“Vitanzing” Transcript

[*Zeugma* theme plays]

Eric Detweiler: Hi there! This is Eric Detweiler. This summer episode is the fifth and final installment in *Zeugma*’s summer interview series from the 2014 Rhetoric Society of America conference in San Antonio, Texas. So far we’ve featured Drs. Roxanne Mountford, Collin Brooke, Jeff Rice, and Joyce Locke Carter. You can listen to all those interviews over at our website: zeugma.dwrl.utexas.edu. This time, I talk with Victor Vitanza. Dr. Vitanza is the founder of Clemson University’s Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design program—or RCID—as well as a professor of rhetoric and philosophy at the European Graduate School. He’s the author of such books as *Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric* and *Sexual Violence in Western Thought and Writing*. He’s also the editor of *PRE/TEXT: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory* and is currently working on a book and companion film entitled *The Returns of Philology: This Time, Anachronistics*. In our far-ranging conversation, we discuss the uncontrollability of language via Kenneth Burke, Immanuel Kant, and septic tanks; the relationships between “old” and “traditional” rhetorics as well as “old” and “new” media; cats on the Internet; Geoffrey Sirc; the futures of *PRE/TEXT*; and Clemson’s RCID program. In talking about rhetorics old and new, we allude briefly to the presentation Vitanza gave at the RSA conference: a conversation with the University of California-Davis’s Dr. James Murphy. In that conversation, which began with the question, “Are there real borders between ‘traditional rhetoric’ and ‘new rhetorics’?”, Dr. Murphy made two claims about Victor Vitanza: First, that he was bitten by a trope as a child. Second, that Vitanza is a verb. Given our habit of using gerunds as episode titles, it only seemed fitting, then, to call this one “Vitanzing.” Let me offer a quick heads-up that this interview moves between the tropological and the scatological. For the sake of listeners with certain sorts of ears, we’ve covered over some of its scatological language. Since the traditional beeps and bleeps seemed out of place here, however, we’ve instead subbed in various bleats and hoots, taking a more satyric approach by introducing goats as well as owls into the conversation, thus opening the door to some of the nonhuman animals in Kenneth Burke’s barnyard. We’ll leave it to you to determine or leave undetermined the words—English or otherwise—disguised beneath these various calls. Just keep in mind that the owls are not in fact what they seem. Finally, let me note that I’ll be popping back up a few times throughout this interview. In addition to my questions, I’ll offer a few excurses, interruptions, and citations to keep things flowing. So here we go, one last time, to San Antonio. Though this trip may be fraught with a few stoppages, blockages, and backups that we haven’t encountered on our previous trips.

[spaghetti western music plays—Chris Saner’s “Mor’s Back”—occasionally interrupted by the beeping of a disconnected phone]

[music cut off by scrambled electronic sounds]

Detweiler: All right! We’re here at RSA 2014 in San Antonio, and I’m sitting here with Victor Vitanza. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down today.

Vitanza: Oh, yes! Happy to be doing this, yes. So let’s talk about rhetoric, but more specifically—or maybe a wider scope—about language. Or what sometimes is referred to as “*logos*,” which has so many different meanings in itself. I’m always very interested in a person’s relationship with language or, let’s say again, *logos*. And I think it was a number of years ago—I was a little slow—that I began to understand the reason for rhetoric, okay? As a means of controlling the flow of sounds or aural speculations: how to make a good speech, how to persuade people, how to get what you want, and so on. But the alternate way of thinking of that is I keep wondering, what is it that language or *logos* wants itself? Just a matter of flipping the question. Every now and then, for years now, I will see someone who’s written a sentence or paragraph or something like that and sort of acknowledging what it might be that language wants for itself. And the person who comes to mind this morning is Henry Miller and his novel *Tropic of Cancer*—interesting title given what I’m going to talk about. And what he says is, “I love all things that flow.” And then he gives a catalog of maybe thirty, thirty-five items, okay? And the mix is unbelievable. In fact, I guess the second or third time I read that novel and that passage, I started thinking about Kenneth Burke and the paradox of substance and *The Grammar of Motives*. And he starts talking about particular words and how they all sort of fit together in antinomian way—that is, against the law or against the culture—and that you would never mix things together. And he’s talking about the Eucharist: the transubstantiation of the flesh and blood of Christ in the wafer, and then two or three lines later, he’s talking about feces—making peace with our feces. And, you know, it’s so comical because he’s always working with the comic frame in the face of tragedy: being locked in and not able to extricate yourself from the situation that you might find yourself in. But K. B. [Kenneth Burke] is known for his scatology, which he changed later in *The Grammar of Motives*: “Beauty, truth. Truth, beauty.” “Beauty, [goat bleating]. [goat bleating], beauty,” [laughter] you know, is what it was in the first edition. He was rather apologetic for having been so straightforward like that, but he’s getting his idea across, okay? So my sense is that rhetoric just wants to flow and go wherever it wants to go.

[child shouts in background]

[interview audio fades out]

Detweiler: First interruption. At this point in the interview, a voice emerges in the background: that of a child sounding unsatisfied with his or her predicament. Perhaps it’s just coincidence, but as I listened back, it sounds as though one could reads the child’s utterances as commentary on what Vitanza has to say. Or, perhaps, vice versa. A juvenile suggestion, maybe, but there’s more than one way to listen to what follows.

[interview audio returns]

Vitanza: And what comes to mind is George Kennedy’s “A Hoot in the Dark.” [child and adult arguing in background] This energy exists before speech exists. It’s all very fundamental in some way. Notice the word “fundamental,” as if it’s foundational—the ground, *Grund*, to get leverage from and that you could always be sure of.

[child cries “No!”; child’s “No!” and Vitanza’s “sure of” echo and reverbate together]

Vitanza: But it’s—I have a very difficult time seeing it that way. That kind of energy is just raw energy. [electric zap sound effect plays]

Detweiler: And that’s what he calls, I think, the “rheme”—

Vitanza: Yes.

Detweiler: —in “A Hoot in the Dark”?

Vitanza: Yeah, yeah. And then look at that title: “A Hoot in the Dark.” [call of a loon plays in the background] A number of years ago, in the introduction to *Writing Histories of Rhetoric*—the book was dedicated to George Kennedy but also Kenneth Burke, and I said something about that title. I said, how in the world are we supposed to read this title because it’s paradoxical: “a hoot,” you know? Well, it was a hoot: [laugh track plays, Detweiler chuckles] you know, we had a lot of fun and that kind of stuff. And “in the dark.” There’s no light there. [crickets chirping in the background, sounds of a forest at night] “A Hoot in the Dark.” So I took it to be serious, but also as not serious. Or, as Richard Lanham would say, *homo seriosus* or *homo rhetoricus*: the very very serious and the very very playful. And the more serious you try to be, you end up being playful. And the more playful you get, you can end up on the other side. Not that these are dyads or anything. It’s just two ways to cut this pie in half, in other words. So it’s energy, it’s flow, it wants to mix things together, but we human beings want to separate things out. And, you know, for some good reasons. Now to give you another example of what I’m thinking about is Immanuel Kant’s three critiques: The *Critique of Pure Reason*—there’s no [goat bleating] there, nothing like that, okay?—the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and then the *Critique of Judgment*, or judgment itself, in which he develops an aesthetic of the beautiful. And the beautiful is handled by reason itself. It’s very rational. And lo and behold, as he’s writing this and he’s getting into it, what does he find? What presents itself to him? And that’s the sublime, the uncountable, the impossible to deal with. It takes over and it begins to back up in his thinking. [bubbling sound in the background] From the third volume—once you get to the third, things go crazy. Unless you want to try to nail it down, okay? But it doesn’t want to do that. [bubbling gets louder] It begins to back up; the sublime begins to back up and it gets into the practical and into pure reason itself. And it’s sort of like a septic tank: [bubbling continues] logic, reason, and so on wants to separate what is not pure or what is not practical, and they have to have some place for it. And let’s say it’s in the septic tank. [bubbling continues] But it’s going to back up, as it does at times, into your house. You know, the place where you live, your foundations and so on. And so this was a remarkable event, and by event I mean “*Ereignis*.” You know, there’s no grounding there anymore. And it’s hard to know what to say. Derrida picks up on Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties*—it’s in a book, these are a collection of essays. The book is *Logomachia*, and it’s “contending with words.” We have to contend with words, okay? At a very early age, as a little kid, you try out the word [baby goat bleating]. And so mom, well, she finds soap and washes out your mouth—this kind of thing, okay? I remember the first time I allowed myself to say the f-word. And I was all alone, I was out in the country, and I tested it, trying, how could I say this: [various owl hoots] You know, this kind of stuff, over and over again. And I thought, “Well, okay, now I’ve said that word.” Anyway, let’s get back to Derrida and Kant, those two [owl hoot]-ers, okay? What Kant did in that *Conflict of the Faculties* was, there were four disciplines, and his was philosophy and it was down at the very bottom. And he received this letter from Friedrich Wilhelm—the king, you know—saying, “You need to straighten things out here. You think that philosophy is more important than theology.” It was like seating arrangements: we’re sitting at this table and there’s Wilhelm over there, and then who gets to sit the closest to him? The theologian. And philosophy the fartherest away. The whole thing, in a sense, was arguing about, how close can I sit to the king and be his favorite and so on? Well, you know, Kant’s going through this and he’s trying to think, “You know, there is really no solid *Grund* [Vitanza pounds on table] that is unmovable.”

[interview audio fades out, first movement of Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto,” or “Italian Concerto,” begins to play]

Detweiler: Immanuel Kant, differentiating the theology faculty from the philosophy faculty in *Conflict of the Faculties*:

Action must be represented as issuing from man’s own use of his moral powers, not as an effect [resulting] from the influence of an external, higher cause by whose activity man is passively healed. The interpretation of scriptural texts which, taken literally, seem to contain the latter view must therefore be deliberately directed toward making them consistent with the former view. If by nature we mean the principle that impels us to promote our happiness, and by grace the incomprehensible moral disposition in us—that is, the principle of pure morality—then nature and grace not only differ from each other but often come into conflict. But if by nature (in the practical sense) we mean our ability to achieve certain ends by our own powers in general, then grace is none other than the nature of man in so far as he is determined to actions by a principle which is intrinsic to his own being, but supersensible (the thought of his duty). Since we want to explain this principle, although we know no further ground for it, we represent it as a stimulus to good produced in us by God, the predisposition to which we did not establish in ourselves, and so, as grace. That is to say, sin (evil in human nature) has made penal law necessary (as if for slaves); grace, however, is the hope that good will develop in us—a hope awakened by belief in our original moral predisposition to good and by the example of humanity as pleasing to God in His Son. And grace can and should become more powerful than sin in us (as free beings), if only we let it act in us or let our disposition to the kind of conduct shown in that holy example become active. Scriptural texts which seem to enjoin a merely passive surrender to an external power that produces holiness in us must, then, be interpreted differently. It has to be made clear from them that we ourselves must work at developing that moral predisposition, although this predisposition does point to a divine source that reason can never reach (in its theoretical search for causes), so that our possession of it is not meritorious, but rather the work of grace.

[Bach concerto continues to play, fades out as interview audio returns]

Vitanza: So it’s turtles all the way down. And Derrida is looking at this and saying, we can’t go any further than being responsible human beings. And of course you have to think of Levinas: to be responsible is also to have the ability to respond to the Other. See how “responsible” gets turned around? And what is the Other? It’s something that, in a sense, we have tried to get rid of, thrown into the septic tank, but how do we deal with this? And I can go on and on, but let’s just stop with that right there.

Detweiler: Well, maybe we can talk in terms of what you were saying about your attempts to sort of attune yourself to what language, what *logos* wants in a certain way.

Vitanza: Yeah, yeah.

Detweiler: You will be participating in a conversation today, the title of which is, “Are There Real Borders Between ‘Traditional Rhetoric’ and ‘New Rhetorics’?”

Vitanza: Yeah.

Detweiler: And you were telling me that you had some sort of cards, I think you said, that you used to sort of shuffle out to come up with the topoi that you were going to use to structure that conversation.

Vitanza: Yes, yeah.

Detweiler: Would you like to talk about that procedure real quick?

Vitanza: Yeah, the title of the session is actually very interesting. It raises the question of “real borders”: is there a real border between “traditional”—and notice it’s “rhetoric,” single—and “new rhetoric”? I have to say “rhetorics,” a plurality, you know, a sublime number of them. The thing about the sublime is you can’t stop counting. Look at Euclidean geometry: the presumption was, this is [hits table] the foundation. In the trivium and the quad, the four, geometry was to control all of these things, in terms of first principles and so on. But then someone starts playing around with the five or six or seven principles for Euclidean geometry, and there are two sentences in there that are poorly written. And they start rewriting them, revising them, and they discover: another geometry. And they discover yet another geometry. So in Euclidean geometry, a right angle has ninety degrees. In the others, it has less than or more than. So in the attempt to try to play around with these things—like what is new here—how do we talk about new? How can we determine that something is new? Maybe somebody else has developed that concept somewhere. And does new want to remain new? Does it want to expose itself as being new? Let me talk about K. B. again, because he wrestled with the old and the new, or the traditional and the new. And he wrote an article, “Rhetorics”—”Rhetoric,” rather, “Old and New,” and he asked the question, “Well, what’s the new?” And he moves from persuasion to identification, and identification is what is new. Isn’t that interesting? That word can have so many meanings as well.

Detweiler: Mmhmm.

Vitanza: So how are we going to control it so it’s not out of hand. A very interesting thing happens, though: the second half of that article, he begins to talk about devices or ruses. And he starts looking at courtiers—Castiglione, for example, the person at court—and it’s like being with the king again, and you’re one of four disciplines and so on. How are you going to conduct yourself and so on? Well, what he begins to talk about is that you look at what is good, and these are the good things, but at the same time, you know at what is not good. Let’s say “evil” or whatever. And he just strings those out.

[interview fades, jazz piano plays]

Detweiler: Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, Burke argues, quote,

deals with questions of courtly ascent, while rising through four successive stages from the mere quest of personal advancement, to a concern with the insignia of the courtier as expert or specialist, thence to the cult of courtly sexual relations, and on to the vision of an ultimate courtship.… This fourth section deals, first, with the Socratic erotic, the love of truth, beauty, goodness, as seen in terms of the courtier who is now in a pedagogic role, aiming not at his own advantage but at the education of the prince in ways that will be beneficial to mankind as a whole. After the pages on the courtier as educator of the prince, you will recall, through appropriate transitions the work rises to its exhilarating close, the oration by Cardinal Bembo, on Beauty as “an influence of the heavenly bountifulness.” Here is, to perfection, the device of spiritualization. So, by the time the Cardinal is finished, we have gone from the image of beauty to the pure idea of beauty—we have united with ideal beauty: the courtly, truth, utility, goodness.... This is the device of “spiritualization”.... a grand device, central to polemic, which is forever translating back and forth between materialist and idealist terms for motives. Are things disunited in “body”? Then unite them in “spirit.” Would a nation extend its physical dominion? Let it talk of spreading its “ideals.” Do you encounter contradictions? Call them “balances.” Is an organization in disarray? Talk of its common purpose. Are there struggles over means? Celebrate agreement on ends. Sanction the troublously manifest, the incarnate, in terms of the ideally, perfectly invisible and intangible, the divine.

[jazz piano continues, then fades as interview returns]

Vitanza: He’s bringing in the stuff from the septic tank, you know?

Eric: Mmhmm.

Vitanza: Geez, I just thought of this story. When I was a little kid, my grandmother fell in the septic tank. The lid was off of it. And it’s become a major metaphor of irony for me. And she had it all over her, you know, she was up to here. I don’t know if you can keep this in the recording, but this is a fact of life. And I was wondering if she got—I was just three or four years old but I knew something about baptism—and I thought, “Did she get baptized with that?”, you know. Because I remember asking my dad, “What is that stuff in there?” And my dad says, “[goat bleating],” and my mother got extremely upset, you know, that kind of thing. And he says, “There’s a lot of water and a lot of [goat bleating] in there, okay? We flush the commode, it goes out of the house,” and that kind of thing. And I thought, “Well, could she—could this count as a second baptism?” I remember in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, about three-quarters of the way in the novel, Kundera begins to talk about [goat bleating]. He talks about, in the Middle Ages, the discussions and the arguments about whether or not God has an intestine to eliminate the waste. And some argued that he did; some argued that he did not. And can you imagine? This went on for a long time. It was like—they were also, let’s not forget, fighting about which is the master trope. Is it metaphor, is it metonymy, is it synecdoche, is it irony? And irony allows us to see how all these come together, along with paradox. Irony names and unnames and renames and so on. Let’s just get back to K. B. again—as if we’re every away from him—and this is sort of a major trope for K. B. I mean, he has at the very end of *Grammar of Motives* an addendum there talking about those four. But irony is what we cannot control and it is the engine that drives the flow of *logos*. So, you know, I love everything that flows. If not, you’re doing what? Denying life.

Detweiler: So you’ve talked a little bit here about the way Kenneth Burke, it sounds like, both uses and upsets that sort of “old”/”new” dichotomy in a certain way.

Vitanza: Yeah, mmhmm.

Detweiler: And for people in rhetoric, the phrase “new rhetoric” might have all kinds of resonances with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric*—

Vitanza: Exactly. It goes on and on and on, yeah.

Detweiler: Another way that that sort of “traditional”/”new,” “new”/”old” kind of split tends to get thrown around in discourse in and around rhetoric is the difference between “old media” and “new media.” Do you see ways in which that resonates in the same sort of manner that you’ve been talking about: upsetting this sort of “old”/”new,” “traditional”/”new” division?

Vitanza: Yes! Thanks for asking that. I’ll give a brief response to it. I don’t know if you remember Bruce Sterling worrying about the loss of the various media, and that he set up a place where all of the old media, you know, could be collected and sent. Not so much as a museum. But there was this fear of losing—I mean, just think? Who uses a blanket and starts a fire and communicates with smoke? [sound of crackling campfire plays in background] Native Americans did that, but who does that today? In a sense, the ability to know how to do that without burning the rug or whatever, okay, is perhaps lost. [campfire fades] But there’s a big argument about whether the so-called “new” media are better than the “old” media. And so it’s a kind of *dissoi logoi*: as we’ve advanced forward with better technology and better media and so on, we think that everything is better, and we’re leaving this behind. But it doesn’t want to be left behind, okay? And there will be some people who will go back and take a look at it and compare and it’s not seen as “better than.” It depends on, what are you using it for? But there was the fear, you know, maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, and Sterling and a few other people started—and you can find it, the website, in its original form out there, which has not been further developed. Old and new media!

[interview audio fades, various phones begin to ring—some analog, some digital]

phones stop, low tone fades in]

Detweiler: Intermission or, Victor Vitanza Takes a Call. [acoustic guitar picks low notes over tone] Halfway through our interview, a call did in fact come in. And perhaps that’s precisely what this interview called for. After all, the medium of the telephone, the questions and answerability and responsibility that come with taking a call—all these resonate in strange ways with this conversation. In *The Telephone Book*, Avital Ronell questions the telephone as a technology and a medium. Riffing on Heidegger and Derrida and some others, Ronell begins the book in mid-sentence. [quoting Ronell with a voice that sounds like it’s coming through a telephone]

... And yet, you’re saying yes, almost automatically, suddenly, sometimes irreversibly. Your picking it up means the call has come through. It means more: you’re its beneficiary, rising to meet its demand, to pay a debt. You don’t know who’s calling or what you are going to be called upon to do, and still, you are lending your ear, giving something up, receiving an order. It is a question of answerability. Who answers the call of the telephone, the call of duty, and accounts for the taxes it appears to impose?[phone effect ends]

Diane Davis, who studied with Vitanza at The University of Texas at Arlington and teaches with him at the European Graduate School, glosses the opening of *The Telephone Book* as follows: [phone effect returns]

[Y]ou pick up the phone, and your first word is, “yes?” Even if you say “hello?” it means “yes?” Before you can say, “yes I will take your call” or “no, I won’t take your call,” you have taken the call, in order to get the chance to decide. Already in picking up you have responded, welcomed the other in.... [B]y the time you are presented with the option of answering, inviting, hosting, you have already welcomed the other, already offered your “yes, come in.” [phone effect ends]

Saying “yes?” to the call, then, precedes and conditions one’s ability to choose. Like language’s uncontrollability, which persists despite and because our attempts to master it, the call exceeds our grasp. Its origin is in some ways undeterminable, stretching back beyond conscious memory. During his conversation with James Murphy, Vitanza claimed, “I’m here because he invited me.” Murphy, in turn, claimed, “I’m here because he’s here.” Who made the call, then? Who started the conversational ball rolling? Am I interviewing Victor Vitanza because I contacted him, or was I prompted to contact him by a call I can’t remember? The compossibilities are limitless. Vitanza’s phone call, however, was finite, and so we returned to our interview. Zooming in on our discussion of old and new media, I asked him about cats. That is, humans and cats have an old relationship, the origins of which may stretch back before historical memory. And cats have also proliferated in new media spaces, as this podcast explored in the “Unified Feline Theory” segment included in our “Mythmaking” episode. So I asked Vitanza about the particular, peculiar pervasiveness of cats on the Facebook page for the journal *PRE/TEXT*. Where did these cats come from, and why do they keep coming back?

[guitar fades into foreground, then music fades as the interview resumes]

Vitanza: A lot of people have posted all kinds of images and brief movies, videos, and so on. Let me tell you how it started, okay?

Detweiler: Okay. That sounds great.

Vitanza: Cynthia Haynes took this photo of her cat, [cat meows] and her cat had my book [cat purring]—*Negation, Subjectivity, and the History of Rhetoric*—and had its paws [cat meows loudly] around it. It wasn’t taking a nap [cat meowing aggressively], but it was wrestling with this book. You know, I thought that was just absolutely fantastic, and then [cat caterwauling] somebody else put another one out there, and in a matter of six months we got two hundred new people to sign up ‘cause they wanted to talk about their cats as well. [multiple cats mewing, Detweiler laughing] I thought, why don’t we do an issue or a volume of *PRE/TEXT* devoted to cats: cat stories and photos and that kind of stuff. So I’ve been collecting them from various people. [cats fade out] But, you know, for me, I refer to people—a group of people, say a group of students or colleagues or whatever; students are my colleagues as well—as, “Hey, cats! Let do such and such.” And where does that come from? It comes from jazz. [jazz combo begins to play] Louie Armstrong and a bunch of other people started calling each other “cats.” And I, you know, when I was younger I was a musician—a jazz musician. I wrote music and so on, and it was just part of what we would say: “Hey, let’s go get some coffee, cats,” and that kind of thing. So it’s a mix of that kind. But other people are adding other angles and ways of looking at cats in our various cultures and so on. So it’s a rather impertinent topic for what is supposed to be a theory journal, but cats—they’re mysterious. Totally mysterious. And that’s all I have to say about cats right now.

[laughter, jazz music ends]

Detweiler: Well, moving on then to one more question about *PRE/TEXT* here: You recently participated in a panel at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication entitled “Never Mind Geoffrey Sirc.”

Vitanza: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Detweiler: And that, on the *PRE/TEXT* Facebook page, you’ve indicated might be the focus of an upcoming issue of *PRE/TEXT*.

Vitanza: Yes, exactly!

Detweiler: I was wondering if you would be interested in speaking toward to futures of *PRE/TEXT* or if you want to give us any sense of why we should never mind Geoffrey Sirc.

Vitanza: [laughs] Well, Geoff—I guess it was about three years ago—made it known to some people that he was not going to return to the 4Cs. He had had it, and he was going to sort of retire from it and that kind of thing. And they were telling me that, and I saw him in the bar one night, you know, and I said, “Hey, let me buy you a glass of wine and let’s sit down and let’s talk,” you know? And we sat down, took a few sips, and I said, “You know, Geoff, I hear you’re not going to come back. That’s really sad because we were planning to have a volume devoted to you—a volume of *PRE/TEXT*.” And he just sat up straight like that, and his eyes got big and that kind of stuff. So he says, “Well, you know, maybe we can—I’ll return, maybe,” you know, this kind of stuff. So we ended up getting him to come back because we were going to have this big presentation panel on him. A roast of sorts. It went so well. I mean, we were so happy. It was a standing ovation. It was a lot of laughter all the way through and so on. And then, after all that, he said, “I’m not coming back.” And I said, “Now wait a minute! We’re going to do this volume!” [laughs] Carrot and stick, you know. Stick and carrot. So, yeah. We’re working on that. In fact, the presentations will be in the book and when we were planning for this, we were on Facebook, and you know that little message that’s in between at the very bottom? Where you can message somebody and nobody else supposedly can see it?

Detweiler: Oh, yeah! Right, right.

Vitanza: Well, about five or six or seven of us were doing that for about six months before we did the panel. And I didn’t say anything to anybody for a while, and it was just—I mean, it was scatological. [bubbling sound returns] And I said—I guess it was a month before the meeting at 4Cs—and I said, “Oh, by the way, I didn’t tell all of you: I’m using all of these and they’re going to be in the journal itself. And you may not change anything that you’ve said.” [both laughing] This is Jenny and Jeff Rice, and Cynthia, and Tom Rickert. And Geoff as well. And we have a history because when I started *PRE/TEXT*, I published a lot of his work. “The A&P Parking Lot,” for example, is one that we published early. As we had the “Re/Interviews,” which were pushed by *PRE/TEXT*. And so we created basically what was a new genre, we thought. And it was a review and interview together, so “re/interview.” So we re/interviewed him, and some of what we said very early in that I used in my presentation. But we’re having other volumes coming out. For example, Mario Untersteiner—his book on the sophists was translated years ago. Nothing else has been translated, so I have a guest editor who knows Italian, and I asked him to get—this was his idea, not mine, to do this—to find some other translators and to get permission, say, for about five, six, seven, eight chapters or whatever, and get those translated, publish them in *PRE/TEXT*. In fact, we could even do a second volume. And on the left, as usual, we’ll have the Italian, and on the right, mirroring, we will have the translations and so on. And we have permission from the house that had supposedly owned all of that—they’re not charging us anything, that kind of thing. And we’ll try to get sort of a bio of Mario as well. People don’t know how he really struggled against Hitler and the takeover and so on.

Detweiler: Fantastic. So we’ve talked about all sorts of various issues of rhetoric, of sort of the way it can structure and destructure our relationship to the uncontrollability of language in all these sorts of different ways. And so you are currently working in the PhD program at Clemson University: Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, so we have that “s” at the end of “Rhetorics”—pretty important obviously. Do you want to speak at all a little bit to how you see that program and the work that its students and faculty are doing trying to pursue the sorts of things that you’ve been discussing both throughout your career and throughout this interview here today?

Vitanza: Well, it’s nine years old now. It’s somewhat of a unique program because it’s not situated in any department nor does it back-and-forth with, say, just two departments. It’s housed in the College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities, and so my faculty come from all of those departments and those particular schools. And so we have a real mix, and we have a number of different vocabularies that are going on. And so I don’t call it an interdisciplinary program, but I call it a transdisciplinary program. By that I mean we create new vocabularies and so on. It’s been very successful. We’ve graduated twenty-nine students, we’re going to graduate two more towards the end of the summer—that’s thirty-one. And those two that we’re going to graduate also have jobs.

Detweiler: Wonderful.

Vitanza: All of them have great positions elsewhere. So it’s been very productive. I’m very proud of this and proud of those colleagues. I learn as much from students as students learn—the program that we have now, the faculty are a function of the students. Not the students a function of the faculty. And it’s very hard for someone who’s new to teaching at the PhD level, or anyone, to understand how that works. But that’s one of the secrets, I think, of a successful PhD program. But it’s a four-year program. Two years of coursework, five core courses, and five cognates, and then two studios. And then the fourth semester the students are taking the two studios. That prepares them for their exams and also for the dissertation. And their exams: one primary area and two supporting areas, and the conjecture, obviously, is situated in the primary area, and this prepares them to establish a committee, finally, and also to prepare themselves for their exams, and then move into the dissertation. So the third year, they take their exams—we hope, say, in the first semester, and then work on their dissertations. And by the end of the third year, they have to have at least three chapters written and generally approved by their committee, okay, because they’re on the market—the job market. And in September and October, you know, and November and December, it’s mad, madness, with writing applications and writing letters of support and so on, and they’re gone most of the time because they get a lot of invitations. And they get multiple offers, so we’re very proud of that program. The faculty, they bring their assets to the program, and the students are really very competitive. The program is very competitive. And we’ve been very successful. We generally get what we want.

[both laughing]

Detweiler: Well that’s a good feeling.

Vitanza: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Detweiler: Well it sounds like a remarkable program. And so I guess the way that we can wrap up today, given the way that we began, it to say, is there anything you think that language wants to be said that we haven’t yet gotten to in this interview that you’d like to end with?

[pause]

Vitanza: Total silence is what language wants to—but here I am speaking. Silence. Listening to silence. I think we have to listen to silence.

[pause]

Not only listen to the words. You know, this may be a misfiring in my brain, but when I look at words I see other words within them. And I cannot not. And I love typos. I turn off my spell-checker in Microsoft Word because I [slaps table for emphasis] want those typos there. And then they get published, and editors usually have to tell the person who’s, you know, going through the manuscript to try to fix it up, “Don’t change any of those words! That’s what Vitanza wants.” [both chuckling] And in fact Janice Walker, she—in the front of an article published in *Computers and Composition*, that journal—she had in all caps at the very top, “There are no typos in Victor Vitanza’s article.” In other words, they’re there, but they’re not typos. It’s what I want. What is it that language wants? It’s going back to that. What does it desire? And so, you know, you’re going to write something, and you start looking at what you’ve written, and I start talking to it and saying, “What is it you want me to type here?” Instead of trying to control it. So what is your relationship with *logos*? That’s the question I’m interested in.

Detweiler: Well, Victor Vitanza, thank you very much again for taking the time to sit down and talk today.

Vitanza: Thank you. Thank you, Eric. It’s a lot of fun. Hope you don’t have to cut out a lot of that [goat bleating] there.

[both chuckling]

[*Zeugma* theme’s beat begins to play]

Detweiler: That’s it for this special summer episode of *Zeugma*. Special thanks to Victor Vitanza as well as our other summer guests: Roxanne Mountford, Collin Brooke, Jeff Rice, and Joyce Locke Carter. You can find more interviews and episodes at our website—zeugma.dwrl.utexas.edu— and on iTunes. And you can like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @ZeugmaPodcast for more updates. Stay tuned this coming year for our third season and check back soon for an interview with Dr. Jody Shipka, who presented at the DWRL’s 2014 Speaker Series earlier this year. Signing off for the *Zeugma* podcast, this is Eric—

[music stops, sound of clattering and clanging]

Detweiler: Oh, [goat bleating.]

[*Zeugma* theme plays]