Drafting, Editing, Publishing vs. Content and Meaning, 1988

For nearly twenty years here at Central I've been teaching future English teachers to look upon the process of writing as made up of three distinguishable, if not entirely distinct, components or subprocesses called **drafting**, **editing**, and **publishing**. The simplest way to get at the three is to set them up as three stages -- that is, shorter hunks within the longer total writing process. But the three aren't really hunks. In one way or another you are always drafting, always editing, always preparing the public text. You don't move through 1-2-3. It's recursive and blurry. So in many ways it makes better sense to analyze the process not into three stages, or hunks, but rather into three **phases**, or strands. Each strand extends the entire length of the process. It is just that early on the drafting strand is the thickest. Editing is quite a tiny strand, and publishing can be legitimately miniscule. Somewhere towards the middle the editing strand comes to dominate, drafting grows less important, publishing somewhat more. And the closer to the end you get, the larger and more insistent become the demands of the public text -- the demand for precision and correctness and such things. The phase analysis into three variable strands comes closer to the truth, though it still misses the recursiveness and blurriness of the process.   The analysis into three stages is pedagogically more useful, however, because it expedites the following sort of display, a display that I now see is just as germane to the study of literature as it is to the study of writing and to the study of the teaching of writing and literature.

Drafting ------------ **Editing** ------------ **Publishing**

Private	Social	Public
Exploring	Discovering	Presenting

Affective .... Cognitive
Inside .... Outside
Formulating .... Communicating

Some terms need to be defined: **Drafting** is the process of initial expression, of pressing out ill-formed ideas and feelings that were inside and getting them outside. It includes what some books call **pre-writing** or **planning** -- though there is not really anything "pre" about it: It is writing.

And if it is planning, it is not necessarily that kind of tidy planning that writing books like to talk about -- especially not in school where student-writers are usually being asked to write about something they as yet really don't understand or know very much about. The key idea in drafting is simply to get the stuff down. Don't try to approximate a final draft, so don't even worry about coming up with what is typically thought of as a first draft. Just get your pile of stuff, rather the way the sculptor has to get a pile of raw clay before the sculpting can begin. The pile of raw clay is not a first draft of the finished sculpture. It is just what the Germans would call <u>Stoff</u> and George Carlin would call "stuff."

Editing is the process of figuring out what you have drafted, figuring out what you are talking about and what you have said about it. A large part of editing is a kind of topic or content analysis, rather like writing an index of the draft. The single most important products of this aspect of editing are those workhorse summary sentences that state your topics and summarize your major comments about them. The second large part of editing is the analysis of your audience: To whom are you addressing your discussion? Why? What do you want to do with them thereby? Very Aristotelian. Editing in the sense of these two kinds of analysis is that phase of the writing process most often ignored by writing texts and writing teachers.

Publishing is the process of creating a finished text. It's major concern is correctness and convention. It is the thing with which writing books and classes seem to have been inordinately preoccupied over the decades.

Drafting is a private act because one's stuff is one's own. You are responsible only to yourself for your draft. No one else has a right to it unless you grant them the right. The writer is also the sole reader, so it is truly private. Editing is social because now the idea of an addressed reader begins to emerge, either explicitly or implicitly. In both the content analysis and, more obviously, in the audience analysis another presence begins to make itself felt. There is now the opportunity for give and take, for second thoughts, for reconsiderations, for T. S. Eliot's visions and revisions. Publishing is, as its name implies, a public concern because once the final text is done, there is no more opportunity for give and take and revisions. It is all left up to the text and its reader -- whatever reader may pick it up and read it. The author no longer has control.

When you draft, you explore meanings -- turning them, varying them, repeating them.

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"What does this poem mean?" is finally a nonsense question, which unleashes the authoritarianism and fascism-masquerading-as-enlightened-liberalism so common in the English classroom. "What does this poem contain" is a better question.

Content is part of the code; meaning is part of the performance.
If so, content is epiphenomenal; meaning is phenomenal. So the phenomenology of language must deal with meanings, not content.

Any text always contains more than it can mean and always means more than it contains.

Content is in time, changing, unstable (though conservative and resistant, predictable and relatively determined). Meanings are out of time (a la Bergson's <u>dure</u>), unchanging, stable (though innovative, indeterminate).

There are enough meaty paradoxes among those last squibs to keep a whole stable of Zenos busy far longer than the arrow flies.