HDWDWW? and Opposing: Specification and Substantiation

The composing process is a continuum: seeing and thinking and writing are all ways of forming. We begin to make sense of the world in the very act of perception. The process of selection and differentiation is implicit in seeing; forming is dependent on seeing how one thing is like another, how it is different from others. This same process of re-cognition continues when we name in response to spatial and temporal forms. Selection and differentiation—forming—is implicit in naming just as it is in perceiving.

Most writing you will do in course work will not be in response to things—objects, landscapes, figures, etc.—but to ideas. Nevertheless, since you don't become somebody else when you sit down to write, it makes sense to claim that what you do when you interpret an idea or a passage of writing is not fundamentally different from what you do when you interpret an object. Writing involves the same acts of mind as does making sense of the world: you construct the same way you construe.

When you figure out what you're looking at, you name and compare, classify and rename: you do the same things when you write. Thinking is a matter of seeing relationships—relationships of parts to wholes, of items in a sequence, of causes and effects; composition is a matter of seeing and naming relationships, of putting the relationships together, ordering them.

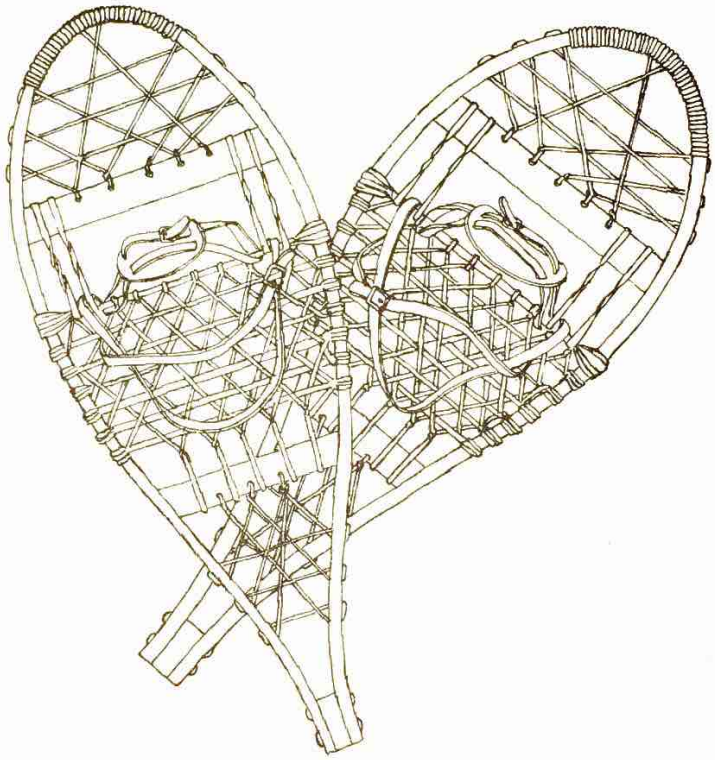
A composition is a bundle of parts: you get the parts by generating a chaos of names and you bundle them as you identify and rename the relationships among them. Listing is the simplest way to bundle the parts, but when your purposes are more complex than a list can serve, then you need to know other ways of bundling, other ways of organizing chaos. If you're going to explain, describe, define, narrate, argue, or promulge—which is Walt Whitman's word for *promulgate*—then you will need to know just what and how much to say about what. A method of composing should offer means of establishing context so that you can develop criteria for judging what specification is needed. Specifying is the way of classifying, of characterizing what goes in which group; as you specify, you give substance to the general. You can't decide how to go about that by asking, "What do I mean?" That question must itself be converted to more specific questions.

The two most serviceable means of generating critical questions that can help you order chaos are very simple and infinitely adaptable: one is asking, *How does who do what and why?* which we will abbreviate from now on as HDWDWW? The other is drawing a line down the middle of the page in order to generate oppositions. Both are means of starting the process of naming and defining and of keeping it going.

"How does who do what and why?" is the master critical question because you can order a chaos by means of it. Answering *HDWDWW?* will give you names for *agent* and *action, manner* and *purpose;* if names are not in your chaos for substantiating the terms of the question, then you will know that you need to generate them. You can see how HDWDWW? works to guide the process of ordering chaos if you consider the problem of explaining a snowshoe. If you had nothing to guide you but "What is a snowshoe?" you might have a hard time getting started, but generating a chaos and then asking HDWDWW? gives the snowshoe a setting, makes it part of an activity and thus helps you develop a context so you can substantiate, specify, and define. Let's try it.

First, a little chaos, generated in response to SNOWSHOE:

SNOW: wet, deep, pretty, cold, white, fluffy
SHOE: foot, protection, Massachusetts, support, boots and slippers, warmth, protection
SNOWSHOE: An old trapper
L. L. Bean
Old-fashioned rug beater
Bear paw
Rats gnaw rawhide
Lacquer
Leather straps
Sloan's Liniment
Sport
Practical



Note how space, time, and causality are represented: there are words that derive from seeing the snowshoe in *spatial* terms: *old-fashioned rug beater* and *bear paw* give us shape. (Do you have other names for the shape?) There is a *temporal* (seasonal) term in the name itself. Several names in this chaos have to do with what snowshoes *cause* (aching muscles); others suggest *effects* or what snowshoes bring about or make happen or allow to happen (*sport* and *practical*). HDWDWW? orders this chaos by guiding us in asking these questions:

WHO DO
1. How does *the old trapper use* snowshoes?
WHO
2. How does *L. L. Bean,* a manufacturer of sporting goods
DO
and hunting equipment, construct a snowshoe?

Naming an agent (a *do*-er) lets us transform *DO* to *use* and *construct.* We can now ask questions about snowshoes as *something used for something* and as *something made out of something*—and we can then answer those questions.

USE
3. Why does the old trapper *wear* his snowshoes?
Whenever the snow is deep enough so that walking is difficult, the old trapper wears snowshoes that support him on top of the snow.
DO WHAT WHY

4. How do snowshoes support the wearer?
HOW
By distributing the weight over a larger area than a regular shoe would cover.

If you combine those two answers, you get this sentence:

> Whenever the snow is deep enough so that walking is difficult, the old trapper wears snowshoes, which support him on top of the snow by distributing his weight.

For the purposes of explanation, you don't need the old trapper, picturesque as he may be, so you can generalize:

> Snowshoes are useful in deep snow, since they allow you to walk without sinking by distributing your weight over a larger area.
>
> Snowshoes, which are like expanded shoe soles, enable the wearer to walk on the surface of deep snow without sinking.

Your explanation can continue with descriptions you can develop from a question about construction:

5. How are snowshoes made?
Snowshoes are made of rawhide strips woven into a network in a frame.
Snowshoes are made by weaving rawhide strips in a diagonal pattern secured by a frame.

Snowshoes are constructed of rawhide strips woven into a diagonal, open-work pattern anchored to an oblong frame. They have leather straps so they can be tied to moccasins, boots, or shoes.

Using HDWDWW? as your guide, write a paragraph on the subject of expressways (superhighways). Proceed as we did in the case of the snowshoe:

1. Generate a chaos of names by considering spatial, temporal, and causal aspects of an expressway from different points of view.
2. Using your chaos, adding to it when necessary, substantiate—give substance to—the terms of HDWDWW? Name the various *who*'s and *what*'s and the *actions;* etc.
3. Make a statement explaining either *agent, action, manner,* or *purpose.* Decide how specific you want your terms (*The old trapper* or *the sportsman-hunter* or *the wearer? Parsnips* or *vegetables* or *produce? Ash tree in winter* or *tree* or *branching system?*).
4. Make other statements until you've substantiated all the terms of HDWDWW? Do you have a paragraph?

Getting started on a composition requires knowing how and when to be specific, deciding how general the names can or should be for the purpose and how particularized they might be. Your grocery list can be in code because you are the user and you can particularize or generalize to suit your needs and purposes. But when you write for a larger audience (or even for yourself at another time), your composition will have to be on its own, so to speak, since you can't staple yourself to the cover sheet or the folder. You have to be sure that when particularization is called for, you will know how to get down to brass tacks and that when the subject needs to be defined in "larger" terms, you will know how to develop the appropriate generalizations.

And who decides what is needed, what is appropriate? You do: the composer does. Those decisions are what keep the composing process going. Of course, your decisions can be wrong: the most difficult thing for any writer to realize is that what is

written on the page may not represent what's in his head. You may have written in a code without being aware of it, without properly translating. In conversation, you have feedback that lets you know: "Huh?" "Whaddaya mean?" "How's that?" "What!?" When you're writing, what you have instead of audience feedback is your own inner dialogue, which you can train yourself to hear critically.

That is not entirely different from what a journalist learns to do. A reporter has to have a nose for news, but she must also develop a sense of what needs to be said in order to make things clear. When you write for a newspaper, you judge which names are appropriate to your subject by keeping in mind the context of situation: How much do your readers know already? How much do they need to know? Like all other writers, the journalist has to learn to avoid, on the one hand, writing in a code that doesn't make sense without extensive interpretation and, on the other hand, setting down in great detail what is self-evident.

By guiding you in defining other choices, a method of composing can save you from setting down empty generalizations or parading presuppositions dressed up as propositions. It does that by helping you get the dialectic going, the naming and defining, which provide the means by which you *substantiate*—give substance and content to—generalizations. Deciding how general your statements should be at what point and which names are appropriate for particularizing is at the heart of the composing process and it can be a very interesting challenge if you can develop some skill in listening in on the inner dialogue.

Knowing how to specify means knowing what's relevant. Deciding what's relevant requires, in turn, having criteria by which to judge what's relevant. If you find yourself saying "I know what I mean, but I just can't put it into words," it's a sign that you are trying to compose without the criteria for deciding what's relevant. Of course, when you're getting started in composing, you can't be sure about what is and what is not relevant and you can't be absolutely sure of the criteria—unless, of course, you are writing a paper in which every step has already been spelled out for you. In the snowshoe chaos, for instance, I set down several words that came to mind in responding to "snow." For the purposes of explaining a snowshoe, I was not immediately sure what would be relevant, what I might need to say about snow, but when I came to thinking about when snowshoes would be used—the context of situation—it was clear that *depth* was a relevant particular: How deep the snow is has

something to do with the function of snowshoes. That thought occurred because "fluffy" reminded me that sometimes snow packs and thus led me to consider what kind of snow would make wearing snowshoes a feasible idea—or even a necessity. "White" and "pretty" were themselves completely irrelevant from the start, but they helped to generate "fluffy," which in turn led to thinking about kinds of snow and thus to developing a context of situation. Such are the uses of chaos: It affords the materials for thinking with.

Somebody from Maine or Minnesota would not have had to go through all that hassle because images of people wearing snowshoes would have guided her directly to the point, but I've never seen an actual snowshoe—only pictures in the L. L. Bean catalog. I therefore needed to generate a chaos in order to get started on an explanation. Of course, you use whatever you already know in getting started, but the point of having a method of composing is to know what to do when you face the unfamiliar.

Naming generates chaos, which is ordered by a process of renaming. HDWDWW? converts the snowshoe from a thing to an activity and thereby helps you decide what specifications are needed in explaining what snowshoes are for. The same thing with "expressway" or any other term or idea, once you have a chaos on hand: HDWDWW? guides you in naming the *who* (agent), the *what* (action), the *how* (manner), and the *why* (purpose) and in relating them to one another. The way out of chaos is by means of making meaning, which is a matter of seeing relationships. HDWDWW? helps identify what needs to be related or what can be related.

The other means I am suggesting for finding relationships is drawing a line down the middle of the page. This generates *oppositions,* the term which throughout this book refers to relating and relationships. Anything set over against something else is an opposition: word/word; word/thing; thing/thing; member/class; particular/general; name/context; etc. Oppositions are forms that find forms; oppositions are means of making meanings. In responding to Fig. 1 (the bare tree, etc.) you set verbs over against nouns; one word over against those clustered around it; the most general term with the names it gathered. You related the two names that seemed the farthest apart and probably the two meanings that seemed the farthest apart; and you organized the entire chaos in two sets. In all these activities, you formed oppositions. The line down the middle of the page can start this kind of ordering because it allows you to see relationships and to

develop context so you can specify and substantiate. In composing, opposing is the way you get from naming to defining.

Like every other aspect of the composing process, opposing goes on all the time. Seeing something with respect to, in terms of, in relation to something else involves oppositions, the forms of relatedness. Here is a checklist you can use in the assisted invitations that follow.

A Checklist of the Forms of Relatedness

1. Is A *the same as* B?
2. Is A *above, beyond, behind, next to, inside, ahead of, before,* etc. B?
3. Is A *the cause of* or *the effect of* B?
4. Is A *a repetition of* or *a duplication of* B?
5. Is A *an example of, the same kind of thing as* B?
6. Is A *comparable in some respects to* B?
7. Is A *a part of* B? Is A *made up of* B?
8. Is A *derived from* B?
9. Is A *the opposite of* (antithesis, antonym) B?
10. Does A *complete* B?
11. Does A *depend on* B?
12. Is A *necessary to the function* of B?

If A is a trout fly, how many of these oppositions would be useful in describing it? What Bs would you choose? Write out a few sentences of description.

Review your journal of observation: how many of these oppositions—forms of relatedness—were prominent in your composing?

Generate a chaos of names in response to the word/idea *education.* Which oppositions are helpful in ordering the chaos?

Using the Checklist as a guide to your questioning, see if you can explain the relationship between the two items in each of the pairs listed below. Write a sentence or two about each; you can incorporate the italicized phrases in the Checklist.

a. rubber stamp/ink pad
b. gun/bullet
c. barn/house
d. oars/paddles
e. cellar/attic
f. ping/pong
g. streams/ponds
h. recognition/memory
i. interpretations/war
j. health/sickness

Here's an assisted invitation to listen in on the classifying process. In each of the paired words below, use the opposition to help you name the class to which both things or ideas or activities belong. Ask HDWDWW? to generate whatever names you need in order to compose a sentence that says something about both names. Finally, check your sentence over against the dictionary definitions: are there any terms in common?

clarinet/trumpet
harpsichord/piano
men/mice
swimming/flying
deserts/islands
caves/mountains
chanting/dancing
oil drum/thermos bottle
Thanksgiving/Christmas
development/change
first violins/second violins
introduction/finale

In the pairs below, the opposition is between a particular thing, idea, or activity and a class to which it could be assigned. Using this opposition to provide a context, name another particular thing, idea, or activity and compose a sentence in which you compare or contrast the given particular and the new particular.

Charlie Chaplin/hero
family/institution
The Great Depression/history
automobiles/technology
history/liberal education
technology/human achievement

Recapitulation

In getting started, a method of composing should help you keep things tentative so that you don't come to conclusions too quickly and thus lose the chance to explore relationships. You write from the start in order to discover what you mean; nam-

ing and opposing are your means of making meanings. As soon as names begin to cluster, chaos is being shaped. Clustering is a kind of classification; it's like gathering fruits and vegetables and laying them out together under a sign that says "*produce.*" It's like drawing a circle around certain items on a list, thereby indicating that they go together for some reason or other. Those reasons have to do with your purposes in composing. From naming to defining by way of opposing—relating—is a good way of thinking about the composing process, if you remember that defining leads, dialectically, to further naming, further purposing. You let what you say discover what you mean.

You name and define when you make sense of the world, and in composing you continually name and define, rename and redefine. A method of composing should help you keep that dialectic in progress. You take a general idea and bring it down to earth with lots of naming—examples, comparisons, demonstrations—just as you can convert a generalized figure—a design—to a particular object by looking at it in a certain way, from a certain perspective. And you take a highly particularized event, object, statement, and find out how it is related to other instances and examples. In fact, you can't do one without the other: composing always involves both generalizing and exemplifying; both classifying and specifying. Deciding on the degree of generality is central to the composing process. The more details you develop, the more particular the form becomes; the fewer the details, the more general. That tradeoff is the dialectic in operation. It's not something you decide ahead of time; these are decisions you make in the course of writing.