). Therefore, while most rhetoricians today no longer acknowledge the key presuppositions of the Peripatetic school - such as the division of form and content or reason and emotion – the dominant tradition continues to exert an influence on rhetorical scholarship that is especially limiting when it comes to questions of aesthetics and style:
Whitehead’s observation that the history of philosophy is one long footnote to Plato can for us be transferred to the *Rhetoric*: All subsequent rhetorical theory is but a series of responses to issues raised by that central work. There is no comparable situation in any other discipline: No other discipline would claim that a single ancient text so usefully informs current deliberations on practice and theory. (Gross and Walzer ix-x)

Therefore, what has been deemed the “dominant tradition” within rhetorical scholarship still remains bound by Aristotelian assumptions regarding “the production of meaning via transparent language, the coherent stability of the human subject, and the intentional application of power to effect change” (Seas 2). Seas further notes that the effect of the dominant tradition on rhetorical scholars produces a condition wherein “we remain bound by the strategic blind spots of a dominant tradition that may have originated in the tactical art of the sophists but has accrued these philosophical predispositions through centuries of institutionalization” (2-3).

This necessarily raises the question: How does contemporary rhetorical theory justify relying on Aristotle’s theory of language use, despite their highly problematic nature? Fahnestock’s *Aristotle and Theories of Figuration* provides a typical example. The justification proceeds as follows. First, we acknowledge the obvious: “Book 3 of the *Rhetoric* appears at first to be Aristotle's grudging concession to a demand that he produce a complete art....” Then, we note that Aristotle did say at least *something* about style: “Yet despite this unenthusiastic start, Aristotle's treatment of lexis in Book 3 does make a substantial contribution to the linguistic art of rhetoric....” Then, we conclude that we need make do with Aristotle, simply due to the lack of an alternative: “It can be argued, however, that.... Aristotle does in fact establish a theory of figuration, at least by default.” Finally, we argue that Aristotle’s position holds critical worth simply because it is the default
position and despite the fact that “Aristotle's comments on these issues are perfunctory, and his cursory treatment is especially obvious in the scant attention he pays to the formal verbal devices that will later be called the figures of speech...” (166-7).

As already discussed above, Aristotle’s theory of style reduces style to *phantasia* – illusions used to charm the unwary. Likewise, I have already argued that the Aristotelian approach to style transforms style from word-magic into a prescribed format and therefore offers neither explanatory power that theories should provide nor a basis for further theoretical expansion. It is therefore both highly remarkable and highly problematic that a theory of style that tries to reduce (if not eliminate) the importance of its theoretical object still survives as the dominant tradition today.

**Lack of Useful Theoretical Alternatives**

While critique and pedagogy based on current-traditional rhetoric continue to dominate approaches to style in language, this does not mean that current-traditional models of style have gone completely unchallenged. As noted in the previous chapter, the second half of the 20th century saw a number of attempts to interrogate style as a concept, both within language and more generally. However, as already noted in that chapter, none of the attempts to address the problem of style have left behind an alternative theoretical basis on which subsequent scholars could build a new theory of style. Perhaps the best and most succinct explanation for this phenomenon, as well as an excellent indicator of the state of studies of style in language comes not from rhetorical studies, but from the related discipline of composition pedagogy, where Louis Milic’s 1965 analysis of style theory still continues to be relied upon by 21st century composition critics and pedagogues, despite the
document’s age. Folk notes that Milic’s analysis continues to “permeate many notions of style when discussed by instructors and textbooks” and that “Milic’s schema… still covers many orientations in the field” (148-9). This fact alone underscores the lack of progress in style studies and closely parallels the state of style theory in art history/criticism, where Meyer Schapiro’s 1962 analysis of style remains the standard today. Milic’s analysis, however, also provides the most succinct explanation of why the traditionalist Aristotelian model of style in language continues to dominate despite its many shortcomings. Milic classifies three approaches to style in language, which he labels: rhetorical dualism, psychological monism, and aesthetic monism. Milic notes that rhetorical dualism “or the theory of ornate form” is “the most familiar” and has remained largely unchanged “from the classical rhetoricians who originated it to the rhetoricians of the moment who are still using it” (3), once again drawing attention to the continuity of the Aristotelian tradition. Milic’s critique of rhetorical dualism notes that this approach necessarily excludes any emphasis on creative/expressive personality of the writer, as well as any emphasis on the subject, since this “contradicts the fundamental assumptions of the theory of ornate form.” Milic concludes that according to this theory “the uniformity of the writing of the students which might result must be taken as a vindication of the theory and not as an evil consequence” (4).

The first challenge to rhetorical dualism is, according to Milic, “individualist or psychological monism, which finds its most common expression in the aphorism that the style is the man....” Psychological monism “means that a writer cannot help writing the way he does, for that is the dynamic expression of his personality, illustrated in his
handwriting, his walk and all his activity” (3). Milic’s critique of psychological monism points to the theory’s lack of utility in pedagogy, since “we cannot urge the student to adopt another personality or to write more naturally than he does when his natural writing is not bearable” (5). A similar point can be made with regards to the theory’s explanatory power. Additionally, if we recall my earlier discussion of Cicero’s analysis of individual speakers’ abilities, we can add to Milic’s critique the fact that the theory of rhetorical dualism has been traditionally applied in practice precisely in order to combat individuality, reign it in, and bring each orator’s natural tendencies in line with the accepted precepts of language use.

Finally, Milic defines the third category of approaches to style, aesthetic monism, as “an organic view which denies the possibility of any separation between content and form,” where “the work of art (the composition) is a unified whole, with no seam between meaning and style.” Milic describes this theory (somewhat wryly) as an “elegant solution which has been widely adopted by enthusiasts quite unaware, it seems, that it left them nothing to do” (3), since this “organic theory of style leaves us even more completely helpless [than psychological monism], inasmuch as it explicitly disavows any segmentation between the subject and its form” and refuses to engage “with devices of rhetoric or anything which casts the least shadow on the integrity of expression.” Instead, says Milic, aesthetic monism “forces on us is the dominance of the subject” (5). Milic concludes his analysis with the pronouncement that composition studies are thereby stuck constantly dealing with a “fundamental theoretical unsoundness.” The problem, as he defines it, is that “form cannot be taught by those who do not believe in it and the creative
expression of personality cannot be interpreted as a reasonable compromise between form and substance.” Milic ends with the following advice: “If we want to teach something in our composition classes, it may be that we must return to some form of rhetoric, which is honestly and unashamedly concerned with form and not with content” (6).

Milic’s summary of the situation is still relevant today because it aptly describes theoretical limitations facing the contemporary communication critic and pedagogue alike. Both communication theory and communication pedagogy have currently stalled in their exploration of style, largely due to the limitation posed by the three theoretical options outlined above. The first option is the dominant tradition, which (in addition to being highly problematic with respect to that which it purports to theorize) is at this point both extremely dated and highly divergent from our overall critical orientation. The second and third options, while effective at problematizing and/or deconstruction the notion of style and the dominant approach, do not currently offer a way forward, since, ironically, both psychological monism and aesthetic monism make style disappear as effectively as Aristotle’s transformation of style into format. Psychological monism treats stylemes as expressions of personality and tends to dismiss style as a set of habits or mannerisms with a biological origin, as can be seen in Barthes:

style has always something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention.... Its frame of reference is biological.... It is the decorative voice of hidden, secret flesh.... the outcome of a blind and stubborn metamorphosis..... (Writing Degree Zero 10-12)

Aesthetic monism makes style disappear most completely, since this conceptualization denies the validity of separating style and content at the outset. Additionally, critics like Sontag, for example, often attempt to sit on two theoretical chairs
simultaneously, proclaiming at once that style is the whole work of art, but also that style is “the signature of the artist’s will” (*Against Interpretation*), thus demonstrating the ineffectiveness of two theoretical approaches at once.

Unsurprisingly, then, 21st century critics are still calling for a new approach to style. Lowe writes with dismay that when it comes to conceptualizations of style “too often, I have been left with the feeling that something was missing” (241). Other scholars note that style is habitually avoided in academia (Folk), resulting in the current cultural condition wherein "no terminology appears to isolate style qua style" (Vivian xii). Still other scholars doubt the possibility of theorizing style altogether, wondering "whether, in the analysis of style, such resistance to a systematic foundation may not be rooted in the concept of style itself" (Lang 14).

In the following two chapters, I will explore two directions that may provide alternatives to the current theoretical impasse.
CHAPTER 3: METIC INTELLIGENCE AND NEOSOPHISM

Introduction and Background

In looking for terminology that will enable the critic "to isolate style qua style" (Vivian xii), the first alternative to following the dominant tradition is to look to the state of communication prior to the Socratic shift. As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of stylistic devices in ancient Greece originated in poetry and flourished in the hands of the Sophists prior to the Socratic shift. Therefore, Sophism is one obvious alternative to the dominant tradition’s approach to style. As other scholars note, the Sophists were both firmly rooted in the poetic (Jarratt; Neel) and famous for privileging style (Crowley; Hariman). The most productive opposition of Sophism to the emerging schools of philosophy in classical Greece, however, was that the Sophistic position on the arts of language treated “rhetoric as art” (Poulakos Towards 36), in strong contrast to Plato’s and Aristotle’s representational theories of language consistent with their emphases on logic and rationality. In light of the downward trajectory of lexis traced in the above pages, it is of significant note that the trajectory of the term “sophist” neatly outlines the same historical trend. Gagarin draws our attention to the fact that although the term “has had a uniformly negative connotation since Plato’s time, it is worth noting that the first occurrence of the word... is in an ode of Pindar.... where it clearly means 'poet'” (xx). Unlike the emerging academics who took up what Plato already called "that old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (Republic 607b), Sophism bore no such antagonism towards the arts. Protagoras, for example, cites Homer and Hesiod as his progenitors. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Sophism and poetry overlapped for a time and that the meaning
of “sophist” and “poet” and “wise one” overlapped as well. Following this usage, the term “sophist” historically transitioned to meaning both “orator” and “philosopher” (Guthrie), roughly until such time as Plato effectively redefined “sophist” to denote his intellectual competitors. For Plato, Sophists belong on the artistic side of truth production, which makes them pseudo-philosophers who practice the “false art” of flattery – *kolakeia* (*Gorgias*). Based on his analysis of the term in the *Republic*, Guthrie notes that the definition of “sophist” established by Plato and used thereafter is closest to “deviser or contriver” (31). Likewise, in his *Gorgias* Plato compares rhetoric to *kosmetike*, a term that denotes personal beautification and which is positioned in the *Gorgias* as a “false counterpart” of gymnastics. Plato describes those engaged in *kosmetike* – those whom we today would call “stylists” - as “knavish, false, ignoble, illiberal, working deceitfully by the help of lines, and colors, and enamels, and garments, and making men affect a spurious beauty to the neglect of the true beauty” (*Gorgias*). Along with Sophism and Rhetoric, style vectors from the aesthetic and into the false as it becomes resituated in the new intellectual environment of emerging philosophical schools of classical Greece. Style, therefore, becomes theoretically problematic in the period immediately preceding Aristotle. The resultant tension between the need for a theoretical engagement with style and the need to marginalize style as belonging to the aesthetic components of discourse – one major consequence of the representative theory of language adopted by Aristotle - was already delineated in the previous chapter. The goal of this chapter is to explore alternative means of approaching style based on what we know about the Sophistic paradigm. As Poulakos writes:
If Greek rhetoric is indeed a trilogy, we need to concern ourselves with its first part, which to this day remains fragmentary. To do so, we must reexamine the surviving fragments of and about the Sophists and seek to articulate on probable grounds their view of rhetoric. *(Towards 35)*

However, the difficulty in simply adopting a Sophistic stance towards *lexis* as a corrective to the Platonic and Aristotelian one is two-fold. First, and as I have already stressed in the previous chapter, very little original material remains from the period preceding Plato and Aristotle, both because this period was still largely oral and because subsequent theorists did not see much value in preserving Sophistic writings. Second, and partially due to the first point above, there is currently no consensus on a unitary definition of Sophism, what neosophism should be, or what neosophism should try to become. Therefore, while scholars have been proposing versions of a neosophistic paradigm as correctives to the Platonic and Aristotelian one - John Poulakos *(Towards a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric)*, Sharon Crowley *(A Plea for the Revival of Sophistry)*, Susan Jarratt *(The Return of the Sophists)*, and others (Jasper Neel, Roger Moss) – no single proposal or definition has been universally adopted. Moreover, the fragmentary and multiple nature of neosophistic positions (including the inability to even put forward a definitive list of notable Sophists) naturally drew significant criticism from communication scholars almost immediately after such proposals were first published in the last quarter of the 20th century. Schiappa, for example, writes that “we are unlikely to come up with a historically defensible definition of ‘sophistic rhetoric’ that is nontrivial and uniquely valuable,” concluding that the concept is historically “incoherent” and “pedagogically unsound” *(5).*

While one could easily argue that the same qualifiers can be applied to the dominant tradition, the final problem with reconstructions of Sophism for this study is that none of
them focus on style specifically, but rather mention style – usually passim – as one of the factors to be reevaluated (presumably later and by someone else) as part of a more general rehabilitation of Sophism (c.f. Hariman; Hawhee; Poulakos), demonstrating that the current academic tendency to avoid direct engagement with style (Folk) extends even to those scholars wishing to revive the most style-conscious orientation available to them. Hariman, for example, allots barely one phrase to the historical problem of style in his introduction to *Political Style*, wherein the past two and a half millennia are summarized as follows:

The Sophists, it seems, were fascinated with style; subsequently it became a standard division of rhetorical studies; periodically it has been the dominant standard; today the notions of style, sophistication, and sophistry are thoroughly intertwined and associated with the conventional disparagement of rhetoric. (59-61)

Poulakos, similarly, engages style only passim and does not bother to explain his position on style “as personal expression” (*Towards* 46), how or from which aspect of Sophism this position is derived, or what the position affords to the contemporary critic. He notes only that “The story of the Sophists' preoccupation with style is too well known to be recounted here” and adds that the reason that the Sophists “were held in contempt for dealing with ‘the non-essentials’ of rhetoric” and that “their excellence in the area of style has often been construed as a liability is due partly to Plato's influence on posterity” (*Towards* 37-8). This means that current neosophistic perspectives neither directly address the question(s) of style nor provide a general model of a Sophist for our emulation. As Schiappa notes, we are either forced to “treat the term [Sophism] as broadly as did the
ancient Greeks” and thus include “every serious thinker” of the period or “to pick a trait that serves no useful function other than to confirm some preconceived preference” (8).

There are several counters to arguments such as Schiappa’s, even if one discounts the premise that the dominant tradition is equally (if not more) historically and pedagogically problematic and that even well-documented Plato seems, as Heidegger once said, at times to not be very Platonic. First, while the historicity of Sophism remains problematic, the aim of this document is not to establish a historicist foundation for Sophism, but to utilize selected sophistic concepts to enlarge the scope of critical engagement with style. This approach has been described by prior scholars as “neosophistic appropriation” and has previously been defended as a means to “search the past for contributions to modern theoretical problems and problematics” (McComiskey, New Rhetoric 10). There is, therefore, no need to defend historical authenticity as part of this approach to Sophism, which aims, rather, to “put aside Plato’s misrepresentations of sophistic doctrines, appropriating doctrines instead from actual sophistic texts and historical interpretations of them in order to find common threads among the ‘older sophists’ and contemporary composition and rhetorical theorists” (McComiskey, New Rhetoric 11).

Second, while “historical” Sophism does not offer the degree of “coherence” that critics like Schiappa demand, contemporary neosophism as a broad orientation does have common traits, several of which are both directly relevant to engagement with style and are also pedagogically sound. They will be discussed below. Third, the focus of the neosophistic exploration in this chapter will be the concept of metic intelligence or metis,
which, as I will demonstrate, is not only indisputably a part of the sophistic orientation, but also a concept sufficiently robust to both stand alone and provide an anchoring point for the broader (and thus more vague) (neo)sophistic context. As to the context itself, several sound and pedagogically useful traits of neosophism remain consistent across its variations.

First, neosophism, as mentioned above, treats rhetoric as art (in the sense of fine art), rather than as science or as argument. Because style is at least partially on the artistic side of this divide, treating rhetoric as art is a more useful approach than the one offered by the dominant tradition:

Conceiving of rhetoric as art is important because on the one hand it designates ‘the sophist view proper’ and on the other it helps place the controversy between Plato and the Sophists in the right light. In particular, one may argue, rhetoric as art does not admit criteria appropriate to strictly epistemological or axiological matters; nor does it call for the same considerations which rhetoric as argument does. Thus, some of the well-known Platonic charges against rhetoric become inapplicable. (Poulakos Towards 37)

Second, even if Sophism historically nothing other than a collection of anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian thinkers of the period, this oppositional attitude can be said to (fortuitously) result in neosophism challenging several aspects of the dominant orientation’s attitude toward style. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the limitations imposed on critical engagement with style emerge from the representationalist model of language use, as well as realist, foundationalist, and modernist assumptions related to and kept alive by this model. Crowley, for example, describes these limitations as proceeding from a “thoroughly technologized” modernist rhetoric (323), while Moss, Poulakos, and Leff each challenge realism, neo-Aristotelianism, and foundational modernism, respectively:
Roger Moss, for example, delivers a case for sophistry that fights against the stifling effects realism has on rhetoric; John Poulakos offers his sophistic definition of rhetoric against limiting neo-Platonic and neo-Aristotelian conceptions of rhetoric; and Leff describes modern sophistic as a reaction to anti-rhetorical foundational modernism. (McComiskey, Gorgias 8)

McComiskey adds that the unifying feature of the neosophistic paradigm tends to be the reconsideration of rhetoric as epistemic, again in direct opposition to representationalist schemas that consider communication to be somewhat epiphenomenal, situating language as the optional and interchangeable “garb” of ideas. Finally, McComiskey highlights perhaps the most important unifying feature of neosophism - that contemporary neosophists all share a “belief that the older sophists provide solutions to a number of problems that contemporary rhetorical theory faces” (Gorgias 8).

Therefore, while the historicity of Sophism remains problematic, I want to argue that the period immediately preceding Aristotle’s canonization of rhetoric can offer additional terminology with which to arm the contemporary critic interested in exploring style as more than boilerplate aesthetic coating. To this end, I propose to examine concepts that relate to the intersection of style and Sophism from a neosophistic perspective, thereby recovering some fragments of a pre-Socratic conceptualization of style. While these fragments do not in themselves form a coherent theory of style, they provide a starting point for constructing a theoretical alternative to Aristotle.

More specifically, the exploration of pre-Socratic terminology in this chapter will aim to fill in two of the most obvious terminological gaps facing critics currently bound by the dominant tradition. As already noted in chapter 1, these gaps have to do with being able to describe style as skill or a collection of skills, as well as style as a quality. Hariman
writes that when it comes to style, “the fact remains that we don't have a suitable vocabulary for discussing an important class of widely distributed skills” (*Political Style* 50-52). Other scholars point to the fact that style functions as a “value term” in describing art or an artist as “having style,” but lament that this meaning of style as a quality is, unfortunately, “outside the scope” of the critic, even as they recognize that this meaning of style “should be considered seriously” (Schapiro 52).

To this end, the arguments in this chapter will revolve around the concept of metic intelligence or metis, a pre-Socratic concept containing a range of skills that I will demonstrate bear an important relationship to style. Scholars note that the concept of metic intelligence, while largely absent from subsequent philosophical work, survived history in “the contribution of the sophists who occupy a crucial position in the area where traditional metis and the new intelligence of the philosophers meet” (Detienne and Vernant 4). On a more general level my exploration of this pre-Socratic terminology will also focus on metic intelligence because this concept fills the voids created by peripatetic overreliance on logic and rationality in the same oppositional way as Sophism, while also providing a point of focus for an otherwise vague notion of a neosophistic perspective. (As Detienne and Vernant have already noted, "sophisma is part of the terminology of metis" (207f). This usage of the term can be traced back to Aeschylus’s *Prometheus.*) Metic intelligence will therefore be instrumental to my filling in the theoretical gaps bequeathed to contemporary critics by Aristotle, as well as to my attempt to account for how we can discourse about style not only as a prescriptive, but as both quality and skill.
In the below sections I will first explain the concept of metis and the way metic intelligence can supplement overly rationalist positions on textual production, enabling us to consider style as skill (or a set of skills). I will then move from this general overview to one specific aspect of metic intelligence – termed hippia – and highlight the ways in which metic intelligence utilizes mediation in lieu of control, thus expanding the notion of style as skill. Following, I will discuss how metis prompts a reconsideration of two related concepts somewhat more familiar to the contemporary critic – mimesis and kairos, as well as how these two concepts further expand our ability to describe style as skill. In addition, I will also introduce what can be described as two metic qualities of a stylist – aiole and pantoie. Following my discussion of metic skills and qualities of a stylist I will turn to two more pre-Socratic terms – poikilia and eurythmia - that provide ways to describe the metic qualities of a stylized text. I end the chapter by highlighting the connections between metis, the stylist, and the artistic components of textual production.

**Metic Intelligence: Overview**

“Métis is a way to think and also a way to think about thinking” (Dolmage 122).

The earliest documented uses of the term metis can be found in ancient Greek poetry, including both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. More recent scholarship often sees the term metic intelligence (Raphals) as an umbrella term that provides shelter to a wide range of skills and abilities. Scholars have noted that due to its association with a “wide semantic field” (Detienne and Vernant 11) metic intelligence is often difficult to define succinctly. Most often, metis is simultaneously defined and dismissed as (mere) cunning. Scott highlights the fact that “Metis is typically translated into English as 'cunning' or 'cunning
intelligence” and states that “while not wrong, this translation fails to do justice to the range of knowledge and skills represented by metis” (313). Certeau offers his own summary of metis as “characterized by a combination of intuition, shrewdness, anticipation, mental agility, a sense of the best chance, all kinds of supplementary skills, and a certain maturity of experience” and attempts to connect metis as shrewdness and experience with the way metis enables everyday praxis: “Metis is related to everyday tactics by its skills, knacks, and stratagems, and by the range of conducts that it governed, all the way from know-how to ruse” (36).

Certeau adds that metis is missing from our current critical and philosophical repertoire, despite being both historically and conceptually robust, and that the reason for its absence can be traced to the emergence of the Academies. He describes metis as “extraordinarily constant throughout Greek history, even though missing from the ideal image (and theory) that Greek thought made for itself” (36). Other scholars concur that “in the picture of thought and intelligence presented by the philosophers, the professional experts where intelligence was concerned, all the qualities of mind which go to make up metis, its sleights of hand, its resourceful ploys and its stratagems, are usually thrust into the shadows, erased from the realm of true knowledge and relegated, according to the circumstances, to the level of mere routine, chancey [sic] inspiration, changeable opinion or even charlatanerie” (Detienne and Vernant 4), a point well illustrated by Plato’s attacks on Gorgias and rhetoric in his Gorgias. Other scholars also point to the historically problematic relationship between metis and philosophy, as well as to possible
connection(s) between this relationship and what Plato had already called “that old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (Republic 607b). Klein writes that metis:

is not able to be thematized because it is a form of intelligence like the savior of savior-faire; it is the knowledge that philosophy, as Kant says, can never conceptualize, because it underlies the distinction between philosophy and its other: art. (11)

Like Rhetoric and style, metis ends up partially on the artistic side of the historical divide between poetry and philosophy. And like Rhetoric and style, metis is resistant to theorization. The result is that – like Rhetoric and style – metis ends up being dismissed by Greek philosophy as merely a knack and experience, despite being applicable to a surprising variety of life’s necessities, what in relation to style Hariman calls “an important class of widely distributed skills” (Political Style 50-52). Detienne and Vernant, who are responsible for unearthing metis and bringing it to scholarly attention in the 1970’s, describe the range of application of metic intelligence as including “a hunting trap, a fishing net, the skills of a basket-maker, of a weaver, of a carpenter, the mastery of a navigator, the flair of a politician, the experienced eye of a doctor, the tricks of a crafty character such as Odysseus, the back-tracking of a fox and the polymorphism of an octopus, the solving of enigmas and riddles and the beguiling rhetorical illusionism of the sophists” (2).

The numerous shifting forms of metic intelligence and their absorption into logical systems is not unique to Western history. Metis is everywhere, consumed, subsumed, but always reemerging as challenging modes of thought- zhi in China (Raphals), hila and the parables of Sufis in Arabia (Certeau), Zen koans in Japan (Hyde), the god Loki in Scandinavia (Koepping), upaya in India (Raphals), the spider tales of the god Ananse in Africa (Koepping), the coyote in Native American folklore (Radin). In China, zhi was
swallowed by the moralistic ren of Confucianism in a striking parallel to the way métis was swallowed by the logos of Plato in Greece (Raphals).

The practical utility (even necessity) of metic intelligence combined with its rejection – in theory – by philosophy results in what Dolmage calls “the consumption and usurpment of métis by the rhetorical tradition” (131), a condition wherein métis remains hidden from theory and criticism despite being practiced even by those philosophers and rhetoricians who deny its importance. “Plato rejects métis,” writes Dolmage, because “it is foreign to his view of wisdom, to the realm of Truth he idealizes. Aristotle, as well.... I would suggest that these philosophers are also eating métis, digesting it.... (131). Klein writes that “in dialogues like The Sophist, the métis which is attributed to the enemies of philosophy is indistinguishable from the weapons which Socrates turns against them in the name of truth” (4). These statements echo the author of On the Sublime in describing Plato as a poet who fought against his predecessors, as well as Cicero’s statement regarding Plato's anti-rhetorical rhetoric in his Gorgias: "What impressed me most deeply about Plato in that book was, that it was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to me to be the consummate orator" (De Oratore 13.29).

This attempted splitting of metic intelligence by Plato and Aristotle - appropriating useful parts of métis into logos, while labeling the rest of it as cunning and charlatanry - served to position métis as "mere" with relation to the logic and rationality of the emerging academies. More importantly, in rejecting métis as part of their own logical systems, the new schools of philosophy were able to give maximum power to the notion of rule-based appropriateness – to prepon. As other scholars have noted, “Aristotle and Plato make métis
logical and systematic; this is metis with the cunning wrung out” (Dolmage 131). I read this new emphasis on decorous adherence to a priori systems of logic as one of the primary – if not the primary – tactic of the Academies in achieving control over the paideia of their citizens, since privileging to prepon forces a student to follow tradition “simply because,” a condition that should now be familiar from my description of the historical trajectory of style in language. The wholesale formalization of everything – including aesthetic phenomena, such as style – thus provides a way for philosophy to capture and control the citizen’s poetic impulse, which was left unchecked by earlier (poetic and sophistic) states of paideia.4

Metic intelligence, on the other hand, stands entirely outside of the precepts of decorum, which is one reason that it made philosophers so uncomfortable post Socrates and one reason that its opportunistic and often casuistic treatment of language as practical poetry was seen as a defect of Sophism. “The sophist is a master at bending and interweaving logoi - at bending them since he knows a thousand ways of twisting and turning, how to devise a thousand tricks, and, like the fox, how to turn an argument against the adversary who used it in the first place,” write Detienne and Vernant (39). Koepping also highlights the way that metis threatens logical structures, describing metis as:

…a kind of play with logic and structure, which enables us to escape the prison of the cut-and-dried rule-governed realm of deductive principles: yet we can only

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4 Consider Hariman’s Political Style, in which the author makes it quite clear that he wants to rely on classical theories of rhetoric and that “The sensibility of classical rhetoric that I want to emphasize was most evident in its concept of decorum (to prepon, decorum, quid deceat)” (180). As I already mentioned, it is also this equation of style with decorum and etiquette that has been picked up by other scholars during the social turn as an effective way to demonstrate that the social can become aesthetic and the aesthetic social.
escape the prison by applying the rules of paradox through acknowledging these rules. In other words, we use the rules in order to show that a strict adherence to them leads to absurdity. Playing around with negativity or with inversion and reversal of symbols in word or action, which is in itself potentially inherent in the rules of language, reveals a hidden truth, that of the absurdity of the close adherence to them, while acknowledging at the same time the existence of the rules without which even the game of negativity could not be played. (191-2)

Metic intelligence, therefore, is clearly an appropriate concept with which to begin remedying the current overreliance on a thoroughly technologized rationalist tradition of equating style with adherence to a set of rules. As I will describe below, metic intelligence’s attendant concepts – mimesis and kairos – are, likewise, resistant to systematization and the precepts of decorum, thus providing additional means to (re)construct a constellation of terms that I argue will enable us to discourse about the artistic side of style not bound by blind adherence to a set of rules. Therefore, I will first discuss how metic intelligence operates as a (re)mediational skill within the context of textual production. Then, I will turn to mimesis and kairos in order to demonstrate how these two concepts enable metic intelligence to function in a mediatory capacity.

**Hippia and Mediation**

As we have seen, the many sides of metic intelligence have a wide range of application and include “the art of the pilot steering his ship against winds and tides, the verbal ploys of the sophist making the adversary's powerful argument recoil against him, the skill of the banker and the merchant who, like conjurors, make a great deal of money out of nothing, the knowing forethought of the politician whose flair enables him to assess the uncertain course of events in advance, and the sleights of hand and trade secrets which give craftsmen their control over material which is always more or less intractable to their
designs” (Detienne and Vernant 48). In order to begin charting the specifics of the relationship between metic intelligence and style, we need to focus on a particular manifestation of metis in Greek thought described by Detienne and Vernant as *hippia* (literally “of the horse”). Sometimes applied to versions of Greek deities associated with the equine or equestrian realms, *hippia* or *hippios* saw one of its earliest documented uses in Pausanias’s *Periegesis* and Pindar's *Olympians XIII*. This metic combination of intuition, strategy, and know-how possessed by a skilled driver is illustrated by the following two statements in the *Iliad*:

It is by metis that the sea  
Captain holds his rapid ship on its course, though torn  
By winds, over the wine-blue water (23.315-18)

And:

The intelligence of a driver full of metis  
Is the true rudder which guides the chariot (13.221-2)

Detienne and Vernant write that this particular “province” of metis - *hippia* - “is that of control: control over the horse by means of an effective instrument, control in the driving of the chariot, whether by guiding the chariot straight along the track without veering off course or by making the most of a favorable opportunity or by seizing the kairos” (206). It is the exact province of metic control over an animal, however, that relates directly to the discussion at hand. In a chapter titled *The Live Bit* Detienne and Vernant draw a sharp dividing line between the natural power over the horse possessed by the divine powers in Greek mythology and the technical power of the horse possessed by a skilled rider and presided over by metis. The dividing line is the bit. This is where metis takes over to control the horse: “The ambiguous relations that exist between the horse and the bit
reveal a particular aspect of the technical object, the instrument which tames the horse, and they allow us to reach a preliminary definition of the kind of intelligence at work” (196).

While horses and bits seemingly have as little to do with style as sails and rudders, there is, in fact, a more general aspect of metic intelligence that comes into play in all three domains. I want to argue that this aspect of metic intelligence concerns mediatory skills directly relevant to understanding some of the functions of style. More generally, metic intelligence can help us understand modes of artistic production in a way that logical systems cannot. Unlike logic, which depends on pattern and systematic control, metis sees a world of chance, in which one can only achieve partial control through participation. The achievements of metic intelligence allow it to sail on the winds of touché over the chaotic and overpowering sea, to control an animal much larger than the rider, to produce a piece of oratory for a heterogenous audience, to make a canvas appear three-dimensional, or to give life to a statue made of stone. In all of these activities, metic intelligence is faced with constraints that cannot be overcome through the brute force of dominance and control. One cannot overcome an ocean of chaos by any means, much less the adherence to a set of rules for sailing a ship. Nor can a formula help navigate a horse through uneven terrain. Similarly, an orator cannot know the state of mind of every member of an audience. Nor can an orator predict which turns of phrase will fill which gaps in the speech with the “right” rhythm prior to actually constructing the speech. Nor can an artist predict the weather over the landscape that is to become a painting or the exact composition of the marble that is to become a statue or which brushstroke will complement the prior one prior to actually painting or sculpting. In all of these instances, then, metis disregards preplanned,
systematic dominance over patterns and looks, instead, for some small technological advantage that will allow it to exert just enough force over the situation to influence its outcome.

Based on my arguments above, from a metic perspective the artist becomes a participant in the process of artistic production, albeit one who has specific ways of guiding the process along. From a metic perspective, the artist becomes not a master, but a mediator, reconciling disparate elements and competing forces of textual production by deploying only minor force through the tools of her trade, by applying inventiveness and flexibility, by shifting along with the changing landscape of emergent conditions, by chasing inspiration and abandoning dead ends, by temporarily submitting to overpowering forces that emerge from the work of art to overpower the artist and cause a change in direction. This reconciliation functions very much like reconciling horse, ground, and gravity by applying minor forces to the bit and/or like the ability to harness great force of chaotic winds via the oblique positioning of multiple sails by applying minor forces to the sheets, changing course when the winds change:

These are all aspects of the role played by… metis, [an] intelligence which is cunning, technical, and magical, all at the same time. Faced with this power which gives control over horse and chariot, [nature] is confirmed as the master of horses but, theoretically, [t]his power stops where artifice takes over, whether the artifice concerned be that of the bit or that of the driver. (Detienne and Vernant 206)

If we look specifically at lexis as it functions in communicatory contexts – the contexts in which the concept was developed - we can see mediation operating on multiple levels. These levels can be separated into categories, in the traditional manner of the theorists. However, as befitting metic domains, the separation between multiple levels of
(re)mediation is also somewhat blurry. In addition to the reconciliation of multiple elements of production that end up constituting the text, as described above, we can say that there are two more levels of mediatory activity that take place, one before and one after the reconciliation and unification of textual elements.

The first level of mediatory activity performed in communicating is the one already discussed by classical theorists – the remediation of thought into words. Here, lexis can be seen as performing the function that Aristotle describes. However, unlike the classical thinkers’ assumption that thoughts exist apart from language, our contemporary understanding of the way linguistic feedback influences modes of cognition makes style significantly more relevant than Aristotle and Plato would like (us) to believe. It should, therefore, suffice to say that it is highly problematic to assume – as the classics did – that language merely gets in the way of transporting fact-objects from mind to mind, especially as this position ignores such terms as “will,” “passion,” and “desire” entirely and assumes that thoughts consist only of internal logical structures (a position that makes little sense when we consider that the poesis of textual production is always at least partially artistic). Nor is it prudent to assume, as Aristotle does, that word choice is both separate from and has no altering effect on the development of thought. Nevertheless, even according to the linear, classical position, it is evident that remediation of mental “content” into speech is one chief activity of the orator, even if the classical position denies the metis necessary to perform mediatory tasks.

The second level of mediation concerns the relationship of the message to the receiver – the text to the audience. As the adjustment of messages to audiences is familiar
to anyone with a basic understanding of communication, I think that it would be opportune to forego elaborating this subject here, except to say that there is a great deal of difference between the rhetorical or sophistic attitudes regarding the audience and the philosophical one. While sophists and rhetoricians consider adaptation to the audience a necessary condition of the production of texts, Aristotle and Plato both consider the audience as little better than children who need to be fed simplified, sugar-coated approximations of a Truth that the ageometretos (not being philosophers) could never truly understand. Therefore, while the classical position considers this level of mediatory activity at best a necessary evil, the sophistic position considers it essential in the production and dissemination of messages.

If we apply the rhetorical model to communicatory activity at large, we thus end up with three levels of remediation in the production of texts: the remediation of thoughts (but also will, passion, and desire) into whatever medium is used to communicate them; the mediation between various elements of the emerging text; and the mediation between the emerging text and its audience.

As an example, let us consider the mediatory levels of producing a painting, since this activity, unlike oratory, is less likely to trigger rationalist explanations. First, the artist needs to mediate her thoughts and ideas into a static image that can be produced with paint on canvas. This is the first level of mediation. Second, the artist needs to reconcile all the elements of the emerging painting against each other, beginning with tools and materials available for use (selecting canvas, ground, pigments, oil, brushes, etcetera), structural elements such as line and color or light and shadow, conventional or technical limitations
such as the accepted use of perspective, and even multiple subjects in the painting that compete for attention and thus physical space or degree of detail (which draws focus) on the canvas. As the list of competing conditions of emergence can grow very large – “wood carving favors grooved or wedge-cut relief, the column of the tree trunk gives the statue its cylindrical shape, hard stone yields compact and angular forms, weaving begets stepped and symmetrical patterns, the potter's wheel introduces a perfect roundness.... (Schapiro 81)

I am going to stop here, in order not to make the example too burdensome and proceed to the next level of mediation, which is far simpler: the mediation between text and audience. Here, the artist must consider what effects her painting will have on the audience - what the audience can be expected to understand and feel when seeing the work. A good example of considering a small segment of such considerations is well illustrated in Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy, by Michael Baxandall. In examining the relationship between what he calls the “pictorial style” and “cognitive style” of the Quattrocento, Baxandall summarizes the issue as follows: “Some of the mental equipment a man orders his visual experience with is variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative....The beholder must use on the painting such visual skills as he has... The painter responds to this; his public's visual capacity must be his medium” (40). This example also illustrates the ouroboric challenges that the poetic process presents to
classification schemes, since the audience – traditionally classified as an endpoint of communication – is actually embedded in the very start-point of the artistic process.⁵

Writing and composition scholars have also highlighted similar challenges of mediating between multiple levels of an emerging text, which, as Mays states, entails “a dizzying amount of complexity” in producing “compensatory shifts” as part of textual production. For example, Mays notes that:

“…while writing is organized on the smaller level of individual word choice (as when tone or grammar is consistent), this smaller level is directly affected by changes on a larger level (such as when the genre changes)…. Genre, though, is not the only level that has an influence on word choice: technology, for example, constrains this choice as well…. Each level constrains and enables all of the others, in differing ways: word choices push on and alter genre constraints, reshaping what is possible in a genre; genre itself constrains and enables (and is constrained and enabled by) technology; culture affects ideology (and vice versa); topic interrelates with audience, and so on. This spiraling out of complexity begins to get at the breadth and intricacy of writing… (569)

As we can see from the above, therefore, one of the most significant challenges of textual production – in painting, oratory, or writing - entails the ability to mediate between a “dizzying” number of (intrinsic and extrinsic) interrelated factors that may influence each other despite being separated by one or more levels of scale.

⁵ The inherent messiness in trying to separate the mediatory activity of a communicator into any number of distinct levels should be evident from the example above (hence my earlier caveat). We could, for example, conceptualize both the internal states of the artist and the adaptation to the audience as two more variables or elements of the production process, which would immediately collapse all three levels of mediation into the reconciliatory activity that I placed on level two. There is even a degree of utility in this alternate approach, as it highlights the centrality of reconciliation in the production of texts, rather than assume a linear (if multiple) remediation of the kind McLuhan would offer and thus places metis centrally as well.
Detienne and Vernant stress that one of the most important aspects of metic intelligence lies in its ability to become a “living bond.” The fox and the octopus, the two animals that exemplified metic intelligence in ancient Greece were not only masters of bonds, but were themselves living bonds. Detienne and Vernant write that the metis of the fox makes it into "a living bond which can bend, unbend, reverse its own position at will."

As is the octopus, the fox is:

a master of bonds. Nothing can bind it but it can secure anything. Bonds are the special weapon of métis. (41)

An intelligence which functions as a living bond and which is often described as circular and oblique, metis is especially effective at closing the circle of textual production – of poesis – by applying oblique forces in order to effect reconciliation. Kopelson writes:

The essential features of métis ...attributed to the curve, to what is pliable and twisted, to what is oblique and ambiguous as opposed to what is straight, direct, rigid and unequivocal. The ultimate expression of these qualities is the circle, the bond that is perfect because it completely turns back on itself. (46)

Metis, therefore, helps explain how style holds a text together by providing a kind of unity that is not analyzable in terms of the logical and the systematic. Schapiro’s essay neatly summarizes the dilemma encountered sans metic intelligence as explanation:

It is possible to see [even] the opposed parts [of a work of art] as contributing elements in a whole that owes its character to the interplay and balance of contrasted qualities. But the notion of style has lost in that case the crystalline uniformity and simple correspondence of part to whole with which we began. The integration may be of a looser, more complex kind, operating with unlike parts. (Schapiro 61-62)

Circular and oblique, the ouroboric metis of the artist naturally presents a great deal of trouble to theoria and theoretical attempts to rationally textualize a work of art into a stable, analyzable whole with stable, analyzable parts, as should be evident from the above.
Circular and oblique, metis excels at reconciliation for the same reasons that make metis and style problematic for theoria. Using the concept of metic intelligence, however, an agent engaged in textual production can now be productively described as a living bond that flexes, bends, morphs and transforms as it participates in the emergent process of artistic creation, even as it sometimes charms, sometimes beguiles, sometimes tricks, sometimes cajoles, sometimes induces, sometimes influences the unification of textual elements into a living whole, giving spirit to the whole, and persuading the audience that the whole is alive: That it communicates.

At this point, it should be easy to see that the classical idea of style as a cosmetic afterthought – applied to thoughts already arranged – has no place in a recursive process wherein the constantly shifting reconciliation of competing vectors necessitates a similarly constant shifting and adjustment on the part of the communicator. Likewise, a trinity of stylistic categories, such as that proposed by Aristotle and his successors, is only as useful as a battle plan is on the field of battle. Metic terminology, on the other hand, allows us to start filling terminological gaps left by the shift that took place with the emergence of classical philosophy, gaps that have persisted all the way to Schapiro’s 20th century essay, which hoped that one day “the modern experience of stylistic variability and of the inhomogeneous within an art style will perhaps lead to a more refined conception of style” (63).

Firstly then, we can begin to look at style as a metic skill, rather than continuing to situate it within logical structures of appropriateness that treat style as merely format. As a
preliminary thought experiment, we can look at the following description of metis, but mentally substitute style as our subject:

it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experiences acquired over the years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic. (Detienne and Vernant 3-4)

It seems to me that this description is a good fit for style. However, my argument that metic intelligence and style come together in mediation and reconciliation of textual elements can benefit from an additional illustration that has roots in the mediatory training that was part of the rhetorical arts.

*Metis, Paraphrasis, and Translation*

Rhetoric, metic intelligence, and style intersect at translation. Translation is a field particularly appropriate to metic intelligence, as translation, to which the "model of authority has underwritten [a] subordinate status" (Venuti 225), marginalized throughout history, itself dwells in a liminal space - between languages. Koepping draws attention to manifestations of "absurd" metic figures "in the mode of 'translator of languages' - as with Ananse of the Ashanti (with echoes in Hermes, mediating heaven and underworld, or in Loki as spokesman between gods, giants, and dwarfs)" (200). Significantly, it was the metic rhetoricians who became experts at translation, with Cicero eventually getting credit as “the founder of Western translation theory” (Robinson 7). Cicero’s contribution was, unsurprisingly, a direct counter to idealist aspirations of being able to exactly duplicate one language in another. Rather, he dealt with translation as would a metically-inclined artist
and described his method as “translating as an orator,” a method that we today call “sense for sense” translation. He writes:

I did not hold it necessary to render word for word [verbum pro verbo], but I preserved the general style and force [genus omne verborum] of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were. *(De Optimo Genere Oratorum 5.14–5)*

This method of translation undoubtedly has its roots in the rhetorical exercises that form a significant part of an orator’s training, such as *progymnasmata*. More specifically, the link between this method of translation and rhetorical training lies in the extensive use of *paraphrasis* - paraphrasing exercises - which formed a major part of the rhetorical tradition. In fact, one major reason that translational expertise emerged out of the rhetorical tradition is that translation itself was studied by the rhetoricians in order to expand their artistic capability, another form of exercise that honed the metic skills of negotiating and reconciling incommensurable domains though stylistic mediation. Terrill writes that “Cicero and Quintilian not only recognize that exact duplication is impossible but also understand this impossibility as an opportunity” in that “the slippage between the original and the translation… provides an opportunity for invention” *(306-7).*

Cicero, Quintilian, and Pliny the Younger are among the many orators who left a written record of advocating translation as a core part of rhetorical training, along with other traditional paraphrasing exercises that develop mediatory skills. Perhaps the most famous example of such paraphrasing exercises comes from Pliny the Younger, who left us a set of instructions on 150 ways to say “Your letter pleased me greatly.” Cicero, on the other hand, tells students of oratory that “your style to be formed, as well by the practice of speaking, as by writing, which contributes a grace and refinement to other excellences.”
(De Oratore 3.49). Quintilian, likewise, advocates for paraphrasis and places a great deal of stress on poetry as the medium of choice, due to its “bold” use of words:

Paraphrase from Latin may also make a considerable contribution. No one, I imagine, doubts this as regards poetry; indeed Sulpicius is said to have practiced no other form of exercise. The lofty spirit of poetry can help to raise the tone of oratory, and the bolder use of words permitted by poetic license does not preclude the possibility of saying the same things in ordinary terms. (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.5)

Of all the terminology needed to fill in the gaps in our terministic capacity, metis presents the best example of how the availability of a word can open up large areas of analysis. This one term already allows us to talk about rhetoricians in a very different way from the Aristotelian tradition on which rhetorical scholarship is typically based. That is, we can consider rhetors as artists in an already somewhat meaningful way: as master mediators who consider style as a crucial part of texts and metis qualities of stylistic mediation as crucial to artistic modes of production. Metis thus opens an area that we can fill out with additional terminology that will expand our discursive capacity vis a vis style. We therefore turn next to a significant component of metis intelligence, a component that is also used in developing the skills of mediation and artistic production and which is also useful in stepping in where prepon-based logical systems fail: mimesis.

**Mimesis**

Along with developing the metis skills of adjusting to the ever-shifting terrain of rhetorical situations, exercises such as paraphrasis, translation, and other progymnasmata served another crucial purpose – the development of mimetic ability in a rhetor. Students of rhetoric were taught to engage works of other authors – written, oral, prior, foreign – not only to develop a mediational flexibility, but also in order to attempt the production of
similar, “imitated” texts. However, the reduction of mimesis to mere imitation - to mere mimicry - leaves aside the very part of mimetic training that validates it as a pedagogical strategy, as student rhetors were not expected to merely mimic source texts. As Terrill puts it, source texts, “even if separated historically or geographically from students’ lived experience - perhaps especially then - serve as inventional resources whose context and purpose must be analytically engaged together with their artfulness and structure” (301). Rather than learning how to produce duplicates, then, the practical purpose of mimetic training was “to expand the inventiona range of the student” (303), much like the exercises in translation we saw earlier. In fact, Bender notes that exact duplication would not even serve a practical end, as a “particular style and inventions of these [imitated] speakers, if revived with perfect fidelity, would be strange sounding, encrusted with historical idioms, and probably incapable of moving or enlightening an audience” (344). Terrill concurs, stating that “A moment of eloquence may have been a fitting response to a particular past situation, but to import it directly into a present situation would be absurd (303). Therefore, rather than “becoming the exemplar,” the student of rhetoric learns how to “take on some of the characteristics of the exemplar” (303), while retaining their own identity and developing their own modes of artistic production of texts, enriched by engaging a varied field of such exemplars. Metis and mimesis thus come together in the development of a transformational skill set that includes the rhetor’s ability to transform the self as part of artistic production of texts, to become multiple, to take on parts of others when the opportunity presents itself. For example, “in the case of Picasso,” writes Schapiro, “two
styles - Cubism and a kind of classicizing naturalism - were practiced at the same time” (63).

Note how Terrill’s description of mimesis unintentionally describes the operation of metis: “The effective orator must be able to apprehend, respond to, and participate in a flow of events unfolding synchronically through time, while at the same time working from models that allow her to mimic another intelligence engaged in a similarly fluid, though diachronic, critical practice” (Terrill 309). The relationship of mimesis and metis is thus perfectly illustrated by the merging of imitation and transformation inherent in a mimetic act. Metic intelligence uses mimesis to copy others' forms and actions, pretend to be someone or something else, even to transform itself into the Other. Similarly, Terrill compares discourse memorized as part of mimetic training to a virus that intermingles with the DNA of its host, transforming the student into “a hybrid entity composed in part of the discourses she has memorized” (306).

While mimetic rhetorical exercises provide the necessary technical training for styling texts into being, the concept of mimesis also points to a largely unexamined conceptual area, allowing us to examine the ways in which the concept function as a kind of aesthetic epistemology – the skill of feeling - that enables the metic reconciliation of the elements of textual production discussed above. Even Plato acknowledges the wide span of the term. In addition to impersonation (as on stage) and education by imitating a teacher (Republic 394E-397B), "the slippage of the meaning of mimesis is carried over into Book X [of The Republic] to include both the total act of poetic representation and the audience's emotional identification with the performance" (Haskins 9). Mimesis, then, is both the way
an artist identifies with the subject of representation and the way the audience identifies with this subject through the work of the artist.

It is not mere emotion or sensation; it includes all modes of the psyche's activity. It is embodied in the poem, and it is called into actuality in the responding reader or spectator. (Schwartz 346)

Other scholars point to this function of mimesis as a kind of impassioned epistemology. Mimesis, says Havelock, "is the name of our submission to the spell" (26).

Earlier, I mentioned the inherent messiness in trying to separate the mediatory activity of a communicator into distinct levels, proposing that we could alternatively conceptualize both the internal states of the artist and the adaptation to the audience as two more elements to be metically reconciled as part of the artistic production process. I noted that this would immediately collapse all levels of mediation into the metic activity of reconciliation. My purpose in keeping the beginning and end of textual production separate from the overall reconciliation of textual elements, however, is that these are the two areas where mimesis is most evident. The inception of the process depends on the affective engagement with the subject, while the completion of the process depends on affective engagement with the audience. But let’s not forget that metis cannot be separated from the process, nor neatly compartmentalized. Worton and Still remind us that: “Imitation as theory and practice presupposes a virtual simultaneity and identification of reading and writing, but it also implies and depends upon a process of transformation” (6–7). As part of a recursive process wherein all levels constantly feedback, both of these stages also combine affective engagement with metically creative transformation, so that separation – between levels or between self and other - becomes blurry in a “self-sustaining productive
cycle” (Terrill 304). Leff, likewise, notes that “while the end of the process is a productive act of invention, this act is so intimately connected to interpretation that production and interpretation virtually coalesce (Idea 98-9).

We could thus add a fourth level of mediation to the list, which chronologically precedes the other three: this is the remediation of external stimuli, forces, and situations into thoughts and passions (or as is traditionally conceptualized: into “ideas”). There is already extant terminology we use to talk about this part of the process, ranging from highly developed and hotly contested concepts such as the “rhetorical situation” to vague terminology such as “inspiration.” Traditionally, however, there has been a great deal of uncertainty as to what sort of agency humans have in actively influencing this part of the process, largely, I believe, due to our rationalist cultural conditioning. (The discussion that forms part of the contemporary canon of rhetorical theory consists of arguments presented by Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny in the late 1960s and early 1970s regarding the dominance of the rhetorical situation over the rhetor or vice-versa.) However, while logical analysis is certainly chronologically subsequent to affective stimuli, mimetic engagement is just as certainly enmeshed in the process of perception. In fact, one way of thinking about mimetic training is to conceive of it as perceptual training dependent on affective engagement with the object. This means that the arsenal of metic abilities presently under discussion is relevant to this stage of remediation as well, as this dual receptive-productive nature of mimesis “almost would seem to be a centripetal force toward unification rather than a
centrifugal force toward fragmentation” (Terrill 304). Mimesis thus provides a way to feel, to know, and unify other(s), aiding the hippia of metis in its reconciliatory tasks.  

From Plato onwards, however, mimesis becomes the strategic point of attack on artistic epistemology as immoral because amoral. Plato has Socrates argue in *The Republic* that the poets are "all together imitators,” that “the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates,” and that therefore "mimesis is a form of play not to be taken seriously" (602b). Only the debased engage in mimicry, says Plato. The more debased the poet, "the less will he shrink from imitating anything and everything" (397a). Melberg notes: "Socrates' argument starts with Homer, and it ends in an imitator who shows little if any resemblance to the exalted singer, but seems closer to a *mimos*, a buffoon" (19). While Plato praises Homer for his descriptive powers and thus allows “good” poetry to function in a purely descriptive historical mode, the mimetic side of poesis is seen by him as fraught with danger, since there is seemingly no control, no moral override that governs and limits artistic modes of production. Mimesis, says Terrill, “facilitates the transfer of knowledge without relying on abstract precept” (302). And

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6 It is important to note that several philosophical trends have made great headway into exploring mimetic territory, even if they fail to aid us in connecting style with skill. Both Heidegger and Gadamer caution against ascribing primitivism to mimesis, rather than letting be epistemologically valid. Heidegger uses the term *Nachmachtung* (a doing-after), while Gadamer augments our terministic screen with *Wiedererkennung* (recognition) and *Erkenntnissin* (recognitions/realizations). Both stress the productive and epistemological nature of mimesis. Titchener has given us *Einfühlung* (empathy), a term that proved phenomenally fruitful in the hands of phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edith Stein. Freud and Burke have contributed two versions of *identification*, a term that will become crucial when we discuss the relationship of style and persuasion later on. Most recently, neuroscience has described mirror-neurons and their functions, extending mimesis (once again) into the gross physiological realm.
without an abstract precept, theoria-based prepon can have no hold on art. Without philosophical moral guidance, art would remain amoral and uncontrolled and uncontrollable, a condition unacceptable to Plato and Aristotle. Debased poets might just imitate whatever comes to mind, regardless of the moral consequences. The amorality of mimesis thus poses a danger to the development of the citizen, as "imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and second nature in the body, the speech, and the thought" (Republic 395d). In order to protect the youth of Athens, then, mimesis, according to Plato, needs to be restricted strictly to the sphere of entertainment. More importantly, mimesis must not have any epistemological status. It shall belong, declares Plato, "to slaves and foreign hirelings and no serious attention shall ever be paid to it" (Republic 816e). Plato thus wants to ban poetry precisely because poetry's mimetic epistemology – unchecked by morals - competes with Plato's theoretical epistemology. As other scholars have already noted, “rhetoric as art does not admit criteria appropriate to strictly epistemological or axiological matters, a position due to which “some of the well-known Platonic charges against rhetoric become inapplicable” (Poulakos Towards 37).

Aristotle’s understanding of mimesis can be summed up as mythos imitating praxis (Poetics). This is a highly structuralist - Melberg calls it "proto-structuralistic" (48) - position. Mythos, which is "a concept of order, which makes it possible to view literary works as structured wholes" imitates praxis, which "refers to already structured events" (45). Both mythos and praxis are approached by Aristotle as structures imitating structures. Ricoeur, likewise, notes that "the very principle of order... is the root of the idea of literary emplotment" (Time and Narrative 2.7; emphasis original). It is this Aristotelian flavor of
art imitating life that ultimately carried the concept of mimesis through generations of subsequent theorists of art history and literary theory as orderly structures that imitate preexisting orderly structures, a highly impoverished and restrictive interpretation of mimesis that results in the complete destruction of the epistemological side of the term, thus leaving the critic with no way to account for the ways in which mimesis aids the metic skill set of the stylist.

**Kairos and Aiole**

As style, metis, and mimesis resist systematization, so does the next term in this cluster. *Kairos* - the opportune moment – is traditionally conceptualized as “the right or opportune time to do something” (Race 80). The confluence of metic and Sophistic thought with kairos can be traced to Gorgias, who was given much credit for emphasizing the concept as relating to the orator. Diogenes Laertus describes Gorgias as willing to "trust in kairos (*toi kairoi*) to speak on any subject" (DK 82A1a), suggested, impromptu, by his audience. However, because kairos does not submit well to theorization, by the time Dionysius of Halicarnassus talks about kairos, he laments that philosophers and orators have been unable to define it properly or provide useful theoretical information to subsequent scholars. In *De Compositione Verborum*, he writes that "even Gorgias of Leontini, who though first to try to write about it wrote nothing worth mentioning" (12). (This comment (like many others) demonstrates that sophistic writings on rhetoric were not as rare as we might today assume. The *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* contains similar grumblings that the sophists failed to produce useful writing on the subject of style, despite their famous preoccupation with the subject. This comment also demonstrates that once the
Socratic shift took place, these writings were often found wanting by later generations, due to the sophists’ failure to accommodate their artistic endeavors to theoretical conceptualization necessitated by Plato’s redefinition of techne.) Noting precisely this resistance to theoria, White goes as far as to say that kairos “stands for precisely the irrational novelty of the moment that escapes formalization” (20). Rickert, likewise, calls kairos a “vector at odds with any emphasis on rational or technological planning” (74).

However, unlike metis and mimesis, kairos is a term that has seen a significant revival, both in critical literature at large and in contemporary studies of rhetoric. There is, therefore, a significant body of literature on which to draw for ways in which meanings of kairos can expand our terministic capacity. Specifically with regards to style as skill, however, there are two aspects of kairos that we need to explore in greater detail.

First, there is the emplacement aspect of kairos. As several scholars note, kairos denoted spatial placement first and only later came to include temporal positioning. Historically, this is the term’s “original” meaning (Bernard Miller; Onians; Race; Rickert; Untersteiner). The earliest references to kairos include the use of kairion in the Iliad to refer to a spot on a body that is vulnerable to being targeted by an arrow (Onians; Rickert). Onians draws attention to a similar use of kairos to denote an “aperture,” as when Odysseus, the metic hero par excellence, puts his arrow through twelve axe irons to win the hand of his wife, Penelope (a second time, since he is at this time in disguise). Rickert points to uses of kairos in Homer, Aeschylus, Pindar, and other authors that describe working with a loom and that also neatly combine denotations of spatial placement and temporal positioning: “As one weaves, there is an opening in the warp through which the
shuttle must pass; the space lasts only a moment” (77). Summing up the way kairos becomes spatiotemporal, White defines the term as “a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force” (13). In broader terms, we can thus conceptualize the older (or “original”) meaning of kairos as denoting *spatiotemporal positioning*. This means that one who is able to feel and seize kairos is one who can be in the right place at the right time – the skill of being “on target.”

The second aspect of kairotic being has to do with the way kairos enmeshes the actor in the emergence and transformation of situations. Being in the right place, at the right time - that is: positioning oneself and timing the metrically oblique forces one exerts on the emergent process – depends on the metic give-and-take of dominance and submission, as well as on the mimetic sensing of elements and forces. The coming together of these (mi)metic abilities thus results in *becoming kairotic*: that is in *feeling the moment in its totality by merging with the moment*. With respect to the operations of an orator, Hawhee calls this working of kairos “invention-in-the-middle,” which she describes as “a space-time which marks the emergence of a pro-visional ‘subject,’ one that works on-and is worked on by-the situation” (18). Rickert goes as far as to say that “the blurring of the interacting elements demonstrates a rhetor to be enmeshed with kairos and hence indistinguishable from it” (83). Rickert goes on to add that as the artist becomes the moment, the artist also becomes the situation: “The kairos of a situation is a moment placed not as something between a subject and exterior situation but as mutually involved and evolving vectors of material and discursive force” (90).
Although metis and mimesis are notably absent from current scholarly discourse on kairos (at least explicitly), the (mi)metic ways of kairos are easily discerned in conceptualization of kairotic participation in an “emerging situation that dissolves the a priori distinction between subject and object,” in which “rhetor and situation take part in each other” (Rickert 82). White can, likewise, be seen as describing metic abilities as a way to achieving kairos when he notes that the successful application of timely force is dependent on constant adaptation to changing circumstances and “newly emergent contexts” (13). Detienne and Vernant draw attention to the shifting swiftness of one who is metic, described as aиole in classical Greek literature. In his Theogony, for example, Hesiod describes Prometheus as aиolометис (514). A metic agent must be even swifter than the shifting winds of touche if s/he is to achieve/become kairos: “It is metis which, overtaking the kairos, however fleeting it may be, catches it by surprise” (16). The shifting swiftness of a metic agent – the aиole of metis – can therefore be described as a skill of positioning oneself with such a degree of spatiotemporal precision that one becomes the moment/situation, enabling metic creative agency. Atwill writes: “in the mastery of the moment lies the rhetor's best chance to intervene in and transform a situation” (59). We are metically closing the circle as we circle back to mediation: “kairos mediates - or goes ‘between’ - the outside of the self, i.e., the nodes where the ‘self’ encounters a world, and the discourse or the ‘other’ that the self encounters” (Hawhee 25). Kairos thus describes a merging with the moment that - due to its (mi)metically-dual, active/passive nature – transforms the situation in such a way as to achieve a balance, a reconciliation and unification of emerging elements. “Kairos achieves a robust, active sense of harmony, not
the palliation of conflicts, exactly, but the achievement of workable or probable truths in situations lacking certainty” (Rickert 81).

Likemetis and mimesis, kairos cannot be normalized or controlled through prepon: “Deploying an art at the ‘right moment’ in a particular situation is the sign of the true rhetor, yet it is something that cannot be taught by explicit precepts or rules” (Atwill 58). Consigny writes that the constantly-emerging moment is always “ephemeral or fleeting…always radically unprecedented and unique…” that in kairos the present moment is “the only reality” (44). One way to think about what achieving/becoming kairos provides, then, is an ability to relate to the whole of the moment at once. This is one way to understand how Gorgias could “trust in kairos” to guide his spontaneous textual invention. In fact, some scholars go as far as to claim that kairos was the “key to Gorgias' subjectivist epistemology” (Consigny 43). Rickert sums up kairotic epistemology by stating that “Kairos marks an abiding, not a grasping” (88).

This dual active/passive engagement with kairos makes much more sense when augmented with our understanding of metis and mimesis, concepts which – like becoming kairos – seem uncomfortably paradoxical to the theoretically-oriented. More than paradoxical, Gorgianic kairos is mortally dangerous to prepon-based systems of control over art. Kairos as a guiding force of the orator during the process of textual emergence demonstrates that the spontaneous aspects of textual production not only do not depend on the linear chain of rhetorical canons, but also invalidate the canons and their rules conceptually. Kairos resists the forced fragmentation of poesis into categorizable parts and, therefore, also the hierarchization of the canons into the essential and the incidental –
content and style - as subsequently attempted by Aristotle. Rickert therefore concludes that “It makes greater sense to understand the kairotic experience as one... that encompasses all elements composing the situation and thereby disrupts reason” (86). Other scholars, likewise, note that kairos is incompatible with the notion of prepon or decorum. Hawhee writes:

Kairotic impulses depend largely on the rhetorical encounter itself and the forces pushing on the encounter. Such encounters mandate responses, and these responses can connect and hence lead to other emergent forces, while severing others. (25)

Kairos thus becomes a problem not only for theoria as pedagogical and epistemological, but also – and possibly even more crucially - for the morals and ethics that Plato sets up as the guiding forces of Greek philosophy. Kairos cannot be theorized, taught, or controlled. Plato’s solution to the problem of kairos, therefore, highly resembles his strategy of dealing with mimesis. Plato strips kairos of all that is valuable – its metic flexibility, its mimetic sensitivity, its holistic epistemology, its art of the moment – and declares it to be merely opportunism. In thus forcibly shifting the value of the term, Plato robs kairos of all epistemological weight. “Plato's kairos is one of a rhetor taking advantage of a momentary opportunity in a given situation…” and “gaining subjective advantage over one's audience” (Rickert 87).

On the other hand, for Gorgias as a kairotic "rhetor of style" style "is not the ornamental dimension of rhetoric" (Hawhee). Rather style is "irreducibly linked" to "what is traditionally figured as rhetorical invention." In fact, according to Hawhee, Gorgias’s speeches "demonstrated the impossibility" (23) of separating discourse production into discrete steps in the first place. For Gorgias, style is thus the tail of the ouroboros, the fuel
for poesis, which is the head. For Aristotle, on the other hand, there is only the hegemony of heurasis over style, as prepon guides decorous adherence to itself. When Aristotle separates textual production into Invention and Style, it is poesis he is fragmenting; it is in place of poesis that he substitutes categories and rules of their use. And even though Aristotle gives some weight to kairos in determining the proper action (*pro ton kairon*), his largely Platonic treatment of the aesthetic once again positions him as against the kairotic epistemology of emergent situations. For Aristotle, kairos becomes merely a minor factor of analysis, while style becomes merely ornamental.

**Pantoie, Pan, and Poly**

The metic, mimetic, and kairotic abilities come together to define a metic actor. What is such an actor like? There are several terms attributed to the metically skillful. The first – aiole – has already been described above as the skill of being so swift as to “catch” kairos. The second skill can also be traced back to Homer, who has Nestor describe it as *pantoie*, the skill of multiplicity (*Iliad* 23.314). Detienne and Vernant write that “When taught by…the deities of metis, the artist also possesses a *techne pantoie*, an art of many facets, knowledge of general application” (19). Whereas the philosophical position is that depth of knowledge leads to the uncovering of truth trough a theoretical drilling for essence, the metic position concerns itself with breadth, instead. Possession of a techne pantoie thus makes the metic hero – Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey* is the example cited most – into an *agkulometes* or *polumetis* (one full of (twisted and/or multiple) metis):

Odysseus is the hero who is *polumetis* as well as *polutropos* and *polumechanos*. He is an expert in tricks of all kinds (*pantoious dolous*), *polumechanos* in the sense that he is never at a loss, never without expedients (*poroi*) to get himself out of any kind of trouble (*aporia*). (18)
Nietzsche famously bragged: “I have many stylistic possibilities - the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man” (Ecce Homo 3.4). The term *pantoie* can, based on the above, be said to describe this very quality of multifariousness attributed to a stylist, a multifariousness that expands authorial agency by expanding the range of available options for overcoming aporia, a multifariousness often attributed to orators who were skilled in the full range of styles from Plain to Grand. However, in order to flesh out more fully the application of technē pantoie as a skill that overcomes aporia, we need to turn next to a term that describes both a metic agent and the quality of a metic text.

**Poikilia**

How does the metis of art overcome aporia? Through *poikilia*. An agkulometes or polumetis is also described as *poikilometis* or *poikilos*, terms that denote a glimmering or a shimmering quality. It is applied to cases as diverse as the glint of weapons or armor, the sheen of liver, the shining of snakeskin, or “the dappled hide of a fawn” (Detienne and Vernant 18). Historically, these uses can be traced back to Homer, who describes Odysseus as *poikilometis* (*Iliad* 11.482; *Odyssey* 3.163; 13.293) and Hesiod, who describes Odysseus as *poikilos* (*Theogony* 514). Metaphorically, poikilia refers to the kind of mental shiftiness (note the connection to aiole) that colors metis as cunning, even one that tints metis negatively as cunning. “Shimmering sheen and shifting movement are so much a part of the nature of métis that when the epithet *poikilos* is applied to an individual it is enough to indicate that he is a wiley [sic] one, a man of cunning, full of inventive ploys (*poikiloboulos*) and tricks of every kind” (19). Detienne and Vernant also cite one of
Aesop’s Fables, where the cunning fox is described as having a poikilos mind. This is the first meaning of poikilia.

During the course of my researches into the relationship of metis and style, I discovered an additional use of poikilia in Greek source documents that has not yet drawn the attention of any scholar (even Detienne and Vernant missed following up on this thread), yet which bears directly on the issue of style. Poikilia, as it turns out, also describes *that which is styled*. For example, Demosthenes, in *Against Aphobius*, describes his case as being so strong that it does not require poikilia, which A. T. Murray translates as “eloquence,” thus (correctly) equating poikilia with lexis and stylization. The best example, however, comes from Isocrates. In *To Phillip*, he describes a styled text as “adorned” with what George Norlin translates as “the rhythmic flow and manifold graces of style” (5.27). Looking at the original Greek and unpacking it step by step, however, shows that, again, poikilia (this time together with lexis and kosmetike) connotes the workings of stylization. What Isocrates says is: “…peri ten lexin euruthmias kai poikilias kekosmekamen,” which can be loosely retranslated as “…around the speaking eurythmia and poikilia cosmetized,” but which also means “as regards the diction rhythmic flow and an iridescence styled.”

The reason that I propose iridescence as the translation of choice for poikilia is that iridescence comes closest to capturing the aesthetics of the term as they relate both to physical phenomena and to a positive, desirable quality that a stylist can help achieve. The *OED* defines iridescence as “Showing luminous colours that seem to change when seen

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Aristotle uses this exact wording, “peri ten lexin,” in Book 3 of the *Rhetoric*, when he says that he is yet to address “the issue of style.”
from different angles.” Detienne and Vernant also use iridescence (irisation) as one of the ways of describing poikilia. They write: "This many-colored sheen or complex of appearances produces an effect of iridescence, shimmering, an interplay of reflections" (18). OED’s definition also captures the metic illusiveness - of poikilia, of style, and of all metic concepts when they come under analysis – in that a change of perspective produces a change of appearance.

While the desirable quality suggested by the secondary meaning of iridescence emphasizes its positive value, poikilia, as I already suggested above, was by no means seen in this light by classical theorists. For Isocrates, it seems to have a neutral value. In his letter to Phillip, Isocrates laments the lack of time that prevented him from “cosmetizing” his missive with more poikilia, but states that this lack of aesthetic coating should not detract from the message. If we recall my description of Isocrates as a kind of “transitional fossil” between Sophism and Platonism, his neutral relationship to poikilia should make sense. Alternatively called a sophist and an enemy of Sophism, Isocrates is precisely situated between the kairotic momentum of speechmaking as outlined by Gorgias and the appropriateness later stressed by Plato, Aristotle, and subsequent theorists. Isocrates gives equal weight to both kairos and prepon, writing that "speeches are good only if they have a share in what is opportune [kairos], appropriateness of style [prepon], and originality" (Against the Sophists 9.14). Isocrates is also an example of a teacher who put much emphasis on mimesis to facilitate learning, while also engaging the beginnings of rhetorical theory (Kennedy Classical). Both pedagogically and theoretically, then, Isocrates sits midway between the Sophists and Plato. He therefore conceptualizes style as desirable, yet
also as adorning speech that is already there. For Isocrates, stylization is still looked-for, but already becoming optional.

The axiology of the term, however, takes a severely negative turn with Plato. *Poikilia* makes two prominent appearances in *The Republic*. In the first instance, poikilia describes a kind of smorgasbord, described by Plato as a “Sicilian poikilian” (404d), a dish for which Plato expresses his utmost disapproval, along with all things aesthetically complex, and against which he famously proposes simple music and a diet of boiled meat. In the second instance, poikilia denotes the glimmer of the stars, *ouranon poikilia* (529d). Here, Plato argues that the workings of the world cannot be comprehended by sight (*ophis*), but must instead be examined by logic and thought (*logos* and *dianoia*). “These sparks that paint (*poikileata*) the sky,” says Plato, are merely decorations (*pepoikiltai*) (529c). Therefore, despite clearly being material and aesthetically important, the appearance of the stars does not reach truth (*aletheia*) or reality of existence (*on*) (529c-d). Plato concludes that the only purpose of *ouranon poikilia* is as patterns or models (*paradeigma*) for the study of the true, invisible, quantitative reality that governs the mass and movement of the stars, as well as their relationship to the rest of “real” existence.

Detienne and Vernant note the post-Platonic distrust of the instability of poikilia: "Plato associates what is poikilos with what is never the same as itself, *oudepote tauton*" (Detienne and Vernant 18-9). However, post Plato, the Greek relationship to poikilia, style, and all things aesthetic is perhaps best summarized by Xenophon, who was born shortly before Plato died and wrote shortly after. In *Memorabilia*, Xenophon writes that a good house is not a decorated house, but one that is comfortable in all seasons and allows the
owner to securely store his possessions. Decorative items – “graphai” and “poikiliai” - on the other hand, “rob one of more delights than they give” (3.8.10).

It is worthy of note that someone who is poikilos does not seem very trustworthy. If we, today, were to describe someone as cunning, full of tricks, and shifty, this description would carry purely negative connotations. We would, in effect, be saying: “Watch out for that one.” Unsurprisingly, poikilia also describes “the cunning of the sophist, the poikilos schemer, who is never without a way of escaping from difficulties” (Detienne and Vernant 33). As Detienne and Vernant further note, the sophist is the prime example of both the mental flexibility and the instability of identity required to negotiate the world, society, art, and politics artistically – to overcome aporia. “For it is in his shifting speeches, his poikiloi logoi that the sophist deploys his words of ‘many coils,’ strings of words which unfold like the coils of the snake, speeches which enmesh their enemies like the supple arms of the octopus… not only possessing the logos of the octopus but also proving himself capable of adapting to the most changing of situations, of assuming as many faces… as there are men in the city” (Detienne and Vernant 39-40). Unsurprisingly, civilized society – both ancient and modern – has a very difficult time accepting shape-shifting as an appropriate quality of the citizen.8 Nietzsche notes that:

[Demosthenes’ speeches] show the most complete mastery of all styles and methods, and therefore differ greatly from one another. If simple natures are presented, of course it is not a Lysian simplicity that appears: even there the rhetorical tension can be felt, as the mighty deinos rhetor merely puts on his mask. As in Isaeus, his versatility and shrewdness are remarkable: it has been remarked

8 If we consider, for a moment, the immense legal pressure constantly applied to the current cultural condition wherein the Body without Organs is a prerequisite for justice, we can immediately see that social consistency is a very important prerequisite for the functioning of civilizations.
that even when they are right Demosthenes and Isaeus arouse distrust. (Nietzsche *On Rhetoric and Language* 230)

Like metis and mimesis, then, the combined skill of poikilia, aiole, and pantoie of a metic agent is "alternately praised for its service in the transmission of truth, condemned and excluded for its power to confound the truth with confusion and duplicity" (Klein 4). Yet this metic shifting is a necessary precondition of becoming an effective mediator. As Kenneth Burke reminds us, “The ideal lyricist would probably speak through as many shifting personalities as the ideal dramatist” (*GM* ix).

**Eurythmia**

Along with his use of the term *poikilia*, Isocrates describes the styling of speech as “cosmetizing” with eurythmia. Norlin’s translation of the term as “rhythmic flow” (5.27) is spot on, as eurythmia, when applied to oratory or poetry denotes the rhythmic movement of phrases and the cadence of language more generally. However, eurythmia also has connotations of graceful movement, harmony, and proportion (the last two meanings later emphasized by Vitruvius in treating the Latin version of the term). Finally, eurythmia also specifically denotes the harmony between an orator and the audience (as later emphasized by Plutarch in treating the Latin version). This sense of rhythmical movement and harmony naturally belongs more to the mimetically guided orality of poetic recitation than to the rationally preplanned visual-geometric domain of objective theorizing, making it highly incompatible with the Platonic and Aristotelian geometric logic. “Plato’s idea of philosophy is based on sight,” says Melberg, “or at least has a visual orientation” (23). On the other hand, writes, Baldwin:
The connection of [style] with delivery, both with reading aloud and with dramatic recital, though obvious, is often neglected. Elocution in our modern sense may, if rightly related, be one of the gateways of style. (24)

As with the rest of the metic cluster of skills relevant to artistic production, a sense of rhythm is developed in an orator not through theoretical pedagogy, but through mimetic instruction in the poetic arts. Looking back to oratorical instructors of the past, we can see Quintilian, in Book 10 of *De Institutio Oratoria*, promoting the oral recitation of poetry and exercises in speed-writing as a means of improving rhythmic sensibilities in aspiring orators. Baldwin, likewise, writes that instruction in style, which is “always delicate and difficult, may well begin through poetry” because poetry, “in descriptive heightening and in harmony of sound with sense, especially of pace with mood, most plainly exhibits style…” (24).

Unsurprisingly, then, Plato never discusses this (orally) poetic term, despite its importance to the art of language. Nor does Aristotle accord eurythmia much importance (despite acknowledging that rhythm is an important aspect of style), preferring, instead to focus on meter over rhythm, likely because meter can be quantitatively expressed via (geometrical) number ratios. Like several of the terms discussed above, eurythmia therefore undergoes a period of decline in use, even among orators (until it is picked up by Romans, like Cicero and Quintilian). Roughly 300 years after Plato, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60 BCE) writes in *De Compositione Verborum* that while the combination of words to create rhythm and pace is even more important than the choice of words themselves, such rhythmic stylizations have become a forgotten art:

The main difference between poet and poet, orator and orator, is in aptness of sentence movement. Almost all the ancients gave this much study; and
consequently their poems, their songs, and their discourses are things of beauty. But among their successors, with few exceptions, this was no longer so. In time it was at last entirely forgotten; and no one thought it to be indispensable or even contributory to beauty of discourse. (1.8-10)

In the same treatise, Dionysius states that although he used to think that logical arrangement of word order was a “plausible” idea, he eventually decided that it was simply “not true” and that harmony achieved through unrestrained artistic expression was more effective. As Baldwin describes it, Dionysius “shows… that word order has little to do with philosophical or logical classification” and notes that Dionysius was attempting to “vindicat[e] the right of the speaker or writer to deal with the order of his words artistically, unfettered by logic” (110-111). Cicero, likewise, writes that phrasing should not: “be governed by the rigid laws of the cultivators of numbers…” (De Oratore 3.49).

Dionysius thus provides us with a description of the end point of the Greek trajectory taken by eurythmia. In addition to the much-belabored transition from “the oral” to “the written,” the reasons for eurythmia’s decline in use should, at this point, be suggested by my analysis of the incompatibility of stylistic endeavors with the methods of prepon-based control preferred by Plato and Aristotle as a means of reigning in the artistic in discourse and the poetic in the citizen. As with metis, mimesis, and kairos, rhythmic sensibilities submit themselves neither to formulization via theoria nor to the precepts of decorum. Bearing the rest of this chapter in mind, however, a concept such as eurythmia can be said to depend on the (mi)metic sensibilities developed in an artist, sensibilities that post-Socrates were dismissed as merely knack and experience.
**Conclusion**

In this chapter I argued that the period immediately preceding Aristotle’s canonization of rhetoric can offer additional terminology with which to arm the contemporary critic looking for a way "to isolate style qua style" (Vivian xii). To this end, I discussed select pre-Socratic terminology that, as demonstrated above, relates to the intersection of style and textual production, offering one way towards being able to discourse about style as a quality and as a set of skills. The central concept of this chapter has been metic intelligence or *metis*, which stands in direct opposition to the overly rationalist approach to textual production inherited by the contemporary critic from the Peripatetics and which functions as an umbrella term for the skills and qualities of a stylist. Understanding metis enables, in turn, the exploration of additional concepts contained within the metic skillset. *Hippiē* represents a subset of metic intelligence that enables agency in a world of chance and uncertainty, where forces and elements of textual production and dissemination that cannot be controlled are mediated, instead. *Mimesis*, although a concept more familiar to the critic, takes on new meaning as the skill of feeling and perceiving these forces and elements. *Kairos*, likewise, takes on a new emphasis, that of effective participation and intervention in an emerging situation, while *aiole* describes the swiftness and mental fluidity required to “catch” this kairos of emergence. *Pantoie* describes multiplicity as the skill of applying breadth of knowledge, rather than depth, enabling the stylist to bring multiple areas of expertise to bear on the process of textual production. *Poikilia* describes both the “shifty” mental attitude of a stylist and the shifting
iridescence – the instability and multiplicity - of a styled text. Finally, *eurythmia* denotes the “flow” or “harmony” of a well-stylized text.

Due to the fragmentary nature of the Sophistic remnants, the set of terms above neither clearly represents nor self-assembles into a theory of style. However, exploring the terminology above does offer a way towards such a theory by filling in the two most glaring gaps in our current engagement with style – style as the skill of the stylist and style as the quality of a stylist or a stylized text. Furthermore, as noted at the outset of this project, these fragments of a pre-Socratic conception of style have the additional utility of functioning as a base for a theory of style based on more recent advances in philosophy and criticism. As also noted at the outset of this project, a way towards an alternative theory of style to the dominant tradition depends on this twofold approach of looking beyond the Peripatetics in both chronological directions: That is, on looking to both before and after Aristotle. Therefore, the import of each term in this chapter may not always be readily apparent to the reader, until this terminology is situated within a more complete theoretical framework. This will be the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: STYLE AND SYSTEMS THEORY

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed a set of terms that, I argued, can be useful to the contemporary critic as a means of discussing aspects of style that escape current conceptualizations of the concept, due to the limitations imposed on theories of style by the dominant tradition in communication criticism. I also demonstrated the utility of these terms in describing style as a skill or a set of skills, as well as style as a quality – of the stylist or of the styled text. The previous chapter therefore represents the first step towards a more useful theory of style than is currently available to communication critics. However, because the terms under discussion are fragments belonging to the pre-Socratic period, they lack a framework within which they can be situated. Therefore, a second step is required, in order to move towards an alternative theory of style – that of providing a theoretical framework that can both tie the terminology together and mobilize the terminology as part of a larger and more robust theoretical construct. Exploring one possible theoretical framework will be the purpose of this chapter.

To this end, I propose that systems theory – and, more specifically, the language of complex adaptive systems (CAS) - can offer an appropriate framework within which to resituate the old terminology of the Sophists, especially as systems theory has already been applied to moving past structuralist approaches, both in communication (Hawk) and in other fields (Rogers et al; Innes and Booher). However, although systems theory is both accepted by textual critics and has found a wide range of application, the terminology offered by systems theory has not been applied to constructing a theory of style. Systems
theory, therefore, represents a rich but as of yet untapped source that, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, can empower the ancient Greek terminology by bringing it into the 21st century.

I will begin with an overview of complex adaptive systems and argue that this branch of systems theory is especially appropriate to overcoming the current limitations of our discourse on style. Following this general overview, I discuss the current state of systems theory application to issues tangential to style within communication criticism. I demonstrate that although systems theory has seen a wide range of uses within the discipline, the rich language and the robust theoretical foundation that systems theory offers have not been utilized in moving towards a theory of style. However, I also review several nascent proposals to view the rhetorical situation – including style - in the context of systems theory and network theory (a related theory often used to analyze system relationships), that have emerged during past decade. Although such proposals offer neither a working theory of style nor a means to such a theory, they provide support for the argument that systems language *can* offer us a way towards such a theory by providing a more general perspective on communication within which a CAS approach to style can be situated. I conclude the preliminary discussion with a brief review of basic systems terminology necessary to discuss CAS and style.

In the remainder of the chapter I combine the pre-Socratic terminology first explored in the previous chapter with the terminology of complex adaptive systems, thus allowing the two past and future alternatives to Aristotle to inform each other. I argue that CAS theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger
theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between CAS theory and style. I conclude the chapter by arguing that combining the two alternatives to Aristotle can enrich our understanding of the concept of style, while accounting both for the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.

**Complex Adaptive Systems**

The term *complex adaptive system* (CAS) was coined at the Santa Fe Institute in the 1980s, as scientists from multiple disciplines, ranging from economics to biology, combined chaos, systems, and complexity theories in order to better conceptualize states of complexity that possessed self-organizing, emergent properties based on non-linear dynamics (John Miller; Waldrop). While general systems theory sees the objects of its inquiry as wholes composed of parts that may be analyzed through reductionist methods, the CAS approach – often referred to as *complexity science* – aims to better understand the way *multi-agent systems* (MAS) become more than the sum of their parts via the dynamic interaction of multiple components or *agents*. Furthermore, CAS theory aims to better understand how such *non-linear dynamical systems* achieve adaptive functionality, whether on the part of one or more system agents or on the part of the system as a whole, as well as how this dynamic interaction may lead to emergent behavior. Highly interdisciplinary, complexity science comprises a continuum of “hard” and “soft” approaches to studying non-linear system behavior, where the former often relies on formalized nomenclature, mathematical models and AI simulations and the latter often employs less precise language, along with a consideration of non-quantifiable agent
properties (Yolles). Miller and Page point out that although CAS theory is thereby situated “in between various fields, like biology and economics and physics and computer science,” the issues explored through the study of CAS are much more general and have, likewise, a much more general range of application. They state that:

Problems like organization, adaptation, and robustness transcend all of these fields. For example, issues of organization arise when biologists think about how cells form, economists study the origins of firms, physicists look at how atoms align, and computer scientists form networks of machines. (33)

Therefore, while traditional examples of phenomena that lend themselves to conceptualization via CAS language, such as the weather or stock markets, seem to be far away from issues such as rhetoric and style, CAS can also offer explanatory aid to the contemporary critic in dealing with issues such as formation, organization, robustness, adaptation, and emergence regardless of the specific field of inquiry. For example, Blank et al. state that CAS "are also relevant to pedagogy, challenging us to think about education not in terms of carefully pre-planned, hierarchical structures, but rather with an understanding that complex organization has a high probability of arising out of the bi-directional interactions of autonomous, somewhat randomly behaving elements" (Web). Rhetoric and composition scholars, likewise, note that systems theory and complexity theory “promise to challenge and transform great swaths of our received knowledge concerning rhetoric, culture, social organization, and composition” (Blakesley and Rickert 822).

Proponents of complex adaptive systems (and complexity theory more generally) emphasize that the kind of chaotic, non-linear complexity explored via CAS is not a special or exceptional condition encountered only rarely in the world. In fact, they argue that the
opposite is true: As other scholars have repeatedly mentioned, in the real world, non-linear dynamics are the rule, rather than the exception (Holland *Studying*; John Miller; Page; Taylor; Waldrop). As Stanislaw Ulam famously noted, the term “non-linear science” is as misplaced as describing most of zoology as “the study of non-elephant animals” (Miller and Page). Therefore, the utilization of the language of CAS is by no means indicative of embracing an obscure and narrowly-applicable fringe theory, but is, rather, a promising alternative to aspects of rhetorical approaches that rely on an outdated and overly linear perception of the world that embraces “the explanatory ideal as deduction from deterministic laws,” itself a “part of a trend that has characterized the history of philosophy for over 2,000 years” (Juarrero 24).

Whereas the term “system” generally “denotes any set of interrelated elements that form a complex or unified whole” (Almaney 35), what distinguishes complex adaptive systems is a number of "components, often called agents, that interact and adapt" (Holland; *Studying* 1). Complex adaptive systems, therefore, are highly dynamic, due to the interaction and adaptation on the part of each CAS component. Juarrero states that in complex adaptive systems:

> individual but interacting parts suddenly correlate to create systematic wholes; once organized, the resulting systems affect their components. In other words, self-organizing systems exhibit that previously unknown inter-level causality, both bottom up and top down. (31)

Due to the adaptability of CAS components and their ability to interact with – and therefore affect – both each other and the system as a whole, the level of dynamic complexity within a CAS, as well as the non-linearity of said dynamics makes such systems highly unpredictable, as well as highly resistant to reductionist approaches (Holland
Studying; Juarrero; John Miller; Taylor). As other scholars note, “at the most basic level, the field of complex systems challenges the notion that by perfectly understanding the behavior of each component part of a system we will then understand the system as a whole” (Miller and Page 26). Other scholars, likewise, note that:

[Systems theory views any organization not as an isolated phenomenon, consisting of discrete variables. Rather, the organization is viewed as a total and dynamic process, consisting of a number of variables that constantly interact with one another and with the external environment. (Almaney 35)

**CAS and the Problem of Style**

As argued in Chapter 1, the problem of style tends to revolve around this very issue - the reduction of style to a set of stylemes and the resultant inability of this “tendency in stylistic analysis to catalog design elements” (Hariman *Political* 125) to account for both the dynamics of stylemes and for how a set of stylemes become a style. In strong parallel to the description of CAS provided above, scholars who touch on style note that stylemes “all seem to be marked by the expression of the whole” and that “the feel of the whole is found in the small parts,” yet express dismay at the failure of the “search for hidden correspondences explained by an organizing principle that determines both the character of the parts and the patterning of the whole” (Schapiro 59-60). As noted earlier, the repeated failure of such approaches to style has even led some scholars to propose the abandonment of the styleme altogether. Lang, for example, concludes that:

Stylemics is, then, a science manqué. The search for the styleme is the search for an object that points always to the fact of its own transience and contingency. (182)

Although it is unlikely to be the motivation, CAS theory seems to have been designed precisely in order to overcome the nature of the limitations imposed by traditional
representational/reductionist approaches to style as a collection of stylemes, the same approaches that have been criticized for “reducing style to a set of ‘do and don’t’ focused largely on correctness” (Corbett 626) and for viewing transience and contingency as obstacles to theorization (Juarrero). Miller and Page note that through the use of “traditional tools” of reduction we “have often been constrained to model systems in odd ways,” with a “focus on fairly static, homogeneous situations composed of either very few or infinitely many agents…that must confront a world in which time and space matter little.” They further state that theories of complex systems, on the other hand, “allow a much wider range of models to be explored,” wherein “any number of heterogeneous agents can interact in a dynamic environment subject to the limits of time and space” (30). Loewe, likewise, notes that we “treat style as a static list of properties possessed by, for example, certain writers or texts” (242) because we lack a theoretical structure that would accommodate dynamism and interaction and that would therefore allow us to “conceptualize style as a system of processes and relationships” (241). Scholars in the field of writing composition also note that because traditionalist approaches to composition are often a “conscious retreat… from complexity” (Doarin 173) they leave the scholar unable to “fully account for” the fact that a textual production system “endlessly fluctuates” (Doarin 143). On the other hand, systems theory is perfectly suited to tackling a multi-layered and dynamic environment. As scholars of writing composition note:

This is precisely the promise of systems theory: to map out the ways that different complex phenomena cohere as self-sustaining entities within a similarly complex environment. And surely, writing is complex, has interacting elements, and coheres in contexts that also are vastly complex. (Mays 565-6)
Furthermore, Miller and Page note that traditional models typically restrict our conceptualizations of agency to the binary options of all or nothing. As they put it, agents modeled traditionally tend to be “either extremely inept or remarkably prescient” (30). That is, agents are conceptualized as acting either in complete ignorance of their context or with unrealistically complete knowledge of their environment that often includes accurate foresight of the consequences of their actions. On the other hand, CAS conceptualization of agency, as I will argue, permits us to model action as adaptability dependent on partial (local) and contingent (situational) knowledge that is continually subject to revision. Here, the parallels to traditionalist versus (neo)sophistic approaches to textual production should, likewise, be obvious, as the Aristotelian focus on logically preplanned action can similarly be contrasted with the Gorgianic emphasis on kairotic improvisation.

Finally, systems language also provides a more exact way to define the problem of traditionalist approaches to style, via the cybernetics term *feedforward*, originally developed during the 1950s by I. A. Richards, whose research explored the intersection of cybernetics and rhetoric (Logan). According to the *OED*, feedforward is: “the use of calculated or presumed future states of a process to provide criteria for its adjustment or control; anticipatory control.” Loewe notes that “the aim of feedforward control is, at the outset, to prevent or reduce deviation from the system’s ideal state” and goes on to say that “in composition, style has often been theorized as a form of feedforward control, namely, the writer’s choices made with the aim of preventing or reducing deviation from a defined ideal state, such as standard academic discourse, concision, or vigorous prose” (247).
One obvious shortcoming of approaching style strictly as a form of feedforward control is that this approach leaves feedback management out of account. However, composition scholars who promote systems perspectives also note that traditionalist approaches to the process of textual production –wherein style is presumed to be choices made by an author- face an inherent impossibility of accounting for choices made by a creative agent and that, furthermore, even a creative agent cannot satisfactorily explain how or why specific choices are made during the process of putting a text together. This means that the “preceptive” (Murphy) model of style as a set of directives fails to account for the actual choices made by creative agents. Mays writes:

The multitude of elements involved in any writing decision exceed our capacity to satisfactorily account for them. As a quick example: when a person writes, he or she must choose relevant support, arguments, and quotations, as well as account for a myriad of stylistic, grammatical, and other choices. Once the writer makes the first of these choices, though, the effects ripple throughout the text, impacting other choices and creating new contexts with new choices that feed back upon the first. In each new decision there are innumerable factors the writer must consider, yet it would seem that even if the writer makes informed and thoughtful decisions, he or she cannot fully account for all of these cascading interconnected effects. (563)

Other scholars note that factors outside the author are, likewise, innumerable. For example, Kyburz states that “the number of influences” bearing on an author “is potentially infinite and therefore indescribable and uncertain” (510), again highlighting the impossibility of using feedforward control and logical preplanning as a sole means of explaining how elements of textual production are selected and combined to form a text. Yet other scholars claim that from a perspective such as the traditionalist one the very possibility of writing becomes “an absurdity” (Blakesley and Rickert 829).
Using systems nomenclature, therefore, provides a powerful and concise means of defining the problem of traditional approaches to style as: overly focused on static properties of systems and their components; ignoring the importance of dynamic interaction and resultant feedbacks between system components, systems, and metasystems; privileging feedforward control exclusively; and assuming that authorial agency is capable of such control because the agency of the author engages with a finite number of choices and because this agency includes accurate foresight of future system states.

While I hope, above, to have convinced the reader of the overall appropriateness of CAS in offering a possible conceptual framework for engagement with style, there remain two objectives to this overview. First, a review of the current state of system theory application to style within the field of communication criticism. Second, a brief overview of systems terminology necessary to discuss CAS and style.

**CAS and Style in Communication Criticism**

Although systems theory has had a place in the field of communication since the middle of the 20th century (Almaney; Beck), its application has been most prominent in organizational communication (Chin). Additionally, both complexity theory and, therefore, the language of complex adaptive systems has been very slow to make inroads within the field of rhetorical studies (Lowe; Folk;). For example, writing only about two years ago (2017), Mays states that “for rhetoric and composition scholars, then, complexity is an exciting new development, with important ramifications to be sorted through, and with
continuously unfolding potential to transform the way we study and teach writing in all contexts” (560).

However, during the past decade the language of complexity has finally begun to be absorbed into communication criticism, following earlier developments in related disciplines (c. f. Taylor), such as cultural studies and composition studies, and often buttressed by related metaphors of the network\(^9\) (c. f. Hawk). The language of complexity (Ciliers), especially, has prompted numerous developments and reevaluations of traditional communication and rhetorical concepts (Urry), such as the rhetorical situation (Hawk) and intersubjectivity (Seas). Therefore, although habitually avoided by critics, style is sometimes included in the description of a larger system or process under discussion, such as the process of composition (Folk; Lowe) or the role of the social in textual production (Brummett, *Rhetoric*), a concern still strongly ingrained post the social turn, as noted in Chapter 1. Despite what some critics have already called “the complexity turn” (Urry), however, the terminology of complex adaptive systems has not been applied to reconceptualizing style directly. Nor has there been any effort to develop a theory of style or connect existing theories of style to the notion of style as skill or quality. Therefore, the available literature on which to base a proposal for complex adaptive systems as a viable approach to style is currently restricted to two loosely connected proposals for reconsidering the concept.

First, there is Drew Loewe’s 2004 proposal for a “cybernetic model” of composition style, based on general system theory metaphors. Loewe notes that current

\(^9\) Network science and graph theory are often used to study the complexity of systems.
approaches to style are held back by their static conceptualization of style as a collection of stylemes and proposes systems theory as a way towards a more dynamic model of style. With respect to systems theory, Loewe states that “This body of theory provides both a framework and a vocabulary for describing how, through exchanges of information, members of a system interact with and affect each other dynamically.” He further proposes that “this body of theory could point the way toward the recursive and holistic conversation our discipline should be having about composition style” (241). However, in line with the post-social turn scholarship already described above, Loewe’s focus remains largely on the sociocultural interactions inherent in textual production, restricting his system to what he calls “the triad” of text, author, and audience. He therefore argues that “systems theory can help us to develop a better theoretical model of prose style because it can help us to account for the reciprocal interrelationships among writers, texts, and audiences that we describe when we talk about style” (242). Despite Loewe avoiding a more direct engagement with style in favor of describing the sociocultural dynamics of text and context, however, his proposal does offer at least some support to the argument that systems theory can be effectively utilized in augmenting our current understanding of textual production. For example, Loewe notes that “each member of the triad is itself a system with its own internal dynamics; in turn, each member affects the other members and the ‘metasystem’ as a whole” (248). The notion of system nesting - that is the openness of systems to other systems and their resultant intermeshing – is one strength of systems theory as a conceptual tool, in that it allows us, when necessary, to evaluate system components as systems or multiple interacting systems as (meta)systems, without having to move away from basic
systems language or having to change modes of analysis and description. As I will argue later in this chapter, there is great utility in leveraging the ability of systems language to freely move between levels of analysis, for example in being able to freely move between the concepts of author as system, author as a component of an author-text system, and author(-text) as a component of larger social systems. Other scholars, likewise, note that conceptualizing writing as a ‘‘writing system…’’ allows a recognition of and emphasis on the expansive universe of writing, but as well it allows us to zoom in very closely on intricate complexities within static texts—something that many approaches to writing complexity do not” (Mays 561). Additionally, Loewe draws our attention to the way authorial agency is reconceptualized when we model textual production as an author-system intermeshing with a text-system to become an author-text-system. “In the shifting perspectives of these processes,” says Loewe, “information loops through the writer; she is part of the overall system she observes” (250). This consequence of systems theory utilization will, likewise, become of service later in this chapter, when I draw the connections between metic intelligence and the differences in mediation and control on the part of the author during textual production.

The second recent proposal for a reconsideration of style connects to complex adaptive systems via the author’s emphasis on complexity and dynamic interaction, offering further support for the viability of the current project. This is Barry Brummett’s 2008 A Rhetoric of Style, in which the author seeks to introduce complexity to the social context of textual production, in order to be able to explore the relationships between the text and four additional categories under his consideration: aesthetic rationales, stylistic
homologies, imaginary communities, and market contexts. A prime example of post-social turn focus on culture, Brummett’s book sets up what one reviewer calls "a vast global system of culture and communication" (Butler 208) in order to support his argument that style is "perhaps the major...way in which cultures are now formed" (Brummett; Rhetoric xii; emphasis original). Although Brummett’s work does not relate to the language of CAS, and despite his work being yet another example of the lasting influence of the social turn (and the lasting influence of Ewen’s approach to cultural style as the hollow veneer of appearance), Brummett does draw attention to the utility in conceptualizing style as complex, at least in that when doing so the critic can better focus on the dynamics of interaction, rather than on static properties of a system. Additionally, Brummett invites others to augment his collection of categories and subcategories, thus making the present undertaking one such possible addition to style’s complexity.

Selected CAS Terminology

Because the focus of this chapter will be to connect the pre-Socratic terminology with the language of CAS, we first need to familiarize ourselves with a few general terms used to describe systems, system components, and system behavior. Readers already familiar with general systems language can move directly on to the next section, where I begin to outline how textual production is described from a CAS perspective.

This brief review of terminology follows Axelrod and Cohen: As described above, a system denotes an aggregation of components. There are two kinds of system components: artifacts and agents. An artifact is largely passive and is defined as any resource that can be accessed by an agent. However, artifacts have the ability to respond
or interact with agents, despite lacking the ability to initiate such interactions. An agent is more active and possesses the ability to initiate interactions with artifacts and other agents. Agents also differ from artifacts in that agents are often in possession of conditional action patterns or *strategies*. Together, agents, artifacts, and strategies produce recurring *interaction patterns*. Agents, artifacts, and strategies are collected into *populations*. *Systems* contain one or more of these populations. Agents, artifacts, strategies, and interaction patterns can be grouped by *type*, which is any characteristic that the group members have in common. One very important type of interaction pattern is *selection*, a process whereby an agent causes the frequency of a particular type of agent or strategy within a system to increase or decrease. Selection is guided by *performance measures*, which determine the increase or decrease of agent or strategy types. Finally, *variety* or *diversity* denotes the level of heterogeneity among population types within a system.

Because textual production falls under the subcategory of creative systems it is necessary to highlight an important distinction between *creative* and *evolutionary* systems. This difference has to do with *interim viability*. An evolutionary system, such as a living organism, has to satisfy interim viability at every evolutionary stage. Otherwise, the evolutionary system fails to evolve any further and collapses. Therefore, selection processes in evolutionary systems are constantly constrained for the sake of ensuring continuous system viability. A creative system, on the other hand, can be guided by a creative agent or designer through unlimited exploration and selection steps without having to satisfy interim viability, as long as the designer is able to achieve viability at a later stage of system configuration. Because in a creative system “interim viability is largely
irrelevant” (Page 124), creative systems have a significant advantage over evolutionary systems in that a creative system always has a larger range of strategies and selection options available for exploration at any stage of its development. As I will argue below, the exploration of possibilities thus becomes a major preoccupation of a stylist seeking to produce a text. This increased ability to explore possibilities also results in an additional (and significant) problem-solving advantage of creative systems: the ability to leverage a greater diversity of types than evolutionary systems (Page; John Miller). This property of creative systems will become important when I discuss style and system plasticity below, as well as style and heterogeneity management at the conclusion of this chapter. Below, I will discuss how CAS terminology and the pre-Socratic terminology of the prior chapter can function together.

**Hippia and CAS: Mediation in Lieu of Control**

The central concept of the previous chapter has been metic intelligence or *metis*, which acts as an umbrella term for the skills and qualities of a stylist and which enables the exploration of additional components contained within the metic skillset. I also described these selected aspects of the metic skillset as follows: *Hippia* represents a subset of metic intelligence that relies on the mediation of forces and elements that are not subject to control and thus enables agency in a world of chance and uncertainty. *Mimesis* is the imitative and transformational skill that also entails the feeling and perceiving of these forces and elements. *Kairos* was described as effective participation and intervention in an emerging situation, while *aiole* was described as the swiftness and mental fluidity required to “catch” this kairos of emergence. *Pantoie* relates to multiplicity as the skill of applying
breadth of knowledge, rather than depth, enabling the stylist to bring multiple areas of expertise to bear on the process of textual production. Poikilia describes both the shifting mental attitude of a stylist and the shifting iridescence – the instability and multiplicity - of a styled text. Finally, eurythmia is conceptualized as the “flow” or “harmony” of a well-styled text.

We can now discuss how the above pre-Socratic terminology fits within a CAS framework, as well as the ways in which these two perspectives on textual production augment each other. Despite the two millennia that separate the two worldviews, the metic perspective and the CAS perspective share general similarities in outlook that suggest an inherent compatibility, in that both perspectives focus on engaging randomness, non-linear unpredictability, and the mediation of feedbacks. As Detienne and Vernant note, metis "is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic" (3-4). Metic intelligence sees a world of touche and seeks a partial and participatory agency in reconciling the winds of chance with the captain’s ship by the oblique positioning of sails. CAS theory, likewise, focuses on the dynamic and only partially predictable interaction of variables, both inside and outside a given system, a constantly shifting contextual terrain referred to as a rugged or dancing landscape that severely limits control and allows only partial and participatory agency. Even the metaphors of the two approaches – metic and CAS – align here, as hippia, or the skill of the rider in reconciling horse and terrain, perfectly matches the metaphors of rugged and dancing landscapes in CAS, while
both perspectives use weather phenomena as quintessential examples of the world of *touche*, which dances like the surface of the sea.

As regards the production of a text, seen from a CAS perspective textual production centers around an author-system becoming an author-text-system, in which the author then becomes a *creative agent* (Corneli, et al.; Pease, et al.; Seifert, et al.). Examined from a metic perspective, this process also entails the transformation of the author as the author takes on this new role. Combining the perspectives, we can say that the rhetor puts on a new mask and becomes a creative agent within a new creative system. An example of how the compatibility of metic and CAS points of view inform each other, this combination has the immediate benefit of dispelling the overly negative post-Platonic connotations of “shifty,” *poikilos* rhetoricians as disingenuous, “masked” dissimulators, since the metic transformation of the author-system into an author-text-system becomes inherent in the act of textual production. As discussed above, however, another significant implication of this transformation is that authorial agency becomes aligned with the mediatory skill of *hippia* as the author’s creative agency becomes limited to a partial and participatory role – the role of a captain guiding his ship through stormy waters or the role of a skilled rider manipulating her horse over rugged terrain. There is a degree of control and predictive ability in a creative agent’s interaction with the text. Feedforward decisions are certainly a part of textual production. However, effective feedback management is, likewise, a part of textual production, one that ultimately affects the reconciliation of textual elements into a unified whole. The metic skillset of the previous chapter, therefore, takes on added import for the stylist wishing to combine parts into a whole and produce a text. To sum up, at this
general level both the CAS and the metic perspectives show similar utility in augmenting the shortcomings of reductionist approaches that tend to privilege logically preplanned feedforward control too exclusively.

**Metic Intelligence and CAS: Plasticity, Sagacity, and Rate of Adaptation**

There are a number of more specific terms from CAS that bear on the issue of style, and combining these with the (neo)sophistic perspective outlined earlier will enable even more of the gaps in reductionist approaches to be filled. By doing so, we will thereby provide additional means to discuss style as skill and quality.

As a creative system evolves, three qualities of the system become paramount to textual development. The first is *plasticity*. System plasticity denotes the ability of a given system to transform itself or parts of itself. (Note the (mi)metic emphasis on transformation.) Scholars note that the plasticity of a system enables the system or “entities in the system to explore new functional possibilities,” which results in a system’s increased “ability to explore the set of the possible” (Page 143). As noted above, the ability to explore possibilities is a major strength of creative CAS. Therefore, when an author styles a text into being, exploring the set of the possible becomes the chief preoccupation of her role as creative agent, as she seeks to combine pigments into colors, transform passion into a series of musical pitches, arrange the positions of sculpted figures, or find 150 ways to transmute the phrase “Your letter pleased me greatly.” System plasticity is, therefore, what makes a system able to evolve at all, as a system with zero plasticity is effectively frozen in place and, therefore, unable to explore any possibilities that would allow the system to transform any part of itself (Helfat, et al.; Teece). System plasticity is directly dependent on what
systems theory calls rate of adaptation, which can be defined simply as “the rate at which those explorations occur” (Page 143). System rate of adaptation, then, becomes roughly equal to “the ease with which an innovator can maneuver in the space of the possible” (143). In order to effectively function as a creative agent, then, an author must maintain the highest rate of adaptation possible, which, in turn, keeps her creative system plasticity at its highest possible level and allows the system to ultimately transform into novel – and hopefully more desirable - states of configuration.

The way in which systems language here parallels my prior description of metic intelligence as adaptive and transformational/transformative should immediately be apparent to the reader (and will be expanded upon below). However, as more recent CAS research has begun to explore the autopoetic dimensions of creative systems (Iba), a third term in systems theory has entered usage only during the past five years, called system sagacity. This term is closely tied to both system plasticity and rate of adaptation (and thus metic intelligence) in that system sagacity specifically delineates the ability of a system to not only maintain viability in the face of the unpredictable, but to take advantage of the randomness of rugged and dancing landscapes to effect system transformation. System sagacity, therefore, increases system plasticity by accelerating system rate of adaptation, which system sagacity accomplishes by enabling a more effective exploitation of resources in a dynamic, emergent environment. Like metic intelligence, system sagacity denotes not one skill, but a skillset, one that enables a system to leverage chance occurrences by recognizing the value and opportunity in the unpredictable randomness of the system’s context and finding ways to reprocess these chance occurrences in ways useful to the
system’s development. In AI research dealing with the creative abilities of computational systems, this process already has a long scholarly history, dating back to the early 1990’s (Wills and Kolodner) and is described as serendipitous discovery. One way to define serendipitous discovery is as "a consequence of recombining observations into unusual but meaningful associations" (Rond and Morley 3), a process dependent on an “underlying ability to recognize opportunities” (7). Again, we can here note the strong parallel to descriptions of metic intelligence as opportunistic and effective at capitalizing on chance occurrences, as well as the emphasis on (mi)metic skills of transformation. While the notion of serendipitous discovery is well-established in the field of AI, however, system sagacity has only recently been proposed as a means of inquiry into specifically what kinds of abilities allow systems to recognize opportunities, as well as what kinds of skills allow a system to act on these perceived opportunities in order to produce serendipitous discoveries. Pease, et al., the group of scholars who originally coined the term in 2013, describe sagacity as a skill with multiple components: “This skill involves an open [or “prepared”] mind (an ability to take advantage of the unpredictable); ability to focus-shift; appropriate reasoning techniques; and ability to recognize value in the discovery” (66). The way that system sagacity enables serendipitous discovery is, in turn, described as follows:

Computational serendipitous discovery occurs when a) within a system with a prepared mind, a previously uninteresting serendipity trigger arises partially due to chance, and is reclassified as interesting by the system; and b) when the system, by processing this re-evaluated trigger and background information together with abductive, analogical or conceptual-blending reasoning techniques, obtains a new result that is considered useful both by the system and by external sources. (Pease, et al. 66)
I want to argue that the above process shares strong conceptual linkage with the metic skills of textual (re)mediation described in the previous chapter. In the below sections I will propose and expand on a grouping of terms that can highlight possible linkages between old and new terminologies. As I will argue, in combining sagacity with the concepts of plasticity and rate of adaptation, CAS theory provides the necessary theoretical framework in which the metic skillset can be resituated and in which the components of the metic skillset can, likewise, be joined with a robust theoretical construct. Below, I will expand on how the process of serendipitous discovery works within CAS, how other concepts belonging to CAS theory support and augment the notion of sagacity, as well as how additional ancient terminology fits within this contemporary theoretical framework to further describe the stylistic abilities necessary for textual production.

**Aiole, Poikilia, and CAS: Prepared Mind 1, Focus Shift, Simulated Annealing**

So far, I have argued that CAS theory and metis intersect at sagacity, plasticity, and rate of adaptation and that combining the three concepts with the skillset of metic intelligence will help explain what sort of stylistic skills are required to produce texts. I also explained how system sagacity increases system plasticity by accelerating the system rate of adaptation, which system sagacity accomplishes by enabling a more effective exploitation of resources in a dynamic, emergent environment. Below, I will further elaborate on how sagacity accelerates rates of adaptation, as well as explain how system sagacity is, in turn, enabled by components of the metic skillset: *aiole, poikilia, mimesis,* and *pantoie,* thus combining the old and new terminologies to describe the abilities of the stylist.
The first component of system sagacity is a prepared mind, a term attributed to Pasteur’s famous quote that chance favors the prepared mind. Within CAS theory Rond and Morley define prepared mind as "the combination of preparedness and readiness to seize unexpected opportunity" (4), what another group of scholars calls “opportunistic assimilation” (Seifert, et al. 65). Pease, et al. note that a prepared mind is closely tied with the ability of a system to focus-shift, which they define as “a radical change in the discoverer’s evaluation of what is interesting” or “a reclassification of signal-to-noise” (65) by the system. They further state:

In cases where there is a focus, this might be abandoned in favour of a more interesting or promising direction…. In computational terms we could model a focus-shift by enabling a system to “change its mind” that is, to re-evaluate an object as interesting, which it had previously judged to be uninteresting. (65)

Other computational creativity scholars point out that “the focus shift is a central necessary condition [of the creative process], in which the system reevaluates or recontextualizes something that had been given a low evaluation score, and subsequently finds it to be of increased value” (Corneli, et al. 1). A mind prepared to focus shift is, therefore, both the first step and a central necessary condition in capitalizing on chance (kairotic) opportunities or serendipity triggers, since a mind fully committed to a predefined goal not only refuses to focus-shift but is also likely to classify presented chance opportunities to shift as mere noise and therefore also likely to ignore them (or not perceive them in the first place). As scholars note, focus-shifting represents the ability to “take consequential note of anomalies and arrive at unanticipated discoveries” (Corneli, et al. 7), an ability that other scholars describe as “serendipitous recognition” (Wills and Kolodner). The parallel between chance occurrences and kairos is so obvious here that little
elaboration should be required. Pease et al. write that serendipity triggers are always at least partially chance occurrences: “The serendipity trigger is unlikely, unexpected, unsought, accidental, random, surprising, coincidental, arises independently of, and before, the result” (66). There is, therefore, a very strong parallel between the ability to focus-shift and what, in the previous chapter, I described as *aiole* or the skill/quality of mental swiftness and fluidity that enables metis to be “more swift” than kairos. Detienne and Vernant write that “It is metis which, overtaking the kairos, however fleeting it may be, catches it by surprise” (16). Both ancient Greek and contemporary CAS terminologies are here addressing the way one seizes kairotic moments to gain advantage via a mind always prepared to focus-shift when a novel direction or opportunity presents itself.

In artificial CAS experiments, systems can be endowed with aiole via the introduction of randomness into system algorithms. Pease et al. write that “the value of carefully controlled randomness in CC and AI systems is well-established.” They note, also, that “introducing randomness into search has also proved profitable in other systems” (66), here referring to a CAS process known as *simulated annealing*. Simulated annealing is simply "the intentional introduction of... errors in the search process," which is done in order "to overcome the usual traps of rugged landscapes" (John Miller 89). Miller goes on to note that “the addition of noise, at least in the short term, tends to lessen performance.” However, he states that "on more rugged landscapes it results in much better performance overall, as it allows [systems] to escape low-lying local optima” (89-90). Put simply, simulated annealing directs a system or an agent within a system to add a small amount of random, undirected behavior to the system’s or agent’s task. Rather than traveling in a
straight line towards its goal, the system or agent will deviate from its path (at a predefined rate), in order to explore additional options and opportunities that such deviation may “serendipitously” present.

In the set of ancient terms explored in the previous chapter, simulated annealing sits very close to the term poikilos, which is derived from poikilia and which refers to one who possesses a kind of mental shiftiness. “Shimmering sheen and shifting movement are so much a part of the nature of métis that when the epithet poikilos is applied to an individual it is enough to indicate that he is a wiley [sic] one, a man of cunning, full of inventive ploys (poikiloboulos) and tricks of every kind” (Detienne and Vernant 19). Detienne and Vernant also note the shifting instability of mental poikilia, writing that “what is poikilos… is never the same as itself, oudepotê tauton” (18-9). The notion of poikilia as the shimmering, random shifting of a metic mind and the concept of aiole as the restlessness, swiftness, and fluidity of a metic mind can thus combine with focus-shifting and simulated annealing to describe the way in which a creative agent discovers chance occurrences within the agent’s environment by constantly exploring this environment as part of its creative behavior.

Simulated annealing is also an example of the way that the old and new terminologies augment each other, as the concept throws much needed light on the somewhat mystically presented Sophistic idea that metis is “more swift” than kairos and is able to “catch” or “surprise” kairos. Because simulated annealing means that the creative agent is always exploring opportunities off the beaten path, the agent actively increases the number of “accidental” encounters with random artifacts in its environment. In a sense, the
agent is “more swift” than the kairos the agent “catches” because the agent is “there” first, via preemptively randomized locomotive vectors. Encountering significantly more chance occurrences via constant deviation from protocol, a creative agent always manages to “surprise” kairotic opportunities, since the rate of adaptation – the exploration of opportunities for transformation – greatly increases via constantly fluctuating explorations of a constantly fluctuating terrain through restless movement in random directions.

Simulated annealing is named after the metallurgical process (another province of *metis*) of heating up metals and letting them cool off slowly in order to effect molecular alignment and increase the durability of the resultant alloy. The key to annealing is the slow cooling off process that allows the molecules within the cooling metal to align directionally. In simulated annealing the analog of this cooling off period is a slow reduction of the randomness in the behavior of the creative agent as the system evolves.

John Miller describes the process in algorithmic AI CAS as follows:

> Early on in the process, the temperature [randomness] is kept high, allowing the algorithm to proceed normally [including random moves]. As time passes, we cool the search, lessening the chance of accepting fitness-reducing moves. Given enough time and a carefully controlled annealing schedule, the system will lock on into areas of higher fitness. (222)

Simulated annealing, then, also provides a way to mediate between the competing tendencies of the post-Aristotelian and the (neo)sophistic approaches to textual production, where the former emphasizes feedforward design and the latter creative exploration. Pease, et al. note that “there is tension between systematicity and serendipity, and it may be the case that incorporating serendipity into a creative system inhibits its ability to produce the desired artefacts” (69). Simulated annealing resolves this tension by demonstrating the
advantage - and therefore the real-world necessity - of combining systematicity and serendipity in the actions of a creative agent, while also drawing our attention to the perils of conceptualizing agent roles in too static a fashion when theorizing authorial agency. In order to be effective, a creative agent has to be able to move freely between the competing directives of systematic preplanned action and random exploratory behavior. Iba notes:

\[
\text{The [autopoetic] process does not follow deterministic laws, but it also does not happen at random. Rather, it includes contingency. (Iba 6617)}
\]

The inclusion of contingency in conceptualizing the autopoetic process once again connects issues of textual production to metic intelligence and its ability to strategically shapeshift. The necessity of moving freely between competing (and possibly incommensurable) acts of random exploration and systematic planning also reminds us that the metic multiplicity of a creative agent requires the wearing of multiple masks, as the agent oscillates between feedforward control and feedback mediation.

Additionally, however, a creative agent must also be able to recognize the appropriate time to cool off, that is to cease exploratory activity and finalize the task at hand. Otherwise, the exploratory phase never ends, and the system never reaches its final, usable state. Here, metic intelligence has the potential to augment CAS theory, which currently provides no theoretical explanation as to how a creative agent determines the appropriate time to end the exploratory phase of system transformation, what CAS theory calls the \textit{burn-in} period. Scholars of CAS note that “our ability to succinctly characterize the burn-in process at a theoretical level is quite limited” (John Miller 223). This limitation is closely tied to the necessity of external evaluation of results and the current inability of CAS theory to guarantee optimal outcomes. Miller explains that “adaptive agents are not
perfectly able to seek out, and remain on, the best solutions to the problems they face,” concluding that “while adaptive agents tend to do well, they are not perfect” (221). And that “[potentially] lower fitness is a necessary evil that prevents the system from getting stuck” (222). Pease, et al., likewise, note that results achieved by a creative system have to be “evaluated externally” because “measuring the value of a system’s results is a well-known problem in CC [computational creativity]” (66). Below, I will argue that the language of metic intelligence – especially the concept of *pantoie* - can fill some of these conceptual gaps vis a vis the judgment required of a creative agent when negotiating the dancing landscapes of textual production.

**Pantoie and CAS: Prepared Mind 2**

Pease, et al. write that the ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities requires that the prepared mind of a sagacious system also contain “previous experiences, background knowledge, a store of unsolved problems, skills and (optionally) a current focus or goal” (66), highlighting the necessity of experience and background knowledge to the skill of being able to recognize opportunities as they emerge. This aspect of the prepared mind parallels the descriptions of metic ability to capitalize on chance via a store of experience, as in Certeau’s summary of metis as a combination of “anticipation, mental agility, a sense of the best chance, all kinds of supplementary skills, and a certain maturity of experience” (36.. More specifically, the metic skillset described in the previous chapter also contains a subset of abilities described using the prefix *pan/poly*, which fall under the designation *pantoie*, applied to a metic agent as possessing “a *techne pantoie*, an art of many facets, knowledge of general application” (Detienne and Vernant 19; italics original).
As I argued in the previous chapter, *pantoie* describes the breadth of knowledge and experience necessary to style a text into being. In light of the connection drawn by CAS theorists between a prepared mind and the ability to perceive opportunities, *pantoie* takes on an added import as part of textual production for three reasons.

First, in order to be “prepared” to recognize opportunities, a creative agent must have sufficient breadth of experience to recognize – that is perceive – signal within noise. Here, increased experience provides increased familiarity with a heterogenous environment and allows the *polymechanos* to recognize an increased number of triggers as potentially serendipitous, what Wills and Kolodner refer to as “serendipitous recognition.”

Second, the same maturity of experience aids the judgment of the creative agent when the agent oscillates between the competing tasks of random exploration and systematic pursuit of the agent’s goal(s). Because, as noted above, CAS theory currently lacks the ability to provide judgment parameters related to the burn-in process - vis a vis the amount of random behavior allotted to a creative agent, the amount of time allotted to this behavior, and the intensity and duration of the cool-down period – the skill of *pantoie* neatly fills this gap in contemporary theoretical discourse by providing the critic a way to discuss the bases on which such judgment calls are made during the process of textual production.

Finally, there is an additional import to the skill of *pantoie* and the notion of a prepared mind having as varied and mature an experience as possible. This has to do with the store of artifacts and strategies present within an author-system as it transforms into an author-text-system. It should be obvious that the more varied the experience of an author,
the more artifacts and strategies are contained in the author-system and, therefore, available to the author as creative agent. However, the diversity of populations within an author-system also impacts the “bridging” (Pease, et al.) or processing techniques of a creative agent seeking to employ system sagacity to effect transformation of the author-text system by maintaining a useful rate of adaptation and system plasticity. Below, I will explain how this diversity of experience connects with mimesis and how it aids in the process of serendipitous discovery by increasing system sagacity and enabling a higher rate of adaptation. First, however, I will describe how mimesis and the transformational nature of metic intelligence can be situated within CAS theory.

**Metis, Mimesis and CAS: Mutation, Inversion, Transfer, and Recombination**

Once a sagacious system has recognized a trigger as being serendipitous and completed focus-shifting its prepared mind, the system has to then process the trigger in such a way as to make the trigger useful to the system and complete the process of “opportunistic assimilation” (Seifert, et al. 65). Essentially, the system has to convert opportunity into asset or resource into system artifact. This step of the process is described by Pease, et al. as *bridging* between trigger and result. They write:

**Bridge:** The techniques which enable one to go from the trigger to the result. These include reasoning techniques such as abduction…., analogical reasoning, conceptual-blending, genetic algorithms and automated theory formation techniques. (65)

Other scholars note that bridging or “the path and set of mechanisms used to get from the triggering event to some result… may have many steps, and may feature chance elements” (Corneli, et al. 5). Because bridging techniques thus revolve around transformation (of a trigger into a useful result or potential asset into system artifact), this
part of the serendipitous discovery process, once again, can be said to be the province of metic intelligence, which specializes in transformation and which also contains mimetic techniques within its creative skillset. The close relationship between mimesis as imitative and metis as transformative is noted by Worton and Still, who remind us that: “Imitation... implies and depends upon a process of transformation” (6–7). In the previous chapter I delineated the connection of metis with mimesis and cited several examples of rhetorical training that sought to develop (mi)metic transformative skills in a rhetor. This training focused on mediation and reconciliation of disparate elements of textual production and on converting the challenges of incompatibility - or even incommensurability – between media into creative prompts, much like the bridging phase of serendipitous discovery in CAS. Examples included writing exercises, the study of poetry, imitating prior works, and translation exercises, where “the slippage between the original and the translation… provides an opportunity for invention” (Terrill 306-7). The intersection of metis and mimesis thus aligns with the transformative skills on which the process of serendipitous discovery depends in order to act on the recognition of a potentially serendipitous trigger. Below, I will describe what specific actions this skillset may enable.

The most general term for transformative action in CAS theory is mutation. Page writes that whether a creative agent introduces alteration within a system "by accident or by intent," this "change can be thought of as mutation" (85). In relation to textual production, then, mutation is simply the introduction of any change to the text-system by the author, even in (serendipitous) error. While the general parallel of mutation to metic intelligence as protean is, again, fairly obvious, there are more specific correspondences
between metis, mimesis, and CAS bridging techniques. The first of these is what CAS theory calls inversion. The simplest transformative process to understand, inversion is theorized in CAS simply as a “mutation.... that takes a particular form” (Page 87). Because inversion is a relatively simple process to replicate mechanically, it often features in AI simulations of creative systems, where it provides an easily programmable transformational skill for the AI to use. Likewise, inversion is an oft-cited transformative technique of metic intelligence, which scholars describe as "playing around with negativity or with inversion and reversal of symbols in word or action" (Koepping 192). In rhetorical training, for example, several figures are created via inversions of various kinds, the most common being chiasmus and antimetabole.

The next two types of bridging processes depend directly on the combination of metic transformative skills and mimetic imitative ability. In CAS terminology these two processes are described as recombination and transfer.

Recombination is a specific type of mutation in which parts from disparate resources are reassembled into a new whole and represents "classic examples of cross-fertilization" or "creating a new type" (Page 88). Recombination affords a system more flexibility to opportunistically assimilate resources in its environment because it allows the system to assimilate as little or as much of any resource(s) the system finds opportune and to discard whatever part of an artifact it does not find useful, as long as the system can find a way to combine the artifact with other artifacts within the system’s population. One common example of such partial assimilation and recombination is authorial influence(s). Indeed, Page cites exactly this kind of case to illustrate how a musician may be theorized
as a product of multiple musical influences, each of which may contribute - in only a small way - to the musician’s “process of recombination of taking bits and pieces from other artists” (88). Note here the exact parallel to my – and other scholars’ – description of the mimetic training process as transforming the student into “a hybrid entity composed in part of the discourses she has memorized” (Terrill 306).

Transfer is more simple than recombination – and may be considered as a special case of recombination - in that during transfer only one artifact (or part of one artifact) is assimilated by the system and “transferred” into a new context. This process, again, depends on the unique combination of metis and mimesis described in the previous chapter as possessing a special talent for imitation, duplication, and hybridity, as in the process of transfer "one entity" simply "copies part of another" (Page 90). Page further notes that in the realm of product design, transfer is one of the most common forms of innovation. As he states, a cupholder, for example, can be easily transferred from a car to a boat by imitating the center console of the former when designing the latter. Similarly, the appropriation of a catchphrase for political or advertising purposes would constitute an example of transfer as a specific case of recombination.

Because recombination (including transfer) requires that newly discovered assets be combined with existing artifacts, the success of this bridging process is dependent on – and therefore inherently limited by - the diversity of types available within a system. Unlike mutation, which is free to explore any potential means of introducing alteration to any part of a system, recombination is therefore theorized as both a “more intelligent” and a “less innovative" process in that it "can only include what's already in the [system] population"
That is, recombination is more intelligent in that it seeks to capitalize on the prior successes and robustness of artifacts to be recombined, but less innovative in that it is limited to recombining existing artifacts or parts of artifacts. Therefore, the single greatest variable ensuring sufficient system sagacity, plasticity, and rate of adaptation for recombination to take place is the richness of preexisting system resources, as a system without a store of artifacts would have nothing with which to combine potential assets. This brings us back to the third reason that pantoie is crucial to styling a text into being. As noted above, pantoie represents the aspect of metic intelligence described as a varied store of experience, a techne pantoie, “an art of many facets” (Detienne and Vernant 19). Combining, again, the terminology of metic intelligence with that of CAS therefore allows us to say that pantoie aids mimesis through greater diversity of type present in an author-system and available for recombination. Additionally, my previous argument regarding the necessity of mature and varied (metic) experience to aid in both perceiving opportunities and evaluating potential outcomes becomes further reinforced by CAS positioning (mi)metic transformative processes as an important means of maintaining system plasticity.

**Summary and Discussion**

In this chapter I argued that the language of complex adaptive systems is especially appropriate as a corrective to the traditionalist trends in communication scholarship and that this language can be used in conjunction with selected pre-Socratic terminology to augment our critical understanding of style and allow us to approach style as a set of skills necessary to textual production. I drew numerous parallels between the CAS perspective
and the perspective of metic intelligence in engaging a non-linear dynamic context as a creative agent that relies on the partial agency of feedback moderation in addition to feedforward design, thus filling in the gap left by traditionalist conceptualizations of style as exclusively (or nearly so) privileging feedforward planning. I further argued that because system plasticity is the most important property of a creative system (without which textual production cannot proceed), any skill or ability possessed by a creative agent that can improve (or at least maintain) system plasticity is crucial to the possibility of styling a text into its final form. I then outlined a possible set of connections between the terminology of metic intelligence and selected CAS theory concepts said to enable system plasticity, such as system rate of adaptation, system sagacity, and the process of serendipitous discovery, as well as prominent subcomponents of system sagacity, such as the prepared mind, focus-shifting, and simulated annealing. I also drew important connections between the bridging processes intrinsic to serendipitous discovery in CAS – mutation, inversion, transfer, and recombination - and mimesis as a subcomponent of metic intelligence that similarly enables transformation and creative growth in a system. Finally, I argued that CAS theory and metic intelligence can be made to inform and augment each other. For example, CAS theory provides much needed clarification to the metic concept of *aiole* and kairotic spatiotemporal targeting, while the metic concept of *pantoie* provides a way to ameliorate the current CAS limitations in dealing with judgement and evaluative criteria used by a creative agent when styling a text into being.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

“The fact remains that we don't have a suitable vocabulary for discussing an important class of widely distributed skills” (Hariman, Political Style 52).

This dissertation offers one possible way to move beyond current theoretical limitations inherent in the dominant tradition of rhetorical approaches to the question of style. As I demonstrated, the treatment of style in Aristotle’s Rhetoric continues to impose theoretical limits on current rhetorical scholarship, despite current consensus among rhetorical scholars as to the inadequacy of Aristotelian approach to style, as well as the more general inadequacy of representationalist theories of language. I therefore argued that when addressing the question(s) of style, communication criticism continues to be held back by a conceptualization of style that reduces style to a set of devices or “mannerisms” used for aesthetic ingratiation or to a set of directives – often haphazard and without theoretical underpinning - for the use of such devices. This conceptualization of style lacks the depth and explanatory power that theories should provide. Therefore, I proposed two initial steps towards an alternative conceptualization of style. The first step looked backwards, beyond Aristotle, and to style's origins in the pre-Socratic period. I therefore examined pre-Socratic terminology that, I claimed, could provide a way to discourse about style as a quality or skill. The second step looked forward, beyond Aristotle, and to more recent theoretical advances available to communication critics today. I suggested that the language of complex adaptive systems (CAS) can, likewise, enable the contemporary critic to treat style as a skill or quality. Finally, I proposed that the two alternatives to the
Aristotelian tradition can be combined to inform each other and that the combination of the two terminologies can provide a further way to discourse about style as skill or quality. I also argued that combining the two terminologies has additional benefits, in that systems theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between systems theory and style. I therefore suggested that combining the two alternatives to Aristotle can enrich our understanding of the concept, while accounting for both the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.

In this chapter, I offer a summary of my findings and arguments, along with the significance and implications of these findings and arguments. Finally, I turn to the limitations of the current project, as well as possible directions for future research.

The Problem of Style

“Recalcitrant notions relating to… concepts assigned to the scrap heap of history (ala style) by currently prevailing approaches need to be questioned” (Folk 206).

In Science and the Modern World, A. N. Whitehead cautions scholars that when “criticizing the philosophy of an epoch” one’s attention should not be solely directed “to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend” because “there will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose.” He goes on to say that these assumptions “appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming.” Yet, these unstated assumptions can only enable “a certain limited number of types of
philosophic systems” (49-50) In defining the problem of style, therefore, this dissertation initially focused on the way that the Aristotelian thread running through the rhetorical tradition functioned as the unstated assumption that has simultaneously influenced and limited critical engagement with style. As other scholars have already noted, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* became the foundation for over two millennia of rhetorical scholarship, positioning “all subsequent rhetorical theory” as “but a series of responses to issues raised by that central work” (Gross and Waltzer ix) The initial focus of this dissertation was, therefore, on delineating the specific ways in which unstated Aristotelian assumptions vis a vis style and language prevent contemporary criticism from building a more useful theory of style. This focus was further justified by the fact that more recent rhetorical scholarship has largely disavowed the representationalist and rationalist assumptions that had previously enabled Aristotle’s communication theory to thrive, thus producing what I described as a disconnect between stated and unstated assumptions in contemporary rhetorical criticism.

Additionally, this dissertation highlights two more unstated academic assumptions bearing on the concept of style. The first assumption is the philosophical dominance of the object (as opposed to process), which, as Whitehead notes above, limits the type of philosophic approaches available to the contemporary critic. Although space does not permit a more detailed discussion of object-oriented philosophy here, I will briefly touch on this subject below, when I discuss the role of systems theory in mediating between object and process. The second unstated assumption underlying the lack of prior successes in establishing an alternative theoretical basis to the traditionalist approach is what I
depicted as a long-standing tendency in academia to write off the artistic and creative aspects of textual production as a dark, irrational void, where the logical enterprises of criticism and philosophy dare not go or need not bother going. I observed that the combination of these two assumptions is often present in the language critics use to dismiss style as an object of inquiry. Critical scholars repeatedly describe style in terms suggestive of a hopelessly elusive object, such as “amorphous” (Ewen 2), “fluid,” or “dissonant” (Sebeok 4). Ewen, for example, states that the subject of his inquiry “lacked the kind of concreteness that has shaped the catalogs of knowledge that scholars and students depend upon for intellectual guidance” (3). This tendency to write off style as an irrational (non)object of hopeless pursuit has, in turn, created a further lack of motivation to engage the concept within academia. Hariman notes that "Established academic conceptions of style hardly prepare one to take seriously the aesthetic dimension of political experience” (115). Finally, the deterrents listed above continue to dissuade scholars from attempting to form new theoretical bases. Lang offers perhaps the best summation of the academic attitude of hopelessness towards style, by asking if the "resistance to a systematic foundation may not be rooted in the concept of style itself" (14). The first goal of this dissertation project, then, was to question the recalcitrant academic notions that have assigned style to the scrapheap of history.

I began by examining the cyclical engagement and abandonment of style by critics during the 20th century, as well as the enduring critical discontent with the state of affairs in the current century. I also outlined some common features of the problem of style that tend to recur with each period of such critical engagement and which, I claimed, revolve
around the reduction of style to a set of elements or components (“stylemes”) or to a set of instructions for the use of one or more stylemes. I argued that this approach fails to account for how a set of stylemes becomes a style or what skills or abilities enable creative agency in designing and constructing a text. As other scholars have already noted, this “other” meaning of style – as a quality or skill – currently lies “outside the scope” of the critic, despite critics’ desire that this meaning of style “should be considered seriously” (Schapiro 52). I then posited that the traditionalist focus on cataloguing a set of stylemes is merely one symptom of the persisting legacy of Aristotelian style theory and that this approach continues to hold communication critics back from establishing a more current and more useful theory of style, one that can be utilized in describing what skills and qualities enable the formation of texts.10 This problematization is novel in its application to style, as previous academic efforts in the rhetorical field have largely focused on expressing either complete hopelessness with respect to the subject or merely discontent with specific aspects of prior critical approaches – the social turn’s treatment of style most recently, for example – without addressing the more general conditions of (im)possibility underlying the problem(s) of style.

Finally, as a tentative and partial solution to the current impasse within communication criticism, I offered a dual approach that, I claimed, could provide the contemporary critic a way past Aristotle, as well as a tentative way to open up two

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10 I also noted that the rhetorical tradition continues to be blamed for an impoverished view of style by critics in related disciplines, such as composition studies, art history, and art criticism, and that this accusation may be justified by the continued overreliance on Peripatetic approaches to style by communication critics who are otherwise past Aristotle philosophically.
additional conceptual areas relevant to the question of style and to the creation of a more useful theoretical base for future critical work: metic intelligence and complex adaptive systems. Although, as I stated in Chapter 4, these two conceptual areas become more useful when combined to inform each other, the relative disuse of both within contemporary rhetorical scholarship also means that either of the two proposed areas is also of significance for further exploration when considered individually.

**Historical Overview of Style**

“If Aeschylus was magical, and Sophocles religious, Aristotle classifying their procedures in his *Poetics* was *scientific*” (Kenneth Burke, *PC* 218; emphasis original).

In chapter 2, I traced the history of style, delineating how Aristotelian conceptions of style survive through to the present day and how their endurance continues to define and delimit contemporary conceptions of style. I began with an examination of primary texts from both Aristotle and the Peripatetic school and then showed how Theophrastus’s extension of Aristotle’s canons of rhetoric suffused subsequent conceptualizations of style by Roman, Christian, and medieval rhetoricians in forming the traditional rhetorical approach to style. I then illustrated how the Peripatetic theory of style, as well as the representationalist model of language on which it is based, survived almost entirely intact in the works of 17th, 18th, and 19th century rhetorical theorists. Likewise, I described how what came to be known as the *current-traditional* approach to style and language remained virtually the same from the 19th into the 20th century and has endured into the present millennium.
One goal of this survey of literature was to connect the Aristotelian origins of communication style theory with their eventual modernist-scientific manifestation. Elsewhere, Kenneth Burke describes the modernist-scientific approach to language as the desire "to evolve a vocabulary that gives the name and address of every event in the universe" (*PLF* 141) the way a postal system produces a one-to-one reference for each resident. Although, as noted in the literature review, there were significant differences between Aristotle and scientific modernism, I saw the ultimate goal of both paradigms as the achievement of a one-to-one correspondence between facts and words, producing an approach to language wherein the plain style was first privileged and eventually taken as the default, “correct” use of language. I believe that this goal was further motivated by the remnants of 19th century desire to develop a universal and neutral language, free from the aesthetic and emotional contamination of style. Therefore, the latest incarnation of Aristotle’s position that style is, at best, a necessary evil that can and should be avoided, became, once again, an unstated assumption vis à vis communication style, one that, I think, still limits critical endeavors today. This unstated assumption also deserves attention because it is, in the opinion of this author, largely responsible for the current theoretical impasse in the area of style. As communication theory evolved post the linguistic turn, our revised views on language moved further and further away from Aristotelian assumptions underlying approaches to style. Ultimately, therefore, I think that the lack of a theoretical base for which the current-traditional model has been (justly) criticized can be said to have developed as a result of the widening gap between stated and unstated assumptions defining philosophical and critical positions on the role of style in language for nearly one hundred
years. As my review of prior scholarship made evident, the lack of an ability to develop a theory more in line with 20th century critical views on language, in turn, positioned the current-traditional model as the only available model, leading to its ubiquity in pedagogy, despite its many shortcomings.

Lastly, therefore, I surveyed contemporary pedagogical materials, which demonstrated the lasting influence of the current-traditional model on 21st century communication pedagogy. Based on this survey of literature I concluded that when it comes to communication pedagogy, the current-traditional model of style has become universal. Therefore, when it comes to style in communication, there is at present no pedagogical alternative to the current-traditional format. Because the current-traditional paradigm is atheoretical, this approach also inherently excludes any theoretical discussion of style’s place in discourse.

Following the historical overview, I posited that while any single critical approach is inherently limited in some way, the Peripatetic approach to style is especially restrictive because it seeks to minimize the importance of style by reducing style to set of devices used to ingratiate a rhetor with an audience that Aristotle described as defective or corrupted. I concluded that this conceptualization additionally prevents us from building a more meaningful theory of style because this conceptualization is antagonistic towards its object of inquiry.

**Style, Sophism, and Metic Intelligence**

In the third chapter of this dissertation I presented the first step towards an alternative to Aristotelian style theory by looking to the pre-Socratic origins of the concept
of style. Because style flourished within a Sophistic context, Sophism presented one obvious alternative to Aristotle. However, Sophistic writings are not sufficiently preserved to allow us to discern a “genuine” or unitary notion of Sophism as a whole, much less a Sophistic theory of style. I suggested, however, that we can examine concepts that relate to the intersection of style and Sophism from a Neosophistic perspective, thereby recovering some fragments of a pre-Socratic conceptualization of style that can serve as a starting point for a theoretical alternative to Aristotle. Further, I anchored my exploration of this pre-Socratic terminology with a focus on “metis” (Detienne and Vernant) or “metic intelligence” (Raphals) because this concept fills the voids created by peripatetic overreliance on logic and preplanned, rational action in the same oppositional way as sophism, while also providing a link between sophism and the notion of style as skill or quality.

The approach described above presents significant advantage to rhetorical critics, as it avoids the two main obstacles standing in the way of rehabilitating pre-Socratic concepts and terminology. As stated in the chapter, the most common criticism leveled at scholars who rely on Sophism as a framework is that Sophism (and Neos Sophism) is historically inauthentic and therefore does not lend additional credibility to critical work situated within a Sophistic context. The approach taken in this dissertation project demonstrates a way to avoid this criticism by isolating aspects of Sophism directly relevant to style and directly supported by primary documents of the era. This approach also has the additional benefit of fleshing out the relationship between Sophism and style, which presently lacks detail, despite the constant attribution of the love of style to Sophists.
Additionally, this project demonstrates that Sophism still holds utility for the contemporary critic, thus countering the second type of criticism leveled at Sophism – that the subject is exhausted and therefore no longer worthy of exploratory efforts.

The concept of metis, or metic intelligence, was instrumental to countering both the above criticisms by providing specific and historically authentic linkages between Sophism and style, as well as serving as a lens through which pre-Socratic terminology could be seen in novel ways. Therefore, as I demonstrated in the chapter, metis is a concept that holds significance for rhetorical scholars that is beyond mere historical curiosity. Yet, despite thorough groundwork laid down by Detienne and Vernant in the 1970s, metis continues to languish in obscurity. This dissertation project implies, however, that metic intelligence has practical applications and that it therefore holds utility for the contemporary critic.

Unpacking the concept of metis and treating metic intelligence as a skill or a set of skills also enabled the exploration of additional concepts contained within this metic skillset, via an extensive examination of primary Greek sources circa the Socratic shift. As I demonstrated, several terms cluster around metis and Sophism and enable the discourse about style as skill or quality: *Hippia* represents a subset of metic intelligence that enables agency in a dynamic and uncertain environment, where forces and elements of textual production and dissemination that cannot be controlled are mediated, instead. *Mimesis*, although a concept more familiar to the critic, takes on new meaning as the skill of perceiving and manipulating these forces and elements. *Kairos*, likewise, takes on a new emphasis, that of effective participation and intervention in an emerging situation, while
aiole describes the swiftness and mental fluidity required to “catch” this kairos of emergence. Pantoie describes multiplicity as the skill of applying breadth of knowledge, rather than depth, enabling the stylist to bring multiple areas of expertise to bear on the process of textual production. Poikilia describes both the “shifty” mental attitude of a stylist and the shifting iridescence – the instability and multiplicity – of a styled text. Finally, eurythmia denotes the “flow” or “harmony” of a well-stylized text.

While some of the terminology explored above—kairos and mimesis, for example—may already be familiar to the critic (and may prompt the argument, similar to critiques of Sophism and Neos sophism, that all novelty has already been exhausted with respect to such terminology), this project demonstrated that even familiar concepts may hold yet more historically authentic meanings and additional utility to scholars today. Equally significant was the exploration and rehabilitation of terms—hippia, pantoie, airole, poikilia, and eurythmia—which, along with metic intelligence have spent over two millennia lying dormant and which continue to suffer from disuse. Perhaps the most significant example of this rehabilitation of terms is the term poikilia, which, although present in Detienne and Vernant’s work on metis, has not heretofore been connected to issues of style and textual production, despite its relevance to both subjects.

At the conclusion of the chapter, I noted that due to the fragmentary nature of the set of pre-Socratic remnants available to the contemporary critic, the set of terms explored therein does not self-assemble into a theory of style. However, I also claimed that exploring this terminology can offer a way towards such a theory by filling in two of the most prominent conceptual gaps in current critical engagement with style—style as the skill or
quality of the stylist or text. Therefore, as noted above, the pre-Socratic terminology rehabilitated in chapter 3 already holds sufficient significance and explanatory power, even without being incorporated into other theoretical frameworks.

**Style, Metic Intelligence, and Complex Adaptive Systems**

A theory of style adequate to the psychological and historical problems has still to be created. It waits for a deeper knowledge of the principles of form construction and expression… (Schapiro 100)

In the penultimate chapter of this dissertation I offered systems theory as the second possible source for an alternative to Aristotelian style theory, answering the call of prior scholars, who claim that “the revival of sophistry specifically within rhetorical studies” should be “defined by the positive search for affinities between ancient and modern theories” (McComisky 299). Specifically, I focused on the terminology of a subset of systems theory, called *complex adaptive systems* (CAS). Through a review of literature, I demonstrated that although this terminology is widely accepted and utilized by critics at large, the rich metaphors offered by systems theory have not yet been applied to addressing the questions of style or constructing a theory of style. However, my review of several nascent proposals to view the rhetorical situation and style in the context of system theory and network theory offers support for the notion that systems language can provide a way towards such a theory. Because, as I demonstrated earlier, the field of rhetoric continues to be held back by unstated assumptions dating from antiquity to modernity the use of latest theoretical developments to update aspects rhetorical scholarship languishing in vestiges of modernism is highly significant and should continue to be pursued by rhetoricians.
As I mentioned earlier, one unstated assumption historically present in criticism is the dominance of the object. One advantage of systems theory, however, is that the systems perspective accounts more fully for both objects and processes and therefore allows the critical focus to be shuttled between object and process, as well. I therefore noted that the language of complex adaptive systems is especially appropriate as a corrective to the traditionalist trends in communication scholarship and that this language can be used in conjunction with selected pre-Socratic terminology to augment our critical understanding of style and allow us to approach style as a set of skills necessary to textual production. I drew numerous parallels between the CAS perspective and the perspective of metic intelligence in engaging a non-linear dynamic context as a creative agent. I further argued that because system plasticity is the most important property of a developing creative system, any skill or ability possessed by a creative agent that can improve or maintain system plasticity is crucial to the possibility of styling a text into its final form. I then outlined a possible set of connections between the terminology of metic intelligence and selected CAS theory concepts said to enable system plasticity, such as system rate of adaptation, system sagacity, and the process of serendipitous discovery, as well as selected subcomponents of system sagacity, such as the prepared mind, focus-shifting, and simulated annealing. I also drew important connections between the bridging processes intrinsic to serendipitous discovery in CAS – mutation, inversion, transfer, recombination - and mimesis as a subcomponent of metic intelligence that similarly enables transformation and creative growth in a system.
In a private conversation that took place several years ago, Steven Shaviro mentioned that scholars often tend to use emergence as a kind of “intellectual copout” that allows one to bypass more thorough analyses. Often relied on when dealing with matters creative and artistic, this tendency is especially apparent in the treatment of Sophistic concepts consigned to the realm of art and diagnosed as suffering from “hermeneutic aporia” (Consigny). (As already noted above, academicians can sometimes be held back by unstated assumptions about the irrationality of art and creativity as inherently resistant to analysis.) Gorgias and style are often the victims of this kind of “rhapsodic” (Consigny) treatment, which began in antiquity with Diogenes Laertus describing Gorgias as willing to "trust in kairos (toi kairoi) to speak on any subject" (DK 82A1a) and which, today, often does not go beyond statements such as: "...style, for Gorgias, was a means of invention, a kind of movement that provides constraints along with possibilities" (Hawhee 23). While this dissertation consciously avoided this type of intellectual copout, the project also aims to demonstrate the utility of applying more recent theoretical developments to analyses of emergent phenomena in communication and obviating the need to use emergence in lieu of explanation. Therefore, I proposed that CAS theory and metic intelligence can be made to inform and augment each other. In addition to the ways – described above - in which CAS theory structures and demystifies multiple Sophistic and metic terms, I also demonstrated that metic concepts (pantoie, for example) can help fill in the most recent gaps in systems theory relating to the expertise and judgment of a creative agent. More broadly, I argued that CAS theory can tie the fragments of pre-Socratic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these
fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between CAS theory and style, allowing us to discourse about style as skill and quality.

As I demonstrated, both metic intelligence and CAS theory have significant implications vis a vis creative agency as reliant on mediation in lieu of control. While, as already stated, pedagogy is not the focus of this dissertation project, the disconnect between mediatory skills necessary for the creation of texts and the now universal control-based approach to communication design in contemporary pedagogy begs for rectification, as students are currently not encouraged to develop a metic skillset within the constraints of current pedagogical practices. Furthermore, as other scholars have already noted, effective participation in emergent environments is (like style) by no means restricted to textual production, but extends to the broader context of human life:

Education serves a variety of functions. We think none is more important than assuring that all humans have the capacity to think for themselves, in order to function effectively in the local, national, and world contexts that are themselves complex emergent systems. (Blank, et al.)

The efficacy of mediation and adaptation in negotiating emergent contexts is also attested to by scholars attending to the political facets of society, who note that “government action will typically only be effective through the mediation of uncertain citizen reaction and, perhaps, the ability to take advantage of unanticipated circumstances” (Letwin 6; emphasis original). Finally, scholars have also noted the significance of developing the range of skills explored in this dissertation, such as sagacity, to basic human survival, stating that “we, as a species, will need to rely on our ability to sagaciously exploit our changing circumstances, and our adaptations, in the coming years, as changes in climate transform the world in which we have developed” (Rond and Morley 5).
Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This dissertation project was necessarily narrowed to a Western cultural and historical focus. This focus is, therefore, both the project’s most significant limitation and the most significant suggestion for future research, as other cultures’ rich histories have much to contribute to the discussion of both rhetoric and metic intelligence. Prior scholarship has already noted numerous correspondences between metic intelligence in Greece and similar concepts in other cultures around the world (Herzog; Wallen): *zhi* in China (Raphals); *hila* and the parables of Sufis in Arabia (Certeau); Zen *koans* and certain aspects of *kabuki* theater in Japan (Hyde; Koepping; Wallen); the god Loki in Scandinavia (Koepping); *upaya* in India (Raphals); the spider tales of the god Ananse in Africa (Koepping); the coyote in Native American folklore (Hyde; Radin); and the fox in folk tales ranging from arctic Russia to India to the Andes (Wallen). The case of China, especially, bears closer examination; as discussed earlier, several detailed parallels to classical Greece have already been drawn by previous scholars, some of whom have also elaborated on the correspondences between *zhi* and metis. Therefore, due to the abundance of material available to scholars willing to go beyond the Western canon, the above parallels bear further investigation.

As I demonstrated, the cluster of terms relevant to metic intelligence and to style possess both explanatory power and the potential to be resituated in a broader theoretical framework. However, the effort undertaken to rehabilitate some of the terminology above also implies that contemporary research may be held back by the lack of widespread literacy in classical languages, especially Greek and Latin. While Latin presents less of a
challenge to English speakers, Greek requires a much larger effort to master, a challenge I experienced during the research phase of this project and one that is likely familiar to the majority of rhetorical scholars. While I certainly cannot claim to have become proficient in classical Greek as part of my archival research for this project, I was able to achieve a very basic level of literacy (reading and understanding syntax and sentence structure) without which the third chapter of this dissertation would not have been possible. The most significant example of the utility of classical language literacy to this project is the term poikilia, which, although included in Detienne and Vernant’s work on metis has not been heretofore explored in detail. Nor has poikilia found its way into scholarly work on style, despite primary archival evidence of the use of the term to describe stylistic endeavors. As academia already has a long history of providing classical language training to scholars, it would, perhaps, not be too difficult to ensure that budding rhetorical scholars gain at least a very basic familiarity with the languages in which the bulk of their source material is written.

Furthermore, this dissertation project implies that Greek source materials relevant to style and textual production have not yet been exhausted and hold further potential to enrich current academic discourse. This statement, likewise, applies to the semantic field of metic intelligence discussed (though not exhausted) in this dissertation, as further exploration of metis and related terminology can be of benefit to future critical work. The same can be said of systems theory, as this dissertation project also implies that more connections can be made between ancient and contemporary conceptualizations of communication.
Additionally, this project’s focus on style as skill necessarily leaves out a broad range of other meanings of the term. As stated previously, style, despite its origin as a concept specific to rhetoric, expanded throughout the past two millennia to become a ubiquitous aspect of human life. As other scholars note, style has become a “strange term, which can apply to everything from the fine arts to what happens at the hairdresser’s” (Hariman Political 50). Yet, the only meaning of style thoroughly explored by contemporary rhetorical scholarship has been the one that grew out of the social turn of the late 20th century and which still provides critics like Brummett fodder for essays into the nature of social symbol sharing. Likewise, this project was intentionally limited to exploring the meaning of style as a skill or a set of skills. Considering the broad range of meanings that can be ascribed to the contemporary concept of style, any endeavor that limits itself to one meaning necessarily leaves out many others. For example, to the extent that style is embodied, Barthes’s dismissive comments on the bodily nature of style can be reexamined through a metic lens to demonstrate the connection between style and bodily modes of being.11 Likewise, Bourdieu’s work on habitus has not heretofore been connected to style, yet could certainly be used to further flesh out the meaning of style relating to embodiment. Additionally, Barthes’s and Bourdieu’s work can be further utilized to draw novel connections between style and the realm of instinct, one of the provinces of metic intelligence.

11 Elsewhere, Barthes writes: "Style is almost beyond it [language]: imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art" (10).
Furthermore, because the concept of style has been languishing in almost complete disuse for so long, even meanings assumed to be already accounted for beg to be brought up to date. For example, Other scholars have already noted the “the common confusion between style and format” (Kubler 164), but have made no further effort to provide a more thorough critical analysis of style as format or to update our understanding of the concept with more contemporary critical work. For example, Galloway’s work on protocol as a means of achieving voluntary regulation within heterogeneous systems could be utilized for this very purpose, thus providing theoretical underpinning for style understood as format. Galloway defines protocol as "conventional rules that govern behavior patterns within a heterogeneous system" and function as "a technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment" (7), a definition that I believe strongly fits the Peripatetic tradition.

Arguably, Foucault’s work on discursive formations also overlaps with this meaning of style, so much so that Foucault originally considered using the term in The Archaeology of Knowledge, stating: “It seemed to me, for example, that from the nineteenth century medical science was characterized not so much by its objects or concepts as by a certain style, a certain constant manner of statement” (33). Despite later abandoning the term in favor of discursive formations (perhaps due to style’s problematic status in philosophy), the overlap between the former and the latter can be seen in Foucault’s definition of discursive formations later in Archaeology, where he states that “whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say,
for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation" (38; italics original). Bringing Foucault’s insights into the relationship between power and communication to bear on the meaning of style-as-format would, therefore, be of immediate utility to critical scholars, especially as Galloway’s work seeks to fill in gaps in Foucault’s analysis of power and control.

While pedagogy is not the focus of the current dissertation project, the above findings imply a possible need to investigate a three-fold corrective to current pedagogical practices relevant to style within the communication field. First, communication pedagogy’s completely atheoretical approach to style may benefit from the inclusion of at least basic theoretical suppositions relevant to the subject, in order to provide at least an equally basic sense of perspective on commonly championed language use standards, such as concision or active voice. Second, the near-ubiquitous sentence reduction exercises that dominate contemporary progymnasmata beg to be diversified via the incorporation of other

12 Note the looseness of the definition, as well as the large scope of its inclusivity. Depending on one's definition of style, there may be very little difference between communication style and discursive formations. It is not until later in The Archaeology of Knowledge that Foucault clarifies the distinction sufficiently. (I have edited the passage for length as much as possible):

What are described as 'systems of formation' do not constitute the terminal stage of discourse, if by that term one means the texts (or words) as they appear, with their vocabulary, syntax, logical structure, or rhetorical organization. Analysis remains anterior to this manifest level.... if analysis studies the modalities of enunciation, it questions neither the style nor the succession of the sentences; in short, it leaves the final placing of the text in dotted outline.... if analysis stands back in relation to this final construction, it is not to turn away from the discourse and to appeal to the silent work of thought; nor is it to turn away from the systematic and to reveal the 'living' disorder of attempts, trials, errors, and new beginnings. (75)
modes of paraphrasis, a la 150 ways to rewrite the phrase “Your letter pleased me greatly.”

Finally, contemporary writing exercises may benefit from being explicitly connected to theoretical analyses in the classroom, examining, for example, such basic concepts as word or sentence length effects on emphasis or deemphasis. I believe that this three-fold corrective has the potential to increase students’ conceptual awareness and broaden their stylistic capabilities, thus improving pedagogical outcomes in the communication field and that further investigation into its efficacy is currently warranted.\textsuperscript{13}

The most immediate suggestion for further research, however, has to do with connecting style to a theory that conceptualizes persuasion as dependent on the sublime powers of language. Although historically connected to both Sophism and style, and despite seeing numerous revivals throughout Western history, this theory of persuasion is rarely engaged in contemporary critical work, due not only to the factors described above (vis a vis style and all matters artistic), but also because it belongs to what Kenneth Burke called the “magical orientation” and, therefore, often describes its subject in magical and mystical terms that, combined with the above-mentioned hermeneutic aporia, seem to make contemporary academics uncomfortable. In contrast to the Platonic and Aristotelian subordination of the persuasive power of words to the persuasive demonstration of self-evident facts, this model combines an emphasis on style with the view that persuasion is dependent on enchanting the hearer. Traditionally, the most prominent example of this

\textsuperscript{13} While students may (or may not) also be exposed to mimetic exercises as part of their education, the imitation of prior authors is typically restricted to a “creative” context. “Practical” communication, on the other hand, currently holds itself apart from such creative endeavors and, instead, continues to stress clarity, concision, and correctness – the three pillars of the current-traditional model.
sublime model is taken to be Gorgias’s *Encomium of Helen*, which still resides within the contemporary theoretical canon and should, therefore, be familiar to most readers. In this document, Gorgias famously describes the power of language used by a skilled orator in terms that have been translated as “magic,” “witchcraft,” and “sacred incantations” (Bizzell and Herzberg 41) that “harmonize” with the soul (Lucaites and Bernabo 7) and take over the audience by mimetic forces that the audience – like Helen - is powerless to resist because the souls of the hearers become “enchanted” (Lucaites and Bernabo 8).

Writing circa 1st century C. E., the anonymous author of *On the Sublime*, likewise, stresses that the force of the rhetorical art “does not convince the reason of the reader, but takes him out of himself” by confounding judgement and eclipsing “that which is merely reasonable or agreeable.” Operating with “an imperious and irresistible force,” the sublime “sways every reader whether he will or no” (1) in exact parallel with the Gorgianic metaphor of forcible harmonization between a rhetor’s words and the soul of the audience. The persuasive result of such an entrainment is that the “harmony of opposites” achieved by the rhetor “gives irresistible authority to their favorable verdict” (7). Additionally, however, the author of *On the Sublime* also draws a distinction between the rule-based realm of logical preplanning and the kairotic moment that is directly relevant to the operation of style described in this dissertation as aiding the production of serendipitous discoveries. He states that while invention and arrangement “gradually manifest themselves in the general structure of a work” and are not able to be appreciated in one or two passages, “a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash, and exhibits the whole power of the orator in a moment of
time” (1). Finally, the author of *On the Sublime* – in exact parallel to CAS scholars today - repeatedly stresses the limitations of theoretical prognostication vis a vis the judgment of a creative agent, as when he states that “a just judgment of style is the final fruit of long experience” (6).

It may be evident to readers of this dissertation that the theory of sublime persuasion described above dovetails both with the Sophistic terminology employed to describe stylistic skills and with selected processes described by systems theory, especially the process of serendipitous discovery. However, whereas the present examination centered on the production of texts via the employment of creative agency as part of participation in emergent environments, the theory of the sublime can be utilized to complement this project, due to this theory’s focus on the way texts and audiences interact, as well as the persuasive effects of those aspects of language considered to be merely figurative by the dominant tradition.

14 In addition to dovetailing with systems theory concepts, such as serendipitous discovery, the notion that style can be used to produce flashes of persuasion and insight is supported by Derrida’s *Eperons*, in which he describes the way that the whole power of the orator is unleashed in a single moment as a *coup de stile* – a “stylistic blow.” Although Derrida’s work is often notoriously difficult to parse, in this case Derrida offers unambiguous support for the notion that the stylistic skillset can produce serendipitous and persuasive results.

The sublime persuasive power of communication also has an established connection to metic intelligence. Detienne and Vernant write that “metis… operates as a mesmeric mechanism” or a “mesmeric power” that relies on “magical aspects” of the communicant’s “behavior” (182-3).
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ABSTRACT

SOPHISTS, SYSTEMS, AND SKILLS: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR STYLE THEORY

by

STANISLAV KOZADAYEV

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In this dissertation, I offer a tentative exploration of how we can move beyond current theoretical limitations inherent in the dominant tradition of rhetorical approaches to the question of style. I argue that the constraining traditional thread most relevant to the question of style in rhetoric can be traced back to Aristotle’s treatment of style in his Rhetoric and that the limitations of the Peripatetic school continue to impose theoretical limits on current rhetorical scholarship. Therefore, despite recent philosophical advances that have been incorporated into the field of communication criticism – and despite the current consensus among rhetorical scholars as to the inadequacy of Aristotelian theories of language more generally – when addressing the question(s) of style, communication criticism continues to be held back by a conceptualization of style that reduces style to a set of devices or “mannerisms” used for aesthetic ingratiatiation. This conceptualization of style lacks the depth and explanatory power that theories should provide. Therefore, I propose some initial steps towards an alternative to Aristotle. The first step looks
backwards, beyond Aristotle, and to style's origins. Style originates as a rhetorical concept, flourishes within a Sophistic context, and becomes problematic only post-Socrates. I therefore examine conceptual terminology that relates to the intersection of style and Sophism from a neosophistic perspective, thereby recovering some fragments of a pre-Socratic conceptualization of style. While these fragments do not in themselves form a coherent theory of style, they provide a starting point for a theoretical alternative to Aristotle. The second step looks forward, beyond Aristotle, and to the more recent philosophical advances available to communication critics today. I propose systems theory - and more specifically the language of complex adaptive systems (CAS) - as the second step towards moving beyond the limitations of the traditionalist approaches to style. While systems theory has proven to be of great utility in its application to communication criticism more generally, the rich terminology of systems language has largely gone unused when addressing the question(s) of style. I argue that systems theory is especially useful as a means of replacing Aristotelian conceptions of style because systems theory is able to correct overly reductionist thinking with a more thorough conceptualization of the emergent and dynamic nature of textual production. Finally, I argue that the above past and future alternatives to the Aristotelian approach to style can be combined to inform each other and that the combination of the two terminologies can provide a way to discourse about style as skill or quality. Additionally, systems theory can tie the fragments of Sophistic conceptualizations of style into a larger theoretical framework, while the correspondences between these fragments and aspects of systems theory can provide better linkage between systems theory and style. Therefore, combining the two alternatives to
Aristotle can enrich our understanding of the concept, while accounting both for the historical origins of style and for directions that future research can take.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Stanislav Kozadayev was born in St. Petersburg, Russia (then Leningrad, USSR).

He immigrated into the United States in 1990 and currently resides in Metro Detroit.